

SISTERS
of the
LAST STRAW

Case of the Missing Maps

Karen Kelly Boyce

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Missing Maps

TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

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ISBN: 978-1-5051-2754-6
Kindle ISBN: 978-1-5051-2755-3
ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5051-2756-0

Published in the United States by
TAN Books
PO Box 269
Gastonia, NC 28053
www.TANBooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

To my fans Amelia Lukacs and Ariana Lukacs.
May you always be blessed with the Joy of the Lord!

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Chapter 1

The Wild Wasp

Sister Wanda ran in through the back door and shouted, “There’s a wasp nest in the garage, and wasps are swarming all around! I need help!”

Sister Krumbles jumped up from the sofa and headed for the basement door. “There’s some bug spray in the basement. I’ll get it!” Glancing over her shoulder, Krumbles didn’t watch her step. Her shoes were untied, and she stepped on one of the laces. She caught her foot and fell.

“AHH!” Krumbles tumbled head over heels down the basement stairs.

BAM! She hit the wall of the finished basement with enough force to break a large hole in the wallboard. Stunned, she caught her breath

and shouted, "I'm okay!" as the other Sisters rushed down the stairs to check if Krumbles was all right.

However, Sister Krumbles was already up and peering into the huge hole that she'd created in the wall. "LOOK! There's a trunk back here behind the wall. I wonder what's in it."

Sisters Lacey and Krumbles lifted the heavy, dusty trunk and pulled it from behind the wall.

Sister Wanda tugged on the lid. "It's locked!" she shouted, as she continued to tug on the lid of the old, worn trunk.

"Bugged and Befuddled!" Sister Lacey said as she ran to get a crowbar. "Maybe we can pry it open."

Mother Mercy's eyes opened wide. "I don't want to destroy it. It probably belongs to my Aunt Elizabeth. Before we do anything else, I'd better give her a call." Mother Mercy ran upstairs to the phone.

Krumbles continued to pull on the trunk lid as if she thought it would magically pop open.

In less than a minute, Mother Mercy returned and shook her head. “Sister Krumbles, let it be. I left my aunt a message about the trunk. We’ll just wait for her to call back before we touch it.”

Krumbles sighed, looking disappointed. “Curiosity is killing me. I don’t think I can bear to wait.”

Mother Mercy smiled. “You’ll soon be too busy to think about it. Mother crouched down and tied Sister Krumbles’s shoes. “Father McNulty is having Eucharistic Adoration at the church, and I promised we would help him. If we don’t leave now, we’ll be late.”

Sister Lovely turned her gaze toward heaven and smiled. “Eucharistic Adoration! I love spending quiet time with Our Lord. Sometimes, He speaks to my heart. All the time, He reminds me not to worry because everything is in His hands. Such Peace!”

“Well, Lollygagging Ladies, let’s get going!” Lacey led the way up the stairs.

The Sisters were in such a rush that they

forgot about the wasps in the garage—that is, until Lacey lifted the garage door open.

“AH! Dastardly Demons!” Most of the wasps flew back to their nest on the ceiling, but one of them headed right for Sister Lacey. As it flew by her head, she made the mistake of swatting at it. That made the wasp angry. It buzzed louder and got closer. Lacey reached up and waved at the wasp as she ran, making the wasp even angrier.

“BUZZ!” it hissed.

Sister Lacey covered her face with her veil and ran toward the shed, hoping to find safety inside. Her veil confused the wasp long enough for her to make a getaway. She ran down the driveway, waving her hands above her head to shoo away the wasp. However, the wasp followed her as she ran toward the shed. BUZZ! BUZZ!

“I’ll save you.” Sister Lovely took a broom and started swatting the wasp. Instead of helping, she only made the wasp angrier and louder. It zipped over to Lovely and buzzed around her.

“AH!” Lovely yelled as she tried to get away. She ran, but the angry wasp kept up with her. Lovely screamed further, “Save me!” as the wasp continued to follow her.

Coming to Lovely’s rescue, Sister Wanda grabbed the garden hose and started spraying. The powerful force of water stunned the wasp and sent it back to its nest.

Meanwhile, Mother Mercy came running from the basement with bug spray in hand, shouting, “STAND BACK!”

Mother started spraying the wasp nest. She sprayed so hard that soon the entire nest was covered with white, drippy foam. The wasps no longer buzzed. The bugs stopped swarming.

After checking that Sisters Lacey and Lovely were all right, Mother Mercy relaxed. No one had been stung. Both Sisters, however, were soaking wet from the hose and dripping all over the driveway.

“Better go in the house and dry off. Put on dry habits. Now we’re going to be late!” Mother

Mercy looked at her watch.

“Don’t diddle-daddle!” Lacey shouted as she and Sister Lovely rushed into the house. All the other Sisters piled into the car. Sister Wanda pulled onto the street and parked in front of the house to wait for the wet Sisters to emerge. It didn’t take long. Lacey and Lovely, in nice dry habits, rushed out the front door. As soon as they jumped in the car, Wanda stomped on the gas. She burned rubber and the tires screeched as they headed to church!

“SLOW DOWN!” Mother Mercy yelled as the car careened down the street. Wanda applied the brakes, and the nuns slid forward in their seats.

“We must always obey the law!” Mother Mercy added.

Even at their slower speed, the Sisters made it to the parish church on the edge of town with time to spare.

Father McNulty stood in the vestibule, wait-

ing for them. “So glad you came to help. My schedule has been busy lately.”

Mother Mercy smiled. “Just call us whenever you need help. Jesus teaches us to help one another.”

Sister Lovely spread out the altar cloths. “These are so white and crisp!”

The tall, thin priest grinned. “Thanks to the Rosary Altar Society. Those ladies are dedicated to keeping the church just so.”

Sister Wanda found the candlesticks and placed them on either side of the altar. Sister Shiny took a polishing cloth and buffed the golden candlesticks until they glowed. Krumbles ran to the candle drawer in the sacristy. She grabbed two handfuls of candles. As she ran back to the altar, a candle started slipping from her left hand. She tossed the loose candle up in the air and caught it with her right hand, which was already full of candles. Instantly, another candle started to slip. Up in the air it went! She caught it with her other hand. Candles started to fly from one hand to the other.

“Son of a Jealous Juggler! Can you teach me how to juggle?” Lacey looked in amazement as the candles flew in the air.

“I don’t know how to juggle!” Krumbles answered as candles flew from hand to hand.

“Well, you could have fooled me.” Shiny watched as Krumbles juggled her way to the altar. When Krumbles reached the altar, she stopped grabbing the candles and they all dropped to the floor. Only two of them broke. She placed the two unbroken candles in the glowing holders.

Sister Wanda brought out the monstrance. “Oh, what a beautiful monstrance!” It had a golden base encrusted with jewels. Bright silver and gold branches reached from the base and surrounded the center opening where the luna would be placed.

“It’s magnificent!” Lovely sighed.

“Shining Sensation! Nothing could be too worthy or beautiful enough to hold the Body of Christ!” Sister Lacey bowed her head in reverence.

Father McNulty appeared with all of his vestments on. Having heard the Sisters' comments, he responded, "It is a glorious monstrance! But it doesn't mean as much to me as the monstrance I used to have."

Lovely's eyes opened wide. "I can't imagine a more beautiful one."

Father smiled sadly. "My previous one was not as ornate; it just meant so much more to me. You see, my parents gave it to me on the day of my priestly ordination. They weren't rich, and they sacrificed to buy it. They even had it engraved. Now that they are both gone, I would love to have it!"

Mother Mercy frowned. "What happened to it?"

Father sighed as he lit the candles that stood beside the monstrance. "It was stolen many years ago!"

"Rascally Robbers! Did they ever catch the thieves?" Lacey shook her head.

"No, and I've given up hope that it will ever be found."

The Sisters rushed to take their places in the pews as Father knelt to begin his prayers.

Each Sister knelt and bowed her head as Father went to the tabernacle and then placed the luna, which contained the Body of Christ, within the monstrance.

Father then began singing part of an ancient Eucharistic hymn called *O Salutaris Hostia*, meaning “O Saving Victim,” as the Sisters sang along. When they finished singing, Father and the Sisters prayed silently for their special intentions.

Wanda, who always got lost herself, prayed that Father McNulty would find the monstrance his parents had given him. And as she prayed, she felt God whispering in her heart, “It will be found!”

Soon the church doors opened, and parishioners joined them in adoration. The hour flew by; the Sisters were surprised when Father said the closing prayers. They helped to put the church

back in order and then headed for home.

As they were driving, Mother Mercy's cell phone rang. "It's Aunt Elizabeth," she announced before taking the call. While her aunt spoke, Mother Mercy smiled and nodded. The others couldn't wait to hear if her aunt knew where the key to the trunk was.

Still smiling, she got off the phone and looked at all the expectant faces of her fellow Sisters. "It's mixed news. The bad news is that the trunk doesn't belong to Aunt Elizabeth. She says it must have belonged to the family who lived in the house before she bought it."

"Who were they?" Sister Lovely sighed. "Will we have to get their permission to open it?"

Mother Mercy grinned. "Well, that's the good news. Aunt Elizabeth purchased the house almost fifty years ago. She has no idea where that family is. She says she checked with her lawyer, and the trunk is part of the house now. Since she gave us the house, the trunk is ours."

“Does she have a key?” Krumbles jumped up and down in her seat with excitement.

“Not sure.” Mother Mercy shook her head. “She said she found a ring of keys when she moved in. She never knew what the keys were for. She tried them on all the doors of the house, but they didn’t fit any locks. Still, she saved them. Aunt Elizabeth put them on the top of the bookshelf in the library. She said to try those keys before we break the lid of the trunk.”

“Does your aunt have any idea what is hidden in the trunk?” Lovely asked.

“No, the basement was finished when she bought the house. The workmen must have dry-walled right over the trunk.

“Maybe they just didn’t want to lift that heavy trunk!” Sister Lovely said, trying to be kind.

“Perhaps the trunk is full of treasure, and they hid it there, intending to come back for the loot!” Krumbles rubbed her hands together in delight.

“Or maybe they just forgot where they put it,”

Wanda said.

Sister Shiny paled and her eyes opened wide. “Deliberate Disorder!”

Lovely giggled. “Now you sound like Sister Lacey!”

“Did your Aunt Elizabeth remember where she put the deed? I know she was anxious for us to receive the mansion officially,” said Sister Lovely.

Mother Mercy smiled. “She knows she left the deed somewhere in the house, but she can’t remember where. We’ll have to look for it so she can sign the house over to us.”

“Holy Piles of Paper!” Sister Lacey shouted. “I was dreaming of gold in the trunk, but I guess that deed would be good as gold to us!”

All the Sisters were excited about opening the mystery trunk, but none were as excited as Sister Krumbles. As soon as they pulled into the driveway, she flung open the car door and bolted for the house.

“Scampering Skedoodle! I’ve never seen

Krumbles move so fast!” Lacey laughed as Krumbles ran through the front door.

Sister Lovely tried to catch up. But no one could catch up to Krumbles, who ran to the library. She pulled a rickety chair from Mother’s desk and pushed it over to the bookcase. After climbing onto the chair, she tried to reach the top of the bookcase. She even stood on her tip-toes, but her hand was at least a foot below the top of the case. Disappointed, Krumbles was about to give up when she suddenly grinned. *I’ve got an idea!*

Taking one foot off the chair, Krumbles started to climb the bookcase as if it were a ladder.

“STOP!” Krumbles froze at Lovely’s command.

Once Sister Lovely was certain that Krumbles had heard her, she grabbed a ladder from the closet. Using the ladder, Krumbles safely climbed up and found the keys. When she was safely back on the floor, all the Sisters headed to the basement.

Sister Lacey tried one key and then the next,

but none of them fit. “Locked up Latches! There’s only one key left to try!”

“It fits!” Sister Wanda shouted, as the key turned and the trunk lid unbolted.

All the curious Sisters gathered around as Lacey lifted the lid. The trunk was filled with books and clothes. The books were dusty, and the clothes were dresses and shoes of a bygone era.

“This trunk must have been sitting here for a hundred years.” Sister Krumbles lifted an old dress and held it up to herself. She started to dance around the basement.

All the other Sisters were disappointed and headed for the stairs.

“Wait! Something is wrong with this trunk!” Wanda yanked the rest of the books and clothes from the trunk and rapped on the bottom.

“What is it?” Mother Mercy demanded.

Wanda looked up. “I’m sure this trunk has a false bottom.”