

DAN CARTER
CUB SCOUT
AND THE
RIVER CAMP

MILDRED A. WIRT

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DAN CARTER AND THE RIVER CAMP ***

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He had found a small cardboard box.

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“DAN CARTER—CUB SCOUT AND THE RIVER CAMP”

[\(See Page 13\)](#)

Dan Carter Cub Scout and the River Camp

by
Mildred A. Wirt

Illustrated

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DAN CARTER—CUB SCOUT AND THE RIVER CAMP

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Dan Carter—Cub Scout and the River Camp

CHAPTER 1

Found in the Sand

“Unless a breeze springs up soon, we’ll be late for the Cub Scout meeting in the Cave,” Dan Carter complained.

Sprawled in the drifting dinghy, the sandy-haired boy raised his eyes to the limp sail which hung in discouraged folds from the tall mast.

“We’ve already missed the first part of it,” remarked Midge Holloway.

A freckled youth of ten, he had draped himself pretzel-fashion over the boat’s bow. His skinny legs dangled a bare inch above the placid surface of the wide river.

“What time is it anyhow?” he demanded.

At the tiller of the sailboat, Midge’s father, Burton Holloway, snapped on his flashlight to see the dial of his wrist watch. An official “Den Dad” of Webster City Den No. 2, he frequently made river trips with the boys and allowed them to use his sailboat whenever they liked.

On this summer day, the three, after scrubbing the craft’s fouled bottom, had set forth for a brief sail. The wind, however, had died suddenly, leaving them stranded far from their Yacht Club moorings.

“It’s ten after eight,” Mr. Holloway answered his son. “We’ll have to work a little if we expect to get in tonight.”

Reaching for a paddle, he plied it steadily. With snail-like speed the awkward-sized dinghy moved toward the twinkling lights visible on shore. With the coming of darkness, a cold, penetrating fog had closed in over the water.

“Wish I’d brought a jacket,” Dan said with a shiver. “Want me to take a turn at the paddle, Mr. Holloway?”

“No thanks, Dan, I’m good for awhile yet. I blame myself for being stranded out here. The wind was dying when we left the yacht club. So I guess we asked for trouble!”

For some time Mr. Holloway paddled in silence. Now and then a big fish would leap and plop into the water nearby. Otherwise, the river seemed unusually quiet.

Then unexpectedly from the direction of Skeleton Island came the muffled roar of a powerful motor boat engine.

Dan twisted around to gaze upstream. He could hear the sound of the motor plainly but the running lights of the approaching craft were not yet visible through the mist.

“If that boat comes this way, we’ll ask for a tow,” Mr. Holloway remarked. “Maybe we’re in luck.”

Resting on the paddle for a moment, the Den Dad allowed the dinghy to drift with the current. The roar of the motorboat engine now had increased in volume. Yet strangely, no one in the sailboat had sighted the oncoming craft.

“Can it be running without lights?” Mr. Holloway remarked somewhat anxiously. “The pilot should know better than that.”

Through the mist, Dan suddenly made out the dark, sleek outline of a speed craft which rode low in the water. Foam boiled from her prow as she split the waves.

“There she is!” the boy exclaimed. “Heading this way, and coming fast!”

Alarmed lest the craft run down the sailboat in the darkness, Mr. Holloway turned the beam of his flashlight upon the limp sail overhead. To make certain that they were seen, he flashed the light on and off several times.

No answering response came from the motorboat which drove directly toward the sailboat.

“Can’t they see us?” Mr. Holloway demanded anxiously.

The motor craft now was so close that those in the stranded sailboat caught a fleeting glimpse of a stout man in dungarees who manned the wheel. Of square jaw, the upper part of his face was hidden by a billed sailor's cap.

"Hey, look out!" Dan yelled. "Turn on your running lights!"

The pilot evidently heard for he swerved the wheel slightly. And then deliberately, as if angered by the boy's remark, he spun the spokes again, bearing directly down upon the drifting sailboat.

Instinctively, Mr. Holloway and the two Cubs braced themselves for a crash.

The pilot of the speed boat laughed boisterously. Having accomplished his purpose—that of frightening the occupants of the sailing dinghy—he then swerved away.

But he had misjudged the distance. As the motorboat swung, its stern grazed the mid-section of the sailing craft. Though the blow was a glancing one, mahogany splintered with a grinding crash.

Choppy waves flung the sailboat far over on its beam. Water began to seep in through a break in the over-lap.

Instead of throttling down, the motorboat sped away into the darkness.

"Why, that dirty crook!" Midge exclaimed furiously. "He's wrecked our boat, and he doesn't even intend to stop! Hey, you!"

The man at the wheel turned slightly. In the moment before he raised his hand to cover the exposed lower part of his face, Dan obtained a fleeting but clear view of him. Two others in the boat crouched low and kept their backs turned.

Mr. Holloway leaped to his feet in the teetering sailboat. Flashing his light on the disappearing craft, he tried to discern the license number. None was visible.

Despite the shouts of Mr. Holloway and the Cubs, the boat did not slacken speed. Soon it was nearly out of sight, still running without lights.

"Those men should be arrested!" Midge declared. "They struck us on purpose!"

Dan had noticed that his feet were resting in an inch of water.

“Say, we’ve sprung a leak!” he cried, scrambling for a bailing can which was kept under the seat. “Now we are in a jam!”

The latest emergency caused Mr. Holloway to divert his attention from the motorboat. Anxiously, he examined the jagged hole in the mahogany over-lap through which a trickle of water oozed.

“Midge, give me that rag under the seat!” he directed.

As his son handed it over, Mr. Holloway wedged it as tightly as he could into the larger hole, pressing it in with his knife blade.

“That should help some, but we’re still shipping water,” he said anxiously. “We’ll have to bail.”

Already Dan was at work dipping with the tin can which was kept for just such an emergency. While Mr. Holloway paddled hard for shore, he and Midge took turns dipping water from the bottom of the boat. By working steadily, they could keep ahead of it.

“I’d certainly like to know who those men were that struck us,” Mr. Holloway remarked. “Aside from the damage they’ve done to our boat, they’re a menace on the river.”

“Dad, didn’t you think the boat looked a little like Jonathan Manheim’s?” Midge inquired. “It was built on the same general lines.”

“I did notice a resemblance,” Mr. Holloway replied. “But I never before saw the man at the wheel. I’d hate to think it was Manheim’s boat.”

Fairly well known to the Cubs, Mr. Manheim was the owner of Skeleton Island and a prominent member of the Webster City Yacht Club.

“Do you think he would try to run us down deliberately?” Dan asked, working steadily with the bailing can.

“It doesn’t seem so to me, Dan. It’s possible that someone else borrowed his boat. However, since we failed to get the license number, it’s useless to

speculate.”

“Odd that the boat was showing no lights,” Dan said thoughtfully. “Also, I wonder if it carried a license?”

By this time even the faint roar of the motorboat’s engine had died away far up the river. Mr. Holloway and the Cubs knew by following the sound that the craft had not returned to the Webster City Yacht Club. Where it would dock they could not guess.

“You’ll try to make those men pay for the damage, won’t you, Dad?” Midge demanded. The shore now was so close he could see the twinkling lights which marked the outline of the yacht club slip.

“I certainly will if I can, Midge. Unfortunately, we have no proof it was Manheim’s boat.”

“He may have a few scratches to show, Dad.”

“Yes, if we notice tomorrow that his speedboat is banged up, we can be quite certain he’s the guilty party. Even so, we’ll have to be rather careful in taking the matter up with him. Manheim has many friends in the club.”

“He won’t have ’em long if he makes a practice of running down sailboats,” said Midge. “We’re lucky our boat didn’t sink.”

Five minutes later, the dinghy, heavily logged with water, limped to its berth at the yacht club dock.

“Hurry on to your Cub Scout meeting, boys,” Mr. Holloway urged. “I’ll look after the boat and make a few inquiries around the club.”

Thus urged, Dan and Midge hastened along a graveled path which curled toward a steep hillside overlooking the water front.

A long flight of wooden steps led up to a natural limestone cave in the rocks high above the beach. Some months before, the Cubs by hard labor had converted this cavern into a meeting place. The room now was attractively furnished with a couch, table, magazines and trophies.

Breathless from hurrying, the boys reached the Cave entranceway. Already the Cub meeting was in progress.

Sam Hatfield, athletic coach at Webster High School, and Cub leader, stood in the center of the cavern talking earnestly to the boys.

Grouped about him in the lighted room were Brad Wilber who was Den Chief, Chips Davis, Red Suell, Mack Tibbets, and Sam's own son, Fred Hatfield.

"Glad to see you, boys," the Cub leader greeted Dan and Midge. "But aren't you a little late?"

Stammering apologies, Dan and Midge explained that they had been delayed on the river. Without mentioning Mr. Manheim's name, they related how their boat had been smashed.

"I knew something unusual must have kept you away from the meeting," declared the Cub leader. "Too bad about Mr. Holloway's boat. I hope you catch those fellows."

"Have we missed much of the meeting, Mr. Hatfield?" Dan asked anxiously.

"Not the treasure hunt," the Cub leader reassured him. "We just wound up the business meeting. Briefly, the Den has decided upon two goals for the summer. The first is to win the Pack swimming meet next month."

"That's where you come in, Dan," spoke up Brad. Nearly fourteen, the dark-haired youngster was a Boy Scout and the acknowledged leader of the Cubs. Even-tempered, quick of wit and fair, he had earned the respect of the younger boys.

"How so?" Dan caught him up.

"You're the best swimmer in the outfit. We're depending on you to crash through and win the silver cup for Den 2."

"I'll do my best," Dan promised with a pleased grin. "Guess I'll have to get busy right away and polish off my crawl stroke."

"What's the second goal, Mr. Hatfield?" Midge inquired.

“Well, the Cubs have voted to help the Scouts earn enough money to buy a permanent camp on Skeleton Island.”

“Skeleton Island?” Midge repeated, glancing quickly at Dan. “Mr. Manheim’s place?”

“Yes, the camp will belong to the Scouts, but our Den will have the privilege of using it for day trips and occasional over-night jaunts.”

“We need both your votes on the project,” Brad interposed. “Since it’s to be a Scout rather than a Cub camp, we don’t aim to go into it unless every member of the Den is in favor of the idea.”

“Why buy a chunk of Skeleton Island?” Midge inquired.

“It’s the only suitable island hereabouts,” Mr. Hatfield explained. “We figure Mr. Manheim shouldn’t ask too high a figure for a small beach section. Of course, if you boys are against the project—”

“You may have my vote,” Dan said after a slight hesitation.

“And mine,” added Midge, a trifle reluctantly. “I just hope you’re right about Mr. Manheim being generous enough to sell at a low price.”

Being uncertain that their dinghy had been struck by Mr. Manheim’s motorboat, neither Midge nor Dan told the Cubs why mention of his name had disturbed them.

The business meeting presently ended with the boys gathering in a circle to repeat the Cub Promise.

“I promise TO DO MY BEST
To be SQUARE and
To OBEY the law of the Cub Pack.”

Parents began to drift into the Cave. On this particular night, a beach treasure hunt had been planned. Everything now was in readiness. Clues had been carefully hidden throughout the beach area.

Red Suell’s father handed out typewritten slips of paper containing hints in

scrambled letters.

“You’re to hunt in pairs,” he instructed the Cubs. “The treasure chest has been hidden somewhere within a quarter mile of the Cave. The first pair to find it should signal by giving the Cub whistle. Then we’ll all join on the beach for a feed before going home.”

Dan and Brad drew identical numbers which meant they were to hunt together. Eagerly they scanned their slip of paper on which appeared the scrambled sentence:

“Dinf eht glgyascr koa.”

“The first two words are ‘find the—,’” Dan discerned at a glance. “But what are those other two mind-teasers?”

“The last one is oak,” Brad contributed. “‘Find the oak!’ But what kind of oak?”

“Scraggly oak!” Dan deciphered the final word. “Come on, Brad!”

With a shout, the two boys were off, leaving the other Cubs to puzzle out their various clues. Clattering down the steps, the pair raced across the smooth sand.

The light of a pale moon plainly silhouetted a stunted oak tree against the dark sky. Making a bee line for it, the boys searched diligently for another clue.

“Here it is!” Dan suddenly shouted.

At the base of the tree he had found a small cardboard box. Inside was another scrambled sentence which directed the boys to search for a large piece of driftwood.

“The beach is littered with washed-up debris,” Brad observed. “This game is getting tougher.”

Other Cubs now began to appear on the water front. However, as each clue was different, the treasure hunters remained widely separated.

Brad and Dan turned up perhaps twenty pieces of driftwood before they found their third clue. The scrambled message required a long time to decipher. On a

ragged piece of cardboard had been printed:

“Kloo denur a toab dna ouy amy dinf a hsoelv.”

“Look under a boat and you may find a shovel!” Dan finally figured it out. “A shovel! Yipee! That means we’re getting close to the treasure chest. Maybe our next clue will lead us to it.”

“And we’re miles ahead of the other Cubs,” chuckled Brad. “The question is, where’s the boat?”

Neither boy could recall having seen one on the beach that day. Because their clue had directed them to search beneath the craft, they were convinced that the boat must be an old one, probably overturned or abandoned somewhere on the sands.

“Let’s look on that stretch that extends out toward the lighthouse,” Brad proposed. “It’s a lonely spot—just the type of place you’d expect the Den Dads to select for the big treasure chest pay-off.”

Scanning every inch of the sand, the boys dog-trotted toward the lighthouse. As its bright beam swept across the water, Dan noticed a dark outline on the beach some distance ahead.

“That looks like a boat!” he exclaimed.

Focusing their eyes upon it, the boys plunged on through the loose sand. In the semi-darkness Dan paid scant heed to his footing. He stumbled, and then suddenly halted, staring ahead.

A dark object lay half hidden behind a little mound of sand. Unmistakably, the form was human.

“Jeepers!” he whispered. “*Jeepers!*”

Brad too had seen the figure in the sand and had halted with a jerk.

“What’s this?” he muttered. “Not a joke the Den Dads are pulling on us?”

The form at their feet was that of a boy no older than Dan. One arm outstretched,

he lay in a posture of complete exhaustion. His clothing was water-soaked, his dark hair damp.

“This is no joke,” Brad said soberly. “Whoever this youngster is, he’s in bad shape.”

CHAPTER 2

A Coded Message

The dark, curly-haired boy who lay on the sand stirred slightly as Dan and Brad bent down to shake his arm.

Seeing their faces above him, he pulled himself up on an elbow, staring at them with blank expression.

Fear gleamed momentarily in his steel-gray eyes, and then he seemed to relax. With a tired sigh, he settled back, clutching convulsively at the sand.

Though the Cubs tried twice to arouse him, he did not respond.

“He’s completely worn out,” Brad said, deeply troubled.

“Obviously he’s been in the river,” Dan added. “My guess is he’s exhausted from a long swim. Ever see him before?”

Brad shook his head. “I’m pretty sure he never went to any of the Webster City schools or I’d remember him. Must be a newcomer.”

“Whoever he is, he shouldn’t lie here in wet clothes.”

“You’re right, Dan. He’ll catch his death in this night air. And he probably needs medical attention.”

“Think we could carry him to the Cave?”

“Not by ourselves, Dan. We need the other Cubs to help.”

Wetting his fingers, Brad gave the shrill whistle which had been agreed upon as the signal to mark the end of the treasure hunt.

Immediately the other Cubs began to gather from all sections of the beach.

“Gosh! What fast workers you little guys are!” Mack Tibbets complained goodnaturedly as he hurried up. “It didn’t take you long to dig up the chest!”

“We haven’t found it yet,” Brad replied. “But we have stumbled into something else.”

Already Mack’s startled gaze had fastened upon the sprawled figure of the boy on the sand. Before he could comment, Mr. Hatfield and the other Cubs arrived.

“What’s this?” the Cub leader demanded, stopping short.

Dan explained how he and Brad had found the strange boy lying on the sand, adding: “The kid raised up a second and then lapsed off.”

“Unconscious?”

“I don’t think so, sir,” Brad replied. “He seemed more exhausted than anything else. We haven’t touched him.”

Mr. Hatfield knelt in the sand, feeling the boy’s pulse which was weak and fast. Carefully he turned him over to look directly into his face.

Again the eyelids fluttered open and his lips moved slightly. Mr. Hatfield bent closer but could not distinguish the words.

“Any idea who he is?” he asked the Cubs.

“We never saw him before,” Brad answered. “We were looking for the treasure when Dan noticed him lying here by the boat.”

“He must have crawled from the water only a few minutes ago,” Mr. Hatfield said. The Cub leader had noticed long marks in the sand, indicating that the boy had dragged himself beyond reach of the waves. “I suppose we’d better send for an ambulance—”

His words trailed off, for the boy on the sand unexpectedly had stirred to life. As if aroused by hearing the Cub leader’s remark, he tried to sit up.

“Easy, lad,” Mr. Hatfield advised, placing a supporting arm about his shoulders. “We’ll get you to a hospital.”

The boy’s head shook in a vigorous negative. His fingers gripped Mr. Hatfield’s arm in a hard pressure.

“No!” he whispered fiercely. “No!”

Puzzled by the intensity of the boy’s reaction, Mr. Hatfield studied him a moment in silence.

“You’ve been in the river?” he asked as the other offered no information.

Again the head bobbed, this time in an affirmative answer.

“Who are you?” Mr. Hatfield inquired, stripping off his leather jacket and wrapping it about the shivering boy. “How did you get in the river?”

The boy merely stared at the Cub leader and did not answer. Then with a supreme effort, he tried to pull away from the supporting arm.

“I go,” he mumbled. “All right now.”

“Where will you go?” interposed the Cub leader. “Don’t be foolish. You’re in no condition to walk. Come on, boys. Let’s take him to the Cave.”

Having no stretcher or board which could be used as one, Brad and Mr. Hatfield made a seat of their arms and carried the boy to the steps leading up into the Cave. There they were joined by Mr. Holloway and Red’s father who helped.

Once in the Cave, the Cubs made the boy comfortable on a couch. Stripping off his wet garments, they wrapped him in a warm blanket.

“Feeling better?” Mr. Hatfield asked him. “I think I should call a doctor.”

“No—please,” he mumbled, pleading with his eyes.

To Mr. Hatfield and the fathers of the Cubs it was apparent that the boy slowly was recovering from his ordeal in the river. And it also was evident that for some reason, he did not wish to reveal anything about himself.

“Suppose you tell us your name,” Mr. Hatfield suggested, seating himself beside the boy.

The youth regarded him with a stony stare and answered no word.

“Maybe you’ll tell us a little later,” Mr. Hatfield said kindly.

Deciding to leave the boy alone for awhile, he retired to a far corner of the Cave to talk over the matter with Mr. Suell and Midge’s father. Neither the Cubs nor their fathers ever had seen the boy before.

“It’s queer how he came to be in the river,” Mr. Hatfield remarked in an undertone. “Plainly, he’s trying to hide something.”

“Think we should turn him over to the police for investigation?” Mr. Holloway asked, looking troubled.

“He seems like a good sort,” the Cub leader replied. “My judgment would be to wait and see what develops. He may be suffering from shock, though I think his refusal to talk is deliberate.”

Brad and Dan, who had taken charge of the boy’s wet garments, now approached Mr. Hatfield.

“What is it, boys?” he inquired, aware by their manner that they had an important disclosure to make.

Brad asked the Cub leader if he would step outside to a platform from which the wooden steps descended.

Surprised by the request, Mr. Hatfield followed the two Cubs.

“What’s up?” he questioned when they were beyond the hearing of the others. “You’ve learned something about that youngster?”

“We were hanging up his clothes, and sort of went through his pockets,” Brad confessed. “Maybe we shouldn’t have—”

“On the whole, I think I might have done the same,” Mr. Hatfield reassured him. “The boy evidently has no intention of telling us anything about himself. So I

figure it's up to us to puzzle out a few facts for ourselves."

"Here's what we found," Dan said, offering Mr. Hatfield a scrap of heavy wrapping paper.

The Cub leader snapped on his flashlight to study the writing. Only two words appeared, preceded by a string of puzzling numerals.

"020614 7552845 24
 Skeleton Island."

"Queer," Mr. Hatfield commented. "You say this paper came from the boy's pocket?"

"Yes, it was wadded up inside an old cigarette case," Dan explained. "That's, why it wasn't water-soaked."

"Find anything else?"

"Only a couple of handkerchiefs, a pocket knife and a few odds and ends," Brad replied.

"Nothing to indicate who the boy is or where he came from?"

"Not a thing, sir. The only clue is this scrap of paper. What do you make of it, Mr. Hatfield?"

"Frankly, I'm puzzled, Brad. This reference to Skeleton Island seems very odd."

"Do you suppose those numerals could be a code of some sort?" Dan asked eagerly.

"Well, that's hard to say. But by all means hang on to this paper, Dan."

"We sure will," Dan promised, replacing it in his pocket. "If it should be a code maybe we can work it out. The only trouble is, I wouldn't know where to start."

Footsteps now were heard padding softly on the steps leading to the platform.

Gazing down, the Cubs saw that it was Mrs. Holloway, who had arrived. The official Den Mother climbed slowly, carrying a heavy hamper of food.

Dan and Brad darted down the stairs to help with the basket.

“Dear me, these steps seem steeper every time I climb them,” she laughed, pausing on the platform to recapture her breath.

Observing through the open doorway of the Cave that all the Cubs had gathered there, Mrs. Holloway expressed surprise that the treasure hunt had ended so early.

“Why, I’m late bringing the food!” she exclaimed. “I expected the beach outing to last at least another half hour.”

Mr. Hatfield told her what had occurred, adding: “Perhaps you can do something for the boy. He’s inside.”

“You’ve sent for a doctor?” Mrs. Holloway inquired.

“Yes, Mr. Suell went after Dr. Redfield a few minutes ago. The lad seems to be coming around all right. He’s a strange sort of boy—so far, he won’t tell us his name or anything about himself.”

“I’ll find out,” Mrs. Holloway said confidently.

Inside the Cave, nearly all of the Cubs had gathered about the couch where the strange boy lay. His dark brown eyes now appeared alert, and roved systematically over the room, taking in every detail.

He noted an animal skin which hung on the wall above the couch, a shelf of Indian handicraft articles, and raffia baskets made by the Cubs. His gaze dwelt longest upon a silver trophy engraved with the Den 2 name.

“We won that cup in the Pack handicraft show,” Chips volunteered, observing the boy’s interest. “Red and I made an Indian headdress which took top honors.”

“Aw, cut out the boasting,” Red interposed with a laugh. “Remember, if it hadn’t been for Brad and Dan recovering that feather war bonnet after it was carried down river with the flood, the Den wouldn’t have won a thing.”

“That’s right,” Chips admitted readily. “We all worked together to earn the trophy. And to clear the Den name too.”

As all the Cubs knew, the feathers which had been so skillfully woven into the headdress had been obtained from the Silverton Pheasant Farm not many miles distant.

Due to a misunderstanding, all the Cubs had been accused of trespassing, and Chips and Red of stealing. Only by diligent work had Dan and Brad cleared the two boys of the charge.

The story of how a group of daring pheasant thieves was brought to justice, has been told in the first volume of a series, entitled: "Dan Carter, Cub Scout."

Quietly taking charge, Mrs. Holloway cleared the bedside by assigning the Cubs to small tasks about the Cave. From a thermos bottle she poured a steaming cup of hot chocolate which she pressed to the boy's lips.

He drank slowly and then with a grateful smile expressed his thanks.

"You're feeling better now, aren't you?" the Den Mother said, straightening the blankets on the couch.

The boy nodded.

"Not very talkative, are you?" Mrs. Holloway asked with a warm smile. "But then, you've had a most harrowing experience. How in the world did you get in the river so late at night?"

The strange lad did not rise to this bait, but allowed the question to remain unanswered.

"You haven't told us your name yet," Mrs. Holloway reminded him.

"Jacques," he answered after a long hesitation.

"Why, that's a French name, isn't it? Jacques—what?"

Again the boy did not answer, merely staring at her with eyes which held a troubled expression.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Holloway. "If you don't feel like answering questions, I won't press you. Later on perhaps you'll tell us about yourself."

She sat by the couch for a few minutes and then as Mr. Suell came in with Dr. Redfield, retired to talk to the Cub leader again.

“It’s no use—I couldn’t get a word out of him,” she confessed. “My guess is that he is foreign-born. And his first name, Jacques, would indicate it.”

“None of the Cubs ever have seen him before,” Mr. Hatfield remarked. “A slip of paper was found in his pocket bearing the name Skeleton Island.”

“Then he may live there.”

“Possibly,” Mr. Hatfield conceded. “However, the island belongs to Jonathan Manheim. I’ve never heard of anyone staying there except a caretaker who looks after the property.”

“What’s to be done with the boy?”

“We’ll have to try to find his people. Possibly he’s a runaway. In that case, he may refuse to tell us the name of his parents or where he came from. It may take a day or two to get his background.”

“I’ll be glad to have him stay at my home tonight.”

“I’d figured on taking him with me,” Mr. Hatfield replied. “That is, if the doctor approves. Let’s see what he has to say.”

Dr. Redfield had completed his examination of the boy and was preparing to leave the Cave. Not wishing to discuss the patient in his presence, he joined the Cub leader and Mrs. Holloway outside on the platform.

“What’s the verdict, doctor?” Mr. Hatfield inquired.

“Oh, he should be all right by tomorrow morning,” the doctor answered. “He’s suffering a little from shock, but nothing serious. Mr. Suell told me the boy was found on the beach and apparently had become exhausted from a long swim.”

“That’s the way we figured it out. He’s told us nothing.”

“The boy has no serious injuries,” Dr. Redfield continued. “In examining him, I did find several bruises on his legs and back.”

“What would you say was the cause, doctor?”

“I couldn’t be certain, but offhand I would think he had been beaten.”

“Then our theory that he’s a runaway may be right after all. By the way, doctor, the boy can be moved safely? I thought I’d take him to my home for the night.”

“He’ll be all right if he doesn’t exert himself,” the doctor replied. “Keep him warm and quiet. If you need me in the morning, telephone and I’ll make a more complete examination.”

After the doctor had gone, Mr. Hatfield and the Cubs prepared to close up the Cave for the night. Deciding to leave the treasure chest buried on the beach, the boys voted to resume the interrupted hunt at their next weekly meeting.

Mrs. Holloway served sandwiches, chocolate and cookies to all the Cubs. Jacques refused to eat anything but did accept another cup of hot beverage.

“Now let’s all sing the Cub pledge before we leave,” Mr. Hatfield proposed.

The boys gathered around and to the tune of America, warbled:

“Cub friendships, pure and deep,
We promise we will keep
Our pledge to thee;
We will honor and obey Akela all the way
And on that twelfth birthday
Good Scouts we’ll be!”

At the end of the song, all the Cubs gave the salute, two fingers raised to their foreheads. Then the meeting began to break up.

“Brad, if you and Dan will stay here with Jacques, I’ll go home for my car,” the Cub leader said. “Then we can get him down the stairs and directly into the automobile. It shouldn’t take me long.”

“We’ll be glad to wait,” Dan offered eagerly.

After Mr. Hatfield had gone, the Cubs and their fathers began to drift off home. Soon only Mrs. Holloway, her son Midge, Brad and Dan remained.

“I’ll wait for Mr. Hatfield,” the Den Mother said. “He should be coming soon.”

“I see a car parking now on the road across from the beach,” Brad observed. From where he stood near the Cave doorway, he could view the entire river front.

“Then I’ll run along,” Mrs. Holloway said, gathering up hamper and thermos bottles. “Good-bye, Jacques. I’ll certainly see you tomorrow.”

“*Merci*,” he mumbled, using the French word for expressing thanks.

The Cave became deeply silent after Mrs. Holloway had gone. Brad and Dan moved close to the couch, studying their guest with curiosity.

“Jacques, can’t you speak English, or don’t you want to?” Brad asked presently. “You’re trying to hide something— isn’t that it?”

Again the boy on the couch flashed them an inscrutable smile. But with a gesture which plainly bespoke gratitude, he reached out to grasp Dan’s hand.

His next act was deliberate. With two fingers extended along Dan’s wrist, he squeezed the hand with a grip which unmistakably was the official Cub handclasp.

“Gosh all fish hooks!” Dan exclaimed, staring down at the boy in astonishment. “You’re a Cub too! And you never let out a hint of it when the others were here.”

Jacques allowed the boy’s hand to slip from his own. With a slight shrug and another mysterious smile, he closed his eyes and pretended to drowse.

CHAPTER 3

Stolen Furs

On the morrow, Dan and Brad called early at Mr. Hatfield's home to inquire as to the condition of Jacques.

They found the boy up and dressed, eating a late breakfast with Mr. and Mrs. Hatfield and Fred. Apparently none the worse for his river adventure of the previous night, the lad seemed in fairly good spirits.

Taking Brad and Dan aside, Fred reported to them that absolutely no progress had been made in learning the boy's identity or anything about his past.

"Just as soon as one asks him a direct question, he pretends not to understand," Fred complained. "It's all a pose."

"What does your father plan to do with him?" Brad asked.

"He hasn't decided yet. This afternoon we're going down to the Cave to clean up after last night's meeting. We'll probably take Jacques with us."

"You know he's a Cub, I suppose," Dan remarked.

"A Cub!" Fred was astonished. "Why, no! He didn't give us a hint of it. What makes you think so?"

Dan and Brad related how Jacques had grasped the former's hand in the official Cub handclasp, mute evidence that he once had been a member of the international organization.

"He's a queer duck," Fred declared. "I'm sure he didn't mention to Dad that he ever had been a Cub. Fact is, he's kept mum about everything. Won't peep a word as to his folks or where he came from."

The Cubs discussed Jacques a little longer, and then Brad and Dan left, but not before promising Fred they would drop around at the Cave later to help with the cleaning.

Anxious to learn how much damage had been done the previous night to Mr. Holloway's sailboat, the boys next stopped at the Webster City Yacht Club. From Midge, who loitered on the dock, they learned that the sailing craft already had been hauled to a nearby boat yard to be repaired.

"The job will cost at least forty dollars," Midge reported. "What's worse, the boat will be out of water for at least two or three days. It makes me sick!"

"Did your father learn if it was Manheim's boat that struck us last night?" Dan questioned.

"Not yet. We inquired around the clubhouse, but no one has seen the Manheim speedboat the last couple of days."

Brad had noticed a mahogany speedcraft which was plowing up the channel at half-speed. "Isn't that Manheim's boat coming now?" he demanded. "It looks like it to me."

"Likewise the same one that struck us last night," Midge muttered, shading his eyes as he gazed toward the sun.

As the three Cubs watched, the boat drew closer until they could read the license numbers—D 351, and see the bright gleam of her brasswork.

"The boat that hit us had no visible license," Dan said, a little troubled. "If it weren't for that, I'd say it was Manheim's craft that smashed into us."

"Who's at the wheel?" Brad demanded. "Not Manheim."

The operator of the boat wore a striped red and blue jersey and soiled brown trousers. His square jaw and grizzled sun-brown face of set expression marked him as a man of surly temper.

As the boat slid along toward the Manheim berth, he glanced briefly at the Cubs. Then deliberately he looked away.

“Wonder who he is?” Midge muttered. “He doesn’t resemble anyone in that boat last night.”

“Not the operator anyway,” Dan agreed. “Actually, we didn’t see the other two fellows well enough to recognize them again.”

The Cubs kept the boat in view as it maneuvered into a reserved space at the far end of the dock. Midge asked a club member, who loitered nearby, if the speedboat belonged to Mr. Manheim.

“Yes, that’s his boat,” the club member identified it.

“But that isn’t Mr. Manheim at the wheel?”

“No, the pilot is a fellow who works for him at Skeleton Island. A new man he hired a few months ago. I’ve heard him called Wilson Jabowski.”

After the club member had moved on, the three Cubs watched the Manheim boat fill its gas tank at a private pump.

“Notice her stern,” Dan whispered to his companions. “Can you see any scratches?”

“We’re too far away,” Midge returned. “But I’ll bet a frosted doughnut it was Manheim’s boat that rammed us last night! I’ll find out!”

Unable to restrain himself, the boy descended three steps to the lower level, there to inspect the craft’s hull.

“Hey!” the boat operator shouted as Midge bent to look closely at the mahogany. “What d’you think you’re doing?”

“Nothing,” Midge mumbled, startled. “Just looking.”

“Well, do your lookin’ somewhere else!” the man snapped. “Mr. Manheim doesn’t want kids hangin’ around his boat.”

“I’m not doing any harm,” Midge defended himself. “I was just noticing a few scratches on your boat. Have you been in an accident?”

“No,” the boat operator answered gruffly. “I may have scratched the mahogany a couple of days ago when I was backing out of the berth. Grazed a dock post.”

“Oh, I see,” Midge said, pretending to accept the explanation. “I thought maybe you might have been in a collision last night.”

“Collision! What you drivin’ at, you young whelp? Trying to make out it was Mr. Manheim’s boat that run into your Dad’s sailboat?”

“I didn’t say so, did I? Anyhow, how did you know of it?”

“Heard about the accident here at the club,” the boat operator retorted. “Let me tell you something! This boat wasn’t away from Skeleton Island last night! And another thing, Mr. Manheim doesn’t go around smashing sailboats.”

“Who said he did?” Midge demanded, now on the defensive. “I never accused him.”

“No, but you’re thinking it was this boat that hit yours. Oh, I heard you boys whispering! Well, get this straight! You better not go to Mr. Manheim with your complaints.”

“I’m sorry if I said anything to offend,” Midge replied, his voice stony. “To tell you the truth, I did think maybe it was his boat that struck ours in the dark. If I’ve made a mistake I apologize.”

“You sure made a mistake, kid. Now get going all of you! I want to fill this gasoline tank and get back to Skeleton Island.”

Embarrassed by the reprimand, the three Cubs took themselves to the club where they sat on the veranda drinking cokes.

“I sure made the old boy sore,” Midge said between sips of the iced drink. “I never intended to accuse him or say anything about the accident. He snapped me up so fast.”

“Almost as if he had a guilty conscience,” Dan agreed. “Maybe he heard about the accident here at the club the way he said. Then again, maybe he didn’t.”

“Those scratches on the boat weren’t very deep,” Midge said thoughtfully. “All

in all, I guess I'd better not exercise my gums too much over the thing. Dad wouldn't like it."

Brad, who had been scanning the morning paper while his companions talked, now uttered a startled snort.

"Say, will you look at this!" he exclaimed, tapping a front page news story. "Guess what happened last night?"

"Break it to us gently, Brad, my boy," Midge laughed.

"It says here that a box of furs valued at \$8,500 was stolen last night from Pier 23. So far the police haven't traced the thieves."

Dan relieved Brad of the newspaper and read the account for himself. The story related that during the early hours of the evening, a fast motorboat had pulled alongside of Pier 23 where a box of furs had been piled up with other merchandise for shipment. Before the warehouse watchman had suspected what was happening, the craft with its unknown occupants had sped away into the darkness.

"Say, do you suppose that could have been the same boat that struck us last night?" Dan demanded as he finished reading the story.

"What time did the robbery occur?" Midge asked thoughtfully.

"The story doesn't say. But you remember, the boat was showing no lights, and coming from the general direction of the docks."

"That's true," Midge admitted, impressed. "All the same, Manheim isn't the type of man to get mixed up in a fur theft. In the first place, he has plenty of money."

"We may have been mistaken about it being the Manheim boat," Dan argued.

"In any case, this story about the fur theft is interesting," Brad said, rereading it. "It looks to me as if the river pirates are getting pretty bold when they can pull off a robbery practically under the eyes of the watchman."

"I wish we had more information," Midge remarked. "Pier 23 isn't far from here. Why not go there and see if we can pick up any more information."

The proposal appealed to Brad and Dan. Finishing their drinks, they caught a bus which dropped them off a few minutes later at the commercial area of the river.

Midge, who was fairly familiar with this section of the waterfront, led his companions toward a small warehouse whose corrugated steel door stood slightly ajar.

Inside, an elderly man was taking an inventory of boxes and crates stacked against the wall. A spry, wiry little fellow with white hair and energy that belied his sixty-nine years, he whirled around as he heard the boys enter.

“You startled me,” he chuckled, obviously relieved. “After last night, I’m a mite jumpy.”

The Cubs noticed then that the warehouse man carried a revolver in a holster at his belt.

“I’m Hank Hawkins, at your service,” he announced cheerfully. “What can I do for you youngsters?”

“We’d like a little information about the robbery last night,” Dan spoke up. “We’re not just asking questions out of curiosity. We may have some information for you too.”

“You kids know something about it?”

“We may have seen the boat that pulled away from the pier. We’re not sure. What time did the robbery take place?”

“Say, who are you kids anyhow?” the watchman demanded, without answering the question.

Brad gave his name and introduced his companions, explaining that they were Cub Scouts. “I guess you think we have our nerve barging in like this,” he added. “We read about the fur robbery in the paper, and we want to learn the details.”

“I see.” Hank sat down on a packing case to light his pipe. “Well, there ain’t much to tell. The Hodur and Fameister firm sent through a box of expensive furs. They were to have been picked up at 10 o’clock last night by the freighter

Albone. At eight thirty I set out the box along with some others that were to go. Then I stepped back into the warehouse for a minute, and it happened.”

“You say the theft occurred about eight thirty?” Dan asked thoughtfully.

“It was about that time. Ordinarily, it wouldn’t have been dark, but a heavy fog had rolled in.”

“Did you see the motorboat and the men in it?” Midge asked.

“Caught a glimpse of ’em as they pulled away—that was all. It all happened so fast. They had that box off the pier and were gone before I knew what was up.”

“What sort of boat was it?” Brad inquired.

“A 20-ft. high-powered speedboat. Mostly she was a blur in the dark. Not a light showing.”

“How many in the boat?”

“Three, I’d say.”

The information tended to convince the Cubs that the craft was the same one that had smashed into Mr. Holloway’s sailboat.

As they were telling Hank about the incident, a tapping sound was heard on the planking outside the door. A moment later, a blindman led by a seeing-eye dog, groped his way into the warehouse.

“Good morning, Joe,” the watchman greeted him. “How’s business today?”

“Lousy,” the blindman complained. “I’ve sold only four packages of pencils all morning. The sun’s so hot it’s wilting me. Mind if I chin for a few minutes while I cool off?”

“Glad to have you,” Hank said, guiding the man to a seat on a box. “Boys, meet Joe Matt, a friend of mine.”

The Cubs gave their own names. Feeling sorry for the man, Brad then bought a package of pencils for a quarter. However, the blindman pocketed the coin rather

indifferently.

“What do you hear from the cops?” he asked Hank. “Any clue as to the fur thieves?”

“Apparently it was a clean get-away. The box was insured for only half its value and that makes it tough for Hodur and Fameister. I’m lucky I didn’t lose my job?”

“Why should anyone blame you?” the blindman demanded. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“No, but maybe my employer will figure I should have had my eyes open a little wider. It’s the first time I’ve lost anything in the eighteen years I’ve been workin’ on the waterfront.”

Hank discussed the theft at length and then began to tell other tales of the waterfront which kept the Cubs enthralled. Brad, Dan, and Midge presently found themselves drawn into the conversation. They told of their Cave on the hillside and the exciting treasure hunt which had led to the discovery of Jacques lying on the beach.

“Jacques?” the blindman interposed. “Is that his name? Must be one of those foreigners.”

“French, we think,” Midge revealed, failing to notice the look of intent interest in the blindman’s otherwise mask-like face. “He’s not much to talk.”

“Hasn’t told you anything about himself?”

“Not yet.”

“Where is the youngster now?”

“He may be at the Cave.”

The blindman talked a few minutes more and then arose to leave. Dan also slid down from the packing box on which he had perched himself.

Slight as was the movement, it disturbed the seeing-eye dog. With a snarl, he

sprang at the boy.

Startled, Dan leaped backward. The blindman uttered a sharp command.

“Here, Rudy! Come here! Behave yourself!”

Still growling and eyeing Dan with deep hate, the dog allowed his master to grasp him by the leash.

“Quite a vicious dog you have there,” Brad said, edging away. “He might have taken a chunk out of Dan.”

“Rudy isn’t vicious,” the blindman denied. “Now and then he takes a dislike to someone. Usually he won’t attack unless he’s annoyed.”

“That’s encouraging,” Dan said with a wry grin. “Believe me, in the future I’ll take pains not to annoy him.”

Without apologizing for the incident, the blindman took the dog and went off down the wharf. For a long while, the Cubs could hear his cane tapping on the planks.

“Joe Matt isn’t a bad sort after you know him,” the watchman remarked, aware that the Cubs had not been favorably impressed by the man’s manners. “Being blind would make anyone out-of-sorts, I guess.”

“Sure,” Brad agreed. “I suppose he’s attached to that dog—though he’s an ugly animal. Wouldn’t want to meet him on a dark night.”

“You can bet I’ll give him a wide berth,” Dan added with a laugh. “Rudy didn’t go for me. And the feeling’s mutual! By the way, Hank, how long have you known Joe Matt?”

“Oh, I don’t remember,” the watchman replied indifferently, knocking the ashes from his pipe. “Six months maybe. Well, I’ve been spinning yarns long enough. Got to do a little work now.”

Accepting the remark as a dismissal, Dan, Brad and Midge said goodbye, and left the warehouse. At the bus line, they debated, and finally decided to make an appearance at the Cave.

“Mr. Holloway and Fred will need some help cleaning up the place,” Dan declared. “Also, if Jacques is there, I’d like to talk to him again.”

“He seemed to go for you more than anyone else,” Brad said, signaling to a bus driver. “Maybe you can get him to loosen up a bit.”

The sun was high overhead as the three Cubs alighted from the bus ten minutes later. Crossing the beach, they climbed to the Cave.

Entering, they saw at once that something was amiss. Mr. Holloway and Fred were there alone, their brooms discarded. Rather dejectedly they sat at a table, studying an object which was hidden from view.

“Hi!” Dan greeted the pair. “Where’s Jacques? We thought you were bringing him here.”

“We did,” replied Fred significantly.

The other Cubs looked quickly about the disordered room. Plainly Jacques was nowhere in the Cave.

“Where is he?” Brad demanded. “Don’t keep us in suspense. He didn’t take a turn for the worse?”

Mr. Hatfield shook his head.

“No, Jacques appeared fine when last we saw him. This will explain.” He thrust a note into Brad’s hand. “The lad left it here a few minutes ago.”

In a large, hard-to-read scrawl, the boy had written:

“Thanks for everything. Goodbye.”

Beneath the message appeared a crudely drawn Wolf cub, its sharp ears pointing to the final word: “Jacques.”

CHAPTER 4

Fluke Victory

Jacques' unexpected leave-taking came as a bitter disappointment to Brad and Dan who had hoped to learn more about the boy.

"We don't know where he went or why," Fred explained to the Cubs as they reread the farewell message. "Dad and I carried a basket of trash down to the beach, leaving Jacques here. When we came back, he was gone."

"That was only a few minutes ago," Mr. Hatfield added. "Dan, you and Brad didn't see the boy anywhere on the beach?"

Dan replied that they had observed no one.

"Dad and I weren't away from the Cave ten minutes," Fred further explained. "I can't understand what got into Jacques. He seemed cheerful earlier this morning."

"Maybe he was afraid we'd ask too many questions," Brad commented, his gaze roving slowly about the room. "Say, isn't there something different about this place?"

"Different?" Mr. Hatfield echoed. "A chair has been upset and another one shoved against the wall. Come to think of it, both those chairs were in place when Fred and I carried out the trash!"

"Maybe someone came here while you were away and forced Jacques to leave!" Dan exclaimed.

"The boy seemed well enough satisfied this morning," Mr. Hatfield said, folding and buttoning the note into his jacket pocket. "That's what makes it seem strange that he'd leave without explaining. Suppose we look around down on the beach."

Eager to search for clues, the boys clattered down the stairway ahead of the Cub leader.

At the foot of the steps they noticed several freshly made footsteps in the sand. Scattered among the imprints left by a small shoe were those of a man's heavy-soled footgear.

"Dan, your theory about someone forcing Jacques to leave may be correct!" Mr. Hatfield exclaimed. "The boy may have gone willingly enough. But that upset chair makes me wonder."

Now rather excited by their discoveries, the Cubs followed the footprint trail for twenty yards along the beach.

Now and then, a small circular mark appeared near the shoe prints. To the observing Cubs this indicated that a stick or similar round object had been carried by Jacques' companion.

"And see here!" Midge exclaimed, staring at a confusion of prints in the sand. "Doesn't this look as if a scuffle took place, Mr. Hatfield?"

"It does," agreed the Cub leader, praising Midge for his observation. "Either Jacques stumbled or was given a hard shove. One can see plainly where he fell down."

The trail of footprints led the Cubs on to a paved road paralleling the river front. There it abruptly ended.

"Well, we've lost them," Mr. Hatfield said, gazing up and down the deserted highway.

"And now we'll never know who Jacques was or where he came from," Dan said. "About all he told us was that he's a Cub."

"Even that seems odd," Mr. Hatfield commented. "I've checked, and Jacques never was a member of any Webster City Den. I only hope that whoever took the boy away treats him right. Those bruises the doctor mentioned, rather trouble me."

Failure to learn what had become of Jacques disturbed not only Mr. Hatfield but

all of the Cubs. During the next three days, the topic was a major one discussed at the Cave.

The Cub leader reported Jacques' disappearance to police, but was informed that no boy of his description had been reported missing.

At first, the Cubs spent many hours trying to decipher the coded message which Dan and Brad had removed from Jacques' clothing.

Failing to figure it out or to hear more of the boy, the matter began to fade into the background. Only Dan remained determined to work out the code.

Meanwhile, the Cubs turned their attention to an important swimming meet which had been scheduled with the boys of Den 1.

In a meet held the month before, the rival Den had captured top honors by a score of 20 to 16. Defeat rankled in the hearts of the Den 2 Cubs who were determined to make a better showing in the second contest.

A total of three meets had been scheduled for the season. An engraved silver loving cup would be awarded to the Den which won two of the contests.

"I'm afraid Ross Langdon will win the Saturday meet too," Dan remarked glumly one afternoon as he practiced with the other Cubs at the "Y" pool. "That guy swims as if he's jet propelled!"

Although Den 1 boasted several fine swimmers, 11-year-old Ross was by far the greatest threat to the rival Cubs. Muscularly built, the boy had the energy of a youngster of fifteen. His crawl stroke lacked form, but by sheer strength he managed to win every race he entered.

"You swim as well as Ross does," Brad told Dan loyally. "Your form is better."

"Maybe," Dan admitted, "but I lack his endurance. I hold out fairly well in the 25-yard free style, but in the 50, I began to lose my wind. And you know we've got to capture both events to nose out Den 1 in the final tally."

"Sure, I know," Brad acknowledged, easing his body snake-fashion down the pool wall into the chlorinated water. "Just get in and pitch, old boy. Remember, the Den is counting on you!"

“That’s what makes me worried, Brad. I want to do my best. I practice and practice, but where does it get me?”

Sam Hatfield emerged from the dressing room in time to hear Dan’s final remark.

“You just keep plugging and top speed will come, Dan,” he said cheerfully. “Stop worrying about Ross Langdon. One of these days his lack of form will catch up with him. Now dive into that pool and swim eight lengths.”

“Eight?” Dan groaned.

“Eight,” the Cub leader repeated firmly. “It’s the only way you’ll ever build up your endurance. When the going gets hard—just keep going.”

Inspired by this advice, Dan dived into the water, and with smooth strokes slashed his way the first length of the pool.

After a turn at the wall, his breath became a little short and he slowed down a little. By the end of the third length, his stroke lost some of its hard drive. At five lengths, his steady six-beat leg thrash became a tired wiggle. Finally at the end of the eighth length, Dan was holding out by sheer will power.

“Keep it up!” Mr. Hatfield called encouragingly. “You’re doing fine.”

At that moment Ross Langdon sauntered into the pool. Large for his age and a natural athlete, the boy’s appearances at the “Y” were few and far between, for he disliked to practice. On this afternoon, however, he had donned satin trunks, showered, and evidently intended to swim.

Observing Dan’s now jerky stroke, he uttered a loud horse-laugh. Then to show off, he plunged into the pool, and swam the length with a speed which tossed foam ahead of his thrashing arms.

Thoroughly discouraged by the display, Dan wheeled over to the side to watch.

“What’s the use?” he muttered to Brad who slithered alongside in the water. “I couldn’t quite finish eight lengths and here Ross blazes in and tears up the pool!”

“That’s all right, Dan,” Brad encouraged him. “You won’t see him doing more

than a few lengths before he caves in. You just keep plugging the way Mr. Hatfield said.”

“But the meet is Saturday. And look at that guy travel! His form may not be so hot, but how he can chop the water!”

Well aware that the Cubs of Den 2 were watching, Ross swam another length, finishing off with a snappy turn at the wall.

Then he pulled himself from the pool, stretching out on the tile floor to relax.

“See, I told you!” Brad muttered. “As soon as the going gets hard, he quits.”

“To win the 25-yard and the 50-yard dash, he won’t need too much reserve,” Dan sighed. “Well, I’ll sure do my best to win, but I’ve got a dark brown feeling.”

On Saturday, the day set for the swimming meet, enthusiasm had mounted to high pitch. By two o’clock, all the Cubs, their parents and many other spectators had gathered at the “Y” to witness the contest.

Five events had been scheduled, fancy diving, the 25-yard free style race, the 50-yard swim, a 100-yard relay, and a back stroke event.

Points were to be awarded on the basis of five for first place, three for second, and one for third place. According to the rules, each team was allowed to enter two contestants in an event.

Den 2 swung off to a good start with Brad taking top honors and Midge Holloway coming in third. This lead of six to three brought enthusiastic cheers from the gallery.

The second event, the racing back crawl, proved discouraging to Den 2. Though Chips Davis swam an excellent race, he lost to one of the Den 1 boys. Den 2, however, managed to snare both second and third places, giving them a total score of 10 to 8.

“From now on it will be nip and tuck,” Brad said grimly as the 25-yard free style was called. “So far Ross Langdon hasn’t had a chance to swim.”

At the crack of the gun, Dan and Ross hit the water together. From that first moment of the race it was evident to the spectators that the remainder of the meet would resolve itself into a battle between the two swimmers.

Though Dan exerted his best efforts, Ross won the event by an easy six-foot margin. Dan was awarded second place, while another swimmer from Den 1 captured third position. The scoreboard proclaimed the discouraging totals: Den 1—14. Den 2—13.

Only two events remained, the 50-yard free style and the 100-yard relay. However, Ross was entered in both events and the Cubs knew his flashy speed could be counted upon to win for his den.

“That boy is in top form today—if you can say he has any form,” Midge muttered, slapping Dan encouragingly on the back. “Well, get in there and show him!”

“Sure, sure,” Dan laughed, but his words had a hollow ring.

As the Cubs of Den 2 expected, their rivals walked away with the relay by a score of 20 to 16.

“Fat chance we have of winning now,” Dan said as the final event of the meet was called. “We’d have to make a complete sweep, and we’ll be lucky to capture one place.”

“It sure looks bad for Den 2,” Brad agreed. “But get in there and fight, boy! Ross acts a bit winded. He may not hold out.”

In the 50-yard free style, the Cubs were required to swim two lengths of the pool. Before the start of the race, an official reminded the boys that they must remain in their lanes and touch the wall at the turn or be disqualified.

At the crack of the gun Ross and Dan were off to a fast start, followed by the field of slower swimmers.

As Brad had observed, Ross seemed somewhat tired from his earlier performances. His stroke looked ragged and jerky. Dan by contrast forged smoothly ahead, pressing him hard every inch of the way.

At the turn, the two rivals were racing almost even. Determined to gain the lead, Ross lunged for the wall, his finger tips missing it by a scant margin. So rapidly did he turn, that few noticed.

Dan, tucking into a tight ball, also made a fast turn, but touched the wall. His shove-off however, was weak. When his head came out of water for a gulp of air, he was disconcerted to see that Ross was a full body length ahead.

“Come on, Dan!” his teammates yelled encouragingly. “You can do it!”

Dan dug in, but his breath was coming hard. Despite his best efforts he could not recapture the lead. In a moment, it seemed, the race was over. Ross had touched the finish wall a scant arm’s length ahead, and was congratulated as the winner.

For the members of Den 2 it was slight consolation that Mack had won third place, nosing out a Den 1 swimmer. The scoreboard proclaimed Den 1 the victor by a total of 25 to 20.

“Congratulations, Ross,” Dan said, offering his hand. “You swam a fine race!”

“Thanks,” the other boy grinned. “You weren’t so bad yourself. Pressed me plenty at first.”

Other members of Den 1 had gathered in a little group. After talking rather excitedly, they called Ross over. The other Cubs could not hear what was said, but they gathered that Ross himself was the topic of conversation. Apparently, he disagreed with his teammates about some matter, for his voice rose in sharp protest.

Then the Cubs heard him say sullenly: “Okay, if you want to be saps, go ahead! It makes me sick, after the way I worked to win for the team!”

Ross’ teammates talked to their coach briefly. Then before the audience or Den 2 swimmers could leave the pool, a whistle blasted for attention.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we regret that an error has been made in scoring,” an official announced. “It has been brought to notice that one of the contestants, Ross Langdon, failed to touch the wall at the end of the first length.”

A buzz of conversation greeted this announcement. Brad and Dan glanced

quickly at each other, and then at Ross. The face of the latter was as black as a summer rainstorm.

“Due to this infraction of the rules, Ross has been disqualified,” the official continued. “Dan Carter wins first place.”

A mighty cheer rocked the pool gallery. Even heavier applause broke out as new figures went up on the scoreboard:

Den 2—24 Den 1—21.

Brad and the other Den 2 teammates swarmed about Dan, clapping him on his dripping shoulders.

“Dan, you did it!” Red Suell congratulated him. “Now the matches are even! If we win the third meet, that silver cup is in the bag.”

“IF is right,” Dan laughed. “Don’t forget, this victory was a fluke.”

From Mr. Hatfield, the Cubs learned that only the good sportsmanship of the Den 1 teammates had been responsible for their success. Ross himself had made no mention of his failure to touch the wall, and his error had gone unnoticed by officials.

“Two of Den 1 swimmers saw Ross miss the turn,” the Cub leader revealed. “They reasoned that honor means more than victory.”

“A Cub Always is Square,” Dan quoted thoughtfully.

“That’s right,” Mr. Hatfield agreed. “I’m proud of our boys for winning, but equally proud of the other team for reporting the incident.”

The swimmers of Den 1 gathered around to congratulate Dan and his teammates. Ross, however, had slipped away to the dressing room without a word.

“He’s a little sore,” one of his teammates remarked. “But he’ll get over it. The coach warned Ross plenty of times to be careful about that turn. He never paid much attention.”

Feeling on top of the world, Dan showered and dressed. As he was getting his

things from the locker, he bumped squarely into Ross.

Dan waited a moment, expecting the other boy to offer some word of congratulation. When Ross said nothing, he remarked:

“You had a tough break, fellow.”

Ross gave a snort of disgust. “I’ll say it was a tough break,” he agreed. “In a straight race, you couldn’t win and we both know it!”

The remark annoyed Dan.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he drawled. “My stroke is improving every day. I noticed you were pretty well winded at the finish.”

“Bunk. I didn’t even exert myself!”

“Anyway, now that the two teams are tied, it will make a good meet when the final contest is scheduled,” Dan said, trying to ease out of a disagreeable conversation.

“Sure,” Ross said, his eyes flashing. “Maybe you can dig up another technical point and win the cup! You’ll never earn it on merit!”

And with that challenge, he brushed past Dan and slouched out of the dressing room.

CHAPTER 5

Paper Bag Eddie

Stung by Ross' jibe, Dan spent much of his time the next few days at the "Y" pool. To build endurance and smooth out his stroke, he also swam in the river. Always on these occasions he was accompanied by Brad or Midge's father in a boat.

Now that the swimming meet was over, the other Cubs temporarily turned their attention to various Den activities. Brad tried to assist Dan in deciphering the code message which had been found in Jacques' pocket.

However, after three days of work, he gave up in disgust.

"Maybe it isn't a code after all," he said, returning the paper to Dan. "I figure those numerals must stand for letters that spell out a message. But I can't get the hang of it."

"I think I'll keep on trying," Dan said. "Not that it will mean much if we do puzzle out the thing. Jacques is gone, and probably we'll never see him again."

"Wonder what became of that kid anyhow?" Brad mused. "It sure was funny, finding him on the beach the way we did."

"And he never told us his name or explained anything. I'd say there was every indication someone came and took him away."

"Mr. Hatfield made inquiries," Brad added. "No one saw the boy leave the Cave. He's unknown in Webster City."

Although Dan and the other Cubs had kept a close watch of the waterfront, they had sighted no boat which resembled the one that had damaged Mr. Holloway's craft. Therefore, the conviction steadily grew that Mr. Manheim's speedboat

might be the one involved.

“Mr. Manheim is well spoken of at the club,” Midge’s father told the boys. “It would be a serious mistake if we made any accusation against him or any of his employees. The boat has been repaired, and as far as I’m concerned, the matter will be dropped.”

Dan and Midge said no more about the affair, but in private they often remarked that they thought Wilson Jabowski, the caretaker on Skeleton Island, would bear investigation.

“I hear he hasn’t worked very long for Mr. Manheim,” Dan remarked. “And folks say that when his employer is out of town, he rides around in that speedboat like a king.”

“Maybe if we keep our eyes open we’ll catch up with him yet,” Midge said. “He may crack into another boat.”

On the regular Friday night meeting of the Den, the Cubs enjoyed the beach treasure hunt which had been interrupted at the previous gathering. Mack and Fred came off victorious, their clues leading them to the buried chest which contained carpenter’s tools.

“The Den needs a bookcase,” Mr. Hatfield reminded the pair as they admired their ‘find’. “We’ll expect you boys to produce something handsome now that you have the tools.”

“We’ll do it too,” Mack promised.

With the treasure hunt over, all the Cubs gathered on the beach for a council fire and “feed.” Mrs. Holloway passed out hot dog sandwiches, chocolate and thick wedges of pie.

When the boys could eat no more, they stretched out on the sand, and begged Mr. Hatfield to tell them a ghost story.

“I might tell you about the ghost of Skeleton Island,” he chuckled.

“A true story?” Dan demanded.

“It may have elements of truth,” the Cub leader replied. “Basically though, the tale is a product of the imagination.”

“You mean you’re making up the story?” Midge asked in disappointment.

“No,” the Cub leader corrected. “I first heard about Skeleton Island as a boy. According to the tale, it once was an old pirate stronghold. River pirates would come upstream and hide their loot on the island.”

“Was any of it ever dug up?” Midge demanded.

“Not that I ever heard. But thirty years ago, a man’s skeleton was found on the island. That’s how the place received its name.”

“What about the ghost?” Dan inquired.

“I’m coming to that part. The old freebooters supposedly built a tunnel which connected some point of the beach with an old inn that was on the island.”

“Not the hotel that’s there now?” Brad interposed. “I mean the abandoned one that Mr. Manheim converted into the caretaker’s premises.”

“I doubt it is the same place, Brad. However, I believe that after the old inn burned down, the present building was erected in its place. That was at least fifty years ago.”

“And the ghost?” Red Suell reminded him.

“The ghost? Oh, yes, to be sure. The fellow, I’m told, never was very active. On windy nights, shore residents reported seeing a white, misty figure moving along the beach.”

“Mist—that’s probably what it was,” Brad said with a snort. “Anyone knows there are no ghosts. I’m more interested in that tunnel. Do you think one actually was built, Mr. Hatfield?”

“I’m inclined to think that part of the story is true, Brad.”

“Then what became of the tunnel? No one has heard of it in recent years.”

“I was asking an old timer about that only yesterday.”

“And what did he tell you?” Dan demanded, eager for additional details.

“This old salt claimed that heavy wind storms blocked off the beach entrance to the tunnel.”

“Couldn’t it be relocated and dug out?”

“Probably, if anyone wanted to go to that much work. It would be a big job shifting so much sand even if the entranceway could be found. I don’t suppose Mr. Manheim ever was interested.”

“He owns the entire island, doesn’t he?” Brad asked thoughtfully. Picking up a piece of driftwood, he fed it to the dying embers of the fire.

“That’s right,” the Cub leader agreed. “The Scouts have been dickering with him for nearly six months to purchase a stretch of beach for their permanent camp. They’re also considering a site two miles farther down river.”

“Which will they take?” Chips asked. “I should think Skeleton Island would be better, because it’s closer to Webster City.”

“So far, Mr. Manheim has asked a fairly steep price and doesn’t seem inclined to come down,” the Cub leader replied. “The Scout director has made two inspection trips and is well satisfied. Now he wants me to make my recommendation.”

“You said the Cubs might go there on an over-night camping trip,” Red reminded him.

All the Cubs waited expectantly for the answer.

“Yes, if plans work out, we’ll make it next weekend,” Mr. Hatfield answered. “The Den fathers are planning the trip.”

The Cubs began to talk about the proposed excursion, discussing what they would take with them to camp.

“Maybe we’ll see the ghost of Skeleton Island while we’re there!” Chips

declared hopefully. "Or find the entrance to the old tunnel!"

The Cub meeting broke up shortly after nine o'clock. Dan and Brad remained a few minutes after the others had gone to make certain that the last embers of the beach fire had been extinguished.

Then together, they started home, selecting a route which took them along the deserted waterfront.

At Clinton Street, the boys turned at the corner, passing a cafe from which issued the discordant notes of a player piano.

On the curb outside the restaurant stood a short little man, who was munching popcorn from a paper bag. His face was sharp and weasel-like, his eyes darting and shrewd.

The Cubs might have passed him with scarcely a second glance, had he not been talking to another man who looked faintly familiar to Dan. The fellow plainly was a sailor, dark of hair and with sturdy body build.

"That fellow looks like one of the men who were in the motorboat that struck the Holloway sailboat!" Dan said in an undertone to Brad.

"Not the little one with the paper bag?"

"No, the other. I'm sure I've seen him somewhere. Let's watch for a minute."

Sliding into a shadowy doorway, Brad and Dan kept their eyes on the pair. However, they were too far away to hear the conversation. A newsboy noticed their interest.

"Know those guys?" he asked, sidling up to them.

Dan shook his head, hoping that the boy would move on.

"See that guy with the paper sack," the lad continued, eager to impart information. "Know who he is?"

Dan shook his head.

“That’s the one they call ‘Paper Bag Eddie,’” the boy said, awe in his voice. “He’s a bad one.”

“Paper Bag Eddie?” Dan repeated, keeping his voice low. “Never heard of him.”

“You never heard of Paper Bag Eddie? Why, he’s known to every cop in town, but they never get much on him.”

“He’s a crook then?” Brad interposed.

“Sure, they say he’s the brains of a waterfront gang. Guess what he carries around in those paper bags of his’n?”

“Popcorn,” said Dan.

“Guess again. He packs a revolver. Eddie loafs around the waterfront and you hardly ever see him without his little paper bag.”

“I should think the police would pick him up for carrying a concealed weapon,” Brad said.

“Oh, Eddie ain’t dumb enough to go around with the revolver all the time. Mostly you’ll see him munching peanuts or popcorn, and if the cops search him that’s what they find. But if he pulls a job, he slips the revolver into the sack. The cops figure he only has a bag of popcorn.”

“Eddie never has been arrested?” Brad inquired.

“Oh, the cops run him in regular, but they’ve never dug up enough evidence to convict him. Eddie’s a slick one.”

“Who is his companion?” Dan asked.

“Never saw him before,” the newsboy said indifferently. “Some sailor, I guess.”

Apparently aware that they were under scrutiny, Paper Bag Eddie and his company glanced briefly at the Cubs and sauntered on down the street. A few doors farther on they entered the Green Parrot Cafe.

“Let’s get on home,” Brad urged.

Dan, however, had another idea.

“Brad, I’m dead certain that sailor with Paper Bag Eddie is the one who was operating the motorboat when it crashed into Mr. Holloway’s sailboat,” he insisted. “I’d like to try to pin it on him.”

“And end up in plenty of trouble. You know Mr. Holloway advised that the entire matter be dropped.”

“Sure, I know. But that was mostly because Mr. Manheim is well known at the club. I have a hunch he didn’t know anything about the boat accident. And it may not have been his speed craft either.”

“Even so, I say we’re asking for trouble if we try striking up an acquaintance with that pair!”

“We don’t have to speak to them,” Dan argued. “Why not follow them into the cafe and take a table nearby? We might hear something interesting.”

“W-e-ll,” Brad hesitated, “I suppose it wouldn’t do any harm. Okay.”

Feeling somewhat ill at ease, the two boys entered the Green Parrot. The room was dingy and dimly lighted, its plaster walls streaked with smoke. Only a few customers were visible.

Brad and Dan slipped into a booth diagonally opposite a table where Paper Bag Eddie and his companion sat.

“You know your orders, Frisk,” they heard the one with the weasel-like face say. “When you get the signal—”

He broke off as his gaze fastened upon Dan and Brad. The Cubs instantly looked away but Paper Bag Eddie’s suspicions had been aroused.

Shoving back his chair, he walked over to the booth.

“Say, what’s the idea?” he demanded in a soft, purring voice.

“I don’t know what you mean,” Brad returned, meeting his gaze steadily.

“You followed me in here. Now you’re trying to eavesdrop.”

“This is a free country,” Brad retorted. “If my friend and I want to come in here for a sandwich, I’d like to see you stop us!”

“You would, eh?” the man replied, his lips parting in an ugly smile. He grasped Brad by the shoulder, pulling him half-way out of the booth. “Who are you and what’s your game?”

Before Brad could answer, the proprietor of the Green Parrot came quickly from the direction of the kitchen. He had seen what was happening and did not want any trouble in his place.

“Cut it out, Eddie,” he said. “No rough stuff here.”

“Who are these kids?”

“How should I know? Never saw ’em before.”

“They were standing outside the cafe, watching,” Eddie informed the proprietor. “When we came in, they followed. I say, throw ’em out.”

The proprietor hesitated, reluctant to antagonize either party.

“Throw ’em out!” Paper Bag Eddie repeated in a tone not to be denied.

“I’m sorry, boys,” the proprietor apologized. “I don’t want any trouble here. I’m afraid I’ll have to ask you to leave.”

“We’ll go,” Brad said. “Come on, Dan.”

In sliding out from the booth seat, Dan bestowed another glance upon the man Paper Bag Eddie had called “Frisk.” More than ever he was convinced that he had not been mistaken in identifying him as the motorboat operator.

“I’ve seen you before,” he said, halting beside the table. “You were handling the wheel of the motorboat that struck our dinghy!”

“That’s a lie!” the florid-faced man rasped. “I never set eyes on either of you before—and what’s more, I don’t want to again. Now if you know what’s

healthy, get out of here!”

Dan would have stood his ground, but Brad grasped his arm, pulling him firmly along. The proprietor followed the two boys to the door.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized once more. Then in an undertone, he added: “Don’t come back. For some reason Eddie has taken a dislike to you—and when he’s crossed, he’s bad medicine!”

CHAPTER 6

Stranded

Three days elapsed during which Brad, Dan and the other Cubs spent much time at the “Y” and at the river practicing for the final swimming meet of the year with Den 1.

Annoyed by the manner in which they had been treated by Paper Bag Eddie and his friend “Frisk,” the two Cubs interested themselves in making a few inquiries along the waterfront.

They learned that a sailor by the last name of Fagan frequently was seen with Eddie. Although known to have no employment, he was reported always with enough money in his pocket.

“I’m as sure as anything Fagan was in the motorboat that struck us,” Dan repeated to Brad one afternoon when the two boys were at the river preparing for a swim. “I suspect that was why he acted so sore in the cafe. He was afraid we’d accuse him.”

Since their meeting with Paper Bag Eddie and the sailor, the two Cubs had not seen either of them again. Nor had they glimpsed Mr. Manheim’s boat or any that resembled it.

On this particular afternoon, Mr. Holloway had promised to take Brad, Dan and Midge for a sail. Four o’clock, the hour appointed for their meeting at the Yacht Club dock, came and went. Finally, Mr. Holloway telephoned from his office to say that he had been held up and would be unable to make the excursion.

“There’s no reason why you boys can’t take the boat by yourselves,” he urged. “You’re both experienced at handling the tiller, and good swimmers. Go ahead! Only don’t go too far from the Yacht Club. A storm could kick up before dusk.”

Fortifying themselves with bottles of pop, Dan and Brad hoisted sail and cast off. With Brad at the tiller, they sailed down the channel, past Fish Island, and on toward Skeleton Island. They had been anxious to explore this island for some time.

Dan lounged in the bottom of the boat, lazily sipping his drink.

“Let’s sail all the way around Skeleton Island,” he proposed. “Okay?”

“Sure, if we have time,” Brad agreed, glancing at the darkening sky. “Those clouds are rolling up rather fast though. We might have rain in a couple of hours.”

“We’ll make it back before then,” Dan replied, stretching luxuriously. “The breeze is just right now.”

In a long tack, they crossed to the far shore of the river and came about, pointing toward Skeleton Island.

As Dan dropped an empty pop bottle overboard, he noticed a mahogany motorboat almost directly opposite the island.

The craft had pulled up along shore, its motor idle. The boy was unable to see the occupants or to obtain a clear view of the boat itself, for it lay half-hidden in a clump of bushes.

“That boat looks a little like Mr. Manheim’s,” he remarked, calling Brad’s attention to it. “Wonder what it’s doing over there? No one appears to be fishing.”

Holding the sailboat to its course, the two Cubs kept watch of the idle motorboat. Though they were too far away to be certain the craft was Mr. Manheim’s, they thought it bore a marked resemblance to the craft operated by Wilson Jabowski.

Presently, as the boys watched, they saw someone aboard the motorboat lower and raise a red flag three times in succession.

“What’s the idea of that?” Dan demanded, all attention. “They’re signaling!”

“To someone on Skeleton Island,” Brad added quietly.

Dan turned his gaze toward the island beach. A man stood there, apparently focusing his attention upon the motorboat. In answer to the signal, he raised and lowered his arm three times.

“What goes?” Brad muttered.

For awhile, the Cubs witnessed nothing more of interest. The man on the beach vanished from their range of vision, while the motorboat remained in the clump of bushes.

“Guess there’s nothing more to see,” Dan remarked in disappointment.

“Yes, there is!” Brad corrected, bringing the sailboat closer into the wind. “Listen!”

The two boys distinctly could hear the putt-putt-putt of a gasoline engine. For a minute they could not localize the sound. Then, from the far shoulder of the island, they saw a flat gasoline-propelled raft scooting across the river.

“That looks like Jabowski,” Dan observed. “And he’s heading straight toward the motorboat! Can we get closer, Brad?”

“Unless the breeze shifts it will take us two or three tacks to come even with the island.”

“And by that time, there may be nothing to see,” Dan grumbled. “I sure wish we had a pair of binoculars!”

Dividing their attention between pressing more speed out of their own craft, and watching the raft, the boys begrudged the time it took to make the long tack.

The raft, they noted, moved directly to the waiting motorboat. What transpired at the meeting place, they were unable to see.

So intent were the Cubs on watching the boat and raft, that they paid scant heed to the low cumulus clouds which had gathered close to the horizon.

Black underneath and hard-edged, they were moving up fast from the leeward!

The Cubs, however, were elated because a stiffening breeze rapidly bore them

toward Skeleton Island. Now they could discern two men aboard the motorboat. Though they could not see the face of the man on the raft, they were convinced he was Jabowski.

“What do you figure they’re doing?” Dan speculated. “And who are those men that have Mr. Manheim’s speedboat?”

“Maybe it isn’t his,” Brad replied. “I’d say it’s the same length and make though.”

Apparently observing the approach of the sailboat, the raft began to pull away from the motor craft.

At that same moment, a dead calm fell upon the river. Startled, Brad raised his eye to the sail which had been drawing well. Now it had slumped into listless, discouraged folds.

“Just our luck!” Dan muttered in disgust. “The breeze plays out!”

“It’s worse than that,” Brad said, thoroughly alarmed. “We’re in the calm that precedes a bad thunderstorm!”

Both the sky and the water had taken on a dark cast. Although not a breath of air stirred, heavy waves pounded against the drifting boat.

“Gosh, we’re a long ways from shore too!” Dan said in dismay. “Skeleton Island is the closest point of land. Think we can make it before the storm breaks?”

“Not a chance,” Brad muttered. “She’s coming now!”

Across the water they could see a misty sheet of water descending.

“There will be wind in a minute! Plenty of it! Dan! Help me get the sail down before it strikes us.”

Working with all speed, the boys lowered the sail from the mast. Before they could furl it, the wind struck, throwing the boat far over on its side.

Dan’s Cub cap was lifted from his head, and carried far down river. For a moment it floated on the surface, and then slowly sank out of sight.

Dan scrambled to fasten down all other loose objects. Rain now was coming down in a torrent. Unable to see many feet ahead of them, the boys lost sight of the raft and the motorboat. For a time they could hear the chug-chug of the raft's engine, and then all sound except the howl of the wind died away.

"This is awful!" Dan exclaimed as a vivid streak of lightning cut across the dark sky. "Let's strike for Skeleton Island. We can find shelter there, at least."

He reached for the paddle. Already the strong wind was propelling the boat in the general direction of the island.

At the tiller, Brad guided the craft more by instinct than sight. Wind and rain had blotted out all view of the shore.

Finally, the shadowy island loomed up. Worn out from hard paddling, Dan put on a last burst of energy which drove the boat onto the sandy beach.

Leaping out, he and Brad pulled the craft high up on the sand beyond reach of the waves. Then they raced for the shelter of a heavily wooded section some distance back from the beach.

"Jabowski lives in the caretaker's quarters at the other end of the island," Brad remarked, huddling against the trunk of a sheltering oak. "We might go there."

"I'd rather wait here, Brad. This storm shouldn't last long. Then we can hoist canvas and sail back to the clubhouse."

Already the rain had slackened. The Cubs waited twenty minutes under the trees. By that time the downpour had dwindled to a drizzle. Then they made their way back through the dripping bushes to the beach.

"Hey! Where's our boat?" Dan demanded, stopping short.

The stretch of beach where the craft had been left less than thirty minutes before, now was deserted.

"But the boat can't be gone!" Brad exclaimed, refusing to believe his eyes. "We pulled it well up on the sand before we took shelter! The waves weren't high enough to have washed it away!"

“Well, it’s gone all right. And there it is, Brad.”

Dan pointed two hundred yards from shore where the empty sailboat drifted aimlessly. Slowly the craft was being carried downstream by the current.

The Cubs stared at it in stunned dismay. Without the sailboat, they were stranded on Skeleton Island!

CHAPTER 7

Camp Site

The Cubs stood a long while, silently viewing the drifting boat. No other craft now was visible on the river, and no one appeared aware of their plight.

“Maybe I could swim out there before the boat moves farther downstream,” Dan proposed, estimating the distance.

“Not on your life!” Brad promptly vetoed the suggestion. “You’re an expert swimmer and might make it, but we’re taking no chances. We’ve already messed things up enough.”

“Mr. Holloway warned us a storm might blow up,” Dan added, kicking disgustedly at the wet sand. “We’d have been more alert if we hadn’t been so interested in that raft and motorboat.”

“Mr. Holloway just had his boat repaired too. Now if it sinks or rams into something, we have no one to blame except ourselves.”

Dan’s gaze had focused upon a man’s large footprint visible in the sand.

“Say! Maybe we do have someone else to blame besides ourselves!” he cried. “Look at that!”

Brad stared at the footprint which plainly had been made since the Cubs had pulled their boat up on shore. Half-protected from the rain by a piece of driftwood, it remained the only mark on an otherwise smooth beachway.

“Someone’s been here since we were!” he exclaimed, stooping to examine the shoe print.

“And that someone must have set our boat free to drift, Brad!”

“Jabowski?”

“Could be, Brad. He took a dislike to me, I know.”

“Even so, it would be a contemptible trick. I hate to think he’d do it.”

“Who else is on the island?”

“No one so far as I know,” Brad replied, his eyes troubled. “Well, it’s a relief to know the boat didn’t drift off due to our own carelessness. Even so, we’re in a jam.”

Dan nodded, his face sober. The afternoon had grown dark and night would come on earlier than usual. When the sailboat failed to return to the clubhouse, he knew Mr. Holloway would be very worried.

“We’ll be picked up eventually,” he said, shivering in his wet clothing. “Meanwhile, we’re in for an uncomfortable time of it.”

“Let’s find Jabowski’s place,” Brad proposed. “He might be willing to pick up our boat with his raft, or at least take us ashore.”

“Think he’d do it? After the way he set our boat loose—”

“We may suspect he did it, but it could have been someone else, Dan. Anyway, isn’t it better than standing here?”

“Sure,” Dan agreed. “It’s our only chance.”

From the beach, the boys could see no buildings on the island. However, from previous sails in the locality, they knew that the old hotel building was situated in a heavily wooded section to the north.

Setting off diagonally through a thicket of saplings, they found a trail which led in the direction they wished to go. After wading through a patch of weeds and rushes which came to waist-depth, they emerged into an area of thin green turf.

Beyond they spied the old hotel, a sprawling building with grimy windows and broken shutters. Unpainted in recent years, it had a look of utter abandonment. The foundation had crumbled in many places and the roof sagged. Broken

window panes in the upper story windows had not been replaced.

“Why, the place is deserted,” Dan said in disappointment.

“Then why is smoke coming from the chimney?” Brad demanded. Trained as a Scout to be observing, he had noticed the blue-white wisp curling from the rear of the building.

“You’re right. Someone must be there now. Let’s knock.”

They pushed on, circling the old building. Brad rapped on the rear door. There was no answer.

He pounded. Still no one came to the door. Glancing upward, however, Dan fancied he saw a face at a dirt-streaked window almost directly overhead. Before he could be sure, the shadow was gone.

“It’s no use,” Brad said, after rapping again on the door. “Someone must be living here, but the place seems to be deserted now.”

“Either that, or Jabowski’s hiding out. I thought I saw a face at the window.”

“Where, Dan?”

The younger boy indicated the window.

“No one there now,” Brad said. “But I think you may be right. Ever since we came here, I’ve had a feeling as if we’re being watched. There’s something about this place I don’t like.”

Convinced they were to obtain no help from the caretaker, the boys sought an easier route back to the beach.

Not far from the rear of the hotel, they noticed an abandoned pier which had fallen into decay. Tied to it was the same raft they had observed earlier that afternoon.

Farther down the shore extended a long stretch of loose sand which gradually merged into turf and wooded area.

“Wonder if that tale Mr. Hatfield told us about the tunnel is true?” Brad speculated as they dog-trotted along. “No evidence of it anywhere around.”

Without seeing anyone, the boys struck across the dunes, and finally emerged on the beach not far from where they first had taken refuge.

Gazing down-river, they sought to determine the position of their drifting boat. To their astonishment it was nowhere to be seen.

“Well, for crying out loud!” Dan yipped. “Now what became of it? How could that boat have drifted out of sight so fast?”

“It couldn’t. Either someone has hauled it in or—”

“Or what?” Dan demanded as his companion broke off.

Instead of answering, Brad pointed far upstream. The missing sailboat had been taken in tow by a motor launch from the Yacht Club.

“There goes our boat now, Dan! And with it our chance for a rescue.”

“Let’s yell. Maybe we can attract attention.”

In unison, the boys shouted and waved their arms. Running far down the beach, they watched the receding launch anxiously.

“They see us!” Brad cried in relief. “She’s turning around.”

True to his observation, the motor craft had come about. With the sailboat still in tow, it set a direct course for the island.

“Lucky break for us,” Brad mumbled in relief. “I had visions of spending the night on this place.”

Within a few minutes the launch came close to the island. Brad and Dan saw then that Mr. Hatfield was at the wheel, accompanied by Midge, Red and Chips. The owner of the launch, a man they did not know, also was in the boat.

The Cub leader eased the craft as near shore as he could. When the launch could approach no closer without grounding, he advised Brad and Dan to wade out.

Eager hands pulled them over the side into the launch.

“We’ve been worried about you,” Mr. Hatfield said, wrapping his coat about Dan. “Didn’t Midge’s father warn you to remain close to the clubhouse?”

“He did, sir. We meant to carry out his orders. But a lot happened.”

“We’ll discuss that later, Dan. The important thing is that you’re both safe. By the way, meet Mr. Fisher.”

Dan and Brad grasped the launch owner’s horny hand, expressing gratitude for the rescue. From him they learned that their drifting boat had been sighted by Midge from the Cave. The Cub had summoned Mr. Hatfield, who had sought the help of Mr. Fisher in finding them.

“You and Brad scared us out of a year’s growth,” Chips said accusingly. “Seeing that empty boat made us think you might have drowned.”

“Me drown?” Dan snorted.

“You may be a crack swimmer, but accidents do occur,” Mr. Hatfield interposed. “Suppose you tell us what happened that caused you to sail so far from the clubhouse.”

Together Dan and Brad explained how their attention had been drawn to the raft and motorboat.

“The storm struck us unexpectedly,” Brad added. “We barely had time to get the sail down.”

“I’m glad you managed that,” Mr. Hatfield approved. “The wind didn’t last long but it was strong when it came. If it had hit you with the sail up, the dinghy probably would have capsized.”

“We made Skeleton Island,” Dan took up the account. “After beaching the boat, we dashed back into the bushes to get out of the rain. When we returned to the beach, our boat was gone.”

“Oh, Dan,” Mr. Hatfield sighed. “How many times have I warned the Cubs always to pull a boat beyond reach of the waves?”

“But we did, sir! Someone deliberately set the dinghy loose.”

Mr. Hatfield braced himself as the launch swung sharply around a buoy which marked a river shoal.

“Your boat was set loose?” he demanded. “Are you sure, Dan?”

“Well, we found a man’s footprint in the sand. That boat couldn’t have broken away by itself.”

“We have an idea who did it,” Brad added.

“Let’s mention no names,” Mr. Hatfield said quickly. “That is, not unless you’re certain.”

Being unable to prove that it was Jabowski who had shoved their boat from the beach, Dan and Brad remained silent.

“I know you believe you were careful about the boat,” Mr. Hatfield said. “Perhaps you were. On the other hand, you might have been mistaken.”

“Hardly,” commented Brad in quick protest.

“Bear in mind that Mr. Manheim, the island owner, has been very friendly to the Scouts and Cubs. He’s given permission for us to camp on Skeleton Island this weekend. Now if wild accusations should reach his ears, it might prove embarrassing to say the least.”

Brad and Dan grasped the idea Mr. Hatfield intended to convey.

“After all, maybe we were mistaken,” Brad grinned. “Those waves were pretty big.”

No more was said about the sailboat mishap at that time. But later at the Cave, the two boys told Mr. Hatfield why they had been so interested in the raft operator’s contact with the motorboat.

“It seemed queer the men in the motorboat would signal,” Dan remarked. “We figured it must have been Jabowski who ferried across the river to meet them. No one else appears to be living on the island.”

“We’ll know more about Skeleton Island after this weekend,” Mr. Hatfield remarked. “The camping trip should give us an opportunity to see that everything is satisfactory before the property is purchased.”

“Then you think something queer may be going on there?” Brad demanded alertly.

Mr. Hatfield smiled and did not answer the question directly. “Oh, one can’t tell,” he replied. “No use exciting the Cubs in any case. So not a word of this to the other boys!”

During the remainder of the week, preparations for the camping trip kept Dan and Brad so busy they had little time to think of possible mystery at Skeleton Island.

However, unknown to them, Mr. Hatfield was more disturbed by the sailboat incident than he cared to admit.

On two occasions he telephoned Mr. Manheim, intending to inquire as to any possible intruders on Skeleton Island.

He was informed that the island owner was out of the city and would not return before Saturday.

Though Brad and Dan were careful to say nothing of their unfortunate experience on Skeleton Island, the other Cubs guessed that there was more to the story than had been told.

“Come on—give,” Midge urged. “I know you boys are too smart to let a boat get away from you, even in a storm.”

“Nothing to report,” Dan replied with a wide grin.

His silence only made the Cubs more curious. They discussed the proposed camping trip at great length, building up elements of mystery and adventure. And to make their rivals, the Cubs of Den 1, envious, they passed out hints that something queer already had happened there.

In due time, these rumors reached the ears of Ross Langdon.

Still smarting from his defeat in the swimming meet, he told his buddies that he intended to have a little wholesome fun at Dan Carter's expense.

"Just be sure it's fun and not revenge," a fellow Cub warned him. "Seems to me you've been a sore-head ever since you lost the race."

"Who lost a race?" Ross retorted. "I wuz robbed!"

Unaware that Ross was plotting revenge, Dan continued to practice his swimming faithfully at the "Y" pool.

Between times, he slaved on the coded message left by Jacques. But try as he would, he could not decipher it.

"When it comes to solving a puzzle, I'm a dud," Dan remarked one afternoon as he and Brad lounged in the cave. "And that reminds me—we've heard nothing more about Paper Bag Eddie or his friend Fagan."

"You know, that fellow's hook-up with a man of Eddie's shady reputation makes me wonder if he could have had any part in the fur theft," Brad said thoughtfully. "I've not seen a word in the paper lately about any hauls by river pirates."

"Neither have I, Brad. That robbery was pulled just about the time of night Mr. Holloway's boat was hit."

"Sure, that's what I've been thinking, Dan. Why not drop around and talk to Hank Hawkins? He may have heard of this bird Fagan."

Having nothing more pressing to do, Dan agreed to the proposal.

The boys found the warehouseman at the dock chatting with his friend, Joe Matt. The seeing-eye dog, upon sighting Dan, began to strain at his leash. Only after the blindman had restrained the animal were the Cubs able to enter the warehouse.

For awhile the conversation centered on river commerce. Then presently, Dan and Brad steered it to the topic of river pirates.

"I wish the police would get busy and catch these pug-uglies that have been makin' so much trouble along the waterfront," Hank said irritably. "Trouble is,

they're slick operators."

"Have you lost any shipments lately?" Joe Matt inquired.

"Not since the furs were snatched. All the same, I'm keeping my fingers crossed."

"You don't think the river pirates would strike twice in the same area?" the blindman scoffed. "Especially with police on the lookout."

"I wouldn't put anything past those boys!" Hank retorted as he studied a bill of lading. "I'm taking no chances! Not with another valuable shipment due any day."

"Another box of furs?"

"That's right."

"Coming through around the 24th," the blindman remarked casually.

"That happens to be the date," Hank admitted, gazing at the other rather sharply. "But I don't remember saying anything about it. Fact is—"

"You told me the other day."

"Then it was a slip of the tongue," Hank replied. "You'll do me a favor not to speak of the date. It's confidential information."

"Sorry," Joe Matt apologized. "I didn't know there was any secret about it."

"Every precaution is being taken to safeguard the shipment. Special police will guard the docks. I got nothing to worry about—and yet I do it anyhow."

"You're jittery," the blindman said, starting away. "Well, see you later. Come on, Rudy!"

After he had tapped off down the dock, Brad and Dan lingered a few minutes longer. Hank, however, seemed preoccupied. Dan asked him if he knew any sailor by the name of Frisk Fagan.

"No, I don't," he answered a trifle irritably. "Now I wish you boys wouldn't

pester me. I got work to do.”

Thus dismissed, Brad and Dan took themselves off.

“Hank was out of sorts because we overheard Joe Matt mention that 24th shipping date,” Dan remarked as they tramped along together. “Say, that’s funny!”

“What is, Dan?”

“Those two dates being the same!”

“What two dates?”

“Don’t you recall?” Dan demanded excitedly. “That coded message Jacques had in his pocket mentioned the 24th!”

“The note included the numerals 24,” Brad admitted. “But what does that prove?”

“Nothing perhaps. Then again, it may mean plenty!” Dan spoke with quiet conviction. “I know one thing. I’m really going to work on that message. I’ll break the code if it’s humanly possible!”

CHAPTER 8

“Dan Carter—Take Warning”

On the night prior to the departure of Den 2 for Skeleton Island, all the Cubs gathered at the Cave to receive final instructions.

Mr. Hatfield informed the boys they were to meet at the Webster City Yacht Club promptly at eight o'clock the next morning. Transportation would be provided to the island in a launch contributed by a friend of Midge's father.

“Now don't oversleep,” he warned as the meeting broke up. “And don't arrive at the dock before the crack of dawn either! Try to make it about a quarter to eight so we can leave on the hour.”

After nearly all of the Cubs had gone, Mr. Hatfield and Brad busied themselves straightening the clubroom. Dan brought the record of the meeting up to date. Then, pulling a chair up beside the gasoline lamp, he reverted to his favorite occupation—that of trying to solve the coded message left by Jacques.

“Having any luck?” Mr. Hatfield presently inquired.

“Not yet.” Dan dropped his pencil in a gesture of utter discouragement. “I guess I'm a sap to waste time trying to figure it out. Maybe it isn't even a code.”

Mr. Hatfield paused at the table to study the scratch pad on which the boy had been writing.

“Don't give up, Dan,” he advised, resting his hand for a moment on his shoulder. “Worthwhile things usually come hard. Keep plugging.”

“I've tried every possible combination of letters. No soap.”

Mr. Hatfield studied the odd grouping of numerals: “020614 7552845 24.”

“Number 5 reappears three times,” he observed. “If only you could figure that one out, it might give you a start.”

“I’ve tried at least twenty combinations with no luck.”

“Well, don’t give up hope, Dan. Bring the message along with you to camp. Perhaps some of the Den Dads can figure it out while we’re there.”

“Guess I’ll have to,” Dan sighed. “I’d rather do it myself though. I have one more idea I want to try.”

Mr. Hatfield, who was ready to leave for home, remarked that the hour was growing rather late.

“Shouldn’t you break it off for tonight, Dan?” he suggested. “Remember, we leave early for Skeleton Island.”

“I’ll be there, Mr. Hatfield. I just want to try one more idea. Don’t wait for me. You and Brad go on.”

The Cub leader was reluctant to leave the boy alone in the Cave. Twice during the week, Red and Chips had reported that they thought someone might be spying on the clubroom.

Although inclined to believe the boys were fanciful, Mr. Hatfield nevertheless disliked to leave Dan by himself.

“Sure you’ll be all right?” he asked.

“Of course.”

“Brad and I will be glad to wait if you’re set on working longer on that code.”

“No need, Mr. Hatfield. I’ll put out the light and see that everything is ship-shape when I leave.”

“Well, don’t stay too long, Dan.”

In departing, Mr. Hatfield and Brad lowered a canvas covering which served as a door across the cave entrance. Of no practical value in protecting the clubroom

from intruders, it kept out wind and rain.

Left to himself, Dan devoted himself once more to the task at hand.

Writing out the letters of the alphabet in orderly rows, he gave each a number, thus:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4

and on through the alphabet.

When this brought no solution he tried a second combination, starting with the number “2” instead of “1”.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5

For the next twenty minutes he worked on, trying many combinations. Each time, he started off with a higher number for the letter “A,” working up as high as “7”.

“It’s no use,” he decided at last. “I may as well go home.”

On the pad before Dan was a string of unused alphabetical letters. Absently, with no hope of striking upon anything that would work, he wrote in corresponding numbers, starting with “8.”

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L		
8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3

Referring to Jacques’ coded message, he then began to transfer the numbers into counterpart letters.

“Let’s see,” he mused. “‘0’ could be either C, M or W; and ‘2’ might be E, O or Y. Number 6 would have to be I or S. Number 1 could represent D, N or X. And 4 would have to be G—”

Dan went no further, for suddenly he saw that the puzzle actually was beginning to make sense. Excitedly he wrote in the first combination of letters:

020614

COMING

“Yipee! I’ve got it!” he muttered. “I’ve found the key!”

A strong gust of wind unexpectedly flapped the light canvas which hung across the cave doorway.

So engrossed was Dan that he did not notice. Nor did he see a shadowy figure crouching on the platform.

Then the light suddenly was extinguished. Startled, Dan jerked to attention.

As he groped for a match with which to relight the lamp, a deep voice intoned:

“Take warning, Dan Carter! Remain away from Skeleton Island!”

Dan felt the hair rise on his neck. Chills slithered down his spine. The mysterious voice, he realized, came from the cave entranceway.

Recovering from the first shock of surprise, the boy sprang to his feet, upsetting his chair.

In three long strides he reached the entrance and jerked aside the canvas flap.

No one was there. But disappearing down the steps Dan saw a lean, dark figure.

“Hey, you!” he shouted furiously.

The intruder only ran the faster, pulling a jacket high around his neck to shield his face.

Angered by the threat and determined to learn who had been spying upon him, Dan started down the steps in hot pursuit.

The intruder, a fleet runner, raced across the beach, heading for a clump of bushes along the highway. Dan pounded closer and closer at his heels.

Then, the one ahead unexpectedly tripped in the loose sand. He stumbled and fell. In a flash Dan was upon him, pulling the jacket away so that he could see the culprit’s face.

“Ross!” he recognized him. “Ross Langdon! Well, of all the dirty, low tricks!”

“Take it easy, will you?” panted the Cub from the rival Den. “You’re smashing my ribs!”

“Serves you right! So you’ve been spying on the Cave!”

“Aw, I wasn’t spying,” Ross protested. “Can’t you take a joke?”

“How long were you hiding there behind the canvas flap?”

“Only a minute or two, Dan. Honest! I saw the light burning, so I thought I’d take a peek and see who was there.”

“It was a lousy trick—especially that warning about going to Skeleton Island.”

“Scared you, didn’t I?” Ross chuckled, squirming to free himself from the other’s tight grasp.

“You startled me. But I don’t scare that easily.”

“Like fun! You nearly jumped through the roof of the Cave! What were you working on so late, anyhow?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“Nothing? You were so absorbed you didn’t hear a thing until I waved the canvas flap to make the light go out. You were figuring out something with paper and pencil. Your income tax?”

“Just a little work for the Den,” Dan replied vaguely.

“Keeping it to yourself, eh? If you’ll climb off my mid-section, I’ll amble back there with you. I’ve always been curious to see the set-up of your much advertised Cave.”

Dan made no comment as he let Ross up. Both boys dusted their clothing free of sand.

“Well, let’s go,” Ross said impatiently. He started toward the Cave.

“I was just thinking it’s time to go home,” Dan said, following the other boy reluctantly. “It’s getting late—”

“I’ll help you close up the Cave for the night.”

“I don’t need any help.”

“Sure you do. Don’t be so inhospitable,” Ross chuckled. “You may as well invite me, because I’m going along anyhow.”

Dan made no further protest as he fell into step with the Den 1 boy. He knew that Ross had in mind learning if he could, the nature of the paper upon which he had been working. Dan was equally determined to keep Jacques’ coded message a Den 2 secret.

“If Ross hadn’t pulled that fool trick, I’d have had the code completely broken by this time,” he thought. “Now I’ll have to take the message home, because I don’t want him to see it.”

The two Cubs climbed the stairs and entered the dark Cave. Dan groped his way to the table and lighted the wick of the kerosene lamp.

In its flickering light, the room somehow did not appear exactly as he had left it. His chair lay overturned. Papers on the table were very disordered. Dan did not recall having left them so.

Not wishing Ross to see the coded message upon which he had been working, the boy looked about for it. But the paper was not on the table. Nor could he find it anywhere on the floor.

Even the scratch papers on which he had written various combinations of letters, had disappeared.

“Lose something?” Ross inquired as his gaze traveled about the well-furnished room. He added admiringly: “Nice diggings you have here! Wish our Den had a cave.”

Dan, thumbing through the loose papers on the table, made no reply.

“What’s wrong?” Ross demanded.

“I’m looking for some work I was doing when you broke in here,” Dan answered reluctantly. “Ross, you didn’t—”

“How could I have taken anything?” the other demanded. “You were hot on my heels every minute.”

“Yeah, that’s right, Ross. You were alone when you came here?”

“Sure. What you driving at anyhow?”

“I’ve lost something—an important paper. You saw me working on it when you came up here.”

“I remember, Dan. Maybe you stuffed it in your pocket when you took after me.”

“I don’t think so. I left everything here on the table.”

To make certain, Dan searched all his pockets. The coded message was in none of them.

Thinking that perhaps a gust of wind had carried the paper far across the floor of the cave, he looked in every corner and even under the couch.

“Ross, it’s gone,” he said with sudden conviction.

“But how could it have disappeared? Honest, Dan, I didn’t take a thing. And none of the Cubs from Den 1 were with me.”

“I believe you, Ross,” Dan assured him. “But someone has been in here while we were on the beach. I sensed it the instant I came in.”

“Anything else missing?”

“Not that I’ve noticed. Mr. Hatfield never allows us to keep anything of great value here because we can’t lock up the cave.”

“Gosh, if it was my fault, I’m sorry,” Ross said. “I wouldn’t have pulled that stunt, only it struck me as a good joke. Who would have come here?”

“That’s what I can’t figure.”

“We didn’t see anyone on the beach, Dan.”

“I know, but we weren’t paying particular attention.” Dan prepared to blow out the kerosene lamp. “Let’s go down there now and look around.”

The boys descended the long flight of wooden steps to the beach. A pale half-moon only faintly illuminated the stretch of glistening sand.

“No one around, Dan,” Ross said, looking up and down the beach. “You’ll probably find that paper in the morning.”

The other boy made no reply. He was staring at the sand near the base of the steps.

“What do you see now?” Ross demanded.

“Someone has been here,” Dan said quietly.

“Footprints, you mean?” Ross was inclined to scoff at the other boy’s observation. “You can’t tell anything by that. You had a Den meeting tonight. Probably those large footprints were made by one of the Den Dads.”

“That could be, Ross. But I’m noticing something else too.”

“Well, don’t keep it a secret, Wise Guy,” Ross said, a trifle irritably. “What have those bright little searchlights of yours picked up?”

Dan pointed to a series of tiny circular marks in the hard-packed sand. Approximately one-half inch deep and perhaps a foot and a half apart, the imprints led down-beach into a clump of bushes.

“What’s so strange about that?” Ross demanded.

Offering no reply, Dan walked over to the bush. As he had expected, no one now was hiding there.

However, in the soft sand appeared additional footprints from a large man’s shoe. And beside them were several mysterious circular marks which he thought might have been made by someone using a walking stick.

Dan turned to Ross who had followed him. “Will you do me a favor?” he asked.

“What kind?” the other boy asked with caution.

“Say nothing to any of the Cubs about what happened tonight—either those in your Den or mine.”

“W-e-ll,” Ross hesitated, for he knew the story would make good telling. “Okay, I’ll keep mum if you will. The joke didn’t pan out quite as I expected. But why do you care?”

“I’ll tell you, Ross. What happened tonight convinces me someone has been spying on the Cave. I know Mr. Hatfield would just as soon the fact isn’t advertised.”

“You think a gang of boys—fellows who aren’t Cubs—are aiming to make trouble?”

“I don’t believe boys are mixed up in it, Ross.”

“Grownups?”

“That would be my guess.”

Ross was inclined to make light of Dan’s theory. “Oh, you’re building up too much out of nothing,” he insisted. “You’ll find that missing paper in the morning. Mark my words.”

“Let’s hope you’re right,” Dan said as the two boys started for home.

Actually, he had no hope whatsoever. A conviction had grown upon him that the paper left by Jacques never would be seen again.

And with its disappearance had vanished his last chance to solve the mysterious coded message.

CHAPTER 9

A Missing Code

Dan was at the Cave before seven o'clock the next morning. Early as was the hour, Mr. Hatfield had arrived ahead of him and already had moved out most of the camping equipment which was to be taken to Skeleton Island.

"Why, hello, Dan," the Cub leader greeted him in pleased surprise. "I hardly expected to see you before eight o'clock."

"I scarcely expected to see myself," Dan grinned. "Fact is, I came to look for a paper I lost last night. Mr. Hatfield, I nearly broke the code only to have the message disappear!"

Quickly the boy related everything that had occurred.

"Ross and I agreed not to tell any of the Cubs," he added. "I figured it would only worry them."

"You're right in keeping quiet about it," Mr. Hatfield said at once. "I hadn't intended to mention it, but for several days I've had a feeling this place is being spied upon. Frankly, I don't like it."

"Any idea who may be doing it, Mr. Hatfield?"

"None whatsoever."

"Do you think it has anything to do with that message we found, or Jacques?"

"I've wondered, Dan. My mind is not at rest with regard to that boy. Obviously he was a Cub, yet I've been unable to find any Den or Pack in which he ever was registered. Of course, he could have given us a fictitious first name."

“It was miserable luck losing the coded message last night,” Dan complained. “I’d just figured out the first word—‘Coming’—when whiff went the light.”

“The paper may be here. Let’s make a thorough search.”

Mr. Hatfield swept the cave floor while Dan searched every possible cranny. The missing paper was not found.

“Well, at least nothing else appears to be missing,” the Cub leader said after he had checked all the camping equipment. “It seems that whoever came here last night must have been after that coded message. Dan, if I’d known this earlier—”

“You’d have called off the camping trip,” Dan completed, guessing at his thought.

“Yes, Jacques must have had a connection with Skeleton Island or the name wouldn’t have appeared on the paper. I have an uneasy feeling about going there.”

“The camp will be well guarded with so many of the fathers going along.”

“I realize that, Dan, but even so—”

“The Cubs would be terribly disappointed if you called off the trip now,” Dan interposed. “Oh, heck, Mr. Hatfield, I shouldn’t have told you about losing that paper!”

“On the contrary, you did exactly right. Well, I suppose it wouldn’t be fair to call off the trip on such short notice. We’ll go on just as we planned.”

“Oh, thanks, Mr. Hatfield!”

“Don’t thank me,” the Cub leader rejoined. “Just keep your lips buttoned and your eyes open after we reach Skeleton Island. If you notice anything out of the ordinary, report to me. But don’t say or do anything to worry or stir up the Cubs.”

“I’ll remember,” Dan promised.

“Now lend a hand with this camping equipment,” Mr. Hatfield said briskly. “I

want to have everything at the dock before eight o'clock."

Two hours later found the Cubs in their temporary camp on Skeleton Island. Tents already were up, balsam beds in preparation of making, and a trench fire started for the noon-day meal.

A beach near the camp sloped gently out into the river more than fifteen yards. This the Den Dads marked off with ropes and floats. Beyond was a somewhat deeper area, suitable for the more experienced swimmers.

"I wish we had a diving raft," Brad remarked, surveying the possibilities.

"Why not build one?" proposed Mr. Hatfield. "I saw some old boards and a log or two lying back in the brush. We easily can build a small raft."

For an hour the Cubs busied themselves carrying boards and logs to the riverside. Mr. Hatfield supervised the work, showing the boys how to fit the logs together to make a firm framework for the platform.

When it was ready for use, Dan, Brad and Sam Hatfield anchored the raft in deep water.

"I'm all tuckered out," Dan announced, pulling himself up on the platform to rest. "You know, camping is mighty hard work!"

"It is until your camp is set up right," Sam Hatfield agreed. "After that, it's easy. If the Scouts decide to buy this property, we'll have cabins and an improved beach. The brush will need to be cleared away. But it will make a first class camp."

"I hope the Scouts decide to buy," Dan said, rolling over so that the sun would warm his back.

"The site seems ideal to me. It's close to Webster City. The beach area is unusually good, and the island has a natural spring. Plenty of woodland for nature trails too."

"You think the Scouts will buy it?" Brad asked. Seated on the edge of the raft, his dangling feet beat a steady tattoo in the water.

“That remains to be seen,” Mr. Hatfield replied. “There are several factors to be considered.”

He did not amplify the statement, for just then Midge’s father called from shore to warn that lunch would be ready in twenty minutes.

With a shout of pleasure, the Cubs scrambled for the beach. Dan and Brad dived from the raft, racing each other in.

“No fooling, you get faster every day,” Brad praised his companion. “If you don’t take Ross for a cleaning in our next swimming meet, I’ll miss my guess.”

“I only hope if I win I do it in a straightaway race, not on a technical point,” the younger boy rejoined. “Ross still figures he lost on a fluke.”

By the time the Cubs were dressed, lunch was ready. Squatting around the glowing coals, they filled their plates with steak, potatoes and generous helpings of carrots.

As his crowning achievement, Mr. Holloway produced a pan of delicately browned biscuits baked in a home-made reflector oven which he had fashioned.

“How does the meal taste, boys?” he asked.

“Swell!” approved Red, reaching for another biscuit. “As a cook, we’ll give you the tin medal!”

When the last scrap of food had disappeared, the Cubs doused sand on the fires, dispatched the dishes and then stretched out to enjoy a rest.

Chips, however, soon became restless.

“I think I’ll amble down the beach and explore,” he announced. “Who knows? Maybe I’ll find the entrance to that old tunnel Mr. Hatfield told us about!”

“If you do, write me a letter about it,” Brad joked, stretching lazily. “I’m treating myself to a snooze. That swim made me drowsy.”

“Don’t go out of sight of camp, Chips,” Mr. Hatfield advised the boy as he started away.

“Aw, Mr. Hatfield—”

“I’m asking the Cubs to stay pretty much in this section of the island,” the Cub leader explained. “Later on, we’ll do our exploring in a group.”

“Oh, all right,” Chips consented reluctantly.

“Want me to go along?” Fred asked.

Chips, acting as if he had not heard, ambled off. Fred, who preferred to remain in camp, let him go alone.

Fresh water was needed, so Dan and Mack went to the nearby spring for a bucket of water. The other Cubs finished making their balsam beds. This work completed, they joined Brad under the shade trees.

“Wonder what’s become of Chips?” Mr. Hatfield presently remarked, scanning the beach area. “I don’t see him anywhere.”

“You know Chips,” said Brad significantly.

“I do indeed. His intentions are good, but he’s apt to wander off.”

“Odd that he went by himself,” Brad mused. “He really gave Fred the brush-off. Want me to see what’s become of him, Mr. Hatfield?”

“I may look him up myself,” the Cub leader replied, getting to his feet.

However, it was unnecessary for him to go in search. Scarcely five minutes later, Chips came running up the beach, obviously excited.

“Hey, fellows!” he shouted. “Come quick!”

The Cubs uncurled themselves from comfortable nooks, and hastened to see what was wrong.

“What’s up, Chips?” Brad demanded.

“I want to show you something,” the boy said impressively. “Gosh, it scared me half out of my wits!”

“What did you find?” Dan demanded.

“Just follow me.”

At a dog-trot, Chips led the Cubs down the beach to a clump of willows. There he pointed dramatically to an object lying in a slight depression.

“A skeleton!” Midge exclaimed, recoiling at the gruesome sight.

“Chips, how did you happen to find it here?” asked Mack with a shudder.

“Oh, I was just walking along the beach,” the boy answered vaguely. “There it was in the sand.”

Brad bent down to examine the bones and the grinning skull.

“Don’t touch the thing,” Fred said, pulling back. “I’ll call my father.”

“Wait a minute,” Brad stopped him. “Chips, you say you just happened along here and found this skeleton?”

“It was exactly where you see it now.”

“Sure it was! After *you* put it there!”

“Why, such an accusation,” Chips protested, but his grin gave him away. “Okay, Wise Guy!”

“I’m wise enough to know varnish when I see it! These bones all have been treated. So ’fess up, Chips. Where did you get the skeleton?”

“From the school laboratory,” the boy admitted with a laugh. “Professor Johnson let me borrow it to play a joke on the Cubs. It would have worked too, if you hadn’t been so smart.”

“The joke doesn’t seem funny to me,” Brad replied severely. “It would have given us all a bad feeling to think anyone had died on the island. We want this camping trip to be a pleasant experience.”

“Guess I made a mistake,” Chips muttered, gathering up the skeleton. “It seemed like a good idea when I first thought of it.”

Disheartened by the failure of his joke, he carefully replaced the bones in a carrying box which he had hidden in the willows.

“Don’t take it so hard,” Brad said, clapping him on the shoulder. “I know you went to a lot of bother to pull off that joke.”

“The Cubs would have fallen for it too.”

“Sure, they would have, Chips. But it would have stirred them up. You know as well as I do that if things go wrong while we’re here, the Scouts may decide not to buy the island site for their camp.”

“You’re right, Brad,” Chips admitted. “I’m sorry. I won’t pull any more stunts while we’re here.”

Back in camp once more, several of the Cubs elected to try their luck fishing. Dan, Chips and Brad, who were to help Mr. Holloway with the cooking that night, remained behind to check over supplies.

“The boys may bring in a few fish,” the Den Dad remarked. “If so, we should have a good meal tonight. But just in case—we’ll be prepared to fall back on ham and eggs.”

Dan wandered off to gather wood for the fire. Upon his return with a large armful of dry pieces, he noticed that the water pail was empty again.

“There must be a herd of thirsty camels around here,” he complained. “I filled that bucket not twenty minutes ago!”

“I’ll do it this time,” Chips offered, eager to make amends for the skeleton. “You’ve done your share of work already.”

Seizing the bucket, the boy disappeared in the direction of the spring.

Brad, Dan and Mr. Holloway busied themselves with preparations for the evening meal, setting out supplies that would be needed.

“How about another batch of biscuits?” the Den Dad proposed. “The Cubs went for them in a big way this noon.”

“Fine!” approved Dan. “And baked potatoes will be easy to fix. We can wrap them in wet clay and roast them on the coals.”

“Know where we can get any clay?” Mr. Holloway asked, searching through the supplies for a package of flour. “It’s mostly sand around here.”

“There’s some back by the spring. I noticed it when I was filling the water bucket awhile ago.”

“Suppose you see if you can dig up some, Dan. Take an old tin can.”

The spring was situated well back from the camp site in a natural shelter of willows, ferns and vines.

Dan had covered less than half the distance when Chips suddenly plunged into view. The water pail left behind, he obviously was excited as he ran toward the other boy.

“Dan!” he exclaimed breathlessly. “I—I saw someone at the spring!”

Dan scarcely knew whether to laugh or take Chips seriously.

“What’s so strange about that?” he demanded. “Was it one of the Den Dads?”

“Of course not!” Chips retorted, exasperated. “What do you think I am, anyhow? A scared cat? I saw this man peering at me as I reached down to dip water from the pool at the spring.”

“Sure you aren’t pulling another skeleton trick?”

“Heck, no! I swear it! Dan, I really saw this man—an ugly looking fellow. It gave me a bad start. I dropped the water bucket and ran.”

“It may have been Jabowski. I’ve been told he stays on the island while Mr. Manheim is away.”

“This man had dark bushy hair and hadn’t shaved in three or four days.”

“You’re sure he didn’t have horns sprouting from his forehead?”

“Wise guy! You think I’m making it up!” Chips said indignantly. “It gave me a

bad feeling, I tell you. I wish you could have seen the way he looked at me. It froze my blood.”

“Where was this monster?”

“Lurking back behind the bushes. As I started to fill the pail, I glanced up. He was staring at me with hatred in his eyes. Then he ducked back out of sight. I dropped the water bucket and ran.”

Dan was only half convinced that Chips was not trying to play another joke. However, he noticed that the boy was breathing hard and actually looked a trifle pale.

“You probably saw Mr. Jabowski,” he said with a shrug.

“Like fun I did! I’ve seen Jabowski at the Webster City Yacht Club. It was someone else.”

“A fisherman maybe who came to the island by boat.”

“We haven’t seen any boats around all day,” Chips contended.

“I’ll go back there with you,” Dan offered. “Come on.”

“You wouldn’t be so brave if you’d seen that leering face,” Chips said, following unwillingly.

The two boys approached the spring warily. All was tranquil. A gentle breeze stirred the dense growth of bushes which hemmed in the spring and pool. Otherwise there was no movement.

“No one here,” Dan observed. “Sure you didn’t imagine it, Chips?”

“I certainly did not.”

“Well, no one is here now, at any rate. I’ll fill the water bucket while you look around to see if you can find any clay. We need it to wrap baked potatoes in.”

Dan moved on to the spring. He stooped to drink deeply of the cool water and then reached down to pick up the tin bucket which Chips had abandoned.

In the still water of the circular pool he could see his own reflection. And then he saw something more!

Merging with the dark of the bushes was a face, the evil countenance that Chips had described so vividly. As he watched, fascinated, a hand slowly was raised.

“Look out, Dan!” called Chips.

Dan ducked. As he flattened himself, a stone was hurled by the man who crouched in the bushes. Sailing over his head, it struck the pool with a hard splash.

CHAPTER 10

The Man at the Spring

A commotion in the bushes informed Dan and Chips that the man who had thrown the stone now was retreating.

“You see!” Chips cried excitedly, joining his friend at the pool’s edge. “I told you the truth, didn’t I?”

“You sure did,” Dan muttered, scrambling to his feet. “If I hadn’t ducked, that stone would have clipped me on the back of the head. Come on, let’s nail him!”

Angry to think that the intruder had dared to risk injuring them by deliberately hurling a stone, the Cubs started after him.

Already the man was far away, moving with cat-like tread through the dense growth of vines and underbrush. Apparently familiar with the terrain, he slipped between the trees like a shadow.

“No use trying to follow,” Dan decided after they had gone only a few yards. “We’ve already missed our chance to see who he was.”

“And if we trail him a long distance from camp, he might try some of his tricks,” Chips added in an undertone. “Dan, that man’s face scared me. He looked downright ugly.”

“He did,” Dan agreed. “I only caught one glimpse of his face, but that was enough.”

“Ever see him before?”

“N-o-o,” Dan replied slowly. “For just a minute I thought—”

The boy was on the verge of saying that the man had resembled “Frisk,” the associate of Paper Bag Eddie. However, his identification had been most uncertain.

“You thought what, Dan?”

“Oh, nothing. I didn’t really see the man’s face plainly. Wonder why he’d try to harm us?”

“Let’s report to Mr. Hatfield.”

To this suggestion, Dan promptly agreed. Picking their way back to the pool, the boys made short work of filling the water pail and gathering clay.

Back in camp once more, they took Mr. Holloway and the Cub leader aside to relate what had happened.

“The man actually hurled a stone?” Mr. Hatfield questioned, his face sober.

“He certainly did,” Dan confirmed. “It missed my head by inches.”

Very much disturbed, Mr. Hatfield and Midge’s father warned the two boys to make no mention of the incident to the other Cubs.

“I’ll take Mr. Suell and explore the island,” the Cub leader decided. “Mr. Holloway will remain in camp with the boys. Without letting them know that anything is amiss, keep them there.”

“It soon will be supper time,” Mr. Holloway agreed. “I’ll find enough work to occupy their time.”

Mr. Hatfield and Mr. Suell set off at once to search for the stranger who had accosted the boys at the spring.

Meanwhile, Chips and Dan helped with supper preparations, trying not to reveal their inner excitement to the other Cubs. As time wore on and neither the Cub leader nor Mr. Suell returned, it became increasingly difficult to contain their secret.

The boys were nearly through supper when the two finally appeared in camp.

Slipping almost unnoticed into the group around the fire, they dished up their own suppers.

“Learn anything?” Dan asked the Cub leader in a whisper.

“Tell you later.” Mr. Hatfield’s glance warned the boy to say no more at the moment.

In silence, but with no show of uneasiness, the Cub leader ate his supper. While the other boys were clearing away the dishes, he took Dan, Brad and Chips aside to relate what he and Mr. Suell had noted in their explorations.

“Did you find that fellow we saw by the spring?” Chips questioned before Mr. Hatfield could speak.

“No, Chips. We tramped the island from one end to the other. Not a sign of him.”

“No signs?” Dan echoed.

“My statement wasn’t quite accurate,” Mr. Hatfield corrected. “We found signs in the way of footprints, a well-beaten trail, and broken bushes. But we failed to catch up with the man himself.”

“Where did the trail lead?” inquired Chips.

“We picked it up by the spring and followed it the entire length of the island through the woodland and marsh. It emerged not far from the old hotel.”

“Maybe the fellow hid in there,” Dan suggested.

“That’s what Mr. Suell thought. We looked the place over, but couldn’t get in. All the doors were locked and the blinds drawn. If Mr. Jabowski looks after the place for Mr. Manheim, he doesn’t hurt himself working at the job.”

Having told the boys everything he and Mr. Suell had learned, the Cub leader again warned them to say nothing of the affair to the other boys.

“Frankly, I can’t figure out why anyone would hurl a stone without provocation,” he said. “I’m afraid someone may be annoyed because the Cubs have camped here.”

“But we had a perfect right to do it,” Dan protested.

“Of course. Mr. Manheim granted permission. But things may be going on here of which he has no knowledge.”

“For instance?” interposed Brad.

“I can’t say, because I don’t know. It’s just a feeling I have. Mr. Suell and I will take turns guarding the camp tonight.”

“Then you think the Cubs may be in danger here?” Brad asked, startled.

“No, Brad, if I thought so, we’d break camp and pull out tonight. We’ll set up a watch as a precaution. First thing in the morning, I’ll go to the mainland to have a talk with Mr. Manheim.”

After the camp work was out of the way, the Den Dads built a huge fire on the beach. Mr. Suell then gave the boys a brief talk on Cubbing in other countries of the world, telling them that the organization extended to 50 lands.

“And are the ideals and aims the same everywhere?” Brad questioned, tossing another stick of wood into the flames.

“Practically so, Brad. In most countries, the Kipling Jungle stories have been made the basis of Cubbing. Akela is the name of the Cub leader in nearly all nations. The two-fingered sign of the Wolf is the Cub sign around the world.”

Dan, who lounged on the sand beside Brad, had listened with keen interest. But now his attention wandered.

Beyond the rim of flickering light, he thought he saw movement. Was that shadowy form a trick of wind and tree boughs? Or might someone be spying upon the camp?

“Wake up, Dan!” Brad nudged him hard in the ribs. “Mr. Hatfield just asked you to lead in the singing of ‘Cheer, Cheer, the Den’s All Here.’ Are you asleep?”

Dan tore his eyes from the area of darkness. After all, he told himself, he probably had fancied the shadow. Imagination played strange tricks upon a fellow.

“Sorry,” he apologized. “I didn’t hear. Guess I was half asleep.”

He launched into the song which was sung to the tune of “Hail, hail, the gang’s all here.” The Cubs joined in, singing lustily.

At its conclusion, the boys all repeated the Law of the Pack, and the council fire came to an end.

As the Den fathers were tramping out the last of the coals, Dan walked over to the clump of bushes which had been directly in his line of vision. He was relieved to find no one hiding there.

But on the ground beneath a blackberry bush was a sheet of paper torn from a cheap writing tablet. Unable to read it in the darkness, Dan took it to Mr. Hatfield.

The beam of his flashlight picked out the scrawled words: “GET OFF THIS ISLAND. STAY AWAY!”

“A warning, eh?” Mr. Hatfield commented. “This little affair has gone quite far enough!”

“Whoever left the note must have done it only a few minutes ago,” Dan said. “I thought I saw someone in the bushes just as you asked me to lead that song.”

“The coward!” Mr. Hatfield muttered, folding the warning and placing it in his pocket. “Afraid to show his face. Instead he throws rocks and sneaks up in the darkness.”

More annoyed than afraid, the Cub leader made a thorough inspection of the bush where the unknown intruder had hidden only a few minutes before. A few large footprints had been imbedded in the moist turf. But the one who had left the note, had fled.

“No use trying to track him down in the dark,” Mr. Hatfield said in disgust. “Tomorrow I’ll take this up with Mr. Manheim.”

With another reminder that no mention was to be made of the matter to the other Cubs, the leader sent Dan off to bed.

However, the boy observed that neither Mr. Hatfield nor Mr. Suell turned in. Instead, the two men posted themselves near the entrance to the tents. Throughout the night, they kept a small fire burning.

Dan was awakened by the excited shouts of the other Cubs who were donning trunks for a pre-breakfast swim.

At the beach he raced Brad to the raft where they rested for a moment.

“Anything happen last night?” Dan asked, eager for a report.

“Not that I heard of. Mr. Hatfield and Mr. Suell sat up until dawn. No one came near the camp.”

“That’s good,” Dan said in relief. “If things start popping, our camping trip will be called off. I like it here.”

“So do I, Dan. I hope the Scouts buy this site, because if they do, the Cubs will get to come here often. But I know Mr. Hatfield is worried. The way matters are going, he isn’t likely to recommend the place as a permanent camp.”

“I’m thinking the same,” Dan agreed. “Oh, well, maybe Mr. Manheim will take a hand in finding out who’s hiding on the island. After all, it’s his property.”

A call to breakfast sent the two boys racing full-blast for shore. By the time they had scrambled into their uniforms, an appetizing meal of orange juice, bacon and eggs awaited them.

The Cubs ate their fill and then listened as Mr. Hatfield outlined plans for the morning.

“I’ll take Dan, Brad and Chips with me to Webster City to pick up a few supplies,” the Cub leader said. “Also to attend to an important errand. Mr. Suell has planned a hike for those who remain behind.”

“I’d rather go to Webster City,” said Mack, who suspected that he was being excluded from an important mission.

“Me too,” chimed in Midge. “Can’t we all go?”

“Not this time,” Mr. Hatfield turned them down. “We’ll make a full report when we get back.”

At nine o’clock, the three Cubs and their leader were picked up by launch, according to an arrangement made with a member of the yacht club. Once on shore, they purchased a few small items. Thereafter, they presented themselves at Mr. Manheim’s office and were elated to learn that the island owner was in.

“He’ll see you at once,” a secretary told them. “First door to your left.”

The room which Mr. Hatfield and the Cubs entered through a frosted door was padded with rich, soft carpet.

A heavy-set man with steel-blue eyes sat in a swivel chair behind a desk at the window. Recognizing the Cub leader, he smiled in welcome.

“Hello, Sam! What brings you here so bright and early? Another proposition to buy that camp site on Skeleton Island?”

“Not exactly, Mr. Manheim. We’re not so sure it’s a safe place.”

“Skeleton Island not safe?” Mr. Manheim demanded. “What gave you that idea? Sit down and tell me all about it.” He waved everyone into chairs.

Mr. Hatfield introduced the three Cubs and then went directly to the point. He related how a stone had been tossed at Dan and showed Mr. Manheim the warning note.

“Why, someone is playing a joke on you,” the island owner said after reading the message. “Don’t tell me you take this seriously?”

“We did and do, Mr. Manheim.”

“I see nothing to cause alarm. Probably some boys from a rival troop are having a little fun at your expense.”

“The stone was hurled by a man,” Dan interposed. “I saw his face quite plainly.”

“It’s possible that tramps have taken up quarters in the underbrush,” Mr. Manheim said reluctantly. “Jabowski’s orders are to keep hoodlums away from

the island. I'll jack him up a bit if he's been remiss in his duty."

"Jabowski is your caretaker at Skeleton Island?" Mr. Hatfield inquired.

"Yes, he lives there with his nephew."

"We saw neither of them. In fact, the old hotel building seemed to be locked up."

"Jabowski has orders not to leave the island without notifying me," Mr. Manheim said, frowning. "He must be there."

To Mr. Hatfield and the Cubs it became obvious that the information they had brought was displeasing to the island owner. Apparently to end the interview, he arose and said:

"Now don't worry about a thing. I'll get in touch with Jabowski and have him ascertain that the island is free of trespassers."

"Thank you, Mr. Manheim. We wouldn't have troubled you only—"

"No trouble at all," Mr. Manheim interrupted the Cub leader. "I always like to help out the Cubs or Scouts. Fact is, I've been thinking for several weeks I'd like to give 'em a bang-up time—a regular jamboree."

"Jamboree?" Mr. Hatfield repeated, rather mystified.

The island owner ignored the Cub leader, turning to Brad, Dan and Chips.

"How would you boys like a beach barbecue? A really big affair?"

"Swell!" Chips agreed.

"We'll invite all the Cubs in Webster City. Make it a bang-up affair. Tonight, shall we say?"

"You're moving a bit fast for me," said Mr. Hatfield. "How can you plan such an affair on short notice?"

"Leave that to me," said Mr. Manheim, pressing the desk buzzer. "We'll call in a caterer, a friend of mine who will take care of every detail. Your job, Mr. Hatfield, will be to have the Cubs there on the island."

“I don’t doubt the boys will jump at the chance for a barbecue even on short notice,” Mr. Hatfield replied. “But what about transportation?”

“My motorboat will be available. And Jabowski can take the overflow on a motor raft he has at the island.”

“Well—” Mr. Hatfield gazed dubiously at the Cubs. “I hardly know what to say. It’s such short notice—”

“The trouble with you, Sam, is that you’re not in the habit of making quick decisions,” the other said jovially. “You have your boys at the dock at seven o’clock. I’ll take care of everything else.”

“All right,” Mr. Hatfield agreed. “I’ll get in touch with the Cub leader of Den 1. I only hope you aren’t biting off more than you can chew.”

“Never have yet,” the island owner said, escorting the party to the door. “See you tonight. We’ll have a jamboree that will give those Cubs the thrill of their young lives!”

“But what about that man we saw at the spring?” Dan half-protected. “If he should be hanging around—”

“Leave that to Jabowski,” Mr. Manheim dismissed the subject. “Don’t give the matter another thought.”

The island owner bowed the Cubs out. When the door had closed firmly behind them, they eyed each other a trifle askance.

“Well, that was fast work if you ask me,” Brad said, sucking in his breath. “Mr. Manheim takes care of everything!”

“In typical Manheim style,” added the Cub leader unhappily. “Unfortunately, I’ve learned from past experience that his plans don’t always pan out right.”

“Then you’re afraid the barbecue won’t come off tonight?” Chips asked as the four started down the hallway.

“Oh, it will be held after a fashion,” Mr. Hatfield replied. “But Mr. Manheim is apt to leave too many details unplanned. Another thing—”

“That man at the spring?” Dan supplied as the Cub leader hesitated.

“Yes, I’m not entirely satisfied that Jabowski will attend to him. For that matter, where is Jabowski?”

“No one has seen him since we landed on the island,” Brad replied.

“It all adds up to an uncertain picture,” Mr. Hatfield said soberly. “Everything may go well tonight. I hope so. But between you and me and the gate-post, I’m wondering if Mr. Manheim’s barbecue may not be a mistake!”

CHAPTER 11

A Barbecue for the Cubs

Despite Mr. Hatfield's misgivings, the jamboree came off that night according to schedule.

At the appointed hour, the island owner's motorboat and the power raft were at the Webster City Yacht Club docks to pick up members of Den 1.

Mr. Manheim personally took command of the speedboat, while his man Jabowski carried the overflow of boys across the river on the open raft.

In an ugly mood, the caretaker complained that the barbecue was "a lot of stupid nonsense."

Actually, he smarted from a lecture delivered by his employer. For three hours that afternoon the island owner had tried to find Jabowski. Finally tracing him to a waterfront tavern, he had warned the man that unless he paid attention to his duties, he would be discharged.

Jabowski blamed the Cubs for the reprimand, and so did his utmost to make them feel uncomfortable.

"Sit still!" he ordered Ross Langdon, who shifted his weight as the raft chugged across the river. "You want to upset us?"

"Aw, I hardly moved," Ross growled. "Anyway, if this raft isn't safe, you shouldn't be taking kids across the river in it."

"The raft's safe enough, if you behave yourselves."

"We are behaving," Ross retorted. "For crying out loud, what's eating you anyhow? You've done nothing but crab since we left the dock."

“You’d crab too if your boss gave orders to have a barbecue on eight hours notice! But that’s Manheim for you. Always doing things in the grand manner—only someone else has to do the work!”

Not much impressed by the caretaker’s complaints, the Cubs eagerly turned their faces toward Skeleton Island. Huge fires burned on the beach and they could hear the music of an eight-piece band.

“Say, this is going to be a shing-ding!” Ross said, pleased. “We should have a swell time tonight. Good grub, Mr. Jabowski?”

“Baked clams and lobster and roasted ox! That ought to be enough to satisfy you kids and your parents.”

“Say! Mr. Manheim’s doing all right by us,” Ross said, impressed. “We’ll have a swell time tonight.”

Although the caretaker could have landed the raft at the beach, he proceeded up-island to a dock which extended out into much deeper water.

“Hey, what’s the idea, bringing us clear up here?” Ross protested, eager to join the other boys on the island.

“Give your gums a rest, will you?” Jabowski demanded rudely. “I’m handling this raft.”

At last after taking his time in fastening the craft to a dock post, he allowed the boys to disembark. Quickly they joined the Cubs from Den 2.

Nearly thirty Cubs and their parents already had arrived at the island. Mr. Manheim went here and there, shaking hands with the grownups and joking with the boys. The music was excellent, the food plentiful. Yet despite the efforts of everyone to have a good time, the party soon began to go a trifle flat.

At that point Mr. Hatfield and Midge’s father took a hand, introducing various games. The fun revived. However, everyone appeared relieved when the gathering began to break up at nine-thirty.

Mr. Manheim took two boatloads of Cubs and their parents to shore and returned for the third. Meanwhile, Jabowski had made one trip in the much slower raft.

“One more trip will wind it up,” the island owner estimated, counting the Cubs who were to remain overnight at their camp. “I can take five, and the others all can get on the raft.”

“Seven on the raft?” Mr. Hatfield interposed in disapproval. “Isn’t that loading it rather heavily?”

“Not at all,” Mr. Manheim returned, annoyed to have his judgment questioned. “The raft was built to carry a much heavier load.”

“It seems sturdy enough, but there are no rails—”

“Jabowski will keep his eye on the boys.”

Dismissing the matter, the island owner filled his speedboat to capacity and pulled away. Following orders, Jabowski herded the remaining Cubs aboard the raft.

When all were seated who were to leave the island, not a spare inch of space remained.

Mr. Hatfield, who had been watching the loading with troubled gaze, stepped to the edge of the dock to speak to Jabowski.

“Why not make another trip?” he suggested. “The raft is overloaded.”

“Mr. Manheim’s orders were to take ’em all in one load,” Jabowski said stubbornly. “I do as he tells me.”

He started the motor and the raft slowly pulled away.

“Hey, wait!” Ross Langdon shouted. “I forgot my cap!”

Before anyone could stop him, he leaped to his feet. The over-weighted raft tilted sharply to the left.

“Sit down!” Jabowski yelled.

The warning came much too late. Other Cubs, their feet under water, were scrambling frantically for safety.

As the raft became even more off-balance, it tilted to a sharper angle, sliding all the Cubs except one into the river. Jabowski, clinging to the motor box, managed to hold on.

The water into which the Cubs had fallen was well over their heads. Weighted down by shoes and clothing, they churned the surface in a frantic effort to keep up.

Ross, an expert swimmer, seized one of the Cubs and towed him ashore.

Mr. Hatfield and Midge's father both plunged in to assist others to safety.

Two of the Cubs grasped the side of the raft and were pulled aboard by the frightened Jabowski.

Meanwhile, on shore, Dan had kicked off his shoes, ready to help.

"Where's Tim Tyler?" he shouted.

Tim was the youngest and smallest member of Den 1. Also, as all the boys knew, he was the only Cub who had never learned to swim a stroke.

In the darkness there now was no glimpse of the boy. He was neither on the raft nor anywhere visible in the water.

"He was aboard when the raft upset," Dan cried. "I saw him just before it went over. Maybe he's pinned underneath!"

Without waiting for others to act, the boy made a clean dive from the end of the dock. With the speed of a bullet he shot beneath the raft.

To his confusion, it was not flat underneath as he had expected. Instead, the craft was laced with four large metal tanks.

At the moment, Dan had no time to think of their significance or to wonder why they were there. Holding his breath, he groped about in the dark waters of the cool river.

He felt rather than saw the body which was wedged between the tanks in the very centermost portion of the raft.

Seizing Tim by an arm, Dan attempted to swim out with him. His head and shoulders came hard against the metal tanks and he could make no progress.

Dan's breath now was growing short and he knew he must work fast. Treading water, he used both arms to try to free the imprisoned Cub.

At first he could not move the boy an inch. Then Dan's hand encountered a jagged nail, and he realized that Tim's clothing had speared on it.

With a hard jerk, he ripped the garment free. Then, with the limp form of the boy on his left hip, he swam and pulled them both toward the outer edge of the raft.

His heart began to pound and his lungs to feel as if they would explode. Could he keep going? He *had* to, Dan told himself. To abandon Tim never entered his thoughts. Only a stroke or two more—

When it seemed to Dan that he had reached the very end, a strong hand grasped his clothing. Both he and Tim, to whom he clung desperately, were hauled up onto the raft.

“Good work, Dan!” Mr. Hatfield's praise rang in his ears. “You saved Tim.”

All the Cubs were taken ashore to dry out by the fire. Mr. Holloway and the Cub leader stretched Tim out on the dock, wrapping him in blankets. It was unnecessary to apply artificial respiration, for he soon opened his eyes and began to breathe normally.

“We'll look after Tim,” Mr. Hatfield advised Dan as the shivering boy hovered near. “Hike to the tent and change your clothes.”

“Mr. Hatfield, there's something I want to tell you—”

“Later, Dan.”

Brad threw a blanket over the boy's shoulders and led him away.

“The Den is proud of you, Dan,” he declared as he waited while the other changed into dry clothing. “You earned yourself a medal tonight.”

“I didn't do anything,” Dan replied. “Or rather, anyone would have done the

same.”

“You thought and acted in a split-second. That was what counted, Dan. If Mr. Manheim hadn’t been so bull-headed about taking too many Cubs on the raft, the accident wouldn’t have occurred.”

“It was badly balanced from the start, Brad. I can’t understand those tanks—”

“What tanks, Dan?”

“Why there were four of them on the underside of the raft.”

“Tanks? You’re sure?”

“I certainly am. They were long and flat and made of metal. Tim was wedged between them, his trousers snagged on a nail.”

“Maybe they were gasoline tanks.”

“They looked like it. But why would the raft need so many? These tanks would hold fifteen or twenty gallons each.”

“Another thing, the gas tank that feeds the motor is on the top side of the raft,” Brad said thoughtfully. “It does seem queer. You told Mr. Hatfield?”

“I aim to. He was too busy working on Tim.”

Dan finished dressing and the two boys sought the warmth of the fire. Tim, wrapped in blankets, was brought there.

The other drenched Cubs were lent clothing by the more fortunate boys of Den 2.

Presently Mr. Manheim returned from across the river. Informed by Jabowski as to what had occurred, he was profuse in his apologies for the mishap.

“I can’t understand how it happened,” he said to Mr. Hatfield. “Why, we’ve transported lumber and very heavy objects on that raft. We never had an accident before.”

“There’s always a first time,” the Cub leader replied. “Fortunately, no serious

harm has been done. But it was a miracle the raft upset at the dock and not in mid-stream.”

After Mr. Manheim had taken the Den 1 Cubs ashore in the motorboat, the Skeleton Island camp settled down for the night.

Not until then did Dan have opportunity to tell Mr. Hatfield of seeing the gasoline tanks beneath the raft.

“I think that’s what made it upset,” he declared. “When the load shifted, all the fuel ran to the same side.”

“Fuel tanks on the underside of a raft,” Sam Hatfield mused. “That seems odd. Why would a raft need such large carrying capacity?”

“Maybe to supply another boat.”

“But Mr. Manheim’s motorcraft has a large tank. It doesn’t make sense to me.”

“I figure Jabowski’s been supplying that motorboat Brad and I saw signal from across the river,” Dan said.

“He may be selling Mr. Manheim’s gasoline and picking up a little extra money for himself, Dan. I wouldn’t put it past him. That, I suppose, would explain those tanks underneath the raft.”

“I’m wondering too if Jabowski may not be mixed up with the river pirates.”

Mr. Hatfield gazed at the boy in amazement.

“Hold on, Dan!” he exclaimed. “You’re going too fast for me.”

“No one likes Jabowski,” Dan argued. “He has no friends. I know because I’ve inquired.”

“The man isn’t very likeable, I’ll grant, but to accuse him of being a crook is something I wouldn’t venture to do.”

“I’m not accusing him, Mr. Hatfield. I’m only wondering. You recall, on the night the furs were stolen, a motorboat almost like Mr. Manheim’s tore into Mr. Holloway’s sailboat.”

“I remember, Dan.”

“Since then, police have watched the waterfront for that boat. Especially gasoline outlets.”

“I’ve read so in the papers, Dan.”

“According to the stories, police have been puzzled as to where the boat owners put in for fuel.”

“I see you’re well informed on the subject, Dan,” Mr. Hatfield said, smiling.

“I’ve read every word, because I’m interested. Maybe those river thieves have moved out of here, but I have a hunch they’re just biding their time before pulling another job.”

“Be that as it may, Dan, the Cubs can’t afford to mix themselves in any such business. As I said before, if I thought Skeleton Island had become a hideout for the river thieves, I’d never recommend that this camp site be bought.”

“But if we don’t investigate, how can you know if the camp’s really safe?” Dan argued.

“So that’s where this conversation has been pointing,” Mr. Hatfield chuckled. “You’re proposing that the Cubs do a little sleuthing before we leave here?”

“Couldn’t we?”

“What could we learn, Dan?”

“I’d like to find out more about Jabowski and his habits. I have an idea, Mr. Hatfield, if you’d hear of it.”

“What is this idea, Dan?”

“You know that game we sometimes play of ‘Follow the Trail.’ One Cub goes ahead and lays out a trail which the others tried to follow.”

Mr. Hatfield nodded. “It’s excellent training in observation for the Cubs.”

“Well, I thought, if you’re willing, we might lay the trail across the island and around Jabowski’s place. The Cubs could be instructed to notice anything unusual and report.”

“Spy out the old hotel, you mean?”

“That’s right. Maybe it wouldn’t net anything. Then again, we might pick up considerable information about Jabowski.”

Mr. Hatfield thought the matter over for a moment.

“We’ll be here only one day longer,” he said. “If we tried out your idea, it would have to be early in the morning.”

“Then we may do it?”

“I’ll think it over,” Mr. Hatfield replied in a tone which was a half-promise. “Get to sleep now, Dan. We’ll talk further of this tomorrow.”

CHAPTER 12

Following the Trail

Excitement swept the camp the next morning when Mr. Hatfield told the Cubs they were to play the trail game Dan had proposed.

Taking the boys partially into his confidence, the Cub leader explained that he wished to obtain as much information as possible about Jabowski or any other occupants of the island.

“What sort of information?” Mack asked, puzzled.

“It’s a request that can’t be explained,” Mr. Hatfield replied. “Just keep your eyes open. If you notice anything unusual report it after the hunt is over. Dan will lay the trail.”

“I’ll need twenty minutes start of the gang,” Dan announced, already making his plans.

Mr. Hatfield told the Cubs that he might be absent from camp upon their return. He had arranged for a yacht club boat to pick him up, as he wished to visit Tim Tyler to make certain the boy had suffered no ill effects from his previous night’s ducking.

“I shan’t be gone long,” he told the Cubs. “During my absence, Brad will be in charge.”

“And that means you all must do just as I say,” Brad instructed the younger boys. “I’ll lead the clue hunt, and I want you to stick close to me. No stragglers!”

The Cubs allowed Dan a full twenty minutes start and then set out in pursuit.

Midge found the first clue, a bit of bush broken off and weighted down with

stones.

Farther on, Red spied a forked stick which pointed the direction. The trail avoided the marsh, skirting the shore much of the way. Finally it wound through a brushy hollow and came out within view of the old hotel where Jabowski lived.

“What’s the idea of all this?” Red demanded, sinking down on a rock to rest. “Dan brought us to this old hotel on purpose, didn’t he?”

“That’s right,” Brad agreed. “And here’s a note from him.” His keen eyes had sighted a slip of paper speared on a nearby tree branch.

Obtaining it, he read aloud: “Watch the windows of the hotel.”

“The windows?” Red repeated. “What does he mean by that?”

“Don’t know,” Brad shrugged. “Just keep your eyes peeled for anything unusual.”

“Such as what?” Midge demanded.

“I can’t tell you that. I don’t know myself. If you see Jabowski or anyone around, keep tab on ’em. Pick up any information you can, no matter how trivial it may seem.”

“But why are we doing this?” Mack complained. “I don’t get it.”

“Mr. Hatfield will explain later.”

“You and Dan seem to be on the inside,” Chips grumbled.

“If you don’t want to play the game, you can trot back to camp. And that goes for all of you!”

“Oh, don’t get tough,” Chips retorted. “We’re willing to spy out the enemy camp, but it would be more to the point if you’d do a little explaining.”

“All in good time, all in good time,” Brad rejoined, restored to good humor.

Following the trail Dan had marked, the Cubs slowly circled the hotel building.

“I don’t believe Jabowski lives there,” Midge declared. “The place is deserted.”

“No, it isn’t,” corrected Red. “I see smoke coming from the chimney at the rear.”

Brad praised the boy for his observation and urged the others to be on the lookout for other signs.

A little farther on, the Den Chief paused to study the grimy windows of the ancient building.

“Jabowski doesn’t hurt himself keeping the place clean or tidy,” he remarked. “Look at those windows! And the weeds in the yard!”

“And the shutters,” contributed Fred. “They’re banging around at every angle.”

Brad suddenly froze into alert attention. His gaze had focused hard upon one of the upstairs hotel windows. The glare of the sun was upon it, and for a moment the others could not see what had attracted his interest.

“Fellows, there’s someone standing at the window!” he exclaimed. “Not Jabowski either!”

“It looks like a boy,” Chips declared, shifting his position so that the reflected sunlight would not blind him.

Huddled together, the Cubs all fastened their gaze upon the window. Plainly they could see a youth standing there, his face pressed close against the dirty pane.

“*Jeepers!*” Chips whispered in stunned recognition. “*It’s Jacques!*”

Almost at the same instant, Brad and the other Cubs had made a similar observation. The boy who stood at the window was the same one who had vanished from the Cave only a few days earlier.

As the boys watched, a hand appeared from nowhere to jerk Jacques back from the window. They waited several minutes, but the boy did not reappear.

“You know what I think!” Midge cried, recovering from stunned surprise. “Jacques is being held a prisoner in there!”

“Either Jabowski or someone else saw him trying to signal us, and pulled him back out of sight!” Fred added excitedly. “I say we ought to break in and rescue him!”

“Not so fast,” Brad cautioned as the other Cubs were ready to back up the proposal. “Our orders were to report back to camp. Remember?”

“But this is an emergency,” Chips argued. “If Jacques is being held a prisoner, we ought to get him out!”

“And maybe get ourselves into a peck of trouble. Nope! Dan must have seen that boy too or he wouldn’t have left the note. We’re hiking back to camp. It’s up to Mr. Hatfield to decide what to do.”

Turning deaf ears upon all protests, Brad led the Cubs back the way they had come. Suddenly, a figure loomed up ahead of the boys. It was Jabowski who confronted them. From where he had come or how long he had been secreted in the bushes, they could not guess.

The caretaker’s voice was hard and unfriendly as he demanded:

“What d’you think you’re doing here?”

“Why, we’re playing ‘follow the trail’,” Brad said as the other Cubs were too abashed to reply.

“You were spying on the house!”

“Spying?” Brad asked innocently. “Why, what is there to see?”

“Nothing. Not a thing,” Jabowski retorted, made uncomfortable by the manner in which the boy had turned the accusation. “I just don’t like kids swarming over the place. See?”

“Mr. Manheim gave us permission to camp on the island.”

“But not to run wild over it. This here place is mine and I don’t want snoopers. Now get back to your own end of the island and stay there!”

“Sure, sure,” Brad said, signaling the Cubs to make no resistance. “We were

leaving anyhow.”

“I don’t aim to be mean,” Jabowski said, mollified by the boy’s willingness to obey. “But a guy has to have some privacy. That raft upsetting last night set my nerves on edge. You the boy that dived under it?”

“No, that was Dan Carter.”

“Which one is he?” Jabowski’s keen gaze swept the group.

“Dan isn’t here,” Midge informed the caretaker.

“Well, no matter,” Jabowski said. “Git along now, and mind what I said. You keep to your end of the island and there’ll be no hard feelings. By the way, when you leaving?”

“For good you mean?” Brad asked. “Why, late this afternoon, I guess.”

“Then you won’t be camping here another night.” Unmistakable relief was stamped on the caretaker’s face. “Good-bye, boys.”

“Oh, you may see us again,” Brad said with mischievous intent. “Oh, say! Have you run into that tramp who annoyed us the first day we camped here?”

“Tramp? The one who threw the stone?” Jabowski’s expression became guarded. “No, I searched the island after Mr. Manheim complained to me. No one around. If anyone scared you, he’s gone now.”

“Let’s hope so, at least,” replied Brad evenly. “Well, so long, Mr. Jabowski. Sorry to have bothered you.”

The Cubs tramped off, and because they knew the caretaker was watching, did not look back until they were a long distance from the old hotel.

Once out of sight and hearing, the boys discussed the important discovery they had made.

“There’s no question that it was Jacques we saw at the window,” Brad declared. “But what’s he doing here? And was it Jabowski who pulled him away from the window, or someone else?”

“He’s a prisoner, for sure,” Midge insisted. “We know someone spirited him away from the Cave. He’s probably been held here ever since.”

“Come on, let’s find Mr. Hatfield,” Brad urged, starting along the trail again.

At the camp a few minutes later, the Cubs were surprised to find the site entirely deserted. Dan was nowhere around. Nor was Mr. Hatfield or Midge’s father to be found.

Belatedly, Brad recalled that the Cub leader and Mr. Holloway had expected to make a brief trip that morning to the mainland.

“That’s probably where they are,” he remarked, his gaze anxiously sweeping the river. “But where’s Dan?”

“Maybe he went along,” Fred suggested.

“Maybe,” Brad agreed doubtfully. “But he couldn’t have returned to camp very long ago.”

While the other boys aired their bedding and attended to camp tasks, the older boy wandered along the shore.

On the west beach he noticed where a boat had been pulled up on the wet sand. The area was splattered with footprints, both large and small.

“A boat landed after the Cubs went trail hunting,” Brad reconstructed the scene. “Dan must have come down here to meet the folks, whoever they were. Maybe he went away with them, or was taken away!”

As far as Brad could see, the river was deserted of small craft. However, the dense bushes lining both sides of the wide stream provided ample protection for any boat which might seek to keep out of view.

Recalling the motorcraft which apparently had been serviced by the island raft, Brad became increasingly uneasy.

“It isn’t like Dan to go away without leaving word,” he told himself. “Something’s happened to him!”

Just then his roving gaze fastened upon a pile of three stones placed conspicuously on the beach. Plainly they had been left there to attract attention.

Brad kicked aside the stones. Folded beneath the lowermost one was a note from Dan.

“Called to Police Station,” it read. “No chance to see Mr. Hatfield. See you soon—I hope.”

Brad read the message twice, trying to figure it out.

“Now why would Dan be called to the police station?” he speculated. “It must be something important to bring the cops here after him.”

Brad was certain that his chum had committed no crime. But why otherwise would he be sought by police?

“See you soon—I hope,” he reread the final words of the note. “That sounds as if he thinks he may run into trouble. I wonder if Jabowski or someone who dislikes having the Cubs on Skeleton Island turned in a false complaint?”

Decidedly worried, the Den Chief pocketed the note and walked slowly back toward camp.

Without a motorboat, he knew he could do nothing until Mr. Hatfield and Midge’s father returned from the mainland.

“A nice kettle of fish,” he muttered. “Dan at the police station, and Jacques apparently a prisoner in the old hotel. No telling what may happen next! And me with all the responsibility!”

CHAPTER 13

Identifying a Prisoner

After laying the trail for the other Cubs to follow, Dan had spent some minutes watching the old hotel at the far end of the island. He too had observed Jacques standing at the window. Greatly excited by the discovery, he left a note for the Cubs and then hastened back to camp to report.

However, neither Mr. Hatfield nor Midge's father was there, having crossed the river a few minutes earlier.

Dan nervously paced the camp, wondering what he should do. Far across the island, he could hear an occasional shout from the Cubs as they noisily followed the trail he had marked.

After awhile, the boy became aware of the approach of a high-powered speedboat. Turning to look, he was astonished to see that a Webster City police patrol boat was beaching on the island.

As he went down to the water's edge, a sergeant and plainclothesman stepped out of the boat.

"Is this the Cub camp?" the sergeant inquired.

"Yes, sir, it is," Dan replied. He wondered what had brought police to the island at such an early hour, or for that matter, at any hour.

"We're looking for a Mr. Hatfield."

"He isn't here just now. But I expect him back in a half hour or so."

"Mr. Holloway?"

“They’re together.”

“We came to take one of the boys back to the station with us,” the sergeant explained. “A kid by the name of Dan Carter. Is he around?”

Dan drew in his breath, and answered uneasily: “I’m Dan Carter. Why do you want me? What have I done now?”

“Why, nothing—not a thing,” the police officer reassured him. “Weren’t you one of the youngsters who saw the operator of a motorboat that struck Mr. Holloway’s sailboat?”

“That’s right. But how did you know?”

“Oh, we check up,” the sergeant replied with a friendly grin. “Remember the blindman?”

“I did tell him about the crash,” Dan recalled. “He passed the information on to you?”

“Right. You saw the men in that boat?”

“Yes, but not plainly. The boat was running without lights.”

“Think you could identify any of the men if you saw ’em again?”

“One of them, I might.”

“Describe him.”

“Well, he was short and muscular—heavily built. His jaw was sort of square and his face puffy. I couldn’t see the color of his hair, but would say he was on the dark side.”

“That’s a pretty fair description, Dan,” the sergeant praised. “You’re observing.”

“Actually, I think I saw him twice,” Dan replied. “Once in the boat and then again on shore talking to a little fellow with a paper bag. ‘Paper Bag Eddie’, they called him.”

The police sergeant and plainclothesman exchanged a quick glance.

“Kid, you’re the one we need to help us,” the latter said. “Now this is the set-up. We’ve picked up a man we think may have been mixed up in the fur robbery. Also, he may be the one that rammed Mr. Holloway’s boat. We want you to identify him.”

“I don’t know if I can,” Dan said doubtfully. “I’ll be glad to try.”

Excited at the prospect before him, Dan scribbled a note for Mr. Hatfield and the Cubs. This he placed under a pile of stones on the beach where he was certain it would be seen. He then boarded the police boat and was ferried across the river.

At the police station, Dan was told to wait in an ante-room. He sat down, thumbing through the pages of a magazine. Policemen went in and out, but save for an occasional glance at the boy, no one paid any attention to him.

Dan began to wonder if he had been entirely forgotten.

After awhile, he arose and wandered out into the first floor corridor. As he stood there watching men and women pass through from James St. to Whitehill Ave., he suddenly stiffened.

Through the revolving doors came Paper Bag Eddie. The man was alone. His hat had been pulled low over his eyes, and his coat collar was high, but he carried the familiar paper sack.

A policeman, recognizing the man, stopped him for a moment.

“Hello, Eddie,” he said, eyeing him guardedly. “What brings you here?”

“The measles,” Eddie retorted, his thin lips curling into a sneer. “You got nothing on me, copper. It’s a free corridor, ain’t it?”

“Just keep moving, Eddie.”

“I’m here to pay a traffic fine,” the man replied. “Any law against it?”

“Go ahead,” the policeman said. “Just make it snappy and get out. We don’t want you loitering around here.”

Eddie eyed the police officer insolently, but made no reply. Passing Dan, he

entered a door which bore a sign: "Pay Traffic Fines Here."

However, he did not remain three minutes inside the room. No sooner had the policeman stepped into one of the court rooms, than Eddie emerged into the corridor again.

His fox-like eyes darted back and forth, noting that no other policemen were anywhere in sight.

This ascertained, he sidled over to Dan.

"You're here to identify a man you're supposed to have seen in a motorboat," his purring voice said. "Get this! You never saw the guy before."

Taken by surprise, Dan stared at Eddie and made no reply.

"Have some popcorn?" the man invited.

Dan shook his head, and made uncomfortable by those dark boring eyes, moved a step back against the wall.

Eddie had opened the bag. Now he thrust it directly under the boy's eyes. Dan saw then that it contained not popcorn, but a 32-caliber revolver.

"You never saw the guy before," Eddie repeated. "If you forget—you'll hear from me. I got a way of taking care of my friends and them that ain't."

Two policemen had emerged from one of the offices. Dan turned to signal to them. Before he could do so, Eddie wheeled and departed by way of the revolving doors.

"You're Dan Carter?" one of the policemen called, noticing the boy. "They're waiting for you."

"That man who was talking to me!" Dan exclaimed. "Did you notice him?"

Neither of the policemen had seen Eddie.

"He threatened me," Dan revealed. "Warned me not to identify someone in the line-up. And he had a revolver."

Now very much interested, the policemen went outside the building to look up and down the street. Paper Bag Eddie was nowhere to be seen.

“Probably hailed a taxi and made a quick getaway,” one of the officers said. “Listen, Dan. Don’t pay any attention to what he told you. It was all bluff. You go in there and identify your man if you can.”

“I intend to,” Dan announced, his face grim. “He can’t scare me.”

“Good!” the policeman approved. “Now follow me.”

Dan was led through a series of corridors and up an elevator to an inner room. There he was introduced to Detective Jim Blackwell and Sergeant Amos Davis.

“Now in a moment, several men will walk across a lighted stage in front of you,” Sergeant Davis explained. “You’ll be behind this screen, protected from their view. Don’t say anything, but look closely at each man. If you recognize any of them, tell me later. Got it?”

Dan nodded. His heart pounded with excitement. He had made up his mind to identify the motorboat operator if he possibly could.

But he couldn’t forget about Eddie and the revolver in the paper bag. Somehow he had a feeling that the threat had not been entirely bluff.

The stage now was flooded with blinding light. One at a time, six men walked into Dan’s range of vision.

The first three he had never seen before and resembled no one he had ever known. Dan gave them scarcely a second glance.

At sight of the fourth man in the line-up, he stiffened. Although the fellow tried to look unconcerned, Dan could see that he was worried. He knew him instantly as the sailor he had seen talking to Paper Bag Eddie.

Also, he was reasonably certain that the man was the same one who had operated the motorboat.

“He’s the one!” Dan whispered.

“Sure?”

“Almost positive.”

The men in the line-up were taken away and the stage darkened. Dan then was led to an adjoining room where he was questioned as to his identification and other information.

Dan told the entire story, including his suspicions that Jabowski might be supplying the river pirates with gasoline.

He related also how Jacques had disappeared from the Cave under mysterious circumstances, the theft of the coded message, and finally, of seeing the boy again on the island.

“It gave me a real shock to see him standing there at the window,” he ended the account. “I tried to signal him, but I don’t think he saw me. After awhile, he stepped back out of sight. I figure though that Jabowski is holding him there against his will.”

“You’ve given us some good tips, kid,” the police officer praised Dan. “Maybe we’ll drop around at the island and give it a thorough going over.”

“A raid on the hotel?”

“You might call it that.”

“Whatever you do, don’t arrest any of the Cubs that are camped on the island,” Dan said anxiously.

His remark amused the officer. “You figure we can’t tell a Cub from a crook?” he chuckled.

“I didn’t mean that, sir,” Dan replied, flushing.

“We’ll look out for your friends,” the officer reassured him. “Don’t you worry.”

Orders were given for squad members to contact Mr. Manheim, the island owner, and then to proceed to the old hotel for a search of the premises.

“We’ll take you along with us, Dan,” the officer told him. “You’ll be needed to point out this boy Jacques who is being held a prisoner, you say.”

In the squad car, the boy was driven to Mr. Manheim’s office. As his accusations were repeated, the island owner bristled with anger.

“Tommy rot!” he exploded. “My man Jabowski is to be trusted completely! This boy must be out of his head! Such gratitude. And after all I’ve done for the Cubs!”

After storming about for awhile, Mr. Manheim agreed to accompany police to the island. During the swift boat ride across the river, he refused to speak to Dan.

At the Cub camp, Mr. Hatfield and Midge’s father both had returned. Already they had received a report from Brad and the other boys. But to see Dan arrive with a squad of policemen was something of a surprise.

“I hope you’re making no mistake,” Mr. Hatfield remarked to the boy after he had been informed that the hotel was to be searched. “Mr. Manheim looks as angry as a hornet! If you should be wrong—”

“All the Cubs saw Jacques at the window,” Brad said, coming to Dan’s defense. “The boy must be somewhere on the island.”

While the Cubs and their leaders approached the hotel by an overland route, police made a swift motorboat descent upon the building, tying up at the old dock.

Accompanied by Mr. Manheim, they presented themselves at the front door. There was no response to their knock.

“I should have a key,” Mr. Manheim said, searching for it in his pocket. “Don’t know what became of it. I’ve not used it in six months.”

Just then an upstairs window opened and Jabowski looked down on the group.

“What d’you want?” he demanded. Then, recognizing his employer, he said quickly: “Oh, it’s you, Mr. Manheim.”

“Open the door,” the island owner ordered. “Police insist on searching the

place.”

“I’ll be right down,” the caretaker replied, leaving the window.

A moment later he unlocked the front door, staring curiously at the members of the police squad.

“Sorry, our orders are to search the place,” one of the officers apologized. “Mind if we look around?”

“Go ahead,” Jabowski shrugged. “I only work here.”

By this time all the Cubs had reached the hotel. However, except for Dan, Mr. Hatfield would not allow them inside the building.

The lobby of the old hotel had been converted into a makeshift living room. Scantily furnished with a few cast-off pieces of rickety furniture, the floor was unswept and the windows dirty.

Climbing a flight of squeaky stairs, the policemen began a systematic search of the bedrooms. Nearly all were empty and unfurnished.

“Jacques was in the room to the right of the corridor,” Dan said, pointing it out.

The officer thrust open the door. A boy who had been lying on an unmade bed, quickly got to his feet. Fully dressed, he stared first at Dan and then at the policemen.

“This the boy?” the officer demanded.

“Yes, it’s Jacques,” Dan answered as the youth stood mute.

Mr. Manheim and Jabowski had followed the policemen into the bedroom.

“Your name, boy?” the police officer questioned.

“Jacques—Jacques Jabowski.”

“Jabowski? You’re related to the caretaker?”

“He’s my nephew,” Jabowski answered before the boy could speak. “Anything

wrong with that?”

The police officer fixed Dan with an annoyed glance. “You didn’t mention a relationship, kid.”

“Well, I didn’t know,” Dan said in embarrassment. “That is, I’d heard Jabowski had a nephew, but I never once thought of his being Jacques. The boy was taken away from the Cave, and when I saw him here—”

“You jumped to wild conclusions,” Mr. Manheim cut in furiously.

“Jacques will tell you I take good care of him and provide him with everything he needs,” Jabowski added.

“But you’ve kept him a prisoner,” Dan accused.

“That’s not so,” Jabowski denied. He gazed hard at his nephew. “You tell ’em, Jacques. Are you held a prisoner here?”

Jacques remained silent.

“Answer up,” Jabowski ordered harshly.

“No!” the boy replied, his face sullen.

“Jacques don’t like it much here in this country,” his uncle explained. “He came over from France six months ago and is learning to speak English.”

“You see,” Mr. Manheim broke in again. “This entire situation has been misunderstood. Everything is in order here. I foolishly gave the Cub Scouts permission to camp on my island and they’ve allowed their imaginations to run riot.”

“If any mistake has been made, it was entirely mine,” Dan said. “But I can’t understand—”

He gazed at Jacques who was looking at him with a strange expression in his eyes. It seemed to Dan that the boy wanted to speak, that he was trying to make something known, and yet was afraid. Dan decided to question him.

“Jacques,” he said earnestly. “Why did you leave the Cave? Who took you away?”

“You came here of your own free will, Jacques,” his uncle replied, putting words in the boy’s mind. “Wasn’t that it? Tell the officers.”

“Yes,” Jacques replied, his eyes downcast. “*Oui.*”

Obviously disgusted by the turn of events, the policemen made a quick and casual inspection of other rooms in the old hotel.

“Everything seems to be in order here,” they informed Mr. Manheim. “Sorry to have caused you annoyance.”

Mr. Hatfield and Dan also apologized to the island owner. However, he was in no mood to accept an explanation or to forgive.

“I made a mistake allowing the Cubs to come here,” Mr. Manheim declared. “You’ve spread damaging rumors about the island.”

“If that’s the way you feel, we’ll leave at once,” the Cub leader replied. “An error of judgment was made, but under the circumstance, I don’t feel Dan should be too severely criticized.”

The island owner and Mr. Hatfield now stood on the sagging veranda, surrounded by Cubs. A few splatters of rain drove into their faces.

“I’ll not ask you to break camp with a storm coming on,” Mr. Manheim said. “If you’ll leave by tomorrow morning, that will be satisfactory.”

“We’ll endeavor to depart before that. I’ll contact the mainland as quickly as I can and have a launch come to pick up our equipment.”

“Suit yourselves,” Mr. Manheim shrugged. “I’m not driving you away. You’re free to stay until tomorrow morning. After that, I’ll consider it a favor if you’ll not bring the Cubs here again.”

“Rest assured we will remain away, Mr. Manheim.”

“Another thing. I’ve changed my mind about selling the camp site. You readily

can see that it would never work out to have Cubs or Scouts here. There would be constant friction.”

“On that point I could give you an argument, Mr. Manheim. However, I realize you’ve made up your mind, so I’ll say no more.”

Leaving Mr. Manheim with Jabowski, the discouraged Cubs trudged back to camp with their leaders. Rain now was falling steadily, adding to the gloom of the boys.

“Brace up, Dan,” Brad said as the two sought the shelter of a tent. “It wasn’t exactly your fault.”

“Sure it was,” Dan insisted. “I’ve messed things up for fair. Mr. Hatfield’s being mighty decent about it, but I can see he’s bothered. And the Scouts will blame us for cutting them out of their camp site.”

“Who wants this old island anyhow? We’ve had plenty of trouble since we came here.”

“All caused by our own wild imagination, as Manheim puts it! Brad, Jacques was hiding the truth from the police! I’m sure of it. He’s completely under the thumb of that uncle of his.”

“Maybe so, but if we can’t prove it, what’s the good in knowing? We’ll be leaving here as soon as this rain lets up.”

Dan nodded gloomily. Already Mr. Hatfield and Midge’s father were making arrangements to have a launch sent from the yacht club. The moment that the storm cleared, he knew an order would be given to strike the tents.

“Brad, if we could talk to Jacques alone, maybe we could get something out of him,” he proposed suddenly.

“Jabowski wouldn’t let us within a mile of the kid.”

“Not if he could help himself.”

Brad regarded Dan speculatively. “You’re suggesting that we try to see him when Jabowski isn’t around, Dan?”

“That’s the general idea. If we could get to him he might talk. I’ve messed things up for the Cubs and I’d like to square myself if I could.”

Brad thought over the proposal. “How’d we get to him?” he asked.

“We’d have to watch the place and sneak in whenever we got the chance.”

“I don’t think it will work,” Brad said slowly. “But I’m willing to try. Shall we tell the other Cubs?”

“Let’s not, Brad. The idea may flop. Let’s just slip away.”

“I’ll leave a note for Mr. Hatfield,” Brad said, scribbling on the page of a notebook he took from his pocket. “If anything should happen that we don’t get back right away, he might worry.”

The older boy left the message in plain view on his bed. Buttoning themselves into their slickers, the pair then quitted the tent. Unnoticed, they followed the shore for a distance, and then sliced through the dunes to the woodland surrounding Jabowski’s place.

As upon the first occasion they had viewed the old hotel, it appeared completely deserted. This time, however, the boys were not deceived.

“Jabowski and his nephew both are inside probably,” Brad said. “Our only chance is to lie in wait until we see Jabowski leave. Then we might try to get in. We’re taking a fearful chance though.”

For three quarters of an hour, the two Cubs shivered in their inadequate shelter of bushes. Rain continued to fall. During the entire time, no one entered or left the hotel.

“We can’t stick here forever,” Brad said at length. “Mr. Hatfield will be sending a searching party after us.”

“I guess my idea was a bum one again,” Dan admitted, brushing a mop of damp hair from his eyes. “Want to leave?”

“Let’s make a tour around the hotel first,” Brad said.

Keeping out of sight, the pair crept through the bushes, completely circling the old building. No one was visible at any of the windows.

Finally they came to the river. Thrusting through a particularly dense thicket, Brad abruptly halted.

“Hello?” he muttered. “What’s this?”

Progress was barred by an accumulation of brush and debris. Pulling some of it aside, Brad saw a dark opening leading back under the rise of ground.

“Gosh, Dan,” he murmured in awe. “This looks like the entrance to the old tunnel Mr. Hatfield told us about.”

“It sure does,” Dan agreed excitedly. “And someone’s found it ahead of us. The sand which blocked the entrance was dug out, and then the opening hidden with all this brush!”

“Let’s find out where it goes!”

With no thought of personal danger, the boys pulled away enough debris to permit them to squeeze through into the dark tunnel.

In years past it had been bricked over, but now water oozed through many breaks in the walls and low ceiling.

“This must lead to the old hotel,” Dan said, groping his way along the damp wall. “Maybe we’ll get in after all!”

Before the boys had gone very far they came upon four sturdy sawhorses where a boat obviously had been allowed to rest while being painted. Varnish and cans of half-used paint remained, but the boat had been removed.

“Dan, I get it all now!” Brad exclaimed. “That boat which struck Mr. Holloway’s sailing craft was painted and outfitted here in the tunnel!”

“And painted to resemble Mr. Manheim’s speedboat!”

“That’s the way I dope it, Dan. Let’s see what lies further on.”

Highly excited by their discovery, the two boys moved rapidly on down the tunnel. Presently, a series of ten stone steps led up to a small bricked room which they judged must be directly beneath the hotel.

But to the disappointment of the Cubs, the room was empty save for a few empty boxes, from which all markings carefully had been removed.

“Dan, you know what I think!” Brad exclaimed, taking care to keep his voice low-pitched so that it would not carry to the rooms above. “This room has been used for the storage of loot!”

“The furs stolen from the warehouse!”

“It wouldn’t surprise me. Why, it was a perfect set-up! The crooks snatched the stuff and made a quick dash across the river. No one became suspicious, because the boat looked exactly like Manheim’s.”

“They unloaded the boxes here, and then if police checked the boat, of course they’d find nothing!”

“Exactly! Then after the theft blew over and police weren’t watching the waterfront as closely, they moved the stuff out and disposed of it.”

“Brad, I was right after all! Jabowski is mixed up in this!”

“Maybe so, but we have no proof,” Brad brought him up short. “While we’re pretty certain in our own minds what happened, the evidence isn’t conclusive. All we have here is a few empty boxes. It doesn’t establish anyone’s guilt.”

“That’s true,” Dan admitted unwillingly. “If we went to the police with this, they’d probably give me the jolly ha-ha again.”

“Let’s see where this tunnel comes out,” Brad proposed.

Quitting the bricked room, the boys followed a dark passageway until they came to a solid oak door. It was locked.

“This is the end,” Brad whispered. “The door must enter the hotel. Jabowski may go back and forth, but he’d never admit it.”

“What do you think we should do?”

“We’ll tell Mr. Hatfield, of course. He may go to the police, but I doubt it. The Cubs already are in Dutch with Mr. Manheim. If we make any more accusations we can’t prove, he’ll have a right to be furious.”

“But this we can prove,” Dan argued. “The tunnel is here.”

“That’s the unfortunate part, Dan. It always has been here. We can’t tie a thing onto Jabowski or those other fellows unless police should catch ’em red-handed.”

“Fine chance of that!”

“They may try to pull another job. What was the date on that coded message?”

“The 24th. I remember because it’s the day of our Pack swimming meet.”

“That date may have significance,” Brad speculated. “But it’s not for us to decide. Let’s get out of here now and give Mr. Hatfield all the facts. Then he can take the responsibility.”

Dan knew that the older boy’s advice was sound and should be followed. But it was with a sinking heart that he followed Brad through the damp tunnel to the river.

He was willing to bet that neither the Cub leader nor police would favor another raid on the island. His attempt to straighten out matters had failed! Time had run out.

Through his bungling, the Cubs would lose their island camp. And there wasn’t a thing he could do.

CHAPTER 14

Victory for Den 2

At the “Y” swimming pool, Dan Carter and the Cubs lounged against the tiled wall, awaiting the signal for start of the long-awaited Pack meet.

The gallery was jammed with spectators, for parents and friends of both teams had turned out in large numbers to witness this decisive contest of the season. A large silver cup, to be awarded the winning Den, stood on a table in plain view of the swimmers.

“Gosh, I sure hope we can win that beautiful baby,” Midge said, gazing longingly at the trophy. “Dan, we’re depending on you to do your stuff!”

“I’ll sure try,” Dan replied, shivering in his wet suit. “But you know Ross! He’s jet propelled. Furthermore, he hasn’t forgotten how we won that last meet.”

As the boys talked, Ross himself sauntered past. He paused to hitch up his trunks and fix Dan with an amused eye.

“It’s going to be too bad for you, little shrimp,” he jeered. “This time, you won’t win on a fluke! In fact, you won’t win. Period.”

“Don’t be too sure,” Midge cut in. “Take a look at the events that have been posted.”

“What’s different about ’em?” Ross demanded suspiciously.

“The coaches got together and substituted a 75-yard free style for the 50-yard. They figure it’s a better test of swimming form. In the shorter distance, a good turn at the wall gives a fellow a big advantage.”

“No one told me about changing the distance,” Ross muttered. “I’m going to

find out about this!”

The Cubs saw him arguing vigorously with his own coach and Mr. Hatfield. The two men listened to his complaint but did not change the list of scheduled events.

“It’s this way, Ross,” Mr. Hatfield explained. “The Cubs steadily have increased their endurance as well as their speed. At the beginning of the season, a 50-yard swim was a hard race for everyone concerned. Now it’s a breeze. The 75-yard freestyle is a far better test of one’s real ability.”

“Sure, I guess so,” Ross admitted, but he looked worried. Though the Den 1 coach had urged him many times to practice the longer length, he nearly always had stopped short at the end of two turns.

While waiting for the starting signal, Dan at the other end of the pool allowed his gaze to wander over the packed audience. In the back row near the door he caught a glimpse of a short little man whose sharp-featured face gave him a start.

“Midge, look over there!” he muttered, nudging his companion.

“Where?”

“He’s gone now,” Dan returned. “Slipped out through the door. For just a minute I thought—”

A shrill blast from Mr. Hatfield’s whistle drove the matter from his mind entirely. Scrambling to his feet, he lined up for the first event of the meet.

In rapid order the events were run through, the back stroke, fancy diving, the 100-yard relay race, and a breast stroke event. With only one event remaining—the 75-yard freestyle, the score stood 20 to 16 in favor of Den 2.

To win the meet the Cubs of Den 2 knew that Dan must defeat Ross for first place. But in the freestyle relay event, the Den 1 swimmer had put on a spectacular burst of speed to capture the event. The prospects looked discouraging.

“Just swim your own race, Dan,” Mr. Holloway advised as the boy went to the starting line.

The swimmers crouched above their lanes awaiting the signal. Sensing that the race would be a close one, the audience rose to its feet.

Mr. Hatfield's revolver cracked and the swimmers were off.

Almost together Ross and Dan struck the water in flat, fast racing dives. From the start, the Den 1 swimmer took the lead.

Dan heard the groans of dismay from his teammates and instinctively increased the tempo of his thrashing legs. Then he told himself he could not hold the pace. Deliberately, he dropped back to his former rhythm.

The race would be a gruelling one at the end. He must save a little reserve for that final spurt!

At the turn, Ross was nearly two body lengths ahead of Dan, his closest competitor. Midge and a youth who swam for Den 1 were almost neck-and-neck another three feet behind.

After the second length, Ross slowed down a bit. Dan's arms and legs now were moving with the easy precision of well-oiled machinery. Going into the final turn, the boy suddenly realized that for the first time in the race, he was a foot ahead!

The knowledge shocked him into losing the smooth rhythm of his stroke. Ross, desperate to regain the lead, spurted ahead once more.

"Come on, Dan!" his teammates pleaded. "Come on!"

Across the pool, the Cubs of Den 1 were urging Ross to give his all. Both boys put on a final thrust of speed.

Dan's arms ached with fatigue but his breath was good. *Fight, fight, fight!* The words pounded through his brain and conveyed themselves to his thrashing legs. His driving arms churned the water to foam as he put forth a supreme effort.

The finish line was just ahead. As Dan surged for it with a feel of power and strength, Ross suddenly seemed to cave in. His stroke lost all rhythm, arm and leg movements became jerky.

Dan moved steadily ahead of him, touching the wall a full length ahead. The audience burst into loud applause. Midge who came in third, after Ross, also was given a big hand.

“Well, you did it, boy!” Brad declared, clapping Dan on the back. “Look at that scoreboard!”

Mr. Hatfield was writing up the chalk figures—26 to 19 in favor of Den 2.

“We’ve won the silver cup!” Chips Davis added, joining in the congratulations. “And not on any fluke either!”

His breath recovered, Ross came around to offer Dan his hand.

“You swam a dandy race and deserved to win,” he said warmly. “From now on, I’m going in for heavy practice!”

“Next year we’ll have a real race,” Dan grinned. “You gave me stiff competition this season.”

Following his teammates to the dressing room, the boy showered and scrambled into street clothes. Victory had brought a warm inner glow. He felt at peace with the world.

The feeling, however, was short lived. In leaving the dressing room, he chanced to hear Mr. Holloway and the Den 1 coach discussing prospects of obtaining Skeleton Island as a Scout camp.

“The deal’s definitely washed up,” Midge’s father told the coach. “Too bad, because the site is the best one around Webster City.”

Since the weekend when the Cubs had camped on the island, Dan had not seen Mr. Manheim or the caretaker, Jabowski. He and Brad had reported to Mr. Hatfield their discovery of the old tunnel leading under the hotel. However, the Cub leader had not considered it advisable to take the matter up.

“It’s useless to speculate on what may have happened there,” he told the disappointed boys. “To impress Mr. Manheim or the police, we need evidence. Without it, we’ll be wise to let matters rest as they are.”

Dan also had been discouraged to learn that Frisk Fagan, the motorboat operator, had been released from jail on bond. Realization that the man was at liberty gave the boy a few uneasy moments. Though he expected no trouble, he could not forget that he had been warned not to identify the man.

As Dan removed his coat from the locker, Mack came hurrying up.

“Say, you’re wanted outside,” he informed. “A man wants to talk to you.”

“Who is he, Mack?”

“Didn’t say,” the other flung over his shoulder as he went on toward the dressing room. “He’s waiting out in front of the building.”

Dan put on his coat and started for the street. By this time the main part of the “Y” building was nearly deserted of visitors.

As he stepped out onto a stone porch giving exit to the street, a little man in an overcoat pulled high around his neck emerged from the shadows. Dan recoiled.

The man was Paper Bag Eddie.

“Hello, Dan,” the other said in his purring voice. “Want to take a little ride with me?”

Dan started to retreat into the building, but Eddie blocked the doorway. The dark street was deserted except for a taxi cab.

“Don’t let out a peep or make a false move,” the man said, tapping the little paper bag he carried. “You’re coming with me.”

Taking a firm grasp upon Dan’s arm, he shoved him toward the waiting taxi cab.

The boy braced his feet and started to resist. But as he opened his mouth to let out a yell for help, Eddie jammed the paper bag into his ribs. He felt the pressure of a revolver press against his flesh.

“Don’t yip, or I’ll let you have it,” the little man said in his pleasant voice. “Just get in that taxi.”

Dan obeyed. As he slumped in the rear seat, he took a quick glance at the driver. Though the face was unfamiliar, he thought the man resembled one of the persons he had seen on the night Mr. Holloway's motorboat had been struck. It was an ugly face, cold and unfriendly. He realized with a sinking heart that any appeal to the driver for help would be a waste of breath.

Eddie sat close beside Dan, his stubby legs stretched out in front of him.

"We have a little score to settle, Dan," the man said, eyeing the boy narrowly. "Remember?"

The words sent an icy chill chasing down Dan's spine. Eddie hadn't forgotten his identification of Frisk Fagan. And this was the payoff!

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded.

Eddie merely smiled and settled back in the cab. The taxi driver, without an order, shifted gears and they sped away.

Along the brightly lighted street, Dan saw many persons he knew walking home from the swimming meet. But he was helpless to signal them or to let anyone know of his plight.

At the next corner, the taxi turned, seeking a narrow, dark street. Gradually it came to Dan that he was being driven to the waterfront. His uneasiness increased.

The cab presently pulled up not far from a familiar group of warehouses. Eddie made no move to leave the taxi. Instead, he seemed to be waiting for someone.

Within five minutes, a tapping sound was heard along the dark street. Craning his neck, Dan saw the blindman and his dog approaching the cab.

The boy's heart leaped with hope. If only he could get word to the man, or in some manner make known his predicament!

But a moment later Dan's hopes nose-dived. The blindman came directly to the cab. He greeted Eddie as an old friend.

"Sorry to be late," he apologized. "You got the kid, I see."

“Sure,” Eddie replied, lowering the cab window. “Everything set?”

“The shipment’s in, settin’ out on Dock 23 covered with canvas. All we gotta do is distract the watchman while the sawing goes on.”

As he spoke, the blindman removed his dark glasses. His eyes as they coldly appraised Dan looked perfectly normal. With a shock the boy realized that Joe Matt never had been blind.

“He’s been a spotter for the gang of river pirates!” Dan thought. “All the time he’s kept watch of shipments to learn when valuable ones go through! Hank foolishly told him everything!”

Belatedly, it occurred to him that this was the night of the 24th. The blindman had learned long ago that a valuable shipment of furs or other merchandise was to be sent through on this day.

As Dan figured it out, the boy Jacques undoubtedly had been assigned to relay the information to a member of the gang. The coded message must have referred to the shipment and was in effect “Coming through on the 24th!” But something had gone awry. Either Jacques had rebelled or had met with an accident as he crossed the river.

“That’s why the boy wouldn’t talk,” he thought. “He didn’t dare. He was afraid of what the gang would do to him.”

Dan’s meditation was cut short by a poke in the ribs from Paper Bag Eddie.

“Get out!” the man ordered. “If you do exactly as you’re told, you won’t be hurt. But don’t try any monkey business.”

Dan was forced to walk along the dock ahead of the blindman and his dog. Eddie loitered far behind.

“Now get this,” Joe Matt said. “One false move and Rudy will tear you to shreds. You’ll do exactly as I say. These are your orders: You’re to talk to Hank and keep him occupied. I don’t care what you say, just so you hold his attention. If you fail—”

“So I’m to be a decoy?”

“You’re to throw him off his guard. Just keep him away from the dock while our work goes on.”

“Work! You’re stealing another shipment of furs!”

“Right, my boy. From under Hank’s very nose too!” The blindman paused in the shadow of the warehouse. “See the stupid fool!”

The warehouseman nervously paced back and forth along the dock. Frequently he paused to glance at a pile of boxes which had been covered by a heavy canvas.

“How do you aim to get the furs?” Dan whispered. “If you make any false move, Hank will blow his whistle and the river police will be here in a flash.”

“Don’t you worry yourself, my boy. Just do as you’re told and don’t ask questions.”

The blindman gave Dan a shove, following a pace behind. At sound of his tapping cane, the warehouseman whirled around.

“Oh, it’s you,” he said in relief. “I’m a mite jumpy tonight. Guarding a valuable cargo. She’s due to be picked up in another hour. It sure will be a load off my mind.”

“Hank, I got a sliver in my hand a minute ago,” the blindman said in a half-whine intended to arouse sympathy. “Will you help me get it out?”

“Can’t see a thing out here.”

“Come inside where there’s a good light.”

The warehouseman hesitated. “I shouldn’t leave the dock—”

“Oh, it will only take a minute. You can watch the canvas from the doorway. Dan here can help you keep an eye on it.”

“My eyesight isn’t very good at night,” Dan said significantly.

The blindman’s arm pressed hard into his flesh.

“Lead me inside, Dan,” the man ordered. “That’s a good boy. You’re a real help to a poor soul without any eyes.”

The three entered the warehouse where they switched on a bright electric light. Carefully he examined the blindman’s hand.

“It’s only a little sliver,” he said. “Hardly worth bothering about. Here, I’ll get it out in a jiffy.”

With his knife he removed the tiny piece of wood.

Dan, who stood where he could see the canvas which covered the crate of furs, thought he could hear the indistinct sound of someone sawing wood. But he could see no one.

Then the explanation dawned upon him! Hours before, a boat had slipped in beneath the dock, lying in wait for this moment. Now the river pirates boldly were carving through the dock with steel braces, bits and saws!

Undoubtedly the blindman himself had given the go-ahead signal by tapping with his cane.

“Those crooks will have the box through the hole and into their boat before Hank catches on!” he thought.

Dan sidled toward the door. Rudy growled and barred his way.

Outside the warehouse, Eddie lounged against a wall, smoking a cigarette. All escape was cut off. Even if he could let Hank know what was happening, Dan knew it was too late to prevent the theft.

“Well, Dan, how did you do in the swimming meet tonight?” Hank asked, making conversation. “Give us a full account.”

“We won,” Dan answered shortly.

Again he felt Matt’s hard pressure on his arm. Knowing that he was expected to keep the warehouseman interested, he grudgingly added a few details.

From where the boy stood, he could see the high mound of canvas. Suddenly it

deflated like a pricked balloon.

The river pirates had succeeded in lowering the loot through the dock hole into their boat! In another moment they would speed away unchecked.

The sight goaded Dan beyond thought of personal risk.

“Quick, Hank!” he shouted. “They’re stealing the furs!”

The watchman whirled toward the door, only to have Joe Matt’s cane crash down on his head. Hank staggered back, slowly collapsing on the floor.

When Dan would have leaped to the man’s assistance, the dog barred his way.

Joe Matt seized the boy by the arm, pushing him roughly out the door. Dan resisted with all his strength. But he was powerless in the grasp of the other.

The motorboat, loaded with the boxes and crates of furs, had emerged from beneath the dock. As it coasted alongside, the blindman shoved Dan ahead of him and down into the craft.

Frisk Fagan crouched at the steering wheel. Jabowski, his face well hidden beneath a cap, huddled beside one of the boxes which had been shoved half way into the cabin. Jacques sat slumped over in the stern of the boat.

“Hey! What’s the idea?” Frisk Fagan growled. “We can’t take that kid along. We’re overloaded now.”

“We got to take him along,” Joe Matt answered. “If we don’t, he’ll spill everything to the cops. Git going!”

Leaping down into the boat, the man bound Dan’s legs and wrists with a stout piece of cord.

“Better gag him too,” Fagan advised. “The river is swarming with cops. Three boats out watching the shore. We can’t risk having him yip at the wrong minute.”

“I’ll fix him right,” Joe muttered. He pulled the thongs tighter about the boy’s wrists and stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth.

The motorboat sped away from the dock, nosing directly toward Skeleton Island.

Scarcely was the craft well out from shore than those aboard heard the shrill blast of a police whistle. Dan's heart leaped with hope.

"We've been seen!" Joe Matt muttered. "Either that, or Hank has revived and given the alarm! Faster, Frisk!"

"I'm pushin' her as hard as I can."

"A police boat is putting out from shore now," Joe Matt informed, scanning the river. "Probably armed with a 45-calibre submachine gun!"

"Keep cool," Frisk advised. "We have a head start. We'll make the island okay and can hide the boat in the tunnel."

“And if it’s found there I’ll take the rap,” Jabowski whined. “I wish you’d never mixed me up in this dirty mess. And you dragged Jacques in against his will—”

“Shut up!” Frisk said harshly. “We’ll get out of this. But if we don’t, we’ll all take the rap together.”

“Throw the cargo overboard,” Jabowski pleaded. “Then the cops won’t find any evidence even if they do catch up with us.”

He arose and reached for one of the smaller boxes. Joe Matt shoved him back.

“Lay off!” he ordered. “We went to plenty of risk to carry out this job tonight. We ain’t pitching any \$10,000 haul just because a copper blows a little tin whistle!”

By this time, a powerfully motored police boat had taken up the pursuit. Jabowski watched anxiously as its brilliant searchlight swept the water.

“She’s coming up fast!” he exclaimed. “They’ll soon be within firing distance.”

“Keep your shirt on,” Frisk advised, hunching lower over the steering wheel. “The cops don’t know for sure we got the stuff. They may take the boat for Manheim’s just as we figured. While they’re wondering whether they dare risk taking a shot, we’ll make the island.”

“I dunno,” Jabowski said fearfully. “They’re gaining.”

“We’ll make the island,” Frisk repeated with more confidence. “The Dawson Street bridge is just ahead. Once past there, we’ll be hidden from view. We’ll slip behind the island into the tunnel. You left Manheim’s boat tied to the wharf?”

“Sure, just as you ordered.”

“Good. If the cops come by and check they’ll find the motor cold. You can claim you haven’t been away from the island all night.”

“They’ll question me. I’m not willing to take the rap while the rest of you get away.”

“The cops can’t prove a thing once we make the tunnel,” Fagan growled. “This is our last haul in this area. You’ll get your share and we pull out to a safer spot.”

“We pull out all right,” Jabowski muttered. “After tonight I’m through. I never should have dragged poor Jacques into this mess—he tried to run away—”

The caretaker glanced briefly at his nephew, huddled in the stern of the boat. Jacques gave no sign he had heard.

“If the cops overtake us—” Jabowski whined.

“Oh, pipe down,” Frisk said irritably. “We’re coming to the bridge now. We’re safe!”

Lying quite helpless on the deck of the speeding motorboat, Dan suddenly saw Jacques come to life.

With no warning whatsoever, the boy sprang to his feet. Savagely, he hurled himself upon the surprised Frisk Fagan, wresting the steering wheel from him.

“Hey, have you gone crazy?” Frisk shouted.

With both hands he gave the boy a mighty shove which sent him reeling backwards over the gunwale.

Out of control, the motorboat crashed with terrific impact into the bridge pier.

CHAPTER 15

The Pay-Off

Dan was hurled violently into the foaming water. As he went under, he held his breath and instinctively turned his head upward.

After what seemed an eternity, his face emerged from the water.

But the boy was helpless, bound hand and foot. He rolled over on his back, trying to float. The gag in his mouth had become water soaked. He began to choke.

This, he thought, was it.

As black despair claimed him, a hand reached out of nowhere to support his back. The gag was jerked from his mouth so that he could breathe again. Gratefully, he sucked in big mouthfuls of air.

Twisting his head, Dan saw that it was Jacques who had saved him. The boy was treading water beside him, supporting his body with his left hand.

“Lie still,” Jacques commanded. “I tow you. Police boat come. Pick us up.”

Even as he spoke, the powerful beam from the approaching launch spotlighted the water about them. A moment later, both boys were hauled aboard.

“Jacques, you saved me,” Dan murmured gratefully as the other boy bent to unfasten the ropes which bound him. “Thanks.”

Gravely they shook hands and wrung the water from their dripping garments.

“And you deliberately crashed the boat so the police would catch up with us,” Dan added. “Why, Jacques?”

The boy shrugged. "Only way," he answered briefly.

After freeing Dan, Jacques watched anxiously while police picked up his uncle, Frisk Fagan and Joe Matt. The three had saved themselves by clinging to the sinking motorboat.

Before the men could release the boxes of stolen furs, police had them covered. They were forced aboard the launch, and the smashed motorboat taken in tow. Fagan's forehead was cut and Jabowski nursed an injured arm. Otherwise the crash had left them unscathed.

"This was your fault!" Joe Matt accused Jacques savagely as a policeman snapped handcuffs on his wrists. "Yellow rat! I wish I'd let you go that time you sneaked away!"

During the ride back to the dock, police officers took detailed statements from both Dan and Jacques. The later spoke in broken English and had difficulty in telling his story.

However, he revealed that in recent weeks he had been held virtually a prisoner at Skeleton Island. Brought to America from France by his uncle, everything had gone well until Jabowski had fallen in with evil companions.

On the night that the Cubs had found him lying exhausted on the beach, the boy had been assigned to carry a message in code to Joe Matt.

"And what did that message say?" Dan asked. "I figured out only the first word before it was snatched from the Cave."

"Coming through 24," Jacques revealed. "Today the 24th."

"That meant the fur shipment?"

Jacques nodded, explaining that the message, relayed by tip-off men to his uncle, had been intended for Joe Matt. But instead of delivering it, the boy had made up his mind to run away.

"I leap from my uncle's boat and swim away in dark," he added. "Reach shore. Hard swim."

“You were plenty tired when we found you,” Dan recalled. “I understand now why you were unwilling to talk. You were deeply involved with your uncle and the gang.”

“Uncle good to me,” Jacques said simply. “Bring me to America.”

“I get the picture now,” Dan said. “Without meaning to, I let Joe Matt know you were staying at the Cave. He came there and made you return to your uncle, didn’t he?”

Jacques nodded, his eyes on the shore lights which now were close by.

“That explains those peculiar circular marks in the sand,” Dan went on piecing the story together. “They were made by Joe Matt’s cane! Oh, he was clever, pretending to be blind. All the while, he picked up information and relayed it to members of the ring. Hank considered him a friend!”

The launch reached the dock and the three prisoners were herded ashore. Hank Hawkins, having revived from the blow Joe Matt had struck, readily identified the boxes of furs as the ones stolen from his company.

“Another one of the gang got away!” he told police excitedly. “He pulled out in a taxi cab.”

“That would be Paper Bag Eddie,” Dan informed. “The driver of the cab was in on the deal too.”

“We’ll get ’em both,” the boy was assured. “If not tonight, within a day or two. Eddie is the key man of a ring of river pirates. The gang is composed of tip-off men, hijackers, a lawyer and a bail bondsman. Also a fence or two who sell the loot. But we’ll round ’em up in time.”

All three prisoners and Jacques as well, were taken to the police station to be booked on larceny charges. However, officers assured Jacques that he would not be held for trial, providing he would testify against Joe Matt and other members of the gang. This the boy agreed to do.

Dan’s narrow escape at the hands of the river pirates became the talk of Webster City during the next few days. Especially was his adventure the chief topic of conversation among the Cubs of both Dens 1 and 2.

“You’re a hero, Dan,” Brad told him proudly. “Why, you brought that gang to heel single-handed!”

“Don’t give me that line,” Dan laughed. “I was just an unwilling passenger. Jacques was the one who brought about the capture. To do it he had to turn his own uncle in and risk prison himself. That kid sure has what it takes.”

“He’s a Cub too,” Brad said proudly. “He joined in France. Mr. Hatfield’s trying to make arrangements to keep him here in Webster City.”

“Maybe he’ll join our Den!”

“Here’s hoping. He’ll be a live wire, that’s certain.”

As both boys knew, Jacques had been released on probation to Mr. Hatfield. Temporarily, the French lad was living in the Cub leader’s home where he would remain until called to testify in court.

Three days elapsed. At the end of that time the Cubs were elated to learn that Paper Bag Eddie had been captured in a neighboring city. Thereafter, one by one, other members of the ring were arrested and returned to Webster City to face charges.

“Now that the entire gang is in the jug, I feel a lot safer,” Dan remarked one night to Brad. The two boys had arrived early at the Cave prior to a Den meeting at which Jacques was to be taken in as a member. “For awhile, I couldn’t look a sack of popcorn in the face!”

One by one, the Cubs and their parents began to arrive for the meeting. Mr. Hatfield started it off with a little talk. First he told the boys how proud he was that Den 2 had won the swimming meet and the silver trophy which now graced a table in the Cave.

Next the Cub leader paid tribute to Dan for his coolness in the face of danger. Finally he spoke of the Cub ideals and the honor of the organization.

“A real Cub always is square,” he emphasized, smiling across the room at Jacques. “Crooked people are unfair, even to themselves. So the Cub follows the law of God and man. I commend Jacques for being true to the ideals he was taught as a Cub. The organization is proud to claim him as a member.”

“Three cheers for Jacques!” proposed Dan.

The Cubs gave them with a will. Mr. Hatfield was on the verge of proposing a song, when footsteps were heard on the steps leading up to the Cave.

Everyone turned to see Mr. Manheim standing in the doorway. The owner of Skeleton Island looked a little embarrassed.

“Hope I’m not intruding,” he said awkwardly.

“Certainly not, Mr. Manheim,” the Cub leader replied. “The Cubs always are pleased to have visitors.”

“Matter of fact, I came here on business,” the island owner said, entering the clubroom. “May I have permission to speak a few words?”

“The floor is yours,” the Cub leader told him.

Mr. Manheim faced the circle of Cubs. He cleared his throat and then began:

“Boys, I owe you an apology. I’ve meant to come here before, but the truth is, I’ve been ashamed. You all know what happened at Skeleton Island. My man Jabowski, in whom I placed great trust, deceived me.”

Suddenly made aware that Jacques was in the group, Mr. Manheim coughed in embarrassment and added quickly: “But that is not what I came here to say. I apologize to the Cubs for misjudging them. Events have proven conclusively that Dan Carter was right and that I was wrong.”

“Under the circumstance, your mistake was natural, Mr. Manheim,” the Cub leader said politely. “After all, the Cubs were a trifle hasty in their actions.”

The island owner waved aside the apology. “This is what I really came to say. I hope the Cubs will forget that I ever ordered them away from the island. I’m engaging a new caretaker, and the property is yours to use whenever you like.”

“That’s most generous of you, Mr. Manheim,” the Cub leader thanked him.

“Furthermore, I’m deeding the camp site to the Scouts without charge. It’s the least I can do to make amends.”

The island owner's generosity delighted the Cubs. Dan proposed a cheer for Mr. Manheim which was given with a will.

"One thing more," the island owner said. "I understand that Mr. Holloway's sailboat was struck either by my motorboat or one which closely resembled it. In either case, Jabowski was mixed up in the affair. I'll send my check to cover the damage."

"It really isn't necessary," Mr. Holloway protested.

"I want to do it," Mr. Manheim insisted. "Shall we say it eases my conscience? Well, good-bye boys. I'll see you at the new camp." With a friendly wave of his hand, he departed.

The Cub meeting now ended quietly with the singing of "The Star Spangled Banner." After the last note had died away, the boys clustered about Jacques to grasp his hand and welcome him to the organization.

"Very glad to be a Cub," the boy grinned. "Glad to be American too."

"Don't think we aren't tickled to have you!" Brad said warmly.

"Oh, we'll have wonderful times next summer at Skeleton Island," Dan added with an air of deep satisfaction. He linked arms with Jacques and Brad as the boys trooped out of the Cave. "Best of all, we've proved to Mr. Manheim that Cubs really know their stuff!"

Transcriber's Notes

- Silently corrected a few typos (but left nonstandard spelling and dialect as is).
- Rearranged front matter to a more-logical streaming order.

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