

Chapter 36

The clue had been solved nearly an hour ago.

It simply hadn't looked like a clue until afterward.

Mission Master's first instruction that morning had led them through the narrow streets toward Westminster Abbey, where a small brass inscription tucked beneath a weathered stone bench read:

History remembers names.

Friendship remembers moments.

They had spent almost forty minutes trying to determine whether the bench itself mattered.

It did not.

The old groundskeeper watering flowers nearby had.

When William finally asked him what his favorite part of the Abbey was, the elderly man had smiled.

"My wife's."

He pointed toward an ordinary stone wall.

"She always rested there after choir practice."

Mission Master had immediately displayed:

OBJECT ACQUIRED.

PLACES ARE BORROWED.

MEMORIES ARE OWNED.

Simple.

Elegant.

Completely unfair.

Now they were stuck.

The second clue remained stubbornly unresolved.

Claire folded the folio closed.

“I think we’re looking too hard.”

Antonio looked around Parliament Square.

“We’ve been looking for two hours.”

“Exactly.”

Rocky nodded.

“Mission Master has a habit of rewarding attention.”

Antonio sighed dramatically.

“It also has a habit of making me hungry.”

William studied the sketch they had been given.

Not a map.

A drawing.

Four arches.

A clock.

Three ravens.

A single word beneath them.

Observe.

“That’s all?”

Antonio asked.

“That’s all.”

“I miss museums.”

They wandered slowly along the edge of the square.

Nobody rushed anymore.

Mission Master had already trained that instinct out of them.

Claire stopped beside an iron fence.

William stopped too.

Not because she asked.

Because stopping beside her had become the most natural thing in the world.

She pointed toward a tiny carving almost hidden in the stone.

“I think that’s older than the restoration.”

William leaned closer.

“So do I.”

Without thinking, he brushed a loose strand of hair away from where it had blown across her face.

The gesture lasted less than a second.

Neither reacted to it.

Neither seemed to notice.

They simply continued studying the carving.

Across the path...

Rocky noticed.

He glanced sideways toward Antonio.

Antonio had noticed too.

Interesting.

A little later, Claire reached automatically for William’s sleeve while stepping around a large puddle.

Not his hand.

Just enough fabric to steady herself.

She let go immediately.

William never broke stride.

Neither acknowledged it.

Rocky smiled to himself.

Antonio leaned over.

“You saw that.”

“I did.”

“They’re different.”

“They are.”

Another twenty minutes passed.

Claire stopped to tie the lace of one boot.

William instinctively slowed his pace.

Waited.

When she stood again, she slipped naturally back beside him.

No words.

No performance.

No awkwardness.

It was simply where they both expected to be.

Antonio grinned.

“Our boy’s gone.”

Rocky laughed quietly.

“He has.”

“They’re not doing PDA.”

“No.”

“They’re just…”

Antonio searched.

“...comfortable.”

Rocky nodded.

“Exactly.”

He watched William quietly resting one hand against Claire’s back as a crowd flowed between them.

Not possessively.

Simply making sure they didn’t become separated.

The hand disappeared as quickly as it had arrived.

Claire smiled up at him.

Continued walking.

Antonio took a deep breath.

“I really like this.”

Rocky looked at him.

“I know.”

William finally noticed the two of them watching.

“What?”

Antonio smiled innocently.

“Nothing.”

Rocky looked toward the sky.

“Absolutely nothing.”

Claire looked between all four faces.

“I don’t believe either of you.”

“You shouldn’t.”

Mission Master remained silent.

No vibration.

No congratulations.

Only London.

Only people.

Only another ordinary afternoon becoming quietly unforgettable.

William frowned at the sketch again.

“We’re still missing something.”

Claire took the page.

She looked at it upside down.

Then sideways.

Then back toward the Abbey clock.

“Wait...”

She stopped.

“The drawing isn’t showing buildings.”

Antonio leaned in.

“What is it showing?”

Claire slowly smiled.

“It’s showing...”

She looked at William.

“...the spaces between them.”

William followed her gaze.

The arches.

The clock.

The ravens.

Not the objects.

The sightlines.

He turned exactly ninety degrees.

Looked through one arch toward another.

Beyond them...

Three ravens perched almost perfectly in line on an old stone wall.

The clock tower framed itself naturally in the distance.

Antonio blinked.

“No way.”

Mission Master vibrated.

MISSION COMPLETE.

A final sentence appeared.

Perspective is rarely found by moving the world.

Move yourself.

Rocky laughed.

“That’s annoyingly good.”

Antonio nodded.

“I hate how much I like this thing.”

Claire looked at William.

He smiled.

“So...”

“What?”

“You were right.”

“When?”

“This morning.”

“About?”

“We were looking too hard.”

She smiled.

“No.”

She slipped her arm lightly through his for the first time all day.

“We were standing in the wrong place.”

Neither noticed they’d remained linked as they began walking again.

Rocky did.

Antonio definitely did.

Rocky leaned close enough that only Antonio could hear.

“I think we’re watching it happen.”

Antonio smiled.

“No.”

“What?”

“I think...”

He watched William instinctively match Claire’s pace.

“...we’re watching them stop noticing it.”

The four friends disappeared into another London street.

Mission Master had completed another lesson.

It had nothing to do with Westminster.

Or ravens.

Or clocks.

It had everything to do with perspective.

And somewhere, without either of them deciding it...

William and Claire had quietly become the kind of people who reached for one another before reaching for themselves.