

**THE THREE INVESTIGATORS**

**IN**

**THE MYSTERY**

**OF THE**

**CHESS**

**PIECES**

# **THE MYSTERY OF THE CHESS PIECES**

**BY**

**MANUEL ORTUÑO**

**THE AUTHOR HAS APPROVED THIS TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH BY KENT WOODWORTH AND  
WISHES TO THANK HIM FOR ALL HIS HELP**

For Carlos, Víctor and Carlos

TO BEGIN WITH...

This story is my personal tribute to Robert Arthur, the original author/creator of The Three Investigators. My intention in writing it was to not necessarily create something really original, but to recreate, by means of a convenient plot, the environment, the atmosphere and the characters that will surely sound familiar to all those who consider themselves true fans of the three boys from Rocky Beach.

Any reader who wishes to send me his/her opinion or review about this story may contact me by sending an email to [huganay@hotmail.com](mailto:huganay@hotmail.com).

As the author of the following story, I declare that it has been conceived and written for entertainment purposes only, that no income or economic benefits are expected by me (and even less, I hope, by third parties), and that the only right I reserve for myself is the authorship of the story itself.

As far as I know, The Three Investigators is a registered trademark owned and copyrighted by Random House, Elizabeth Arthur and Robert Andrew Arthur.

The author

## A NOTE FOR THE TRUE FANS

The following story takes place right after the mystery #13 solved by The Three Investigators, whose title is *The Secret of the Crooked Cat*. Thus, this story can be considered as mystery #13 and a half.

The author

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1 - THE CHESS SET APPEARS .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2 - A MYSTERIOUS LETTER .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3 - DEDUCTIONS .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4 - A CLIENT APPEARS .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5 - THE ENIGMATIC MISS SCHOENBERG.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6 - TWO DUBIOUS VISITORS .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7 - A VISIT FROM CHIEF REYNOLDS.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>CHAPTER 8 - BACK TO THE WRITER'S HOUSE.....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>CHAPTER 9 - CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>CHAPTER 10 - A SCUFFLE IN THE DARK .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>CHAPTER 11 - FOLLOWING A NEW LEAD .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>CHAPTER 12 - THE MYSTERIOUS TITLE.....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>CHAPTER 13 - STUMPED .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>CHAPTER 14 - AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY .....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>CHAPTER 15 - AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>CHAPTER 16 - IN THE PARK AT NIGHT .....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>CHAPTER 17 - RESOLVING THE MESSAGE .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>CHAPTER 18 - A FANTASTIC STORY .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>CHAPTER 19 - INTO ENEMY HANDS .....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>CHAPTER 20 - THIEF ON THE RUN .....</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>CHAPTER 21 - A VISIT TO ALFRED HITCHCOCK .....</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>CHAPTER 22 - THE FINAL MOVE .....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>EPILOGUE.....</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>A FINAL NOTE FROM BOB ANDREWS .....</b>	<b>170</b>

# A MYSTERIOUS INTRODUCTION

Welcome, mystery lovers, to a new adventure of those three sagacious young men who call themselves The Three Investigators. Although it has been strongly recommended in the past that any veteran reader skip the introductory lines with which each case opened, I must note an exception that, at least on this occasion, one should read this presentation. 'Why?' some (if not all) of you may ask. Faced with this question, my answer is that the reasons for such a recommendation cannot be disclosed at the moment, but I give you my word that they will be in due time.

Be that as it may, I will tell you that one of the reasons why you should read these lines is the fact that the writer is not, as usual, Mr. Alfred Hitchcock, but a humble servant who, at least for now, is forced to leave his identity mired in anonymity.

As you all know, the great film director passed away long ago. However, he was still alive at the time this story took place. That is why his presence should not be a surprise in *The Mystery of the Chess Pieces*. Why it has had to wait until now for this story to be published is something that will be revealed in the story itself. Nevertheless, I assure you that Mr. Hitchcock would have wished with all his might to have the opportunity to present such an intricate and mysterious case as we have here. Throughout these pages, you will encounter the search for a valuable object that strives to remain hidden, coded messages, dangerous ruffians, great intrigue, and a mysterious chess...

But no, I must speak no more of the mystery that is about to begin. Instead, let me clarify, for those who are not yet familiar with the main characters of this story, that The Three Investigators are Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews.

Jupiter, the brains of the trio, is a stout boy according to his friends and fat according to his enemies. He is capable of adopting the appearance of a complete idiot when in fact he possesses a cunning and penetrating intellect. Orphaned at an early age, he lives with his aunt and uncle, Mathilda and Titus, and he helps them run their business, an impressive junkyard called The Jones Salvage Yard, which is probably the most renowned throughout all of southern California.

Pete, the athletic one of the group, is tall and has brown hair. Although he sometimes feels a strong aversion to being involved in hazardous situations, he has no qualms when it comes to helping his friends or becoming Jupiter's right hand when he has to face any investigation that requires physical prowess.

Bob, meanwhile, is blond, studious, and the youngest of the group. He is also in charge of taking notes and keeping records during the boys' investigations. In addition, he is responsible for researching any and all information that may be useful when solving a mystery, which is benefited by his part time employment at the public library.

The three live in Rocky Beach, a small coastal town in southern California surrounded by numerous hills and not far from Hollywood. Their headquarters is in an abandoned trailer that, completely covered by assorted junk and thus hidden from the eyes of others, occupies one corner of the Jones Salvage Yard.

Now that the above has been said, let's move on to what really matters. Because, my young friends, a mysterious chess set is about to make its appearance...

Signed,

Your humble and (for the moment) anonymous servant

## **CHAPTER 1**

# **THE CHESS SET APPEARS**

One morning in mid-September, Jupiter Jones and his friend Pete Crenshaw were busy working together at the Jones Salvage Yard, the impressive junkyard owned by Jupiter's aunt and uncle. Although it wasn't a particularly hot day, the two boys' foreheads were beaded with perspiration due to the enormous task. They had been separating, sorting and moving all sorts of material from one corner of the yard to the next, under the attentive gaze of Mathilda Jones, Jupiter's aunt, who never stopped issuing orders and lecturing the boys about how carefully they should transport this merchandise or where they should deposit that item.

When, thanks to Aunt Mathilda's strict supervision, the enormous pile of junk was finally reduced to the last few items, Pete stood up and, taking a handkerchief from his pants pocket, wiped his forehead.

"Phew!" He sighed. "I'm looking forward to finishing. My bones feel like they've turned into melted wax. Good thing there isn't much left."

Aunt Mathilda, on hearing this, wrinkled her nose.

"Don't be too happy, Pete Crenshaw," she told the tall, brown-haired boy. "Titus will soon arrive with a new load. He left very early this morning for the business district in the company of Hans and Konrad and, judging by what time it is already, I don't think it will be long before he returns. You do know what it will mean when that happens, don't you?"

"Let me guess, Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter said, looking at the woman. "More work!"

Then, after exhaling heavily, he added plaintively, "Oh, come on, Aunt Mathilda. Pete and I have been working non-stop for almost two hours. We need a break or we'll be dead by lunchtime."

"You always have lunchtime on your mind," said Aunt Mathilda, while Pete, aware that his friend didn't like to joke about food or weight, suppressed a smile. "However, don't worry about that break you asked for, because you will have it," added the woman. "You only have to finish putting away what's left of that pile and you can rest until Titus arrives. So, the sooner you finish, the sooner you can enjoy some free time."

"Let's go. Let's get this over with," Pete said, giving Jupiter a pat on the back. "My muscles won't hurt much more from working another couple of minutes."

Clenching his teeth, he reached down and picked up a box full of gardening tools.

"Look at this, Mrs. Jones," he said. "A gardener's toolbox. They're in good condition. Where do I put them?"

Aunt Mathilda, after writing down the description of the article in a large inventory book, pointed to a corner of the yard.

"Put them there, next to those hoses and that box of pruning shears," she ordered.

Pete, obediently, took the box to where she indicated. Jupiter, meanwhile, reached for a pair of wooden folding chairs.

"Here's the last of it, Aunt Mathilda," he announced. "Two folding chairs. They'll need a coat of paint and a little oil."

"Well, you know how you can entertain yourself this afternoon," the woman said as she wrote in her notebook. "Jupiter, let them lean against the wall of the office."

"All right, Aunt Mathilda," said the boy. "Can we go and rest now?"

"Yes, but don't go too far," said Aunt Mathilda sternly, but then her expression softened as she added with a smile: "Pass the office and have a glass of fresh orange juice if you wish. I prepared it for you. You've worked hard and you deserve it."

"Oh! Thank you, Mrs. Jones!" exclaimed Pete. "That's just what I need. Are you coming, Jupe?"

"Sure!" replied his friend, winking at his aunt.

Although she made them sweat when she insisted on putting them to work, the woman possessed a heart of gold. Quickly, the boys headed to the office. Once they had quenched their thirst, the two of them retreated to a secluded corner of the junkyard where, some time ago, they had installed a workbench, a printing press, and various other accessories. This was Jupiter's workshop, where the boys could meet and enjoy a little privacy because the area was out of sight from the rest of the yard.

Once there, Pete panted.

"Phew! I thought we would never finish," he said, dropping onto a chair. "We'd better take some time to rest, Jupe. You heard your aunt. Your uncle Titus will be here soon."

"Mmmm," grunted Jupe, taking his seat in an old rocker. "This isn't my idea of making good use of our time. We are getting rusty."

"What do you mean?" Pete asked. "If you call this rusty, what term would you use to describe a double gym class session?"

Jupe grimaced.

"I mean, in our case, the balance between mental exercise and physical exercise lately is too dangerous for the latter. And we are investigators, remember."

Pete blinked.

"Speak plainly, Jupe. I'm too exhausted to get myself into complicated sentences," he complained.

"I mean during the last week we've done too much physical exercise and very little mental exercise. Since Andy and Carson's Carnival left Rocky Beach, we've only worked like mules. It's clear to me, we need a case."

"It's clear to me, my friend, what I really need is a good swim in the ocean to take advantage of the last days of summer," said Pete.

"Maybe you're right," Jupe agreed with a deep sigh. "A good swim in the ocean would relax us and leave us fully prepared to face any mystery that might cross our path. Maybe this afternoon..."

But he didn't finish the sentence, for just then the shrill sound of a loud horn interrupted him as the roar of an engine invaded the tranquility of the salvage yard.

"Oh, no!" Pete moaned, putting his hands to his head. "That's the big truck. Uncle Titus, Hans and Konrad just arrived. And you know what that means, Jupe. Goodbye, rest!"

With obvious reluctance, Jupe nodded and got to his feet. Pete mirrored his bleak expression. They hadn't yet taken a step when Aunt Mathilda's powerful voice shouted to them.

"Jupiter! Pete! Titus just arrived! Come here! You know what this means!" Resigned, the two boys trudged through the piles of junk and other scrap materials that hid Jupiter's workshop and shuffled uncomfortably to the office. The big truck had just stopped at the front entrance of the salvage yard. Titus Jones, a small but sturdy man with broad shoulders and a huge black mustache that hid nearly half his face, jumped out. Hans, one of the two Bavarian brothers who worked as helpers in the junkyard, followed. Konrad, Hans' brother, had turned off the vehicle's noisy engine and was still sitting at the wheel.

Seeing the boys, Titus Jones waved and winked.

"Hi, Jupe. What's up, Pete? What happened to you? You look exhausted," he told them as he approached.

"We've been working non-stop for hours, Mr. Jones," Pete said in a plaintive voice. "We had just sat down when you arrived."

"It's been a rough morning, Uncle Titus," Jupiter said with a half-smile.

Aunt Mathilda, who had gone into the office to retrieve her inventory book, went out into the junkyard again and approached her husband.

"Don't listen to these kids, Titus," the woman said. "They are always complaining. How was the trip?"

Uncle Titus hugged his wife and planted a huge kiss on her cheek.

"Very good, Mathilda," he said. "The salvage yard has acquired a nice collection of items from one of the best auctions to take place in the commercial district in the past year."

He turned to Hans and Konrad and winked at them. They, for their part, nodded and smiled at Aunt Mathilda and the boys.

"Oh, really?" said Aunt Mathilda. "In that case, why is the truck bed almost empty? Did you lose the merchandise while you were back on the freeway?"

It was true. Pete and Jupe, too tired, had not noticed that the truck was almost empty. Only a few pieces of used furniture and some small appliances appeared in the bed of the truck, which Konrad had just opened. Uncle Titus smiled gently.

"Calm down, my dear," he explained to his wife. "We haven't lost anything. It's just that we bought so much stuff that the auction staff will still need a few hours to pack everything and make it ready for transport. They will have it ready early this afternoon. So, after lunch we will have to go back to pick it up. What we brought in the truck are just a few things I bought from Baker, the downtown pawn shop. I got a great deal on some good merchandise, my dear, I assure you."

"All right," she agreed. "I hope you spent your money wisely, Titus Andronicus Jones. By all the saints!" she exclaimed with a smile. "You must be tired. Come to the office. I have a pitcher of orange juice waiting for you!"

"Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter said quickly.

"Yes?" said the woman.

"Do you want us to unload the truck now?" The boy asked. "There isn't much there, and maybe it would be better to unload it all at once this afternoon, when the rest of the stuff is here..."

"It's not up for discussion, Jupiter!" exclaimed his aunt. "There are only a few things, so it will take you even less time than expected. Come on! It won't take you ten minutes to empty the truck. Besides, you already had orange juice."

"Leave it, woman," Uncle Titus said with a smile as he slipped an arm around his wife's waist. "They have already worked hard. Look at them, they're sweating. Hans, Konrad and I will unload the truck as soon as we've had a glass of that delicious orange juice that only you know how to make."

Visibly flattered, Aunt Mathilda frowned and looked at her husband reproachfully. Then, however, she let out a breath and smiled.

Turning to the boys, she said to them, "It's okay. You are free for the moment. But try to be around early this afternoon, understand?"

With that, and without waiting for an answer, she started toward the office, closely followed by Hans and Konrad. Uncle Titus, smiling, approached the boys.

"You're lucky," he muttered as he pulled at his huge mustache.

"Thank you, Uncle Titus," said Jupiter. "Like I told you, it's been a rough morning. Too much physical exercise isn't good if it's not accompanied by some kind of mental training."

"You mean that club of yours?" The junkman asked.

Some time ago Jupiter and his friends had formed a club dedicated to solving riddles and puzzles. Uncle Titus had learned of the existence of this club, although he had no idea that this association he referred to had ended up becoming The Three Investigators, a company that had extended its horizons considerably in the resolution of mysteries and enigmas of all kinds.

"That's right, Mr. Jones," Pete said. "Jupe complains that we don't have anything at the moment to get our brains going. He fears that our mental machinery, as he likes to call it, is getting rusty and going to waste. But I've already told him that before anything else, I need to lie down and rest to recharge my batteries."

"So, you desire to exercise your gray matter, eh, Jupe?" said Uncle Titus, looking at his nephew. "Well, we'll figure something out. Sometimes it doesn't require great mysteries, but everyday solutions to remedy such situations."

Jupiter, blinking, was on his guard.

"What...? What do you mean, Uncle Titus?" He inquired.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he replied, laughing. "Go, go and rest for a while. I have a date with a glass of fresh orange juice. See you later."

After giving the boys a nod, Uncle Titus turned and walked to the office, cheerfully tugging at one end of his mustache. Once alone, Pete stretched.

"Free at last," he muttered. "Even if it's only until early this afternoon."

In mutual agreement and in a somewhat livelier mood because of the immediate rest that awaited them, the two boys returned to Jupiter's workshop and sat down again, but this time sitting where they could enjoy the warm rays of the southern California sun.

They sat there for about ten minutes and began to fall asleep when approaching footsteps caused them to open their eyes and blink in the morning sunlight. Jupe, putting his hand to his face like a visor, saw his uncle coming around one end of the huge pile of scrap that hid the workshop from the rest of the junkyard and approaching them with great strides. He carried a medium-sized cardboard box in his hands.

"I figured I'd find you here," the man said as he reached them.

"Hello again, Mr. Jones," Pete said. "Do you feel like sunbathing?"

"No, thank you, Pete," said Uncle Titus, smiling. "Mathilda wants the books to be reviewed, and she's decided that I should do it."

Pete and Jupe smiled. They knew Mrs. Jones well enough to know full well that it wasn't easy to oppose her designs more than once, and Uncle Titus had already used up his quota for the day by insisting that she leave the boys free for the rest of the morning.

"What do you have there, Uncle Titus?" Jupe asked, gesturing with his chin at the box that the junkman brought with him.

"Ah, this. You will see," said Uncle Titus, handing the box to Jupiter, who took it and placed it on his lap. "I was going to give it to you for your next birthday, but I couldn't help but think about what you said earlier regarding the scarcity of exercise you've lavished on your intellects lately. So, I've decided to give it to you right now. I hope you like it. Besides, since there are two of you, you can both use it at the same time."

Jupe looked at the inside of the box and raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"What is it?" Pete asked, intrigued, half sitting up in his chair.

"A chess set!" cried Jupe. "So, that was what you meant before when you said that sometimes the most everyday solutions may be the answer where there is a shortage of good mysteries."

"That's right, Jupiter," Uncle Titus agreed. "It is practically new and it's a real gem. As soon as I saw it, I thought you'd like to have it. So here it is. It's yours, boy."

Jupe put his hands in the box and Pete pulled his chair closer so he could better see what his friend pulled out of it. It wasn't the typical board accompanied by lots of loose pieces. The chess set in question had the shape of a drawer whose upper face, in white and black squares, formed the board itself. On one side was a small brass handle. Jupe tugged at it and the drawer opened to show a foam surface in which each of the chess pieces was perfectly fitted as if they were tiny little men resting in custom made niches.

Jupe blinked in surprise and smiled.

"An ingenious system designed to keep the pieces from being lost or damaged," he murmured as if thinking aloud.

"Those pieces look like a collection of stuffed dwarfs," Pete laughed.

"The workmanship and detail of the pieces is impeccable," murmured Jupe, ignoring his friend's comment, "and it seems to be made of high quality wood." Then, raising his head, he

added, "Thank you, Uncle Titus. I agree, it is a real gem. Did you say it's practically new? Where did you get it?"

Uncle Titus smiled pleased.

"I shouldn't tell you since it's a gift," he said. "But if it really interests you, I'll tell you that I found it at Baker's pawn shop. Tom is an old friend of mine, and as soon as I told him that I intended to give it to my nephew he made me a very special offer that I couldn't help but accept."

Looking dreamily, the salvage dealer slid a finger across the checkered surface of the chessboard. Pete thought he looked like a man embracing long forgotten memories that had suddenly resurfaced.

"Chess is a fascinating game, boys," he said, as if he were daydreaming. "No two matches are the same. I tell you, as a young man I played a great deal. I have many good memories of playing chess, especially in the free time that we enjoyed between each show when working in the circus. I became an expert after a while, to the point that there was no one in the company capable of beating me."

He was silent for a moment and then, as if returning to reality, he added, "Well boys, I have to go. Enjoy the chess set and enjoy as many good times as I did."

With that, and after a loud laugh, he turned and walked away.

Once alone, Pete turned to Jupiter.

"Gleeps, Juve!" he exclaimed. "Your uncle is full of surprises. Now it turns out that he's also an expert chess player! As for the chess set itself," he added, pointing to it, "I must admit that it looks like a work of art."

"That's right," said Jupiter. "Its wood surface is neatly polished and luxuriously lacquered."

The First Investigator held the chess set up to his eyes to look at it closely. Just as his uncle had done a few moments earlier, he ran a finger down its polished surface with a dreamy air.

"Chess," he said slowly. "An exciting game whose origins are lost in time. What do you say, Pete? Do you fancy a game?"

Pete looked at his friend.

"Who, me? No way!" He said, leaning back in his chair. "Right now, the only thing on my mind is 'Rest.' No offense, Juve, but I'm still too tired to hurt my brain with a game like chess. Besides, I don't even know how the pieces move."

"There's an easy solution for that, Pete," said Jupiter. "I can teach you the rules. Let me get rid of this cardboard box and then..."

Jupiter, who still had the cardboard box on his lap, let go of the chess set with one hand in order to put the box on the ground. However, in doing so, either he didn't realize how heavy the chess set was or because of its polished surface, the chess set slipped from between his fingers.

"Be careful, Juve!" Pete exclaimed.

But the warning came too late. The cardboard box fell to the side. The chess set, on the other hand, landed on the pavement. The drawer separated from its case and five or six white and black pieces fell from their foam holder to roll in the morning sun.

"That was really clumsy!" Jupiter lamented as he got up and stepped towards the fallen game.

The stout boy picked up the board and ran over it with his fingers. Pete knelt to pick up the fallen pieces and began to return them one by one to their foam bed.

"Just a couple of scratches," Jupe said, examining the board closely. "Fortunately, it's not broken or splintered."

"Here you go, Jupe," Pete said, putting the last piece in place. "Be careful with it, don't drop it again."

Pete handed Jupe the drawer containing the pieces. He took it with one hand and slid it into the hollow of the board, which he held firmly in the other. In doing so, however, a look of surprise flashed across his face.

"Oooh..." he murmured, his eyes widening.

"What happened?" Pete asked. "Is it broken after all?"

"No," Jupiter said, biting his lower lip. "There is something inside. It looks like a piece of paper. Let's see if I can get it out."

The First Investigator carefully placed the drawer with the pieces on the ground and put his free hand in the hollow of the board. Then he frowned.

"I can barely reach it with my hand," he said with annoyance. "You try it, Second. You have longer fingers."

Pete reached inside and fumbled.

"You're right. There's something in here," he said. "It's a piece of paper. It's stuck to the bottom, but I think it will be easy... Yes. I got it."

With a triumphant gesture, Pete reached out. Caught between the tips of his fingers was something white and rectangular.

"An envelope!" he exclaimed.

"There seems to be something written on the back," said Jupiter. "Let me see."

Pete handed the envelope to his friend who stared at it intently as he rotated it in his hands.

"To Glenn," Jupiter read aloud. "Inside is a sheet of paper. It looks like a letter..."

"And who would think of putting a letter inside a chess set?" Pete asked. "Isn't that strange?"

"It seems most peculiar," said his friend. "And it's also extremely mysterious," he added. "Well! The envelope is open..."

"Do you think we should read what's inside?" Pete asked.

Jupe looked at his friend and sighed.

"Well," he said, "that would be the only way to find out the answer to certain questions like, who Glenn is, if the chess set belongs to him or was originally intended for him, and if there really is something mysterious in the fact that the letter was hidden inside the chess set instead of simply delivered with it to its recipient."

"Then get the letter and read it," Pete said. "Maybe it will answer some questions."

Jupiter opened the envelope and pulled out a carefully folded sheet of paper. With impatient fingers, he unfolded the paper and held it up. Pete stood behind him to look over his shoulder. The two boys read the following:

*"Dear Glenn,*

*Here is the chess set and the letter that I promised you. I have conceived a plan for you (call it a game if you wish) full of mystery that you will have to solve. I hope that, as a fan of writing mystery stories, you use this plot that I have devised as inspiration to enable you to write a good story. You have always been a good friend and a loyal assistant, and I hope that you become a writer as famous and admired as I am (allow this lack of modesty on my part, I am sure you will understand). This game is, therefore, my exclusive legacy for you.*

*There is something that I possessed for many years, something extremely valuable that I hid and that I wish only you to find. Find it, as well as the mystery plot that you can use to write that novel you've always wanted, and you will acquire universal fame. What I hid is something that almost no one believes can be hidden, and yet it is. Only you must find its whereabouts. To do so, ask my old friend, Miss Erika Schoenberg, to type the following message for you, which she is prepared to do:*

*XTU ALI CPH XWCPDU LEHEY*

*OBD AHL VNQ TPZBUHT KKVB*

*NFT WXS IGB LJDY RBGQA*

*That was the easy part. Now search what I love the most. The name will lead you on the right path. From then on you will have to face more intricate challenges and use your imagination. Keep in mind that things are not always what they seem.*

*Just one last tip: always keep this chess set with you. It will bring you good luck and help you. You must be careful, since surely you are not the only one who wants to find what almost no one believes is lost.*

*Your faithful friend,*

*Arthur Roberts."*

"Holy smokes, Jupe!" Pete said, his eyes wide. "What sort of letter is this?"

## CHAPTER 2

# A MYSTERIOUS LETTER

Seeing that his friend, still absorbed in the reading of the letter, didn't answer, Pete asked again, "What kind of letter is this, Jupe?"

After a long pause, Jupiter frowned and bit his lower lip. "Obviously, one that is extremely mysterious," he said in a barely audible voice.

"Oh, really?" Pete said sarcastically. "Gee! Thanks for telling me. I hardly noticed. How do you explain how someone can find something that no one believes is lost?"

"That *almost* no one believes is lost," Jupiter corrected. "I admit I don't know, Pete. That's part of the mystery. The truth is that it's a most intriguing letter."

"Most intriguing?" Pete grumbled. "Boy, that's putting it mildly. I think it's gibberish in the form of a puzzle and disguised as a hieroglyph. What about that series of meaningless letters that a Miss Schoenberg must type?"

"Undoubtedly, this is a coded message," responded Jupe. "Perhaps if we found this Erika Schoenberg, part of the mystery would be revealed. In fact, judging by what the letter says, that's precisely what needs to be done. The author openly asks Glenn, the addressee, to turn to her for help."

"And how do you intend to find our dear Miss Schoenberg?" Pete asked. "Are you going to put an ad in the newspaper?"

"It's a possibility," Jupiter answered. "But before that, we can do some simple things like look in the phone book. Or more sophisticated techniques like our Ghost-to-Ghost Hookup."

Jupe was referring to a search and locate system he had devised by which The Three Investigators contacted hundreds of boys and girls from Rocky Beach and the surrounding area by means of the telephone. Each of the participating children was called a "ghost" to ensure their anonymity against strange ears such as adults. In previous cases this system had proven to be effective.

"Nevertheless," said Jupiter, "I'm more inclined to look for Glenn. It is he who is told to resort to Miss Schoenberg. It seems clear that Glenn knows who she is and where to find her. If we find Glenn, he would surely lead us to her, and then we could begin to search for what almost no one believes is lost. I believe that is the best course of action."

"Just a minute, Jupe!" exclaimed Pete, raising his hands. "I see that dangerous spark in your eyes that can only mean 'mystery in sight.' Well, before you get too excited, let me remind you of one thing: we are tired and we have more work to do this afternoon. Besides, what about that swim at the beach we talked about earlier?"

"Second, the occurrence of a mystery, even if by chance as in this case, is something we cannot disregard. Only ten minutes ago, we were longing for a mystery that would set our gray matter in motion," Jupiter argued.

"You mean *you* longed for a mystery," Pete grumbled. "I longed for a day at the beach."

"Remember that we are investigators and we have something here that seems tailor-made for us," Jupiter insisted.

"I'd say it seems tailor-made for someone named Glenn, not for us," Pete said.

Jupe looked at his friend and smiled slightly.

"Maybe you're right about that, Pete. But..." he began.

"But what?" Pete snapped.

"I was going to say that if we found this Glenn we might be able to offer our help in finding what almost no one believes is lost."

"I prefer the beach," Pete grunted.

"On the other hand, I believe there is something else which, with almost certainty, can be drawn from this letter," Jupiter announced as he continued to reread the letter.

"Oh, yeah? And what is that?" Pete asked. "A clue as to who Glenn is?"

"Not exactly about Glenn, Second," Jupiter replied, "but about who wrote the letter. If we reread this carefully, you'll agree with me that, unless I'm mistaken, the Arthur Roberts to whom the signature belongs died exactly one week ago, today."

Pete looked at Jupiter wide-eyed as his mouth formed a huge O in astonishment. The boy took the letter from his friend and reread it. Then, with a very confused expression, he returned it.

"How... how on earth can you deduce something like that from this piece of paper?" he managed to say after a few seconds.

Jupiter smiled slightly.

"Adding to the contents of the letter something you undoubtedly know, though you must have forgotten," he replied with a certain air of mystery.

"What do you mean?" Pete asked.

"You see," said Jupiter. "Actually, only half of my deduction comes from the letter. The other half is due to the fact that only seven days ago, a famous writer of mystery and espionage novels called Arthur Roberts died. The news was in all the newspapers and was even on television. Maybe you missed it or simply don't remember."

"Now I remember..." said Pete, nodding slowly. "My father said something about it a few days ago, during dinner. Apparently, he also worked in the movies as a screenwriter in adaptations for the big screen of some of his most famous novels. I remember my father mentioned being introduced to him on one occasion."

Mr. Crenshaw, Pete's father, knew the world of movie studios firsthand because he worked as a special effects technician for one of Hollywood's biggest producers.

"Exactly, Pete," Jupiter said. "And, in this letter, Mr. Roberts not only claims to be a famous writer, but also speaks of mystery novels. Also, one of the first paragraphs refers to a legacy. A legacy is, as a rule, what one man leaves to another upon dying. Something like a kind of inheritance. As you can see, Second, the association is direct and inescapable."

Listening to his friend's explanation, Pete felt like smacking himself in the forehead. Of course, he would have deduced the same thing if he had remembered the news of the death of the old writer. Or maybe not...

"As you can see, Pete, we have made rapid progress," Jupiter continued. "Now we know that we are in possession of a chess set and a letter bequeathed to a certain Glenn by a recently deceased famous author. Not bad for starters. We'll have to see how to find Glenn. What I'm asking myself now is how a chess set as nice as this one would end up in a pawn shop when it is clear that it is a very personal gift."

"Maybe this Glenn guy was in financial trouble," Pete said.

"Mmmm... It's possible, though it doesn't seem very likely," Jupiter said.

"Why not?" inquired the Second Investigator.

"Mr. Roberts explains in the letter that there is a valuable object that can be found with the aid of this chess set," explained Jupiter. "If Glenn was having economic difficulties he wouldn't dispose of an object that could lead to a fortune. Of course, it is also possible that Glenn did not see the letter. That would explain why it remained in place until we found it."

"Maybe Glenn thought all this was just a joke. Maybe he doesn't even like chess," Pete suggested.

"Mmmm... It could be," Jupiter conceded. "But I'm not convinced. The letter seems sincere. In it Mr. Roberts speaks of Glenn as 'a good friend and loyal assistant'. No, Pete, I don't think this letter is a joke. Perhaps the late Mr. Roberts had a rather extraordinary sense of humor in sending such a letter to a good friend before he died, but the tone of it convinces me that it is serious. If only we could find Glenn..."

Then, after reflecting for a few seconds, he added, "Maybe we should call Mr. Baker, the owner of the pawn shop, to see what he can tell us. Perhaps he can tell us about Glenn. I suggest that we go to Headquarters and call from there."

Jupiter got to his feet and started walking with the chess set tucked tightly under his arm. Pete, looking at him, sighed.

"Goodbye to the beach," he said before getting up and following his friend.

The two boys made their way to a space behind the printing press in Jupiter's workshop. Near the ground was a metal grating that seemed to have been left there by chance. It appeared to be propped up against the huge pile of junk. However, when Jupiter picked it up and set it aside, the grating revealed the mouth of a metal pipe through which both boys entered and started to crawl forward. The boys had named the galvanized iron pipe 'Tunnel Two'. It was one of the secret entrances leading to the headquarters of The Three Investigators.

Headquarters was located inside an old trailer which, impossible to sell because of its deteriorated state, Uncle Titus had given to his nephew so that he could meet there with his friends. Over time, and with the help of Hans and Konrad, Jupiter and his friends had piled up scrap metal around the trailer until it was hidden from view under a huge pile of junk. Uncle Titus either lost interest or forgot what was there, so The Three Investigators had a hidden place to hold their meetings without risk of being bothered. They built a series of secret entrances to which only they had access. Tunnel Two was the most frequently used of them. As for Headquarters itself, thanks to materials from the junkyard and the profits that the boys earned by working in the salvage yard, it was equipped with a typewriter, telephone, chairs, office desk, a periscope, and even a small laboratory for developing photographs.

The boys advanced quickly through the pipe. After traveling about thirty feet, Juve, who was in front, pushed a trapdoor at the end of the tunnel. The door opened upwards, allowing access to Headquarters. Once inside, the boys stretched out their legs and brushed off their trousers.

"Okay," said Jupiter. "Now let's see what Mr. Baker has to say about this chess set. Pete, hand me the phone book."

While the Second Investigator took the required volume from a shelf, his friend sat behind the desk and carefully placed the chess set on it. Pete handed Jupiter the phone book and took his seat. Before he had finished settling into the chair, the First Investigator was leafing through the pages of the book.

"We'll look in the pawn shops," he said.

After turning a few more pages, he found the page he was looking for and began to traverse it with his index finger until he stopped with a sigh of triumph.

"Baker's pawn shop," he read. "Here it is."

As he picked up the phone and dialed the number, Jupiter reached for a small speaker next to the phone and connected it. This way, Pete would be able to hear all of the conversation, thanks to Jupiter's remarkable ability to construct electronic gadgets of his own invention.

"Baker's pawn shop. Tom Baker speaking," said a voice after the fourth ring.

"Hello?" Jupiter said. "Am I speaking to Mr. Baker, the shop owner?"

"That's right," said the man. "What can I help you with?"

"You see, sir," Juve began. "My name is Jupiter Jones. My uncle Titus bought a chess set from you this morning. The chess set has a luxurious appearance, is practically new and has a drawer shape. The pieces are stored inside a bed of foam and..."

"Yes, Yes. I remember it perfectly," Mr. Baker said. "So, you're Titus' nephew? Very good. And what about the chess set? Is it damaged? It didn't appear to have any damage when your uncle took it."

"That's not the point, Mr. Baker," Jupiter explained. "Actually, the chess set is in perfect condition. The reason for my call is that I found a hidden letter inside it and wanted to see if you would be so kind as to tell me..."

"A hidden letter, you say?" Mr. Baker interrupted again. "And who might want to keep a letter inside a chess set like that?"

Jupiter hesitated a second.

"I... er... well, that's exactly what I'd like to find out," he said.

"Oh? Oh, yes, of course," said Mr. Baker, clearing his throat.

"I thought maybe you could tell me who pawned the chess set," Jupiter said quickly. "Maybe the letter was his and he didn't really want to get rid of it. It's possible that it was inside the chess set by mistake," he explained. Then, holding his breath, he added, "Can you help me, sir?"

Mr. Baker was silent for a few seconds.

"Usually that information is confidential, my boy," he said at last. "However, knowing that you are Titus' nephew and that your purpose sounds very decent, I wouldn't mind making an exception. The trouble is that it would be impossible to even if I wanted to," Mr. Baker explained.

"I remember perfectly when that chess set came in and who pawned it. It was four or five days ago. It was brought in by a tramp I had never seen before in my life. The poor man was eager to sell it. I felt such pity for him that I even gave him more for it than I would have given anyone else."

"Could you describe the man, Mr. Baker? Would you know where to find him? Did he say his name? Please, Mr. Baker," Jupiter said. "It's very important."

"Hey! How important is that letter?" replied the owner of the pawnshop. "Look, kid, the guy didn't say his name. He simply took the money and walked out the door. As for his appearance, he was dirty and had a beard. That's all I can tell you. And now you'll have to excuse me, but I have work to do in my shop. Give your uncle my regards."

"That's okay, Mr. Baker. I will. And thanks anyway," Jupiter said, unable to hide the disappointment in his voice.

"Whiskers, Juve!" Pete exclaimed as Jupiter hung up the phone and unplugged the speaker. "A dirty, bearded bum. What a description! Do you have any idea how many homeless people fit that description on the streets of Rocky Beach and in the outskirts of Los Angeles?"

Jupiter shook his head.

"I admit it doesn't seem very promising," Jupiter agreed. "Even if we started a Ghost-to-Ghost Hookup we wouldn't be able to give a minimally detailed description of the man we are looking for. There could be dozens of such men in the Rocky Beach area, Santa Monica, Hollywood and... of course..."

Pete looked at his friend. Who, in turn, looked at him with wide eyes.

"What's the matter, Juve? Why are you looking at me like that?" Pete asked uncomfortably.

"Because you said something earlier and, foolishly, I missed it until now," Jupiter replied.

"Oh? And what did I say?" Pete asked.

"That Arthur Roberts worked in the movies. Even that your father knew him. Do you think he could...?" he started to ask Pete.

"Impossible," Pete said. "My father is currently on the east coast, in the middle of a shoot. It will be two weeks before he returns."

"Then we only have one chance," Jupiter said determinedly. "Arthur Roberts worked as a screenwriter. He was the author of mystery and suspense novels. He adapted his own novels to be movies. And who do we know in the movie world, related to mystery and suspense films, who surely knows the best writers of that genre?" Jupiter added with a smile.

Pete's face brightened.

"Alfred Hitchcock!" He exclaimed. "Of course! What are we waiting for? Let's call him right now!"

But Pete's words were unnecessary, for even before he finished saying them, Jupiter had already picked up the phone again, plugged in the speaker and dialed a number well-known by both of them. This time, a female voice answered after the first ring. Pete heard his friend give his name and ask about the great filmmaker. The woman asked him to wait a few seconds. Apparently, they were in luck. Everything seemed to indicate that Mr. Hitchcock was in his office.

After waiting for a minute, the well-known voice of the master of suspense greeted Jupiter affably from the other end of the line.

"Hello, young Jones," he said. "Greetings from Hollywood to The Three Investigators. My intuition kept telling me that it would not be long before I heard from you again."

"Hello, Mr. Hitchcock," Jupiter said politely. "We hope we aren't interrupting your work. We are investigating the origin of a chess set that has reached our hands and..."

"A new case?" inquired Mr. Hitchcock.

"Well, sir, I couldn't say yet," said Jupiter.

"I see," said Mr. Hitchcock. "I'm waiting for a producer with whom I have an important meeting. However, I still have a few minutes. If your story is not very long it will be a pleasure to listen to it. You know I'm always interested in your adventures. What is it this time?"

"Well, sir," Jupiter began. "There really isn't much to tell. At least not yet. Nevertheless..."

The First Investigator explained to the film director everything about the chess set and the letter from Arthur Roberts.

"Arthur Roberts, eh?" said Mr. Hitchcock once Jupiter had finished. "Yes, of course I met him. I was even about to work with him on one occasion some years ago. However, we never got together and our relationship was limited to a temporary collaboration for a film that never wound up being shot. I cannot tell you much about him except that he was a solitary, reserved type dedicated entirely to his profession of writing and to cultivating his two great hobbies: chess and art. Actually, your chess set story fits in perfectly with him. Did you know that he was an accomplished teacher of the game?"

"Really, sir?" Jupiter asked.

"I believe so," said Mr. Hitchcock. "As far as I know, none of his students managed to beat him. The only time I was at his house, years ago, he showed me his collection of chess sets. He had over fifty."

"I suppose you'd heard about his death, sir?" inquired Jupiter.

"That's right," Alfred Hitchcock said. "I read about it in the newspapers. I remember that I instructed my secretary to contact the family of the deceased to send them my most sincere condolences, but the only thing she was able to find out was that the deceased had no family of his own. He lived alone, and it was not known if he had any relative nearby. Only a few distant relatives living in Europe were mentioned in passing, and a friend from New York who appeared in his will."

"Mr. Hitchcock, did you hear the name Glenn mentioned in connection with Mr. Roberts?" Jupiter asked.

"Well," said the director. "Let me see if I can find the communiqué we received from his lawyer, because it contains the name of that friend in New York. I think I left it here, on a corner of my desk."

Through the loudspeaker, Pete could hear Mr. Hitchcock rummaging through the papers on his ample desk.

"Aha! Here I have it, young Jones," he said in triumph after a few seconds. "Let's see... No, bad luck. That friend's name is Timothy Burke. I'm sorry I cannot help you, Jupiter."

"Don't worry, sir," replied the First Investigator, trying to hide his dismay.

However, the following words of the film director made him open his eyes wide.

"Just a moment! Wait!" Pete and Jupiter listened intently to what Mr. Hitchcock said. "Here's something, at the end of the communiqué. Glenn Heggyns. Say! Turns out it's the name of the lawyer who sent it to us. Maybe this is the Glenn you're looking for, young Jones."

"It's very likely, Mr. Hitchcock," Jupiter stammered, unable to suppress his excitement. "Would you happen to have the address of this Mr. Heggyns?"

"Of course I have it, Jupiter," said Mr. Hitchcock. "His address and phone number are printed on the header of the communiqué. Do you want to write them down?"

"Yes, thank you sir," Jupiter said.

With a gesture, the First Investigator motioned for Pete to take notes. The latter, after taking a pencil and a sheet of paper from one of the desk drawers, wrote down the information he heard from Mr. Hitchcock on the speaker.

"Thank you, sir," said Jupiter, once the film director had finished. "You have been very helpful."

"I'm glad," said Alfred Hitchcock. "Now, however, you will have to excuse me, my boy, for the time of my meeting is at hand. I hope you keep me abreast of your progress with the chess set and what Mr. Heggyns has to tell you. Who knows, a good mystery may come from this."

"Do not doubt that we will, sir," Jupiter said. "And, again, thank you."

Alfred Hitchcock said goodbye and hung up the phone. Jupiter did the same and disconnected the speaker. Then he leaned back in his chair and looked at Pete with a slight smile of satisfaction.

"You got the information?" he asked him.

"Of course!" was Pete's answer.

Jupiter leaned against the arms of the chair and clasped his hands in front of him.

"Now all we have to do is call Mr. Glenn Heggyns and talk to him about this chess set," he said, gesturing with a nod.

"Do you think it's the Glenn we're looking for?" Pete asked.

"Certain details lead one to believe so," said Jupiter. "Glenn is not a real common name. In addition, in his letter Mr. Roberts speaks of Glenn as a good friend and loyal assistant. If Mr. Heggyns was in the service of Mr. Roberts for a long period of time, he could very well refer to him in such a manner. I would say that..."

But his words were suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Bob Andrews at Headquarters, the firm's third member. He opened the trapdoor leading from Tunnel Two and emerged from it so suddenly that his two friends, whirled to look at him in surprise.

"Bob! What...?" Pete stammered.

"What's the matter, Records?" Jupiter asked.

Bob, studious and blond, dropped the trapdoor, which closed with a thud. He was breathing heavily, as if he had come running from the other end of town.

"Guys!" he said breathlessly as he waved a rolled-up newspaper in one hand. "Do you want to earn a reward? All we have to do is..."

Suddenly he fell silent and his eyes widened. Pete and Jupe exchanged a conspiratorial look and then looked back at Bob. He pointed with trembling fingers at the wooden chess set that rested placidly on the desk.

"It can't be!" he cried in astonishment. "But it's identical to the one being sought! How do you have it?"

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **DEDUCTIONS**

"Golly, Bob!" exclaimed Pete. "What do you mean?"

As the Third Investigator continued to point at the chess set lying on the table, Pete, stunned, looked at Jupiter, then at the chess set, then at Bob, and then back at Jupiter. It took only a few seconds for his expression of surprise to become one of attentiveness. Pete watched his friend frown and furiously pinch his lower lip as he watched Bob closely. Pete knew instantly what that meant: The First Investigator was forcing the gears of his mental machinery to turn.

"It has to be the same!" Bob exclaimed. "The description fits perfectly!"

"Records," Pete said, somewhat exasperatedly, "what are you talking about?"

Bob stopped pointing at the chess set and looked at Pete as if he had just noticed his presence in Headquarters.

"It's about that chess set, Pete," he said.

"About this chess set?" asked Pete, looking at the wooden set. "What's wrong with it?"

Bob took a step toward the desk opening his mouth to answer, but at that moment Jupiter, who continued to pinch his lower lip, finally intervened.

"One moment, Records," he said, raising his hand. "Give me a chance. Let me deduce and explain to Pete what his eyes and his understanding cannot see."

Bob turned to Jupiter, nodded and let a smile come to his lips. Whenever he could, his friend used the occasion to show off his enviable gifts of deduction. This, together with his secretive process, his fluid verbiage and his undeniable taste for the theatrical, made him an accomplished master of ceremonies.

"Go ahead, Juve," Bob said, taking a seat in front of Pete. "Surprise us."

"Actually, my deductions should not surprise you," Jupiter began. "Nevertheless, I will oblige you."

Then, looking at Pete, he said in a rush, as if it were a paragraph he had been rehearsing for hours, "It would appear that this morning, during his work in the library, Bob was browsing through the local newspaper and he came upon the classifieds section. He found an advertisement that caught his attention, an announcement that spoke of the disappearance of a chess set identical to the one we have here and for which a reward was offered. So, once his day ended, Bob came here pedaling as fast as he could. On the way here, he stopped at the mall. It was a brief stop that barely lasted more than a minute. He bought the local newspaper at the newsstand and hit the road to the salvage yard at high speed."

As he spoke, the expression on Pete's face changed progressively. At first it was just a face full of surprise, but soon it transformed to disbelief whose degree of astonishment grew until it became the very representation of stupefaction.

"How did you find out?" The boy managed to stammer.

"I haven't found out, Second. I've just figured it out," Jupiter said. "Come on, Records," he added, turning to him. "Tell Pete if my deductions are right. I already know that they are."

"Absolutely correct, Juve," he replied, nodding. "Each and every one of them. I can imagine how you came to some conclusions, but I admit that the rest are completely beyond my comprehension."

Sighing, Jupiter leaned back in his chair. Pete looked at Bob and blinked.

"Golly, Bob!" he exclaimed. "Do you really know how Juve came to some of his conclusions? Surprise me, Records. Explain at least one of them, because if you don't give me a reasonable explanation, I'll run from here convinced that something unnatural is happening in this old rickety trailer."

Bob adjusted his glasses and looked alternately at his friends as Juve gathered his fingertips in front of him.

"Well," he began, "I understand how you deduced that I pedaled as hard as I could from the library. I came in here panting, and you both know that I have been at the library all morning since I don't leave until noon. However, I don't see how you knew it was a local newspaper, the classified ads, the ad I found, and..."

"You want to look at what you have in your hands, Bob?" Jupiter asked simply.

Surprised by the question, Bob looked down and realized that in his hands, on his lap, rested a rolled-up newspaper.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the Third Investigator. "I forgot that I had the newspaper with me! I guess when I came in here and saw the chess set, I was so shocked I forgot everything else."

"And while you were surprised by the chess set, Pete and I could see that newspaper in your hand," said Jupiter. "It was easy for me to see that it was a local newspaper (the typeface is unmistakable), and I saw that it was open to the classified ads section. I noted that there was a circle drawn in red marker around one of the ads and remembered what you said yourself as soon as you entered. You mentioned a reward and you said that the description of the chess set fit perfectly with the one that was lost. As you see, having these clues and knowing how to put them together, my deductions seem obvious."

"That's true," Pete agreed. "It seems clear once you explain it. The only problem is that we didn't have that explanation beforehand."

"But you had all the information necessary to piece it together," Jupiter said.

Bob nodded his head.

"Yes," he said, "the fact is, because we haven't had a case to investigate since Carson's Carnival left Rocky Beach, I decided to check the classified ads in the local press. You can always find something interesting in them or run into an advertisement like the one I found, where someone wants to find a lost object. It's not that looking for something lost is too promising, but there's always the possibility that it will lead to a true mystery. It's happened to us before. Besides, it's better to look for a lost chess set than to sit around without anything interesting to investigate. But, Juve," he added, turning to his friend, "what I can't understand is how you deduced what I did when I left the library."

"Yes," Pete said, nodding. "How do you explain that, Juve?"

Jupe looked at his friends and gave them a slightly exasperated smile.

"It's really simple," he began. "You see, Bob brought a newspaper with him. In a public library, the newspapers they receive daily are not loaned out, but are referenced during the day and then become part of the newspaper library, where they are archived and bound.

"Since the newspaper you brought doesn't belong to the library, you had to buy it on your way here, Bob. That's what you did in the mall which is on your way here."

"And how are you so sure?" Pete asked. "On the way from the library up here there are at least half a dozen places where Bob could have bought that newspaper. How do you know he did it at the mall?"

"By your shoes," said Jupiter. "They have traces of asphalt stuck to the edges of the soles. The residue is recent because it's still shiny. Also, upon entering Headquarters Bob left bits of asphalt on the floor."

Pete and Bob looked toward the trapdoor leading to Tunnel Two. On the ground near the trapdoor, several small sticky-looking dark spots could be seen.

"From the public library in Rocky Beach to our Headquarters, there is only one street where asphalt work is currently underway," Jupiter announced pompously. "That's Lincoln Street, which is adjacent to the block occupied by the shopping center, and precisely on the same facade where the newsstand is located."

Pete and Bob looked at each other.

"That's true," said the latter. "When I bought the newspaper, I started to search for the ad as I walked. I was so absorbed in it that without realizing it, I absently stumbled into the area under construction and stepped on a portion of newly added asphalt. It was warm and my feet sank slightly into it. I earned a good reprimand from the foreman."

"All right. That seems clear to me," said Pete. "But how did you determine Bob spent less than a minute in the mall?"

"If you look at the red circle that Bob drew around the ad," said Jupiter, "you'll see that it's very poorly drawn. Actually, it hardly looks like a circle. If one tries to draw a circle while walking or even running, it invariably turns out bad. That's what happened in this case."

"I actually drew it while riding my bike," Bob said. "I had even started pedaling."

"That's a small detail," said Jupiter, frowning. "On the other hand, Bob, you have half a dollar bill sticking out of your pants pocket. That means that, after buying the newspaper, you took the change and stuffed it in your pocket without worrying about whether it fell out or not. I suppose you even did it after you started running for your bike."

"That's the way it was," Bob nodded, pulling the bill from his pocket. "It may be the hastiest purchase I've ever made."

"A few 'small' deductions!" laughed Pete. "Now everything's clear."

Jupiter smiled, visibly flattered. However, Bob, adjusting his glasses, straightened up in his chair.

"Just a minute," he said. "It may be obvious to both of you, but there's something that remains a mystery to me."

"And what's that, Bob?" Pete asked.

"The fact that you have a chess set here that has a five-hundred-dollar reward on it," said the Third Investigator.

Pete sat up in his chair. Even Jupiter raised his eyebrows at what he had just heard.

"Five hundred dollars?" Pete asked incredulously. "Golly, Bob! It better be the chess set they are looking for! It *has* to be!"

"It is," Bob said. "The ad states it very clearly," he added, lifting the newspaper and spreading it on the table so his friends could read it. "Here it is."

Pete and Jupiter leaned over to read the ad Bob showed them. When they finished reading it, the two boys looked at each other and smiled.

"We have it!" exclaimed Pete radiantly. "It's ours! There is no doubt. Right, Juve?"

"I think so," confirmed the First Investigator. "It has to be the one we have. The advertisement describes it in detail and, furthermore, anyone who finds it is asked to contact Mr. Heggyns by calling a telephone number. Let us see if it matches..." he added as he consulted the sheet of paper before him. "Yes. As I imagined, this is the same number that Mr. Hitchcock gave us. Therefore, I can say that the chess set that lies on this desk is the same as that sought by Mr. Glenn Heggyns, lawyer for the recently deceased Arthur Roberts."

"You forgot to mention that it's also the passport to a five-hundred-dollar bill," Pete laughed.

"Do you want to tell me what you're talking about?" said Bob. "Tell me once and for all what was going on before I got here."

Jupiter looked at the Third Investigator and leaned back in his chair.

"Bob, do you remember what you said earlier about how sometimes the search for a lost object ends up leading to mysteries of unsuspected magnitude? Well let's just say that in this case your hunch seems to be correct. You see..."

Then Jupiter and Pete proceeded to tell their companion what had happened since the chess set fell into their hands. Jupiter even showed him the letter to Glenn.

"Wow!" Said Bob with a whistle. "There's no doubt that the Glenn in the letter is the same as that of the advertisement. And what a letter! What do you think we should do next?"

"Just one thing," said Juve. "Since we have his telephone number, our next step will be to call Mr. Heggyns and tell him that we have the chess set he is looking for. We will personally deliver it to him. Then we will propose to help him look for 'what almost no one believes is lost'. If Arthur Roberts presented Mr. Heggyns a mystery before he died, he may need some help in solving it. Especially knowing that more people are interested in its solution, as is clearly stated in the letter. Let's hope that Mr. Heggyns will accept our offer."

"All right, First," Pete agreed. "In that case, when should we call?"

Without another word, Jupiter switched on the speaker again, picked up the telephone and, after consulting the sheet of paper spread out in front of him, dialed Mr. Heggyns' number.

"Hello?" said a male voice on the other end of the line.

"Pardon me, sir," said Jupiter very politely. "My name is Jupiter Jones. I would like to speak with Mr. Glenn Heggyns."

"You're talking to him, lad," the man replied. "I am Glenn Heggyns. How can I help you?"

"I'm calling you in reference to the advertisement you published in the local newspaper," Jupiter explained. "In it, you said you had lost a chess set and asked whoever found it to call you at this number."

There was a brief silence on the other end of the line. Then, after a few seconds, Mr. Heggyns' voice was heard again in Headquarters.

"You have it? Are you sure it's the one I lost?"

Jupiter winked at his friends.

"Yes, Mr. Heggyns. At least I think so," he said. "The truth is that it fits perfectly with the description included in your ad. However, there are certain aspects of the chess set that allow me to assure you that it is the same one that you are looking for."

There was another silence on the other end of the line.

"What did you say, boy?" Asked Mr. Heggyns at last. "What do you mean by 'certain aspects?' " The voice sounded confused and surprised.

Pete and Bob exchanged a look and grinned. Jupiter Jones had a unique ability to surprise adults not only with his fancy words, but also with his tendency to propitiate situations shrouded in mystery.

"If you would be so kind as to come and see us or tell us where to find you, I think I can explain everything, sir," Jupiter said, not without a certain air of solemnity. "Anyway, we'll have to meet so you can recover your chess set."

"Of course, boy," said Mr. Heggyns. "I have to be out this afternoon. If it suits you, I can come and see you then. Where can I find you?"

"Do you know the Jones Salvage Yard in Rocky Beach?" Jupiter asked in turn.

Mr. Heggyns told the First Investigator that he knew of the junkyard.

"My aunt and uncle own the business," Jupiter said. "Come and ask for me."

"Did you say your name is Jupiter?" Mr. Heggyns asked.

"That's right, sir. Jupiter Jones," he said.

"I'll be there by mid-afternoon," Mr. Heggyns agreed. "Until then..."

Mr. Heggyns hung up and Jupiter did the same. He then disconnected the speaker and looked at Bob and Pete.

"That's it," he said with a satisfied smile. "This afternoon we will meet Mr. Heggyns and we'll find out if there is anything worth investigating in relation to the chess set and the letter. What's the matter, Pete?" he asked when his friend made a slight moan.

"Why didn't you even mention the reward?" said the Second Investigator in a pitiful voice. "Five hundred dollars would suit us very well."

Jupiter sighed.

"Second," he said, "a reward didn't enter my mind when I was talking on the phone a moment ago. There was only room for the opportunity of a potential mystery. And if we actually face a mystery, we must dedicate all our mental faculties to it."

"But we can't apply our faculties to this case right now, Jupe," Pete protested, rising abruptly. Jupe looked at Bob and raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Why can't we?"

"Because it's time to devote our powers to another situation!" exclaimed Pete with a laugh. "It's time to eat!"

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **A CLIENT APPEARS**

Lunchtime went by so quickly that before the boys knew it, the three of them were standing in front of the office, under Aunt Mathilda's attentive gaze, watching a truck full of junk pass through the great wrought iron gates that served as entrance to the salvage yard. As soon as they saw it, their faces fell. Pete, unable to restrain himself, let out a moan and Bob and Jupiter sighed.

Aunt Mathilda, on the other hand, watched the boys with a smile. The good woman was more than satisfied to be able to count on not two but three pairs of strong young hands to put to work. However, seeing how sad the boys were, and noting how sunken the wheels of the truck were due to the weight of the goods being transported, she seemed to pity them slightly.

"Come on, boys," she said. "Don't complain yet. Today you've worked hard, so as soon as we finish this you can have the rest of the afternoon to yourselves. Also, Hans, Konrad and even Titus are here to help, so if we all work hard I don't think it will be too bad."

The truck stopped near the office. A wide-backed man dressed in a blue uniform descended from the truck and approached the group as he consulted a sheet of paper.

"Mr. Jones?" he asked.

"Yes, that's me," he replied. "If I'm not mistaken, what you have here is the material from the discarded items auction, isn't it?"

"That's right," said the big man. "You can start unloading it whenever you want."

Actually, Aunt Mathilda was right. The presence of the strong arms of Hans, Konrad and Uncle Titus made the work much easier for the boys. Mr. Jones, the two Bavarian brothers and, occasionally, Pete, the most athletic of The Three Investigators, took care of moving the heaviest articles. However, that did not prevent the three boys from being sweaty and exhausted by the time the last object was deposited in the corner indicated by Aunt Mathilda. Between deep sighs and sore arms and legs, the three of them took a seat on the office steps.

"Your aunt wouldn't have a new set of muscles I could use, would she, Jupe?" Pete asked, panting. "I guarantee you, my body needs them."

Jupiter smiled.

"I don't think so, Pete," he said. "But there may still be some of the orange juice she made this morning."

"Orange juice!" Pete said. "I could drain a jug in one gulp!"

With renewed energy, and as if impelled by a spring, the three jumped up and rushed into the office. Seconds later they gave a good account of the orange juice remaining in the jug. They had just set aside their glasses when they heard Aunt Mathilda's powerful voice calling them from outside.

"Jupiter! Boys! Come out here! You have a visitor! Somebody is asking for you, Jupiter!"

The boys looked at each other and, without a word, went to the entrance.

"Here I am, Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter said as the three of them walked out the door. "Who wants to see me?"

The boys approached to where Aunt Mathilda was inspecting some of the newly unloaded salvage items. Next to her was a middle-aged man in a gray suit. He was thin, not very tall, wearing wire-rimmed glasses and his dark hair was flawlessly combed back. When he saw the boys, he smiled pleasantly.

"This gentleman," said Aunt Mathilda, "says that he spoke to you this morning on the telephone and that he agreed to stop by to see you."

"That's right, Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter said, nodding. Then, turning to the man in the gray suit, he added, "You must be Mr. Heggyns, correct?"

The man nodded, smiling.

"And you are Jupiter Jones," he said. "Nice to meet you."

Jupiter shook hands with the man and then looked at his aunt.

"Don't worry, Aunt Mathilda," he said. "I will attend to Mr. Heggyns."

The woman, more attentive to what Hans and Konrad were doing at the time, moved away, nodding vigorously. Jupiter turned to the newcomer.

"Let me introduce you to my friends Bob Andrews and Pete Crenshaw," he said, stepping aside.

Mr. Heggyns shook hands with Bob and Pete.

"Nice to meet you boys," he said. Then, looking at Jupiter again, he added, "So, is it you who found the chess set?"

"Not really, sir," replied Jupiter, "but it has come into my possession."

Mr. Heggyns looked at Jupiter without bothering to hide his surprise.

"What do you mean, boy?" he asked.

"Come with us and I'll explain, sir," said Jupiter. "It's this way."

Taking advantage of the fact that Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus as well as Hans and Konrad were absorbed in the inventorying of the unloaded items, the boys led Mr. Heggyns to a secluded corner of the salvage yard not far from Jupiter's open-air workshop. There they would have the opportunity to speak freely with their visitor without fear of being overheard. Jupiter guided them under a narrow roof that spanned much of the inner fence of the junkyard. Once there, they all sat down on several garden chairs made of wicker, each different from the other.

"Forgive me, lads," said Mr. Heggyns, as soon as he sat down, "but are you afraid that they will hear us? Did something happen?"

Jupiter cleared his throat and, sitting up in his chair, answered in a most solemn tone, "It's nothing, Mr. Heggyns. It's just that we don't want my aunt to put us back to work if she sees us chatting quietly with you."

"Aunt Mathilda said earlier that she gave us the rest of the afternoon off," Pete pointed out. "You heard it yourself."

"It would not be the first time my aunt changed her mind, Pete," Jupiter said with a sigh.

Mr. Heggyns settled into his chair.

"Even so," he said, "you can't deny that your course of action is mysterious. Why is this?"

Jupiter leaned forward, rested his elbows on his knees, and clasped his hands together.

"Let me answer that question by telling you all about the chess set that you lost and we have now," he began. "You see, sir..."

Pete and Bob listened as the First Investigator recounted how the chess set had come into his possession, as well as everything that had been learned from the call to Mr. Baker's pawn shop.

"A tramp, eh?" said Mr. Heggys after hearing that part of the story. "The truth is that it does not surprise me. I am currently moving from my home and the move is taking me longer than anticipated. I have been moving belongings to my new apartment for almost a week, and the process is slow because I have to balance it with my work. Let's just say that I'm between two addresses at the moment. The fact is that, at the beginning of the move, I asked Martha, my housekeeper, to clean up and get rid of old junk. The chess set was temporarily stored in a box of worthless old items. I put it there in the short term due to lack of space. What happened was that Martha, still working with good intentions, got rid of the box, whereupon the chess set was thrown out in the trash. At least that's what I could find out from her. With the tumult from the move, it took me two days to discover the absence of the chess set. When I went to the garbage cans, the chess set, along with everything else, had disappeared. I suppose that tramp you mentioned found it and decided to pawn it."

"That must have been what happened," said Jupiter, nodding. "How did the chess set come into your possession, Mr. Heggys? You didn't have it until recently. Someone sent it to you, did they not?"

At that, Mr. Heggys opened his eyes in surprise.

"How do you know that?" he asked. "What do you guys know about the chess set? Have you been inquiring about it?" he added, looking at one after another of the three friends.

"Jupiter will explain everything, sir," Bob said, smiling. "But to begin with, here is our business card. Please take a look."

With a hesitant hand, Mr. Heggys took the card that Bob offered him and read it with a confused expression. The card read as follows:

**THE THREE INVESTIGATORS**

"We Investigate Anything"

? ? ?

First Investigator ..... Jupiter Jones

Second Investigator .... Peter Crenshaw

Records and Research .... Bob Andrews

"Very impressive," said Mr. Heggys, blinking. "So, you investigate all sorts of things."

"That's right, sir," Pete said. "As you can see, 'We investigate anything' is our motto."

"And what do the question marks mean?" Asked the man.

The boys, who were waiting for that question, grinned.

"The question mark," Jupiter explained, "is the universal symbol of the unknown. It represents unresolved mysteries, unanswered questions, seemingly unexplained enigmas. That is why The Three Investigators adopted it as a trademark."

"I understand," said Mr. Heggyns, weighing the card between his fingers. "This is certainly surprising. However, can you tell me what this has to do with my chess set? And how do you know that I recently received it as a gift?"

"You will know at once, sir," replied Jupiter. Then, turning to Pete, he added, "Second, would you be so kind as to go get the chess set, please?"

"Right away, Juve," said Pete, rising to his feet.

While Pete disappeared into the workshop to retrieve the chess set, Jupiter proceeded to relate to Mr. Heggyns everything concerning the letter found inside the game board and the subsequent conversation with Alfred Hitchcock.

"Whoa! You know Mr. Hitchcock personally?" Mr. Heggyns asked in surprise. "You truly are involved in the world of mystery. Yes, I remember sending the death notification of my friend and client, Arthur Roberts, to Alfred Hitchcock. I sent it to many people in the film industry, but I especially remember sending it to him. I love his movies. I really love everything about literature and mystery and suspense movies," he said with a wistful expression. Then, frowning slightly, he added, "And you say there was a letter addressed to me hidden *inside* the chess set? That's strange. I completely overlooked it. Of course, because of my work, it's true that I didn't examine it very thoroughly."

"Actually, we noticed it by pure chance," Jupiter acknowledged. "It was well hidden in the bottom of the drawer. We found it by accident."

At that moment, Pete arrived carrying the chess set and the envelope that contained the letter. Carefully, he placed both items in Mr. Heggyns hands. The man's face, radiant in recognition of the lost chess set, was furrowed by a wide smile.

"Thanks, boys," he said. "Yes, it's my chess set. As Arthur explained to me shortly before he died, it is completely handmade and impeccably finished. I am very happy to get it back, boys. Which reminds me that I offered a reward to whoever returned it to me. The reward belongs to you."

After putting the chess set on his knees, Mr. Heggyns put a hand inside his jacket and extracted a wallet. He opened it, and was about to take something out of it when Juve stopped him with a gesture.

"No need, sir," he said solemnly. "We appreciate your generosity, but the best reward you can give us is not the one you mentioned in your ad."

Mr. Heggyns stared at the boys without blinking.

"But the offered reward is yours," he said. "And a promise is a promise."

"Please, don't insist," Jupiter said disregarding Pete's moaning and Bob's pitiful expression. "Instead of the money you offered, we would prefer another kind of reward. If you agree, of course."

"Very well," said Mr. Heggyns. "Your gesture is highly commendable. Now, what reward do you prefer?"

Jupiter, very serious, pointed to the chess set with a slight movement of his chin.

"We are convinced that the chess set and the letter we found hidden inside it are the starting point that leads to a mystery of which we know very little yet," he explained. "If you would be kind enough to read the letter, sir, I think you will understand what I am saying."

At the suggestion of Jupiter, Mr. Heggyns took the envelope and opened it.

"I recognize the handwriting on the envelope," he said. "There is no doubt that it is Arthur's."

He took the letter out of the envelope and began to read it. As he did, his face adopted different expressions: amazement, amusement, intrigue... When he finished reading, he spread the letter on the chessboard and looked it over.

"Very much like Arthur," he muttered as he tapped the sheet of paper with his fingertips. "Not even the nearness of death could make him change. A mysterious man with a peculiar sense of humor to the end."

Then he looked up at the boys.

"Very well," he added. "I have read the letter. Now tell me, what reward would you like to get from all this?"

"It's very simple, sir," Jupiter said, leaning back in his chair and cupping his fingertips together. "We are investigators. That chess set and the letter pose a mystery, a kind of challenge in which it is proposed to find something very valuable, something that, as the letter itself says, 'almost no one believes is lost.' "

"That's right, Jupiter," Mr. Heggyns conceded. "A most intriguing description, don't you think?"

"For that very reason, sir," said Jupiter, "as a reward for having returned your chess set we would like you to allow us to help you unravel the mystery that surrounds that letter."

Mr. Heggyns looked openly at the boys and gave them a wide smile.

"Help me?" He asked, amused and intrigued. "Absolutely. It will be a pleasure to receive your help. Although I must warn you that this may only be a joke crafted out of the extraordinary love my old friend Arthur felt for mystery and intrigue. However, it's also possible that... Well, in any case, we can try to tackle the enigma that this letter poses. You have already read it. What do you think is the first step we should take?"

"The letter alludes to a hidden object," Bob interjected. "It is something extremely valuable that almost no one believes is lost. However, as a starting point, we are told to turn to a woman named Erika Schoenberg and ask her to type for us what is clearly a coded message."

"That's right, Mr. Heggyns," Jupiter went on. "We need to go see this woman to help us. Since the letter was intended solely for you, I presume that you know her. Therefore, we would need you to lead us to her in order to decipher the encrypted message. Do you know where to find Miss Schoenberg? Can you give us her address or phone number?"

To the surprise of The Three Investigators, Mr. Heggyns was silent for a few seconds and then laughed. The boys, disconcerted, exchanged looks of astonishment. Seeing them, Mr. Heggyns stopped laughing and, rising in his seat, struggled to regain his composure.

"I beg your pardon, boys," he said, still smiling. "I guess your question caught me off guard."

Jupiter, looking at the man with a strange expression, took a deep breath.

"I don't understand, sir," he said. "What about Miss Schoenberg? Are we wrong and you don't know her?"

"Oh no. Nothing like that, Jupiter," replied Mr. Heggyns, shaking his head. "Of course, I know who she is. I know her very well even though she... has never existed!"

## CHAPTER 5

# THE ENIGMATIC MISS SCHOENBERG

Mr. Heggys looked at the boys, delighting in the expression of surprise that had taken over their faces. A mischievous smile curved his lips during the moment of silence that followed his puzzling words.

"Gleeps, Jupe!" exclaimed Pete, looking at his friend. "First a lost chess set, then a mysterious letter with the legacy of a dead man, and now a woman who doesn't exist, yet Mr. Heggys assures us he knows. Our mystery is complicated, don't you think?"

Jupiter looked at Pete for a second, then turned to the chess set owner as he pinched his lower lip furiously.

"Certainly, Pete," he said, "Mr. Heggys will be able to tell us what he means by saying that he knows Miss Schoenberg even though she has never existed. However, I would say... Oh, of course."

Suddenly, his face lit up.

Bob, intrigued, looked at Jupiter and frowned.

"Do you have an idea, Jupe?" he asked him.

"I was thinking that Mr. Roberts was a writer," replied the First Investigator. "He was a famous author of mystery novels. Hence, he created stories, created characters, which leads me to think that..."

"Bravo!" said Mr. Heggys, amused. "You're a smart boy, Jupiter. Yes, you are right. Erika Schoenberg has never existed, and yet I know her very well. And I know her because I read about her. But she does not exist and has never existed, at least as a woman of flesh and blood. Erika Schoenberg was but a character in one of the most celebrated novels of my old friend Arthur. The novel in question was entitled *The Island of Mirrors*, and was one of the works Arthur was most proud of."

"A character in a novel!" Bob exclaimed. "In that case, how are we going to ask her to type the ciphertext that appears in the letter for us? We can't ask anything from someone who only exists in the pages of a book."

Jupe leaned back in his chair, still pinching his lower lip.

"I think Mr. Heggys can answer that, Bob," he said, turning to the lawyer.

Mr. Heggys looked at the chess set resting on his knees and caressed it with adoration. After a few seconds, during which he seemed to be absorbed in deep thought, he looked up at the boys again.

"I think, since you're going to help me unravel this entire matter, I'd better tell you everything from the beginning," he said. "And since the first step we must take is to go see Miss Erika Schoenberg, I propose this: come with me to see her and we will begin to solve this mystery together. We can go in my car, which I left parked next to the entrance. Along the way, I'll update you on everything I know about my late friend Arthur and this chess set. That way we'll save some time. What do you say?"

The boys were enthusiastic, especially Jupiter, who, not yet clear how Mr. Heggyns intended to ask a character from a novel to type an encrypted message for them, was eager to take action.

After informing Aunt Mathilda that they were leaving, the boys left the salvage yard in the company of their visitor. He led them to a dark sedan parked by the curb. Seconds later, the four of them were traveling comfortably through the streets of Rocky Beach in Mr. Heggyns' vehicle.

"We don't have far to go from here," Mr. Heggyns said.

They headed into the hills, specifically a small canyon located not far from Hollywood.

Jupiter, sitting next to the driver and with the chess set on his lap, looked at Mr. Heggyns.

"Can you tell us your story now, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Heggyns accelerated slightly toward the outskirts of Rocky Beach and inhaled sharply.

"You see, boys," he began. "About two months ago, I received a short letter from Arthur in which he told me that just before his death, which was close at hand given that he was very ill, I would receive a chess set. According to Arthur, said chess set would help me untangle an ingenious mystery plot that he had specially devised for me and that, after his death, I could turn it into a novel."

Jupiter nodded.

"Yes, sir," he said. "All this can be deduced from the letter found in the chess set. Mr. Roberts says it very clearly."

"Arthur was a man prone to do things like that," Mr. Heggyns explained as he drove. "He had a most peculiar sense of humor and he loved surprises, which he employed in a thousand different ways in the outcome of his novels."

"Excuse me, sir," Bob said. "Why would he devise a plot just before he dies so that you can unravel it? What interest would that have in itself? Don't you think it's a strange legacy?"

"Well, guys, to tell you the truth," said Mr. Heggyns with a shy smile after a few seconds, "I love mystery stories. The ones Arthur wrote were fantastic. Simply sensational. I was always his most devoted fan. However, I like mystery stories so much that I don't settle for just reading them. I also write them, but with the difference that I am only an apprentice compared with Arthur, and my own stories are most common compared to those he wrote. So, while he was a professional writer, I was just a lawyer who took care of his legal affairs and who, in addition, wrote mystery stories in his spare time. I soon confessed this passion of mine to Arthur, who was delighted to help me develop my stories.

"Arthur was always much more than a client. First of all, he was a great friend. I was constantly encouraged to push my limits in the stories I wrote. Inspired by that, I wrote a couple of novels that, unfortunately, no publisher accepted. Today, years later, I recognize that their plots were weak and none of them deserved to be published. But my yearning to write a good mystery story remained. Arthur knew it. He always knew it. So, as a farewell gift at his death, he bequeathed to me a plot which he himself, thanks to his infinite imagination, had wrought especially for me. In the letter I received two months ago, he warned that unraveling the plot was not going to be easy, but I had to try it because the final result would be worth it. According to him, not only could I use the plot to write the mystery novel that I always wanted, but it also would provide the whereabouts of something very valuable. The letter that you found inside the chessboard

confirms what Arthur told me in the first letter. I didn't give much importance to it, even after I received the chess set, but now I see that Arthur was not joking."

"That's right, sir," agreed Jupiter. "The letter is very clear in certain aspects, especially after hearing everything you have just told us."

"That letter is as clear as mud to me," Pete muttered from the backseat.

"If we read the letter carefully, we can see that the only real enigma lies in the encrypted message and the identity of the valuable object which Mr. Roberts claims to have hidden so mysteriously," Jupiter explained. "Everything else is crystal clear, especially after what Mr. Heggyns has just told us: that Mr. Roberts fabricated a plot for him to unravel, and later to inspire him to write a mystery novel; that the chess set is of vital importance in solving the mystery, which is demonstrated, in the first place, by the fact that it contained the hidden letter; that there is an invaluable object which Mr. Roberts has hidden and which can be found if we follow his clues; that the object in question is of incalculable value, since finding it can lead to universal fame. Finally, there are aspects very evident in this letter, although there are others that are not so much. Mr. Heggyns, what does it suggest to you that the object is something that 'almost no one believes is lost?' Isn't that a very peculiar description?"

The man nodded without taking his eyes off the road.

"That's right, Jupiter," he said. "I confess that I have no idea what such a description means. In fact, it is extremely confusing, as it seems to contain a certain contradiction. The object is hidden, although hardly anyone believes it to be. It's hard to find something hidden if, in principle, it doesn't seem to be hidden... even if it really is."

"Lots of gibberish," Pete said, scratching his head. "Are we looking for something we don't even know for sure has been hidden? Don't you find this a little pointless?"

"Be patient, Second," Bob said. "Give Jupe a chance. We're just getting started. What else occurs to you because of the letter hidden in the chess set, Jupe?"

"Several things," replied the First Investigator. "For example, tell me, Mr. Heggyns: do you know of anything of particular value that Mr. Roberts possessed, and which he might have hidden to create the plot he devised for you?"

Mr. Heggyns raised his eyebrows.

"Arthur didn't have an ostentatious lifestyle, though he was a very successful writer, and he made a lot of money," he said. "I was his lawyer, but not his manager. In fact, he didn't have one, he alone knew what he was spending most of his fortune on. He had no family and rather few friends. I am the closest thing he had to a confidant, and yet I must confess that Arthur was always secretive about how he spent his money. I am almost certain he didn't possess any valuable jewels. In fact, his great passions, besides literature, were chess and art."

"Art, eh?" murmured Jupiter. "Did he own any works of art? I mean, really valuable works of art."

"Some, though he wouldn't be considered a collector in the strict sense of the term," replied the lawyer. "He had expensive paintings at home, yes, and statues and vases of great value, but these couldn't be described as priceless masterpieces. In reality, Arthur's interest in art seemed to be reflected in books about art rather than in the actual possession of works of art. He owned several encyclopedias of art that collected all the periods of history and he was fascinated to visit

museums, but he wasn't obsessed to own the work of the artists, with few exceptions, and then not with top rated artists. He simply saw a picture that he liked, and bought it from time to time. But, as far as I know, nothing whose finding could lead to universal fame."

There was a brief silence as the car left Rocky Beach and approached the hills.

Then Jupiter, looking thoughtful, asked, "You say that Mr. Roberts loved literature. Did he have many books in his home?"

"I believe so," said Mr. Heggyns. "The house was full of books. He seemed delighted to be able to line the walls with bookshelves full of books. He had so many that he even had to become his own librarian. I remember a summer in which, between finishing one novel and beginning another, he spent weeks cataloging, classifying and listing his books. He had thousands of volumes, each of which he adored as if they were his own children. I can almost see him sitting behind the huge desk in his office, amidst towering stacks of books, steadfastly enumerating and cataloging them in several different ways."

"Do you think the object Mr. Roberts hid might be a book?" Bob asked Jupiter.

"That's a possibility, Bob," Jupe said. "Perhaps, among so many books, Mr. Roberts referred to one of them. And if that book were on one of his shelves, it would be in plain sight to anyone, so it could be said that it..."

"...wouldn't really be hidden!" Pete finished. "It would be camouflaged among the other books, but not really hidden. Wow, Jupe! Do you think we have something?"

"I don't know yet, Pete," Jupiter said. "It's too early to say. Mr. Heggyns, do you think Mr. Roberts had any book of inestimable value? Perhaps an old volume or even a manuscript that could have been the work of one of the great geniuses of literature?"

Mr. Heggyns considered the question for a few seconds as he drove his car along one of the winding roads bordering the hills.

"I couldn't tell you, Jupiter," the lawyer finally answered. "During that summer when Arthur cataloged and listed all the books he owned, I got to help him on several occasions, and the truth is I didn't see anything that resembled what you are suggesting. Of course, it's also true that I never checked all of his books, so I suppose your idea is possible."

"Nevertheless, before we go over Mr. Roberts' books, we'll have to see what we can learn from Miss Schoenberg," Bob said. "According to the letter, that's the first step we must take."

"Which doesn't cease to intrigue me, Mr. Heggyns," said Jupiter. "I fail to understand how a character from a novel can help us type an encrypted message. Unless, of course, the key that decodes the message is in the novel that Mr. Roberts wrote."

"That's not the case, boys," said Mr. Heggyns, smiling. "But I beg you to be patient, for in a few minutes you will meet Miss Schoenberg personally. In fact, we have arrived."

Mr. Heggyns, who had driven into a narrow canyon, drove his car to a small bungalow. There, the road ended in a small courtyard next to which there was a paved space with the capacity to park a couple vehicles and a leafy hedge behind which could be seen the reddish roof of the house. The lawyer parked the car in front of the bungalow and they all got out. Then the man made his way to the front door. The three friends followed him visibly intrigued.

"Is this where Miss Schoenberg lives?" Pete asked.

"This is at least where we can find her," replied Mr. Heggyns with a smile, "but the one who lived here was Mr. Roberts. Yes, boys, this is my friend Arthur's house."

Immediately, in front of the confused and intrigued gaze of the boys, the lawyer reached into one of the inside pockets of his jacket and pulled out a key.

"And this," he added, "is the key that opens the house. As Arthur's lawyer, after his death I am his administrator. So, let's go inside. Miss Schoenberg is waiting for us."

"This doesn't seem like the kind of place you'd expect a famous writer to live in," Pete said.

"I told you before that Arthur didn't like to live in an ostentatious way," said Mr. Heggyns. "Besides, my friend was something of a hermit. This is a secluded and delightfully quiet place, and there is nothing that a writer appreciates more than a quiet and comfortable place to write. Take it from an amateur writer."

Pete and Bob smiled and Jupiter pinched his lower lip as Mr. Heggyns inserted the key into the lock. Once the door was opened, everyone entered. Mr. Heggyns turned on the lights and the boys could see a small hallway. There was a closed door on the left, a corridor led forward, and to the right was a large, comfortably furnished living room, the most striking aspect of which were the tall, solid bookshelves that filled the walls from top to bottom.

"Wow!" exclaimed Pete. "Where are the walls? It's all books."

"You didn't exaggerate when you said that Mr. Roberts had thousands of books," Bob commented. "This room is more like the library where I work than a private home."

"I told you so," said Mr. Heggyns. "It takes a lot of books to keep a person busy cataloging them for an entire summer."

The four of them entered the room. In reality it was not a library, but rather a conventional living room containing an abundance of books. In a gap between the shelves the boys could see a couple of pictures and a large mirror. Otherwise, the room was furnished by a low table, a few chairs and a large comfortable sofa.

"So, this was the abode of the famous writer Arthur Roberts," murmured Jupiter as if he were thinking aloud.

"This is indeed," said Mr. Heggyns. "If we dispense with the abundance of books, it is a quite ordinary home."

"Will we find Miss Schoenberg in one of those books on the shelves?" asked Bob, pointing to the volumes that filled a wide and solid oak shelf.

"I suppose so," said Mr. Heggyns. "On some of these shelves are the works of Arthur himself. He gave them a special place. In fact, he classified his books according to theme and genre. There is a bookcase dedicated solely to novels, another to plays, another to poetry, etc. In that one there," he said pointing to a solid maple bookcase, "are all his chess books. And in that one," he added, pointing to another corner, "all his encyclopedias and art books. Each shelf is cataloged and listed in a different way. Arthur was an extremely creative man."

"Very impressive," murmured Jupiter. "A booklover would find it hard to leave. But we haven't come to see books, but someone who lives in one of them. Well, Mr. Heggyns, I want to see how Miss Schoenberg can help us."

Mr. Heggyns smiled and turned.

"Of course, Jupiter," he said, heading back into the hall. "Come with me, boys. It's this way."

The Three Investigators followed the lawyer, who guided them down the hallway they saw on entering the house. When they reached the end, they turned right and entered a large room which appeared to be the study of the late Arthur Roberts. If the living room had surprised the boys by the number of books that covered its walls, the room in which they now stood drew their attention because of the incredible variety of objects that decorated it. A diverse assortment of items adorned the furniture and walls: a stuffed owl, an ancient oriental sword, a soldier's helmet from World War II, a shelf full of chess sets of all colors and sizes, a skull that smiled from the top of a cabinet, a bust of Leonardo da Vinci, a statue of a tiger, and dozens of other objects. A large armchair sat in the center of the room behind a huge desk covered with papers. Several paintings of various styles hung on the walls along with a multitude of framed photographs featuring the deceased writer in the company of important personalities from the movies and literature. The boys recognized their own mentor, Alfred Hitchcock, in one of them.

"This is Arthur's study," Mr. Heggyns said. "This was where he wrote most of his thrilling novels. As you can see, he loved to be surrounded by a wide variety of articles as he wrote. He said that this often served as his inspiration. Be that as it may, the room is quite astonishing, don't you think?"

"I agree," Pete said, nodding. "It looks more like an antique shop than the studio my father has at home."

"And now, boys, give me a moment and I will show you what we have come for," said Mr. Heggyns.

Under the watchful eyes of the boys, the lawyer went to a cabinet, opened it, and began to rummage inside. Jupiter, Pete, and Bob watched him pull things out and look behind many others with a puzzled expression.

"I think Arthur kept it here," the man said. "If I'm not mistaken... AHA! I found it. Here it is. I was sure Arthur had it in this closet."

Mr. Heggyns bent down and picked up something square from the bottom of the cabinet. Then he stood up and turned to the boys, carrying in his hands what appeared to be a medium-sized wooden box fitted with a latch and a metal handle. While the boys watched with an expression of wonder, the lawyer went to the large desk covered with papers and laid the mysterious box on it.

"Gather round, boys," he said. "That way you can see it better."

The boys obeyed, squeezing in front of the desk without losing sight of the box.

With a quick gesture, Mr. Heggyns opened the latch that held the box closed and popped it open. "Boys, I present to you Miss Schoenberg," he intoned.

For a few seconds the boys stared blankly at what was inside the box. Then, once they began breathing normally again, they blinked in amazement. Pete shook his head.

"But-if it's just a typewriter!" he cried in disappointment.

After a couple of seconds of silence, Bob cleared his throat and frowned.

"No, Pete," Bob said. "It just *looks like* a typewriter. It is very different from the one we have at Headquarters. I mean, it's not a conventional typewriter. This is something else."

And indeed, it was. What the three friends gazed at, though looking like a typewriter, was, at the same time, different. It was equipped with a keyboard that included all the letters of the alphabet. However, on the other side of it was a kind of panel in which all the letters of the alphabet appeared again, each in a tiny circular compartment. At first glance it gave the impression of having two keyboards. In addition, the appearance of the machine was especially bizarre because its base was covered by a network of cables that came in and out of different holes. Pete had the strange feeling that the machine was smiling mockingly from inside its open box, waiting for the boys to start using it.

"Two keyboards! It has two keyboards!" the boy grumbled. "What kind of typewriter has two keyboards? Isn't just one enough?"

"Don't worry, Pete," said Mr. Heggyns, smiling. "Actually, this machine doesn't have two keyboards, only one. The other is just a display panel. Bob was correct in saying that this isn't a typewriter, but something else. Jupiter, you are the First Investigator. Do you know what it is?"

Bob and Pete turned to look at their leader. The latter, who had remained silent, pinched his lower lip tirelessly.

"I think so," he said after a moment. "If I'm not mistaken, this is an Enigma machine. I read about it, but I never imagined that I would actually see one."

"Well done, Jupiter!" Said Mr. Heggyns. "Without a doubt, you are a true fount of knowledge. Boys, Jupiter's right. This is an Enigma machine. And more specifically an Erika model, which is a slightly later variant but whose operation is essentially the same as that of Enigma. This model dates, of course, from World War II. I don't know where Arthur got it, since the only thing he told me about it was that it was given to him by someone very important during a trip to Europe several years ago. He confessed to me once that he had always wanted to own one. I assure you that there are not many such as this in the world, so, as you can imagine, you are in front of a valuable collector's piece within the exciting field of cryptography."

"Crypto... what?" Pete asked.

"Cryptography," Bob repeated. "It is the discipline dedicated to writing encrypted messages. Cryptology, on the other hand, is the science that's dedicated to studying and deciphering these messages."

"And what the heck is this Enigma machine?"

"Surely Jupe can tell you, can't you, First?" Bob suggested.

The First Investigator took a deep breath, satisfied to know he had the attention of all those present.

"It's a coding machine and a decoder, Pete," Jupiter explained. "With it you can write encrypted messages and decrypt messages previously written by it or by another similar machine. The Nazis invented and used it during World War II. It was very effective until the Allies captured one and figured out how it worked. After arduous research, they managed to understand its mechanisms and, consequently, they intercepted many of the secret communications of the Germans, which helped the Allies win the war."

"I'm sure you even know how it works, don't you?" said Pete mockingly.

"More or less," said Jupiter, frowning at his friend. "Its operation is fascinating and, at the same time, extremely complicated. According to what I have read about it, inside the machine there are three rotors that spin as you type. The rotors must be set in a predetermined position previously agreed upon, before typing a message. As I recall, in the letter we found inside the chess set, Mr. Roberts says that we should ask Miss Schoenberg to type the text for us, for she *is ready to do it*. Those last words lead me to believe that we shouldn't touch the rotors, but simply connect the machine and start typing the text."

"I think so too, Jupiter," agreed Mr. Heggyns, nodding. "So, let's get started."

The lawyer pushed a button on the side of the machine and it produced a slight hum, as if it had just awakened from a deep sleep.

"It seems incredible that it still works," Bob remarked.

"Arthur had it checked out by specialists shortly after obtaining it," said Mr. Heggyns. "They said it was in impeccable condition for it had rarely been used. But let's not waste any more time. Let's do what we came here to do. Come on, Jupiter, I'll give you the honors. I assume you know how to make it work, right?"

"I think so," replied the First Investigator. "That, at least, is simple. All you have to do is type in the ciphertext. For each letter pressed, another one lights up on the display panel, which is the part Pete took for a second keyboard. We will write down the letters that light up and we will get the original message, which is the one we are looking for."

"Very good, Jupiter. Here's the letter with the text," said Mr. Heggyns, taking it from his coat pocket and handing it to the boy. "Whenever you wish."

Jupiter looked at the letter and reached toward the machine to press the X key, which was the first letter in the encrypted message. The letter T automatically lit up on in the display panel.

"Records," Jupiter said to Bob, "write down the letters that light up."

"Don't worry, First. I'm on it," said Bob, who had already pulled a small notebook and pencil out of his pocket and written down the first deciphered letter.

"Now comes the T," said Jupiter, pressing that letter.

An H lit up on the display panel.

One by one, Jupiter pressed the letters of the encrypted message while Bob recorded the decrypted letters of the original message.

"So, this is the mysterious Miss Schoenberg," Pete said in fascination as he watched Bob and Jupiter work.

"Indeed, Pete," said Mr. Heggyns, amused. "*The Island of Mirrors*, Arthur's novel that I referred to earlier and where it appears, is set in the Second World War. In the novel, the Germans spend all their time hunting a mysterious woman known only as Erika Schoenberg, whom they suspect is a spy working for the Allies.

"It doesn't occur to them to suspect that Miss Schoenberg is a cipher machine that a harmless looking old man, who turns out to be the real spy, carries with him in a shabby suitcase. The novel is frankly brilliant and the climax is, in my humble opinion, tremendous."

Looking at Bob and Jupiter, he said, "How's it going, guys?"

"There it is," Jupiter announced. "The last letter is an A."

The boy clicked on that letter and the letter S lit up on the attached panel.

"I have it," Bob said, writing the last letter of the original message. "We're done. We have the message! Although..." he added after reading what he had just written, "I don't know what to think of it..."

Arching his eyebrows in surprise, Bob turned his notebook and showed the others the message he had transcribed. Jupiter, Pete, and Mr. Heggyns came over to see it better. What they read was the following:

THE WAY THE KNIGHT MOVES

THE WAY THE BISHOPS MOVE

THE WAY THE PAWN MOVES

"Oh, no...!" Pete moaned.

## CHAPTER 6

# TWO DUBIOUS VISITORS

After rereading the message several times, the four looked at each other in silence.

"Good grief, Jupe!" exclaimed Pete, unable to contain himself. "I thought we had deciphered the message. All we have is more gibberish with the same meaning as the previous one: nothing. This case is a head scratcher."

"I think we've made some progress, Pete," Bob said. "At least we can read this message. What do you think, Jupe?"

Frowning, Jupiter was pinching his lower lip fiercely.

"It sounds like a chess puzzle," he said after a brief silence. "Yes, it certainly seems to be some kind of riddle related to chess. Fellows, we're progressing from one riddle to another."

"I agree with, Jupiter," said Mr. Heggyns. "Honestly, it sounds like Arthur."

"What do you mean, Mr. Heggyns?" Bob asked. "You mean Mr. Roberts liked chess related riddles?"

"Yes, of course he liked them, Bob," the lawyer replied. "I already told you he was passionate about the world of chess and everything to do with the game. However, this time I meant that it was very fitting for Arthur to behave in this manner. It was a technique he often used in his novels. He would expose one clue that led to another, and this, in turn, to a third, and so on. Sometimes he subjected his characters to the most unthinkable hardships leading them from one path to another. I firmly believe that's what his intention is here. He is presenting us a challenge. This message will lead us to a new clue, that one to another, and so on until we find what he hid. You cannot imagine how much he enjoyed designing this kind of plot. He was a most ingenious man."

"Could the machine be defective?" Pete asked. "Perhaps we didn't get the right message."

"No, Pete," the lawyer shook his head. "If the machine was damaged it would result in completely unintelligible text. The message we obtained, however, is perfectly readable. There is no doubt that this is the right message."

"Does the message seem readable to you?" Pete insisted. "I can't make heads or tails out of it."

"What Mr. Heggyns means, Pete," said Jupiter, "is that the message itself is understandable. The only thing that's not clear is what it means. That's what we have to find out. It seems to be a chess related riddle, and fortunately we have the chess set Mr. Roberts sent to Mr. Heggyns before he died. Now I understand why Mr. Roberts told him in his letter to always keep the chess set with him. This game seems to be an indispensable part of finding the whereabouts of what Mr. Roberts hid. Now that we have the original message, I propose that we devote ourselves to studying it thoroughly. Let's go back to the salvage yard and get to work, guys. Besides, it's getting late and Aunt Mathilda will begin to seriously consider having dinner without me. And that would be a big problem for me!"

They all laughed. Then, after checking his watch, Mr. Heggyns looked at the boys.

"Very well," he said. "I also have some pending business to deal with. I'll drive you to the salvage yard and continue on to my house. However, I'll take Miss Schoenberg with me just in case we need to use her again. Once involved in one of Arthur's mysteries, you never know what might happen."

The lawyer quickly turned off the machine and closed the box that it was in. Then, picking it up by the metal handle, he placed it under his arm.

"Let's go, boys," he said.

They all headed for the front door. Once in the hall, Jupiter, who was in front, opened the door and began to step out. However, as he crossed the threshold, he came face to face with a man who had just come to call. Jupiter stopped dead in his tracks and stared at the stranger. The others, unable to stop in time, ran into the back of the First Investigator without knowing what was happening.

"What is it, Jupe?" Pete asked. "Let us out."

"We have a visitor," Jupiter said simply.

When the others looked up, they saw the man standing in front of Jupiter with his hand still raised as if he were about to knock on the door. As the newcomer lowered his hand and regarded Mr. Heggyns and the boys with surprise, the others were able to observe him more closely. The visitor, a tall, thin middle-aged man, was dressed in an expensive and impeccable suit and wore a hat no less flamboyant and expensive. His face was thin and bony, with sunken eyes and cheeks. His mouth had very thin lips and looked like a slash drawn on the skin of his face. His appearance was most elegant and distinguished, and was accentuated by the strong scent of cologne that surrounded him.

Once his initial surprise was overcome, the man looked at each of them and cleared his throat.

"I beg your pardon," he said in a strong British accent. "Unless I am mistaken, this is where my friend, the famous writer Arthur Roberts, resides, does he not?"

Mr. Heggyns stepped forward to stand in front of the stranger.

"Mr. Roberts passed away just a few days ago," he said. "If you were a friend of his, you should have been notified. I was his lawyer and personally took care of sending the unhappy news to all his friends and acquaintances. I don't know if you were on that list. Your name is..."

"I am Mr. Sinclair. Malcolm Sinclair," said the newcomer. "My friend Mr. Lagalle, here," he added, turning to one side, "and I have just arrived from Europe on a business trip."

As he stepped aside, the newcomer revealed a man shorter than himself who had up till then been hidden behind him. He was a dark-haired man with broad shoulders and strong arms, which caused a noticeable bulge in the sleeves of his suit. Instead of a hat, like his partner, he wore a type of cap. His general appearance wasn't as distinguished or elegant as Mr. Sinclair's, and the expression on his face was rather surly. He had thick eyebrows, and a deep scar drew a pink-colored diagonal line across his chin.

"Mr. Lagalle comes from Paris," Mr. Sinclair explained. "He met me in London so that we could come and visit Mr. Roberts on business. We both met him during his last trip to Europe and the three of us became close friends. We regret his death, Mr...."

"Heggyns," he said. "My name is Glenn Heggyns, and for years I was Mr. Roberts' personal lawyer until his death a week ago. As I have told you, I communicated the sad event to all his acquaintances, and even to his distant relatives in Europe, but I see that I didn't do the same with you. In fact, if I did not, it was because Mr. Roberts never mentioned your names nor alluded to you. How did you know him?"

The shorter man, the so-called Lagalle, twitched nervously and looked at his companion. The latter maintained his composure and smiled. Pete shuddered slightly at the smile.

"It's a long story," he said, "that would be a little tedious to tell. I deeply regret that my old friend Arthur did not tell you about us, but you know that these writers who like to live like hermits are often quiet men. Arthur was, no doubt. Maybe that's why he did not talk about us. Who knows?"

"Excuse me, Mr.... er... St. Claire," said Jupiter.

Mr. Heggyns looked at Juve and gave a start. Pete and Bob, somewhat less surprised, turned to their companion. An actor by nature from a very early age, he had dropped his jaw, which hung half open giving his face a stupid expression, and had slumped his shoulders as if his arms weighed half a ton each. He narrowed his eyes too, which gave him the appearance of an imbecile. This was a ploy that Jupiter often used to confront people whom, at first glance, it was better to distrust. This trick had proven fruitful to The Three Investigators on many occasions, for it was unthinkable for anyone to be suspicious of a boy as stupid as the one Jupiter was portraying at the time.

"Sinclair, young man. My name is Sinclair, not St. Claire," he corrected, giving Jupiter a reproachful look.

"Excuse me, er... Sinclair," Jupiter went on in an idiot voice. "I don't know if you knew that my uncle is no longer with us."

Which was true. Jupiter's uncle was in the salvage yard, several miles away.

"Your uncle?" the Englishman asked, surprised. "What do you mean, your uncle? Who are you, boy?"

"My uncle will not be able to see you anymore," said Jupiter, looking stupid. "Maybe I can... er... attend to you myself."

Bob and Pete smiled at each other. Jupiter's uncle, of course, could no longer attend to many people that day, because, taking into account the time it was, the salvage yard would soon close its doors to the public.

"Your uncle?" repeated Mr. Sinclair, astonished. "Arthur Roberts was your uncle? I understood that he had no family in America."

Mr. Heggyns cleared his throat and laid a hand on Jupiter's shoulder.

"Jupiter is a distant nephew of the late Mr. Roberts," he said. "The poor boy was greatly affected by the death of his uncle. I am currently his adviser. Can I help you with anything? What kind of business did you wish to conduct with Mr. Roberts?"

"You see," Mr. Sinclair began, as he alternately stared in confusion at Jupiter and Mr. Heggyns. "Mr. Lagalle and I are art dealers. Mr. Roberts had something that we bought from him on one occasion but, for one reason or another, he couldn't send to us. So, after a lengthy wait, we

decided to travel here to collect what belongs to us. We do not intend to disturb his nephew. We are just here in search of something that is ours. Now I understand that, being ill, Arthur was not able to send to us what he sold us."

"Did my uncle sell you something... er... Mr... er... St. Claire?" inquired Jupiter. "What did he sell to you? Do you recall? Maybe I can... er... find it for you."

Bob and Pete smiled to themselves again. It was difficult for them to imagine a man as expensively dressed and perfumed as Mr. Sinclair rummaging through the heaps of scrap stacked in the salvage yard.

"Art, boy. Works of art," the man replied with a shuddering smile of yellow teeth. "I have already told you that we are art dealers. And I repeat that my name is not St. Claire, but Sinclair."

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir," Jupiter said, speaking in his hopelessly stupid voice. "Please... er... excuse me. Art, you say? Is it possible that... Mr. Heggyns," he added, looking at the lawyer with a helpless face, "do you think he is referring to my uncle's... er... pictures and statues?"

Mr. Heggyns looked at Jupiter in surprise.

"What are you saying, Jupiter? Ah! Oh, of course, yes. I'm sure he means them. Too bad they aren't here anymore."

"Yes... it's a shame," murmured Jupiter, pretending to be crestfallen.

Mr. Sinclair, appearing alarmed, looked at them both with a frown.

"What happened to the artwork in the house?" he asked.

"The police took them," Jupiter said simply.

"What are you saying?" Mr. Sinclair asked.

"That's right," Mr. Heggyns quickly corroborated. "After Mr. Roberts' death, the police decided to take possession of the artwork as a precautionary measure on the grounds that it's too valuable to remain unprotected in a house as isolated as this one, now that it is suddenly empty. The police have it all temporarily. However, they are merely custodians until Mr. Roberts' will is settled."

"If you wish... er... you can come with us to the police station," Jupiter offered. "We are going there right now. Maybe they'll let you see the artwork they have in custody and... er... maybe... maybe you'll find the one you say my uncle sold to you."

Mr. Sinclair glanced at his companion and took a step back.

"No, my boy, thank you very much," he said, still smiling. "I don't think it is necessary to go that far. Please follow the procedures relating to Mr. Roberts' will and we will contact you as soon as it is over. We have no wish to intrude. As for the police, it seems to me that it was a good idea to allow them to take custody of the artwork. Undoubtedly the best thing that could have been done, wouldn't you agree, Mr. Lagalle?"

The short, dark man just shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Let's go already. It's late," he said simply with a pronounced French accent.

"Yes, it is getting late," Mr. Sinclair agreed. "We must leave, gentlemen. I am sorry about your uncle, my boy," he added, turning to Jupiter. "Please accept my deepest condolences at such a regrettable loss. And now we must leave. It has been a pleasure meeting you."

The two men turned away and hastened toward the road, where a small black car was parked next to Mr. Heggyns' sedan. They jumped into it and sped away from the house, disappearing behind a bend in the canyon. Even after leaving, the strong smell of the Englishman's cologne hung in the afternoon air.

"You were great, Jupe!" cried Pete excitedly. "I didn't like the look of those two guys as soon as I saw them. And you managed to drive them away just by mentioning the police."

"That's right, Second," Jupiter acknowledged, speaking again like the intelligent boy he was, and putting aside the dimwitted persona he had just emulated. "Those two seem like the type to be cautious of. Mr. Roberts was right to warn us in his letter that there could be more people interested in finding what he hid before he passed away. Which is not surprising knowing that it's something of great value."

"It took me a moment to catch on to your performance, Jupiter," said Mr. Heggyns. "Fortunately, I reacted quickly enough and was able to follow your story. I didn't like those guys either. They looked dangerous."

"I think so too," Bob said. "The French guy's jacket was very tight, and I don't think it was all due to his muscles. He was probably wearing a holster with a gun."

"I got that impression also," said Mr. Heggyns. "I hope there aren't many more ruffians like that on the trail of what Arthur hid. Maybe this is too dangerous after all, boys."

"No, Mr. Heggyns," Jupiter said quickly. "I don't think there are many more people in search of what Mr. Roberts hid. In his letter, he said that 'it was possible' that someone else would be looking for it, not that it was a sure fact. In addition, he refers to the supposed loot as something that 'almost no one believes is lost.' That 'almost no one' excludes almost everyone. However, this meeting has certainly been enlightening, since it reveals something that until now was only a slight suspicion to me."

"And what's that, Jupe?" Bob asked.

"That what Mr. Roberts hid was a work of art," said Jupiter. "Let's connect the dots, Records. Mr. Roberts loved art and even owned some artwork. These two acknowledged being art dealers and claimed to be here to retrieve a work that Mr. Roberts sold them. The letter tells us it is something of great value. All this seems to point in one direction, the writer hid an extremely valuable work of art before he died."

"But, Jupiter," said Mr. Heggyns, "although Arthur loved art and possessed some works of definite value, he wasn't really a collector. I never knew of him acquiring any artwork that would be considered priceless."

"I know," said Jupiter. "But perhaps he did it on occasion without ever informing you. We shouldn't give up on such a possibility."

"I don't know, Jupiter," said Mr. Heggyns. "Perhaps you are right, but the fact is that seems a very remote possibility."

"Leave it for now," Bob intervened. "Right now, the important thing is to go home and start working on the message that we deciphered with the help of the Enigma machine."

Everyone agreed with Bob. So, after locking the door tightly, and clutching the wooden box firmly under his arm, Mr. Heggyns led the boys to his car and they all climbed in. Moments later,

they were headed home along the road that wound through the canyon and beyond, into the hills near Rocky Beach. The already setting sun's fading light projected the car's long shadow on the mountain slopes as they drove.

The street lights were already lit in Rocky Beach. By the time they reached the salvage yard, the sun, which sets rapidly in southern California, had almost disappeared. Everything was dark inside the immense junkyard except for the office, where someone, probably Uncle Titus or Aunt Mathilda, was rearranging papers awaiting the imminent closing time. Mr. Heggyns stopped the car by the curb, a few yards from the entrance.

"My aunt and uncle are about to close," Jupiter said.

The truth was that it had been a long hard day.

"Very well," said Mr. Heggyns. "Shall I leave the three of you here? Bob and Pete, do you want me to take you to your respective homes?" he offered.

But they shook their heads.

"Thank you, sir," said Bob, "but don't bother. Pete and I have our bikes here."

"As you wish," said the lawyer.

"Perhaps it would be better if you parked inside the yard, sir," said Jupiter suddenly, "and not in the middle of the street."

"Think someone followed us, First?" Pete asked.

Jupiter nodded.

"That's right, guys," he said, pinching his lower lip as he spoke. "Mr. Sinclair and his companion, Mr. Lagalle, may have followed us. In fact, I would almost count on it."

"But, Jupiter," said Mr. Heggyns, "I haven't noticed anything strange. I haven't seen their car behind ours at any time. And I assure you that I would have noticed, because when we started back I thought the same thing as you."

"They looked like they know how to follow someone without their quarry noticing," Jupiter said. "Also, they may have switched cars. Guys like that usually have an alternate vehicle wherever they go to secure an escape route or to 'disguise' their tracking."

"I see," Mr. Heggyns sighed. "What do you propose, Jupiter?"

"I suggest that you park your vehicle inside the salvage yard, in a dimly lit area," he replied. "I don't know if those two believed the story that I am a relative of Mr. Roberts, but if they watch us and see that I'm staying here, they'll discover that this is where I live, learn what my name is, and realize that we deceived them. Learning that we lied to them, they will think that we did it in order to hide some secret from them. In which case, they may prove to be *truly* dangerous."

"I think you're right, First," Pete swallowed.

"Besides, we don't want them to see the chess set," Jupiter added. "If they do they might think it's important and try to take it. And we need the chess set to solve this conundrum. Mr. Roberts made that quite clear in his letter."

"All right, lad," said Mr. Heggyns. "Let's park inside, then."

The lawyer moved his car forward through the large open iron gates. Then he made his way to the shaded corner that Jupiter pointed out, and turned off the engine. After looking around and turning off the headlights, Mr. Heggyns turned to the boys.

"I hope things go well, fellows," he said. "Call me as soon as you figure something out from the message or if you see those men again. I hope they don't cause problems."

"I hope that too," Pete said nervously.

The boys got out of the car and said goodbye to Mr. Heggyns.

Before he started the car, he told them, "You'd better keep the chess set and the letter," he said, passing both things to Jupiter through the window. "If both are really so important, you will certainly need them to solve Arthur's message. So, keep them with you. I know that they will be in good hands. I will keep Miss Schoenberg with me," he added, smiling and enjoying the posthumous joke of Arthur Roberts. "If you think that she can be useful again you have only to call me."

"We will call to keep you abreast of our progress," Jupiter promised. "As for the chess set and the letter, thank you for entrusting them to us. We will keep them in a safe place."

After thanking them again, Mr. Heggyns started his car and left the salvage yard slowly without turning on his headlights until he reached the street.

Once they were alone, Jupiter said, "Stay in the shadows. We don't want to be seen. I'll go and put away the chess set in Headquarters. You can return home discreetly using one of our secret entrances."

Bob and Pete nodded and followed their friend. The three slipped stealthily from shadow to shadow in the direction of Jupiter's workshop. Unfortunately, Pete stumbled and knocked over a stack of garden blocks that fell apart like a house of cards, causing a loud rumble.

There were hurried footsteps in the office, accompanied by an exclamation. A second later all the yard lights went on. The shadows dissipated instantly as the three boys remained completely paralyzed. The strong figure of Aunt Mathilda suddenly appeared in the office doorway. Seeing them, she put her hands on her hips and glared at them sternly. Her frown was so profound that her forehead seemed furrowed by a deep scar.

"But for all the saints in heaven!" she blurted out, her voice echoing through the yard. "Jupiter Jones and company! What are you doing there? What a fright you gave me! For a moment, I thought there were thieves in the yard! What are you playing at?"

Jupiter swallowed and, adopting the humblest expression he knew, which in his case was not an easy accomplishment, he looked at his aunt.

"We were just playing... scouts, Aunt Mathilda," he said.

"Well, you have little or nothing to explore here!" cried the woman. "And for your information, we have closed. So, go wash your hands and get ready for dinner. Bob and Pete, are you boys staying for dinner?" she added.

The boys, who ate at the Jones' house almost as often as in their respective homes, chose to decline the offer on that occasion.

"No, thanks, Mrs. Jones," Bob said. "My parents expect me to dine with them from time to time."

"Same for me," Pete sighed. "But thanks for the invitation."

"As you wish," muttered Aunt Mathilda. "And now quit playing around. What a fright you gave me!"

The woman retreated into the office and turned off the yard lights. They were plunged into shadows even deeper than before.

"Every last crook in Rocky Beach must have seen us," Pete sighed as he worked his way through the pile of blocks he had knocked to the ground. "Even if they weren't watching us before."

"It was a stroke of bad luck," Jupiter said. "Well, we'd better say goodbye until tomorrow. Pete, you think about Mr. Roberts' message. Bob, you do the same, but also try to learn more about chess in any free time that you have while working at the library tomorrow. It wouldn't hurt to know more about this fascinating game. I, for my part, have changed my mind and think that I will take the chess set to my room for tonight. Pete, you and I will meet at Headquarters tomorrow morning. Bob, you come as soon as you leave the library."

"And what will you do, Juve?" Pete asked.

The First Investigator looked at his friends and shrugged. Then, frowning, he said, "Me? Apart from thinking about the message there is only one thing I can do."

"And what is it?" Bob asked.

"Play chess," Jupiter Jones said simply.

## **CHAPTER 7**

# **A VISIT FROM CHIEF REYNOLDS**

The first thing Jupiter did when he opened his eyes the next morning was to take a hard look at the chess set, which rested placidly on his bedside table. He wondered silently what kind of secret the white and black piece of wood could have. Then, when he went down to the kitchen to have breakfast, his Uncle Titus, who had been sitting at the table for some time, set aside the newspaper he was reading and gave him a warm smile. Aunt Mathilda, standing behind her husband, said good morning as she fried bacon for breakfast.

"Good morning, Uncle Titus. Good morning, Aunt Mathilda," he said with a yawn.

"Good morning, Jupiter," his uncle replied. "How are you this morning? It doesn't look like you slept very well. I hope those losses in chess that I inflicted on you last night just before bed didn't keep you awake."

Jupe smiled in spite of himself. The night before, after supper, Jupiter had suggested to his uncle to play a game of chess, to which the man agreed delightedly. They had played two games and both had finished with the same result: victory of the uncle over the nephew. Jupiter, tired after the events of the previous day and with his mind more focused on the message left by Arthur Roberts than on the developments of the game, was no match for his uncle, an expert in chess and totally concentrated on the game. However, the boy consoled himself thinking that it had served as an approach to chess, to the movements of its pieces and, finally, to the mysterious case that The Three Investigators had on their hands.

"More or less, Uncle Titus," said Jupiter, sitting down at the table. "I must admit that you are an excellent player."

"Little can be done against the Jones opening if you're not a real expert," said his uncle, laughing. "It's all strategy, Jupiter," he said while touching his finger to his forehead. "Pure and simple strategy. The truth is that it's a pleasure to play with a chess set as finely crafted as yours."

"Yes, Uncle Titus," said Jupiter. "Although it's a pity that it really belongs to someone else."

"To someone else?" asked Aunt Mathilda, looking up from the pan. "By all the saints! Your uncle paid for it! It belonged to him until he gave it to you. It's yours now."

Titus Jones looked at his nephew inquisitively.

"What do you mean, Jupiter?" he asked him.

The boy proceeded to relate everything concerning the advertisement published in the newspaper and about the true owner of the game, although he was very careful to make only the slightest reference to the letter found in it and to the mystery that both the letter and the chess set had triggered. He added that he possessed the chess set at the moment because the real owner had agreed to lend it for a few days, as a reward, for him and his friends to practice. After hearing this, his uncle smiled and began to prepare his pipe.

"Your gesture is very praiseworthy, Jupiter," acknowledged his uncle. "If I were that Heggyns fellow, I would have been very sorry to have lost such a beautiful chess set. Not many people would do what you did. As for your birthday present, don't worry. I'll figure something out there."

"You don't have to, Uncle Titus," said Jupiter. "But thanks anyway."

After breakfast was over, Jupiter's aunt had him organize some items in the salvage yard. Resigned, the boy set to work, which allowed him to keep his hands occupied while his mind was absorbed in the message left by Mr. Roberts. As he worked, his thoughts came into focus little by little with certain ideas regarding the meaning of the message going through his mind. When, after half an hour, the task was finished, the First Investigator was an entirely different boy from the one who, sleepy and sulky, had come downstairs for breakfast. His eyes were now shining with pure excitement.

With nothing else to do for the moment, Jupiter looked around. After checking that there was no sign of Aunt Mathilda anywhere, the boy ran to the house where he lived with his aunt and uncle, went up to his room, picked up the chess set and, with it firmly tucked under his arm, ran back to the junkyard. Then he slyly entered the corner of his workshop, removed the grating behind the printing press, and scurried through Tunnel Two to Headquarters.

Once inside, Jupiter took a seat behind the desk and deposited the chess set in front of him. He opened the drawer containing the pieces, which continued to sit comfortably in the bed of foam, and he took out a knight, two bishops, and a pawn. With shaking hands, he placed the four pieces on the board and began to move them according to the rules governing the movement of the pieces.

After a minute, Jupiter, completely absorbed in his thoughts, stopped moving the pieces on the board. His eyes shone brighter than ever. Then, as if waking up from a trance, he picked up the phone and hurriedly dialed Mr. Heggyns' number. A woman's voice answered after a couple of rings.

"Excuse me for disturbing you, ma'am," Jupiter said. "Is this Mr. Glenn Heggyns' address?"

"Yes, that's right, but..." the woman replied nervously.

"Could I speak to him, please?" Jupiter asked quickly. "This is very important. My name is Jupiter Jones. Mr. Heggyns knows who I am."

"Yes, but... Mr. Heggyns cannot stand..." the woman replied in a whisper. "He's not... Anyway, he..."

Jupiter interrupted her, he was so excited.

"Not home?" he asked. "Well? Do you know when he'll be back? Or can you give me another phone number where I can reach him?"

"Mr. Heggyns..."

Jupiter, surprised, heard the woman stifle a sob.

"Are you Mr. Heggyns' housekeeper, ma'am?" he asked.

"Yes," the woman replied in a strangled voice. "Mr. Heggyns is in the hospital. Last night two unscrupulous men attacked him and... they hurt him severely. The poor man is badly injured... You found me at home by pure chance. I'm just picking up some of his belongings to take to him and... My Lord, what a disgrace!"

"Madam, is Mr. Heggyns seriously injured?" inquired Jupiter, more and more alarmed.

"I don't really know yet," the woman replied. "I... How can someone do something like that to Mr. Heggyns? He is so good to everyone... I'm sorry, but I have to get back to the hospital as soon as possible. You should call there."

The woman on the other side of the line hung up. Jupiter, still surprised by the news he had just received, slowly hung up the receiver and stood motionless staring blankly.

"Rascal! Rascal! Give me back my doubloons, rascal!" Blackbeard, the mynah bird the boys had adopted after resolving an earlier case, croaked from inside the cage hanging from the ceiling.

Jupiter looked up and stared at him. Blackbeard, restrained by the attentive eyes of the First Investigator, chose to remain silent and hide his head under one of his wings. Jupiter finally looked away and sighed in dismay.

After a few seconds a noise from the floor made him react. The trapdoor leading to Tunnel Two opened and Pete was smiling. However, seeing the expression on his friend's face the Second Investigator couldn't help but exclaim as he took a seat in front of Jupiter, "Gosh, Jupe! What happened to you? Anybody would say you've seen a ghost. Did you fall asleep thinking about Mr. Roberts' riddle?"

Jupiter proceeded to recount what he had just learned from the call to Mr. Heggyns' address.

"Attacked!" exclaimed Pete as soon as he heard it all. "Golly, Jupe! Attacked by two unscrupulous men! I bet it was Sinclair and Lagalle! I knew those guys were dangerous! What are we going to do now?"

Jupiter sighed.

"In the first place," he said, "we don't know that it was Mr. Sinclair and Mr. Lagalle who attacked Mr. Heggyns, but for the moment what we can do is call the hospital in Rocky Beach to see how he is. If we can talk to him or even go to see him, we may find out who assaulted him, and we can discuss with him certain ideas I have about Mr. Roberts' message."

Pete blinked in surprise.

"Have you solved the message?" he asked. "I admit I was up all night going over it in my head without making sense of it. Well," he added, "at least until I fell asleep."

"I don't know if I've solved the message, Pete," Jupiter said. "But, I do have a definite idea about it. I would have liked to have gotten Mr. Heggyns' opinion. But, as you can see, it was impossible."

"And what idea is that, Jupe?" Pete asked simply. "What do you think the message means?"

"All in good time, Second," responded Jupiter. "First we have to call the hospital to see if we can find out anything about Mr. Heggyns' condition. Also, we must wait for Bob to let us know what he may have learned at the library."

Jupiter opened the desk drawer and pulled out a phone book. After searching for the phone number of the hospital in Rocky Beach, he picked up the receiver and started dialing. He had not quite finished when they suddenly heard Aunt Mathilda's powerful voice echoing through the salvage yard.

"Jupiter! Jupiter Jones!" shouted the good woman. "Where are you? Jupiter Jones! Get out here right now! You have a visitor!"

The boys exchanged a silent look. Jupiter hung up the phone and set the phone book aside while Pete jumped up and was about to take a look outside of Headquarters through the *See-All*. This

was a contraption that Jupiter had built to remedy the only defect in their command post: their lack of visibility. It was really nothing more than a rudimentary periscope made of an old metal pipe inside of which mirrors had been arranged. Nevertheless, and in spite of being homemade, it was extremely useful to the boys to be able to inspect the vicinity of Headquarters.

Pete turned the *See-All* in one direction and then another until finally he found what he was looking for. In doing so, the boy gave a start.

"Golly, Jupe!" he cried. "Guess who's with Aunt Mathilda. Chief Reynolds!"

Jupiter looked at his friend and got to his feet. Chief Reynolds was the chief of police in Rocky Beach. The boys knew him well, for they had helped him on several occasions to solve very difficult mysteries.

"If the chief himself comes to see us, it must be important," he said. "Come on. Let's get out of here and see what he wants."

The two boys hurried out of Headquarters through Tunnel Two. The voice of Aunt Mathilda, who never ceased to call Jupiter, followed them all through the tunnel until they exited behind the printing press in his workshop. After briefly brushing off their trousers, the boys left the workshop, circled an enormous pile of junk, and headed to where Chief Reynolds and Aunt Mathilda were waiting for them.

When she saw them, she exclaimed, "There you are finally! I don't know where you were that it took so long to answer my calls. I was starting to get angry with you! Chief Reynolds has come to see you, Jupiter. By the way, good morning, Pete."

"Good morning, Mrs. Jones," the boy replied courteously as the woman turned and approached a customer who needed her help.

Jupiter and Pete were left alone with the police chief of Rocky Beach. Samuel Reynolds, dressed in his spotless blue uniform, gave them a faint smile although, in spite of it, his face showed obvious signs of concern.

"Hello, boys," he said, shaking hands.

"Hi, Chief," said Jupiter. "What brings you here? Can we help you with anything?"

Reynolds looked at the boys with a grave expression.

"I think you can help me," he answered. "I've come specifically to see you on a very particular matter. You see, I came directly from the hospital. If I am not mistaken, you know a man who was admitted yesterday after being brutally assaulted. His name is Glenn Heggyns. Am I right? Do you know him?"

Jupiter and Pete assented.

"That's right, Chief," said the First Investigator, "but only since yesterday."

Reynolds nodded slowly and pursed his lips.

"Very well," he said. "He told me exactly the same thing. Anyhow, the fact is that last night, as he was heading home, Mr. Heggyns was assaulted by two individuals who attacked him, threatened him, and even robbed him."

"Yes, sir," said Jupiter, nodding. "We know. Well, at least we know he's in the hospital because he was attacked yesterday. We knew nothing of any robbery."

Chief Reynolds raised his eyebrows, visibly surprised.

"You knew that?" he asked.

"Well, we actually found out just before you came," Jupiter said.

The First Investigator proceeded to relate everything concerning the call he had made to Mr. Heggyns' home and the brief conversation he had had with the lawyer's housekeeper.

"We were about to call the hospital to see if we could talk to him, or at least find out what his condition was, when you arrived," Jupiter concluded. "That's all we know. So, you were able to talk to Mr. Heggyns? How is he?"

Chief Reynolds took off his cap, put it under his arm and ran a hand over his forehead.

"First of all," he said, "I want to be clear on one thing. Mr. Heggyns is not well. The doctor has ordered absolute rest for him, so I don't want you to disturb him under any circumstances. Given his delicate condition the only people who are allowed to see him are the doctor in charge of his case and myself, since he asked for me personally. I will tell you that his condition is serious, but if he maintains absolute rest as prescribed by the doctor and is not subjected to stress of any kind, he should recover well. Apart from a severe shock, Mr. Heggyns has suffered acute trauma and has dizziness and intervals of unconsciousness."

"What exactly happened, sir?" Pete asked.

"He told me this morning while he was conscious," Reynolds said, "that after dropping you off here last night, he was driving home on one of the minor highways along the coast when a car driven by two individuals pursued him and forced him off the road. His car was literally rammed and crashed into a tree. Half-conscious from shock, and unable to move, Mr. Heggyns, however, could see the car that struck him had stopped a few yards ahead of his and two individuals got out of it. The two men came up to where he was, searched the car, and stole a wooden box containing a valuable message-coding machine dating back to World War II. The last thing he saw was the two men running back to their car carrying the machine. Then he passed out. When he awoke, he was already in the hospital.

"Mr. Heggyns told me that the two men who attacked him are the same people he and you saw yesterday at the house of a Mr. Roberts, a writer who died recently and who was a client of Mr. Heggyns. He gave me a brief description of the two individuals, but he said that you might be able to add to the information about them. Mr. Heggyns also showed me your card and explained to me that you are helping him find something that his late client, Mr. Roberts, hid with the intention of him finding it. I suppose this is one of those strange mysteries that you love to solve, right?"

Jupiter and Pete nodded.

"That's right, Chief," said the First Investigator. "That is the case we are currently on. It all started yesterday, when my Uncle Titus gave me a chess set he had just acquired at a pawn shop downtown. You see, sir, it turns out..."

Jupiter proceeded to recount to Chief Reynolds everything concerning the case thus far, without omitting a single detail. He explained everything step by step, paying particular attention to describing both the Enigma machine, whose theft was the alleged motive of the assault on Mr. Heggyns, and to Malcolm Sinclair and Mr. Lagalle, who were clearly the perpetrators of the aforementioned assault.

When Jupiter went on to describe the car in which the two individuals left after a brief visit to the home of Arthur Roberts, it occurred to him to ask, "What kind of car attacked Mr. Heggyns, Chief? Did he describe it?"

"Mr. Heggyns could only tell me it was a red sedan," said the chief, "he didn't get a chance to see anything else, let alone the license number."

Jupiter bit his lower lip.

"When those two left Arthur Roberts' house, it was in a smaller, black car. I thought that they might have another vehicle. That's why none of us managed to notice anything strange yesterday, while, presumably, they followed us."

Jupiter added an exhaustive description of the small black car which Chief Reynolds wrote down in a small notebook alongside the previous notations he had made regarding the description of the two individuals and some details concerning the mystery raised by the dead writer.

"All right, guys," the chief finally said, closing his notebook and putting it in his shirt pocket. "So, you are helping Mr. Heggyns to look for something that Arthur Roberts, the recently deceased writer, seems to have hidden with the sole intention of him finding it. That sounds rather macabre and twisted, as if Roberts was trying to write a final mystery story even after he died. Or as if, unable to write it because he died, he was making you live through it."

Jupiter pursed his lips.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I suppose all this could be interpreted from that point of view."

Chief Reynolds was silent for a few seconds, then inhaled deeply, "Look, boys," he said. "This case doesn't seem to be a game at all. Someone has been attacked without hesitation, and if there are criminals around capable of doing that to an adult, think about what they could do to three boys like you. I know that if I forbid you to proceed with your investigation it won't do much good because you will carry on with it anyway. I know what a mystery means to you, especially to you, Jupiter. So, I want you to promise me that you will keep your eyes wide open and that you'll be careful at all times, without exception. You have proven yourselves on more than one occasion, and I trust your judgment to the utmost, but promise me that you will be extremely careful. Do we agree on that, young men?"

Pete and Jupiter nodded.

"We will, Chief," said the latter. "Thank you for letting us continue with the investigation."

"All right, Jupiter," said the chief. "Now, boys, tell me one thing. Are you fully convinced that what Arthur Roberts concealed was a work of art? What makes you think so?"

"Jupe, at least, is," Pete replied. "Right, Jupe?"

Jupiter nodded.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Certain details of the case, to which I have already alluded, cause me to believe it. Details, for example, that Mr. Roberts loved art but had only a few works of relative value in his house. That leads one to think that he could have kept one or more extremely valuable works somewhere else, somewhere he never told his lawyer, Mr. Heggyns. On the other hand, Mr. Sinclair and Mr. Lagalle have shown by their actions they are after something. Otherwise I don't think they would have gone so far as to attack Mr. Heggyns in the way they did."

They claim to be art dealers in search of something Mr. Roberts possessed. I don't think they are art dealers, but rather members of some gang of smugglers. In any event, art keeps popping up in this case."

Chief Reynolds stared at Jupiter for a few seconds and smiled.

"You are quite perceptive, Jupiter," he said. "That, and because I know that I can trust you, is why I'll provide you with some information that, although it's never been proven, is a consistent rumor that's been going around the underworld for some time. What I'm going to tell you must be kept strictly between us."

Jupiter and Pete, intrigued, opened their eyes wide.

"We won't say a word, sir," Pete said.

"You see, boys..." Chief Reynolds began. "Over the past few years, the Rocky Beach Police Department has broken up, on more than one occasion, bands of outlaws specializing in the art trade. For good or ill, the mansions of people connected to the movies abound in this area and in the environs of Los Angeles. These people are rich, and many of them collect art. And when I say art I'm talking about works of art that are worth a lot, a lot of money. There are walls in some Hollywood mansions that are worth much more than those in many museums based on what hangs on them. You yourselves, from a previous case, can attest to everything I'm telling you."

"Roberts was one of those people in the movie world who loved art," Chief Reynolds continued as the boys nodded. "Or at least that's what most people believe. A self-confessed member of one of these bands that operated in Hollywood, whom we arrested about a year ago, revealed Arthur Roberts' name has been heard persistently in the world of art trafficking for a long time. This person once told us that he had heard that Roberts had dealt with art traffickers. According to him, this happened, as I say, years ago, before I was even a policeman. But the rumor, widespread in some circles, may have taken hold following the death of Roberts. What is said specifically is not that the writer bought works of art, but that he knew of traffickers and that on one occasion he cooperated with them by identifying genuine works of art and differentiating them from mere forgeries. In other words, by virtue of his extensive knowledge of art, he came to act as an appraiser certifying the authenticity of stolen works with which others trafficked. This doesn't make him a trafficker really, but someone who knew that world, who maintained certain... let's say... risky contacts, and perhaps, on occasion, as a lover of the art world, would acquire something valuable that had to be kept hidden.

"If this is all true, which has never been proven, you may be right in believing that what Mr. Roberts hid before he died was a valuable work of art that he acquired long ago but has kept hidden for years in a safe place only he knew about.

"Although not widespread, it's only a rumor that exists in certain spheres of the underworld, and it's possible that a few believe that there is some truth at the bottom of it all. That's why you may encounter some particularly dangerous individuals if you decide to go ahead with this case. Some of whom you have already met. I hope there are no more involved in this affair. That's why I'm asking you to stay alert at all times."

Pete and Jupiter exchanged glances.

"Whew!" exclaimed Pete. "Encrypted messages, a hidden treasure, our client in the hospital, and now... art traffickers no less! And it all started with a simple game of chess!"

"The case is growing more serious, intricate and even sinister," Jupiter admitted. "We may be unwittingly sitting on a time bomb. Thank you for your confidence in telling us all this, Chief Reynolds, as well as your advice. But don't worry. We will keep our eyes open. If we notice anything strange, we will let you know."

"I hope so, Jupiter," said Chief Reynolds. "I think it's the right thing to do. And now excuse me, but I must go. I have things to do. Keep me informed of everything that happens. And don't bother Mr. Heggyns. If you need to tell him something, come to me and I will pass it on to him as soon as I can."

"We will, Chief," Pete said. "Say hello to Mr. Heggyns for us the next time you talk to him. Tell him that we wish him a speedy recovery."

Chief Reynolds shook hands with the boys and put on his cap. Then he turned and went to his patrol car, which he had parked by the entrance of the salvage yard. He got in, started it up, and went down the street.

When they were alone, Pete looked at Jupiter.

"What a mess! When I think of how we could be sunbathing on the beach and enjoying the last days of summer..."

Then, seeing that his friend was absorbed in his thoughts and kept pinching his lower lip, he asked, "What do you think, Jupe? Any ideas?"

He looked at Pete.

"It's just that," he said, as if he were thinking out loud, "I think I can understand why, if the rumors were true, Mr. Roberts kept his past relationship with art traffickers from Mr. Heggyns."

"Oh yeah?" Pete asked. "Why do you think he did it?"

"He was his friend," said Jupiter. "If Mr. Roberts really did associate with art smugglers, he would probably break the law. If he told Mr. Heggyns, who was his personal lawyer, he could be seen by the law as an accessory if the whole matter someday came to light. Fortunately for Mr. Roberts, that never happened while he was alive. But he had to ensure the innocence of his lawyer, Mr. Heggyns, anyway. That's why he never told him anything at all. And now that he is dead, he conceives an ingenious plot by virtue of which he can make Mr. Heggyns, by finding the hidden treasure, able not only to gain fame but also to have a good plot for a novel. And he is completely innocent, for he never suspected Mr. Roberts' secret. No doubt Arthur Roberts was a most intelligent man. Otherwise he would never have been able to live the double life he lived for years."

"No doubt about it," Pete agreed. "This story is certainly complicated and besides... Hey! Here comes Bob. Maybe he has news."

Jupiter looked up and saw Bob riding through the large, open salvage-yard gates. When he reached them, he braked abruptly and dismounted.

"Guys, wasn't that Chief Reynolds driving the patrol car that just left here?" he asked. "Did he come to talk to you? Did something happen?"

Jupiter and Pete told him everything that had happened that morning. When he heard his friends' story, Bob let out a low whistle.

"Wow! Things got complicated, but at least we're learning something," he said. "I'm sorry about Mr. Heggyns. I hope he gets better soon."

"So do we," said Jupiter. "How about you, Records? Have you been able to find out anything during your work in the library?"

"Not much," replied Bob, pulling a small notebook from the back pocket of his trousers. "But if you want, we can exchange thoughts at Headquarters."

"Great idea!" exclaimed Pete. "Did you know that Jupe thinks he has discovered the meaning of Mr. Roberts' message?"

Bob turned to Jupiter.

"Is that true, Jupe?" he asked.

"Mmm... It's possible," grumbled the First Investigator, slightly morose. "First let's go to Headquarters and hear what you have to tell us."

The three of them headed for Jupiter's workshop, where Bob parked his bicycle. Then they entered Headquarters through Tunnel Two. Jupiter took the swivel chair behind the desk. Bob and Pete took seats in front of him.

"And now, Records, tell us what you learned," Jupiter said.

Bob cleared his throat and opened his notebook.

"It's not really a big deal," he said. "Once you start looking for information about chess, you can find it in thousands of books. No matter how much I searched and searched, I didn't find anything really useful to our investigation, let alone to unravel the mysterious message of Mr. Roberts."

"You never know, Bob," Jupiter said. "Please, tell us everything you found out."

"Okay, First," Bob said, staring at his notes. "To begin with, chess is an ancient game about whose origin there are many versions. The most accepted one is that it was invented in India back in the sixth century AD. Thanks to the trade routes, knowledge of it spread first to Persia, then to the rest of Asia, and from there to the Arabs, who studied it, wrote treatises on it, and formalized its rules. It did not take long to expand into Europe, although it wasn't until the sixteenth or seventeenth century when the game evolved into the form we know today and the rules that are known today were written down. Its development progressively increased, and soon the first schools appeared. From there to the present its rules have not changed.

"The objective of the game is to 'checkmate' the opponent's king by placing it under an inescapable threat of capture. This is achieved through the collaboration of all of a player's pieces and making the proper moves based on a strategic plan. The strategy thus becomes the fundamental point to executing a good game.

"As far as the movements of the pieces..."

"What's the use of knowing all that?" interrupted Pete. "How does that relate to Mr. Roberts' message?"

"Give Bob a chance," said Jupiter. "Records," he added, turning to him, "you know the rules of chess, if I'm not mistaken. Pete, on the other hand, does not. Mr. Roberts' message concerned the movements of some particular pieces. Can you explain anything to Pete about this?"

"Of course, First," responded Bob. "If we remember the message, it alludes to the way the knight, the bishop and the pawn move. With regard to this we have the knight, which always moves in the form of an L, the bishop, which always moves diagonally regardless of how many squares it travels, and the pawn, which always moves forward, that is, vertically as we look at the board."

Pete looked at Bob, then at Jupiter, then at Bob again.

"Well?" he asked. "Does that clarify anything about this case? If so, I swear I don't see how."

Bob turned to Jupiter.

"Jupiter," he said, "I'm with Pete. I confess that as much as I have read Mr. Roberts' message and have thought about the movements of the pieces, I haven't been able work out anything. Pete said earlier that you thought you'd figured something out. What is it?"

"C'mon, Jupe," Pete insisted. "Stop being so mysterious and tell us what your idea is about the message. No matter how much I think about it, I can't figure it out."

"That's because you don't see what you should see," said Jupiter. "Or, at least, you don't see what Mr. Roberts wants us to see."

"Stop gibbering and tell us, Jupe," Pete complained. "It's bad enough I have to be here and can't go swimming."

Jupiter, somewhat arrogantly, smiled and leaned forward until he rested his elbows on the desk.

"All right," he said. "Bob, can you repeat your description of the way a knight moves?"

The Third Investigator, surprised, adjusted his glasses and repeated, "The knight always moves in the form of the letter L."

Jupiter looked at his friends.

"Well?" Pete asked after a few seconds of silence.

"Don't you see?" said Jupiter. "The knight moves in an L shape. By saying that Mr. Roberts is telling us..."

"Just a second, just a second!" Bob exclaimed. "Do you mean that...?"

"Indeed, Bob," Jupiter said, nodding. "Mr. Roberts is telling us something. He is telling us... the letter L! Or, at least, it refers to something or someone whose name begins with that letter."

"Darn it!" exclaimed Pete. "Bob said it before and I didn't even notice. It seems so obvious..."

"Often the most obvious is the most difficult to notice precisely because it's not hidden, Pete," Jupiter pointed out. "All right. So, the first line of the message left by Arthur Roberts refers to the letter L. What else do we have, Bob?"

"Well," said he, thoughtfully, "we have the movement of the bishop, which, as I said before, is always diagonal. So, if we follow the same method as with the knight's movement, we have to..."

Then, shaking his head, he said, "There's something wrong, Jupe. If we draw a diagonal line, which is how a bishop would move, we get no letter, no number or any other character. All we get is a simple diagonal line."

"Read the message carefully, Bob," Jupiter said. "In the second line, it clearly says: 'as the bishops move,' not 'as *a single* bishop moves.' So, we must consider the movement of the two

bishops at the same time, do you understand? See what happens when I move these two bishops on the chessboard starting from their original positions."

Pete and Bob watched their leader pick up the two white bishops and put them on the board. The First Investigator then moved one of them to the opposite end of the board. Then he moved the other. The imaginary lines drawn by the movement of both pieces intersected right in the middle.

"You see?" inquired Jupiter. "Do you see what happens if we draw a straight line with the movements of each bishop?"

"The letter X!" cried Bob, his eyes widening. "The two lines intersect and form an X. Mr. Roberts is telling us another letter! I get the feeling that they could be the initials of something or someone."

"That's what I thought, Records," said Jupiter. "In fact, with respect to the movement of the bishops there are other possibilities, but this is the only one that results in a definite letter. Thus, we have the letter L and also the letter X."

"And what about the third line of the message?" Pete said. "Have you forgotten about it?"

"It's next, Pete, it's next," Jupiter said. "Bob, please, tell us about the pawn's movement."

"As I explained before," Bob said, "the pawn moves vertically to the opponent's line of pieces, so..."

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Pete. "If we are drawing letters from the movements of specific chess pieces on the board, leave this to me. A vertical movement consist of drawing a vertical line. If we draw a vertical line, we get... the letter I. Plain and simple the letter I! Am I right, Juve?"

He nodded.

"That's right, Pete," he said. "I'm sure we are on the right track with this. I believe that with this message Mr. Roberts is telling us to look for something or someone whose name matches the initials we have just discovered: L, X and I. I am convinced that he didn't mean anything else."

"Initials!" Bob repeated. "Or an acronym that leads to something! Juve, do you have any idea where we should look for what these three initials correspond to?"

"I've been thinking about that too, Records," said Jupiter. "In the letter that he hid in the chessboard Mr. Roberts wrote, just after the encrypted message, the following."

He picked up the letter from the desk, unfolded it, and read aloud: " 'That was the easy part. Now search what I love the most. The name will lead you on the right path.' Does that suggest anything to you?"

"That only suggests one thing to me: Keep looking," grumbled Pete, frowning.

"Bob," said Jupiter, "you're good at proposing courses of action. What does what I just read suggest to you?"

"I suppose," replied Bob, "that what Mr. Roberts loves most must be in his house. I think there is something that we have to find there, something that matches the initials that we just discovered. Maybe it's the name of a friend or somewhere to go. Hence it says 'the name will lead you on the right path.' "

"So..." said Jupiter.

"So, I suggest that we return as soon as possible to Mr. Roberts' house, and look among his possessions for something that fits with what we've discovered from the encrypted message. Then, we will have found the next clue."

"That's right, Records," Jupiter agreed. "Like you, I think our next move is to return to Mr. Roberts' house."

"How are we going to get in?" Pete said. "Mr. Heggyns has the key. And we can't go to him because he's in the hospital."

"Pete's right," Bob said, looking at Jupiter. "I didn't think about that detail."

"We'll figure something out," said the First Investigator. "We will get in somehow. Mr. Heggyns is our client which gives us his permission to undertake our search. And our purpose is completely honorable."

"If anyone sees us, they might not think so," said Pete.

"We'll be careful," Jupiter said. "Well, it's time for us to get going. Let's go ask Uncle Titus to borrow the small truck with Hans or Konrad. Given what time it is," he added after consulting his watch, "we'll have to wait until after lunch to go. But the sooner we ask for the truck, the better."

The three of them rose and entered Tunnel Two. After crawling for a few yards they emerged from the tunnel in Jupiter's workshop.

They were about to leave when Pete, who had fallen behind slightly to brush off his pants, exclaimed, "Gosh! Look! Do I see what I think I see?"

Bob and Jupiter stopped and turned to look at their friend. The boy, with his eyes wide, was pointing at the printing press. Bob and Jupiter looked where Pete was pointing and felt their jaws drop in surprise. There, on the printing press, was a battered wooden box with a metal handle. A box they all recognized.

"The Enigma machine!" shouted Bob, puzzled. "How did it get here?"

"It wasn't there when we entered Headquarters!" exclaimed Pete. "I'm sure of it."

"Evidently somebody brought it here and left it," said Jupiter, who had quickly recovered from his surprise and was pinching furiously on his lower lip. "And whoever brought it didn't leave it there by chance, but brought it to *us*, so that we would see and recover it. So, the valuable Miss Schoenberg reappears. Very, very interesting..."

"Good grief!" cried Pete. "As if all this weren't enough trouble, now we must add the puzzle of an Enigma machine that mysteriously reappears."

"Who brought it here, Juve?" Bob asked. "Do you think it could have been Sinclair and Lagalle? They stole it yesterday. Perhaps, not knowing how to use it, they returned it thinking that we do, with the intention of letting us use it while they keep an eye on us. They'll track us while we lead them to the hidden treasure."

"Mmm... It's possible," Jupiter agreed. "Maybe it was them and maybe not. If there are more people involved in this affair, it may have been taken from them and brought to us on their own. Remember that we don't know how many people might be involved in this whole story. Maybe while Sinclair and Lagalle watch over us there are people who, in turn, are watching over them."

"Uh!" Pete growled. "To make matters worse, thieves who are being watched. That's what I call a tangled mess!"

"Which reminds me of the promise we made to Chief Reynolds about keeping our eyes open at all times," Jupiter said, ignoring Pete's remark.

Then, approaching the printing press, he picked up the box and opened it.

"It doesn't look so good, Juve," Bob commented. "Do you think it may be damaged?"

Jupiter bit his lower lip and held up the open box. The machine inside appeared rickety, it was cracked in three or four places and had some broken keys. The box itself was battered and didn't close properly. Jupiter noticed that one of the hinges was broken and one of the corners of wood was splintered. As he shook it lightly, the three of them noticed a muffled but disturbing sound of loose parts.

"I'm afraid it is," Jupiter finally said. "This machine was in Mr. Heggyns' car yesterday when he suffered the accident. I presume that it was broken in the accident and is clearly unusable."

"Boy, are we in a fix!" cried Pete. "I hope we don't need it again to unravel this mystery, because if we do, we can say goodbye to the treasure Mr. Roberts hid."

"I'm afraid you're right, Second," Jupiter said. "I also hope that we don't have to use it again."

"What do we do with it, First?" Bob asked.

"Since it's of no use broken, we can hide it right here in the workshop," Jupiter replied. "Then we'll talk to Uncle Titus, Hans and Konrad. One of them might have seen someone hanging around here who may have left the machine."

Jupiter closed the battered wooden box, placed it under the printing press, and covered it with a piece of burlap cloth he picked up from a corner of the workshop. The machine sat there, covered and innocent looking.

"No one will suspect an ordinary looking bundle covered with burlap," he said.

Then the three boys came out of the workshop and rounding the huge piles of junk that hid Headquarters crossed the yard and approached where Uncle Titus, along with Hans and Konrad, was busy sorting some of goods purchased the day before. But, no matter how much they were asked, none of the three could help them. They had been too busy to pay attention to the corner of the junkyard where Jupiter's workshop was located. Not even Aunt Mathilda, who was approaching them with the firm intention of putting them to work for a while, could be of help. There had been plenty of customers to attend to all morning, so the good woman had not noticed anything out of the ordinary nor had she seen anyone who fit the descriptions the boys gave her of Sinclair and Lagalle.

"I'm sorry I can't help you boys," Mrs. Jones concluded. "However, I'm happy to see you, because you can help me with the pile of stuff on that side," she added, pointing to a corner of the salvage yard.

The boys groaned as they looked in the direction she indicated and saw what awaited them.

"It would be perfect if you would inventory and organize it while I prepare lunch," she said, handing her nephew a pen and a notebook. "And I won't accept protests of any kind, Jupiter. So, stop looking at me like that and... get to work!"

## **CHAPTER 8**

# **BACK TO THE WRITER'S HOUSE**

"What exactly are we going to look for at Mr. Roberts' house, Juve?" Pete asked.

"Anything related to the letters we discovered," Jupiter replied absently, for he seemed absorbed in his own thoughts. "The name of a person, a reference to a place... I don't know, anything. We'll just have to start looking and we'll know it when we see it."

"And if we don't find anything, Juve? What if we can't even figure out what we are looking for?" Pete demanded.

"Then I'll start worrying," Jupiter said simply.

The three boys were crowded inside the cab of the small truck driven by Hans, with Bob sitting on Pete's knees. After finishing the inventory work assigned by Mrs. Jones, and after a quick meal, Uncle Titus had given Jupiter the use of the vehicle for the afternoon. There were no pending trips to make, so the junkman could dispense with the truck and one of his assistants for the rest of the day.

"What bothers me the most, Juve," Bob said as Hans drove toward the outskirts of Rocky Beach, "is one of those letters, the X. There aren't many names, of people or places, that begin with an X. Are you sure we're on the right track?"

Jupiter, as if awakening from deep trance, looked at Bob.

"I confess, Records, I've had that thought too," he replied. "However, even though few words and names begin with X, they do exist. I believe we are on the right track. Even if we aren't, it is our duty as investigators to exhaust all possibilities that present themselves. But, as I say, I am convinced that... What is it, Hans?"

"Not sure, Juve," replied the blond Bavarian looking in the rear-view mirror, "but I think someone follows us."

"Can you see who it is, Hans?" asked Pete, looking in the right side-view mirror.

"Don't look back," Jupiter warned. "Act normally."

The others obeyed.

Then, after a few seconds of calm, Juve spoke again, "Carefully look in the rear-view mirror, Hans, and tell us if he's still there." Hans did as he was told and nodded.

"Act natural, fellows," Jupiter said. "Hans, what kind of car is it?"

"A red sedan," said the Bavarian. "He is behind us after we left the salvage yard. He follows us very carefully, but I see him there all the way."

"A red sedan!" Bob cried. "I bet it's Sinclair and Lagalle. They don't know that we know that they have a red sedan in addition to a black car. That's to our advantage."

"Can you see who is driving it, Hans?" Jupiter asked.

The Bavarian glanced surreptitiously in the rear-view mirror as he continued driving down the streets of Rocky Beach.

"There are two men," he answered. "The driver is a short guy. The other looks tall and wears a hat."

"It's them, Jupe!" moaned Pete. "They must have been watching us all the time."

"I think so, Pete," said the boy.

"What now, Jupe?" Hans asked. "You want me to try and lose them?"

Jupiter pondered for a few seconds and then, biting his lower lip, replied, "Change of plans, guys. Hans, circle the next block and take us to the freeway. Once there we will try to lose them. There are lots of cars on it at this hour. That will make it easier for us."

"Hokay, Jupe," said Hans.

Obedying the First Investigator, Hans turned right at the next intersection, circled the block, and headed for the nearest Los Angeles freeway entrance, which wasn't far from where they were. Los Angeles, as well as the entire suburban area that surrounds it, is traveled via wide freeways of many lanes that crisscross to form a dense network through which thousands of vehicles travel daily. In the midst of this tangle it was not too difficult to mislead a pursuer at certain times of the day.

"Are they still there, Hans?" Pete asked.

"Yes, Pete," said the Bavarian.

"We shouldn't let them realize that we know they're following us," Jupiter said. "Let's head to the freeway as if nothing is going on. Once there we will have time to accelerate to lose them."

"That's easy, Jupe," declared Hans.

Hans turned right and headed down a very quiet street at the end of which one of the entrances to the freeway could be seen. At the end of an access ramp, thousands of vehicles were speeding along the imposing road built from tons of concrete.

The small truck advanced down the street. From the rear-view mirror, Hans could see the red sedan round the corner and turn in behind them.

"They are still behind us," the Bavarian reported. "I do not think they notice that we see them because we go slow. I hope it is easy to lose them on the freeway. We wait for the right moment to accelerate and... But what the...?"

Unable to avoid it, the boys, even Jupe, turned to see what had caused Hans' surprise. Forgetting all caution, the three boys' faces watched through the rear window of the cab as a second car squealed around the corner at high speed.

Everything happened in a flash. As Hans and the red sedan drove at moderate speed, the newcomer turned directly toward them with such speed that the three friends barely managed to notice that the vehicle was dark blue. Nevertheless, the blue car accelerated into the red sedan and, with a sudden change in direction, pushed it toward the curb. After a brief crash and a momentary screech of metal against metal, the red sedan, partially lost control, swerved sideways, jumped over the curb and crashed sideways into a street lamp. The vehicle stopped with two burst tires while a wisp of smoke emerged from the engine. Jupiter, Pete, and Bob could briefly see the angry faces of Sinclair and Lagalle. The latter seemed to be uttering all sorts of curses while threatening the driver of the other vehicle with raised fists.

As for the dark blue car, without diminishing its speed but rather the opposite, it raced toward the small salvage-yard truck, and flew past it. Hans and the boys watched as it sped off toward the freeway access ramp, onto the freeway, and disappeared into the swarm of vehicles that were rolling along in the California sun.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Pete, once he had recovered from surprise. "What crazy driving! Luckily this is a lonely street and there were no pedestrians in sight. Could you see who it was?"

"No, second," said Bob. "The car had tinted windows. I couldn't see anything even when he whizzed past us. Of course, he did it so fast that I doubt we could have seen something even if it was ordinary glass."

"Anyone see the license plate number?" Hans asked. "That guy belongs in jail."

"The license plate was partially covered with mud," said Jupiter, speaking slowly as he pinched his lower lip. "Possibly its occupants did it on purpose to hide the number. Of course, the driver deserves to be arrested, but the truth is he did us a favor."

"A favor?" Pete asked. "Jupe, that guy is crazy. He almost killed us!"

"No, Pete, he isn't," said Jupiter. "Reexamine what just happened."

Pete blinked in surprise.

"Jupe's right, Second," Bob said. "The blue car attacked Sinclair and Lagalle but passed us untouched. At reckless speed, it's true, but without touching us. It's clear that we were not his target."

"That's right, Records," said Jupiter. "What happened is irrefutable evidence that, apart from Sinclair and Lagalle, there are more people interested in this whole affair. Who are they? We don't know, but what is clear is that, at least on this occasion, they have helped protect us from Sinclair and Lagalle."

"Jupe!" blurted Bob, suddenly hit with an idea. "Do you think it could have been them who left the Enigma machine in the workshop at the salvage yard?"

Jupiter was silent and thought for a few seconds.

"That's a possibility," he said at last. "I wouldn't be surprised if they did. Friends, someone else definitely wants us to find what we are looking for. Thus, we are watched over by more than one band of criminals, which, as we've seen so far, can be considered as potentially dangerous."

"Jupe," said Hans, who had reduced his speed slightly, "if you are in a mess and there are dangerous men after you, I think we should go back and tell your uncle, or let us go to the police now. Going to the police now is smart."

Jupiter considered the idea.

"Actually, the police are already aware of everything, Hans," he said. "However, it would be wise to inform them of what has just happened. Even so, I'd rather do it later, Hans, if you don't mind."

"Hokay, Jupe," the Bavarian agreed. "Then what should we do?"

"I'd like to go where we were headed in the first place," Jupiter responded. "Then, once we've finished our task, we can call the police. Let's forget the freeway, Hans, and resume our earlier route."

"Hokay, Juve," Hans said simply.

The Bavarian turned at the next corner, just a block before reaching the freeway access ramp, and returned to the streets of Rocky Beach. They rode the rest of the way in virtual silence, alert and with their eyes wide watching for possible pursuers or any suspicious detail around them. However, they did not see the dark blue car again, nor did they see the presence of any vehicles that might be following behind them.

Thanks to Hans's firm hand at the wheel, they soon found themselves on the outskirts of Rocky Beach following the winding road that ran through the hills. After a short time, the Bavarian, following the directions of the boys, entered the narrow canyon leading to the home of Arthur Roberts.

"Please, park there by the curb, Hans," Jupiter directed as soon as he saw the house. Hans obeyed and parked the truck in front of the hedgerow that stood by the curb. Jupiter, Pete and Bob got out and headed for the front door. Hans followed closely.

"How will we get in, Juve?" Pete asked.

"We will check the doors and windows," responded the boy. "With a little luck, we will find an open one or one that's easy to open."

"Well, we must be on a lucky streak, First," Pete said. "Behold!"

Jupiter and Bob looked to where Pete was pointing. His arm was reaching toward the front door, which was ajar.

"The door is open!" Bob exclaimed. "Mr. Heggyns couldn't have opened it. He's the one with the key and he's in the hospital. And we all clearly saw him lock it yesterday, when we left here."

"Someone must have entered by force," Pete remarked.

The three of them ran to the door. Jupiter bent over and stared at the lock for a few seconds. Then he stood up and looked at his friends with a frown.

"The door has been forced," he said. "They didn't use a crowbar because the frame is not damaged, but some sort of picklock. They opened the door but left the lock unlocked."

"Be careful," said Hans, who had joined them. "Someone might be inside. He is dangerous, I think."

"You're right, Hans," Jupiter conceded. "We should search the house room by room. Let's stay together and not get separated. Above all, try not to make the slightest noise."

Following Jupiter's instructions, the four of them entered the house and moved from one room to the next as quietly as possible until they had passed through the entire house. As they looked, they discovered many of the things that had been neatly arranged the day before were now either strewn on the floor or thrown into a corner. While the house looked as if it had been searched, that search didn't appear to have been very thorough, but rather somewhat hurried. Although there were some books lying on the floor in the living room, most of them were still on the shelves.

As for the furniture, some of it had been displaced, but not all the drawers had been opened and emptied.

"The general impression I am getting of this search," commented Jupiter, "is that whoever carried it out was in a hurry and impatient. If they had searched the house thoroughly, surely we

would have found things like raised floorboards. Whoever searched the house was either surprised in the middle of their work, or changed their mind and simply walked away."

"Or maybe he found what he was looking for," Bob said.

"I don't think so, Records," said Jupiter, shaking his head. "If so, I don't think they would have followed us on our way here if they had found what they were looking for. No, Bob, the treasure is still hidden. I'm sure of it."

They found themselves in the room that was once the study of Arthur Roberts, the same one in which they had deciphered the encoded message the day before.

"Whoever searched the house paid special attention to this room," Pete commented.

In fact, the disorder appeared to be greater there. The desk drawers and cabinets had been emptied and thrown to the floor. The closet was open and had been rifled through. All its contents were lying on the floor. The unusual objects that inhabited the room had been moved around, the huge wooden desk had been displaced, and all the papers that had covered it the previous day were scattered on the floor. Many of the photographs that hung on the walls were crooked. Some of the larger ones had been picked up and thrown to the ground.

"No wonder they searched this study more thoroughly," Jupiter said. "Mr. Roberts kept many of his favorite items in this room. It was, so to speak, his lair, the place where he wrote his novels. In a sense this room might have been the place where Mr. Roberts kept 'what he loves the most'. So, if we are to find what Mr. Roberts loved the most, it would be advisable to start doing so in this room."

"Sounds reasonable," Pete agreed.

"Whoever searched this room even included the walls," Bob interjected.

"You can say that again," Juve agreed. "Some of the pictures have been moved or taken down, as if they were expecting to find a safe or a secret panel behind one of them. Even the picture of Mr. Roberts with Mr. Hitchcock has been moved."

Bob, meticulous and orderly by nature, approached the wall to straighten the photo mentioned. As he did so, Hans approached Jupiter and stood in front of him.

"Juve," he said, "this house is broken into and may be robbed. Also, we saw one car run another one off the road. I am sorry but we should call the police now. You know we should. Your Uncle Titus would say that, too."

Jupiter looked at Hans intending to plead in favor of continuing their investigation. However, after hearing and considering Hans' words, he ended up giving in. With a resigned expression, he let out a breath.

"I think you're right, Hans," he admitted. "It would be best to call the police as soon as possible. Let's find a phone and call Chief Reynolds."

He was about to leave the study with Hans to search for the telephone when Bob's voice stopped him.

"Fellows! Come here! Come and look at this! Tell me if I'm seeing what I think I'm seeing!"

Jupiter, Pete and Hans ran up to where Bob stood, by the wall. There, the Third Investigator pointed with a trembling hand at one of the photos that still hung crookedly on the wall.

"I came over to straighten the picture with Mr. Roberts standing next to Mr. Hitchcock when, suddenly, look what I saw," he explained.

With the tip of his finger, Bob touched the photo immediately below the one in which Alfred Hitchcock appeared. In this new photo, the thin figure of Arthur Roberts appeared at the door of one of the famous Hollywood studios in the company of a short, chubby man who wore a broad smile. It was a black and white photo that seemed to have been taken at least fifteen or twenty years ago.

"What about it, Records?" Pete asked. "What's with the photo? Unless I'm missing something, we don't know the guy who appears in it with Mr. Roberts."

"Look at what's right under the picture," Bob said.

They all looked. Pete scratched his head.

"It's just a photo caption," Pete said. "As far as I can see, almost all the photos in this room have them. Mr. Hitchcock's, for example, says: 'With the master of suspense during a break in the filming,' " he read.

"I know, but read *this* at the bottom of the page, Pete," Bob insisted, pointing again to the photo that had so powerfully caught his eye.

"As you wish," he agreed. "It says: 'With my dear friend, screenwriter Lewis Xavier Inglewood, at the studio door.' So?"

Jupiter, his eyes bright with pure excitement, smiled.

"Good work, Bob!" he said. "We have it! We just found what we came for!"

"What are you guys talking about?" Pete asked. "Have you lost your mind? What have we found?"

"We have Lewis Xavier Inglewood," Jupiter said.

"So?" the Second Investigator asked again.

"Lewis Xavier Inglewood," Jupiter repeated. "The name that fits with the initials L, X and I that we discovered from Mr. Roberts' message."

"Whiskers, Juve!" Pete cried as the light of understanding finally worked its way into his head. "The message was about a friend of Mr. Roberts!"

"That's right, Pete," Jupiter said, nodding. "An old and dear friend of his, that's why Mr. Roberts told us to look 'among what he loved most.' He was referring to an old friend of his."

"Are you really sure we're on the right track?" Pete asked hesitantly.

"We must be," Bob said. "Xavier is not a common name in English. And finding someone whose initials exactly match the letters that we discovered in the message is already something that's difficult in and of itself. At least on this occasion, I believe that we can definitively rule out coincidences."

"Bob's right," said Jupiter. "Without a doubt, we are on the right track. If Mr. Roberts was referring to Mr. Inglewood, I think our next step will be to visit him and see what he can tell us about Mr. Roberts. Maybe he has something for us or he can tell us where to find the next clue."

"And how are we going to meet with him?" Pete asked. "We don't know where he lives."

Jupiter pinched his lower lip for a few seconds.

"Mr. Inglewood was a personal friend of Mr. Roberts," he said at last. "Therefore, he should have his address or his telephone number somewhere. Fellows, let's find an address book or notebook. I don't know, anything where someone would write down the phone number and address of an old friend."

"Wait, Jupe," Hans said. "First, call the police."

For a moment, the First Investigator seemed about to raise a protest, but finally agreed.

"Yes, Hans, you're right," he said, not without regret. "I'm sorry. What we discovered made me forget what we were about to do. Bob, Pete," he added, turning to his friends, "look for an address book or a phone number while I use the phone to call Chief Reynolds."

While Jupiter called the chief, Pete and Bob opened drawers and shuffled through papers carefully so as not to add to the disorder already there.

"This is like looking for a needle in a haystack," Pete complained. "How are we going to be able to find an address book in this jumble of papers, books and all kinds of stuff? This is worse than a jungle."

"Come on, Pete," Bob said as he looked into one of the drawers of the large desk. "You heard Jupe: no doubt we are on the right track. Let's keep looking."

Hans joined them in the search, but even with the help of the blond Bavarian they were unable to find anything useful. Finally, after a few minutes, Jupiter appeared again in the study door.

"I just talked to Chief Reynolds and explained what happened," he announced. "He's coming. I don't think it will take him too long to get here. The chief said that the wisest thing to do is to leave a guard on duty here for a few days while an inventory of everything in the house is being carried out. How about you? How did it go? Anything to report?"

Bob looked up from under a pile of papers and regarded their leader.

"We haven't found anything yet, Jupe," he said. "Help us search. With any luck, we might find something before Chief Reynolds shows up."

"I really don't think it's worth looking, Records," Jupiter mused.

Pete, Bob, and Hans sat up and looked at the First Investigator.

"What do you mean, Jupe?" Bob asked, surprised. "I hope Chief Reynolds hasn't removed us from the case."

"Not at all, Bob," Jupiter said with a half-smile. "What I mean is that *you* don't have to keep looking."

Then, lifting up a small leather-bound notebook he'd kept hidden behind him, he added, "I got it, guys. I found this address book lying in a corner behind the telephone table. It must have fallen there while they searched the room. Actually," he said, with a certain tone of self-reproach in his voice, "I should have realized that a phone book is never far from a telephone."

"This notebook," he continued, after regaining his usual aplomb, "contains not only Mr. Inglewood's telephone number, but also his address. He lives in Hollywood, so if we hurry we can go see him. It's not far from here and it's still early enough to pay a visit to the screenwriter. So, let's get going fellows!"

## **CHAPTER 9**

# **CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND**

"Here it is, Hans," said Jupiter. "This must be the house. Park by the curb, please, if you would be so kind."

"Hokay, Jupe," said the Bavarian.

It had been barely twenty minutes since the boys left the late Mr. Roberts' house in the small truck driven by Hans. While he drove, Jupe, Pete and Bob, after consulting a map found in the glove compartment for the exact location of the street in question, served as guides while traveling the distance to the address where Lewis Xavier Inglewood purportedly lived. After leaving the hills they went into one of the residential neighborhoods of Hollywood. The sun was already beginning its descent on the nearest mountains when they finally found the house they were looking for.

Hans parked the truck in front of the house and the boys jumped out onto the sidewalk.

"Wait for us here, Hans," said Jupiter. "I don't think it will take long."

Hans nodded and pulled out a newspaper. The boys started toward the house. It was a rather small bungalow half hidden behind tall thickets of shrubs and sycamores. A path of flat stones divided the large well-kept lawn and served as access to the bungalow.

"I hope Mr. Inglewood is home," Jupe said. "I'm looking forward to any clues he can provide."

Following the path of stones, the boys left behind the bushes that hid the house and went to a small porch. Jupiter stepped forward with the intention of ringing the bell, but just as he was about to ring, a man's voice stopped him.

"What are you boys looking for? Can I help you with anything?" he asked.

The boys turned to the voice and could see a short, plump old man approaching them through the bushes. He wore large, thick gloves and carried a small hoe in his hand. His smile was very friendly. The boys recognized the old man as the same man they had seen smiling with Arthur Roberts in the photograph taken years ago.

"Mr. Lewis Inglewood?" Jupiter asked.

"Yes, I am, lads," the man said softly. "Or at least that's the name I've always been known by. Did you want to see me?"

"That's right," said Jupiter. "We've come to see you on a matter concerning Mr. Arthur Roberts."

The man blinked, then smiled nodding.

"You mean the late Mr. Roberts," he corrected. "He died last week. He was an old friend of mine."

"We know, sir," said Jupiter. "We've come to see you, because the late Mr. Roberts has led us to you. We represent Mr. Glenn Heggys, who is not able to come to see you personally because he is in the hospital. We work for him. Here are our credentials, sir."

Jupiter pulled out one of The Three Investigators business cards and handed it to the old man. He took off one of his gloves and grasped it with a strong, wiry hand.

"I know Glenn, yes. He was Arthur's lawyer," he said as he examined the card. Then, after reading it, he added: "An impressive card of yours. What do the question marks mean?"

Jupiter explained it to him and proceeded to introduce Pete and Bob.

"Nice to meet you boys," the man said politely, shaking hands with the three of them. "And you say that Glenn is in the hospital? What has happened to him?"

Without going into too much detail, the boys brought Mr. Inglewood up to date on what had happened to Mr. Heggyns.

"I hope he recovers soon," the man said. "It's crazy driving a car on the streets these days. An old man like me gets goose bumps just thinking about it every time he crosses the street. But tell me one thing: you said that you have come to see me for Glenn because old Arthur has led you to me. That intrigues me. It sounds like one of Arthur's old mysteries. Can you explain exactly what you meant by those words?"

Jupiter nodded and proceeded to briefly tell the old man about the chess set and the letter hidden in it which Mr. Roberts had addressed to Mr. Heggyns before he died. Then he told him about the hidden object and how they were trying to find it from the different clues the writer had left them.

"So," concluded Jupiter, "we came to see you because the last clue we found led us to visit you. We want to ask you if you can help us and if you have something to provide, whether it be some object, message, or information that Mr. Roberts entrusted to you before he died."

Mr. Inglewood looked at the boys attentively and then, smiling gently, said, "Come with me, boys. I would like to speak with you and invite you to a glass of fresh orange juice. I will not detain you long and the orange juice is worth it. My wife made it."

The boys nodded and followed Mr. Inglewood into the backyard. There they took their seats in large garden chairs which the old man offered.

"Give me a few seconds while I bring the orange juice and glasses," said Mr. Inglewood.

He disappeared into the house. When they were alone, Pete looked at Jupiter.

"Jupe, don't you think we're wasting our time?" he asked in a low voice.

"I don't get that impression, Pete," he said. "If Mr. Inglewood had nothing to tell us he wouldn't have offered us his hospitality. Be patient, Second. Let's see where all this leads."

The boys were silent when their host reappeared. He arrived loaded with a tray carrying a pitcher filled with orange juice and four glasses, which he placed carefully on a small wicker table. No longer smiling, Mr. Inglewood poured four glasses and handed three of them to the boys. Then, after taking a drink from his own glass, he exhaled deeply.

"So, you've come in search of some clue that, you presume, Arthur gave me and that should help you find something he hid before he died," he said, staring at the boys.

"Exactly," said Jupiter. "Can you tell us whether our assumptions are correct, Mr. Inglewood?"

"Partly, and partly not," was the enigmatic answer the old man gave after taking another drink from his glass of orange juice.

"What do you mean, sir?" inquired Jupiter, visibly intrigued.

"I mean," replied the man, "that it's true that Arthur gave me something, but that something was supposed to go to Glenn and not three boys claiming to be investigators."

There was a brief silence during which the old man drank another sip of orange juice. Jupiter had not yet tasted his.

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Inglewood, gently, "as you claim to come from him, and since you seem to be respectable boys, I will trust you and give you what Arthur has entrusted to me."

"Oh... Thank you, sir," said Jupiter, breathing quietly, his lips parted for the first time. "This orange juice is excellent," he added.

Mr. Inglewood laughed.

"I know, boy," he said with a laugh. "You're very kind."

Then the man put one of his strong hands in his shirt pocket, pulled a white envelope out of it and handed it to Jupiter.

"About three weeks ago, Arthur came to see me and gave me this envelope," he explained. "Although he was very ill, he had the strength to come and hand it to me. In doing so he gave me very clear instructions regarding it. He made me promise I would not open it under any circumstances and that I would hand it over to Glenn only if he came here to pick it up. He strictly forbade me to send it to him, for it was he who had to come for it, since, according to Arthur, that meant that everything was going according to plan. When I asked him what he meant by that, he laughed and refused to answer. Well, if, as you say, what is in that envelope can lead you to something hidden maybe that explains Arthur's words. Nevertheless, you have the envelope. You look like good lads and say you come from Glenn. That's enough for me."

"By the way," added the old man, "you will notice that the envelope is sealed. As you see, I kept my promise not to open it and read its contents. And all this, undoubtedly, arouses my curiosity. I'm convinced that it is one of those fascinating mystery plots that only someone like Arthur was able to come up with, right?"

"We think so, Mr. Inglewood," Jupiter said, turning the mysterious envelope in his hands. "You worked with Mr. Roberts, didn't you? If I understand correctly, you are a screenwriter."

"I *was* a screenwriter," corrected the old man. "All that has been left behind and now I'm only interested in taking care of my garden plants. As for your other question, yes, I worked side by side with Arthur in the film adaptation of some of his novels. He was a real genius inventing mystery plots while I, in reality, was nothing more than a script adapter specializing in dialogue. Working with him was a simply delightful experience."

"Is it true that Mr. Roberts was fascinated by chess and art?" Bob asked.

"Yes, it is," said Mr. Inglewood. "He was an excellent chess player. I at least never managed to defeat him. As for art, he used every spare moment to visit a museum no matter how small and insignificant it might be. I remember a certain whirlwind trip that we took to Paris years ago, with the aim of establishing locations for one of our scripts. In three days, he toured all the museums of the French capital and the surrounding cities. Although books were what he cared about most in this world, art was his great frustrated passion."

"Do you think he could have managed to secretly collect valuable works of art?" Jupiter asked, draining his glass of orange juice.

Mr. Inglewood frowned, and after a moment's thought he shook his head.

"I don't think so," he said. "Arthur didn't usually buy works of art. He preferred to buy books. Of course, I could very well be wrong about that. Arthur was always a mysterious man. I had known him for years and I always had the feeling that he was wrapped in the same aura of mystery that could be perceived on every page of his novels."

"Well," said Jupiter, putting his empty glass on the table and rising to his feet, "it has been a pleasure to speak with you, sir, but now we ask you to excuse us, for we have obligations to attend to. Thank you very much for your hospitality and for trusting us with the envelope Mr. Roberts gave you."

"The pleasure has been mine, boys," said the old man. "Please wish Glenn a speedy recovery from me the next time you speak to him."

The boys promised they would and let Mr. Inglewood accompany them to the front of the house. From there they left him and returned to the sidewalk via the stone footpath. As they walked to where Hans was waiting for them, Jupiter raised the envelope they had just collected in front of him and gazed at it thoughtfully.

"We got it, guys," he said. "We have the next clue."

"Why don't you open it and see what it's all about, Juve?" muttered Pete.

"We must be careful, fellows," warned the First Investigator. "Remember that they may be watching us."

Pete looked up and down the street and gave a snort.

"Come on, Juve," he complained. "The street is deserted and there is no one here except us and Hans waiting for us in the truck. Open the envelope right now and look inside. You want to do it even more than we do."

Jupiter looked at Pete, then at Bob, then nodded reluctantly.

"Well okay. I'll open it. But I still don't think it's a good idea."

Despite his reluctance, his hands trembled as he opened the envelope and pulled out a folded sheet of paper. Slowly he unfolded it and spread it out in front of him as Pete and Bob stood behind him to look over his shoulder. When the three of them finished reading, despair showed on their faces. Pete, frowning, sighed.

"Golly, Juve! All that trouble for this? It must be a joke."

"I confess I don't understand, Jupiter," Bob murmured. "We must have done something wrong or overlooked some detail."

Jupiter, incredulous, bit down furiously on his lower lip as he reread the message found in the envelope. This one, in a neat and clear handwriting, said:

*"This is a false clue, my friend, so you have to go back. And don't forget to keep in mind that things are not always what they seem."*

## **CHAPTER 10**

# **A SCUFFLE IN THE DARK**

Jupiter was silent all the way back to the salvage yard. Pete and Bob, intrigued and confused, asked him one question after another, but both, seeing that their scowling and sulky friend refused to answer, chose to keep silent as well and watch the traffic of Hollywood and Rocky Beach monotonously stream by while Hans drove.

When they finally arrived at the junkyard, the sun was already very low on the horizon and the sky was beginning to darken. Hans drove the truck through the large wrought-iron gates and parked in front of the office. Pete, Bob, and Jupiter got out slowly and thanked Hans for his time.

"No thanks needed," replied the Jones' blond assistant. "Good luck," he added.

"Thank you, Hans," Pete said with a breath. "At this point I think we'll need it."

Hans smiled and entered the office. The boys, standing by the truck, looked around. The setting sun bathed the junkyard with oblique orange light. In that dying light, the piles of scrap and salvage gave the impression of metal giants sleeping at dusk. There were no customers searching among them for treasure long awaited. It was late and the salvage yard was about to close.

Bob and Pete looked at Jupiter. For the first time since they left Mr. Inglewood's house, he looked back at them. Then, with a deep sigh, he put his hands on his hips.

"I was convinced we were on the right track," he said. "I was so sure we were..."

"Don't take it so hard, Juve," Bob said. "We were on track but it turned out that this wasn't the right one. But we haven't lost the trail. We just have to go back and review the steps we've taken so far."

"Bob's right, Juve," Pete said. "We've misinterpreted some clue, but we haven't lost the trail. Let's say we were on the right track but we took a wrong turn."

Jupiter looked at Pete and smiled slightly.

"I suppose you're right," he said. "We will have to go back and start over. I think if we go to Headquarters to talk it over and put our ideas together maybe we can..."

"Hold on, Juve!" Pete interrupted. "It's getting late. Your aunt and uncle are about to close the salvage yard for the day. Bob and I are expected for dinner. And I think you'll agree that we've had more than enough excitement for one day. Let's go home, rest, and tackle the case tomorrow, when our brains are fresh and our bodies more rested. I vote for it. Does anyone else vote with me? Come on! Just raise your hand and say yes."

"I'm with Pete," Bob said. "Also, I have to go home and pull together all the information regarding the case. I have a lot of notes to put in order."

Jupiter, though not willingly, agreed.

"All right," he said, frowning. "Let's go home and rest. But let's meet again at Headquarters tomorrow. Bob, we will see you as soon as you finish your day at the library. I think we've had enough for today."

"You said it, First!" Pete chuckled.

"I'll think about the case while I sort out my notes, Jupe," Bob said. "If I can think of anything that might be interesting, I'll call you. See you tomorrow."

Jupiter accompanied his friends to where they had left their bicycles and followed them to the front gates.

Once there, Bob turned to him and asked, "Jupe, what do you think of the message Mr. Inglewood gave us? What do you think he means by saying that 'things are not always what they seem?'"

"I don't know, Bob," said the First Investigator. "It's a phrase that appeared in the letter that we found in the chess set. It seemed something merely circumstantial, put there to indicate that we can expect almost anything from this case. But it may have some hidden meaning or point in some particular direction."

"The phrase might be more important than it seemed at first glance," Bob said.

"I suppose so," Jupiter admitted. "I'll think about it tonight."

"It only suggests to me the fact that Mr. Roberts is making fun of us," groaned Pete. "Maybe there is no treasure after all and this whole thing is just a big joke."

Jupiter looked at Pete.

"Mmmm..." he said thoughtfully. "I don't think so, Pete. I think there is something hidden. Otherwise Mr. Roberts wouldn't have written a letter that seems so serious and formal and wouldn't have taken the trouble to hide it."

"I hope something occurs to you soon, Jupe," Pete said. "I admit that I'm completely stumped."

Jupiter said goodbye to his friends, who pedaled together down the street for a few blocks before separating and heading to their respective homes. Once alone, Jupiter, unable to go home because of the ideas churning in his head, decided to ponder the case a little longer and headed for his workshop to reflect. As he passed the office, his uncle Titus, who was walking out the door, stopped him.

"Hello, Jupe," he said. "I haven't seen you all afternoon. Where have you been?"

"Pete, Bob and I have been busy trying to solve a riddle that defies us," Jupiter replied. "We haven't yet found the answer. We thought we had made progress in resolving it but we were wrong."

"Ah, yes... you and your puzzle solving club," his uncle murmured.

Both he and Mrs. Jones firmly believed that the organization formed by Jupiter and his friends was nothing more than a club dedicated to solving puzzles, riddles, crosswords, and the like. Not unfounded, because it had been in the beginning. But what they didn't know was that the initial club had led to The Three Investigators, whose purpose, as well as the kind of mysteries they faced, were of a much more serious nature.

"By the way," continued Uncle Titus, "I have something for you."

The junkman crouched down and took a medium-sized cardboard box from a corner of the porch that seemed to contain an assortment of items. Then he approached Jupe and handed it to him. He looked at the contents of the box and looked at his uncle.

"What is this, Uncle Titus?" he asked. "And what do you want me to do with it?"

"These are things that have come into the yard this afternoon, and that, far from being junk, can look as good as new if the necessary repairs are made," Uncle Titus explained pompously as he gave a slight tug at one end of his mustache. "As for you, young man, I have just named you the official repairman of the salvage yard. So, let's go, Jupe. See if you can fix this junk to sell later. If you do a good job and there is something there that you like, you can keep it."

Jupiter looked first at his uncle, then at the box in his hands.

"All right, Uncle Titus," he said. "I'll see what I can do."

He started toward his workshop. As he was on his way, his Aunt Mathilda, who had just left the office to join her husband, shouted to him in her powerful voice, "Hurry up, Jupe! We're closing right away!"

"Don't worry, Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter said over his shoulder. "You go. I'll take care of closing."

His aunt and uncle watched him as the boy walked away to his workshop in the dying light of evening.

"What is the boy doing, Titus?" Aunt Mathilda asked her husband. "Do you know something?"

"Let him be, woman," he said, embracing his wife. "He has one of those puzzles he likes to solve in his head. I've given him some manual work to keep him entertained. This will keep his hands busy while exercising his mind deciphering puzzles."

After circling a large pile of junk, Jupiter arrived at his workshop. Once there, he sat down and began to inspect the objects contained in the box by pulling them out one by one and putting them in a row on his workbench. At that hour of the day the light was so dim that he had to get up for a moment to turn on a small lamp hanging over the printing press. Then he sat back down and continued taking things out of the box. He found a wide variety of items: a microscope with a broken lens, a new pipe with a broken mouthpiece, a magnifying glass, a pair of books in good condition but with the covers separated from the text, a tennis racket with loose string, a stuffed toy, an alarm clock whose glass lens was cracked...

Suddenly, Jupiter was completely paralyzed. His mouth fell open of its own accord as he gazed at the alarm clock he had just placed on the workbench. He stared bewilderedly at the cracked glass lens for at least half a minute while a single phrase echoed in his head: "Things are not always what they seem." When he finally managed to react, he reached out, picked up the alarm clock, and held it with disbelief in front of him for a few seconds as he felt an uncontrollable urge to smack himself in the forehead.

"How could I have been so stupid?" He reproached himself. "Of course, things aren't always what they seem. Sometimes they aren't what they appear to be at first glance."

Jupiter left the alarm clock on the workbench and stood up completely forgetting the box and the other items it contained. Then he circled the printing press, knelt, and entered Tunnel Two. Seconds later he opened the trapdoor that led to Headquarters and rushed to the telephone. Maybe he could still find him in his office. Fingers trembling with excitement, he dialed the number for the direct line to Chief Reynolds.

"Rocky Beach Police Station. Samuel Reynolds speaking," he heard the voice say.

"I'm glad I found you, Chief," said the boy. "This is Jupiter Jones. I need to ask you a favor."

On the other side of the line, Chief Reynolds gave a slight growl of impatience.

"You found me by chance, Jupiter," he said. "I was just leaving. Tell me what's going on? What is so urgent that you need to ask me? Speak. And make it quick."

"You see, sir," Jupiter began, "I'm calling you with the motive for the search of Mr. Roberts' home. If I remember correctly, you told me this afternoon on the telephone that you would leave one of your men guarding the house so that nobody could return and re-enter it, did you?"

"That's right, Jupiter," said the chief of police. "In fact, one of my men is guarding the house right now. He will remain at his post until tomorrow, when the police detectives get involved. They're the ones that will have to take inventory of everything in the house to try to determine if something is missing. They may have to stay for a few days until the inventory is completed. Why do you ask?"

Jupiter swallowed.

"Chief, could you speak to your officer and arrange for him to let me in? I'll be there as soon as possible. I think it could be in a half hour or so, if Worthington and the Rolls-Royce are free tonight, and..."

"I'm afraid that's quite impossible, young Jones," said the chief. "No one can enter that house until the police detectives arrive. No one except the police and the owner of the house, of course, and the latter, unfortunately, cannot do so."

"But you could, Chief," Jupiter argued. "You are the chief of police. You would be let in. And if I go with you, so would I. Couldn't you...?"

"Don't even think about it, Jones," Reynolds said flatly. "If you want to go into that house you will have to wait until tomorrow. Right now, what you ask is impossible. Unless it's an emergency, of course. Is that the case?"

Jupiter was silent for a few seconds.

"Well, not really, Chief," he said at last in a slightly strangled voice. "I suppose I could wait until tomorrow. But..."

"What do you have to do that is so important in the house of an old dead writer?" inquired the chief. "Are you and your friends still in pursuit of the treasure supposedly hidden by old Mr. Roberts?"

"That's right, sir," Jupiter agreed. "Actually, all I have to do is find a book. I won't need to take it, not even read it. I just need to see the title."

"And you have to go there now to see the title of a book?" Reynolds asked, not without a trace of annoyance in his voice. "Jupiter," he added more calmly, "I highly commend your work and that of your friends, and I acknowledge that your help has been vital to the Rocky Beach police on more than one occasion. However, you'll have to wait until tomorrow to find that book. I have a reliable man at that house that will not allow anyone to approach it. Besides, books can't walk by themselves, so the one you are looking for will not escape. And if you attempt to get in my officer will be there to stop you. Got it, young man?"

"Yes, sir," said Jupiter in a low voice, unable to conceal his dismay. "I understand perfectly. Thank you anyway."

After a few seconds of silence, however, Reynolds added, "We'll do this, Jupiter. If you go to Roberts' house tomorrow morning at ten o'clock, I may be able to do something for you. I will be

there and you'll be able to enter with me, because the police detectives will not arrive until later. However, once in the house you will have to stay with me the entire time, understood?"

"Understood, sir," said Jupiter. "Until tomorrow at ten, then. And again, thank you very much."

Chief Reynolds hung up and Jupiter did the same. Then, lifting the handset once more, he dialed Pete's number.

"Hi, Jupe," said the Second Investigator. "Any progress?"

"Possibly," said Jupiter. "Do you think you can be here tomorrow morning at nine-thirty? We will make a brief excursion to the hills."

"Seriously?" Pete asked. "How about going swimming, Jupe? It's still hot and ..."

"See you tomorrow at nine-thirty, Second," Jupiter said.

"I'll be there," Pete sighed.

Jupe hung up again and lifted the handset for a third time. He dialed the Rent-'n-Ride Auto Agency phone number and, seconds later, spoke to Mr. Gelbert, the owner.

"Well, young man? What do you want?" Mr. Gelbert asked.

Jupiter requested the services of Worthington and the Rolls-Royce for the next morning at nine-thirty, a service he was granted. Fortunately, both chauffeur and car were not previously engaged until the afternoon.

After winning a contest some time ago, Jupiter had been awarded the use of the car with Worthington, its English chauffeur, for a period of thirty days. The gratitude of August August, a boy whom The Three Investigators had helped find a valuable jewel inherited from his great-uncle, had allowed them the opportunity to continue to use the Rolls-Royce and its driver whenever they wished.

"Thank you, Mr. Gelbert," Jupiter said. "I'll see you tomorrow, then."

Jupiter hung up for the third time, and, letting out a deep breath, leaned back in the swivel chair he was sitting in. A multitude of ideas rushed through his head, but one of them stood out above all the others: that things are not always what they seem. Curiously, and almost by pure chance, an old alarm clock with a cracked lens had triggered his understanding. However, he would have to wait until the next morning to see if the new lead he had just found was a good one and if it would put them back on the right track. It would be a very long night. His impatience and Mr. Roberts's mystery would make it difficult to fall asleep.

Slowly, Jupiter got to his feet and descended into Tunnel Two. Moments later he pushed open the metal grating that covered the opening of the tunnel behind the printing press and found himself back in the workshop. Turning off the light that hung over the press, he stood up and headed for the exit. Outside, the salvage yard was completely engulfed in shadows.

As soon as he left the workshop, something caught Jupiter's attention. It wasn't a noise, not even something he could see, for everything was covered in a thick blanket of darkness. It was something that he breathed in heavily through his nose: the undeniable scent of a cologne he had perceived once before.

Although the smell had put him on guard, by the time Jupiter had decided to run, it was too late. A huge, bony hand covered his mouth as a pair of incredibly strong and sinewy arms circled his torso, imprisoning him and making any resistance or attempt to flee useless. Unable to use

his arms, Jupiter desperately thrashed with his legs, striking out at the men who had grabbed him. The man who kept his mouth closed, groaned when he got kicked. Then his voice, with a strong English accent, sounded next to his ear in a muffled whisper.

"If I were you I would be quiet, my boy," said the voice. "I know how to keep calm, but my friend here, is not as patient as I am. When someone is troublesome, he doesn't hesitate to stick a knife between his ribs. And I assure you that he is extremely skilled with a knife even in the dark. So, will you be still?"

Jupiter, understanding, nodded and relaxed his body. The man who had been restraining his upper body with his vice-like arms released him and appeared to take something out of a pocket. Then he switched on a flashlight and lit himself briefly. For a moment, Jupiter could see the face of Lagalle, Sinclair's cohort, smiling at him with an eerie expression. Beside his face, raised in the air, Jupiter saw the glint of a large intimidating knife blade.

"This is what awaits you if you do not cooperate, lad," Lagalle said, nodding at the knife. "Now come with us if you don't want to have six inches of steel tangled in your gut."

Lagalle turned off the flashlight, plunging them back into gloomy darkness. What little light there was came only from the moon and from the beam of a distant street lamp on the other side of the high fence.

"If you cooperate you won't suffer any harm," Sinclair whispered to Jupiter. "We're just looking for information."

Then, speaking to his companion, he added, "Let's go, Henri. Lead the way and get us out of here. I cannot see anything in the middle of this cursed darkness."

Without a word, Lagalle began to walk while Sinclair and Jupiter, the former without ever letting go of the latter, followed in almost absolute darkness. Jupiter could see the timid, pale reflection of the moon on the sharp knife the Frenchman was still holding.

The silent procession slowly circled the large scrap heaps toward the salvage yard's wide main gates. Jupiter saw with dismay that the office was already closed and dark, which meant that neither his aunt and uncle nor Hans nor Konrad were there. Surely, they had gone home after hearing that he would close up. Recalling his own words, Jupiter felt an uncontrollable desire to kick himself for being so stupid as to forget that he and his friends were being watched and for having brought about a situation in which he had found himself alone in a highly vulnerable position. Jupiter wondered how long Sinclair and Lagalle had been hiding in the junk waiting for the right moment to capture him. Undoubtedly, after suffering the car accident that afternoon, they had decided to go to the one place where they knew for a fact that they would find him: The Jones Salvage Yard.

Continuing to move slowly to avoid stumbling in the dim light, and trying to make as little noise as possible, captors and captive circled one last corner and headed down the straight path leading to the wide iron gates. Suddenly, just as they passed by the last pile of junk that stood in their way, a tall shadow emerged from the large mound of junk, and, moving with great speed, fell on Lagalle. The Frenchman, surprised, stifled a groan and rolled on the ground with his attacker, both locked in a flailing mass of arms and legs. Jupiter saw the Frenchman's knife soar through the air and, with one last ghostly flash, it was lost in the shadows.

Seeing his partner attacked, Sinclair retreated to a corner, dragging Jupiter with him. As he did so, the boy could see the Englishman poking his free hand into the inner pocket of his jacket in search of what could only be a weapon. However, before he got it out, someone grabbed him from behind. Jupiter, noticing the Englishman's grip had suddenly loosened, threw all his weight forward and managed to disengage himself with little difficulty. Free at last, the boy started to run, but being disoriented by the darkness and what was going on around him, he stumbled over something and fell heavily to the ground, banging his head on something hard and blunt. Stunned by the blow and unable to move or think clearly, Jupiter chose to remain where he was, crouched on the ground, watching what he could of what was happening beside him.

Apparently, Sinclair and Lagalle had been attacked by members of a rival gang, perhaps the same ones that forced them off the road that afternoon, although this detail was impossible to verify, since Jupiter had not been able to see the faces of those men then nor was able to see them now. All Jupiter could see were human-shaped bundles that, in a fierce struggle, seemed to leap in a ghostly struggle through the shadows of the yard.

At one point, Jupiter heard Sinclair, who seemed to have momentarily freed himself from his attacker, running across the yard.

"Let's get out of here, Henri! Quick! He is here!" he shouted as he passed the place where Lagalle and his opponent were fighting.

With one last terrific shove, the Frenchman flung off his opponent, who came to rest against a pile of scrap, and ran after his partner. Jupiter managed to see, one after another, the silhouettes of the two men, neatly trimmed against the light of a lamppost, running through the still open wrought-iron gates. Seconds later there was the sound of an engine starting, followed by a sudden squeal of tires as the car sped off into the night.

Once the two men had left, Jupiter remained motionless, not even daring to breathe, lying on the earthen floor of the courtyard. After all, he was not alone. A few yards away there were still at least two people whose intentions were not yet clear.

Though his head ached horribly from the blow, Jupiter listened quietly, crouching in the dark. After the scuffle, the two men sat up and brushed off their clothes amid slight grunts of pain. Jupiter could see that they were looking around, looking for something in the shadows.

"Where did that boy go? Can you see anything?" He could hear the silhouette of the tall, stout man with a raspy, unpleasant voice.

The other, somewhat shorter but equally broad, did not respond. From the ground, Jupiter could see his silhouette against the dark sky. The man stood completely still, with his head bowed, as if expecting to hear the slightest noise. Jupiter struggled to hold his breath.

"I know you are there, boy," he heard the second man finally say in a low, manly voice. "Don't worry, do not be afraid. We don't intend to hurt you."

Knowing that he was discovered, Jupiter swallowed and gathered all his courage.

"What do you want?" he asked, from the ground.

Jupiter could see the man's head automatically turning to the shadows where he was hiding. Something resembling a malicious smile glided across his face. Jupiter swallowed again.

"We're just looking for information," the man said quietly. "Don't be afraid to come with us. The boss wants to see you."

Jupiter hesitated, holding his breath. Just then, hurried footsteps echoed closer and closer to the entrance gates of the salvage yard. Seconds later, three men came running through the gates and began focusing powerful flashlights all over the yard.

"Let's get out of here, Norbert!" said the shorter man to his companion. "Let's go out the way we came. As for you, my boy," he added to Jupiter, "you will hear from us again."

The two men disappeared into the darkness as if they had been swallowed up by the shadows. Jupiter, exhausted, got to his feet laboriously. At that moment, the lights of the courtyard were lit and the three men who had run into the junkyard moments earlier came to where Jupiter was.

"Uncle Titus! Konrad! Hans!" shouted Jupiter, recognizing them.

"Jupiter!" exclaimed his uncle, coming up to him and taking him by the arm. "What happened? Are you okay? We heard noises and thought something might have happened to you."

"I'm all right, Uncle Titus," the boy replied. "I think I surprised a thief. That's all. I ran into him by accident and tried to stop him, but he was faster than I was. I fell to the ground and he escaped over the fence."

"Thieves!" cried a fourth figure Jupiter had not seen enter following the three men. "Just what I imagined!"

Jupiter looked toward who had just spoken, and smiled slightly when he saw his aunt Mathilda with a scowl on her face. The good woman was holding a huge frying pan in her right hand.

"Thieves in the salvage yard! In *my* salvage yard!" Mrs. Jones went on shouting. "That's all we need! That rascal is lucky he got away, because if I had gotten my hands on him he'd have known who Mathilda Jones is!"

Jupiter couldn't help but sympathize with any thief who ever had the misfortune of falling into the hands of his aunt. Such compassion, however, was nothing compared to what he felt for himself when he heard what she said next:

"But for all the saints! Jupiter, look at yourself! You are covered in dirt from head to toe! And it looks like you have a good lump on your forehead! Jupiter Jones, take a bath right now!"

## **CHAPTER 11**

# **FOLLOWING A NEW LEAD**

After eating a hearty breakfast and promising his mother that he would clean and organize the garage that afternoon, Pete Crenshaw pedaled furiously through the streets of Rocky Beach so as not to be late for his appointment with Jupiter Jones. Pete, knowing how it displeased his friend when his plans were disrupted by an unexpected delay, increased the pace of his pedaling.

He soon caught sight of the outer fence of the Jones Salvage Yard. On this occasion, however, Pete decided not to enter through the front gates to prevent Mrs. Jones from seeing him and automatically putting him to work. Instead Pete headed toward the far end of the front fence of the junkyard. At a particular point about thirty yards from the wide entrance gates he stopped by the fence. A picturesque scene in which a ship was struggling in the midst of mighty swells had been painted on the outer fence. In one corner of the scene a fish peered out of the water and watched the boat battered by the waves. Pete came up to the fish and pressed the spot where the eye was painted. Automatically two of the spring-driven fence boards rose, revealing a secret entrance. This was Green Gate One, so called because of the greenish color with which the sea had been painted. This entrance provided access to the corner of the salvage yard where Jupiter's workshop was located.

Pete entered through the gap in the fence hauling his bicycle behind him. Then he turned and pushed the boards down returning them to their original position. It was still five minutes until nine-thirty. He had arrived in plenty of time.

"Be still!" he suddenly heard a voice say behind him. "Don't move!"

Pete gave a start and stood motionless, obedient to the warning just heard. Then, slowly, the tall brown-haired boy turned and looked around. A few feet from him, squatting on his heels and staring intently at the dirt floor, was his friend Jupiter.

"Hey, Jupe! What's wrong?" Pete grumbled. "You scared me."

"Give me a moment, Second," Jupiter said, not looking away from the floor. "And, above all, don't move from where you are."

"Do you mind if I breathe?" Pete asked sarcastically. "I've been pedaling at full speed all the way from my house and I'm out of breath. I hope you don't mind me taking in some oxygen. I need it to survive."

Jupiter did not answer. In fact, he didn't even look at him. He continued to stare at the dirt floor and slowly moved toward where Pete was standing. After a couple of minutes, the stout boy got to his feet and pinched his lower lip, an unmistakable sign that he was employing all his mental machinery.

"Just as I imagined," he whispered softly. "It was the only possible answer."

Pete, blinking, sighed.

"What did you imagine?" he asked. "What is going on? And, above all, can I move now? I'm getting a statue complex."

Jupiter, distracted, looked at his friend.

"Hmm? Oh, yes, of course, Pete," he said. "Go park your bike anywhere. I hope you're ready to leave. Worthington will be here shortly."

"Thank you for allowing me to move," Pete sighed sarcastically.

The Second Investigator pushed his bicycle into a corner, left it there leaning against the fence and returned to where Jupiter was brooding.

"Well, First," he began, "can you tell me now what this is all about? What were you looking for on the ground? Have you lost a fifty-cent piece?"

Then, opening his eyes wide, he pointed to Jupiter's forehead.

"That's quite a bump!" he exclaimed. "How did you get it? Did you fall out of bed this morning?" he added teasingly.

Jupiter frowned and grunted. He then proceeded to tell Pete everything that had happened the night before when he was assaulted on leaving Headquarters.

"It's definitely confirmed," he concluded, "that there is more than one gang in this whole affair. The members of the first gang are Sinclair and Lagalle. I'm not sure if the two men who attacked them last night are the same ones who helped us yesterday on the road since I couldn't see their faces then nor could I see their faces last night. The only thing I can say for sure is that the tall one answered to the name of Norbert. However, their voices were not familiar to me at all. Maybe it's a third gang and there are more thugs involved than we even imagined. Nevertheless, I am sure of two things: the two gangs know each other, because during the fray I clearly heard Sinclair, on his escape, shout, 'He is here!' No doubt he was referring to one of the men in the other gang. On the other hand, I'm sure that the members of the second gang at least know of the existence of Green Gate One."

"Why's that, Juve?" Pete asked.

"Sinclair and Lagalle ran away through the front gates of the salvage yard," Jupiter explained, "but not the other two men. They escaped 'out the way they came', according to the shorter one. When they escaped, they headed to this corner of the yard and not the front gates because my uncle and Hans and Konrad were entering right then. So, they had to get out some other way. Through this corner of the yard, more specifically. Today, in the light of day, I can clearly see the traces they left on their escape. I was studying them right when you entered. Next to the fence, where Green Gate One is located, there are usually just our footprints. But today you can see traces of two people other than us, traces that are different and bigger. Thus, Norbert and his accomplice, the members of the second gang, entered and exited using our secret entrance. That proves that they have been keeping a close eye on us and that at least one of us has used Green Gate One while being watched. From now on we must exercise extreme caution and use secret entrances only when we are absolutely sure that we aren't being watched or, when in doubt, use them only when strictly necessary."

"I get it, First," Pete agreed. "And now can you explain...?"

But Pete didn't finish the question. A honk interrupted him.

Jupiter, hearing the honk, said, "Worthington has just arrived. Let's go meet him. Hurry."

"Do we really have to?" Pete asked. "This case is getting more and more complicated, Juve. The only thing I'm in a hurry to do is to forget about this case and let someone else take care of solving

the mystery. It isn't easy to be an investigator when you have at least two bands of criminals following you, ready to catch you in the middle of the night."

"On the contrary, Pete," said Jupiter. "All this makes it even more stimulating. Besides, these men won't leave us alone until we solve the entire mystery. So, the sooner we set the record straight, the sooner we'll be free of the danger they represent to us. And now let's go!" he added as he started walking.

"All right, Jupe. You know what you're doing," Pete said, following his friend. "But at least tell me one thing: where are we going?"

"I will answer any question you want to ask me during the journey," Jupiter merely replied. "Now let's hurry. Worthington is waiting for us."

The two friends rounded the large scrap heaps that separated them from the center of the yard. When they reached it, they saw the magnificent Rolls-Royce at the front gate, its immaculate body and gold-plating glistened in the California sun. Seeing them emerge, Worthington, the tall, impassive English chauffeur in his impeccable uniform, stepped out of the car, opened one of the rear doors for the boys and greeted them with a slight bow.

Jupiter and Pete strode toward him.

"Let's make sure Aunt Mathilda doesn't see us leave," Jupiter said. "I would rather not run into her or her desire to put us to work this time."

"This time, you say?" Pete said. "Gosh, Jupe! That's what I *always* prefer!"

Worthington greeted them with a wide grin as the boys arrived at the car.

"Good morning, Master Jones," he said. "Good morning, Master Crenshaw. Nice to see you again."

"Good morning, Worthington," Jupiter said. "Thanks for coming."

"It's a pleasure," said the English driver. "A new mystery to investigate?"

"That's right, Worthington," Jupiter said as he and Pete entered the luxurious car. "On this occasion we are investigating the whereabouts of a valuable object that someone hid before dying."

"Mmmm... Sounds interesting, Master Jones," Worthington said. "I hope you are able to bring the investigation to a successful conclusion."

"Thank you, Worthington," said Jupiter.

Once the boys were settled inside the vehicle, the English chauffeur closed the door and got behind the wheel.

"Where are we going, Master Jones?" Worthington asked, preparing to put the car in motion.

Jupiter gave him the necessary instructions to take them to the house of the late Mr. Roberts. Worthington, being satisfied, drove the Rolls-Royce out into the street, joining what little traffic there was at that hour. Pete blinked in surprise at the directions given by his friend.

"Are we going to Mr. Roberts' house again?" he asked, intrigued. "What for, Jupe?"

Ignoring him, Jupiter tilted his head slightly toward the rear window of the vehicle and peeked out. A couple of blocks away, and seemingly satisfied, he settled into the soft backseat with a sigh of relief.

"Apparently, no one is following us this time," he said. "But we shouldn't ever lower our guard."

"Well, maybe they decided to take a break after last night," Pete said.

"I don't think so," said Jupiter. "Although surely they will be more prudent now when it comes to us. That will be in our favor unless they decide to join forces to go after us. I hope something like that doesn't happen."

For a few seconds the two boys were silent as Worthington drove toward the hills.

"Well, Jupe," Pete said at last. "Now will you explain to me what this is all about? Why are we going back to Mr. Roberts' house?"

Jupiter, without looking at his friend, replied, "To find the next clue, Pete."

"What do you mean, First?" Pete asked, blinking. Then, adopting a more serious pose, he added, "Jupiter Jones, you've discovered something and are convinced that it's important. Why don't you say it already? Don't be so mysterious. You said earlier that you would answer all of my questions on the way. Well, we're on our way. Start talking."

Jupiter looked at Pete and grinned.

"Very well," he said. "You see, I think I've discovered the next clue Mr. Roberts was referring to. Although I must admit in all honesty that chance had a lot to do with it. Of course, that's not a bad thing, many important details in the history of criminology have been discovered by chance. Nevertheless, I was stupid not to notice such a simple detail earlier."

"Get to the point, Jupe," Pete said, intrigued.

"Last night, when I said goodbye to you," explained Jupiter, "my uncle Titus handed me a box of second-hand objects that needed to be repaired. Inside the box I found an alarm clock. I didn't notice at first, but when I looked at it again I saw a most trivial detail. Then I understood everything."

"And what does a used alarm clock have to do with Mr. Roberts and all this business about the chess set and the hidden treasure?" Pete asked.

"The numbers, Pete," Jupiter replied enigmatically. "That's what it has to do with. That's the clue!"

"The numbers?" repeated Pete, confused.

"That's right," continued Jupiter. "You see, on most clocks the numbers that appear on the dial indicating the different hours are conventional numbers, also called Arabic numbers. These are the numbers we use every day. The 1, 2, 3, etc. But many other clocks mark the hours with another type of numbers, numbers that are letters. Or, rather, letters that are numbers."

"What do you mean, Jupe?" Pete asked.

"I'm talking about Roman numerals, Pete," Jupiter explained. "That's what I mean. Letters that aren't really letters, but numbers. The alarm clock that my uncle gave me displayed the hours from one to twelve with Roman numerals. When I saw them, it all made sense. It was stupid of me not to realize it before."

"Golly, Jupe!" cried Pete. "Are you certain?"

"Completely, Second," said Jupiter. "It fits. On the one hand, that's the reason Mr. Roberts said that 'things are not always what they seem.' That phrase, which appears in the letter addressed

to Mr. Heggyns, is repeated in the message that Mr. Inglewood delivered yesterday. So, 'if things are not always what they seem,' it is logical to think that letters are not always letters, but sometimes they are something else. Sometimes they are just..."

"...Numbers!" Pete finished. "Wow, Jupe! That does sound meaningful."

"But there's more, Pete," Jupiter went on. "Do you remember what Mr. Heggyns told us that Mr. Roberts did with the books he owned at home?"

"What do you mean, Jupe?"

"I'm referring to the fact that Mr. Heggyns told us very clearly that Mr. Roberts spent a whole summer ordering, sorting, and cataloging all his books. He even *categorized them in different ways*. Don't you get it, Pete? I'm convinced that some of these books are numbered with Roman numerals, and that on one of the shelves in that house there is a book whose number is LXI, which is 61 expressed in conventional numbers."

"Golly, Jupe!" Pete exclaimed again. "That all makes sense! However, what makes you think it's one of the *books* that Mr. Roberts owned? What is their connection with the message?"

Jupiter bit his lower lip.

"There was a detail that made me think of books," Jupiter explained. "In his letter, Mr. Roberts says clearly: 'seek what I love most.' We were misled by the fact that we discovered an old friend of his whose name fit with the initials L, X, and I. You love your friends, and that's what got us off track. But Mr. Roberts also loved other things, like art, chess, and... his books. Mr. Heggyns told us quite clearly and we missed it. Even Mr. Inglewood alluded to it yesterday."

"In other words, when Mr. Roberts says in his letter that 'the name will lead you on the right path,' what he is really referring to is, more or less..."

"...The title of the book!" cried Pete. "Whiskers, Jupe! Am I right?"

"I think so, Pete," answered Jupiter. "The name of the book in question, in other words its title, is supposed to lead us on the right path."

"So," said Pete, "we have to go to Mr. Roberts' house, go into his library, find the books classified with Roman numerals, find the one numbered LXI, that is, number 61, and read the title. And that title will point us to the next clue. Is that it, Jupe?"

"That's right, Pete," said the First Investigator. "Or, at least, that's what I've concluded from my deductions. I firmly believe in my theory, and I'm convinced that this time we are on the right track."

"Whew!" whistled Pete. "If your theory is right, then Mr. Roberts truly could devise the most twisted and baffling plots."

"You can be absolutely sure about that, Second," Jupiter said. "But I'm also convinced of something else."

"What's that, Jupe?" Pete asked, looking at his friend.

"We're going to unravel this mystery," Jupiter said, not without some pomposity. That said he refused to add one more word the rest of the way.

## **CHAPTER 12**

# **THE MYSTERIOUS TITLE**

After a pleasant drive through the hills, the Rolls-Royce finally entered the canyon leading to Arthur Roberts' house. Pete couldn't help but look back from time to time to see if anyone was following them. Seeing no suspicious cars, the boy sighed in relief, especially when he spotted a pair of police patrol cars from Rocky Beach as they approached the deceased writer's house.

Following Jupiter's instructions, Worthington approached the house and stopped by the sidewalk a few yards from the patrol cars. Watching the gleaming Rolls-Royce park, the guard at the garden gate approached the car and leaned toward the driver's window.

"I'm sorry, but you cannot stay here," he told Worthington. "This house has been broken into and the entire area is under police control."

Before giving Worthington time to answer, Jupiter lowered his window and, adopting the most adult-like voice and pose possible, told the officer, "Excuse me, good man, but I have a date here with Chief Samuel Reynolds. He is waiting for me. Would you be so kind as to inform him of my arrival, please?"

Even knowing his friend's gifts as an actor, Pete couldn't help but grin at the sound of it. Despite being a young man, Jupiter seemed to have aged ten or fifteen years. His demeanor, coupled with the presence of the Rolls-Royce, gave him the appearance of a serious and demanding young man who didn't like to be kept waiting.

The officer, on hearing this, hesitated.

"I repeat that the area is under police control and strangers are not allowed," he insisted scratching his head.

"And I repeat that Chief Reynolds is waiting for me," replied Jupiter. "Kindly advise him, sir, or I shall be forced to go in search of him myself."

The officer seemed more confused than ever. But Samuel Reynolds' manly, authoritative voice, who appeared behind the dazed officer, put an end to the discussion.

"It's all right, Johnson, it's all right," he said. "The boy is correct. Return to your position and I will take care of him."

Still confused and frowning, the officer obediently retreated to the entrance of the garden. Once alone by the Rolls-Royce, Chief Reynolds put his hands on his hips and looked at Jupiter.

"Very well, young Jones," he said, not without some severity. "You've got what you wanted: to come to this house even though it goes against the rules. How can I help you this time?"

"As I told you on the phone yesterday, Chief," Jupiter said as he and Pete climbed out of the luxurious car, "I need to consult a book that I hope to find in this house."

"Ah, yes, that's right," said the chief. "I remember you mentioned something about a book. You see, Jupiter... this house has been broken into, and nothing that's still in the house can be removed. So, you can't take anything, whether it's a book or not."

"Not a problem, Chief," said Jupiter. "I just need to look at it. Anyway, if we need the book itself maybe we could get a copy in the public library. As you know, our partner, Bob Andrews, works

there and could easily borrow it. Even so, I don't think it will be necessary to take the book out of the house. In theory, we just need to see the title."

Chief Reynolds looked at the boys and sighed.

"All right, guys," he said. "Come with me. But keep one thing in mind: don't touch anything. If you need to examine something tell me and I will get it for you."

"If you mean footprints, don't worry about that," Jupiter said. "We've been in this house twice before, so chances are that ours are already inside."

"We'll talk about that later. For the moment, just do what I tell you and don't touch anything," insisted the chief. "And now, follow me."

Pete and Jupiter nodded, and after asking Worthington to wait for them, they started off after the Rocky Beach Police Chief. He led them through the garden and into the house. Once in the hall, he turned and looked at the boys.

"Well, Jones?" he asked Jupiter.

"Let's go into the living room, Chief," he said. "That's where Mr. Roberts had his private library. We will search there."

"Very well," said the chief of police.

The three of them stepped into the large room and studied it from the threshold. Pete and Jupiter once again stared at the large bookshelves crammed full of books. They rose from floor to ceiling and occupied almost all the walls.

"Mr. Roberts personally cataloged all his books," Jupiter explained. "He grouped them into sections and gave each one a different numbering system. We are looking for the section of his library that is marked with Roman numerals, whatever its topic."

"That will be easy," Chief Reynolds remarked. "The books don't seem to have been one of the primary objectives of the search. Let's look. But remember we don't have much time. The police detectives will arrive soon, and I'd rather you weren't here then."

"It should just take a few minutes, Chief," said Jupiter, who, being careful not to touch anything, had already approached the first shelf to see the numbering of the books there.

Each of them approached a different wall and began to look at the shelves.

"Every book has a label on the bottom of the spine," Jupiter commented after looking at the books in front of him. "That's where the number is. These aren't the ones. They are numbered with the Greek alphabet."

They kept looking.

"Maybe the book we're looking for is about chess," Jupiter said, biting his lower lip. "This entire case has to do, in some way or another, with the game. Let's look at the chess section. Maybe there ..."

"That section is over here, Juve," Pete interrupted. "It's right in front of me and ... yes! They are numbered with Roman numerals. You were right, Juve!"

Jupiter and Chief Reynolds approached Pete, who was kneeling in front of an oak shelf that occupied the farthest corner of the room.

"Look for number 61, Second," Jupiter directed. "That's the number LXI."

"Here it is, Jupe!" Pete answered. "I see it! Please, Chief Reynolds," he added, turning to the chief of police, "please pick it up and show us. The title isn't on the spine. It looks like a fairly old book."

Chief Reynolds pulled thin rubber gloves from his pocket and put them on. Then he bent down and picked up the book Pete was pointing at. He then stood up and held it out so that Pete and Jupiter could look at it. It was, in fact, a rather old-looking book as Pete had said. Its covers were quite worn and its pages had begun to yellow at the edges due to the effect of humidity, light and the passage of time.

"You couldn't read the title on the spine because it was covered up, Pete," Chief Reynolds explained. "Doubtless the covers fell off at some point, and Mr. Roberts repaired it to keep it from deteriorating more. However, the title appears on the front, boys. Read it for yourself."

"We did, Chief," Pete said. "And, honestly, I don't get it. What do you think, Jupe?"

"*The Basis of Chess*," Jupiter read quietly, as if distracted by his own thoughts. Then, as if returning to himself, he added, "The truth is... I don't know what to say. I had hoped the title of the book would be somewhat more descriptive. *The Basis of Chess*. Such a title, which says so much and so little at the same time, is extremely intriguing."

"Jupiter, what sort of title is that?" Pete asked. "It doesn't really tell us anything. Are you sure this is the clue we are looking for?"

"It has to be, Pete," Jupiter said, still pinching his lower lip. "I'm absolutely sure that my theory is correct. Mr. Roberts was referring to the title of *this* book. We have to think about it, Second Chief," he added, turning to the chief of police, "can't we take the book to study it, even for just a few hours?"

Chief Reynolds shook his head.

"I'm afraid that's quite impossible, Jupiter," he said. "Also, if you have already found what you were looking for, I have to ask you to leave the house. The police detectives will arrive at any moment and it would be inappropriate for them to find you here."

"You're right, Chief," Jupiter said, visibly disappointed. "Maybe Bob can find us a copy at the library, even though it's such an old book. Fortunately, the Rocky Beach Public Library is very well stocked. Let me just write down the author's name so that I can communicate it to our friend."

Jupiter wrote the name on a piece of paper and thanked Chief Reynolds for his help. After returning the book to its place, the chief accompanied them outside and told them goodbye. Pete and Jupiter walked slowly back to where the Rolls-Royce was parked with Worthington at the wheel. On the way, Pete looked at Jupiter. The latter, lost in thought, frowned and pinched his lower lip furiously.

"What do you think, Jupe?" he asked. "What's our next step? What can we conclude from such a meaningless title as *The Basis of Chess*?"

"I acknowledge that I am exceedingly perplexed," replied Jupiter. "However, I don't think it would do us any harm to have a copy of that book. Perhaps reading it will help us to find the clue we need to proceed with this case. Come on, Pete, we'll call Bob at the library from the phone in the Rolls-Royce. We'll ask him to look for a copy of Alexander Redimov's *The Basis of Chess* and borrow it. A dose of chess research wouldn't hurt us on this case."

"And what will we do if Bob can't find a copy of the book?" Pete asked. "It's an old book that may not be so easy to find. Then we won't be able to make progress with this case?"

Jupiter was silent for a few seconds.

"Well?" Pete persisted.

"In that case, and much to my dismay," replied Jupiter, frowning, "I will gladly agree to accompany you to the beach and take advantage of the last days of summer swimming in the ocean."

Pete's laughter echoed through the canyon as Jupiter, pinching his lower lip, strode back to the gleaming Rolls-Royce.

## **CHAPTER 13**

# **STUMPED**

Bob Andrews pushed open the trapdoor at the end of Tunnel Two. As he bounded into Headquarters he saw that his friends Pete and Jupiter were already there, waiting for him, just as they had told him they would be when they called him at the library from the telephone in the Rolls-Royce.

It was nearly noon and lunchtime was approaching. Worthington and the magnificent automobile had returned to the Rent-'n-Ride Auto Agency after depositing the boys back at the salvage yard. Aunt Mathilda, who saw them arrive by pure chance, put them to work immediately sorting and carrying scrap metal from one place to another in the yard. The arduous day of work lasted until just before lunchtime. Jupiter and Pete had taken advantage of the lull to retire to Headquarters in order to exchange views on the case and wait for the arrival of the Third Investigator.

After adjusting his glasses, Bob moved to the desk where his friends were sitting. Pete, looking tired, played absentmindedly with the chess pieces while Jupiter seemed to brood with a sulky expression. Seeing Bob arrive, however, Jupe glanced up and looked at his friend.

"Hello, Bob," he said. "You get it?" he asked simply.

Bob smiled and raised the book he had kept hidden under his arm.

"I have it, First," he said, handing the book over to Jupiter. "You can't imagine how difficult it was to get it out of the library. Convincing Miss Bennett was hard work."

"Hey!" Pete scoffed as he lined up the black and white pieces on the chessboard. "Hard work, you say? We worked hard this morning when we got back from Mr. Roberts' house. Aunt Mathilda caught us by surprise, so we couldn't escape. And it was awful. Thanks, Records, but don't talk to me about hard work."

"Why did you have trouble getting the book out, Bob?" Jupiter asked, ignoring Pete's comment and beginning to flip through the book. "What do you mean?"

"To begin with, I had trouble finding it," Bob explained. "That book is out-of-print, because it's very old. It was mentioned in the card catalog but there was no trace of it on the bookshelves or in the list of books on loan. Finally, and with the help of Miss Bennett, I found it in the warehouse, waiting to be repaired, and included on the list of off-loan books that are not allowed to be taken out of the library. After much insistence, I got Miss Bennett to allow me to check it out, but only for a couple of days and on the condition that I work in the library this afternoon as a special favor. I couldn't refuse, so you won't be able to count on me to help with the case this afternoon. What do you think, Jupe? Do you think a couple of days will be enough if you have to read all of it? As you can see, I had to do a few repairs on the book."

"And you did a good job," Jupiter acknowledged as he stared at the book. "I'm sorry you'll be at the library and away from the case this afternoon, Records, but we'll keep you informed if there are any developments. As for your question, I hope it isn't necessary to read the whole book, although, worst case, I think two days will suffice to read all of it."

"I hope this book is the clue we're looking for, Jupe," said Bob.

Jupiter turned the book over in his hands.

"I hope so too," he said, frowning. "As far as I can see, this is the same book that we saw at Mr. Roberts' house, although it's a later edition. Even so, this copy is almost as old as the other. Nothing seems to indicate that the text of this version has undergone changes in its content with respect to the previous edition. Anyway, friends," concluded Jupiter, "we have a copy of Alexander Redimov's *The Basis of Chess*, if only for two days. I hope we find it useful, although, frankly, guys, I don't know what to think."

"What's the matter, Jupe?" Bob asked. "You aren't sure that this is the clue we need?"

"Jupe is in a bad mood," Pete said. "He recognizes that the title of this book doesn't tell him anything and that this whole thing is nothing but complete and utter nonsense leading nowhere."

Bob looked at Pete and then back to Jupiter, who, after a few seconds of silence, let out a long, deep breath.

"I confess that I'm certainly stumped," he said finally with resignation. "If Mr. Roberts actually referred to this book in his message, which I don't doubt, I fail to understand why he bothered to tell us that its title would lead us on the right path. If so, a title like *The Basis of Chess* should be clear enough to indicate a direction or clue to follow. But the truth is the title is so general, so brief, says so much and so little at the same time, that it leaves me completely bewildered. Frankly, I don't know what to think. And yet there must be something in this title that is enlightening."

"Perhaps the title itself is just a sign indicating the path, and the path is the reading of the book," suggested Bob. "It's possible that the book explains some tactic or movement of chess pieces that... Hey, guys!" he shouted excitedly. "What if some basic tactical chess moves are explained in the book? What if these moves led to others and these were the basis of more letters, as happened with the first part of the message? What do you think, Jupe?"

"I don't know, Records," said Jupiter. "I acknowledge that it's a possibility that we must consider."

"That sounds like Chinese to me," Pete protested. "Besides, I don't think that many letters can be built with the movements of the chess pieces, let alone long messages, whether composed of letters, Roman numerals or whatever."

Discouraged silence spread among the three young investigators. After about a minute Bob cleared his throat.

"I think Pete's right," he said. "However, there is something in that book, in its title, or in some other part of it, that will indicate what our next move should be."

"We agree, Bob," Pete conceded. "But, what can it be?"

"Any ideas, Jupe?"

Pete and Bob looked at their friend. He pondered for a few seconds as he flipped through pages and pages of the book until, shaking his head, he looked back at his friends.

"I'm sorry, guys," he said, "but nothing meaningful occurs to me. I'm mentally blocked. Of course... Let's see, guys. If you hear someone refer to 'the basis of chess,' what would you think automatically? What would the title of the book suggest to you?"

"You have to beat the opponent," Pete said without thinking.

"You must defeat the enemy king," Bob said softly.

"You don't understand what I mean," said Jupiter. "Beating the opponent or, similarly, defeating the enemy king, is the *object* of the game, but not its basis. The pillars on which chess is based are something else. Let's see, Bob. You know the rules of chess better than Pete. What would the title of the book suggest to you if you heard it mentioned?"

Bob pondered for a few seconds.

"Well," he said at last. "I guess strategy. After all, it is a game of strategy. That's its foundation. Strategy, tactics, and also to be able to discover and predict the opponent's strategy. It's a game where you have to attack and be cautious at the same time. To play chess, you have to watch where you step."

Silence gripped Headquarters again for a few seconds.

"Well?" Pete finally said. "What does that tell us, fellows? What good does it do us to know that the basis of chess is strategy and one has to look carefully where he puts his feet?"

Jupiter pinched his lower lip furiously. Pete and Bob could almost hear his mental cogwheels colliding with each other. Finally, the First Investigator, giving up, leaned back in his chair and directed an inquiring look at the chess pieces Pete had left on the board.

"I wish those pieces could talk," he said absently. "Anyway," he added, getting to his feet, "I suggest we take a lunch break. Perhaps some fresh ideas will come more easily on full stomachs."

Pete, standing up, looked at his friend.

"If you just said that we'll forget the book and the chess set for now, we'll go eat, and we'll deal with the case after lunch... I just have to say that I can't agree with you more!" he laughed.

Amidst the laughter, Pete and Bob went to the trapdoor and entered Tunnel Two. Jupiter, still brooding, followed slowly, not before giving a last, defiant glance at the book and the impassive chess pieces resting on the desk in Headquarters.

## **CHAPTER 14**

# **AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY**

After a quick meal at the Jones' house, Pete, Bob and Jupiter asked permission to leave and crossed the dirty, narrow street in the direction of the salvage yard. Once there the boys headed toward Jupiter's open-air workshop. Bob turned to his friends.

"Well, guys," he said. "Miss Bennett asked me to not be late this afternoon. I'm afraid I have to leave now."

"Of course, Bob," Jupiter conceded reluctantly. "I'm sorry you had to work extra to get the book."

"No problem, First," Bob said. "Keep me up to date with anything new."

"Don't worry," Pete said. "We'll call the library. If you aren't there we'll leave a message at your house."

Bob said goodbye and went to pick up his bike. Seconds later he was going out through the great iron gates of the salvage yard, leaving a cloud of dust behind him. Once he was gone Jupiter continued toward his workshop.

"Let's go to Headquarters," he told Pete. "Let's see if our full stomachs are capable of producing any new ideas."

"Darn, Juve! I can't stay," Pete cried. "I just remembered that this morning, just before leaving, I promised Mom that I would spend the afternoon cleaning and organizing the garage. Sorry, First, but I'd better leave if I don't want to get in trouble. Call me if you make any progress, will you?"

Jupiter nodded dejectedly and watched as Pete got on his bicycle and left the same way Bob had just moments earlier.

Completely alone, Jupiter looked around, and after shrugging his shoulders, finally reached his workshop and stepped around the printing press to get into Tunnel Two. Once inside Headquarters, he went to the desk and took a seat in the swivel chair. Sitting there, he folded his arms and, frowning, stared at the chess pieces that Pete had left lined up on the board. There he remained for a while, examining them without blinking, while the pieces, in turn, looked at him blindly as small silent witnesses of a mystery they had no intention of revealing.

A multitude of ideas began to fill the First Investigator's head. For a moment, while he sat there alone silently with his arms folded looking at the chess pieces, they seemed to be secretly laughing at him, as mocking guardians of the unknown. Feeling a bit foolish at this fleeting thought, Jupiter leaned on the table and occupied himself by sliding the pieces over the polished surface of the board. Then, continuing to think, he took a couple of pieces and rotated them between his fingers, feeling their solid wooden bodies and the soft circle of green felt attached to their bases. After a while, tired of the chess pieces, he picked up the board and examined it closely without finding anything special about it. It was simply a wooden drawer containing a bed of foam in which the pieces could be safely stored.

Jupiter finally left the board on the desk and took the book. *The Basis of Chess*, by Alexander Redimov, he recited once more. He then opened the volume and began to read it paying special attention to those parts in which any aspect of strategy or tactics was explained, discussed or even mentioned in passing. Oblivious to the passage of time, Jupiter busily read the book for a long while until, finally, the powerful sound of his Aunt Mathilda's voice summoned him from his self-absorption.

"Jupiter! Jupiter Jones!" cried the woman. "Where on earth are you this time? Come out of there! There are things to do in the yard!"

Startled, Jupiter looked up and, with great care, set the book aside. He got to his feet and made his way to the trapdoor that led to Tunnel Two. A minute later he circled the large piles of junk that hid Headquarters and out into the yard.

"It's about time you showed up here!" his aunt reproached him as soon as she saw him. "We have work to do! Hans and Konrad have gone out with the big truck and your uncle is busy in the office. Now take over the job of charging customers while I attend to those who arrive."

"Yes, Aunt Mathilda," replied the boy.

Jupiter, obediently, did as his aunt had directed him while the woman approached a newly arrived couple who signaled her requesting help. Nevertheless, the First Investigator was so preoccupied with the mystery of the chess set that he made three mistakes in the first half hour while giving change. His aunt, seeing the level of her income in jeopardy, finally decided to relegate the boy from his job and assigned him to paint white garden chairs which, despite some rust, were not in poor condition.

Grumbling to himself because of his bungling, Jupiter retired to the area behind the office and there, armed with a paintbrush, a can of white paint and a good dose of patience, began to apply the paint soaked brush to the rusty metal chairs. His head, meanwhile, drifted light years away to a strange world full of chess pieces that made the most convoluted movements.

Jupiter remained there for much of the afternoon as the sun began to descend above the hills that surrounded Rocky Beach. And that was where, as the day began to wind down, his uncle Titus found him when he left the office to stretch his legs.

The junk dealer, seeing his nephew so dedicated to his work but so engrossed in his own thoughts, approached him with a playful smile on his lips as he tugged at one end of his huge mustache. The man, invariably cheerful and carefree, felt an intense desire to jest when he saw such a grave expression covering his nephew's face.

"Hi, Jupiter," he greeted cheerily. "How's it going? Have you finally decided to dedicate yourself to painting now that you've proven that you can't do anything against the great Titus Jones, incomparable chess master?"

Jupiter looked up and, leaving the paintbrush in the paint bucket, smiled regretfully.

"Hi, Uncle Titus," he replied. "It's not that. I was... I was completely absorbed in my thoughts."

"Those thoughts wouldn't have anything to do with chess, would they?" asked Uncle Titus, pouring a ration of tobacco into the bowl of his pipe. "It seems that lately that game is always on your mind."

"Something like that, Uncle Titus," said Jupiter. "In reality it's a kind of riddle that doesn't seem to make much sense."

"What is it exactly, Juve?" The junkman asked as he lit his pipe.

Jupiter pondered for a moment. Then, resolutely, he said, "Uncle Titus, if anyone asks you what you think is the basis of chess, what would you answer?"

His uncle blinked in surprise.

"The basis of chess?" he repeated after taking a draw from his pipe. "Wow! Well, my answer would be that the basis is the strategy, of course. Pure and simple strategy. And knowing how to predict both the movements of the adversary and the consequences of the movements themselves. That is fundamental in chess."

Jupiter felt that Mr. Roberts had weaved his plot so intricately as to prevent the movements of anyone who decided to try to unravel it.

"I know, Uncle Titus," Jupiter insisted. "But what if they asked you the question in such a way that it was necessarily a kind of riddle?"

Then, suddenly inspired, he added, "And imagine you applied a phrase like: 'things are not always what they seem' to that riddle. What would you answer?"

Uncle Titus took a long puff from his pipe and thought for a few seconds. Then, without further ado, he laughed, enveloped in a small cloud of smoke.

"I would answer the board and the pieces, of course. Without them you couldn't play. It would be almost like walking without feet."

Uncle Titus laughed again, satisfied with his own response. Jupiter, for his part, gave a disgruntled smile and sighed.

Suddenly, the First Investigator froze. His eyes, bright with excitement, opened wide as his breathing halted completely for a few seconds. What Uncle Titus had just said was in itself something apparently absurd. But what if...? After all, that answer fit the title of the book perfectly without having to read it in its entirety. Often the more complicated questions required the simplest answers. Plus, on the one hand, things were not always what they seemed, and on the other, chess was a difficult game, so perhaps the simplest answer, however absurd it might seem... What if...?

Trembling with excitement, Jupiter got to his feet and ran to the opposite corner of the salvage yard, where his workshop was located. His uncle blinked in surprise.

"Where are you going, Juve?" he asked. "Have you suddenly felt the urge to exercise?"

"Excuse me, Uncle Titus," the boy replied, still running, "but I just remembered something I left undone. Can you handle those garden chairs until it's finished? Thank you!"

Without waiting for an answer, Jupiter disappeared among the huge piles of junk. His uncle, amused at such strange behavior, shrugged, sucked in a deep puff from his pipe, tugged at one end of his mustache with one hand, and with the other hand took the paintbrush and began to apply short, quick brushstrokes to the chair that had been half painted.

Meanwhile, Jupiter arrived at his workshop, hurried through Tunnel Two, and panting, he entered Headquarters. Once more he took a seat in the swivel chair and stared at the chess set

as he had done just a few hours earlier. This time, however, a strange smile crossed the lips of the First Investigator.

Suddenly the phone rang. Without looking away from the chess pieces, Jupiter reached out and took it.

"Hello?"

"Jupiter," said Bob's voice from the other end of the line, "I'm calling you from the library. I've been thinking about Mr. Roberts' riddle. Tell me this: do you think the word *basis* could be a reference to the chessboard? After all, a chessboard is the *base* on which the pieces are placed and arranged. The game develops on it, like actors on a stage. Do you think Mr. Roberts could be referring to something like that with his message?"

Jupe was silent for a moment.

Then, in a low voice, he asked, "What made you think of that, Bob?"

"Well," replied Bob, with a slight embarrassment in his voice, "it wasn't really my idea. You see, this afternoon I was so distracted thinking about the title of that book that I asked Miss Bennett what she thought. I explained what was going on and she happened to say, jokingly, what I just told you. The idea hasn't stopped bouncing around in my head for a while and I thought I should tell you about it. What do you think?"

Jupiter was silent for so long that Bob thought that they had been cut off.

"Jupe? Are you there?" he asked.

"Yes, Bob," said Jupiter. "My uncle Titus made me think of a similar idea."

"Really? And what do you think...?"

"Bob," Jupiter interrupted in a visibly excited voice, "try to be available. I'll call you as soon as I find out. Now, goodbye."

"All right, Jupe," he just had time to say before Jupiter hung up.

Sitting in the swivel chair, the First Investigator leaned his elbows on the desk, set the chess pieces aside, and took the chessboard in his hands as ideas rushed feverishly through his head. What his uncle Titus had said to him just a few minutes earlier echoed again in his ears: *The board and the pieces, of course. Without them you couldn't play. It would be almost like walking without feet.* The words whirled in his head. Then he remembered briefly other words that had been uttered inside Headquarters, just a few hours earlier. *To play chess, you have to watch where you step.* Those had been Bob's words. And Pete, shortly afterwards, had pointed out: *The basis of chess is strategy, and one has to look carefully where he puts his feet.*

Feet.

Feet can be considered as a base. For example, the base of a person on which sits the full weight of his body.

The feet (or simply the foot, depending on the case) can also be the bottom of a ladder or the base of a column, a tree, a statue or... a figure.

Chess pieces are small statues, or figures, representing different characters.

These figures don't have proper feet, but, like any statue, they have a *base* on which they set on the board.

Jupiter set the chessboard on the desk and focused his attention on the chess pieces. He took one at random, a black rook, and examined it carefully. He traced its smooth carved wood surface with his fingers. It was made of solid wood, and there were no cracks or crevices to reveal even the smallest secret compartment. It wasn't hollow, so it couldn't have a message inside. It was made of one piece, so there was no use looking for something inside it.

Suddenly, Jupiter became completely still and scrutinized the chess piece even more closely. No, in reality, not all of it was made from a single piece of wood. Jupiter turned the figure of the black rook between his fingers and turned it face down. There was the base of the figure before his eyes. The bottom of the figure was circular, and its base was lined with a small circle of green felt that had been adhered to it in order to make the piece glide across the board more smoothly and avoid scratches.

Thus, the figure wasn't entirely a single solid piece. And the circular piece of felt could easily be removed and replaced without damaging it.

Eyes bright with excitement, Jupiter rummaged in one of his pockets and pulled out his Swiss multi-bladed knife. He unfolded one of the blades and plunged the point between the wood of the chess piece and the felt cloth that lined the base. Little by little, and with some difficulty, he managed to separate the circle of felt from the wood. Then he put the felt and pocket knife on the table and looked closely at the bare base of the figure.

There was something written on the small circle of wood. Despite the remains of dried glue and a few strands of felt, Jupiter was able to read the following:

**2**

**3 on 9**

Jupiter held his breath. What was the point of writing those numbers on the base of this chess piece? It couldn't be a trademark or anything like that. Looking closely, the white numbers seemed to have been written by hand on the black wood with the aid of a very fine paintbrush.

He had finally found something! He had finally found *the basis of chess!*

After a first jubilant moment Jupiter, however, was again submerged in concern. He had discovered something, yes, but he didn't know what it meant or why it had been written there. After taking a couple deep breaths, he set aside the black rook, looked at the rest of the figures, and, without thinking twice, he took another at random.

This time it was a white pawn. With the tip of his Swiss knife and a few skillful movements he managed to remove the piece of green felt, which he set aside. He looked at the base of the pawn and again found something written on it. This time it was numbers written with black paint on the white wood.

**6**

**8 on 3**

Jupiter's excitement was increasing. He had just found more mysterious numbers. Although he didn't know their meaning, there were thirty other chess pieces left, so that perhaps one of them, or all together considered as a whole, could make him understand what one piece was unable to tell him separately.

Jupiter looked at the rest of the pieces, which resembled silent little dwarves waiting their turn to reveal their secret. After a few seconds of hesitation, the First Investigator set to work with frenetic energy. Nevertheless, considering it prudent to proceed with a logical plan, he decided to start on the white pawns. He repeated the operation one after another, stripping each pawn of the felt layer that covered their bases. After a few minutes of uninterrupted work, he combined the numbers found on these pawns with the numbers he found previously, resulting in the following list:

<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>6 on 5</b>	<b>9 on 1</b>	<b>7 on 22</b>	<b>2 on 15</b>	<b>8 on 3</b>	<b>4 on 9</b>	<b>1 on 21</b>	<b>3 on 2</b>

He took a pencil and a sheet of paper and wrote down all the numbers. He looked at them for a few seconds and realized that the upper numbers found on each piece ranged from 1 to 8. Chess has eight white pawns; the upper numbers must necessarily indicate the order in which the pawns were to be arranged. Thus, once ordering the messages, he obtained the following:

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4 on 9</b>	<b>9 on 1</b>	<b>3 on 2</b>	<b>6 on 5</b>	<b>2 on 15</b>	<b>8 on 3</b>	<b>1 on 21</b>	<b>7 on 22</b>

Supposedly this was the order in which the messages found on the pawns were to be arranged. Jupiter didn't know what the messages might mean. At least for the moment. But there were still more pieces to be examined, and perhaps what they revealed would shed some light on the significance of the numbers.

It was necessary to put it all in order, Jupiter reflected. In every game of chess, the player who plays with the white pieces is the player who makes the first move. Thus, the white pieces must speak first. And, arranged in order on a board, from left to right and from top to bottom like reading a book, the first piece to consider would be a white rook. Jupiter, therefore, took the two white rooks and removed the pieces of felt from their bases. What he found was the following:

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Oceanview Park</b>	<b>13 on 16</b>

Jupiter smiled and trembled with excitement. It was already looking better. He read what he'd just found. He understood that, of the two white rooks, he had to consider the one with the

number 1 written on top first, since that number, as with the pawns, indicated the order in which they were to be arranged.

Jupiter picked up a new sheet of paper and, in the upper left corner wrote:

**1**  
**Oceanview Park**

This was the first piece of the new message. Arthur Roberts seemed to be heading toward one of Rocky Beach's oldest public parks. Jupiter knew Oceanview Park well enough. He had been there dozens of times. In fact, it was only about fifteen blocks from the salvage yard. And apparently, this had been the place chosen by Arthur Roberts to propose a new stage in the search for the hidden treasure. How long would this endless search last? One clue led to another and then another.

Jupiter placed the first white rook on the chessboard, at the square corresponding to the beginning of a game. Then, bearing in mind that a white knight should be next to the rook, Jupiter took the two white knights and carefully removed the felt covering with his pocket knife. When he finished, he saw that he had obtained the following:

**1                      2**  
**Bandstand            8 on 4**

He placed the message of white knight number 1 next to the one found on rook number 1. So, once in Oceanview Park they had to go to the bandstand. Mr. Roberts was becoming more specific, gradually narrowing down where the search for the treasure he hid should proceed. Jupiter was well acquainted with the bandstand the message referred to. It was one of the oldest in Southern California, although it had been a long time since any band had played there.

Jupiter resumed working. Next it was the two white bishops. The boy worked hard and methodically, first with the white pieces and then with the black ones. Once the felt that lined the bases of each and every chess piece had been removed, the boy gathered the messages and ordered them. He decided that, logically, they should be ordered according to the pieces from which they came, which, in turn, should be ordered from left to right and top to bottom, starting from the initial position of each piece at the beginning of a game.

After ordering all the pieces and all the messages, what he wrote on a new sheet of paper was as follows:

<b>Wh. Rook 1</b>	<b>Wh. Knight 1</b>	<b>Wh. Bishop 1</b>	<b>Wh. King</b>	<b>Wh. Queen</b>	<b>Wh. Bishop 2</b>	<b>Wh. Knight 2</b>	<b>Wh. Rook 2</b>
<b>Oceanview Park</b>	<b>Band stand</b>	<b>5 on 14</b>	<b>6 on 10</b>	<b>12 on 1</b>	<b>2 on 24</b>	<b>8 on 4</b>	<b>13 on 16</b>

<b>Wh. Pawn 1</b>	<b>Wh. Pawn 2</b>	<b>Wh. Pawn 3</b>	<b>Wh. Pawn 4</b>	<b>Wh. Pawn 5</b>	<b>Wh. Pawn 6</b>	<b>Wh. Pawn 7</b>	<b>Wh. Pawn 8</b>
4 on 21	9 on 1	3 on 2	6 on 5	2 on 15	8 on 3	1 on 22	7 on 22
<b>Bl. Pawn 1</b>	<b>Bl. Pawn 2</b>	<b>Bl. Pawn 3</b>	<b>Bl. Pawn 4</b>	<b>Bl. Pawn 5</b>	<b>Bl. Pawn 6</b>	<b>Bl. Pawn 7</b>	<b>Bl. Pawn 8</b>
1 on 19	9 on 20	11 on 12	8 on 13	5 on 7	12 on 5	3 on 24	16 on 17
<b>Bl. Rook 1</b>	<b>Bl. Knight 1</b>	<b>Bl. Bishop 1</b>	<b>Bl. King</b>	<b>Bl. Queen</b>	<b>Bl. Bishop 2</b>	<b>Bl. Knight 2</b>	<b>Bl. Rook 2</b>
4 on 23	11 on 28	12 on 18	10 on 10	10 on 4	18 on 27	6 on 20	3 on 9

When he finished writing, his hands trembled with excitement and his head was feverish. He leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath.

"I've got it!" he yelled. "I've got it, Mr. Roberts! I've got it!"

"I've got it, Mr. Roberts! I've got it!" squawked Blackbeard, the myna bird, from his cage suddenly awakening from his interrupted sleep. "I've got it, rascal! Give me back my doubloons!"

Jupiter looked up at the cage and his eyes met Blackbeard's. He was so jubilant that he would have gladly gone to the cage and kissed the dark yellow-billed bird.

## CHAPTER 15

# AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

Bob Andrews kept looking at the phone hanging from the kitchen wall as he hastily ate an early dinner that day. After an exhausting afternoon of work in the library, the Third Investigator had come home hungry and tired but still wondering if his friend Jupiter had made any progress in the case. His mother, brown-haired and with a graceful figure, sat down beside him as he devoured everything on his plate with canine hunger.

"Really? Jupiter hasn't called all afternoon or left any messages for me, Mother?" Bob asked again.

"For the third time in five minutes, Robert, your friend Jupiter has *not* called," his mother replied both amused and angry. "Why so much interest in that call?" added the woman, looking at him quizzically. "What are you up to this time?"

Bob swallowed a piece of sausage.

"We're trying to find something valuable," he explained. "You see, someone hid a letter in a chess set, we found it and..."

"A letter in a chess set?" interrupted his mother. "How strange!"

"That's right, Mom," Bob agreed. "The letter spoke of a valuable hidden object that could be found by following specific clues. We tried..."

The ringing telephone interrupted him. At his mother's stunned stare, Bob sprang nimbly out of his chair and picked it up before it rang for a second time.

"Hello?" he answered.

"Bob?" Jupiter's voice sounded excited and urgent. "Could you be at Headquarters after dinner? Let's say... in an hour?"

"I'll be there, First," Bob said. "What's it about?"

"We're going on a night expedition," Jupiter answered. "We have to act quickly and discreetly. Don't forget they're watching us, but it may be easier to go unnoticed at night than during the day."

Bob was unable to contain himself.

"What have you discovered, Juve?" he asked.

"There's no time for explanations now, Bob," Jupiter said simply. "Call Pete and tell him to meet us at Headquarters in an hour. There's no time to lose. See you later."

Bob hung up and, doing as Jupiter requested, picked up the phone again to call Pete. As the phone began to ring in the Crenshaw's home, Bob wondered what Jupiter might have discovered and where he planned to take them that night.

While Bob pondered such questions, inside Headquarters of The Three Investigators Jupiter Jones got to his feet and approached a small bookshelf full of books. From these, he removed a medium-sized volume that contained maps of a number of cities in Southern California and began to leaf through it.

Soon he found what he was looking for. As he recalled, the section for Rocky Beach had a detailed street map that included a map of Oceanview Park and all its facilities. With a quick motion, he tore out the page that showed the map of the park and put it in his shirt pocket.

Then he took the sheet of paper on which he'd written down everything he'd just discovered from the chess pieces and put it in his pocket as well. Once this was done, he made his way to the trapdoor that led to Tunnel Two. Behind him, scattered on the desk, were the chess pieces and a small pile of green felt. Jupiter gave them one last triumphant look before he left.

The First Investigator quickly scampered through the galvanized metal pipe, set the grating aside and emerged inside his workshop.

Everything seemed quiet and calm. Jupiter could see that the afternoon had advanced into evening, and that growing shadows had engulfed the salvage yard.

After standing up, Jupiter stepped around the printing press and set out for the main yard.

"Good afternoon, young Jones. It appears that our paths are destined to cross once more."

Jupiter stopped dead. Alarmed, his heart skipped and began to beat wildly. The words that had just sounded in the workshop took him by surprise. However, it was not the words themselves nor the surprise caused by hearing them that left him completely petrified, but something Jupiter had detected in that voice: the French accent.

Jupiter knew the owner of that voice. Not in vain, The Three Investigators had encountered him during the resolution of two of their earlier cases. And the boys could hardly forget the difficulties that he had caused them in the past.

When Jupiter had regained control of himself after a few seconds, he chose to remain completely motionless and search the darkness in the workshop. In the stillness of the evening, Jupiter was able to perceive what appeared to be the outline of a man's shoulders and a hat shifted slightly between the shadows on the other side of the printing press.

Suddenly, a faint rasp sounded in the corner. A spark timidly dispelled the darkness. There, in the faltering match light, appeared the face of Huganay. Half-buried in the shadows and dimly illuminated by the trembling light of the match, which threw ghostly outlines throughout the workshop, the face of the dangerous art thief had a ruthless hue that made a chill run down the First Investigator's spine.

Huganay smiled. A soft, malicious laughter echoed in the workshop.

"I hope I did not frighten you, my dear friend," said the Frenchman. "If so, I beg you to excuse me, for that was not my intention. And, by the way, do not be afraid. I am not here to hurt you. I just came to talk to you."

Jupiter, now fully recovered, remained in his place.

"I should have guessed you were involved in this whole affair," he said. "When I found out that we were after a hidden work of art and I saw a band of European thieves appear, I should have assumed that you wouldn't be very far away."

Huganay smiled again. In match light, his mustache cast dancing shadows on his cheeks. His appearance was truly ghostly.

"Please, young Jones, do not compare me with those beginners," he muttered. "They have no chance against me."

Jupiter bit his lower lip and thought for a moment.

"You've been watching over us all this time, haven't you?" he asked. "It was you who snatched the Enigma machine from Sinclair and Lagalle after they robbed Mr. Heggyns. And it was you who gave it back to us, leaving it here, in the workshop, the next day, without anyone seeing you."

Huganay nodded, pleased.

"That's right, my young friend," he said. "I see that you continue to connect the dots quite well. What if we turn on the lights and keep talking? Do not worry about who can see us. I am not alone. My men will be in charge of keeping at bay anyone who tries to bother us. Anyway, as long as I'm here with you those men would not dare to come near. They fear me too much to even try."

Understanding that Huganay's intentions were friendly, Jupiter nodded and turned on the small bare bulb that hung from the roof of the shop. An oblique light fell on Huganay's face without letting it lose a single hint of his devilish appearance.

"Let's sit down and talk, my young friend," Huganay said.

Jupiter nodded, and the two sat facing each other on separate stools.

"It was you who forced Sinclair and Lagalle off the road yesterday, near the highway. You were in that car," said Jupiter. "And it was you, or at least two of your men, who helped me last night right here, in the salvage yard, when they attacked me. I didn't see you, but I'm certain you weren't far away."

Huganay, visibly pleased, nodded again.

"That's right, Jones," he said with a malicious gleam in his eyes. "My men and I have been watching those who were watching you and we kept you safe. Norbert and Harris, my helpers, are most efficient types, not like the dimwitted Lagalle and *Mylord*."

"*Mylord*?" inquired Jupiter.

"Ah," said Huganay. "That is the nickname Malcolm Sinclair is known by in the underworld."

"He and Lagalle are art thieves, aren't they, Mr. Huganay?" Jupiter asked.

Huganay smiled.

"That, at least, is what they claim to be," replied the Frenchman. "I have known them well for some time, when, like me, they began their career in Europe. *Mylord* is just a graceless swindler who pretends to be an art thief. He has tried everything, but he has had only minor success. He's too clumsy for this business. As for Lagalle, I know him well because he came to be under my command during a time when I was operating in France. I never liked him. Too impulsive. Handles guns and knives well, which makes him a dangerous character.

"But do not fear anything from them, my friend. Since last night they are watched more closely than ever. Besides, while you're with me you'll be safe."

Jupiter looked at the Frenchman and frowned.

"You say you're here because you want to talk to me," he said. "What do you want to talk about?"

Huganay leaned forward until his elbows rested on his knees, and he stared into Jupiter's eyes.

"I do not like absurd questions, Jones," he said sternly. "You know very well what I'm looking for. I'm looking for the same thing as you. I look for the painting, the masterpiece that Arthur Roberts concealed before he died. And I think it's high time we joined forces to find its whereabouts. You and your friends have the means to find the painting but you lack protection. I do not have the means but I can offer you the protection you need. We will work better, faster, and more secure together. Under these circumstances, I have no doubt that we will find the picture."

Jupiter considered for a moment.

"Can I count on your full protection for myself and my friends?"

"Boy, you've been counting on it since this whole affair began," Hukanay responded. "In return, in addition to helping me find the picture, you will have to promise me that you will not go to the police under any circumstances. Is that clear? Keep the police out of all this. Agreed?"

Jupiter considered again. Finally, believing it to be his best option, decided to accept the deal that Hukanay was offering him.

"Very well, my young friend," the Frenchman agreed cordially. "From now on we will work together. The terms of our agreement are, therefore, clearly established. But tell me, is there anything you want to ask me before we continue?"

Jupiter bit his lower lip and nodded.

"What exactly are we looking for, Mr. Hukanay? What painting is it?"

Hukanay looked at Jupiter silently for a few seconds as if pondering the fact that the boy was asking him that question.

"Well," he said at last, "I thought you knew. Of course," he added, reflecting, "it's not surprising that you don't know which picture it is, since, in truth, almost nobody knows the secret. So, let me reserve the answer to your question. However, I will do something for you. When we find the picture, I'll let you be the first to see it, after myself, of course. Perhaps then you'll be surprised."

Jupiter, who loved expressing himself to others enigmatically but hated when they did the same to him, frowned and reluctantly agreed. Hukanay, amused, reached out and patted his shoulder.

"Do not fret, young friend. This way, you'll have one more incentive to bring this search to a successful conclusion," he said. "And now let's start with you. What have you learned so far and how do you think it can help us find the picture? I know you're a smart boy, Jones, so you'd better tell the truth. I am convinced that you know things that can assuredly lead us to our objective. Very well, boy. Now speak. I will listen."

With some hesitation at first, but with greater certainty as his story formed, Jupiter told him what he and his friends had discovered thus far. He left to the end what he had discovered just a few minutes earlier on the chess pieces.

"Hmmm..." Hukanay reflected. "Encrypted messages hidden under the felt covering the bases of the chess pieces. And all the messages together should lead to a place where, supposedly, the painting is hidden. An ingenious way to send a message. Very typical of a man like Arthur. Do you have the messages you found there?"

Nodding, Jupiter took out the sheet of paper on which he had written down the series of encrypted messages and showed it to the art thief. He frowned at it.

"The Oceanview Park bandstand," he said. "That all seems clear. But what do you think all these numbers could mean? Do you have any idea?"

Jupiter hesitated.

"I'm not sure, sir," he said, "but I think it's something to be solved once we're at the bandstand."

"What makes you think that?" Huganay asked.

"You see, sir," said Jupiter, "the numbers on the paper follow the same coding method as certain encrypted messages which my friends and I have encountered on an earlier case. On that occasion, the numbers represented specific pages of a book and the number on that page identified the word in question. Well, in the encrypted messages that I found on the chess pieces the same method and the same pattern are repeated."

"You mean the numbers refer to words in a book?" Huganay asked. "Do you have that book? I mean... do we have it?"

"I don't think it's a book, sir," said Jupiter, "but something simpler."

"What do you think he's referring to, then?"

"If you look closely at pairs of numbers, sir," said Jupiter, "you will notice that the first numbers are not large. The highest is an 18. The second numbers, meanwhile, also don't reach very high values. The highest number is, let me see ... a 28. That makes me think of a text that isn't very large. Bigger than a sentence, yes, but not as extensive as a book.

"I've known Oceanview park and the bandstand since I was a kid. And I know that there is text inscribed on the floor of the bandstand with a mosaic-like technique. The text commemorates the inauguration of the park, one of the oldest in this part of California, and refers to the old pioneers who came to the coast of the Pacific Ocean and founded the cities around Los Angeles, including Rocky Beach.

"If I remember correctly, this text consists of about thirty lines, and there will be no more than twenty words in each of them. In my opinion, these dimensions are perfectly in line with those of the text to which the numbers refer. So, either I'm wrong or what we have to do next to find the picture is to go to the bandstand in the park and see what words of that text, inscribed on the floor, Mr. Roberts referred to with the numbers he hid on the chess pieces. If after gathering all the words the resulting message makes sense, which I don't doubt will happen, it will be a sign that we are on the right path."

"Your theory sounds completely plausible!" exclaimed Huganay, with bright eyes. "Plausible and quite ingenious. Arthur Roberts was able to pose the most convoluted riddles, but it seems to me that what you just said makes sense. Boy, I think you have the next clue in your hand. When do you think we can go to Oceanview Park to see if your theory is correct?"

"Well," said Jupiter, "I had actually thought of going there tonight. The park will be deserted and there will be no one to bother us. In fact, I have already advised my friends to meet me here in"---he consulted his watch---"a little more than half an hour."

"Half an hour, eh?" said Huganay, his face dark. Then, after a few seconds of reflection, he added decisively: "Very well, then. We will not alter what is planned. Here's what we'll do: meet here with your friends. When the three of you are together, exit through the secret entrance there, in

the fence, and meet me at the nearest corner. I'll be waiting for you in my car. Together we will go to Oceanview Park and pay a visit to that old bandstand. Agreed, boy?"

Jupiter nodded.

"Very well," Hukanay continued. "Remember that under no circumstances are you to notify the police. It's part of the deal. Your own security depends on how much or how little you respect what you and I have agreed upon. Have I explained myself clearly enough?"

Jupiter nodded again.

"Understood, Mr. Hukanay," he replied.

"Perfect," said the Frenchman. "I am leaving now. Until half an hour, young Jones. It's a pleasure to work with you again. I wish one day I could have you completely on my side."

Having said that, Hukanay got up, left the workshop and disappeared in the night as quietly as he had appeared. Behind him, alone in the interior of the workshop, was Jupiter. The boy was deep in thought.

## CHAPTER 16

# IN THE PARK AT NIGHT

When Pete Crenshaw raised the trap door from Tunnel Two and entered Headquarters, he saw that Bob and Jupiter were already there. Jupiter, who did not stop twirling a pencil between his fingers, turned to him at the entrance and looked at him impatiently.

"You're late, Second," he said simply.

"Sorry, guys," Pete said. "Mom insisted that we have the custards she made this afternoon for dessert. But I'm only a few minutes late."

"A single minute can prove decisive in certain circumstances," Jupiter said.

"Well, Jupe," Bob intervened, "now that Pete has arrived, are you going to tell us what this is all about? What did you discover? Where do you want us to go tonight?"

Jupiter proceeded to tell his friends what he had discovered only a short time earlier on the chess pieces. To support his story, he opened the desk drawer and took out both the chess pieces and the discs of green felt. Seeing the pieces and the messages written on their bases, Pete and Bob stared in amazement.

"Gosh! What a story!" cried Pete. "Hidden messages on the bottom of the chess pieces! Who would think to look there even considering the title of the book we found?"

"It's just amazing," Bob said admiringly as he grabbed a pair of chess pieces and examined what had been written on their bases. "So, that was what Mr. Roberts was talking about 'the *basis* of chess.' It's very original."

"And very clever," agreed Jupiter. "Now let's hurry, fellows. We have things to do."

"Are we going to Oceanview Park, like the message says, Jupe?" Pete asked.

"That's right, Second," said Jupiter.

"Does it have to be right now?" Pete protested. "It's nighttime and the weather is awful. Besides, they're predicting fog. The park will be empty, too empty..."

"That's why we have to go now," Jupiter replied. "At night will work best. No one will see us, no one will bother us, and searching will be easier without unwelcome observers."

"But, Jupe, the park is closed at night," Pete said.

"I know, Second, but we'll find a way in. Don't worry," said Jupiter.

"How can I waste time worrying, Jupe? I'm too busy wanting to stay here," Pete moaned.

"Stop complaining, Pete," Jupiter insisted. "I feel we are getting closer and closer to solving this case and we can't afford to waste any more time."

The First Investigator opened the bottom desk drawer and pulled out three powerful flashlights.

"Take it," he said, handing them each one. "They will be useful. Now, let's go. I've taken the trouble to get a detailed map of Oceanview Park. Although the three of us know the park, a map can always be useful if we are going to look for something there. Let's go, fellows. No time to lose. He's waiting for us."

Pete and Bob looked at each other.

"Did you say he's waiting for us?" Pete asked. "Who's waiting for us?"

"You mean Hans or Konrad? Or Worthington, perhaps?" Bob asked.

"Follow me and you'll see for yourselves," Jupiter said in answer.

After saying this, he entered Tunnel Two and began to crawl on all fours. Pete looked at Bob for a second and sighed.

"Does Juve always have to be so mysterious?" he groaned as he also entered the passage.

A minute later the three friends left the workshop and stepped into the shadows that surrounded the salvage yard, which was already closed.

"We'll go through Green Gate One," Jupiter instructed, heading for the junkyard fence. "Try not to make any noise."

Obediently, Pete and Bob moved with extreme caution and followed their friend through Green Gate One. Once it was closed, the three found themselves in the middle of the dingy, dark street.

Jupiter turned to the other two. "Follow me," he whispered.

Jupiter walked quickly and stealthily to the nearest corner while Pete and Bob followed in silence. Once at the corner, Jupiter stopped. A lonely streetlamp cast a desolate beam of light that drew a yellowish circle on the sidewalk. A few wisps of fog floated slowly and lazily in the air piercing the aura of light, giving it a milky texture.

"The fog from the sea is starting to appear," Pete whispered. "By now it must be invading most of the city. It's moving fast and that... ulp... makes me nervous."

"Calm down, Pete," Jupiter said. "The fog won't hinder our search. You and I have searched in the fog before. And we were successful."

Pete nodded, but he couldn't help but swallow hard as he remembered the difficulties they had faced during the resolution of an earlier case while escaping from criminals in the middle of the fog. And in an old abandoned cemetery no less.

Jupiter stepped forward and pointed to an old blue sedan parked near the sidewalk, just at the edge of the circle of light projecting from the street lamp. The First Investigator approached the car. Pete and Bob followed. Bob, however, hesitated in alarm.

"Juve, isn't that the car we saw run Sinclair and Lagalle off the road yesterday?" he asked.

"It's the same," Jupiter said over his shoulder, not looking back. "Come with me and don't worry."

When the boys were finally at the sedan, the driver's window rolled down and the silhouette of a man could be seen behind the wheel.

"Good evening, sir," Jupiter said. "We apologize for the slight delay."

"Good evening," said the man with a French accent. "I was beginning to believe you would not come."

"I suppose you remember Pete and Bob," Jupiter said, stepping aside. "I don't believe they have forgotten you."

The man sitting behind the wheel poked his head out the window and looked at Jupiter's friends. Pete and Bob, who had already recognized the voice, felt a chill down their spines as they saw the unmistakable face of Huganay, who gave them an incipient and enigmatic smile.

"Nice to see you again, boys," said the Frenchman. "Are you ready to go on an expedition?"

"Huganay!" shouted Pete, taking a small leap back. "Jupe! Have you gone mad?" he added, looking at his friend. "What's going on?"

Jupiter walked over to Pete and took him by the arm.

"Mr. Huganay is here to help us, Pete," he explained. "He and I have made a deal whereby he will protect us from Sinclair and Lagalle and we will help him find the missing painting."

"But we can't trust him, Jupe!" Pete insisted. "He isn't on our side! Have you forgotten that chase in the Merita Valley cemetery, when we solved the *Mystery of the Stuttering Parrot*?"

"Think about it, Pete," Jupiter said, trying to convey calm with his voice. "He helped us get Harry's father out of jail when we solved the *Mystery of the Screaming Clock*. That time he cooperated with us. That's what he intends to do now. He is after the picture and wants it for himself, but we are also looking for it, and he has offered to protect us if we help him find it. Accepting his help is our best alternative at the moment."

"That's it, boy," Huganay said, smiling enigmatically. "I am your best, and surely, only alternative. *Mylord* (or Sinclair, as you call him) and Lagalle are idiots, but they are also dangerous. And only I can help you deal with them. If you stay with me they will not dare to approach you."

Bob, who had recovered from his surprise, looked at Pete.

"They're right, Second," he said. "Remember this was the car that came to our aid yesterday, when Sinclair and Lagalle were after us. Mr. Huganay was protecting us then. And there's no doubt that he knows how to do it."

"I'm glad to see that young Jones is not the only intelligent boy around here," Huganay said, laughing softly. "Okay, boys. That's enough discussion. Time is short. Get in the car. We have work ahead of us."

Pete, still uneasy, looked at Jupiter.

"Are you sure about this, Jupe?" he asked.

Jupiter nodded and, without further response, opened the back door of the car and got inside. Bob followed. Pete, after hesitating for a couple of seconds, climbed into the vehicle also and closed the door behind him.

"Are you coming alone, Mr. Huganay?" Jupiter asked as he and his friends settled into the backseat.

"That's right," said the Frenchman. "My men are now doing certain things... let's call them 'surveillance work' by driving *Mylord* and Lagalle away. I instructed my men to take care of them in such a way that you and I had a clear path to operate at our leisure. Besides, if they had come there would not have been room for everyone in the car," he added with a laugh.

Pete shuddered when he heard the Frenchman laugh.

"And now let's be on our way," Hukanay said, starting the engine. "Oceanview Park awaits us. Tell me the way, my young friends, if you would be so kind."

Hukanay set the vehicle in motion and pulled away from the sidewalk. Moments later the Frenchman was driving the sedan through the dark streets of Rocky Beach toward Oceanview Park following the directions Jupiter gave him.

The sedan traveled along the city's side streets. The closer they got to their destination, the thicker and more disturbing the presence of the fog became.

Not in vain, wisps of mist licked the car and collided softly against its surface like ghostly fingers. Hukanay, behind the wheel, frowned, and for a moment lost his sardonic smile.

"We didn't choose the best night to go hunting for treasure, did we, young Jones?" He commented as he drove.

"I don't know what to tell you, sir," said Jupiter. "The fog could play in our favor if we consider that it can make it harder for them to follow us."

Hukanay smiled again.

"Obviously, you're right, boy," he said. "What do I do at the next intersection?"

"Turn right, sir," said Jupiter. "Almost there."

The fog thickened at times, occasionally wrapping the car in a kind of white blanket. Pete, curled up between Bob and the door, swallowed nervously several times as the fog drew ghostly faces that crumpled against the car window.

"We've arrived," Jupiter announced after a couple of minutes. "That dense mass you can vaguely see there in front of us is some of the trees in Oceanview Park. You can park there by the curb, sir."

"All right, lad," Hukanay agreed.

The Frenchman pulled to the curb and stopped the car. As Hukanay turned off the engine, the three friends peered through the mist at the fog-shrouded park. The tops of the trees stuck their branches through the tendrils of white mist like grieving souls desperately stretching their arms in search of a handhold. Pete shivered again.

"Out, boys," Hukanay said, opening the door and getting out of the car.

The boys obeyed and got out of the vehicle. Automatically, the fog and the cold night clung to their bodies like invisible ghostly breath. The boys, unable to suppress a shiver, looked around as far as the fog allowed them to see. The street was deserted except for themselves. The night and the fog covered everything like a fateful shroud.

"Lead me to the entrance, boys," Hukanay said. "It would appear that this park is surrounded by a high fence."

The boys looked to where Hukanay was pointing. The fence surrounding the park's perimeter was made of thick iron bars having tips that looked like ominously sharp spears.

"The park is closed at this hour, Mr. Hukanay," said Jupiter. "All the doors are chained and have thick padlocks. We could try forcing the locks to enter."

"Forget it, Jones," said the Frenchman. "Locks are not my forte. When it becomes necessary to open one I always turn to a specialist."

"We can't jump the fence," Bob said. "Not only is it too high, but we run the risk of getting speared on those high bars."

"We will not have to jump the fence," Huganay said softly. "Leave that to me."

The Frenchman rummaged in the pocket of his jacket and pulled out a small flashlight. Then he went to the trunk of the car and opened it. Under the boys' curious gaze, he searched inside the trunk as he lit it up with the beam of light. After a few seconds, he stood up holding a small hydraulic jack in his hand.

"Boys," he said after closing the trunk, "give me a hand holding this between two of those bars."

Huganay went to the fence, placed the jack horizontally and positioned it between two bars. Obediently, Pete and Jupe each held one end of the jack while the Frenchman grasped the handle firmly with one hand and began to turn it.

Little by little, under the strong and powerful arm of Huganay, the jack grew and bent the bars on either side of it. After a minute Huganay removed the jack and left it on the sidewalk. The thick iron bars were now bowed, leaving enough space between them to permit a person to pass through cleanly.

"Come on, boys," the Frenchman said.

One after another, the four of them entered through the bars and into the park. After moving a few yards through the fog and shadows, they came to a stand of trees. Huganay stopped them there.

"Jones, do you have the map?" he asked the First Investigator. "Let me see it."

Jupiter, carrying the map in one hand and the flashlight in the other, unfolded the map and handed it to Huganay. He took it and lit it with his flashlight so everyone could see it.

"We are here," said Jupiter, pointing a finger at the map. "We're very close to the east entrance, which is on our right. The bandstand is higher up near the north wall. We can get there using this path, which passes by the entrance of the old Cave-Labyrinth."

"Cave-Labyrinth?" Huganay asked. "What the devil is that, boy?"

"It's an old attraction that was built in the park many years ago," Jupiter explained. "I played in it when I was little. It's an artificial cave whose underground paths split in multiple directions to form an actual labyrinth of tunnels. It could sometimes take hours to find your way out. The tunnels extend over much of the subsoil of the park. It was an attraction that was successful at the time, but fell into disuse and has remained closed to the public for years. That's why its openings are closed and fenced. Entry into it without permission is prohibited."

"Curious attraction," said Huganay, looking at the map. "I must admit," he added, pointing to it, "that this map is extremely detailed. It even includes a diagram of the labyrinth tunnels. I imagine more than one person who visited this attraction when it was open would have given anything to have a map like this. They would have found the exit in a matter of minutes. Okay, boys," he finished, looking up. "Time is short. Let's follow this path and go to the bandstand."

Shrouded in mist, the group began to move slowly through the trees.

"Pete," said Jupiter, "your sense of direction is excellent by nature. You better lead the way. Do you know how to get to the trail?"

"According to the map," replied Pete, "the path must be right in front of us. If it were not for the fog, we would be seeing it right now. Let's keep going."

Huganay nodded in agreement and led the way with Pete at his side. Bob and Jupiter followed on their heels. After walking for a few dozen yards, they finally reached the path they were looking for. The hard dirt path divided the wide grass field and was lost in the fog at both ends.

"Now let's follow the path to the right and up," Pete said. "And let's hurry. The fog seems to be getting thicker."

Hurrying, yet remaining cautious, the four of them proceeded along the path. The flickering beams of their flashlights moved in front of them, dissolving the darkness of the night but unable to pierce the asphyxiating and milky texture of the fog. It seemed to absorb the light as if by magic, slowing and frustrating their progress. They entered a dense bank of fog and could scarcely see more than six or seven feet in front of them. Pete, sure of the direction they were headed at the moment, was greatly relieved to think that Huganay was at his side and not pursuing them from behind.

After a few minutes of slow progress, the fog seemed to dissipate slightly. Then they saw a wooden sign, with worn letters painted in black, hanging from a wire fence. The sign read:

CAVE-LABYRINTH  
ENTRANCE CLOSED  
NO TRESPASSING

Huganay pointed at the fence with his flashlight. On the other side, half-hidden by the wisps of fog, the four of them could see a wide opening in the form of an arch that penetrated the earth and whose entrance was covered by a wire mesh. Thanks to the ghostly effect of the fog, it looked like a huge mouth trying to yawn through a gag.

"Here is the entrance to the labyrinth," said Huganay. "A peculiar and unique attraction for a leisure park."

They continued along the path, which, after a few yards, turned sharply left, to the north. Along the way, thicker banks of fog alternated with less dense ones, which aided their progress at times. At last, after crossing a group of leafy trees, they came to a clearing completely devoid of fog. Pete and Huganay probed the shadows with their flashlights, and all of them could see the tall, dark bulk of the old bandstand, fifty yards away.

"There it is!" cried Pete.

"Let's hurry over there," Huganay said. "The fog is less thick in this part of the park. We should take advantage of the break that it offers us."

The four of them ran to the bandstand. Then they hurried up the dozen steps that surrounded its base and gathered on the stage that had, long ago, welcomed the music of a small orchestra on a multitude of occasions.

"I think it's been a long time since the music played, boys," Huganay remarked.

The boys looked around. The bandstand looked dirty, miserable and abandoned in the haunting light of their flashlights. A multitude of dry leaves and a thick layer of dust covered its surface giving it the appearance of a strange temple that no one cared to visit. Pete walked over to the railing and surveyed the landscape before him. In the dim glow of the fog-blurred streetlights nearby, everything seemed sad and desolate as if it were a lunar landscape.

"Very good, Jones," said Hukanay. "Now show me the text you told me about."

Pointing to the ground with his flashlight, Jupiter went to the center of the bandstand and brushed away a small pile of dry leaves with his feet.

"Help me clear this," he said. "It's been a long time since anyone has used a broom on it."

With everyone's help, the floor of the bandstand was swept out in no time. Once cleared, Jupiter stepped back and bit his lower lip.

"Point your flashlights to the ground," he said.

Three beams of light joined his and the floor of the bandstand was almost completely illuminated. They all looked closely. There, inscribed on the floor with a technique similar to that of a mosaic, words and entire lines could be read clearly, despite the dust and the passage of time. The body of the text occupied nearly the entire surface of the central part of the stage.

Hukanay stepped forward and focused on the heading of the text. There the title could be read followed by the name of its author, an old local poet.

"You were right, Jones," he said. "It is a commemorative text written in honor of the old pioneers of Southern California. Let's see if you were also right in your assumptions. We must act quickly."

Jupiter, nodding, rummaged in his shirt pocket and pulled out the sheet of paper with the numbers he had found written on the bases of the chess pieces. He unfolded it and held it up in front of him.

"Bob," he said, "write down the words we read. If the message we get makes sense, it means we are on the right track."

After putting his flashlight aside, Bob dutifully took out a small notebook and a pencil preparing to write whatever was dictated.

"Let's see," said Jupiter. "The message on the first chess piece says: '5 on 14'. Then look for word number 5 on line number 14."

Hukanay, Pete and Jupiter counted at the same time until they found the word they wanted.

"Look," Jupiter read. "That's the first word, Bob. Write it down."

Bob obeyed.

"The next word is on line number 10," Jupiter said, "and it's the sixth word on that line."

"West," Hukanay remarked after a rush. "Write it down, boy. 'Look west,' this makes sense. The message is taking shape."

Little by little, word by word, Bob was writing down with trembling hand what the others dictated. When they had finished reading out words, the boy took the flashlight so he could better read what he had written. He read it quickly and then looked at the others. They, expectant, looked back at him with intrigue.

"There are no more words, boy," said Hukanay with a trace of impatience in his voice. "Now read the result."

Bob looked at him and nodded.

"Yes, I think we finally have it," he said. "The resulting message makes sense."

"Read it! Quick!" demanded Hukanay.

"Wait for the punctuation marks," said Bob. "It will be ready in a moment."

"Hurry up, Bob!" urged Jupiter. "We're dying to know!"

Bob worked eagerly for a few seconds.

Finally, finishing the correction, he put away the pencil, cleared his throat and read, "'Look west. Guide your horse, old pioneer, ninety yards away. Then eighty. Follow metal look that leads to the hole in the water. Look under step seven behind door thirteen.'"

When he finished reading, Bob looked up from his notebook and looked at the others. They stared back at him in bewilderment. There, standing in the middle of the bandstand, everyone was silent.

"Gosh, Bob!" exclaimed Pete after a few seconds. "You call that a meaningful message?"

## **CHAPTER 17**

# **RESOLVING THE MESSAGE**

Bob blinked and looked at Pete.

"The message makes sense from a grammatical point of view," Bob said. "The meaning that the message contains is something else."

"Forget the grammar, Records," Pete said wryly. "It won't get us out of this mess. I have enough trouble with it on school exams."

Huganay stepped forward.

"We'd better focus, boys," he said. Then, turning to Bob, he added, "Show Jupiter what you have written and let him read it carefully. Surely, he can think more clearly than the rest of us. He has demonstrated that on other occasions."

Bob handed Jupiter the sheet on which he had written the message. With a deep frown, the First Investigator took it with one hand while pinching his lower lip with the other. The boy read the message carefully and thought for a few seconds.

"Well, Jones?" Huganay finally asked. "What do you make of it? What new game does old Roberts present to us?"

Jupiter looked at Huganay and then read the message again. His brow, furrowed in thought, looked like a scar drawn in the middle of his forehead.

"My impression," he said at last, "is that this new message leads us to some sort of hiding place, perhaps in the park, where the picture or, at worst, a new riddle might be waiting for us. At first glance this seems very clear."

"Clear, you say?" Pete said. "And what do you think of the metal look and the hole in the water? How can you make a hole in the water? And step seven behind door thirteen? What door is that? And where is that seventh step?"

"Calm down, Pete," Bob said. "Give Jupiter a chance. He's only read the message a couple of times."

"Well, Jones," Huganay said, looking at Jupiter. "What, in your opinion, should be our next move? Think fast before the fog returns making our search even harder!"

Huganay pointed around as the boys looked in all directions. Thick, threatening fog banks were approaching the bandstand like white gauze curtains moving in slow motion. Pete felt a chill at the icy, wet touch of a wisp of fog that brushed his arm.

"Okay, fellows," Jupiter said, turning his attention back to the sheet of paper. "Let's break it down. We can start by doing the first thing the message tells us and surely the steps we take will allow us to figure out on the way what the following sentences of the message refer to."

"That sounds reasonable, Jones," Huganay agreed. "Let's proceed!"

"The first thing the message says is 'Look west,' " read Jupiter. "So, let's follow this first instruction, which is the clearest of all. Pete," he added, looking at him, "you'd better lead us. Your excellent sense of direction is innate. The map of the park won't help us much in this fog."

Pete looked around.

"This bandstand has four entrances," he said. "We came up here by the south entrance. Those other steps over there," he said, pointing to his left, "correspond to the west entrance. We have to go that way."

They all looked to where Pete pointed. At the foot of the steps on the west side of the bandstand, a narrow dirt path, similar but narrower than the one they arrived on, trailed off into the mist and darkness.

"Come on, then," Hukanay said, and started walking. "There is no time to lose."

"One moment, Mr. Hukanay," said Jupiter.

The Frenchman stopped and looked at the First Investigator.

"What is it, boy?" he asked.

"Let's keep in mind what the message says right after," Jupiter said. "'Guide your horse, old pioneer, ninety yards away. Then eighty.' We must proceed carefully and obey these instructions. Mr. Roberts tells us that we must go ninety yards west. Once this is done, we must move forward another eighty. I propose that we advance the first ninety yards taking ninety steps of approximately one yard each. Let's go down to the base of the bandstand and start walking from the trailhead."

Hukanay was satisfied, and he and Jupiter descended the steps of the bandstand making the beams of their flashlights dance before them. Pete and Bob followed.

"Mr. Hukanay," said Jupiter when they were all there, "you have the longest legs. Could you give us ninety steps of about a yard each?"

"I suppose if I came here all the way from Europe to look for a painting I can do what you ask, boy," the Frenchman said smiling.

Hukanay marked two steps at the beginning of the trail and Jupiter bent down to measure them. After making a quick calculation with the width of his hand, he rose again and looked at the trail that was lost in the fog.

"Ninety steps will suffice," he said. "Let's begin."

Hukanay advanced while counting his steps and was followed closely by the boys. As they followed the path, the bandstand disappeared behind as the fog engulfed them. They were alone and abandoned again, surrounded by a blanket of indolent white mist.

Finally, after a couple of minutes, Hukanay took his final step and stopped. Everyone looked around. The path they had followed led them straight to the very center of a junction where four similar paths converged to form a tiny square. There was a wooden bench in each corner of the square that offered rest to those who visited the park during the day. Beside each bench a street lamp threw its dim, muffled light through the milky veil of fog.

"We're at a crossroads," Hukanay said, glancing around with his flashlight. "What do we do now, Jones?"

Jupiter held the message in front of him and focused on it with his flashlight.

"The message clearly indicates that we must go another eighty yards," he said.

"I don't understand, Juve," Pete said. "If Mr. Roberts wanted us to walk ninety and eighty yards, which is one hundred and seventy, why not just say so, and not have to count twice?"

"I suppose that's due to the limitations of the text inscribed on the floor of the bandstand," Jupiter replied. "The number one hundred seventy doesn't appear in the text, but ninety and eighty do. I guess that's the only reason."

"Well, Jones? Are we still moving forward?" Huganay asked.

"That's right, sir," said Jupiter. "Another eighty yards straight west."

"Let's go that way," agreed the Frenchman.

Huganay strode forward. The boys, as before, continued to light the way with their flashlights. As they walked, Bob approached Jupiter.

"Something doesn't fit, Juve," he said softly.

"What do you mean, Bob?" his friend asked, looking at him and biting his lower lip.

"I'm not so sure we're moving in the right direction," Bob explained. "Something doesn't fit and I don't know what it is. I have the impression that we skipped some important detail. Maybe if we went back..."

An exclamation of disgust interrupted him. It was Huganay, who had just stopped with a grimace of disgust.

"I don't get it!" the Frenchman continued to shout. "I haven't even walked fifty steps! Something's wrong, boys."

When Bob, Pete and Jupiter came alongside the art thief, they understood the meaning of the words he had just uttered. A few yards away from where they had stopped, a metal fence, about three feet high, had just emerged from the fog, blocking their passage. Behind the fence, a large expanse of water definitively ended the trail.

"The pond!" Bob exclaimed. "The park pond! That's what I missed! Something told me that we couldn't continue this direction. Now I understand why I was so sure we weren't heading in the right direction. I saw it before, on the map."

They all stared in dismay at the reservoir of water that lay on the other side of the short fence. The mist slid gently just above the surface of the dark waters like a ghostly halo in the middle of the night. Pete thought that the scene couldn't be more unnerving.

"We cannot continue this way, Jones," Huganay complained, turning to Jupiter. "We must have overlooked some detail. Unless, of course, old Roberts wants us to take a swim. Think, boy!" the Frenchman said. "What do we do now?"

"Just a minute!" cried Pete. "The message refers to a hole in the water, whatever that means. The pond is full of water. Are you sure this isn't where we should look for the next clue?"

They all looked at Jupiter after hearing Pete's suggestion. The First Investigator consulted the message once more and, pinching his lower lip, looked back thoughtfully.

"I don't think so, Pete," he replied, shaking his head. "If we were to look here for the hole in the water, what happens to the metal look? No, fellows, the message states clearly: first we must find the metal look, whatever it is, and it will take us to the hole in the water. We must go step by step,

and at least on this occasion we must go back. Let's go back to the small square we came to earlier. I wouldn't be surprised if there had to be..."

Suddenly, Jupiter was silent while he stared in front of him with his eyes wide. In the ghostly glow of the flashlights everyone could see how those eyes glittered with excitement.

"What is it, Jones?" Huganay inquired.

"What is it, Jupe?" Bob asked, approaching his leader.

Jupiter, seeming to return to himself, blinked and looked at his friends.

"How could I have been so stupid?" he said. "How could I have overlooked such a simple and logical detail in this whole affair? Quick! Let's go back to the crossroads!"

He turned and ran into the fog. The others followed him closely. A few seconds later they all met again at the little square where the four lampposts sadly poured their gloomy light over the empty benches.

"You shouldn't just run like that into the fog, Jupe," Pete said. "You could get lost, and we should stay together at all costs. This fog is dangerous."

Jupiter, not paying any attention to what Pete told him, looked around.

"Guys," he said, "I've just come to understand why Mr. Roberts asked us to advance first ninety yards and then advance eighty rather than simply ask us to advance one hundred seventy."

"I thought you'd answered that before, when you talked about the limitations of the text on the floor of the bandstand," Bob said.

"That's an added reason," said Jupiter. "The real reason is something else, fellows."

Pete and Bob looked at each other. Huganay put his hands on his hips and looked at Jupiter with a frown.

"And what, according to you, is that reason, Jones?" he asked.

"We must read the message carefully," said Jupiter. "It says: 'Guide your horse, old pioneer, ninety yards away. Then eighty.'"

"Well?" roared Huganay.

"Can't you see?" Jupiter said in disbelief. "The key is in the word 'horse'. If Mr. Roberts would have wanted us to walk ninety yards and then eighty in *a single direction*, why not just say it? Instead, it tells us to advance ninety yards to the west and then eighty more, but, in a direction *other than west*."

Pete scratched his head.

"I don't understand where you're going with this, Jupe," he said.

"It's very clear!" said Jupiter. "Why does Mr. Roberts, who was an excellent chess player, refer to a horse? In the message, it says: 'Guide your horse'. This whole thing is related to chess, so we have to guide our horse *according to the rules of chess*."

"You mean...?" Bob asked.

"I mean that we have to go ninety yards and then eighty yards just as a knight, which is represented by a *horse* in chess, would do. Specifically, an *L-shaped* movement. Otherwise it wouldn't make sense for Mr. Roberts to refer to a horse in his message. So far, we've advanced

our horse ninety yards in a westerly direction. Now we move forward the other eighty describing the other part of the L, specifically, advancing to the right or to the left. In other words, to the north or to the south. Only then will we be moving our horse according to the rules of chess."

"I think you're right, lad," Huganay said, nodding. "We have to move forward just as a knight in chess would. This is another of the tricks that old Roberts devised to confuse us."

"That's right," said Jupiter.

"Okay," Pete said. "If we are in the middle of this small square, we have to advance eighty yards either to the north or to the south. Which direction should we go, Jupe?"

"Let's find out," Jupiter said simply. "Let's try turning to the right, that is, to the north."

Huganay was satisfied and began to count steps in the indicated direction. They all moved together along a narrow path that led through the twisted shapes of the trees.

Suddenly the path disappeared completely, leaving the four of them in front of a thicket of shrubs that appeared before them out of the fog. They all stopped.

"I don't think we're going in the right direction," Bob said. "We hardly took thirty steps and this hedge cut us off."

Pete walked over to the bushes and pulled out some branches. He focused his flashlight in the gap between them and peered on tiptoe.

"Bob's right," he said. "On the other side of these shrubs there is nothing but the fence that surrounds the park and, beyond that, the street. Let's turn around, guys."

Sure as to which direction to go now, the four returned to the center of the square again.

"South must be the direction," Jupiter commented. "Once you have eliminated every other possibility, the one that remains must be, without any doubt, the correct one. Let's go south."

For the third time Huganay began to move forward in great strides with the three boys at his heels. Counting the steps of the Frenchman, the group entered the narrow path that started from the square. Soon it was behind them, lost in the fog, and they advanced through the dark shapes of the trees.

They were still short of completing the required distance when they were suddenly enveloped by a particularly thick bank of fog. It was so dense that they were forced to slow down and continue almost blindly, with their hands outstretched in front of them to avoid colliding with any unseen obstacle.

"This fog is unbearable!" complained Pete. "The flashlights are useless in these conditions."

It was true. The fog was so thick it seemed to reflect back their flashlight beams as if it were a mirror, almost completely blinding them.

"Careful, boys," Huganay said. "Direct your flashlights toward the ground. That way our own light won't blind us."

The boys obeyed and the four of them advanced painstakingly and silently.

When Huganay finally counted the last step, they found themselves facing a clearing that had just opened in the fog. The thick fog-bank they had just passed through was now behind them, hanging from the air like a heavy white curtain. The visibility in the clearing before them was

relatively good despite a few scattered wisps of mist still floating in the air. It felt like leaving the night to emerge in the middle of the day for Huganay and the boys.

"We've taken the last step, boys," Huganay said. "Let us take advantage of the fact that the fog is less dense here and work fast."

They had reached a small square similar to the previous one. There were trees, benches, lampposts that shed a halo of ghostly light... and something else.

"Look!" shouted Bob, pointing ahead.

There, in front of them in the center of the square, a bronze statue stood on a solid stone pedestal. Carved in the pedestal it read *Monument to the pioneer*. The statue itself represented a pioneer of the mid-nineteenth century wearing a large hat, riding pants, neckerchief and pistol on his belt. One hand was placed over the eyes shading them like a visor in order to scan the horizon. His expression was grave and expectant. His gaze, lost in the distance, was fixed in a single fog-filled direction.

"The metal look!" exclaimed Huganay. "We found it! Quick, Jones! What else does the message say?"

With his hands quivering from excitement and cold, Jupiter aimed his flashlight at the message again and read.

"'Follow metal look that leads to the hole in the water.' Quick!" he said urgently. "Let's see where the statue is looking! His gaze will show us where we must continue our search."

Everyone approached the statue. Pete, taking the initiative, climbed nimbly and perched on the solid stone pedestal. Once there he followed the direction of the statue's gaze. In the distance, between a cluster of trees and the dim light of a street lamp, he thought he could see a dark blurred shape that was barely distinguishable from the fog.

"There in the distance, under the trees!" he cried, extending an arm directly in front of himself. "There's something out there, but I can't tell what it is because of the fog."

"Let's run!" Huganay ordered. "There's no time to lose!"

The Frenchman, Bob and Jupiter ran in the direction indicated by Pete. The latter jumped to the ground and followed closely. They ran like shadows through the patches of fog in the direction of a small, out-of-the-way spot where something resembling a small hut stood alone looking abandoned. They were only a few yards away when the fog seemed to dissolve abruptly and left them alone, face to face, with their objective. Seeing it clearly under the light of the flashlights, they all stopped dead and stared at it in complete silence.

There, before them, stood a small circular structure made of stone blocks and topped by a small gabled roof. Underneath the roof was a crankshaft from which hung a half-wound rope and a dirty, rusting bucket. On the roof, with letters discolored due to the passage of time, a small sign said:

WISHING WELL

One coin and your wish will come true

"A well!" Pete shouted at last, breaking the silence. "An old wishing well!"

"Is this really the place where the message should lead us?" Hukanay asked, not seeming to believe what he was seeing. "Are you sure, Jones?"

They all looked at Jupiter. The latter, after pinching his lower lip, took a deep breath.

"I think so," he said solemnly. "After all, from a poetic point of view a well could essentially be described as *the hole in the water*."

Hukanay looked at Jupiter and then stared at the well.

"It's possible," he muttered. "What does the rest of the message say?"

Jupiter looked once more at the sheet of paper.

"Look under step seven behind door thirteen," he read. "I don't see how the well can relate to a door number thirteen, but what is certain is that many wells have steps in them that lead to the bottom."

"That's true," agreed Hukanay. "Maybe this is one of them. Anyway, lads, if this is where we have to look for door number thirteen referred to in the message, there's only one way to find out."

The Frenchman moved decisively to the edge of the well. As he walked, his voice resounded with determination in the faint fog-filled light.

"Follow me, boys. It's time to find out if this old well has any secrets to unveil."

## **CHAPTER 18**

# **A FANTASTIC STORY**

Huganay came to the well and laid his hands on the parapet. Jupiter, Pete and Bob met there with him. The Frenchman's face looked serious, but a fiery gleam brightened his gaze.

"I feel like we're close," said the art thief. "This well occupies a small corner of the park, so it seems an ideal place to hide something."

"How can a well be a suitable place to hide a painting?" Bob asked. "The water and the humidity would damage it beyond repair."

"Not necessarily, lad," said Huganay. "Let me check one thing."

Huganay directed the beam of his flashlight into the well. The boys, intrigued, imitated him. Four beams of light walked toward the bottom of the hole without revealing the slightest reflection of water.

"Just as I imagined," said Huganay. "This well doesn't contain water. Actually, I don't think it ever had the smallest trickle. It's nothing more than a hole in the ground, a pretext for this park to have a wishing well."

For a few seconds the four of them stood in silence contemplating what the flashlight beams showed them. There was nothing but a simple dry earth floor where, under the effects of the light, small dots that looked like stars at the bottom of a tunnel glowed. Everyone understood that it was the coins that the visitors of the park had thrown into the well over time in the hope of seeing their wishes fulfilled.

Bob swung the beam of his flashlight down the inside wall of the well. He could see how, out of the solid stone blocks that formed it, some stood out from the rest like small sculpted steps. These, situated a short distance from each other, formed a precarious staircase that spiraled downward.

"Steps!" Bob exclaimed. "One of them must be number seven!"

Jupiter focused on the inner wall of the shaft and, after a few seconds of reflection, shook his head.

"I wouldn't be so sure, Bob," he said. "The message states that the seventh step is behind a door numbered with the number thirteen, so the first thing we have to find is that door. And from what I see here, there are none. Of course," he added after a moment's reflection, "this well is dry. Perhaps there is something at the bottom that leads us to the door we are looking for."

Pete flinched at his side and nearly dropped his flashlight.

"You're not implying that we should go down there, are you, First?" he asked in alarm. "I'm sorry, but the idea of getting into a hole like this in the middle of a foggy, gloomy park is too unappetizing for Pete Crenshaw."

"In that case," Jupiter said, "you can always stay up here alone, standing guard."

Pete groaned.

"But, Juve," he protested, "who knows what might be down there?"

"To begin with, a hidden masterpiece," Hukanay said impatiently. "Let's go, boys. We've already wasted too much time. If the conclusion of this entire search is really down there, we'd better go down as soon as possible."

Uniting action with word, the art thief sat down and swung his legs over the parapet. Then, after planting both feet on the first two steps, he began to slowly descend the pathway illuminated by the beam of his flashlight.

"Follow me, boys," he told them. "This well must be thirty to forty feet deep. The steps are not very wide, but with a little care it shouldn't be too dangerous."

Little by little, Hukanay was spiraling along the inner wall of the well. Jupiter, taking action, decided to follow. Bob went after. Finally, Pete, though reluctant, decided to imitate his friends and crossed the parapet after Bob. After a couple of minutes of careful descent, the four were gathered on the bottom. Once there, they directed the beams of their flashlights at the bed of dry earth strewn with coins where they were standing.

"Let's shine our flashlights at the walls and look for some opening, crack or even door," Jupiter said. "Something must be down here."

It was Hukanay who saw it, almost instantly.

"There is!" exclaimed the Frenchman, pointing in front of him.

The boys turned their flashlights there and saw a narrow, dark passageway dug into the stone.

"It's just a passage, guys," Pete said. "There is no door."

"But it may lead us to one," said Hukanay.

Making the beam of his flashlight dance before him, the Frenchman entered the passage. The opening was so narrow that he had to enter sideways due to his broad shoulders. Jupe, having some problems due to his stout body, followed closely. Bob and Pete, thinner, entered after them.

After traveling that way about forty feet, they came to a more or less rectangular room that, like the tunnel they had just traversed, seemed to be dug directly into the stone. Its roof was uneven and vaulted, and the ground an amalgam of rammed earth. From one of the walls hung a sort of cabinet that contained electrical panels full of switches. All of them, however, were moldy and dusty, as if they had fallen into disuse long ago.

"Look! There!" exclaimed Jupiter.

They all looked in the direction the First Investigator pointed. It was the wall farthest from them. There were six metal doors erected in the wall. In the glow of Jupiter's flashlight, everyone could clearly see the numbers that had been drawn in white paint on each door: 2, 7, 9, 11, 12 and 13.

"Thirteen!" Bob shouted. "Door thirteen! We found it!"

They all ran toward it. Hukanay, coming forward, tested the knob and checked that it was locked.

"Locked!" he muttered. "We will have to force it! Get back, boys!"

The boys, obedient, stepped aside. Hukanay, putting the flashlight on the ground, took a few steps back and then dashed against the door. The door shuddered under the Frenchman's violent attack but remained closed.

Without giving up, Huganay stepped back again and launched his shoulder against the metal door, but it didn't budge. After another pair of attempts the Frenchman looked at the boys.

"It's too solid," he said, taking a handkerchief from his jacket pocket and wiping his forehead. "If we tried all at once it's possible that then maybe..."

"I don't think that's necessary, sir," said Jupiter, pulling out his multi-bladed Swiss knife. "Maybe I can manage with the help of this. The lock," he added, pointing to the door, "is bolted from this side. If I can disassemble it, I may be able to open it without having to bruise our shoulders."

Huganay looked at Jupiter and pulled at his thin mustache.

"Agreed, Jones," he said with a faint smile. "The door is all yours. Open it and lead us to step seven."

The Frenchman stepped aside and Jupiter knelt in front of the door with his Swiss knife.

"Help me, Pete," he told his friend. "Focus your flashlight on the lock while I try to disassemble it."

Pete did as his friend asked. Jupiter, meanwhile, unfolded one of the blades of his knife, which was nothing more than a small screwdriver, and began to work.

"These screws are extremely rusty," he said. "It may take me a few minutes to unscrew them."

Everyone was silent as Jupiter labored. The boy's fingers trembled with the effort, but he did not stop. Little by little the First Investigator began to feel thin droplets of sweat appearing on his forehead and beginning to drip slowly down his cheeks.

Bob shook his head and frowned.

"There is something that puzzles me," he said, breaking the uncomfortable silence. "What are these doors doing here? Where do they lead? And why do they appear to be numbered randomly?"

Huganay approached him.

"I think I can answer that question," he said.

The Frenchman rummaged in his jacket pocket and pulled out the map the boys had brought with them that night.

"Before, when I saw the map your friend brought with him," he explained as he unfolded it for Bob to see, "I couldn't help but notice. As you can see, this map includes a detailed drawing of the different tunnels of the Cave-Labyrinth, the attraction whose entrance we passed a while ago. These tunnels extend a long way underground and cover much of the area occupied by the park. Some of the tunnels end right here. In particular, six of them, the ones numbered 2, 7, 9, 11, 12 and 13 on the map. I presume there will be other exits scattered throughout the park, but, in particular, those six tunnels stop here. Curiously, they are connected to the wishing well by a narrow passage. The room in which we are now must have been, judging by the electrical panels hanging on the wall, some kind of maintenance room. Undoubtedly, the workers working in the maze controlled the proper functioning of the lights that illuminated the interior of the tunnels from here. The Cave-Labyrinth needed technical personnel to watch over it, like any other attraction."

"I see," Bob said, nodding. "So, this door leads directly to the thirteenth tunnel of the Cave-Labyrinth. I didn't realize that the labyrinth was connected to the wishing well."

"Well, as you have seen, it is," said Huganay, carefully folding the map of the park and putting it in his jacket pocket. "All right, Jones. How's it going?"

"Jupiter's almost done," Pete said.

Huganay and Bob stared at the small circle of light in which the First Investigator's hands struggled with the lock. Finally, there was a slight click, followed by a cry of satisfaction.

"There it is," said Jupiter. "It resisted but, at last, it has fallen."

Jupiter folded the blade of his Swiss knife and put it in his pocket. Then, as he rose, he pushed the metal door open. With a soft squeal, door number thirteen swung on its hinges until it was completely open, exposing the opening of a tunnel as black as the night itself.

Advancing to the threshold with determination, Huganay focused his flashlight on the inside of the tunnel. The beam of light resolutely pierced the darkness and revealed a cement floor and brick walls that rose to a vaulted ceiling. A cable ran along the highest point of the ceiling. Dust covered bulbs, which must have been long dead, hung every fifteen to twenty feet from the cable.

"Come on, boys," Huganay ordered. "Let's look for step number seven. There must be stairs inside this tunnel, somewhere."

The Frenchman and the boys entered the tunnel, lighting their way with their flashlights. They didn't have to go far. After about fifty feet the tunnel turned to the right and came to a small flight of stairs of about a dozen steps.

"Stairs!" cried Pete. "These must be the ones we're after!"

With nervous fingers, he and Huganay counted the steps until they located the seventh one. Then, impelled by his own impatience, the Frenchman put his flashlight aside, rushed to the step and began to feel it with his hands.

"This step is loose!" he announced. "If we can move it, we can check if something is hidden underneath."

Pete and Jupiter both placed themselves on one side of Huganay and lifted the flat, elongated stone that served as a step. Huganay was right. The stone slab was loose. With the combined forces of the Frenchman and the boys, lifting it out of its place took only a matter of seconds. Once the slab was pulled loose, it fell to the floor of the tunnel with a thud and split in two.

Huganay then picked up the flashlight he had left on the floor and illuminated the spot the slab had occupied.

"There's a cavity!" he exclaimed. "And there is something in it! Something that seems to have the correct dimensions! Illuminate the opening while I remove it."

Pete and Bob obeyed as Jupiter and Huganay inserted their hands into the cavity and probed it with their fingers.

"It's true," said Jupiter. "There's something down here. It seems to be a metal plate judging by the feel of it."

"Do you have it?" Huganay asked. "Get ahold of it on that side. I'm holding this one."

"I have it," said Jupiter. "Let's lift it out carefully."

Slowly, Jupiter and Huganay extracted what appeared to be a thick metal plate. After a few seconds, in the glow of Pete and Bob's flashlights, everyone could see that what they really had before them was nothing more than a flat, rectangular metal box about thirty-five inches high by twenty-five long and only about four inches in width.

"It's got the right dimensions and the expected weight," Huganay repeated, assessing it, unable to keep a slight touch of nervousness from creeping into his voice. "A metal box built to size and hermetically sealed to isolate the treasure it contains from moisture and insects. And without locks that could allow the passage of air."

The boys looked closely at the box Huganay held in his hands, and found that it had, instead of a lock, a pair of latches on one side and three small hinges on the other.

"I think we finally have it, boys," Huganay said. "We have the painting that Arthur Roberts jealously kept for years."

"Let's have a look!" Pete exclaimed, unable to contain himself. "I can't wait to see that mysterious canvas."

"Well," Huganay said, "it's not really a canvas, boy."

Pete raised his eyebrows in surprise, and gave the Frenchman a quizzical look.

"What do you mean?" asked Bob. "Isn't this a painted canvas?"

"It is a painting, yes," replied Huganay, "but not on a canvas, rather on wood. More specifically on a poplar wood board. A wooden board, my dear boys, which is several centuries old. Hence, due to its fragility, it must be carefully preserved from moisture and insects and be handled with the utmost care. Nonetheless, let's open the box and take a quick look. Besides, I promised Jones I'd let him see it. And I owe him that."

With jubilant eyes but with a firm pulse, Huganay unhooked the latches that kept the box closed. Jupiter, Pete and Bob struggled not to blink when the Frenchman opened the box with one hand and focused his flashlight inside with the other. The beam of light illuminated a blanket of dry, snow-white cotton that Huganay impatiently removed with his fingers. In doing so, the painting that Arthur Roberts took so much trouble to conceal appeared at last to the eyes of those gathered there.

Jupiter, Pete and Bob held their breath, entranced at the sight of the painting. Even Huganay, who was more than ready to contemplate that image, couldn't help but catch his breath for a moment. The four of them fixed their eyes on the panel painted centuries ago by the master hand of one of the great painting geniuses and felt how difficult it was to look away from it. Before them was the portrait of a lady of singular beauty who seemed to thank them with a look for having rescued her from such a long confinement.

"It's finally in my hands," Huganay said softly as a devilish smile came to his lips.

After a second of silence, Pete, frowning, was the first of the boys to react.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "But this is the painting that appears on the cover of the encyclopedia of art that my father has in his studio!"

"It's incredible," Bob murmured in astonishment. "This painting... here, in Rocky Beach."

Pinching his lower lip, Jupiter seemed to recover from his shock.

"It can't be," he said. "This picture can't be here. Everyone knows that this painting is on exhibit at the Louvre in Paris, one of the largest and safest museums in the world. You, Mr. Huganay, as an art lover, you know that. What we've just found must be nothing more than a forgery."

"What do you mean, Juve?" Pete asked with frustration. "Was the whole point of this search to find a forged painting? All this trouble for nothing? Did you suspect something like that, First?"

"On the contrary, Pete. I completely disregarded that possibility," Jupiter responded. "I never imagined an outcome like this. There must be some mistake. Arthur Roberts would never have been involved with forged art work."

"That's true, my dear young Jones," Huganay said slowly and softly.

The three friends turned to look at the Frenchman. In the dim light created in that dark corridor by the flashlights that still illuminated the painting, the face of the art thief had acquired an air more devilish and ghostly than ever. He smiled.

"What are you saying, Mr. Huganay?" Bob asked.

"Just that Jupiter is right," he replied, savoring his own words. "Arthur Roberts never acquired a fake. He understood art very well. That's why the few paintings he acquired in life were always authentic. And this, the only one he hid, and for which he paid a considerable fortune, was not an exception. Boys, believe it or not, this painting is authentic. It is *the* real one. You are looking at a portrait painted centuries ago by the great master..."

"Impossible!" interrupted Jupiter in exasperation. "That painting is in the Louvre Museum."

Huganay laughed.

"You're wrong, my dear boy," he said. "But I don't blame you for your reaction. It is the same as anyone would have when confronted with the surprising truth. And now, permit me to explain to you: as you undoubtedly know, the picture was stolen. In 1911 to be precise. And it has remained hidden until a few minutes ago."

"But as I recall reading, the picture was recovered," Jupiter insisted. "It appeared in a hotel in Florence, Italy, two years later, in 1913."

Bob and Pete, knowing that Jupiter, who possessed a photographic memory, was capable of retaining almost everything he read, did not hesitate to believe what their friend affirmed.

"It is true that six copies were made of the painting," continued the First Investigator, "which were sold to collectors, as is the fact that they were all detected and recognized as such when the original was found."

Huganay looked at Jupiter and smiled again.

"Your memory is excellent, boy," he said. "I see that you are able to retain much of the information you read. It is a pity that sometimes what appears in books does not fit with reality."

"What do you mean?" inquired Jupiter.

"Six copies were not made, but seven," said Huganay. "And what hangs on one of the walls of the Louvre is but the seventh copy, not detected at the time, while the original painting remained hidden in Italy for a few years and then came to the United States thanks to the black market."

A subdued silence seized the boys. Jupiter in particular seemed more confused and dazed than ever. He didn't stop pinching his lower lip while his brow furrowed. Huganay, between defiant

and amused, stared at him, never letting his ironic smile disappear from his lips. Finally, the Frenchman, after covering the painting with the cotton layer, closed the box and slid the latches into place.

"That's better," he said. "Both the humid air of this tunnel and the powerful light of our flashlights could end up damaging the paint if it is exposed to them for too long."

Huganay slowly got to his feet and placed the metal box under his arm.

"And now, boys," he said, "come with me. You have helped me find the treasure I was looking for, and I believe you have the right to an explanation. Let's get out of here. I don't like these tunnels very much. Let's return to the mouth of the well and, once there, pay close attention to the story I have to tell you."

Illuminating the tunnel before him with his flashlight, Huganay led the way. Bob, Pete and Jupiter, still stunned by the truth they had just discovered, followed obediently, intrigued by what the Frenchman had yet to tell them.

Quietly, the three of them made their way down the tunnel single file, through the dark room containing door number thirteen, and then returned to the wishing well through the narrow passageway. Carefully, they climbed the steps that spiraled up the inside of the well and found themselves gathered again by the parapet a couple of minutes later.

There the fog was still present as a slow, lazy curtain of mist that limited visibility to a few yards. As a silent witness to his discovery, the haze swirled around the group seemingly trying to listen secretly to as much as Huganay was willing to say.

The art thief sat on the well's parapet and, with deliberately slow and elegant movements, lit a cigarette. Then, after exhaling a wide puff of smoke, he looked at the boys. They stood before him, waiting expectantly.

"Let me tell you a story whose beginning you already know," Huganay began. "As my dear young Jones well knows, the painting in this metal box was stolen from the Louvre Museum in 1911. I will not go into details about that robbery. Suffice it to say that for a professional like me that was nothing but a second-rate job. But, as occasionally happens with the shoddy ones, it ended up being successful. For two years this painting was considered lost. In 1913, in a hotel in Florence, a copy was found so perfect, masterful and sublime, that it deceived the whole world and was taken to be the original painting. That copy was painted by a man whose name is beside the point but whom, due to one of those mysterious circumstances that occurs in life, I met a little more than ten years ago, on his deathbed.

"At that time, I had been working in the black-market world of art for some time, and I had begun to fashion an enviable and at the same time dreaded reputation in the underworld. As you can imagine, boys, that reputation has only increased in spite of the fact that you have stood in my way on more than one occasion.

"As I was saying, the person who painted the picture which was discovered in Florence (the same one that now hangs in the Louvre Museum) revealed his secret to me on his deathbed. I had not only heard of him, but had even dealt with a pair of his forgeries, from which I had made enormous profits. He was the greatest genius at making forgeries that had ever existed in the world at the time. To copy the painting in this box, he spent eight months working and had to put into practice a special process of aging wood and oil that he invented himself. The result was a

resounding success. His fake was put in that hotel in Florence on purpose to be mistaken as the original, and later hung in the Louvre. Fortunately, in those days the proofs of authenticity to which a painting was submitted were not as precise as the present ones. That genius of falsification deceived the whole world at the time. If today, with modern methods, the authenticity of the painting hanging in the Louvre was tested, surely the deception would come to light. But consider this: do you think someone is going to attempt to verify the authenticity of a painting that everyone already believes to be authentic?

"Thus, we have a great forgery replacing the real painting and the true masterpiece hidden in a place that is still difficult to find today. Not even that genius of forgery knew its whereabouts, for his role in this drama was simply to paint the copy, to collect a large sum of money for it, and remain silent for the rest of his life, which he fulfilled until he found himself about to expire.

"During one of my operations in Europe, a quirk of fate led me to be alone with him on his deathbed. That dying man, old and thought to be mad by many (he had squandered in vain all the money he had made by forging paintings), entrusted his extraordinary secret to me. His confession included a subtle detail, which was the only way to be able to differentiate the copy from the original painting. At first, I thought the man was lying or delirious. I believed he was mad, too, but he provided so many details that I found it impossible not to take him seriously. Over the following few months I made certain checks that absolutely confirmed the information the man had confessed to me. To convince myself completely, I decided to go to the Louvre and closely examine the painting that everyone had been looking at for years. There, standing before that portrait, I discovered the small detail that the forger had confessed to me and that was the only way to differentiate the copy from the original. That difference was so subtle, so sublime, and the dying man's description of the detail so concise, that I realized he had told the truth. During the ensuing years, I searched incessantly for this painting. I investigated. I followed its trail. I checked that everything matched and that each piece fit in place. And although I carried out all sorts of operations in the art underworld, my search for this portrait never ceased. Tonight, finally, after more than ten years, my search is over."

Huganay was silent and looked at the boys.

"Now I understand what Mr. Roberts meant when he referred to the treasure he concealed as 'that which almost no one believes is lost,' " Jupiter commented earnestly. "For decades, almost everyone has believed that this painting was still hanging in the Louvre without even suspecting that it was a simple forgery."

"A forgery yes, young Jones, but not simple," Huganay corrected. "You should have seen that copy closely. It was just amazing. Sometimes I think it is even more beautiful than the original painting."

"What will you do with the picture now, Mr. Huganay?" Bob asked. "Will you reveal it to the world? Will you sell it?"

Huganay looked at the boys and smiled.

"My young friends," he said, "this is where this whole story takes on a particularly dramatic aspect for me. You see... Have you ever wondered what it is that connects me to the world of art or why I belong to it? To answer this question we must go back to 1913, the year in which the copy was mistaken as authentic. There were three art experts who were instructed to study the painting found and to decide whether or not it was authentic. The verdict of those three experts,

as you can imagine, was one of authenticity. But what you don't know is that one of them was my grandfather."

The boys, surprised at this revelation, raised their eyebrows and listened even more attentively.

"He was my mother's father," Hujanay continued. "Although I did not get along with my own father, I, from a very young age, always appreciated the man and owe him my initiation in the world of art. Years later, my father and grandfather permanently broke off their relationship, due to the death of my mother, as well as certain family disagreements. Some time later my father was ruined trying to set up an art business, became ill and died. I was left alone with only the art company and a bankrupt family business. Soon I learned how to do business in a much more lucrative way in that world and I became what I am today: the most successful black-market art dealer (we do not need to use the word thief) on three continents.

"My grandfather, meanwhile, had correspondingly become (ironies of fate!) the most respected art expert not only in Paris but in all of France, a reputation he maintained for decades. He, nevertheless, always ignored the true nature of the operations to which I dedicated myself. Over the years, my grandfather died leaving behind an enviable reputation. At his death, one of the wings of the Louvre Museum, the one in which the copy of the portrait that we found tonight is hung, was christened with his name.

"My grandfather's wife, an elderly woman whom I have always adored and who has always treated me in a particularly benevolent manner, has kept an indelible memory of him since her husband's death. She adored that man as much as I adore that old woman. It may seem strange to you to hear me speak this way, but the truth is that if you knew me better perhaps you would not be so surprised.

"I needed to find this painting before anyone else. At the death of Arthur Roberts, it was liable to fall into hands that were inconvenient to me. If it came to light tomorrow that this painting had been found and shown to be authentic and that which hangs in the Louvre is but a copy, my grandfather's memory would fall into disgrace. That in itself is not so bad for me. But I am convinced that the news, as well as all the scandal and disrepute that would come to my grandfather's memory, would kill his wife, who, in addition to being very old, is affected by a serious heart disease. No, boys, I don't want that to happen. That is why I need this painting to remain in my hands, at least while my grandmother is still alive.

"That is the whole story I had to tell you, boys," Hujanay concluded.

The boys stared expectantly at the Frenchman as the silence and fog enveloped them. Bob and Pete looked at Jupiter. The boy, apparently calm, bit his lower lip and looked at the art thief.

"You are forgetting one small detail, Mr. Hujanay," he said at last. "We also want that picture, because it has been bequeathed to our client. You and I made a deal to find the picture. Now that it's found, I understand that the deal has expired. So now I beg you to give us the painting."

Hujanay took a deep puff from his cigarette and smiled.

"I'm sorry, my boy," he said, "but the painting is in my hands and that is where it is going to remain."

"Until it's ours," was unexpectedly heard, in a British accent slightly muffled by the mist.

The boys turned, startled. Hukanay, who was in front of them, merely sat quietly where he was, looking forward, not smoking or smiling. Jupiter, Pete and Bob looked around until two ghostly figures suddenly emerged like specters from the fog that had hitherto concealed them.

It was Malcolm Sinclair, also known as *Mylord*, and Lagalle. The Englishman smiled contentedly while he held a pistol. The Frenchman, meanwhile, turned a fearsome-looking knife between his fingers as he watched them with a sour face.

A glint of cruelty gleamed in their eyes as they looked menacingly at the group gathered by the well.

## CHAPTER 19

# INTO ENEMY HANDS

Sinclair and Lagalle came to a halt about fifteen feet from the well. The Frenchman watched Huganay with an icy glare. Pete, seeing it, thought a look like that could rattle a steel beam. Sinclair looked at the boys and gestured with the hand that held the pistol.

"Move over by Huganay, boys," he ordered. "Stand on either side of him. I want to be able to see all four of you. And try to avoid any sudden movements, of course."

The boys obeyed slowly. Pete stood to the left of the art thief while Bob and Jupiter stood to his right. Huganay remained silent and motionless, sitting on the parapet of the well, protecting the flat metallic box in his arms.

Sinclair's gaze passed across each of the boys' faces.

"I'm sorry I kept the scent of my cologne from betraying my presence this time," he remarked, looking significantly at Jupiter as he smiled with a satisfied air. "No cologne today, *Mylord*, I told myself. So it will be easier to surprise those chaps who think they are so smart."

Jupiter looked at Sinclair and then at Lagalle. The latter remained silent as he toyed with his terribly sharp-looking knife. Jupiter, seeing such a formidable weapon, swallowed hard and felt a chill run down his spine. Then, regaining control of himself, he glanced sideways at Huganay and saw that he was completely calm. What's more, he smiled. Jupiter realized, even before he looked at him, that he had expected to find Huganay with such an attitude, nerves of steel. Sinclair then looked at Huganay and aimed his pistol at him.

"Hello, Huganay," he said. "A true story of your own. We heard it all and I must confess that it has moved us both. Isn't that right, Henri?" he asked his companion with amusement.

"Yeah, sure. I almost cried," Lagalle mumbled, not removing his penetrating gaze from Huganay.

Slowly, still smiling, Huganay crossed his legs and cleared his throat gently.

"Welcome, gentlemen, to this little meeting," he said at last in a tone of irony. "While we are waiting, may I ask to what do we owe your honorable presence here?"

Sinclair, in turn, smiled amused.

"Did you hear, Henri?" he said, looking briefly at his companion. "Our friend wants to joke. Too bad we aren't here to joke."

Then, suddenly becoming serious, he added, "Did you really think that you would deceive us with your ineffectual ruses? We didn't take the dim-witted bait. It was easy to recognize the deception and realize that we were following your men but not you. Fortunately, we were able to get rid of them and we came to meet you. We knew where to look for you. In that old, dirty junkyard where the fatty and his friends hang out."

Despite the insult directed at him, Jupiter felt that this wasn't the most appropriate time to reply and decided to remain silent and concentrate all his energies on being alert. Bob, at his side, watched as his friend stiffened.

"Don't blame the boys, Malcolm," Huganay said. "They are better and smarter than you. Without them both of us would still be wandering around Los Angeles without knowing for sure where to look."

"You're very funny, old friend," Sinclair replied. "But now stop talking and hand over what you found inside that well."

Huganay feigned surprise.

"What do you mean, Malcolm?" he asked. "I do not know what you are talking about."

"All right already, Huganay! Stop playing games!"

Suddenly, Lagalle stepped forward. "Picture!" he demanded, holding out his free hand.

Huganay turned his gaze from Sinclair's face and looked at Lagalle as if he had just noticed his presence for the first time.

"Well!" he said with a smile. "It's none other than Henri Lagalle, master knife-thrower and expert at forcing open locks and safes. Forgive me for not noticing your presence earlier. I didn't know you were here. So now you work for this fellow, eh? I didn't know you frequented the company of rats now. You should have continued to work for me instead of becoming a dirty traitor."

At these words Lagalle clenched his fist and lifted the dagger over his head ready to throw it at Huganay. Sinclair, however, stepped forward and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Calm down, Henri!" he said quietly. "Don't fall into his trap. We have won. That's the only thing that should matter to you right now. We will take the picture and it will not be necessary to shed blood. Calm down."

After weighing the words, Lagalle slowly lowered his arm and gave Huganay a look even more penetrating, if possible, than the previous one.

Huganay, who had barely moved a muscle, looked at Jupiter, Pete and Bob.

"What do you boys think?" he asked them without getting upset. "Do you think we should give the picture to someone like this?"

Pete swallowed.

"What would be wrong with that?" he said. "I consider our lives much more valuable than a wooden plank, even though it may be several centuries old." Huganay smiled and looked at Jupiter.

"What do you think, Jones?" he asked.

"I think we have no choice," Jupiter said. "They seem to have won."

Sinclair, when he heard them, laughed.

"That's what I call good sense," he said. "You were right when you said the fat one was the cleverest of them all. So now... give us the picture!" he added, suddenly turning serious and waving the weapon in front of him. "We have won and you know it, Huganay."

Huganay was silent for a few seconds and remained motionless, as if he had heard something in the distance, something that seemed to come from some corner lost in the fog. Then, smiling once more, he raised his eyebrows.

"You have won? Do you believe that, Malcolm?" he asked sarcastically.

What took place next happened in the blink of an eye.

An arm ending in a fist suddenly emerged from the fog and slammed into Lagalle's face. The Frenchman staggered and, caught by both surprise and the punch, fell to his knees on the ground. Then a shadow fell upon him, and a second later, both Lagalle and his attacker were engaged in a savage and terrible struggle.

As for Sinclair, something huge in the form of arms came out of the mist, just behind him, and fell on him. The Englishman, caught in a powerful bear hug, was dragged backward as one of his attacker's hands tried to seize the pistol he was holding. It rose in the air and shot involuntarily. The bullet was lost in the black night sky.

"Stand aside," Hujanay said to the boys. "Leave this to me and do not intervene."

The boys obeyed meekly while Hujanay, so calm until now, became full of energy and power. Without letting go of the flat metal box, held firmly under his left arm, he stepped forward and struck a formidable kick against Sinclair's armed hand. With a groan of pain, the Englishman opened his hand and the weapon, propelled by Hujanay's kick, was lost in the night. Disarmed, Sinclair fell to the ground as his first attacker sat on him. This one, a big man who doubled the thin Englishman's weight, only needed a few seconds to leave the latter completely immobilized on the ground.

Lagalle, in the meantime, was struggling with his attacker, a blond, sturdy young man of similar complexion to his own. In that match, which was appreciably more even than the other, Lagalle managed to escape by throwing his body to one side. Momentarily free from opposition, he turned toward Hujanay and threw his knife at him.

"Watch out!" yelled Bob.

The warning was unnecessary. Hujanay, who had seen the movement well in advance, bent low enough to dodge the deadly blade. It passed only a few inches from his head and disappeared into the fog floating behind him.

Hujanay, reacting quickly, lunged at Lagalle and struck him in the chest. The latter, stunned more by the disappointment of having missed his throw than by the blow received, staggered and fell into the arms of the young blond, who immobilized him by running his arms under the man's armpits and joining hands behind the nape of the neck. Lagalle struggled for a few seconds until, realizing that his efforts would be futile, chose to remain still.

Only then did Hujanay, who still held the metal box under his arm, pull a small pistol from an inside pocket and aim it at his two enemies.

"Good work, gentlemen," he said, praising his men. "Bring them here. And you two, don't move. You both know that, although I detest weapons, I know very well how to use them."

Keeping his aim on Sinclair and Lagalle, Hujanay returned to Jupiter, Pete and Bob, who at his suggestion had remained motionless near the well during the fray. Smiling with irony, he sat down again on the parapet. His two assistants, the giant and the young blond, approached them carrying Sinclair and Lagalle respectively. The Englishman looked like a puppet in the arms of the big man. Lagalle, on the other hand, clenched his teeth while cursing in French.

"Your insults will not release you, Henri," Hujanay said to him, amused, "so shut your mouth. Boys," added the thief, turning to The Three Investigators, "I present to you my helpers, Norbert and Harris," he said, pointing one after another at the giant and the young blond.

"We met the other day at the salvage yard," Jupiter said, "although there were no formal introductions at that time. Of course, there was no time for it either."

"We don't have time to lose," said Huganay. "Norbert," he said to the big man, "do you have the rope?"

"Yes, boss," replied the man.

"Give it to me," Huganay ordered.

Holding Sinclair with one hand, Norbert scrabbled inside one of the wide pockets of his jacket and pulled out a roll of thin but sturdy nylon rope that he handed to Huganay.

"Now," he said, taking the coil of rope and handing it to Pete, "tie those two up, boy. Strong and solid knots on the wrists. Don't skimp on the amount of rope used."

Pete took the coil of rope and began tying Sinclair's wrists. The Englishman, faced with the threatening presence of Norbert's fists and the pistol Huganay wielded, could not resist.

"You'll pay for this," he told Huganay. "I assure you, things are not going to stay this way."

"I do not think so. Everything will be much worse for you and better for this picture and for me in a matter of minutes," scoffed Huganay.

Pete finished tying Sinclair and began to do the same with Lagalle, who gave them all a murderous look while he continued to mumble in French.

"Enough, Henri," Huganay warned him as he peered at Pete's newly tied knots. "You should save your breath to scream. Maybe someone can hear you calling for help once we've left."

"What do you mean, Huganay?" Sinclair asked, as his face went pale.

Huganay rose from the parapet and pointed to the mouth of the well with a movement of his chin.

"Take them down," he ordered his men. "Once down there, tie their ankles and then tie them back to back. Put handkerchiefs in their mouths, but don't knot them too hard so they can be removed after a while and call for help. I leave that detail to you, Harris."

"Yes, boss," said the young blond.

Norbert and Harris pushed Sinclair and Lagalle to the mouth of the well and forced them down the steps.

"Light the way, boys," Huganay told The Three Investigators. "And you," he added, addressing the newly captured, "look where you put your feet and don't try anything unusual. Remember that I have my weapon aimed at you."

Jupiter and his friends lit the inside of the well with their flashlights. The four men descended in silence broken only by the words in French that Lagalle occasionally mumbled. Sinclair went first, followed by Norbert. Then it was Lagalle's turn, followed by Harris. When the four were gathered at the bottom, Huganay turned to The Three Investigators.

"As you can see, these men are no match for me," he said with a smile. "I hate to use my energies against mere amateurs. They're not like you, boys. You've made it more difficult for me than they have on more than one occasion."

"How did you do it, Mr. Huganay?" inquired Jupiter. "You seemed to know exactly where your men were. You seemed to be waiting for them."

Huganay looked at Jupiter and smiled.

"Is that what intrigues you, young Jones?" he said. "You see... I had my men simulate an expedition through the hills, knowing in advance that this wouldn't fool them. However, I did manage to make them believe that they were the pursuers, causing them to stop watching their backs. This is how anyone acts who believes himself to be the pursuer and not the pursued. In fact, my men followed them while they followed us. That's all."

"But you seemed to know when your men would attack," Jupiter said. "The discussion you held here with Sinclair and Lagalle was no more than a ruse to gain time until Norbert and Harris arrived."

"Ah, yes, it is true," Huganay agreed. "You didn't miss that, did you? Harris had a small transmitter on the sleeve of his jacket that kept me constantly aware of his movements. It is a small microphone connected by radio waves to this receiver that I have installed."

Huganay put a hand up to one of his ears and unhooked something from there. Smiling, he extended his open palm before the boys so that they could see a miniature headset, smaller than a button. It was the color of his skin, which, coupled with its tiny size, explained why the boys had not noticed it.

"Thanks to this, my men could keep me abreast of the movements of those two men."

"And how were they able to locate you in this fog?" Bob asked. "You don't have a microphone and you can't talk to them."

Huganay rummaged in one of his jacket pockets and pulled out something like a disk about three centimeters in diameter.

"This is a small locator," he explained. "In spite of its diminutive size, it has a reach of more than nine miles. My men carry the receiver with them. Its wavelength is different from that used by the microphone and headset. It's the only way to avoid interference. With these devices, everything was easy. They forestalled the added obstacle of the fog."

Huganay smiled at the astonished faces of the boys.

"They're way better than our walkie-talkies and our chalk question marks," Pete said.

"There's no doubt about that," said Jupiter, frowning.

Huganay turned abruptly when he heard a noise behind him. It was Norbert and Harris, who, after finishing the work at the bottom of the well, were returning. As his men surfaced and jumped over the parapet, Huganay took a flashlight and lit the bottom of the well. They all looked down. On the dusty, coin-spattered bottom, Sinclair and Lagalle, seated and tied back-to-back, looked upward with the lower half of their faces covered by gags. Blinded by the bright light of the flashlight, the two blinked helplessly.

"It's a pleasure to say goodbye to you in circumstances like these," Huganay said triumphantly. "*Au revoir*, my dear apprentices. For your own good, I hope someone finds you soon."

Having said that, Huganay turned and looked at the others.

"And now let's get out of here," he said. "We have already wasted too much time."

"Not so fast, Huganay," someone said. "Put your hands up! No one moves!"

Alarmed, Jupiter, Pete and Bob looked around and saw someone standing a few feet away, almost at the edge of the fog, his gaze fixed on them. It was the young blond who responded to the name of Harris. The latter, stealthily withdrawing from the well while the others looked down, now pointed at them with a revolver.

"Harris!" exclaimed Norbert, the big man, with great bewilderment. "What is the meaning of this?"

"What's going on?" Bob asked.

"Silence!" the blond young man ordered sharply. "Huganay, drop your weapon. You too, Norbert."

The giant, hesitating, looked at Huganay. He looked back at him and silently nodded. Norbert slowly pulled a revolver from a holster and laid it on the ground. As he did so, Jupiter looked once more at Huganay and saw that the Frenchman had not lost his composure for even a moment and was still completely at ease.

"Don't worry about my gun, Harris," Jupiter heard the Frenchman say. "It's not loaded. You know I hate resorting to guns."

Huganay threw his small pistol and it fell only inches from Harris' feet. He kicked it and sent it to some corner lost in the fog.

"What is going on? I don't understand," Pete said. "Can someone explain?"

"The only thing that is happening here, my young friend," replied Huganay, still smiling, "is that Harris is not really who he appears to be."

Pete frowned and scratched his head.

"Who is he then?" he asked.

"His conduct can only mean one of three things," said Jupiter. "Either he is another thief who works alone, or belongs to a third band, or is..."

"Or I'm a private detective," Harris interrupted, finishing the sentence. "That's right, kid, I'm a private detective," he continued, pointing at Huganay and Norbert with his revolver. "My real name is Jack Walton. I've been following this guy for months, and now, at last, I've captured him. I could have caught him before, but as soon as I found out he was after a masterpiece, I decided to wait for him to find it. That would kill two birds with one stone. I would catch the greatest art thief on three continents and recover a lost masterpiece. And that moment, I am glad to be able to say, has arrived at last."

"Now, boys," he added, "stand aside and don't approach him or Norbert."

The boys, unable to do anything but obey, moved away from the well and stared, dumbfounded, at the scene in front of them. Harris, or rather Jack Walton, aimed his revolver at Huganay and Norbert. The giant, unable to believe what he was seeing, alternately looked from one to the other while keeping his hands up. The Frenchman, meanwhile, clutching the metal box, looked at the private detective. His ironic smile, perennial like a tattoo, continued to be drawn on his lips.

"And now give me the picture!" shouted Walton, staring at Huganay.

There was a deep, uncomfortable silence for a few seconds. Then Huganay, throwing his head back, gave a loud laugh. As the Frenchman laughed, Jupiter looked at the private detective. A shadow of disbelief came over his face.

"Stupid!" said Huganay, overcoming his fit of laughter. "Did you really think that you could surprise me and get away with it?"

The shock was now on Jack Walton's face as Huganay continued to laugh.

Pete, hearing him laugh like that, felt a chill and thought that any resemblance between the French thief and a demon couldn't be mere chance.

"What do you mean?" Walton asked. "What are you talking about?"

Huganay stopped laughing, staring at him.

"Don't bother pointing that gun at me," he said. "It will do you no good. I made sure of that myself this afternoon, before leaving you to go meet with these boys."

Everyone looked at Walton more intently than ever. The latter, frozen, stared at his revolver for a second, then returned to stare at the Frenchman.

"It can't be," he said. "I loaded this revolver myself this morning. And the bullets are still in it. Unless, of course, you force me to use them."

"That revolver is crippled, imbecile," Huganay replied serenely. "I took care of it myself. If you try to shoot it, chances are it will explode in your hand. As I said before, I hate guns, but I know very well how to use them... and how to disable them."

Walton looked at the revolver in his hand but didn't lower it. Jupiter and his friends watched in suspense while the private detective hesitated between believing a powerful enemy and relying on a weapon that might well cause him to lose a hand. Huganay, looking serious now, stepped forward.

"Don't move!" yelled Walton.

"I suspected you shortly after hiring you," Huganay said, ignoring the warning. "I realized what game you were up to but I decided to follow it and make you believe otherwise. So, I always knew what to expect from you. That gave me a valuable and undeniable advantage. It was easy to predict each of your movements and when you would make them.

"And now, my boy," he added, holding out his free hand, "give me that revolver before you get hurt. If you obey me, be assured that no one will get hurt. Not even you."

"No!" Walton cried. "Quiet!"

"Get him, Norbert," Huganay ordered.

Before the astonished eyes of The Three Investigators the Frenchman advanced towards Walton closely followed by his gigantic buddy. At that moment, half a dozen beams of light pierced the night, and several figures emerged from the mist just behind the private detective. Jupiter could see that these figures were dressed in uniform and wielding firearms.

"Don't move! Stay where you are! Police!" shouted a voice.

The boys turned to the spot where the voice seemed to come from. A human figure appeared to take shape there. Then, when it finally broke through a thick patch of fog, The Three Investigators could see a face well-known to them. He looked at them severely and gestured to them to step aside.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pete. "Chief Reynolds!"

## **CHAPTER 20**

# **THIEF ON THE RUN**

"Stand aside, boys," said Samuel Reynolds.

As Jupiter and his friends obeyed, seven or eight uniformed figures emerged from the fog aiming their flashlights and pistols forward. Everything happened very quickly after that.

Huganay, still near the well, stopped dead. Norbert, obsessed with the idea of taking down Walton and his pistol, continued to advance and rushed at the young blond without seeming to notice the rest of what was happening around him. Walton, immersed in a sea of doubt, didn't dare to shoot. A second later the two men were engaged in a violent struggle.

Jupiter looked at Huganay and saw that the face of the art thief had completely changed. He was still standing there, with the metal box secured under his arm, but his expression was now that of a cornered beast facing a sudden and unexpected turn of events. Jupiter realized that Huganay, for the first time all night, did not have the situation under control. For a fraction of a second the Frenchman glared at Jupiter with a deep hateful look. Jupiter, powerless, could only glance back and shake his head, meaning to imply that the police's presence there was not his responsibility.

Jupiter looked back at the police. Five of them had approached Norbert and Jack Walton, who continued to struggle, and tried to force them apart. One policeman had Walton from behind. The other four tried to immobilize the gigantic Norbert clinging to his arms and legs. In the fray, Jupiter saw Walton's revolver fall to the ground like a wounded bird and disappear between the combatants' feet.

"Subdue that big man!" shouted Chief Reynolds.

"Be careful, Chief!" called another policeman. "The other one is escaping!"

Jupiter turned his head and looked back toward the well, expecting to see Huganay still standing next to it. However, what he saw was something very different. The Frenchman, a man of quick reflexes, took advantage of the confusion caused by Norbert and Walton's continued struggle to take action. Turning, he had made a quick leap and climbed the parapet. When Jupiter looked over, all that he could see of Huganay was the upper half of his body disappearing rapidly into the well. The Frenchman, even at the risk of falling into the void, went down the steps two at a time with suicidal speed.

Chief Reynolds raised his weapon.

"Stop or I'll shoot!" he yelled.

Huganay didn't stop. His head descended and disappeared from sight. Chief Reynolds fired his gun. The bullet rapidly shot passed the spot which had been occupied by the Frenchman's head only a fraction of a second earlier and crashed against the edge of the parapet. With a small spark the bullet ricocheted and was lost in the fog.

"He's got the painting!" exclaimed Pete, running toward the mouth of the well.

"After him!" howled Bob following his friend.

"Get out of the way, boys!" yelled Chief Reynolds as he ran after Pete and Bob with his weapon raised in front of him. "That man is dangerous! Stand aside!"

Bob and Pete, on hearing this, stopped short.

"He's escaping, Chief!" Bob shouted helplessly. "And he's taking the picture with him!"

Chief Reynolds, keeping his weapon trained on the well's mouth, tilted his head slightly.

"Fenton! Murray! Arnold! Surround the well!" he shouted to his men over his shoulder. "The rest of you, keep that big man still!"

While four of the policemen were subduing Norbert, the three officers called by Chief Reynolds circled the well and slowly approached it with their weapons drawn, ready to fire. Pete and Bob, heart in a mouth, stayed behind Chief Reynolds trying to suppress their desire to peer over the parapet.

Step by step, Chief Reynolds and his men reached the well and, with extreme caution, peered inside.

"He's gone, Chief!" one of the officers reported.

"Watch out! Something is moving down there in the dark!" warned another.

Pete and Bob, understanding what was happening, rushed forward and laid their hands on the parapet.

"Don't shoot, Chief!" shouted Pete.

"There are two men tied and gagged down there," Bob explained. "They are dangerous criminals but they are unarmed. Don't shoot!"

One of the officers walked the beam of a flashlight down to the bottom of the shaft.

"The boys are right, boss," he reported. "There are two guys tied up down there."

They all looked to the bottom. In the beam of the flashlight they could see the gagged faces of Sinclair and Lagalle, who were gazing upwards with wild eyes.

"There's no sign of the other one," Reynolds lamented, lowering his weapon. "Well, men, get down there! Two of you untie those men and bring them up here. The rest follow the other one and investigate where he may have gone. Be careful! Who knows what he is capable of!"

One by one, five of the officers entered the well and began to descend the steps. Chief Reynolds then turned and approached Norbert and Walton. The boys followed.

Norbert was handcuffed and fervently guarded between two officers. Tired of struggling, and finally understanding the situation he was in, his brow was furrowed and his expression downcast as he stared at the ground. He looked like an overgrown boy who had been punished for not doing his homework the previous afternoon.

Chief Reynolds stood in front of Norbert looking at him. Then, turning to the two officers who guarded him, he beckoned to them.

"Take him to the car and wait for the others to get back," he ordered.

The officers obeyed and withdrew, disappearing into the fog after a few seconds. Reynolds turned to Walton. The latter, still gasping, stood with an officer at his side.

"How are you, Walton?" The chief asked. "I hope that brute hasn't left you too bruised."

"Don't worry, Reynolds," Walton responded. "It's just a couple of scratches. That guy is darned strong, but unfortunately for him he's easy to handle."

Pete, standing next to the chief of police, pointed to the private detective.

"Do you know him, Chief?" he asked. "I mean, does he work for you?"

"More or less, Pete," Bob intervened, stepping forward. "As far as I can tell, Jack Walton is, as he said before, a private detective working side by side with Rocky Beach Police. It was undoubtedly he who led the police here with the aim of capturing Huganay."

"That's right," Walton agreed, smiling. "And speaking of Huganay, have they succeeded in capturing him?" he asked Chief Reynolds.

"My men will take care of him," he answered. "For now, one criminal leads to another. Down below we found two ruffians tied up that, it seems, also are dedicated to tasks that have little to do with the punctual fulfillment of the law."

"Oh, yeah, those two guys," Walton said, rubbing his chin. "They're nothing more than a pair of morons, though one of them is very dangerous with a knife in his hand. It's not bad to have caught those two birds, but the most important piece is Huganay. Not an easy sort to catch."

"Don't worry, Walton. My men will do their best to get him," said Chief Reynolds, looking at the private detective. "And now, boys," he added, turning to them, "would you be so kind as to tell me all that's happened since I last spoke with you? How did you come to be in this solitary park in the middle of a foggy night with a dangerous art thief?"

"Well," Bob began, "it's really Jupe who can best tell it all. It was he who discovered the secret hidden on certain chess pieces. Isn't that right, Jupe?"

When there was no answer, Bob looked around for his friend.

"Jupe?" he repeated.

They all looked around, but they could only see the well and the dense curtain of mist that completely surrounded them a few yards in every direction.

There was no trace of the First Investigator anywhere!

"Darn!" exclaimed Chief Reynolds. "Where the devil did that boy go?"

• • •

Although not possessing the infallible sense of direction of his friend Pete Crenshaw, Jupiter Jones was able to find his way through the dense fog that covered Oceanview Park. Fortunately, in order to do so he only had to retrace the path which he and his friends, in the company of Huganay, had traveled to the wishing well. And although Jupiter Jones was more likely to get lost than to be well oriented in a solitary park overrun by fog, the truth is, when you've followed a path, going back through it without getting lost is much easier than just moving on, no matter how much or little fog one may find himself surrounded by. So, he thought, if he managed to go back without leaving the path that had brought him there, he wouldn't get lost and would soon reach his destination.

As soon as Huganay disappeared through the mouth of the well, Jupiter realized where to go to look for him. And although he was tempted to ask Chief Reynolds to accompany him, he

remembered that he had promised the French thief that he wouldn't lead the police to him and that he wouldn't report him. The weight of his promise, even if it had been made to a criminal, was too much for the First Investigator. So, he decided to keep it and go alone to meet Huganay. Now all that was left to do was try to retrieve the picture.

He remembered mentally, more or less, where the statue of the pioneer whose stare had led them to the wishing well was located. So, not without caution, he headed in that direction through the thick fog that filled the night.

After a few minutes, he saw, with immense relief, the form of the statue appear on his left in the milky light of his flashlight. He then followed the path that led to the square where they had been before, and from there, he retraced his steps until he saw the dark shape of the bandstand standing alone in the mist in front of him.

Traveling the rest of the way was even easier. Leaving the bandstand behind, Jupiter took the path that led from the south entrance and began to follow the trail before him. As he did so, a strange sensation assailed him. For a few moments, he found himself in a nightmare world in which he was advancing towards some fateful end. As he passed, the lower branches of the trees seemed to stretch towards him, appearing suddenly from the mist like powerful ghostly claws seeking to ensnare him. The silence, absolute and overwhelming, broken only by his own footsteps, felt like a huge stone pressing his shoulders and crushing his heart. An intense feeling of helplessness seized him and ran down his body with a shiver. The First Investigator, however, swallowed and forced himself to keep moving forward. Every muscle in his body was tense and his teeth were tightly clenched.

At one point, Jupiter decided to turn off his flashlight and move cautiously through the gloomy light of the streetlamps. However, he didn't have to go far in such conditions, for what he sought soon appeared before him.

The wire fence suddenly appeared at the side of the path as if it were a gigantic cobweb. The sign that barred the passage to the Cave-Labyrinth still hung gloomily where he and his friends had seen it before.

Jupiter went to the fence and examined it carefully. When he found that it was intact, he bent down and, without making a sound, set himself as comfortably as he could along the side of the path, ready to wait as long as necessary. From his observation post he scanned the entrance to the cave, even though he could scarcely distinguish it. All he could see was a big hole. The metal mesh that covered it was hidden in the darkness of the opening.

Jupiter waited as a disturbing sense of isolation seized him. The minutes dragged like a snail over the surface of time. It felt like an eternity until, at last, something appeared to happen on the other side of the fence, where the mouth of the Cave-Labyrinth was built. Jupiter listened carefully, searching the darkness.

There was no movement at first, but there were short, dry sounds with a metallic tone that seemed to come from the entrance of the cave. Jupiter realized it was the sound produced by pliers cutting the wires of the mesh fence one by one. The sounds continued as Jupiter, expectant, felt a knot pressing down his throat more and more.

The sounds ceased after a couple of minutes. Then, for a few seconds, nothing happened until a shadow suddenly appeared at the entrance to the cave. Jupiter sharpened his senses and saw

that it was the shadow of a man who was sneaking around. The boy smiled to himself and remained motionless.

The shadow moved toward the wire fence. As he watched, Jupiter caught his breath as the shadow stopped beneath the sign that barred the passage, only a few yards from where he was waiting. He noticed that the shadow seemed to have something under his arm.

Again, the dry, metallic sounds were heard as the man cut the diamond-shaped wire sections of the fence with his pliers. After a couple of minutes, the sounds ceased and the shadow tugged at the fence wire. A small section of the fence was detached and pulled to the side leaving an opening wide enough for the shadow to get through. Without making the slightest noise the man went through the gap and reached the path at last.

Jupiter decided that the time had come to act.

"Mr. Hukanay," he called in a whisper.

The shadow stopped abruptly and turned to where Jupiter was, only a few yards away. The pointed blade of a knife gleamed sinisterly in the subdued light of a lamppost.

"Mr. Hukanay," said Jupiter again. "Don't be alarmed. It's me, Jupiter Jones."

The shadow seemed to relax slightly. Then the voice of Hukanay, filled with suspicion and apprehension, was heard in a cutting, icy-cold whisper.

"You're alone?" he asked.

Jupiter swallowed and nodded.

"Yes, sir," he replied. "Don't be afraid."

"Are you going to turn me in?" Hukanay asked from the darkness. "Are you going to bring the police down on me?"

"No, Mr. Hukanay," said Jupiter. "I gave you my promise that I wouldn't and I assure you that I have kept it the entire time. You did your part by protecting us from Sinclair and Lagalle and my friends and I fulfilled ours by helping you find the picture without telling the police."

A brief silence slipped through the shadows. The blade of the knife Hukanay wielded continued to glisten in the milky light of the mist.

"If what you say is true, young Jones, can you tell me what the police are doing here? Who brought them to this park?" replied the Frenchman in a serious and sharp tone.

"Believe me, sir. It wasn't us," Jupiter whispered. "I suppose Harris, or should I say Jack Walton, the private detective, did."

Hukanay was silent again for a few seconds.

Then, in a somewhat less suspicious voice, he said from the mist, "Clearly. It must have been him. He waited until I had the picture in my hands in the hope that, at that moment, I would have let my guard down. But he was wrong. I already suspected him and foresaw his actions. However, I never imagined that he would bring the police with him. In my experience, private detectives often prefer to work alone in order to take as much glory and any reward that may be offered for the recovery of valuables or the capture of one of my profession. Yes, my boy," concluded the Frenchman, "I should have foreseen that Harris could do that. After all, there were more thieves

besides myself involved in this affair, so he, seeing himself outnumbered, decided to go to the police.

"I trust what you say, young Jones. If you have come to explain, I appreciate the detail. You have shown great ingenuity in knowing where to look for me."

"It was simple to guess, sir," said Jupiter. "You entered the well after remembering that it was connected to the Cave-Labyrinth. And during our search tonight, you were the one who kept the map of the park that I brought from home.

"I remembered that you put it in your pocket for just such an occasion. And that map includes, as we all saw, a map of the labyrinth tunnels. Armed with a map and flashlight, it must have been easy for someone like you to mislead the policemen in the tunnels and find the route that leads here. You are accustomed to thinking fast and not to be dazed by circumstances. But I am also."

Huganay put away the knife he wielded and approached the First Investigator as he laughed. The boy shivered slightly when he saw the devilish smile on his face.

"You are a worthy adversary, Jones," said the Frenchman. "I thank you for respecting your promise and not putting the police onto me. And now, if you'll excuse me, I must go. I run a great danger staying here longer than advisable. And, by the way," he added, "thank you for the painting."

Huganay turned to leave.

"One moment, sir," said Jupiter.

Huganay stopped and looked over his shoulder at him.

"Well?" he asked.

"You forget that I also want that picture under your arm," said Jupiter. "I request that you to give it to me."

Huganay stared at the boy as a thin wisp of mist slid between them. The Frenchman smirked.

"And why should I do such a thing, my young friend?" He asked slyly.

"That picture was bequeathed to Mr. Glenn Heggyns," said Jupiter. "It's up to him who should have it."

Huganay laughed.

"You forget something, Jones," he said. "This is a stolen painting, and was acquired illegally by an old writer who had no right to possess it despite having paid a heavy sum for it. I, however, have not stolen it. I have found it. It would be the first work of art that I did not steal in a long time."

Huganay laughed at his own joke. Jupiter was serious.

"We were the ones who found it for you, don't forget," said the boy.

"Because we made a deal," Huganay countered. "And this bargain did not include anything relative to the ownership of the painting once it was found."

Jupiter searched for arguments. Finally, determined to act, he stepped forward.

"I beg you to give it to me," he said, extending his hand.

Huganay looked at him very seriously, his mocking smile lost in the fog.

"Why not share it, Jones?" he proposed. "For the last time, join me and I will make you the greatest criminal mind ever."

"Never," said Jupiter, shaking his head. "And now give me the picture."

"Very well, boy," said Hukanay. "Since you persist in opposing me, then that's it. As for the picture, if you want it so much... come and get it!"

Quick as lightning, Hukanay switched on a flashlight, turned and ran. Jupiter, acting on impulse, followed. The Frenchman, who seemed to find his way despite the darkness and fog, plunged into a group of trees shaking before the beam of his flashlight while he kept running. Jupiter, slower and less graceful, followed trying not to lose sight of him.

Pursuing fiercely, Jupiter ran as fast as he could while numerous shrubs and low branches crashed against his body, scratched his arms and tore his clothes. The trunks of the trees, like immobile ghosts, suddenly appeared before him in the midst of the fog and were difficult to avoid. Hukanay, meanwhile, a better runner than the boy, was moving fast. The Frenchman seemed to know perfectly well which way to go.

The race, however, was not long. Just as Jupiter, who was gasping for breath, thought he was going to lose sight of him, Hukanay came to a halt with both hands clutching thick metal bars. The Frenchman had reached the fence that surrounded the park.

Jupiter heard Hukanay, in spite of his lead, uttering a cry of rage. No doubt he'd thought himself capable of finding the hole through which they had all entered earlier, hoping to get out through it. But he'd been mistaken in his calculations, and before him stood the strong, solid spearheaded bars, which were impossible to get through.

Jupiter, breathing heavily, watched as Hukanay looked to the right and left, wondering what direction to take. One of them led to the hollow of bent bars, the other to a dead-end cage.

Jupiter ran after the Frenchman again. However, he stepped wrong and his foot became entangled in a clump of roots causing him to fall heavily on the grass. From the ground, he raised his head and watched Hukanay's actions with disbelief.

The latter, determined to escape, threw the metal box, which he had held firmly until then, through the bars. Despite its valuable contents, the box fell heavily on the sidewalk letting out a metallic clang that the fog was responsible for dampening. Then Hukanay clung to two of the thick bars and began to scale them. Displaying Herculean force, the Frenchman ascended the fence and reached the top. Then, agilely, and before Jupiter's astonished gaze, he leapt over it, clearing the sharp spearheads by a few inches. Seconds later Hukanay slid down the bars and reached the curb on the other side of the fence.

Jupiter jumped to his feet and ran. When he arrived, Hukanay picked up the metal box from the ground. The Frenchman, putting it under his arm again, straightened up and looked at Jupiter smiling maliciously.

"I don't think you will be able to follow me this time, my young friend," he said.

Jupiter clung to the solid bars and looked up. After trying to climb them a couple of times, he realized painfully that he would never make it. Desperate, he looked helplessly at Hukanay. The Frenchman, only inches from him but out of reach on the other side of the fence, stared back at him, still smiling.

"This is where we must part, young Jones," he said in a triumphant tone. "You have been a tremendous collaborator and a better adversary. But I get the win this time. You have already done it twice before."

Jupiter, powerless, just looked at him.

"By the way," Huganay continued, "don't bother giving a description of my car to the police. I have another vehicle waiting for me a block away, one that you have never seen. I will take it and be out of the country in a matter of a few hours. Everything has turned out as I said it would. And you know something, boy? I love it when a plan comes together."

"It's not right that this is how it ends!" cried Jupiter, gripping the bars. "That picture doesn't belong to you! It's not fair for you to take it!"

"And who decides what is right and what is not, Jones?" replied Huganay. "All right. I'm leaving now and the painting is coming with me. Too bad you don't want to join us. *Au revoir*, my young friend. Maybe we'll meet again someday."

With a final smile and a mocking wink, Huganay turned and disappeared into the fog. In a matter of seconds even his cautious steps ceased to be heard. Jupiter listened intently to discern them but the only thing that came to him was the muffled sound of a car as it started. The vehicle in question roared to life and the noise of its engine was soon lost in the distance until finally merging with the silence of the night.

It was a fact. Huganay was gone. And he had taken the picture with him.

Jupiter, dejected, looked down and stared grim-faced at the ground as wisps of fog swirled gently on the sidewalk. Thus, clinging to the bars, he remained submerged in absolute silence for several seconds.

Finally, filled with disappointment, he sighed and released the thick iron bars. Then he turned and walked, hoping to find the path that would take him back to his friends.

• • •

"Any trace of that criminal, Murray?" Chief Reynolds asked the officer who had just appeared through the mouth of the wishing well.

"No, sir," the officer replied, shaking his head. "He's given us the slip. He entered a passageway that seems to connect with the tunnels of the old labyrinth attraction and disappeared in them. Looking for him in there could take days. At least we managed to pick up those two guys," he added, pointing to Sinclair and Lagalle.

Chief Reynolds turned to the two European miscreants and stared at them. Handcuffed and escorted by a pair of officers, they stood there with miserable expressions and stared at the ground.

"You two will have to answer a fair number of questions in the next few hours," the police chief said.

Sinclair frowned and remained with his head down. Lagalle meanwhile, looked up, narrowed her eyes, and gave Reynolds a murderous look.

"Take them, boys!" ordered the chief of police. "Put them in one of the cars and wait there for me."

The officers left with their prisoners. When the fog had swallowed them up, Chief Reynolds turned to Pete and Bob.

"All right, guys," he said, giving them both a serious look. "I don't think those two will be the only ones with something to say tonight. I believe you also have a few things you need to tell me."

"We should find Jupe first, Chief," Bob said. "He may be in danger. Besides, he could best explain..."

"Chief!" interrupted one of the officers, raising his pistol. "Someone is coming!"

They all remained silent and turned to where the officer was pointing. There, in the midst of thin wisps of fog, an indistinct figure was approaching, preceded by the light of a flashlight. The silhouette drew closer until, as if crossing the curtain of water from a waterfall, its outline could be seen with total clarity. A second later, with a serious and dejected face, Jupiter Jones emerged from the fog and approached the group gathered by the well.

"Jupe!" Pete cried out on seeing him.

"Where have you been?" Bob asked. "We were worried!"

"Jones!" exclaimed Chief Reynolds. "Where did you come from?"

Jupiter looked at them all with sorrow.

"Hi, guys. Good evening, Chief. I thought I saw someone fleeing in the fog and decided to follow. But I was wrong. I didn't find anyone."

"Who did you think you would find?" Chief Reynolds asked. "We all saw how that man disappeared into the well."

"I thought it might be some accomplice that had been hidden all the time, Chief," Jupiter said quickly. "Your officers were already chasing that man, so I decided to follow another lead, although my imagination must have played a trick on me. I... er... Did you find him?"

"No, Jupiter," replied Chief Reynolds, shaking his head. "My men haven't been able to catch him. However, I'd like to know where you went yourself, boy. Your clothes are all torn up."

"It's true, Jupe," said Bob. "You're a total mess. Did you fall down an embankment or something?"

"I can't wait to hear what your Aunt Mathilda has to say as soon as she sees you," Pete laughed.

Jupiter looked at his friends and tried to smile without success.

"I... well, I..." he stammered. "I guess I got lost," he said simply.

## **CHAPTER 21**

# **A VISIT TO ALFRED HITCHCOCK**

"I'm glad to see you again, boys," said Mr. Hitchcock from behind the large desk in his office. "I must admit that the call you made to tell me about your interest in finding Glenn Heggys, lawyer of the late Arthur Roberts, aroused my curiosity. Now that the case has been concluded, I'm glad to see that you've come to visit me. Maybe now my curiosity will finally be satisfied."

Pete and Jupiter, sitting in chairs opposite the large desk, nodded. It was the afternoon following The Three Investigators' nighttime visit to Oceanview Park in the company of Huganay.

Despite the long evening and the many emotions experienced during those hours, Bob had risen early the next morning. After calling the public library and explaining to Miss Bennett that he couldn't be at work that morning, but could in the afternoon, he busily arranged all his notes on the case by lunchtime. After that, the Third Investigator went to the salvage yard to see Jupiter, who, reluctant to present the case to Mr. Hitchcock because he considered it a failure, ended up yielding to Pete and Bob's insistence and called the great director in his office to see if he could receive them. Hitchcock, always interested in the cases that the boys brought to him, agreed to see them in the afternoon. Now the great film director, after reading the notes written by Bob, set them aside and, clasping his hands before him, looked at Pete and Jupiter. Bob, who had to go to the library to make up for his morning absence, had been unable to accompany them.

"A very interesting case you bring me, boys," Mr. Hitchcock said. "And I dare say it's the most complicated of all that you have faced so far. Something in which, without a doubt, the hand of Arthur Roberts, whose privileged mind was capable of conceiving the most intricate plots, is noticeable. I think it my duty to congratulate you on having unraveled this one, boys."

"Thank you for your congratulations, sir," said Jupiter with some regret in his voice, "although I'm not sure that we are worthy of any praise."

Hitchcock looked at Jupiter and raised his eyebrows.

"I don't think you should criticize yourself, Jupiter," he said. "Your deductions in the case and your method of solving the riddle raised by Roberts in relation to that enigmatic chess set were simply excellent."

"Don't mind him, sir," Pete said, laughing. "Jupe is annoyed because, although we found the painting, we lost it. He feels responsible for this because he wasn't able to stop Huganay when he escaped from him."

"I don't think so," said Mr. Hitchcock. "Your work was brilliant and you managed to clear up a mystery that for most would have remained unresolved. You found a work of art of incalculable value and, although you lost it, it was only due to circumstances beyond your control. Huganay is taller, quicker and stronger than you, Jupiter. And, to top it off, he was armed with a knife. I don't think you should blame yourself for his escaping."

"It's not that, Mr. Hitchcock," Pete rejoined. "What really hurts Jupiter is the fact that he respected the promise he made to Huganay. When he went after him he didn't alert the police. With the help of Chief Reynolds and his men, he might have caught him, but Jupiter decided to

keep his promise and not lead them to him. Because of this Hugaray escaped. That's what Jupiter actually regrets."

Jupiter shrugged and looked away.

"A promise is a promise, sir," he said. "Hugaray and I made a deal and both of us fulfilled our respective parts. He protected us and we helped him. And a deal is a deal even if it's done with an art thief."

Mr. Hitchcock smiled and gathered his fingertips in front of him.

"That's true, Jupiter," he said, nodding. "By respecting the deal, he managed to escape by being physically stronger than you. If you had broken it, he could very well have been captured. There were no lives at stake, only a painting, albeit a masterpiece that 'almost no one believes is lost.' Would it have been better to break a promise and capture the thief? Well, that's an ethical dilemma that isn't up to us to discern. What's done is done, Jupiter. You did as your conscience dictated and that is what counts. However..."

Hitchcock, master of suspense, paused and stared at the two boys. Pete and Jupiter, intrigued, leaned forward involuntarily.

"Yes, sir?" inquired Jupiter.

"I don't know if you really know what's going on here," Mr. Hitchcock went on. "The circumstances are as follows: there is a famous painting of incalculable value hanging from one of the walls of the Louvre Museum in Paris, which apparently, according to your tale, is a forgery. The original, on the other hand, is in the possession of an art thief who, for personal reasons, will keep it hidden until a certain old lady dies. Only a few people know the truth, and among them are three smart young California boys and yours truly. My question is: will you keep the secret? This case has put you in the position of keeping silent or publicly requesting an examination of the painting hanging in the Louvre. We all know that if this happens it's quite possible that its falsity will be exposed, no matter how good the copy, thanks to the reliability of modern methods. What are you going to do about it? Will you talk?"

"You see, sir," Jupiter began. "Hugaray called me this morning on the telephone and spoke to me on that subject. We talked at length and I decided that it would be best to keep quiet. And not only because this was a case in which The Three Investigators were not victorious, but because the honor of a famous surname intimately linked with the world of art in France would be discredited, which would undoubtedly end the delicate health of a certain old lady, as you say.

"Hugaray and I made a new deal. We keep silent and he will keep the picture hidden, promising not to sell it to anyone or try to get rich at its expense. At least as long as the old lady is alive.

"On the other hand, if we go to the media asking for an examination of the copy that hangs in the Louvre, we would be considered crazy. We've never been to France or visited the Louvre, so what's the point of making such a statement? We wouldn't be taken seriously, sir, for we are only known as investigators in our city. At the end of the day we are just some American boys who aren't very knowledgeable about art. So, we won't. As for you, we would strongly urge you not to either, sir."

"Me?" inquired Mr. Hitchcock, laughing. "I never would, Jupiter. Just for my own self-interest, I wouldn't say a word. Despite being a successful filmmaker, I'm not much of an art critic, so who am I to claim the falsity of a certain painting? They would think me senseless and obtrusive, and

that would be bad publicity for my work. My films could be seriously affected by such a situation. No, sir. Let life take its course."

"Thank you, sir," said Jupiter. "And I suppose Huganay too."

Alfred Hitchcock frowned and took a deep breath.

"All this causes me think," he began. "If this case is to remain a secret, I understand that you have come to see me with the sole intention of satisfying my curiosity and keeping me abreast of your activities. But, since, at least for the moment, this story is not going to be divulged, I suppose you aren't going to ask me to present the case. Am I wrong?"

Jupiter grinned.

"You aren't mistaken, sir," he answered. "Actually, we just came to tell you what happened and not to ask you to present a case that we don't know when it will come to light. However, if Huganay notifies us that his relative has died and therefore is free to reveal the painting, don't doubt that we will come to you to ask you to present our humble case."

"And it will be my pleasure once it becomes possible, boys," Alfred Hitchcock agreed. "But don't treat this case as humble. Frankly, it seems incredible to me that you have come across a painting from centuries ago that everyone admires in one of the world's leading museums when in fact it isn't. Now that I think about it, what will happen to Sinclair and Lagalle? They know what picture it is. Isn't Huganay worried about them talking?"

"Not really, Mr. Hitchcock," said Jupiter. "They seem to have told the whole story to the police, but the police haven't taken them seriously. So, I guess they must be in a strange situation to be telling a truth that nobody suspects and that nobody is willing to believe."

"Poor miscreants," Hitchcock chuckled. "I guess that prison awaits them, right?"

"That's right, sir," said Pete this time, "but not for matters connected with art trafficking, but for their attack on Mr. Heggyns. If the indictment goes ahead they will go to jail. Even if it doesn't happen, the justice systems of several European countries have claimed them, so they will most likely pay for one crime or another."

"Or perhaps all of them," Mr. Hitchcock concluded. "And what about Glenn Heggyns? How is he?" he added.

"Much better," Pete replied. "Chief Reynolds told us about him last night when he took us home. However, he will still spend a week or two in the hospital until he has fully recovered. We plan to go see him over the next few days. We'll take his chess set to him now that it doesn't have any more secrets to keep."

"Will you tell him the truth about the identity of the painting?" Hitchcock asked.

"We haven't decided yet," said Jupiter. "As our client, he has the right to know the full truth about the case, but it's also true that this case includes some very unusual circumstances that need to be taken into account. So, we have not made a final decision on that yet, sir."

"I'm sure your judgment will not fail you," commented Mr. Hitchcock. "What about Norbert and Harris? Or should I say Norbert and Jack Walton?"

"Norbert is nothing more than a petty thief," said Jupiter. "He's been in prison before, but currently there is no charge against him, so he will be released. What he most regrets is not having received a penny of the money Huganay promised him. Whereas Harris, or Jack Walton,

his real name, has been a private detective for several years. He has worked for museums in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, and that acquainted him with the art world and also with the underworld of art trafficking. He heard about Huganay, whose fame in that arena is nothing less than legendary, and decided to offer his capture to several insurance companies working for museums. He managed to find Huganay and be hired by him, but Huganay, as shrewd as ever, was suspicious. In the end Huganay was smarter and escaped."

"That's right," Hitchcock agreed. "Huganay demonstrated that by preemptively sabotaging Walton's pistol without him noticing."

"Well," countered Pete, "it wasn't exactly like that. When Huganay called us this morning he confessed to us that although he had indeed suspected Walton, he hadn't been able to sabotage the weapon due to lack of time. So, what he said by the well was just a bluff. But Walton took the bait and, for fear of being injured, didn't fire his weapon when he had Huganay at his mercy."

"Remarkable!" praised Mr. Hitchcock. "An admirable demonstration of cold-bloodedness and self-control on the part of Huganay. Of course, boys, you cannot recriminate yourself for anything after facing a character of such magnitude. Also, remember that you already won the game on two previous occasions."

"For him, I suppose the third time's a charm," Jupiter said, forcing a smile. "At least that's what they say."

Alfred Hitchcock laughed.

Then, after glancing at the notes collected by Bob, he asked, "What about Huganay? Do you know anything about his whereabouts?"

"I can't say with complete certainty, sir," responded Juve. "Everything indicates that, after calling us this morning, he returned to his hiding place in Europe. It's entirely possible that the call was made once abroad. We can't be sure. The truth is that Huganay knows how to escape. And he knows how to do it fast."

"He's simply a professional with extensive criminal experience," said Hitchcock. "And experience is the mother of wisdom. Well, boys, I believe that's enough to close *The Mystery of the Chess Pieces*, as you have decided to call it. Of course, now that I think about it, it occurs to me that you can still answer some more questions. How did Arthur Roberts get the picture? And where did he keep it?"

"We don't know exactly how or when he acquired the painting," Jupiter replied, "but Chief Reynolds did tell us last night where he kept it. Apparently, when the police detectives went to Mr. Roberts' house to make a record of the search carried out, they discovered a small subterranean chamber carved into the rock and accessed by a cleverly disguised moving panel in the basement. There were several pictures of great value, although none of them proved to be of the same class as the one hidden in Oceanview Park.

"We don't know when Mr. Roberts hid the painting in the park, but it seems that it was shortly before he died, during the weeks before he entered the hospital. He liked to walk at night, and he'd probably known the hiding place for some time. We assume that he took one of these night walks to hide the picture."

"Well," said Alfred Hitchcock, gesturing with his hands, "I suppose this marks the end of another case for The Three Investigators. I must admit that your work can only be called

excellent, and the fact that the hidden painting didn't wind up in your hands is not that important. Of course, it would have been better to get it back, but I don't think I can blame you for not having gotten it. So, don't feel bad about such a thing. The only thing I'm sorry about is not being able to write the well-deserved presentation right now. In short, we will have to wait for certain news to arrive from Europe. But I want you to know that, if possible, I would do it very willingly."

"Thank you, sir!" said Pete, smiling.

"In the meantime, I hope you will keep me abreast of what happens in your unstoppable career as investigators. Having seen this, who knows what will happen next?"

"We wouldn't even venture to guess," said Jupiter. "However, whatever it may be, we won't hesitate to let you know as soon as possible. Our motto is 'We Investigate Anything.' "

After a sober handshake, the boys said goodbye to Mr. Hitchcock and went to the door. As they walked out of the room, the great film director leaned back in his comfortable chair and, after putting his fingertips together again, looked distantly at the ceiling for a few moments.

"An enigmatic chess set and a masterpiece that must, nevertheless, remain hidden," he thought. "I wonder if these boys will ever fail to amaze me."

Slowly, the master of suspense came out of his reverie. Seconds later he leaned forward and began to sort through the countless documents that covered his desk.

## **CHAPTER 22**

# **THE FINAL MOVE**

After leaving the bungalow in which Mr. Alfred Hitchcock kept his office, Pete and Jupiter made their way down the stone-paved walkway that led through the lawn to the sidewalk, where the gleaming Rolls-Royce with gold trim awaited them at the curb. Worthington, standing by the car in his impeccable uniform, opened the door for them.

"Is everything all right, Master Jones?" he asked Jupiter as he got into the car and settled into the comfortable upholstered leather backseat. "Any new assignment to investigate for Mr. Alfred Hitchcock?"

"No, Worthington," said Jupiter. "In fact, we only came to give him the results of our last case. We haven't received a new assignment. We are unoccupied, so I suppose the best thing to do is to go home and rest."

"Salvage yard, then?" the chauffeur asked.

"That's right, Worthington. The salvage yard," answered Jupiter.

With elegant solemnity, Worthington sat behind the wheel and drove the luxurious automobile away from the studio. Shortly thereafter, he headed down the coast road toward Rocky Beach.

On the way Pete looked at Jupiter, but seeing that he just stared out the window scowling and grim-faced and showing no signs of wanting to talk, Pete didn't dare speak to him. Knowing his friend's character, Pete decided to let him be and leaned back on the leather seat. It would still be a few days before Jupiter recovered from the disappointment he felt from seeing Haganay escape.

Thus, the journey passed in complete silence until Worthington, after turning a corner, came into view of the large entrance gates to the salvage yard. With exquisite smoothness, the English chauffeur pulled the car to the curb and parked by the entrance.

"We're here, gentlemen," he said as he got out to open the door for the boys.

Pete and Jupiter got out and said goodbye to Worthington, thanking him for his service. Then the English chauffeur got into the automobile, started it and drove off down the street. The boys followed him with their eyes until the car disappeared around the corner. Pete looked up and saw that it was already late afternoon.

"If we hurry a little bit, we might still be able to get to the beach in time for a good swim," he told his friend.

Jupiter groaned in response. Pete, realizing that his friend wasn't in the mood, decided to insist.

"Come on, Juve," he said. "No matter how grouchy you are, it's not going to change things. The case is over. Haganay escaped and took the picture with him. It's no use moping. You won't be able to get it back. If you go on like this, the only thing you'll accomplish will be to waste the last days of summer."

Jupiter pondered, weighing inwardly the words of his friend. After a few seconds his expression relaxed and he gave a timid smile.

"I think you're right, Second," he said at last. "It's no use sulking. Let's hurry and get our swimsuits and take advantage while there's still some sun. Do you need to go home for yours?"

"Are you kidding?" Pete laughed. "I'm wearing it under my pants!"

The two friends entered the large iron gates and ran into the salvage yard. Their momentum was such that they failed to see Konrad, who, in the company of his brother Hans and Mrs. Jones, was unloading what appeared to be decorative plates made of plaster from the small truck. Jupiter, unable to dodge the Bavarian blond in time, collided with him. Konrad, surprised by the blow, lost his balance and stumbled. The large plaster plate he was carrying, about the size of an open newspaper, fell forward and smashed onto the ground, breaking into several pieces.

"What you doing, Jupe? Be careful," Konrad said.

"Jupiter Jones!" roared Aunt Mathilda, seeing the destruction caused by her nephew's clumsiness. "What were you thinking? Look what you've done!"

Red with indignation, Mrs. Jones approached Jupiter and stood before him with her hands on her hips. Pete stepped back in fear. He knew that for Mrs. Jones a broken article meant a lost sale. But, what was more serious, if such a break was caused by some sort of oversight or accident, then the loss became a real catastrophe. And that infuriated Mrs. Jones, who hated to lose the possibility of selling anything that entered the salvage yard.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" the woman continued to rant. "Now you owe me five dollars, which is what I thought of asking for that plaster plate. And now get out of here before you wreck the whole cargo!"

There was a brief moment of silence, during which no one moved.

"Jupiter Jones!" Aunt Mathilda roared again. "What's wrong with you now? What are you doing standing there like a halfwit? Don't you have anything to say?"

Pete, who had been looking at Mrs. Jones, glanced at his friend. What he saw startled him. Apparently, seeing the damage he had caused laying on the ground, the First Investigator's face had suddenly lit up. His eyes had opened wide and shone with excitement.

Pete was on his guard. When a look like that surfaced in the eyes of his friend, it was because he had discovered some detail of paramount importance.

"I... I'm sorry, Aunt Mathilda," Pete heard him say. "I'm really sorry. I'll pay you the five dollars right away."

Mrs. Jones let out a deep breath and started toward the office in search of a dustpan and a broom.

"Forget the five dollars," she said more calmly. "But get out of here before you break something else." Turning to Hans and Konrad, she added, "I'll get that."

Pete approached Jupiter, who was still staring at the remains of the plaster plate.

"What is it, Jupe?" he asked.

Jupiter, blinking, seemed to awaken from a faint reverie.

"Pete! We have to go back to Oceanview Park right now!" he said, looking at his friend.

Pete frowned.

"What about the beach?"

"It'll have to wait," Jupiter said simply. "Come on! No time to lose! Maybe we still have a chance after all!"

Pete, alarmed, raised his eyebrows and looked at Jupiter.

"What's going on?" he asked in exasperation.

"There's no time for explanations now," said Jupiter. "I'll tell you everything when we get to the park. Now let's get on the bikes and pedal as fast as we can."

Still dazed and uncomprehending, but fully trusting his friend, Pete decided to obey and follow Jupiter, who was already running toward the corner of the salvage yard where their bikes rested. Within a minute, they were pedaling furiously along the streets of Rocky Beach toward Oceanview Park.

They soon spotted the scene where they had been intensely searching just the night before. When they finally reached the barred iron gate behind which the leafy treetops rose, the afternoon light was beginning to decline and the park was being covered in increasingly long shadows.

"Where are we going, Juve?" Pete asked, without slowing down the frenetic pace of his pedaling.

"The park is still open at this hour," Jupiter said breathlessly. "Let's go to the south gate, which is the closest, and enter. From there we'll go to the entrance of the Cave-Labyrinth."

"You mean the entrance at the bottom of the wishing well?" Pete asked. "Do you want to go down into that well again?"

"No, Pete," said Jupiter. "I'm referring to the main entrance of the labyrinth, which has remained fenced off and closed to the public for years."

"Whatever you say," Pete replied.

"Take the lead as soon as we get into the park," Jupiter said. "You know your way around much better than I do. That way we'll get there sooner."

Pete nodded in agreement. Within seconds the two arrived at the south entrance of the park and entered. Once inside the enclosure, Pete took the lead and pedaled swift and fast in the direction of the entrance of the Cave-Labyrinth. Jupiter, sweating, followed his friend as closely as he could.

Although the afternoon was almost over, the park was still open. However, few visitors roamed the park at that hour. As they pedaled, Pete and Jupiter barely caught sight of any people. A few couples were walking arm in arm or chatting quietly sitting on benches. In a clearing, two children were flying a kite in the evening light, careful not to entangle the string in the tree branches. Beyond that, a bearded man, no doubt an employee cleaning the park, was picking up trash and dead leaves off the ground with the help of a stick, and placing it into a huge garbage bag. Not far from him a young man was reading a book and lying casually on the grass. Pete and Jupiter hurried past them all as dusk swept over the park.

"When we're about fifty yards from the labyrinth's entrance, hit the brakes, dismount and hide your bicycle in the bushes," Jupiter ordered. "From there we will continue on foot, hiding amongst the vegetation and advancing from tree to tree."

Pete nodded, still pedaling. After a minute, reaching the point indicated, Pete braked sharply and got off his bicycle. As he pushed it behind some bushes, Jupiter reached him and followed suit. Immediately the two boys went into the trees and crouched behind the thick trunk of a weeping willow.

"Well, Jupe," Pete said, "we're here. Will you explain to me what this is all about now?"

Jupiter looked at his friend and put a finger to his lips.

"Don't talk so loud," he warned in whispers. "He could be here."

Pete looked at Jupiter in surprise.

"He? Who?" he asked, straining to lower his voice and look around.

"Huganay," Jupiter whispered in answer.

"Huganay?" Pete repeated suddenly immersed in a sea of doubt. "Have you gone mad, Jupe? Huganay left. He went to Europe. Don't you remember?"

"That's what he wanted us to believe when he phoned us this morning, Pete," Jupiter replied. "But really it's not so. He's still here in Rocky Beach. Or at least I hope, if it isn't too late."

Pete grabbed his friend by the shoulder.

"Hey, Jupe," he said. "I don't understand a single word. Why don't you put aside the dramatics and tell me why we're here?"

Jupiter looked at Pete and sighed.

"Last night I overlooked a small detail that, in due course, should have surprised me," he began. "Last night, when we found the picture, Huganay treated it with exquisite pampering. He opened the box with great care and, rather than looking at it, caressed it with his eyes. When he removed the cotton layer so that we could all admire the painting, he didn't even touch its surface. It's a wooden board several centuries old. The passage of so much time can make it, however well preserved, become extremely fragile. That's why Huganay didn't even dare to touch it."

"Well?" Pete asked.

"If you read Bob's notes carefully," Jupiter went on, "you will recall a detail of what happened when Huganay escaped by scaling the park's steel barred fence. I told Bob that detail myself so that he could write his notes, although I did so without paying attention. I was stupid not to notice it before, because, if I had, perhaps we would have the picture in our possession right now."

"What exactly do you mean?" Pete asked.

"You see..." Jupiter said, leaning his back against the trunk of a tree and peeking toward the entrance of the labyrinth. "When I was pursuing him, Huganay came to the park fence and decided to climb it. But he couldn't do it while he had the box clutched under his arm. To be momentarily free of it, and thus be able to climb, he got rid of the box by *throwing* it through the bars. I saw him do it, and I even heard the box fall loudly on the sidewalk on the other side of the fence."

"Well?" Pete repeated.

"You still don't get it?" asked Jupiter. "Huganay is cool enough to know how to act in extreme situations. He proved it last night, by the wishing well. I would have passed the metal box through the bars and placed it carefully on the sidewalk instead of just throwing it to the ground. And

why? Because it's assumed that inside the box is a valuable and extremely fragile wooden board that could break if the box falls to the ground violently."

Pete looked at his friend opening his eyes wide.

"Gleeps, Jupe!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean that Huganay risked breaking the painting he wanted so badly, right?"

"No, Pete," said Jupiter. "What I mean is that if Huganay tossed the box to the ground it was because he knew the painting would not break."

"And how could he be so sure of it?" Pete asked. "Did he put more cotton inside?"

Jupiter sighed.

"What I mean is that Huganay threw the box down because it was really empty," Jupiter finally explained. "I realized this earlier when I saw the plaster plate break as it hit the ground after I collided with Konrad in the salvage yard."

Pete raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"I don't understand, Jupe," he said. "We all saw him enter the well with the box under his arm. And the painting was inside it all the time."

"Yes," Jupiter nodded, "we all saw Huganay go into the wishing well and from there to the labyrinth with the box containing the painting. But when I saw him coming out of the mouth of the cave I didn't see the painting, only the box. I assumed that the picture was still inside when in fact it wasn't."

"How can you be so sure of that?" Pete asked. "You didn't see Huganay remove the painting from the box and hide it somewhere else."

"Because if the painting had been inside the box, Huganay, as a cool and calculating man, would have treated the box much more delicately, as I have already explained," Jupiter insisted. "However, if the painting had really been inside the box and Huganay had inadvertently dropped it more violently than intended, he certainly would have lamented it. But he didn't. He dropped it, climbed the fence and picked up the box on the other side as if it were nothing."

"And why would Huganay remove the painting from the box?" Pete asked.

"When he entered the labyrinth, Huganay didn't know what he would find when he left," Jupiter explained. "He believed that I had brought the police with me and that he could therefore be ambushed near the entrance with Chief Reynolds waiting for him to leave. In other words, he might be caught."

"So, to prevent the painting from falling into someone else's hands he decided to remove it from the box and hide it in some corner of the maze. If they caught him, he would be carrying nothing but an empty box. If they didn't catch him, he would return to pick up the painting when there was no danger in sight."

"So, according to you, right now the picture is hidden somewhere in the labyrinth, right?" Pete asked.

"I hope so," said Jupiter. "Huganay left it there with the intention of coming back for it as soon as possible. These corridors are humid, and excess moisture could damage the paint. Maybe he has already come or maybe not. That was why it was so urgent to get here. Huganay has a map

of the maze, so it won't be difficult for him to find the picture again. If my deductions are correct he must have hidden it not far from the entrance to the cave."

"Why close to this entrance and not the one at the wishing well?" Pete asked.

"Think about it, Pete," said Jupiter. "When Huganay entered the maze near the well he had several policemen at his heels. He couldn't entertain hiding the picture. On the other hand, if his intention was to return later to get the painting, it would take less time to recover it if he concealed it near this entrance than if he hid it in the depths of the labyrinth."

"Now that you explain it, it all makes sense," Pete said. "What do you think we should do now?"

Jupiter pinched his lower lip and looked around.

"We've been watching the entrance to the Cave-Labyrinth for a few minutes, and there's no sign of any movement," he said. "Come on, let's approach cautiously moving from tree to tree."

Advancing as he described, Jupiter and Pete left their hiding place and, crossing the vegetation of the park, approached the fence that spanned the access point to the cave entrance. They stopped when they were only a few feet away.

"It's too quiet," Pete said. "What do you think, Jupe?"

The First Investigator pinched his lower lip again.

"There are three possibilities," he said. "Huganay has already been here, or he has not yet arrived, or he is in there and we may run into him."

"Gosh, Jupe!" Pete moaned. "That last option is my least favorite!"

Jupiter looked past the fence toward the entrance to the cave. The daylight was growing scarce.

"There's only one way to find out, Pete," Jupiter said. "Come on. Let's try to make as little noise as possible."

Pete grabbed his friend by the arm.

"You're not implying that we're going in there, are you?" he protested. "We haven't brought any maps this time!"

Jupiter freed himself and stepped forward.

"I know. In a hurry, I didn't realize we might need one, so we'll have to get along without it," he whispered over his shoulder to Pete. "Besides, we can always avail ourselves of your infallible sense of direction."

"Is it really that infallible?" Pete asked with a groan.

Ignoring the hesitancy of his friend, Jupiter emerged from the vegetation that hid them and approached the fence with great strides. Pete, still reluctant, followed. The two boys crouched down and examined the mouth of the cave once more.

"Let's go where Huganay came out last night," Jupiter said.

With silent, furtive movements, the boys slipped along the metal fence until they reached the hole Huganay had made in it the night before.

"Let's go in," Jupiter said.

He was about to wriggle through the hole when Pete suddenly stopped him.

"Hold on a moment, Jupe! What is that?"

Jupiter looked where Pete was pointing, just to his left. There, attached to the wire mesh, was a sheet of paper swaying lazily in the gentle afternoon breeze. What really caught the boys' attention, however, was the fact that there was something written on it.

With a black foreboding constricting his heart, Jupiter reached out, grabbed the paper and, with a gentle tug, pulled it free. He then spread it out in front of him so that he could read it. Pete, intrigued, approached to look over his shoulder. Slowly, almost unable to believe their eyes, the two investigators read:

*"My esteemed young Jones,*

*I suppose if you are reading these lines it is because you have recognized a certain small detail that cannot be considered anything but an error that I committed last night while escaping from you. Even a fellow like myself can commit some carelessness when he is being pursued by someone with a mind as illustrious and portentous as yours. Let's say that for any of those who exercise my humble profession it is not reassuring to have Jupiter Jones on his heels.*

*The fact that you and your friends are reading this note will also mean that this time I have been, if not smarter, at least faster than you. But that is not a slight to you, because your abilities are truly commendable. It is a pity that you are directing them in the opposite direction of mine.*

*Now I must go. Do not try to locate me because it would do you no good. This time I will leave your country in a matter of hours. That is why I have only to say au revoir and thank you for the help you have given me in the search for the painting that I carry with me.*

*Your humble servant,*

*Huganay."*

"He's here!" Pete shouted as he finished reading the letter. "You were right, Jupe. Huganay is here!"

Pete looked at his friend and saw that his face was pale and shattered. Which wasn't surprising, the boy thought. The world's most celebrated art thief had just escaped for the second time in less than twenty-four hours. Jupiter, however, swallowed hard and struggled to speak without giving the slightest hint of trembling in his voice.

"You're wrong, Pete," he said. "Actually, what you mean is that Huganay *was* here. He came and left. And he definitely took the picture with him. It was stupid of me not to realize everything much earlier. If I had, we could have come sooner or asked Chief Reynolds to leave a couple of men here waiting for Huganay to show up.

"The important thing, however, is that he has escaped again. And that he took the picture with him."

Pete noticed how his friend was shaking from head to toe holding in his anger.

Jupiter, biting furiously on his lower lip, looked at the note in his hands, rereading it, as if unable to believe what was written in it.

"Don't feel bad, Juve," Pete said, trying to comfort him. "As Hujanay says in his note, he was faster than us. But that doesn't detract from the work you've done or your deductions, which allowed us... What's going on?"

Pete looked at his friend once more in alarm. The look on his face had suddenly changed. His eyes were bright with excitement.

"Pete!" he cried. "Maybe we still have a chance! Maybe you're right after all!"

Pete blinked.

"What am I right about?" he asked. "What do you mean?"

"In saying that Hujanay *is* here," said Jupiter.

"How? But you yourself said that..." Pete said.

"Look at the note carefully, Pete!" interrupted Jupiter urgently. "Don't you see something very significant? It's something that the limited lighting here doesn't reveal at first, but it's immediately obvious if you look closely."

Pete looked at the sheet of paper, read it and frowned.

"Actually, I don't notice anything special," he said, scratching his head. "To me it's just a note."

"It's the ink! It hasn't finished drying yet! Look!" exclaimed Jupiter.

The boy slid a finger across the last line of writing. The ink with which it had been written smeared, leaving the edges of the letters slightly blurred.

"It's still wet!" cried Pete.

"Indeed," said Jupiter, nodding. "This note was written with a fountain pen and the ink hasn't had time to dry completely. So, whoever wrote it couldn't have gone far. He may have hung it up just before we arrived."

"But that's almost impossible, Juve," Pete objected. "We would have seen something. We would have come across or encountered him."

Jupiter pinched his lower lip.

"And who's to say that it didn't happen?" he replied. "It may have happened just like you said."

"But we didn't notice anything," Pete said. "We didn't see anyone."

"Wait, Second. Let's think about it a little bit," said Jupiter. "Although the light is beginning to fade, it's still daylight. If Hujanay came to pick up the picture while it was still daylight, he probably didn't do it openly, but tried to go unnoticed. And what better way to go unnoticed than...?"

"With a disguise!" Pete concluded. "Think, Juve! Who did we see as we walked through the park to get here? I saw one couple walking and another sitting on a bench."

Jupiter frowned, exerting his photographic memory to the limit.

"It all happened so fast," he remarked, "and I was so focused on pedaling that it's hard to say. Let's see... In a clearing, there were two kids flying a kite, although it's clear that none of them can be Hujanay. Besides them... Oh, no!"

"What is it, Jupe?"

"There was a man carrying a sack and a stick with a skewer collecting papers!" cried Jupe, remembering suddenly. "It has to be him! It's the perfect disguise. No one would suspect someone like that in a public park. People would see their presence as something completely normal. In addition, with a disguise like that, he could go almost anywhere, even the entrance of the Cave-Labyrinth, without raising suspicion. Besides, now that I remember him, he wore a full beard. The perfect disguise to keep your face well hidden!"

"And he had a very full sack on his shoulder!" Pete pointed out. "I'm sure he had the picture inside! A perfect way to get it out of the park without arousing suspicion."

"Quick!" urged Jupiter. "Let's look for him!"

Running wildly, the two boys returned to their bicycles, mounted them and began pedaling furiously.

"Let's go back the way we came," ordered Jupe. "Let's go to the place where we saw him and start looking for him there. He may still be close by."

Invigorated by the incipient pursuit, the two friends hurried back to the place they sought and dismounted.

"This is where we saw that man," Jupiter said, looking around.

"There's no sign of him now," Pete said after looking in all directions. "We could ask any people we find if they saw him."

But the fact was they didn't see anyone. That corner of the park, sinking deeper and deeper into shadows, was completely deserted except for themselves.

Jupiter knelt down and inspected the ground.

"Unfortunately, there are no prints," he moaned. "This area is covered with tall grass. It's useless to look for footprints here."

"Let's search the park and its surroundings, Jupe," Pete suggested. "Maybe we're still in time and we'll spot him trying to leave."

"I guess that's the best we can do," Jupiter agreed nervously.

Suddenly the First Investigator fell silent, stretched his neck and listened intently.

"Quiet, Pete!" he warned. "Listen to that."

"What...?" his friend stammered.

"Listen!" repeated Jupiter.

The two boys listened intently. From somewhere outside the park, on the other side of the leafy trees, came the muffled sound of a car engine being started.

"I recognize the sound of that engine!" said Jupiter. "I swear it's the same one I heard last night, when Haganay escaped. It sounds exactly the same. Come on, Pete! Don't let him escape!"

After mounting their bicycles again, they pedaled rapidly to the park entrance. As they did, they heard the sound of the engine gain strength for a couple of seconds, then slip into the distance until it dissolved completely in the evening air.

When they reached the entrance, and then the street, nothing moved nor was heard except the occasional chirping of birds. If the car they had just heard was actually the one in which Haganay escaped, there was no longer any trace of it.

"Nothing!" Jupiter lamented. "He's gone! He has slipped through our fingers!"

"Yes, but we've been hot on his heels," said Pete. "Look there, Juve!"

Jupiter looked where his friend was pointing. There, by the entrance gate of the park, was a garbage can. Inside it, and sticking out its edge, the boys could see a long stick, a large bag full of papers and a thick tuft of hair that was undoubtedly a false beard.

"You were right, Juve!" exclaimed Pete. "It was him in disguise!"

"We had him!" said Jupiter, clenching his fists tightly. "We had him and he escaped again!"

Pete looked at his friend and chose to remain silent as Jupiter, consumed by frustration, clenched his fists. The two boys remained like that, in silence, for several moments. Pete knew that once his friend finally did decide to return to the salvage yard, silence would overshadow the entire journey. Jupiter would be sulky and ill tempered, and Pete would have to wait at least a couple of days before again suggesting to his friend to go swimming. With that thought in mind, Pete looked at Jupiter and sighed. Around them, the sun began to set on the park.

## EPILOGUE

I do not know if you will remember me, dear readers, but I am the same person who wrote the mysterious introduction with which this story began. On that occasion I had to keep my identity hidden for the sake of the plot, and all I could say about myself was that I am not Alfred Hitchcock. Unfortunately, the master of suspense died some time ago and the world has since been deprived of new mystery tales arising from the mind of the great director. Something similar to what happened with the disappearance of the inimitable Arthur Roberts.

But I am getting away from the first of the reasons for these concluding lines: my identity. To discover this suffice it to say, if you still have not guessed, my name is Hukanay, I am French and I participated (very advantageously, by the way) in the story you have just read.

No doubt you will wonder why it is I who writes these lines. One of the reasons is, as I have already pointed out, the death of Mr. Hitchcock. The other is that no one else but the great director, The Three Investigators, those two stupid beginners *Mylord* and Lagalle, and I knew the whole truth about this story. And since the story itself has been kept secret at my request, I think it is up to me to bring it to light now that it is possible.

The elderly lady for whose delicate health I feared so much if the truth spread, died, to my deep regret, just a couple of weeks ago. She was someone I loved very much, so I'm glad she said goodbye to this world in peace and without having to face a painful truth. However, once she was dead, it was up to me to spread the truth, whether the world decided to accept it or not. Therefore, I contacted The Three Investigators and explained the turn of events. Jupiter Jones and his friends were in agreement with me in spite of their initial reaction against it, owing to the painful, especially for Jupiter, remembrance that it was I who came out victorious from this confrontation. Nevertheless, Bob Andrews retrieved his excellent notes on *The Mystery of the Chess Pieces* from some long-forgotten file and brushed off the thick layer of dust that had accumulated on them. Moreover, since I had been involved in the events, the boys asked me to present it, to which I couldn't help but be delighted. It was a real honor to do so and, incidentally, to remember with nostalgia from my retirement in a remote corner of Europe the exciting adventure that I lived with them. The result is the story you just read. I hope it has been to your liking.

Despite what I have said so far, there is a matter that without a doubt, one or another may be wondering. What happened to the painting? Well, I must say that it is still in my possession. I can see it from here as I write these lines sitting comfortably in my studio and my eyes are the only ones who have seen it over the last few years. Will I bring it out? Who knows? For now, the death of the old lady is too new, so I have not yet made any decision. I suppose sooner or later the famous portrait of the lady of rare beauty will appear. But it will still be some time yet for this. However, dear readers, if any of you, having read this story and known the truth, are impatient in nature and prefer to speak before that time comes, you must know that you are free to do so. All you have to do is go to the Louvre Museum and prove that the painting hanging there is but a copy of the original that I possess. An excellent copy, it must be said, but a copy after all whose falsehood, if one relies on his own expertise, can... let's say, risk showing.

Little remains to be said. Although they have had to delay it for a few years, The Three Investigators have closed one more of their cases. And now that it has been presented, I understand how Alfred Hitchcock must have felt each time he dealt with one of the adventures experienced by these boys. Who knows what is yet to come? Surely many would like to find out. I, for my part, confess that I want to know as well.

And now, dear readers, I must go. My own affairs are calling me. So, *au revoir*.

Your humble servant,

Huganay.

## **A FINAL NOTE FROM BOB ANDREWS**

Only one detail remains to be added to *The Mystery of the Chess Pieces*.

During the years following everything reported above, Chief Samuel Reynolds carried out a series of investigations with the intention of ascertaining the whereabouts of Huganay and, as much as possible, aiding in his capture, which, incidentally, never happened.

Throughout these inquiries, Chief Reynolds assisted and relied on, among other organizations, the FBI and Interpol. That was how he discovered some interesting facts that he very kindly communicated to Jupiter, Pete and myself.

Among these facts was the information that neither Huganay's grandfather nor any of his predecessors ever worked for the Louvre Museum in Paris. In fact, no one from his family nor from the friends that he hung around with in his youth had any relation with the art world.

Which goes to show that the surprising story that Huganay told us that night in that underground tunnel in Oceanview Park was really nothing but a series of lies.

Hence, to this day the true motives for which Huganay has maintained and still keeps secret the possession of the masterpiece that he managed to take with him remain a mystery.

If on some occasion The Three Investigators come across any information capable of revealing details about it, don't doubt that it will be communicated to you as soon as possible.

Bob Andrews

Rocky Beach, November 19??