

Cindy was preparing for the quick trip to the museum. “Walkie-talkies, Jeff?” She pulled out hers to check if the battery was good.

Jeffrey went to his backpack and removed his walkie-talkie. He turned it on and said, “Cindy, do you hear me?”

Cindy’s walkie-talkie screeched Jeffrey’s voice.

“Check,” she responded. She checked her camera. Good. Magnifying glass with light. Check. Pen and paper. Check.

“Ready, Stacey?”

“Let’s go.”

They left the house.

### **What the girls did that night:**

The Peabody Essex Museum is just a few blocks west on Essex Street. They were there in almost no time. The woman at the ticket window was getting up to leave as they arrived.

“Two, please,” asked Stacy.

She sat back down. “We will close soon. You won’t get your money’s worth. But we are open tomorrow at eight o’clock,” she said with a smile.

Stacy was insistent. “That’s okay. Two please?”

“Okay, then. Four dollars for the both of you.”

She took their money and handed them the tickets. The girls ran inside.

The museum was larger than they anticipated. They really had no idea where to go.

Stacy noticed a guide. She walked up to him and asked, “Hello, sir. I heard that there are some Ancient African books here. Ethiopian.”

“Oh, no. Sorry,” he said.

Stacy and Cindy cringed with frustration.

He continued. “We had several for an exhibit here several years ago. But now, just one.”

They brightened up. “One is good,” said Stacy. “Where is it?”

“It *should* be with ancient texts,” he commented. “It appears to be rather venerable. Instead, it is with the African Art exhibit. That way, and to the right. It does have some pretty pictures.”

They were already on their way before he finished. Stacy turned around as she hastened to the exhibit. “Thank you!”

The room contained quite an assortment of different objects—carved masks, statues, paintings, a drum, vases, even cookware resembling some that they saw in the bomb shelter.

And the lone Ethiopian illuminated manuscript. It was open to a page with text on the right, and a page with a painting on the left. It was on a table behind a rope. The book was sitting on a tilted bookstand.

“It looks like they don’t want us touching it,” remarked Stacy.

“I wonder if we could just take it.”

“Now, Cindy, that could really screw us up if we got arrested. And, look. It is held to the bookstand with a clasp that has wires coming from it. I imagine that an alarm would sound if we tried to swipe it.”

They looked around. One family was leaving the exhibit. One guard stood by the entrance. With the family leaving, he had just the two of them to watch.

“He’s staring right at us,” Cindy noticed.

“Okay. Now what?”

“I have a plan. Come.”

They walked out of the exhibit. As they did, the guard told them, “The museum closes in ten minutes.”

Stacy clenched her fist. “Argh! I did not want to wait another day. And even then, what are we going to be able to do tomorrow that we couldn’t do just now?”

Cindy spoke quietly. “We will stay. We will spend the night here.”

“What?”

“I read a book where two runaways lived in a museum. They stayed there every night.”

“I read that, too. But that was fiction.”

“But they had a great idea. They hid in the bathrooms when the museum was closing. Come, let’s ‘powder our noses’.”

They entered the restroom. Looking around, they saw that they were the only ones inside.

Cindy pointed to the two stalls farthest from the door. “Okay. I’ll take this one and you take that. Sit on the toilet so that your legs are not visible.”

Stacy went in, closed the lid, and sat cross-legged on the commode. “Oops. I need to close the door.”

“Don’t close it. The guard will know that the stall is occupied if it is closed. Leave it ajar like it normally is.”

“You know how to be sneaky, Cin.”

“Now, shh!”

They waited for a few minutes in silence. Then, a museum employee opened the restroom door and looked in. “Anyone in here? The museum is closing now.”

*Silence.*

The employee turned off the light switch and walked out.

Stacy let out a sigh of relief. The two remained silent and waited.

There were still some muted voices barely audible coming from the museum. These tapered off until the place was completely quiet.

They were now in darkness and silence. Stacy could hear her own heart beating. She finally whispered, “How much longer?”

Cindy pressed the button on her watch button that made it light up. She could see the hands. It was 6:11. “About ten minutes. For now, I need to tell Jeff not to expect us back.”

She pulled out the walkie-talkie and got Jeffrey. “Jeff, shush and listen. We are staying here for the night?”

“Staying where?”

“At the museum. We won’t be back tonight.”

“You can do that?”

“No. But we are. Keep radio silence for now. Don’t call us unless it’s an emergency. Bye.”

She turned it off and they waited for a few more minutes.

“I think that it is safe for us to go,” whispered Cindy. “So, let’s go.”

Both girls got out of the stalls and stood in the middle of the restroom. It was dark, but some light emanated from under the door and their eyes had adjusted. They could barely see each other.

Cindy put her hand on Stacy’s shoulder. “Let us head to the door.”

Stacy took the lead, walking carefully, as if she might bump into something unseen. Cindy held on, following.

Stacy made it to the door and cracked it open. Peeking outside, she saw dim lights near the floor—nightlights. But no humans. “The coast is clear, I think.”

She opened it a little more and stuck her head out. Cindy got down and stuck her head out, too. They looked in both directions. No one in sight.

“Okay,” whispered Cindy. “Let us walk quietly to the exhibit.”

Stacy walked out into the hall. Not a sound did she make. Cindy stepped out. *Klat, klat!* The sound of her footsteps echoed.

*Why did I not wear sneakers today?* She thought.

“I need to take off these stupid shoes,” she whispered.

After doing so, she tried to put them in her purse, but they would not fit. She saw an old French desk in the hall. She pulled on the handle and found that the drawer was unlocked and opened it. She put the shoes in the drawer and closed it.

“Okay. I am ready.” They headed, slowly, towards the exhibit, Cindy in stocking feet. Not a sound.

Stacy and Cindy crept towards the old book. While it had been open for view when the museum was open, the book was now closed.

“That’s actually a good sign,” noted Cindy. “The alarm was probably not set to go off if pages were turned. We can probably leaf through the book without setting it off.”

“And our plan is?”

“I will photograph each page so that we can examine it at our leisure when we get out of here. And, while you are here, you can read it, if you can. Perhaps we will learn what we need to know while we are still here.”

“Will the pictures take in this dim light?”

“I sure hope so! I have my camera set for the darkest light; plus, I have my magnifying glass, which has a built-in light.” She pulled out the magnifying glass, turned it on, and gave it to Stacy. She took out her camera.

Each page was photographed. Stacy read the entire text, translating to English, before each page was turned. This was the story of the book:

*And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions.*

*And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bore spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.*

*And Solomon answered all her questions: there was not anything hid from the king, which he told her not.*

*And when the queen of Sheba had seen all of Solomon's wisdom, and the temple that he had built, and the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her.*

*And she said to the king, it was a true report that I heard in my own land of thy acts and of your wisdom.*

*Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceeded the fame which I heard.*

*Happy are the men, happy are these your servants, which stand continually before you, and that hear your wisdom.*

*Blessed be the Lord your God, which delighted in you, to set you on the throne of Israel, because the Lord loved Israel forever, therefore made he you king, to do judgment and justice.*

*And she gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones. There came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon.*

*And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones.*

*And the king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the Lord, and for the king's temple, harps also and psalteries for singers. There came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day.*

*And King Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.*

With that, the story ended.

Cindy was confused. "How is this a treasure map?"

“I don’t know, Cin.”

“So, I know who Solomon is. Who is the Queen of Sheba?”

“She was the queen of Axum, of what is now Ethiopia, at that time. And this story seems familiar. I think that I have read some version of it before.”

“I see. Well, mission accomplished. We just need to get out of here in the morning.” She put the camera away. “Can I have my magnifying glass?”

“Of course.” She handed it to Cindy.

*Click, click, click.* The button that controlled the light cycled through various settings before landing on “off”.

“Wait! Wait!” exclaimed Stacy. “Do that again. Slowly.”

*Click...*

*Click...*

“Stop! See that?!”

She did. In the ultraviolet blacklight setting of the glass, the edges of one page glowed brightly.

“Turn to that page, Cin!”

Turning to that page revealed one side with a painting of people walking, and another side void of black ink, but the border of the page was glowing, as was some handwritten letters. The letters were:

*≠ ENGLISH. 2<sup>nd</sup> ROMAN 1<sup>st</sup>  
BACK TO FRONT  
A.: S.:*

Cindy took a picture of it, put the camera away, and got out her pen and paper to copy the message when...

*Clank!*

They heard a slight commotion coming from the hallway. Cindy very quickly completed writing the glowing letters down and turned off the glass. They crouched down and waited.

Lights turned on in the hallway. *Crap!*

They remained motionless and quiet. There continued to be a little bit of noise coming from the hallway.

“We should hide!” insisted Stacy.

“There! that tapestry!” suggested Cindy.

They walked quickly and quietly to the tapestry and hid behind it.

The noises came closer. Very slowly.

And now they were right outside of the entrance.