

Nina had expected her great-great uncle's house to be like mansions in the movies, with marble columns and rose gardens, not peeling paint and a weed-filled lawn. But Dad explained that Waldo hated spending money, except on his collections.

Nina's parents thought the kids were playing outside. Instead, they snuck into the candlelit parlor.

"Your Mom will freak out if she catches us," Nina's cousin Max muttered.

"I know. But Uncle Waldo traveled a lot and I never got to meet him while he was alive. I just want to see what he looks like."

"At least turn on some lights," Max grumbled. "This is creepy."

"Didn't you hear the lawyer talking to Mom and Dad? Uncle Waldo called the parlor his 'candle room.' He never had it wired for electricity." She crept over to the coffin and peered inside. Waldo wore a tuxedo with a ruffled shirt and red cummerbund. His white hair was neatly combed, his nails manicured, and his diamond stickpin and silver cufflinks glittered in the candlelight.

"He looks nice," Nina whispered.

Max took one glance inside, then pulled Nina away from the coffin. "Weird," he said. "I didn't think people wore tuxedos when they were buried."

"He liked it. Dad said Uncle Waldo even had his portrait painted wearing this exact same outfit. He put it in his will that he wanted to be dressed for his funeral exactly the way he is in that portrait."

Max shivered. "I wonder who had to dress him?"

"Harvey, Waldo's assistant."

"Like a butler?"

"Sort of."

"So he really was rich. Hey, your Dad was kidding about inheriting twenty cents, right?"

Nina led her cousin back down the hall. "Well, Waldo did leave Dad two dimes. But Mercury is facing the wrong way or something, and that makes them worth a lot of money. Mom said it was enough to pay my way through college someday."

"Cool."

"Uncle Waldo's daughter, Fiona, inherited the house and all this stuff."

They entered the study where Nina's parents were talking to the lawyer, Mr. Baxter. Max gawked at Waldo's "collections." Display cases everywhere were filled with jewel-encrusted objects.

Harvey, Waldo's assistant, handed glasses of lemonade to the kids, then left. Nina thought he looked as sour as the drink tasted.

"Fiona arrived earlier, but you probably won't see her until the funeral tomorrow," the lawyer was saying.

"Waldo requested burial near his gazebo. Harvey will dig the grave himself."

"Poor Harvey," Dad murmured.

Baxter nodded. "At least Waldo set up a trust that will continue to pay Harvey's salary, small as it is. Now, would you like to see the dimes?"

In the master bedroom upstairs, the lawyer twirled the combination lock on a wall safe while Nina studied the painting of Waldo that hung above the fireplace. Decker out in his tux, ruffled shirt, jade cufflinks and diamond stickpin, he seemed to wink down at her. Baxter removed a box from the safe and opened it.

Everyone gasped. The box was empty.

"Impossible!" the older man exclaimed. "They were here an hour ago."

"The safe isn't damaged," Mom remarked. "How many people know the combination?"

He frowned. "Just myself, Fiona and Harvey. I'd better call the police."

"Go ahead," Dad said. "But no matter who stole the dimes, they're small enough to be hidden anywhere. Even if the police tear the house apart, I'll bet they never find them." Nina stood up, staring at the portrait. "I think I know who took the dimes," she whispered to Max. "And if I'm right, I know where they are."