

# CHAPTER Two

'HOW MUCH?' I GASPED. 'What's it made of, solid gold?'

I fell back into my Thinking Chair. This made the rip in the arm worse, but right now I was more concerned to hear the details of Charlie's problem. Or rather, his brother Ed's problem. Charlie blew the dust off an old crate full of paint pots and sat down.

'Ed is a collector of comics,' said Charlie. 'He buys and sells them, and he's got shelves full of really old and valuable ones.'

'As it's a weekday afternoon, and he's sent you here rather than come himself, I deduce that he normally needs to be somewhere at this time of day. So trading comics is his hobby, not his job?' I said.

'Yes, that's right,' said Charlie, 'he works at the

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restaurant in Frizinghall Street. He's a chef. But he's hoping to become a full-time trader. Or he was, until this comic was stolen.'

I settled down in my Thinking Chair, trying to ignore the low ripping noise that was still coming from the arm. 'So, tell me all about this comic, and what exactly has happened.'

'It's Issue 1 of *The Tomb of Death*,' said Charlie. He consulted Ed's note again. 'Published in America in 1950. There were only a few thousand copies made, and there are less than six known to still exist.'

'And what's so special about Issue 1 of *The Tomb of Death*?'

'Dunno, never read it,' shrugged Charlie. 'But comic collectors dream of owning a copy. It's one of the most valuable comics in the world, so Ed says.'

'And when was it stolen?' I asked. 'Give me every detail you can.'

'Ed keeps it... er, kept it... in the wall safe downstairs at our house. Dad had the safe put in because he sometimes has a load of money in the house, if he can't get to the bank after his shop's shut. But Ed uses it mostly. *The Tomb of Death* was in a see-through plastic case, propped up at the back of the safe.'

'And how long had it been there?'

'Ed inherited it a couple of years ago. Our granddad used to be an avid comic reader when he was our age, and when he died he left two big boxes of old comics to Ed. And in amongst them was *The Tomb of Death*.'

'It was always kept in the safe?'

'Always. Ed hardly ever took it out. It was far too valuable and delicate to handle. It stayed in the safe twenty-four-seven!'

'Why didn't Ed sell it?'

'I think he was going to. I'm not sure, you'll have to ask him.'

'And when was it stolen?'

'Last weekend. Dad opened the safe on Monday morning, and it was gone.'

'Just like that?'

'Just like that.'

'The safe had been cracked? You'd had a burglar?'

'Ed and Dad say not. We have an alarm system, and that hadn't been tripped. The safe has its own alarm, and that wasn't tripped either.'

'Was it there on Sunday?'

'Yes. Dad put the weekend's takings from his shop in there. The comic was still in the safe then. Definitely. I saw it myself.'

'So there was a lot of money in the safe that night?'

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'Yes. That's why the safe was opened on Monday morning: to get the money out so Dad could take it to the bank.'

A couple of important points had already become clear to me. One of them was about the safe, about *how* someone had gained access to that comic. The second important point was about the comic itself, about *why* the thief had stolen *that*, rather than the money that was also in there. Can you work out what I was thinking?

