

CHAPTER 1 THE PICTURE

“Mason, stop staring at that picture. You’re always staring at it. Sometimes I think you’d rather be in the picture than here.”

Mason ignored Matthew, which is what he did when he didn’t feel like talking. The large picture in question held center stage on the family room wall. It was a street scene in the early evening at an undetermined location and an undetermined date. Some of the people in the picture carried umbrellas, and water in the street reflected their images. Yellow light shone from the windows of buildings; faces peered out from some of the windows. Street lights also shone yellow from the tops of poles. A single traffic light was attached to one of these poles. Green-leafed trees grew up from the sidewalks. An incongruous buggy pulled by a single horse plodded along.

Mason finally pulled himself away from the picture. “It is an idyllic setting.”

“Idyllic. Good word.” Matthew nodded. “Is that your word for today?”

Mason was known for continuously adding words to his vocabulary. He turned back to the picture. Then he knelt on the sofa below it and put his nose right up to it. Matthew started to walk away. He had homework to do. He needed to maintain his status as an A student. Mason called after him.

“Come and look at this.”

“What?”

Matthew didn’t have time for games. He’d looked at the picture many times. What more was there to see? Mason urgently motioned for him to come closer. In order to get Mason off his case, Matthew knelt beside him on the sofa. He was about to ask what this was all about when Mason spoke.

“Look at the girl...not that girl, the one on the other side of the street walking with that guy.”

“Yeah, so? Have you fallen in love with her?”

“The expression on her face has changed.”

“I think that junk food you eat addles your brain. Besides, you can’t really see her expression.”

Mason produced a magnifying glass from his pocket, a tool of the budding scientist he was. He peered at the girl through it.

“She was looking at the boy, kind of smiling. Now she’s looking at us with a strange expression, like a plea for help. She’s in some sort of trouble.”

Matthew took the magnifying glass and studied the face of the girl.

“You do have a rich imagination; I will grant you that. I know what you’re leading up to. You want to go into the world of the picture. You’re using the girl as an excuse.”

Mason produced a sly smile. “Well, it’s Saturday evening. Mom and Dad are out. It might be fun.”

“Fun. I don’t like your idea of fun. The last time we did something like this we almost got ourselves killed.”

The boys had been whisked back 4,000 years to the Minoan civilization while on a visit to Crete the previous summer, and to survive they’d been forced to join a team of bull dancers.

As usual, Matthew felt responsible for his younger brother. He went into lecture mode.

“Look, we’re getting too old to play games like this. I’m in high school; you’re in junior high. Life is a serious business.”

“Not too serious, I hope. Don’t take all the fun out of it.” Mason regarded his brother. “You’re a good puzzle solver. I’ll bet you could figure out a way to get us into the picture.”

Mason knew how to tempt him. Matthew couldn’t resist a challenge. They’d found out that reality was more than what they learned in school. He looked at the picture with new eyes. How would one get into a world like that? If Mason was correct about the girl changing her expression and looking at them imploringly, perhaps she could help them.

Matthew took the magnifying glass again. She did appear to be looking at them. Matthew concentrated on her and tried to mentally connect with her. He asked her for assistance to get into the picture. He closed his eyes. Something was happening. He reached for Mason.

“Take my hand.”