



## CHAPTER ONE

ONLY ONE newspaper carried the story in detail, under the headline:

### TREASURES STOLEN FROM MUSEUM

Several Celtic works of art were stolen from the British Museum yesterday, one of them worth more than £50,000. Police say that the theft appears to be the result of an intricate and so far baffling plan. No burglar alarms were set off, the showcases involved were undamaged, and no signs have been found of breaking in.

The missing objects include a gold chalice, three jewelled brooches and a bronze buckle. The chalice, known as the Trewissick Grail, had been acquired by the Museum only last summer, after its dramatic discovery in a Cornish cave by three children. It had

been valued at £50,000, but a Museum spokesman said last night that its true value was ‘incalculable’, due to the unique inscriptions on its sides which scholars have so far been unable to decipher.

The spokesman added that the Museum appealed to the thieves not to damage the chalice in any way, and would be offering a substantial reward for its return. ‘The grail is an extraordinary piece of historical evidence, unprecedented in the whole field of Celtic studies,’ he said, ‘and its importance to scholars far exceeds its intrinsic value.’

Lord Clare, who is a trustee of the British Museum, said last night that the chalice –

‘Oh do come out of that paper, Barney,’ Simon said irritably. ‘You’ve read it fifty times, and anyway it’s no help.’

‘You never know,’ said his younger brother, folding the newspaper and cramming it into his pocket. ‘Might be a hidden clue.’

‘Nothing’s hidden,’ said Jane sadly. ‘It’s all too obvious.’

They stood in a dejected row on the shiny floor of the museum gallery, before a central showcase taller than the rows of identical glass cases all round. It was empty, save for a black wooden plinth on which, clearly, something had once been displayed. A neat silver square on the wood was engraved with the words:

*Gold chalice of unknown Celtic workmanship, believed sixth century. Found in Trewissick, South Cornwall, and presented by Simon, Jane and Barnabas Drew.*

‘All that trouble we had, getting there first,’ Simon said. ‘And now they’ve simply come and lifted it. Mind you, I always thought they might.’

Barney said, ‘The worst part is not being able to tell anyone who did it.’

‘We could try,’ Jane said.

Simon looked at her with his head on one side. ‘Please, sir, we can tell you who took the grail, in broad daylight without breaking any locks. It was the powers of the Dark.’

‘Pop off, sonny,’ Barney said. ‘And take your fairy stories with you.’

‘I suppose you’re right,’ Jane said. She tugged distractedly at her ponytail. ‘But if it was the same ones, somebody might at least have seen them. That horrible Mr Hastings –’

‘Not a chance. Hastings changes, Great-Uncle Merry said. Don’t you remember? He wouldn’t have the same name, or the same face. He can be different people, at different times.’

‘I wonder if Great-Uncle Merry knows,’ Barney said. ‘About this.’ He stared at the glass case, and the small, lonely black plinth inside.

Two elderly ladies in hats came up beside him. One wore a yellow flowerpot, the other a pyramid of

pink flowers. ‘That’s where they pinched it from, the attendant said,’ one told the other. ‘Fancy! The other cases were over here.’

‘Tut-tut-tut-tut,’ said the other lady with relish, and they moved on. Absently Barney watched them go, their footsteps clapping through the high gallery. They paused at a showcase over which a long-legged figure was bending. Barney stiffened. He peered at the figure.

‘We’ve got to do something,’ Simon said. ‘Just got to.’

Jane said, ‘But where do we start?’

The tall figure straightened to let the behatted ladies approach the glass case. He bent his head courteously, and a mass of wild white hair caught the light.

Simon said, ‘I don’t see how Great-Uncle Merry could know – I mean he isn’t even in Britain, is he? Taking that year off from Oxford. Sab – whasit.’

‘Sabbatical,’ Jane said. ‘In Athens. And not even a card at Christmas.’

Barney was holding his breath. Across the gallery, as the crime-loving ladies moved on, the tall white-haired man turned towards a window; his beak-nosed, hollow-eyed profile was unmistakable. Barney let out a howl. ‘Gumerry!’

Simon and Jane trailed blinking in his wake as he skidded across the floor.

‘Great-Uncle Merry!’

‘Good morning,’ said the tall man amiably.

‘But Mum said you were in Greece.’

‘I came back.’

‘Did you know someone was going to steal the grail?’ Jane asked.

Her great-uncle arched one white bristling eyebrow at her, but said nothing.

Barney said simply, ‘What are we going to do?’

‘Get it back,’ said Great-Uncle Merry.

‘I suppose it was them?’ Simon said diffidently. ‘The other side? The Dark?’

‘Of course.’

‘Why did they take the other stuff, the brooches and things?’

‘To make it look right,’ said Jane.

Great-Uncle Merry nodded. ‘It was effective enough. They took the most valuable pieces. The police will think they were simply after the gold.’ He looked down at the empty showcase; then his gaze flicked up, and each of the three felt impelled to stare motionless into the deep-set dark eyes, with the light behind them like a cold fire that never went out.

‘But I know that they wanted only the grail,’ Great-Uncle Merry said, ‘to help them on the way to something else. I know what they intend to do, and I know that they must at all costs be stopped. And I am very much afraid that you three, as the finders, will be needed once more to give help – far sooner than I had expected.’

‘Shall we?’ said Jane slowly.

‘Super,’ said Simon.

Barney said, ‘Why should they have taken the grail *now*? Does it mean they’ve found the lost manuscript, the one that explains the cipher written on the sides of the grail?’

‘No,’ said Great-Uncle Merry. ‘Not yet.’

‘Then why –’

‘I can’t explain, Barney.’ He thrust his hands into his pockets and hunched his bony shoulders. ‘This matter involves Trewissick, and it does involve that manuscript. But it is part of something very much larger as well, something which I may not explain. I can only ask you to trust me, as you trusted me once before, in another part of the long battle between the Light and the Dark. And to help, if you are sure you feel able to give help, without perhaps ever being able fully to understand what you are about.’

Barney said calmly, pushing his tow-coloured forelock out of his eyes: ‘That’s all right.’

‘Of course we want to help,’ Simon said eagerly.

Jane said nothing. Her great-uncle put one finger under her chin, tilted her head up and looked at her. ‘Jane,’ he said gently. ‘There is absolutely no reason to involve any of you in this if you are not happy about it.’

Jane looked up at the strongly marked face, thinking how much it looked like one of the fierce statues they had passed on their way through the museum. ‘You know I’m not scared,’ she said. ‘Well, I mean I am a