

The Mystery of Smugglers Cove

The Mystery Series – Book No. 1

By Paul Moxham

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NOTE:

This story is set in 1950's Britain and is written in British English - not American English - so bear this in mind regarding the spelling of some words.

This story is the first in *The Mystery Series*.

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Chapter 1: Smugglers Cove

The bicycle skidded to a halt as Joe Mitchell stopped beside a huge oak tree. His slim frame rocked forward, causing a lock of brown hair to fall into his eyes. He glanced back at his two sisters who were still pedalling furiously. Grinning broadly, he called out to them. "I told you I'd win!"

"Well, your legs are much longer than ours," Sarah panted. "Next time we race, Amy and I need a head start to make it fair." Only eight years old, she was the younger of Joe's two siblings and had short blonde hair.

"Look!" Joe exclaimed as he caught sight of a large house in the distance. "That old place looks interesting."

They headed down a dirt road and, a minute later, found themselves in front of two big, steel gates. At the end of a long, overgrown driveway was a three storey mansion.

"I wonder who lives there," Amy said. "It looks terribly old." The curious ten year old twirled a strand of her brown hair around her finger.

"I bet nobody does," Sarah stated, her green eyes filled with doubt. "Look at all those weeds and bushes everywhere. If someone lived there, wouldn't they keep the garden tidy?"

"Let's see if the gates are open." Like many twelve year old boys, Joe was always on the lookout for an adventure, and this place looked very intriguing. He tried to open the gates, but they didn't budge. "Help me, you two."

The girls threw their bicycles on the grass and joined Joe in trying to move the rusty gates but they had no luck.

Joe stepped back and glanced around. "I wonder what this place is called."

"Chandler Manor!" Amy exclaimed triumphantly a moment later. She pointed to an old metal nameplate attached to the gatepost.

“Yes, that’s right,” a cheery voice called out.

The children spun around and saw a boy of about Joe’s age with flaming red hair. His freckles and cheeky smile gave him a goofy look, but he looked as though he would be fun to have as a friend.

“My name’s Will,” the boy said. “Actually, it’s William, but most people call me Will. You’re new here, aren’t you? I haven’t seen you around Smugglers Cove before.”

“We just arrived yesterday,” Joe said. “We’re staying at Rose Cottage. It’s a little place on the cliff overlooking the cove.”

“What a coincidence,” Will said. “That’s where my father and I stayed while we were looking for a house to buy. “Have you got the bedroom with the skylight?”

Joe grinned. “Yes, it’s fantastic.”

“There was a fire at our house,” Sarah piped up. “That’s why we came here.”

“Were you there at the time?” Will asked.

“No, it happened while we were at school,” Amy replied. “The house was too badly damaged to stay in, so our parents decided to rent a place here for the summer holidays. It’s a lot smaller than Danfield, though.”

“Isn’t that in London?” Will questioned.

“Yes, but how did you know?” Joe asked.

Will grinned. “We used to live quite close to Danfield.”

“Why did you move here?” Amy asked.

“My dad wanted some peace and quiet so he could write his novels, so we moved here after the war ended,” Will replied.

Joe turned back towards Chandler Manor. “Does anyone live here?”

Will shook his head. “No. The owner died five years ago, just after we moved in.”

“It looks very mysterious,” Joe said. “I wouldn’t mind exploring it.”

“If you want to do some exploring, I know just the place,” Will said. “Have you heard anything about the history of Smugglers Cove?”

“No, do tell us,” Amy said.

“How about we go and buy ice creams and I tell you all about it?” Will suggested. “There’s a place called Darby’s that sells really yummy ones.”

Sarah looked disappointed. “But we don’t have any money.”

“Don’t worry, my dad gives me heaps of pocket money, so I can buy ice creams for all of us,” Will replied.

The four children rode back into the village. As they passed the police station, they saw the local constable talking to the baker. Both of them were plumpish with round faces, but the constable was taller than the baker and wore thick rimmed spectacles.

They brought their bicycles to a halt a few moments later outside Darby’s. It was an attractive little shop with tables and chairs both inside and outside. After grabbing an ice cream each, they went outside and sat at a table surrounded by pots of red geraniums.

Will launched into his story. “A long, long time ago, smuggling was a roaring trade around here. Ships used to anchor off the coast and smugglers would transport the goods to the beach and into the caves where, as legend says, there were a maze of tunnels. These tunnels criss-crossed all over Smugglers Cove but, to this day, only a few have been found.”

“Why didn’t the police discover where the tunnels came out?” Amy asked.

“Well, apparently the smugglers made the exits to the tunnels underneath houses,” Will replied. “That way, they could slip down to the cove, get the goods, transport them to the tunnels, and be back in bed by sunrise, all without going out the front door.”

Joe frowned as he licked the ice cream that was dribbling down the cone. “That sounds a bit farfetched.”

“Why would anyone go to all that trouble?” Sarah asked.

“Smuggling was an easy way to make money back then.” Will glanced around. Apparently satisfied that no one was listening, he looked back at the others. “Can you keep a secret?”

As the others nodded, Will continued talking. “Last week we had a massive storm that washed away a huge amount of sand and opened up a number of caves. I know the previous ones didn’t have

anything in them but, if you believe the rumours, there's a chest of gold hidden somewhere underneath Smugglers Cove."

Joe's eyes gleamed with excitement. "A chest of gold?"

"Yes," Will replied. "But even if that isn't true, I'm sure there would be something valuable in one of the caves."

"Let's get moving then," Joe said, getting up from his seat.

Will shook his head. "We can't go now. You can only get to the caves at low tide, so we can only explore them in the afternoon or early in the morning. By the way, how long are you staying here?"

"For the whole school holidays," Sarah said.

Will smiled. "Great! That will give us plenty of time to explore."

Joe looked at his watch. "We'd better go home for lunch. Why don't we meet somewhere this afternoon?"

"How about the beach near your place?" Will suggested.

"Okay, we'll see you then," Joe said.

They parted ways. Soon, the three siblings were pedalling up the steep hill towards Rose Cottage. When they reached the top, they paused for a moment to rest their legs.

As Joe glanced around, he couldn't help but think that the view was magnificent. The sea was a glorious shade of blue. The cliffs, edged with a narrow strip of golden sand, wound around the cove. Seabirds soared above the cliffs.

A minute later, they rode towards Rose Cottage, which was perched on top of the cliff. With its dazzling whitewashed walls and rose bushes climbing up the veranda posts, the two storey thatched roof cottage looked like a picture postcard.

After throwing their bicycles on the grass, they rushed down the path, almost bowling over their mother as she opened the front door.

After eating lunch, they set off for the beach. Once there, they paddled in the water and made a sandcastle. The afternoon wore on, but Will never arrived. Wondering what could have happened to delay their friend, they headed back home disappointed.



It was early morning when Joe, awakened by a strange noise, sat up. He had been having a wonderful dream, flying in the sky with a number of seabirds, when something had disturbed him. He slipped out of his bed and walked over to his window. As he did so, a small pebble struck the glass.

Curious, he waited a moment and then opened the window slowly in case more pebbles flew in his direction. When it was fully open, he peeked over the side and, to his surprise, saw Will.

Will waved and called out softly. "Open the door."

Joe headed downstairs. A few moments later, he opened the door and found Will waiting outside.

"I can't stay long," Will said. "My grandmother is sick and I'm going to see her for a few days."

"What happened yesterday?" Joe asked. "We waited the whole afternoon and you didn't come."

"Sorry about that. My dad wanted me to do some errands for him," Will explained. "I got a puncture in my tire, so it took longer than I expected. By the time I got back, it was too late to come over."

"When will you be coming back?" Joe asked.

"In a few days. I have to go now. Say hello to the girls for me. Bye." With that, Will was gone.

Joe closed the door and headed upstairs. He thought about going back to bed but, knowing that he probably wouldn't be able to sleep, decided instead to explore the beach by himself. He changed out of his pyjamas and, grabbing his binoculars and a torch, hurried outside.

Glancing up at the sky, he was surprised at how different it looked from yesterday. The sun was slowly rising as storm clouds moved inland towards the coast. It looked very ominous. The clouds were very dark, the darkest he had ever seen them before. He sensed it was the calm before the storm, but that didn't stop him. Will wasn't coming back for a few days and he didn't want to wait that long to have a look at the caves.

Joe thought he would have time to explore one of the caves before heading back. He'd brought his torch at the last minute as he thought that, even though it was daylight, it might be a bit dark in the caves. With this in mind, he headed towards the rocks.

Five minutes of brisk walking found him outside the first cave. After looking in the first three caves, he started exploring the fourth. Straight away, he noticed something strange. After looking around the cave with his torch, he found the answer. While the other caves were nearly all damp, part of this one was dry. Taking a closer look, he noticed there was a fair amount of loose rock on the bottom of the cave.

He suddenly realised that this was the cave that had opened up after the storm. Wondering if the cave could possibly lead to a tunnel, he focused his attention on moving the rocks that had fallen down.

Chapter 2: Exploring

As Sarah and Amy climbed out of bed and got dressed, they talked excitedly about what they were going to do that day.

As Sarah hurried downstairs, Amy went to wake Joe. “Wakey, wakey,” she called, tapping on the bedroom door. Not getting any response, she slowly opened the door. She planned to scare him, just as he had done to her many a time.

She stopped in surprise. Joe’s bed was empty. Fearing a trick, she slowly opened the cupboard. No one was there. Not knowing what else to do, she raced downstairs to the kitchen. “Joe’s disappeared.”

Mrs Mitchell frowned. “What do you mean?”

“He’s not in his room,” Amy replied.

“I’m sure I can find him,” Mrs Mitchell stated. “You search upstairs while I look down here.”

They went their separate ways. They searched everywhere they could think of, but Joe was nowhere to be seen. Mrs Mitchell slumped in the kitchen chair after five minutes of searching.

Sarah could see that her mother’s expression had changed to one of concern. Walking over, she gave her a comforting smile and hugged her. “Don’t worry. I’m sure Joe is—”

Amy suddenly rushed into the room. “You know those binoculars Dad gave Joe for his birthday last year?”

Mrs Mitchell nodded. “Yes, what about them?”

“They’re gone, as well as his torch and shoes,” Amy replied. “So he must be outside.” Just as she finished speaking, lightning flashed across the sky. A moment later, thunder rumbled.

Everyone rushed to the window and looked out. Rain began to pour down. The dark and threatening clouds blocked out almost all of the blue sky. It looked like dusk instead of morning.

“Wow. That’s one big storm!” Sarah exclaimed.

Amy nodded. “I hope Joe’s somewhere dry.”



Joe hadn’t noticed that the weather had taken a turn for the worse, he had been too busy exploring. Moving the rocks had taken a lot longer than he had anticipated. By the time he had almost finished, he was tired out.

Looking around for a place to sit and rest, he was stunned by what he saw. In the short time he had been moving the rocks, water had crept in and now filled the cave entrance. He would need to duck his head underneath the water if he wanted to get out.

Luckily, the part of the cave where he had been working was still dry, but now the water was creeping towards where he was standing.

Peeking through the cave entrance, he saw it was raining. He could also hear muffled thunder. He looked at his watch and was surprised to see it was almost eight thirty.

The constantly creeping water was now knee deep. A shiver ran down his body. The water was rapidly rising and it would keep on rising. No longer concerned about the time, he tried to think of a way out of this mess.

With a sinking feeling, he realised that he could do nothing. He would just have to wait it out. He leaned against the wall and stared at the slowly rising water.

Time passed slowly. Joe tried to stay dry by standing on the pile of rocks that he had moved. He had thought about moving the rest of the rocks to see if there was a tunnel, but his arms were too sore.

After standing on the rocks with water up to his knees for what seemed ages, he noticed that the water was finally receding. He grimly smiled. The tide was finally going out and, by the sound of it, the storm had passed.

Moving towards the entrance, he discovered how stiff and cold his legs were. All that time standing in the water had taken its toll. He glanced at his watch. It was almost noon.

His stomach rumbled from hunger. He hadn’t even eaten breakfast. He tried to forget about it as he sat down on one of the wet rocks and waited for the water to recede.

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It was unusually quiet at Rose Cottage. Sarah and Amy were trying to play a board game while their mother sewed, but every few minutes one of them would pause and glance through the window to look for any sign of Joe.

As noon came and went, Amy could tell that her mother was quite worried. She was sewing, but what she had done in half an hour could easily have been done in five minutes.

Amy decided she had to do something. Looking out of the window, she saw the storm had finally passed. The last drops of rain were falling and the sun was coming out from behind the clouds. She stood up. "Why don't Sarah and I go outside to see if we can find Joe? I promise to be back here in an hour if I can't find him."

Mrs Mitchell thought it over. "Okay, but be careful."

"Thanks, Mum." Amy gave her a hug and rushed outside. Sarah followed her.

The girls decided they should go to the caves in case Joe had decided to explore them on his own. They walked along the beach until they reached them. However, they found that most of them were partly underwater due to the high tide. Deciding that Joe wouldn't have been foolish enough to enter one of them at high tide, they started to walk away.

Suddenly, a brief noise in the distance caught Amy's attention. It sounded like a voice. She looked across at her sister. "Did you just hear something?"

"No, why?" Sarah asked.

"I thought I heard someone call out," Amy replied.

Sarah glanced around. "I can't see anyone."

Amy suddenly realised something. "Golly, he must be in the caves! Let's yell out and see if he answers. That will save time going through all of them." She shouted out. "Joe!"

Sarah joined in. "Joe!"

"Where are you?" Amy yelled. "Please answer!" She listened for an answer. There was no reply.

~

Not far away, Joe, who had been trying to decide if he should wait until the water was down to his knees or go when the water was waist deep, suddenly heard voices.

After stepping closer to the entrance, he peered out. His two sisters were walking away from him and heading farther away every second. He shouted their names as loud as he could.

A few moments later, he heard them shout back. He yelled and waved his hands. They ran in the direction of his voice, stopping when they reached the point where the water was almost lapping at their feet.

"How did you find me?" Joe asked.

"I noticed that your binoculars and torch were missing," Amy replied. "I thought you had gone for a walk. But I didn't imagine that you would have tried exploring the caves by yourself."

"I'm sorry about that," Joe said. "Will came over early this morning to say that he was going to his grandmother's house for a few days as she was sick—"

"And you couldn't wait that long," Sarah interrupted.

Joe nodded. "I was exploring and, before I realised it, the tide had come in." Deciding that he may as well leave the cave now as his trousers were already partly wet, he slowly waded through the waist deep water. As he did so, he shivered.

Amy took off her cardigan and draped it over her brother's shoulders to keep him warm. "We'd better get you home as soon as possible. We don't want you to catch a cold."

~

Mrs Mitchell rushed out to greet them as they approached Rose Cottage. She scolded Joe as she got two blankets from the cupboard and wrapped them around him. She then hurried upstairs to run a hot bath.

Five minutes later, Joe was soaking in the hot water. A while later, he climbed out and dried himself. He headed downstairs after dressing in clean clothes. Now warm, he was looking like his old

self again. He sat down in the living room as his mother handed him a steaming cup of cocoa. He sipped it as he told her and his sisters everything that had taken place that morning. As he finished talking, he sneezed.

His mother frowned. "You were very foolish. You'll not be given any pocket money this week, plus I want you to stay away from the caves for the next two days."

"Do I really have to?" Joe asked. "I feel fine."

"Rubbish! I know a sick boy when I see one, and I happen to be looking at one right now. Before you went on your little escapade, you were beginning to get a cold, and now you've probably made it worse. I want you close so I can keep an eye on you." His mother smiled. "Don't argue. I'm only doing this because I want you safe and sound. God knows what could have happened to you in the caves by yourself, so maybe this will remind you to always tell someone where you are going before you set off."

Chapter 3: The Cave

For the next two days, it rained almost constantly. There were a few dry periods, but the rain always resumed soon afterwards, and the children were forced to stay indoors and play games. Monopoly was their favourite, so they played that one often.

On the second wet day, Will came over. He had just returned from his grandmother's and was eager to see if the children wanted to go exploring the following day since the weather was supposed to improve. After tossing options back and forth, they agreed they would search the caves.

The sun shone down upon them as they met up at noon the next day. They headed straight for the cave that Joe had got himself trapped in a few days earlier.

After they had all had a look around, Joe showed them where he had been moving the rocks. "I have a gut feeling there may be something behind those."

"Why don't we split into two groups?" Will turned to the girls. "Joe and I can move the rocks while you two put them into a pile."

For the next twenty minutes, the children worked enthusiastically as they applied themselves to their respective jobs in an effort to find a tunnel. But, at the end of this time, they still hadn't found anything.

They decided it was time to have the picnic lunch that Mrs Mitchell had prepared for them and left the cave to sit down on the sand. Joe handed a sandwich to each of them and they all hungrily munched on the food.

Once they had eaten everything, they returned to the cave. They went to work and, before long, their hard work paid off.

"Gosh!" Will exclaimed. "A hole!"

"Where?" Amy yelled as she and her sister rushed over to investigate.

"Here, in the gap," Will replied. "Joe and I were moving a big rock and it suddenly fell through a hole."

Amy put her face close to the hole. "I can feel a slight breeze."

"There must be a hole farther up," Joe said. "The tunnel must come out somewhere up there and that's where the fresh air is coming from."

"I think you've hit the nail on the head," Will said. "Let's hurry up and remove the rocks around it so we can make the hole bigger. Then we can explore the tunnel."

Agreeing that this was the best thing to do, all four children started to remove the rocks that surrounded it and, before long, had made a hole that was large enough to squeeze through. Eagerly, they climbed through the narrow space.

Once everyone was on the other side, they started walking down the tunnel. It was quite tall in some places, but in some parts it was so small that they were just able to stand up straight without bending down.

For the next five minutes, as the tunnel twisted and turned, the children smiled, thrilled that they had just discovered something that was at least a hundred years old. However, the smiles on their faces disappeared as they rounded a corner and stopped dead. Ten feet ahead, the tunnel came to a wall.

"Oh no!" Will exclaimed as he raced forward. "It can't end here!" But it did. There were no gaps or holes that he could see, and the wall was rock solid.

"It certainly looks like it must," Joe muttered.

"But what's the purpose of the tunnel if it just ends here?" Amy asked. "It doesn't make sense."

Sarah agreed with Amy. "Only a madman would build a tunnel that ended in a blank wall."

"Hold on a minute." Will tilted his head. "I'm sure I can feel a breeze coming from somewhere."

Joe shone his torch around the area and saw what they had been missing. Straight above Will was a black hole. "Look! Up there."

Amy laughed. "Golly, no wonder we missed that before. It looks like the tunnel goes straight up."

Joe nodded. "It sure does."

"But how do we get up there?" Sarah asked, a puzzled expression creeping onto her face.

"We might have to use a rope," Joe suggested.

“Joe, shine the light over here next to the wall,” Will called out. “I may have found something.”

“What?” Joe hurried over to where Will was standing.

“I thought so!” Will exclaimed. “This dent looks manmade. It could be a handhold.”

Joe shone the torch up, revealing more dents. “This must be how you get up the hole.”

“Don’t you think that may be a bit dangerous?” Amy asked, concerned. “It looks a long way up.”

Will gave Amy a reassuring smile. “Don’t worry. I’ll go first to make sure it’s safe.” He started climbing. Soon, he was through the hole. He looked back down. “Come on. It’s only around ten feet.”

“I’ll go next.” Amy took a deep breath and started climbing. When she was safely up, she yelled down and Sarah started climbing.

As Joe waited for his turn to come, he tried to memorise where the holes were. As he needed both hands to climb, he would have to put the torch in his pocket.

A moment later, Sarah yelled down that she had finished, so Joe put his hands on the upper footholds and started the climb. He was slower than the others in climbing up, but that was because he couldn’t see. Nevertheless, he soon reached the top and pulled himself out of the hole.

After taking the torch out of his pocket, he shone it around the large cave. There was a natural window in the side of the wall letting a small amount of light enter the space.

Everyone looked in surprise at the sight in front of them. They had never expected to find anything in the cave, but it was just the opposite. There was a wooden table and chairs in the middle with a lamp and matches on the table. On the far side were a number of wooden boxes that looked as though they had been there for years. An old wooden door was built into the rock on the left side of the cave.

Amy was the first to speak. “Golly!”

“I wonder who put all this stuff here? The wood would have rotted away by now if it had been used by smugglers years ago, and this packet of matches seems new.” Will walked over and picked them up.

“Hold on,” Joe said. “I don’t think we should touch anything until we find out who put all this stuff here.”

“You’re right,” Will agreed, putting the matches down. “I didn’t think of that.”

“You think someone comes here regularly?” Sarah asked.

“I don’t know, but this stuff can’t have been here that long,” Joe replied.

Will glanced around. “If someone does come here regularly, you can bet that they’re up to something illegal. They wouldn’t come here for any other reason.”

Amy looked at Will. “Do you think smugglers might use this place?”

“Maybe.” Will walked over to where light entered the cave. Looking out, he could see the beach. “I think we’re roughly seven hundred feet or so from where we started.”

“I think you’re right.” Joe suddenly stiffened. He quickly ran to the hole and listened. The sound of men’s voices coming up the passage was getting louder as each second passed. “Someone’s coming!”

Sarah ran over to the door and tried to open it. “It’s locked.”

“Let’s try the boxes.” Amy hurried over and tried to open them. She cried out in desperation a few moments later. “It’s no good! They’re nailed down.”

Will glanced down the hole and saw a dim light. “Blow! There’s nowhere to hide. We may as well give ourselves up and hope they let us go.”

“No!” Joe whispered, his eyes defiant. “We can’t let that happen.”

A moment later, a man emerged from the hole. As he leaned down to grab the lamp from someone, Joe realised that in a few more seconds they were going to be discovered!

Chapter 4: Chased!

Joe suddenly spotted some boxes near the wall. "Quick! Hide behind these."

Everyone hurried over and knelt down. A moment later, the room was flooded with light as the first man to climb up put the lamp on the table and sat down. Through a gap between the boxes, they could see that he was thin, small, clean shaven, and wearing fisherman clothes.

Shortly, another man, who was tall and had a beard, and dressed the same as the first fellow, joined him at the table. Before they could start talking, the door opened from the other side and another man walked in. The bald fellow was dressed in a suit and had big, broad shoulders. He nodded curtly to the others. "Jake, Louis."

The tall man, Louis, looked up as the newcomer sat down opposite him. "Good to see you Rocky, what's new?"

"I just got word from the boss," Rocky replied. "He's coming tonight."

The thin man, Jake, stared. "Tonight? I thought he wasn't coming for a few days."

"He's moved up the deadline," Rocky said. "He's coming here to make sure that all the details have been finalised since the boat is coming tomorrow. It will be our biggest haul yet."

"But we haven't moved any of the boxes," Louis said. "We were going to finish tomorrow night."

"You'd better get cracking then," Rocky replied. "There's a big bundle of stuff up at the house that needs to be brought down here. So you'll need to take the empty boxes from here and carry them up to the house." He stood up and left the same way he had come.

As soon as boxes had been mentioned, Joe stiffened and started thinking of a plan. He realised there was only a slim chance of being able to pull it off but, being the eldest and the one in charge, he had to take the chance. He whispered his plan to the others. He and Will then searched the cave floor for two small rocks.

Jake sighed. "You heard what Rocky said. We had better get started."

"Okay." Louis got up and walked towards the children's hiding place. He started moving the boxes at the far end of the pile. Jake went to help him.

The time had come. Joe threw a rock right through the hole. It was a perfect shot.

"Hey! What was that?" Jake snatched the lamp and ran over to the hole with Louis not far behind.

Will grinned. The plan was working. The table was now between them and the men.

"Now!" Joe stood up and, followed by the others, started tiptoeing across the room. They managed to get two thirds of the way before their luck ran out.

Jake turned and saw them. He snarled. "Hey! What are you doing here?" He strode menacingly towards them.

"Run!" Joe yelled as he sprinted to the door. Amy and Sarah followed close behind.

Will paused at the door. With all his might, he threw the second rock at the lamp. As the room was plunged into darkness, he slipped through the door that the others had left open before he slammed it shut.

As luck would have it, the key had been left in the lock. He grabbed and turned it, locking the men in the room. He hurried around the corner of the tunnel where the others were waiting for him.

"Everything go okay?" Joe asked.

"Yes, but we'd better get moving," Will replied. "They might have an extra key."

"I'm scared!" Sarah cried.

Joe gave her a big hug. "Don't worry. We're ahead of the men for the moment, and that's how it will stay."

"But what if there's someone in front of us?" Amy asked.

"Don't worry about that now," Will said. "Let's concentrate on where we are, so no more talking unless it's absolutely necessary. We don't want to give the men notice that we're coming."

The children hurried up the tunnel. It narrowed dramatically, forcing them to travel single file. This slowed them down.

Joe turned the corner and stopped as he saw that they had arrived in another cave. While not as large as the first one, this one also contained a number of boxes. There were two passageways leading out of it.

“Which one do we choose?” Amy asked.

“I don’t know,” Joe said. “One heads straight up in the direction that we’ve been going. The other one heads to the left. What do you think, Will?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” Will replied. “That man who came into the cave talked about going to the house, so one of them must lead there. That’s the way we don’t want to go. We should try to head for the other one.”

“But we don’t know where the other one leads to,” Amy said, desperation in her voice.

“You’re right, but there’s a chance that no one will be at the end of the other tunnel,” Joe admitted. “If we go to the house, there will surely be someone there.”

“Hurry up!” Sarah said. “I can hear the men coming!”

Joe realised that if they didn’t make a decision within the next few moments, they would be caught. “Let’s try the one that goes to the left. The other one looks as though it’s used more often.”

Leading the way, he hurried along the tunnel with the others following close behind. They hadn’t gone far when Joe noticed that the light from his torch was becoming dim. He prayed that it would last until they were out of the tunnel.

After travelling a short way, he spotted light streaming in through a small opening. “Yes! An exit!” He hurried towards the light. Pushing away some bushes, he was able to make the hole bigger.

He made his way through the small opening and stepped into the bright sunlight. As he glanced around, he was surprised to see the building that was at the bottom of the hill. It was Chandler Manor.

“Hadn’t we better get moving away from here fast?” Sarah asked. “The men might still be following us.”

Joe looked around urgently. They could either head towards the village, into the woods, or to the manor. “Yes, we need to find somewhere to hide.” Deciding to head towards Chandler Manor, he ran down the hill. “Follow me!”

Joe realized that if someone had been following them up the tunnel they would emerge any minute, so he looked back after he was halfway down. He saw no one. Hoping that it would stay like that, he ran down the rest of the hill.

A few moments later, Will suddenly yelled out. “Oh, no!”

Joe glanced back and spotted Jake rushing towards them. He looked towards the manor. There was no way they could reach it and hide somewhere in time.

“What are we going to do?” Amy yelled.

“I don’t know,” Joe said. “We can’t go to Chandler Manor and we can’t go to the road.”

Will suddenly grinned. “Of course! Why didn’t I think of it before?”

“What?” Amy asked.

“Follow me!” Will rushed off, heading towards the woods. He sped down a well trodden path. “This spot up here is my home away from home.”

“What do you mean?” Joe said.

“I know this place like the back of my hand,” Will said. “I come here all the time.”

“How far away is it?” Sarah gasped as she tried to catch her breath.

“We’re nearly there.” Will ran around the next bend and stopped. In front of him was a river with a small island in the middle. “Our destination is over there.”

“How are we going to get over there?” Amy asked.

“Are we going to get wet?” Sarah questioned.

“Not if we do it right.” Will rushed over to a tree that had a rope attached to a high branch. “Last summer, my cousin and I tied this rope here so we could hold on while someone else pushed us, and then we’d fly over the water and land on the island. That’s what we’re going to do now. It will save us getting wet and, if we can get across without the man seeing us, we might lose him.”

Will got Joe to push him, and soon he was on the other side. Then the girls followed suit.

Joe frowned as he realised that there was no one to push him. “How am I supposed to get across?”

“Just climb onto that dead stump behind you,” Will said. “The extra height will help you get across.”

Joe looked behind him and saw the stump. "Okay." Just as he was about to move towards it, he noticed a movement to his right. Glancing in that direction, he saw a man emerge from the bushes. It was Jake!

Chapter 5: The Raft

Knowing he only had a few seconds to get across the river, Joe scrambled onto the stump as the man rushed over and grabbed his left foot. Joe slammed his right foot into the man's face and used the momentum to push himself off the stump. Crying out in pain, the man let go.

As Joe flew over the water, he knew it was going to be touch and go. He hadn't managed to get a good push off, so he would be lucky if he made it to the other side.

Reaching the island, he let go of the rope. As his feet touched the ground a foot from the water, he breathed a sigh of relief. "Phew, that was a close shave."

"You can say that again," Will said.

Amy pointed. "Look! He's not giving up."

Sarah watched as Jake grabbed hold of the rope as it swung back. "Oh, no! What if he makes it?"

"I don't think he will," Will said. "That rope was already old when we tied it on. With his weight, it'll probably break. But, if it doesn't, we'll need to make a run for it."

They watched as Jake launched himself off the tree stump. For a few seconds everything went fine, and then the rope broke. As the man tumbled into the water, he splashed about for a few moments before he started to swim towards them.

"What are we going to do now?" Joe asked.

Will smiled. "Follow me. I've still got one more surprise in store."

"What is it?" Amy questioned.

"Wait and see." Will hurried across to the other side of the island with the others in hot pursuit. Reaching a clump of long grass, he began pulling it aside. With Joe helping him, he took hold of something hidden underneath. It was a little raft made from a number of logs that had been tied together with rope.

"It may not look like much, but this little beauty has survived many a summer," Will said.

"Let's hope it works." Joe glanced towards the bushes. "I think I hear footsteps."

"Find a place to sit and I'll push off," Will said. "There should be some oars. Grab them."

Amy quickly sat down. "Push off, Will, we're all on."

After pushing off, Will nearly missed the raft as he jumped on. It was only due to Joe quickly grabbing his arm that saved him.

Will glanced back and saw Jake. "Quick, paddle!" He dug his oar into the water. Slowly but surely, the raft began to drift downstream. As the children paddled as fast as they could, Jake ran through the undergrowth.

Suddenly, Jake tripped, landing flat on his face. He shot to his feet and stumbled towards the edge of the island as the raft floated by. The children cheered as Jake turned and disappeared from sight, clearly annoyed with himself.

"Do you think we're safe now?" Sarah asked.

Will nodded. "Probably, but let's continue down the river for a little while." Five minutes later, he steered the raft into the bank. "I think that will be enough."

The children climbed out of the raft and, after covering it with some branches, they walked towards Smugglers Cove. Before long, they were back in the small village.

"See, we made it," Joe laughed, playfully hitting the girls as they walked down the road. "There was nothing to worry about after all."

"Oh, I suppose you knew how to escape all along?" Sarah asked.

"Of course," Joe said, trying to keep a straight face.

"Fibber!" Sarah yelled.

"Come on, you two," Amy scolded. "What are we going to do now? Hadn't we better tell someone?"

"Tell who?" Will replied. "We know that something illegal is going on, probably in Chandler Manor, and that a tunnel connects it to the beach, but that's all. If we told the police, they probably wouldn't believe us."

"What about the boxes we saw?" Amy asked. "They must have had stuff in them."

Joe nodded. "Yes, but even if they believe us, by the time we got there with the police, they would have gone. What we need to discover is the name of the boss. We also need some more details about the boat."

Sarah frowned. "But that means that we'll have to go back there again."

"Yes, it does, but you girls needn't come if you're too scared," Joe said.

Amy tried to hit Joe, but missed. "You're not getting rid of us that easily."

"Run, Will!" Joe said, playfully. He and the red haired boy ran down the road as the girls pursued them.

~

Mrs Mitchell smiled at the children as they rushed into Rose Cottage. "Did you have a good day at the beach?"

"Yes, we did," Amy said. "I loved the sandwiches."

Joe nodded. "They were good, but I'm still hungry."

"How can you be hungry already?" Sarah asked.

"I'm a growing boy. Plus, it was hours ago that we ate those sandwiches." Joe glanced down at his wrist and was surprised to see that his watch was no longer there. "Oh, no!" He stood up and hunted in his pockets.

"What have you lost?" his mother asked.

Joe searched every pocket in his clothing. "My watch."

Mrs Mitchell frowned. "You'd better find it. That watch cost your father a lot of money. He wouldn't be pleased if you had lost it through carelessness."

"Don't worry," Joe replied. "I'm sure I know where it is."

"Okay," his mother said. "Now, who wants to help me in the kitchen? The potatoes need to be scrubbed and the carrots need to be chopped up. As well as that, I need someone to ride down the street to get a loaf of bread."

"I'll help with the potatoes," Amy said.

"And I'll chop up the carrots," Sarah said.

Joe smiled. "Then I guess I'll be going shopping." He didn't mind riding to the bakery. It beat scrubbing potatoes any day.

As it was getting cold outside, he put on a warm jumper before setting off. Heading towards Smugglers Cove, he remembered his watch. He changed direction and headed for the beach.

Minutes later, he stopped the bicycle at the edge of the sand and ran towards the cave. He ground to a halt ten feet from the entrance. He could see all he wanted from there. It was high tide, which meant the cave was flooded. As there was no way he could get the watch now, he rode back to the village.

Arriving at the bakery just before it closed, he chose a round, crusty loaf of bread which he put in his rucksack that he had brought. After paying the jolly baker, he pedalled back to Rose Cottage.

That night, as the girls climbed into bed, Joe crept into the room and, in a whisper, told them that he planned to retrieve his watch that night.

"Are you crazy?" Sarah asked.

Amy frowned. "At this time of night?"

"I have to get my watch back," Joe stated. "I'm sure I took it off and placed it on the ledge in the cave. Plus, you heard what those men said. The boss is going to visit them tonight. It might be the only chance to see him."

"Have you made a plan?" Amy asked.

Joe nodded. "I aim to grab my watch and then go down the tunnel. If no one is in the first cave, I'll decide what to do then."

"Please be careful," Sarah begged. "You don't want to stay in there too long. Otherwise, the cave might flood again."

"Good point," Joe said. "I'll keep that in mind."

"Good luck, and be careful," Amy said.

"I will." Joe crept back to his bedroom and slipped beneath his bedcovers. He lay there until he heard his parents go to their room.

Ten minutes later, he grabbed his torch, quietly opened his door, and made his way stealthily along the hallway. Luckily, his parents were sound sleepers and their bedroom door stayed shut.

Thankful that he hadn't woken them, he made his way down the stairs and past the kitchen. He opened the front door and slipped out into the night.

A full moon shone overhead as Joe headed towards the caves. Suddenly, a loud thunderclap broke overhead. He could just make out a number of dark clouds building as they headed inland. Hoping that it wouldn't rain until he got back, he hurried along until he reached the cave.

After finding the watch, he let out a sigh of relief. He put it on his wrist and hurried down the tunnel. He was soon below the hole. After putting his torch between his teeth, he climbed up the footholds. At the top, he waved his torch around the cave and saw that no one was there.

He decided to explore just a tiny bit more. He made his way to the door and opened it. After closing it behind him, he headed up the tunnel. He had been walking along and shining his torch in front of him for five or so minutes when he heard a sound.

He stopped and listened. It was the sound he had been dreading. Voices. They were heading his way. He knew that they were heading in his direction because, as the seconds passed, the voices got louder.

He realised he had to go back the way he had come. He hurried back down the tunnel. The noise of his footsteps echoed off the walls and he hoped, desperately, that the men couldn't hear it.

In less than ten minutes, Joe was back in the furnished cave. Now he had to decide what he should do. He could go back to the beach or wait in the cave and see if the men would pass. Either option had its own share of problems, but he decided to go to the beach. He didn't want to get caught. Judging by their speed, he assumed they would be along in roughly two minutes.

He went over to the hole, put his hands on the footholds, and climbed down. He was about to proceed down the tunnel when he heard more voices.

Joe frowned. He thought the voices had come from the direction of the beach. Dismissing it as tiredness, he started walking. He went about fifteen feet before stopping again.

He could still hear voices. They were getting clearer each second. He suddenly realised that there were two lots of people, one from each end. This had turned into a desperate situation. He needed to get back into the cave and hide behind the boxes before the other group of men entered.

Throwing caution to the wind, he hurried to the hole, scrambling up as fast as he could. With men closing in on him from both sides, Joe's heart pounded as he headed over to the far side of the cave. The boxes had disappeared!

Chapter 6: A Night Of Adventure

Joe was furious with himself. How could he have been so stupid! He should have noticed earlier that the boxes were gone. He rushed over to the window. No good. Underneath the table? No good either.

As the men's voices drew closer, Joe realised he was truly and utterly trapped. He glanced around the room one final time. As he did so, he looked up and saw something that he hadn't noticed before.

A hole had been cut in the rock. It was small and blended in well with the roof. This must have been why he and the others hadn't seen it earlier. He knew he only had a few moments left before the men saw him, so he climbed on the window ledge and clambered through the hole. As his feet cleared the hole, the room was flooded with light.

Gasping with relief, Joe rested at the top of the hole, trying to be as quiet as possible. He did not want to turn on his torch in case the men saw it, so he only had the dim light of the lamp from below to try to see his surroundings. But that didn't matter. Even in this light, he could see what he wanted. The cave, if it could be called one, was about eight feet long, four feet wide, and five feet high. Satisfied that he was safe, he tried to listen in on the men's conversation as they sat at the table.

From what he could make out, it seemed that half of the group wanted to increase the number of trips the boat was making, which meant an increase in pay, but the other group wanted it to stay the same.

He peeked down and saw five men sitting around the table. Suddenly, the door opened and in walked a man wearing a dark coat, sunglasses, and a hat. Presumably, he was the boss. He sat down and listened to the argument going on.

"Look here, Dan," Louis said as he glanced at a young man with a crew cut and a ring in his ear. "We have a perfect setup, so I don't see why we can't do a few more trips."

Dan shook his head. "I know we're on a good racket, but I don't want to take more risks. If the coppers saw the boat out there, we'd be in a nice mess. Don't you agree, Baz?"

A slightly older fellow with reddish hair and a beard nodded. "If we didn't do that, it would take ages to transport the goods. At the moment, we anchor the boat off the bay, drop the dinghy, and row it to the shore where we pick up the money. But if we—"

"Enough said," the boss interrupted. "I've listened to all your arguments, and I've come up with a plan. We will increase the amount of notes that we're printing, and I will acquire another dinghy. The boat will now come once a week and will anchor here at midnight, which will mean that it will be away from the coast by sunup. I will be in contact via Rocky to announce any further developments."

"Is the boat still coming Friday night?" Dan said.

"Yes. The boat will be here every Friday night. Make sure that everything is ready. We can't afford any mistakes. Let's get to work." The boss stood up and left.

Joe realised that if they were going to put the men behind bars, they would need to discover the name of the boss. They would also have to break into Chandler Manor as soon as possible and get some real proof. Determined to put that plan into action the next day, he peered down.

Darkness cloaked the room. He jumped down, turned on his torch, and listened. He couldn't hear a single sound, so he walked over to the hole, climbed down, and hurried home.



The girls were eager to hear what had happened the previous night and so, as the sun rose in the sky, they quickly got dressed and knocked on Joe's bedroom door.

"Come in," Joe muttered, half asleep.

The girls entered. "Tell us what happened," Amy said.

Joe sat up. "Well, I found my watch just where I thought it would be, and then I made my way up to the furnished cave."

"Were the men there?" Sarah asked.

"Not when I entered, but then I heard men coming from both directions," Joe replied.

Shocked, Sarah stared at Joe. "Goodness, what did you do?"

Joe grimly smiled. "Let me tell you, I was scared. Especially when I realised that the boxes were no longer there. But then I found a little hole just above the window, large enough for me to squeeze in."

"Did you see the boss?" Amy asked.

"Well, there was one man who wore a coat, sunglasses and a hat," Joe replied. "Everyone stopped talking when he spoke, so I believe he was the boss."

"What did they talk about?" Sarah questioned.

Joe thought for a moment. "About the boat and when it was coming and so on. Oh, and there were six men there."

"What are we going to do?" Amy asked.

"We have to find out the name of the boss," Joe said.

"How are we going to do that?" Sarah asked.

"I think Chandler Manor holds the key to the whole mystery," Joe said. "We must find some way to break in. But first, let's go and eat some breakfast. I'm starving."

As the three children hurried downstairs, they were just in time to say goodbye to their father. He had been called away on urgent business and didn't know when he would be back.

After eating breakfast, the children walked through the village until they came to Will's place. He was in the garden, repairing his bicycle.

"Hey, Will," Joe said. "Do you want to come with us to explore Chandler Manor?"

"Yes, but how are we going to get past the wall?" Will asked.

"Well, I thought your dad might have a ladder we could borrow," Joe replied.

"I think we have two ladders, but I'd better ask Dad if we can take one." Will stood up and the four of them hurried inside. A few moments later, he knocked on the study door.

"Come in," said a warm, welcoming voice.

As Joe followed Will into the room, he found himself staring at a middle aged man who had sandy coloured hair and a slender face. He was sitting at a well-worn wooden desk covered in papers.

Mr Spencer glanced up. "Hi, Will. Are these the children you were telling me about earlier?" As Will nodded, the man smiled. "Will has told me a lot about you. You seem like nice children."

"What are you doing?" Sarah asked.

"I'm editing my newest novel," Mr Spencer replied. "I'm not sure if Will told you or not, but I'm an author. I've been meaning to spend some time with Will, but I've been under pressure from my publisher, so it's good to see that he has made some new friends. So, what are you planning to do on this fine day?"

"We wondered if we could borrow one of your ladders," Amy asked.

"A ladder?" Mr Spencer frowned. "May I ask what for?"

Amy paused, apparently unsure of what to say, so Joe helped her out. "We have some fruit trees in our garden and we'd like to see if the fruit is ripe now." Technically this was the truth, as they did have some trees in their garden and, if they had time afterwards, they would use the ladder to pick the fruit.

Mr Spencer nodded. "I have two, one big and one small."

"Can we take the small one please?" Joe said.

"I'll just get it out of the shed." Mr Spencer stood up and led the way to the shed. He opened the door and, after moving a few things to the side, he placed the small ladder onto the grass. "Take care of it. I don't use it often, but I would like it back once you've finished with it."

"Of course," Amy said.

After Mr Spencer headed back inside, Joe glanced at the others. "So, are we all ready to go?"

"What do we do when we get there?" Sarah asked.

"We lean the ladder against the wall, climb up, then lift it up and place it on the other side," Joe said.

"But isn't the ladder going to be too heavy?" Amy questioned.

"Don't worry, with all four of us helping, we shouldn't have any trouble getting the ladder there or lifting it to the other side of the wall," Joe replied.

The children set off. They were able to make good progress by cutting through the woods via a path Will knew.

When they reached Chandler Manor, they headed to a part of the wall that couldn't be seen from the gate and set the ladder in place.

Joe climbed up. As he reached the top, he looked down at the others. "Who's next?"

The others climbed up without any difficulty. Joe didn't think that the ladder would be too heavy to haul up, and he was right. Before long, they had the ladder leaning against the other side of the stone wall.

Everyone climbed down and, after stowing the ladder behind some bushes, walked towards the manor, trying to keep behind the trees and bushes as much as possible.

They had to find a way to get inside and discover as much as they could. That was the only way the police would believe them. The best way in would be via the front door, but going in the front would only be possible if it had been left unlocked. Even though that didn't seem likely, it was still a possibility.

Rounding the corner of the ivy covered building, they came to the front door. Just as they were about to see if it was unlocked, they heard a noise.

Chapter 7: Chandler Manor

Will glanced around and was shocked to see the big steel gates slowly opening. “A car must be coming.”

They hid in the nearby bushes that grew along the side of the wide driveway. They waited in complete silence and then, a moment later, the front door opened and a man stepped out. He walked towards the garage beside the manor and pulled up the roller door. He climbed into a blue sedan and drove down the driveway. Once the car was through the gate, it started to close.

After waiting a few moments to make sure the coast was clear, the children headed up the steps to the front door.

Will put his hand on the doorknob. If it was still unlocked, it would save precious time and be an easy escape route. But if it wasn't, they would have to find some other way to enter.

It opened. Breathing a sigh of relief, Will stepped inside, the others following close behind. They hadn't intended to linger, but they were so in awe of the sight that greeted them they just had to pause.

In front of them was a giant foyer with a massive staircase in the middle. With the paint peeling off the walls and cracks appearing in the steps, it looked somewhat shabby. Even so, the sheer size of the individual marble stairs, as well as the whole staircase, left the children awestruck.

A hallway led to the right and left on each of the floors. As this was a three storey building, there was a spiral staircase just to the left of the top of the first lot of stairs that led up to the top floor.

“Golly,” Amy said.

“There must be a ton of rooms in this place,” Sarah said. “How are we going to have time to search them?”

“We can probably dismiss the rooms on the top floor,” Joe said. “If I were a crook, I would want to stash my goods somewhere close, not someplace that would require me going up and down a number of stairs. We'll have to be fast, so we should split up.”

Amy nodded. “Good idea. Why don't Will and I search the first floor? You two can have the ground floor.”

“Sounds good,” Joe said. “Let's meet back here in fifteen minutes.”

The two groups set off, all too aware that if they made too much noise, there could be trouble. Searching upstairs, Will and Amy didn't have any luck. After coming across countless bedrooms and bathrooms that were empty, they thought they should go downstairs. Clearly, there wasn't any illegal business happening on the first floor. They trooped downstairs and met the others.

“Any luck?” Joe asked.

“No, maybe they're hiding the goods in the cellar,” Will replied.

“But Joe and I didn't see any sign of steps leading to one,” Sarah said.

“Listen!” Amy exclaimed. “I hear the gate opening again. The car must be coming back.”

“Good,” Will said. “That fellow ought to come back inside, and when he does, we can follow him. He might lead us to the others.”

“Let's hide behind the stairs so he doesn't see us when he comes in,” Joe suggested.

The group hurried around to the back of the crumbling marble structure and waited. A minute later, they heard the front door open. Footsteps echoed down the hallway.

Motioning for the others to follow him, Joe edged along the wall until he came to the corner of the hallway and peered around it. The man was nowhere to be seen, but they could hear distant voices up ahead.

Joe looked over his shoulder to see where the others were. They were right behind him. “Let's go.” He tiptoed as fast as he could down the passageway.

After a right hand turn, and then a left one, they came to the end of the hallway. Of the rooms they had passed, all were empty of people and furniture. Now there was only one more room left.

Joe pressed himself to the wall as he edged towards the door as quietly as possible. He paused before the open door and smiled with relief as he saw that the room was empty. It appeared to be a kitchen. On the other side of the room, steps descended into a cellar, the source of the voices.

After telling the girls to wait where they were, the boys crept down the steps. Now that they were so close, Joe's heart beat faster in anticipation at what they would find.

The boys walked around the corner and came out into a brightly lit medium sized room. Pausing, they stared at the sight in front of them.

The cellar contained two couches, crates, and three printing presses. A desk stood by the wall and a man was examining notes with a magnifying glass. The machines were being operated by a number of men.

They watched for the next few moments as another person came into view. They assumed he had come up through the tunnel, but as they couldn't see the entire room, they didn't know where the entrance was.

Satisfied that they had seen enough, they rejoined the girls and quickly told them what was happening below. Determined to come back when the men weren't there, the children hurried back the way that they had come.

Joe suddenly spotted a door that he had previously not seen. He hurried towards it and opened it. After seeing that it led to a study, the children entered. In front of them was a gigantic oak desk, leather chairs, and two massive bookcases. It was evident that this room was often used as there were various papers spread out all over the desk.

On the left side of the room was a panel. It was made of metal, with a lever sticking out. The words Open and Close were written on it.

"That must be what opens the gate," Will said.

"Probably." Amy glanced at the papers. "We should grab something and show it to the police."

"Maybe, as long as we don't take anything the men might miss," Joe said. "They might get suspicious."

They all looked at the documents which ranged from newspaper cuttings to offers to buy the manor. There was even one piece of paper that looked as though it had been cut from a French newspaper.

Joe picked up the article. "I can't understand all the words, but it says something about money."

"Hey, I've just had a thought," Amy exclaimed. "What if they put the fake money on the boat and transport it across the Channel?"

Will looked at her in admiration. "I think you might be right. If they..." He suddenly paused. "Hey! That sounds like the men."

The children hurried out of the study and hid in a nearby room. The men walked down the hallway a moment later and entered the study. The children heard the grating of the gate moving and assumed someone had pulled the lever.

The children held their breath as the men passed the room where they were hiding behind a sofa. Judging by the men's conversation as they walked by, they were going out for a while.

Will realised that if the men locked the front door, they would have to find another way out. And, if they broke a window, the men would surely see it the next day and become suspicious.

After a few minutes had elapsed without any further sounds, Joe got up and walked to the door. Opening it quietly, he was pleased to see that there was no one near the front entrance. But he could still hear voices upstairs.

Joe walked over to a nearby window and looked out. He was surprised to see that the gate was closed. He grabbed the doorknob and twisted it. "It's locked."

"How can it be?" Will asked. "The men haven't gone out yet."

"Well, maybe only one of the men went in the car," Sarah said. "Maybe the others plan to use the tunnel entrance after they've finished upstairs."

"Possibly," Joe said. "Come on, it's getting late. We need to get out of here. We don't want to be trapped like last time. Let's head to the cellar and grab some of the money before we find a way out."

They walked back down the hallway and into the cellar. Walking down the steps, Will rounded the corner and stopped in surprise.

Sarah gasped as she saw Rocky sitting at the table in front of a bunch of money! Hearing Sarah's gasp of surprise, he glanced up.

"Go back!" Joe shouted.

The children ran up the steps as the man raced after them. As Joe reached the top of the stairs, he glanced back. The man was gaining fast. "We need to split up! Will – you and Amy head left while Sarah and I go right."

When they arrived at the end of the hallway, they did precisely that. Joe tore up the stairs with his sister following close behind.

"Hurry up," Joe called as they reached the top. They began running down the hallway, trying to find a place to hide.

"I'm doing the best I can," Sarah puffed. She followed her brother into a bedroom.

"Get under the bed," Joe whispered. He climbed inside a wooden closet, leaving the door partly open.

A few moments later, Rocky entered the room. He trod quietly on the carpet as he made his way around the room. He bent down to look underneath the bed.

Clutching a broom that had been leaning next to him, Joe rushed out of the closet and hit the man with it. Grabbing his head in pain, Rocky tumbled to the floor.

Joe dropped the broom and waited for Sarah to get out from underneath the bed before they raced downstairs. Once they had reached the ground floor, Joe called out. "Will? Amy?"

Will peeked out from around a corner. "We're here."

Joe hurried over. "Have you found a way out?"

"I might have," Will replied. "One of the rooms I passed looked as though the window might have been broken."

"Let's have a look." Joe glanced anxiously up the stairs. There was still no sign of Rocky, but it couldn't be too long before he appeared.

They ran down the hallway. As they entered the messy room half a minute later, Joe ran to the window. He grinned. The windowpane had previously been hit with a rock and the window was smashed. He grabbed the handle and pushed. The window swung outwards. He thrust his legs over the side and dropped down onto the grass. Glancing around to make sure no one was in sight, he beckoned to the others to follow him. First Amy, then Sarah, and finally Will appeared.

"What's your plan?" Will asked.

"Make for the ladder," Joe said. "Hopefully, once we climb over the wall, the man will give up."

They made for the wall where they had left the ladder. They had managed to travel a quarter of the way before Joe heard a noise. He glanced back and saw that Rocky was running towards them.

"Split up!" Joe shouted.

Chapter 8: Midnight

As the four children split up, Rocky followed Joe, gaining on him every second. But, in his haste, he failed to look where he was going and tripped over a tree root. He hit the ground hard.

At the sound of the thud, Joe headed towards the nearby oak trees in the hope that he could hide amongst the branches. Moments later, he reached the trees and started climbing up one of them.

Rocky closed on where Joe had been moments earlier and slowed down. He looked around in confusion.

Joe looked down from his hiding place and watched as Rocky started climbing one of the nearby trees. Despite the situation, he grinned at how long it took the man to climb the tree. He clearly hadn't climbed many trees in his life before, and this was especially evident when, not finding him at that tree, he tried to climb down again. However, he paused halfway, fear on his face.

Sensing that this was his chance to escape, Joe began climbing down. He glanced towards Rocky as the man tumbled down and fell, twisting his ankle.

Joe grinned and raced away. He and others were soon on the other side of the wall and, after hiding the ladder in the bushes, walked back to Will's house. Promising the red haired boy that they would meet up again the following day, the three children strode through the village and up the hill to Rose Cottage.

They were almost there when the heavens opened up and it began to rain. They ran down the dirt road, flung open the front gate, and raced down the path. Soon, they had dried themselves off and were tucking into some freshly made scones that their mother had made.

Mrs Mitchell passed the jam to Joe and watched as he spread it thickly on his scone. "Just as well you were close to home when the storm hit."

"Yes," Joe replied. "We would have been drenched if we had been any farther away." He looked out of the window. It was still raining quite heavily, and there were quite a few dark clouds scattered across the sky. "I think the wet weather has set in for today."

After eating, they decided to paint, so they got the brushes and paint from the attic and began painting. This went on for quite some time and then, after cleaning up, they played a few board games before it was time for supper.

After a lovely meal, the children decided to have an early night. This was partly because Joe wanted to go exploring the following night and he didn't want to be tired. Even though the girls were not sure if they were going to go, they decided to go to bed as well.



The following morning, Joe and the girls went shopping with their mother. Arriving back shortly after midday, they had just entered the house when the telephone rang. Mrs Mitchell hurried over and answered it. After listening and nodding her head twice, she hung up.

"Who was that?" Joe asked.

"It was Grandma," his mother replied. "She's hurt her back and can't get around by herself. She wants me to go and stay with her for a few days and help her, but I don't really want to leave you three alone."

"We'll be fine," Joe said. "Go and help Grandma."

Mrs Mitchell frowned. "If only there was someone to keep an eye on you."

"What about Will's father?" Amy suggested. "I'm sure he would be happy to do that."

"I'll see." Mrs Mitchell picked up the telephone and dialled. After talking for a few minutes, she hung up. She looked at the others. "He's busy working on his novel, but he promised he'll make sure you don't get into any trouble."

"Can Will come over and stay tonight?" Joe asked.

"I suppose so, as long as his father agrees," his mother replied.

Joe hugged his mother. "Thanks."

"Are you leaving now?" Sarah asked.

Mrs Mitchell looked at her watch. "If I hurry, I should be able to catch the bus that departs at two." She went upstairs, packed her bag, and then left, waving to the children as she hurried down the garden path.



The children went over to Will's to see if he wanted to stay the night. He did, and after his father agreed, Will quickly packed a rucksack. Then, after leaving it at Rose Cottage, he and the others headed along the cliff path until they reached the track that led down to the beach.

After splashing playfully in the knee high water, they headed to the rocks near the caves and began to search for a good hiding place. As the boat was coming at midnight, they had decided that tonight would be the best chance of learning what was going on.

They hadn't been searching for too long when Will, who was climbing part of the rock face, suddenly yelled out. As the others hurried over, he pointed to what he had seen.

It was the cave window! The one that they had looked from the other day. After climbing the last few feet to the window, Joe looked in. He couldn't see much, as it was dark inside, but there was enough light to see that it was the same cave.

Ten feet to the right of the window was a small alcove that appeared to have been made by the wind and the rain over the years. It would suit their purpose nicely. By being near the window they would be able to see, and possibly hear, the men if they came into the cave. They would also be able to see the boat come in.

Everyone agreed that it was the perfect location, and so they left the caves and made a sandcastle. After that, they decided to have running races on the sand. It was a happy group of children that made their way back to Rose Cottage in the late afternoon.



It was nearly midnight as Joe and Will grabbed their torches, binoculars, and a few snacks before leaving the house. Fortunately, there was a full moon, so they didn't need to use their torches.

As they walked along the sandy beach, Joe thought things over. According to the conversation that he had overheard, the boat would be coming once a week. So, this time next week would be the ideal time to launch a raid as the police would capture the men at the manor and whoever was on the boat.

The two reached the rocks and climbed up to the cave. Joe switched on the torch for a few moments. Even with the moonlight, it was tricky to climb the rocks in the darkness.

As they passed the hole in the cave, Joe looked in but couldn't see anything. That could only mean that the boat hadn't arrived yet. He breathed a sigh of relief. "Let's have a midnight snack while we wait." Joe pulled two bars out of his pocket and, after handing one to Will, started munching on the other. He stared out into the darkness as he ate. Without the binoculars, he could make out the beach, but beyond that it was a sea of black.

Finishing off the snack, Joe took hold of the binoculars and did a thorough search of their surroundings. Other than the gentle lapping of the waves, he heard nothing.

Suddenly, Will tapped him on the shoulder and pointed. "I think I just saw something."

Joe looked through the binoculars. "You're right, there's a dinghy approaching." He watched as the small craft reached the beach.

The binoculars were so powerful, and the men so close, that he was able to see every move they made. After dragging the craft up the beach, the men threw the oars into the dinghy. This done, two of them began to walk towards the cliffs below.

Joe lowered the binoculars. "It will be interesting to see which cave they enter to get to the tunnel."

"Yes, that will be most interesting," Will said.

Joe put the binoculars up to his eyes again and searched the beach for the men. They were nowhere to be found. He looked to see if the guard was still there. Thankfully, he hadn't disappeared from view. "I can't find the two men." Not getting a response from Will, he glanced around and got a shock. Will wasn't there!

Surprised, Joe hurriedly looked around. Where could he be? Careful not to trip over anything, he made his way slowly back to the cave window. Light was streaming through the hole. He looked down the way that they had come earlier, in case the group of men had returned to the beach.

That's when he saw it. Halfway down the path, a dark shape lay against the rocks. He knew that whatever it was, it couldn't have been there when he and Will had come up earlier. He raised the binoculars to his eyes.

He stiffened as he realised it was a person. As he took a closer look, he realised that the motionless figure was Will.

Chapter 9: Dangerous Times

Joe scrambled down the rocks, taking care not to slip, and in a few moments he was beside his friend. He let out a gasp of relief as Will slowly turned around and put a finger to his lips, motioning for him to be quiet. Wondering what was going on, but realising that he wasn't going to get an answer, Joe stayed still.

A minute later, Will stood up and whispered to Joe. "Let's get back to the alcove."

Joe nodded and followed Will as he climbed up the rocks once more. They passed the cave and sat down.

Will gulped down some lemonade before he spoke. "Did you wonder where I was?"

"Of course," Joe said. "One moment you were there, and the next moment you were gone."

"Well, while you were looking through the binoculars I thought I heard a noise coming from the cave," Will said. "You were busy, so I thought I'd have a look myself. I saw that the cave was still in darkness but, just as I was about to return, I heard a faint noise coming from the beach."

Will paused as he took another sip of his lemonade. "I was scrambling down to investigate and had nearly got to the bottom when my foot slipped on some loose rocks and I tumbled down. I wasn't sure if anyone had heard me, so I lay still for a moment or two. It was lucky that I did that, because the next thing I heard was two men talking. They were discussing whether they should go and investigate. Luckily, they didn't. And then you arrived a minute or two after that."

"Thank goodness I didn't arrive any earlier," Joe said.

Will nodded. "I wasn't sure if the men were still about, and that's why I wanted you to be quiet. So, what do we do now?"

Joe thought for a moment. "We should see if we can hear what the men are talking about. We might find out some information that the police would be interested in."

Will followed Joe as they made their way along the ledge to the cave window. They looked through the opening, but were disappointed. They had hoped to find a meeting in place, but there was nothing of the sort. A lamp sat on the table while several men walked back and forth lowering boxes down the hole.

"Well, that didn't help," Will whispered as they slowly headed back.

Joe didn't answer. A thought had just occurred to him, and he was wondering if it could possibly work. If it did, it would solve all of their problems. "Has the guard gone from the dinghy?"

"I'm not sure. Let me have a look." Will peered through the binoculars. "I can only see boxes."

Joe nodded. "Good. Why don't we see if the dinghy has a name on the side of it? If it does, the police will be able to track the boat."

"Okay," Will said. "But if any of the men approach, we should make a run for it."

The two boys made their way down the rocks and onto the beach. As they walked along the sand, they hugged the rocks so they would blend into the shadows.

They were soon near the dinghy. Luckily, clouds now covered the moon, meaning there was just enough light to see where they were going, but not enough for the men to spot them if they happened to come out of the cave.

"I'll go since I thought up the plan," Joe offered.

"Okay," Will said. "Just be careful."

As Joe started to walk away, Will grabbed him and pulled him to the ground. "Wait! The men are coming."

Slowly getting up, Joe joined Will in peering around the rocks to see what the men were doing. There were five of them and they were putting the boxes that they had brought from the tunnel into the dinghy.

When they had finished, the dinghy was almost full. In fact, it looked as though there was only enough room for two people as the back part of the craft was filled with boxes. The men then pulled a big sheet of plastic over the boxes, tying it at all of the corners except one. This done, they moved back up the beach and were soon out of sight.

“Phew, that was a close call,” Joe muttered. “Thanks, Will. If it hadn’t been for you, they might have caught me.”

“Just as well I had my eyes open,” Will replied.

Joe studied the dinghy again. “It looks to me as though the men have almost finished. They’ve probably gone back to get one or two more boxes or maybe some final instructions.”

“I think you’re right,” Will said. “If so, you’ll have about seven minutes. That’s how long it should take to go to the cave and come back.”

“All right, time me,” Joe said. “As soon as there’s a minute left, give me a hoot. Also, give me a hoot if you hear someone coming. That will let me know that I had better get out of there quickly.”

Joe hurried towards the dinghy and arrived in good time. Now that he was standing next to it, he could see it was actually a bit bigger than he had first thought. He quickly checked the craft for any names. In doing so, he discovered that the whole of the dinghy had been painted over in black.

Frustrated that he had achieved nothing, he attempted to see if he could find out anything from the boxes. Finding a few nails that hadn’t been pushed down fully, he attempted to open a crate to get some of the fake money which he imagined would be in there.

~

Will, who was keeping an eye on the time, failed to see that fog was rapidly swirling in from the sea. When he did glance up to see if any of the men were about, he was shocked. The whole beachhead was covered in thick, white, mist that was getting thicker every second.

Disgusted with himself for not noticing it sooner, he hooted to Joe. He did this three times. Hopefully, Joe would get the message and come back. It was too dangerous to stay there with the fog rolling in. It would be almost impossible to spot the men before they reached the dinghy. As it was, Will couldn’t even be sure that they hadn’t reached it yet.

~

Upon hearing the hoots, Joe stopped what he was doing. He couldn’t understand why there had been three hoots as they had only agreed on one.

Deciding to wait a little longer, and dismissing the hoots as a real owl, he continued what he was doing. He had nearly managed to break open a box. A few moments more and he would be able to see what was inside, and then he could go back.

~

Will was in a state of distress. He had imagined that Joe would run back as soon as he had hooted, but there was no sign of him. And now the fog was so thick that he couldn’t see five feet in front of him.

Giving another hoot, Will was about to set out for the dinghy when he heard voices. He glanced at his watch. He’d thought the men would be at least another two minutes before they came back, but this was not the case.

The men’s voices became louder and the light from a strong torch penetrated through the fog. There was no doubt about it. The men had returned!

~

Joe was still working on getting the box open when he heard voices. He quickly pulled back the plastic that he had been working underneath and stopped in shock.

All around him was a thick blanket of fog. He realised that it must have been Will hooting earlier to warn him of the fog rolling in. Surprised, he climbed out of the dinghy just as a torchlight stabbed through the fog and landed on him.

Moving as quickly as he could, Joe tumbled back into the dinghy. He wasn’t sure if he had been spotted or not, but he wasn’t going to wait and see. He moved over to the other side and climbed out.

He paused as another torchlight appeared in front of him. He could hear voices up ahead. He only had one option. He scrambled back into the dinghy and crawled underneath the plastic near the back of the boat as he manoeuvred himself between two boxes.

There was a chance that the men would tie the plastic down without looking at it too closely, and thus he would not be noticed. It was a slim chance, but it was better than nothing.

If he could remain unseen until the craft started moving, then his chances would improve greatly. He could hear the men getting into the dinghy. Two of them were having a conversation, but he couldn't understand anything they said because they weren't speaking English.

Hoping that they would forget to tie the plastic down, Joe was disappointed when he heard footsteps right next to him. He tried holding his breath for as long as he could. He was relieved when the man pushed the last box only partly underneath the plastic.

~

Will peered through the binoculars, trying to spot the dinghy that he knew must be out there. He had gone back to the alcove to gather up Joe and his belongings and had hoped that, as it was higher up, the fog wouldn't be as thick as it was down on the beach.

Fortunately, it wasn't. Due to a fresh breeze blowing in from the sea, he could make out patches of water. But it was still hard to see. Almost as soon as the wind had pushed a clump of fog away, a new batch floated in.

He was about to stop looking when he saw the dinghy going slowly out to the mouth of the cove. He was able to see that three people were on board before the fog covered them.

Relieved, Will removed the binoculars from his eyes and hung them around his neck. He had only seen three people and hadn't heard a scuffle, so he believed that Joe had gone undiscovered. It would still mean that Joe was in a desperate position, but Will knew that if there was chance to escape, his new friend would find it.

Not wanting to give up so easily, Will decided to give the beach a thorough going over. If Joe was somewhere nearby, he was going to find him.

He spent the next hour tediously going over every stretch of sand in the area. But he couldn't find Joe. Disappointed, he walked back to Rose Cottage.

Chapter 10: Adventure On The High Seas

As the black dinghy travelled across the water, Joe tried to think of a plan that he could put into action as soon as it stopped. He would have to do something quickly as the men would probably start unloading the goods immediately.

Try as he might, he couldn't think of anything. Behind him sat a number of boxes, so there was no chance of getting out that way. In front of him sat the men, so that way was also useless. It looked as though he would have to wait until the dinghy reached the boat.

Before long, one of the men called out and, a voice that he hadn't heard before, answered. Joe knew that they must have arrived. This was confirmed by the grating of a chain being released from a small crane.

Moments later, the dinghy started to rise up. Joe stayed quiet and didn't move. Now wasn't the time to be discovered. He could feel the dinghy swaying and, in a few moments, it stopped with a slight bump. He guessed that the dinghy was now on the deck of the boat. After releasing the chain, the men climbed out and walked away.

Realising that the men were probably going to celebrate their haul before packing the goods away, Joe decided that this was the chance he'd been waiting for. Peering from underneath the plastic, he saw that the coast was clear. He jumped out. From what he could see, he was on a medium sized fishing vessel that had been converted to suit the needs of the men.

Crawling along the deck, he headed towards the railing. He stood and looked to see if there was some way of getting down the side of the boat. There were no obvious safe ways.

A loud noise suddenly startled him. The engine was warming up! If he didn't get moving now, he would probably be on his way to France.

Joe peered out across the water and was glad to see that the fog was lifting. Now he could make out a strip of land in the distance. That was the only thing he could see besides water. Once the boat started to move away from the strip of land, there would be no hope of escape.

The boat lurched into motion. Scared, but trying to stay calm, Joe hurried to the far end of the ship. By the sound of things, the men had started unloading the goods. Hopefully, that would keep them occupied for some time, at least until he found a way to escape.

At the back of the boat, Joe was glad to find a rope ladder that descended down to the water. What made him even happier was that he could see a small rowboat tied to the end of it.

After looking around to make sure that none of the crewmembers had spotted him, he climbed over the railing and started to climb down the ladder. All was going well until he was halfway down. Then he heard footsteps. Stiffening, he paused and held on tight. He didn't know where the person was, but he knew that he was close. Praying that the person would pass, he waited.

Joe didn't know how long he waited. It seemed like hours, but it was probably only a few minutes. The man was fixing something near the railing but, for the life of him, he couldn't think what it could be.

Instead, he concentrated on holding onto the ladder. The breeze had now turned into a strong wind and was pushing the rowboat from side to side. The ladder also swung back and forth.

Tired from hanging on, and with the wind getting stronger, Joe started to climb down to the rowboat. He hoped the wind would swallow any noise he made. In any case, he wasn't going to wait any longer.

Moments later, Joe reached the rowboat. Now the difficult part remained. He needed to untie it and row to the shore. Luckily, the fog was all but gone, but now something else unpleasant had taken its place. The wind had strengthened and the waves were getting higher. To make things worse, rain began to splatter down.

Joe knew it would be dangerous to row to shore in these conditions. Remaining in the boat until the storm died down had seemed a good idea at first but now he realised that, by the time the storm had worn itself out, the boat would be too far away from the shore to attempt to get back.

As it was, the shore was getting farther away each second, so Joe decided to try his luck with the storm. He untied the rowboat, set the oars in place, and began to row.

Straight away, he realised he didn't have a chance against the storm. The waves were two feet tall, wind blew the boat in all different directions, and the rain blotted out the land.

Disappointed and angry, Joe tried to head back towards the boat. His craft would be swamped in minutes in this weather, so his only chance lay in rowing back to the boat and trying again after the storm had died down.

He tried to head back the way he had come, but it was no use. Fearing drowning more than capture, he tried shouting to attract the attention of the crew. "Hello! Can anyone hear me? Help me!"

Joe paused to see if anyone had heard him. He waited, and waited, and waited.



As the morning sun shone through the bedroom window and onto the bed, Will awoke. It was odd awakening in a strange place, and for a moment he wondered where he was. But then it all came flashing back to him. The midnight trek. The fog. The dinghy. Joe's disappearance.

The sooner the girls knew, the better, so he hurried downstairs. He found the girls tucking into their breakfast. He sat down and stared down at the kitchen table before glancing up.

"What's up?" Amy asked.

Will decided to not beat around the bush. "Joe's missing."

"What!" Amy exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" Sarah said, shocked. As Will explained all that had happened the previous night, she made eye contact with the red haired boy. "Do you think Joe escaped?"

Breaking eye contact, Will looked down, tapping his fingers on the wooden table.

"Well?" Sarah said.

"I don't think so," Will replied, glancing up again.

"What are we going to do?" Sarah asked.

"We have to work out a plan." Will banged his fist upon the table. "We'll search Chandler Manor, the caves, and—"

"Hey, wait a minute," Amy interrupted, putting a hand on Will's shoulder. "Calm down. For all we know, he might come walking in the door at any moment."

"Okay, but we still need a plan," Will said. "I suggest we search along the beach and surrounding cliffs. If he escaped, that's the most likely place to find him."

"Let's get going then," Sarah said.

Within a matter of minutes, they were heading towards the beach. Before long, they arrived at the cliff path. They decided to walk along it until they got to the caves and then come back along the beach. That way, they would cover the whole area.

Suddenly, Amy stopped and called out. "Hey, I see something!" She put the binoculars to her eyes and looked through them. "It's a boat."

"Can you see Joe?" Will asked.

Amy shook her head. "No."

"Are you sure?" Will questioned, looking at Amy.

"You can look, but I couldn't see any sign of life near the boat," Amy replied, handing the binoculars to him.

Will looked through the binoculars. "It looks empty, but why would an empty boat be there? I'm pretty sure it wasn't there last night."

"Maybe it's connected with Joe after all then," Sarah said, her green eyes shining in delight.

"Maybe he isn't there because he's already home by now. We should go back and have a look."

"Hold on," Amy replied. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves. We should examine the boat first and see if there are any footprints leading from it. I tried to see if I could see any through the binoculars, but it's too far away for me to see."

Will resumed walking. "I seem to remember a track that goes down to the beach just ahead. I don't think we've passed it, so we should come to it at any moment."

Chapter 11: Missing

The storm had tossed the boat all over the cove. Luckily, it hadn't capsized, and it had beached itself on the sand. Joe stirred. He slowly opened his eyes and looked around. Not recognising the surrounding area, he feared that he might be marooned miles up the coast, or maybe even in France.

He tried to stand, but collapsed. His legs were stiff from lying in the boat. Taking it slowly, he sat on the side of the boat and looked at his watch. It had stopped ticking. Judging by the height of the sun, he assumed it was around nine thirty.

His top priority was to find out where he was, so he started to walk towards the cliffs. He didn't get far. Poking up from the sand was a rock that he hadn't noticed until it was too late. His ankle twitched in pain. He had fallen awkwardly and twisted his ankle. There was no use going exploring in his condition. He would have to rest.

~

Will and the girls hurried down the track which led to the beach. Going down a steep section, he started to slip. The storm the previous night had made the path slippery and, by the time Will realised this, he had completely lost his footing, dislodging rocks as he slid down. He cried out. "Help!"

"Try to grab hold of something," Amy yelled as she looked on in desperation.

"Use your hands to stop yourself," Sarah shouted.

Sliding past a clump of bushes, Will tried to grab hold of one of them. He missed the first one, but was successful with the second. He was just in time. A small bit of protruding rock offered the front of his feet some feeble support.

As his fingers clutched at the bush, his feet slipped from underneath him and he realised that the path had been swept away by the storm. If he hadn't grabbed hold of the bush, he would have ended up on a pile of rocks that were sharp and quite a long way down.

He tried to get a foothold on the side of the cliff, but it was no use. It was just too slippery. He was in a fix. He couldn't climb down and he couldn't climb up. As long as the bush held, he was all right, but if it started to give way, he'd be on a one way trip down the cliff.

Will looked upwards and shouted. "I've grabbed a bush, but I can't climb up! It might break any minute. Go to my house and tell my father! He'll know what to do."

"I'll go," Amy called down. "I'm the fastest."

~

Halfway to Smugglers Cove, Amy stopped for a moment to rest. Remembering the empty rowboat, she turned around and looked towards the beach. Her face broke into a smile. She could see Joe sitting by the boat. Thankful that he was okay, she was about to continue when she spotted someone else.

Hidden by the bend of the beach, two men were walking in Joe's direction. They couldn't see him at the moment as an outcropping of rocks acted as a wall between the two sides of the beach. By the way they were searching every nook and cranny of the cliffs, Amy realised that they were searching for something.

She figured Joe had two minutes to escape. Powerless to do anything, she could only hope that Joe headed off in the other direction before the men came. She didn't want to attract attention because she still needed to save Will and she couldn't let the men catch her. She tore off down the path, her mind all in a muddle.

Arriving at Will's house, she was worn out, but she still had enough energy to rush up the path and bang loudly on the front door. She puffed as she waited for Mr Spencer to open it.

A few moments later, he did. The man smiled at her. "Hello Amy, how—"

"Come quickly," Amy interrupted. "Will has slipped on one of the cliff paths. He's hanging onto a bush that could break at any moment."

"Oh no!" Mr Spencer exclaimed. "I'll just grab a rope from the garden shed and I'll be right with you."

~

Will suddenly heard an ominous crunching. Looking up at the bush, he could see that it was slowly giving way as the roots broke apart. He needed to act quickly and find something else to hang onto.

He swung his legs to the left and right, trying to get the momentum of swinging back and forth happening. Once he did, he released one hand and tried to reach over to grab another bush, which was a few feet away.

While it wasn't as sturdy as the one that he had been holding onto, if he could succeed in grabbing it, he could repeat the manoeuvre until he came to the next one which was sturdier. Plus, there was a slim ledge that he might be able to put his feet on once he had a hold on the far bush.

On the third try, he was successful. He quickly released his other hand and started swinging again. He needed to be successful, and he had to be quick. There were already signs that this new bush would soon give way.

This time, it only took him two tries before he succeeded. As he latched both hands onto the bush, he looked down and managed to get his feet onto the small ledge.

For this he was thankful. Even if it took ages for Amy to arrive, he would still be all right. There was no chance of him falling now with the ledge supporting him. Looking up, he yelled to Sarah and told her what was happening.



Sarah leapt to her feet as she saw Amy and Mr Spencer run towards her. "Thank goodness you're here. I was beginning to think something had happened to you since you were so long."

"Show me where Will is," Mr Spencer said. "I need to assess the situation. Hopefully, we shan't need anything else besides a rope. We don't want him hanging down there any longer than is necessary."

Sarah quickly showed him the spot and Mr Spencer looked down.

"Is that you, Dad?" Will shouted.

"Yes," Mr Spencer said. "Hold on. I'll be there in a jiffy. Sarah told me your feet are on a ledge, and you're hanging onto a bush. Is that correct?"

"Yes," Will replied.

"Okay. I'll try to get directly above you, but not too close, and then I'll throw the rope down. See if you can catch it. If so, tie it around your waist and give me a shout. Then the three of us can try to pull you up." Taking the rope, Mr Spencer made sure he had a grip on the other end before he threw down the rest.

Will was quick to release one hand from the bush and grab the rope as it fell past. Using the ledge to support himself, he carefully released the other hand and used both to tie a knot. He was just about to make sure it was secure when part of the ledge crumbled and fell.

Caught unbalanced, he quickly made a grab for the bush, but it was too late. He had already started falling.

Chapter 12: Hanging By A Thread

Mr Spencer was caught unprepared as Will's weight on the rope pulled him towards the edge. He tried to dig his feet into the ground to stop the momentum, but it was no use. Slowly but surely, more and more rope was going over the edge. Unless he did something soon, the rope would snap and his son would plummet to the rocks below.

If they were to succeed, they needed to attach the rope to something solid. A tree would do the job. As luck would have it, there was a strong tree not too far away. But unless they attached it soon, there wouldn't be enough rope to reach it since, as every second passed by, the rope got shorter.

Sarah grabbed the end of the rope and raced back towards the tree while Amy helped Mr Spencer. After reaching the trunk, she quickly went around it and tied two knots in the rope.

Finally, the rope stopped moving. They were just in time. Mr Spencer's legs were almost over the edge. He released the rope from his grasp and collapsed. It had taken every muscle in his body to stop the rest of it from going over the edge.

Breathing heavily, he staggered to his feet. His arms were tired, but the danger was not over yet. He peered over the edge. He let out a sigh of relief. Will was still tied to the rope.

But he was hanging in mid air. They had to haul him up quickly. There was no knowing when the rope would break.

Mr Spencer looked at the girls. "We all need to hold onto the rope and pull Will up. It will be hard, but if one person acts as an anchor, we should succeed." He directed Amy and Sarah into various positions and then moved behind them. "We haul at my command. One, two, three!"

They all started pulling. This went on for a few minutes, and each time they gathered a large amount of rope, they would wrap it around the tree and tie it. This was the easiest way that they could think of and, if they happened to slip, or if they wanted to take a break, then they could do so and not worry about all their hard effort being in vain.

Finally, just as Amy was about to suggest they take a rest, her eyes lit up. "I see Will."

Sarah smiled. "We've done it!"

"Okay, a few more heaves and that should do it," Mr Spencer said, a wide grin spreading over his face.

Moments later, Will was safe. "Thanks. For a while there, I thought I was gone. Next time I'll be more careful."

"I hope you will," Mr Spencer said as he gave his son a hug. "Lucky I was at home, otherwise you might be at the bottom of the cliff by now."

Will smiled. "I'll make sure it'll never happen again."

"My goodness!" Mr Spencer exclaimed. "It's almost lunchtime. Why don't you young ladies go and collect your brother and come back to my place for a bite to eat?"

Amy was stuck for words. "Well, we were—"

"What's she trying to say is that we were planning to have a picnic on the beach today," Will interrupted.

"That's right," Amy said. "And we're getting some food from our place."

"Oh, all right then." Mr Spencer smiled. "It's more fun having picnics than eating inside with me."

"No, it's not that," Amy protested.

"Well, have fun and no more taking risks, understood?" With that, Mr Spencer gathered up the rope and, with a cheery wave, strode back along the cliff path.



As Amy arrived at the place that she had spotted Joe, she stopped and eagerly glanced down at the beach. "I can't see him or the boat."

"Are you sure this is the spot?" Sarah asked.

Amy nodded. "I was standing right here. I'm positive."

"We can easily find out," Will said. "We just need to walk to the spot that you saw the boat and see if there are marks on the sand."

They made their way down the steep side path until they reached the sand and hurried to the spot where Amy thought the boat had been.

Will frowned as he saw some marks on the sand. "It looks as though you're right after all."

"I told you so, but you didn't believe me," Amy said.

"We do now," Sarah replied. "As well as the marks made by the boat, I can see some footprints leading back the way we came."

Will walked over to the cliffs and studied the footprints there. He then walked back to the girls. He pointed to the first lot of footprints. "As you can see, there's one set of footprints that's smaller than the other. But the ones over at the cliff look almost identical."

"What does that mean?" Sarah asked.

"I believe the two men that Amy saw came here and found Joe," Will explained. "One of them took the rowboat somewhere else while the other one marched Joe back along the beach. However, I could be completely wrong."

"It doesn't really matter what took place here," Amy said. "What really matters is, where's Joe? If the crooks have captured him, then the most likely place for him to be would be the manor."

"You're probably right," Will said. "I suggest that we explore Chandler Manor."

Agreeing with him, the sisters followed him as they walked up the cliff path once again and through the woods until they reached the big building.

They found the ladder in the same place as they had left it. They leaned it against the wall and climbed over. After hiding it in the bushes, they proceeded to the manor. They had made it almost halfway there when they heard a noise. Unable to recognise the sound, the children paused.

"Did you hear something?" Will asked.

"Yes," Amy replied.

"Me too," Sarah said. "It sounded like a dog barking."

Will nodded. "You could be right. If that's the case, we'd better hurry. We don't want to be caught out in the open if there are dogs about."

They quickly made their way to the window they had climbed through the previous day. After peering through to make sure that no one was about, they opened it and climbed over the sill.

They closed the window and crept towards the door. Will was just about to open it when he heard voices. He quickly motioned for the others to hide behind the curtains. It was unlikely the men would come into the room but, if they did, he wanted to be prepared. The voices became louder as they reached the door, but then quietened as the men walked past.

"That should be a warning to us," Will said. "If we hear voices again, we should hide straight away. And, if it looks as though we'll be caught, we should split up."

"I agree," Amy said. "Where should we search first?"

"We didn't explore the top floor last time, so I think we should search that," Will said. "Besides, unless they tied Joe up, they probably wouldn't put him on the ground floor, otherwise he could climb out of the window. That's why he's most likely to be on the top floor."

Will opened the door and peered out. No one was in sight. He beckoned to the others and quietly but quickly headed up the hallway. Within minutes, they were climbing the stairs. So far they hadn't heard or seen anyone, so their luck was holding out.

Reaching the top floor, they paused. Deciding it would be a waste of time if they all went in the same direction, Will told the girls to explore the rooms on the left while he went to the right. They were to open every door that they found and see if Joe was in that room. If the door was locked, it would be an indication that Joe was likely inside.

Will headed up the hallway. He made good time as he opened one door after another. A few minutes later, he was heading back to the girls. He was frustrated because he hadn't found a single locked door. He glanced at his watch. They had already been inside Chandler Manor for fifteen minutes and they were still no closer to finding Joe. He wasn't one to get anxious easily, but he knew that the longer they stayed there, the chance of them being caught increased. And, if all four of them were caught, who would come along and save them?

Chapter 13: Uncertain Times

Seeing the girls up ahead, Will noticed that they had stopped in front of one of the doors. Hoping that they had found Joe, he hurried towards them.

“This door’s locked,” Amy said.

“Let me see.” Will tried the handle and realised that Amy was right. He looked through the keyhole, but he couldn’t see anything. “There’s a chance that Joe’s in here, so I’m going to call out. You get ready to run just in case it’s someone else.”

He leaned close to the door and softly called out. He did this twice. He was just about to stop and speak to the girls when he heard a noise on the other side of the door.

“Will? Is that you?” Joe called.

“Yes, it’s me,” Will said.

“I was wondering when you would arrive,” Joe said. “I’m glad you’re finally here. The men shoved me in this room a number of hours ago. They didn’t treat me too well, but they haven’t harmed me. I haven’t seen them since.”

“I’m so glad they didn’t hurt you,” Sarah said.

“Me too,” Joe said. “They said something about the boss coming to talk to me. I think they want to find out if I know anything, and then they’ll decide what to do with me.”

Will nodded. “That means that we have to find a way to get you out of here quickly. As long as the boss doesn’t come, you’ll probably stay in here, but who knows where you’ll be after they talk to you.”

“Well, the door’s locked with a key, and the man that put me in here took the key away,” Joe said.

“What if we—” Amy said.

“Quiet!” Will interrupted. “Someone’s coming!”

Telling Joe that someone was approaching, the children hurried into a nearby room. They didn’t have long to wait. Peeking through the door which was ajar a tad, Will saw a man carrying a bowl of soup walking down the hallway.

The man stopped outside Joe’s room, produced a key, unlocked the door, and went in. A minute passed before the man reappeared without the soup. Locking the door, he turned and walked back down the hallway.

Will waited for another minute before he flung open the door and, along with the others, hurried to Joe’s room.

“Hey!” Amy exclaimed in delight. “The key has been left in the keyhole.”

“Gosh, you’re right.” Will grabbed the key and turned it. A moment later, the door swung open. Sitting on the bed eating the soup was Joe. “Keep your voice down.” Will smiled. “We don’t want someone coming to see what all the noise is about.”

“No, you’re right,” Joe said, putting the soup down and standing up. “The man said that he would be back in ten minutes, so let’s hurry.”

The children hurried down the staircase. They reached the bottom without any trouble and were just about to head down the hallway when they heard voices.

“We need to hide.” Will hurried towards the nearest room which turned out to be the study.

It wasn’t the best choice that they could have made but, with the men getting closer each second, there was no turning back. They quickly hid behind the curtains, hoping that the men would pass the room just like the previous time.

Unfortunately, they didn’t. They heard the door open and Rocky and Jake entered the room arguing. The argument went on for several minutes with the voices getting louder.

Will peeked at his watch. Ten minutes had nearly gone by. Time was running out. If they didn’t escape soon, the alarm would be raised. Another minute passed, and then the men left the room.

Joe had just breathed a sigh of relief, thinking that they could now get to the window, when suddenly he heard shouting. He realised that his escape had been discovered.

Already, he could hear several men running around upstairs. Soon they would search every room. If they were to escape, it had to be within the next five minutes. Otherwise, it would be too late. The odds were mounting against them the longer they stayed in the study.

Will moved out from behind the curtain and peeked through the door. "The hallway is clear." He opened the door and swiftly hurried up the hallway, followed by the others. They reached the room without seeing any of the men and entered.

"We had better keep a guard at the door in case they come," Will said. "Joe, how about you stand next to the door while the rest of us go through the window? Then, once we're through, you can join us."

"Okay." Joe stayed near the door, opening it a tad to see out into the hallway. He then glanced back and forth and saw Amy and Sarah climb out of the window. Then, hearing footsteps, he saw Jake come around the corner. He slammed the door shut. "We've got company."

Will looked around the room. "If we could find something to put up against the door—"

"We could use the couch," Joe interrupted. "It's probably the only thing that might delay the men. That is, if we can move it."

"Let's try." Will walked over to the couch and, along with Joe's help, dragged the couch in front of the door. They had just finished moving it when someone tried to open the door.

"Come on." Joe hurried to the window and leapt out.

Will joined him a moment later and soon all four were back together. As they reached the wall a minute later, he frowned. "The ladder's gone! The men must have taken it."

"If we don't have the ladder, how can we escape?" Sarah cried out.

"We'll have to think fast," Joe said. "The men will break through the room that we left soon. When they do, they'll know we're outside."

Suddenly, the gates started to open. "Oh no!" Amy exclaimed. "Someone must be coming in."

"This might be our only chance of escape," Joe said. "But we'll need to run if we're to make it." He sprinted as fast as he could towards the gates, keeping close to the wall. The gates were fully open by the time a big black car glided through the entrance.

As the vehicle approached, the children hid behind a tree, not wanting to be seen. Then, as soon as the car had gone by, they rushed towards the gates that were now starting to close.

But, unfortunately, they were too late. They arrived at the gates just as they slid back into the closed position.

"Oh no!" Sarah tried pulling on the gates. They didn't budge.

"What are we going to do?" Amy asked.

Joe paused as he heard a noise. "Do you hear what I hear?"

Will spun around and turned towards the ivy covered manor. He was just in time to see two massive german shepherds round the south west corner of the building and tear towards them. They were barking furiously. "They must have discovered that we had escaped out of the window and got the dogs out."

"Let's climb one of these trees," Amy suggested. "If we do that, the dogs won't be able to get to us."

"Good thinking," Joe said. "We might even be able to climb onto the wall and down the other side." He ran towards the nearest tree and started climbing up it.

Will glanced back towards the building as he waited for the girls to follow suit. The animals were approaching fast. "Come on! We don't have much time."

Chapter 14: A Dangerous Task

Joe climbed up the tree as fast as he could. He paused as he reached the third branch. As he glanced across at the manor, he saw three men hurry out of the front door. As the dogs growled nearby, he looked down and discovered that the animals had reached the trees.

Joe didn't know much about dogs, but he could see that these animals were athletic and had sharp teeth. They were the perfect dog to stop intruders. He looked across at the girls who were on a lower branch. "Are you all right?"

Amy nodded. "Luckily the dogs can't leap too high."

"I'm still scared though," Sarah said as she gazed down at the dogs who were barking non stop.

"There's no need to be afraid of them. They can't hurt you now that you're up this tree." Joe looked up at Will who had climbed the highest and saw that he was seeing if he could leap across to the wall. "Can you jump to the wall?"

"It's risky," Will replied. "The branch doesn't quite reach the wall. Besides, even if we did manage to get to the wall, wouldn't the men open the gates and let the dogs chase us?"

"Possibly. But maybe if just one person went..." Joe fell silent as he heard voices. He looked down as the men approached.

While Dan and Jake calmed the dogs down, Rocky glanced up at the children. "Come on down."

"Why should we?" Joe questioned.

Rocky grinned. "If you don't, I'll let the dogs do what they want with you when you finally decide to come down. After all, there's only one way that this ends, and that's with you lot climbing down. Unless, of course, you want to leap across to the wall, but I don't think you would so foolish to attempt such a thing as the chance of you being unscathed from such a jump would be highly unlikely."

Joe looked up at Will. "What do you think?"

"We'll have to climb down," Will said. "We don't have any other choice."

Joe turned to the girls and, as they nodded, started climbing down.

"Good to see that you're sensible," Rocky said. "Now, head towards the house." The man waited for the children to start walking before he followed them.

With Dan leading the way, the children walked back into the manor and up the staircase until they reached the top floor. They then went down the hallway until they arrived at the same room that Joe had been locked up in earlier.

"In you go." Dan waited as the children entered in single file and, as soon as they had done so, slammed the door shut.

Amy went to the lone window. "There's no way out via the window. It's too high to jump down."

Joe nodded. "I know. I looked last time I was here. The only way out is through the door that we came in. And, unless we can figure out how we can get the key, we'll be here forever."

"Surely they can't lock us up forever!" Sarah exclaimed.

Joe put his arm around his sister. "I didn't mean that literally. Once they've finished doing whatever they are doing, we'll be free to go."

The door suddenly opened and Rocky entered. "The boss wants to meet you." He leaned against the wall as a man wearing a grey coat and sunglasses entered the room.

The boss gazed at the children for a minute before he spoke. "You can start by telling me your names and why you are trespassing on private property."

Joe decided to be the spokesperson. "I'm Joe. These are my sisters, Amy and Sarah, and this is my friend, Will. They were on your property because they came to rescue me."

The boss was about to reply when suddenly he had a fit of coughing. It was a deep, throaty kind of cough. Joe knew that if he didn't remember anything about the man physically, he would remember the cough. After the coughing had stopped, the boss resumed talking. "Is that so?"

"If you dare hurt us, I'll tell my dad and he'll get the police to lock you up," Sarah piped up.

The boss smiled at the girl's threat. "And how is your father going to find you here? I don't suppose you told him you were going to break into Chandler Manor."

"I did," Joe lied. "And if we don't show up then the police will storm this place and find us."

The boss laughed. "I don't believe you. In fact, to prove it, I will keep you locked up until our business is finished here."

"You can't do that!" Sarah shouted.

"Can't I? Just wait and see." The boss left the room. Rocky closed the door and walked away.

Will got up and went over to the door to make sure they had locked it. Unfortunately, they had.

"It looks like this is it." Amy hung her head and stared at the floor.

"Don't worry," Will said, trying to comfort Amy. "Even if we don't get out of here, someone will come searching for us."

"But no one knows that we're here," Amy said. "Even if your dad came over to check up on us later today, he would just think we had gone for a walk. Let's face it. We're going to be stuck here for some time."



As evening came, Dan brought them some food to eat. It wasn't much, just bread and jam, but at least it was something for their grumbling stomachs.

Will was sitting on the bed and eating one of the slices of bread when he suddenly thought of something. He stood up and walked over to the window. After opening it, he glanced down. He had just remembered that he had seen ivy growing up a number of walls of the manor and hoped to find some ivy nearby.

He was in luck. A thick vine was growing right next to the window. He tugged on it as hard as he could to see if it was strong or weak. It didn't break away in his hand, so it seemed pretty strong. Will turned to the others and smiled. "I think I may have found a way out."

"How?" Sarah asked.

"There's ivy growing up this wall," Will replied.

"Of course!" Joe exclaimed. "I should have thought of that earlier."

"Think of what?" Amy questioned.

"One of us can climb down the wall using the ivy as a makeshift rope," Will explained. "That person can then get to the wall."

"And do what?" Sarah asked. "We don't have a ladder and, if the dogs are on the prowl, the person will be chased by those ferocious animals."

Will nodded. "It's a risk, but what other choice do we have?"

"Will's right," Joe said. "It's too risky for you girls since you can't run as fast as us, so it's between us boys."

"I'll go," Will offered. "I've climbed down trees, drainpipes, and almost everything else that you can climb. But, as well as that, I know this area like the back of my hand, which means that I'm not going to get lost in the woods."

Will went to the window and surveyed the ivy. If the truth were to be told, it didn't look too safe. The ivy could break at any time, but it was the only plan that they had, so it had to be attempted, no matter how great the risk was.

Now that they had a plan, time passed swiftly and it wasn't long before the setting sun disappeared below the trees and darkness descended upon the area. As the stars appeared in the clear sky and the moon rose, Will got ready to escape.

The girls hugged him and Joe patted him on the back. They all wished him luck. The red haired boy opened the window and, after glancing both ways to make sure that no one was about, he climbed over the ledge.

Then, after taking a deep breath, Will started to climb down the ivy. He had to be careful and take it slowly. It was a long way to the bottom and he couldn't risk falling. He also had to be quiet. If he made the slightest noise, the dogs might hear him. If they investigated, he wouldn't stand a chance against the animals if they saw him.

All was going well when, a quarter of the way down, he decided to rest for a moment. He grasped a bunch of ivy and, too late, realised his mistake. It was dead and couldn't hold him. It came away in his fingers and he fell.

Chapter 15: The Dawn Raid

Will reached out with his hands in an effort to grab the rest of the ivy. He was six feet from the ground when he succeeded in grabbing a vine.

Looking up, he saw the others peering down anxiously. Giving a wave to show that everything was fine, he started to climb down the remaining distance.

He stopped and listened once his feet touched solid ground. There was no barking, which meant that the dogs hadn't yet noticed him.

Praying that the wind wasn't blowing his scent towards them, he made his way towards the wall. He got there without a hitch. Everything was going like clockwork. But now the hardest part remained. How was he going to get over the wall?

While Will had been waiting for the darkness to come, he had gone over this question in his head many times. The only solution he could think of was to climb a tree and edge along one of the branches until he reached the wall.

He selected the tree closest to the wall and started to climb up. This he achieved with no problem. It was the bit ahead that would be tricky. He chose the best branch and gingerly edged along it. At the end, he manoeuvred himself until he was hanging by his arms like a monkey. After swinging, he landed safely on the wall.

Will sat down on the cold stone for a few moments to regain his breath. Ready to continue, he jumped down on the other side, tumbling in the thick grass. Unhurt, he got to his feet and hurried along the road.

He realised it would be too dark to use the path through the trees that he knew, so he stayed on the road. It took a bit longer this way, but at least there wasn't any chance of him tripping over something. Reaching his house a short while later, he ran down the garden path and banged on the front door.

A few seconds passed before his father peered through the curtain. A moment later, the door opened. "What are you doing here? I thought you—"

"You need to telephone the police," Will interrupted. "The others are being held prisoner at Chandler Manor!"

His father stared in shock. "What in heaven's name have you been up to? You had better come and sit down and tell me exactly what's going on."

Will hurried inside and quickly told him everything that he and the others had done in the last few days. When he'd finished speaking, he looked over at his father. "Are you going to tell the police everything that I've told you?"

Mr Spencer frowned. "It's a bit more difficult than you realise, son."

"Why?" Will asked.

"I'm going to have to tell you something that I wasn't supposed to tell anyone, not even you." Mr Spencer paused for a moment while he thought. He then resumed speaking. "As you know, I used to be a police officer. I was very successful and put a good many men behind bars."

"What has that got to do with this?" Will asked.

"Well, for the past few months I've been working with Inspector Price—" his father replied.

"Inspector Price?" Will interrupted.

Mr Spencer nodded. "Yes, he lives in Edgeworth and is in charge of this district. Anyway, a while ago he told me that he believed a counterfeiting ring was operating somewhere close. He didn't have any concrete evidence, but he was suspicious. Not wanting to attract the usual publicity that a police officer gets, he asked me if I could keep my eyes open."

"Gosh!" Will exclaimed. "So we've stumbled upon the men that the police have been trying to catch for months."

Mr Spencer nodded. "Yes, it certainly looks like it."

"Can we tell the local constable?" Will asked.

His father shook his head. "No."

Will frowned. "Why not?"

“For the past six months, despite there being roughly the same number of crimes committed in Smugglers Cove compared to other neighbouring towns, hardly anyone was being caught,” Mr Spencer replied.

“Was someone tipping the crooks off?” Will asked.

“Probably,” his father replied. “That was the second problem that the inspector told me about.”

“So what are you going to do then?” Will questioned.

“Contact the inspector,” Mr Spencer stated. “Knowing him, he will want to come himself, so we should expect him and his men around dawn tomorrow.”

Will sighed. “But the others are waiting for me to return with the police.”

“They’ll just have to wait,” his father said. “If someone tips the men off and we find nothing, I’ll have blown my cover for nothing. Besides, there’s no way that Constable Howard can capture the men all by himself. So we will have to wait till dawn.”

~

As dawn broke over Smugglers Cove, Mr Spencer paced back and forth along the pavement near the police station. He then walked back to his car where Will was sitting in the front passenger seat.

“What’s taking them so long?” Will asked.

“I don’t know, but they were due five minutes ago, so they should be here soon,” Mr Spencer replied.

“And then what?” Will said.

“Well, after the inspector has talked to Constable Howard, we’ll drive to Chandler Manor,” his father said.

“What if they’ve already been tipped off?” Will asked, worried.

Mr Spencer shook his head. “That isn’t possible. As I explained to you last night, the informer is someone who has access to the police station. It could be the cleaner, a friend of the constable—”

“So almost anyone,” Will interrupted.

“Yes. But at the moment only two people in Smugglers Cove know about this plan and that happens to be you and me. So, since the informer obviously can’t know at the moment, he can’t tip them off.” As Mr Spencer finished talking, four police cars tore down the street and braked to a stop just behind his vehicle. He left Will and made his way over to the lead car just as a cheerful looking fellow with a moustache and a bald head, climbed out of the car. “Inspector Price?”

The man nodded. “Are you Mr Spencer?”

Will’s father nodded. “We need to get moving straight away if we are going to catch the men sleeping.”

The inspector flicked his hand at the police station. “What have you told Constable Howard?”

“Nothing,” Mr Spencer said. “Just for him to be here. I suggest that you deploy him and three of your officers to the beach. Our sources indicate there’s a tunnel which goes from Chandler Manor to the beach.”

“That sounds like a sound plan.” Inspector Price headed inside the police station with one of his men to talk to the constable. Mr Spencer paced back and forth as he waited anxiously.

A few minutes later, the inspector and the constable exited the building. Without further ado, Inspector Price climbed into his car and drove off.

Mr Spencer leapt into his car and followed the group of police cars as they made their way through the village, past the woods, and finally to Chandler Manor.

The cars braked as they came in sight of the building. Will climbed out and watched as several police officers placed a ladder against the wall.

Inspector Price walked over to Will. “I need someone to help me navigate the way to the study. I understand there’s a machine there that will open the gate. Are you up for the challenge?”

Will nodded. “I’ll do anything to help rescue my friends.”

“I understand,” the inspector said. “But no heroics, okay? You stay behind me at all times.”

“Yes, sir,” Will replied.

Inspector Price called to one of his men and then the three of them climbed up the ladder.

~

As the morning light penetrated the small room in Chandler Manor, the children were awoken by a commotion somewhere below them.

Joe yawned. "The men must be moving stuff."

"Maybe they're planning a getaway," Amy suggested. "They must realise that sooner or later someone will come here and ask questions. And if the police did search this place, they would find the printing presses."

"You may be right." Joe walked over to the window and opened it. He stiffened as he saw something. "Hey, I just thought I saw someone move behind those bushes up near the gate. But now I can't see anything."

"Maybe it's someone coming to rescue us," Sarah piped up as she peered through the window. "If Will managed to get out, he could be here with the police."

"Let's hope it's the police," Amy replied. "I don't fancy another night sleeping in this room. The bed is as hard as a rock." She joined the others in gazing out of the window, hoping to see a movement in the garden below.



Will breathed a sigh of relief as they reached the manor without hearing the sound of the dogs. He then led the way to the side window that he and the others had climbed out earlier, hoping that it would be in the same state as they had left it, but it wasn't. It had been boarded up.

"Is there another way in?" Inspector Price asked.

Will thought. At last, he looked towards the inspector. "I'm afraid not. The only other way we discovered was via the front door, and it's unlikely that it would be unlocked."

"Well, there's no harm in trying," Inspector Price replied.

They crept towards the front entrance, keeping close to the bushes that hugged the wall. Without warning, the front door burst open and Jake rushed out. He took a quick look around before heading down the driveway.

Chapter 16: On The Run

“Looks as though they are keeping watch,” the police officer stated.

“I agree.” Inspector Price frowned. “I wonder if our plan has somehow been leaked. If that is—”

“Hey! This could work in our favour,” Will interrupted.

“What do you mean?” Inspector Price asked.

“The man could have left the front door unlocked,” Will said.

“Yes, you’re probably right. Well, let’s see if we can sneak inside without anyone looking.”

Inspector Price stood up and, as quietly as he could, made his way to the door.

The police officer and Will followed close behind. Fortunately, the door was unlocked. Once they were inside, the man paused. “I can hear voices.”

“The other men are probably in the cellar,” Will said.

“We’ll go there later,” Inspector Price said. “Right now, I need you to lead me to the study.”

Will walked down the hallway. Once inside the small room, he showed the police officers the gate opening mechanism.

Inspector Price took hold of the lever and pushed down. He glanced through the window and smiled with satisfaction as he saw the gates slowly opening. He turned to the police officer. “Head outside and meet the others.”

“Yes, sir.” The police officer left the room.

Will looked towards the inspector. “When are we going to rescue my friends?”

“As soon as all the men are caught.” Inspector Price frowned as gunshots suddenly rang out. He rushed to the window just in time to see the police cars, which had been heading down the driveway, skid to a stop. The inspector looked at Will. “Stay here.”

“But what if one of the men comes into the study?” Will asked.

“Well, come with me then. But stay behind me at all times.” Inspector Price took out his pistol and hurried out of the room.

Will walked as close to the inspector as he could, but stopped as the man came to a halt as he reached the front door. Will leaned to the right of him and gasped as Jake slammed the door closed.

The man came to a halt as he saw Inspector Price pointing his weapon at him. “Put the gun down on the floor, nice and slowly,” the inspector ordered.

Jake hesitated for a moment. Then, sighing, he placed the gun that was in his hand onto the floor. But, just as the weapon made contact with the wood, he looked over the inspector’s shoulders and smiled.

Fearing a trap, Inspector Price was about to order the man again to drop his weapon when he glanced in a mirror that was facing him and caught a glimpse of another man holding a gun.

Will had also seen the reflection in the mirror and also turned around. He saw Dan walking down the hallway towards them. “Oh no!”

“Stay calm,” the inspector whispered. He turned around and saw that Jake was now aiming his weapon at him as well.

“Hand the pistol over!” Jake yelled.

“You’ll never escape,” Inspector Price stated. “My men will—”

“Do it now or else the boy gets hurt!” Jake interrupted.

“Okay, just relax.” The inspector laid his weapon down just as the front door burst open and four police officers burst into the room. Quickly assessing the situation, two of them tackled Jake.

Seeing he was outnumbered, Dan turned and rushed down the hallway. But he was no match for the police officers who ran after him and he was soon caught.

Will grimly smiled. “Phew! Those officers just arrived in time.”

Inspector Price nodded. “Yes. I...” He paused as a tall, burly fellow with brown hair ran up.

“What’s the status, Sergeant Wilmore?”

“There were three men in the cellar and another one in the kitchen, so we might have captured all the men,” Sergeant Wilmore replied in a thick cockney accent.

“Good job. But keep searching the entire premise to make sure. Oh, and find Mr Spencer. I want a word with him.” As the man hurried away, the inspector turned to Will. “I think it’s time to see where your friends are being held.”

“They should be on the top floor,” Will said.

“Okay.” Inspector Price walked over to the staircase and started climbing up. As he reached the top floor, he and Will waited as two police officers quickly searched the hallway to make sure that no one was hiding nearby. Satisfied that it was safe, the inspector turned to Will. “Show me what room your friends are in.”

Will raced along the hallway until he reached the room. He tried opening the door, but it was locked. He banged on it and shouted. “Hey! Are you still there?”

There was a moment of silence, and then Amy called out. “Yes! Let us out!”

“Move aside,” Inspector Price ordered. Will obeyed as the man called out to the prisoners. “Move right away from the door. I’m going to shoot the lock.” He took out his pistol and then, after waiting a few seconds, fired. The bullet split the lock in two and it fell to the ground.

Will rushed forward and threw open the door. He was greeted by three smiling faces.

“Great job!” Joe yelled.

“Smashing!” Sarah shouted.

Amy reached forward and hugged the red haired boy. “You’re the best.”

Will smiled. “Thanks, but it wouldn’t have been possible without the police.”

Inspector Price stepped into the room. “Are you all okay? I can send for an ambulance if—”

“Thanks, but no thanks,” Joe interrupted. “The men didn’t harm us, thank goodness.”

“Good to hear,” Inspector Price said. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to see what’s happening with the search.”

~

By the time the children had descended the staircase, they found the ground floor abuzz with police officers as they ransacked the rooms.

Joe spotted the inspector as he exited the study. “What are you doing?”

“Trying to find some solid evidence to put these men behind bars and track down the counterfeit notes,” Inspector Price replied.

“But what about the printing press in the cellar?” Will asked.

“We found those, but nothing else,” the inspector replied. “They will be helpful, but I doubt the men will stay behind bars for long if that’s all we can find.”

Will glanced around. “Have you seen my dad?”

Inspector Price shook his head. “No, but I asked Sergeant Wilmore to get him for me. There was something...” He paused as he spotted the sergeant walking down the hallway. “I thought I told you I wanted to speak with Mr Spencer.”

“I couldn’t find him,” Sergeant Wilmore replied.

“Is his car still by the gate?” Inspector Price asked.

Sergeant Wilmore nodded. “Yes.”

“Then he must be somewhere on the premises.” Inspector Price walked back into the study. “Does anyone know where Mr Spencer is?” No one replied. “When was the last time anyone saw him?”

A young police officer raised his hand. “Just after I had spoken with Sergeant Wilmore. I was coming inside when I saw him go past me. I told him you wanted everyone inside and he said he had to examine something first.”

Inspector Price frowned. “Examine what?”

The man shook his head. “I don’t know. He didn’t say.”

Will ran to the front door and flung it open. He called out in his loudest voice. “Dad!” He waited for an answer. There wasn’t any. He looked back at the inspector as he walked up. “He must be in trouble.”

The inspector joined Will at the door. He gazed at the police van that was parked by the garage. He called out to the sergeant. “Did you leave anyone guarding the van?”

Sergeant Wilmore nodded. “Yes, two men. Why?”

“Because I can’t see anyone.” Fearing the worse, the inspector pulled out his pistol and raced towards the van.

Chapter 17: The Disappearing Men

Upon reaching the vehicle, Inspector Price hurried to the back and opened the door. Two unconscious police officers were inside. He punched the door in frustration. He paced back and forth in anger as three police officers and the children rushed up.

Sergeant Wilmore took one look at the back of the police van. "How could they escape?"

Inspector Price shook his head. "I don't know. But one thing is certain. They didn't get out of the van by themselves. They might be counterfeiters, but they're not magicians. And you would have to be a magician to unlock handcuffs without a key and knock out two police officers. But they won't get far. Radio the neighbouring police stations and tell them to set up roadblocks."

As Sergeant Wilmore hurried to a police car, the inspector turned to the officer that was standing next to him. "Tell the men inside to get out here pronto."

"Yes, sir." The man hurried away as the inspector and the remaining officer carried the unconscious men out of the van and onto the nearby grass.

"How many crooks were in this van?" Joe asked.

"Five," the inspector replied as he laid a motionless body upon the ground. He attempted to revive him and thinly smiled as the man opened his eyes. Once the man assured the inspector that he was fine, the inspector turned his attention to the rest of the police officers who had grouped around him. "Listen up. The men who were locked up in this van have now escaped. We don't know where they are, but I suspect they will be armed. So be careful. Search the woods, farmhouses, sheds, and anything else that you think could be where they're hiding. I want you to turn over every part of Smugglers Cove, not stopping until every single criminal is found. Any questions?"

There were none. As the children watched, the police officers began the search, some on foot and some in cars. A few moments later, Sergeant Wilmore approached. "Constable Howard is still waiting down at the beach with a couple of men. What shall I tell him to do?"

"Come here," Inspector Price said. "We need all the help we can get."

As Sergeant Wilmore left, Will spoke up. "What about my dad?"

The inspector glanced towards the four children. He then walked over and placed his hand on Will's shoulder. "Go home and get some rest. All of you."

"But what about my dad?" Will asked. "Aren't you going to search for him?"

"No," Inspector Price replied.

"But you can't just leave him!" Will yelled.

As the inspector gazed down at the ground, Joe suddenly had a thought. "You think that Mr Spencer helped the men escape, don't you?"

Inspector Price nodded. "That has crossed my mind."

"My dad is not a crook!" Will yelled.

Inspector Price gazed into Will's blue eyes. "Then where is he?"

"Maybe the men kidnapped him," Amy suggested.

"Why would they clutter themselves up with a hostage when they are planning on getting as far as away from here as possible as quickly as they can?" Inspector Price questioned.

"Maybe he saw something," Sarah said. "Something that they wanted to keep a secret."

"Well, all I know is that I have five men on the run that will do anything to avoid capture. They're not here at Chandler Manor, so I must put my men elsewhere. You are free to look anywhere you want for Mr Spencer, but I doubt he's here. If I were to guess, I'd say he and the men are planning how to get to France."

"He wouldn't do that," Will said, his eyes burning with defiance. "I'm his son. He's not going to leave me."

"Well, money does strange things to a person," Inspector Price said. "Being an author isn't an easy way to make a living."

"My dad is not a crook and I'll prove it!" Will glared at the inspector before he stalked back to the manor.

Inspector Price turned to the others. "As a police officer, I have to face the facts. And the facts are that someone helped the men escape. It's also a fact that Mr Spencer is missing. So, though I find it hard to believe, the obvious conclusion is that Mr Spencer made a deal with the criminals and helped them escape."

"Just because it's the obvious answer doesn't make it the right one," Amy said.

"No, it doesn't," the inspector replied. "And I'll be happy to accept what Will said, but only if you find Mr Spencer."

Joe glanced at the girls who nodded. "We'll find him."

"There will be a police officer guarding Chandler Manor at all times so, if you do find anything, let him know," Inspector Price said. "Good luck. I must get going now."

As the inspector climbed into his car and drove away, Amy turned to Joe and Sarah. "Is it possible that Will's father is a crook?"

"No," Sarah replied. "He's a nice man. I like him."

"That doesn't make him not a crook," Amy said.

"But that doesn't make him a crook either," Joe said. "I find it hard to believe that he's working with the men we saw. But something doesn't add up. How do five men escape from a locked van that has two guards standing outside it?"

"They must have had help," Sarah said.

"Yes, but from who?" Joe questioned.

"I don't know, but we should find Will," Sarah replied.

Joe and his sisters headed inside the manor. They found an unhappy Will sitting on the staircase. They all sat down next to him and were silent for a few moments. Then Amy put her arm around her new friend. "It's going to be all right."

Will shook his head. "How can you say that? I know my dad isn't guilty, but that doesn't matter to that stupid police officer."

"He's just doing his job," Joe said.

"Then why can't he do his job somewhere else?" Will cried out, angry and hurt. "Why does he have to ruin my life?" He stood up. "My dad's a good man. And I'm going to prove it. Are you with me or not?"

Sarah stood up. "I'm in."

Amy stood up. "Count me as well."

Joe also stood up and patted Will on the shoulder. "Together we'll find some answers. The first thing we ought to do is to search this building from top to bottom."

"But the police have already searched it," Sarah said.

"Yes, but they may have missed something," Joe said. "Either way, we don't have any other leads to go on, so let's split up and meet back here in half an hour."

The others agreed that this was a good plan, so they started searching. It was a long and tiring task, but it was one that they knew that they had to do if they were going to solve this mystery.

Amy knew how hard it must be for Will, and she didn't want him to suffer for any longer than was necessary. She might not be the best judge of character, but she couldn't believe that Will's father was a bad person. It just didn't make sense. There was no reason that he, a former police officer, would have switched to being a crook.

Dismissing these thoughts from her head, she made her way down the staircase and met the others. They all had gloomy faces, which indicated to her that they hadn't found anything. And, after a quick chat, this was confirmed.

Amy sighed. "So, what do we do now?"

"Search outside," Joe said. "Maybe there's something outside that will lead us to Mr Spencer or the crooks."

The children walked outside and explored the grounds. They climbed trees, searched in the bushes, went along the edge of the stone wall, but nothing could be seen.

Seeing the garden shed, Amy hurried over to the dilapidated building. Hoping that there would be something in interest in it, she opened the door.

Suddenly, three german shepherds rushed towards her, barking savagely.

Chapter 18: Searching

Amy hurriedly slammed the door shut. Luckily, the animals were tied up so they couldn't break the door down, but she was still nervous as she stood a few feet away. The commotion was so loud that the others hurried towards her.

"What happened?" Joe asked.

Amy pointed to the shed. "The dogs attacked me. Fortunately for me, they were tied up."

A moment later, a police officer rushed up. "What's the problem?"

"Did you know that there were dogs in that shed?" Joe asked.

The police officer shook his head. "No, but with the men escaping—"

"Have they been caught yet?" Amy interrupted.

"No," the man replied. "Inspector Price just reported in and said that no one has seen any sign of them. It's as though they have disappeared into thin air. But we'll catch them. It might not be today or tomorrow, however, rest assured they will be caught and brought to justice."

"What about Mr Spencer?" Will asked.

The police officer peered at Will. "You must be his son."

Will nodded. "Yes. And I don't care what you say, but my dad is not a crook."

"I believe you," the police officer said. "But, just like the other men, there has been no sign of Mr Spencer. He's not at his house and his car is still parked outside the gate so it's a mystery where he is." He looked at the shed. "I'll put out a call for the dogs to be picked up."

As he walked away, the children sat down on the grass. They were exhausted from searching the inside and outside of Chandler Manor, but they were not ready to give up. Not when Mr Spencer's life was on the line.

Joe sighed, then suddenly smiled. "Why don't we think like a crook?"

"What do you mean?" Sarah asked.

"Just pretend that you're one of them," Joe said. "You're sitting in that police van when someone comes and sets you free. What do you do?"

"Make a run for it?" Sarah suggested.

"I would get away as far as possible before the escape is discovered," Amy said.

Joe nodded. "That might work, but these are smart men."

"If they were smart, they wouldn't be crooks," Will said.

"Well, no, but you know what I mean," Joe replied. "If the men did have someone to help them escape, and it wasn't Mr Spencer, it must have been one of the police officers."

"Well, last night, my dad told me that there was a leak in the police force," Will said. "He thought the person might be close to Constable Howard. But that doesn't make sense."

"What do you mean?" Amy questioned.

"The constable was down at the beach," Will said. "So how could he, or someone close to him, have helped the men escape from Chandler Manor?"

"Your dad must have been wrong," Joe said. "The leak must come from someone close to Inspector Price."

"Does it really matter who the leak is?" Sarah said. "In fact, maybe the men did escape by themselves. Either way, how is that going to help us find Will's dad?"

"What I'm thinking, is why would the crooks run away when they could hide nearby?" Joe asked.

"Of course!" Will's face lit up. "Why didn't we think of it earlier?"

Amy glanced back and forth between the two boys. "What?"

Will smiled. "The tunnels!"

"How could we be so stupid?" Amy grinned. "That's the perfect place to hide out. Especially since the police don't even know about them."

Joe stood up. "We don't know where the tunnel entrance is inside the manor is, but we can get into the tunnel via the other entrance."

"Are you going to tell the police?" Sarah piped up.

Joe shook his head as they hurried down the driveway and headed for the gate. “We don’t know for certain. So let’s just go down the tunnel ourselves and see if we find anything.”

The children eagerly raced up the hill, but they were in for a shock as they arrived at the entrance to the tunnel. The hole was no longer there!

Joe rushed forward and tried to move the rocks that were blocking the entrance, but it was impossible. The others joined him, but they all stopped a few minutes later.

Will kicked the ground in frustration. “We’ll never move all these rocks.”

Joe sat down on the grass. “There are only two ways that these rocks could have got here. Either there was a natural rock collapse or the men put them there.”

“My guess is that it was the men,” Amy said. “Which makes me believe even more that they are hiding in the tunnels.”

Will nodded. “If only we knew where the other exit is located.”

“We know it’s in the cellar,” Sarah piped up.

“Yes, but where exactly?” Joe asked. “And who is to say that they haven’t blocked that exit as well?”

“Let’s go where we know we can get in,” Will said.

“Where?” Amy questioned.

Will grinned. “The beach.”

“Of course. Let’s tell the police officer. They wouldn’t have blocked that exit since that would trap them in the tunnels.” Joe got to his feet and hurried down the hill.

If the police officer was startled to see the children tearing down the hill towards him, he didn’t say so. He just smiled. “Having fun? I remember when I was a child—”

“We know where the crooks are!” Joe interrupted.

The police officer stopped speaking and his face took on an expression of astonishment. “You do? Where?”

“There’s a tunnel that goes from Chandler Manor to the beach,” Joe replied.

“Did you tell this to Inspector Price?” the police officer asked.

“No,” Joe replied. “When he was here, we thought the crooks had fled the area. But, since they haven’t been found, they must be in the tunnel.”

The police officer nodded. “I’ll contact the inspector.” He hurried to his car as the children waited. It wasn’t long before he came back. “I can’t seem to reach him, so let’s all go to the station together.”

The children followed him back to his car. After they had climbed in, the officer started the engine and headed down the road. The children grinned at each other as the car drove past the woods and headed into Smugglers Cove.

“If the crooks are caught, it will be because of us,” Joe said.

“I can’t see them being anywhere else.” Will smiled. “My dad must be tied up in one of the caves.”

As the vehicle arrived at the police station, Joe spotted the inspector walking towards his car. He yelled out. “Inspector!”

Inspector Price paused as the children and the officer rushed up. “The children think they know where the criminals are,” the police officer said.

Inspector Price frowned. “You do?”

“There’s a tunnel that connects Chandler Manor to the beach,” Will said. “The men must be there.”

Inspector Price nodded. “That’s a good theory, but the criminals have just been spotted on the outskirts of Rockford.”

“But that’s ages from here!” Will spluttered.

“Exactly,” Inspector Price stated. “Which means that if they’re there, they can’t be in the tunnels.”

“How do you know that the men at Rockford are the men that escaped from the van?” Joe questioned.

“Well, a person just telephoned the station and told us that his vehicle had been hijacked by five men,” the inspector replied. “Men that match the description of the one’s we caught. He saw them drive down the road heading towards Rockford. I’m on my way there now. So, as you can see, they can’t be in Smugglers Cove if they’re heading towards Rockford, can they?”

Will shook his head. “I suppose not.”

The inspector climbed into his car and drove away. The police officer patted Will on the shoulder. "It was a good idea while it lasted." He turned and walked back to his car.

The children watched as the remaining police officers climbed into their vehicles and drove away. Disheartened, the children sat on the curb as silence descended upon the area. A few moments later, the station door opened and out walked Constable Howard. He stared at them through his thick rimmed spectacles. "I didn't expect to see you here."

Joe glanced up. "Why didn't you go with Inspector Price?"

"Someone has to stay and keep an eye on Chandler Manor. Besides, he has plenty of men to deal with the situation." The constable looked towards Will. "I heard about Mr Spencer. I'm sorry. He seemed like a good man."

"My dad's not a crook," Will said.

The constable nodded. "Well, if I hear anything, I'll let you know." He left them and climbed into his police vehicle.

Joe looked at his watch. "It's nearly noon. We must have spent ages searching Chandler Manor."

"And all for nothing," Sarah said.

"So, what's the plan now?" Will asked.

Joe thought for a moment. "Well, we could go down to the beach just in case the crooks aren't in Rockford. I know it's highly unlikely, but it isn't as though we've got anything better to do."

Chapter 19: The Secret Entrance

Arriving at the beach, Amy was the first one to stop as she came in sight of the caves and, within moments, the others had also come to a stop.

Joe frowned as he saw it was high tide. "Blow! We can't search the caves now."

Will walked forward and peered into the water in an effort to see how deep it was. "We could still wade in and get to the cave."

"Or we could take our shoes off," Sarah suggested.

Joe shook his head. "That wouldn't work."

"What do you mean?" Amy asked.

"I'm sure we could get to the cave as well as the tunnel, but what if the men were in there?" Joe questioned.

Will sighed, disappointed. "We would be trapped."

Joe nodded. "Yes, and a lot of good that would do us. No. There's only one thing we can do."

"What's that?" Sarah asked.

"Search Chandler Manor for the other exit," Joe replied. "I know we searched the cellar before, but let's search it again. Or we could wait a few hours until the tide retreated."

"No," Will said. "Let's search the cellar again."

As everyone was worn out from walking, Joe suggested that they get their bicycles and ride to Chandler Manor. Before long, four bicycles were whizzing through the woods. Soon, the children had reached the driveway of the manor and were not surprised to see that the police officer was no longer guarding the entrance.

"I guess everyone thinks that the crooks are at Rockford," Will said.

On reaching the front door, Joe threw the bicycle onto the gravel and hurried up the steps. He grabbed the door handle and twisted it. It didn't open. "It's locked."

Will frowned. "The police officer must have locked it before he left."

"How are we going to get in then?" Sarah asked.

"What about that broken window that we climbed out of?" Amy suggested.

"No," Will replied. "The crooks boarded it up."

"There must be another way in." Joe hurried along the side of the building. The others followed him as they looked at all the windows in an attempt to see if one of them was open. But none were. They made their way back to the front door.

Joe frowned. "If we can't get in, it means that we can't search the cellar, and if we can't search the cellar, then we can't search the tunnels and—"

"We can't find my dad," Will interrupted.

"So that's it then." Amy sat down on the grass, disappointed "It's all over."

Sarah stared at the others. "Why are you giving up?"

"There's isn't any way in," Joe said.

Sarah grinned. "Of course there is."

"What?" Amy asked.

"We can climb the ivy," Sarah said.

Will suddenly smiled. "That's a brilliant idea."

Joe grinned. "Yes, why didn't I think of that?" He hurried around to the wall where Will had climbed down the previous night.

Standing below the window, he glanced up. Even though part of the ivy had broken when Will had climbed down, it was still possible to reach the window as long as you climbed to the right first. "Since Will climbed down last night, I think it's my turn this time."

"But I'm more experienced than you are," Will said.

"Yes, but you fell last time," Joe said.

"I couldn't help it," Will argued. "The ivy broke."

Joe glanced at the girls. "Who do you think should climb up?"

"I don't know, just hurry up and decide," Amy said.

Joe looked at Will. "I'm sure I can get to the window without falling."

"Okay, I'll let you be a hero this time." Will smiled. "Just don't show off."

Joe turned to the wall and started the climb. He hoped the window was still as they had left it otherwise they would have to think of another way in.

Up and up he climbed. He didn't want to be like Will the previous night and have the ivy break away, so he went slower, making sure that each section of the plant was firmly entrenched in the wall.

He passed the second level and stopped. He rested his leg on the window frame and glanced down. He waved and yelled out. "It's all good."

"Don't get cocky!" Amy called.

Joe shook his head and then continued up the wall. He hadn't had any problems thus far, and by not taking any risks, he was able to get to the top window without any trouble. With one hand on the ivy, he reached forward and took hold of the window.

It was still ajar, so it opened without any trouble. He pulled himself up using the windowsill and tumbled into the room. Getting to his feet, he peered down at the others and waved to show that he was all right.

He raced out of the room and sprinted down the hallway. He slowed down as he reached the staircase and, moments later, he was at the front door. He turned the knob, but the door didn't budge. Annoyed, he realised that the police officer had locked it with a key.

He thought for a moment before he made his way into the nearest room and unlatched the window. "Hey! I'm over here."

He waited for the others to climb in before he closed the window. They then headed down the hallway, past the kitchen, and down the steps into the cellar.

As they explored the room, it was hard to see how there could be a secret entrance somewhere. The walls and floor were made of stone and crates and boxes were piled here and there. Apart from two couches and a few printing presses, it was bare.

"The police have already searched this place, so how can we find something that they didn't?" Amy asked.

"Because the police weren't looking for an entrance to a tunnel." Joe gazed around. His eyes came to rest on the couches. "We should move those."

"Surely it wouldn't be underneath there," Sarah said.

"Why not?" Will questioned. "I think it's the perfect spot. Let's take a look."

The first couch was extremely heavy and it took all their combined strength to move it. Once they had moved it far enough away, they stopped and looked down at the floor.

Amy bent down and felt the stones. "I don't see any marks."

"Let's try the other couch," Joe suggested once it was clear that there was nothing underneath.

Everyone moved into position and pushed. A moment later, Sarah glanced down at the floor and squealed in delight. Joe had been right. A trapdoor was set in the stone floor. "Goodness! We've found it!"

Joe quickly bent down and pulled up the trapdoor to reveal a dark hole. He reached into his pocket, took out his torch, and turned it on. "Follow me and be quiet. We don't want to alert the men if they're in here." He shone his torch down the hole and saw that there were a number of steps. "Keep close."

The girls followed Joe down the hole with Will close behind. With the light from the two torches, it was possible to move fairly quickly and, before long, they found themselves at the first cave.

Still leading, Joe paused and listened. He heard no sound. "Maybe we were wrong after all." He searched the cave and saw that, while there were still a number of crates and boxes, it looked almost the same as it had when they had last seen it.

"If the other cave is deserted then yes, we were wrong," Will said. "But let's continue on. I'll take the lead this time." He pushed past Joe and hurried down the tunnel.

The others followed him but, within a minute, everyone had stopped. A light could be seen in the distance coming toward them. Listening, they could hear voices.

As Will realised that they were getting louder with every passing second, he glanced at the others. "It's the crooks!"

Chapter 20: Betrayed!

Joe frowned. "We should retreat. We can't afford for the men to see us." He turned and hurried back the way that they had come.

Once they arrived back at the first cave, Joe headed down the other tunnel, the one that led to the hill near the manor. He wasn't sure if the men behind would stop at the cave or head to the manor, but they certainly wouldn't head up their tunnel now that they had blocked the entrance.

Joe turned off the torch and they waited in silence. The voices increased in volume and then stopped. The tunnel was plunged into darkness as the dim light also vanished.

"What happened?" Sarah whispered. "One moment they were coming towards us, and then nothing."

Joe frowned. "I don't know. Maybe they heard someone and are doing what we're doing, standing still and keeping silent."

"Maybe we should stay where we are for another five minutes or so," Amy suggested.

Everyone fell silent. After an agonising five minutes, Joe turned on his torch and moved towards the cave. "Let's find out what's happening."

They reached the cave without any trouble and, again, Joe stopped and listened. No sound could be heard. The children silently moved off down the tunnel.

Will suddenly switched his torch off and glanced at. "Turn your torch off as well."

As Joe did so, the children noticed that a faint glow was visible on the right. There was obviously another tunnel that they hadn't noticed previously.

"This must be where those men disappeared to," Will whispered.

"Yes," Joe replied. "Let's you and I investigate. The girls can stay here and warn us if anyone comes."

Will handed Amy his torch. "We'll be back as soon as we can."

The boys disappeared down the tunnel. As the light source got brighter, they tiptoed, not wanting to attract any attention. Both of them could tell that there were quite a few men talking loudly up ahead.

Joe was the first to creep around the final corner of the tunnel and, while he knew there would be a cave, he could never have been prepared for what lay in front of him.

He was staring into a cave that was three times larger than the furnished cave that they had first discovered. Several lamps sat on ledges around the walls. There were a number of bunk beds, complete with bedding. As well as this, there was a table and chairs in the middle of the cave.

It was clear this was the hub of operations. He could see a stack of money piled in boxes beside the walls of the cave. There also appeared to be an adjoining cave.

Dan and Baz lay sleeping on the beds, while Jake, Louis, and Rocky played poker.

Joe froze as Jake suddenly yelled out. He then relaxed as the man threw his cards on the table.

"A royal flush!" Jake grinned as he reached forward and took the money that lay in the middle of the table, but paused as Rocky laid his meaty hand over his.

Rocky sneered. "Not so fast! You no good cheat. You're not getting away with that."

Jake's face took on one of astonishment. "I didn't cheat."

Rocky glanced over at Louis. "What do you think?"

Louis threw down his cards and stood up. "I gotta check on the prisoner."

As Louis headed into the adjoining cave, Rocky let Jake's hand go. "Take it. I suppose it doesn't matter. After all, it's fake money." He laughed.

As his booming laughter echoed throughout the cave, the two boys hurried back up the tunnel to where the girls were standing.

"Are they there?" Sarah asked.

Joe grinned. "Yes, all five of them."

"And my dad, by the sound of it," Will said.

"Did you see him?" Amy questioned.

"Well, not exactly, but one of the men said that he had to go and check on the prisoner, so I assumed he meant my dad," Will replied.

“Let’s head back to the manor,” Joe suggested. “We need to think of what to do.”

Once they had arrived back at the first cave, Joe paused. He had been thinking hard and had come up with a plan. “We need to get the police here as soon as possible.”

“Agreed,” Will said. “However, Inspector Price is at Rockford and it will take some time for him to get here. The men could easily escape in that time.”

“But it’s high tide,” Amy said.

“I know that, but what if there’s another way out that doesn’t rely on the high tide?” Will questioned.

Joe nodded. “One of us should go back to Chandler Manor and ride to the police station to tell the constable everything that has happened. He’ll know what to do.”

“Who is going to go back?” Sarah asked.

“I’d better go,” Will replied. “He sometimes goes home in the afternoon, and I’m the only one who knows where he lives.”

“Okay,” Joe said. “We’ll wait here until you get back.”

“I’ll be as quick as I can.” Will waved and disappeared up the tunnel.

Joe wandered over to a crate and sat on it. The girls did the same. He turned the torch off to save his batteries.

Time passed slowly but, eventually, the light of a torch coming towards them could be seen and, a few moments later, Will and the constable entered the cave.

Amy looked at the constable. “Did you radio Inspector Price?”

“Yes, he’ll be along shortly,” Constable Howard replied. “So…” He paused as he suddenly had a fit of coughing. It was a deep, throaty kind of cough. He resumed talking a moment later. “Would you be able to lead me to the place where the cave is?” He looked towards Joe as he noticed that the boy was staring at him. “Is everything okay?”

Amy glanced at her brother when he didn’t answer. “Are you okay?”

Joe slowly nodded. “I was just thinking.”

“What about?” the constable asked.

“Oh, nothing that would interest you. I’ll show you where the men are now.” Joe stood up and led the way down the tunnel with the constable right behind him.

As Joe passed the spot where the tunnel was, the police officer called out. “Where are you going? Isn’t this where the entrance is?”

“Yes, sorry,” Joe said. “My mind was somewhere else.”

“You’d better concentrate since you’re going to identify the men,” Constable Howard said.

Joe frowned. “I am?”

“Yes,” Constable Howard replied. “I need you and the others to make sure that they are the ones that were in Chandler Manor and not just some random people that are hiding in the caves.”

Joe headed down the tunnel. Halfway down, he whispered to Will and Sarah. “He’s a crook. Amy, head back up and get ready to run. Will, help me tackle him.”

A moment later, Amy stopped. “Oh no!” She turned and went to head back up the tunnel. She passed Sarah, but paused as the constable blocked her way.

“What’s wrong?” Constable Howard asked.

“I’ve lost something,” Amy said. “It must be back at the cave.”

“Just identify the men and then you can go and search for it,” the constable said.

Amy shook her head. “No. I can’t do that. I need to search for it now.”

Constable Howard reached into his pocket and pulled out a pistol. “I’m afraid…” Before he could get the rest of the words out, Joe pummelled into him.

“Run!” Will yelled. He joined Joe as they tackled the constable to the ground. Normally, two boys wouldn’t have brought down the police officer, but they had caught him unawares.

As he fumbled around on the ground for his weapon, Amy and Sarah squeezed past him.

The man yelled out as he tried to grab the girls. “Rocky!”

Will threw his torch to the girls as they evaded capture. “Go!”

Amy and Sarah disappeared as footsteps pounded behind the boys and Rocky came into view. He assessed the situation with one glance. He called out. “Dan! Jake! Louis!” He reached forward and pulled the boys off the police officer with his meaty arms.

The constable got to his feet. "The two girls got away."

"Not for long." Rocky glanced backwards as the rest of the gang came into view. "Follow me."

While Dan stayed to help the constable take care of the boys, Jake and Louis followed Rocky down the tunnel.

Chapter 21: No Way Out

Amy paused as she entered the main tunnel, causing her sister to bump into her.

“Which way shall we go?” Sarah asked.

Amy thought for a moment. Heading back to the manor seemed like the best idea, but it was also the most obvious. “Let’s head for the beach.”

They were making good progress when Sarah suddenly tripped. She fell forward and landed on her face. “Ouch!”

Amy helped her sister to her feet. They then continued for a minute before Sarah stopped once more. “My ankle. It’s really painful.”

“You must have twisted it.” Amy knelt down and shone the torch on Sarah’s ankle. She couldn’t see anything different but, when she touched both ankles, she could feel a difference.

They continued on, but slower this time. Footsteps were getting louder and louder as their pursuers gained ground on them. Sarah knew she had to make a choice. “Go ahead. Get help.”

“But—” Amy said.

“The men will be here any moment,” Sarah interrupted. “Go! I’ll try to slow them down as much as possible.”

As a flicker of light bounced around the corner, Amy knew she had to leave her sister. “I’ll be back soon, I promise.” She turned and raced down the tunnel. Escape. Escape. Escape. That one word penetrated her brain. Now that everyone else had been captured it was up to her.

Before she knew it, she was at the furnished cave. She glanced around as she looked for somewhere to hide. But she couldn’t see anywhere. She suddenly remembered that Joe had told her where he had hidden the other night, but for the life of her, she couldn’t remember what he had said exactly.

She could hear her pursuers closing the gap, so she headed for the hole. She put the torch in her pocket and climbed down faster than she had ever done before. In fact, she was at the bottom before she even knew it.

Flicking her torch back on, she rushed along the tunnel. She was soon at the exit. As she climbed into the cave, she suddenly remembered why they hadn’t gone that way in the first place.

The tide was still in. Water filled half the cave. She hesitated. She had no idea how deep the water would be in some places and, as such, she couldn’t take the risk.

Disappointed, she climbed back into the tunnel and retreated the same way she had come in. Hoping that she would be able to make it back to the furnished cave, she hurried along.

Halfway there, she paused. Voices were getting closer. Her heart caught in her throat. With the water behind her and the men in front of her, she realised she was trapped!

~

Pushing Will, Joe, and Sarah along in front of him, Constable Howard made his way into the cave. He turned to Baz who had just returned from the adjoining cave. “Tie these children up. And make the ropes tight. I don’t want anyone escaping and giving us the slip. Understand?”

“Right, boss.” Baz strode towards the children. “Walk ahead of me to the next cave and make it snappy. Anyone out of line will get what they deserve.” He pushed the children into the adjoining cave.

Will glanced around and smiled as he saw his father sitting by the wall. “Dad!”

Bruised, battered and not looking his best, Mr Spencer greeted his son with a grim smile. “Hi, Will.”

Will rushed forward and tried to hug him, but that was hard since his arms were tied behind his back. Baz took hold of the boy and started tying him up. He didn’t protest since he knew it wouldn’t do him any good, so he just stood there.

The others did the same as Baz tied them up one by one. They sat in silence as they waited for the man to leave them alone, which he did a few moments later.

When Will could hear him chatting to the constable, he moved closer to his father and whispered to him. “Everyone was saying you were a crook, but I stood up for you.”

Mr Spencer smiled despite the situation. “Thanks. But how did you find me?”

“It’s a long story,” Will replied. “But I guess we’ll be here for a while, so I’ll start at the very beginning.”



Amy suddenly remembered that there was one chance left. Like the others, she knew that the men used another tunnel to enter and exit the tunnel system, one that joined the tunnel she was currently in. She didn’t know where it was, but it had to be somewhere. She moved off, swinging her torch back and forth along the cave walls. Nothing, absolutely nothing, out of the ordinary could be seen. As the seconds passed by, the men got closer and closer.

Suddenly, a light from one of her pursuers struck her and a man yelled out. “Stop!”

Amy raced back towards the beach cave as fast as she could. She didn’t know what she was going to do, but she couldn’t get caught. She just couldn’t.

The men pursued her, their footsteps echoing off the walls of the tunnel, making them louder.

Arriving at the beach cave, Amy saw with dismay that it was completely flooded. She had to make a decision. If she went to the beach the men would just catch her there. There was only one thing she could do. She hurriedly glanced around as she searched for something.

But, as footsteps thundered closer and she caught sight of the men once again, she knew she only had a few moments to find what she was searching for.



As Will finished telling Mr Spencer all that had happened, Jake roughly pushed Amy into the cave. Joe wanted to say something to her, but restrained himself from talking while the man was still within hearing distance.

Jake glared at all five of them. “If anyone is thinking of trying anything smart, let me remind you that someone will be guarding the doorway at all times. And, without those torches of yours, you’ll be lost in the tunnels even if you do escape from here. So just stay put. We’ll be gone by tomorrow morning and, if you’re good, the boss will let someone know that you’re here.”

“You’ll never get away with this,” Mr Spencer said.

Jake laughed. “But we are.” He laughed once more before he left them in peace.

“Are you okay?” Joe asked glancing at Amy.

Amy nodded. “Yes. I tried my best to escape, but I couldn’t.”

“I’m sure you did,” Mr Spencer said. “If only we had something we could use to help escape.”

“I have something.” Amy turned her back to Will and pushed up against him.

“What are—” Will asked.

“Reach down into my back pocket,” Amy interrupted.

Will reached down. Feeling something in there, he grabbed the object tightly in his grasp before withdrawing his hand to reveal that it was a rock.

“A rock?” Joe exclaimed. “How is that…” He paused as Will turned the rock over to reveal that, while it was blunt at one end, the other was sharp, sharp enough to cut through a piece of rope.

Mr Spencer smiled. “Good job, Amy.”

Amy smiled back. “Once I knew I was trapped, I searched for the sharpest rock that I could find. Hopefully, we can use it to cut through the rope.”

Will transferred the rock to Amy’s hands. “So, who thinks they have the best cutting skills?”

Joe glanced around at the others. “I’m happy to give it a try.”

“Give it a go on Mr Spencer first,” Amy said as she transferred the rock to Joe who turned until his back was facing Will’s father.

The others helped the two get into position and then watched as Joe tried to cut through the rope. After losing the grip on the rock a few times, he finally began to make progress.

After having to pause a few times when one of the men glanced in to make sure that they weren’t up to anything, Joe realised that the rope around Mr Spencer’s hands was just too hard for the rock. He had made some progress, but it was so tiny that it didn’t make any difference.

Mr Spencer decided they needed to try the rock on another piece of rope, one that was already worn out. And, as Joe wanted to rest his hands, Will tried cutting Sarah's rope. It was the most worn-out looking one of all of them. After working on it for five minutes, the rope gave way.

"Yes!" Sarah rubbed her hands together in an effort to get the blood flowing through them once more.

"Great job, son." Mr Spencer smiled. "Now Sarah, it's up to you."

Sarah turned to Will and tried untying his ropes. It wasn't easy work for the eight year old girl as the rope had been tied tightly but, after a while, she succeeded. The two of them then worked on the others and it was a welcome sight when everyone was free.

Mr Spencer tried standing up but collapsed straight away. He grimaced. "My ankle hurts. Would one of you look out and tell me what you see? We need to know what the men are up to."

Joe crept to the front of the cave. He peeked out and saw Jake and Louis playing poker. He could hear noises in the tunnels and he noticed that many of the boxes had disappeared from the cave, so it looked as though the rest of the men were moving the goods. After all, if what Jake had said was true, they would be leaving tonight and never coming back.

Joe suddenly froze as Louis stood up and walked towards him.

Chapter 22: A Chance To Escape

Joe was as quiet as a mouse as Louis passed by him and reached for a bottle that was sitting on one of the boxes. After he returned to the table, Joe hurried back and told the others what was going on.

Amy glanced at Mr Spencer. "What do we do now?"

Mr Spencer thought for a moment. "With Constable Howard in league with the men, the person that we need to contact is Inspector Price."

Sarah suddenly smiled. "Constable Howard told us that he'd contacted him and he was coming here."

"He probably said that just to make us believe that he was one of the good guys," Joe said. "I bet the inspector is still at Rockford trying to find the crooks."

Mr Spencer nodded. "Yes, but one telephone call from me and he'll come rushing over. So all we have to do is get to my house."

"And how are we going to do that?" Amy asked.

Mr Spencer frowned. "With my sore ankle, I can't go anywhere. And you lot are not going to be able to distract the men by yourselves, so we'll have to wait."

"But the men will be escaping soon," Joe protested.

"The boat won't be coming until it's dark, so we have plenty of time. Besides, we have to be careful. We only have one chance. We can't waste it, so I suggest we wait until my ankle feels better and we're able to overpower the men in the cave. Hopefully, they will need more men to carry the boxes and they might leave us..." Mr Spencer suddenly turned towards the entrance of the cave. Footsteps could be heard coming towards them. "Quick! Pretend you're asleep."

The children quickly scuttled to the walls, put their hands behind their backs, and closed their eyes.

A moment later, Dan glanced into the cave. His eyes scanned over the children before falling on Mr Spencer who was trying his best to look as though he was completely worn out.

"Just don't hurt the children, that's all I ask," Mr Spencer said. "They didn't mean to cause trouble. They are just curious kids. I'm sure you were like them once."

Dan slowly nodded. "Well, they shouldn't have been poking their noses into things that don't concern them, but I'll let it pass. I'll make sure that someone finds you in the morning. I may be a crook, but I've got nothing against kids." He turned and left.



Amy didn't know how much time had passed since she had dozed off, but Joe suddenly shook her awake. She quickly stood up. The others were beside Mr Spencer as he stood by the entrance of the cave. It was time to leave.

Mr Spencer hurried forward and the children followed as quickly and silently as they could. He made his way to the table, grabbed a lamp that was there, and entered the tunnel.

Joe brought up the rear and, as he walked past the outer cave, he saw that all the boxes had been taken away. It was completely empty except for the table, chairs, and beds.

"Why didn't the men leave a guard?" Amy asked, who still wasn't sure what was happening.

"Mr Spencer was able to make them believe that we were all worn out and, as such, weren't going to escape," Joe replied. "But I also think that they needed everyone to move the boxes."

As they reached the main tunnel, Mr Spencer stopped. He listened carefully. All was silent. Suddenly, distant voices could be heard from the direction of the manor. He made a decision. "We have to go to the beach."

He moved off, the lamp swinging to and fro as the others followed as quietly as they could. They made good progress and were soon at the entrance to the furnished cave. Mr Spencer slowly opened the door. He stopped as he heard two men talking.

Joe peered through the narrow gap and saw Dan and Louis sitting at the table, having a drink.

Louis grinned as he poured himself some whisky. "Let's have a toast."

Dan smiled and put his glass up in the air. "To Toulville. Where we can get drunk to our hearts content."

Louis joined him. "To Toulville."

They were halfway through drinking when a voice yelled up from the hole. "Louis! Dan! You're supposed to be moving boxes, not celebrating."

Dan quickly stood up. "Coming." He hurried to the hole and started climbing down. Louis followed him a moment later.

Mr Spencer waited half a minute and then opened the door and entered the cave. He walked over to the hole and listened. He could hear faint voices.

"What do we do now?" Will asked.

Mr Spencer placed the lamp on the table as he sat down to rest his ankle. "We wait a minute for those criminals down below to get far enough away and then we go down the hole." He glanced across at the window. "Does that look down at the beach?"

"Yes," Will replied.

"Good," Mr Spencer said. "Glance out and tell me what you see. That way we'll know how soon the men intend to leave."

Will and the others hurried to the window and glanced out. To his surprise, he saw it was already dark. "We must have been in that cave for ages."

"Look!" Amy pointed towards where a dinghy and a couple of men could be seen. A moment later, the small craft left the beach and headed out into the water.

"The boat must be already here," Sarah piped up.

Joe peered out into the cove. Due to a mixture of mist and fog that had entered the sheltered waterway, it was impossible to see anything. He turned to Mr Spencer. "I can't see anything, but we should get going now."

Mr Spencer stood up and walked over to the hole. All was quiet. He turned to the children. "You lot go first."

Joe hurried over and started climbing down. Sarah went next, then Amy.

As Will took the lamp and prepared to climb down, the door suddenly opened and Jake entered. Both parties were surprised to see each other, but Mr Spencer reacted faster. He turned to Will. "Go get the inspector now!"

Will was in a state of shock and didn't move as Jake launched himself at Mr Spencer. He watched horrified as both bodies hit the ground and tumbled over and over, with each person trying to gain the upper hand.

"Go!" Mr Spencer yelled. "Tell him about Toulville!"

Will stood still, his face betraying the fact he wanted to help his father. But then he heard footsteps hurrying down the passageway and saw, through the open door, Baz heading towards them.

Will quickly went to the hole and, using one hand to climb down, hurried as fast as he could. He reached the ground and was surrounded by the others who had only caught snatches of the conversation.

"What's happening?" Joe asked as he and the others followed Will down the tunnel.

"One of the men came and started fighting with my dad. He told me to leave and get help. I wanted to help him but then another man came and I had to run. There was no other choice. I just hope..." Will skidded to a stop as Rocky suddenly appeared, thus blocking the tunnel.

Rocky grinned as he shone his torch at them. "Well, well, what do we have here?"

"Where did you come from?" Joe asked, curious.

Rocky pointed his torch above him and the children could make out a hole. "Up there."

"So that's where the entrance to the other tunnel is!" Amy exclaimed. "No wonder we didn't see it before."

"Did you block up the tunnel by the manor?" Will asked.

Rocky nodded. "Who needs that tunnel when there's an even better one available?"

Hearing footsteps, Will glanced back and saw Baz come around the corner. He knew that the time had come. It was now or never. He threw the lamp at Rocky and yelled out. "To the beach!"

Chapter 23: A Risk Worth Taking

The children raced down the tunnel as Rocky, his hands laden with a lamp and torch, tried to stop them. He grabbed onto Sarah, but was no match for the rest of them as they ducked and tore past him.

It was a horrible feeling leaving Sarah behind, but Will knew they had no other choice. They had to go slow now as they had no light to guide them, but they increased their speed once Baz, holding a torch, came into view. He was surprisingly fast and managed to grab onto Amy.

Now it was just the boys left. Joe and Will ran as fast as they could, determined for Baz not to catch either of them.

Joe sighed with relief a moment later as he neared the entrance to the cave. They tore towards it. They had made it! However, they skidded to a stop a moment later as they reached the place where the hole was.

Will shook his head in astonishment. "What?"

Joe gasped. He couldn't believe it. It was no longer there! He rushed forward and felt the place where the hole used to be. He sighed with relief as his fingers touched loose dirt. "It's just a mini landslide. The hole should be on the other side."

The boys hurriedly moved the dirt away to reveal the hole. They had made a small hole when Joe heard footsteps. "Oh, no!"

"Go now!" Will shouted.

Without delay, Joe went headfirst through the small hole. He was soon on the other side and waited as Will followed suit. He suddenly caught sight of Rocky as he came into view. "Quick! Go now!"

Will moved fast and went headfirst through the hole. Joe reached out and grabbed his arms to help him through but, at that very moment, Rocky grabbed his feet!

Will was caught in the middle as both parties tried to drag him either way. He knew that the situation was hopeless since Rocky was a lot stronger. "Go!"

Joe didn't want to leave him. But he had to. "I'll be back!" He let go, turned, and stumbled through the cave. He tripped, but pulled himself back up almost straight away.

He made his way to the entrance of the cave and glanced out. He could see the dinghy and some men farther up the beach, but no one close by. Knowing that Rocky would be onto him at any moment, he left the cave and ran to the cliff.

He was just in time. Rocky appeared at the entrance of the cave and scoured the beach with his torch. The light bounced off the cliff wall near where Joe was hiding but, since he was behind the rock, Rocky couldn't see him.

A moment later, Rocky called out. "Dan! Louis!" As the men answered, he left the place where Joe was hiding and walked towards the dinghy.

Joe stood up. Now was his chance. He turned towards Smugglers Cove but was shocked to see a torchlight bobbing to and fro. Someone was coming towards him!

He realized he couldn't go that way, but he couldn't stay where he was. He suddenly remembered the alcove that he and Will had hid in previously. He left the cliff and climbed up the rocks.

The full moon provided him with some light to see, which was handy as it would have been almost impossible to climb up the rocks, along the little walkway, past the window, and into the alcove in complete darkness.

Joe sat down and waited. There was nothing he could do now except sit and watch the men below. They had started searching the beach and the caves and he just hoped they didn't climb up to where he was.

Time passed. The search stopped and a group of men gathered near edge of the water. He heard the voices of the others and, glancing below, saw they were being led to the dinghy.

This caught Joe by surprise. He had assumed that the men would have just tied them up and left them in the caves, but now it looked as though they were going to be taken with them. He was shocked. Utterly shocked. Although he knew that the men were going to France, he didn't know which part.

He then realised that the men probably suspected that Mr Spencer knew the exact location. Thinking back to the scene where the two crooks had been drinking, Joe recalled that he did hear a French name but couldn't recall what it was.

Joe peered down as he saw the others climb into the small craft. Wanting to get a better view, he headed down the rocks and made his way along the cliff until he was close by. He watched in horror as the dinghy headed out into the water. He didn't want to stand there and do nothing, but what could he do?

He started to run towards Smugglers Cove but stopped as he realised that he had no idea how to contact the inspector and, even if he did, he wouldn't get to the beach within twenty minutes. And, if that didn't happen, the others would probably be on their way to France by the time the police arrived.

Joe glanced back and saw the remaining men sitting on the beach. Only a few boxes were in sight. He assumed they were waiting for the dinghy to return. He sat down and tried to think of a plan.

After a few minutes, he had come up with only one option. It was a wild idea, but one so wild that it might just actually work. He hadn't worked out the finer details yet, but he knew what he had to do first.

Joe crept along the beach until he was quite a distance from the men. He then headed closer to the water's edge. Once there, he waited.

Five minutes passed before he caught sight of the dinghy approaching. He walked into the water until it was chest height and then, slowly but surely, waded towards the men.

Once he was close, he descended lower into the water. He didn't want to take any chances with the men seeing him, though he was pretty confident that they would be busy looking towards the approaching craft.

Joe paused as he got closer. He watched as Rocky joined Constable Howard in the boat and took the oars. Dan loaded the remaining boxes, tied them down, and pushed the small craft out into the water before he also jumped aboard.

Now was the moment that Joe had been waiting for. He waded towards the craft as quickly as he could. He had been hoping the men would use a rope to tie down the boxes, and he had kept his eyes glued to the leftover rope Dan had thrown to the back of the dinghy. Luckily, the end of it had fallen off the side and was now dragging in the water.

Joe waded through the water as fast as he could as the craft, now powered by the strong arms of Rocky, headed out of the cove.

Joe thought he could keep up, but the dinghy began to pull away. Desperation shot through his head as he realised that, if he failed to grab the rope, it would all be over. This was his very last chance.

Strength he never knew he possessed shot through him and he swam towards the small craft faster than he had ever swum before. His arms yelled out in pain and his legs burnt in agony, but he was determined. He was not going to let anyone down. No one, not even fully grown men could defeat him. Not now, not ever.

Approaching the craft, he reached out for the lone piece of rope. Closer, closer, until he finally clutched it in his hand. Just like that, all his strength seemed to be zapped from him and he stopped swimming. He clutched onto the rope with both hands and held on tight as it unravelled a number of feet before it pulled tight.

The waves lapped at Joe's face as he held on. His arms were burning. As the dinghy travelled away from the beach, he realised what he had got himself into.

If he were to let go now, he would be all alone in the middle of the cove. And, with exhaustion almost upon him, there would be no chance of him being able to swim back to the beach. This was a scary thought.

Joe didn't know how he managed to keep hanging on, minute after minute, but he did. He caught a glimpse of a big boat moored at the entrance of the cove and he knew that he was nearly at his destination. He was glad he had reached the vessel, though now the next part of his wild plan had to be put into action.

Waiting until the last possible minute, Joe let go of the rope as the dinghy came to a stop. He swam away and headed towards the stern of the boat. He was looking for the rope ladder that he had climbed the other time he was on the boat.

He was tired out and his swimming strokes were smaller than before, but he kept on going, knowing that there wasn't long to go now.

He reached the stern and stopped in amazement. No ladder could be seen. And, for that matter, no rowboat. Fear struck him. Where could it be? Surely the men hadn't pulled it up? Was his plan going to come undone now?

Joe glanced back at the dinghy and saw that it was nearly on the deck. A moment later, he heard a strange sound. He dog paddled while he waited to see what it was and realised, as a metal object came out of the water, that it was the anchor being pulled up.

Joe's heart froze in fear. He had been fairly optimistic about the plan when he started, but now, with the vessel getting ready to set sail and no rope ladder, he would be left all alone in the choppy and wild waters. And, with his arms and legs almost at the point of exhaustion, there was no way that he would be able to swim even a quarter of the way to the shore.

With a sick feeling, Joe realised it was all over. He had come so close to saving those he loved the most, but now he was going to drown. And it would all be for nothing.

Chapter 24: Bound For France

Joe frowned as something occurred to him. He swam around the stern to the other side and smiled. In front of him lay the rope ladder. The men hadn't pulled it up at all! He had been looking on the wrong side.

He quickly swam over to it and climbed up. He was just in time. A moment later, the boat was underway, slowly chugging away from the coast.

Once on deck, Joe paused. He could hear voices, but they were some distance away. Staying close to the railing, he walked along the deck. He passed several rooms and looked through the windows but learnt nothing of interest.

Joe continued towards the front of the vessel. He could hear voices as he approached the bridge and saw that Constable Howard was in the wheelhouse.

Suddenly, a nearby door opened and out stepped a crewmember. He entered the wheelhouse and began speaking to Constable Howard.

Not wanting to be seen, Joe decided to head back, having noted that the room from which the man had emerged was the radio room.

Joe headed to the middle of the boat and saw a hatch which, he presumed, would lead to the cabins below deck. He quietly opened it and listened. There were faint voices. He hurried down the stairs, closing the hatch behind him.

Once in the hallway, he could hear voices coming from one direction. He couldn't risk going that way, so he headed the other way, stopping beside each cabin door to see if it was locked.

A minute later, he found a room that had a key in it. He turned the key and opened the door. Joe grinned as he saw the others tied up and sitting in the small cabin. They couldn't believe their eyes.

Sarah smiled. "Joe!"

Amy shook her head, stunned. "Golly, how did you get here?"

Joe smiled as he closed the door. "It wasn't easy."

Will grinned from ear to ear. "You're the best."

Mr Spencer was also smiling. "I don't know how you did it, Joe, but well done. Now untie us and let's see if we can get off this boat."

Joe untied Mr Spencer. Once he was free, the two of them went to work on the others. Just as the last person was freed, footsteps sounded nearby.

"Quiet!" Mr Spencer said.

They waited in silence as the footsteps got closer and closer. To Joe's dismay, they stopped directly outside the door. He then heard a click.

Mr Spencer rushed forward and reached out for the door handle, but it was too late. He slumped and turned around. "It's locked."

Joe slammed his fist upon the bed, angry. "I should have taken the key out."

Mr Spencer shook his head as he sat down on the bed. "The man must have decided to check the door and found that it was unlocked. So, even if you had taken the key, I'm sure he would have noticed and come in. But at least we're untied now."

"But what good is that if we can't escape?" Sarah exclaimed.

"I should have just used the radio to call for help," Joe said.

"The radio?" Mr Spencer asked.

"Yes, I saw it on the way here," Joe replied.

Mr Spencer smiled. "We can use it to contact Inspector Price. Once he knows we're heading to Toulville, he'll contact his French counterpart. Then, as we enter the harbour, the police will surround us."

"But how do we get to the radio?" Amy asked.

Mr Spencer's smile softened. "Well, I haven't got an answer to that at the moment."

Amy stood up and walked over to the small porthole. "If only this porthole wasn't so dirty. Then at least we could see out."

“Hey! That’s how we can escape.” Will hurried over to where Amy was and looked through the porthole that she had just opened. He glanced up and saw that a rope ladder, the same one that Joe climbed up, was nearby. It was perfect. Well, nearly perfect.

Will turned to the others. “One of us can go through the porthole, use the ladder to climb up onto the deck, and radio for help.”

Mr Spencer quickly stood up. “That’s a brilliant idea. Why didn’t one of us think of it sooner?” He strode towards the porthole, glanced out, and saw the ladder. He tried putting his arms out and reaching for it, but it was no use. His size prevented him from leaning out far enough. “I’m afraid I can’t go. It will have to be someone smaller.”

“I’ll try.” Will walked over and tried. He was okay with putting his head out, but when the others took hold of his legs and pushed him out in an effort to reach out and grab onto the rope ladder, his hips couldn’t fit through the hole.

They pulled Will back in and Joe tried. But he also failed. Amy was the next to try and she was nearly successful, but not quite. The others pulled her back and Sarah tried.

With Mr Spencer holding her legs, she reached out for the ladder. With each passing moment, she got closer. Then, just like that, her waist was through. Because of this, she was able to reach out and touch the ladder with her fingers.

Mr Spencer brought Sarah back inside and closed the porthole. Everyone was silent for a moment as they digested what this meant.

Will had been the one to think of this plan, but even he wasn’t too keen on Sarah attempting it. He voiced his opinion to the others. “I think we should think of another plan.”

Mr Spencer agreed. “It’s too risky.”

“Why? Because I’m a girl?” Sarah said. “I can do almost anything—”

“You’re only eight years old,” Joe interrupted. “You’re just a baby.”

Sarah shook her head. “Just because I’m eight doesn’t mean I can’t do the same things as you.”

Mr Spencer looked at Sarah. “You were just able to touch the ladder that time. And that isn’t good enough. Once I let go, you will be all on your own. Which means if you can’t hold onto the ladder, you’ll fall into the sea.”

Joe glanced around the cabin. His eyes came to rest upon the rope that the others had been tied up with. He walked over and picked it up. Holding a piece, he turned to Mr Spencer. “If we were to tie these together, and then tie one end to Sarah, it wouldn’t be so dangerous.”

Mr Spencer smiled. “That’s an excellent idea. Then if she falls, we’ll be able to pull her back in.”

Joe gave the rope to Mr Spencer and reached for the other pieces. With the others watching on, Mr Spencer tied the small pieces of rope together. He then pulled on it. Satisfied that it would hold, he tied one end around Sarah’s waist.

Suddenly, the boat pitched to one side. Everyone reached out and grabbed onto something as all loose objects tumbled to one side.

“What was that?” Joe asked, surprised.

Mr Spencer got to his feet and made his way to the porthole. He frowned. The others crowded around. As far as the eye could see, a black mass of angry clouds hung over the sky. Rain thundered down and pelted onto the side of the boat. The wind whipped at Mr Spencer’s hair.

Mr Spencer looked towards the others. “We’ll have to delay the escape. With the rain, that ladder will be wet and slippery. It was going to be tough before, but it will be impossible now.”

“I can still do it,” Sarah said, determined. “What if the storm lasts till we get to France?”

“Well, we could—” Mr Spencer replied.

“Just let me try,” Sarah interrupted. “I know I can do it.”

Mr Spencer looked to the others. “What do you think?”

“Sarah’s right,” Will said. “The storm could go on for hours.”

“And we do have the rope,” Amy pointed out.

“Okay,” Mr Spencer said. “Now, for this to work, after I grab onto Sarah’s legs, I will need someone to hold onto the rope. Sarah will need every inch she can get, so I will be leaning out as much as I can. And I can’t do two things at once.”

“You can count on us.” Joe looked towards Sarah and quickly explained where the radio room was.

As he did so, Mr Spencer caught sight of a pencil and some paper. Using the pencil, he drew something. He then looked towards Sarah as Joe finished speaking. "I'm drawing you a diagram of the radio. I will circle the switches that you will need to turn on. You've seen a radio before, haven't you?"

Sarah nodded. "Yes. My uncle has one."

"Good," Mr Spencer said. "Now, after you have done all that, repeat the phrase mayday and keep switching the frequency until someone answers. Once they do, tell them to contact the police and tell them that the men will be landing at Toulville. You got that?"

Sarah nodded. "Then what?"

"Turn the radio off and hide somewhere until the police come," Mr Spencer said.

"Why can't she come back here and let us out?" Amy asked.

"Because it's vital that the men think that we're locked up here," Mr Spencer replied. "If they think that the police are waiting for them at Toulville, they will simply go to another port." He finished drawing and handed the piece of paper to Sarah. He then walked over to the porthole and opened it again.

The storm was still as fierce as before, but at least this would cover up the noise of Sarah moving about on deck. With the rope around her waist, Sarah started to edge out through the porthole. Mr Spencer grabbed onto her legs while the others held onto the rope.

The rain lashed at Sarah's face, but this didn't affect her one bit. She had a job to do, and she was determined to do it. She got closer and closer to the ladder as Mr Spencer leaned farther out.

She managed to touch it with her hand and tried to pull it towards her so she could place both hands on it. The ladder inched closer and closer. Suddenly, the rope started to come apart.

Chapter 25: One Last Chance

“I’m bringing you back,” Mr Spencer yelled.

“No!” Sarah reached out and grabbed the ladder firmly with one hand. She kicked her feet, forcing Mr Spencer to let go. He watched in horror as Sarah hung onto the ladder with one hand. She then reached out with her other hand and grabbed the ladder tightly. He sighed with relief. It looked as though things were going to be okay.

Sarah gave a slight smile as she climbed up the slippery ladder. Things had been touch and go for a few moments, but now she was fine.

Reaching the deck, she brushed her wet hair out of her face and looked around. It was hard to see with the rain lashing everywhere, but at least she knew the direction of the radio room.

She hung onto the railing as the boat pitched to and fro and the wind blew at her hair. The storm hadn’t subsided at all and was still fierce, but at least none of the crewmembers would be out in this wild weather.

After reaching the bridge, she could just make out the radio room and the wheelhouse. Both of the doors were shut, so she didn’t know if there was anyone inside. Just as she was about to head towards them, the door to the radio room opened and a crewmember walked out. He hurriedly went into the wheelhouse.

Now was her chance. She didn’t know how long he would be away for, but with her fingers getting colder with every passing second, she had to take the risk.

Sarah hurried to the door and tried to open it. It was hard work because of the wind blowing against it, but she finally managed to open the door. After entering, the wind slammed the door shut. She sat down at the desk where the radio was.

She took out the diagram that Mr Spencer had given her, which luckily hadn’t got wet, and switched on the dials. After putting the earpiece on, she started saying mayday repeatedly. No one answered. She switched the frequency and tried again. No luck. She repeated this process for roughly two minutes before someone answered.

“Hello? Is anyone there?” the man said.

Sarah’s heart leapt for joy. “I need you to contact the police. Crooks are landing at Toulville—”

“Hold on there a moment, young girl,” the man interrupted. “This isn’t a joke, is it?”

“No. You’ve got to believe me. My friends and I are being held captive aboard a fishing boat bound for France.” Sarah pleaded with the man. “Please contact Inspector Price.”

“Inspector who?” the man repeated as static filled the air.

“Inspector Price!” Sarah shouted. “He lives in Edgeworth. Just tell him that Mr Spencer says that the men that he’s searching for will be landing at Toulville in a short while.”

“You sure this isn’t a joke?” the man said. “It’s after midnight here and I don’t want—”

“Just do it!” Sarah interrupted. “I need the police...” She paused as she heard voices. She then saw the door handle turn. Her heart caught in her throat. She froze with fear as the door opened.

A voice called out and the door half shut. As the crewmember began talking with another fellow, Sarah whipped off the headphones and turned off the radio. As the two men continued talking, she searched desperately for a way out.

But there was none. The room was small and only contained a desk, radio, and a small bunk bed. She rushed over to the bed and tried to see if she could fit underneath it. But she couldn’t.

As the men finished talking, Sarah rushed towards the only other place that she could think of. The desk was quite large and, maybe, just maybe, if she pressed herself up against the wall, the man wouldn’t notice her. She crawled underneath just as the door opened and the man entered.

The man made his way to the desk, pulled the chair out, and sat down. He was so close that if Sarah reached her hands out, she would have been able to touch the man’s legs.

Sarah stayed as quiet as a mouse. She was frightened beyond belief. She knew that if she was discovered in the radio room, Constable Howard would no longer head to Toulville and the police might never catch them.

The fate of everyone rested upon Sarah's shoulders. She could either become a hero and be the one who caught the crooks or be the one who helped them escape. She closed her eyes as the man fiddled with the controls of the radio and, for a moment or two, she wondered if he would notice that the frequency was different. But he didn't.

Sarah tuned out as the man began speaking to someone. But, as she heard the other person talking, her eyes shot wide open. She listened intently. She wasn't interested in the conversation, which appeared to be about the weather, she was only interested in the voice of the other person.

She was sure that she had heard the cockney accent before. But it couldn't be someone who was on the boat, and yet it had to be a crook. Sarah frowned. It didn't make sense why someone would stay behind.

The man turned off the radio and headed over to the small bed. Sarah heard the bed creak as the man lay down.

Sarah attempted to lie down, but it was difficult, not to mention uncomfortable. Instead, she stayed where she was. There was no way she could try to leave the room while the man was still there.

Resigned to the fact that it was going to be a long few hours, she stretched out as best as she could. She hoped that when the vessel entered the harbour at Toulville, the police would be waiting, but there was no guarantee that the fellow she had spoken to had taken her seriously. And, even if he had, it was after midnight so it could be any number of hours before Inspector Price heard the news. Had she taken the risk all for nothing? Would she ever see her parents again? Or would she and the others be a prisoner forever?



Down below in the small cabin, the others rested. No one spoke because there simply wasn't anything to say.

Joe gazed out of the small porthole and watched as the storm died down. He had no idea if Sarah had managed to make contact with the police, but he assumed that she hadn't been captured. If she had, the men would have brought her back to the cabin, which they hadn't.

Time slowly passed. As the lights of the coast came into view, Joe had no idea what was going to happen next. He glanced towards Mr Spencer. "Do you think she made it?"

Mr Spencer grinned. "Of course she did. I bet you that right now there are several police boats waiting for us."

"Do you really believe that?" Amy asked, gazing earnestly at him.

"Well, until we know for certain, why not be optimistic?" Mr Spencer replied. "Isn't that better than expecting the worst?"

"But what if the police don't make it in time?" Will said.

Mr Spencer sat down next to his son and tousled his red hair. "When the doctors told me that there was nothing that they could do to save your mother, I didn't give up hope."

"Why not?" Will questioned. "If the doctors—"

"Hope was the only thing that I had left," Mr Spencer interrupted. "Though your mother did sadly pass away, that hope helped me through the tough times. No one can have too much hope. Anything is possible anytime, anywhere."

"So what you're saying is that we should never give up hope, right?" Joe asked.

Mr Spencer nodded. "Life is tough, and I'm not just talking about this situation. If you always have hope that things will eventually turn out for the better, I believe that's the best way to go through life."

Amy went over to the porthole and glanced out. "We're entering the harbour."

Everyone rushed over and looked out. Apart from distant lights on the shore, nothing could be seen. They waited anxiously as the boat headed towards Toulville, slowing down as it approached a pier. Soon afterwards, the vessel stopped and the anchor was thrown overboard.

Joe couldn't stand the suspense any longer. "Sarah mustn't have been able to get..." He paused as the silence was suddenly shattered.

Chapter 26: The End Of The Adventure

Lights blazed and sirens sounded. A big commotion broke out on the upper deck and they could hear stern voices ordering the crooks to stay where they were.

As Amy glanced out of the porthole, she saw a French police boat pull up beside them.

Mr Spencer grinned. "I told you things would be all right."

The others smiled as they eagerly banged on the door and yelled out. "Hello! We're locked in here!"

They waited for what seemed like ages before the door was pushed open and a French police officer smiled at them. But before he could say anything, someone rushed past him. It was Sarah!

Chatting eagerly to one another, the group made their way upstairs to the bridge.

There they found themselves in the presence of a jolly looking French police officer. "Bonjour!" he said, with a strong French accent. "I'm Inspector Dupont."

Mr Spencer thrust his hand out and warmly shook the officer's hand. "I'm Arthur Spencer. This is my son Will, and the others are his friends Joe, Amy, and Sarah."

Inspector Dupont looked up from a piece of paper that he was holding in his hand. "You're a long way from Smugglers Cove."

Mr Spencer smiled. "You already knew who we were, didn't you?"

Inspector Dupont smiled. "I just wanted to confirm who you were. Inspector Price told me—"

"You spoke to the inspector?" Mr Spencer interrupted.

"How did you think this operation came about?" Inspector Dupont glanced over at the crooks that were being lined up on the nearby pier. "I suspected that something fishy was going on in these parts, but could never put my finger on what it was. But, thanks to you, these criminals will soon be behind bars."

Mr Spencer looked at the children. "Thank them. Especially Sarah. She's the one who made the radio call."

The inspector shook each child's hand. He stopped in front of Sarah. "Great job." He glanced at the whole group of them. "I expect you want to get back to England."

Mr Spencer nodded. "It's been a long couple of hours, so the sooner I can lie down on a nice comfortable bed the better."

"Well, the authorities in England will want to take charge of these criminals, so once we process them here, we will send them back," Inspector Dupont said. "So, if you would like to have a rest at the station, you're more than welcome."

"Thanks, we will," Mr Spencer replied.



At around nine that morning, a French police boat entered the harbour of Smugglers Cove and pulled up alongside the pier.

As police officers transferred the crooks from the vessel to the waiting police cars, the children and Mr Spencer shook hands with the inspector before they walked down the gangplank.

They were met by Inspector Price and Sergeant Wilmore. The inspector smiled at everyone. "Good job. If it wasn't for you lot, we wouldn't have caught the men. And you did especially well, Sarah. I received your radio message just in time to contact Inspector Dupont."

Sarah smiled. "I was terrified, but it was worth it to see the crooks caught."

"Are you sure you've captured all of them?" Joe asked.

Inspector Price nodded. "We've captured six men, which includes the five we previously caught as well as Constable Howard."

As the constable was led past, he glared at Joe. "How did you know it was me?"

Joe grinned. "Your cough."

Constable Howard frowned. "My cough?"

Joe smiled. "Yes. It was so distinct that day at Chandler Manor that it was impressed in my memory. So, when you coughed in the cave, it got me thinking. And when I passed the tunnel and you stopped beside it, it made me realise that you had been in the cave before."

The constable growled as he was led away. Inspector Price looked towards the children. "I'll make sure he's locked up for a long, long time." He glanced at his watch. "I'd better get going. I'll come by Rose Cottage next week to let you know how things turn out." He turned and walked away.

As Mr Spencer's stomach rumbled, he grimly smiled. "I don't know about you, but I'm starving. Who feels like going to Darby's for something to eat?"

Joe smiled. "Yes, please."

As the others confirmed that they wanted to go as well, Mr Spencer walked down the pier. Everyone except Sarah followed.

Joe glanced back. "Are you coming?"

Sarah frowned. "I don't think all the crooks have been caught."

"What?" Joe said. "But you heard what the police officer—"

"He was wrong," Sarah interrupted. "I'm sure of it. And, if we don't act soon, he's going to get away."



As Will finished off his third scone and quenched his thirst with a glass of lemonade, he glanced around the table and saw that everyone else was enjoying the food as much as he was. At least, everyone who was there.

The bell rang as the door opened and in came Joe. "Hope you left some food for me." He hurried over to the table and piled two scones, a jam tart and a slice of chocolate cake on his plate.

"Where did you suddenly disappear to?" Amy asked.

"One moment you were right behind us and the next moment you had disappeared," Will said. "Sarah told us you were going to talk to someone, but she didn't know who."

"Who did you see?" Amy asked.

"Let the boy eat first," Mr Spencer said as he saw that Joe had his mouth full.

The others resumed eating. Ten minutes later, all the food was gone and everyone was full.

Mr Spencer leaned back in his chair and rubbed his stomach. "That was filling."

"I'm stuffed," Joe said. "I shouldn't have eaten so much."

Amy glanced at him. "Stuffed? Really? Can it be true?"

Joe nodded. "Yes."

"So you're human after all," Will said, smiling as he reached for the lemonade and gulped it down. He placed the glass back on the table just as the bell rang and the door opened.

In walked Inspector Price and the sergeant. As they spotted the children, they walked over to them and pulled up two chairs.

Mr Spencer smiled. "I didn't know you ate here."

"I don't usually, but Joe asked me to meet him here," Inspector Price replied.

Will looked at Joe, puzzled. "You did?"

Joe glanced at the inspector. "Is everything in place?" As Inspector Price nodded, he glanced around at the others. "While we were making our way back to Smugglers Cove, something was bugging me. And, when Sarah talked to me on the pier, everything made sense."

"What made sense?" Amy asked.

Joe looked at Mr Spencer. "Just before you got knocked out at Chandler Manor, you saw someone wearing a police uniform helping the crooks escape from the locked van. We thought that Constable Howard could have somehow sneaked back through the tunnels and helped them, but that didn't happen."

"How do you know?" Sergeant Wilmore asked.

"I just spoke to the two officers who were on duty then and they told me that the constable was within sight of them at all times," Joe said.

"Maybe the crooks escaped by themselves," Will suggested. "Either way, does it really matter now that we have caught all the crooks?"

“But what about the person wearing the police uniform?” Joe questioned. “How do we know that he—”

“Maybe one of the men put it on to disguise himself,” Sergeant Wilmore interrupted. “But, as Will said, we have caught all the criminals.”

“How do you know we did?” Joe reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper. “I just had a word with Constable Howard and he told me that someone else was paying him to pretend to be the boss.”

Intrigued, Will leaned forward in earnest. “Did he know who?”

Joe placed the paper down in front of him. “This has one name on it. Constable Howard wrote it down for me when I asked him to name the person who was the actual boss.”

Everyone reached for the paper, but Inspector Price got to it first. He opened it up and glanced at it. He folded it back up and offered it to the sergeant. “Care to take a look?”

Sergeant Wilmore stared at the piece of paper and then took it. He gingerly opened it and then, seeing what was written, leapt up and rushed to the door. But he didn’t get far. There were two police officers standing outside the cafe and they took him down.

As the officers led him away, Inspector Price looked at the twelve year old boy. “Good job, Joe.”

Amy grabbed the piece of paper and opened it. It had two words on it: Sergeant Wilmore. She glanced over at Joe. “This is your writing.”

Joe nodded. “Yes.”

Sarah frowned. “But you said Constable Howard—”

“I lied,” Joe interrupted. “He didn’t confess, but I took a gamble that the sergeant wouldn’t know what the constable’s handwriting looked like, so I wrote the name myself.”

“But how did you know it was him?” Will asked.

Joe looked at Sarah. “I have Sarah to thank for that. Tell the others what you told me.”

“Well, when I was on the boat, the radio man contacted someone, and when I heard the person reply, they spoke with a thick cockney accent,” Sarah explained. “And, as I had only come in contact with one person who had this kind of accent, I straight away thought of the sergeant.”

Joe nodded. “When Sarah told me about the cockney accent, I realised we hadn’t found out how those crooks escaped from the locked van in the driveway of Chandler Manor. And, having the sergeant as one of the crooks explained how that could have occurred.”

“But why would he do it?” Amy asked.

“In the last few months I’ve heard rumours he had money problems, but I didn’t think anything of it, but maybe it was true,” the inspector replied. “Anyway, at least he’s caught now. Though, if Joe hadn’t had a private talk with me beforehand, I would have been none the wiser.” He looked at the young boy. “If you feel like joining the police force when you grow up, give me a call and I’ll put in a good word for you.”

Joe smiled as he glanced across at Will and the girls. “Thanks, but it was a team effort.”

Inspector Price stood up. “Well, thanks once again. Now I need to see that the men are safely taken to Edgeworth.”

As the police officer left the table, Mr Spencer glanced at the others. “I’d better get going as well. My publisher isn’t going to be too happy if I don’t deliver the first draft of my book on time.” He stood up, paid the bill, and headed out.

Joe twirled his glass around on the table. “I can’t believe it’s all over.”

Amy nodded. “It was scary, but also fun.”

“Now that it’s over, it doesn’t seem so scary,” Sarah said. “But when we were trapped on that boat heading to France, I thought it was all over.”

“Well, that adventure’s over, but there’s still plenty of exciting stuff to do in Smugglers Cove,” Will said.

“Like what?” Joe asked, intrigued.

“Well, there’s Brackness Castle—” Will replied.

“A castle?” Joe interrupted. “That sounds exciting. When can we go and explore it?”

Will laughed. “You really do like exploring, don’t you?”

“Of course.” Joe grinned. “Who doesn’t?”

“Well, if you want, we could go tomorrow,” Will said.

Joe grinned from ear to ear. “Good. Let’s do it. This has already been the most exciting summer holiday ever, but if we could have one more adventure, it would be perfect.”

Amy smiled. “Maybe we’ll have it at Brackness Castle.”

Joe nodded. “Hopefully. I guess we’ll just have to wait and see.”

The End

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The Mystery of Adventure Island

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Chapter 1: A New Adventure

After gazing through the binoculars for several minutes, twelve-year-old Joe Mitchell turned to his two sisters who were sitting beside him on the cliff. "We should ask Will if he knows anyone who can take us there. It looks like a great camping spot."

Amy, the eldest of the two girls, swept back her long, brown hair. "But what would we do if we went there?"

Joe looked back at Lighthouse Island which was situated just off the coast. Apart from a lighthouse, there was nothing on it except a few bushes and trees. "I know it might not look too exciting, but I bet there are tons of different sea birds there." He glanced at Sarah, the youngest of the three siblings. "What do you think?"

“I think it would be fun,” Sarah said, her green eyes shining. “It may not be as much fun as exploring the tunnels underneath Chandler Manor or Brackness Castle—”

“I didn’t think you liked those places,” Amy interrupted. “Last week, after we solved the mystery of the missing gnomes, you said—”

“I know what I said, but that was then and this is now,” Sarah interrupted.

Joe smiled. “You know, I never thought that Smugglers Cove could be so much fun, especially since it’s smaller than Danfield. I like living close to London, but we seem to be having more adventures here than we ever had at home.”

“I wish we could stay forever,” Amy said. “But in just over two weeks, we’ll be back at St. Mary’s.” She stood up. “Let’s go and talk to Will about going camping.”

Climbing onto their bicycles, the children pedalled along the cliff path. They were soon in the main street of the small seaside village of Smugglers Cove. Waving as they passed Constable Biggens, they rode past the shops and houses, stopping when they arrived at a medium sized house.

Joe saw that their red haired friend was in the front garden cleaning his bicycle. “Hello, Will!”

Will glanced up and gave a cheery smile. “Hi.”

“Do you know of any good places to go camping?” Amy asked.

Will grinned. “Getting bored, are we?”

“How did you guess?” Joe questioned.

“Well, when I first came here from London just after the war ended, I was bored at first,” Will replied. “Of course, you can’t say it’s been too dull for you. You’ve had three adventures in four weeks.”

“I know,” Joe said. “I guess we’re just lucky. Anyway, I was wondering about Lighthouse Island. Do you know if there are many birds there?”

Will thought. “I don’t think there are, but I haven’t actually been there. The lighthouse was closed a number of years ago, so there hasn’t been a reason for anyone to go there. Why?”

“I want to see some birds, and it would be fun camping by ourselves,” Joe replied.

“We would need a boat,” Sarah piped up.

“Well, we’d only need a rowing boat to go to Lighthouse Island, so I’m sure I could find someone to loan us one.” Will dipped his rag into a bucket of water and gave his bicycle a rub. “I have some errands to run, so why don’t we meet at the beach in three hours and discuss it then?”

“Sounds good,” Joe replied.



The afternoon sun shone down on the three children as they raced down the well-worn path that led to the sandy beach. After splashing in the shallow water, they decided to make a sandcastle. They didn’t have any buckets to help them move the sand, but they still managed to make a pretty decent castle.

As they waited for the tide to come in, Sarah spotted Will standing up on the cliff path.

Will waved. “Come up here!”

“I wonder why he wants us up there,” Amy said.

“Well, there’s only one way to find out.” Joe raced across the sand with the girls in hot pursuit. Soon, the three had joined Will on the cliff top.

“What’s up?” Amy asked.

“Follow me. I’ve got something to show you.” Will turned and walked away.

“What?” Joe asked, curious.

“You’ll see,” Will replied.

Joe and the girls followed their friend through the streets of Smugglers Cove. As they arrived at the small harbour, Will headed towards an old shed. He put his hand on the door handle. “I talked to my father and…” He paused and flung open the door.

Inside the shed was an assortment of tools and scrap metal and other useless junk, but it was what was in the middle that attracted everyone’s attention.

It was a sailboat. Joe’s eyes lit up. A real sailboat. Sure, it didn’t look like much, but as long as it could float, that was all that mattered. He touched it. “Is this for us to use?”

Will nodded. "My father talked to Quigley, an old fisherman who owns this boat, and he told me that if we wanted to spend some time fixing it up, we could take it out whenever we wanted."

"Does it float?" Sarah asked.

"Well, I can't see any holes in it, so it should." Will walked over and joined the others as they admired the craft. "I know it's pretty old, but it's a boat."

Amy touched the wood and realised that it was coated with a thin layer of dust. "Golly! This hasn't been used for ages."

"As long as it can take us to Lighthouse Island, that's all that matters." Joe turned around as a man suddenly entered the shed.

Will smiled. "Hello, Quigley. It's a fine boat."

With deep creases in his brown, weathered face and a white beard, Joe thought the fisherman looked very old. With the aid of a walking stick, he shuffled over to them. "She'll take you to Lighthouse Island and back again if you treat her right. She may not look like it, but she's been on many a trip, she has."

Quigley touched the woodwork of the boat with tenderness and closed his eyes. "I called her The Seven Seas. She went on many a grand adventure. Still can feel the wind whipping me face and hear the thunder breaking overhead when I sailed her to Adventure Island." He opened his eyes and grimly smiled. "Young then. Very young." He turned and looked at himself in a half-broken mirror. "Look at me now."

"Where's Adventure Island?" Sarah asked.

"Hmm? Up the coast," Quigley replied.

"I've never heard of such a place," Will stated.

Quigley gingerly sat down on a wooden crate. "It's there all right."

Joe frowned. "But none of the maps—"

"Adventure Island isn't what the maps called it," Quigley interrupted. "Why, back then I made up me own names for all the places I went. Even that castle up on yon hill. The Haunted Castle, I called it. Quite a sight."

"What about Adventure Island?" Joe asked. "Why did you call it that?"

Quigley smiled. "Can't you guess?"

"Because you had adventures?" Sarah asked.

Quigley nodded. "When I was a lad, I went there with me best mate for several summers. We would stay there for days on end and then me father, he was a fisherman you know, would pop by with his fishing boat and pick us up. We even built our own tree house."

"I wonder what our parents would say if we asked to go there," Joe said wistfully.

"I don't think they would let us," Amy said. "It must be ages up the coast."

"Well, it's quite a ways," Quigley said. "I used to live in Seacrest, so I not be sure how far it is from here."

"But we can still go to Lighthouse Island, right?" Sarah said.

"Yes." Joe looked at Quigley. "Do you mind if we use the tools in here to fix up the sailboat?"

"Go right ahead. Those tools have been there for many a year. There should also be some spare paint lying around." Quigley stood up. "I best be getting along." He looked at Will. "Oh, and if you be wanting me to teach you how to sail—"

"Yes, please!" the children yelled excitedly.

Quigley smiled. "I'll be seeing you around then." He turned and limped out of the shed.

Joe glanced at the others. "Do you think our parents will let us go to Lighthouse Island?"

Will nodded. "Dad will let me. After all, I've known how to swim since I was five, and the island isn't that far away."

"When can we go?" Joe asked.

"It will take a day or two to fix the boat up, and it would be good to let Quigley teach us the ropes so that we're fully prepared," Will replied. "So, we should be ready by the weekend."



The next day, the children arrived bright and early at the boat shed. To their joy, their parents had agreed to let them go to Lighthouse Island, but only if Quigley showed them how to sail the boat. Even

though the island was nearby, anything could go wrong and, if wild weather should hit, they wanted everyone to be prepared.

The first job involved cleaning the boat. The children knew it would be dirty work, so they had worn some old clothes. Even though the boat was on a trolley with wheels, it was still hard to move. But, with the help of a fisherman, the children pulled the boat out of the shed and onto the pavement.

With buckets full of water, they began cleaning it. The old paint was partially peeling, so they needed to remove that as well. The wood needed to be nice and smooth before they put the new coat of paint on, otherwise the new paint would peel off.

It took some time, but as the hours passed, the boat began to look much improved. “Now we just need to paint her.” Joe stepped back and admired his handiwork. He looked towards the paint tin that they had found. “There should be enough, but we should just paint the outside first, just in case.”

“We should see if Quigley has any oars,” Amy said.

“Why would we need oars?” Joe asked. “If we have the sail—”

“Amy’s right,” Will interrupted. “A sail is good, but what happens if there’s no wind? Hopefully we won’t need to use the oars, but we should have them just in case.”

Will climbed into the sailboat and walked to the back where the tiller was and tested it. “It seems to work fine, but we won’t know until we get it into the water.”

Amy climbed aboard and peered into the little cabin. The room was pretty small and, as she stepped in, she realised that she could just stand up in it. She turned and walked back to the others. “We’ll be able to store the tent and other things in there if we go camping.”

Will looked up at the blue sky and noticed it was perfect weather for painting since there weren’t any clouds. “With the weather how it is, I say we paint now.”

Joe glanced at his watch. “Why don’t we go home, grab a sandwich, and return here in half an hour? We can also bring any paint brushes that we find.”



As the three children raced up the path of Rose Cottage, they saw their mother hanging up washing on the clothes line.

“Did you get hungry?” Mrs Mitchell asked.

Joe nodded. “We came home to get something to eat, and then we’re going to start painting the boat. But we only have one paintbrush, so we were wondering if you knew where we could get some more.”

“Well, Mrs Thompson, the old lady who owns this cottage, did say on the phone that there was some paint in the garden shed and that we could use it if we wanted to,” Mrs Mitchell said. “I imagine that there would be some brushes too.”

“Thanks!” Amy yelled, rushing off towards the shed. Their mother was right. In the far corner of the small building, they found some paint and brushes.

Joe picked up four paintbrushes. “We may only need three, but I’ll take four just in case.”

Amy grabbed two empty tins. “If we put some paint in these, we can each have our own container of paint.”

“Good idea. Now, what else do we need?” Joe said.

“I’ll take these rags,” Sarah said.

Joe nodded. “Okay, well, that should be all. Let’s take these things to the path and leave them there while we eat some lunch.”

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