



THE
CROW
AND THE
CASTLE

by KEITH ROBERTSON



Illustrated by Robert Greiner



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I. MR. CLEMENS

It was a hot day in August. It was hot early in the morning and it got hotter as the day wore on. Probably Swede and I should have known better than to go fishing. Maybe on hot days fish stay down near the bottom of the stream,

where it's cooler, or maybe they're just too hot to bother with worms. On real hot days the fish simply won't bite. This day was no exception. By ten o'clock we knew we had made a mistake, and by eleven o'clock we had given up and had started back toward town. We caught a ride with a truck as far as the hill above Saucer Valley, but there the truck turned off. There was nothing else to do but start hiking or stand there in the sun.

The pavement was new and smooth, and the sun bounced off it right into our faces. Hector hopped along from fence-post to fencepost, keeping even with us for a while. But finally it got too hot for him and he let out a couple of raucous calls and flew on ahead to a maple tree about midway in the valley. The trouble was that Swede and I couldn't fly; we had to walk. Not a car came along, and by the time we finally reached the tree, both of us were soaking wet with perspiration, and we were tired and disgusted.

Hector let out a couple of squawks to tell me that he was someplace in the tree up above my head. Swede stretched out on his back and closed his eyes, and I sat down where I could look up and down the road and began pulling up blades of grass and chewing on the white ends of them. About half an hour went by, during which only four cars came along the highway. Either they were full, or the drivers were in no mood to give us a ride. By this time I had eaten half the grass within reaching distance and I was hungrier than when I had started.

“If this was a year or so from now, we'd be seventeen, we'd have drivers' licenses, and we wouldn't have to hitch a ride,” I remarked.

"We wouldn't if we also had cars," Swede remarked without opening his eyes. "Me, I'm in no hurry to get my driver's license."

"For Pete's sake, why not?" I asked. For the past three years I'd been looking forward to the day when I would get mine.

"We went to visit my cousin at Tarrytown last Sunday," Swede said. "His father is a builder, like mine, and he got his driver's license right before school ended. He told me a few things."

"Like what?" I asked.

Swede yawned. "Carpenters are like plumbers; they always forget a board, a nail, a hinge, or something. Somebody has to jump in the pickup truck and go get it. Since my cousin has learned how to drive, that means him. He spent the summer running errands in that pickup truck."

"I wouldn't mind driving around in a pickup truck," I said. "It beats walking, like we're doing now."

"My cousin said it was fun for the first couple of weeks, and then it got sort of tiresome."

"The trouble with you is you're lazy," I remarked.

"I don't think so," Swede said judiciously. "I'm not really lazy, but I'm not just crazy about work." He stretched his arms above his head. "You know, all my life I've heard people say that childhood is the most wonderful period in your life. They've convinced me. I'm going to have to go to work soon enough, driver's license or no driver's license. This will probably be my last summer for loafing, and I want to enjoy it."

Swede is a big blond boy about two inches taller than me. He's good-natured, and slow, and easygoing. I've heard

people talk about dumb Swedes, and whether most Swedes are dumb or not I don't know, but Swede certainly isn't. He's cautious, but he thinks things out, and he's usually right.

There was a fluttery noise over our heads and Hector flew out of the upper part of the tree and landed on a limb just above us.

"I think that crow of yours brings us bad luck when we go fishing," Swede said. "He scares the fish away."

"Why should the fish be scared of a crow?" I asked. "The woods are full of crows."

"Yeah, but the crows that you find in the woods say, 'Caw,'" Swede pointed out. "They don't laugh like a hyena."

Hector didn't laugh like a hyena, either, although I had taught him to say, "Ha" instead of, "Caw." Now and then when we were fishing he'd swoop down and try and pick up the bobber on our fish line, but I don't think he scared the fish away. Swede didn't really think so, either, because he was as fond of Hector as I was. In fact, he had spent hours with me trying to teach Hector to talk. I can't say that we had actually managed to do this, but he could make a few noises that sounded like "Hello," and he could say, "Phooey," pretty plain. Right now he looked down at Swede and said, "Phooey."

A second later I saw a small blue bug of a car coming down the hill. It was a convertible with the top down, and whoever was driving it seemed to be standing up.

"What do you suppose this is coming?" I asked.

Swede rolled over on one elbow and looked up the road. "That's an MG," he announced.

"I know it's an MG," I answered, "but what's that driving it?"

Swede looked again. "A giraffe," he said promptly.

He was about right. Whoever was driving the car looked like a giraffe in a baby buggy. However, he seemed to have the car under control, because it came buzzing down the highway at a fast clip. I got to my feet and moved over closer to the edge of the road.

"There's no use trying to thumb a ride with him," Swede said. "There's not enough room in an MG even for the driver."

I raised my arm anyhow, and, to my surprise, as the MG drew closer, it began to slow down. Finally it came to a stop right opposite the tree. A tall stringbean of a man was driving it. He had a long stringy neck, and a long horse face. There was a thin line of a mustache on his upper lip, and what little hair he had was sticking out like a brush all around the rim of his skull. He had a very good-natured face, and when he spoke, his voice was the deepest I've ever heard.

"You boys want a ride?" he asked.

I looked at the car doubtfully, and Swede got to his feet. "Do you think we can fit in?" he asked.

The man made a noise which was a cross between clearing his throat and a snort. It ended up by being as close to the word "Ha" as anything else, and it sounded exactly like Hector. "Ha," said the man. "I got in here, and if I can, you two should be able to—that is, if you don't mind being a little crowded."

"I don't mind anything if I don't have to walk in this hot sun," I answered.

Swede got in first. He's about five feet, nine inches tall, and there wasn't too much room for his legs. I put our two fish poles beside him and then somehow I managed to climb over these and Swede's legs and get in myself. I got the door closed, but Swede had pretty well disappeared from sight. He gave me a jab in the back and said something that sounded like, "Get your elbow out of my ear."

The man shifted gears and was about to go when I remembered Hector. "Wait just a minute, would you please?" I asked. "I forgot Hector."

"Hector?" he asked.

"He won't take up much room," I said. "Here, Hector!" Apparently Hector didn't like sports cars, because there wasn't a sound from him. I called again twice, and when nothing happened, I said, "Well, I guess we might as well go on without him. He can fly home."

The tall driver cocked his head to one side, looked down his long nose, sort of puzzled-like, and said, "What's he got, an airplane?"

"No, Hector's my pet crow," I replied. "He can find the way home."

"A pet crow! I'd like to see that."

Just then there was a ruffle of wings and Hector came down out of the tree. He landed on top of the windshield for an instant and then dropped into my lap. Hector likes to ride in a car, but this was the first time he had ever ridden in one with the top down, and I guess he was afraid for a minute.

"Pet crow," said the man in his deep voice. "Ha, most unusual. Can he talk?"

"A little," I replied. "He's just beginning to learn. After all, he's still less than six months old."

"Did you split his tongue?"

"No, I don't think people really do split the tongues of birds. At least, I've never known anyone who has," I replied.

"Odd," said the man, "I've always heard of splitting a bird's tongue. Where do you suppose the idea came from?"

"Crows' tongues look like they're naturally split," I said. "At least, a little ways on the end." I reached down and took hold of Hector's beak. "Would you like to see his tongue?" I asked.

"Never mind; I'll take your word for it," the man said with a grin. He let out on the clutch and we started down the road. That car may have been small, but it certainly had pickup. In nothing flat we were doing sixty miles an hour and the wind was whistling past our ears in a gale. Hector was facing backward, and it caught his tail feathers and practically tore them out. It also caught the ruff of feathers around his neck and blew them out like a big collar. I put my hands around him and turned him to face forward. Then he seemed to enjoy the ride.

We had gone about a mile when the driver shouted above the noise of the wind, "Are you boys from Belleville?"

I nodded my head, meaning that we were.

"Do you know anybody by the name of Wudge?" he asked. "Captain Wudge."

I shook my head. "Nope, never heard of him."

"He's a chess expert!" shouted the driver.

"A doctor?" I asked.

"No, 'chess,' not 'chest'!" he bellowed back.

"I don't think he lives in Belleville," I said. "I know almost everyone in town."

"That's funny, I'm sure Belleville is his address," the driver remarked.

Swede poked me in the back, and I leaned forward so that he could speak. "Maybe he lives on a rural route," Swede suggested. "There are several out of Belleville."

"That could be," the driver agreed. He looked ahead and saw a service station. "Would you boys care for a Coke?"

"Sure," I answered, replying for both Swede and myself.

The man pulled into Tash's service station, stopping by the gas pumps. First Hector left my lap and flew to the top of the service-station roof, where he started cawing like mad. Next I managed to climb out, kicking Swede twice and jabbing him in the ribs once in the process. I removed the fish poles, and Swede was able to get out. Then both Swede and I turned to watch the driver get out.

The way that man got out of the car was sort of a minor miracle. He seemed to unfold like one of those six-foot rulers that carpenters use. I don't know exactly how he did it, but yards and yards of him got out of that tiny car. He didn't bump anything and he seemed to do it without a great deal of trouble. When he finished, he stood up beside the car, and he was even taller than we thought. He must have been at least six foot five. Then he stretched his hands above his head—to loosen up his muscles, I guessed—and he seemed to stretch upward indefinitely. That little bug of a car looked as if it were parked beside a radio tower.

Andy Tash, who runs the station, was watching the unloading of the car with goggle-eyes. When the tall driver

did his stretch act, Andy blinked and said, "Is that a circus car, or is there some trick?"

"No," the driver replied, "it's just an ordinary car and it takes gasoline. Fill it up with High Test."

He walked over to the Coke machine, inserted three coins, and removed three bottles. He opened them and handed one to Swede and one to me. The tall man raised his Coke bottle to his lips and in what seemed one gulp drank half of it. Then he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and said, "Ha," and asked, "Who do you suppose would know this man Wudge?"

"Hey, Andy," I called, "did you ever hear of anybody named Wudge? Captain Wudge? He's supposed to live in Belleville."

"Nope," Andy replied from the gas pump. "Why don't you look in the telephone directory?"

"Excellent suggestion," said the tall man.

I went inside the station and found the telephone directory. I turned to the section labeled Belleville, and, sure enough, toward the end of the Ws was Wudge, H. L., Captain, U.S.N.

"Hey, he's a captain in the Navy," I said. "What do you suppose he's doing in Belleville?"

"I imagine he's retired," our driver replied. He looked over my shoulder and read the address. "Pumpkin Hollow Road. What sort of name is that?"

"We have all kinds of odd names for our roads around here," I replied. "There's Aunt Molly Road, Featherbed Lane, Hardscrabble Road, and dozens of them like that."

"This would be more appropriate if it were Pumpkin

Head Road," he observed with a slight smile. "Just where would Captain Wudge be in relation to town?"

"Go on through town on this same highway," Swede replied. "About three or four miles on the other side there will be a small road leading off to the right—that's Pumpkin Hollow Road. It's only about a mile and a half long, and he has to live somewhere along that."

The man finished his Coke and set the empty bottle on the cement beside the vending machine. "Have you boys lived long in Belleville?" he asked.

"All our lives," I answered.

"I don't suppose there's such a thing as a detective agency in a town as small as Belleville," he said.

"There certainly is," I replied promptly. "The Carson Street Detective Agency."

"Well now, that's surprising," he said. "What sort of an outfit is it?"

"One of the best," I said. "It has an exceptionally fine record."

He looked at me suspiciously. "Do you know who runs it?" he asked.

"Yep," I replied. "Swede and I do. My name is Neil Lambert and this is Swede Larson. We're partners in the Carson Street Detective Agency."

He started to smile and then stopped halfway. "I see," he said in his deep voice. "I'm very happy to meet you." He put out his hand and we shook it in turn.

I could tell what he was thinking. He thought that we were a couple of kids who played at being detectives. One of the troubles with adults is that they think there are just certain things that young people can do. They'll admit

that a teenager can work in a grocery store; he can work on a farm and run complicated machinery such as tractors and combines; he can build radio sets and do all sorts of things with electricity; but he can't run a detective agency. As far as I'm concerned, being a good detective is simple compared to algebra in high school.

"Swede and I have a good agency," I said a little belligerently. "We've found a number of things that have been lost and stolen in Belleville, and we've solved two criminal cases. Just what sort of work did you have in mind?"

"Well, I'm not certain that I have anything in mind," the man answered; but I could tell that he did. "Perhaps what I need is a photographer."

"Swede's a very good photographer," I urged. "He can do anything except portrait work."

"You two can do 'most anything," the tall man said with a smile.

"Well, we're willing to try 'most anything," I said. "That's half of it."

"You're entirely right," he agreed, "and don't you let doubters like myself talk you out of anything you want to try. Well, shall we be going?"

We managed to get back into the car, although this time it was a tighter squeeze than before. Maybe it was because of those three bottles of Coke that we drank. However, we didn't have far to ride, and about five minutes later we pulled into Belleville. Our driver let us out about the middle of town. As Swede was thanking him and saying good-by, I wrote my name, address, and telephone number on a slip of paper and handed it to him.

"If you need a detective agency, just give me a call," I

said. He took the slip of paper but said nothing. Then he shifted gears and zipped on down the street on his way out of town.

No one was home when I got there, so I raided the icebox, made myself a sandwich, and drank a glass of milk. Then I got out the power mower. I had started mowing the lawn the night before and I had promised my mother before going fishing earlier in the day that I would finish it. Hot as it was, I spent the next two hours walking back and forth. The lawn looked nice when I was done, but I was wringing wet. I had stretched out in the hammock in the back yard to rest a while, when my mother and my sister, Eileen, drove in. They had been shopping somewhere, and they were hot and tired too. Mother made a pitcher of lemonade, and we were all sitting in the shade of the big maple tree, enjoying it, when there was a distant rumble of thunder.

"I expect we're due for a thunder shower," Mother observed. "We usually are when it's so hot and sultry this way." She looked over her shoulder at the clothesline, which was filled with freshly washed clothes.

"I imagine most of those are dry," she said. "Go look, would you please, Eileen?"

Eileen got up and walked over to feel the clothes. She removed the clothespins from several dishtowels and walked back with the towels in her hands.

"The thin things like the dishtowels are dry," she announced. "But the Turkish towels are sort of damp."

"I guess we might as well take them all in," Mother decided. "If we leave them out here they will probably get soaked."

As Eileen came toward us, Hector flew down from somewhere in the maple tree above our heads and landed on the clothesline in the spot that had been occupied by the two towels that Eileen held in her hand. He cocked his head curiously at the clothes, took three short hops along the line, grabbed the nearest clothespin in his beak, and gave a yank. It came off suddenly, and Hector nearly went head over heels off the clothesline. He flapped his wings and managed to regain his balance. Then he hopped a foot or so farther on and tried the next clothespin. It came off too. Again he almost fell. He dropped the second clothespin to the ground and went on to the third. By this time he had the knack of it. He was able to pull that pin off without even teetering on his perch. Deciding that this was a wonderful new game, he started hopping along the clothesline and removing one clothespin after another. Soon he had gone about twenty feet and clothes were fluttering down all over the grass in every direction. Mother and Eileen had their backs turned, but I could see everything, and I was laughing like a fool.

"What are you laughing at?" Eileen asked suspiciously. Before I could reply, Mother turned and saw what Hector was doing.

I've heard Dad say that women are hard to understand, and where their sense of humor is concerned, I agree with him. Sometimes I don't think they have *any* sense of humor. Now to me, that was funny, Hector hopping along the clothesline, pulling all those clothespins off. But Mother didn't seem to see the joke at all. She glared at Hector, and then she glared at me. The trouble was, I was laughing so hard I didn't watch closely to see what she was doing. There

was a badminton racket leaning against the tree and she grabbed that. She gave the hammock a big push, and when it swung back, she let go with the badminton racket and swatted me right through that canvas hammock. It stung.

"Funny, eh? When I spent the entire morning washing clothes? You get up out of there and go pick those up."

In spite of the swat with the badminton racket, I was still laughing when I went over to pick up the clothes. I shooed Hector away and then investigated the damage. There wasn't much, because the clothes were mostly dry. There were a few blades of grass on some, which I was able to shake off. I folded the things and put them in the clothes basket. Mother and Eileen were removing those left on the line, and in about two minutes all the clothes were down. The storm didn't seem any closer, so we sat down again under the tree to finish our lemonade. Hector's part in the affair would have been forgotten if it hadn't been for Eileen.

I guess as kid sisters go, Eileen is pretty nice. But there are times when she can be a pest, and this was one of them. Once in a while when she gets something to pick on, she won't let it die. At the moment she felt like picking on Hector.

"That crow is a menace," she announced. "Yesterday I was sitting here, and I took off my barrette to comb my hair. I put it here on the table for about half a minute, and when I looked up, Hector had it in his beak. If I hadn't swatted him, he'd have flown off with it."

"He was examining it," I said casually.

"Examining, nothing!" said Eileen. "He was going to steal it, and if he steals that silver barrette I'm going to borrow your shotgun and shoot him."

"That will be the day"—I snorted—"when you can hit Hector! That crow is smart. In fact, I would say he is considerably smarter than you. Not that that is much of a compliment to Hector."

"Children, children," said Mother, "it's too hot to quarrel."

"I'm not a child," Eileen objected, trying to act dignified. She's fourteen.

"You are when you act the way you're doing now," Mother replied. "While we're on the subject of Hector, Neil, I have a little bone to pick with you. Mrs. Neven said that she was setting up the table for an outdoor tea at her house yesterday. She was entertaining the garden club, and when she looked out she saw a crow on the table. Later, when she went outside, one of her little silver demitasse spoons was gone. Now, if that crow is starting to steal valuable silverware, something has to be done about him."

"She doesn't *know* that Hector stole the spoon," I protested.

"No, but there's such a thing as circumstantial evidence," Mother replied. "She may not know positively that the crow took the spoon, but you and I are pretty certain of it, aren't we?"

"Well, he could have," I admitted.

"And would have," Mother said. "I don't know why you always pick out such troublesome pets. First there was that raccoon, which Mr. Whipple claimed ate four or five of his chickens; then Mildred, the pig, which had the entire neighborhood up in arms and half the police force camped on our doorstep, explaining that you were violating an ordinance. And now there's this crow."

I was trying to think of something to say in defense of Hector when the Capital Oil truck drove in. It parked in the driveway, and Herb Westmore, the driver, got out. He unreeled a long black hose across the lawn, took the cap off the pipe leading to our oil tank, and inserted the nozzle.

"I must say that this is the height of something or other," Mother said. "It's downright ridiculous. On the hottest day of the year, you come in and start pouring oil into our tank."

Herb Westmore is a serious sort of guy and doesn't know when anyone is kidding him. "After all, you do heat your hot water with oil, Mrs. Lambert," he explained. "Also, it's probably half a cent cheaper now than it will be next month."

"Say, Herb, do you know anyone by the name of Wudge?" I asked. I wanted to keep the conversation off Hector, if possible.

"Wudge?"

"He's a retired captain in the Navy, I think."

"Oh, the captain," Herb said. "Sure I know him. I deliver oil to his place."

"What's he like?" I asked.

"He's got a terrible temper," Herb said promptly. "One day when I was out there, filling his oil tank, something went wrong with the radio upstairs. I guess he'd had it fixed two or three times within a month or so. Anyhow, he got so mad that he picked it up and threw it out of the second-story window. It smashed to pieces on the cement driveway. What I mean, I wouldn't want to cross that man."

"What does he look like?" I asked.

"Hmm, about medium height," Herb replied. "A little stocky, snow-white hair, and a beet-red face. Maybe he doesn't have a beet-red face all the time, only just when he's mad."

"And how often is that?" I asked.

"When he isn't asleep," Herb replied. "The fellow who lives down the road says that the captain really has an even temper, since he's always the same—boiling mad."

I actually wasn't too interested in Wudge, but I was curious as to why the tall man in the MG had wanted to know about him. Herb, however, wanted to keep on talking.

"Funny thing," he said. "I was over in that direction yesterday, making deliveries, and two men in a Pontiac with a New York license plate stopped and asked me about Wudge. They were a couple of tough-looking characters. Wanted to know who else lived there and all about him."

I sat up in the hammock. If still other people wanted to know about Wudge, there must be something interesting about the man.

"Who does live with him?" I asked.

"No one, as far as I know," Herb answered. "I've never seen anyone. Someone said that Mrs. Wudge was dead but that he has some married children somewhere."

Mother got up and started toward the house. She had just reached the back porch when the telephone rang. She went on inside, and a minute later she came to the door and called me. "It's for you, Neil," she announced. "There's some man who wants to speak to the Carson Street Detective Agency."

I went inside and picked up the telephone. "Carson Street Detective Agency," I said. "Neil Lambert speaking."

I half expected to hear some friend who was playing a joke. Instead a deep voice said, "How do you do. Is this the young man with the pet crow who rode with me for a while this afternoon?"

"That's right," I replied. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Well, I think perhaps I would like to retain the services of your agency," the deep voice said solemnly. "At least, I'd like to talk to you about it. When would it be convenient?"

"Any time that's convenient with you," I said.

"Suppose we make it shortly after dinner—say, seven-thirty. Would that be all right?"

"It certainly would," I told him. "I'll get in touch with Swede and have him here so we can have a conference."

"Perhaps that would be advisable," the deep voice said. "You said that he was a photographer, didn't you?"

"A good one," I replied confidently.

"Seven-thirty, then," the voice said. "Tell me, how do I find you?"

"Carson Street is the second street north of Main Street," I instructed him. "I live at Number Two-oh-two. It's a big old-fashioned white house with a lot of tall maple trees around it. In one corner of the lot, almost back at the hedge, is a big red frame barn. There's a garage downstairs, and up above the garage are our offices. You'll see a sign beside the door."

"I think I can find it," the voice said. "I will see you later then, Mr. Lambert."

"What is your name, sir?" I asked.

"My name?" the voice asked, sounding slightly surprised.

"Yes," I replied. "I want to make a note of it on our appointment calendar."

"I see. Just put down Clemens, S. Clemens."

I called Swede right away, and he said he would be over at seven. He was just as excited and tickled as I was. Then I walked out to the kitchen. It had begun to rain, and the air had cooled slightly. Mother had started to get dinner.

"Who was that who called, Neil?" she asked.

"A Mr. Clemens."

"What did he want?"

I stuck out my chest a little bit. "He wanted to engage the Carson Street Detective Agency for a little job."

"What sort of job?" Mother asked.

"It isn't ethical to divulge a client's secrets," I said, very dignified.

"What does he want to see you about?" she repeated. I could tell from her tone that she meant business.

"I don't really know. He just wanted to see me and Swede at seven-thirty."

"About this Captain Wudge that you were asking Herb about?"

"How'd you guess that?" I asked.

"It wasn't difficult," my mother said dryly. "Your Mr. Clemens said he wanted to see you about Captain Wudge."

"That's more than he told me."

"I don't like the sound of this Captain Wudge," Mother said firmly. "And I don't like the thought of a stranger coming here and making an appointment with you as

though you were an honest-to-goodness detective agency. There's something wrong with the picture."

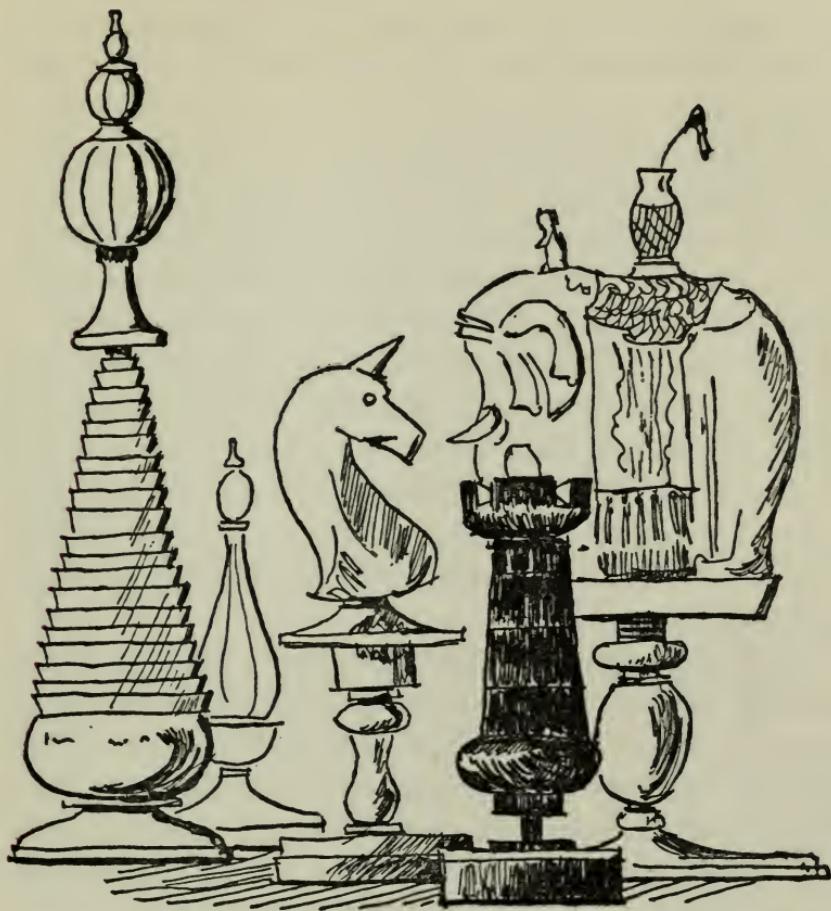
"What do you mean, we aren't an honest-to-goodness detective agency?" I asked indignantly. "Haven't we solved two crimes?"

"I know you helped solve several cases," Mother said patiently. "But I still say you're not a regular detective agency. You are still going to school. Being a detective is a full-time occupation. There's something wrong when a responsible adult comes and engages your services. This has been a quiet summer. You and Swede haven't been locked up any place, you haven't been threatened by anybody, and, as far as I know, you haven't been in danger of imminent death for months. I want to keep on just the same way."

"How do I know this is anything dangerous?" I protested. "It's got something to do with taking a picture."

"There are pictures and pictures," Mother said. "All I know is that I want you to keep out of danger and trouble. And I want to know what is going on. I don't care whether that violates the ethics of the detective-agency business or not. That's final!"

The way she said it, I knew it *was* final. I didn't argue.



2. THE HOUSEBREAKERS

It rained off and on the rest of the afternoon and evening. Swede managed to slip over a few minutes after seven, during one of the lulls, but when seven-thirty arrived, it was really pouring. We were waiting upstairs in our office, not really expecting Mr. Clemens until the rain let up a little.

Our office may not look like Park Avenue, but it's pretty

comfortable. We have a big desk, over at one end. It's sort of beat-up, but the drawers all work, and it's just the right height to put your feet up on. We have two swivel chairs, a two-drawer file cabinet, and a row of shelves or cubby-holes made of orange crates, stacked along one wall. We use the same offices as the headquarters of the Carson Street Outdoor Club, of which Swede and I are the only members. I suppose things are a little mixed up. We have some extra fishing lures in the same box with our fingerprint set, and one drawer of our file cabinet is filled with a collection of sea shells. But we know where everything is. Most of the walls are covered with pictures that we've cut out of magazines. It's sort of a mixture of pictures of giant tarpon, baseball players, cowboys and horses, gorillas, space ships, and football players.

The variety makes things interesting, I think. There is one big bulletin board which we have reserved for clippings about the cases we've solved. The newspaper clippings covering our two big cases are sort of old and dusty, and there's a lot of vacant space on the bulletin board. I certainly was hoping that this Mr. Clemens would have something exciting for us to do, in spite of what Mother said.

We heard a noise on the gravel of the driveway, and Swede hurried to the window. "Taxi," he said. "I wonder why he didn't come in his own car." I went to the window too. Gabby Murphy, the taxi driver, knows our place well, and he had driven practically up to the door of the garage. Even so, Mr. Clemens got wet going the few feet from the car to the garage.

When we heard his footsteps on the stairs, Swede and I rushed back to our chairs and tried to look busy. I picked

up a pad of paper on the desk and made doodles on it, while Swede examined a little notebook that he pulled from his pocket.

Mr. Clemens had to duck his head to get through the door, but inside, the office is open right up to the peak of the roof, so he had plenty of room. His light gray suit was spotted with rain, but he didn't seem to mind.

"Good evening," he said in his deep voice. "If it rains much harder, I'll have to take a boat back to the motel." He glanced around the office, and he didn't look amused, the way so many people do. He nodded his head very soberly and said, "Nice office. Both pleasant and functional."

"What?" Swede asked, getting up to get Mr. Clemens a chair.

"Functional," Mr. Clemens said, knowing that that was the word Swede had missed. "I mean that things are arranged so that they will be handy."

He sat down in the chair facing us across the desk and said, "First I want to make an apology to you two. I've made a few inquiries around town. When you said this afternoon that you ran a detective agency, I didn't take you seriously. I thought that it was just wishful thinking. But I understand that you're rather remarkable lads, that you actually have solved two cases, and that you know what you are doing. In fact, I've heard nothing but praise about you, and I think that you are probably just the men I want for the job I have in mind."

I could see right away that Mr. Clemens was a very intelligent man, and that we were going to like him. "Well, we have had a little success," I said modestly. "There are a few

clippings concerning some of our work over there on the bulletin board." He glanced at the bulletin board but didn't get up.

"What was it you had in mind, Mr. Clemens?" I asked, hoping that it would be something exciting but not so dangerous that my parents would veto the whole idea. The trouble is that my mother and Mrs. Larson have a sort of union in restraint of trade. When one of them turns her thumbs down on something, the other one always agrees.

"First I'll explain briefly what I want," said Mr. Clemens, "and then I'll tell you about the difficulties." He settled back in his chair and put the tips of his long fingers together. "This Captain Wudge that I spoke of this afternoon is a chess collector. He collects chess pieces, or has collected chess pieces, from all over the world. I think he's considered one of the foremost authorities in the history of chess and chess pieces in this country." Mr. Clemens paused and cleared his throat. "At least, he considers himself the foremost authority, but on that subject there is some difference of opinion. Now, during the period of thirty or forty years' travel in the naval service, Captain Wudge has collected a number of interesting and unusual chess sets. Without a doubt, he has one of the fine collections in this country. Among his various sets is one that he calls the Ascension Island set."

"What?" Swede asked.

"Ascension Island," Mr. Clemens replied. "A-s-c-e-n-s-i-o-n Island. That's a small island in the South Atlantic, about seven hundred miles northwest of Saint Helena. Saint Helena, as you may recall, is the island where Napoleon was exiled. The reason for this chess set's having this name is

that it was found on Ascension Island. It's a rather unusual ivory set, and there is some mystery connected with its background, although not quite the mystery that Captain Wudge would have us believe. Now the project I have in mind for you two is to photograph both kings and both queens of this set. I want good, close-up photographs."

He folded his hands in his lap and looked expectantly at Swede and me.

Swede wrinkled up his nose, closed one eye, and ran his hands through his blond hair. That is, he ran his hands through what hair he had. Since he has a crew cut, his head looks like a wheat field that has been clipped close.

"Why couldn't you go out to Captain Wudge's, go up to the front door, tell him who you are, and ask permission to photograph the chess pieces?" Swede asked.

Mr. Clemens nodded his head soberly. "That certainly is the direct approach, I must admit," he agreed. "But we have these difficulties that I mentioned earlier. Now we'll take up those. First, this Captain Wudge is a very irascible man."

"What kind of a man?" Swede asked.

"He blows his top at almost anything," I said to Swede. I hadn't known what "irascible" meant either, but after talking to Herb that afternoon, and learning what a terrible temper this Wudge had, I figured out the meaning.

"Exactly," Mr. Clemens said. "Your partner has defined the word a trifle differently from the way I would have, but as he says, this Captain Wudge is likely to blow his top."

"But about what?" Swede asked. "What are you going to do with these photographs that would make him blow his top?"

By this time, both Swede and I had relaxed and put our feet up on the desk. Mr. Clemens looked from one pair of feet to the other and then asked, "Do you mind if I put mine up too?"

"Not at all," I replied. "We like our clients to be comfortable."

Mr. Clemens put his feet up on the desk and leaned back in his chair. "I frequently write articles on chess and chess pieces," he explained. "I'm considered by some to be something of an authority on the subject myself." He grinned. "Unfortunately even two so-called authorities on a subject do not necessarily have the same opinions. Captain Wudge and I are not always in complete unanimity." Mr. Clemens paused and looked expectantly at Swede.

"Got it," Swede said. "You don't always agree."

"Correct. Now, there's nothing wrong with a certain amount of disagreement, but unfortunately Captain Wudge doesn't take any difference of opinion kindly—especially when that difference of opinion is with him. He is what you might call intolerant of any opinions about chess which don't match his own."

"I would like to do an article about some of Captain Wudge's chess sets," Mr. Clemens continued after a pause. "It will in no way be uncomplimentary to him or to any part of his collection. However, it may not agree with some of his ideas about the origin or background of his chess pieces. For that reason I'm quite certain that he would refuse me permission to photograph this particular set if I were to ask. However, I'm equally certain that when my article does appear, he will be quite pleased by it." Mr. Clemens paused and scratched his chin. "That is, he will be

pleased after he gets used to the idea that someone else might know even more about his collection than he does himself. To illustrate my article I need the photographs that I mentioned."

I drew a big, happy sigh. I didn't see anything wrong or particularly dangerous with trying to photograph a chess set. Mr. Clemens certainly looked honest enough; and besides, what can you do that's dishonest with a photograph of a couple of chess pieces?

"Well, that sounds like a perfectly reasonable assignment," I said judiciously. I took my feet off the desk and tried to look businesslike. "Swede is a good photographer, as I said this afternoon. I can see one difficulty, though. How are we to identify this particular chess set if he has so many?"

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Swede had closed one eye and was running his hand through his hair again. He was looking at me as though I were crazy. I had a good idea why he thought so.

Mr. Clemens reached in the inside pocket of his coat and pulled out a small envelope. "The matter of identifying the chess set should not be difficult," he said calmly. "You will find it an almost exact duplicate of the pieces shown here."

He handed me the envelope, which I opened. I pulled out a color photograph about four inches wide and six inches long. Swede leaned over to look at it with me. It was beautiful. It showed an inlaid wooden chessboard with dark brown and light brown squares and a finely decorated border. On the board were a number of chess pieces. As I learned later, when I knew more about chess, the complete chess set was not shown. There were nine white pieces and eight green ones. Naturally Swede and I didn't know one

piece from another. But all of them were beautiful. Whoever had carved the set must have been an expert, and he must have spent years doing it. Most of the pieces were several inches tall, and all of them had matching bases with little delicate scallops and flutes. There were all sorts of tops on the different pieces, but the only ones that meant much to me were those which were horses' heads.

"These ivory?" Swede asked.

Mr. Clemens nodded. "Solid ivory."

"Green ivory?" Swede asked.

"That is stained," Mr. Clemens replied. "I imagine both sets were carved from the same ivory and the one was stained green. In chess you must be able to tell the two sets apart, just as in checkers. This can be done by coloring the two sets differently or by carving them differently."

"Can we keep this?" I asked.

"You can," Mr. Clemens replied, "but don't show it to Captain Wudge. This is a photograph of a set that I believe to be very similar to his. If he saw it, it might give him a clue as to the origin of the Ascension Island set."

"Which are the king and queen?" Swede asked.

Mr. Clemens pointed out the four largest pieces. "Naturally I would like a photograph of all of them," Mr. Clemens said, "if you can get one. But I want those four in particular. Now, I don't think that you will find half of his set colored green. Perhaps it once was, but the color may have been removed or have worn away."

I returned the photograph to the envelope and put it in the desk drawer. Swede looked at me and started scratching his head once again. "That's one difficulty taken care of," he

said, "but it isn't the one I'm thinking of. How are we going to get in this man Wudge's house to take the photograph?"

That had been bothering me too, but I didn't want to admit it out loud, the way Swede did. After all, detectives have to appear resourceful; they can't admit they are puzzled, like other people.

"That is the problem that we have to solve," I said with dignity.

"Exactly," said Mr. Clemens, getting to his feet. "Now, I'm on my way to visit my daughter in New England, but I should be back in about ten days. Suppose I get in touch with you then. Perhaps you'll have figured out a solution to the problem." He reached in his hip pocket and pulled out his billfold. "I presume you would like a retainer fee."

The only time that Swede and I had ever had a retainer fee was once when a girl gave us two dollars to find her brother's bicycle which had disappeared. That time my mother made us give the two dollars back. However, in the detective stories, the detective usually gets a retainer fee.

"It's customary," I said.

Mr. Clemens seemed to think that was funny, for some reason. He pulled out a twenty-dollar bill and laid it on the table, and I stared at it, bug-eyed. "Will that be enough?" he asked.

"Probably too much," Swede said bluntly. "If we can't figure out any way to earn it, it will be an awful lot to pay back."

"I'll take that risk," said Mr. Clemens. "If you do get a chance to take photographs you will be put to some expense for film and prints." He looked outside and saw that

it had stopped raining. "I think I'll be on my way while I have a chance. Good night, gentlemen. I trust that we will find our association mutually profitable."

He ducked his head and we heard him clomping down the stairs. I was still staring at that beautiful twenty-dollar bill, but Swede hurried to the window.

"I figured it out," he announced a minute later.

"Figured out what?" I asked.

"I figured out why Mr. Clemens came in a taxi instead of using his own car. It was raining and he can't get in that little car with the top up."

"Start figuring out some way we can get that photograph," I said disgustedly.

"That's your problem," said Swede. "You're the one who was so anxious to solve it."

Neither of us was able to think of an idea that night, or the next morning, either. However, the weather was beautiful the following day. It had rained most of the night and had become much cooler. About ten o'clock Swede and I decided to ride out toward Captain Wudge's place on our bicycles. Mother had asked me the night before what Mr. Clemens had wanted and when I explained that he simply wanted us to take photographs of some chess pieces she looked suspicious but didn't say anything.

We had no trouble finding Captain Wudge's lane. There was a mailbox with his name on it at the road. We couldn't see much of the house; it was set well back behind a grove of pine trees. We stood at the entrance for some time, trying to figure out a reasonable explanation for going in to call on him. Finally Swede suggested that we ask him for permission to hunt rabbits in the fall. We could explain

that we wanted to get the landowner's permission well in advance so that we knew where we could go. Once we got to talking to Captain Wudge maybe we could figure out some way of getting inside to see his chess pieces.

We got back on our bicycles and went pedaling up the lane. Just as the house came into view Hector swooped out of the pine trees and landed on the fence with a couple of loud caws. He had been with us for the first three miles out of town, but then he had disappeared. Crows have a tricky way of disappearing, even in open country, where there's no place for them to hide. Sometimes I think they dig holes in the ground.

"I hope this Captain Wudge doesn't hate crows," Swede said. "If he does, with that temper of his that you were talking about, he's liable to take a pot shot. People shoot at crows and ask about them afterward."

The house was a large white clapboard farmhouse, of a style that is fairly common in New Jersey. It had a low-pitched roof with a fireplace and chimney at one end and a lower one-story addition at the other. There was no front porch—only a little stoop. It was the kind of house that my mother calls "New Jersey colonial." She says they were built about one hundred and fifty years ago.

Not far away was a two-car garage. It had overhead doors, one of which was open, but there was no car in sight. We parked our bicycles near one corner of the garage, well out of the way. As we did so, I saw that the other side of the garage held no car either. Instead it was filled with all sorts of tools. There was a workbench at the back, two power mowers, an aluminum ladder, and a number of garden tools.

The lawn had been mowed recently, and the whole place was well kept and neat. On beyond the garage was a big barn, an old corn crib, and a small building that was probably a machinery shed. From the looks of them, I would say that Mr. Wudge did no actual farming and that none of them was used.

We walked up onto the stoop and pressed the bell. Since there had been no car in the garage we didn't expect anyone to answer. However, we rang several times and waited. While we were waiting, Hector flew down and landed on a plant box that lined one edge of the small brick stoop. He hopped around busily and stuck his head in under the leaves of the plants. Then he flew up to the little low iron railing beside the plant box.

"Hey, look," Swede said. "Hasn't he got a key?"

Sure enough, Hector had a key. It must have been hidden in the plant box. Swede and I knew right away what it was. Some people hide their front-door keys under their door-mats, some in the mailbox, and Captain Wudge apparently hid his underneath the plants in that plant box.

"Gimme that key, Hector," Swede said, reaching out toward the crow.

That was the wrong thing to do, and Hector got stubborn. He flew from the railing to one of the lower branches of a nearby tree. When he has something in his beak and he gets mad enough, he'll drop it and start cawing. If he holds it long enough to fly away a few feet, you haven't got a chance.

"Come on back, Hector," I wheedled, walking toward the tree slowly and carefully. I looked around, hoping I'd see something that I could offer him to eat. There was noth-

ing, so I reached in my pocket and crumpled up a little piece of paper and held that out in my hand. "Come on, Hector—food. Come on, Hector, have your dinner," I urged. But I wasn't fooling Hector one bit. He knew perfectly well that I had nothing but paper in my hand. And he preferred the taste of that key to paper. He stared at Swede and then at me, cocking his head to one side.

"I'm going to toss this stick at him," Swede said. "Maybe I can scare him into dropping it."

"Don't hit him."

"I won't, but I don't really know why not," Swede said.

He threw the stick, but Hector saw it coming. Swede was accurate, but Hector wasn't there any more. He flapped his wings, circled lazily three times above our heads, and then flew up to the peak of the roof. We had to back way out into the yard to see him.

"Come on back down, Hector," I pleaded, using as sweet a voice as I could.

Hector just sat there on the peak of the roof, staring at us. I talked for almost five minutes, but he wouldn't move. Finally I got my bicycle and started to ride down the lane, calling to him as I went. Swede stayed behind to see what he did with the key.

"Come on, Hector!" I shouted as I got farther and farther away.

Finally Hector decided that I really was leaving and he flew away from his perch on top of the house. I was too far away to see what happened, but I heard Swede let out a bellow of rage. "He dropped the key on the roof!" he shouted.

I turned around and went back. Hector, when he saw

that I wasn't leaving after all, disappeared someplace in the pine trees, and for once I was glad to see him go.

"This is a fine mess," Swede said when I got back. "Captain Wudge will come back and reach in the flower box for his key and there it will be up on top of his roof."

"Maybe he has another one," I said hopefully.

"If he hasn't," Swede said, "we are really off to a fine start. This *would* happen with someone we want to make friends with."

Of course we could have jumped on our bikes and hurried out of there and kept quiet about the key. However, that wouldn't have been a very honest thing to do. I felt responsible, since it was my crow.

"I know what," I said suddenly. "There's an extension ladder there in the garage. We'll put that up, and I'll go get the key."

"I guess that's the only thing we can do," Swede agreed. "I hope Captain Wudge doesn't come back while you're up crawling around on his roof. He might not like it."

I didn't think I'd like it, either, especially after what I'd heard about Wudge's temper. I suggested that we hide our bicycles around back of the garage and that we put the ladder up on the far side of the house. That way anyone driving in wouldn't see us unless he walked around the house.

We got the ladder and carried it to the back of the house. It was one of those new magnesium or aluminum affairs and was like a feather compared to wooden extension ladders. We put it up carefully where there were no windows, so it couldn't be seen from inside, and extended it to

its full length. It just reached the eaves. Swede held the bottom of the ladder and I climbed up as fast as I could. The house had a tin roof with a very gentle slope, so I had no difficulty walking up to the peak. As I reached the top, I heard the sound of tires on gravel and realized that exactly what we had been afraid of was happening. A car was part way down the lane. Hector had dropped the key near the front edge of the roof, and I was afraid to go get it because I would be in full view of the car the minute it came out of the pine trees.

It was a good thing I didn't. I had just time enough to warn Swede and turn around when the car came into view. I lay flat on my stomach on the tin roof, with my head just high enough so that I could see over the peak and down into the yard. The car swung into the graveled area in front of the garage and then turned around until it was headed back the way it had come. It was a gray Pontiac sedan, and there were two men in it. They both got out at the same time, on opposite sides, and walked around to the front of the car, where they stood looking at the house. One was a short, stubby man with a round face and a mashed-down hat that was perched on top of his head. He was chewing on the end of a cigar. The other man was several inches taller and much thinner. He was a stringy sort of man with a very sour, twisted face. Neither of them looked like candidates I'd pick for mayor.

"Well, Al, there she is," the short man said. He chewed on his cigar and then spat on the grass.

Al gave a short grunt and started walking toward the front door. The two disappeared from sight as they got

close to the house. A minute later I heard the doorbell ring inside. After a short pause, the screen door swung open and then slammed shut with a bang.

"Locked," Al's voice said sourly. "Just our luck. Lots of people out in the country leave their places open."

"What are they doing, inviting people to rob them?" the other man asked.

"Most of these hicks don't have anything worth stealing," Al said sourly.

As they talked they walked toward the corner of the house. I lay very still, hoping that if they went around back Swede would be out of sight. It was plain that neither of them was Captain Wudge, and they didn't sound like friends. However, you can never be sure about anything, and I decided to lay low. I lost track of them for several minutes, and the next thing I knew they were back in front of the house. I guess they had walked completely around it.

"Well, there's a second-floor window with no screen on it," Al said thoughtfully. "I doubt if it's locked. Lots of old houses don't have locks on second-floor windows. Go get the ladder."

When I heard that, my heart sank. It didn't take much imagination to figure out that they were going to break into the house. I certainly wasn't going to get up and announce myself to a couple of housebreakers. On the other hand, I didn't want to be marooned there on the roof when they took away the ladder. There was only one thing I could do and that was to keep quiet and hope that Swede would get me out of this mess somehow.

I turned around to look at the tip of the ladder just in

time to see it disappear. There was a clank and a rattle as the man lowered it, and then I heard him walking toward the front of the house. A few minutes later I heard the ladder bump against the siding. On hands and knees, I crawled toward the edge of the roof. I had sense enough not to peek over directly above the ladder; instead I went to the far end. The house had wide built-in gutters and I was able to lie flat on my stomach at the very edge of the roof and poke my head over. The short, heavy man was at the top of the ladder and was pushing on the window. It gave a protesting squeak and then opened.

He pushed it all the way up and turned around and grinned at his partner, who was standing at the bottom of the ladder. "We're in," he announced. "Just as simple as throwing cats out of an attic window."

"Then get on in," Al said, "and I'll follow you."

His partner gave a couple of grunts and disappeared inside the house. Al followed him up the ladder, and a moment later he too had disappeared. I stayed there in the gutter with my head hanging over the edge, looking sadly at the ladder. It was at least ten feet below the eaves, and as far as my getting down was concerned, it might just as well have been in the garage. Deciding that I'd better locate Swede, I went back to the other side of the roof where Swede and I had originally put the ladder. I had on sneakers, and, although it was a tin roof, I was able to walk without making any noise. I was on my knees at the back edge of the roof, trying to peek over, when I heard a "Pssst!" from the bushes. I looked and there was Swede, a short distance out in the yard, hiding behind a small evergreen. He was pointing toward the opposite corner of the house. I looked

and couldn't see a thing. Then he started waving his arms around and going through all sorts of gyrations. After several minutes, I got the idea. He was pretending to climb something. I looked back at the corner of the house and saw what he meant. There was a big maple tree, and one limb hung right over the eave of the house, not three feet above the roof line. It was a big limb, plenty big enough to support me.

I had started toward the tree when I realized that I still hadn't got the key. So I hurried back over the roof, picked up the key, stuck it in my pocket, and went back to the maple. It was simple to get from the house up on the limb, although it was a little scary as I inched back toward the main trunk, because I was really up in the air. There were quite a few branches on the tree, so I didn't have much trouble climbing down to the next big limb; it went back toward the house just beneath one of the second-floor windows. Going any farther down the trunk didn't look half as simple. There was only one more limb beneath me, and the trunk was too big around for me to get much of a grip on it. It could be done, but I knew I would probably take some skin off my arms, maybe even some off my face, as I slid down.

I was about to start when I heard another warning "Pssst" from Swede. I looked over, and he was shaking his head and pointing at the window beneath me. This time I didn't have any trouble figuring out what he meant. The men were in the room directly below me, and I would have to slide right past the window in order to get down. I was still trapped. I sat on the limb for a while, hoping that the men would leave the room, but they seemed to like it there.

Finally I decided to take a peek in the second-story window that was so handy. I edged out along the limb, standing up and holding onto a limb above me. When I finally got near enough, I found that I was looking into nothing but a bathroom. Disgusted, I moved back to the trunk, climbed up to the limb above, and went back to the roof. As long as I had to wait, it was more comfortable waiting where I could sit down on a flat surface. I looked across the lawn and saw that Swede was sitting down too. Apparently we were in for a long wait.

It isn't much fun sitting around on a roof, while the house beneath you is being robbed. I didn't like the situation at all. Sooner or later, I supposed, the two men would leave the room they were in and I could slide down the tree. If and when that happened, I didn't want to waste any time or take any chances trying to sneak around to replace the door key in the flower box. My idea of the smart thing to do was to get away from there fast and notify the police. However, I still didn't want to run off with Captain Wudge's key. I slipped quietly over to the other side of the roof, peeked over the eave, and edged along until I was directly above the stoop. Very carefully I held the key out and dropped it. It landed kerplunk, square in the middle of the rubber doormat, and didn't make a sound. Unless someone else saw it and took it, Captain Wudge couldn't possibly miss it when he came home. I moved back again to where I could see Swede and sat down to wait for those two housebreakers to finish their housebreaking.

3. CAPTAIN WUDGE

I hadn't waited on the roof long when suddenly I heard a loud and indignant cawing. It seems that crows are always objecting to something or are making a fuss, and Hector was even louder than the average crow. He appeared out of nowhere and started circling over the house. I sat very quietly, wishing that I had a rock. If he kept on making so much noise he might attract the attention of the two men inside. If they looked up at the roof and got back far enough, they would see me, even though I was lying flat. That possibility didn't bother me as much as the one that Hector might see the key again, lying there in plain view on the doormat. If he did, he would probably pick it up, and this time there was no telling where he would go with it—possibly to the top of one of the barns, or even off into the woods.

I looked at Swede, and he held up both arms and went through the motions of firing a shotgun at Hector. Then I heard the noise of tires on gravel and knew what Hector's fuss was about. Someone else was coming. I moved farther up on the roof, where I could look down into the parking lot. A second later a Ford station wagon drove into the

parking area and a man jumped out. I knew immediately that he was Captain Wudge.

Captain Wudge wasn't fat, but he was a stocky, husky man about five feet nine inches tall, with a very red face, a bristling white mustache, and snow-white hair, which was cut almost as short as Swede cuts his. In spite of the white hair, I guessed his age at no more than fifty-five. He moved like a young man and also as though he had made up his mind about every step and no one was going to change it. He glared at the other car suspiciously, and then he noticed the ladder to the second-floor window. His red face got redder and he let out a snort.

"Who's in there?" he bellowed in a voice that could be heard for a mile.

I can't imagine two robbers dumb enough to pick the front of the house as a spot to put a ladder up to the second-floor window, and then to go in, leaving the window wide open, in the middle of the day. They deserved to be caught, and Wudge had caught them. He let out a roar that apparently was supposed to be words but didn't make much sense to me. Then he charged toward the front door as though he were running down a football field.

The captain didn't miss a trick. He saw that key lying on the doormat even before he reached the stoop. He picked it up without pausing and had it in the front-door lock in a second. Meanwhile I heard a pounding on the stairs inside the house. As Wudge went in the front door the first man came out the open window. I moved closer to the eaves to watch the excitement. The tall, sour man named Al came out first, and he was moving even faster than Wudge. I don't think I've ever seen anyone go down a ladder in less

time. He reached the bottom and was halfway to his car before his dumb-looking, fat partner was half out of the window. The car moved forward a few feet and Al opened the back door for the other man, who was still hurrying down the ladder. If Captain Wudge had thought, he could have caught them. If he had parked his station wagon in front of their car there wouldn't have been time for them to maneuver and get away. As it was, the captain appeared at the second-floor window a few seconds before the stocky man reached the car. He didn't hesitate. There was a roar, and the fleeing man let out a yelp of pain; then he practically dived into the car. Al pulled the door shut, and the car roared toward the lane. Wudge fired once more at the rear end of the car, but nothing happened. From the sound of the report I guessed that he was firing a shotgun. It was probably a double-barrel gun and he didn't have time to reload after those two shots.

I was glad that he had arrived in time to chase those two thugs out of there, but I didn't feel any happier myself. I was still marooned up on the roof. If I couldn't manage to get down soon, I suppose I would have to let Captain Wudge know I was there. I certainly didn't intend to, though, until he had a chance to cool off. The way he was feeling, if he heard a noise from the roof he'd probably start firing and ask questions later.

Once more I moved back to where I could see Swede. I pointed to myself and then down to the ground. Swede opened his hands helplessly. He didn't know what to do. I pointed to the tree, but Swede shook his head. Either Wudge was in the room below, or Swede was afraid he would appear at any minute. Once more I sat down to wait.

At least matters were improved slightly. Wudge had his door key and I didn't have to worry about Hector running off with *it*. I couldn't see much else to be glad about, though.

Not more than five minutes had passed when there was the sound of still another car on the gravel driveway and then a state-police car drove in. A trooper in uniform got out. Captain Wudge had heard the noise of the car too, and he came hurrying out the front door.

"That was certainly fast work," he said.

"You were lucky," the trooper said. "I was cruising along the highway here, not more than three-quarters of a mile away, when the station notified me by radio to come here. You're Captain Wudge, I take it."

"That's right," said Captain Wudge, holding out his hand.

"What's the trouble?"

"Well, briefly, the facts are these. I had started for Doylestown and had stopped for some gasoline when I discovered that I had forgotten my driver's license. So I came back for that. When I drove in I saw this strange gray car parked right over there. Then I looked up and saw that ladder beneath that window, and the window wide open. I knew right away someone was inside, going through the house. I guess I lost my temper." Wudge paused. Even thinking about it made him angry, and his face started to grow red again.

"I should have taken their license number," he barked. "Stupid of me. That's not being very foresighted. Anyhow, I ran for the front door." Again he paused. "Funny thing about that—usually I keep the front-door key in that plant box there, hidden under that begonia. But this time it was lying right in the middle of the doormat. Anyhow, I picked

it up. The door was locked and I opened it. As I did, I heard someone rushing upstairs. I hurried into my study and got my shotgun and threw two shells into it. Then I went upstairs after them. One man was in the car by the time I got to the window, and the second one almost there. I winged him, but he still got in the car and drove away. I fired once more at it as it headed down the lane."

"Do you think you wounded the man badly?" the trooper asked.

"No," Wudge said in complete disgust. "The only shotgun shells I had in the house were number-six shot—that's about the right size for birds, as you know. A couple of those little lead pellets may have gone through his clothes, but they couldn't have hurt him seriously. I shot right at the seat of his pants, and probably he won't sit down comfortably for a few days, but I doubt if he'll even go to a doctor."

"It's just as well," said the trooper mildly. "While I think that unquestionably these two men were after something in your house, it is possible at times for something to look very much like robbery when it isn't. Actually I think you'd feel better if you let a thief escape than if you seriously wounded someone through a mistake."

"Mistake!" barked Captain Wudge. "What sort of mistake could there be? When you see a ladder at your second floor, and a window wide open, it's pretty obvious what's happening."

"Yes, it is obvious," agreed the trooper. "Too obvious for the middle of the day. Was anything taken?"

"I don't know," Wudge replied. "Let's go inside and look."

They disappeared inside, and I moved up to the peak of the roof, where I could watch both ways. Swede was still sitting behind his bush. He seemed to be very interested in one of the downstairs windows. After a minute or two he got cautiously to his feet, looked up at me, waved his hand, and then started scooting from one bush to another, heading toward the front of the house.

He made a big circle around the house, and I lost track of him for a while. When I saw him next he was back of the garage. He peeked around the corner cautiously and motioned me to come to that corner of the house. Very quietly I started in that direction. I knew what he planned. He was going to sneak out and raise the ladder up to the roof. He would be taking quite a chance on being seen and so would I when I climbed down. However, it seemed the only thing to do. I didn't want to get involved with a robbery, and I knew that Swede didn't. The farther we both got from Captain Wudge, considering the mood he was in, the better I was going to like it.

Swede disappeared, and a few seconds later I heard the clink-clink of the ladder being raised, and then the tip of it appeared above the edge of the roof. Swede had moved it over about four feet, so that it was no longer in front of the open window.

I didn't waste any time. I gave a quick look to see that no one was around and started down. The tall, thin man named Al may have gone down that ladder fast, but he didn't compare with me. I tried not to make any noise, but my feet on the rungs of the ladder sounded like a stick dragged across a picket fence. Swede was nowhere in sight when I reached the bottom—and that was just where I

intended to be in a second. I raced for the corner of the garage, rounded it, and ran smack into Swede.

"I've got our bicycles," he said. "We can cross that one little open space and be behind those pine trees; then we can stay behind them until we get at least part way down the lane."

I nodded to show that I agreed with his plan and we moved cautiously around the garage. With each of us wheeling his own bicycle, we made a quick dash and got in the cover of the first pines. We were just in time, because the front door opened again and Captain Wudge and the trooper appeared.

I put out my hand to stop Swede. "Let's see if he's going to leave right away," I said. "We don't want him to bump into us right at the end of the lane."

The trooper, however, was not ready to go yet. He and Captain Wudge started toward the corner of the house, apparently on their way to look around. As they neared the corner they both stopped suddenly and looked at the ladder. We couldn't hear what they were saying, but we could imagine it. The ladder had not only been moved, it had been raised. They both looked up at the roof, and the trooper said something to Captain Wudge. The captain didn't answer. He was on his way back into the house. A minute later he reappeared with his shotgun.

"Look, this may be interesting," Swede whispered, "but I want to get out of here. I don't like the looks of that gun."

I hated to leave, but that seemed to be the only sensible thing to do. We wheeled our bicycles through the weeds

and cut across the field to the road. Then we started pedaling back toward the highway as fast as we could go.

When we got to town we went up to our office to talk things over privately. It's funny how when something scary is over, and you feel perfectly safe, you begin to think it was a lot of fun. Something mysterious had been going on out at Captain Wudge's, and Swede and I knew more about it than anybody else, even the police.

"There was a big picture window downstairs on my side of the house," Swede explained. "That tree is right in front of it. Those two men were inside. From where I sat I couldn't see too clearly, but the walls seemed to be lined with some sort of glass cases. They were examining those. They stayed in that same room practically the whole time they were in the house."

"Maybe Captain Wudge's chess sets were in the cases," I suggested. "They may have been trying to pick the right ones to steal."

Swede thinks things through very carefully. He thought about this for a minute and then said, "Neither one of those lugs looked like he knew anything about chess sets. That's pretty specialized. It's sort of like knowing antiques or old coins."

I told Swede what the state trooper had said about the ladder and the open window being too obvious, and he agreed. It didn't make sense that two men would drive in as boldly as they had, turn their car around, and act as they did, if this had been an ordinary robbery. We hashed over possible explanations for a while and then decided to pay a visit to the state police. The state troopers have a

barracks at the edge of town and Swede and I know Sergeant John Miller, who's on the desk most of the time during the day.

We were lucky—Miller was on duty. We pretended that we had just dropped by for a friendly call and we talked about baseball and the weather for a few minutes. Then Miller looked at me and said, "All right, out with it. What have you got on your mind?"

"Me?" I asked innocently.

"Yes, you," he replied. "You two didn't drop in here just because you like my company. You've been able to get by without it for some months now. You're getting all set to poke your nose into trouble again. I can tell it by the looks on your faces."

"No trouble," I said. "We're just curious."

"About what?"

"About what's going on out on Pumpkin Hollow Road," I answered. Swede frowned at me, but I had already planned what I was going to say.

"What do you know about Pumpkin Hollow Road?" Miller asked. "Is there something going on out there?"

"That's what I want to know," I replied. "Swede and I were on our way to go fishing. We were pedaling down the road when we saw a patrol car turn in one of the lanes. It was a house on the right, set well back from the road. What was the name, Swede?"

Swede looked up at the ceiling. "Widge or Wodge or something like that," he answered, his blue eyes open wide.

"Uh-huh," said Miller. "It's likely two sharp-eyed would-be sleuths like you two would not make a careful note of what was on the mailbox. So you just saw a patrol

car turn in a lane and you were so curious that you came out here to talk to me? That's a likely story."

"What's unlikely about it?" I asked.

"You know perfectly well that people call on the state police when they lose their dogs, or a steer strays away, and for all sorts of things. Why are you so interested in this particular case?"

"Well, we were just kind of curious," I said casually. "We'd been resting beside the road a short while before and we thought we heard a couple of gunshots." I leaned forward and really put on an act this time. "Who was murdered?" I asked eagerly.

Miller started laughing, and I knew we had him fooled. "No one was murdered," he replied. "You two have got the world's most vivid imaginations. This Captain Wudge came home and caught two fellows breaking into his house. He fired his shotgun at one of them. He stung one man a little, but that was all. They got away."

"Oh," I said, disappointed-like. I got to my feet and said, "Well, let's go, Swede." I winked at him, and he knew what I meant.

"Let's have a Coke first," he suggested. There was a machine in the hall outside the office, so I got two bottles for us and one for Miller and we sat down again.

"Isn't it sort of peculiar to rob a house in broad daylight that way?" Swede asked after a minute.

"There were a couple of odd things about this," Miller admitted. "Apparently it was planned. Some antique-dealer in Doylestown telephoned Wudge early this morning and said that he had an unusual chess set. He claimed that he had heard somewhere that Wudge was a chess collector and

thought he would be interested. Wudge was and said he would be right over. Now we haven't been able to check yet, but my hunch is that there is no antique-dealer with a chess set in Doylestown at all. That was simply a trick to get Wudge away from the house. By accident he discovered that he had forgotten his driver's license and went back for it. He caught these two men inside the house."

"How'd they get in?" I asked innocently.

"They put a ladder up to a second-floor window that was unlocked. That alone shows that they didn't expect Wudge back soon."

"What did they steal?" Swede asked.

"Nothing at all," Miller replied. "Of course, that doesn't mean too much. They were apparently still looking around when Wudge arrived. I guess they hadn't been there more than several minutes."

"Why didn't he keep them there if he had a shotgun?" Swede asked.

"Well, as he went in the front door, they went upstairs and out the window again," Miller replied. "This Captain Wudge shot at one of them as he was getting into the car, but they got away completely and he didn't get the license number. He did notice that it was a New York plate, though."

"You said there were several odd things," I reminded him.

"Well, there was one other thing," Miller said thoughtfully. "John Gruber was the officer who investigated. While he was inside, someone moved the ladder. Just what for, I can't figure out, nor can Gruber. That means there must have been a third man around somewhere. Possibly he was

supposed to be a lookout and slipped up. I don't know. I guess there's some simple explanation."

We left a few minutes later and went back to Swede's house. After we had talked things over for a while, we decided that the smart thing to do was to call up Captain Wudge and offer the services of the Carson Street Detective Agency to solve the attempted robbery. That way we'd keep in touch with the mystery and we might get a chance to photograph the chess pieces at the same time. Mrs. Larson was working in the garden, so there was no one inside to listen while we phoned.

"You do the talking," I told Swede. "Your voice is deeper, and he'll think you're older than you are."

We looked up Wudge's number and dialed it. The captain answered almost immediately, and the conversation was short and to the point. "Captain Wudge, I understand that there was an attempted robbery at your home this morning," Swede said very politely.

Captain Wudge believed in bellowing into telephones, and Swede had to hold the receiver six inches from his ear to keep from being deafened. "If this is the newspapers, I have nothing to say!" Captain Wudge barked.

"I am not a newspaper reporter," Swede said in a dignified voice. "My name is Larson and I'm a partner in the Carson Street Detective Agency. We thought we'd offer you our services."

"If there is anything I do *not* need it's a private detective," Captain Wudge interrupted. "I am bothered enough by blithering idiots, and inquisitive fools, without hiring one to ask silly questions about what is obviously an attempted robbery."

With that, he hung up. I had a notion to call the telephone company and tell them that Captain Wudge was likely to need a new telephone any minute, the way he banged it down, but I decided not to. There didn't seem much more that Swede and I could do at the moment, so I went on home. It's my job to wash the car once a week, and I did that. By the time I had finished, it was dinnertime.

After dinner I was in the living room with Dad. He was sitting over in the corner in his big leather chair, reading a business magazine. When Dad has his nose deep in a magazine or book, it's a good time to get some advice from him. My dad is pretty smart. He seems to be able to keep right on reading and think about the questions that I ask him with some odd corner of his mind. If Mother is trying to read something and I ask her a question, she either doesn't hear me, or when she does hear me, she bawls me out for interrupting her. Dad acts as if he doesn't hear and then after several minutes he'll come back with an answer, and usually it's a pretty smart one too. He doesn't seem to realize what either of us have said, which is a good thing at times.

This was one of those times. I wanted to ask him how Swede and I could go about getting a photograph of that chess set, but I didn't want him to get too interested in Captain Wudge. Also, I wanted to be completely finished talking about the subject before Mother and Eileen were through doing the dishes and joined us.

"Do you know how to play chess?" I asked.

There was a long pause, and Dad read to the bottom of the page and then said, "Uh-huh, used to know how." He didn't look up, but kept on reading.

"Could you teach me?" I asked.

"Uh-huh," Dad grunted after a while. "You seem reasonably intelligent."

"Do you know anything about the history of chess or about chess pieces?" I asked.

Dad turned a page, read part of it, and then said, "Not much. It is a very old game, though."

"Who would know something about old chess sets?" I asked.

There was a long pause and then Dad put his magazine in his lap and looked at me over the top of his glasses. "That is a dumb question," he announced.

"What's so dumb about it?"

"You've asked me similar questions at least a dozen times," he replied, "and I've always given you the same answer. Look it up. That's why I bought that encyclopedia. That's why the town maintains a public library. When you want to know something, go look it up. Get a book on it."

"You mean there'd be a book about chess sets?" I asked incredulously.

"I would wager that there are dozens upon dozens of books about chess sets," Dad replied. "You can find a book on almost any conceivable subject; sometimes you can find too many. Now I don't know for certain that the local library will have a book on chess pieces, but they can certainly get you one from the state library."

He picked up his magazine again and began reading. I didn't say anything more, figuring that enough had been said. There was silence for several minutes, and then Dad asked in a preoccupied way, "Why are you so interested in chess all of a sudden?"

"There's a man out in the country who is supposed to have a large collection of old chess sets," I answered. "Swede and I would like to look at them."

"You're on the right track," Dad said. "Learn a little about the subject, show him that you're interested, and he'll be delighted. Collectors are always happy to show their treasures to anyone they think really wants to see them."



4. THE MISSING CASTLE

Swede came over the next morning and I told him what Dad had said about chess. We don't have a whole set of encyclopedias like the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, but we do have a one-volume job. Even that had quite a bit in it about chess. Dad was right. It was really an old game. The encyclopedia said that it probably had been invented about the sixth or seventh century in India, and then it spread to

Persia. Later it had moved on to Europe, and then to China and to almost every place in the world.

Dad was also right about the books on chess. The encyclopedia mentioned at least half a dozen, and said that there were hundreds. The article described a chessboard and gave us the names of all the pieces, but it didn't tell us how to play.

"I've got an idea," Swede announced suddenly. "Before we go to the library, let's go down and see Mr. McVaugh."

Mr. McVaugh is an antique-dealer in Belleville. He also has a room full of old books. A lot of people in town don't like Mr. McVaugh very much, because he doesn't act like any other businessman. He doesn't seem to care whether he sells anything or not. You can never be certain when his shop will be open. If he doesn't like the looks of a customer he'll refuse to sell him anything. Several times when Swede and I have been in his place he has insulted customers deliberately, to make them leave. My mother says that he's the best antique-dealer in the state, though. For some reason or other he has always liked Swede and me. Swede's idea was a good one. If anyone in town would know something about chess, it would be Mr. McVaugh.

We rode downtown and were lucky enough to find him puttering around in the back of his shop. He's a short, round-shouldered man, with a huge shock of gray hair that stands straight up. If he combs his hair at all, he must do it with a fork.

"Good morning Mr. McVaugh," I said. "How are you today?"

"I *was* fine, until I was interrupted," he growled. "I didn't know I'd unlocked the front door."

We were used to his manners, so we didn't pay much attention. We stood there and waited until he had finished packing a piece of china that he was putting in a box. Finally he looked at us through his thick spectacles and asked, "Well, what mischief are you two up to today?"

"No mischief at all," Swede said. "We wondered if you knew something about chess."

"Of course I know something about chess," Mr. McVaugh replied with a snort of disgust. "Any man who is really civilized knows something about chess. That's as ridiculous as asking a Christian if he knows anything about the Bible." He paused and shoved his thick glasses up on his forehead. "What do you want to know about chess?"

"Well, how to play it, for one thing," I answered.

Mr. McVaugh looked at me and then at Swede. He hunted for his glasses for a second and then realized that they were on his forehead. He pulled them down and peered at both of us. "I suppose you have an hour or so to devote to learning how to play chess," he said.

"How much time will it take?" I asked cautiously.

"At least ten years!" Mr. McVaugh bellowed explosively. "Twenty years to learn it thoroughly."

"Do you mean that everybody who plays chess spends ten years learning it?" Swede asked.

Mr. McVaugh nodded. "Everybody who *really* plays chess. Of course there are a lot of people who think they're playing chess and shove the pieces around according to the rules."

"Maybe that's all we'd better try to learn now," I said doubtfully "The rules, and how to shove the pieces around."

"Well, that's all you can expect to learn," Mr. McVaugh

said in a much friendlier voice. "Then, as you enjoy playing the game over the years, you'll learn more and more about it."

Mr. McVaugh is often like that. He barks at you at first, and you think he is going to throw you out of his shop; then suddenly he changes and is as friendly and as helpful as can be.

"Where can we get a set of rules?" I asked.

"I imagine if you bought a chess set there would be a little pamphlet included," Mr. McVaugh replied. "However, I think I happen to have a book for beginners which I would be glad to give you. Come with me."

We followed him into a back room, where he located a chessboard and a set of chessmen. They were made of wood and weren't nearly as interesting as the chessmen in the picture which Mr. Clemens had given us. Mr. McVaugh told us how to recognize the various pieces and how to place them on the board. The two castles or rooks were located in the corner squares, the two knights next to them, then two bishops, and finally the king and queen. The eight pawns were placed on the second row of squares. Then he told us the moves that each piece was allowed to make.

"There's no use my explaining anything further right now," he said. "You won't remember, so I'll get you the little book, which you can take home and study."

"Do you have many books on chess?" I asked as we followed him into the book room.

"No, I don't," Mr. McVaugh replied. "At one time I had quite a few—several that were rather rare. Then about six years ago a chess collector moved near here, and he bought the lot."

"Was his name Captain Wudge?" Swede asked.

"That's right," Mr. McVaugh replied. "Do you know him?"

"No, but we'd like to."

"Well, he's a fine gentleman," Mr. McVaugh said enthusiastically, "and he knows his subject. You can always tell when a man knows what he's talking about, and Captain Wudge certainly knows chess. He has one of the finest collections of chess sets in the United States."

"Does he let people see it?" I asked.

"He doesn't open his house up to the public, if that's what you mean," Mr. McVaugh replied. "However, if he knew you were interested, I'm certain he'd let you see his collection. As a matter of fact, I suggested to Miss Fallon over at the museum that she get in touch with him and display a couple of his sets in that special-exhibit case."

"Did he buy any of his chess sets from you?" I asked.

"Certainly not," Mr. McVaugh snapped, as though I had asked a ridiculous question. "He's looking for only exceedingly rare items. I handle antiques and books, not chess sets."

"But I've seen a couple of chess sets in here," I objected.

"Just run-of-the-mill stuff"—he snorted—"things I happen to get along with furniture!"

After we left Mr. McVaugh's shop, we went to Eckleberry's drugstore and had a soda. Next we went to the library. The library and museum are located in a big old brownstone house right next to the police station. The library is on the left-hand side as you go in, and the museum is on the right. The museum isn't big, and it certainly can't compare to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, but it's not a bad museum for a town like Belleville. There are

four floors of it. I doubt if half the people in town have ever seen all four floors. Swede and I have been through it a dozen times. There are old guns and pistols, and Indian arrowheads, and spears, and lots of swords and bayonets. There are also several rooms filled with china, and there are early costumes with hoop skirts, which aren't so interesting to me. But the rest of the museum is worth some time. There's even one room full of stuffed birds and animals that were killed or caught right around Belleville. One great big eagle was shot just south of town, according to the card. The card is probably correct, but the eagle must have been shot a long time ago, because I've never seen anything like it.

Miss Fallon, the wispy little woman who runs the museum, knows where everything came from and all about it. She also knows more about the history of the town than anyone else. The library, which takes up one-half of the ground floor, is supposed to be entirely separate from the museum, but Miss Fallon spends a good deal of her time over there, checking books in and out. I doubt if she gets any salary at all, but she seems to love her work.

When Swede and I entered, there was no one in sight, so we waited at the little desk for a while. There were voices on the floor above us, and a minute later Miss Fallon came down the stairs.

"I thought I heard someone come in," she said in her thin, piping voice. "How are you, Stephen, and Neil?"

It always startles me when someone calls Swede by his right name, which is Stephen, but I guess he's used to it. We both said good morning and told her that we would like to look at books on chess.

"I don't believe we have a book on chess in the library," she said regretfully. "However, we do have a number of books on games, and I'm sure there must be a section in some of them on chess."

Miss Fallon is always so anxious to help you and seems to be so pleased when she does that I didn't have the heart to tell her that we already had a book with the rules. She hunted through half a dozen books or so and finally found one that had a chapter on chess. I had my doubts that it had any information that we didn't already have in the book that Mr. McVaugh had given us, but we checked it out anyhow.

"You don't have any books on collections of chess pieces, do you?" Swede asked. "Or a book on collecting other things that might have a chapter in it about chess?"

"No, we don't," she replied.

While we were talking I heard footsteps on the stairs, but I had paid no attention. I supposed that someone had been upstairs, looking through the exhibits, and that he had gone out through the front door. Instead there was suddenly a loud voice right behind us. Both Swede and I jumped.

"Did I hear you boys say you were interested in chess?" the voice asked.

We turned, and there stood Captain Wudge. He had the same reddish face and bristling white hair, only this time he didn't look quite so angry. In fact, he looked quite friendly.

"We thought we'd like to learn how to play," Swede said.

"An excellent idea!" boomed the captain. "Excellent idea. Very few boys today are willing to sit still long enough to learn how to play chess."

"Mr. McVaugh gave us a little book for beginners," I said. "And we have a chapter on chess in this book that Miss Fallon just found for us. But we thought we'd like to get a book on chess sets. There seem to be at least a dozen different shapes and kinds."

"Dozens!" the captain laughed. "Why, there are literally hundreds of thousands of chess sets, all of them different. Chess sets have been carved from ivory, stone, bone, wood, jade, and hundreds of other materials. They are every size and shape and description. The Moslems, for example, who don't believe in images, have chess sets which are simply different types and sizes of disks."

"It sounds interesting," Swede said.

"One of the most absorbing subjects in the world," the captain agreed heartily. "A man can spend a lifetime studying the history and evolution of chess. And almost as many books have been written about the subject as there have been chess sets. Several of them go back to the fifteenth century."

"We weren't hunting for anything rare," Swede confessed. "All we wanted was a modern book that would tell us a little bit about the game."

"I warn you that it's fascinating," the captain said. "Once you start reading about chess or start playing it you're lost. The first thing you know you'll either be a chess addict or a chess collector. Of course I can't imagine any way to have more fun." He looked at Swede and then at me and said, "Tell you what, I've just promised Miss Fallon here to bring a couple of chess sets in for a special exhibit for the next few weeks, and I'm going home to get them now. Why don't you two lads come with me? I think I've got just the

book you want, and I'll be glad to lend it to you. You can take a quick look at some of my chess sets and then I'll bring you back to town."

"We'd like to," both Swede and I said together.

Captain Wudge glanced at his watch and said, "Well, we'd better be on our way. I have an appointment this afternoon, and I'm in sort of a hurry. If I get you two back by twelve-fifteen, will that be all right?"

We assured him that would be fine and followed him out to his car. On the way I whispered to Swede, "We really fell into it, didn't we?"

"Yeah, but I haven't got my camera," he replied in a disgusted whisper.

I hadn't thought of that, and for a minute I felt sick. Then I decided it didn't make much difference; we were making progress, anyhow. If Captain Wudge was in such a hurry we wouldn't get much of a chance to examine his chess sets and might not be able to find the right one. We would have to return the book that he lent us, and also we could say that we would like to look at his chess sets again when we had more time. We had two excuses for going back. When we did, we would be certain to take the camera. Everything was working out fine.

I don't know how they drive battleships, but Captain Wudge drove his car as though it were a battleship with a whole ocean to maneuver in. He went down the middle of the road and when he turned around corners he straddled the white line. Every time another car came from the opposite direction and he had to move over, he got angry.

"Road hogs," he bellowed. "Three-fourths the people that drive today are road hogs. At sea we wouldn't tolerate anything like that."

He managed to get us safely out to his place, although it certainly wasn't his fault. I noticed when he unlocked the front door that he took the key out of his pocket instead of out of the plant box. Swede and I grinned at each other, but we didn't say a word.

Captain Wudge led us through a small entry hall and into a large room on the opposite side of the house. It had a huge picture window that looked out on the back lawn, and right in front of the picture window was a tree which I recognized immediately as the one that I had started to climb down.

There was a fireplace at one end of the room. The four walls at one time had been paneled with some sort of dark wood. Later glass cases had been built in front of the paneling on two walls and part of a third. The insides of the cases were lined with shelves about six inches apart. On the shelves were literally hundreds of chess sets. There were big chess sets, little chess sets, finely carved chess sets, and rough-looking chess sets. There were black chessmen, red chessmen, blue chessmen, and chessmen that had been painted all sorts of colors. One set, which was just inside the door, had been carved to represent different people, and I recognized Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Swede and I stood there with our mouths open. We could see what Captain Wudge meant when he said that chess was fascinating.

Swede looked at a set that was carved out of some very

dark wood. "There's a piece there that looks like a ship," he said. "What's that?"

"That's a rook or castle," Captain Wudge replied. "That set comes from Java." He pointed at a set two shelves above. "Now here's a more modern set that comes from India. The castle to this set is that piece there that looks like an elephant with a tower on its back."

"Why are they so different?" I asked. "And how come either one of them is called a castle?"

"That's one of the reasons chess is so fascinating," Captain Wudge replied. "The game originated in India, and Sanskrit was the language in use at the time. Now I think that the piece was originally a ship, and the word for ship in Sanskrit is 'roka.' When the game moved from India into Persia, the word became 'rukh.' When the Italians started playing chess, they called it 'rocca'—that means 'fortress' in Italian. Chess is supposed to represent a battle, and in the old days on the field of battle they used to have portable castles or fortresses. Soon the Italians and other European nations made the piece look like a castle. In English it soon was called the 'castle,' although it is also still called the 'rook.' In other countries, such as Russia and Siam and Java, the piece is still a ship, and it is called a ship in their languages."

"How did anyone figure all that out?" Swede asked.

"Research," the captain replied, "and by what you'd call educated guessing. Of course there are other theories. Some people claim that originally the piece wasn't a ship at all, but a chariot. I don't put much stock in that theory. I'm certain that it was originally a ship, and it's a shame that it isn't a ship in every chess set today."

I figured that the captain was probably prejudiced in favor of ships. I couldn't see that it made much difference how the piece had started out. However, knowing a little of the history of the various pieces did make it more interesting to look at them. I could have spent hours examining the different sets, and so could Swede, but the captain was in a hurry.

"I'm meeting an old friend in New York this afternoon," he told us, "and I have to catch a train. I want to change clothes, so I'll have to leave you two. First I want to show you my other display room. Then you can look at sets in both places while I'm dressing."

He led us upstairs and into what had evidently been the master bedroom once but was now lined with glass cases similar to those downstairs. There were at least as many chess sets on display here as in the room below. A large mahogany table stood in the center of the room, and on one end of it was a chessboard with a white and red chess set. Some of the chess pieces had been removed and were in a box near the board. At the other end of the table was still another chess set, which apparently had just been unpacked. The pieces were blue and white china, and the larger ones were about three inches tall.

"That looks like my mother's Wedgwood," I remarked.

"It *is* Wedgwood," Captain Wudge replied. "That's an old set, but it's in very nice condition. One piece has a small chip out of it."

"Was someone's game interrupted?" Swede asked, nodding at the chessboard.

"No, that's a game I'm playing with a friend in Australia," Captain Wudge answered casually.

"In Australia?" Swede asked.

"Yes, we play by mail," Captain Wudge replied. "He makes a move and then writes and tells me what it is. I make one and write him back."

"But it must take weeks," I remarked.

"Oh yes," Captain Wudge admitted. "It does, but that gives you plenty of time to think over your moves. And it's much faster now than it was before we had air mail."

Swede and I looked at each other and both thought the same thing. Chess addicts are just as crazy as antique addicts, or horse addicts, or anyone else who becomes hipped on a subject. In fact, after knowing Captain Wudge better, I'm not certain that chess addicts aren't the craziest of all.

"I think I'll take this set down to the museum," said the captain, pointing to the Wedgwood set on the table. "It's out and ready for packing, and besides, I think it will be interesting. While I'm dressing, you two boys pick another set or two that you think will make a contrast to this one, and that people would enjoy seeing."

He hurried out of the room, and Swede and I began looking at the sets. The one that took my eye first must have come from the middle of Africa because all the figures were carved of ebony and some of them looked like witch doctors or medicine men. On the shelf below this was a set that was made entirely of jade. We got so interested that we forgot that we were looking for a particular set. I'd find one, would call Swede to look at it, and then a minute later he'd yell for me to look at something he liked. Then suddenly he blundered onto the set we were looking for.

"Hey, Neil, here it is!" he called excitedly. "I'm sure this is the set that Mr. Clemens wants to see."

I hurried over to join him. The set he pointed out was on the middle shelf of a big case between two windows on the outside wall. There was no doubt about it. I hadn't expected we would be in Captain Wudge's house so soon, examining his chess sets, and I didn't have the picture with me. Nevertheless, I was sure. The set was carved of ivory, and all the pieces had the same flat, fluted base which narrowed down to a tiny neck and then expanded out into sort of a ball. The closest way I can describe the bottom parts of the pieces was that they looked like old-fashioned kerosene lamps only they had much more gingerbread and curlicues everywhere.

From what little conversation we had had with Mr. McVaugh and with Captain Wudge we were able to identify some of the pieces. The pawns were easy to pick out, and so were the king and queen. Then we figured out which pieces were the bishops and which were the castles. Of course we were able to identify the knights, because of the horses' heads. As Mr. Clemens had predicted, the pieces were not white and green, like those in the picture he had shown us. However, there were some traces of what looked like red on some of the pieces.

"Twenty-nine," Swede said, counting the pieces. "Let's see, sixteen on each side; there are three missing."

"And all three are pawns," I said. Both Swede and I were beginning to talk like experts.

"Boy, if I only had my camera and a flashbulb," Swede said, "we'd be all finished by now."

"The next time we come back, Captain Wudge probably

won't leave us alone like this," I said sadly. "This is the chance of a lifetime, but there's no use crying about it."

There wasn't much point in standing there staring at the set, so we went on and looked at the others. Five minutes later Captain Wudge reappeared. He had changed to a business suit and was wearing a white shirt and a tie.

"Well, have you boys picked out several sets that you think would be interesting?" he asked briskly.

He caught us flat-footed, because neither Swede nor I had made any attempt to pick out the three sets that we thought people would like best. "Well, I think that china set on the table would be nice," I answered, largely because I knew Captain Wudge had already decided on that.

A pleased grin came over Swede's face. He walked across the room and pointed at the set that we had been examining a few minutes before, the ivory one that we were supposed to photograph. "I like this one," he announced. "That's some very nice carving."

Captain Wudge smiled with pleasure. "You're a smart young man," he said. "That is an interesting set, and a mysterious one too. It was found on Ascension Island out in the middle of the Atlantic a long, long time ago. No one knows how it got there, or where it came from. Also, it's a beautiful set, as you say." He shook his head doubtfully. "I don't know; I consider that one of my most valuable sets. I don't know whether I want to risk lending it to the museum."

"Miss Fallon will make certain that it's in a locked case," I pointed out. "No one will get a chance to handle it."

"It's simple enough to break glass," Captain Wudge observed.

"Yes, but the museum's right next door to the police station," Swede remarked. "It would probably be safer than in your own house."

"That might be true," Captain Wudge admitted. He didn't say anything more, but we knew that he was thinking about what had happened the day before.

"All right," he announced, abruptly making up his mind. "We'll take that one. What's the third?"

Now that we'd won our point, it didn't seem to make much difference what the third set was, so I said, "Why not take that big ivory one two shelves below? That's big enough to attract everybody's attention."

The set I mentioned was also carved of ivory but the pieces were heavier and taller than the average. The castles were about two and a half inches tall, and except for a little narrow portion near the top, about three-quarters of an inch in diameter. The other pieces were correspondingly large. Half the pieces were white, or natural ivory color, while the others had been painted black.

"I think that's a good choice," the captain agreed. "As you say, it's large enough to catch people's eyes. I don't know very much about its history. Offhand I would guess that it's not too old, probably about seventeen-fifty."

"That seems old to me," Swede said.

"But it's not old, as chess sets go," the captain observed. "All the pieces are here, too, which is nice for an exhibit."

He found a small box and we wrapped the pieces separately in tissue paper and put them inside. We were hurrying because when the captain glanced at his watch he saw he didn't have much time to catch his train.

Driving back into town was a nightmare. The captain

not only drove in the center of the road again, but this time he was in a terrible hurry. At least going out he had driven slowly. But by another miracle we got back safely.

The captain drew up in front of the museum. "Would you two boys do me a favor?" he asked. "Take that box in and give the sets to Miss Fallon and explain that I had to catch a train." He hesitated a minute. "I don't want to appear fussy, but please ask her to take good care of them, because I prize them very highly."

"We'd be glad to," I said. "And thank you very much for letting us see your collection. We'd like to come back sometime."

"We certainly would," Swede said. "And we'll take good care of your book."

We meant everything we said. The way things looked, we wouldn't need to go back to get our photograph, but I certainly wanted to go back anyhow. Those chess sets were the most interesting things I had seen in a long time. We jumped out of the car, and Captain Wudge drove on down the road. We went inside the museum, delivered the chess sets to Miss Fallon, and gave her the captain's message.

"Oh dear," complained Miss Fallon. "I was hoping that Mr. Wudge would help me arrange them for display. I don't know anything about chess."

"We'd be happy to help you arrange them," Swede said with a wink at me. "Any time."

"That's very sweet of you," said Miss Fallon. "I certainly appreciate it. How about right after lunch?"

"Sure thing," Swede replied.

Everything worked out perfectly. Swede went to his house for lunch and to get his camera and flash equipment.

And I went to my home to eat. Hector, my crow, had been away somewhere when I had started out early that morning, and apparently he had missed me. He swooped down when I appeared, cawing and making an awful fuss. While I ate lunch in the kitchen, he stayed right outside on the windowsill, every now and then letting out a raucous "Haw."

"You should be teaching that bird how to keep quiet instead of how to talk," my mother observed. "He's been complaining ever since he discovered that you went off without him this morning."

I could see that Hector had been annoying her, so I took him with me when I went back to the museum. Now and then Hector will hop in the basket on my bicycle and ride along with me. He rode all the way to the museum and then, as I reached the door, he swooped up into a peach tree in the next yard. Swede appeared a minute later and I didn't think anything more about Hector.

Miss Fallon had unwrapped all the chess pieces and had them all set on a table near an open window in the first room on the right on the ground floor. She was busy cleaning the glass in a flat display case when we appeared.

"I think they're all beautiful," she said enthusiastically. "Especially that one ivory set with the intricate carving."

"That's what Captain Wudge calls his Ascension Island set," I told her.

Swede had his camera and flash attachment ready, but he said nothing about it, merely placing it to one side, where it would be handy. We had scarcely started working when we got the opportunity we were waiting for. A talkative

woman came in and wanted Miss Fallon to explain something about some old maps on the second floor.

As soon as they had gone upstairs, I set the two kings and two queens of the Ascension Island set on the edge of the table and Swede took a close-up photograph of them. Then we placed all the pieces in a row, and he was about to take another picture, when Hector hopped down on the windowsill. He cocked his head to one side and said, "Haw, haw," as though laughing at Swede's efforts.

"Laugh, you idiot!" said Swede. "See how you like this."

He pressed the button and the bulb flashed, scaring Hector half out of his wits. I never knew before that birds could jump, but Hector certainly did that time. He seemed to do a back flip, and at the same time he let out an indignant screech. Swede and I both laughed like fools. However, Hector didn't remain scared long, and by the time we'd stopped laughing, he was back on the windowsill, watching what we were doing. Swede took several more pictures, including one of all three sets. Then Miss Fallon returned and we went on with our work of arranging the pieces in the case. She had borrowed a chessboard someplace and we put it in the center, with the Wedgwood set arranged as though someone were about to begin a game.

"Now, how do you want the other two sets arranged?" I asked.

"Oh, any way that looks artistic," said Miss Fallon. "You and Stephen fix that set and I'll do this one."

Swede and I began arranging the Ascension Island set. As far as I was concerned, arranging something artistically just means arranging it haphazardly, but Swede seemed to have

some idea of what he was doing. He put the king and queen and taller pieces in the center and then made sort of a crescent of the pawns. It looked very nice when he'd finished. I wasn't doing much of the work, and when Swede put the last piece in, I started counting to make sure that we had them all.

"Twenty-nine," I said, when I finished.

Miss Fallon looked up from her end of the case. "Only twenty-nine?" she asked. "I have thirty-one."

"The entire set isn't here," Swede told her. "I guess some of the pieces were lost a couple of hundred years ago."

"I see," said Miss Fallon. "How many pieces are supposed to be in a full set?"

"Thirty-two," I replied promptly.

Someone came to return a book, and Miss Fallon went into the other room for a minute.

"Say, that set she was arranging is supposed to be all here," Swede said. "Where's the other piece?"

I counted them again. Miss Fallon had been right. There were only thirty-one pieces.

"Look in the box," I said. We looked in the box. Then we hunted through all the tissue paper in which the pieces had been wrapped, and we looked on the floor. There was no missing chess piece. I got down on my hands and knees so that I could look under one of the tables.

"It's the castle that's missing," said Swede. "It's about two and one-half inches long, so you should be able to see it."

I couldn't find it, though. I got to my feet and started to go through the tissue paper again. Suddenly a horrible thought struck me. "Where's Hector?" I asked.

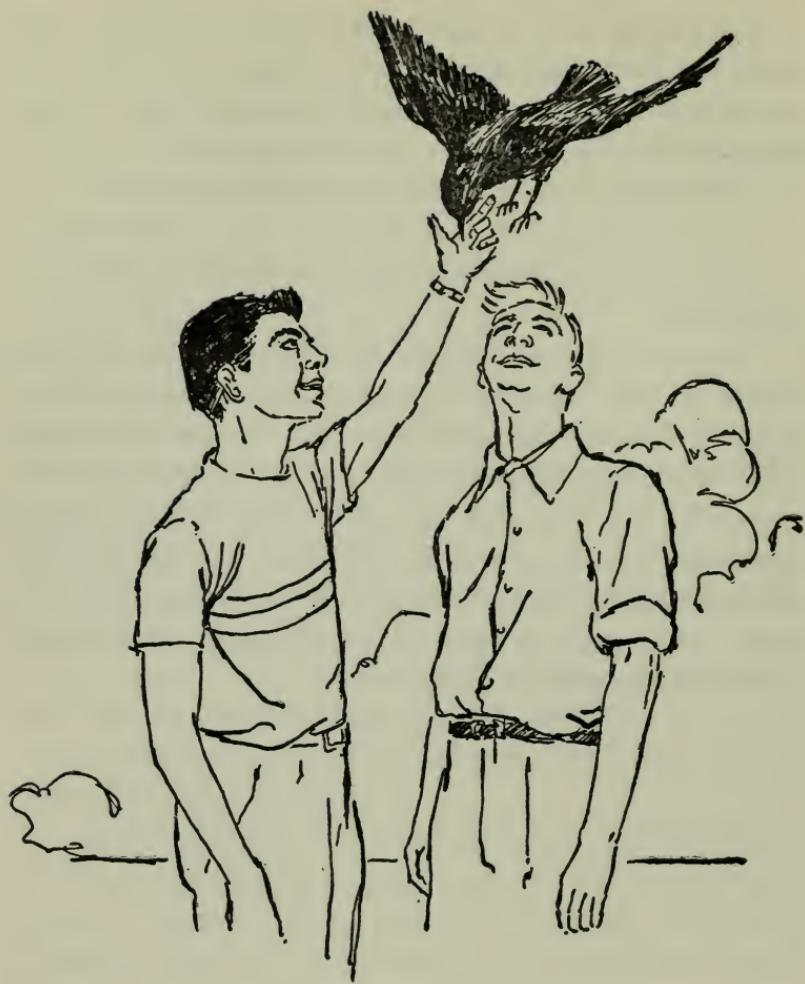
The windowsill was empty. Swede and I looked at each other, and we both knew what had happened. There was no screen on the window, and Hector had simply hopped in, picked up a chess piece, and disappeared.

"Holy Ned," I said, "now we're really in trouble!"

"You'd better get outside and see if he's on the roof."

"Give Miss Fallon some excuse," I replied. "I wish I had a shotgun."

I raced outside and around to the side of the building where Hector had been. I looked hopefully up at the roof but there was no black crow in sight. There was nothing above me but the empty eaves of the museum, and, above that, blue sky. We had assured Captain Wudge that his precious chess sets would be safe next door to the police station, but we hadn't thought about Hector. When it comes to protecting against crows, I guess the Belleville police are out of their field.



5. THE SUBSTITUTE CASTLES

I circled around the museum building about five times, looking up at the eaves, but there was no sign of Hector. Then I went across the alley to the Millers' house. My family

and the Millers have been friendly for years, so I asked Mrs. Miller for permission to go to her second floor to look for my crow. She suggested that I go right on up to the attic, and through a trapdoor, onto the roof. I did, and I could see the top of the museum building from one end to the other. But there was still no sign of Hector. If he had gone to the museum roof at all, he had flown away by this time.

I felt pretty discouraged, but there was one other place to look. I hurried home and went up to the second floor of the barn, to my old pigeon loft. That had been Hector's home since he had been a tiny fledgling and for the first three months I kept him penned up there. Now he came and went as he chose, through a little gate. This time he had not chosen to come home; the loft was vacant. I went out into the yard and called, but there was no sign of him and no answer. Finally I sat down glumly on the back steps and tried to figure out what to do next. I was still sitting there when Swede rode into the driveway on his bike.

"Did you find him?" he called.

"Not a sign of him," I said disgustedly.

"Brother, what a mess!" Swede said, sitting down beside me. "What are we going to do?"

"What did you say to Miss Fallon?" I asked.

"Just that you remembered an errand you had to do," Swede replied.

"Then she doesn't know there's a piece missing yet?"

"No, she just closed up the case and locked it," Swede answered. "I doubt if anyone will notice, except Captain Wudge, and he may not be in the museum for a few days."

"I hope not," I said. "It looks as if I'm going to need a few days to locate Hector."

"Even if you do locate him, he won't be carrying that castle around with him," Swede observed sourly. "What a pickle!"

"You don't suppose we forgot to pack that piece and it's still out at Captain Wudge's? We were in a big hurry."

"Not a chance," Swede replied. "The table was bare when we left."

Hector finally showed up about five o'clock that evening, but as Swede had said, he wasn't carrying the castle around with him. I got a shiny bottle cap out of the trashcan and threw it on the back step. Usually Hector likes bottle caps and picks them up and carries them off, but naturally he was stubborn this time. He just wasn't interested. Then I tried to talk to him. I asked him where he had taken the castle, where he had gone. He looked intelligent as could be and cocked his head on one side and seemed to be listening. Each time I stopped talking he would cock his head on the other side and say "Phooey." I guess I talked with him and pleaded with him for a good three-quarters of an hour, and the only response I got was "Haw-haw" and "Phooey." I was so mad at him that I felt like getting a butcher knife and cutting his head off, but I knew that if I did, he never would show me where he had hidden the castle.

I spent most of the next day, which was Thursday, trying to watch him, but Hector was a hard bird to watch. He'd disappear into the leaves of the maple tree and fly out the other side before I could see what had happened. Or else he'd sit on a limb high up in the tree, hidden by the leaves,

and not make a sound for an hour. He certainly was infuriating, and I began to agree with Eileen: he was a menace. I don't honestly know why I liked him, but I did, in spite of all the trouble he was causing.

I didn't see Swede all day because he had several jobs he had to do, but Friday morning he appeared and the two of us together tried to watch Hector. We offered all sorts of things to him, but he wasn't in the mood for stealing. The most we were able to get him to do was to pick up a piece of tinfoil and carry it up into a tree where he dropped it. At any other time, he would steal anything that wasn't nailed down, and was small enough, but now he had suddenly turned honest.

Mother and Eileen had gone into New York for the day to go shopping. About noon Dad drove in the driveway.

"What are you doing home?" I asked.

"I was hoping I'd find you here," he answered. "I've taken the afternoon off. I just realized this morning what next Tuesday is."

"What is next Tuesday?" I asked. "Is there a good baseball game or something?"

"Next Tuesday is your mother's fortieth birthday," Dad said solemnly.

"It is?"

"Pardon me," Dad said. "Next Tuesday is your mother's birthday. Forget I said it was the fortieth. I think she's a little sensitive about that point, so don't bring it up."

"I'd better get busy," I said. "I haven't got her a present."

"Neither have I," Dad replied. "That's why I'm taking

the afternoon off. I'm going to do some shopping. If you'll come with me and help me, I'll pay for the present you buy her."

"That's a deal," I said. "Have you got any ideas?"

"Oddly enough, I have," Dad said triumphantly. "I'm rather proud of myself. First, I remembered in time and, second, I've got a very good idea."

"Let's hear it."

"A small oval marble-topped table," Dad replied, looking as though he had just won a new car at a raffle. "I remember your mother's saying she had seen one that she liked very much in an antique shop over by New Hope. Maybe it's still there. That's why I need your help; you've visited all those antique shops with her and you know where she goes."

"You've got yourself a big job," I warned him. "Mother goes to *all* the antique shops, and around New Hope there are at least fifty thousand."

"Well, let's make a try," Dad said. "Also we can pick a piece of old china or glass for you to give her. Would you like to go along, Swede? We can all drive out to the highway drive-in, have lunch, and go on from there."

Swede didn't have any better offer, so he came with us. After we had had a couple of hamburgers and some french-fries out at the drive-in we headed for New Hope. I had been antique-hunting with Mother any number of times. Actually I sort of enjoy poking around shops full of old and secondhand junk, and now and then I find something I like. I have three or four old knives and a couple of old pistols at home that I found while I was on trips with Mother.

I guess I was some help to Dad, after all. I had been through enough of the shops to know which ones had furniture and which ones didn't, and we were able to bypass quite a few. Nevertheless, by three o'clock we'd been in about twelve places and we hadn't seen a single marble-topped table. Dad was beginning to get a little discouraged.

"You certainly haven't got what it takes to be an antique-hunter," I said. "After twelve shops Mother is just getting warmed up."

Two shops later we came to one filled with a lot of china. Mother collects ironstone china, and there were three or four pieces there that we thought she might like. While we were looking around and trying to make up our minds, Swede was in back, going through some old books and magazines. As we were buying a covered vegetable dish for me to give Mother, Swede came hurrying forward from the back of the shop with a magazine in his hand.

"Hey, look," he said, "here's Mr. Clemens!"

The magazine was called *The Chessman* and about half of it had been ripped away. On the top page of what was left was a picture of Mr. Clemens holding a chess piece in his hand. Beneath the picture the caption said, "The author with the bishop, or Fil, of early Italian origin." Down near the bottom of the page was a small box which said, in black type, "Don't miss this interesting article, by one of our country's foremost authorities on chess history."

"That's Mr. Clemens, all right," I agreed. "You couldn't make a mistake about that long horse face of his."

"There's a whole stack of chess magazines back there," the proprietor of the shop said. "I'll sell them all to you for five dollars."

Five dollars was a lot of money, and neither Swede nor I wanted to spend that much on a bunch of old chess magazines. However, we went back and looked through three or four. We didn't see Mr. Clemens' name mentioned again, or Captain Wudge's. Swede made a note of the months of the magazine, in case we should want to know later, for some reason.

"I guess we won't take them," I told the man. "We know several men who are interested in chess, though, and we'll see if they want them."

"I have a nice inlaid chessboard up front," the proprietor said eagerly. "Twenty-five dollars."

"We're interested in chess, but not that interested," Swede said. "We'll use an ordinary board."

"How about some chessmen?" the owner of the shop asked, refusing to be discouraged. "I have a very nice set made of teakwood."

"I'd like to see those," I replied.

He got out the set, but they weren't much, compared to those we'd seen at Captain Wudge's. The carving was crude, and three of the men were missing.

"We want an ordinary set to play with," I told him.

"How about some odd chessmen, of ivory?" the proprietor asked.

"No, I don't think so."

He insisted on getting them out, anyhow. All in all he had about seven ivory chessmen. There were a king and a queen, two knights, and a pawn that seemed to match. There was nothing spectacular about them. They were simply ivory chessmen.

"And then I have these two larger pieces," he said.

He rummaged around in a drawer and set two castles down on the table in front of us. Swede and I looked at them and blinked. They weren't identical to the castle in the big ivory set at the museum, but they certainly were close. They were about the same height and had the same kind of base. The carving around the top appeared somewhat different, but the tops of the two white castles of the museum set had not been identical with those of the two red castles, anyhow.

"How much?" I asked.

"One dollar each," the man replied.

I didn't attempt to bargain with him; I paid him the two dollars and stuck the castles in my pocket. Dad had already gone outside, so we followed him.

"Your good fairy is certainly looking after you today," Swede said as we walked toward the door. "If you went looking for chess pieces to match that missing one, you'd probably be fifty years."

"I don't think the match is exact," I told him. "The simplest thing to do is to substitute both these castles for the one white one that's left."

That was a lucky afternoon. Three shops later we found just the oval marble-topped table that Mother wanted, and it was already cut down to tea-table height. The man didn't want much more than twice what it was worth, which is unusual where antiques are concerned. Dad bought it and we loaded it into the car and started back home. It was a successful day after all.

I washed off my two ivory castles that night and shined them up a bit. When I had finished, they looked pretty good. They were fairly plain pieces, which was good,

because one plain piece looks very much like another. If Hector had stolen one of the Ascension Island castles, I never in the world could have found a replacement.

Swede came over the next morning and we tried to think of some good excuse for asking Miss Fallon to open the case long enough for me to make the substitution. Finally Swede had a fairly good idea. He went home for his camera and I met him at the museum entrance.

"We want to take a picture for the paper," Swede explained to Miss Fallon. "I meant to do it the other day and then forgot all about it."

"Swede is going to take the picture and I'm going to write a little article. We'll get some publicity and people will know the sets are on exhibit," I said.

"I think that's an excellent idea," Miss Fallon said.

"You stand over here in front of the case," Swede suggested, "so that I can get both you and the chess sets."

"Oh, you don't want *me* in it," Miss Fallon protested, but we could see that she was pleased with the idea of having her picture in the paper.

Swede took two pictures and then said, "You know, I'm afraid the glare from the glass in that case is going to keep the chess pieces from showing up. Why don't you hold several of the pieces in your hand, Miss Fallon, and let me take a couple of shots of that?"

Miss Fallon got the key to the case and opened it. Then Swede had her pose holding the chessboard with a set of chessmen on it and also holding two of the individual chessmen. He maneuvered her away from the case, and, while she was busy watching the camera, I took the two ivory castles from my pocket and substituted them for the one white

castle in the case. I put that in my pocket. While I was doing the changing, I made a quick comparison of the pieces. They were not exactly the same height, and the original castle had a small narrow groove near the top that was missing on the ones I had bought, but otherwise they were an awfully close match. I guess I had cleaned my two too much because the ivory seemed a shade whiter, but unless one examined the set very closely he would never notice the difference. I did some quick rearranging of the set to make room for the additional piece, and then nodded to Swede that I was finished. He took one more picture, and we went on our way.

"That will be a dollar and fifteen cents," Swede said as we walked down the front sidewalk. "I used that much film and flashbulbs."

"What'd you have to shoot so many for?" I grumbled, but I gave him the dollar and fifteen cents. Actually, I was relieved to be out of the mess that cheaply.

"I suppose we'd better get these developed and actually offer them to *The Belleville Enterprise*," Swede remarked. "Miss Fallon expects to see her picture in the paper."

We had a soda to celebrate being out of trouble and then we took the film to Johnny Doyle's studio. Johnny Doyle is married to Swede's older sister and it was through him that Swede became interested in photography.

We left our film and asked Johnny to pick several good shots of Miss Fallon and to make glossy prints for the paper. As we were about to leave, Johnny remembered that he had finished the film that Swede had taken several days before, in the museum.

"You got some very good close-ups there, Swede," he

said. "On one or two you were too close, and there's some parallax, but most of them are excellent."

We opened the envelope and looked at the pictures. Johnny Doyle was right. Swede had taken some wonderful shots. There was one especially clear photograph of the two kings and two queens alone, and we asked him to make an enlargement of that. We left all the negatives but took the positives with us.

I was curled up in a chair, reading a book, that night when at about eight o'clock the telephone rang. It was for me. As soon as I heard the deep voice at the other end, I knew who it was.

"How's the young detective?" Mr. Clemens asked.

"Just fine, sir," I replied.

"I got back a little sooner than I expected," Mr. Clemens said. "Have you had a chance to do any work on this Wudge assignment?"

I took a deep breath and stuck out my chest. "Yes, sir," I said proudly. "We met Captain Wudge; we identified the chessmen that you described; and we have taken the pictures."

"You have?" he asked in amazement. "That is really fast work."

"Speedy service is our motto," I replied.

"And I must say you live up to it. When will we know how the pictures turned out?"

"We have prints," I said. "We ordered some enlargements today of the best ones, but we have some that we could show you now if you'd like."

"I can think of nothing that would interest me more."

"I'll have to get in touch with Swede," I told him. "He has the pictures."

"I just arrived in town," Mr. Clemens said, "and I haven't eaten, nor have I checked in at the motel. Suppose I locate a room and meet you in about a half-hour? Where's a good restaurant? You could join me for a piece of pie or something."

"The Maple Grill has good food," I told him. "We'll be there at eight-thirty."

I told Dad that I was going downtown and I got on my bicycle and rode over to Swede's house. He put on a clean shirt, stuck the pictures in his pocket, and we started toward the Maple Grill on our bikes.

"You know there's one thing that worries me about this," Swede remarked. "Do you remember those two lugs who broke into Wudge's house?"

"Of course I remember them," I said. "I'm not likely to forget spending all that time up on the roof."

"Well, did they look like two men with a lot of imagination?" Swede asked.

"My guess would be that they would have about as much imagination as a mackerel," I replied.

"That would be my guess too," Swede agreed. "But whoever got Wudge away from the house that day used a little imagination."

"What are you driving at?" I asked.

"Well, Miller out at the police barracks said someone called Wudge that morning, claiming to have an unusual chess set. Whoever did that must have known Wudge was interested in chess, and he must have known something

about chess himself in order to give Wudge a story that would interest him. Now does that sound like either of those two men?"

"No, it doesn't," I admitted.

"Then who could it have been?" Swede asked.

"How should I know?"

I did know, and Swede knew that I knew. He was thinking of Mr. Clemens. Mr. Clemens knew that Captain Wudge was interested in chess. Also, Mr. Clemens was a chess authority.

"We don't want to get mixed up in any robbery," Swede said after a minute or two. "Especially not on the wrong side."

"But what would be the point of the pictures?" I objected. "A few pictures can't hurt Captain Wudge."

"I've been trying to figure out about those pictures," Swede admitted. "I can't see much harm in delivering them to Mr. Clemens. But suppose he isn't going to use them for an article about chess at all?"

"Then what would he use them for?"

"I don't know."

We had ten minutes before it was time to meet Mr. Clemens, so we stopped at the park and sat down on a bench to talk things over. We racked our brains but we couldn't think of a single logical reason why Mr. Clemens would want a picture of those chessmen except as an illustration for an article or a book.

"That set may be especially valuable," Swede suggested. "Mr. Clemens may want the picture to help his two burglars identify the right set. With a picture they wouldn't waste

so much time going through all those sets out at Captain Wudge's."

"Then why didn't he give them the picture that he gave us?" I asked. "We were able to identify the set without any trouble."

That ruined that idea, and we were back where we started. Finally at eight-thirty we agreed that we could see nothing wrong with giving Mr. Clemens the pictures. However, we also agreed to keep quiet about where the set was and how we had managed to take the photographs. If Mr. Clemens had ideas about trying to steal the Ascension Island set, his men would be looking in the wrong place if they looked at Captain Wudge's.

We arrived at the Maple Grill about eight-thirty-five and had no trouble locating Mr. Clemens. He was hunched up beside one of the tables, with his head about a foot above every other diner in the place. When Swede and I sat down we looked like two grasshoppers sitting at the same table with a praying mantis.

"Good evening, gentlemen," Mr. Clemens said heartily. "What would you like to eat?"

"We've both had dinner," I explained.

He insisted on our eating something, so we finally ordered cherry pie à la mode. I had been suspicious when we walked into the café, but you couldn't be around Mr. Clemens long and not like and trust him. That alligator face of his was just as friendly as it was ugly.

"Have you got the pictures?" he asked eagerly.

Without a word, Swede pulled them out and laid them on the table. Mr. Clemens took them from the envelope

and went through them slowly. He examined each one carefully. When he came to the best one, the one of just the two kings and the two queens, he got out a magnifying glass from an inside pocket and looked at the picture through that.

"Excellent," he said happily. "I congratulate you both. You've done a wonderful job. Now, did I understand you correctly when you said that you are getting enlargements made of these?"

"Only of that one," Swede said, pointing at the print. "It seemed the best."

"A good selection," Mr. Clemens agreed. "What size are you having it made?"

"About five-by-eight."

"I think that will do the trick," Mr. Clemens said thoughtfully. "I certainly hope so. If that doesn't answer my questions, then they can't be answered without seeing the actual pieces."

He reached in his hip pocket and pulled out his billfold. Carefully and deliberately he laid a twenty-dollar bill in front of Swede and another twenty-dollar bill in front of me. "How's that?" he asked.

"It's too much," I said. "What do you think, Swede?"

Swede nodded. "It wasn't very much trouble. One twenty between us would be fine."

"If you were clever enough to find an easy way of taking those pictures, then good for you," said Mr. Clemens. "Anybody doing a job should be paid for results. Put the money in your pockets. I'm certainly well satisfied, if you are."

The waitress arrived with our pie à la mode and it seemed

silly to leave all that money lying around there on the table, so Swede and I stuck our twenty-dollar bills in our pockets.

"I suppose the enlargements will be ready in a day or two?" Mr. Clemens asked.

"Sometime Wednesday afternoon," Swede replied. "I said there was no hurry, but I suppose I could get them sooner, if you'd like."

"No, Wednesday will be perfectly satisfactory," Mr. Clemens said. "I'm astonished that you've accomplished so much in such a short time. Many of the so-called experienced operators in the detective business could take lessons from you two boys."

By this time I had forgotten all my suspicions of Mr. Clemens. He had an easy way of talking, and something about him made one feel that he was honest. I suppose it isn't smart to pay any attention to hunches in the detective business, but I had a hunch that Mr. Clemens was all right. I was convinced that we could trust him, until the waitress appeared with the check.

The check was on a little plate which the waitress placed on the table in front of Mr. Clemens. He pulled out his billfold again and took out still another twenty-dollar bill. I began to wonder if he carried anything other than twenty-dollar bills. His billfold looked fat and full, and if it held nothing but twenties I figured that he must be carrying quite a bit of money. The waitress picked up the plate and went to get change. Mr. Clemens waited, holding his billfold in his hand. It was a nice billfold, although it was worn. It was made of alligator and had little gold corners. Near one edge were two initials which had been gold too at

one time, but most of the gold had worn away. The initials, however, were still quite plain. I glanced at them and for a minute they didn't register. Then I realized what they were. They were "H.S." There was no "C." anywhere. Either Mr. Clemens had someone else's billfold or his name wasn't Clemens at all.

The waitress returned with the change and, after leaving a tip, Mr. Clemens stood up. We all walked to the door together. When we got outside, he said good night and started down the street toward his little blue bug of a car, which was parked in front of the hardware store. I stood where I was, watching his tall gangling figure. He was at least eight or nine inches taller than anyone else on the street, so tall that people turned around to look at him. His height alone made him odd enough, and with that long, thin face he certainly attracted attention. No one who was so peculiar-looking could possibly be a successful crook. People would be able to identify him too easily.

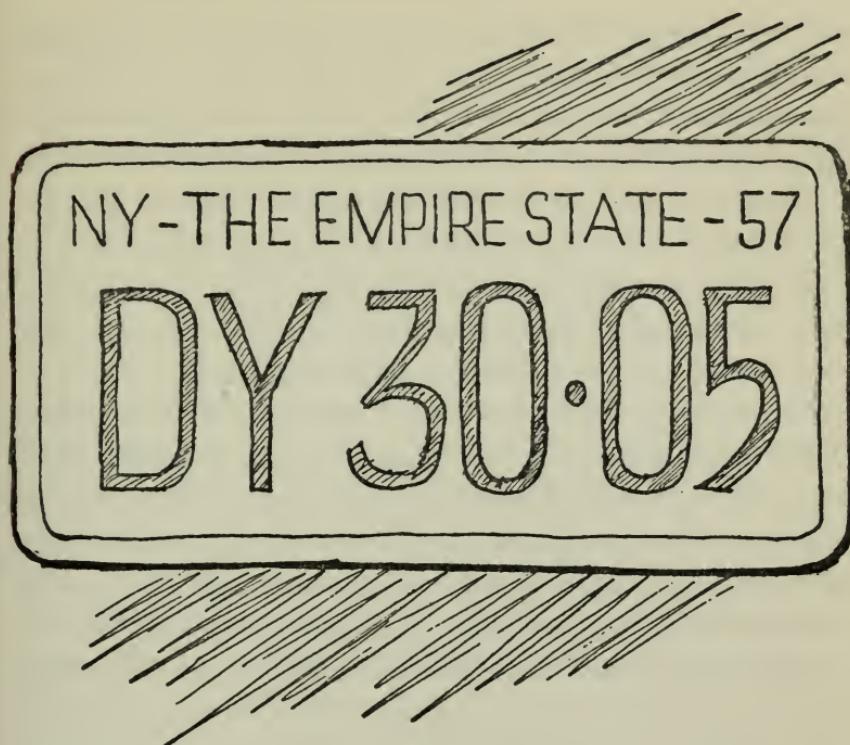
"Come on," Swede said. "Let's get going."

We started walking toward our bicycles. "That article we saw in the chess magazine in the antique shop," I said, "did it give his name any place?"

Swede thought a minute. "No, I don't think it did. It just said something about the author underneath the picture. Why?"

"Because the initials on his billfold were 'H.S.' "

Mr. Clemens came by in his car. He waved at us gaily and then the light changed and he went on down the street, disappearing into the darkness.



6. MARSHMALLOW SYRUP

Although the enlargements of the chess pictures weren't to be ready until Wednesday, we were able to get the glossy prints of Miss Fallon on Monday morning. I had written a short article about the chess sets' being on display at the museum, and I added something about Captain Wudge's being one of the top chess collectors in the country. The book that he had lent Swede and me was quite interesting. It told all about the origin of chess and how the game started in India between 500 and 600 A.D. I put some of this in my article, and I was quite proud of it when I had

finished. I borrowed Dad's portable typewriter and typed the article Sunday night. He told me that articles for newspapers should always be double-spaced and typed on only one side of the paper. I did that, and although there were a number of erasures, the article looked professional to me when I had finished it. Swede's pictures turned out well, and when we walked into the office of *The Belleville Enterprise* on Monday morning we felt we had done our best whether or not we got our work in the paper.

Mr. Gerber, who runs *The Belleville Enterprise*, is a funny brusque little man who wears a green eyeshade. He's the editor and the owner, but he also likes to work out in the shop. No matter how early in the morning you see him, he always has an ink smudge on his nose. Dad claims that he puts ink on his nose before he sits down to breakfast.

Mr. Gerber looked at Swede's pictures, nodded, said, "Hum," and then read my article. While he was doing this we went over to the door and watched the presses in the back room. They do job printing at the *Enterprise* offices—things like stationery, sale bills, and business forms. I like the smell of ink, and I've always been interested in how a newspaper is printed. I think that next to being a detective or a forest ranger, I'd like to be a printer.

"Very good," Mr. Gerber said suddenly, "very good indeed." He pulled open his cash drawer and took out two five-dollar bills. "I'll pay you five dollars for the pictures, young man, and you five dollars for the article."

We were both flabbergasted. We hadn't expected to be paid anything. Miss Fallon had been so pleased at having her picture taken that all we had wanted was to get that in the

paper and to have her name mentioned. She does a great deal of work, and no one ever gives her much credit.

We thanked Mr. Gerber for the money and went on our way. Neither one of us had found time enough to play any chess yet, and we decided to do it now.

"I think I'm going to like the game," Swede said. "Altogether it's made us thirty-five dollars apiece so far. I've never played any other game that made any money."

Swede had located a chess set someplace so we went to his house. We spent most of the morning in his back yard, trying to play our first game. Chess is not simple, like checkers, and every piece has a different move. Once you get used to it, however, it's twice as much fun as checkers. It takes a long time to play a game, especially when you have to look at the rule book every two or three minutes, as we did. We hadn't half finished when it was time for lunch.

We both had work to do during the afternoon, but after dinner we met and went downtown to a movie. It wasn't a good show and we were both disgusted. The name of it was *The Lost Hour*, which we thought was a mystery and instead was a romance. We stayed to the end because there was a funny cartoon and we wanted to see that again. It was about nine-thirty when we left. We were looking at the billboard of coming attractions when two men walked out of the theater. Swede nudged me in the ribs and jerked his head.

"Look who's coming," he whispered.

Not more than five feet from us was the stringy, sour-looking man named Al, and his short, round-faced partner

—the two men who had broken into Captain Wudge's house. They didn't pay any attention to us, naturally, since neither of them had seen us before. We continued to look at the billboard until they strolled down the street. After they had gone a short distance, we followed.

"Do you think we ought to call the police?" I asked doubtfully.

"I don't know," Swede replied. "We've put ourselves on a spot by not saying we were there in the first place. Besides, what would they arrest them for?"

"Housebreaking."

"Yeah, I suppose they could," Swede agreed. "But they didn't steal anything, as far as we know, so probably nothing much would happen to them."

"Okay, let's just follow them and see if we can find out where they're staying."

The two men walked down the street about half a block and started to get in their car, the gray Pontiac that they had driven the day they were at Captain Wudge's. It was parked parallel to the curb, with a car ahead of it and one behind. The short, heavyset man opened the right front door and Al started to walk around the front bumper toward the driver's side. Then he changed his mind. He said something to the other man and the two began walking down the street again. At the corner they turned into a cigar store.

"They're probably after some cigarettes," Swede observed. "Once they get in the car, we'll lose them."

"I wish we had a car and could follow them," I said.

"We might have a long ride," Swede observed. "They might be on their way to New York. They have a New

York license plate." We both pulled out notebooks and wrote down the license number.

"I think they're staying somewhere right around here," I said. "Otherwise why would they go to the movies here? Even if they were staying someplace as close as New Brunswick or Trenton they wouldn't come here to the movies."

"Well, I suppose we could try following them on our bicycles," Swede suggested without much enthusiasm. "If they obey the speed laws we might be able to keep track of them as far as the edge of town."

"We could let the air out of their tires and slow them down."

"Not time enough," Swede said. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a long nail. "That's a thought, though. I could put this nail so that it would go in their tire. That would slow them down. In fact, it would stop them."

"Just the thing," I agreed. "Quick."

Swede reached down and wedged his nail under the back of the rear tire. Their car was almost against the bumper of the car ahead, and they would have to back up to get out of the parking place. The minute the car moved backward, the nail would go into the rubber.

"That's a dirty trick," Swede said as he moved away.

"Dirty trick, nothing," I replied. "I didn't enjoy being trapped up on that roof. I don't feel a bit sorry for them."

"This just delays things," Swede pointed out. "As soon as they get the tire changed they'll go off and leave us anyhow."

"The way I figure it, they'll be too lazy to change the tire," I said. "They'll go to the nearest service station and

get a man, or if they do change it themselves, they'll take the tire to the service station to be fixed. It's late to wait for it to be fixed now, especially if they're staying around here. Maybe they'll leave the tire and call for it tomorrow."

"It's possible," Swede admitted.

We moved several doors away and pretended to be looking in a clothing-store window. A minute later the two men came out of the tobacco store and sauntered toward their car. Al walked out into the street, passing between the rear of his car and the front of the one behind. He climbed in under the steering wheel, but his round-faced partner stood with his hand on the door handle, peering up the street.

"Come on, Little Neck," Al called from inside. "Quit gawking and get in."

"I wonder why he called him Little Neck?" I asked. "He's got a neck like a Black Angus bull."

"And probably just as dirty," Swede said. "Here we go."

Al started the motor and we waited tensely for him to back up and ram the nail into his tire. At that moment a big man hurried up to the car ahead and got in. The space ahead of him was vacant, and in about ten seconds he had pulled out into the street. The gray Pontiac waited and did the same thing. It didn't back up at all.

"Phooey!" I said in disgust. "That other big lunkhead *would* have to come out just at the wrong moment! Let's go home."

"Wait a minute," Swede said. "I want to get my nail back."

"Come on and I'll give you half a dozen nails," I said.

"No, this is a special nail," Swede answered. "I filed it to a sharp point this afternoon so that I can poke holes in

some leather that I'm making into a pair of moccasins."

After he found the nail in the gutter, we walked up to Eckleberry's drugstore. We had left our bicycles in the rack by the side door. You're not allowed to ride your bicycles on the sidewalk in Belleville, and we were wheeling ours along the main street in the general direction of home, when the gray Pontiac with the New York license plate passed us again.

"They turned around," Swede said. "Should we see if we can keep up with them?"

The car was cruising along slowly, and the man called Little Neck had his head out the window, looking at the shop signs. He said something to the driver and pointed back in the general direction of Eckleberry's drugstore. Deciding against chasing the car, we stood where we were and waited. The car went slowly on for three blocks and then made a U-turn and came back. It was now pointed in the same direction as it had been when it was parked.

"What do you suppose they're up to?" I asked.

"I don't know," Swede replied. "But they're certainly looking everything in town over very carefully."

Belleville has about five blocks of business district, with a few stores on the side streets. Everything was closed at that hour except the three drugstores, two restaurants, a delicatessen, a cigar store, and one place that sold newspapers and toys. There were a few people on the streets, but not a sign of any of Belleville's police force.

"You don't suppose they're planning on holding up some place, do you?" I asked excitedly.

"Could be," Swede answered. "They're certainly acting very strange."

The gray car made a second U-turn and again came back. This time it parked directly in front of Eckleberry's drug-store. With our knees feeling sort of wobbly, we turned and walked back in that direction. We didn't want to get close enough to be in the way if any bullets started flying, but we didn't want to miss anything, either. The two men climbed out of the car and sauntered toward the drugstore. We were close enough to hear what they were saying.

"I don't know why you're so particular," Al complained.

"I've been in every joint in town," Little Neck replied. "And this is the best."

There wasn't a customer in the drugstore, and we waited tensely while the two men walked through the front door and back to the soda fountain, where Frosty was cleaning up. We call Mr. Eckleberry "Frosty" because he makes such good frosted chocolates. Little Neck said something to him and he nodded and pointed to a sign. Then he picked up two containers and began filling them with ice cream. Swede and I looked at each other foolishly and grinned.

"Little Neck was right," Swede said. "I've tried every place in town too, and this is the best ice cream."

Sweeney, who works for Mr. Eckleberry, came out the side door, carrying a big cardboard carton full of trash. He brought it to the main street and set it down near the curb. The sanitation truck collects trash about seven o'clock in the morning, and Eckleberry's isn't open at that hour. The big box was filled with empty jars, cans, and other trash. On top was a gallon can with a label—"Marshmallow Syrup."

"He must have made a lot of banana splits today," I observed.

"Not from that," Sweeney said. "That can's practically full. It's moldy. It's the first time in the twenty years I've worked here that I've ever had a can of fountain syrup go bad on me."

There were odds and ends of string and cardboard in addition to the bottles and cans in the box. Swede looked at them thoughtfully. "We could tie a tin can to their bumper," he suggested. "Then we could follow them, the way they do newlyweds."

"Or we could pour the marshmallow syrup on their tires and they'd leave tracks," I said, proving I could be just as silly as he was.

Then we had a really brilliant idea. I said, "The marshmallow can"; and Swede said, "With a hole in it." We didn't need to explain things any further.

I grabbed the gallon can of marshmallow syrup and put it on the bumper, next to the license plate. Swede took a piece of string and tied it in place as tightly as he could, running the string between the trunk handle and the end of the bumper. Then he pulled the nail from his pocket and held it in place near the bottom of the can and said, "Kick it, but don't mash my fingers." I lifted my foot and gave the nail a hard kick with my heel the very first try. That nail must have been needle-sharp, because it punctured that can like a balloon. Swede yanked the nail out and we watched while a thin trickle of marshmallow syrup began pouring out onto the black pavement.

"Success!" I said. "Let's get out of here."

"We're all set if they don't look at the rear end of the car," Swede said.

We got our bikes and rode to the first intersection, where

we waited. A minute later the two men came out of the drugstore with a paper bag. They got in the car without even glancing at the trunk. There was no one parked ahead of them, so they simply drove forward into the street. By the time they passed Swede and me they were going at a fairly fast clip, but we could see a thin but steady stream of marshmallow syrup coming from the rear bumper.

We jumped on our bikes and started after them. They turned about five blocks ahead and headed along the highway, going east. We weren't wasting time, but we weren't breaking our necks, either, trying to keep them in sight. If they didn't go too far we could follow the marshmallow trail. If they did go far, eventually they would run out of syrup.

Fortunately Swede had a flashlight on his bicycle because after we left the edge of town we needed it. However, with a light, it was simple to follow the trail. The nail hole was exactly the right size; enough marshmallow leaked out so that we could see it without difficulty. Apparently several other cars had gone by after the gray Pontiac, because here and there the trail was splotchy. We had followed the car about a mile when the trail began to fade. Either the marshmallow was giving out, or too many other cars had come by.

"What do you think?" Swede asked. "Should we go on out to the intersection?"

The intersection he meant was about four miles from town and was the junction of two highways. Two service stations, a diner, and a motel were located there. The Sleeping Beauty Motel, which is on the north side of town, is newer and better, but the Three Oaks Motel, which is at the intersection, isn't bad either.

"They may be staying at the Three Oaks," I said. "Let's take a look, anyhow."

The Three Oaks Motel is built like a crescent, with one end toward the highway. We turned in the graveled driveway and pedaled up to the office. From there we could see the entire crescent, with all the cars parked in front of the rooms. Near the far end was a gray Pontiac with a New York license plate, and even from where we stood, we could see that it had a gallon can tied to the bumper. The Pontiac wasn't what caught Swede's and my attention, however. Right next to it was a little blue bug of a car. It was an MG with the top down.

"There are quite a few MGs around," I said weakly. "It could be someone else's."

"But I doubt if it is," Swede said.

I doubted it too. "Do you think we ought to take that can off the Pontiac?" I asked. "They might figure out they'd been followed."

"I don't guess they'd know what it was for," Swede said. "But if they're a couple of burglars, it might make them suspicious."

We left our bikes near the motel office and walked along behind the row of cars until we came to the Pontiac. Swede cut the string loose with his pocket knife and I took the can. Near the office we found a trashcan, and we dumped the can and string in that.

"Do you know the man who runs this place?" I asked Swede.

"No," Swede replied. "And people who run hotels and motels aren't very anxious to answer questions about their guests."

"Let's go get a hamburger and see what we can do on the telephone," I suggested.

We crossed the road to the diner and ordered hamburgers. While they were cooking, I went to the phone booth and called the Three Oaks Motel. It took quite a while for the man to answer, and he was grumpy when he did.

"Would you mind calling Mr. Clemens to the telephone," I said. "It's rather important."

"Clemens?" he asked. "I don't think we have a Clemens. Let me look."

There was silence for a minute and then he came back to the telephone. "There's no Clemens registered here," he said in an annoyed voice, and slammed the receiver back on the cradle.

I rejoined Swede at the counter. "If that is our man's MG, and he's staying over there, he's not using the name Clemens," I told Swede. "What's more, the man who runs the place is grouchy as a bear and he's not going to volunteer any information."

We couldn't think of anything more that we could do, so we got on our bicycles and pedaled back toward town.

Swede and I had a conference the next day in our offices above the garage. It seemed mighty strange that Mr. Clemens, who wanted pictures taken of Mr. Wudge's chess sets, should be staying at the same motel right next door to the two thugs who had broken into Captain Wudge's house.

"I guess we pulled a boner," Swede said, "giving him those pictures. He may look honest, but I think he's got some plot afoot."

We decided that there were only two things that we

could do. We could go tell everything to the police, or we could make a clean breast of everything to Captain Wudge. I didn't like either idea, and neither did Swede, but we had to do something. After a lot of talking, we decided that talking to Captain Wudge was the best plan.

"He may lose his temper and blow his top," Swede said. "But he'll probably come closer to knowing why Clemens wants a picture of his chess sets than the police will."

"I wish we knew what Clemens' real name was," I said.

We had about decided that our only hope of learning Mr. Clemens' real name was to buy the stack of old chess magazines in the antique shop, when we had a better idea. We went inside and called the Three Oaks Motel.

"Hello," Swede said when a voice answered at the other end, "this is the Acme Service Station in town. Last night I fixed a tire for a very tall, thin man in a little MG. He said he was staying at your place."

I leaned close so that I could hear also. There was a woman on the telephone, and she was a trifle more cooperative than the man had been the night before.

"There was a man here answering to that description," she said, "but he's checked out."

"Well, he didn't take his tire," Swede said.

"I suppose he went away and forgot about it completely. That's a shame."

"Do you have his name and address?" Swede asked.

"Wait just a moment." She was gone a minute. "It's Mr. Hiram Snedeker, Boxwood Drive, Oak Hills, Pennsylvania."

"Thank you very much."

Swede hung up the phone and looked at me. "Hiram

Snedeker," he said. "That's a phony name too. However, we did the best we could."

He handed me the telephone. "Now it's your turn."

I didn't enjoy the job but it had to be done. I looked up Captain Wudge's number and placed the call. From the way he bellowed into the phone, he sounded mad at something already. "Captain Wudge, this is Neil Lambert," I said.

"Neil Lambert? Neil Lambert?" he asked.

"Swede Larson and I were out to look at your chess sets the other day," I told him.

"Oh yes," he said in a more friendly voice. "What can I do for you?"

"We'd like to come out and see you," I replied. "We have some information we think we ought to tell you."

"I can't see you today," he said. "The house is full of guests. My son and his wife are here, and their three children."

"Would tomorrow be all right?" I asked, feeling relieved that he hadn't told us to come out immediately.

"Tomorrow afternoon will be fine. What's this all about, anyhow?"

"It's about a man named Mr. Clemens."

"Mr. Clemens?" he barked. "Never heard of him."

"Well, he seems to have another name—Hiram Snedeker."

"Hiram Snedeker!" he bellowed. "What do you know about Hiram Snedeker?"

"Swede and I have been talking to him," I replied.

"Talking to him? Is that blackguard around here?"

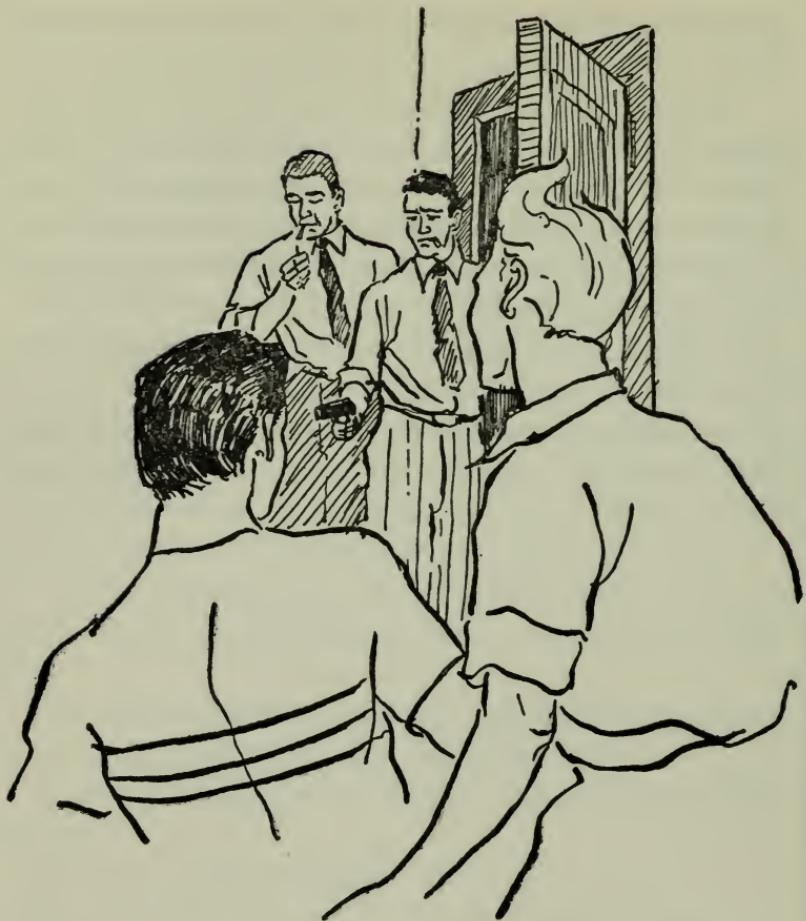
"He was last night," I replied, getting worried. It was

obvious that Captain Wudge didn't like Hiram Snedeker. What's more, he was getting angrier by the minute.

"Maybe you'd better come out here today after all," Captain Wudge said. Then he paused and seemed to calm down. "No, I guess not. I'm very interested in any news that you may have about Hiram Snedeker, but after all, my son gets by only once a year or so to visit me. So tomorrow then, about one o'clock."

I replaced the telephone and turned to Swede. "He doesn't like Hiram Snedeker," I said.

"I got that impression," Swede said dryly. "And unless Hiram Snedeker is awfully far away, he probably heard too."



7. THE SHAH'S CHESS SET

We were busy as bees Wednesday morning. In order to tell Captain Wudge exactly what had happened we needed copies of the photographs Swede had taken. So he went down to help in his brother-in-law's studios and to hurry up the enlargements that we had ordered. I went to *The*

Belleville Enterprise offices and got a copy of the paper the minute it came off the presses at eleven o'clock. The picture Swede had taken of Miss Fallon was on the front page. She was holding several of the chessmen, and not only was it a good picture of her; you could see all three chess sets in the glass case behind her, as well. They had printed my entire article, and I felt pretty proud when I read it. I got an extra copy to take along to show Captain Wudge. Maybe the publicity would make him feel good and he wouldn't be so angry at Swede and me.

I certainly wasn't anxious for the visit, but we showed up at Captain Wudge's door promptly at one o'clock. He was expecting us and he led us right into his downstairs display room.

"Swede took a picture of the chessmen in the museum," I said, "and I wrote an article. The paper came out this morning, and I thought you'd be interested."

He took the paper, gave it a glance, and said, "Yes, yes, um, very nice, um, I'll get around to reading it later. Now, what's this about Snedeker? What is that misinformed, cross-grained imbecile doing around here?"

"Is he a tall skinny man, who drives a little MG?" Swede asked.

"I don't know what he looks like!" Captain Wudge barked. "I've never seen the man."

"Why do you dislike him so, then?" I asked.

"Because he is one of the stupidest, most pigheaded men it has ever been my misfortune to have anything to do with," Wudge said angrily. "Hiram Snedeker is probably responsible for the dissemination of more misinformation than any man I can think of."

"What does he do?" I asked.

"He publishes a little magazine on chess," Wudge said in complete disgust. "He must have some money behind him, and I daresay he's the owner as well as the publisher. Certainly no respectable magazine that he didn't own would publish some of the silly tripe he writes."

"Then he's a chess authority too?" I asked.

"He *thinks* he's a chess authority!"

There was no doubt that Captain Wudge did *not* think Hiram Snedeker was a chess authority. He paced up and down the long room, fuming and getting angrier, just thinking of Snedeker. Finally he stopped, glared at Swede and me, and said with suppressed rage, "Why, Hiram Snedeker has even tried to revive that old argument about chess's having been a four-handed game before it was two-handed!"

I didn't know what he was talking about, but obviously he thought that his remark proved how dumb Hiram Snedeker was. Suddenly he remembered that we had come to tell *him* some news about Snedeker.

"That's right," he barked. "You two were going to tell me something about him. Come on, come on, out with it! What are you waiting for?"

"We haven't had the chance to tell you yet," Swede said mildly.

"No, I guess I haven't given you much opportunity," Captain Wudge admitted, calming down just as suddenly as he had grown angry. "All right, I'll let you do the talking for a while."

We told him the whole story of having met Snedeker, of his hiring us to take a picture of the Ascension Island set,

and of how I happened to be on the roof the day the two men had climbed in the second-story window. We ended by telling about following the marshmallow trail on Monday night.

"Clever work," Captain Wudge said. "Of course those two hoodlums are working for Snedeker. Now what do you suppose he's after?"

"He said he's after a picture to illustrate his article," I replied. "He's supposed to get in touch with us later this afternoon in order to get the enlargements."

"Why do you suppose he said his name was Clemens?" Swede asked. "The name Snedeker would have meant nothing to either of us."

"He was afraid you might possibly mention the name to me," Captain Wudge said thoughtfully. "Of course it would have meant something to me. He and I have been carrying on a magazine battle about chess for fifteen years. He is one of the most obstinate, illogical, obtuse individuals it has ever been my misfortune to run across. How he has managed to collect so much misinformation about one subject in a single lifetime is beyond me."

His face began to grow red again and we could see that he was about to take off and pace the floor once more in his anger over Snedeker. I don't know what the captain and Snedeker had disagreed about, but it was a good thing they argued in print, because the captain would probably have gone for his shotgun if Snedeker had been within range.

"Why would he hire us to photograph the chess pieces, if he already had those two thugs working for him?" I asked.

Captain Wudge pulled his mind away from his grudge

against Snedeker with an effort and returned to the problem. "Hiram Snedeker is a man of considerable means, and he spares no expense where his hobby is concerned. He has one of the best chess collections in the country. Probably there isn't a better one, outside of a museum, except mine." The captain stuck out his chest a trifle and smiled triumphantly. "Hiram Snedeker has been jealous of me for years. I beat him to a number of chess sets that he was after, and he wants revenge."

"You mean he'd steal some of your sets?" Swede asked.

"I don't think he'd stoop to stealing," the captain answered. "But nothing else would be too low for him, if he could win some sort of victory over me, or prove that I was wrong in some way"—he paused, and then gloated—"which he has never been able to do."

Swede looked at me and shook his head in wonderment. I felt much the same way. How two grown men could get so worked up over a game was beyond me. You would think from the way Captain Wudge talked that the whole world was hanging breathlessly on what he or Hiram Snedeker said next about chess. Maybe other chess fanatics were; I didn't know.

"Do you think he hired those two men, and Swede and me too, just to be certain of getting a photograph?" I asked.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Captain Wudge replied. "I've received a great deal of publicity because of that Ascension Island set. To begin with, it's a very fine and unusual collection of chessmen, and also there's the mystery of where it came from. Hiram Snedeker probably has some harebrained idea that he can prove that the set is a fake or

that I didn't get it on Ascension Island at all. No doubt he needs to examine the pieces closely to prove whatever crazy theory he has in mind. Now, the police checked and found that the call from the supposed antique-dealer in Doylestown with the unusual chess set was a fake. Hiram Snedeker was undoubtedly behind that. He expected that I would be away from the house for at least a few hours, so he sent these two men out to get the set." The captain snorted in disdain. "He was probably afraid to come himself."

"Do you think he would have kept the chess pieces if they had managed to steal them?" Swede asked.

"No," Captain Wudge said promptly. "Snedeker probably hoped to examine them and return them immediately. Perhaps he planned to photograph them at the same time."

"Then where would we fit in?" I objected. "He hired us before those men broke into the house."

"That's just a detail," Captain Wudge said with a wave of his hand. "Perhaps they'd tried before and failed and so he hired you two boys just as a sort of insurance. As I said, expense would mean nothing to him if he could steal a march on me."

The captain's theory seemed a bit illogical to me, but I wasn't going to argue. If he was satisfied with it, it was all right with me. It solved at least one thing—Snedeker wasn't a real criminal, if all he was after was to prove that Captain Wudge was wrong about a chess set. Maybe climbing into someone's house through the second-story window is technically against the law, but to me the whole thing seemed like a big game between two overgrown boys. I

felt relieved because I had liked Mr. Snedeker, or Mr. Clemens.

"If he calls later this afternoon, should we go ahead and give him these pictures?" Swede asked. He had the envelope with the enlargements inside his shirt. He pulled them out to show them to Captain Wudge.

Wudge examined the pictures carefully. "Excellent photographs," he said, with a nod of his head. "I wouldn't be ashamed to have those published at any time. There's very fine carving in those pieces, and I'm proud of them. Sure, give them to Snedeker. Let him publish an article and I'll make hash of it. Forewarned is forearmed!"

The front doorbell rang and all three of us jumped as though someone had shot off a gun. We had been so absorbed in our talk that the bell sounded like a fire alarm. Captain Wudge frowned in annoyance and started toward the door.

"Now who in the world could that be?" he asked in an exasperated tone. "If it's some salesman I'll slam the door in his face!"

I grinned at Swede as the captain left the room. I could see what that neighbor had meant when he said that Captain Wudge really had an even temper: that he was always boiling mad.

We expected to hear the captain bellowing at someone to go away, but we waited for almost a minute and there was not a sound. Then suddenly he came back in the room, his face almost purple with rage. Behind him came the mean-faced man named Al, and in his hand he held an ugly automatic.

"This is going too far!" Captain Wudge said, almost

choking in his anger. "I'll see Hiram Snedecker in jail for this!"

"Quit frothing at the mouth," Al said calmly, "and sit down."

Little Neck appeared in the doorway. "Everything jake?" he asked.

"Yep," Al answered. "Go tell the boss the coast is clear. And there's plenty of time, so don't go driving seventy, like you usually do."

"Right," said Little Neck. He made a mocking half-salute in the direction of Captain Wudge and said, "Watch out, sailor boy, or you'll blow a gasket."

I thought Captain Wudge *was* going to blow a gasket, the remark made him so furious. He started to get up, but Al waved the gun at him.

"Sit down," he warned. "Don't pay any attention to Little Neck."

I heard the front door slam and a minute later the sound of the car going out of the drive. I don't know why we hadn't heard it coming in. I suppose it's because we were all talking and weren't expecting anyone. Al sat on the corner of the big mahogany table and swung one leg back and forth. He let his gun dangle down in his lap, but his eyes remained very alert. Captain Wudge seemed to be making a determined effort to get his temper under control.

"What is this all about?" he asked finally, in an almost normal voice.

Al raised one eyebrow. "The boss will be here in a minute," he answered. "Ask him."

Captain Wudge and Swede and I were sitting there like bumps on a log. It seemed to me that I ought to be able to

do something. Finally I decided to at least make a half-hearted try. "Well, we'd better be going, Swede," I said, standing up. "We'll be late."

"Sit down," Al said. "Be late."

"My mother told me to be back at two-fifteen," I argued. "She'll be calling up in a minute."

Al just nodded. "I'm worried," he said sarcastically. I couldn't think of anything else to try and neither could Swede or Captain Wudge. We all sat glumly for at least another five minutes, while Al stayed seated on the corner of the table, swinging his leg back and forth. He said nothing and did nothing, but just looked at us sourly and waited. We didn't know what was going to happen next, but it was a relief when we heard a car on the driveway again. Al didn't appear worried about whether it was his partner or not. He sat where he was, with his eyes warily on the door. A minute later we heard three short "beeps" of the horn.

"That'll be Mr. Jones," Al said. "You can ask him your questions."

The front door opened and we heard steps in the hallway. We all looked toward the library door, expecting either Little Neck or Mr. Snedeker to enter. Instead a tiny, dapper man, not more than five feet five inches tall, walked in. He had on a blue pinstripe suit, and his coal-black hair was plastered down tightly to his head. He was wearing a white shirt with a very conservative blue tie and black shoes that shone like a mirror. In his right hand he held a dark gray Homburg. He glanced around the room with bright, beady black eyes, taking in the glass cases of chess sets, Captain Wudge, Swede, and me.

"This is outrageous, Snedeker!" Captain Wudge bel-

lowed, starting to get to his feet. "You can't get away with it!"

"Jones is the name," the little man said in an oddly clipped voice, "and I seem to be getting away with it."

"Sit down," Al said again.

Captain Wudge didn't sit down. Instead he turned to me. "Is this the man who hired you?" he asked.

I was bewildered. "I never saw this man before in my life. Snedeker is about six feet five and has a little mustache."

Captain Wudge sat down slowly, looking very puzzled. Jones walked over to a chair at the end of the mahogany table, pulled out a white handkerchief, flicked some dust off the seat, and seated himself very gingerly.

"Now let's get down to business," he said in his clipped voice. "A few weeks ago, Captain Wudge, you bought a chess set from a shop on Lexington Avenue, at about Fifty-sixth Street."

Although Captain Wudge hadn't shown any desire to argue with Al's gun, he hadn't appeared in the least frightened or intimidated from the beginning. Now he glared at the little man and bellowed, "And if I did, what business is it of yours?"

Mr. Jones ignored the question. "This was an ivory set, rather simply carved, with very large pieces. I would say some of them were more than three inches tall. Where is this set now?"

Quite plainly Captain Wudge had no intention of cooperating. He glared at the little man, sputtered for a minute, and then said, "Find out for yourself."

Swede and I glanced at each other. We both thought we knew where the set was. It was one of the three that we

had taken to the museum, the set from which Hector had stolen the castle.

"You're being rather foolish, you know," the man said. "You're merely delaying matters. However, I am quite competent to find the set myself." He turned to Al. "See that they stay where they are."

He got up from his chair and made a slow circle of the room, looking at all the chess sets on display in the glass cases. Halfway around the room, he paused and turned in the direction of Captain Wudge.

"Although I'm not a collector of chess sets, I'm a collector of other things, in my way," he announced with a slight smile. "This is a quite creditable collection you have here, Captain."

The patronizing tone made Captain Wudge furious. He grabbed the arms of his chair and I half expected to see him leap to his feet and bellow something back, but instead he managed to remain quiet. Mr. Jones made the rest of his inspection tour in silence. Al continued to sit where he was, still swinging his leg. Little Neck had remained outside, apparently to act as a lookout.

"Where are your other sets?" Mr. Jones asked precisely, when he had finished a circuit of the room.

Captain Wudge said nothing, but glared in defiance.

"He's got another room like this upstairs," Al said.

"Then we'll all go upstairs," Mr. Jones announced. "After you, gentlemen."

Swede had been sitting in his chair, holding the envelope with the enlargements in it. He got up with this in his hands. I don't know what made me do it but I reached out and picked up the copy of *The Belleville Enterprise* that I had

brought to show Captain Wudge. You do funny things when you're tense and frightened, and I guess I thought I might not be coming back to that room, and it was my paper, and I wanted it.

We marched out of the door single file, like Indians, and turned up the stairs. Swede went first; I was second; Captain Wudge and Al and Mr. Jones brought up the rear. When we got to the second floor, we turned into the display room and lined up in front of the big table in the center.

"Sit down, gentlemen," Mr. Jones said as he entered. He looked at Captain Wudge, smiled slightly, and said, "After all, this is your house. Make yourself comfortable."

Captain Wudge gurgled with rage but said nothing. Mr. Jones began the same routine of inspecting the chess sets. He looked at each one carefully, but wasted no time. In about three minutes he had made a circuit of the room; then he turned again toward Captain Wudge. This time he was annoyed, and his black eyes were snapping.

"Where else do you keep chess sets, Captain?" he demanded.

"No place," Captain Wudge replied.

"I will search this house from top to bottom if necessary to find what I'm after," Mr. Jones announced. "But I don't want to take all day doing it. If I don't find that set soon, I'll get an answer from you."

He began going through the drawers beneath the glass cabinets that lined the inner wall. One by one, he searched them, looking in various boxes and opening everything. I put my paper on the table and leaned back in my chair. It looked as if it was going to be a long wait.

It *was* a long wait. An hour later Mr. Jones was still searching the bedrooms on the second floor. We stayed where we were, with Al standing guard at the doorway. For most of the hour, he leaned lazily against the door frame without moving. He could stand longer in one position than any man I have ever known. Finally even he got tired, and he started strolling up and down the room. Then for some reason or other he happened to notice the newspaper on the table. I had tossed it down carelessly and it was half turned toward him. He picked it up and walked back toward the door. He still had his gun in his hand, but I guess he thought he could glance at the paper and still keep a close guard on us. He could have, as far as I was concerned, because I wasn't going to try any tricks while he had that gun, whether he was reading or not.

He immediately saw the picture. He glanced at the caption beneath it and yelled, "Mr. Jones, I think I've got something!"

Jones moved like a cat. We didn't hear him coming, but a moment later he was beside Al. Al handed him the paper and pointed at the picture. Jones read a few lines of the article and then looked up and smiled a nasty, gloating smile.

"So, it's on display at the local museum," he said. "Well, well, well."

He pulled out a chair from the opposite side of the table and sat down himself. Very quietly he read the entire article; then he looked up at Al. "It says here that the museum is open every weekday except Wednesday, and today is Wednesday."

He sat in quiet thought for several minutes, tapping the

paper with a forefinger. Then abruptly he asked, "Where's the telephone?"

"Downstairs in the front hall, I think," Al replied.

Mr. Jones silently left the room and was gone a few minutes. When he returned, Little Neck was close behind him. Mr. Jones pulled his chair back against the wall on the opposite side of the room from us, sat down, and turned to Al. "Give me your gun for a while," he said quietly.

Al handed him his gun. Mr. Jones inspected it very carefully and then put it in his lap. "Now here's the plan," he announced. "You'll find a large cardboard carton in the closet beside the telephone. Find some string and tie that up to make it look as though it were a package that had been shipped. Perhaps you had better put something in it to make it heavy, if it's not heavy enough already. Then you and Little Neck are to take the station wagon and drive in to town. The museum is located on the main street and there is an alley in back. You are to drive to the rear entrance and back up near the rear door. Then you go next door to the police station and ask the man there for the key."

"Police station!" Little Neck exclaimed. "Look, boss, I don't want to do any job in a house next door to a police station."

"It's all been arranged," Mr. Jones said quietly and firmly. "I've spoken to Miss Fallon and I've arranged to deliver this package of china. They keep a key at the police station next door. I trust that you'll be able to get the key without the policeman's coming along, but if he does, one of you keep him in conversation at the back door while the other one carries in the package. Take the package to the first floor, drop it anywhere, and locate this case with the chess pieces

in it." Mr. Jones tapped the newspaper. "According to this article, the case is located to the right, in the first room after you enter the front door. Break the case open, smash the glass, or whatever is necessary. Bring the chess set back here."

"Are we going to have any trouble figuring out which one's the right one?" Al asked.

"There are only three," Mr. Jones replied. "Bring all of them."

"What about a lookout?" Al asked. "You'll be without one while we're gone."

"That can't be helped," Mr. Jones replied. "I think two men are more essential on this little expedition than they are here. All right, let's be on our way."

Al and Little Neck clomped downstairs. We heard them rustling around below for some time and then the sound of a car starting and going out the drive. After that there was silence. Mr. Jones sat very quietly and so did we, but as the time passed, I began to grow more and more curious as to why Mr. Jones wanted that particular chess set so badly.

Captain Wudge must have been wondering too, for finally he said, "What is this all about? Why are you so anxious to have that ivory set?"

Mr. Jones looked at Captain Wudge thoughtfully. "Then I take it the set in the museum is the one you bought in New York recently."

Captain Wudge nodded. "Yes, and there's nothing especially outstanding or valuable about it."

"Not as a chess set," Mr. Jones agreed. He looked around

at the glass cases. "This must be a fascinating hobby—almost as fascinating as mine."

"And what is yours?" Captain Wudge asked warily.

"Tracking down the odd and unusual," Mr. Jones replied, a smug look spreading over his face. "You might call me a master treasure-hunter. I specialize in recovering priceless objects of art, jewels, and other items that have become lost." He paused a moment and then added, "I recover them for myself, you understand."

"I would suspect that you were not a philanthropist," Captain Wudge growled. "What's so priceless about this chess set?"

"As I said, there's nothing so valuable about the set itself," Mr. Jones replied. "But what the set contains is another story. You're something of a historian—would you like to know the history of this particular set?"

Captain Wudge nodded.

"Do you know much about Persian history?" Mr. Jones asked.

"Not much," Captain Wudge admitted.

"Few people do," said Mr. Jones, "not even the Persians themselves. Actually I needn't go back into Persian history; just a brief summary of some of the more recent Iranian history will do."

Mr. Jones settled down in his chair and warmed up to his story. However, he did not relax his guard at all and he kept a firm grip on his pistol. As he talked, his cold, hard face became alive for the first time. Whatever else could be said about him, he certainly was interested in his subject.

"As you may know," he said, "the Arabs took over what

is now Iran in six-twenty-six. They brought with them the new religion of Islam and a very dictatorial rule. There were various dynasties over the next eleven hundred years, and then, in seventeen-twenty-two, the Shah was overthrown by the Afghans and there was a brief period of Afghan rule. Shortly after this, however, a man named Nadir Shah chased the Afghans out of what is now Iran and established the Afshar Dynasty. Nadir Shah was quite a military leader, and several years after he had established his rule he made an invasion of India. This was immensely successful. He looted India of some of its greatest treasures, and when he returned to Persia he took with him the famous Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-noor diamond. These were just two of the most important items. He had a treasure in jewels—rubies, emeralds, pearls, diamonds, sapphires—the collection of centuries of some of the Indian princes and maharajahs."

Mr. Jones's eyes glowed as he mentioned the treasures that Nadir Shah had stolen in India. In spirit he was with the Shah and had found the treasures himself. I could see what he meant when he had said earlier that he was a treasure-hunter.

"That much is history," said Mr. Jones with a wave of his hand. "You can find it in any history book. You can also find in any history book that Nadir Shah's military successes and his immense wealth went to his head. He became a very despotic ruler, and he had his ministers and friends beheaded at his slightest whim. Finally his enemies banded together, and in seventeen-forty-seven he was assassinated." Mr. Jones leaned forward in his chair. His excited, beady black eyes looked from one to the other of us. "What most

people do not know is that Nadir Shah loved to play chess. Just how expert a chess player he was we will never know, but apparently he thought rather highly of himself. As you know, the Moslems do not believe in images; it is against their religion. So most of the Moslems use chess sets made of flat disks; but Nadir Shah was an exception. He had a special set carved from ivory. The work was done by a Frenchman, so it looked more like a European set than a Persian one. The set is the one that you recently bought, Captain Wudge."

Captain Wudge had been listening, completely absorbed, just as Swede and I were. Mr. Jones was so interested in his story that we had all caught his fever.

"With all his money the Shah should have been able to get a better set than that," Captain Wudge remarked. "I've got fifty or a hundred that are finer."

"There was nothing so outstanding about the carving of this set," Mr. Jones admitted. "But it had one unusual feature—both the white castles were hollow. Now, as I said, Nadir Shah was a cruel and despotic man. An ordinary game of chess did not satisfy him, so, before each game, he filled one of the white castles with poison and in the other he put a jewel of great value. If Nadir Shah won the game, he was happy, and he would give his opponent a bag of silver; but if he lost, he forced his opponent to choose one of the two white castles. The opponent was told what was in them before he made his choice. If he was lucky, he got the jewel and was warned never to appear at court again. If he was unlucky, he was forced to take the poison—then he was never seen anywhere again." Mr. Jones licked his thin lips. "This added zest to the game for

Nadir Shah. If he won, he was pleased with himself; if he lost, he saw his opponent sweat and perhaps die."

Mr. Jones paused impressively and smiled happily at his thoughts. "When Nadir Shah was assassinated," he said, "he had just started a game of chess with one of his most important ministers. Now, the jewel that he put in the castle was usually commensurate with the position of his opponent, so this time it must have been a jewel of fabulous value. It was a large ruby, I think."

I had forgotten all about being afraid, I was so interested in the story. "What happened to it?" I asked.

Mr. Jones smiled greedily. "Nothing," he replied. "The jewel is still in the castle."

Captain Wudge cleared his throat. "This is all very interesting," he said, "and possibly even true, but the chess set that I bought came from Philadelphia originally, where it had been in the possession of a family there for some time."

Mr. Jones nodded. "I've spent ten years in tracing the set," he said triumphantly, "and it has cost me a fortune in money and time, but I am certain of my research. Are you interested in learning what happened to it next?"

"Naturally," Captain Wudge replied.

"After the assassination of Nadir Shah there was the usual period of chaos," Mr. Jones said. "I suppose the chess set was shoved off in some corner or tucked away with a lot of the other palace possessions. There were various rulers or shahs in power in Persia, until finally Aga Mohammed Khan defeated the last ruler of the Zand Dynasty and set up the Kajar Dynasty, which lasted until nineteen-twenty-five." Mr. Jones paused and looked at Captain Wudge.

"Have you ever heard of a mechanical chess player called the Terrible Turk?"

"Of course," said Captain Wudge. "It was a hoax."

"That I wouldn't know," said Mr. Jones. "I do know that it had nothing to do with Turkey. As I understand it, the device was invented by Baron von Kempelen, an Austrian, and it consisted of a large box or chest on top of which was a chessboard and behind which sat a full-sized turbaned figure of a Turk. As you probably know, this mechanical chess player attracted considerable attention."

"I'm well acquainted with its history," Captain Wudge said with a tone of annoyed impatience.

Mr. Jones was not interested, whether Captain Wudge wanted to hear the details or not. I had the feeling that he had half forgotten we were there, and that he was relating a tale that he had gone over many times and each time had found more interesting than before. His eyes had an absorbed, faraway look. I glanced at his gun and wondered if he had forgotten that too. Probably if any of us had made a move he'd have remembered it quick enough. I don't like to brag about what good detectives Swede and I are, but one mistake that boy detectives never make that grown-up detectives in the books seem to make all the time is the mistake of being too brave. I'd be too scared to try punching anyone in the nose when he had a gun handy, or to try sneaking out of a room when he had a gun in his lap. Besides, I was interested in the story. Captain Wudge may have known all about this automatic chess player called the Terrible Turk, but I had never heard of it before.

"Before each exhibition, the doors were opened to show all the machinery in the chest," Mr. Jones continued. "The

entire apparatus was mounted on casters, so that one could see under it. There was very little possibility that a man could slip into the box through a trapdoor."

"However, a man could have been inside the dummy figure of the Turk," Captain Wudge interrupted.

Mr. Jones did not appreciate the interruption. It was his story and he wanted to tell it. "No one knows exactly how the device operated," he snapped. "In any event, the human opponent of the Terrible Turk did not play on the same board as the mechanical man. He played at a side table with a duplicate set, and an attendant went from the Terrible Turk to the side table to move the pieces. The reason given for this procedure was that it gave the spectator a clearer view of the Terrible Turk. An opponent sitting at the same board would naturally have kept many people from seeing, but all this is beside the point. What is important is that the Terrible Turk attracted a great deal of attention for almost seventy years and its secret was so well kept that no one knows it today."

Jones leaned forward in his chair and his excitement increased. "Now, the Turk was first exhibited in Vienna in seventeen-seventy. During the subsequent thirty or forty years it went on tour throughout Europe. Whatever the secret of its operation, it was a difficult opponent to beat. Some of the best chess players in Europe were defeated. Many of the crowned heads of Europe met the Turk over the chessboard, and there were books written about it. In about eighteen-hundred, the Shah of Iran, who was greatly interested in chess, and of course had heard about the marvelous mechanical chess player, selected one of the best chess players of his court and challenged the Terrible

Turk to a match. The meeting was held in Budapest. Perhaps the Shah had some theory that the chess pieces used contained the secret of the device. At any rate, he sent his own chess set with his representative. By sheer accident he happened to select the special set which Nadir Shah had used some sixty or seventy years before. The secret of the set of course had long since been lost, and the Shah had no knowledge that one of the castles contained a priceless ruby."

"How do you happen to know all this?" the captain asked skeptically.

Jones smiled condescendingly. "That is a story in itself," he said. He waved his hand at the cases of chess sets that lined the room. "I assure you that the research involved in tracking down this one chess set, and learning its history, dwarfs all the work you have ever done in connection with all the sets you own."

Captain Wudge didn't bother to reply to this. He simply snorted.

"Whether the Shah's delegate won or lost his match with the Terrible Turk, I have no idea," Mr. Jones continued. "But I do know that, for one reason or another, he left the chess set with the owners of the mechanical chess player. As I mentioned, there was nothing particularly spectacular about the appearance of this chess set, and perhaps it was the Shah's custom to give a chess set to the winning player. At any rate, the chess set became part of the equipment that went with the Terrible Turk. Eventually the entire apparatus came into the possession of a man named Ludwig Maelzel, who brought it to the United States on tour. He died in Philadelphia in eighteen-thirty-seven. The machine

and all that went with it was bought from his estate by a Philadelphian named Ohl, who in turn sold it to Doctor John K. Mitchell in eighteen-forty. Doctor Mitchell gave the Turk to a Philadelphia museum, where unfortunately it was destroyed by fire in eighteen-fifty-four.” Mr. Jones paused for a moment. “The Terrible Turk is gone forever, and we’ll never know exactly how it operated.”

“How did the chess set escape the fire?” Captain Wudge asked.

“Mr. Ohl did not sell it with the Terrible Turk to Doctor Mitchell,” Mr. Jones replied. “Instead it remained in his family until his granddaughter died, not too long ago. She had a number of antiques, and quite a collection of china, and all of it including the chess set was sold to a Philadelphia antique-dealer. The chess set found its way to New York, where you bought it.”

“And this ruby is still in the white castle?” I asked.

Mr. Jones smiled a very thin smile. “I sincerely hope so,” he replied. “In a very few minutes we shall know.”

“And what do you intend to do with it if it is?” Captain Wudge asked.

“Keep it, of course,” Mr. Jones replied. “It belongs to me.”

“I don’t recall your mentioning yourself as the owner of the chess set at any point in your long story,” Captain Wudge barked.

“As the finder, it belongs to me,” Mr. Jones replied, his eyes gleaming. “For over two hundred years fools like you have owned the chess set, with no idea of what it was worth. That ruby would have been undiscovered for an-

other two hundred years if I hadn't tracked it down. You will still have your chess set just as you had before and be none the poorer. I discovered the secret of the ruby and I intend to take it."

"The law might see it a little differently," Captain Wudge warned.

"I am not interested in what the law says about the owner," Mr. Jones snapped. "I've earned the ruby." He patted the gun in his lap.

There was a sound of a car on the gravel driveway. Mr. Jones sat slightly more erect, but he did not move. "You will all remain quiet," he said crisply. "I trust that this is the long-awaited chess set, but of course it might be the oil man."

I was hoping that it was the state police. When someone reports an attempted burglary or other trouble, an officer often makes frequent checks for some time afterward. However, there was no such luck. The front door opened and Al's voice asked, "Everything okay, boss?"

"Certainly," Mr. Jones snapped. "Did you get it?"

"Easy as falling off a log," Al replied. For the first time there was a cheerful note in his voice. "I'm leaving Little Neck outside as a lookout."

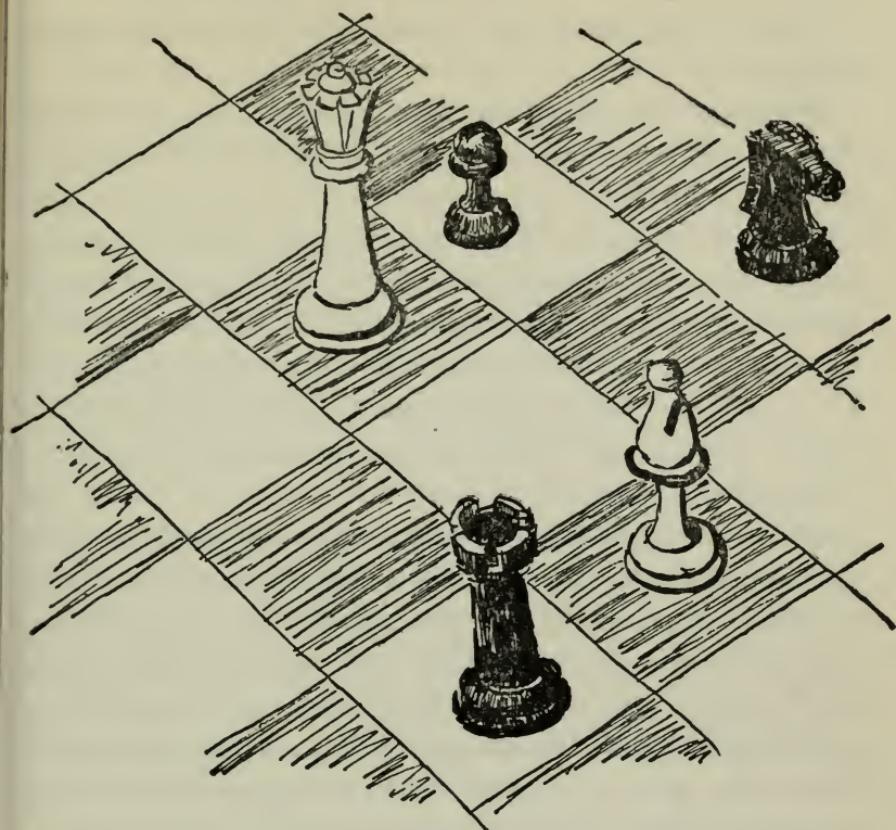
A minute later he appeared, carrying a large brown paper bag in his right hand. He brought this to the center of the table and turned it upside down. All three chess sets that had been on display at the museum had been dumped helter-skelter into the bag. As Al emptied them onto the table they rolled in every direction. Captain Wudge gurgled with rage as he saw his precious Ascension Island set being

treated so roughly. He started to rise from his chair, but subsided in helpless rage when Al gave him a warning glance.

"Keep an eye on them," Mr. Jones ordered. He began pushing the chess pieces to and fro to locate the ones he wanted. Finally with a little crow of triumph he saw both the white castles that he was seeking. He pounced on them in delight and held them up excitedly, his black eyes glittering.

"For ten years I've hunted these," he said triumphantly. "And now they're mine!"

I looked at the two white castles and then I looked at Swede. Mr. Jones might have been hunting the Persian chess set for ten years, but he had not been hunting those two pieces. They were the castles that Swede and I had bought from the antique-dealer near New Hope and had substituted for the originals.



8. JONES IS DISAPPOINTED

Mr. Jones swept all the other chess pieces to the far end of the big table and placed the two white castles on the polished wood surface in front of him. He looked at them lovingly and smiled in the pleased manner of a small boy who has just received a toy that he has wanted for a long, long time. He reached out and touched them fondly.

"You would never dream that there was anything inside either of them," he purred.

"Well, why don't you open them?" Al asked impatiently.

Mr. Jones glanced at him in annoyance. Like most small men, he enjoyed being a boss and he didn't want any suggestions from Al or anyone else. He was enjoying his victory. Also, I think he was a little scared to open the chess pieces. After all, during two hundred years someone might have stumbled on the secret. I knew how he felt. After all his trouble he had now reached the point when he would know whether he was right or not, whether there really was a ruby in one of the castles or whether it was all a waste of time.

Of course I could have told him the answer. He could spend another ten years and he'd never find a ruby in either of those two pieces. If there ever had been a ruby in the chess set, it was in the castle that I had taken home when Swede and I had made the substitution, or it was in the other castle, which Hector had stolen—and heaven knew where that was. If I hadn't been so frightened I would have had trouble keeping my face straight. I guess Swede wasn't quite as scared as I was, because he gave me a faint grin and a tiny wink.

Mr. Jones reached out slowly and picked up the first of the two castles. He examined it very carefully and gingerly took hold of the top edge of the piece in one hand and the bottom edge with the other and gave it a slight twist.

"I don't know whether they had threads on them or merely fitted together," he remarked, speaking half to himself.

He twisted the piece, using slightly more force; then he pulled. Naturally, nothing happened. As he continued to

work at it, a slight shadow of worry crossed his face.

"After two hundred years it may be impossible to get it apart," he said as though trying to reassure himself. He turned to Al. "Go downstairs and see if you can find a hacksaw."

Al nodded sourly and disappeared. He was gone three or four minutes, during which Mr. Jones tried twisting and pulling at the other castle. Again nothing happened. Then Al reappeared with the hacksaw in his hand.

"Want me to cut them in two?" he asked.

"I'll do it," Mr. Jones replied. "I don't want to damage the stone." He rested the piece on one edge of the table and very carefully began sawing it just below the fluted top. Captain Wudge's face was purple with outrage as he saw his precious chessman being ruined. He had told Swede and me several days before that the set wasn't particularly valuable, but any chess set meant a great deal to him. Also, I suppose that now he had learned the history of this set, it was worth much more in his eyes.

Mr. Jones sawed on through the castle, and the top of it dropped off onto the floor. He examined the cut surface carefully. Obviously there was no hole in the chess piece—at least not that near the top. Again he began sawing, this time about half an inch lower. He sawed completely through the chess piece again, and still it was solid. Finally he sawed exactly through the middle. The castle was solid ivory. He dropped the hacksaw on the top of the table, making a big jagged scratch on the polished surface. Then he glared around the room, first at the chess sets and then at Captain Wudge and Swede and me. He was furious with everything and everybody for his failure to find the ruby.

Of course he was coming much closer to the truth than he imagined in glaring at Swede and me.

"Maybe it's in the other one," Al suggested.

"They both should have been hollow," Mr. Jones said in a tight, hard voice. "One contained poison and one the ruby."

Nevertheless, he was reaching out to take the second piece when the front door opened.

"Hey, up there," Little Neck shouted, "I'm coming up with a visitor!"

Mr. Jones had long since returned the gun to Al, who had put it in a side pocket. Al got it out again and waited quietly. There was the sound of two men ascending the stairs, and a minute later a tall thin figure entered the room. It was the man Swede and I knew as Mr. Clemens.

"Mr. Clemens!" I said. Then I corrected myself. "I mean, Mr. Snedeker."

If Mr. Snedeker wondered how I knew his right name he certainly didn't show it. I guess he was too absorbed in what was happening, and he certainly couldn't have felt relaxed, because Little Neck was close behind him and his gun was very much in evidence.

"Where did this man come from?" Mr. Jones asked.

"What is going on here?" Mr. Snedeker asked in his deep voice.

"Keep quiet," Al warned. Then he turned to Little Neck. "What's the story, Little Neck?"

"This tall giraffe came sneaking up through the trees," Little Neck replied. "I watched him circle the house and go around to peek in the window. I figured he was acting too suspicious, so I nabbed him."

Captain Wudge looked puzzled. He glanced from Snedeker to Jones, as though trying to decide whether this was an act or not. Snedeker was even more baffled. Al had picked up the sawed pieces of the castle from the floor and had replaced them on the table. Snedeker looked at these with a bewildered expression.

"Is someone sawing up chess pieces?" he asked in horror as he saw the hacksaw.

No one answered him. Al turned to his partner and said, "Go get another chair, will you, Little Neck? Since he's so inquisitive he might as well join the party."

Little Neck found another chair, which he placed beside me, and Mr. Snedeker sat down. Then Little Neck went back outside to take up his post as lookout. Mr. Jones picked up the remaining castle and very quietly began sawing off the top. Again he sawed it in three or four pieces and again it was solid ivory all the way through. This time he acted as though he expected to find nothing.

Mr. Snedeker, although he was mystified by what was going on, couldn't keep his eyes off the Ascension Island set, which had been shoved down the table until the pieces were almost directly in front of him. gingerly he reached out and picked up a king and queen. Al watched warily, but apparently decided that there was nothing wrong in his examining the two chess pieces. I honestly think Mr. Snedeker forgot all about everyone else in the room, about the guns, and about the mystery, as he looked at those two chess pieces. There was a slight smile on his lips, and his face had the intent look of a bird dog after a pheasant. He examined the pieces from top to bottom, and his slight smile broke into a big, broad grin. At the same moment,

Captain Wudge, at the other end of the table, noticed him.

"I'll thank you to keep your hands off my chess pieces, Snedeker!" he shouted furiously.

"I was merely examining them," Snedeker replied. "I assume that you are Captain Wudge?"

"That's right," Wudge replied.

"You are correct in calling me Snedeker," Snedeker said politely. "We have come together under rather unusual circumstances, but I'm very happy to meet you nevertheless."

Swede looked up at Al, who was standing near the end of the table. "I want to go to the bathroom," he said.

Al glanced at his boss, but Mr. Jones was staring at the pieces of the castle, which he held in his hand. He had apparently heard nothing that Snedeker, Wudge, or Swede had said.

"Where is the bathroom?" Al asked.

Captain Wudge jerked a finger over his shoulder at a door in the wall. "In there," he replied.

Al walked over, opened the door, and glanced inside the bathroom. Since that was the only entrance to it he decided Swede would be safe if he allowed him to go in by himself. "Go ahead," he growled.

Swede walked into the bathroom, closing the door behind him. Mr. Jones picked up the pieces of the second castle that he had sawed in two and placed them on the table beside those of the first. He laid the hacksaw carefully beside them and sat back in his chair. For several minutes he sat quietly, staring at the sawed sections. Then he stood up and walked to the group of scattered chess pieces on the table in front of Mr. Snedeker. He searched among them

until he found the two black castles. With these in his hand he returned to his chair. There was a low light above him, which he turned on. Very carefully he examined the two pieces. For some reason or other, two small holes had been carved through the centers of both black castles. It was easy to see by glancing at them that neither was hollow or could have anything inside. Mr. Jones placed them on the table in front of him. Then very carefully he reassembled the cut sections of the white castles until they stood beside the black pieces. They were a good quarter of an inch taller.

"The white castles are taller than the black castles, and the carving is not the same," he observed in a cold voice.

"Of course not!" Captain Wudge snorted. "The white pieces of that set aren't exactly the same as the black pieces; they're just similar. That's frequently the case with chess sets."

If Mr. Jones heard, he paid no attention. He sat back in his chair and stared moodily at the table. There was silence for two or three minutes. Finally I began to fidget in my chair. Mr. Jones stood up and carefully selected all the pieces belonging to the large ivory set. He arranged them in two rows in front of him on the table. Again he sat down in his chair and looked at the set thoughtfully. Mr. Snedeker had picked up several more pieces of the Ascension Island set and was examining them. As near as I could tell, he wasn't paying a bit of attention to Mr. Jones or what Mr. Jones was doing. He was much more interested in his own chess puzzle, whatever that was.

Captain Wudge, however, was doing exactly the same thing as Mr. Jones. He was looking thoughtfully at the two

groups of chessmen. The various sections of the white castles were still stacked one on top of another, and Captain Wudge seemed especially interested in those. There was an odd look in his eyes. He was beginning to suspect that those two castles didn't belong to the set. The fact that he wasn't certain shows what a good match they were. He was a chess expert, and the set had belonged to him. Undoubtedly he had examined it very carefully before he bought it, but even so, he was uncertain. Mr. Jones might be the expert about the history of this particular set, but he didn't know as much about chess sets in general as the captain did. If the captain couldn't be certain that a switch had been made, I didn't see how Mr. Jones could know.

I turned to look at Swede and suddenly I realized that he had been gone an awfully long time. There hadn't been a sound from the bathroom. Al must have had the same thought, because he said, "Where's that kid?"

He hurried to the bathroom door, turned the doorknob, and pulled. The door was locked. He rattled the doorknob and pounded on the door.

"Come out of there!" he ordered.

Mr. Jones came out of his trance and glanced up at Al. "Is that the only door?" he asked.

"Yeah, or I wouldn't have let him go in alone," Al replied. Again he pounded on the door. "Come out, do you hear?"

There was no sound from the bathroom. Al began to look annoyed, and Mr. Jones appeared wary and thoughtful.

"I saw a pinch bar out in the workshop," Al said. "I'll go get it and break the door down."

"There's no need," Mr. Jones replied crisply. "If he's still in there, let him stay in there, but if he's not in there, we want to know. Send Little Neck around to see if he could have gone out the window somehow."

"I'll go myself," said Al.

He hurried down the stairs, and we heard the front door open. He was gone only a minute and when he returned he came up the stairs three at a time.

"The window's open, the screen is off, and there's a tree not three feet away. It would be simple to step from the window onto a limb."

I knew exactly what Al meant. I had climbed down from the roof onto the limb and had peeked into the bathroom the day that he and Little Neck had broken into the house. I grinned. Good old Swede! They would never catch him now. He was probably well on his way to the nearest neighbors', and as soon as he got there he would phone the state police.

"How long ago did he go in there?" Jones asked.

"Not more than five minutes," Al replied.

Mr. Jones didn't panic easily. He got calmly to his feet and looked around the table quickly. When Al had dumped the chess pieces on the table when he and Little Neck came back from the museum, he had crumpled the paper bag and thrown it in a nearby wastepaper basket. I guess Mr. Jones was looking for that and didn't see it. His gaze stopped at the brown paper envelope in front of Swede's chair. It contained the photographs of the chess pieces, which we had taken at the museum.

"Shove that over here," he ordered.

I reached out and shoved the envelope, pictures and all,

across the table. I don't like to argue with people who look as dangerous as Mr. Jones. He didn't bother to take the pictures out, but simply opened the envelope and swept all the chess pieces into it.

"What are you doing with those?" Captain Wudge demanded.

"It's quite obvious what I'm doing with them," Mr. Jones snapped. "I'm taking them with me."

"That set cost me fifty dollars," Captain Wudge said angrily.

Mr. Jones looked at him in contempt. "That set has cost me a small fortune during the last ten years—perhaps as much as the ruby will be worth when I find it. But that isn't the point. I mean to find it."

He turned to Al. "Is there someplace where we can lock them up to give us time to get away?"

Al nodded. "There's a big closet at the other end of the hall."

His gun was in his hand again, and he motioned with it for us to get to our feet. We didn't argue, and all of us marched out of the room and turned to the right. Part way down the hall he told us to stop. "You, open that door!" he ordered me, pointing with his gun.

I did, and found a large closet. There wasn't much in it except a few suitcases and some packages on one of the upper shelves. It was a big closet, big enough for three people to sit down comfortably, but certainly not big enough so that I wanted to spend any time in there. However, I didn't have much choice. Al ordered all three of us inside and closed the door. Then we heard the key grating

in the lock. Once more there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs, followed by silence. We didn't hear the car as it left but we knew after a minute or two that it had gone.

We sat in silence for a minute and then Snedeker asked, "Do you think we could break the door down?"

"No," Wudge replied. "These are good stout doors, and the locks are good too. I think the best course is just to sit here quietly until someone comes after us." He turned to me. "What do you think your partner will do?"

"He'll go to the nearest neighbors' and phone the police," I replied.

"Good," Captain Wudge said gruffly. "I was hoping that he would do that, instead of running all the way back to town. After all, I wouldn't blame him if he was so scared that he did that."

"Not Swede," I said proudly. "He doesn't lose his head."

"There's a good-sized crack under the door," Captain Wudge observed. "We may get rather uncomfortable here before someone finds us, but we won't suffocate."

"What is this all about?" Snedeker asked.

"It's a rather long story," Wudge replied. "First I want to apologize to you. After what the boys told me I concluded that you were behind all this. But I can see that I was wrong."

"Just who is this Mr. Jones?" Snedeker asked.

"I have no idea," Wudge replied, "but he had a rather interesting story about that chess set. Since we seem to have plenty of time, I might as well tell it to you." He paused. "Understand, if you print this in your magazine I am not

vouching for its accuracy. This is merely hearsay. Don't accuse me later of misstating the facts and then try to show how you were right about it all the time."

"My dear Captain Wudge," said Mr. Snedeker, "I've never accused you of misrepresenting the facts. However, on several occasions you have drawn what are obviously wrong interpretations from the facts."

"Wrong interpretations!" bellowed Wudge. "I've never heard such drivel in my life. What about those three articles that you wrote concerning the origin of the rook? Nine-tenths of those were sheer conjecture on your part."

His voice in that small space sounded like a cannon. That little closet was going to be awfully small if these two chess fanatics were going to bellow like mad bulls, arguing about the fine points of chess history. You would think that they would be more worried about getting out than about something that happened three or four hundred years ago. But not these two. They argued back and forth and discussed things that were way above my head for at least ten minutes. Then finally Mr. Snedeker, who got a little annoyed now and then, but kept his temper better than Captain Wudge, remembered what he had asked in the first place.

"You were going to tell me the story of that chess set," he reminded Captain Wudge, "and explain what this is all about."

"That's right," Captain Wudge said, calming down a little.

He told Mr. Snedeker what had happened from the very beginning—how the two men had tried to break into his

house; about the Shahs of Iran; the Terrible Turk; and right on down to the point where Mr. Jones had cut the castles in two.

"Last night the boys went to the movies and they saw these two thugs," he concluded. "Neil, you tell him what happened after that."

I explained to Mr. Snedeker how we had trailed the men out to the Three Oaks Motel, following the trail of marshmallow syrup. He got quite a kick out of that. "When we found their car, it was parked next to your blue MG, so Swede and I figured that you were all in this together."

"That was a logical conclusion," Mr. Snedeker admitted. "However, staying at the same motel, and their car being next to mine, was entirely an accident. I had never seen either of them before today."

"We called the motel and asked the office if they had a Mr. Clemens there," I explained. "They didn't. When we described you they said there was a man registered by the name of Snedeker who answered to that description."

Mr. Snedeker cleared his throat. "That's a little bit more awkward to explain," he admitted.

It was dark in the closet and I couldn't see Mr. Snedeker's face at all but I still knew how he felt, by the tone of his voice. He was embarrassed about that business of going under the name of Clemens.

"When I first gave you boys a ride, I didn't give my name at all," he explained. "Later, when I decided to hire you and called you on the telephone, you asked for my name. I knew that if you ever mentioned the name Snedeker to Captain Wudge here, he would immediately be on his

guard. I decided that the best course was to use an assumed name and I gave you the first one that came into my mind, which happened to be Clemens."

"How did you happen to be out here today and to get caught by that fat-faced thug?" Captain Wudge asked.

"I've been around Belleville for some days," Snedeker replied. "I was to see the boys today to get the photographic enlargements. For several days I stayed out at the motel and spent my time sightseeing. Then I met an old friend from Princeton and he insisted that I come visit him for several days. Today I was eating a late lunch in town and I picked up a copy of the local paper. I saw a picture of the woman who runs the museum, holding some chess pieces, and I read the article. I was not certain from the picture, but it appeared to me that your Ascension Island set was one of those on display. Naturally I went right over to the museum. Unfortunately it was closed. I was trying to peek in the window when that thin man, Al, appeared inside the museum. He went to the case, pried it open with a screwdriver, and scooped up all the chess pieces, putting them in a paper bag. Naturally I wondered what was going on. I walked around the building in time to see a station wagon turning into the alley. I hurried back to my own car and followed.

"When the station wagon turned in your lane and I saw the name Wudge on the mailbox, I was even more puzzled. I tried to sneak through the trees to learn what was going on. Unfortunately their lookout caught me. I guess I'm too clumsy to be a good detective. I'd better leave my detecting to someone competent, like Neil or his pal."

"I don't understand why all the mysterious plot to get a look at that chess set," Captain Wudge said.

"There was really no plot," Mr. Snedeker replied, clearing his throat. "It was just that I—uh—well, I wanted to examine your Ascension Island set, but I knew perfectly well that if I came out here myself you wouldn't let me."

"How do you know I wouldn't?" Captain Wudge demanded.

"Well, you're such a hot-tempered, irritable person," Snedeker said bluntly. "You fly into a rage when anyone disagrees with you about chess."

"Me, fly into a rage!" Captain Wudge bellowed. "Why, that is the most ridiculous, asinine statement I've ever heard!"

"Well, you're in a rage right now, or in a very good imitation of one," Snedeker pointed out.

I guess Captain Wudge saw that he was being a bit ridiculous, because he calmed down immediately. "What did you want to see the Ascension Island set for?" he asked suspiciously.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I thought I'd steal a march on you," Snedeker admitted. "I had a theory as to where that set came from. Now that I've had a chance to look at the pictures and actually examine the pieces, I find that I was right."

"And what's your theory?" Captain Wudge asked with a sarcastic edge to his voice. "I suppose the set was carved twenty years ago and I took them to Ascension Island myself."

"Not at all," Snedeker replied. "As a matter of fact,

when I finish telling you about the set, you'll agree that it's vastly more valuable than it was before."

Captain Wudge gave a grunt which could have meant anything.

"Several months ago I was in London," Mr. Snedeker said. "While there I naturally looked at a number of chess pieces. There's a beautiful set in the London Museum, which was given as a present to Samuel Pepys by James the Second. That's the Pepys of the famous Pepys' *Diary*. He mentions the fact of his receiving it in his journal, and there's no doubt whatever that the set in the museum is actually the royal present. Pepys received the chess set about sixteen-eighty, I believe."

"Now, it's a matter of record that James the Second also gave Sir William Dampier a chess set at about the same time. Dampier, as you probably know, was the famous English explorer and buccaneer. He had gone on a very successful expedition against the Spanish in America, in sixteen-seventy-nine to 'eighty-one, and I suppose he seized a lot of gold and other treasure from the Spanish in the Caribbean. Whatever the reason, he received a chess set made by the same craftsmen as Pepys' set. Neil here has seen the picture of the Pepys chess set. The pieces are almost identical with those of the Ascension Island set. Half of them are white, and the other half have been dyed green. Whether the set that Dampier had was colored the same way or not, I don't know. Dampier probably prized these chess pieces, and he took them with him when he commanded a naval expedition, to Australia, New Guinea, and New Britain, about sixteen-ninety-nine to seventeen-oh-one. His flagship was the *Roebuck*. It finally foundered

on the way home, off Ascension Island. Naturally the vessel broke up, and I suppose a lot of its contents were washed ashore. Chess sets in those days were often kept in wooden boxes. Now, my theory is that this Ascension Island set of yours was originally Dampier's set, given to him by James the Second. It was washed ashore, and someone there eventually found it and preserved it. After examining the pieces I'm certain that I'm right. They're the same workmanship as the set of Pepys'."

"That sounds quite possible," Captain Wudge said excitedly. "And I hope you're right. I'd like to have Dampier's chess set. To my way of thinking, he's one of the great explorers of all time. And he was a fine seaman."

Wudge sounded quite pleased, and I could see why he would be. If I had spent thirty or forty years at sea, it would probably mean something to me to have a famous naval officer's chess set—especially one that had been given to him by a king. The captain was so pleased that I guess he decided that Snedeker was human after all. The two of them spent some time discussing the details of the chess set and various possibilities, until I began to get tired of the subject. I hadn't realized how involved all this chess business was. Before Swede and I were through, it looked as if we were going to get mixed up in the history of the whole world. Here in one day we had already been involved with a Shah of Persia who invaded India, and then a mechanical player that had toured all around Europe. And now we were sailing the Spanish Main, discovering New Guinea, and having a shipwreck in the Atlantic.

Personally, I'd had enough worldwide travel for one day. I just wanted to get out of that closet and travel as far

as town. In spite of the big crack under the door, it was beginning to get stuffy. I hunched up my knees, put my forehead down on them, and tried to go to sleep. Captain Wudge and Snedeker about this time got involved in discussing some chess game which they called the "Immortal Game." It seems that some German by the name of Anderssen had played a famous game against a Russian about a hundred years or so ago. Snedeker and the captain actually knew all the moves of this game. Even in the dark, without a chessboard, they could describe every move. They started tossing terms back and forth such as, "Pawn to Queen three," and, "Pawn to King's Rook four," which meant nothing to me but seemed to make sense to them. I was just about to drift off, when they got back on the subject of Jones again.

"If his story about one of the castle's containing a ruby and one containing poison is not just legend, what do you suppose became of the two castles?" Snedeker asked. "These two were certainly solid."

"Yes," Captain Wudge replied. "And they aren't the correct castles for the set. The fact that the white castles were a quarter of an inch taller than the black ones didn't mean a thing, as I pointed out. But Jones was on the right track. The carving doesn't quite match."

"The two original pieces could have disappeared any time within the last two hundred years," Snedeker observed.

"They could have, but I don't think they did," Wudge replied.

"Why not?" Snedeker asked.

"Because I don't think these two castles were part of

the set when I first examined it in New York. I looked at it very carefully and the following day I went back and bought it. To be honest, I haven't examined the pieces closely since that first time. The substitution could have been made at any time since."

"That means that the dealer made the switch between the time you looked at the set and the time you bought it," Snedeker said. "I wonder how he knew the secret."

"He didn't," I interrupted. "I know when the switch was made."

"You do?" they both asked at the same time.

"Yes," I replied, "and you aren't going to be very happy when you hear about it."

"Well, what is it?" Captain Wudge asked.

"Swede and I made the switch," I confessed. "The two pieces that Mr. Jones cut up were pieces I bought from an antique-dealer over near New Hope. I have one of the original castles at home in my room, and the other one was stolen by my pet crow Hector."

9. CAPTURED

It seemed to me that we were in that closet for hours, but altogether it was slightly less than forty-five minutes. After Swede climbed out the bathroom window and down the tree, he had gone to the nearest neighbors', as I had expected he would. However, there was no one at home and the doors were all locked. He had had to go almost a half-mile farther to find a house where someone was home and he could telephone. Then it had taken a few minutes to find a police car, so altogether forty-five minutes went by.

We heard the police enter the house, and we pounded on the closet door. A minute later they had us unlocked. The air out in the hall smelled very good to me, and the light was a relief, although it made my eyes blink.

"That was smart work, remembering that tree by the bathroom window," I said to Swede.

"I didn't remember it at first," Swede replied. "I had to go to the bathroom. After I was inside I noticed the tree by the window."

"In any event, you did a good job," Captain Wudge observed.

The police stayed only about fifteen minutes. They didn't hold out much hope of locating Mr. Jones or his two thugs.

Swede and I described their car as well as we could, and we gave them the license number, which we had copied down the night before. Of course we weren't certain that they were in the gray Pontiac any more, since Mr. Jones had mentioned something about a station wagon. However, if they had come in two cars, they had left in two cars, so there was some possibility that at least one would be caught. The police radioed a report to headquarters and I imagine an alarm was sent out over the state.

Captain Wudge didn't go into detail with them as to what it was all about; he simply explained that the three men thought that there was something valuable hidden in the chess set. There was very little else that the police could do, so they left a few minutes later.

The captain wasn't at all angry about Hector's having stolen the castle. In fact, he seemed quite pleased.

"If that story is true, and there is a ruby in one of those castles, and Hector hadn't interfered, then Jones would have had it by now and it would have been lost forever. As it is, there's a fifty-fifty chance that it's home in your room right now. I think we all ought to go and see."

Mr. Snedeker had left his car at the end of the lane. Swede rode with him, and I went with Captain Wudge.

Mother was cleaning the living room, and she had decided to rearrange all the furniture. She does this about every three months. You walk in expecting to find a sofa or chair in a certain spot and it isn't. We've become used to that over the years, and before we sit down in our house, especially in the living room, we always look to see if Mother's been on one of her rearranging sprees. Now all the furniture was shoved out in the middle of the room, and there

were lamps all over the floor, and she wasn't a bit happy to see me walk in with two strange men. I didn't want to go through the whole long story before I got the castle, so I simply said we were hunting rubies and hurried on up to my room.

I came down with the castle a minute later and we moved out into the dining room. Mother came with us. The word "rubies" had her interested too. I gave the castle to Captain Wudge, since it belonged to him. Just to prove how crazy chess people can be, he pointed out to Snedeker how the castle was different from the one Swede and I had substituted. They talked about that for almost a minute before Captain Wudge even tried to see if the chess piece was hollow. He took hold of the top and bottom and twisted. The bottom unscrewed without any trouble at all. All of us stood around holding our breaths while he turned it. It took three or four turns before the chess piece came apart, and then a fine, white powder spilled out onto the table.

"The poison!" I said. "Hector got the ruby and we got the poison."

"Fortunately it isn't quite as fatal as it was when one played chess with the Shah," Captain Wudge remarked with a slight grin. "We don't have to take the poison."

The white powder had spilled onto the shiny top of the table. Captain Wudge and Mr. Snedeker were examining the workmanship in the chess piece, but I couldn't take my eyes off that poison. I wondered how good a chess player the Shah had been, if many men had beaten him, and when they had beaten him how many had picked the castle with the poison and had died, and how many had picked the right one and had been rich as a result.

"Is that really poison?" Mother asked, pointing at the white powder.

"I don't honestly know, Mrs. Lambert," Captain Wudge replied.

"Well, I don't care for it on my dining-room table," Mother said with a smile. "Neil, run out in the kitchen and get the dust pan and a brush."

"It would be interesting to have it analyzed," Snedeker pointed out.

"Good idea," Captain Wudge agreed. "I have a chemist friend up in New Brunswick who will do it for me."

I got an envelope from the desk in the study and we carefully brushed the powder into that. Captain Wudge sealed it and stuck it in his pocket.

Between us we told Mother the story of the chess piece and what had happened that afternoon. She was quite interested in the tale about the Shah and the mechanical chess player, but she didn't seem very happy about matters in general.

"These two boys are what I call danger-prone," she told the captain. "If there's any danger within a radius of fifty miles, they manage to find their way right into the middle of it. I think they can smell trouble, and once they smell it, they head right in its direction."

"You may be right. I'll have to admit that they have been in the middle of all the excitement connected with this chess mystery," Captain Wudge said. "But you'll have to admit that they handle themselves very creditably when they do get in a tight spot."

"I'm thankful for that," Mother said. "Of course, it's like praising someone for being smart enough to swim

ashore after he's been dumb enough to go out on the water in a leaky boat."

Captain Wudge and Snedeker both laughed. "We'd like to go have a dinner as a sort of celebration at being safe ashore again," Snedeker said. "We'll do our best to find a reasonably safe restaurant."

The four of us—Captain Wudge, Mr. Snedeker, Swede, and I—drove over to an inn near the Delaware River and had dinner. Swede and I both had lobsters and french-fried potatoes, which is my idea of a wonderful dinner.

"The whole story makes my discovery about Dampier and his chess set seem tame by comparison," Snedeker remarked as we were eating our pie à la mode. "If you don't mind an outsider's hanging around, I'd like to stay on a while and learn what happens."

"I'd enjoy your company," Captain Wudge replied. Apparently he and Snedeker got along very well as long as neither of them mentioned some of the points on which they disagreed about chess. "The trouble is, we can't tell when, or if, anything will happen. From this point on it's to be up to the boys."

"And the crow," Snedeker added. "How far do crows usually range from their nesting grounds or headquarters, or whatever you call their home base?"

Captain Wudge and Mr. Snedeker were the experts on chess, but Swede and I were the experts on crows. It was fun having them ask us questions about what should be done next, and listening very carefully and respectfully while we gave opinions.

"Wild crows roost in big colonies called crow roosts," I told them. "Sometimes there are thousands of crows in one

small area. If there's food enough around, they usually stay within three or four miles of that, but sometimes they go farther. Since there's food for Hector in the pigeon loft, I doubt if he often flies much more than a mile from home."

"A circle with a mile radius is an enormous area," Captain Wudge said with a shake of his head. "It would take in all of Belleville and much more besides."

"You could advertise a reward for anyone who found the castle," Mr. Snedeker suggested. "I suppose the crow might have dropped it any place."

"I doubt if he dropped it," I said. "I've talked to a few people who've had pet crows. They like to steal things and hide them away in one particular spot. They build up a sort of cache, or a collection. I don't know why they do it, but they do."

"I understand perfectly," Snedeker said with a nod of his head. "And so does the captain here. It's the collector's instinct. We both have been bitten by it. Why does either of us collect chess sets? We couldn't possibly play chess with all the sets we have. And we wouldn't think of doing it if we could. For actual play we use some ordinary cheap set that you can buy in any store. Your crow is a kindred soul. He likes to collect things and keep them."

"That makes the problem easier in some respects, and more difficult in others," Captain Wudge said thoughtfully. "The crow probably didn't drop the castle willy-nilly, so it won't be hidden behind somebody's rosebush or be in the gutter someplace or get washed down a storm drain. On the other hand, the castle could be hidden high up in some tree or in a bush or in any one of a thousand places in town. It looks hopeless to me."

"It's not going to be easy, but I don't think it's hopeless," I said. "First, I'm sure his hiding place, wherever it is, is high. Second, he'll take other things that he steals to the same place. We could let him steal something and try to follow him."

"Excellent idea," Captain Wudge said enthusiastically.

"It's not easy," Swede warned. "One day he stole a quarter from Neil and me while we were in Neil's back yard. We tried to follow him, but he disappeared into a tree. If he flies any distance to his hiding place, we're going to have a tough time keeping track of him until the leaves are off the trees this fall."

"What will happen this fall?" Snedeker asked. "Do crows go south?"

"Most of them do," I replied. "I don't know whether a pet crow will or not."

"Well, I don't think I'd better plan on buying myself a new limousine or any more chess sets on the proceeds from that ruby," Captain Wudge said philosophically. "But at least I'm no poorer than I was before. If I actually did own a ruby, I didn't know it at the time."

"You're poorer by one chess set," Snedeker observed. "Now that we know its history, that's quite a loss."

Swede and I planned to start our search for the castle the next day, but there was a drizzly rain which lasted from early morning until almost dark. Neither of us felt much like trying to follow a crow around in the rain. Hector didn't feel like cooperating either. When you make a pet of a wild animal, about the easiest thing to teach it is that it's enjoyable being comfortable and lazy. The first thing

Hector learned was that there was no point in going out rustling for his food when I rustled it for him. I guess the second thing he learned was that he could be dry and comfortable and safe in the pigeon loft, when it was rainy and cold outside. He spent practically the entire day sitting on a perch up there, either eating or sleeping. I don't know how birds or animals manage to sleep as much as they do. A dog is a good example. If he hasn't anything better to do, he can sleep all day, and all night too.

The following day was nice again, so I started right after breakfast trying to get Hector to steal something. Naturally he wasn't in the mood to be a bit helpful. He certainly wasn't tired, after all the sleep he had had the day before, and he was acting quite sassy. Ordinarily if I placed any small object that I wanted within a few feet of him he'd try to get away with it. But now that I wanted him to steal something, he wouldn't. I must have tried everything. I offered him bottle caps, little pieces of paper, gum wrappers, colored pieces of pasteboard, and everything I could think of. By eleven-thirty I decided that Hector must have flown into church the Sunday before and listened to the minister. He had suddenly turned into an honest crow.

Swede came over to help after lunch, but Hector disappeared. We called, we looked all over, and I whistled until I was out of breath. But no Hector. We still hadn't found him when the telephone rang. It was Captain Wudge.

"I just got a report from my chemist friend in New Brunswick," the captain told me. "He says that powder was a crude form of strychnine. Strychnine comes from a tree in India and has been known for centuries. So that part of Jones's story seems to be correct. One of the white castles

certainly contained poison, and there was enough for a lethal dose, too."

I told Captain Wudge that we weren't having much success with Hector, but he didn't seem as discouraged as I was.

"You haven't got much left of your summer vacation," he warned. "Don't spend it trying to locate that castle. You'll probably fail, or what would be even more annoying, after a lot of effort you'll find it, and there will be no jewel in it after all."

Neither Swede nor I felt like taking Captain Wudge's advice. We couldn't get the castle off our minds. If we did find it, it and the ruby would belong to Captain Wudge—but that wasn't the important thing. The fun of locating it and learning whether the story about the Shah was really true kept us interested. In a way, I knew how Jones had felt. To find a jewel that a Shah of Persia had hidden two hundred years before, was like living a chapter of the *Arabian Nights*.

To get Hector to lead us to where he was hiding his treasures, however, we needed a genie from the *Arabian Nights*. That crow simply refused to help in any way. He became the most stubborn bird I have ever known. Now that we wanted him to be mischievous he decided to be good. He either wanted to stay within a few feet of us and talk, or else he would disappear completely. He suddenly was able to say "Phooey" much more clearly than he had ever said it before. I honestly think he knew what the word meant too, because every time we tried to get him to steal something, he said, "Phooey!"

We spent most of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday trying to persuade him to take small objects and hide them. In all

that time, he did so only twice. Both times we lost him within a matter of seconds. First he flew up into the maple tree in the back yard. Swede was standing in the driveway the second time that Hector flew off with some loot. After a short time the crow flew out of the top of the tree, still with his prize in his beak. He started toward the south and then disappeared behind a giant elm in Mr. Fernald's back yard. Since Mr. Fernald's back yard abuts onto ours, we knew Hector's flight path for all of a hundred feet. The way a crow circles around, he could easily have come back and hidden in a tree in our own front yard.

On Monday we discarded the idea of trying to follow Hector and decided to make what you might call a tree-to-tree search. We worked on the theory that Hector probably was staying fairly close to home, although we had no real reason for believing that he did. We looked at all the trees around our neighborhood, and any that had a crotch or a hollow in it that would make a likely hiding spot, we climbed up and examined. We had a lightweight extension ladder, and between us I think we climbed at least a hundred trees, within a radius of a block or two.

We had examined the roof of our house several days before. When we found nothing in the nearby trees we then started climbing up on other roofs. That wasn't nearly as easy as the trees. Most of the people of whom we asked permission to climb up to look at their roofs wanted to know why, and it took time to explain. We didn't tell them that Hector had stolen a chess piece containing a fabulous ruby, but only that he had stolen a number of things, such as little silver spoons, chess pieces, and so on. Even after we had explained why we wanted to examine the roof, most

of the women insisted on calling my mother or Mrs. Larson, as though we were a couple of kindergarten children. I suppose they were worried that we would fall off the ladder and break our necks. Swede's father is a builder, however, and he taught Swede how to use a ladder and how to put it up properly and that someone should foot it if there is any possibility that it might slip.

There were still five or six houses within a block or so that we hadn't examined, when we decided to take a vacation from our job. As Captain Wudge had pointed out, there wasn't much left of our summer vacation. Wednesday was one of those beautiful days that you seldom get in August. It was warm enough to go swimming but not so hot that you were uncomfortable. Swede and I decided to go out to Burnt Hill, where there's an old milldam, and to spend the day fishing and swimming. Miss Hankin, who owns the property, is an old friend of ours, and she always has spare fish poles which we can use. All we took with us when we started, about nine o'clock, was a small bag containing some sandwiches.

In addition to the mystery of where Hector had hidden his treasures, there were several other mysteries about that silly bird. One of them is how he knew when I planned to go on a hike out in the country. He had been missing since breakfast, but the minute Swede and I started down the street with our lunch in our hands, Hector suddenly appeared. He flew along beside us from tree to tree, cawing and making a lot of racket to tell me how happy he was to be along.

There wasn't much traffic at that hour, and by the time we had walked almost a quarter of a mile from the edge of

town, only three cars had passed. All of them had been full and hadn't wanted to give us a ride. Then we looked back and saw a truck and a station wagon coming. The truck was a beat-up wreck, painted a faded purple. It bumped, and jounced, and rattled along, but as it approached us, it began to slow down. The station wagon did too; apparently both of them intended to offer us a ride. The truck was in the lead, so it reached us first. Both Swede and I would have much preferred riding in the station wagon, but we knew it wouldn't be good policy to do so. We had seen the truck a number of times before and knew it must belong to some farmer in the area. We might want to ride in it again someday, while we would probably never see the station wagon again.

We climbed into the truck. The cab was just as dirty and uncomfortable as we had expected. The upholstery had long since worn out, and the springs stuck through in spots, so that we had to move around every few minutes to keep from having holes worn through the seats of our pants. A couple of the floorboards were missing, and dust and smoke kept swirling up into our faces. However, the driver didn't seem to mind. He was an old man with a handlebar mustache, and he seemed to enjoy the racket that the engine made.

We rattled along for about four miles and then he turned off the road to the left. We got out, took a few breaths of fresh air, and started hiking again. Hector had refused to get in the truck with us, but keeping up with that truck was no trick for him. He was sitting on a fencepost when we got out, and I'm willing to bet that he enjoyed flying much more than we enjoyed that ride. However, a ride is a ride,

and there's no use being fussy about such things. Riding in that truck was a lot faster than walking. We wanted to spend the day swimming and fishing, not hiking along the highway.

"Here comes another station wagon," Swede said, looking over his shoulder, a few minutes later.

We started walking backward, holding out our arms to show that we wanted a ride. Cars go so fast on an open stretch of a smooth highway that you have to let them know well in advance or they can never slow up in time.

"Say, that looks like the same station wagon that was behind the truck," I remarked to Swede.

The station wagon was a blue-green Plymouth about a year old. I suppose there are hundreds and hundreds of Plymouths of that same model and color running around the highway. However, you don't often meet two within a few minutes, as we had. The car began to slow down, and we naturally looked at it carefully. There were two men in the front seat, and I had noticed that there had been two men in the other station wagon.

"Uh-uh," Swede said suddenly. "It's our pals. Little Neck and Al."

The car pulled to a halt beside us and Al, who was on the right side, leaned out and asked, "Want a ride, boys?"

"Not with you," I replied.

"I think you should take one, anyhow," Al said with a slight warning note in his voice.

Swede and I looked around cautiously. There were pastures on both sides of the road. If there had been cornfields we would have simply ducked into them and disappeared. As it was, there wasn't a chance of escaping across open

pasture. I don't doubt that both Swede and I could have outrun either Al or Little Neck, but we couldn't outrun a bullet. They had both had guns the last time we met them, and there was no reason to suppose that they didn't have them now.

Al opened the front door and got out on the road. "One of you get in front and one in back," he said.

"We don't want a ride," Swede said stubbornly.

"Be sensible," Al said. "You're not going to come to any harm. The boss merely wants to talk to you for a few minutes and then we'll take you on wherever you were going."

He seemed to mean what he said, and after all we didn't have much choice. Swede climbed in front with Little Neck and I got in the second seat with Al. The third seat, if there had been one, had been removed. An air mattress and a couple of blankets were on the floor. Someone had been sleeping in the station wagon, from the looks of things.

"Nice country around here," Al observed as we drove along. "I never knew much about this section of Jersey. I thought Jersey was all just flat mudbanks, like you have between Newark and the river."

"I seen several deer around," Little Neck said from the front seat. "I wouldn't mind going hunting around here this fall."

Both men were very friendly, and they acted as though we were on a sightseeing ride through the countryside. I was sitting behind Little Neck, where I could look at his beefy shoulders. I wondered why he was called Little Neck, when actually his neck was thick and fat. Finally I asked.

"That's because he likes Little Neck clams so much," Al explained.

"I love 'em," Little Neck said from the front seat. "One time I ate five dozen at one sitting."

We kept on with an amiable conversation for another two or three miles, and Swede and I began to feel quite relaxed. Then suddenly Little Neck turned down a narrow side road. He had gone only a short distance when he turned into the trees and stopped.

"All right," Al ordered. "We have to blindfold you and then you have to lie down in back."

"I thought this was a friendly visit," Swede protested. "This doesn't seem so friendly to me."

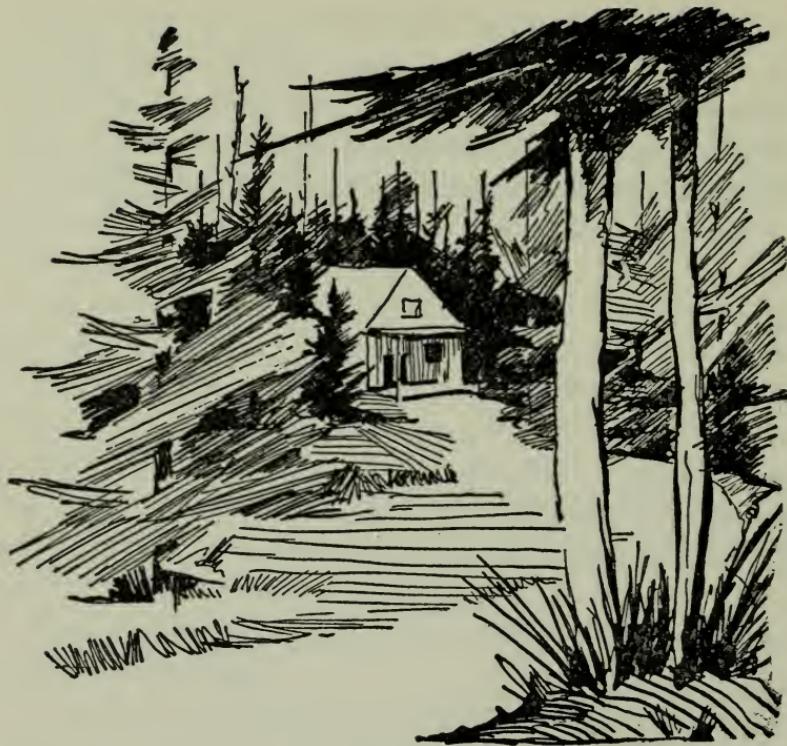
"We're friendly enough," Al said with a grunt. "But you might not be. We have a nice comfortable place to stay at the moment and we don't want to have to move if you two decide to blab to the police."

They blindfolded us and made us lie face down on the blankets in the back.

"I won't tie your hands if you don't try to remove the blindfolds," Al said. "I'll sit here in the seat where I can watch you."

I don't know how far we drove after that. If you're lying face down on the floor of a station wagon with a blindfold over your eyes, you haven't much sense of distance. I suppose we went five or six miles. I have no idea how many times the car turned, but we seemed to be following some sort of winding road for the last few minutes. Finally the station wagon stopped, and we got up, still with the blindfolds in place. Al helped us out. As we walked toward the house, I heard a familiar sound. Hector was somewhere nearby. He wasn't making a lot of fuss or

racket, as he usually does when he rejoins me after following me in a car. However, there was no mistaking his voice. That caw didn't come from any ordinary crow. All the blindfolding and twisting and turning in the car may have fooled Swede and me, but it hadn't fooled Hector.



10. ESCAPE

We were led up some steps and through a door and then our blindfolds were taken off. We found ourselves in a small room with the blinds drawn and the electric lights on. The room was furnished with worn-looking, overstuffed furniture which had probably not been much good when it was new. There was a worn rug on the floor, and in general the place looked run-down and shoddy. From the appearance of that one room, I guessed that the house was probably a summer cottage or a small bungalow.

Mr. Jones, looking smaller than ever, was seated in an overstuffed chair in one corner near a radio. He had been reading, and his book was lying beside him on the table. He didn't get up but he motioned Swede and me to two chairs.

"I'm sorry to have to inconvenience you this way," he said in what he meant to be a pleasant voice. "I hope your ride wasn't too uncomfortable. I felt there were several things we ought to talk over."

"What?" Swede asked.

"The same subject that we were discussing the last time," Mr. Jones said with a wave of his hand.

"I thought that was finished," I told him. "You cut the castles to pieces with a hacksaw and there wasn't any ruby and there wasn't any poison."

"You two are resourceful and intelligent young men," Mr. Jones said with a patronizing nod. He nodded at Swede. "You proved that, when you escaped through the bathroom window. Now, I don't know what role you two have in this little drama, but you seem more aware of what's going on than that dunderhead, Captain Wudge. By the way, who was that long, lanky, individual with the sepulchral voice?"

Swede and I looked at each other, and I gave a slight shrug of my shoulders. I knew that Swede felt as I did. We didn't want to tell Mr. Jones anything that might help him. However, there didn't seem much at this point that we could tell him that would be of any value. Certainly it didn't mean anything if he knew who Mr. Snedeker was.

"That was Mr. Snedeker," Swede said. "He's a chess expert. He wanted to look at one of Captain Wudge's chess

sets and he hired us to take a picture of it. He was going to use the picture for an article in a chess magazine."

"Did you take these pictures?" Jones asked. He tapped with one of his small white fingers on a brown envelope on the table beside him.

Swede nodded. "I took them at the museum."

"You did a fine job," Jones said with an approving nod of his head. He was doing his best to be friendly. "You must have used a special lens for close-up work."

Again Swede nodded.

"As you may recall, I took that chess set with me," Jones said, "including the various pieces of the two castles."

"I remember," I said. "What did you do, cut them all in two to see if they were hollow?"

Mr. Jones smiled pleasantly. "That wasn't necessary," he said in his clipped voice. "My information was quite explicit that the two white castles were the hollow pieces. However, I'm a thorough man, so I took the precaution of looking at all the others through a fluoroscope or whatever you call the device. There's nothing in any of them."

"Then I guess the story about the Shah and his ruby was all just a fairy tale," I suggested.

Mr. Jones smiled and shook his head. "No, I don't think so. I would be very disappointed if it was, and I think you would be too. It would be a shame if a wonderful romantic story like that turned out to be a myth." He paused for a minute. "No, I examined the castles very carefully and I came to the obvious conclusion that they are not the two original white castles belonging to the set. They were substitutions."

I was surprised and a little disappointed to hear him say

that. I had supposed that he had been completely fooled. However, that was silly. Anyone who had spent as many years as he had tracking down the set would be too thorough to be fooled by substitute castles.

"I wouldn't know about that," I said.

"Perhaps that possibility hadn't occurred to you," Mr. Jones admitted. "But I think you can tell me about when the substitution took place and possibly even how it took place."

"That chess set has been kicking around for two hundred years," Swede objected. "At least, that's what you say."

"That's right," agreed Mr. Jones. There was a pleasant smile on his lips all the time that he talked. But his little black eyes weren't pleasant at all. He had probably lost the knack of making them friendly years before. They were always cold and hard and mean.

"I examined your photographs under a magnifying glass," Mr. Jones said. "You were apparently concentrating on that finely carved ivory set, but in two of the pictures the set in which I am interested appears in the background. The white castles are visible in both, and they are not the white castles which I cut in two."

I said nothing. Mr. Jones sounded positive, so there wasn't much sense in arguing with him. He had certainly narrowed down the time and place at which the substitution had been made. I didn't like him, but that Mr. Jones would have made a smart detective.

"Wudge knows that those aren't the original castles," Jones continued. "I'm a very observing man. While I was cutting those castles in two at the captain's, I was absorbed

in what I was doing. Naturally I was quite excited, because I thought I had reached the end of a long chase. Even so, I noticed things, although I didn't analyze them at the time. Now, the captain was just as intensely interested as I was—or as all of us were—after I had told him the story of the chess set. He wanted to know what was inside of those castles as I was cutting them apart. Later when I stacked the cut pieces on the table and observed that they were taller than the black castles, he had a very odd expression on his face. He realized then that those two pieces didn't match the set."

Suddenly Mr. Jones glared at Swede and me and his voice became very stern. "You two are going to be in serious trouble," he warned, "if I inform Captain Wudge that you know about the substitution and haven't told him."

"But we did tell him," I said.

The words were scarcely out of my mouth when I realized that I had made a slip. I looked at Swede, who drew a deep, disgusted breath. I felt the same way about what I had done. Mr. Jones had tricked me into admitting that we knew something about the substitution.

"I thought so," he said softly. "Now be sensible and tell me about it."

He was still trying to be friendly, but those black eyes kept their mean look. Al and Little Neck were sitting on the sofa on the other side of the room. Al was smoking a cigarette and listening intently. Little Neck was reading a tattered comic book. I doubt if he could read anything much more difficult.

"We can make them talk if you want, boss," Al suggested in a quiet but very ominous voice.

"Yeah," Little Neck added. "A few loose teeth might loosen their tongues."

"Now, now," said Mr. Jones. "You know I don't believe in force. This is just a friendly meeting."

I didn't put much faith in his not believing in force, and neither did Little Neck, because he looked surprised. I glanced at Swede and raised my eyebrows.

"Even if we told them they wouldn't be any better off," Swede said. "So why not?"

"All right," I said to Mr. Jones. "I'll tell you what happened to the castles."

He rubbed his hands together. "As I said, I think you two are very intelligent, alert young men." He leaned back in his chair and beamed.

"Swede and I were down at the museum, taking pictures of one of the chess sets for Mr. Snedeker," I explained. "While we were doing it the case was open. I've got a pet crow named Hector. He hopped in the museum window, picked up one of the white castles, and flew away with it."

For once Mr. Jones forgot his usual calm manner. He stared at me in amazement. "A crow?" he asked in a squeaky voice. "A crow stole that castle?"

"Don't believe it, boss," Little Neck said from the sofa. "That's the craziest tale I ever heard in my life."

"Crazy or not, that's what happened," I said.

Mr. Jones stared at me, his face still wearing a stunned, amazed expression. "I believe it," he said finally. "It's too fantastic a story for anyone to make up on the spur of the moment. And as this young man knows, it would be simple enough to check on whether he has a pet crow or not."

"Call up my mother," I said. "Our telephone number is

Belleville six-oh-five-two-two, and my name is Neil Lambert. Ask her about the crow stealing the castle if you want."

"Go on," said Mr. Jones. "What happened after the crow stole the castle?"

"Well, we didn't know Captain Wudge very well, and naturally I felt responsible," I said. "I had no idea there was anything special about the castles. In fact, I didn't know anything about chess sets. Miss Fallon didn't either, and she didn't notice at the time that one piece was missing. Several days later Swede and I happened to be in an antique shop and we saw the two castles that you cut to pieces. It was one of those things that happens once in a thousand years. They were certainly a close match for the chess set, or at least I thought so."

"They were," Mr. Jones admitted. "I don't think anyone except a chess expert like Captain Wudge or someone who had a special interest, like myself, would have noticed the difference."

"Anyhow, we made a substitution," I explained. "We put in the two castles that I had bought, and took out the one that was originally with the set."

"And where is that now?" Jones asked, his eyes glittering.

"Captain Wudge has it," I answered.

"Did he open it?"

"He opened it at my house," I answered. "It was hollow, just as you said." I waited, because I wanted to make him sweat.

"And?" asked Mr. Jones, sitting forward tensely in his chair.

"It was filled with a white powder. Captain Wudge had a chemist analyze it, and it was strychnine."

From Mr. Jones's expression you might have thought that he had found the other castle and had the ruby in his hand. His eyes glowed with pleasure, and there was a look of triumph on his face. He forgot Swede and me and Al and Little Neck.

"It's true," he gloated. I knew that he was talking to himself. "The manuscript was right, and I've tracked it down. It's the set used by Nadir Shah. I've tracked it down through two centuries and across three continents, and it's true!"

Suddenly his look of triumph disappeared. "A crow!" His eyes seemed to come back into focus. "I found the set and now a crow has the ruby. What is Captain Wudge doing?" he asked abruptly.

"Doing about what?"

"About locating this missing castle."

"What can he do? Nobody knows what Hector did with the thing. At the time he took it from the museum I ran outside, but he had disappeared."

Mr. Jones leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. He was silent for several minutes, while he thought. The silence began to get on my nerves, just as it had that day at Captain Wudge's. This seemed to be a favorite trick of Jones's—to lean back in his chair and have a conference with himself. Finally he opened his eyes and looked at me.

"Where did you get this pet crow?" he asked.

"A friend of mine gave it to me when it was just beginning to feather out."

"Then you raised it?"

I nodded. "Yes, I like birds. I used to have some pigeons at one time, homing pigeons."

Jones nodded, as though he were quite interested. "Then you undoubtedly know more about this crow than anyone else."

"I suppose I do."

"I've made a few inquiries about you two young men," he said, abruptly changing the subject. "And Al here has been observing you."

"I figured someone was," Swede said dryly. "That station wagon was certainly johnny-on-the-spot to give us a ride when we started hitchhiking out of town."

Mr. Jones gave a slight smile and nodded his head. "From what I'm able to gather in town you two are quite enterprising. As I understand it, you operate a detective agency."

"The Carson Street Detective Agency," Swede answered. "And it's not a joke, either."

"I wasn't implying that it was," said Mr. Jones very politely. "I imagine that you have considerable difficulty on that score, although I understand you have been instrumental in solving several cases."

"Even when the newspapers write a long story about us they act as though everything we did was an accident," I complained. That had been a sore spot with Swede and me for some time.

"I quite understand your resentment," said Mr. Jones. "I would like to hire you two to locate that missing castle."

"But it belongs to Captain Wudge," Swede objected.

"That's a debatable point," said Mr. Jones, putting the tips of his white fingers together. "I have in my possession the chess set, in which I have no further interest whatever. I will either give that to you two boys to return to Captain Wudge, or mail it back, if you prefer. Once that is in his

possession he has a complete chess set, the exact set that was on display at the museum."

"But the two white castles are cut into pieces," I protested.

"An unfortunate but unimportant detail," said Jones, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Legally it would be rather difficult to prove who was the rightful owner of this missing castle, if it should be located." He looked meaningfully at Swede and then at me. "Especially difficult if you two happened to be reluctant to give any testimony on the matter. Captain Wudge would have his original chess set back and would be none the poorer."

"But he's the rightful owner of the chess piece *and* the ruby," Swede insisted.

Jones lost his temper for an instant. "Who can say who the rightful owner is?" he snapped. "If Wudge wants the castle back I'll give it to him after I've removed the ruby. That ruby has passed from hand to hand for two hundred years, and no one has even suspected its presence. It belongs to the man who is clever enough to find it."

He seemed to realize that he wasn't getting anywhere by being angry, and he became very persuasive again. "Captain Wudge is an irascible nincompoop," he said. "If you two boys were to locate this missing castle, at best you'd probably get a 'thank you' from him." Jones leaned forward in his chair. "Gentlemen, that ruby is worth a fortune. As I said, I sincerely believe that it belongs to those who are clever enough to find it. Why should you do all the work of finding it and then give it to Captain Wudge?"

"Why should we do all the work of finding it and give it to you?" Swede asked very practically.

"An excellent question," Jones replied, not in the least taken aback. "However, I would like to point out that a ruby of that size and value is rather difficult to dispose of without publicity. If two boys of your age were to try to sell it to a jeweler, he would immediately inform the police. The story would certainly get back to Captain Wudge and then he would claim that he was the owner. Now if you work with me there's no need to dispose of it. I'll take care of that detail. As a matter of fact, I would like to keep it myself. I will quite gladly pay you two handsomely for your part in the matter."

"How much?" I asked. I had no intention of turning any ruby over to Jones, but I wanted to see how much he was willing to offer.

"Five hundred dollars apiece," he said. I didn't know how much the ruby might be worth, and I suspected that five hundred dollars was far from being one-third of its value. However, five hundred dollars is an awful lot of money, as far as I'm concerned. I took a deep breath and felt my chest get bigger. People could laugh at Swede's and my detective agency if they wanted, and say it was not a professional agency, but I doubted if many regular detective agencies in the big cities had five hundred dollars waved in front of them every day in the week.

"What do you say?" asked Mr. Jones. "Is it a bargain?"

"There's not much use in our saying yes," Swede pointed out. "We've hunted all over and we can't find that castle."

"Just a few days have gone by," Mr. Jones replied. "I'll admit that I was somewhat taken aback when you told me that a crow had stolen the castle, but I'm not a man who is easily discouraged. If I were, I would never have traced the

set this far. It's taken me ten years, and what are a few weeks more or less? I'm confident that if you look hard enough, and observe that crow closely enough, we'll find what we're after."

I hoped so too, but I wasn't going to tell him so. I looked doubtful and said, "It's like looking for a needle in a haystack. He might have flown anywhere with the castle, or have dropped it anywhere."

Mr. Jones knew more about crows than either Captain Wudge or Mr. Snedeker had. "I've read about mischievous crows that steal things," he said. "As I recall it, they have favorite hiding places for their treasures. Sooner or later, your crow should take you to his."

I didn't see much use in arguing with Mr. Jones. He was a very thorough man and I had no doubt that, after we had gone, he would get an encyclopedia or a bird book from someplace and read about the habits of crows. If we said we weren't going to cooperate with him, he probably would have Al and Little Neck continue to watch us. I hadn't seen either of them since the day at Captain Wudge's, but they must have been watching us closely to know so promptly when we had started along the highway. If we did agree to work with Jones, we might not be spied upon all the time.

"How would we get in touch with you if we found the castle?" I asked.

Mr. Jones reached in his coat pocket and pulled out a stamped envelope, which he handed to me. I glanced down at it and saw that it gave only a box number and a Philadelphia post-office address.

"Just stick a note in that envelope and mail it to me,"

he said. "I'll be in touch with you the next day. Tell no one what you have found. Once the knowledge becomes public, Captain Wudge will undoubtedly claim the ruby."

Swede started to say something, but I gave him a warning look. "Well, we'll keep our eyes open," I said. "I don't think there's a chance of doing anything until November, though."

"Why not?" Jones asked, in a slightly surprised voice.

"Hector seems to prefer to fly through the trees rather than above them," I told him. "It's impossible to follow him with leaves in the way. Once the leaves drop in November, it shouldn't be so difficult."

"I understand," he said. "Well, as I said before, after ten years a few weeks more or less won't make too much difference." He nodded at Al. "Would you get that chess set from the other room?"

Al went through a door into the next room and returned a moment later with a small brown paper bag, which he handed to Swede, who was nearest. Swede wasn't taking anything for granted. He dumped the chess pieces out into his lap and counted them as he returned them to the bag.

"I trust they're all there," Mr. Jones said.

"More than when we started," Swede said with a slight grin. "Since those two castles are now about eight pieces instead of just two."

"We paid two dollars for them," I remarked.

Mr. Jones took the hint. He got a wallet out of his hip pocket and pulled out two dollars, which he handed me without a word. I took them without a word too, because I didn't figure we owed him any thanks.

"I'm sorry, but I think it would be wise if we blindfolded

you on the trip back also," said Mr. Jones. "Actually I don't think the police have any charge they could press against any of us, except possibly one of entering illegally. With the return of this chess set, they certainly can't accuse us of stealing anything. However, I suppose Captain Wudge has made complaints of one sort or another to the police. If you leave blindfolded and are later asked by the police if you know anything about our whereabouts, you can honestly say no. So the blindfolds are really for your own protection."

He may have convinced himself that he was doing it all for us, but he hadn't convinced me, and I am quite certain he hadn't convinced Swede. Al put the blindfolds over our eyes again and we were led outside. Actually the blindfolds weren't uncomfortable, and I could even see a little with mine on. I couldn't see through it, but I could see along the sides of my nose. That helped a little when I was going down the steps.

We were led along a gravel path and out into what I suppose was the driveway. Al was smoking a cigarette, which he dropped by my right foot as he reached into his pocket for the keys to the car. He didn't bother to stamp it out.

"Wait a minute," Little Neck said. "There are a couple of cases of beer bottles and Coke bottles that I want to take back to town. The boss says we're not to leave any of that junk around when we leave."

"Go get 'em," said Al. "I'll stay here with the boys."

I heard the car springs creak as he leaned against the fender. I reached out my hand, found the car, and leaned against it too. One of the rear windows was down, and I

put my elbow on that. I heard a soft flutter of wings and then a slight *tick-tick*, as something landed on the windowsill. I twisted my head and tilted it back, until I could see along my nose. Hector was sitting on the car windowsill, not two inches from my fingers. I was standing between the crow and Al. If Al had seen him fly down to the car, he said nothing. I reached out my finger and scratched the back of Hector's head a second. Again there was a soft flutter, and I felt something by my foot. I looked down just in time to see Hector pick up the smoking cigarette butt that Al had dropped.

I don't know why I didn't say anything. I started to call to Hector and then changed my mind. I didn't want him to get burned, because then that would teach him not to steal things. If we ever expected to recover that castle, he had to steal, at least long enough for us to follow him to his hiding place. But if I called out to Hector, Al would realize that I could see out of the bottom of my blindfold. I decided to keep silent. Little Neck was gone for some time, and finally Al began to get impatient.

"Hey, hurry up!" he shouted. "What are you doing?"

"Be there in a minute!" Little Neck shouted from somewhere.

It was more than a minute, but a short time later we heard a door slam and then the cases of bottles clink as Little Neck came toward the car. Al opened the rear door and helped Swede and me into the back, where we lay face down, as before. Little Neck began to load the bottles in beside us. He tossed the first case in and poked Swede in the ribs.

"Hey, look out!" Swede protested. "That's me."

"Sorry," said Little Neck, sounding as though he meant exactly the reverse.

He slammed the back door and I suppose he started to walk around to the driver's seat.

"Hey, what's that?" I heard him ask a moment later.
"Isn't that smoke?"

"It certainly looks like it," Al's voice replied.

The car door opened and Al got out. There was a moment's silence, and then Al said, "You go in and tell the boss, and I'll get a bucket of water."

"This sounds like a good time to look around," Swede whispered. We pushed up our blindfolds and raised our heads cautiously. The station wagon was parked in front of a small, square, green-shingled bungalow. It seemed buried in the middle of a woods, and there were no other houses in sight. A narrow trail led out of the front yard, but after a short distance it too disappeared in the trees.

"Hey, get your head down," Swede warned. "They'll see us."

"What are they going to do if they do see us?" I asked, feeling suddenly reckless. "They can't shoot us—after all, we're partners of Mr. Jones."

"Yeah," Swede grunted, "I know what kind of partners we are. We do all the work and he takes all the money—or, in this case, the ruby."

Al came hurrying around the corner of the house, carrying a heavy bucket of water. Until he looked up, we had not located the smoke that had caused the delay. Now we saw it. A thin column of blue-white smoke about the size of a broomstick rose straight up in the air. It seemed to be coming from the gutter of the house.

Swede pointed to a tall pine tree that towered over the low bungalow. "I'll bet a lot of pine needles from that have fallen in the eaves trough," he remarked. "Something has set them on fire."

"And I know what it was," I said, half chuckling. "Al threw a lighted cigarette on the ground and Hector picked it up. I'll bet he carried it up to the roof and dropped it."

It was a simple little fire, and anybody but a simpleton would have been able to put it out in a minute. The pine needles were only smoldering when Al and Little Neck first spotted the smoke. For some time after Swede and I saw it, there was still no visible blaze. Al stood below it, looking helplessly up at the eaves with the bucket of water in his hands. He glanced around frantically, apparently hunting for something to use for a ladder.

"Why doesn't he back the car up to there and climb on top of it?" Swede asked. "He could almost reach the gutter then."

"Don't tell him," I warned. "There's nothing like having to think things through yourself to bring out the stuff in a man."

In desperation Al swung the bucket and tried to throw the water up at the rising column of smoke. About two-thirds of it fell back on his face, and I doubt if any of it reached the eaves trough.

"Find me something to use for a ladder!" he bellowed, and then disappeared around the house again to get another bucket of water.

"There she goes," Swede said, pointing.

A little tongue of yellow flame flickered up above the edge of the roof and a second later it was joined by another.

The eaves trough must have been full of old leaves, sticks, and pine needles, because once the blaze started, it spread rapidly. In seconds it was blazing along the edge of the tarpaper roof for about three feet. Little Neck came bursting out the front door, carrying a short stepladder. Behind him came Mr. Jones. Little Neck opened the stepladder, climbed about three or four steps, and stopped. It was obvious without his climbing any higher that the stepladder was too short to do much good.

"If they backed the car over there and put the stepladder on top of it, I'm sure they could reach it," Swede said. "What a bunch of dumb bunnies."

"If I was certain the house belonged to Mr. Jones, I'd say let it burn down," I remarked.

Swede looked at the dashboard and jabbed his elbow in my ribs. "The keys are in there," he said. "Shall we back it over for them?"

The car had been turned around and was pointed back along the trail leading out of the woods. I had a sudden inspiration. "No," I said. "Let's start the car and get out of here."

Al appeared around the corner of the house again, carrying another bucket of water. Mr. Jones looked at him and then up at the edge of the roof. The asphalt shingles had not yet caught fire, but they were smoking.

"If we get a long pole and hoist one bucket of water up there, we can put it out," he announced crisply. "I think I saw some poles of some kind in the back yard."

All three of them hurried back around the corner of the house. As they disappeared, Swede and I made a dive for the front of the car. We climbed over the two intervening

seats and he slid under the steering wheel. I rolled up the window on my side, locked it, and then reached over and locked his door. We were both familiar with Plymouths, and it took only a second to get the car started. Swede snapped off the emergency brake, pressed the drive button, and we were off. He tromped on the accelerator, and we picked up speed. I turned around to watch. As we rounded the first bend and the cottage began to disappear I saw someone—I think it was Little Neck—appear around the corner of the cottage. He bellowed something which I couldn't understand. Whatever he said, we didn't much care.

The trail wound in and out of the trees for almost a quarter of a mile before it came out on a small dirt road. Without even pausing, Swede turned to the right.

"One way is as good as another," he said grimly. "Do you suppose they have another car?"

"They might have," I said uneasily. "The track went on around the back, so it could have been parked in the back yard. They've got a gray Pontiac, you know."

"I remember it," Swede said. He swung the car around a curve, doing better than forty. "I hope no one's coming in the opposite direction."

We followed the dirt road for almost a mile before it came out on a black-top highway. Again we turned to the right. The road was fairly straight, and Swede increased the speed until we were doing almost sixty. We began to breathe easily for the first time. We turned left at the next crossroad and then right again at the following one. After we had made several more such zigzags, we felt reasonably safe. Finally we came to a smooth concrete highway and

a sign which said "Flemington—six miles." Swede turned onto the highway and we headed toward Belleville.

"You know, we'll never have another situation like this; we ought to appreciate it," I observed.

"How do you mean?" Swede asked.

"Here we are, a couple of teenagers not quite old enough to drive. We stole a car but we aren't worried about being picked up by the police. In fact, I'd like to be picked up by the police."

"So would I"—Swede grinned—"and that's where I think we ought to go, straight to the police barracks outside Belleville."

"Drive on, James."

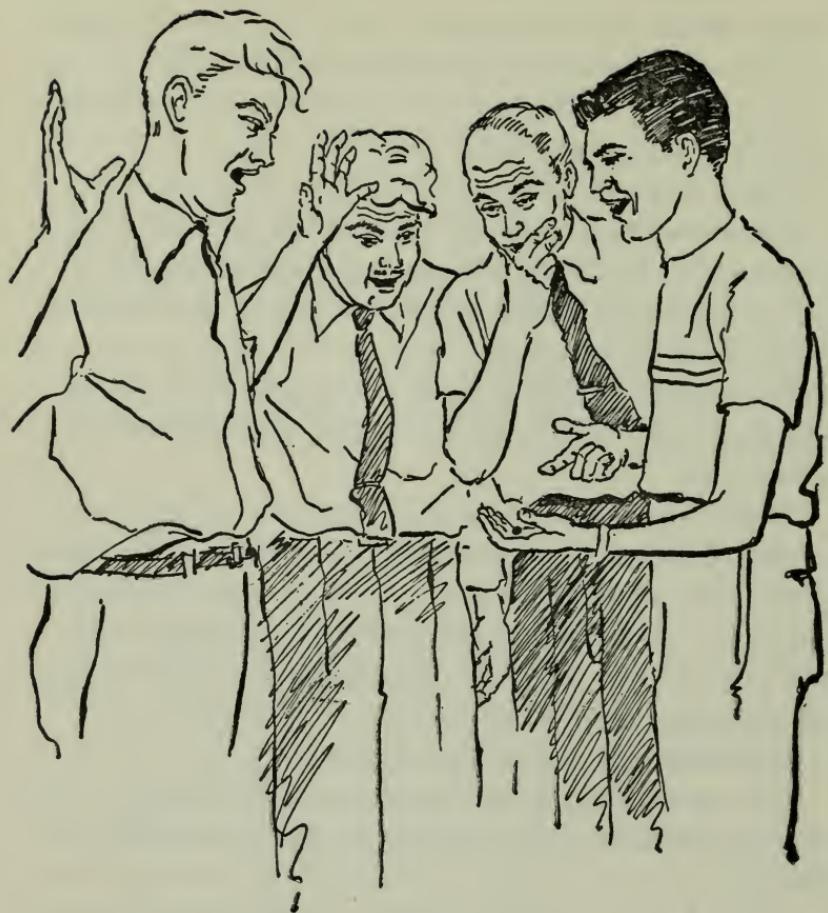
"Do you think you could find your way back to that place?" Swede asked.

I shook my head. "I was too excited and scared there at the first, and you made too many turns. You were driving. Could you take us back?"

"I wouldn't even try," Swede answered.

"It was sort of a shame to leave in such a hurry," I remarked. "I doubt if they were able to put out that silly little fire."

"Yeah," Swede agreed. "I hate to miss a good fire too."



II. THE RUBY

I guess that with Mr. Jones acting as fire chief, they must have put the fire out after all. Although Swede and I couldn't tell the police exactly where we had been, we knew the general area. There was no fire reported in that locality, and if the cottage had burned down, someone would have

noticed. Swede and I thought we had scored against Mr. Jones and his two thugs by making off with the car, but as it turned out, we didn't accomplish much except to escape. About two days later, the police discovered that the car had been stolen in Maryland. I suppose if that trio needed another they probably would get it the same way. We may have forced them to move to a new location, because they had no way of knowing that we couldn't find our way back. Whether they did move or not, I'll never know.

I don't know how Hector got home that day, either. He could have followed the station wagon. Although it seemed to me that Swede was driving like a lunatic at the time, I doubt if he ever got over sixty miles an hour. That's not much speed for a crow, especially when he doesn't have to follow the road. Maybe crows have a homing instinct, like pigeons, and Hector flew home as a crow flies, which I suppose is in a straight line. Anyhow, he got back.

For the next few days Swede and I stuck very close to home. We didn't go hiking in the country, or take any walks along dark streets at night. Instead we spent most of our time in my back yard, trying to get Hector to steal things. He obliged several times, but we soon lost track of him.

"What we need is a helicopter," Swede remarked one hot afternoon. He was stretched out in the hammock and I was lying on the grass, looking up through the leaves of the big maple tree.

"Good idea," I agreed. "We could hover above the trees where we would have a bird's-eye view of that crazy bird. I'll bet it would work."

"Who has helicopters?" Swede asked. "Is it the Army or the Air Force?"

"The Army, the Air Force, the Navy, the Coast Guard—everybody's got 'em, except us. And we need 'em the worst."

"Suppose we wrote a letter to the President," Swede said. "Maybe he'd lend us one."

"People who dust crops from the air have them too," I remarked. "I wonder if we could rent one."

"We'd have to rent it for too long a time," Swede objected. "That crazy crow of yours is too temperamental about stealing. If he's going to be a thief, why doesn't he stick to his work and steal regularly? This business of stealing today and loafing tomorrow will never get him any place."

"If we could build a tree house at the top of a real tall tree or climb up to the top of the water tower, that might work," I suggested.

Swede sat up suddenly. "That's it!" he said. "The water tower! They're painting it."

"Who's painting it?" I asked.

"The Mason brothers. They do a lot of painting for my dad. I wonder if they'd let me go up there with them. I could sit there with a pair of fieldglasses and watch."

"You might have to watch for hours."

"What else have I got to do?" Swede asked. "I could take my lunch up tomorrow morning and spend practically the whole day. You do your best down here to get Hector to steal something."

"We'd have to arrange some sort of signal, so that I could let you know when Hector decided to cooperate."

You couldn't sit up there with your fieldglasses to your eyes all day."

"Maybe you could run up some sort of flag," Swede suggested.

"I don't know how you would see it from there, unless you looked right at the house all the time. Some sort of sound signal would be better, or maybe a flashing light."

"That's it," said Swede. "That Boy Scout mirror signaling thing."

"Heliograph. It might work at that."

We live in a big, old, white clapboard house, with two high-ceilinged floors and a large attic above that. Swede and I went up to the attic and found that the gable in the south side faced the water tower, about three blocks away. I got out the heliograph, and although the sun was pretty far in the west, I was able to catch it and reflect it on the water tower. A heliograph is nothing except a good mirror which you use to reflect the sunlight, and a shutter which you can open and close in front of the mirror in order to make dots and dashes. In Boy Scout work we had used them to signal as far as three miles.

"I imagine from about ten o'clock on, you'll be able to catch the sun and spot me on the water tower," Swede said.

"The difficulty is taking care of Hector and then getting up here fast enough to signal you. Maybe I can get Eileen to help me."

"I'll see the Masons," Swede said. He was really excited about the idea.

By seven o'clock that night we had it all arranged. The Masons weren't too enthusiastic about having Swede up on the tower with them, but he promised to wear a safety belt

attached to the railing and sit quietly in one spot. Eileen agreed to spend the day trying to get Hector to steal. I had to give her a dollar, but I didn't know of anyone I could get cheaper. Besides, he knew Eileen well and would take things out of her hand, while he might have been afraid of somebody strange.

The sky was blue and cloudless the next day, and by ten o'clock Swede was up in the water tower and I had the heliograph focused on him. I had fastened Hector in the pigeon loft the night before, and as soon as Swede and I were ready, Eileen let him out. To show how much he thought of our idea, he promptly disappeared, and didn't come back until almost eleven-thirty. When Hector disappeared, however, there was no telling when he might suddenly swoop down out of a tree and be at your elbow. Just in case, I kept the heliograph focused. That meant that every four or five minutes I had to change the position of the mirror slightly so that the reflected sunlight would shine on Swede. He was seated on the little walk that encircled the tower. With practice I was able to focus the sun right in his eyes. I had no worries about attracting his attention. We had agreed that a steady light meant that I was focusing, while a series of flashes meant that Hector had taken off.

Eileen earned her dollar, I'll have to admit. From the time Hector came back at about eleven-thirty, until two o'clock, she tried to cajole him into running off with something. Most of the time he perched on one of the lower limbs of the maple tree and looked at her. She offered him little bits of wood, pieces of tinfoil, a shiny match cover and about a dozen other things.

"I'll go get one of those Christmas-tree ornaments," she called up to me about two o'clock. "I know where they're packed away in the basement."

She came back a few minutes later with a small red Christmas-tree ball. It was the plastic kind that doesn't break. She placed it carefully on the table beside the hammock and picked up her book, pretending to read. Hector was definitely interested. He hopped along his branch with his head cocked inquisitively to one side. From there he flew down to one of the hammock ropes. He sat there a while and finally hopped over to the table. Eileen stayed perfectly still, watching him out of the corners of her eyes.

I think Hector preferred to take things that he thought people didn't want him to take. He looked suspiciously at Eileen and then at the Christmas-tree ball. Eileen had thrown things at him several times in the past when he was trying to steal something, and he was cautious. Finally he decided that it was safe. He made a dart and in a second he and the Christmas-tree ball were gone.

I had the mirror focused on Swede, and as Hector took off, I started working the shutter. He got the signal immediately and raised one hand high in the air. He put his fieldglasses up to his eyes and I turned the heliograph away. I didn't want to interfere with his tracking Hector by flashing light in his face.

I remained in the attic window, watching Swede. Finally I realized that I was holding my breath with excitement, and I let it out with a long sigh. A minute later I saw Swede lower his glasses. Not more than three minutes had passed since Hector had taken off, and I assumed that Swede had lost him. Then Swede unfastened the safety belt, got

to his feet, and started toward the ladder. He was coming down. I gave a whoop of joy. I closed the attic window and ran toward the stairs.

I was waiting at the bottom of the water tower by the time Swede was two-thirds of the way down. He saw me and waved. I didn't shout any questions and he didn't say anything. We were both being cautious. For all we knew, Al and Little Neck might be hiding behind some bush. I wouldn't have been surprised if one of them had turned up underneath one of the canvases in the Mason brothers' paint truck.

"Where'd he go?" I asked when we were on the sidewalk and were certain there was no one around.

"He came up through the maple tree and flew straight to Buckingham Palace," Swede replied. "He had something bright in his beak when he landed on the roof. I didn't see exactly what he did with it, but when he left there, it was gone."

Buckingham Palace is a name that somebody gave to the old Wentworth house a long time ago. About fifty years ago Mr. Wentworth was president of the Belleville National Bank, and I guess he was the richest man in town. From what my dad has told me, most people liked him, but they didn't like Mrs. Wentworth. She had some very fancy ideas, and the big red-brick house had been built for her. The grounds occupied an entire square block right at the edge of town. There was a high hedge all the way around.

The house was a big, ugly affair, built of red brick, with white stone lintels over the windows. There was a rounded

tower on the second floor at each corner. I suppose you would call the roof a mansard roof. The towers at the four corners had little conical roofs, and the house did look something like a palace. I don't know if that was the reason people called the place Buckingham Palace or whether it was because Mrs. Wentworth thought she was the queen of society. At any rate, everyone had called it Buckingham Palace for as long as I can remember.

There were five Wentworth children, and I suppose a large number of grandchildren. The children had long since moved away, and Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth had both been dead at least ten years. There was a quarrel over the estate, and the house had been unoccupied for at least eight or nine years. A man was paid to look after it in a way, but the big hedge was overgrown and the lawn wasn't mowed more than once or twice a year. The flower garden had gone to weeds, but the house itself was still in good shape.

Swede and I walked directly to the palace to inspect it. There seemed to be a built-in gutter or ledge about two feet wide running around all four sides of the house. The mansard roof sloped up from this, and of course the conical roofs of the four towers were outside everything.

"I suppose the roof is flat after you once get past that steep part," I said, pointing at the slate roof, which slanted upward from the broad gutter.

"Usually that kind of roof is practically flat above the mansard part," Swede said.

"Do you think there's a trapdoor in the flat part?" I asked. "If there is, I think I could get old Mr. Witlock to let us in."

"I doubt it," said Swede. "I think the only way to get up there is with a ladder. We'd need an extra-long extension ladder, at that."

"Where can we get one?"

"The Mason brothers," Swede answered promptly. "I saw one at their house when I went to see them yesterday afternoon."

Mrs. Mason lent us the ladder, which was an extra-long aluminum extension ladder. The Masons lived about two blocks from the Wentworth place, and we carried the ladder back through the alley to keep from attracting attention. We selected a good safe spot at the back of the house and ran the ladder up. After we extended it to its full length, it reached about six inches above the edge of the roof. Swede held the foot of the ladder and I climbed up.

As I climbed over the edge of the roof, I stepped into the flat ledge or gutter. It was about thirty inches wide and sheathed with copper. There were a few sticks and leaves here and there; but it took me less than three minutes to make a complete circuit around the house and to make certain that neither the Christmas-tree ball, the castle, nor any of the other things that Hector had stolen was there.

"No luck," I called down to Swede. "It must be on up on the next part."

From the flat copper gutter, the roof slanted steeply upward for about eight feet. I was wearing sneakers, but it was impossible to climb it. If I had been able to get back and make a long run, I might have made it. As it was, I didn't have a chance. I didn't want to get part way up and

then slide back. There was too much risk of losing my balance when I landed in the gutter. It was a long drop to the ground.

"I can't get up there," I explained to Swede.

He found a board about eight or nine feet long and climbed up with that. His idea was to brace one end of it in the gutter, and then, with the board to hold on to, one of us might shinny on up to that flat roof. But this didn't work either. It was too risky. If you lost your grip when you were most of the way up, you would slide back too fast.

After discussing several plans we decided that a rope would be best. "We'll throw one end over the roof and tie it at this chimney here and to the one on the other side," Swede said. "Then with the rope to hang onto we can climb on up the steep part."

That seemed like a good idea, and since my house was closest, I went for the rope. The only rope that I could find that was long enough was Mother's clothesline. She's fussy about clotheslines, and I suspected that she wasn't going to be too happy about my using it. She wasn't home, and I suppose I shouldn't have taken it without asking her, but I had money enough to buy a new one if I ruined that one. I also took a heavy steel bolt to tie to the line, to give it some weight when we threw it, and then I rejoined Swede.

It was quite a distance across that roof, and my clothesline wasn't any too long. I made two or three throws and finally got the bolt over the top and part way down the steep roof on Swede's side.

"Shake the rope a little!" he called. "The bolt will pull it down and I can reach it."

I wriggled and shook the rope and tried to send ripples over the top of the roof.

"I've got it!" he called finally.

"What?" I called back.

"I've got it!" Swede called, still louder.

"Suppose you tell him to bring it around here and toss it down?" a voice said.

I whirled around and looked over the edge. Standing at the bottom of the ladder was Al. Little Neck was a few feet behind him, grinning happily. I didn't say anything. I guess I was too surprised to say much—and besides, I couldn't think of anything worth saying.

"Tell your buddy to bring that castle around here and drop it down," Al ordered.

"He hasn't got the castle," I explained. "He meant that he had the rope."

"Quit wasting time," Al said firmly. "I want that castle."

I could tell from his tone that he meant business. He was certain that we had the castle. I stood staring down at him while he got angrier by the minute.

"So far we've taken into consideration the fact that you two are just boys," Al said ominously. "But right now I'm forgetting it. You've insisted on getting mixed up in a tough game and you can expect to be treated accordingly."

"We haven't got it," I maintained.

Swede came around the corner of the roof. "Who are you talking to?" he asked.

"We've got visitors," I told him, pointing downward. "They think you've found the castle."

Swede knew from my expression who our visitors were, but he looked anyhow.

"Throw that castle down here, towhead," Al ordered.

"I haven't got any castle," Swede replied.

"For the last time, are you going to throw it down or are we going to have to come up and get it?" Al asked.

Swede and I looked at each other and then at the end of the ladder. We might be trapped on the roof, but they would have a difficult time coming up after us if we didn't want them to. The minute either of them started climbing we could start shaking the ladder from the top.

Swede pointed to the board that we had brought up in hopes of climbing up to the flat part of the roof. "We could push the ladder completely away from the house with that," he said softly. He turned and looked down at Al. "Come on up and get it, if you think you're big enough!" he shouted.

Al hadn't realized until then that there was no way they could get up unless we wanted them to, any more than we could get down. He looked at Swede in surprise, and then he looked at the ladder. An expression of helpless rage spread over his face.

"Come on," Swede said. "Why don't you start climbing?"

Little Neck was dumb enough to accept the challenge. He walked to the ladder and started up. We let him climb about ten feet and then I grabbed the end of the ladder and started sliding it along the edge of the roof. Little Neck gave a gurgle and went back down twice as fast as he had come up. When he reached the bottom I shoved the top of the ladder back to its former position.

Al backed away a short distance and leaned against a

tree. He pulled out a cigarette and lighted it. For several minutes he stood quietly, trying to figure out what to do.

"Do you suppose if we yelled anybody would hear us?" Swede asked.

I shook my head. "With all these trees and hedges, and in the middle of this big block, there isn't a chance," I said. "If anyone did hear us, he'd think it was some children playing."

"Then I guess we'll have to wait and see what happens," Swede said philosophically.

Apparently Al decided on the same course. Half an hour went by, and then he called up to us. "It's going to get dark eventually," he warned, "and you're going to get mighty hungry."

"So are you," I replied. "Sooner or later somebody's going to come looking for us."

Another half-hour went by, and then he held a conference with Little Neck. Little Neck nodded in agreement with whatever Al was saying and disappeared. He was gone perhaps another half an hour, and when he returned he had several parcels and a flat cardboard box under his arm. Swede and I watched with interest as he opened the bag and took out some bolts, a wrench, and a hand drill. Then he opened the cardboard box and took out two big hooks.

"Skyhooks," said Swede. "He's smarter than I thought."

"What are skyhooks?"

"Ladder hooks," Swede replied. "He's going to bolt those two hooks on the upper end of the ladder. Then he'll hoist the ladder up and bring it down hard. Those hooks are sharp, and they'll bury themselves here in the copper

gutter. We won't be able to move it once he gets some weight on it."

We were worried. The situation did not look good.

"Maybe one of us had better get up on top of that roof and see if the castle is there," I said. "If we find it we'll have something to bargain with. If they come up here and we don't have it, they may think we've thrown it off in the bushes somewhere. The way Al is feeling, he may throw us off into the bushes after it."

"I'll go," Swede said. "I'll climb up on the other side, where they won't see me."

He got up and walked around to the other side of the roof. I put my hand on the rope near where it was tied to the chimney, and I could feel the tension when Swede started up. He must not have had much trouble, for a minute later I heard him walking around. Apparently the flat top was copper or some kind of metal. He was gone four or five minutes and then he returned the same way he had gone.

"There isn't a thing up there," he said with a worried look on his face.

"We really are in the soup. They'll never believe that we didn't find that castle."

"What are we going to do?" Swede asked.

I didn't know any more than he did, so we sat on the edge of the roof and watched Al and Little Neck. It doesn't take long to bore a hole through aluminum, even with a hand drill. In about twenty minutes they had the hooks in place. Then they set the ladder against the side of the house. When it was in place Little Neck lifted it up in the air until

the top of it stuck over the edge of the roof by at least four feet. Then he pulled it down with a bang, just as Swede had said he would. The two hooks, which were bolted to the top of the ladder, buried themselves in the copper gutter at least an inch. We could have pulled them out easily enough, if there hadn't been any weight on the ladder. But Little Neck was standing on the bottom rung. To move the ladder at all, we would have had to lift him.

"I'll go up," we heard Al say.

The ladder was located in about the middle of one wall. Swede and I moved to the nearest corner and waited.

"I suppose we could take that board and try bashing him over the head as he gets near the top." I suggested without much confidence.

"I suppose we could," Swede agreed. "But if we did, one or the other of them would probably fire a few shots to make us stay back."

Al's head appeared a minute later and then he climbed over and stood in the gutter. We were still at the corner, making no attempt to hide.

"All right, give it to me," he said.

"We haven't got it," I protested. "We couldn't find it."

He gave an annoyed snort and started toward us. Naturally we backed away. By the time he reached the corner where we had been standing we were at the next one. Again he moved toward us, and again we backed away. We stayed just the length of one side of the house ahead of him. Both of us were wearing sneakers, and I suppose we felt a lot more certain of our footing than he did. He didn't try to hurry, but moved very cautiously. Although

that gutter or ledge was wide enough if you watched what you were doing, if you made one false step you would be over the edge.

We made two complete circuits of the house, and he realized that alone he didn't have a chance of catching us. Again he asked us to give him the castle, and I told him the truth, which was that we didn't have it.

"When I do catch you, you're going to be sorry," he warned.

"Then we're going to make certain that you don't catch us," Swede replied. Swede was just as frightened as I was, but from the way he talked back to Al, you would have thought he didn't have a care in the world.

"Come on up here, Little Neck!" Al called, standing near the top of the ladder. "These boys want to play ring-around-the-rosy, and I guess it's going to take both of us to catch them."

Swede and I didn't know what to do. We could hear Little Neck slowly coming up the ladder. When he got to the top, no doubt one of them would go one way and one the other. We didn't wait but hurried around until we were on the opposite side of the house from the ladder and completely out of sight of Al.

"It looks like the jig is up this time for sure," I said.

We were standing by the rope that we had thrown over the roof. "We can go up there at least," Swede said. "They might be able to follow us, but they won't like climbing up that steep slate roof."

We took hold of the rope and scrambled up the slates to the flat roof above. Swede had been up before, but it was

my first time. That clothesline was small, and you couldn't get much of a grip on it. It was no easy job climbing. I didn't look back as I went, because that would have made me twice as worried.

Very quietly we tiptoed across the roof and, getting down on our hands and knees, we peeked over at Al. He was standing directly below us. Then we ducked back. Little Neck's head had appeared and he was looking up, naturally, and we were afraid we would be seen.

Swede jabbed me in the ribs with his elbow and held out his hand. In it was his pocket knife. He made a gesture toward the rope and grinned. We could cut it in two and then Al and Little Neck would have nothing to hold onto if they tried to climb up after us. Of course we knew that would only delay matters. They would go after boards, or a ladder, and nail them to the roof. However, the longer we could delay things, the better. I was about to nod my head, when we heard Al speaking.

"You go that way and I'll go this," he told Little Neck. "They're probably around on the other side."

We slid forward and watched as Al walked to the right and Little Neck to the left. They reached the two corners of the house at about the same time, and started down along opposite sides. With the mansard portion of the roof between them, they couldn't see each other and they couldn't see us.

"Shall we cut it?" Swede asked.

Suddenly I had a better idea. There was the ladder directly beneath us and the rope right beside us, so that we could climb down. Both of the men were out of sight.

"Let's go," I said, and started down.

I slid down that slate roof feet first, on my stomach, holding on to the clothesline. It wasn't easy on my clothes, or on my knuckles either, which bumped against the slates, but I went down fast. I could hear Swede right above me, but I didn't waste time looking. I scrambled for the ladder and started down it. Swede was even faster than I was, and by the time I was a third of the way down the ladder, his feet were kicking me in the head. When I got about six feet from the bottom I jumped. I sprawled on the ground, but only for a second. As I picked myself up, I looked to see if Swede was safe and got set to run as fast as I could.

"Wait," Swede said, "grab the other side of the ladder with me."

He took one side of the ladder and I the other. Together we gave a big heave upward. The hooks came out without any difficulty.

"Now flop it over," Swede said.

We turned the ladder over so that the hooks were pointing out instead of in over the edge of the gutter. Then, holding on to the bottom of the ladder, we hurried out away from the house. The top came banging and bumping down along the bricks, and a minute later the ladder was lying flat on the ground.

We needn't have hurried at all, because Al and Little Neck didn't realize what had happened for several minutes. Apparently they had met on the other side of the house and had decided immediately that we must be up above on the flat portion of the roof, out of sight. I don't think they heard us take the ladder down, either, because several

minutes later, when they came back around the corner, we could see the look of surprise on Al's face when he realized what had happened.

"Let's get behind this tree," Swede said. "They may be so mad they'll start shooting."

Al and Little Neck looked down at the ladder lying on the ground, too dumfounded to say anything. I was still shaking with excitement, and I suppose Swede was too. The fact that we had escaped and now had them trapped was slowly seeping into my brain. I began to feel much better—even a little bit brave.

"I suppose one of us ought to go get the police," I suggested. "Although there's no real hurry."

"That fellow Jones could show up," Swede said. "Let's take that ladder away and hide it."

The end of the ladder was only a few feet away. We ran out, grabbed it, and started away. Al shouted something, but we didn't pay any attention. In a few seconds we were well hidden by the bushes. We carried the ladder over to a far corner and hid it by the hedge. Then we returned to the house. Al and Little Neck were still standing where we had left them.

"You can get awfully hungry up there!" Swede shouted.

Neither one of them had an answer. Swede and I grinned happily and started toward the entrance. "While you phone the police, I'll phone the newspaper," I said. "I'd like some pictures of this for our scrapbook."

Captain Wudge stopped by our house the next day after lunch. He had spent the morning at the police station, making a statement and getting details settled. Al and Little

Neck were charged with attempted robbery, breaking and entering, carrying guns without permits, and stealing a car.

"I doubt seriously if they will get much of a sentence out of all this, unless they have previous offenses," Captain Wudge said. "This is a fantastic case in every way. Actually they haven't stolen anything from me or anyone else around here. No doubt they stole that car, but they can always claim that Jones did it."

"Well, I hope they keep them in jail long enough so that we can spend a few weeks looking for the castle without having to worry about someone's looking over our shoulders," I said. "Do you think it would do any good, Swede, if we tried our water-tower stunt again?"

"I don't know whether I could get up there again," Swede answered. "They're finished painting now. I'd have to get special permission from the mayor or someone."

"I certainly don't think you should risk your necks climbing anywhere for a hypothetical ruby," Captain Wudge said.

"There wasn't any doubt where Hector went," Swede said thoughtfully. "He definitely landed on the roof of Buckingham Palace, and when he left, he didn't have that Christmas-tree ball."

"Well, it wasn't there, and I certainly didn't see any place he could hide it, unless he dropped it down a chimney."

Swede sat up suddenly. "That's it!" he said.

"What is? That he dropped it down the chimney?" I asked.

"No, down the drainpipe or down the spout from the roof gutter. I'll bet that's what happened. There's a little wire guard over the hole. Don't you remember? There's an

outlet at each corner and a copper drainpipe going down."

He was so certain, that Captain Wudge and I got excited too. To examine the drainpipes we would have to take them down. First we had to find old Mr. Witlock, the caretaker, and get his permission to do it.

"I think I'll phone Hiram Snedeker," Captain Wudge said. "He's still visiting in Princeton and would probably like to be in on this too."

We were all set by three o'clock. We had several ladders and a carpenter, who worked for Swede's father, to help us. The drainpipes had been up a long time, and were difficult to take apart. The first one contained nothing except a few leaves, some dirt, and pieces of sticks. The second one was the same, but on the third one we hit pay dirt. The pipe curved near the top and it had clogged part way around the bend. Swede shook it and poked at it with a stick, and suddenly dozens of objects poured out the bottom of the pipe. There were bottle caps, folders of paper matches, several small plastic clothespins, fifteen or twenty buttons, a couple of Eileen's barrettes, the missing silver spoon, and, in the middle of it all, the ivory castle. I picked it up with a whoop of joy.

We all stood around in a circle, while Captain Wudge opened the castle. The bottom came off easily, just as the other one had, but nothing dropped out. He turned it over and looked at it, while we all held our breath. It was stuffed full of a fluffy material that looked like loose wool. The captain got out his penknife and removed several pieces of this. Then he inserted the tip of the knife blade and pried out a small object wrapped in silk.

"It's well wrapped," he said. "And whatever it is, I doubt if it's as big as Mr. Jones hoped."

He unrolled the silk, and there was the ruby. It was perhaps a quarter of an inch in diameter and slightly oval in shape. In the two hundred years that it had been hidden inside the ivory castle, it had lost none of its beauty. The sunlight caught it, and it sparkled with a red glowing light, deep inside. It nestled in the palm of Captain Wudge's hand, dark-red, shining, and beautiful. As I looked at it, the rich red color seemed to pulse and glow.

"May I look at it?" Snedeker asked.

Wudge handed the tall, lanky man the ruby. Snedeker took a magnifying glass from his coat pocket and examined the stone carefully. He held it up to the light and then gave it back to Wudge.

"I'm no expert on precious stones, but I do know a little," he said in his deep voice. "A ruby of that deep-red color is what they call a pigeon-blood ruby in the trade. All the better rubies of that type come from Burma, and I imagine that this one did too. Rubies don't reflect a great deal of light, the way diamonds do. They're prized more for their color. As a result, they are frequently smooth, like this one, instead of cut in facets, like a diamond. A smooth ruby is known as a cabochon ruby."

"What's it worth?" Captain Wudge asked.

"You need an expert to tell you that," Snedeker replied. "Rubies usually have flaws; a perfect ruby is almost unknown. The value depends on the quality and the color. As rubies go, this is a large stone, and if it is almost flawless it could be worth almost any amount. I would guess that

it's worth at least five thousand dollars—perhaps much more."

Swede and I looked at each other, goggle-eyed. Snedeker might think that the ruby was large, and I'll admit it was beautiful. But how anything the size of a pea could be worth five thousand dollars was beyond me. I haven't got a girl friend, but when I get one I hope she doesn't get any ideas about ruby necklaces.

"That's a sizable sum, even though I doubt if it's as much as Jones expected," Captain Wudge said with a pleased smile. "However, I think he would have been satisfied, anyhow. His fairy tale was true." The captain looked up from the stone and glanced at Swede and me. "Whatever the stone is worth, each of you two boys gets ten per cent. You've earned it."

"What are you going to do with the rest of the money?" Snedeker asked, a curious smile on his lips.

"You know perfectly well what I'm going to do with the rest of it," Wudge replied. "I'm going to buy some chess sets that I've wanted for a long time and felt that I couldn't afford."

"Well, you could replace several of those sets you have downstairs with better ones," Snedeker said judiciously. "That one china set in the case to the left of the door is not genuine in my opinion but a copy."

"A copy!" Captain Wudge roared. "That shows how much you know about eighteenth-century stoneware chessmen!"

The ruby was still resting in the palm of Captain Wudge's outstretched hand, and he was waving the other arm around excitedly. Suddenly above the noise of the arguing I heard

a raucous caw. I looked up and saw Hector sitting on the edge of the roof gutter. He was looking down at us with a suspicious glint in his eye.

"Captain Wudge, you'd better put that ruby away!" I warned him. "Hector is up there, and I suspect he likes rubies too."

"Thanks, Neil," the captain said. He stuck the ruby in his pocket without even glancing at it, as though it was an odd penny or a nickel. Then he went right on with his argument with Snedeker.

"What do you say we go play a nice quiet game of chess?" Swede asked with a grin.

"I don't see anything quiet about the game at all," I replied. "If we want something safe and relaxing we'd be better off playing football."