



From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs Basil E Frankweiler

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Having adventures and holding secrets are important to 12-year old Claudia, and this is why she decides to leave home. Since she needs money and her nine-year old brother James has savings, she invites him along. She's not one for hardship and loves a touch of glamour ? as she puts it, she wants to run ?to?, not ?from? somewhere. They head for New York, the most elegant and exciting place she knows. They end up at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where entrance is free, and stay on, avoiding the guards and making it their base. They become enamoured with the museum's collections, especially a small renaissance statue of an angel, which, as it turns out, may well be by Michelangelo. In trying to solve the puzzle of its provenance, they track down its original owner, Mrs Frankweiler, a rich and eccentric 82-year-old.

As the prologue establishes, Mrs Frankweiler is the narrator, recounting in a letter to her solicitor the children's adventure and her involvement in it. The book, winner of the Newbery Medal in 1968, reads beautifully and is shot through with humour deriving, in the main, from the relationship between James and Claudia, and Claudia's punctilious insistence on correct grammar. The author's exploration of character is perceptive and Claudia and James come across as real children, full of contradictions and spontaneity, revelling in their newly found freedom. Mrs Frankweiler, the voice of wisdom, provides commentary and insights into the children's behaviour. She teaches Claudia the true meaning of adventure, its fleetingness and the importance of memory in keeping cherished moments alive. This is an outstanding and thoughtful book with an intriguing mystery at its heart.

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