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The Curse sample  
NOT FOR SALE

## **THE CURSE**

Level 3 - A2/B1 Intermediate (1) Graded Reader from I Talk You Talk Press

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The Curse

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## Introduction

Billy and Joey are art thieves. They steal expensive paintings from art galleries, old castles and homes. Then, they sell the paintings to buyers. They make a lot of money doing this.

Billy is older than Joey. He is a very clever art thief and he enjoys stealing paintings. The police can never catch him.

Joey is a little different. He feels bad when he steals paintings. But he likes Billy very much. Billy is like an older brother to Joey, and he wants to be with Billy all the time. Also, he likes the money he gets for stealing paintings. He buys his mother many things with the money. His mother thinks he has a good job in a bank. She doesn't know he is a thief. Billy doesn't buy his mother anything. He likes gambling and fast cars.

Billy and Joey are professionals. They know a lot about museum and home security. They have stolen paintings from museums in the daytime, and at night.

They have many different ways of stealing paintings. Sometimes, when they steal paintings in the daytime, Joey wears a hat and a fake beard and walks into a museum. Then, he takes the painting off the wall and runs out of the museum. The security guards chase him, but he is so fast that they never catch him. Joey runs to Billy who is waiting in the getaway car, and then they escape.

Sometimes, when they want to steal a painting, Billy and Joey pretend to be repair or maintenance workers. When a museum is having repairs, they go to the museum wearing workmen's clothes. Then, they break the security camera system and take the paintings.

Once, Joey got a job as a night time security guard in a museum. He left the door open and fell asleep. Billy came in and took the painting. Joey got fired from his job because he fell asleep, but no one knew he was one of the thieves.

Now, Billy and Joey are in a meeting with Mr Sweeney, a very rich art collector. Mr Sweeney is a bad man. He often asks Billy and Joey to steal paintings for him and his friends.

## Chapter One

Billy and Joey are sitting in Mr Sweeney's office. The office is on the top floor of a very tall building in the centre of London.

Mr Sweeney lights a cigarette and says, "I have a new job for you. A difficult job."

"A difficult job? Good. I like a challenge," says Billy. "What is it?"

"It is more difficult than any other job," says Mr Sweeney. "I want you to get the painting called *The Girl in the Blue Dress*."

Billy and Joey look at Mr Sweeney. Then they look at each other. They are very shocked.

After about a minute, Joey speaks.

"*The Girl in the Blue Dress*?" he says quietly. "In Boglow Castle?"

"Yes. *The Girl in the Blue Dress*, by the famous artist Décor," says Mr Sweeney. He walks over to the office window and looks down on the city of London. It is raining and the clouds are very dark.

Billy and Joey look at each other again nervously.

"As you know, there is a famous story about the painting. It was painted in 1850. The young girl in the painting was the daughter of Lord Boglow II, the owner and resident of the castle at that time. She loved the castle and didn't like to leave. She especially liked her room. She used to cry when her mother and father tried to take her on trips away from the castle.

When she was nine, Décor painted her portrait. A few weeks later, she died of an illness. Her father, Lord Boglow II, was very upset. He put the painting in his daughter's bedroom and spent many hours every day sitting on her bed and looking at the painting. Before Décor died, someone said to him, 'You have painted many pictures. Which is your favourite?' Décor answered, '*The Girl in the Blue Dress*.' After that, many people wanted to see the painting, and it became very famous. A few years later, a thief stole the painting. Soon after he stole it, he died mysteriously. It's one of Décor's most famous works, and it has been stolen four times."

"And every time someone steals it, something bad happens, and the thief dies mysteriously," says Joey. "The painting is cursed."

"Ah, the curse! Yes!" says Mr Sweeney. He laughs and takes a sip of whiskey. "You don't believe that story, do you?"

"I don't," says Billy. "I don't believe in curses."

"I don't believe it either," says Mr Sweeney. "How about you, Joey?"

Joey takes a long drink from his glass of whiskey.

"I believe it," he says quietly. "It has been stolen four times. And every time, the thief has died. That is not a coincidence," says Joey. "There is something mysterious about the painting."

"Do you believe in Santa Claus, too?" asks Billy.

"Do you believe in angels and fairies?" asks Mr Sweeney.

Mr Sweeney and Billy laugh.

"Joey, you are like a child!" says Mr Sweeney.

Joey scowls and looks out of the window. Mr Sweeney and Billy often make jokes about him, because he is young. He is twenty-five, but Billy is forty-five, and Mr Sweeney is sixty. Billy sometimes calls him *Baby Joey*. Joey really does not like that name.

"Okay, let's forget about the fairy story. Let's talk about the important thing. The money," says Billy. "Mr Sweeney, how much will you pay us?"

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