

# A Knight in New York

Ray walked south down Broadway, away from Times Square and toward the Empire State Building. He couldn't believe it. The huge skyscrapers, the colourfully-dressed people from every part of the world, the endless river of noisy traffic. Was he really in this city he had seen in so many movies? Was he really in Manhattan? On Broadway?

He waited for the lights where Broadway met 34th Street and the Avenue of the Americas. Broadway! The home of so many songs that people knew all over the world! Was it Frank Sinatra who had sung '*New York, New York, it's a hell of a town*'? Ray felt Sinatra was right. He had only been in the city for an hour, but already he felt at home. He had never been here before in his life, but he knew more about New York than any place back in Tennessee. Ray had his cousin Jim's address in his pocket. But he wasn't a hundred per cent sure he would find his way around the Lower East Side, the area of Manhattan where Jim lived. Ray could even get lost in his own home town!



So you found it OK, Ray,' Jim said two hours later.

'Yep, no problem,' answered Ray.

'Well, it's good to see you. I hope you have a great week and, for a start, we're going to a party tonight.' Most of the people at the party worked for the same company as Jim and were much older than Ray. But there were a few who were about his own age. Ray wanted to speak to a tall girl in a blue dress, but he was nervous.

'You OK, Ray? Can I get you something to drink?' his cousin asked him.

'Uhuh. Yes, please. But tell me, Jim, who's that girl over there?'

'The blonde girl? She's Tom's younger sister. You know, the guy who was talking to you earlier about baseball. Pretty, isn't she? Come on, I'll introduce you. But careful, now. She's made of ice. All the guys fall in love with her and they line up outside her house, but she breaks their hearts. She has a different boy-friend every week. Her name is Josie.'

As they walked across the room, a foot came from nowhere and Ray almost fell. His arm flew up and most of his drink flew through the air toward Josie's face and hair. Splash!

'S-s-sorry,' Ray said.

Jim said, 'I'd like you to meet my cousin. He arrived today. He's from out of town.'

'Swam here, huh?' Josie said.

After that terrible introduction, they talked a little and laughed a lot. Josie had a quick sense of humour and spoke much faster than people in Tennessee, but he usually got the joke in the end. Although she acted tough, Ray guessed she had a softer side. When he said he had no plans for the week and asked for her phone number, she smiled and said, 'Like a challenge? OK, try this. Phone numbers have seven digits, right? But I'll only give you the first two, not the last five. If you can find out what they are, you can call me tomorrow night at about 6.15.'

'OK. I'll call at exactly 6.15,' Ray said. He thought, 'Huh, she calls this a test? I'll just ask Jim for her brother's phone number.' But Josie went on, 'By the way, I won't be home tomorrow night. I'll be at a friend's house. It's her phone number you'll need.'

'Oh,' Ray said. 'What's her name?'

Josie smiled a beautiful smile. 'Hey, not that easy. But I'll give you three clues. Go to the Metropolitan. Find my favourite painting - Dance Class by Degas - and get the number of the floor that it's on. That's the first digit you need. For the next two digits, go to a place on 89th Street and find out how much it costs to rent a horse for an hour in Central Park. And the third clue is ...'

That night, Ray dreamed Josie was a princess who lived in a castle made of ice. Ray was a knight on a white horse. To win the hand of the princess, he had to find the answer to a difficult riddle. In the dream, it didn't seem too hard ...



When Ray woke up the next morning and went into the kitchen, he found a note from Jim:

**SORRY. HAD TO FLY TO CHICAGO. BACK TOMORROW, I HOPE. IF YOU NEED HELP WITH ANYTHING, ASK MR. AND MRS. GOMEZ, MY NEIGHBORS IN APARTMENT 2C. THEY'RE GREAT.**

After a quick breakfast, Ray ran to 2c. Mr and Mrs Gomez were at work, but their daughter, Maria, was home. She was about Ray's age and, like him, had no school that week. Ray asked if she had a street map with details of the city's museums. 'Sure,' Maria said. She even showed him which subway to so take for the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

At the museum, Ray hurried across to the information desk and said to the woman there, 'Hi. I'm looking for a Dancing Lesson. I'm trying to work out this number, you see. And I need the right floor. Can you help me please?'

The woman put down her pen and spoke very slowly. 'I'm sorry, this isn't a dance studio. It's a museum of art. We don't teach dance here. OK? Have a nice day.'

'Err, ... it's a painting by Degas.'

'Oh, you mean Dance Class. It's on Floor 2.'

Next, Ray had to hurry north along Fifth Avenue and then find the place on 89th Street where horses could be rented. He hurried along East 89th Street, but he couldn't see any horses anywhere. Just then a police officer got out of a car, so Ray asked him for help. 'You can't find what? A horse?' the man said. 'Hey, is this a joke? You got a hidden camera somewhere? Am I going to look stupid on TV tonight?'

Ray said he was doing a school project and the officer was friendlier. He used his car radio and said: 'You want West 89th Street, kid, on the other side of Central Park.' Then, 'You sure you don't have a camera?'

Central Park was bigger than Ray had thought, but he felt at home. He knew so much about it from a movie. In fact, he felt as if he was in a movie. He kept thinking, 'Hey, world, I'm in New York!'

He found the horses, heard the price was \$33 for an hour and wrote down: 33.

Then he got into a taxi. 'To the American Museum of Natural History, please,' he said to the driver.

Ray soon found the last two digits: the whale in the Hall of Ocean Life was 94 feet long.

At 6.15 Ray phoned. Nobody answered at - so he wondered if he had the wrong number. Then he got through. Josie wasn't there and Laura, her friend, was surprised Ray had called. But she seemed to know about him because she said, 'OK. Do you have a pen, so I can give you the second part of Josie's challenge?' 'What second part?' Ray said.

'You don't have to do it,' Laura said. 'But it will give you a phone number where you can reach Josie at about 3.15 tomorrow.'

Ray was starting to get angry. But he wanted to see Josie again. So he wrote down the first digit of the new phone number and Josie's clues for the last six. 'Six this time!' he thought. And he'd have to go all over the city, too. He went back to Jim's apartment, depressed and angry.

As he was opening the door, he saw Maria.

'Did you have a nice day?' she asked.

'Well, yes and no,' Ray said.

'My parents say you can eat with us if you want. We're having a Puerto Rican meal and you'd be welcome.' Thanks, I'd like that.'

The food was good, and Mr and Mrs Gomez showed a lot of interest in Ray's trip around their city and his plans for tomorrow.

'Do you have any plans for tomorrow night, Ray?' Mr Gomez asked. 'We have three tickets for a show tomorrow - at the Gershwin Theater - but I can't go. Would you like to go instead?'

'That's real nice of you, but, um, I don't know about tomorrow night yet,' said Ray.

'Maybe,' he thought, 'Josie will...'

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The next day Ray left early, and Maria went with him. She knew how many floors the Chrysler Building had - 77 - so they went straight to the Brooklyn Bridge to look for a plaque about the immigrants from Germany who had designed the bridge. They enjoyed the view.

'Awesome!' Ray said. 'I've seen this bridge a million times on TV, but being here is something else.'

Maria was quiet at first, but slowly she began to talk more. She told Ray why her parents had left Puerto Rico and come to the USA. They had been poor and had both had two jobs: full-time by day and part-time in the evening. Maria was very proud of them.

Suddenly Ray said, 'You know, I've had enough of Josie's game. For her next digit we'd have to go to the Bronx. But I'd prefer to see more of Manhattan.'

Maria smiled again. 'Well, we could go to the top of the World Trade Center, of course,' she said. 'But how about the Songwriters' Hall of Fame at Times Square? There's lots to see, and you can play some of the instruments.' 'Sounds cool,' Ray said.

That evening, as Ray and Maria got out of the elevator back on the Lower East Side, they met Jim. 'Hi, Ray, I'm back,' he said. 'I hear from Mrs Gomez you've been busy.'

'Sure,' Ray said. 'We had a great day.'

'Oh, by the way, there's a message for you on the answering machine. It's from Josie. She says you passed the first part of her test at least, and she'd like to meet you tonight. How did you melt the heart of the ice queen?' Jim laughed.

Ray looked at Maria, then said to Jim, 'I can guess what she'd say if I agreed to see her. She'd ask me to meet her somewhere - like the top of the Empire State Building. But you know what would happen if I went up there to wait for her? I'd wait there and wait there, and in the end I'd have to go down: alone. Josie wouldn't come. No way. I have better things to do.' Maria smiled.

'Can you call Josie for me, Jim?'

'Sure, Ray, if that's what you want. What should I say?'

'Tell her your cousin just swam away.'