



The Strange Sketch of Sutton

A Kent family adventure

Jennifer L. Armstrong

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CHAPTER ONE

It must be a fraud!" Dad is saying to his brother, our Uncle Ken. "Something this big couldn't go undiscovered for a thousand years!"

"I think it's worth investigating," Uncle Ken is insisting. "I know you have a lot on your plate right now, but just give this a couple of weeks. I have a feeling that there's more to this than we might think."

"But we practically just got back from Syria," Dad says. "Helena hasn't even finished unpacking . . ." Helena is my mom.

My name is Ginny, I'm fourteen, and at the moment, I'm eavesdropping on a conversation that's going on in the kitchen.

"Well, good!" says Uncle Ken. I can hear him thump the table as if it's settled. "Don't bother unpacking. I can get you on the next flight to England."

England!

I'm so excited I forget to be quiet and when my sister Julia, who's twelve, joins me in the hallway I blurt out, "We're going to England!"

Behind the closed kitchen door I hear a laugh.

“Ginny! Julia!” Dad calls out. “We have a few extra brownies in here. Why don’t you join us?”

We burst into the kitchen, although I think Julia is more interested in the brownies.

“England, Dad?” I say excitedly. “Why?”

“Well, Ginny,” says my dad. “It’s a strange case.”

My dad is Dr. Anderson Kent and he’s an archaeologist specializing in Biblical artifacts. Uncle Ken assists him but since he’s a university professor he stays behind in Toronto while we go out and do the field work.

You might wonder why my sister and I are able to just go along with our parents anytime they travel. Well, we’re home-schooled and my parents figure our adventures are great learning experiences. We don’t bring textbooks along when we travel but we learn way more than when we stay home and just read about other people’s lives.

“Quite frankly,” Dad continues, “right up front I’m going to say I believe it’s a hoax. I know as a scientist I should be objective and wait until I’ve examined the evidence but the idea is too preposterous . . .”

“Highly unlikely,” agrees Uncle Ken. “But as long as there is the slightest possibility that the sketch might have some validity. . .”

“What are you talking about?” I demand. Julia is calmly eating brownies but I can’t stand it. What sketch? A hoax? What’s going on?!

“Well,” says Dad. “It’s a sketch of Jesus.”

Even Julia looks up from a brownie.

“Jesus!” The way it bursts out I sound as if I’m taking his name in vain.

“Yes, Jesus,” says Dad. “Not from the first century, of course. That would be a priceless find and would probably be easier to verify. Then we could test the materials to see if they really are two thousand years old. Not that that alone would make it a sketch of Jesus, but it would be a start. No, this is a little more complicated.”

Uncle Ken takes up the story.

“An elderly lady in England, Rose Sutton, contacted me recently. She’s the last in a long line of adventurers, rascals

and Bible scholars. An odd mix, to be sure, but what it comes down to is the Sutton men liked to collect ancient artifacts and the Biblical scholars in the family basically ignored the underhanded ways that they acquired the artifacts.

“Well, since Rose and her sister never married, she wanted to make sure that all these treasures ended up in safe hands. Most of them, she gave to her church who is going to set up a little Bible museum in their town of Sutton. The town was named after Rose’s family who were the first to settle there.”

“But, what about the fact that a lot of those artifacts she’s donating might have been stolen?”

“Well, Ginny,” says Dad thoughtfully. “That’s a tough one because most of the artifacts were found in what is now Israel, but hundreds of years ago when the land was in the hands of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. So who lays claim to all the items? First of all, provenance would have to be established and I doubt most of the items came with papers. Rose only knows where each item was found based on the stories passed down in her family and there’s no guarantee that the Bedouin or the merchant who sold the item was telling the truth.

‘I’m going mainly to examine the sketch. But I would love to have a chance to examine the other artifacts as well. For example, Rose told your Uncle Ken she has a pottery bowl from Jericho at the time the Israelites took the city. Now, it’s quite possible it’s true because the bowl came into her family at the time that that part of Jericho was being excavated. On the other hand, she has an oil lamp from Hazor that is supposed to date back to the days of Joshua as well, but Hazor wasn’t being excavated at that level a hundred years ago when her great-grandfather brought it back from Palestine. So my guess is that it’s a fairly recent piece . . .”

My dad could go on and on like this and mostly I’d be glad to listen, but this time something else is on my mind.

“But the Jesus sketch!” I say. “What about that?”

“Ah, yes,” says Dad, looking thoughtful. “That’s one of the things Rose held onto. She wants us to look into it further. It dates back to the Crusades. A Sutton, who was a commander of some sort, came across it while in Jerusalem. He was a lover of old books and while doing the customary pillaging of that

time, found a small room in a house with a stash of what appeared to be an ancient library of Jewish literature. The owner had fled so we don't know anything about him. So this Sutton loaded up all the books and lugged them home to England where he hired some rabbis to look them over. He was told the books were worth a fortune."

"And keep in mind," interrupts Uncle Ken, "that appraisal was a thousand years ago. Now the books are priceless."

"One of the books is supposedly from the first century," continues Dad, taking a sip of tea, "and it's a slim volume that basically outlines all the enemies of Judaism at the time. Mostly it's a list of false Messiahs. It seems to have been put together as a warning to young rabbinical students because it even includes a sketch of each false Messiah."

My jaw drops.

"You can see where this is going," Dad grins. "Yes, there's a lengthy write-up for Yeshua of Natsoreth and from the sounds of it, his crucifixion is getting close. It includes the story of the resurrection of El'azar, or Lazarus as we would call him, though it warns that El'azar was a co-hort of Yeshua's and not to be trusted. The writer of the book felt that Lazarus was alive in the tomb waiting to pretend to be resurrected. Anyway," Dad takes a deep breath. "Like all of the other entries, there's a sketch of Yeshua."

"It's worth investigating," insists Uncle Ken.

"You're usually right," says Dad, standing up. "I'll go tell Helena that we're leaving on the next flight that you can get us. Girls, you'd better start packing."

CHAPTER TWO

We may not have to learn a foreign language to speak in England but Julia and I are having fun going over some slang phrases that we printed off the internet.

It's about four in the morning on our transatlantic flight to London and neither of us can sleep. The in-flight movie ended hours ago and the last snack served was at midnight. Dad and Mom are asleep behind us, as are most of the people on the plane, so we're trying to be quiet.

So far we've learned that *barmy* means crazy, *best of British to you* means best of British luck to you, if something *costs a bomb* it's expensive, *cheerio* is good-bye, *a doddle* is something that is easy, *fortnight* means two weeks because it's short for fourteen nights.

"*Grub* is another word for food," says Julia, looking up and down the aisle of the plane. "Do you think we could ask a flight attendant for some grub? I'm starved."

"She might think you're barmy for being awake this late," I say, folding up the paper and putting it back in Julia's knapsack

But when a flight attendant passes by, Julia asks for a snack and we both end up with ginger ale and some crackers and

cheese. It keeps us going until the pilot comes on and announces that we should be in London in thirty minutes and to please put our tables in an upright position and fasten our seat-belts.

People start to stretch awake.

“Mmmmm,” says Mom behind us. “I’ll be happy to have a proper cup of English tea as soon as we arrive.”

“If you add an English muffin to that I’ll be content,” says Dad. “Did you girls have a good sleep?”

Before we can answer that we didn’t do much sleeping, there is a commotion about ten rows in front of us.

A man wearing a dark suit leaps out into the aisle and he’s waving something that looks like a small knife. This takes us all completely by surprise.

Behind me I hear someone say, “What the . . . ?!”

While Julia and I have a row to ourselves, there is a burly young man in the aisle seat beside our parents. He’s the one who is now swearing with a heavy English accent and I can understand why. The man with the knife is rushing right at him!

I don’t want to look but I can’t help it. I turn around to see the muscular young Englishman leap up and give the knife-waving man a sharp kick in the groin. The knife drops to the ground and unbelievably, it is Julia in the aisle seat who reaches down and grabs it. Immediately, my dad pops up behind her and grabs it from her. I do believe that he’s ready to use it except that the young Englishman is on top of the dark-suited man pounding on his face and chest. The dark-suited man is offering a bit of resistance but eventually gives up since he is older and doesn’t seem up to the fight. It takes a male flight attendant and a passenger to pull the Englishman off of him.

“Bleedin’ terrorist!” exclaims the Englishman. “Good thing I’ve had experience with blokes and aggro.”

A cheer goes up from all the passengers near us.

The male flight attendant has a roll of duct tape brought to him by a female flight attendant and is wrapping the terrorist up in it.

I realize I'm shaking but Julia looks calm. All around me I hear people talking about how we almost got hijacked. The young Englishman is a hero. His name turns out to be Stan and someone convinces a flight attendant to give him a complimentary bottle of wine for his part in saving us all.

In the midst of it all, the pilot comes on and asks us to prepare for descent.

Everything settles down temporarily. I don't see where they put the duct-taped hijacker.

When we land, there are policemen waiting to take away the terrorist and detectives waiting to talk to us. Our family is escorted to a small room near Customs. Stan is in a room beside us. He's really popular. People are patting him on the back and I imagine he'll be talking to a lot of reporters today.

"Good day and welcome to England, Dr. and Mrs. Kent," says a middle-aged man with grey hair and a grey suit to match. "And, of course, to your daughters as well." Unlike Stan, he speaks a dignified English. I can't imagine him asking anyone for grub. "A most unpleasant beginning to your visit."

"Yes," agrees Dad. "Rather shocking."

"My name is Inspector Cloude. I'm with Scotland Yard and I won't waste your time today," says the man, glancing at a piece of paper in his hand. "The man apprehended today was well-known to us. He is not a terrorist. I do not think he was trying to hijack the plane and I do not think it was his intent to do harm to the young football fan who ended up subduing him."

Dad is nodding slowly as Inspector Cloude speaks.

"You are not here simply to sightsee," Inspector Cloude continues. "And whether you know it or not, I believe you have disturbed a hornet's nest. Would you like to tell me your reason for coming to England, Dr. Kent?"

"May I ask first who the man on the plane was?" asks Dad.

"You may," says Inspector Cloude. "Although, I may not tell you all I know about him. But I will say that he is an aging thug, now semi-retired in Toronto, who will basically do anything for anyone, providing the price is right. Right now we think he is working for a London businessman who collects artifacts, particularly Biblical artifacts."

“A strange hobby for a man who hires a thug to threaten us with a knife.”

“Yes, indeed. The event will be reported as an attempted hijacking and we believe that the plan was to see that you, Dr. Kent, were seriously injured, maybe even killed, in that attempt.”

Mom gasps.

Inspector Cloude continues.

“The hijacking itself would have only been a cover. So, what I want to know is, why you have been targeted by a rich, powerful man who has a strange fetish for Biblical artifacts?”

Dad nods.

“A sketch,” Dad replies. “Supposedly of Jesus Christ from a book found in Jerusalem at the time of the Crusades. I’m here to look into it.”

Inspector Cloude takes a deep breath as he absorbs this information.

“Do you think it’s authentic?” he finally asks.

“No,” says Dad. “Quite frankly, I do not. The book is most definitely a copy of the original and so the sketch would have had to have been copied a number of times. You see, the document was supposed to have been written at the time of Jesus Christ, a warning about false messiahs. But at that time, the Jews didn’t preserve things in books, but in scrolls. And I doubt that too many of their scrolls were illustrated since that would make the work of a scribe so much harder.”

Inspector Cloude nods.

“Fascinating,” he says. “But nonetheless, a controversial find that in certain hands could be manipulated. Well, Dr. Kent . . .” He glances down at the piece of paper again. “You and your family are in danger. But we will not ask you to turn around and head home. I think it would be in all of our best interests to get to the bottom of this. So if it is acceptable to you, we will have an agent set up to be close to you at all times.”

“Well, I really think . . .” I know Mom is about to say that, in fact, we really should be turning around and heading home, but Dad is already nodding his head.

“I certainly do want to get to the bottom of this,” he says. “I will say one thing, whether we have an authentic sketch of Jesus or not, we do have an intriguing find that may be a thousand years old if it does truly date back to the Crusades. That in itself may be significant.”

Dad stands up and he and Inspector Cloude shake hands.

“We’ll keep in close contact,” promises Inspector Cloude. “At all times we’ll have an agent within sight of you, starting immediately. At the first sign of trouble, he’ll move in.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” says Dad. “But my family and I also know that we have God’s protection.”

“We appreciate all the help we can get,” says Inspector Cloude and it’s impossible to tell whether he believes in divine defense or not.

Dad gives him a brief run down of our itinerary which basically consists of renting a car and setting out for Sutton. Once in Sutton, we’ll be staying with Rose Sutton for a couple of weeks.

On our way out we encounter Stan, surrounded by admirers. He breaks away from his fans to come over and clap Dad on the back.

“They finished with you, mate? Blimey! I thought we almost had it there on the plane. That bloke really cheesed me off! The coppers are really going to do him . . .”

Julia has pulled the British slang paper from her knapsack.

“*Blimey*,” she whispers to me. “An exclamation of surprise. Short for God Blind Me. Well, really!” She forgets to whisper. “Why would anyone want God to blind them?”

But Stan isn’t listening. He’s inviting Dad to join him and some mates for a celebration drink at a pub.

“I’d love to,” says Dad. “But unfortunately we have to be leaving London this morning.”

“Where’re you headed?” asks Stan, mostly to be polite because when someone comes up and gives him a hearty thump on the back and tells him the reporters want to see him, he gives us a grin and heads down the hallway.

We quickly pass through Customs and head for the rental car agencies.

“I was planning on a day in London, but all things considered I think I’d like to head straight for Sutton,” Dad says quietly.

I can’t help looking around because Inspector Cloude said that an agent would always be close by and I didn’t notice anyone following us after our meeting. But the airport is too crowded to see anyone in particular.

The car we get is tiny compared to our car back home. Julia and I are squished in the back seat with a suitcase and a duffel bag between us since the trunk (or boot as they call it here) is too small to hold all of our luggage.

It’s a little disheartening to learn that we have a four hour drive north to get to Sutton but Mom assures us that we’ll stop for a proper English breakfast about halfway there.

London is starting to get crowded with early rush hour traffic. Everybody drives on the left side of the road and the steering wheel is on the right side of the car, so that’s a little strange at first. I’m looking all around, trying to take in as much of the English ambience as I can. I love the old buildings. There’s something stately and reassuring about old buildings -- a sense that they’ve survived many things and we can feel safe in their shadows. But I know that’s just an illusion. Dad always says that we have to trust God for our safety.

The countryside is more peaceful. Very green. We even see sheep by the side of the road. We pass through a few charming villages that I would love to stop and walk around in but we’ve traveled for about two hours before Dad pulls into one of them and begins to look for a place to have breakfast.

As it turns out, the only restaurant in this village is in a small hotel.

If I had my way, we’d stay in this hotel for our whole visit.

The walls have wood-paneling and pre-Raphaelite paintings in gold frames. There are little sitting rooms with chintz chairs and footstools. French windows look out on green hills.

The sound of clinking cutlery directs us to the dining room. It has about fifteen tables and it is half full, mostly with older couples, probably people staying at the hotel.

We take a window seat and a waitress brings us a pot of tea.

When she returns, Dad orders a traditional breakfast for all of us.

It turns out to be a plate full of food -- fried eggs, potato pancakes, sausages, bacon, fried mushrooms, a couple of tomato slices and slices of toast. There are a variety of jams and marmalades in china bowls with little silver spoons.

“Hello duck!” says one older lady beside us as we’re finishing our food. She’s talking to Julia who’s shamelessly looking around at people. “Are you staying here?”

“No,” says Julia. “We’re going to . . .”

Dad kind of clears his throat and interrupts her.

“We’re off to the north country,” he says. “A bit of a holiday.”

“Where’re you from, luv?” asks the lady. There is an older man with her but he’s just drinking his tea.

It suddenly dawns on me that there should be a Scotland Yard agent among these people, or at least close by. But if there’s a Scotland Yard agent, maybe there’s also someone working for that London businessman. It makes me nervous all of a sudden.

“Canada,” says Dad briefly. “How ‘bout you?”

“Oh, we’re not from that far away, dearie,” says the lady smiling. It’s hard to imagine that she’s anything except what she seems, but I guess we have to be careful.

“We’re from Brighton. Though I used to live up north as a child, Shropshire area. Lovely, lovely area. I like to go back once every while. That’s where we’re headed.”

“Well, all the best,” says Dad briskly, consulting the bill, putting down the appropriate amount of money and standing up to shepherd us out the door.

When we’re back on the road I ask a question that I’ve wanted to for a while.

“Dad, do you think this picture of Jesus is real? I mean, is there any possibility . . . ?”

“Well,” he says slowly. “No, I don’t. There’s an apocryphal book about the acts of Paul . . .”

Julia interrupts.

“What’s apocryphal?”

“Biblical-type books that weren’t accepted into the official canon. Some were considered heretical. Some just weren’t considered inspired by God even if they had historical value. But anyhow, the Acts of Paul contains a physical description of Paul. It says he was short but strongly built, meeting eyebrows, large nose, bald, bow-legged, and full of grace. Some people said that at times he looked like an angel.”

“That’s kind of neat,” I say. “To know what he looked like.”

“Yes,” agrees Dad. “If there was an apocryphal book with a description of Jesus, I would seriously consider its merit. But a sketch seems too contrived, as if someone did it knowing that if they could pass it off as authentic, it would be worth a fortune. So, although I will seriously examine it, I’m also interested in investigating it from the angle of who perpetuated the fraud. Was it someone a thousand years ago or someone more recent?”

“At this point I would guess someone more recent,” says Mom, sounding nervous.

“What makes you say that, dear?” asks Dad.

“The fact that there’s a car following us.”

CHAPTER THREE

Now, Helena,” says Dad, calmly. “You know someone from Scotland Yard is supposed to be watching us at all times.”

“Well, up til now they’ve been very discreet about it. This man is pretty obvious.”

I can see what Mom means. He’s right behind us and when Dad speeds up, he speeds up. When Dad slows down, he slows down. When Dad makes a sudden left turn, he makes a sudden left turn.

“I wish we knew whether it was an agent or not,” says Mom, not taking her eyes off of the rear view mirror.

“Helena,” says Dad, firmly. “You’re fretting. Who else would it be at this point?”

“Maybe the same people who hired someone to attack you on the plane,” suggests Mom.

“I doubt that whoever did that had someone waiting for us at the airport. He probably expected his man on the plane to finish the job. I’m sure that’s Scotland Yard behind us. Maybe he’s new and hasn’t gotten the hang of following people without them knowing it.”

Because we're so busy watching the man behind us, we miss a lot of the scenery. But I think overall it's green and hilly and I love that so many buildings are made of large stones or wood, something you don't see a lot of North America where everything is brick or aluminum siding.

"I'm hungry," announces Julia after about two hours of driving, broken up by periodic breaks to check the map.

"Hungry?" says Dad. "We just ate!"

"I'm a bit peckish myself," I say. *Peckish* is British slang for hungry.

"A cup of tea isn't a bad idea," says Mom, getting into the swing of things. "It will force our man to stop and give us a chance to look at him."

"It will also give us all a chance to go to the loo," says Julia, helpfully. *Loo* means bathroom.

"Well, I guess it wouldn't hurt to stop and stretch our legs," says Dad. "I'll keep my eyes open for a place to turn off."

We exit the highway at the next village, Peterborough, and though it's small, we find a little tea-house on the main road through the town.

Like the hotel, the tea-house has wood-paneled walls as well as lots of small wooden tables and chairs. There is a glass counter with all sorts of pastries behind it and I have trouble choosing what I want.

"I thought this was just supposed to be a cup of tea," Dad protests as Julia, Mom and I go ahead and order a piece of chocolate pound cake, a custard slice, and a strawberry tart, respectively. He sighs.

"I'll have a Banbury tart," he says to the lady behind the counter.

"What's a Banbury tart?" asks Julia, always curious about food.

"It has ground up raisins, figs, and walnuts," Dad explains. Julia doesn't look impressed.

We all have a mug of tea and we carry our snack to a table by the window. The man following us hasn't gotten out of his car. He's just parked it right behind ours on the street.

“Well,” says Dad, sitting down. “He’s being so obvious about it, his intentions can hardly be malicious. If they do tea-to-go here, should we take him out a cup?”

“I think he can see that we’re going to be awhile,” says Mom. “Let him come in and stretch his legs if he wants to.” She still doesn’t sound convinced that he’s a good guy.

Dad checks his map while we finish our snack.

“I think we might have stopped unnecessarily,” he says, popping the last bit of tart into his mouth. “It looks like Sutton is the next town.”

“Are you going to Sutton, love?” asks the lady who was behind the counter and is now cleaning a table beside us.

“Yes,” says Dad, without elaborating.

“Visiting family?” asks the lady, pausing in her cleaning.

“No,” says Dad. “Not family. A friend.”

The lady nods.

“I’m not usually so nosey,” she says. “It’s just that Sutton is an unusual destination unless you have family or friends there.

There are a few moments of silence as the lady continues to wash the table. It’s a small table and it’s getting a lot of attention.

“I apologize for intruding,” the lady starts speaking again. “But I thought you’d like to know that I think you’re being followed.”

Dad and Mom look startled.

“Yes,” says Dad. “I think you’re right.”

The lady looks directly at us. She’s older. Maybe in her late 60’s.

“If I may be bold again . . . May I ask if you’re Dr. Anderson Kent?”

Now Dad and Mom look even more startled, then Dad laughs.

“I guess it would be silly to deny it.”

“I’m sorry,” says the lady. “Let me bring you some more tea to keep up the pretense . . . That is, for the sake of the man who is watching you, and then I’ll explain everything.”

The lady brings over a tea-pot and doesn’t speak until she’s pouring us all a fresh cup.

“My name is Daisy Sutton. My sister is Rose. I believe you are going to Sutton to see her?”

Dad nods.

“My sister has told me all about you coming.” Although Daisy takes her time replenishing our sugar and milk supply, she is speaking quickly. “Last night she phoned me, frightened. She said she heard noises in our father’s library but she was too scared to go and check what was going on. Naturally, I told her to phone the police, but she said she already had. She just wanted to talk to me while she waited. The police came as fast as they could, but the intruder ran away. I’m worried about my sister, but she refuses to leave her house and stay with me.”

“You have nothing to worry about,” says Mom comfortingly. “We’ll be staying with her now.”

We all look at Mom, surprised. I would have thought the intruder story would have her insisting that we all head back to Canada on the next flight out, but I guess the thought of a poor old lady, scared in a big house, is occupying her thoughts.

“That’s what I wanted to know,” nods Daisy. “I wanted to make sure she’d have company tonight. I know you’re a good Christian man and that Rose will be fine with you there.”

“If you’d like to pray with us right now, we can,” says Dad.

Forgetting about the man in the car, Daisy pulls a chair over from the table beside us. We don’t bow our heads so maybe he’ll just think we’ve gotten into a conversation with the shop owner.

Dad says a prayer for protection, both for Daisy and for Rose, as well as for a resolution to this whole business, and we all say a hearty amen when he’s done.

“Please phone me if Rose needs me, or if you do,” Daisy says, standing up. “I’ve never taken an interest in Father’s old relics, but it seems that someone else has.”

As an afterthought, just as we’re heading out, Daisy asks, “Who is the gentleman following you?”

Dad shrugs and smiles.

“We haven’t figured out whether he’s friend or foe yet. I imagine it won’t take too much longer to find out.”

I’m glad it’s a sunny autumn day, because if it had been one of England’s grey, rainy days, I would be feeling kind of

creeped-out, as if I was caught in the middle of a murder mystery.

But the sun is going to go down tonight and I wonder what it will feel like to stay in an old English house where ancient relics are kept and where thieves break in to look for them.

Sutton is small. The closest thing they have to a main road is a short street with a few houses, a post office, and a pub. We all go into the post office with Dad and I'm surprised to find that it's also a small grocery store. The lady behind the counter is happy to direct Dad to Rose Sutton's house. She's so talkative that I imagine by this time tomorrow, anyone in Sutton who comes in for their mail will know that Rose Sutton has foreign visitors.

Taking advantage of her willingness to talk, Dad says, "I understand there's a church in Sutton?"

"Oh yes," says the lady, beaming at the chance to impart information. She is middle-aged with curly blond hair and bright red lipstick. "Rose Sutton will be able to tell you all about it. Her family has kept it up for years because it's on the edge of their property. Church of England, of course. Her family never went in for all that Wesleyan nonsense. Of course, my son is a devout follower of the . . . Oh hullo, Freddie." A young man wearing overalls has just come in the door, causing a bell to ring. "Freddie works for Rose Sutton," she says to us. "He's an *electrician*." The way she says it, she clearly considers this is an impressive career.

Freddie smiles absently at us as he selects a pack of cigarettes and a bag of potato chips.

"Crisps," Julia and I say to each other at the same time, and laugh. *Crisps* are potato chips in England. *Chips* are French fries.

"Oh, that's where we're headed," says Dad. "Are you doing some work for Mrs. Sutton?"

"Whole house needs the wires replaced," says Freddie briefly, as he puts his items on the counter and reaches into a pocket for a wallet. He doesn't look like the typical Briton because he has a tan and wavy black hair. My guess is he's Middle Eastern, although he has an English accent. He's good-

looking and since we just got back from Syria where my sister had a crush on one of the soldiers assigned to guard us, I figure Freddie will be her next attraction.

“Freddie started this afternoon. He came in here asking for directions, just like you folks,” says the postmistress, ringing up his purchase and taking his money. “You’ll be here for a while, won’t you, love?”

“Uh-huh,” says Freddie, pocketing the cigarettes, opening the bag of crisps and heading out the door. “Be seeing you.”

He gives Julia a wink.

Dad and Mom exchange glances.

“He is *so* cute,” says Julia turning rosy and still watching him through the window.

Freddie’s already in his small truck when we’re getting into our car.

“He could be the one!” says Mom once all our car doors are closed. “Scotland Yard could have sent him ahead of us! We certainly took our time getting here. He could have easily made it ahead of us.”

Dad nods.

“That reminds me. Where’s our man?”

We look around but the car that followed us is nowhere in sight.

“Obviously it was his job to get us here safely!” I say, excitedly. “But now that we’re here, it’s Freddie’s job!”

“That’s the most obvious theory,” agrees Dad, starting the car.

We end up following Freddie to Rose Sutton’s house.

Freddie drives his small truck around the side of the house and disappears while we park in the front and get out.

It’s a grand house made of grey stone. I count eight windows on the second floor and a giant window on either side of the first floor. The grass on the large lawn is long but not unkempt. There are some giant urns on the front stoop, each filled with orange and yellow autumn flowers.

Somewhat hesitantly, we head for the massive wooden door. There is a modern doorbell but it takes about two minutes for someone to answer it.

When the door swings open, it is a small elderly woman wrapped in a soft pink crocheted shawl and wearing a long beige dress. Her hair is white and her eyes are sparkling blue.

“Dr. Kent!” She claps her hands like a little girl. “I recognize you from your photos, Dr. Kent! And this must be your beautiful family! Come in! Come in!”

And before we can say anything, we are standing in a foyer decorated with enormous oriental-style vases full of dried flowers. There is an old-fashioned coat-rack and a wooden bench to sit on while you take your shoes off.

My parents return the greeting and make introductions.

“And now you must come in here and rest after your long journey,” says Mrs. Sutton leading us to a large, but comfortable, living room. It is full of floral sofas and loveseats and wooden tables and framed photographs of people on all the tables. There are china knick-knacks on wooden bookshelves and paintings of the English country-side on the walls.

“I’ll get Belinda to make us some tea,” says Mrs. Sutton, heading for the back of the room where there is a small hallway that presumably leads to a kitchen.

“Can I help?” asks Mom.

“Oh goodness, no,” says Mrs. Sutton smiling. “Sit down, dear. Belinda has already made us some sandwiches and all that is left is to boil some water.” She heads down the hallway.

“A lovely lady,” says my mom, finding a comfortable loveseat to sit on. Dad takes the spot beside her and Julia and I take either end of a long couch. I look at the photos on the end table beside me and in a few minutes Mrs. Sutton is back, followed by a young woman carrying a large tray.

The tray is put down on the one table that doesn’t have pictures or knick-knacks, a large round wooden table in the centre of the room. There is a plate of sandwiches, as well as some scones and butter and jam, and a big pot of tea.

“This looks wonderful!” says Mom, staring down at the spread.

“Belinda is a treasure!” says Mrs. Sutton sitting down in a chair beside the table and beginning to pour tea into cups. “Her mum keeps my house tidy and Belinda does all my cooking.”

“We also met Freddie at the post office today,” says Dad, accepting a cup of tea.

“I’ll be off now,” says Belinda quietly to Mrs. Sutton.

“Thank you so much for staying the extra hour, dear,” says Mrs. Sutton.

After a smile, Belinda leaves the room and closes the door behind her.

“Ah, yes, Freddie,” says Mrs. Sutton, sitting back in her chair. “He came to me today. Excellent references. He had a letter of recommendation from my godson. My godson is my heir, you see. He seems he feels that this old house needs to have some new wires.” Mrs. Sutton’s eyes sparkle. “He doesn’t realize that this house goes back to the days when people used candles.”

“When exactly was this house built, Mrs. Sutton?” Dad asks, leaning forward and going into archaeologist mode.

“Well, I daresay there isn’t an original panel of wood in this whole place,” says Mrs. Sutton. “There have been so many renovations over the years. But the original structure was said to have been established before the days of the Normans.”

Dad whistles.

“But of course there is no way to actually prove that. The town records only go back to the 1500’s. But since the legend of the town’s beginnings go back to the crusades, it is more likely that the house *was* here at the time of the Norman invasion of England and the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Obviously it survived the devastation that swept across the country at the time. You see, the house was here before the town was. It was a farm that was taken care of by two brothers, John and Peter. John stayed back to tend to the farm, Peter went on the earliest crusade to Jerusalem.”

“1099,” Dad nods.

“In my letter to you, I told you about the crusader, Peter Sutton, and the chest of books he brought back. Those have been kept in this house for a thousand years now. The town of Sutton was established when he brought a little circle of scholars here to study the books and to educate him further on the Hebrew and the Christian faith.”

“A school of some sort?” asks Dad.

Mrs. Sutton nods.

“Of sorts. Certain precocious young men were invited to study the books brought back from the Holy Land, but it didn’t carry on past that one generation, from what I understand. John Sutton most likely put an end to it when his older brother died. It seems he placed all the books back in the trunk, along with Peter’s diary, and just left it for the future heirs of the house to manage.”

We hear a noise outside the door of the room. It sounds like something dropping.

“Belinda, dear?” calls out Mrs. Sutton. “Is that you?”

“Uh, sorry,” says a male voice. The door opens. It’s Freddie.

It looks as if he dropped a pair of pliers on the wooden floor.

“Can I have a look around this room?” he asks, looking slightly uncomfortable. “I think this might be the room I have to start in.”

Dad turns to Freddie.

“Where is the electrical panel located in this house?” Dad asks. “If I’m not being too forward,” he adds, glancing at Mrs. Sutton.

“It’s a good question, dear,” she says to him. “I’m afraid I don’t even know where it is.”

“I, uh, it’s in the library,” says Freddie, sounding surprised that anyone would take an interest in his electric work. “I’m sorry to interrupt . . .” He starts to back out of the room.

“My dear,” says Mrs. Sutton to him. “You feel free to come and go as you please. We were just discussing the history of this house.”

Freddie nods and goes to a corner of the room and begins to wave a small rectangular box all around the wall. Occasionally it beeps.

“What is that?” Julia whispers to Dad, loud enough for all of us to hear.

“I believe it’s a stud-finder,” Dad whispers back, loud enough for all of us to hear.

Freddie nods and smiles while still concentrating on the wall.

“When was the wiring put in this place?” asks Dad, out loud to Mrs. Sutton.

“Oh, my dear,” says Mrs. Sutton, thinking. “I have no recollection of any such thing ever happening. So I imagine it must be quite old. I’m not surprised my godson is concerned.”

We finish off our tea and then Mrs. Sutton shows us to our bedrooms. Julia and I are sharing a sunny yellow room with twin beds and a big window overlooking the backyard. Our bedspreads are a matching pale yellow with pink rosebuds, as are the curtains.

Dad and Mom have a room beside us. It’s done in dark green and pink.

Mom and Dad go back downstairs to help Mrs. Sutton clean up and to get better acquainted. But Julia and I decide to stay in our room. I just want to lie on my bed and read. Julia wants to update her diary, no doubt, planning to fill at least three pages of it describing Freddie.

After that, even though it’s still early, we agree that it’s been a long day and we need our sleep, so we take turns visiting the loo (bathroom) down the hallway and then settle in for the night.

I think it’s the middle of the night when a noise wakes me up. It’s also quite chilly in our room.

For one horrible moment I notice the curtains blowing inward and think that someone is entering our room through the window. But then I realize it’s just the night breeze. Our bedroom window was open when we came into our room earlier and neither Julia nor I remembered to shut it.

I get out of bed, shivering as my feet hit the cold wood floor, and hurry over to close the window. But something down below in the backyard catches my eye. Directly below me, someone is leaving the house.

CHAPTER FOUR

In the dark I can't even tell whether it's a man or woman, but it's someone who is now running across the yard.

For a moment, I don't know what to do.

Should I go next door and wake up Dad and Mom? I quickly decide that they would want to know if an intruder had been in the house.

First, I wake up Julia. Sleepily, she throws a blanket around herself to keep warm and follows me into the hallway. We knock on our parents' door. It takes a few knocks to get an answer.

"Girls!" My dad sounds instantly worried.

I tell him about the person running across the yard away from the house.

"I think this is important enough to wake Rose Sutton," he says, quickly pulling on a bathrobe. "Follow me!"

Mom has also thrown on a robe and we hurry down the hallway to the end door. I guess Mrs. Sutton told our parents which room was hers.

"Mrs. Sutton!" Dad calls out as he knocks. "I'm terribly sorry to wake you, but I think this is important."

After a minute or two, the door is opened. Mrs. Sutton is wearing a big cap on her head and a long flannel nightgown. She looks startled.

“I’m so sorry!” says Mom. “We really wouldn’t have woken you up if we didn’t think it was necessary . . .”

Dad tells her about what I saw.

Mrs. Sutton’s eyes widen.

“Why, my dears, that’s the library below the girls’ room! We must hurry and see if the books are safe!”

Despite her initial surprise, Mrs. Sutton moves quickly along the long dark hallway to the stairs.

The library is right beside the stairs and Mrs. Sutton hurries around turning on lamps.

“Nothing looks out of order,” she says. She peers around a large wooden desk.

“The safe appears to be untouched. You see,” she points to the floor where a person seated at the desk would put his feet. “For some reason, my ancestors liked to hide their treasures in the ground under the house and my more recent ancestors carried on the tradition by putting their safe in the ground.”

“The best thing to do is to call the constable right away,” says Dad. “Even if nothing’s been disturbed.”

“You’re right, of course,” says Mrs. Sutton, reaching for an ancient looking black rotary-dial phone on the desk. “Though it may take him awhile to get here.”

After making the call, Mrs. Sutton suggests we sit in the library and wait.

“You mentioning that it may take the constable awhile to get here reminds me that we met your sister in Peterborough yesterday,” says Dad. “I’m sorry we forgot to mention it earlier.”

“Daisy?” Mrs Sutton, leans forward, her eyes sparkling. “What a delightful coincidence!”

“Yes, we stopped for a cup of tea at her tea-shop. She guessed who we were.”

“Of course she would,” Mrs. Sutton nods. “I’ve told her so much about you.”

“Yes, and she also mentioned that there was someone in here last night too.”

Mrs. Sutton nods.

“That’s something *I* forgot to mention earlier. Actually, I feel much safer now with you and Freddy sleeping here.”

“Freddy sleeps here?” asks Dad, startled.

“Oh yes,” says Mrs. Sutton. “There’s no other place in Sutton for him to stay and I didn’t want him to have to drive from Peterborough every day.”

“I wonder how it is we haven’t woken him up with all of our noise?” says Dad.

“Oh, I’m not surprised. He’s not sleeping upstairs. I gave him my godson’s room which is in the back of the house, behind the kitchen. It has a door that goes directly outside. I find that young men want that sort of freedom.”

“Nonetheless,” says Dad standing up. “I think I’ll go wake him. There’s been an intruder and maybe he heard something.” Dad heads out of the room.

A few minutes later he returns with Freddie. We’re all in our pyjamas, but Freddie is dressed in jeans and a white shirt.

“Freddie just got back from the pub,” Dad explains.

“Heard you had an intruder,” says Freddie to Mrs. Sutton. “Just got back myself . . .”

“Well, my dear,” says Mrs. Sutton. “In that case you might as well go back to bed.”

“It’s possible the police will want to talk to all of us,” says Dad, firmly.

I think Dad is thinking that if Freddie is an agent assigned to protect us, he needs to learn all he can about the intruder.

“Don’t think I can be much help . . .” says Freddie, but he sits down anyhow.

It takes a full fifteen minutes for the constable to arrive. He’s an older man and he greets Mrs. Sutton courteously.

“You must have some valuables around here for someone to make a second attempt,” he says, sitting down on the arm of one of the chairs and pulling out a notebook.

Mrs. Sutton introduces us to Constable Smythe and explains that Dad is here to look over some of her father’s old books.

“It was actually Ginny who saw the intruder,” continues Mrs. Sutton.

Now it's my turn to try to describe everything I saw. Constable Smythe gets a statement from everyone but of course, everyone else just says they were sleeping. Freddie says he went to the pub but was probably on his way back when the intruder was leaving the house.

"Did you see anyone as you were coming up to the house?" asks Constable Smythe.

Freddie shakes his head.

"Well, I'll have a look around," says Constable Smythe, standing up. "Was anything taken?"

"Not that I can tell," says Mrs. Sutton.

While Constable Smythe is in the library, we all sit quietly. By the time he leaves, the sun is beginning to come up.

"I don't know about you," says Mrs. Sutton, coming back from showing Constable Smythe out, "but I don't think I could go back to sleep."

I could, but Dad and Mom decide that we'll all stay up and just make it an early night tonight.

Of course Freddie isn't under Dad and Mom's jurisdiction so he says he's going to get some sleep, but he promises to put his eight-hour day in starting a little later.

Since Belinda hasn't arrived yet, Mrs. Sutton escorts us to the kitchen for a breakfast of tea with bread and jam. Her china is a lovely pattern of roses and vines and makes the simple meal seem elegant.

After that, Mrs. Sutton leads us back to the library where she opens the safe and hands Dad a heavy-looking book bound in a beige cover.

Dad has put on gloves to protect the book and we gather around behind him, all eager to see this famous sketch.

"Well, my dears," says Mrs. Sutton, "here it is."

Casually flipping through the book, Mrs. Sutton finds the right page and puts it down on the desk.

We all stare.

"Well . . ." says Dad, finally breaking the silence. "I will say that that it is a clever forgery. *If* it is a forgery," he adds.

"Do you think it might be authentic?" asks Mrs. Sutton eagerly.

“Well,” says Dad slowly. “As you know, every time period has its artist’s renditions of Jesus. From as early as the 200’s people were creatively producing such artwork. One of the earliest pieces is a sculpture of Jesus with a lamb around his shoulders. But the sculpture is done in the Roman style, typical of its time, with only the title of the piece to let us know that the artist had Jesus in mind. And every century has it’s artwork with Jesus looking like a Medieval man, a Renaissance man, that sort of thing. It’s only more recently that we see artists who strive to make a picture that is historically acceptable, though even now, we have many movies that set the life of Jesus in modern America and make Jesus look like an average American man.”

“Ah, yes,” says Mrs. Sutton, gazing down at the picture. “But this picture is different . . .”

“Yes, it is,” agrees Dad. “From what we know of Semitic people at the time of Jesus, this picture fills the bill. And from what we know of the Bible’s description of the Messiah, this picture also fills the bill. He wasn’t supposed to be handsome, but we can certainly expect that he was a strong-looking man. Despite that this sketch is purported to be done by an enemy, the artist shows the man as being strong-willed and determined, yet there’s an understanding in his eyes . . .”

“Yes, it’s the eyes,” agrees Mrs. Sutton, still looking down at the picture. “Not ruthless, at all. Kind.”

We all nod. It makes me breathless to think I might be looking at a picture of Jesus.

“He kind of looks like Freddie,” says Julia.

That makes us all laugh.

He does actually, but only a bit. With Julia’s current state-of-mind, anyone remotely Middle Eastern would remind her of Freddie.

“Now, you know I’m not an antique dealer,” says Dad, looking at Mrs. Sutton. “I can only give you my opinion as an archaeologist knowledgeable in Biblical artifacts, but even if it only dates to the Crusades, it would be an extremely valuable book. Have you established its provenance?”

Mrs. Sutton shakes her head.

“It’s a family story, nothing more.”

“Then the first thing I want to do is to contact a rabbi who is an expert in first-century Israel. My brother, Ken, gave me his name in case I needed his opinion. He lives in London and works at the British Museum and with your permission, I’ll phone him when the museum opens.”

Mrs. Sutton nods.

“You talk to whoever you have to talk to. Invite him here if you like.”

“I’m sure he’d be delighted to examine such a treasure. The writing in this book certainly looks authentic. Aramaic. Spoken by Jesus, though he no doubt also spoke Hebrew and some of his Old Testament quotes are from the Greek Septuagint. But the one thing that makes me think this is a copy or a fraud is that it’s in book form. Before books, scrolls were popular in Judea. In the synagogue, they read off of scrolls. But that’s not to say that there weren’t any books at the time. It was the time when scrolls were fading out and books were beginning to take over. However, I doubt very much that a book could be preserved that long without being in some kind of protective case. The Dead Sea scrolls were from that time period and they were preserved because they were in pots in a completely dry environment.”

Dad is examining the book.

“It’s survived remarkably well. I almost can’t believe it’s a thousand years old. England is such a damp environment.”

“The chest it was originally kept in was airtight,” explains Mrs. Sutton. “And the safe is, of course, a dry place. I don’t think it was taken out much. What drove my family weren’t the treasures themselves as much as the acquisition of the treasures. So the treasures came home and were put away and the stories were told about how they found them.”

Dad smiles.

“There are still men like that today. The spirit of the hunt. It’s more thrilling than actually owning the object.”

Dad decides he wants to spend the morning in the library, examining the book.

Mom says she wants to explore the village, but looks at Dad first to see if it’s OK.

He looks hesitant but then says, “Go ahead. I can’t expect you to stay locked up here in a library with me. Do you girls want to go with your mother?”

I’m torn. The library is full of all sorts books that I would love to curl up with. But Julia, who doesn’t share my love of history, bursts out, “Of course we would!”

So we go upstairs and get dressed.

There is only one thing that would motivate Mom to leave the safety of the house and that is her love of architecture. I’m sure Sutton has plenty of it.

Mrs. Sutton apologizes for wanting to stay at home but Mom assures her that we just want to get out and go for a walk and that she mustn’t feel under any pressure to constantly entertain us.

Once we’re dressed, we head out down the long driveway.

As we get to the end of it, a pick-up truck coming from behind pulls up beside us. It’s Freddie.

“I’m heading for Peterborough to pick up some supplies,” he calls out. “Do you want to hop in?”

We look at each other but it’s Mom who answers.

“No, thanks,” she calls back. “We’re exploring Sutton today.”

He nods and pulls out of the driveway.

“Mom!” Julia says as he disappears down the road. “How is he going to keep an eye on us if he’s in Peterborough? We should have gone with him!”

“He wouldn’t have been able to watch us if he were doing electrical work in the house all day,” points out Mom.

The first thing we do is turn right and walk down the road. Mom says we’re heading for the stone church, the one the postmistress said was on the edge of the Sutton property. Before we come to the church, there is a cemetery. Mom suggests we wander around it.

“Hey,” says Julia, after we’ve checked out some of the tombstones. “There are a lot of Suttons buried here!”

Mom nods.

“With this many people, it’s hard to believe that Mrs. Sutton and her sister are the last of the line. Still, I guess it happens.”

The stone church looks inviting but the wooden doors are locked.

“I guess we’ll see it on Sunday,” says Mom.

We head back to the road and Mom suggests we walk around the village.

“You mean, go look at the post office again?” says Julia.

Mom laughs.

“Yes, I guess we could do that. But I’m sure there are also a lot of beautiful houses to look at. We can have lunch at the pub.”

“But isn’t the pub like a bar?” asks Julia.

“No,” Mom says. “A pub is a bit different. It serves beer but it’s also a good place to have some authentic British cuisine and enjoy the atmosphere.”

There is one thing I don’t know anything about and that is architecture. But Mom does.

We walk all around the streets of Sutton with Mom pointing out the houses typical of the Victorian era, and others typical of the Georgian period. There is one that she really likes that’s Elizabethan. Mom stands in front of it for so long that a man who comes around from behind it starts talking to her and we end up taking a tour of his garden. After that, we head back to the pub.

The pub is called The Rose and Crown and inside it is all wood-paneling and shelves displaying horse pictures or items related to horses.

“Well,” says Mom, looking at the chalkboard that has the daily specials. “I vote we be a complete cliché and order fish and chips!”

“I agree,” says Julia reading the board. “I don’t like kidney beans.”

“Actually,” says Mom, “that kidney pie would contain animal kidneys, not kidney beans.”

Julia looks as if she might throw up while Mom blithely orders a pint of beer and a couple of Cokes for us.

There are only two other patrons in the pub, two older men. Curiosity overcomes their reserve and very soon after we get our drinks they are casually asking us if we’ve come to see the archaeological exhibit at the church.

“The ones donated by Rose Sutton?” says Mom. “Well, yes, I guess we have.”

“Used to be able to go into the church anytime,” grumbles one of the older men. “Now it’s all locked up because of the old pots and such.”

“Have a lot of people been coming to see the items?” asks Mother.

“From London, mostly,” says the other older man. “Though, I imagine they have to spend the night at a hotel on their way back. Nobody stays here. No place to stay.”

The way he’s looking at us he wants to know whether we’re staying here.

But his friend is oblivious of his attempt to gather information.

“Had a bloke from Edinburgh come. Not a Reverend. Called himself a Pastor. One of those evangel . . .”

“Evangelicals?” asks Mom.

“Yes, something like that. He was keen. Really into archaeology. Wanted to talk about Jesus. I told him I never called our Lord by his first name. He didn’t have much to say about that.”

Our food arrives and out of politeness, the men allow us to eat in peace.

As we’re leaving, Freddie appears at the outside door of the pub.

He nods at us and keeps heading inside.

“Well, we’d better get back,” says Mom. “I don’t want Dad to worry about us.”

When we get back to Mrs. Sutton’s house, she and Dad are finishing a lunch of meat pies and salad.

“Rabbi Lichtman is on his way,” says Dad, cheerfully, standing up briefly. “Should be here this afternoon. How was your exploring?”

“Fine,” says Mom, sitting beside him and accepting a cup of tea from Mrs. Sutton.

“The town is talking about your treasures in the church,” she says, smiling at Mrs. Sutton.

“Oh yes, of course,” says Mrs. Sutton. “I’ll have to call the vicar and arrange a time for you to visit the church. I

understand he's set up a little museum. It was my desire that the Sutton treasures be seen by the people of Sutton, not locked away in some room."

Julia and I opt for a nap and after a couple of hours in our room, we head back downstairs to find our parents. They're in the library with Rabbi Lichtman. He has on gloves and is carefully examining the book. He's a short man with a long white beard and the outfit of an orthodox Jew. When he speaks, I expect him to talk in broken English, as if he's from some Eastern European country, but he has a refined British accent.

"I would concur with you, Anderson," he says. "An excellent hoax. But I will quickly add that it is valuable nonetheless. It is a work of great antiquity and certainly scholars would love to examine the whole work to determine the validity of the textual information. Another interesting question is why make such a work in the first place and why was it simply sitting in the library of a Jerusalem Jew?"

I have to admit, I'm disappointed.

I like the idea of having a picture of Jesus.

Rabbi Lichtman and Dad are discussing the Crusades. It's an interesting topic and I wish I could stay and listen, but Mom and Mrs. Sutton get up to leave the room and it seems that the men are to be left alone to have their discussion.

"May I show you my garden?" Mrs. Sutton asks. Mom enthusiastically says that she would love to see it. So we all head out the back door.

I've never learned the names of flowers but I do know that Mrs. Sutton has a lot of roses. From what I overhear, Suttons have kept this garden since settling the town and some of the perennials are thought to be hundreds of years old. The garden is spread out all over the backyard, with a vegetable garden at the very back.

We help Mrs. Sutton pick some radishes and green peppers and then we head back inside.

"Let's check the library to see if Anderson is done," suggests Mom, after we've dropped the vegetables off in the kitchen.

We find Freddie outside the library door. He looks uncomfortable when we appear.

“Uh, I need to get to the electrical panel,” he explains, “but I don’t want to interrupt . . .”

“Rightly so,” nods Mrs. Sutton. “We’ll just let them talk.”

I don’t know what Freddie is supposed to do, but we head to the living room and soon Belinda is bringing us in some afternoon tea. She’s used the radishes we’ve picked in the chicken sandwiches which is different, but I try one. I notice Julia just skips the sandwiches and goes for the lemon tarts.

“Take some tea to Dr. Kent and the rabbi, please,” says Mrs. Sutton to Belinda. “We won’t force them to join us.”

After having about four cups of tea, Julia excuses herself to go to the loo. When she comes back, she looks excited about something, and I can tell that she wants to tell me something. It’s kind of the way her eyes are flashing at me. But with Mom and Mrs. Sutton on the topic of Tudor architecture, it sounds as if it might be awhile before we are excused and alone.

Mrs. Sutton and Mom are discussing how the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII freed up land for the newly wealthy to build homes on when we hear a shout from the front door.

We all hurry down the hallway to find Dad standing at the doorway for one moment, before bolting out the door.

As we reach the door, we see that he is chasing the rabbi’s car down the driveway, with the rabbi in the driver’s seat, except that the car is careening back and forth and heading for a large tree.

Julia screams. Mrs. Sutton gives a muffled cry. I hear Mom call out a quick pray.

The rabbi’s car hits the tree.

The Strange Sketch of Sutton

CHAPTER FIVE

In one collective rush, we all take off toward the car, even Mrs. Sutton. Granted Mrs. Sutton is the last one to reach the car.

The rabbi is moaning and holding his head.

“Rabbi, sit still!” my father insists as the rabbi attempts to climb out of the car.

“But what if the car blows up?” blurts out Julia.

Mom gives her a withering look.

“Thank God, you’re OK,” says Mom to the rabbi. It’s a strange statement to make to a man who has blood running down his head, but what I think Mom is saying is that she’s glad he’s alive.

Mrs. Sutton, escorted by Mom, hurries back to the house to call an ambulance. She tells us later that Belinda had heard the screams and when she had seen the accident, she called the ambulance. That’s why it’s arriving barely two minutes after Mrs. Sutton and Mom have disappeared into the house.

The paramedics carefully help Rabbi Lichtman onto a stretcher and then into the ambulance. Dad goes along with him and before we know it, Julia and I are standing alone on Mrs. Sutton’s lawn.

“Well . . .” I say, knowing that my voice is a bit shaky. My legs are trembling. “I guess we’d better go in.”

“You know, Ginny,” says Julia, as we’re heading back to the house. “There’s something I feel like I should tell you, but I can’t remember what it is. I was about to tell you something but now I’ve completely forgotten it.”

“You were probably about to tell me that you’re hungry,” I say.

She laughs.

“No, something important.”

“It’ll come back to you,” I say absent-mindedly.

Freddie is standing at the front door, staring out at the car still attached to the tree.

“Bloke going to be OK?” he asks.

“I think so,” I say.

He nods, looking grim.

Before any more words can be exchanged, we hear Mom calling us from the living room.

“Girls! Did the ambulance already come?”

“Yes, Mom!” Julia calls back.

With Dad gone, our moods are restless and sombre.

Freddie is clunking around in the library, probably something to do with the electrical panel, so I don’t feel like interrupting him to look for a book to pass the time.

We ladies sit around in the sitting room until well past a reasonable bedtime. Finally, we hear a noise at the front door.

Dad has arrived, having taken a cab to get back.

“Rabbi’s fine,” he says tersely, rubbing a hand over tired eyes. “But when I explained the circumstances surrounding his injuries, a policeman, or constable I should say, said someone would be out early tomorrow morning to check the car. It’s just routine, I think. Technically it’s a car crash and every car crash requires a report being written up. Particularly since the driver ended up in the hospital. Also, the rabbi will need to have some kind of police report for his insurance company.”

“Well, that’s that,” says Mom, standing up and taking Dad’s arm. “I wouldn’t have been able to go to bed without you but now that you’re home, I really could use some sleep.”

“We all could,” agrees Mrs. Sutton, also standing.

We all sleep soundly. I think that's why we miss out on what happens in the night.

The constable sent to investigate the car crash is having tea with the adults in the kitchen when Julia and I come downstairs.

Dad and Mom are pouring themselves another cup of tea when we sit down at the table.

"Ah," says the constable, who is about Dad's age but bigger and with a moustache. "Now that we're all here, I can ask the young ladies if they have any information."

"Information?" I say.

Julia looks curious, but unlike me, goes immediately to a platter of croissants and danishes and fills a plate.

"Do you have an idea as to where the rabbi's car might have gone?" he asks.

I look at Dad and Mom in surprise.

They nod.

"It's disappeared," says Dad. He takes a sip of tea. Obviously he and Mom have already been questioned.

"Did you hear anything in the night? An engine starting, perhaps?" asks the constable.

We both shake our heads.

"I slept pretty soundly," I confess. "And we didn't have our window open."

Julia's mouth is full of chocolate croissant, but she nods to support me.

"Anybody else in the house, ma'am?" the constable asks, turning to Mrs. Sutton.

"Well, of course there's Freddie," says Mrs. Sutton. "My electrician," she adds, as if it is a normal thing to have a personal electrician living in the house.

"OK, then," says the constable, after a brief pause. "I'd like to talk to him, please."

Dad is sent to get Freddie who comes in wearing a white t-shirt, plaid pyjama bottoms, and bare feet. He looks groggy. As our Scotland Yard protector, he doesn't look like he's got it all together. Dad is right. God is really our protector.

The constable asks him if he has any idea where the car is.

“Well, sure,” he says, rubbing one of his eyes. “I called a tow-truck to haul it away. Didn’t think Mrs. Sutton would want it cluttering up her lawn.”

The constable looks angry.

“That was a crime scene!” he says.

“Crime scene?” says Freddie. “He lost control of his car and hit a tree!”

“That was for me to decide,” says the constable, stiffly, standing up. “Very well. First of all I want to see where the car hit the tree and then after that I want the name of the towing company.”

He walks out of the kitchen with Dad and Freddie following him.

Well, if Freddie’s from Scotland Yard, I figure he knows what he’s doing. But the constable certainly didn’t seem pleased. I guess they’ll sort it all out.

“Crime scene!” says Mrs. Sutton, when the men have left. “That gives me the chills. My dears! Could it be possible?”

“I think at this point, anything’s possible,” sighs Mom, reaching for a croissant.

“Well, dears,” says Mrs. Sutton. “Tomorrow’s Sunday. Would you like to accompany me to church?”

“Of course,” says Mom. “We’d love to.”

“I’ll call our vicar and tell him that you’re coming,” says Mrs. Sutton, standing up. “He’ll be delighted. He’ll be able to show you all the other Sutton treasures. He’s an early bird so I’ll ring him at home.”

She heads out of the kitchen.

We sit eating and drinking until Belinda comes in the back door of the kitchen. She smiles at us as she takes off her jacket, hangs it up and begins to whistle as she moves around the kitchen.

A young man appears at the back door with paper bag. Belinda takes it from him and they exchange hellos and smiles. Although they only make some pleasant remarks about the weather, their friendliness makes me think that they might like each other. The bag turns out to be full of bakery goods, enough for the daily needs of the household.

After the man leaves, Belinda explains to us that he's Charlie, son of the postmistress that we already met. A truck from Peterborough comes everyday with the town's baked goods and Charlie then delivers them to the regular customers in Sutton.

"We go to a Bible study together," concludes Belinda.

"Oh, that's lovely!" exclaims my mom. "Church of England?"

Belinda blushes slightly.

"A little more evangelical than that," she says.

Mom laughs.

"I think that's our brand of Christianity, as well. Though, of course, while we're here and our hostess . . ."

Belinda nods.

"Well, Church of England is just fine," my mom concludes as Mrs. Sutton returns.

"Our vicar would be delighted to see you today," says Mrs. Sutton. "That is, if Dr. Kent is willing."

"Oh, I'm sure he will be," says Mom, standing up. "He's very eager to look over the collection."

Once Dad knows he can examine the Sutton treasures, there is no more lingering over tea. He hustles us out the door and Mrs. Sutton suggests that we cross the grass as a shortcut.

As we're walking across the large lawn, I see Freddie ambling down the driveway, heading for the road. I guess he's following us discreetly by pretending to be going to the village. I don't think anyone's told Mrs. Sutton that he's a Scotland Yard agent.

As we arrive at the small stone church, the vicar has obviously been keeping an eye out for us because he greets us before we even have a chance to knock on the door.

"Welcome!" he says, smiling at all of us.

He's younger than Dad, but has a round, pale face and glasses which give him a scholarly, serious look.

"Come in, come in," he directs us into the simple church interior. There are wooden pews and a cross at the front, not as elaborate as some churches. The vicar introduces himself as Steggles and I don't know if that's his first or last name. Dad introduces us and then himself as Anderson. Then the vicar

leads us to a door at the front of the church which he opens with a key. It turns out to be to some stairs which we head down. Another door and another lock.

“Security,” explains Steggles.

“Understood,” says Dad.

The basement of the church is a fellowship hall with long tables and chairs and a kitchen at one end, but all around the room are glass display cases – the Sutton treasures.

The first thing that catches our eye is a gleaming gold cow.

Mom gasps.

Even in the dark room, it sparkles.

“Yes, isn’t that splendid?” nods Steggles, leading us to the glass case that it is standing in. “Sort of puts me in mind of the ancient Israelites.”

“The Exodus or Jeroboam?” asks Mom.

Steggles laughs.

“You read my mind. Of course, Moses destroyed the golden statue that the Israelites bowed down to, so I’d have to say Jeroboam.”

“Is there any possibility . . . ?” Mom doesn’t finish the sentence.

“That this is a replica of Jeroboam’s cows?” Steggles finishes it for her.

“What are Jeroboam’s cows?” asks Julia.

“When Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, became king, Jeroboam broke away from the southern kingdom and formed his own in the north, which became known as Israel,” explains Dad. He is walking in a circle as he examines the small cow. “But Jeroboam was afraid that he would lose his subjects if they kept traveling down to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. So he had two gold calves made and then put one in Bethel and the other in Dan. He announced to Israel that these were their gods, who had brought them out of Egypt.”

“So, he turned them to idolatry?” I say. Julia’s eyes have already glazed over and she’s looking around the room for something else that might be interesting.

“Exactly,” says Dad, his eyes still on the statue. “The Bible doesn’t give us the dimensions of his calves. I wonder . . .”

“Mrs. Sutton,” says Mom, looking around. “Where on earth did you keep this all these years?”

Mrs. Sutton laughs.

“In a crate in the attic. It had Hebrew writing on it, Steggles says.”

Steggles nods.

“Yes. My Hebrew is a bit rusty but I think it was a crate that had originally held jars of olive oil.”

“Any idea about the provenance?” Dad is fixated on the statue. He’s gone right into archaeologist mode.

Steggles shakes his head.

“No records, Mrs. Sutton says. Just something her family had for years.”

“If its solid gold it must be priceless,” says Mom. “I mean, never mind the historical value.”

“I doubt it’s anything but gold-plated,” says Steggles. “But I’m not an expert.” He looks at Dad questioningly.

“We’ll have to have a closer look at it,” says Dad, glancing at Mrs. Sutton who nods her permission. “I’ll call a friend of a friend of mine from the British Museum. He’ll have what we need to try to establish its origin. Offhand, I would guess it’s an idol and it’s Middle Eastern, but a first year archaeology student would be able to tell you that.”

We move on.

Dad follows Steggles and soon they are examining a piece of cloth and having a discussion about the Mandylion.

The Mandylion myth is that there is a piece of cloth with a picture of Jesus’ face on it. There are different stories of how it happened. Some traditions say that a woman named Veronica wiped his face while he was on his way to Calvary.

The next glass case contains a small statue of a Greek shepherd but with the name ‘Yesu’ scratched on the bottom in Greek letters.

“It looks like the earliest artwork we have of Jesus,” Dad says, glancing at us since he’s recently referred to it.

Steggles nods.

“The marble piece in the Vatican’s museum in Rome,” he says. “Probably done in the late 200’s. Yes, I would say this is a very similar piece.”

Dad is looking at Steggles with respect.

“Of course,” Steggles continues. “Depicting Christ as the good shepherd was very common.”

“A product of its time,” Dad agrees, “more than a realistic depiction.”

That launches Dad and Steggles on a lengthy topic about the earliest depictions of Jesus Christ in art.

Julia giggles and whispers to me to check out one of the windows in the corner. Though we’re below ground, there are small windows near the ceiling of the room. Freddie is peeking in one of them. My theory of him keeping an eye on us is upheld. I turn away before he notices that I’ve seen him and Julia and I begin a tour of the glass cases.

There are no explanations to go along with the artifacts like there would be in a museum, so if we want to know what things are, we have to tag along behind Mom and Mrs. Sutton.

“. . . from the time of the Crusades,” Mrs. Sutton is saying to Mom as we peer down at a large silver cross. “I’m told it’s a particular cross particular to a certain type of Crusader, but I’m afraid I can’t remember at the moment . . .”

The next glass case contains an ancient oil lamp.

“Canaanite, I’m told,” says Mrs. Sutton.

Mom nods.

“Now this is interesting,” says Mrs. Sutton, as we come to an intact clay pot. “From the time of Joshua. Found at Jezreel. Or was that Hazor?”

We move on.

We come to the case that Dad and Steggles are in front of.

“Or take for example, the Publius Lentulus document . . .” Steggles is saying.

Dad nods.

“The 1514 forgery.”

“Exactly,” says Steggles. “Brilliant idea. Pontius Pilate’s successor writes down a description of Jesus. Only drawback is, it’s describing the beauty of the 16th century – a tall man, graceful curly hair, smooth complexion, symmetrical face, clear blue eyes . . .”

“Yes,” nods Dad. “And Isaiah explicitly said that there would be nothing beautiful about his appearance, nothing that would draw us to him.”

Their conversation prevents us from examining the case they’re standing in front of so we move on to a Byzantine washbasin. Or it might be Renaissance. Mrs. Sutton isn’t sure, but Mom comments that it’s beautiful, whatever it is.

Mrs. Sutton nods.

“Steggles tells me that these are very valuable. But I believe that these treasures belong to the people of Sutton as much as they do to me and I want them to be able to see them.”

Mom says that Mrs. Sutton has a generous spirit.

Our day is full of examining the treasures – a Crusader sword, a Phoenician water jug, a Greek vase, Roman coins, Israelite shekels from the time of the Maccabees, a portion of a wall mosaic from a synagogue in Turkey, a kitchen utensil from Masada at the time of Herod of Great, just to name a few.

Dad wants to carefully examine each item so Mrs. Sutton suggests we leave him with Steggles and head back to the house for tea.

Once back in Mrs. Sutton’s sitting room, Belinda brings in a plate of sandwiches and a pot of tea that we all devour. She apologizes for not finishing the day’s baking but says that she has some shortbread cooling in the kitchen and will bring it in soon.

“Belinda, dear,” says Mrs. Sutton, before she can leave the room. “You seem a little distracted today. Would I be rude in inquiring as to why your mind is on other things?”

“Oh no,” says Belinda. “I don’t mind at all. It’s just that it’s all a rather peculiar business, that’s all . . .”

“Do sit down,” says Mom, sliding over on the couch to make room for her.

Absently, Belinda sits.

“Well, you see, it’s Charlie. You know we’re friends. Well, he just stopped by to tell me about something strange that happened in the pub at lunch today. He felt he should tell me because it involves our Freddie.”

“Freddie?” says Mrs. Sutton.

“Yes, ma’am. He was at the pub preaching what can only be described as a sermon.”

Mom’s and Mrs. Sutton’s eyebrows rise at that.

“He had his lunch there,” continues Belinda, “but then he stood up and said ‘if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me.’ Charlie says at first everyone thought it was an offer to buy a pint for them, but then Freddie began speaking about waters of everlasting life and how he was the way to life everlasting . . .”

“*He* was the way?” says Mom.

“Well, Charlie can only assume he was talking about Jesus.” Belinda stands up. “Well that’s it, ma’am. I only heard this about ten minutes before you arrived back and I was so distracted by it that I accidentally burned my first batch of shortbread.”

“I don’t blame you,” says Mrs. Sutton, taking a thoughtful sip of tea. “It’s not every day that one finds out that one’s electrician is also an itinerant preacher.”

It seems to be the British way not to discuss strange things for too long because Mrs. Sutton changes the topic despite that I know all members of the Kent family would have enjoyed talking about Freddie some more.

Our Scotland Yard man preaching in the pub! We saw a Christian movie once about a man who started preaching in a bar in Las Vegas but I’ve never known somebody that brave in real life.

Mrs. Sutton is telling Mom about one of the paintings on her wall, saying that it was done by her grandmother and that it was of a nearby lake. Would we be interested in taking a drive out to see it sometime?

Mom doesn’t have a chance to answer because Dad comes in at that moment and joins us for what’s left of the sandwiches. Belinda brings in the shortbread and we finish up lunch talking about the Sutton treasures at the church.

Afterward, Mrs. Sutton excuses herself saying that she is going to rest in her room for the afternoon but to feel free to make ourselves at home.

“Well, I want to go look at Mrs. Sutton’s garden,” says Mom. “She has some flowers out there that I’ve never seen before.”

“I’m inclined to check out that library some more,” says Dad. “Want to join me Ginny, Julia?”

Julia makes a face but I eagerly accept.

“Well kiddo,” says Mom to Julia, standing up. “That means you and me to the flower garden.”

Julia sighs but follows Mom out of the room, both of them carrying the lunch plates since they’ll be passing through the kitchen.

Dad and I head down the hall to the library.

I almost start telling him about our Scotland Yard man preaching in the pub but stop when I see that Freddie is in the library. Freddie is just as startled when we push open the door and find him halfway inside what looks like a closet. I guess it’s the electrical panel.

“Uh, just finishing up,” he says, as we come in. “I won’t disturb you.”

“Oh, it’s no disturbance,” says Dad absently. He’s already heading for one of the walls covered in bookshelves. There’s a particular book he wants because within minutes he’s found it and is sitting in one of the comfortable leather chairs.

I browse.

Freddie starts taking off the covers of one of the electrical outlets. I wonder if he’s a real electrician or if he just has to go around the house fiddling with electrical stuff while keeping an eye on us.

He must be doing something, I decide, as I watch him out of the corner of my eye. I guess in a house this old there’s always something to do.

There’s a book about the history of England that looks interesting. It’s called *Our Island Story* and it’s for children because it has pictures. But it has a lot of information too.

I settle into one of the other leather chairs and get caught up in the stories of the mythical Albion and the hero Brutus and the Romans trying to conquer Briton and Boadicia fighting back and the coming of the Saxons and Arthur and his knights . . . By the time I’ve reached Henry VIII it’s time for a light supper.

We are summoned by Julia to join Mom and Mrs. Sutton in the kitchen. Freddie has long since left the library. Since

The Strange Sketch of Sutton

Belinda has Saturday afternoons off, Mom and Mrs. Sutton have made us a salad, some rolls, wine for the adults and lemonade for Julia and I.

It crosses my mind that Freddy never eats with us. I wonder how he keeps an eye on us if we barely see him.

Little do I realize what awaits us tomorrow.

CHAPTER SIX

I've never been to a Church of England service before.

We've all each brought along one good outfit so that's what we wear.

At a breakfast of tea and rolls, Mrs. Sutton is wearing lace and pink satin and pearls. On her head is a large pink straw hat with a white feather.

Julia whispers to me that she looks like a little girl playing dress-up but I think she looks a picture in a Victorian novel.

We walk across the dewy morning lawn and into the front door of the church, now wide open as Steggles greets people coming in.

Mrs. Sutton leads us to a pew at the very front.

We know some of the hymns, like All Creatures of Our God and King, but a lot of them we just have to mumble along to. After a prayer, we sit down and Steggles begins to speak.

I take a quick peek behind us. The church is full.

Freddie has just come through the door and is taking a seat in the back pew. Guess he's here to make sure we're safe.

There are some announcements about local community events, a ladies group knitting blankets for poor children, a

charity luncheon to raise money for a missionary in Honduras, that sort of thing.

I guess at that point maybe we would have sung some more songs or maybe Steggles would have just begun his morning message, but there is a little murmur in the church.

I turn to see Freddie walking to the front.

“May I read a scripture?” he asks Steggles, politely.

Steggles looks surprised but he gives a gracious gesture to indicate, *by all means*.

Freddie opens up a small Bible he has been carrying and begins to read.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me, to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.”

Freddie looks up.

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Freddie heads back in the direction that he came from. Before stepping out the door he tosses back one phrase.

“I’ve returned.”

I’ve returned. It gives me chills to hear him say it.

It’s unbelievable. Could he be . . . ? I’m staring back at the door. He’s gone now, but his presence is still felt. It’s impossible, or is it possible that he really is . . . ?

The whole church is talking all at once.

Steggles looks stunned. He kind of staggers towards Dad. Mom quickly scoots over to give him a spot to collapse into.

“Of course, you know what he was saying,” he says to Dad, his eyes wide.

Dad nods emphatically.

“He was quoting Isaiah. Jesus quoted the first part of the prophecy when he stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth and he concluded it the same way Freddie did. Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Dad and Steggles both have glazed looks as they talk.

“Yes, but he finished off the prophecy,” says Steggles. “The part that some scholars say applies to the second coming.”

So he’s thinking it too!

Mom is listening carefully to Dad and Steggles. Mrs. Sutton looks as if she has no idea what to think. Julia looks confused too.

“I can’t very well carry on with the service,” says Steggles.

“Oh, but I think you must,” says Dad, looking around. “Stand up. Say something. Say anything. But don’t leave these people like sheep without a shepherd. They need you right now, Steggles!”

Steggles nods and after taking a deep breath returns to the front.

“Dear people,” he says, earnestly. “That was startling, to say the least. The young man implied a rather fantastical notion that he might be the returned Saviour that we are all awaiting. Now, I’m not going to tell you that this is impossible. The first time our Lord came, many people didn’t recognize him as their Messiah. God forbid that that should happen the second time around. I don’t pretend to be a prophecy expert and I don’t pretend to understand the book of Revelation.”

There is still a lot of murmuring in the church.

“But, I will say this,” says Steggles, firmly. “Let’s keep an open mind and let’s stay close to our Bibles. Don’t get caught up in anything that isn’t true and don’t run away from something that is true. Read your Bibles, dear friends. Read it very carefully. Evaluate everything that happens through its words and stay close to God in prayer. He will show you the way.”

Steggles steps down from his podium and heads for the back of the church. It’s clear the service is over. The organist hurries to the front and begins pounding out a tune. It turns out to be Faith of our Fathers. The congregation sings with great intensity. We’re all confused, but united in our confusion.

Steggles is on the front stoop of the church, with many people gathered around him, by the time we make it out the door.

He gives us a nod over all the heads and says that he will stop by later, when he can.

We make our way back to the house.

“Well,” says Mrs. Sutton as we walk across the grass, “I don’t care for being indelicate, but does one keep such a man on one’s staff under such circumstances? I appeal to your wisdom, Dr. Kent.”

Dad takes a deep breath.

“Well, Freddie certainly did imply that he was the second coming, but even Jesus was a carpenter. I suppose this time around he could have come as an electrician.”

We all smile.

“Still, a talk with him is inevitable, I suppose,” says Mrs. Sutton, sighing. “The sooner the better.”

“I might talk with him myself,” says Dad.

I don’t blame him. Our Scotland Yard man claims to be Jesus. How can he go around claiming to be Jesus and keep an eye on us at the same time? On the other hand, if he is Jesus, he should be able to keep us quite safe.

But when we get back to Mrs. Sutton’s, neither Dad nor Mrs. Sutton are able to talk to Freddie.

His room is empty.

All of his stuff is gone. So it looks like he’s planned this in advance.

“Well, that’s that then,” says Mrs. Sutton, looking around the small room. She sounds relieved.

“Inasmuch as you won’t be having a resident electrician,” agrees Dad. “But somehow I don’t think this is the end of Freddie.”

Belinda doesn’t work on Sundays, but she arrives, breathless, just as we’re finishing off a light lunch of sandwiches and fruit.

“Mrs. Sutton!” she gasps, appearing at the doorway of the sitting room. “I came over as soon as I could . . .” She’s out of breath and has to pause before continuing.

“I hope you don’t think me a gossip, but seeing as it concerns Freddie I thought you should know . . .”

“Know what, my dear?” Mrs. Sutton sits up straighter in her chair.

We’re all leaning forward to hear what Belinda has to tell us.

“Well, it’s our church service. You know, we meet in the room behind the pub and today Freddie was there. He stood up during our service and he started talking about the end being near, and how the end was already here. He said he was the end of all things and that he was the truth, the way and the life.”

Our eyes widen and the adults exchange looks.

“He must have headed over there after our service,” says Dad.

Belinda sits down in one of the chairs.

“He was at your service too?”

“Yes, my dear,” says Mrs. Sutton. “And he stood up and announced that he was prophecy fulfilled and that he had returned.”

Now it is Belinda’s eyes that widen.

“Dr. Kent, you don’t think that he’s saying that he’s . . .” Belinda can’t finish her sentence.

“I think he is saying that that’s who he is,” says Dad. “Now it’s our turn to find out whether it’s true.”

Belinda nods.

“Freddie left our service without talking to anyone but he sure did create a stir. Charlie is having everyone over at his mum’s so we can have coffee and talk about what to do. But I wanted to come over here first to let you know seeing as he is your employee.”

“Was my employee,” says Mrs. Sutton, taking a sip of tea. “We came home to find him and all of his possessions gone. I don’t think he’ll be coming back here.”

After Belinda leaves Mrs. Sutton remarks, “Well if they’re meeting at Charlie’s mother’s place everyone who comes in to buy stamps will hear all about Freddie.”

“There’s one thing I want to settle,” says Mom. She sounds almost timid. “Is it at all possible . . . ?”

She can’t finish her sentence. But we all know what she’s trying to say. Is it possible that Freddie is Jesus?

“I’m keeping an open mind,” says Dad grimly. “If he is, we have nothing to fear. But if he isn’t, he needs to be stopped.”

He stands up and pushes his chair back under the table.

“Where are you going?” Mom sounds alarmed.

“To find him,” says Dad. “I want to find out what he wants. He’s dropped all these bombshells. Surely he doesn’t just want to be ignored.”

“Then I’m going with you,” says Mom standing up.

“Me too!” I leap to my feet.

“Me three!” cries Julia, up as well.

Dad sighs.

“Mrs. Sutton,” he says, “would you also care to join us?”

“Don’t mind if I do,” says Mrs. Sutton, her eyes sparkling. She gets up a little slower than the rest of us, but soon we’re all heading across her front lawn.

“I think we should start with Charlie and his mum’s place,” says Mrs. Sutton. “If anyone has an idea of where he might be, it will be Charlie’s mum.”

The post-office is packed.

Charlie’s mother is behind the counter, selling chocolate bars and crisps and cigarettes at a rapid rate. But what really seems to be bringing people out is Freddie.

I can hear his name, though with all the din it’s hard to actually hear what people are saying.

“Most of these people aren’t even Christian!” says Mrs. Sutton. “Word has certainly spread!”

“I’m going to buy something and see if anyone knows where Freddie is,” says Dad joining the long line, or *queue*, as they say.

While Mom examines some postcards and Julia examines some bags of candy, or *sweets*, as they say, Mrs. Sutton turns to me and says, “I can’t help but think that this has something to do with me giving the family treasures to the church. It’s always been such a quiet town.”

“Did anyone outside your home know about all those treasures before you gave them to the church?” I ask.

Mrs. Sutton shook her head.

“No, they were a great family secret, passed on from father to son. But since there are no male Suttons left, it seemed to me to be time to share them. But now I wonder if all of this . . .”

“Mrs. Sutton!”

It's Belinda. She's come down some stairs in the corner of the store.

"Hello, dear!" says Mrs. Sutton. "Such excitement!"

"Yes, indeed. We're upstairs talking about it if you'd like to join us."

Mrs. Sutton glances around, first at Dad who is at the counter paying for some crisps and then at Mom who by now has a handful of postcards.

"Yes, I think that would be good. I'll just let Dr. and Mrs. Kent know we'll be up there."

"Yes and I've been sent down to get more crisps, so let me pop over and get some," says Belinda.

Soon our family and Mrs. Sutton have joined all the evangelical Christians in the area who are having a talk over crisps and pop. It's a large living room and there are about twenty people, mostly under 30-years-old. Dad contributes his large bag of crisps to the coffee table and we take seats where we can find them.

"Has anyone talked to Freddie?" asks Dad.

Everyone shakes their head, no.

"He came, he went," explains Charlie.

"Does anyone want to talk to him?" asks Dad.

People exchange looks.

"We'd love to," says Charlie. "But we don't know where he is now that he's not at Mrs. Sutton's."

"He's currently at the pub," says Dad. "Your mother just told me."

"My mum!" exclaims Charlie, giving himself a whack on the head. "Why didn't I think of asking her!"

"Well," says Dad, leaning forward, "I think we need to go and have a talk with him. Not in an antagonistic way, but just to feel him out. We need to find out what his plans are. We also need to talk theology."

There is a chuckle around the room.

"Yes," agrees Charlie. "We definitely need to talk theology. OK, gang? Who's coming with us?"

Nearly all the people stand up, including our family and Mrs. Sutton.

“Let’s go out the back door,” suggests Charlie. “I don’t want that whole gang down there following us.”

He leads us through the apartment and down a flight of stairs that exits out behind his mother’s shop.

The pub is right beside the post-office so we’re all crowding into the pub within a matter of minutes.

“Normally Sunday is a slow day,” Mrs. Sutton remarks to me as we enter and all try to find some tables.

If half the town is in the post-office, the other half is in the pub.

But it’s no surprise.

Freddie has parked himself in front of the bar and is preaching about the fires of hell. There’s not a person in the pub who isn’t watching with wide-eyed attention.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I'm going to go call Steggles," says Dad to Mom, as soon as we sit down. "He should be here."

He gets up and makes his way to the back of the pub where there is a sign for the bathrooms and a phone.

The only person in the bar not paying attention to Freddie is one overworked barmaid.

In North America there are a lot of Christians who don't drink. England is different. With the exception of Julia and I who have lemonade and Mrs. Sutton who has red wine, the barmaid is busy bringing out 22 pints of beer.

"I won't judge you," Freddie is saying. "But my Father will. Remember Lazarus who begged Abraham for a cup of cold water while he was being tormented in the flames of hell?"

I see Mom raise her eyebrows and quickly pull out a pen and scribble something down on a paper napkin.

"You drink your beer, comfortable in the land of the living, but your torment will come," Freddie assures everyone in the room. "It will come."

"What do we have to do to be saved from hell fire?" calls out one older man.

“Repent,” Freddie calls back. “Repent and follow me. Keep my commands.”

“Who do you think you are?” calls out a younger man. He sounds peeved.

“I am who I am,” announces Freddie. “I am the way. I am the only way to life.”

“Only Jesus Christ is the way,” calls out one of the men in Belinda’s group of Christians.

“I am who I say I am.” Freddie turns to stare at him. “If you don’t believe in me, you don’t have faith.”

“Jesus Christ did miracles,” one of the girls in the evangelical group says. “Can you do miracles?”

“Oh faithless generation!” Freddie practically screams. “How long will I put up with you! Perverse generation!”

Some of the people in the pub look shocked.

“How long will you go on! You search the scriptures thinking that in them you have eternal life, but have nothing because you don’t have me!”

“He’s on his way,” says Dad, dropping into the seat beside Mom. “He said he was just on his way over to Mrs. Sutton’s so he was glad I called.”

Freddie is still preaching, if you want to call it that, when Steggles arrives. The sight of the clergy seems to further increase his passion.

“Woe to the workers of iniquity! Woe to you shepherds who call light darkness and darkness light!”

All eyes, including Freddie’s, are on Steggles as he makes his way to our table.

“Like the Pharisees rejected me, so will I be rejected by men who call themselves religious leaders!”

Steggles blushes slightly, but his jaw looks determined and his eyes aren’t wavering as he stares right back at Freddie. I notice Dad’s face has become stern and he looks just as determined as Steggles.

“Moses wrote about me!” declares Freddie. “And I prophesied to you that I would return! The time is coming! The time has already come! I am HERE!” Freddie throws his arms up in air and for a moment, looks rapturously at the ceiling. Someone begins to clap and a few other people join in.

Freddie decides this is a good place to stop and somewhat abruptly, turns and leaves the pub.

For a few seconds there is silence, and then everyone starts talking.

“Well, one thing’s for sure,” says Mom to Dad. “He doesn’t know his Bible perfectly. When you were phoning Steggles, he said Lazarus was in torment in the fire, but Lazarus was actually the beggar who was with Abraham.”

“It’s an understandable mistake,” says Steggles. “But at least it proves he’s not the Son of God.”

We all kind of grin at each other, like, it’s good to get *that* established.

“This town is going to need help though,” says Dad. He lowers his voice. “Look at these people. They’re confused. They may really buy into this.”

We look around the pub.

People are talking earnestly. Freddie has stirred things up. Some people seem to be arguing with each other.

“They’ll need you, Steggles,” says Dad. “They’ll need all the believers in this town.”

We turn to look at the evangelicals. Even they’re stirred up. Charlie gets up and comes over to our table.

“We’re going back to my mum’s place,” he says. “We have a lot of talking to do. You’re welcome to join us.”

People from the pub have come over to report everything to the people in the store, so it’s a bit chaotic when we return. Nonetheless, we manage to buy more crisps and head up to the apartment.

“He could be the real thing,” one girl with long blonde hair is saying as we take our seats. “I mean, why not? We’re expecting him to come. Why shouldn’t he come here?”

“It doesn’t seem right,” says Charlie. “Aren’t we expecting him on clouds? I mean, showing up in Sutton doesn’t seem right.”

“I don’t want to condemn him until I’m absolutely certain that he’s not who he says he is,” says a tall thin man with short brown hair. “I’m inclined to agree with Charlie, but after all, the Pharisees didn’t recognize their saviour and I don’t want to make the same mistake.”

“That’s wise,” says Steggles. “Stay in the Bible and keep an open mind. The Holy Spirit will lead us.”

Charlie nods.

“But I’m thinking he’ll be telling us that Freddie isn’t the Son of God,” he says.

“I can’t believe you guys!” says the girl with the long blonde hair, standing up. “We’re always praying for him to return and when he does we don’t believe it. Jesus has come back just like he said he would and I’m going to follow him!” She stomps out of the room.

“Trina,” sighs Charlie. “Should we go after her?”

“I will,” says Belinda, also standing up. “Be back when I can.” She heads out.

“You know,” says the tall thin man with brown hair, whose name turns out to be Evan, “When I think about it, I really don’t know any scriptural way to prove or disprove this Freddie bloke. I mean what are the scriptures about false messiahs?”

This is Steggles’s opportunity to pull out his Bible and direct everybody to some scriptures about false teachers and how they lead people astray.

“Bottom line is, they’re in it for the money,” says Steggles. “Jesus said we’d know them by their fruits. I’m not going to outright condemn Freddie at this point, but I’m going to keep a close eye on him, see if he’s loving, see if he’s patient and kind, you know, all of the qualities in 1 Corinthians 13 that describe love.”

“That’s good advice,” says Charlie.

Mrs. Sutton whispers to Mom that she’s tired and wants to go home and lie down. She protests when we get up to join her, encouraging us to stay for as long as we like and insisting that she can make it home by herself. But Mom says she wouldn’t mind a rest as well.

“I don’t think any of us feel like doing any cooking tonight,” says Dad, as we’re heading back to the Sutton manor. “Do they have take-out in England?”

Mrs. Sutton laughs.

“It’s called take-away here. We have pizza delivery here in Sutton and Indian take-away in Peterborough. Why don’t I ring

up my sister in Peterborough and tell her to bring us some Indian take-away?"

"Oh, we can't impose on her like that . . ." Mom begins to protest but Mrs. Sutton interrupts.

"Nonsense, my sister and I always look for excuses to get together. And Indian food is one of her favourite indulgences."

"Tell her, at least, that it's our treat," says Dad. By this time, we're at the front door of the house.

"What's this?" says Mom.

There's a white piece of paper on the front door.

All it says is, "Jesus. Has come. Tuesday. 7:30."

"Strange," says Dad, pulling it off the door and examining it. "It looks professionally printed. Probably everyone in town got one."

Mrs. Sutton agrees and once we're inside heads for the phone to call her sister.

It takes an hour and a half for Mrs. Sutton's sister and the food to come. I've never tried Indian food but it's fantastic.

First there are onion bahji that are kind of like onion rings. Then there are popadoms, a fried bread, with a delicious mango chutney. There are lots of different kebabs – lamb, beef, chicken, and vegetables. For the main course, there is tandoori chicken which is cooked in a spicy yogurt sauce. This comes with a serving of curried rice and as much naan, or Indian flatbread, as we can eat. For dessert, there is a big bowl of creamy rice pudding.

We're all pretty full afterward and it's only the pot of tea that Mrs. Sutton makes that keeps us from all dozing in our chairs.

All through the meal, Mrs. Sutton has been telling her sister about Freddie. When she's done, Daisy Sutton announces that she's not going to leave her sister with a self-proclaimed messiah on the loose.

"Nonsense," says Rose Sutton, her eyes sparkling. "The Kent's are taking good care of me and protecting me from heresy. Besides, you have your tea shop to think about. But, of course, I wouldn't dream of having you drive back to Peterborough at this late hour. You will stay the night."

Daisy laughs.

We all agree that it's late and we're tired and head for our beds.

The next morning at breakfast, Dad suggests we do some sleuthing.

He says that first of all he's going to call Scotland Yard and ask if our bodyguard has been ordered to reveal himself as the Second Coming.

"Who knows?" he says. "They didn't tell us everything. Maybe this is all part of a greater plan."

Our eyes widen at this suggestion. I don't know if Dad is serious.

But Mrs. Sutton is confused.

"Your Scotland Yard bodyguard? I don't understand."

Dad explains to her about what happened to us on the plane ride over and Mrs. Sutton looks horrified.

"But Freddie can't be your Scotland Yard bodyguard. He came because of my godson."

We all look at one another.

Dad suggests that Mrs. Sutton phone her godson to confirm that he sent Freddie and try to find out more information about him.

Belinda is now in the kitchen and promises that when Dad and Mrs. Sutton have made their calls, she'll phone around and see if anyone in her church group might have further information about Freddie's recent activities.

Mom is assigned to use Dad's laptop to access the internet and see if there are any other messiahs appearing in small towns.

Daisy is heading back to Peterborough, but says she'll be keeping in touch by phone.

I think Julia and I are supposed to just keep out of everybody's way. So we head to the library.

"Hey!" says Julia, snapping her fingers as we stop outside the library door. "I forgot! I was going to tell you this ages ago! Remember when the rabbi was in that car crash?"

I nod.

“Well, just before all that happened, I saw Freddie hanging around outside this door, and listen to this, Ginny! He told me he thought I was cute!”

She tells me this like I’m supposed to be thrilled.

“But Julia, he says he’s Jesus.”

“Well, maybe he is!” says Julia. “Have you ever thought about that? And he’s good-looking and I think he was waiting outside that door to tell me.”

“I think more likely he was listening in on Dad and the rabbi.”

“Oh come on, Ginny! He was working all the time around the house.”

“It’s possible, I guess. The electrical panel is in the library.”

Julia looks at me strangely.

“No it isn’t,” she says. “It’s in the pantry.”

“The pantry?” I say.

Julia nods.

“I was hungry last night . . .”

“But you ate a ton!” I interrupt.

Julia shrugs.

“I don’t like rice pudding. So when I was helping clear the plates, I went into the pantry in case there was some cake, or something. Mrs. Sutton said I could!” she says defensively. “I thought it was a cupboard but it was the electrical panel.”

“Dad needs to know this!” I say turning around and heading back to the kitchen.

Dad is just getting off the phone.

“Well, Freddie has nothing to do with Scotland Yard,” says Dad. “We kind of jumped to conclusions there. Apparently, Constable Smythe is assigned to watch us. He does rounds in the village and he’s supposed to be keeping an eye on us. Evidently, he’s been very discreet about it.”

I tell them about the electrical panel.

Mrs. Sutton claps her hands.

“I totally forgot about that old door in there! I think I knew that it was the electrical panel at some point in my life, but I’d totally forgotten.”

“Well,” says Dad. “Freddie wasn’t doing electrical work in the library then. I can only guess at what he was doing. It

seems like too much of a coincidence that a valuable book with a purported sketch of Jesus happens to be in there at the same time that he puts himself forward as a candidate for the Second Coming.”

Mrs. Sutton’s call to her godson confirms that he didn’t send Freddie to help her out with electrical work.

Mom has been sitting at the large wooden kitchen table with Dad’s laptop.

“Well, from what I can tell, no recent Messianic appearances anywhere else. This is it. Sutton is the privileged town.”

Now Belinda is using the phone. Within minutes she’s gotten off with some exciting news.

“I called Trina. You remember her, she was the one who thought he was the real thing. I had a good long talk with her yesterday. She’s longing for an authentic spiritual experience. So she followed him last night and well, now he’s actually staying in her spare room. She and her mom have a little three bedroom house and Trina told me that she and her mother have received him as an authentic religious man, although her mom is more into the eastern religions and sees him as an enlightened teacher rather than the son of God . . .” Belinda pauses for a moment. “Well, I’m kind of rambling, but Trina promised me that she’d call me as soon as she knows what ‘The Teacher’, as she calls him, is going to do.”

“Excellent, Belinda,” says Dad. “It’s really important that we keep that channel of information open, so we’ll have to be careful not to offend Trina. We’ll keep our doubts about Freddie’s messiah status to ourselves.”

We all nod.

By now it’s time for lunch.

Belinda makes some sandwiches that we eat absent-mindedly. I think only Julia notices what’s actually in the sandwiches.

Steggles comes around after lunch, out of breath and looking rosy.

“I’ve been talking to a lot of people today,” he says, once we’re all seated in the living room. “They’re concerned. Particularly because of these.”

He shows us a flyer that boldly declares, “Meet Jesus in the Park.” The rest of it says that you will have a deep spiritual experience Tuesday night in Sutton Park, starting at 7:30.

“They came by post,” explains Steggles.

Julia is sent to check Mrs. Sutton’s foyer where her mail drops through the slot in the door. Sure enough, along with some letters is the flyer.

“Of course,” continues Steggles, “a lot of ministries use expressions like ‘an evening with Jesus’ or other terminology that indicate you might spiritually meet Jesus at their meeting, but I don’t think they mean it quite as literally as this flyer is insinuating.”

Dad nods.

“We need to be prepared,” says Dad.

“My flock is ill-prepared,” says Steggles, groaning. “That’s what I found out today. Most people read a few scriptures in the morning as a devotional, if they even do that. I talked to so many people today who didn’t know the first thing about how to discern a true teacher from a false teacher. We read passages from the writings of Paul where he describes their love of money and that was an eye-opener for a lot of people. What really frightened me was I think a lot of people in my congregation are so caught up in the pursuit of material possessions that they’ve neglected pursuing the kingdom of heaven.”

“Maybe this will all work out for the best,” suggests Mom.

“I know it will,” agrees Steggles. “We needed to be shaken up. I just didn’t realize it.”

“Well,” says Dad, “maybe what we need to do now is prepare for tomorrow. I want to have a few questions that don’t sound belligerent, but that will expose Freddie as a false messiah.”

Steggles nods.

“Jesus wouldn’t want us to blindly accept anyone that comes along claiming to be him. It’s not unprecedented that the Word of God came in the flesh, but it’s not very likely . . .”

While Dad and Steggles are flipping through their Bibles and trying out different questions, Trina phones to say that The Teacher is resting at her place until tomorrow night when he

will appear in Sutton Park. He's receiving a few visitors, but no members of the clergy.

"No members of the clergy, eh?" says Steggles.

"He told Trina that the religious leaders of the first century didn't receive him and that he didn't expect them to receive him now," explains Belinda. "Anyway, I'm going over there." She slings her purse over her shoulder. "Anyone coming with me?"

We exchange looks.

"I want to prepare for tomorrow," says Dad.

"Then we'll stay with you," decides Mom. "I don't want to face him alone."

"I'll be back with a report, if not today, then sometime tomorrow," promises Belinda as she heads out.

Mrs. Sutton and Mom share a pot of tea in the living room while Steggles and Dad do their Bible study in the kitchen.

Julia and I end up in the library.

"Something about this is strange," I say to Julia, when we're seated. "I mean, Freddie shows up in Sutton the same day we do. He ends up staying in the same house as us. I can't help but think we're connected with all of this somehow."

Julia shrugs.

"Freddie never went out of his way to be friendly with Mom and Dad. He kind of ignored them. It's only me that he likes."

I sigh but I have to agree.

"That's true. And that's something else that's weird. Dad's a well-known Bible scholar and he's a great Christian. If Freddie really were Jesus, he'd like Dad. If Freddie is just pretending to be Jesus, you'd think he'd try to impress Dad so that Dad would be on his side. But Freddie barely talked to Dad."

"Unless Freddie didn't want Dad here for some reason," suggests Julia. "Maybe Dad needs to learn more about faith before Freddie, I mean, Jesus can accept him."

I usually ignore my crazy sister's comment, but something about this one makes sense.

I snap my fingers.

"That's it, Julia!" I say, leaning forward in my chair. "The attack on the plane! Maybe we weren't supposed to be here! Maybe Freddie was behind that attack!"

“Freddie wasn’t even on that plane” says Julia, sounding annoyed. “Believe me, I would have noticed!”

“Maybe he’s a man with connections,” I say excitedly. “If he was behind that attack on the plane then he knows some bad people.”

“Why pretend to be Jesus unless you really are?”

“I dunno,” I say. “Money? Power? But only if he could pull it off . . .”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if he does,” says Julia. “He looks a lot like that sketch in Mrs. Sutton’s book.” Julia gets up and heads over to look out the window. I think she’s miffed that I don’t think her love is the Second Coming.

“Yes,” I say, thinking about the sketch. “But Dad says it’s a fake and . . .” I pause mid-sentence and my eyes widen at the thought I just had.

“That’s it!” I whisper to myself. “That’s why the attack on Dad! Freddie knew Dad was a scholar and would say it wasn’t the real thing!”

“What did you say?” Julia calls out from across the room.

“Nothing,” I say out loud, standing up. I’ve got to talk to Dad. I want to tell him what I’m thinking. And that explains what happened to the rabbi! His car was probably tampered with because he agreed with Dad! Freddie was there the whole time listening at the library door and then later right at the car.

I hurry out of the room, kind of breathless, leaving Julia staring out the window and ignoring my exit.

Dad and Steggles listen to me as I tell them what I’ve been thinking.

Dad nods when I’m done.

“It’s not a far-fetched theory, Ginny,” he says. “I think we really have to be careful now when it comes to Freddie.”

He pauses as the phone rings. But after one ring it stops and he carries on.

“No going off by ourselves. From now on we stay in this house and when we go out, it’s as a group.”

Steggles nods.

“In fact, I think we’ll just stay in the house until tomorrow night and then we’ll all go to the Sutton Park to face Freddie together.”

I kind of sense that Steggles and Dad are eager to get back to their Bible study so I leave them and return to the library.

Julia is gone.

I join Mrs. Sutton and Mom in the living room for tea. Julia isn't with them so I figure she's gone up to our room. Probably to update her diary about all that's been happening with Freddie.

Mrs. Sutton has some magazines about life in Britain and the Royal family so I browse through those until dinner.

"Go tell Julia it's dinner time," says Dad, as we all take our places around the kitchen table for an informal meal of omelettes and rolls, prepared by Dad and Steggles.

I hurry upstairs and then back again.

"She's not in our room," I report. "I looked in the library. She's not there either."

Dad and Mom exchange glances.

"Where else could she be?" asks Mom.

"The garden, perhaps?" suggests Mrs. Sutton.

But after a quick tour of the outside, we all determine that Julia isn't here.

"Oh dear!" says Mom, panic in her voice. "Where is that girl?"

The phone is ringing as we enter the kitchen.

Mrs. Sutton answers and briefly listens to what the caller has to say.

Looking worried, she hands the phone to Dad.

We're all tense as we see the look on Dad's face. It's as if a black cloud has suddenly appeared above his head.

He puts his hand over the phone.

"Freddie has Julia. We don't get her back unless I stand up tomorrow night and announce that I believe Freddie is Jesus himself."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mom moans.
“I want to speak to Julia!” I say, pushing forward.
Dad nods.

“Her sister wants to speak to her. Is that OK?”

Evidently it is because the phone is passed to me.

“Julia!” I say to her.

“Oh hi, Ginny,” says Julia’s voice. She sounds casual, not like a traumatized abductee.

“He’s not the Messiah, you know,” I say.

“You don’t know that,” says Julia. “He called when I was in the library. It’s a good thing I picked it up because it was Freddie calling for me. He wanted me to come see him . . .” There’s some muffled whispering on the other end.

“Oh, I’m not allowed to tell you where I am,” she continues. “But anyhow, he told me he needed me so I met him and now he says that I can stay with him until tomorrow night. I think he’s the real thing, Ginny. It’s kind of like a Bible story coming true.”

“You nitwit,” I say to her, ignoring the fact that Mom and Dad don’t like me calling her that. “He’s using you. He wants Dad to get up and say he’s Jesus.”

“I know that,” says Julia, as if I’m the nitwit. “He wants Dad to get up and say he’s Jesus because he *is* Jesus.”

“Jesus didn’t go around abducting young women,” I point out.

“He didn’t abduct me,” says Julia. “I came of my own free volition.” I think she means volition. “Now I have to go, Ginny. We’re going to have something to eat. Tell Dad and Mom not to worry. See you tomorrow night.” She hangs up.

Telling Dad and Mom not to worry is kind of like telling the sky to go away. Mom is hysterical. Dad has Constable Smythe on the phone and is firmly telling him that whatever he is doing, he can stop doing it because he is required at the Sutton house immediately. After that, Dad is calling Scotland Yard and explaining the whole thing to them.

When Mom’s hysteria subsides, she and Steggles and Mrs. Sutton go to the living room for some prayer.

Only Dad and I are left to eat what is now a cold dinner.

“She’s OK, Dad,” I say, trying to comfort him. “She’s not upset.”

“It’s a comfort that she’s not out of her mind with fear,” Dad acknowledges. “But it doesn’t change the fact that I’m out of my mind with fear. Oh Ginny! Let’s pray!”

Dad prays that we will have peace through this and that Freddie will not harm Julia in any way. It’s a short but heartfelt prayer.

Pretty soon Constable Smythe has arrived and is asking everyone questions.

I describe my day with Julia and when I recount my part of the telephone call to him, his tone changes.

“Well, she’s a runaway then,” he says, leaning back in the wooden chair that’s been provided for him. “I was under the impression you people said she was abducted.”

Dad and Mom look at each other.

“She did go voluntarily,” Dad admits. “But under the circumstances, we fear for her safety. When Freddie talked to me he said that if I don’t stand up with him tomorrow night and tell everybody that he’s Jesus Christ, we won’t see Julia again.”

Constable Smythe thinks about this.

“That is serious,” he admits. “Of course I’d heard about all of this Jesus nonsense, but as long as it was harmless I was letting it go. But this changes things somewhat.” He leans forward in his seat. “Any idea where Freddie might be residing at the moment?”

Mrs. Sutton tells him about Belinda’s friend, Trina and her mother.

Constable Smythe nods.

“Well, that will be my first place to investigate. But I’d be awfully surprised to find your daughter there.”

Mom moans.

“Don’t worry ma’am,” says Constable Smythe, standing up. “Sutton is a small town and Freddie can’t have gone too far if he wants to be here tomorrow night for his big sermon.”

“Besides,” he adds, on his way out the door. “Scotland Yard gave me a ring and said they’d be sending a man out my way to help us along. I imagine I can thank you folks for that.”

It’s impossible to tell whether he’s happy that he’ll be getting additional help.

With the adults all worried and uptight, I’m sent up to bed.

It’s almost tempting to climb out a window and run around the town looking for Julia. I wouldn’t be surprised if Dad or Steggles do something like that tonight.

It’s a lonely feeling going to sleep without my sister. I cry a bit, say a prayer, and then finally, after a lot of tossing and turning, fall into a restless sleep.

Morning comes with no news about Julia’s whereabouts.

Dad isn’t downstairs.

He and Steggles did go around Sutton the previous night, mostly talking to the Christians and telling them what has happened and to be on the lookout for Julia and Freddie. Since they were out late, Dad is still sleeping.

Mom and Mrs. Sutton are sitting in the living room. Mom is red-eyed and tired-looking. She gives me a distracted smile. Mrs. Sutton looks sombre and doesn’t seem to see me.

Since no one seems interested in breakfast, I make myself some toast and pour myself a glass of milk. Belinda isn’t around.

When I'm done my breakfast, I join Mom and Mrs. Sutton. Mom has her eyes closed and seems to be praying. Mrs. Sutton is reading a Bible. Before I have a chance to try to figure out what I should do to pass the time, Belinda bursts into the room, out of breath.

Startled, everyone looks up.

"Trina just got a call from Freddie!" she declares. "He didn't spend last night there," she adds. "I asked. She said he headed out in his pick-up truck late in the afternoon and never came back."

"When he came to get Julia," says Mom, softly.

Belinda nods

"He made that call yesterday from Trina's place. She said that he called someone and asked the person if they believed he was who he said he was and would it be possible for them to get together and talk. He said he'd pick her up at the end of the drive-way. After that, he left." Belinda pauses. "But Trina refuses to believe that Freddie's done anything wrong. She's mad at Constable Smythe and Dr. Kent and Mr. Steggles, so I have to be very careful talking to her, not letting her know what I'm really thinking."

"Wise," nods Mrs. Sutton.

"But Freddie called her wondering if anyone had stopped by the house asking for him and of course, Trina told him about all the people who were looking for him. He told her that it was the same for him back when he lived in the first-century. Family members and local authorities were always mad at him when someone wanted to believe he was the Messiah. And Trina thinks he makes perfect sense." Belinda sighs.

"Did he say anything about where he was or how Julia is?" asks Mom, eagerly.

Belinda shakes her head.

"No, unfortunately. But please don't worry . . ."

Dad appears at the doorway. There's hope on his face for a moment, but when he realizes that it's just us, it disappears. I guess he heard Belinda's voice and was thinking it might be Julia's. He drops into a chair and Mom gets up to pour him some tea from a pot on the table.

“She’s right,” he says, taking his first sip, with a nod of thanks to Mom. “Don’t worry, Helena. I think Freddie will take good care of her so as not to spoil tonight. He wants her looking cooperative.”

Mom kind of sniffs. “I don’t see you not worrying.”

It’s the first time in all of this that I see a slight smile on Dad’s face.

“Giving advice and taking it are two different things,” he replies. “Now, I hope it doesn’t come to this, but we have to discuss what I’m going to say tonight. There’s a strong possibility that we won’t find Julia and I’m going to have to stand up and say something.”

Belinda snorts.

“You don’t have a thing to worry about, Dr. Kent,” she says. “All the Christians in town know what’s happened and wouldn’t blame you a bit for saying whatever you have to in order to get your daughter back!”

Dad nods slowly.

“It’s true enough. And believe me, I’ve been thinking about it ever since that phone call came. As a father, I’d say anything to get my daughter back. As a Christian, I’m filled with horror at the thought of declaring this man to be anything other than what he is.”

Mrs. Sutton softly speaks up.

“It is highly likely that God knows that already and has this all planned out to serve his glory. Of course, the hard part in life is always being brave enough to put his glory first.”

“You’re right, of course,” says Dad. “So right . . .”

The phone rings.

Belinda answers it and then tells Mrs. Sutton that it’s her sister in Peterborough.

Wearily, Mrs. Sutton gets to her feet but after a few minutes of talking to her sister, her eyes widen and we hear her say, “No, my dear. You did the right thing! Oh yes, you did the right thing. Oh you don’t know how happy her family will be to hear . . . !”

Of course, Dad and Mom have jumped to their feet.

Mrs. Sutton finishes the call and turns to them, her eyes shining.

“Well, at least we know that dear Julia hasn’t been harmed in any way. You see, my sister has a little flat above her tea shop and this morning when she was doing her hair, she saw your daughter come out of the pub with a young man who looked Middle Eastern. She thought it was strange because she felt it was a little odd for your daughter to be with an older man like that, particularly coming out of the pub . . .”

“The pub,” Mom interrupts. “The pub? I don’t understand. Wouldn’t it be closed at this hour?”

“No,” says Mrs. Sutton shaking her head. “The drinking part would be, of course. But the pub owner has two rooms he often rents out to people passing through. It’s not well known outside the town. It’s mostly people who know someone in Peterborough who take advantage of it. Or salesmen. But it’s pretty clear that your daughter and Freddie had the two rooms last night.”

Mom sits down to think about this, but Dad heads for the phone.

“It’s too much to hope for that they might still be in the area, but I’m going to call Constable Smythe. He’ll need to know.”

While Dad’s picking up the phone, Steggles comes in the back door.

“I’m sorry to intrude,” he says, sitting down on one of the couches. “But I thought you might want the company.”

Mom nods and smiles, but her smile is sad.

Mrs. Sutton pours a cup of tea for Steggles. One thing I’ve noticed, no matter what’s happening, the English have a cup of tea.

That triggers a thought in my mind.

“I think I know how we can track down Julia!” I blurt out.

CHAPTER NINE

Freddie still has to eat,” I say, as everyone turns to look at me. “And Julia will complain if she doesn’t get her meals. He’ll have to get food from somewhere.”

“And he doesn’t have a home base,” interrupts Steggles, immediately following my thinking. “So he’ll have to go to a store or a restaurant!”

“There can’t be too many places!” I say, excitedly. “How about we divide up into groups and go check them out? Then if he shows up at one, we could follow him and maybe find Julia!”

Mom actually looks hopeful.

Dad has paused in his dialling. I didn’t realize he was listening. He finishes dialling, and has a lengthy conversation with Constable Smythe.

“The constable likes your idea, Ginny,” he says, when he gets off. “He says he’ll get on it right away, specifically keeping his eye on the pub and Charlie’s mother’s store. But he said it wouldn’t hurt if we checked out the takeaways.”

“I’m going to call my sister,” says Mrs. Sutton, rising to her feet. Her eyes are sparkling. “She can keep an eye on the Peterborough pub and of course, her tea shop.”

“I guess that leaves us with the pizza delivery to investigate,” says Dad. He glances at his watch. “Though, I don’t imagine that they’ll be open until lunch time.”

When Mrs. Sutton gets off the phone she tells us that her sister says she’s also going to call the Indian takeaway in Peterborough and tell them about the situation.

“Excellent,” says Dad. “Now, we’ll have to do the same with the pizza delivery once it opens. Are there any other sources of quick food around here?”

Mrs. Sutton starts to shake her head and then she remembers something.

“The Mendelbaum farm! It’s not in Sutton, exactly. It’s about five kilometers east of here. It’s a bit of a tourist destination, actually. It has a petting zoo for the children. There are pony rides. And it has a small refreshment tent.”

“Is it open this time of year?” asks Mom.

“Oh yes,” says Mrs. Sutton. “They don’t close to the public until the middle of December.”

“I forget that the temperatures are milder here,” says Mom. “In Canada, the weather would be getting pretty nippy in December.”

“Then let’s get going,” says Dad. He glances down at what he’s wearing as if to confirm that he did get dressed that morning.

Belinda says that she’ll stay around Mrs. Sutton’s place in case any phone calls come in. Steggles has his cell phone if she needs to get a hold of us. Belinda also says she’ll call the pizza delivery place at 11:00 when it opens.

Allowing Mom to grab her purse and me to take a quick trip to the bathroom (I did drink a couple of cups of tea throughout all of this), we all head out for the car.

Since Steggles walked over, all of us get into our rental car.

Mrs. Sutton gets the front seat while Mom, Steggles, and I are squished in the back seat. Thankfully the farm is only about a ten minute drive away.

The farm gate is closed and there is a sign that says it will open at 10:00 a.m.

“Fifteen minutes from now,” says Dad, glancing at his watch.

“We’re going to have to be discreet,” says Steggles. “Freddie won’t stop by any place where he thinks he might be seen.”

“Does Freddie even know about this place?” asks Mom.

“Oh yes,” says Mrs. Sutton. “The first day he was here, before you arrived, he was asking me about what sort of things a person could do around here. I told him about the church museum, this farm, and, of course, the pub. We’re somewhat limited in recreational facilities . . .”

“Then there’s a good chance he may come here!” says Dad. “It’s not a place where he’d expect to see anyone he knows and it’s a great source of food!”

“That it is,” agrees Mrs. Sutton. “I’m pretty sure I mentioned the refreshments as well as the bushels of apples and other produce you can buy.”

When the gate is opened by a young man in overalls, we head down the long driveway and then carefully park on the part of the lawn designated for cars.

I guess we’re all a bit nervous.

We can’t exactly get out and wander freely around like the people who are arriving now. We don’t want to be seen by Freddie if he comes. I’d kind of like to check out the petting zoo but it’s right at the front and the first thing you see when you park.

“Tell you what,” says Steggles. “If Freddie shows up, we want to be able to make a quick getaway. So I’ll stay here in the car.”

“Probably the most discreet place for us is the refreshment tent,” says Dad. “At least for now. Though we’ll have to exit quickly if Freddie arrives . . .”

“A lookout!” says Mrs. Sutton suddenly. “We need someone to alert us as soon as Freddie comes up that driveway! Above all, he must not see us if our plan is to follow him and rescue dear Julia!”

“Well, that would be me then,” says Steggles. “If I’m sitting here, I can clearly see the driveway. I have my cell phone.”

“That won’t do us much good,” says Dad. “I left my cell phone back in Canada. Do you know any bird calls?”

“As a matter of fact, I do,” says Steggles. “How about this?” He opens his mouth and lets out a loud whistle.

“Amazing!” says Dad. “I was only joking, but that’s perfect. What bird is it?”

“Always the scholar,” my mother sighs.

“Meadowlark, I think,” says Steggles. “Though, I can’t be sure. My father taught it to me.”

We get out of the car and head for the big tent that says Refreshments on the sign outside it. We’re the only ones in there because most people don’t arrive hungry. So we have to wait a bit before the food is laid out.

I don’t think the adults are hungry but we have to order something. They order a pot of tea and a variety plate of cookies. I can’t help but think that the cookie plate would go faster if Julia were here. But maybe she will be here before it’s finished . . .

We wait.

And we wait.

And we wait.

At lunchtime we order meat pies and potato salad. The lady serving in the refreshment tent is probably wondering about us, but I think my parents are beyond caring.

Just when I’m taking my last bite of meat-pie and thinking that nothing is going to happen, the sound of a meadowlark is heard in the distance!

We look at each other, not sure what to do.

Is Freddie coming up the driveway? Should we hide? Should we run to the car?

Before we can decide, Steggles appears in the opening of the tent.

“Oh, I’m so sorry!” he says, sounding breathless. “I lost my head. I forgot that that was just the signal for if Freddie came up the driveway. But I just had a phone call . . .”

We are all staring at him because he’s not making much sense.

“Belinda,” he explains. “Freddie was just at Mrs. Sutton’s!”

“What!” exclaims Dad, jumping to his feet. “And we were here?! This is terrible!”

“Julia wasn’t with him,” says Steggles, turning around and heading back toward the car. “Come on! We have to hurry. Belinda’s pretty shaken up.”

Steggles is a little clearer once we’re all in the car. We’re rapidly heading down the driveway to the road.

“Freddy showed up at the back door. Apparently, he thought the house was empty and just wanted to steal something from the pantry. Belinda was in the sitting room at the time, on the phone, so she didn’t hear him at first. But when she got off the phone, she heard a plate, or some piece of china drop and she hurried into the kitchen, only to encounter Freddie heading out the back door with a plate of cake and a bowl of fruit.”

“Oh, if only we’d been there!” moans Mom.

Steggles shakes his head as he drives along the country road.

“He only did it because he thought the house was empty. He still has a key to the back door.”

Mrs. Sutton closes her eyes for a moment.

“I forgot to ask for it back,”

“Well, he didn’t leave in a normal manner,” says Steggles. “I think you can be excused for forgetting.”

“So that’s that then,” says Dad. “He has his food. He won’t be coming out of his lair until tonight.”

“It’s not necessarily the end,” says Steggles. “You see, Belinda called me from her cell phone. She saw Freddie drive down the driveway and then turn right. She kept running and then saw him turn left.”

“That’s the road we’re on!” cries Mrs. Sutton.

“Exactly,” says Steggles. “And the trail is hot! This all happened only minutes ago. He’s somewhere around here!”

The Strange Sketch of Sutton

CHAPTER TEN

So, either we'll meet him along this road," continues Steggles, "or else he turned down one of the side roads." "But all the side roads only lead to farms," says Mrs. Sutton. "They don't go anywhere."

"Exactly," says Steggles. "Which will make it easier for us to find her."

"I think I'd better call Constable Smythe," says Dad.

Steggles hands Dad the cell phone and Dad fills the Constable in on everything that's happened.

"Well, that's excellent," Dad says, hanging up. "Constable Smythe says the Scotland Yard man has arrived and they'll start searching the farms between here and Sutton. He wants us to stay at home and call right back if we spot Freddie."

"I intend to do more than call back," says Steggles grimly. "I intend to follow Freddie and administer torture if necessary to find out where he's hidden your daughter. I've read a lot about the Inquisition and some of the methods used to extract confessions of heresy from people."

"You're a formidable opponent, Steggles," says Dad.

Steggles smiles modestly.

But we don't encounter Freddie on the road.

“That can only mean that he’s staying at one of the farms,” says Steggles as we pull into Mrs. Sutton’s driveway.

“But which one,” muses Mrs. Sutton. “I think I know most of the people out that way . . .”

Dad parks the car, but we don’t get out because Steggles and Mrs. Sutton are thinking.

“Well . . .” says Steggles. “I only know the Fields. They’re on the farm closest to Sutton.”

Mrs. Sutton nods.

“Yes, you would. None of the others are Church of England.”

“Would the Fields be sympathetic to Freddie?” Dad asks.

Mrs. Sutton shakes her head.

“No. I doubt it. They’re extremely conservative and cautious.”

“What about the other farms?”

“Well, I believe the MacGregors belong to some kind of reform church. My sister’s mentioned them to me because they’re a small group that meets in the back room of the pub in Peterborough. It’s possible they’d be sympathetic to Freddie, but I only say that because I don’t know them very well.”

“Let’s check them out, then,” Steggles says. “I doubt Freddie would gain any sympathy with people who aren’t religious so we’d better start with the MacGregors.”

Dad starts up the engine.

Normally, my parents have a general philosophy of life where they uphold the law and I think that under different circumstances they wouldn’t dream of getting in the way of Constable Smythe’s investigation. But since it’s Julia we’re talking about here, they don’t offer the slightest protest to Steggles’s bold suggestion.

We drive back in the direction we came.

As we pass by the farms we see Constable Smythe’s car pulling down one of the driveways. He has a passenger, obviously the Scotland Yard man.

“The Browns,” says Mrs. Sutton. “I strongly doubt they have Freddie. Their son joined some cult based in London when he was a teenager and they’ve been suspicious of religion ever since.”

We turn down one of the long driveways.

Dogs bark as we pull up to the grey stone house, but nothing actually comes running out to greet us

Since nobody seems to be around, we get out of the car and all head for the front door.

After a minute or so, an older woman with a floral dress and an apron opens the door. There is flour on her apron and one of her hands is sticky with dough.

“Well, hello there!” she says to Mrs. Sutton. “Haven’t seen you in ages!” She glances at all of us, questioningly.

“Hello Mrs. MacGregor. I’d like you to meet the Kent family. They’re visiting from Canada . . .”

“Aie!” says the lady. “I know! One of your own was over here earlier. A wee lass named Julia.”

Success! We all look at one another with excitement.

Dad steps forward.

“Yes, that’s why we’re here. We’re somewhat worried about her.”

“Oh dear,” says Mrs. MacGregor, looking concerned. “I didn’t realize there was anything wrong. Freddie is a dear lad. He did a small electrical job for my husband. And this morning he asked if he could leave the lassie here while he ran some errands.”

“She’s not here anymore?” says Mom. It sounds like a groan.

“No, dear. I’m afraid they left only about fifteen minutes ago. Freddie came in a hurry and picked her up.”

“Any idea what direction they headed?” asks Steggle.

“Well . . .” says Mrs. MacGregor, staring thoughtfully down the driveway. “I assumed that they headed toward Sutton. I was doing my baking in the kitchen and even though there’s a window, my mind was on the dough.”

“Could you tell me if Julia was OK?” asks Mom.

“The lassie? She was fine!” says Mrs. MacGregor. “My impression was she was having the time of her life.” She sees the expressions on Dad and Mom’s face. “Oh dear! I do believe I have done something wrong . . .”

“We’re glad to hear she was OK,” says Dad quickly. “You’re in no way at fault, Mrs. MacGregor. But we would

like to get Julia back. If you see her again, we'd really appreciate you giving Mrs. Sutton or Constable Smythe a call."

"Constable Smythe?" Mrs. MacGregor clutches her neck. "Oh dear!"

She is looking over our shoulders and that's when we realize that Constable Smythe has pulled up beside our car.

Constable Smythe is quickly brought up to date. He doesn't seem thrilled that we're here, but he accepts it and introduces us to Inspector Leitch.

Since Mrs. MacGregor can't give any more information, we agree to head back to Sutton. Constable Smythe says that he and Inspector Leitch will cover the public places and we can feel free to investigate all our *religious* contacts. He says religious as if it's a stinky dishcloth.

"Of course, if we can't find anything, we'll expect to see you at the big Jesus get-together tonight," is Constable Smythe's final comment to us.

It doesn't surprise me that Julia is having the time of her life. After all, Freddie is good-looking and my sister had a crush on him right from the start. But, boy! This is a strain on my parents!

The strange thing is, a similar thing happened when we were in Syria but it was someone else's kid and someone else's parents. I don't think Mom ever thought she'd have a kid who would run off like this.

I look at them and they both look so worn out. It's at that moment that I have an eye-opening thought.

My parents are *worried*.

But the Bible says we're not supposed to be worried. And we've just found out that Julia is fine. And most likely she'll continue to be fine until we get her back. But they're feeling rotten worrying that something *might* happen to her.

I guess parents don't have it completely together when it comes to their faith. I don't blame them. But it's like all of a sudden, I have this peace. Like I know God is taking care of Julia and it's all going to work out.

The first thing we do is go back to Mrs. Sutton's house and pick up Belinda. There is no new information and Belinda suggests that we check out Trina's.

Since we can't all fit into one car, our family takes our car and Mrs. Sutton and Belinda go with Steggles after he goes back to the church to get his.

We follow Steggles to Trina's house and only Belinda goes in to check out the situation. Five minutes later, she's back saying that Trina hasn't seen Freddie, although she's excitedly getting ready for the evening in the park.

The next stop is Charlie's mum's store. Belinda is hoping that with Charlie driving around all day delivering baked goods, he might have heard something useful.

We all go into the store.

It occurs to me that it all started here. This is the first place we saw Freddie and the first place where he flirted with Julia. My sister is so susceptible. I can appreciate a good-looking face, but logically, crushes are a waste of time. Sometimes Dad calls me Mr. Spock.

"No, luv," says Charlie's mum, who's behind the counter. Things are quiet. "I haven't seen Charlie since his morning run. He had to go straight to Peterborough and pick me up some things for the store. What's the news on the poor girl?" The last comment is directed to Dad and Mom.

"Still looking," says Dad. "We were hoping that Charlie might have heard something."

"Wish I knew, dear," says Charlie's mum. "I haven't heard a thing."

"What are the general feelings about Freddie?" Dad asks. "What do people say about him?"

"Well," says Charlie's mum, thinking about this. "He doesn't fool me. Those good-looking charmer types . . ." Her sentence drifts off as she seems to contemplate the good-looking charmer types. "But some people think he's the real thing. A few of the old folks, some of the ladies who have been in to do some shopping. A few from your church," she nods to Steggles. Steggles looks chagrined.

"Some of the teenagers who've come in say he's the real thing, but I think they're just doing it to be a bit rebellious, if you know what I mean."

Dad and Mom and Steggles nod, as if they're familiar with rebellious teens.

“Are there people planning to come out tonight?” asks Steggles.

“Oh yes,” nods Charlie’s mum. “Nearly everybody, I think. Curiosity, really. Not much on the telly tonight, either.”

A young man comes into the shop to buy cigarettes and we all head out.

We stand outside in the sun, not sure what to do next.

“I’m going to make a bold suggestion,” says Steggles, “one I really should have made earlier.”

We all look at him.

“I suggest we go home and pray,” says Steggles. “We’ve been close to finding Julia, but somehow, it just doesn’t seem to be working. We know she’s OK, praise God. But maybe we need to go home and prepare for tonight . . .”

He stops, as if he’s worried the suggestion won’t be well-received.

My parents are silent for a moment, thinking.

“My heart wants to keep on with the search,” says Dad finally, with a heavy sigh. “But my mind tells me you’re right.”

Evidently Mom feels the same because she doesn’t protest.

We all head for the cars and are back at Mrs. Sutton’s within minutes. Belinda starts preparing a pot of tea while the rest of us settle down in Mrs. Sutton’s living room. At first, Dad and Steggles lead us in prayer, but after that we pray silently.

When I can’t think of anything else to pray about, I get up quietly and pour myself a cup of tea from the pot that Belinda has left on a corner table.

Something has been bothering me about all of this.

Something doesn’t seem right.

Freddie doesn’t have a whole lot of support in this town. Why wouldn’t he build up a whole bunch of followers before calling a public meeting? He’s good-looking enough to attract people and if he started his own little church it might grow into a big one.

Maybe he doesn’t have the time to wait. Maybe he figures getting Dad to endorse him will be the short-cut way to fame and success. Still, it doesn’t seem right. He came to town the same day we did. How did he expect to get a following this

quickly? And most importantly, what does he expect to accomplish?

I think it would be insensitive to discuss these questions with Dad or Mom who are seated across from Steggles and Mrs. Sutton, and who are praying with their eyes closed but their mouths silently moving.

Instead, I go to the kitchen and talk to Belinda.

She smiles at me when I come in. She's making sandwiches.

"I guess by now you've noticed that when I'm worried I like to make food," she says.

"Sounds good to me," I say. "Can I help?"

She gets me going on a scones recipe.

Probably the adults won't touch any of it, but it's relaxing for me and Belinda to make something. Plus, if Julia were here she'd be hungry.

"I'm going to put away some of this for Julia," I announce, once the scones are in the oven. "She's always hungry and I don't think being held captive will do anything to diminish her appetite."

Belinda laughs.

"Well, in that case, let's really make her something special!"

"Like what?" I ask.

"Let's be really crazy and make her a Welcome Home cake!"

I love the idea and I know Julia will think it's the best welcome home. Plus, I think it's our way of saying to God, we know she's OK and we know she's coming home.

Belinda's a marvellous baker and she sets to work creating a double-layer chocolate cake with mocha icing. On top is written "Welcome Home Julia!" in yellow and there are yellow roses all around the edge.

Just as Belinda's finished, Mom comes into the kitchen.

She looks at us and then she looks at the cake and then she bursts into tears.

Belinda and I are horrified.

"Oh, girls!" she says, between sobs. "Julia will love it."

Belinda and I look at each other, relieved.

“I said I’d come in here and get us a snack,” says Mom, trying to stop her crying and accepting a paper napkin from Belinda.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” apologizes Belinda. “Ginny and I made food. We just got caught up in the cake.”

She hands the plate of sandwiches to Mom and I follow with the scones. Belinda makes a fresh pot of tea and we all sit down to a light meal before the big encounter with “Jesus” in the park.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The whole town appears to be out,” says Mrs. Sutton, looking around.

Mom is clutching my hand. I’m not sure whether it’s because she doesn’t want to lose me too or whether it’s just because she needs my support.

We’re at the Sutton Park which is on the edge of the town, a ten-minute drive from Mrs. Sutton’s house.

At home, a park would mean a jungle gym and some benches, but this is more of a garden-type park. People have brought lawn chairs to sit on. Belinda has brought a large blanket for us all.

There is a small platform set up which supports the conclusion that this is indeed the place where Freddie is going to make his appearance.

Steggles snaps his fingers.

“We should have thought about a stake-out in the park!” he says. “Freddie must have been here to set up the podium!”

The podium turns out to have been set up by Trina and her mother, however. Trina and her mother are sitting on a nearby blanket and when Belinda moves over to join them, they loudly tell her how excited they are. Freddie requested that they find

some sort of a platform for him to preach on and he's promised them important positions in his kingdom.

Dad kind of gags at that.

"Dad, what are you going to say?" I whisper to him.

He shakes his head.

"Don't really know, Ginny. I've decided to let the Spirit move me at the time so I've stopped thinking about it."

"Just as well," I say, looking around. There have to be two hundred people here, but no Freddie. "God's taking care of Julia whatever happens."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Ginny," says Dad.

Our group sits in silence, but all around us, the crowd is murmuring among themselves. Steggles checks his watch.

"He's fifteen minutes late," he remarks.

The longer we sit, the more restless everyone gets.

Trina and her mother are constantly looking back, hoping that Freddie will appear.

Mom clutches Dads arm.

"Julia! Do you think . . . ?"

"Don't think," says Dad, holding on to her hand. "Just pray."

Steggles looks around.

"Some of the people have been here awhile," he remarks. He stands up, brushing some imaginary grass off of his pants. "Perhaps I'd better see about having the public conveniences unlocked."

Public conveniences. I'll have to remember that one to tell Julia.

"Good idea," says Mrs. Sutton.

He heads out in search of something but is slowed down by several people who want to talk to him.

When Steggles returns he announces that the man in charge of park upkeep isn't here.

"However, I have a spare key to the facilities in my office," he says. "I'll drive over to the church and be right back."

Fifteen more minutes pass.

The people who aren't so committed to the Second Coming decide to head home.

The more time passes, the more people leave.

I'm really starting to wonder about Freddie's strategy when all of a sudden there is a loud noise from the parking area.

It's such a commotion that everyone who's left turns to look in the direction of Steggles standing outside his car.

"Anderson! Anderson!" he shouts. "Helena! Guess who I've found!"

Mom jumps to her feet, clapping her hand over her mouth. Dad stands up, and for a moment I notice that tears are running down his face.

It's Julia!

She's standing beside Steggles, waving at us.

My parents cross the park in about ten steps. I don't know how they manage to navigate through the people so quickly. I linger a bit to help Mrs. Sutton to her feet and we make our way to the parking area a little slower.

Julia's being hugged and kissed by Mom and Dad.

Steggles is beaming.

"Well," he says to me and Mrs. Sutton, since we're the only ones paying attention to him. "Finding Julia is the good news. I'm afraid I have some bad news."

My parents pause for a moment.

"You see," he says, "I found Julia in the basement, tied to a chair. But the Sutton family treasures are gone."

Mrs. Sutton gasps. "Tied to a chair?" she and Mom say at the same time.

"All of them?" asks Dad. Even with Julia back, he's an archaeologist at heart.

"Yes, even the golden calf."

"Oh dear!" says Dad, snapping his fingers. "That reminds me that I completely forgot to call Dr. Tobormitz at the British Museum! I wanted him to come up here and examine everything. That day we came back from the church basement we found out that Freddie was preaching sermons and I didn't think about the golden calf after that!"

"I think Mrs. Sutton needs to sit down," says Mom, concerned, as she takes Mrs. Sutton's arm. Mrs. Sutton is pale.

"Of course!" says Steggles. "Sit down in my car."

Mom and Mrs. Sutton sit down in the backseat.

“Dad?” says Julia, looking around at all the people who are staring at us. “Are all these people here to see Freddie?”

“Yes, dear,” says Dad taking her arm.

“They think he’s Jesus, don’t they?”

“Some of them do.”

“Then I’d better talk to them.”

The suggestion is so unlike Julia that both Dad and I stare at her. But Julia is already heading for the platform.

As she climbs up, every eye is on her.

Constable Smythe and Inspector Leitch are moving forward in the crowd to talk to Dad, but they don’t prevent Julia from speaking.

“I know you’re all here because you’re interested in Freddie,” says Julia, speaking loudly. “I was interested in him too. I’m a Christian and I’ve grown up hearing about Jesus and I thought that maybe Freddie could have been Jesus. Maybe some of you thought the same thing.”

A few people in the crowd nod.

“Well, without telling my parents, I left to go find out for myself. I knew my parents didn’t think he was really Jesus, so that’s why I took off on my own.”

She looks at Dad and bites her lip but keeps talking.

“Well, at first he was nice to me. But after a while, he just started acting cranky. He was impatient and didn’t want to talk to me. And I kept thinking about that story where Jesus said, let the little children come to me, and even though I’m not a little child, I couldn’t help thinking that Freddie wasn’t like that Jesus. I tried to ask him questions about God and the Bible because I figured if he were Jesus, there was a lot I wanted to know. But he just told me I asked too many questions and that God was whatever I wanted him to be. Well that seemed kind of weird and I kind of knew at that point he wasn’t the Jesus in the Bible.”

Julia looks at Dad again.

“I thought that I would gather as much information as I could so that I could tell my Dad, but really, I think I was just out on an adventure. I got really suspicious of him this evening when we were hanging out in the church basement. He said that he didn’t like this museum that had been set up and that it

was displeasing to his father in heaven. He didn't really explain why, but he wanted my help to get it all out to a truck that was behind the church. I told him that I thought we should keep the things here because my dad's an archaeologist and he'd probably want to look all this stuff over some more. But then Freddie got mad and tied me to a chair."

I glance up at Dad. Again, there are tears in his eyes.

"While I was tied up, Freddie hauled all of Mrs. Sutton's stuff away. Then he left too. After he left, I just prayed. I don't know how long I waited. Maybe fifteen minutes. And then Steggles came."

It's a strange way to end a story, but nobody seems to mind as Julia steps down and heads back to us.

Steggles has some more big news.

"When I went to get the key I discovered that my office has been ransacked. Absolute chaos!"

"Did you have any of the Sutton treasures in your office?" asks Inspector Leitch, who by now has joined us.

Steggles shakes his head.

"No, but Freddie was probably looking for more. It now seems pretty obvious that this thing in the park was to keep me away from the church."

Constable Smythe and Inspector Leitch have about a bazillion questions for Julia and Dad. The whole lawn is talking. I don't think anyone is thinking that Freddie is Jesus anymore.

About an hour has passed and Dad has been answering questions about all of our experiences right back to the plane ride. Julia has given a full report of her time with Freddie.

"Well," says Inspector Leitch with a big sigh. "I think you're right that this whole messiah thing was just a cover for the theft. Even the abduction of your daughter sounds like a way of keeping you folks busy looking for her while he committed the robbery. He threw everyone off by planning this big event in the park so that it would never occur to anyone what his real intentions were. But he obviously never intended to be here."

“Well, I knew his story wasn’t true,” says Constable Smythe. “And we can safely conclude that the intruder in the Sutton house was Freddie. But why target the Kent family?”

“It doesn’t sound as if he ever wanted Dr. Kent to endorse him as Messiah,” says Inspector Leitch. “In fact, I don’t think he wanted Dr. Kent here in England at all.”

“He seems to not have wanted any expert around,” says Dad. “I have a strong suspicion that he was the reason Rabbi Lichtman had that accident.”

Inspector Leitch nods.

“I think the same. Did the rabbi examine the museum in the church basement?”

“No,” says Dad. “He was going to come back the next day, but after the accident he couldn’t.”

Constable Smythe and Inspector Leitch look at each other.

“I’m starting to see a pattern here,” says Inspector Leitch. “Recently, a pastor from an evangelical church in Edinburgh visited the museum. He had a doctorate in Ancient Israelite history. On his return trip home, he was the victim of a hit-and-run accident. We assumed it to be unrelated to this case but it’s starting to look like the case is connected.”

“Any expert who examines the Sutton treasures puts his life in danger!” says Dad.

“I can think of only one reason,” says Constable Smythe. “Low security. I always thought those Sutton treasures were ridiculously under-protected.”

Inspector Leitch nods.

“As long as no expert came forward to declare that anything was too valuable, any thief who knew his business could easily walk away with the whole collection.”

Dad groans.

“The golden calf,” he moans. “It’s probably solid gold! That alone would be of inestimable value!”

Constable Smythe and Inspector Leitch want to know all about the golden calf. When Dad tells them about the other items, it’s Inspector Leitch’s turn to groan.

“A crusader sword? That would be priceless!”

Steggles hears the tail end of the conversation. He reports to us that he’s driven Mom and Belinda and Mrs. Sutton home.

Mrs. Sutton's going to be fine, but she's worn out and is having a cup of tea to revive her.

"It's time I tell you something," says Steggles. He sounds like he's nervous about what he's about to say. "I've just told Mrs. Sutton and under the circumstances, she has generously forgiven me . . ."

He has our attention.

"You see, when the treasures were first entrusted to me, I had an old seminary professor of mine come and take a look at them. He works for the British Museum now, with a special interest in Biblical artifacts."

"Dr. Tobormitz!" exclaims Dad.

Steggles nods.

"He examined the treasures and agreed that a church basement was no place for such items. Together we masterminded an exchange program. Replicas were made and I replaced the real things with copies. Toby took the originals to the British Museum for further study."

"But how did you do something so . . . big?" Dad is practically speechless.

"Well, the advantage was that Mrs. Sutton really wasn't aware of her own artifacts. One crusader sword looks like another to her. And the replicas were excellent, first-rate. Most of them had been made for previous exhibitions. You know, the sort of thing where children can touch the exhibits or it tours the schools. Nothing was a perfect match, but Mrs. Sutton didn't notice. Since none of our experts who visited the museum actually handled the items, it fooled everyone. Even you." Steggles glances at Dad. "That's the part I feel bad about. I've been deceiving people. I feel as if I've played you for a fool and I deeply apologize."

Dad laughs.

"I do feel like an idiot," Dad admits. "But under the circumstances you are totally forgiven. Besides, I was actually called here to examine the book with the Jesus sketch. I presume that was never replicated?"

"No," agrees Steggles. "That was always in the Sutton safe so it was out of my hands. It would have been near impossible to replace anyhow. Of course, you know there were other

books in Mrs. Sutton's collection. The ones found by her Crusader ancestor?"

Dad nods.

"I assumed she had them in her safe?"

"Oh no," says Steggles. "She gave them to me. I took them to Toby as well. Anderson, I have to tell you, they are priceless. It terrified me to have them in my little church. I'm not surprised someone attacked you on the plane. For some people, these books are worth killing someone for. Freddie and whoever he was working for were obviously hoping we didn't realize the value of what we had and they didn't want you coming to tell us. They would be impossible to steal from the British Museum and extremely easy to steal here."

"So, just let me get this for the record," interrupts Inspector Leitch. "You're saying that Freddie stole a collection that was virtually worthless?"

"Not worthless, exactly," says Steggles. "As I said, the replicas are excellent. But it's not what he thought he was getting."

"Of course, what I'm wondering is . . ." says Dad with a faraway look. "Will I be able to examine the genuine collection?"

"But naturally," says Steggles, grinning. "As soon as we're not needed here, we'll head down to London. Toby will be thrilled to meet you."

"But why didn't you just tell Mrs. Sutton that you thought the items were too valuable to be stored here?"

This comes from Julia. I guess she's getting bold after her public speaking experience.

Steggles laughs.

"She's a stubborn dear. She wanted the Sutton treasures to be for the town of Sutton. I don't blame her. But I was terrified to be entrusted with such valuable items of antiquity. She did what she thought was right. I did what I thought was right."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Belinda's "Welcome Home Julia" cake is waiting for us at Mrs. Sutton's. And Julia is predictably famished after her captivity and an evening of answering questions. Belinda comes through with some chicken sandwiches, a tomato salad and a pot of tea, as well.

Steggles and Mrs. Sutton argue over whether it would be better to build a high security museum in Sutton or to donate the collection to the British Museum with the stipulation that the collection stay intact while on display. Naturally, Mrs. Sutton wants the collection to stay in Sutton and always be accessible to the people of Sutton at no charge. It is a jovial argument and one that will go on long after we're back in Canada, I'm sure.

The remainder of our stay in England is taken up with a visit to the British Museum. Unlike museums in Canada, this is a museum that can take weeks to visit and we wander through the majestic hallways and examine the multitudinous exhibits while Dad and Dr. Tobornitz examine the Sutton treasures.

"What about Freddie?" asks Julia. "What's going to happen to him?"

We're all eating tea and cake in the cafeteria of the museum.

“Well,” says Dad sipping his tea. “No doubt he was working for the same man that the thug on the plane was working for. A man who has a penchant for Biblical artifacts and no scruples about how he acquires them. But he’s not going to be pleased with Freddie when he discovers everything he stole was a well-made replica. Freddie is either going to experience some negative repercussions from the man he was working for or the police will catch up with him. Either way, we’re out of the picture. Freddie was only a threat to us before the robbery.”

“How do the police plan to capture him?” asks Julia.

“They have contacts in the black market,” explains Dad. “Plus, with Mrs. Sutton’s permission, they’re going public with the story of the theft and the replicas being stolen instead. If the British millionaire hasn’t already realized Freddie’s mistake, he’ll know shortly.”

“What I don’t understand,” says my mom, thoughtfully, “is why Freddie bothered with the whole false messiah thing.”

“Well, he had to buy time” says Dad. “No doubt, he was looking for the library of the Jewish man. Remember the story of the Sutton Crusader who brought home the library of the Jewish man? Well, I’ve been examining the collection with Dr. Tobornitz and Steggles is right. It is priceless. They’re all hand-copied, of course. In excellent condition. A wealth of Jewish rabbinical writings.”

“I get it!” I say. “At first, Freddie posed as an electrician in order to try to find the books in Mrs. Sutton’s house!”

“Exactly,” says Dad. “Except that there were no signs of the books in Mrs. Sutton’s house. So he switched his tactics and decided to be Jesus. I don’t know why, exactly. Maybe he thought it would give him a chance to get a closer look at the church. In any case, he had to buy time in order to find those books. Posing as Jesus would certainly distract everybody and keep everybody from guessing his true intentions. From the way he ransacked Steggles’s office, it seems as if he thought the books might be there. But thankfully Steggles had followed his conscience and brought it all here for safe-keeping.”

“That’s why he abducted me,” says Julia thoughtfully. “He asked me a few times what my dad was doing here and what sort of things he was studying. Like, was he studying books

and did I know where any books were? Of course, I didn't know anything."

Typical Julia. She forgot that Dad came here to study a book. If Freddy wanted information, he should have abducted me.

"I think that's exactly why he abducted you," agrees Dad. "He didn't care about my endorsing him as Jesus. He wasn't even planning to be around for that little gathering. But one thing puzzles me. He had you. He had my daughter. And he didn't use the situation to force us to tell him where the books were."

Mom gasps.

Dad nods.

"I was so mad at God that whole time," says Dad, "thinking where was he and why wasn't he taking care of my daughter? And the whole time my daughter was in a den of vipers and God was taking care of her."

Julia is wide-eyed.

"It could have been so worse and the fact that Freddie didn't hurt you or use his advantage to force us into giving him the information he wanted is the biggest proof to me that God was there taking care of us all through the whole thing."

There is a moment of silence as we all absorb this information.

Anyway, what I really thought you'd all be interested in . . .

"Were you and Dr. Tobormitz examining the sketch of Jesus today?" I ask eagerly.

"Yes," sighs Dad, "and much as I'd like to tell you it's an authentic picture of our Saviour, the tests have shown the whole book to date from the time of the Crusades. It's priceless just for that reason, but it's impossible to determine whether there's any merit to the sketch. Was it based on an earlier manuscript? We may never know."

"The strange sketch of Sutton," murmurs Mom.

"I think the strangest part of it all is that it looked like Freddie," says Julia.

We all agree.

The day comes for us to fly home.

Steggles drives Mrs. Sutton and Belinda down to London to see us off.

After the chaos of the luggage check-in, we sit down to have one last cup of British tea with our new friends.

There are tears and promises to write, particularly between my mom, Mrs. Sutton and Belinda. There are promises to e-mail between my dad and Steggles.

“I’m praying your flight will be quieter than your previous one,” says Steggles, patting my dad on the back, as we’re about to pass through from the public waiting area to the boarding area.

“All prayers are appreciated,” says Dad.

“I have a gift for you,” says Steggles, opening up a large paper bag he’s been carrying around. I was kind of wondering why he had it. “Just something to remember us by . . .”

Dad takes the gold-wrapped package and begins to open it.

“Actually,” says Steggles, mischievously, “I really think Julia should open it.”

Julia’s eyes widen.

Dad hands her the package and she cautiously pulls off the paper.

“Oh, Steggles!” gasps Mom. “How did you do it?”

Steggles laughs.

“Toby’s idea,” he admits. “He said it’s what brought you here so it’s what he suggested I give to you as a memento. A replica, of course. A British Museum artist made one up for you guys as well as one for their collection.”

“Can I keep it?” asks Julia, holding it carefully. “I’ve always really liked it and I think I learned a lot from this whole experience.”

“All in favour of Julia being allowed to keep it, say aye,” says Dad.

Everyone, including Steggles, Mrs. Sutton and Belinda, says “Aye!”

So Julia gets to have a beautifully framed Crusader-era sketch of Jesus for her side of the bedroom wall. I’m a little jealous, but it’s the first time my sister’s shown an interest in antiquity so I guess it’s a good thing.

After hugs all around, we head for the departure area.

Our plane is already in the process of boarding so we hurry to get in line. On the plane, Julia and I have a middle seat and a window seat, respectively. Our parents are right behind us.

In the aisle seat beside Julia is a teenage girl wearing a school uniform. We tell her our names and she introduces herself as Emma and says that she's flying home to be with her family. Her grandmother has just died. She goes to a British private school although her family lives in Canada.

"That's too bad about your grandmother," says Julia.

"I didn't know her very well," says Emma. "She's my father's mother and had a lot of kids. I was just one of about twenty grandchildren. But yeah, it is kind of sad. I mean, I wonder what happens to people when they die? I hope she's in a good place. She always seemed nice."

We've put all of our hand luggage underneath the seat in front of us for the take-off, but as soon as we're in the air, Julia gets out the framed sketch to look at it.

"Is that your boyfriend?" Emma asks Julia.

Julia laughs.

"Well, no, but in a way I do love him . . ."

I look at my sister, surprised.

At first I think my sister is talking about Freddie. But then my sister starts talking about Jesus and how at first it seemed like he had shown up in Sutton, but how when she had gotten to know him it turned out he was only a pale shadow of the real thing.

I sit and listen to my sister tell Emma all about Freddie and her time with him and from the quiet behind us, I know my parents are listening too. Emma listens in breathless silence as Julia tells of every minute with the good-looking stranger. There's way more to it than what she told the police and I'm hoping my parents can hold up hearing all the details of Julia's crush on "Jesus."

"But in the end I realized the real Jesus was the one I loved. I had hoped it would be Freddie because it's a lot easier to love someone who's right there in front of you. But Freddie couldn't be Jesus for me. Only Jesus can be Jesus. And the

coolest part is that Jesus can love anyone as much as he loves me.”

“Wow,” says Emma. “That is cool. I’ve got to think about that some more. So, like, what was Jesus like when he was, you know, a man?”

While my sister is telling Emma every story she can think of about Jesus, I lean back in my seat.

How has this trip changed me? Julia’s turned into an evangelist with exciting stories to tell about the difference between a false Jesus and the real Jesus. But what about me? Has England changed me at all?

“Would you care for something to drink?” asks the flight attendant stopping in front of our aisle with a cart.

Julia and Emma order Cokes.

“Tea,” I say automatically. The flight attendant passes me a cup of hot tea.

Tea! I’m a tea-drinker now! All those endless pots of tea!

Maybe I wasn’t abducted by a good-looking false messiah, but while we worried about Julia I learned two important things -- one, that God is in control, and two, no matter what the occasion, good or bad, you can always make a pot of tea!

THE END

The Kent family adventures

The Treasure of Tadmor
The Strange sketch of Sutton
The Hunt for the cave of Moravia
The Search for the sword of Goliath
The Buried gold of Shechem
The Cache of Baghdad
The Walls of Jerusalem
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