

THE MYSTERY OF THE KIDNAPPED WHALE

Marc Brandel

Introduction

A Hello from Hector Sebastian

Hullo out there. This is Hector Sebastian —

I was going to say this is Hector Sebastian speaking. But I'm not speak-ing. I'm writing this on my new word processor. That's a computer with a typewriter keyboard and a memory to store what I write.

I'm a mystery writer by profession. I used to be a private detective. But that seems a long time ago now, and the case you're going to read — at least I hope you're going to read it — has nothing, or almost nothing, to do with me.

It's a case that involved some young friends of mine, The Three Investi-gators, as they call themselves. So the best thing I can do is tell you about them first.

The Three Investigators are boys who live in Rocky Beach, a small city on the coast of southern California not far from Hollywood.

Jupiter Jones is the leader of the group. He is short and he probably thinks of himself as stocky. If you wanted to be unkind, you could say he was stout. You could even say he was fat. He has a keen deductive mind and a dogged determination to get to the bottom of anything that puzzles him. He also has a lot more self-confidence than I did at his age. Some people might even find him a little too sure of himself, but I'm fond of Jupe, as his friends call him, so I'll just say that if he often believes he's right about something — well, he often is.

Pete Crenshaw, the Second Investigator, is the most athletic of the three. He likes baseball and swimming and he keeps in good shape, which gives him a healthy appetite. He enjoys working on the Three Investigators' cases, but he is much more cautious than Jupe about getting into dangerous situations.

Bob Andrews, the Third Investigator, is in charge of records and research. He is intelligent and studious and sensitive to other people's feelings. He is also a born reporter. He carries a notebook around with him all the time and writes down everything that the Investigators learn.

So, now that I've introduced the boys to you, I'll leave you to find out for yourselves how they solved the mystery of the kidnapped whale.

A Hello from Hector Sebastian

I hope you'll enjoy it and that you won't find it difficult to read. Reading, after all, is much easier than writing, even with a word processor.

You can lie down while you're reading.

And, as the King of Hearts says in *Alice in Wonderland*, all you have to do is to start at the beginning and go on until you come to the end, then stop.

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"There she blows!" Bob Andrews shouted. "Look. Over there."

He pointed excitedly out to sea. Sure enough, three or four miles offshore a huge oblong shape had surfaced for a minute. A plume of water rose from its back, spurting out like a fountain in every direction. Then the great gray whale plunged back into the ocean.

The Three Investigators — Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw, and Bob — were standing on the cliffs above the beach. It was the first day of the spring school break. They had gotten up early that morning and cycled down to the ocean in the hope of seeing the gray whales pass.

Every year, in February and March, thousands of these huge creatures migrate down the Pacific coast from Alaska to Mexico. In the warm lagoons off the tip of the Mexican peninsula called Baja California, the female whales give birth to their calves.

Then the whales rest for a few weeks, recovering their strength, before beginning the five-thousand-mile journey back north to spend the summer feeding on the tiny shrimp and plankton that swarm in the Arctic waters.

"No one seems to know for sure how they get back up north," Bob said.

Bob Andrews worked part-time in the library in Rocky Beach, the small coastal city where the Three Investigators lived, and he had spent the day before reading up on the whales.

"Why not?" Pete asked.

"No one has been able to track them," Bob explained, glancing at his notebook. "On the way down they all stick together, and they're easy to see. So some people think they must split up on the way back, just traveling in couples way out in the Pacific."

"Sounds reasonable," Pete Crenshaw admitted. "They'd be harder to spot that way. What do you think, Jupe?"

But the First Investigator, Jupiter Jones, didn't seem to be listening to him. He was not even looking out to sea, where another gray whale had

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surfaced and was spouting its fountain of water into the air. His eyes were on the deserted cove below them. There had been a heavy storm the week before and the sand was littered with driftwood, odd pieces of plastic, and mounds of seaweed that had washed up in the heavy seas.

"I think I see something moving," Jupe said in a worried voice. "Come on."

Bracing his stocky legs, he slid down the cliff path to the beach and hurried off at an angle toward the water's edge. Pete and Bob followed him.

The tide was halfway out. The three boys jogged along for several minutes before Jupiter stopped, panting slightly, and pointed at something a few yards out at sea.

"It's a whale!" Pete said.

Jupiter nodded. "A stranded whale. Or it will be stranded in a moment if we don't help it."

The Three Investigators quickly took off their sneakers and socks. Leaving them on the dry sand, they rolled up their jeans and waded out into the ocean.

It was a very small whale, only about seven feet long. A baby one, Bob guessed, that had strayed away from its mother and been swept inshore by the heavy rollers.

The slope of the beach was so gradual that by the time the three boys reached the struggling creature, the water was still only just above their ankles. This was lucky for them because it was a chilly morning and the ocean was freezing. But the very shallowness of the water was what had prevented the whale from getting back out to sea.

The Three Investigators pushed and tugged at the whale. They even tried to lift it. It was amazingly heavy for its size — it must weigh a ton, Jupe thought — and its firmly packed body was as slippery as ice. There was nothing they could hold on to either, except its tail or its flippers, and the boys were afraid that if they pulled too hard on them they might hurt the little whale.

It did not seem frightened of them in the least. It appeared to understand at once that they were trying to help it. As the boys gathered around the whale, straining to heave it afloat from the sandy bottom, it looked at them in a friendly, encouraging way.

And then, as Bob leaned over, trying to get his arms around it, he noticed something about this whale, about the blowhole on top of its head. Remembering what he had read about gray whales

in the library, he realized that he might be wrong in thinking this was a calf that had strayed away from its mother.

He was going to tell Jupe and Pete about his discovery, but at that moment a particularly heavy roller broke only a few yards out at sea. The

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three boys were swept off their feet. By the time they were all standing upright again, the water had receded. It scarcely covered their toes now, and the little whale, swept in by the breaker, was lying high and dry on the sand.

“Oh, rats,” Pete said. “It’s really stranded now. And the tide’s still going out.”

Bob nodded gloomily. “It’ll be over six hours before the water’s high enough again to float the whale off the beach.”

“Can a whale survive that long on dry land?” Pete asked him.

“Afraid not. They dehydrate pretty fast out of the water. Their skin gets all dried up.” Bob leaned down and gently patted the whale’s round head. He felt so sorry for it. “Unless we can find some way of getting it back into the ocean at once, it’s done for.”

As though it had understood what he said, the whale opened its eyes wide for a moment. It looked at him sadly, resignedly, Bob thought. Then its eyes became slits and slowly closed.

“Get it back into the ocean?” Pete asked. “How? We couldn’t even move it when it was half floating out there.”

Bob knew he was right. He looked at Jupe. It struck him that the First Investigator hadn’t said anything for a long time. That wasn’t like Jupe. He was usually the first one to come up with a suggestion when they were faced with a problem.

Even if he wasn’t saying anything, Jupiter Jones was obviously thinking hard. He was pinching his lower lip between his thumb and forefinger the way he often did when he was pondering something.

“If Mohammed can’t come to the mountain,” he said, “the mountain will just have to come to Mohammed.”

“Talk English, will you?” Pete begged him. “What mountain?”

Jupe did have a habit sometimes of using long words or of speaking in riddles that made it difficult for the other two Investigators to understand what he was getting at.

“That mountain,” Jupiter explained. “The ocean out there. If we had a spade. And let me see — a tarpaulin. And that old hand pump Uncle Titus bought for the junkyard last month, and a good long hose — ”

“We could dig a pit,” Bob interrupted him.

“And line it with the tarp,” Pete added.

“And pump it full of water,” Jupe finished. “We could make a sort of swimming pool where the whale could survive until the tide comes back in.”

After a short discussion it was decided that Bob and Pete should cycle back to The Jones Salvage Yard for the supplies while Jupe stayed with the stranded whale.

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After the other two had gone, Jupiter searched the flotsam on the beach until he found a battered plastic bucket that would still hold water. For the next half hour, while he waited for his friends, he spent his time trudging out to the edge of the sea, filling the bucket, then trudging back and emptying it over the stranded whale.

The First Investigator had never much enjoyed physical work. He preferred to use his brain. “About time,” he said crossly when the other two Investigators came back, although as a matter of fact they had been surprisingly quick.

They had brought all the things he had asked for — a long roll of tarpaulin, the hand pump, a good sharp spade, and a hose.

“Let’s dig as close to the whale as we can,” Jupe directed. “Then maybe we’ll be able to roll it over into the pool.”

Pete, who was the strongest of the three, did most of the digging. Luckily the damp sand under the surface was quite soft. In less than an hour they had made a trench about ten feet long, two feet wide, and almost two feet deep.

They lined the trench with the tarpaulin to make it watertight. Then Pete worked the pump from the edge of the sea while Bob and Jupe stretched the long hose to the pool. It was a good pump that had probably once belonged aboard a fishing boat. They soon had almost two feet of water in the trench.

“Now comes the hard part,” Jupiter said.

“Thanks a lot,” Pete told him. “I hope that means you’ll do your share of the work this time.”

Jupe didn't bother to answer him. It seemed to him he had already done more than his share. The whole plan had been his idea.

After they had rested a moment, the Three Investigators gathered on the side of the whale away from the pool. They leaned forward and rested their hands against the animal. It lay there without moving, its eyes closed. Bob patted its head. It opened its eyes at once, and Bob could have sworn it smiled at him.

"Now, when I say 'heave,' " the First Investigator said. "Are you ready? All together — "

He never finished his command. As the three boys strained, ready to heave, the whale seemed to be straining, too, gathering itself. With a sudden convulsive movement of its body it flipped itself up, turning, spinning in the air, and landed on its back in the pool.

"Wow!" Bob exclaimed. Jupe and Pete were excited too.

Once in the water the whale righted itself. It submerged for a minute, wallowing in the pleasure of being in its own element again, then floated

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slowly to the surface and spouted up a single jet of water from its blowhole. It was exactly as though the whale were thanking them.

"Now, when the tide comes in — " Jupiter began.

"Never mind the tide," Pete interrupted him. "It must be nine o'clock now! We promised to work at the junkyard this morning. And I haven't even had my breakfast yet."

Jupiter's uncle Titus Jones and his aunt Mathilda, with whom he lived, ran The Jones Salvage Yard on the outskirts of Rocky Beach. The three boys often worked in the yard, sorting and repairing the old furniture, scrap iron, and odds and ends of machinery that Uncle Titus was always buying.

Hastily they said goodbye to the whale.

"Take care of yourself and keep wet," Bob told it. "We'll be down early this afternoon to see you get back in the ocean."

The three boys put on their socks and sneakers, picked up the pump, the spade, and the hose, and hurried off. They were at the top of the cliff, retrieving their bicycles, when Jupiter heard a sound behind them.

About two miles offshore a small outboard cabin cruiser was chugging slowly past. There were two men on board, but the boat was too far away to see what they looked like.

Then Jupe saw a flash of light from the boat, then another and another.

“Looks like they’re signaling,” Pete said.

The First Investigator shook his head. “There’s no pattern to the flashes,” he said. “My deduction is that one of those men is using a pair of binoculars, and those flashes are the reflection of the sun on the lenses.”

It sounded reasonable and ordinary enough to the other two Investigators, but Jupe didn’t pick up his bike. He was still watching the boat, which was turning toward the shore now.

“Come on,” Pete told him impatiently. “Stop trying to make a mystery of everything. Hundreds of people along this coast go out every day to look at the gray whales.”

“I know,” Jupe agreed as they pushed their bicycles toward the road. “But the man on that boat wasn’t watching the whales. He had his glasses turned the wrong way. Toward the shore. In fact, it seemed to me that he was watching us.”

“Maybe he saw us save the whale,” said Bob indifferently, and Jupe dropped the matter.

Jupe’s Aunt Mathilda was waiting for them when they reached the salvage yard. She was a kind, cheerful woman who enjoyed living in the small coastal city and running the junk business with her husband. She enjoyed having

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Jupe live with them, as he had ever since his parents had died. But the thing she enjoyed most in life was putting the boys to work.

“You’re late,” she greeted them as they cycled into the yard. “I suppose you’ve been busy with one of your puzzles again.”

Jupiter had never explained to his aunt that he and Bob and Pete were serious investigators, taking on professional cases for all kinds of people who needed their services. Aunt Mathilda thought they were just members of a club that met to solve riddles they found in newspapers and magazines.

The boys put in several hours’ hard work in the junkyard before Aunt Ma-thilda gave them their lunch and told them they could have the rest of the day off.

It was after three before the Investigators reached the cove again. The tide was coming in fast over the sand. They left their bicycles at the top of the cliff and hurried down to the beach.

Pete, who could run faster than the other two, was the first to reach the pool. He stopped abruptly, his back stiffening with dismay, as he stared down into it.

Jupiter and Bob joined him. They were dismayed, too, when they saw what Pete was staring at.

The improvised pool was still there in the dry sand. And it was still full of water. But that was all there was in it.

The little whale had vanished!

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Ocean World

“Maybe it managed to flip itself onto the beach,” Pete said, “and worked its way back into the ocean somehow.”

He didn’t sound as if he believed his theory himself.

“I hope so,” Bob said. But there was no hope in his voice. The whale would have had to travel a long way before it reached water deep enough to swim in.

Jupe didn’t say anything. He had moved away from the pool and was pacing in circles, staring down at the sand.

“One truck,” he said thoughtfully, returning to the others. “With a four-wheel drive. It came down from the road and across the beach. Then it backed up to the pool. It stayed there long enough to sink several inches into the soft sand. Someone had to put boards under the front wheels to get it moving again. Then it drove back to the road.”

Jupe showed his friends the crisscrossing tracks on the beach, the sharp dents left by the boards. They could see he was right. The whole thing even seemed obvious to them now. But then Jupe’s deductions often did seem obvious once he had explained them to you.

“Maybe someone reported the stranded whale,” Pete suggested after a moment. “And they sent some men down to rescue it.”

“Good reasoning,” Jupe told him approvingly. When he said that, it usually meant he had just been thinking the same thing himself. “Now, if someone saw a whale swimming around in a homemade pool on the beach, who would they call, I wonder?”

He did not wait for an answer. He was already walking back to their bicycles. Pete and Bob rolled up the tarpaulin and followed him.

“Ocean World.” Jupiter answered his own question a half hour later. “That’s who they’d probably call.”

The Three Investigators were sitting in their Headquarters in the junk-yard.

Ocean World

Headquarters was a thirty-foot mobile home trailer that Titus Jones had bought a long time ago and had never been able to sell. Gradually great heaps of junk had been carefully piled up around it, until by now it was completely hidden from the rest of the yard, and the boys had their own secret ways of entering it.

Inside, the trailer was equipped with a laboratory, a photographic dark-room, and an office containing a desk, an old filing cabinet, and a private phone which the boys paid for with the money they earned working in the salvage yard.

“Ocean World,” Jupe repeated. He was sitting in the swivel chair behind the desk, looking through the western area phone directory. He found the number and dialed it.

A loudspeaker was attached to the phone so that all three boys could hear the ringing tone and then a man’s voice answering.

“Thank you for calling Ocean World,” the voice said. “Ocean World is located off the Pacific Coast Highway, just north of Topanga Canyon.” It was obviously a taped message.

Jupe listened impatiently as the man went on to tell them the price of admission and the times of the various shows that the open-air aquarium put on for the public. It wasn’t until nearly the end of the message that Jupe showed any interest.

“Ocean World is open from ten to six, Tuesday through Sunday,” the man said. “Every day except Monday you — ”

Jupe hung up.

“Just our luck,” Pete said. “We call on the one day of the week the place is closed.”

Jupiter nodded absently. His round face was puckered with concentration, and he was pinching his lower lip again.

“So what do we do now?” Bob asked. “Try again tomorrow?”

“It’s only a few miles down the coast road,” Jupe said. “Why don’t we cycle there tomorrow and pay the place a personal visit?”

At ten o'clock the next morning the Three Investigators padlocked their bicycles in the Ocean World parking lot and bought their tickets at the gate. For a while they wandered along the paths of the vast aquarium, pausing to watch the sea lions and penguins playing in their big open pools. Then Bob saw a sign outside a white painted building, ADMINISTRATION, the sign said.

Jupe knocked on the door.

"Come in," a polite voice told them, and the Three Investigators stepped into the office.

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Ocean World

A young woman was standing behind the desk. She was wearing a two-piece swimsuit and her body was tanned a deep, even brown. Her hair, cut rather short, was dark and feathery like an Indian's. Taller than any of the Three Investigators, she had wide, strong shoulders and narrow hips that made her look streamlined in a supple way, as though, like a fish, she would be more at home in the water than on dry land.

"Hi. I'm Constance Carmel," she said. "What can I do for you?"

"We wanted to report a stranded whale," Jupe told her. "At least it was stranded until we made a pool for it . . ."

He went on to explain everything that had happened at the cove the day before, ending with their discovery that the whale they had rescued had vanished.

Constance Carmel listened without interrupting.

"All this happened yesterday?" she asked.

Bob nodded.

"I wasn't here yesterday." She had turned away from the boys and was taking a diving mask out of a locker. "We only work a skeleton staff on Mondays." She was silent for a moment, pulling at the strap of the mask, before she faced them again. "But if any stranded whale had been rescued and brought here to Ocean World, I would have been told about it first thing this morning."

"So none was?" Bob asked in a disappointed voice.

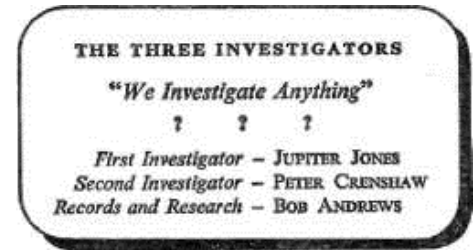
She shook her head, still pulling at the rubber strap. "I'm sorry," she said. "I can't tell you anything about it. I can't help you, I'm afraid."

"Well, thanks anyway," Pete said.

“I’m sorry,” Constance Carmel repeated. “And now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a show to do.”

“If you do hear anything .. .” Jupe took a card from his pocket and handed it to her.

It was one of their professional Investigators’ cards, which Jupiter had printed himself on the old press in the salvage yard. It said:



Under that was their private phone number at Headquarters.

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Ocean World

People usually asked what the three question marks were for. Jupe would then explain that they stood for mysteries unsolved and riddles unanswered.

Constance Carmel didn’t ask anything. She put the card on the desk without even looking at it.

The Three Investigators turned and filed toward the door. Pete was just opening it when she walked toward them.

“You really care about that pilot or gray whale or whatever it was, don’t you?” she asked.

Bob told her they did.

“Then don’t worry,” she reassured them. “I’m sure it’s okay. I mean, I’m sure someone rescued it.”

Outside the gates of Ocean World, the Three Investigators unchained their bicycles and wheeled them between the parked cars toward the road.

Bob and Pete were feeling rather gloomy at the failure of their mission, but Jupiter didn’t look the least bit discouraged. He was smiling in the eager, excited way he had when he thought the Three Investigators were on to an interesting new case.

“Okay, Jupe. Let’s have it,” Pete told him. “What are you grinning about?”

They had reached the exit to the parking lot. Jupe leaned his bicycle against the low stone wall. The other two did the same. It was obvious that the First Investigator wanted to talk.

“Let’s examine the facts,” he said. “Anyone who called Ocean World yesterday would have gotten the same taped message we did.”

“So they couldn’t have reported a stranded whale,” Pete put in.

“Not unless they called Constance Carmel at home,” Jupe explained.

“What makes you think they did that?” Bob asked.

“Because when we told her about it, she didn’t seem in the least surprised. She listened, but the only question she asked was one we’d already answered.”

“You mean she asked when did all this happen?”

“Exactly.” Jupe nodded. “Which leads me to think she wasn’t really asking a question at all. She was making a point. She was telling us she wasn’t here yesterday. She couldn’t have had anything to do with it. And the next moment, when we were leaving, she went out of her way to tell us the whale was okay. She said it very definitely. She said she was sure the gray whale had been rescued.”

“No, she didn’t.” Something that had been at the back of Bob’s mind since the day before had suddenly become clear to him, something he knew was important. “She said the pilot or the gray whale, or whatever it was, was okay.”

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Ocean World

“Maybe that was just a trick,” Pete suggested. “She was only trying to sound vague, so we wouldn’t think she knew all about it already.”

“No, it wasn’t a trick.” Bob was so sure of himself he raised his voice a little. “It wasn’t a trick. It was an unintentional giveaway. Because she was right. It wasn’t a gray whale we rescued. Gray whales have paired blowholes, like nostrils. That’s why when they spout, the water comes out like a fountain. But the whale we rescued only had a single blowhole. I noticed that when we were trying to push it back out to sea. And when it spouted, the water shot up in a single jet.”

The other two Investigators were looking at him with amazement.

“So what kind of a whale was it we rescued?” Pete asked.

“I’m pretty sure it was a young Pacific pilot whale that just happened to be traveling with the gray whales.”

“And Constance Carmel knew it was too.” Jupe nodded thoughtfully. “Good reasoning, Bob. So what do we have now? One kidnapped whale, which happened to be a stray, and a trainer at Ocean World, who says she doesn’t know anything about it. But she obviously does — ”

Jupe broke off at the blare of a horn. The Three Investigators were forced to scatter behind the wall as a white pickup truck shot out of the parking lot and turned off toward the Pacific Coast Highway.

It was going fast, but not fast enough for the three boys to miss seeing who was driving it.

Constance Carmel.

And just five minutes before she had told them she couldn't spare them any more time because she had a show to do.'

Something must have come up awfully suddenly.

What?

"Maybe it was us," Jupiter said thoughtfully. "Maybe what we told her made her take off in a hurry."

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One Hundred Dollars' Reward

"So maybe Constance Carmel was lying to us," Pete said. "But I don't see that that proves much."

It was late afternoon. After the trip to Ocean World, Bob had had to go to work at the library. Pete had had some chores to do at home. Jupiter had been helping out around the yard. The Three Investigators had met back at Headquarters as soon as they were free.

Pete went on. "After all, most adults — when you ask them a question, you don't expect them to tell you the whole truth — "

He broke off. The phone was ringing. Jupe answered it.

"Hullo," a man's voice said over the loudspeaker that was attached to the phone. "I would like to speak to Mr. Jupiter Jones, please."

"Speaking."

"I understand you were at Ocean World this morning, inquiring about a lost whale."

The man had a strange accent. When he said, "I understand," he made it sound like "Ah under-stay-and."

He might be from Mississippi, Bob thought, or maybe Alabama. He had never known anyone from either of those states, but the man talked the way people did on television when they were supposed to be from the South.

"Yes, we were," Jupe said. "How can I help you?"

“I also understand” — he said “under-stay-and” again — “that you are by way of being a private investigator.”

“We are. We’re The Three — ” Jupe started to explain.

“Then perhaps you might be interested in taking a case.” He made it sound like a cay-us. “I’m prepared to pay you one hundred dollars to find that lost whale and return it to the ocean.”

“One hundred dollars!” Bob gasped.

“Will you accept the cay-us?”

“We’d be glad to,” Jupe told him. He pulled a scratch pad toward him

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and picked up a pencil. “Now if you would give me your name and phone number — ”

“Fine,” the man interrupted him. “Then please get to work at once, and I’ll call you again in a couple of day-us.”

“But — ” Jupiter started to say. There was a sharp click over the loud-speaker. The caller had hung up.

“One hundred dollars!” Bob repeated. Although the Three Investigators had had many clients in the past and had solved many interesting cases, no one had ever offered them a hundred dollars for their help before.

Jupe slowly replaced the receiver. His mind was already busy reviewing the call.

“A man calls and offers us a reward,” he said. “But he doesn’t tell us his name. He doesn’t say how he happened to get our number either. But he knows we were at Ocean World this morning — ” He broke off, pulling at his lip.

“Well, for thunder’s sake,” Pete demanded. “You’re not going to drop the case, are you? A hundred bucks!”

“Of course not. Quite apart from the money, that rather mysterious phone call makes the mystery even more challenging. The only question is where to begin our investigation.” Jupe was silent for a moment, then picked up the phone book.

“Constance Carmel,” he said. “She’s the only lead we’ve got so far.”

He leafed through the directory to the C’s. There were three Carmels listed. Carmel, Arturo. Carmel, Benedict. And Carmel, Diego, Charter Boat Fishing. There was no Constance Carmel.

Jupe started with Arturo. The operator answered on the third ring. Arturo Carmel's number had been disconnected.

Benedict Carmel didn't answer for a long time, then a polite man's voice informed Jupe in a whisper that Brother Benedict was in retreat in the monastery. Even if he came to the phone, he wouldn't be able to say anything because the good brother was under a vow of silence for six months.

That seemed to rule Benedict out of any connection with the case.

Diego Carmel, Charter Boat Fishing, didn't answer at all.

"At least we know where we can find her," Bob said. "Six days a week anyway. She's at Ocean World."

"We know something else too," Jupe added. "We know her car when we see it. That white pickup truck." He frowned, half closing his eyes. It made him look like a cross, sleepy cherub.

"Ocean World closes at six," Jupe said, remembering the tape they had listened to the day before. "So Constance Carmel probably leaves not long

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One Hundred Dollars' Reward

after that. I think this is a job for you, Pete. But it's already too late today. You'll have to go tomorrow."

Pete sighed. Whenever things had to be done that needed someone who was fast on his feet, fast enough to get out of a dangerous situation in a hurry, Jupe usually thought it was a job for Pete Crenshaw.

But for once Pete didn't mind. There was something about this case that particularly attracted him. It wasn't altogether the hundred dollars either. It was the thought of getting that little whale back where it belonged, in the ocean, free.

At five thirty the next evening Hans, one of the two Bavarian brothers who worked for Titus Jones in the salvage yard, dropped the Three Investigators off in the parking lot at Ocean World.

Jupe and Bob took their bicycles down from the back of the van.

"You sure you be okay now?" Hans asked them, scratching his blond head. "How you going to get back? Three of you with only two bicycles."

"Pete won't need his bicycle," Jupe assured him. "He's getting a free ride."

“Okay.” Hans shrugged and climbed back behind the wheel. “If you need me, you call.”

As soon as he had driven away, the Three Investigators set out to look for Constance Carmel’s pickup. It wasn’t hard to find. It was parked in a section marked STAFF and it was the only white truck there. Jupe and Pete walked around to the back of it while Bob watched the gates in case Constance Carmel came out unexpectedly.

The boys were in luck. The open back of the truck wasn’t empty. In it were several long strips of foam rubber, a tangle of ropes, and a large, loosely folded piece of canvas.

Pete climbed in over the tailgate and lay down on the metal floor. Jupe piled some of the foam rubber around him and then covered him with the canvas. It would be dark in a little while, but even in broad sunlight no one would have seen Pete there.

“Bob and I had better leave now,” Jupe told him. “We don’t want Constance Carmel to see us hanging around. We’ll wait for you at Headquarters. Okay?”

“Okay,” Pete answered. “I’ll phone you there as soon as I can.”

He heard Jupiter climb back down to the ground and then the sound of his footsteps growing farther and farther away. After that, for a long time he didn’t hear anything except other cars starting up and driving off.

He was close to falling asleep when there was a sudden clunking sound quite close to him. A small shower of water splattered on the canvas above him and seeped through onto his face. Salt water. Pete waited until the truck

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was gathering speed outside the parking lot and then peeped out beneath the canvas.

A large plastic container was standing a few inches from his face. Pete could hear the water swilling around in it.

When the truck stopped for a red light a few minutes later, he could hear another sound coming from the plastic container — a rapid fluttering against its sides.

Fish, Pete decided. Live fish. He pulled back under the canvas out of sight.

For several minutes the truck traveled fast along a level road. The Coast Highway, Pete guessed. Then it slowed and started up a hill. Santa Monica? he wondered, remembering the steep ramp that led into that city. After that there were so many stops and turns that he lost all sense of direction. But as darkness fell the truck was climbing once more, up a winding road, and Pete figured he must be somewhere in the Santa Monica hills.

The truck stopped at last. Pete heard the tailgate being lowered and then the slither of bare feet coming toward him. He held his breath. There was a slopping sound as the plastic container was lifted. The bare feet moved away. The tailgate was lifted back into place.

He waited three minutes before poking his head out from under the can-vas.

The truck was parked outside a long, expensive-looking ranch house. There was a lamp over the front door and a flight of concrete steps that led up to the house. At the bottom of the steps was a mailbox. Pete could just read the name on it.

SLATER.

He waited another minute, then climbed carefully out on the side away from the house. He moved softly around to the front of the truck so that he could look over the hood without showing any more than the top of his head.

No one was in sight. He hadn't really expected there would be in an isolated residential district like this. But what did surprise him was that except for the lamp over the door, the ranch house was completely dark. Not a single light showed from any of its windows. Wherever Constance Carmel had gone, it didn't look as though she had gone into the house.

Well, no sense crouching here all night, Pete thought. There were obviously only two sensible things he could do now. He could walk to the nearest corner, make a note of the name on the street sign there, and report the Slater address to Jupe and Bob. Or he could investigate a little further himself, try to find out where Constance Carmel had gone and what she was doing there with a bucket of live fish.

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One Hundred Dollars' Reward

He had almost decided to walk to the corner and then find the nearest phone booth when he heard a woman's voice calling from somewhere out of the night.

"Fluke," she called. "Fluke. Fluke. Fluke."

There was no answer.

Pete was sure the sound of the voice had not come from inside the house. It had come from somewhere outdoors, maybe from the back of the house.

For the first time he noticed that a steep concrete drive led up to a garage, attached to the left side of the house. Beside the garage was a little wooden gate, and beyond it he could see the silhouette of a palm tree against the faintly glowing sky.

Pete walked up to the gate. It was fastened with only a latch. He lifted it and walked on, closing the gate behind him.

He was on a cement path that ran beside the dark wall of the garage. Pete crouched down, moving slowly, softly, toward the backyard.

“Fluke. Fluke. Fluke. That’s a good baby, Fluke.”

The woman’s voice was much closer now. It seemed to come from only a few yards away.

Pete stopped dead. Ahead and to his left, across a stretch of grass, was the palm tree he had noticed from the street. He couldn’t see anything to the right. The garden, or whatever there was behind the house, was still hidden by the wall of the garage. He braced himself for a second and then sprinted for the palm tree.

He reached it, slipped behind it, took a deep breath, and looked.

The first thing he saw, because it was the only thing to see, was an enormous swimming pool. Bright and shimmering with underwater lights, it ran the whole length of the ranch house.

“Fluke. Fluke. Fluke. Good baby, Fluke.”

Constance Carmel, in her two-piece swimsuit, was standing at the far end of the pool. The plastic container was on the concrete verge beside her. As Pete watched, she reached into the container, took out a live fish, held it up for an instant, and then threw it in a long, looping arc over the water.

Instantly a gray shape broke the surface of the pool. It rose, up, up, until its whole seven-foot length was clear of the water. It seemed to hang there for a second as though it were flying. Its mouth opened. With a quick flip of its supple body it caught the fish in mid-air. Another flip and it somersaulted gracefully backward, rolled over in midflight, and dived back into the pool.

“Good baby, Fluke. Good boy.”

Constance Carmel was wearing scuba flippers, and diving goggles were hanging by the strap from her neck. She pushed them up over her eyes and slipped into the water.

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One Hundred Dollars’ Reward

Pete was a pretty good swimmer himself — he was on the school team — but he had never seen anyone swim the way Constance Carmel did. She hardly seemed to move her arms or legs at all. She swooped and glided through the water with the ease of a swallow gliding through the air.

She was halfway across the pool at once. The little whale met her there. It seemed to Pete that they met like old friends who hadn't seen each other in far too long. The whale nuzzled gently against her side. She rubbed his round head and stroked his lips. They swooped together to the bottom of the pool. She swam beside him with her arm around him. She rode on his back.

Pete was so interested in watching the two of them play that he stretched out on the grass behind the palm tree and rested his chin on his hands. It was better than being at the movies. He was completely absorbed.

Constance Carmel had started a different game now. She and the whale were at the end of the pool closest to Pete. She patted the whale's head, then with a quick, graceful twist swam away from him. The whale followed her. She patted him again, shaking her head. Once more she glided away from him. This time the whale stayed where he was, quite still, waiting.

She reached the other end of the pool, slipped out of the water, and sat on the concrete edge there.

The little whale still waited.

"Fluke. Fluke. Fluke," she called.

The whale raised his head from the water. Pete saw the sudden alertness in his eyes. Then, in a single glide, he joined Constance Carmel.

"Good boy. Good Fluke." She touched his lips with her fingers, then reached into the plastic container and popped a fish into his mouth.

"Good Fluke. Good Fluke."

She patted him again, then picked up something that was lying in the grass behind her. For a moment Pete couldn't see what it was. The under-water lights, though they illuminated the whole pool, left its surroundings in darkness.

The little whale — or Fluke, as she had named him — had raised the top of his body from the water.

He seemed to be standing on his tail. Constance Carmel's arms went around him, doing something to his back. Lifting his head a little, Pete saw what she was doing.

She had slipped a canvas strap over Fluke's head, just behind his eyes, where his neck would have been if whales had necks. She pulled it tight and fastened the buckle. She was putting a collar, a sort of harness, on him.

Pete ducked his head suddenly into the grass.

One Hundred Dollars' Reward

The latch had clicked as the little wooden gate was pushed open. Pete heard it close. Footsteps approached him. They came so close he tensed with fear that they were going to tread on him. They went on past. The sound of them moved away down the side of the pool.

“Hullo, Constance,” a man’s voice said.

“Good evening, Mr. Slater.”

Pete didn’t dare raise his head, but he tilted it a little so that his eyes were clear of the grass.

The man was standing beside Constance Carmel at the far end of the pool. He was rather short, at least six inches shorter than she was. His face was in the shadows and it was hard to make out his features. But there was one thing about him that stood out like a light. Although he looked quite young — in his mid-thirties, Pete guessed — he was completely bald. Even in the half-darkness his round head gleamed, pale and smooth and as hairless as a cue ball.

“How’s it coming?” the man asked. “When are you going to be ready to go?” He had a curious way of talking. There was a slowness in his speech that reminded Pete of something.

“Now listen, Mr. Slater.” Constance was looking down at the man. Pete could hear the cold anger in her voice. “I agreed to help you because of my father. But I’m going to do this my own way. In my own time. Any interference from you, and Fluke goes back in the ocean and you can find yourself another whale and train him yourself.”

She paused for a moment, glancing at Fluke.

“Understand, Mr. Slater?”

She was looking down at him again, her hands clenched on her hips in a threatening way.

“Ah under-stay-and,” Mr. Slater said.

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4

The Man with the Odd Right

Eye

“You sure?” Jupiter Jones asked. “You sure it was the same voice, Pete?”

It had taken Pete twenty minutes, jogging down the hill, before he found a gas station where he could call Headquarters. After that it had taken Hans almost as long to drive there from Rocky

Beach and pick him up. The Three Investigators were now sitting in the back of the van on their way home.

Pete had told the other two everything that had happened since he left Ocean World. He was resting, lying on his back, his hands folded under his head.

“Pretty sure,” he said sleepily. “Of course, I can’t sway-er to it. But it sure sounded like the same voy-us.”

Jupiter nodded, pinching his lower lip. His mind was racing like a squirrel on a wheel. Round and round. It didn’t make any sense. Why should a man call and offer them a hundred dollars to find a lost whale when all the time it was in his own swimming pool?

Jupe didn’t ask the question out loud. He thought it was something he could figure out better if he slept on it.

They dropped Pete off at his house first. Then Bob. Then Hans drove Jupe back to the Jones house, across the street from the salvage yard. The Three Investigators had agreed to meet at Headquarters the next morning as soon as they could get away.

Bob was the last to arrive in the morning. Just as he was leaving his house, his mother had called him back to help wash the breakfast dishes.

He left his bicycle in Jupe’s outdoor workshop in a front corner of the yard. Next to the workbench, an old metal grating just seemed to be leaning against a wall of junk. Bob moved the grating aside. Beyond it was the entrance to a large corrugated pipe. This was Tunnel Two. It ran under piles of junk and soon brought him directly below the mobile home trailer,

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which was Headquarters.

Bob pushed up the trap door above his head and climbed out into the office, where his two friends were waiting, for him.

Jupe was sitting behind the desk. Pete was sprawled in an old rocking chair with his feet up on a drawer of the filing cabinet. Neither of them said anything. Bob sat down on a stool and leaned back against the wall.

It was Jupe, as usual, who opened the discussion.

“When you’re trying to solve a problem and your mind comes up against a blank wall,” he said in what Bob recognized as his special thinking-aloud voice, “you are faced with two possible alternatives. You can either bang your head against the wall. Or you can take a detour and try to find your way around it.”

“Meaning what?” Pete asked. “I mean, meaning what in English?”

“Meaning Diego Carmel,” Jupe explained. “Diego Carmel, Charter Boat Fishing.”

“Okay. Call him,” Bob suggested. “I don’t see what he’s got to do with it, but there’s no harm in trying.”

“I’ve been calling him since breakfast,” Jupe admitted. “There’s still no answer.”

“Maybe he’s gone fishing,” Pete suggested. “Sometimes people don’t answer their phone because they’re not there.”

“As to what he has to do with it,” Jupe said, ignoring Pete’s interruption, “we know that someone called Constance Carmel on Monday. They told her about the stranded gray whale, or pilot whale, or whatever — ”

“Fluke,” Pete put in. “Let’s just call him Fluke.”

“About Fluke,” Jupe agreed. “They didn’t call her at Ocean World because she wasn’t there. And they didn’t call her at Arturo Carmel’s because his phone’s been disconnected.”

“And they didn’t call her at Brother Benedict’s monastery,” Bob said helpfully.

“So that leaves only one other Carmel in the phone book. Diego Carmel, who lives in San Pedro and does charter-boat fishing. It’s possible he’s a relative and that someone called Constance there.”

“And Constance Carmel told that Slater guy she was helping him because of her father, right?” said Bob.

“Okay,” Pete agreed. “Maybe Diego is her father. Maybe not. But I still don’t see what he has to do with anything.”

“That’s what I meant about the blank wall,” Jupe explained. “Constance Carmel and Slater won’t talk to us. At least, she’s lying to us and he may be. So if we can’t find out anything from them, perhaps we can find out

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something about them instead. That means we run down to San Pedro and talk to Diego Carmel — assuming he’s connected somehow.”

“And what if he’s out fishing?” Pete asked.

“Then we’ll talk to his neighbors and some of the other fishermen. We’ll find out what they know about Constance, and if Diego happens to have a friend named Slater, and if the two of them might be the men we saw in that boat last Monday when we rescued Fluke.”

“Okay.” Pete stood up. “It’s a pretty long chance, but I vote it’s worth trying. San Pedro, here we come. How do we get there? It’s over thirty miles away. Do we call Worthington?”

Pete was referring to their friend who worked at the Rocky Beach Rent-’n-Ride Auto Rental Company and often gave the boys a ride. But Jupiter reported that Worthington was on vacation.

“Then what?” said Pete. “You know Hans and his brother are much too busy this time of day to —”

“Pancho,” Jupe said. He looked at his watch. “He should be here any minute.”

Pancho was a young Mexican the Three Investigators had helped out of trouble when the police suspected him of stealing spare parts from the garage where he was then working.

He was crazy about cars. He made a living now buying up old wrecks and cannibalizing them, taking the engine from one and the body from another and the wheels from a third, and putting them all together. The automo-biles he assembled in this way looked like something out of the Smithsonian Institution. But Pancho was such a good mechanic and his homemade cars ran so well that college students would come all the way from Santa Barbara or even Berkeley to buy one from him.

He was grateful to the Three Investigators for proving his innocence — if it hadn’t been for them he might be in prison now — and he was usually glad to drive them when asked.

The three boys waited for him in the yard. In a few minutes Pancho drove up in his latest Ford-Chevro-let-VW. It was an even stranger-looking contraption than most of his cars. The back wheels were much larger than the front ones, so that the whole car sloped forward in a way that reminded Pete of a bull with its head lowered, ready to charge.

The car was as powerful as a bull too. As soon as they were on the freeway to San Pedro, Pancho pushed it up to sixty and it loped along as though it still had plenty of speed to spare.

Pancho soon found St. Peter’s Street, the address given in the phone book for Diego Carmel. He let the three boys off there — he wanted to look at several used-car lots in the area — and arranged to pick them up at three

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The Man with the Odd Right Eye

o’clock.

St. Peter's Street was near the docks. Most of it was taken up with battered frame houses and stores selling fishing tackle and live bait or candy and groceries. Diego Carmel's house was halfway down the block. It was better kept than most of the others, a three-story building with an office on the ground level.

CHARTER BOAT, FISHING, it said on the office window. Through the window Jupe could just see a desk with a phone on it, a few wooden chairs, and, hanging from a rack, a row of wet suits and scuba gear.

The boys were starting toward the door of the office when it opened and a man came out, locking the door behind him. He looked at Jupe in a slightly startled way and hastily put the key in his pocket.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

He was very tall and thin with narrow, sloping shoulders and a lined, studious face, and he was wearing a worn blue suit with a white shirt and a dark tie.

Jupiter had made a habit of observing people's clothes and appearance and deducing what he could from them. If anyone had asked him what this man did for a living, he would have guessed he was a bookkeeper or a clerk in a small store. Or maybe a watchmaker, Jupe thought, looking at the man's right eye.

Below that eye, but not below the left one, was a curious fold of puckered skin. It was almost like a scar. Either the man was used to wearing a monocle, Jupe guessed, or, more likely, he spent hours every day with a jeweler's glass screwed into place over his eye.

"We were looking for Mr. Diego Carmel," the First Investigator said politely.

"Yes?"

"You're Mr. Carmel?"

"Captain Carmel. Yes."

The man half turned in the doorway. Jupe could hear the phone ringing in the office behind him. For a moment Captain Carmel looked as though he was going to open the door and answer it, then he shrugged his narrow shoulders in a hopeless way.

"What's the use?" he asked. "I lost my boat last week. In the big storm. People call, they want to go fishing, and I have no boat."

"I'm sorry," Bob said. "We didn't know."

"Do you three boys want to go fishing?"

Captain Carmel spoke perfect English. You couldn't say he had any foreign accent. But there was something in the way he picked his words that made you realize English wasn't his native language.

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Maybe he was from Mexico, Bob thought, and had spent most of his life in the United States.

"No. No, we just wanted to talk to you, Captain Carmel," Jupe said. "We have a message for you from your daughter."

"From my daughter?" He seemed a little surprised. "Ah, you mean from Constance?"

"Yes." Jupe was trying to hide his satisfaction. His hunch had paid off. Captain Carmel was Constance Carmel's father.

"And what was the message?"

"Oh, it wasn't anything very important. We just happened to see her at Ocean World this morning and she asked us to tell you she may be working late tonight."

"Ah." He looked at Jupiter and then at Bob and Pete. "And you?" he asked. "Would you be by way of being The Three Investigators?"

Pete nodded. He wondered how Captain Carmel had recognized them. Then he remembered that Jupe had given Constance one of their Investigators' cards. She must have told her father about them. The three of them — and especially Jupe, with his round face and his stocky build — were easy enough to describe.

"I am very pleased to know you." Captain Carmel held out his hand and they all shook it. He smiled.

"Now, what do you say? Don't you think we could all do with a ham-burger? There is a place down the street here."

Pete thanked him, accepting the invitation. There were very few times when Pete Crenshaw couldn't do with a hamburger.

They found the place, a lunchroom, and settled into a booth. The ham-burgers were very good. While the boys ate, Captain Diego Carmel told them about the storm and the loss of his boat.

He had been bringing a man named Oscar Slater back from a fishing trip to Baja California. The storm caught them without warning some miles off the coast. He did everything he could to get into port but the seas were too heavy. The charter boat swamped and sank. He and Oscar Slater

had been lucky to come out of it alive. They had swum for hours, supported by their life jackets, until a coastguard cutter picked them up.

Pete and Bob told him how sorry they were. Bob was going to ask if the boat was insured, but Jupe interrupted him.

“Your daughter’s a wonderful swimmer, Captain Carmel,” he said. “It’s great the way she trains those whales.”

“Ah. Yes. At Ocean World.”

“Has she been doing it long?” Bob asked. He could see that Jupe wanted to get Captain Carmel to talk about Constance.

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“Several years.”

“It must be a long trip for her, going to Ocean World every day,” Jupe said. “All the way from here.”

“From here?”

“I’m sorry. I guess I thought — Doesn’t she live with you here in San Pedro?” Jupe persisted.

Captain Carmel nodded absently. He seemed to be thinking about some-thing else. He finished his coffee.

“As a matter of fact,” he said slowly, with a curious emphasis as though he wanted to make sure the Three Investigators heard and remembered every word he was saying, “it just so happens that Mr. Slater is very interested in training whales too. Most interested. He has a house in the hills above Santa Monica.” He gave them Slater’s address, which they already knew. “And he has a big swimming pool in the back. A very big swimming pool.”

He didn’t say anything else until they were out on the street. Then he shook hands with them again and said he hoped he’d see them again soon.

The boys thanked him for the hamburgers and said they certainly hoped so too. Jupe was frowning and pinching his lower lip as he watched the tall, thin man walk away.

“Nice guy,” Pete said. “Too bad about his boat.”

“Mmmm.” Jupe didn’t seem to be listening. He was still pinching his lip a few minutes later when Pancho picked them up to drive them back to Rocky Beach.

“I guess you waste your time, huh?” Pancho said sympathetically as he turned onto the freeway.

“Waste our time? How?” Bob asked. He and Pete were sitting in the back. It was like riding on the top of a bus with Pancho and Jupe in front of them on the lower deck.

“Don’t find Captain Diego Carmel.”

“Sure we found him,” Pete said. “He bought us a hamburger.”

“Huh?” Pancho half turned in his seat, then concentrated on the road again. “Of course you don’t find him. I run into some Mexican friends at a used-car lot. They tell me all about poor Captain Carmel. His boat sunk.”

“Sure,” Bob agreed. “He told us himself — ”

“Somebody maybe tell you. But not Captain Carmel.”

“Why not?” It was the first time Jupe had spoken since they left the captain. He was looking at Pancho in a quizzical way as though he half expected what the answer would be.

“Because Captain Carmel is in hospital,” Pancho told him. “Very sick. He got pneumonia, all that time in the water. Is in intensive care.”

He shrugged in sympathy.

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The Man with the Odd Right Eye

“Poor Captain Diego Carmel. He can’t talk to anybody.”

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5

Time for a Showdown

“If he wasn’t Captain Carmel,” Pete said, “why did he pretend to be?”

The Three Investigators were back at Headquarters, sitting in the office.

“And who was he really?” Bob asked.

Jupe didn’t answer. He was leaning back in the swivel chair behind the desk, and his round face was all puckered up with concentration.

“I hate to say this,” he admitted after a moment. “But I’m an absolute idiot, a first-class, credulous, stupid, illogical jerk.”

Bob wanted to ask why, but he couldn't think of any way of putting the question without sounding as though he agreed with him. He waited for Jupe to explain himself.

"Because I didn't listen to my brain," Jupe went on. "I didn't believe my own eyes. When I looked at that man who met us outside Captain Carmel's office, I was sure he wasn't a charter-boat captain. He didn't dress like a charter-boat captain. He didn't have the hands or the build of a charter-boat captain. And did you notice his right eye?"

"You mean that sort of heavy crease underneath it?" Bob asked. "Yes, I did notice that. I thought at first — You remember that Englishman we met last year?"

Jupe nodded. "The one who wore a monocle. That's what I thought too at first. Then I thought he might be a jeweler or a watchmaker. Then when he was so friendly and he bought us a hamburger, I just stopped thinking about it altogether. I sat there like a half-witted owl, listening to him — "

His cheeks were pink as he thought about it. He seemed to be blushing with shame at the memory.

"And I believed him. I lapped it all up. I — "

"We all did." Bob wished Jupe would stop blaming himself. So, okay, they had been taken in. But thanks to Pancho, at least they now knew it. The thing to do was to go on from there. "The point is not that the guy lied to us. But — "

Time for a Showdown

"But what?" Pete prompted him.

"But that a lot of the things he told us were true. He told us Captain Carmel lost his boat in a storm. And we know that's true because of Pancho's Mexican friends. He told us Oscar Slater's address. His right address. And then at the end — "

Bob didn't have Jupe's deductive powers but he had a good memory. "At the end he said Mr. Slater was very interested in training whales and had a house with a big swimming pool in back."

"And that's certainly true," Pete agreed.

"It's funny the way he told us that," Jupe said. "He made such a point of it. He wanted us to know it. But that still doesn't explain why he pretended to be Constance's father, unless . . ."

He was silent for a minute, thinking hard. He remembered the way the man had come out of the office, locking the door behind him, and the startled surprise on his face when he saw the boys standing there.

“Unless he had been snooping around Captain Carmel’s office,” Jupe went on. “Maybe even searching the whole house.”

“What for?” Bob asked. “I mean, I don’t think the guy was a thief, do you? What do you figure he was searching for?”

“Information,” Jupe said. “Maybe he went to San Pedro for the same reason we did. To see what he could find out about Constance and Captain Carmel. Then, when he came out and saw us watching him, he said the first thing that came into his head to explain what he was doing there. He said he was Captain Carmel.”

The First Investigator stood up. “Okay,” he said. “Let’s saddle and ride.”

Pete took his feet off the file drawer and stood up too.

“We’re not going to bike all the way up to Slater’s house, are we?” he asked plaintively. “Because if we are, I vote we take some supplies with us. A couple of Aunt Mathilda’s sandwiches. I could go for a ham and Swiss cheese on rye — ”

“No.” Jupe was already lifting the trap door that led down into Tunnel Two. “We’re not going to Slater’s. We’re going back to Ocean World to talk to Constance Carmel.”

He paused before stepping down into the tunnel.

“It’s time for a showdown,” Jupiter said.

The Three Investigators had plenty of time to cycle up to Ocean World before it closed. They were waiting beside the white pickup truck in the parking lot when they saw Constance Carmel come out through the gates.

It was a chilly evening. She was carrying a terry-cloth robe folded over her arm, but apart from that she seemed as indifferent to the cold as a penguin.

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Time for a Showdown

She was wearing her usual swimsuit and open sandals.

“Hi.” She stopped when she saw the three boys. “You looking for me?”

“Miss Carmel.” Jupe stepped forward. “I know it’s kind of late and you’re probably tired. But I wonder if you could spare us a few minutes.”

“I’m not tired.” She looked down at Jupe as he stood in front of her. She was a good six inches taller than he was. “But I am rather busy. I’ll tell you what. Why don’t you come back tomorrow?”

“We’d sooner talk to you now.” The First Investigator drew himself up to his full five feet four. “It’s about — ”

“Tomorrow,” she repeated. “Say around noon.” She walked forward as though expecting Jupe to move out of her way.

The First Investigator stood his ground. He took a deep breath and said a single word. He said it loud and clear.

“Fluke.”

Constance Carmel stopped. She put her hands on her hips, staring down at Jupe in a rather threatening way.

“Why are you after Fluke?” she asked.

“We’re not after him.” Jupe tried to smile. “We’re very glad he’s safe in Mr. Slater’s pool. And we know you’re taking good care of him. But there are a few things we’d like to talk to you about.”

“We want to help you, Miss Carmel,” Bob put in politely. “Honestly we do.”

“How?” Constance Carmel turned on him with that same challenging stare. “How can you help me?”

“We think somebody’s been spying on you,” Pete told her. “We saw a man come out of Captain Carmel’s office in San Pedro today, and when he saw us watching him he pretended to be your father.”

“And he couldn’t be your father, could he?” Jupe pointed out. “Because your father lost his boat in the storm last week and he’s in the hospital.”

Constance Carmel hesitated. She seemed to be thinking it all over, making up her mind. Then she smiled.

“Well,” she said. “You really are investigators, aren’t you?”

“Like it says on our card.” Pete smiled back at her.

“Okay.” Constance Carmel felt in the pocket of her robe and found her car keys. “Why don’t we take a ride and talk it all over?”

“Thank you, Miss Carmel,” Jupe agreed. “That’s very kind of you.”

“Constance,” she told him, unlocking the door. “Just call me Constance, and I’ll call you Jupiter.”

“Jupe.”

“Okay. Jupe.” She looked at Pete. “And you’re Bob?”

“Pete.”

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Time for a Showdown

“I’m Bob,” Bob explained.

“Jupe and Pete and Bob. Got it.” Constance smiled at each of them in turn. “Okay. Let’s go.”

There was only room for three of them in the front of the truck. “I’ll ride in back,” Pete volunteered. “You tell me all about it later, Jupe.”

Jupe sat next to Constance with Bob beside him. She was silent and thoughtful as she turned toward the Coast Highway.

“That man you saw coming out of my father’s office?” she asked, stopping for a red light. “What did he look like?”

Jupe described the tall, thin man with the crease under his eye. He told Constance everything the man had said to them.

Constance shook her head. “It doesn’t sound like anyone I know,” she said. “Maybe a friend of Dad’s. Or ...” She paused. “Or someone trying to make trouble for him.”

The light changed. Constance drove on. “Okay,” she said. “What do you want me to tell you?”

“Suppose we start at the beginning,” Jupe suggested. “On Monday morn-ing, when Mr. Slater called you in San Pedro and told you about the stranded whale he’d spotted through his binoculars while he was out in his boat.”

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6

The Lost Cargo

“I had just come back from the hospital, visiting my father,” Constance said. “The phone was ringing in his office and I answered it. It was Oscar Slater. He comes from down South somewhere, Alabama, I think. I’d met him two or three times because Dad had taken him out charter fishing before. Before the last time, I mean, when Dad lost his boat. Slater said he’d found a stranded whale on the beach.”

She went on to tell them how she had helped rescue the whale. The first thing she did was round up two Mexican friends who owned a tow truck. They rigged a big canvas sling to the crane and drove down to the cove, where Oscar Slater was waiting for her.

Once they had hoisted the whale into the truck, Constance packed wet foam rubber around it and they took it up to Slater’s house and set it free in the swimming pool. The Mexican friends left in the tow truck and Constance swam around with Fluke, as she had decided to call him, making friends with him and getting him used to the pool.

Oscar Slater drove off to buy some live fish at a storehouse Constance knew about, and everything went fine until he got back. Fluke was already responding to Constance’s friendliness and seemed quite happy in his new surroundings.

“Of course, all whales are intelligent,” Constance explained, starting up the ramp to Santa Monica. “More intelligent than human beings in some ways because they have a larger brain. But I could tell at once that Fluke was exceptional. I’ve been training and working with all kinds of whales for years, but Fluke was the fastest learner I’ve ever met. He’s only about two years old, which would make him around five in human terms, because most whales are fully grown by the time they’re six or seven. But he’s much brighter than any ten-year-old child I’ve ever known.”

Constance went back to describing that first day at Oscar Slater’s house. She had fed Fluke the fish that Slater had brought back. Then she decided

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to return to San Pedro and stop by the hospital for news of her father. She asked Slater to drive her. He was standing by the pool with the sun gleaming on his bald head, and he was looking at her in a calculating way.

“I’ll get Ocean World to send some people over tomorrow,” she told him. “They’ll probably return Fluke to the ocean, or they may decide to keep him for a day or two. In any case, he’ll be fine now.”

She started away from the pool toward the driveway. Oscar Slater stopped her.

“Just a moment, Constance. I think there’s something you ought to know. Something about your father.”

She had never exactly liked Oscar Slater. Until then she had never thought about him much. Now she felt she was really seeing him for the first time. She realized she didn't like him at all.

"What about my father?" she asked.

"He's a professional smuggler. He's been taking tape recorders and pocket radios and all kinds of electronic equipment into Mexico for years and selling it there for three or four times what he paid for it."

Constance waited. She didn't want to believe what Slater was telling her. But she had heard her father drop an unguarded word now and then. And, well, she loved him and he had been a wonderful father to her; he had taken good care of her since her mother died. But no one could pretend he was exactly a solid citizen.

"He had a particularly big load on the last trip," Slater went on. "Mostly pocket calculators, which fetch a high price in Mexico. And when the boat sank, they went down with it."

Constance waited for Slater to get to the point.

"There must be twenty or thirty thousand dollars' worth of them in that wreck," Slater told her. "And half of the money tied up in them was mine. Your old man and I were partners on the deal. Those calculators are sitting safely down there in a waterproof container. And I don't intend to lose my investment. I'm going to salvage that wreck and recover those things. And you're going to help me."

His slow southern voice was threatening now.

"You and that whale, Fluke, or whatever you call him. You are going to help me, aren't you, Constance?"

She thought it over carefully before she gave Slater her answer.

She was sure that from the American government's point of view, her father had done nothing criminal. There was no law against taking pocket calculators or tape recorders out of the United States once you'd paid for them. If Slater was trying to blackmail her by threatening to make trouble for her father with the American police, he was wasting his time. And there

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was nothing the Mexican authorities could do unless they actually caught her father smuggling things into Mexico.

But the problem was that her father, in his happy-go-lucky way, had let the insurance on his boat lapse. He had no medical insurance either, and his intensive care at the hospital was costing

hundreds of dollars a day. If she helped Slater recover those things from the wreck, her father was entitled to his share of them. Ten thousand dollars would go a long way to help pay the hospital bills.

And she wouldn't be doing anything illegal either. She didn't like Slater. She liked him less and less every minute she spent with him. But what harm could there be in doing a salvage job for him?

"So I agreed," Constance finished as she drove up into the hills. "And that's the way things are now. I'm trying to train Fluke to find that wreck for us."

Jupe hadn't said a word since they had turned onto the Coast Highway. He was silent for another minute.

"So that's what the straps were for," he said thoughtfully. "That harness you were fitting on Fluke's head. You're going to attach a television camera to him. And a whale can dive much deeper and swim much faster than any scuba diver possibly could. So Fluke will be able to cover much more of the ocean floor much more quickly, and there's a far better chance that the camera on his head will pick up a sight of your father's boat on the bottom of the ocean."

Constance smiled. "You know," she said, "you're pretty bright, aren't you? Pretty bright for a human being anyway."

Jupe smiled back at her. "We can't all be as intelligent as whales," he said.

"Okay." Constance glanced at him in her direct, friendly way. "Suppose you tell me your story now. Why are you so interested in Fluke? What is it you're investigating?"

Jupe thought of the anonymous caller who had promised them a hundred dollars. He wanted to be as frank with Constance as she had been with him, and he didn't see that he would be betraying any confidences if he told her the truth.

"We've got a client," he explained. "I can't tell you his name, because I don't know what his name is. But he hired us as investigators and promised us quite a large fee to find the lost whale and return it to the ocean."

"Return it to the ocean?" Constance asked. "Why? What for?"

"I don't know," Jupiter admitted. "At least I don't know yet."

"Well, you've done half your job already, haven't you? You've found Fluke." Constance pulled up in front of the expensive-looking ranch house

belonging to Oscar Slater. “So why don’t you help me finish the job?”

“Sure,” Bob answered. “How can we help?”

“Have you ever done any scuba diving?”

The Three Investigators had. Jupe explained that Pete was the best at it, but they had all taken a scuba course and been checked out by the instructor in their final tests.

“Great,” Constance said. “Then let’s work together. I’m going to put Fluke back in the ocean as soon as I can. As soon as I feel he likes me enough not to run away. After that I could use your help in finding Dad’s boat. Okay?”

“Okay,” Bob and Jupe replied together. It sounded great to them. They would not only be earning their fee, but they would have all the added fun and excitement of searching the ocean for the wrecked boat and recovering the cargo on board.

“Then come on.” Constance opened the door of the truck. “Come on in and meet Fluke again.”

The little whale was dozing, floating half submerged in the pool, with his closed eyes and his blowhole above the water. He awoke at once when Constance turned on the underwater lights. He swam to her and lifted his head and wagged his flippers with pleasure.

He seemed to recognize the Three Investigators too. When they knelt at the edge of the pool, he went to each of them in turn and nuzzled them gently with his pursed lips.

“Wow,” Pete said. “It’s almost like — I mean, do you think he really remembers us?”

“Of course he does,” Constance told him impatiently. “You saved his life. You think he’d forget a thing like that?”

“But he’s only — ”

Bob could see that Pete was going to say Fluke was only a whale. He nudged him quickly to shut him up.

Then, remembering Pete had missed all that Constance had told them on the ride, he drew him aside and filled him in.

Constance fed Fluke, then started to put on her flippers. She was slip-ping her feet into them when she suddenly turned with a look of startled annoyance.

Two men had come out of the ranch house and were walking toward her. Jupe recognized Oscar Slater from Pete’s description of him.

All three of the Investigators recognized the other man at once. He was very tall and thin with narrow shoulders and, even in the underwater light from the pool, they could see the crease — almost like a scar — under his right eye.

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“You agreed to stay out of this,” Constance told Slater angrily. “Stay away from the pool until I’ve finished training Fluke and I’m ready to start searching for Dad’s boat.”

Slater didn’t answer her. He was looking at the Three Investigators.

“Who are these kids?” he asked in his slow, drawn-out way. He made it sound like “kee-uds.”

“They’re friends of mine,” Constance explained coldly. “Scuba divers. I’m going to need help and they’ve agreed to work with me.”

Slater nodded. Jupe could tell he didn’t like it. He didn’t want them around. But if Constance said she needed them, he would have to accept them.

“And who’s your friend?” Constance glanced at the tall, thin man who was standing beside Slater.

“My name is Donner,” the man introduced himself. “Paul Donner. I’m an old friend of Mr. Slater’s. And also a friend of your father’s, Miss Carmel.” He paused, smiling. “An old friend from Mexico.”

“Oh. Okay.”

Jupe was sure that the name meant nothing to Constance, that she had never seen the man before. But he could guess from the way Donner smiled when he said “from Mexico” that he was telling Constance not to worry. He knew all about her father’s little smuggling game and he was on her side.

Paul Donner was still smiling as he looked at the Three Investigators. “So you’re scuba divers,” he said. “Do you work at Ocean World with Miss Carmel?”

“Now and then,” Constance told him. “When I need extra help. Oh, sorry. I forgot to introduce you. Jupe and Pete and Bob.”

“Glad to meet you.” There was not a trace of recognition in the tall, thin man’s eyes as he shook hands with them.

Either he had a worse memory than an absentminded sleepwalker, Jupe thought, or else Paul Donner didn’t want Slater to know that he had ever seen the boys before.

Why not? Jupe wondered. What was Paul Donner trying to hide?

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A Dangerous Corner

“Paul Donner,” Jupe said. “Where does Paul Donner fit into the mystery?”

He wasn’t really asking a question. He was just thinking aloud.

It was the next day and the Three Investigators were waiting impatiently by the gate of the salvage yard. Constance was taking the afternoon off from Ocean World and had arranged to pick the boys up at the yard after lunch.

“Somehow I think he’s part of the story,” Jupe went on. “Constance had never heard of him before she met him at Slater’s yesterday, but he seemed to know all about her father’s little trips to Mexico.”

“And he was snooping around Captain Carmel’s house,” Bob added.

“Exactly,” Jupe agreed. “And he’s a friend of Slater’s, so he may have been the other man in the boat that first morning when Slater saw us rescue Fluke.”

“He isn’t a very open friend then,” said Bob. “He didn’t let Slater know he’d met us before in San Pedro.”

“There’s one thing for sure,” Pete put in. “He knows more about us than we know about him. He recognized us at once as the Three Investigators when he met us in San Pedro.”

“If you ask me,” Jupe said thoughtfully, although nobody had, “I think he knows about everything. About the smuggling and the storm and those lost pocket calculators, and Slater’s plan to use Fluke. He knows, but he doesn’t seem to fit into it anywhere — ”

He broke off as Constance’s white pickup truck stopped at the gate. The Three Investigators climbed aboard. Jupe was carrying a small metal box as he settled into the seat beside Constance. He handed it to her.

“I hope it’s what you wanted,” he said.

“You finished it already?” She was obviously pleased.

Jupe nodded. He had gotten up at five o’clock and spent all morning carrying out the instructions she had given him the night before. He showed Constance how the box opened.

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Inside was a battery-powered tape recorder with a microphone and a speaker. Jupe had fitted two thin plastic disks into the side of the case so that the recorder could pick up or broadcast even when the box was sealed.

He had tested it in the bathtub before Constance arrived and it had worked. The recorder functioned perfectly underwater and not a single drop had leaked into the case.

“You’re a real whiz at electronics, aren’t you?” Constance complimented him.

“I don’t know. It’s just a hobby.” Jupe privately thought he was practically Thomas Edison when it came to inventing and making things in his workshop. But he didn’t want to boast about it. He preferred to let his products speak for themselves.

The Three Investigators had brought their scuba masks and flippers with them. As soon as they arrived at the ranch house, they changed into their swimsuits and gathered at the pool.

There was no sign of Slater or of his friend Paul Donner.

“I warned them they’d better leave us alone,” Constance said. “If they don’t, I’ll — ” She didn’t finish the sentence.

“You wouldn’t really quit, would you?” Bob prompted her anxiously.

She shrugged. “I can’t quit. Dad needs the money too badly. We’ve got to find that cargo.”

“How is your father?” Pete asked.

“He’s still pretty sick. But he’s a tough old man. A real Mexican hombre,” she said proudly.

“The doctors think he’ll be okay. They only let me see him for a few minutes every day, and he can’t talk much. When he does, it’s usually about the same thing. He keeps saying — ” She paused, pulling on her flippers.

“You’re investigators,” she went on. “Maybe you can make sense of it. He keeps saying, ‘Look out for the two Poles. Keep them in line.’ ”

She slipped into the pool and Fluke glided eagerly to greet her.

“The two Poles,” Jupe said, pinching his lower lip. “Keep them in line.” He looked at Bob and Pete. “Suggest anything to you?”

“Poles,” Bob repeated. “I guess Paul Donner could be Polish. He does have, well, not a foreign accent. But the way he talks — ”

“Good observation,” Jupe told him. “It’s the precise way he picks his words. But if he’s one of the two Poles Constance ought to keep in line, who’s the other one?”

“Beats me,” Pete admitted. “Wow! Look at that!”

Fluke was racing around and around the pool while Constance rode lightly stretched out on his back with her arms around him.

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For the next half hour the three boys watched Constance and the little whale play together. It looked like play, but Bob knew it was really work. She was training Fluke, not so much to obey commands as to know from her slightest gesture, the expression on her face, what she wanted him to do and to respond to her immediately.

They were like close friends, Pete thought. So close they seemed to be able to read each other’s minds and share the same impulses, think and move together as one person.

After Constance had fed Fluke, she suggested the Three Investigators join her in the pool so that Fluke could get used to them and be friendly with them too.

It was a little scary at first, Pete found as he swam beside Fluke and felt the whale nudging playfully against him. Fluke seemed so big, so solid and powerful. But he was so gentle too. It wasn’t long before all three boys felt thoroughly at home with him.

“You’re doing fine,” Constance congratulated them as they climbed out of the pool. “Now let’s try that recorder.”

Fluke was floating at the other end of the pool. By now Constance had taught him to stay there and wait until she called him.

She took the metal box and switched it on to Record. Then, after fastening a weighted belt around her waist, she dived to the bottom of the pool.

After a second Fluke dived too and stayed at his end, lying flat on the bottom.

The Three Investigators watched Constance, fascinated. It was incredible how long she could stay underwater, Jupe thought. She was resting there as comfortably as Aunt Mathilda in her living room. Pete could see that as she held the recorder out in front of her, she was snapping the fingers of her other hand.

She stopped. She was smiling, cocking her head to one side.

After what seemed a long time but was probably no more than two minutes, she swam to the surface and took a deep, controlled breath.

“I think I got it,” she said. “Let’s see what it sounds like.”

Jupe wound back the tape and switched the recorder to Play.

There was no sound from the speaker at first, except for a gentle rippling. Then the three boys heard a quick clicking sound. That was Constance, Pete realized, snapping her fingers underwater.

The snapping stopped, then quite clearly over the speaker came a birdlike chirping. It rose and fell, the pitch constantly changing, and was accompanied, the way a Spanish song might be accompanied by castanets, by a sharp clacking sound.

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It wasn't exactly like a bird, Jupe thought. It was too deep-throated, too vibrant. It was — it was like nothing he had ever heard before.

It ended after a minute, and Constance turned off the recorder.

“That was Fluke?” Bob asked in an awed whisper. “That was Fluke singing to you?”

“Singing. Talking. Whatever you want to call it,” Constance told him. “All whales communicate with one another by sound. And of course sound carries a long way under water. We've never been able to learn or understand their language, but if we did we'd probably find it's as meaningful and complicated as ours is.”

She paused, taking off her flippers.

“Except I don't think they ever quarrel with one another,” she went on. “Just as they never fight. They're much too civilized. And I'm sure they never lie to one another either, the way we do. They've got too much sense. After all, what's the point of having a language if you use it to twist things instead of to say what you mean?”

“Could we hear it again?” Pete asked.

“In a moment. First I want Fluke to hear it.”

Jupe wound back the tape and switched to Play. Then Constance knelt down and held the metal box under the water. The Three Investigators watched Fluke.

He was still lying restfully on the bottom of the pool. His body suddenly seemed to quiver. His flippers straightened away from his sides. Then, in a single powerful movement, he glided the length of the pool toward them. He looked as though he were smiling, Bob thought, the way he had when they were trying to rescue him on the beach.

Fluke slowed as he reached the metal case. He hesitated. Then he gently rubbed his lips against it.

“Good,” Constance said, lifting the case out of the water. “Good Fluke. Good baby. Good little boy.”

She was smiling with pleasure as she threw up a fish for him and he caught it in midair.

“That’s what I wanted to see,” she told the boys. “It looks as though it’s going to be okay. If he strays away from us out at sea, we can call him back by playing his own voice to him underwater.”

“I could re-record it if you like,” Jupe suggested. “Play it over and over so we’d have a whole half hour of his voice on one tape.”

Constance thought that was a good idea. She gave the metal case back to Jupe.

“I want to go to the hospital and visit Dad,” she said. “I’ll drop you three off at the yard on the way.”

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She had left the pickup truck on the street outside the ranch house. Pete climbed into the back again, and the other two boys sat in front with Constance.

The road was level until the first corner, then it started to wind steeply down the hill. Constance was going awfully fast, Jupe thought. He wondered why she didn’t brake on the curves. She was usually a skillful, careful driver. But the way she was going now, hurtling around the bends, she seemed to be trying to beat the speed record.

Then Jupe saw that Constance was using the brake. She had it pushed all the way down to the floor.

There was a sharp, almost right-angle turn ahead.

The truck was rushing toward it like a bolting horse. Instead of slowing, the truck was going faster and faster.

Constance reached for the hand brake and eased it back. The truck was still racing along. She wrenched the emergency brake full on. The speedometer was still climbing. Forty. Forty-five. Fifty miles an hour.

“Is there something — ” Bob asked in a choking voice. “Something wrong with the brakes?”

Constance nodded, gripping the stick shift. “They don’t work,” she announced briskly. “Sorry.” She changed rapidly down to low gear, trying to slow their speed by using the engine as a brake. Jupe could feel the truck tremble like a boat in a storm, but a glance at the dashboard told him it was still going fifty.

Straight ahead of them, where the road turned sharply to the right, was an old house set back among some trees.

Surrounding the house was a solid stone wall.

Traveling so fast, Jupe thought, there was no way the truck could make the turn.

There was no way it could do anything but crash head-on into that wall!

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Constance was wrenching the truck into the center of the road. Then far over into the left lane. If a car came around that corner now, both vehicles would end up a tangle of twisted metal.

But there was nothing ahead. Nothing but that stone wall that looked as solid and unyielding as a cliff.

Bob and Jupe were bracing their legs against the dashboard, waiting for the impact, the shock, the sudden rending crash.

Constance tore the wheel hard over to the right. At the same instant she threw the gear shift into reverse.

The wall still seemed to be rushing toward Jupe ... except that — and it was all happening so fast that every impression was like the flash of a strobe light — except that it seemed to be slanting to the left now.

Instead of looming straight ahead through the windshield, the wall was turning away. It was out of sight for an instant, blocked by the window post, then was suddenly there again only a few inches from the side window.

The engine was grinding, screaming in protest. Bob and Jupe gripped their seats, hanging on with all their strength to keep from being flung side-ways against Constance.

She was still holding the wheel hard over to the right. The tires squealed like police sirens as they skidded across the macadam. The stone wall seemed to reach out, trying to tear off the door, the whole side of the truck.

Constance straightened the wheel.

The truck lurched on for another ten yards. It skidded slowly to a shuddering stop. The engine stalled.

No one said anything for at least a minute. Constance lowered her head, resting it on the steering wheel. She was breathing deeply, taking long controlled breaths the way she did after a dive.

“Okay,” she said. Her voice was a little hoarse but quite steady. “Let’s all pile out and see what the damage is. We’ll have to get out your side, Bob.”

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My door’s jammed.”

For a moment, after he had climbed down onto the road, Bob had to hang on to the side of the truck to stay on his feet. His legs wouldn’t support him. He didn’t seem to have any feeling in them.

Then he remembered Pete.

He stumbled to the tailgate and lowered it.

Pete was lying face down on the metal floor. His arms and legs were stretched out like a starfish. He wasn’t moving.

“Hey, Jupe,” Bob yelled. “Come here.”

Bob climbed into the back of the truck and Jupe followed him. They both knelt beside Pete. Bob gently lifted his friend’s wrist and felt for his pulse.

Pete stirred slightly at his touch. He opened his eyes.

“Hurry up and tell me,” he whispered urgently. “Am I alive or dead?”

“You seem to be alive.” Bob couldn’t help laughing with relief. “Your pulse is fine and your sense of humor’s undamaged.”

“Sense of humor, my foot.” Pete rolled over and sat up, feeling his arms and legs for any broken bones. He didn’t find any. “What in thunder and lightning was going on? You all go crazy up front, or were you just practicing for the stock-car races?”

Jupe shook his head. It must have been worse for Pete, he realized, being flung around in the open back of the truck without any idea of what was going on.

“My guess is that someone disconnected the brakes,” he said.

“On purpose?” Pete was on his feet now.

“Let’s go and find out,” Bob suggested.

It didn’t take them long to discover that Jupe’s guess was right. Con-stance had the hood open by the time they joined her, and they could all see at once that the connecting rods of the foot pedal and the hand brake had been neatly cut with a hacksaw.

“Somebody could have done it while the truck was parked outside Slater’s house,” Jupe told Constance. “They had plenty of time.”

“Somebody?” Constance demanded. “Who?”

But that was a question the First Investigator couldn’t answer yet. It was a question that needed a lot of careful, deductive thought.

For the next couple of hours, while Constance called her friends with the tow truck, while they waited for them, while she dropped the Three Investigators off at the salvage yard before going on to San Pedro, Jupe did his best to give it that kind of thought.

But it wasn’t until he was leaning back in the old swivel chair behind his desk at Headquarters that he felt he could really put his brain into action

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and concentrate the way he needed to.

“Somebody.” Jupe was thinking aloud so Bob and Pete could follow his deductions and help him if they had any suggestions. “Somebody doesn’t want us to find the wreck of Captain Carmel’s boat. They were prepared to try and kill us this afternoon — or cause us a serious accident anyway — to stop Constance, to stop all of us from going ahead with our plan to train Fluke to search for the boat.”

He was silent for a moment, pinching his lip.

“Now,” he went on. “There seem to be three possible suspects. Three that we know about, anyway.

“One.” He held up a pudgy finger. “Oscar Slater. But Slater seems to have everything to gain by finding that wreck. Not only that, but every-thing he’s done — kidnapping Fluke, persuading Constance to train him — everything seems to show he wants us to succeed.”

Jupe paused again.

“So let’s go on to number two.” A second pudgy finger joined the first one. “Paul Donner. What do we know about him? When we met him in San Pedro, he knew our names. He knew we were the Three Investigators. How did he know that?”

No one answered.

“Paul Donner told us a lot of lies, pretending to be Constance’s father,” Jupe went on. “But he also told us some things that were true. He told us Captain Carmel was taking Oscar Slater on a fishing trip to Mexico when his boat sank. No, wait a minute.” Jupe searched his memory. “He said that he was bringing Oscar Slater back from a fishing trip to Baja California when the boat went down.”

Bob and Pete knew Jupe was right. He was always right when it came to remembering exactly what someone had said.

Jupe sat there for a moment without moving, then he picked up the phone and dialed.

“Hullo.” Constance’s voice answered over the loudspeaker.

“It’s Jupe.”

“Hullo, Jupe. You okay? You sound sort of worried.”

“I’m not worried,” Jupe told her. “I’m just puzzled.”

“You’re puzzled.”

“There are a couple of questions,” Jupe said, “you might be able to help us with.”

“Go ahead.”

“When we gave you our Three Investigators card in your office at Ocean World, did you show it to anyone else or tell anyone about us?”

“No.”

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“What did you do with the card?”

“I guess I left it on my desk.”

“Could anyone have seen it there?”

“Sure. I suppose so. I share that office with some of the other trainers so it’s hardly ever kept locked.”

“So almost anyone who had seen us go into your office could have waited until you left and just walked in and seen the card on your desk.”

“I guess they could. I didn’t really look at the card until you three had gone, then I — ”

“Then you got worried about Fluke and you drove straight over to Oscar Slater’s house to make sure he was okay.”

“That’s right. How did you know?”

“We were in the parking lot when you drove by.”

“So you were. I almost ran over you, didn’t I?” Constance paused. “What’s the other question, Jupe?”

“It’s about your father. When he was taking Slater down to Baja Cali-fornia to sell those pocket calculators — ”

“Yes.”

“How long had he been gone before he ran into that storm and lost his boat?”

There was quite a long silence. Constance seemed to be trying to remember.

“I don’t know,” she admitted. “You see, when I’m working, it’s too far to commute to San Pedro, so I stay with a girlfriend in Santa Monica. I usually went home to San Pedro to see Dad every Monday on my day off. But I had to go to San Diego about that time. So I hadn’t seen Dad for two weeks when the hospital called and told me — ”

Her voice broke off. She was obviously recalling the shock of that terrible call.

Jupe waited sympathetically until she spoke again.

“I see what you’re getting at,” Constance said in her usual brisk voice. “Dad and Slater could have been out at sea all that time and I wouldn’t have known.”

“It’s possible, isn’t it?” the First Investigator agreed.

“You think it’s important?”

Jupe did. After Constance had hung up, he sat for several minutes thinking how important it could be. Had Captain Carmel and Oscar Slater actually reached Baja? Were they on the way back when they ran into the storm? He had to find out.

How?

He looked at Pete. "How about a quick trip to Malibu?" he asked.

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"Sure." Pete was on his feet at once. "That's the first sensible thing you've said — "

"How about you, Bob?"

"Okay."

Bob had an idea what Jupe was suggesting and he thought it was a good plan. But his mind was still busy with what the First Investigator had said earlier.

"There are three possible suspects," Jupe had announced.

He had mentioned two of them.

Oscar Slater.

And Paul Donner.

"Wait a second, Jupe," Bob said. "Who's the third suspect you were talking about?"

But the First Investigator had already opened the trap door.

He disappeared into the tunnel without answering Bob's question.

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Help from Hector Sebastian

"Brown rice," proudly announced Hoang Van Don, the Vietnamese houseman who worked for Hector Sebastian.

He set a huge steaming bowl on the patio table and smiled broadly at the Three Investigators.

"Very healthy," Don said. "Has all natural vitamins. No chemicals. No preservatives."

And no taste either, I'll bet, Pete thought, leaning forward and sniffing it.

He almost missed the days when Don had taken all his recipes from the late-night television commercials. At least fish fingers and frozen pizzas were better than the goo he was serving now that he had started watching the afternoon shows. On afternoon TV, Don had discovered a health-food guru who gave lectures on organic turnips and natural carrot juice.

“Natural brown rice, anyone?” Hector Sebastian asked. No one answered as he spooned it out onto their plates.

They were all sitting in Mr. Sebastian’s enormous living room, with its long row of windows overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The house in Malibu had once been a restaurant called Charlie’s Place. Hector Sebastian had bought it after his mystery novels had started to sell to the movies. He was gradually converting the building into what he called a stately home.

“Notice anything new?” he asked Jupe now. “See how much progress I’ve made since the last time you were here?”

Jupe looked around the almost empty barn of a room, which had once been the restaurant’s main dining room.

“You’ve had the floor refinished, Mr. Sebastian,” he said. “And you’ve — you’ve bought a rocking chair.”

Hector Sebastian nodded proudly. “I didn’t exactly buy it,” he admitted. “The studio gave it to me. That was the rocking chair they used in my last movie, *Chill Factors*. You remember the scene where the old lady gets

Help from Hector Sebastian

strangled with a wire clothes hanger?”

Jupe remembered it vividly. She had been sitting in that rocking chair when the strangler crept up behind her.

He wondered why anyone would want a memento like that in his stately home. But he had learned to accept Hector Sebastian’s mild eccentricities.

In fact, Jupe admired and was grateful to the writer for them. Because one of the eccentricities was that he was always willing to put aside his own work to listen to the Three Investigators tell him about their latest case, and to help them if he could.

For years Mr. Sebastian had been a private detective in New York. He had started writing mystery novels while he was recuperating from a leg injury. His books had been so successful that he had given up his career as a private eye. He was well-known now as a novelist and screenwriter and often appeared on talk shows.

But he was still interested in anything to do with detective work. Perhaps he missed the days when he had tailed suspects himself, had stood for hours on street corners watching for a single face in the crowd, had known the excitement of trapping an embezzler or a blackmailer.

He had been delighted to see the Three Investigators when they arrived at his house late in the afternoon. He had listened attentively while they filled him in with a general outline of their latest case.

Then, without Jupe even having to suggest it, Mr. Sebastian had gone to the phone in his study and made several calls. The Three Investigators were waiting anxiously for the reply to those calls now, information they hoped Mr. Sebastian could get for them because they couldn't easily get it themselves.

Pete dug into the mound of brown rice on his plate.

He lifted a forkful to his mouth and chewed it.

“Well?” Don demanded. “How you like, Mr. Crenshaw?”

“It's — ” Pete didn't know how to describe it. “Well, it's certainly interesting,” he admitted.

“Is not supposed to be interesting.” The Vietnamese was indignant. “In-teresting food is bad for stomach. That is what guru say on television.”

“But if food isn't interesting,” Bob protested, “people won't want to eat it. Then they'll starve to death.”

“You say that because you think wrong thoughts,” Don told him sternly. “Wrong thoughts start wrong digestive juices. Then you get ulcers.”

“I guess you're right,” Bob agreed meekly, chewing his way through a mouthful of brown rice and trying hard to think the right thoughts about it.

“How's your new book coming, Mr. Sebastian?” Jupe asked to change the subject. It was bad enough eating this glup without talking about it.

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“It seems to be coming along fine,” Hector Sebastian told him. “Now that I've got that new word processor, I can almost see what I'm thinking before I write it down. It's like — ”

He broke off. The phone was ringing.

Mr. Sebastian took the cane that was hanging from the back of his chair and leaned on it as he got to his feet. His leg injury still bothered him. He limped slightly as he made his way across the huge room, past a projecting bank of bookshelves. At the far end of the room, behind the bookshelves, was his study with its big desk and a typewriter stand. On the desk, dwarfed by the word processor, was the phone.

The Three Investigators heard Mr. Sebastian answer it. For what seemed an agonizingly long time they could hear him speak into the receiver occasionally. It was agonizing because they couldn't hear what he said.

Pete was so busy straining his ears that he was surprised to find he had finished his whole heaped plate of brown rice without noticing he was eating it.

"More?" Don smiled encouragingly as he lifted Pete's plate.

"No!" Pete snatched it back before the Vietnamese could fill it up again. "No, thank you," he added politely. "It's deli —"

He caught himself just in time. He had been about to say it was delicious before he remembered it wasn't supposed to be delicious. Delicious food was bad for you. It made you think the wrong thoughts.

"It's so healthy and nourishing," he corrected himself, "that I just couldn't eat another mouthful."

He turned quickly, looking toward the far end of the room. Hector Sebastian was limping back toward the table. He was holding a sheet of paper in his hand.

"Well," he said, glancing at the paper as he addressed the Three Investigators. "I've got something all right. But I don't know how it'll fit in with your case."

"What?" Jupe asked eagerly. "What did you get?"

"That was the Mexican immigration authorities in La Paz, in Baja California. Captain Diego Carmel and Oscar Slater put into La Paz on Captain Carmel's charter boat, the Lucky Constance, on February tenth. They were in port for two days and left again on February twelfth."

Jupe nodded, frowning.

"Thank you, Mr. Sebastian," he said. "Captain Carmel's boat sank on February seventeenth. That means they were definitely on their way back from Baja, heading for San Pedro, when they ran into that storm."

He looked at Bob and then at Pete.

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“And that means,” he went on, “at least I think it means, that if they had a cargo of pocket calculators they were going to smuggle into Mexico somewhere along the coast — ”

He turned back to Hector Sebastian.

“Well, either something went wrong and they couldn’t get them ashore. Or Oscar Slater was lying when he told Constance all that stuff was still on board when the boat sank. What do you think, Mr. Sebastian?”

“I think you’re thinking the right thoughts, Jupe.”

Hector Sebastian smiled.

“In fact, as one of my favorite characters, Alice in Wonderland, would say, your new case seems to be getting curiouser and curiouser.”

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The Faceless Giant

“Think you can fix it, Jupe?” Aunt Mathilda asked.

Jupiter looked at the old washing machine standing in his workshop in the salvage yard.

Uncle Titus had brought it home the night before. Its yellowing enamel surface was so cracked and crumpled it reminded Jupe of a sheet of paper that had been all scrunched up and then only half straightened out again. He hated to think what kind of shape the motor must be in.

“I’ll give it a try, Aunt Mathilda,” he promised. “I’ll work on it all day.”

Aunt Mathilda smiled. Here was a boy, her nephew Jupiter Jones, and there was the broken washing machine, a job of work to do. Put the two together and you had the perfect combination, the way Aunt Mathilda saw it. Work and a boy. A boy at work.

“You do that, Jupe,” she said contentedly. “And I’ll fix you a nice lunch.”

Jupiter didn’t really mind putting in the whole day at the salvage yard. He would be earning some money and, more important, he would be earning time off.

The other two Investigators were earning time off too. Bob was at the library and Pete was home mowing the lawn. Tomorrow they would all be entitled to a whole free day.

Early tomorrow morning they would meet Constance at the rocky cove she had picked out. Her Mexican friends would bring Fluke there in their tow truck. Then Constance and the boys would begin to search for the sunken boat.

Within an hour Jupiter had taken all the old, rusted screws out and had disconnected the washing machine's motor. He hoisted it onto his workbench. It wasn't in as bad a shape as he had feared. It must be one of the early postwar models, he thought, at least thirty years old. They had certainly built things to last in those days.

The first thing it needed was a new driving belt. He would have to make

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one. He started to rummage around the workshop for a length of tough rubber.

Jupe suddenly stopped dead. His mind was so busy figuring out how to fix the washing machine that for a second he didn't realize what it was that had halted him. A red light was blinking over his workbench. That meant the phone was ringing in Headquarters.

Jupiter was not normally fast on his feet. But in less than half a minute he had pulled the old grating aside, squeezed his tubby body through the pipe of Tunnel Two, pushed open the trap door, bobbed up through it like a cork, and snatched up the phone.

"Hullo," he said breathlessly. "Jupiter Jones speaking."

"Hullo, Mr. Jones," a familiar voice replied. "I'm calling to find out what progress you've been making with that whale."

Only he didn't say "whale." He pronounced it "way-ull."

"I'm glad you called, sir," Jupiter told him. "We've been making a lot of progress. I'm happy to be able to tell you that by seven o'clock tomorrow morning, Fluke, I mean the way-ull, will be back in the ocean and our assignment completed."

There was a long silence.

"Hullo?" Jupe said. "Hullo?"

"Well, that is good news, Mr. Jones," the caller told him. "You are certainly to be congratulated."

"Thank you."

"And rewarded too. I believe I mentioned a fee of one hundred dollars."

“Yes, sir. You did. If you’ll give me your name and address, I’ll be glad to send you a bill, and I will enclose a photograph of the whale in the ocean to prove we’ve done our job.”

“That won’t be necessary. I’ll take your word for it. In fact, I’ll be out of town for the next few weeks, so if you would care to meet me this evening, Mr. Jones, I’ll pay you the hundred dollars at once.”

“That’s very kind of you,” Jupe agreed, although his mind was racing with suspicions and questions. Why wouldn’t the man tell him his name? Why was he so willing to take Jupe’s word for it that the Three Investigators had earned their hundred-dollar reward?

“Where shall I meet you and what time, sir?” he asked.

“You know Burbank Park?”

Jupiter did. Years ago it had been a popular recreation area. There was an old bandstand in the center of it where people had once gathered on Sunday evenings to listen to Sousa marches and medleys from Gilbert and Sullivan.

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But the city of Rocky Beach had grown and developed away from the park. The Burbank neighborhood had been left behind. The park was still there but it had become derelict, a place of overgrown paths and tangled bushes. It had been years since any band had played there.

It had been years since anyone, anyone Jupe knew, had dared to venture into Burbank Park after dark.

“Eight o’clock this evening,” the caller instructed him. “Don’t bother to bring your friends with you. Just come yourself, Mr. Jones. I’ll be waiting for you by the bay-and stay-and.”

“Sir — ” Jupiter was going to ask his client if he couldn’t pick a better place to meet. But he was too late. The caller had hung up.

Jupe stood for a while staring down at the desk, thinking. The caller had asked him to come alone. That was another odd thing that had aroused his suspicions.

He picked up the phone again and called Bob and Pete. He told them about the mysterious call and the odd meeting place their client had chosen. Then he went back to work on the washing machine.

By five o’clock he had the repaired motor bolted back in place with new screws. He called Aunt Mathilda into the yard and plugged the machine into the socket over the workbench.

There was a purring sound which rose quickly to a roar as the rotating drum began to turn, slowly at first, then faster and faster. The whole machine rattled and shook like a tin shack in an earthquake. But it worked. Aunt Mathilda had to admit that.

“You’re a good boy, Jupe,” she told him. “A good, hardworking boy when you put your mind to it instead of fussing with those puzzles of yours. I’ll fix you some pecan ice cream for dessert tonight.”

After dinner, as soon as he had finished the ice cream, his favorite kind, Jupiter wheeled his bicycle out of the yard and rode off to the other side of town.

Burbank Park looked as forbidding as an unexplored jungle when Jupe got off his bike at the edge of it. He took a piece of white chalk from his pocket and quickly scribbled a ? on the sidewalk.

It was a trick the Three Investigators had often used. Each of them carried a different-colored piece of chalk. Jupe’s was white. Bob’s, green. Pete’s, blue. They had chosen the ? sign to mark their trails, not only because it was the symbol on their cards, but because it looked so innocent. Anyone else seeing a ? on a building would hardly notice it, or think some child had scrawled it there.

Jupe found a path leading into the park. He guessed it was a path because there were streetlights and bushes on both sides of it but only weeds down

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the center. Wheeling his bicycle, he advanced along it, stopping every few yards to draw another ? on a tree or on one of the broken wooden benches he found along the way.

Jupiter Jones was not an imaginative boy. His brain was naturally logical and deductive. To him a bush was a bush. It might be something else as well, of course, like a hiding place. But it was still just a bush.

But as he walked on into the deserted park, it began to seem to Jupe that everything around him was alive, grasping, menacing. The branches of the trees were like twisted limbs, the twigs at the end of them reaching fingers. They were reaching out to grab him and drag him off into the night.

He could see the bandstand ahead of him now. Its roof had collapsed and weeds grew up through the floor. He leaned his bicycle against it and drew another ? on the rotting wooden boards.

“Mr. Jones.”

Jupe started so violently that he almost knocked his bicycle over. He searched the gloom around him. There was nobody there. Nobody he could see anyway.

“Yes?” he managed to gasp out at last.

There was a rustling sound. Footsteps approaching through the grass, Jupe guessed. The rustling came closer and closer. It seemed to be coming from less than a yard away before Jupe could make out the figure of the man in front of him.

He was a very tall man, and he was wearing a soft, dark hat with the brim tilted down over his ears. If he had any eyes, Jupe couldn't see them. He couldn't make out any of the details of the man's face. His features looked blurred, out of focus, the way a photograph looks if you jog the camera while you're snapping the picture.

The one thing Jupe could make out about the man was his size. He was enormous. He was wearing a Windbreaker and his shoulders were so broad, his arms so thick, they reminded Jupe of a gorilla's.

“If you'll just step forward, Mr. Jones,” the man said. “I'll give you what you came for.”

Jupe stepped forward. Instantly the man's hands seized him by the shoulders. Jupe felt himself being spun around. An arm was pressing against his neck, forcing his head back. Jupe tried to grab it. His fingers closed for a second around the man's forearm. It felt curiously yielding. It was like sinking your fingers into hamburger.

Then Jupe's other hand was wrenched behind his back and forced up between his shoulder blades. The man's bony wrist tightened across Jupe's throat.

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The First Investigator was helpless. He couldn't struggle anymore. The man had him in a hammerlock.

“Now you do exactly what you're told, Mr. Jones.”

Jupe could feel the man's breath against his ear as he spoke.

“Understand, Mr. Jones?”

Jupe tried to nod. He couldn't move his head.

“Because if you don't, Mr. Jones,” the voice close to his ear warned him, “if you don't do what you're told, I'm going to break your nay-uck.”

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Ramble and Scramble!

Jupe did what he was told.

He walked down the path away from the bandstand. It wasn't the path he had come along, and he wished he could draw another ? on a tree as he passed. But he couldn't even get the chalk out of his pocket. The man was still gripping Jupe's right arm, forcing it up between his shoulder blades as he marched Jupe ahead of him.

They reached a street at the edge of the park. Still holding Jupe by the wrist, the man opened the trunk of the battered limousine standing there.

"Get in," he said.

Jupe glanced quickly up and down the street. There was no one in sight. No one he could call to for help.

With a quick wriggle he managed to get his arm free. But it was still impossible to break away altogether. The man's huge, soft chest was pressed tight against his back, forcing him forward. Another second and Jupe would lose his balance. He would be tipped headfirst into the open trunk of the car.

"Ahhh," Jupe moaned softly. He let his legs go limp. He slipped weakly to the ground as though he had suddenly fainted. He lay there, face down on the street. As he had sagged to his knees he had slipped the chalk out of his pocket. He had it in his right hand now.

For as long as it took Jupe to reach under the car and draw a ? on the road surface there, the big man seemed to be deciding what to do next. He evidently hadn't expected the First Investigator to faint on him.

Then Jupe felt a hand grabbing at his hair, taking a firm hold of it. He was pulled to his feet. He was forced forward over the open trunk of the car again. This time he did lose his balance. He toppled into the trunk.

The door of the trunk was slammed shut on him.

He heard the engine turn over and catch. He felt the car move slowly forward.

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It was pitch-dark in the narrow space, dark and smelly with the stench of gasoline and motor oil. Jupe groped around. It was obvious from the smell that the old limousine was an oil guzzler. It

probably used up a quart of oil every ten miles. People with cars like that usually carried a spare quart.

His reaching fingers soon found what he was looking for. Working by touch, he pulled out his prized Swiss Army knife and punched a hole in the can.

The metal floor of the trunk was so old that it was rusted almost through in places. Working with the saw blade of the knife, Jupe soon cut a thin slit through the metal.

Drop by drop he poured the oil out of the can through the slit he had made. It wasn't as good as being able to draw more ?'s. But at least he was leaving a trail behind him.

The car was traveling very slowly. Luckily for Jupe it didn't travel far. He had only half emptied the oil can when he felt the old limousine lurch to a stop.

The trunk was opened. The big man reached in and grabbed Jupe by his hair again.

“Get out,” he said.

Jupe had to obey him. He scrambled out as fast as he could. He hated having his hair pulled.

As he staggered to his feet, he saw that the car was parked in the driveway of a dilapidated wooden house. The man still had him by the hair. He was half pushing, half pulling him toward the house. The porch creaked and groaned as Jupe crossed it. The man took a key from his pocket and opened the front door.

“Get in.” A final tug at his hair and Jupe found himself stumbling forward into a dark room. The door closed behind him. The lights went on.

Jupe could see at once why the huge man standing over him had seemed to have no face when he looked at him by the bandstand. He was wearing a nylon stocking pulled down over it. It made a blur of his eyes and nose and mouth.

If Jupe had ever seen this man before, he wouldn't know it. He wouldn't recognize him if he ever saw him again.

The man looked even bigger and burlier in the light. It might be fat, not muscle, under the Windbreaker he was wearing, but he had the chest and arms of a giant.

Jupe glanced quickly around the room. A few wooden chairs, a rickety table with a phone on it, tattered curtains over the windows. No newspapers or magazines. No pictures on the walls. Jupe figured that the man hadn't been living there long.

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Ramble and Scramble!

“In there,” the giant told him. He pronounced it “they-er.”

He pushed Jupe toward an open door at the end of the room. He shoved him through it, then slammed and locked the door on him.

Jupe was in the dark again. Groping around, he soon discovered he was in a very small place, obviously a closet.

“Hullo.”

He could hear the man’s voice from the room beyond. He must be talking on the phone. Jupe leaned against the door, listening.

“Hullo,” he heard the man say again. “I’d like to speak to Miss Constance Carmel.”

There was a brief silence, then the man’s voice went on.

“I thought you’d like to know, Miss Carmel, that your young friend, Jupiter Jones, is by way of being my prisoner.”

There was another pause.

“Yes, to put it bluntly, Miss Carmel, I have kidnapped him.”

Another pause.

“I’m not asking for any ransom money. I just wanted you to know that if you do not return that little way-ull to the ocean at once and give up your plans to continue the search for your father’s boat — ”

This time the pause was very brief.

“Then you will never see your young friend Mr. Jones again. Not alive, any-way-er.”

Jupe heard the man hang up.

The Three Investigators had found themselves in a number of difficult — even dangerous — situations in the course of solving their many cases. They had been menaced by sharks. They had been bound hand and foot in the cellar of a haunted house. But this seemed to Jupe the worst spot he had ever been in. Because he knew the man in the next room meant it.

Jupe had announced to Bob and Pete that there were three possible suspects who might have disconnected the brakes on Constance’s pickup truck. Oscar Slater and Paul Donner were two of them. The third suspect Jupiter had had in mind was the mysterious caller who had offered them a hundred dollars to free Fluke.

“To find that lost way-ull and return it to the ocean.”

What he was really hiring them to do was to make sure Oscar Slater couldn't use Fluke to find Captain Carmel's boat. He didn't want that wreck found. He didn't want whatever was on board to be recovered.

And if he had been prepared to kill Constance and the Investigators once — what was to stop him from carrying out his threat against Jupiter now?

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Jupe knelt by the door and pulled out his Swiss knife. If he could force the lock . . .

The man was certainly big, enormous. But he was also fat. Not stocky the way Jupe was. He was covered in flab. Jupe had felt the softness of his arms and chest.

If Jupe could take him by surprise . . .

He slipped the blade of his knife into the lock.

He worked as silently as he could. He could hear the man walking up and down on the wooden floor of the next room. He tried to time every movement of the blade to the creak of the floorboards.

And then, all at once, there was no longer any need for cautious silence. Jupe heard a rending crack. It sounded like wood splintering. Had the man fallen through the floor?

He snapped back the bolt of the lock and threw open the door.

At the same instant, as he rushed into the room, the front door splintered and burst open.

In the sudden light it seemed to Jupe that the room was full of hurtling bodies. Pete was diving through the air in a flying tackle. The big man was falling backward. Bob was racing forward from the open doorway.

A moment later the Three Investigators had coordinated their movements and were acting together like a well-trained team. Before the huge man in the Windbreaker could struggle to his feet, Jupe and Pete were out the door, across the porch, and on the sidewalk. Bob was close behind them.

“Ramble and scramble!” Jupe shouted.

It was a prearranged signal they had used several times before. It meant the Investigators should all take off in different directions.

“Your bike’s right there,” Bob yelled to Jupe as he jumped onto his own bike and Pete vaulted onto his.

By the time Jupe’s kidnapper reached the porch, the three boys were almost out of sight, pedaling furiously away, rambling and scrambling off into the darkness.

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“We were a bit confused at first,” Bob admitted. “When we found your bicycle by the bandstand, we knew something was wrong. And there weren’t any chalk marks leading out of the park.”

Jupe nodded. “I’m glad I called and told you where I was going,” he said.

It was early the next morning. The Three Investigators had met at a small rocky cove. They were wearing their swimsuits.

Jupe had phoned Constance as soon as he got home the night before and told her he was okay. He was no longer being held captive. They could go ahead with their plans to search for the sunken boat. They were waiting for her now.

“It was Bob who finally figured it out,” Pete explained. “When we found a patch of oil on the street with one of your chalk marks near it, Bob guessed some old jalopy had been parked there and you’d been driven off in it.”

“Yeah, but it was Pete who discovered another oil stain a hundred yards farther on,” Bob put in. “And after that it was easy. All we had to do was follow the stains until we saw that old limousine in the driveway of the house.”

He looked up. A tow truck was backing slowly down the dirt road that led to the cove. In the back of the truck, carefully packed between layers of wet foam rubber, was Fluke. His eyes were closed and he looked comfortable and content.

The truck backed across the narrow strip of beach until it was standing up to its rear axle in the ocean. Constance had picked this sheltered cove because the slope of the shore was unusually steep. Only a few yards out from the beach the water was deep enough for Fluke to swim in.

Constance and her Mexican friend climbed down from the cab. She was wearing a wet suit, and scuba goggles were dangling from her neck. She walked around to the back of the truck and, leaning over in the water, patted Fluke.

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Pete could see now that beneath Fluke's body a heavy canvas sling had been laid on top of the foam rubber. Working together, Pete and the young Mexican drew the flaps of the sling together and attached them to the dan-gling hook of the crane.

While they were doing this, Constance stroked Fluke's head and told him not to worry.

The whale didn't look the least bit worried. He opened his eyes and wagged his tail as the crane lifted him up out of the back of the truck. Then, heaving together, the three boys managed to swing him out over the water.

The young Mexican, working the winch, lowered the whale carefully into the ocean. Fluke was still helpless inside the sling, but he didn't try to struggle. He lay quite still until Pete unfastened the hook. The canvas sling unfolded. Fluke glided out of it and swam a few yards out to sea.

He was free again. Free in his own world.

"Stay, Fluke. Stay, baby," Constance called to him.

He obeyed her at once. He turned quickly in his own length and swam back to where she stood waist deep in the water. He nuzzled against her and she stroked his head.

"Okay," she said to her Mexican friend. "Muchas gracias."

The Mexican smiled and climbed back into his tow truck. "Buena suerte," he called as he drove away.

"Ready to go?" Constance asked the Three Investigators. She looked out to sea. A hundred yards off-shore Oscar Slater's outboard cabin cruiser was waiting for them.

"Bring the tape recorder with you, Jupe," Constance told him. "I don't think we'll need it. Fluke won't stray away from me, will you, Fluke? But I think we'd better have it with us, just in case."

"Constance."

Jupe advanced into the water until he stood beside her. The other two Investigators joined him.

"What is it, Jupe?"

"I've been thinking," Jupe told her. "And I think Bob better stay here with the tape recorder."

"Why?"

Jupe told her why. He explained it was possible that Oscar Slater had managed to smuggle that cargo of pocket calculators ashore in Mexico. "And if he did," he finished, "he might want to cut you out of your share of whatever there is aboard that wreck. He might try to kidnap Fluke. Bob can be our insurance."

Constance listened attentively. “You certain about the dates?” she asked.

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“Positive,” Jupe assured her. “We had a friend check it out with the Mexican immigration officials. The boat put in to La Paz all right.”

Constance thought it all over for a minute.

“Okay.” She pushed the scuba goggles up over her eyes. “I guess Fluke and Pete and I can handle the diving without Bob. Come on, Fluke.”

She turned and swam quickly out to sea. Fluke swam beside her. Jupe followed more slowly. Pete walked back to the beach and picked up a small sealed plastic bag Jupe had brought with him to the cove that morning. Pete turned his back while Bob fastened it with a cord to the rear waistband of his swimming trunks. Inside the bag was a walkie-talkie.

“Think you can swim with it okay?” Bob asked.

“Sure. It feels pretty heavy now, but it won’t weigh me down once I get in the water.”

Bob watched his friend wade out into the sea. Pete was right. Once the water was above his waist, the plastic bag with the walkie-talkie in it floated up from him. Pete launched himself forward, breaking into a strong breaststroke. He soon caught up with Jupe.

Bob walked back up the beach. He picked up the airtight metal case with the recorder inside it, then, unrolling the sweater he had strapped to his bicycle, he took out a second walkie-talkie.

He pulled out the antenna and switched it on to Receive.

He found a dry rock, put on the sweater, and sat down, holding the walkie-talkie on his lap. The recorder in its metal case was on the rock beside him. Looking out, he could see that Constance and Fluke had already reached Slater’s boat.

“Welcome aboard,” Slater said, holding out his hand to help Constance climb in.

She paid no attention to him. “Stay, Fluke,” she said. “Good Fluke, you stay here.” She raised her hands to the low wooden rail and with a single easy movement swung herself on board.

With rather more effort, Jupe climbed in after her. Pete was floating on his back a few yards away.

“Can we just check the equipment, Mr. Slater?” Jupe asked.

“Sure.” Slater led him into the cockpit and showed him the small closed-circuit television camera. Jupe examined it and then looked at the monitor screen fastened to the bulkhead above the wheel.

“Are you sure the camera will work underwater?” he asked.

“Of course it will. Constance borrowed it from Ocean World. They use it all the time there.” He pronounced it “they-er.”

“You got any more stupid questions, boy?”

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Jupe was ready with as many more stupid questions as he needed to give Pete time to get aboard, unfasten the plastic bag from his waist, and hide the walkie-talkie in the locker at the stern without Slater seeing him. Jupe was an accomplished actor when it suited him, and one of his best roles was playing dumb.

“I was just wondering about the range underwater,” he said. “How close will Fluke have to stay to the boat?”

“It’ll be okay up to fifty yards.” Slater’s bald head seemed to be gleaming with annoyance. “Didn’t Constance explain all that to you?”

“Yes, I guess she did. But with the searchlight she’s going to attach to Fluke’s head — ”

He didn’t need to go on. Pete was standing on the afterdeck. He ran his hand through his wet hair. It was the signal they had arranged. The plastic bag was safely stowed away.

“Oh, I see, yeah, that’s a pretty powerful light,” Jupe finished.

“Then let’s get on with it,” Slater walked back on deck. Constance was leaning over the side, talking to Fluke in a friendly, reassuring voice.

“Where’s that other kid?” Slater asked her. “I thought there were three of them.”

“Bob’s got a bad cold,” Pete explained. “We left him at the cove. We thought — ”

“Okay.” Slater unhitched the line that was holding the wheel on center and put his hand on the throttle of the outboard motor. “How fast can that fish swim?” he asked Constance.

“He’s not a fish,” Constance told him coldly. “Fluke’s a highly intelligent and civilized mammal. And he can swim at least fifteen miles an hour when he feels like it. But I’d sooner you kept the speed down to eight knots. I don’t want him to tire himself.”

“Whatever you say.” Slater eased the throttle forward and steered out to sea. Constance stayed where she was, leaning over the rail and talking to Fluke as he swam playfully along beside the boat, sometimes leaping and diving in long, graceful arcs.

“The Coast Guard guys who rescued us told me we were five miles offshore when they picked us up,” Slater said.

Jupe glanced at Pete. There were some sensible questions he wanted to ask, but in his role of dummy he preferred that Pete ask them.

“How long?” Jupe mouthed silently.

Pete understood him at once. “How long had you been in the water?” he asked Slater.

“At least two hours.”

“Tide?” Jupe mouthed.

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The Two Poles

“Was the tide coming in or going out?” Pete asked.

“It was getting dark,” Slater remembered. “And the waves were so high it was hard to see anything. But I did get an occasional glimpse of the shoreline, and it seemed to be getting farther and farther away no matter how hard we tried to swim toward it. So I guess the tide was going out.”

Two hours, Jupiter calculated silently. He recalled the night of the storm. The gale had come up from the northwest. The wind would have carried them parallel to the shore, so he could forget that factor in his calculations. Handicapped by their life jackets, Captain Carmel and Oscar Slater would have been capable of little resistance against the tide. Jupe figured it would have carried them around two miles out to sea in two hours.

He eased over to Pete and whispered to him.

“I’d say the boat must have gone down about three miles offshore,” Pete told Slater.

“How do you figure that?”

“The wind and everything,” Pete explained vaguely.

“Maybe. Your guess is as good as mine.” Slater glanced at his watch and made some calculations of his own. He slackened speed.

“We must be about three miles out now,” he said after a minute. He turned to Constance. “How about getting that mammal harnessed up and we’ll search up and down the line we’re on now.”

He turned the boat so that it was idling slowly along, parallel to the shore.

“Fluke,” Constance called. “Come close, Fluke.” She reached for the canvas harness on the deck beside her. She had already fastened the television camera and the searchlight to it. She slipped into the water and fitted the straps over Fluke’s head.

Jupe was pinching his lower lip. Three miles out, he thought. But three miles out from where? From Slater’s vague information the boat might have gone down anywhere along a ten-mile lane of ocean. It was going to be like looking for a lost nickel on a freeway unless they could fix the location of the wreck more exactly than that.

Constance had the light and the television camera fastened to Fluke’s head. She climbed back on board. Jupe sidled over to her.

“Did your father ever manage to say anything else to you?” he asked. “Anything about the night of the storm?”

Constance shook her head. “Nothing that made any sense to me,” she answered. “I told you what he did say.”

Jupe remembered. That stuff about keeping those two Polish guys in line. He might have meant anything. He might even have been talking about something that had happened years ago.

Jupe stared at the shore three miles away.

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The Two Poles

There was very little to see. The cliffs were high, hiding all but the distant line of mountains from the boat. An occasional house showed on the top of a hill. An office building rose out of the landscape. There was a tall television relay tower on top of another hill. What looked like a factory chimney showed way over to the right of it.

“Better get into a wet suit, Pete,” Constance said, “and we’ll check the air tanks so we’re all ready to dive with Fluke.”

Pete nodded and walked forward into the cockpit, where the scuba equipment had been set out for them.

Jupe was still staring at the coastline. He was pinching his lower lip so hard that he had pulled it all the way down to his chin.

Diego Carmel was an experienced sea captain. When he knew his boat was going down, he would have tried to take a sighting of some kind. If only he was well enough to talk . . .

Jupe's eyes shifted quickly from the television tower to the tall chimney. Suddenly he saw them as they would look at dusk in a storm.

"Two poles."

He grabbed Slater's arm. This was no time to pretend to be stupid.

"Keep the two poles in line!" he shouted excitedly.

"What? What are you jabbering about, boy?"

"Captain Carmel," Jupe told him. "When the boat started to sink, he tried to get a fix on the shore. He saw that television tower with the factory chimney behind it."

"What?"

"Don't you see?" It seemed to Jupe it was Slater who was being stupid now. "All we've got to do to find the area of the wreck is to go back down the coast until those two landmarks, those two poles, are in a straight line!"

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13

Danger in the Depths

Jupe stood on the foredeck with the binoculars to his eyes.

He held them focused on the shoreline three miles away. As the boat moved down the coast, the television tower and the factory chimney were drawing closer together. Another hundred yards, he figured.

Slater was at the wheel. "Slow speed," Jupe called to him. "Steady."

Closer and closer. And then they met. The tower was directly in front of the tall chimney.

The two poles were in line.

"Here," Jupe shouted. "Hold it right here." He lowered the binoculars.

The water was too deep to drop anchor. Slater would have to keep the boat motionless by idling the engine against the tide.

Jupe watched him as he turned the bow toward the shore. A few minutes ago he had thought Slater was pretty dumb, but he could see now that that bald head contained a lot of savvy. The man was handling the boat like a pro.

“Okay, Pete?” Constance had finished fastening the air tank to Pete’s back. He adjusted the mask over his eyes while Constance inspected his breathing hose and checked the air-pressure gauge.

The needle indicator on the gauge showed that his air tank was full.

Walking clumsily in his flippers, he followed Constance to the rail. She sat down on it, then, leaning out over the water, let herself topple gently backward into the ocean.

Pete tumbled in after her.

He straightened out a few feet below the surface and floated face down in the water. He was trying to remember everything he had been taught about scuba diving.

Breathe through your mouth so your mask won’t fog up. Keep checking the air hose to make sure it doesn’t get a kink in it. Don’t dive until the moisture inside your wet suit has had time to adjust to your body tempera-

Danger in the Depths

ture. The deeper you go, the colder the ocean and the greater the pressure. At the first sign of giddiness surface immediately but not too fast.

For several minutes Pete swam around three feet underwater, lazily wag-ging his flippers and giving himself time to relax and get used to this under-water world.

He had always loved scuba diving. With the weighted belt around his waist counteracting his buoyancy, he felt as if he were flying. Flying the way a bird could. There was the same wonderful sense of freedom.

Constance and Fluke were floating a few yards away from him. Pete raised his hand, forming his thumb and forefinger into a circle. He was ready to dive.

Constance patted Fluke’s back. With the powerful light beaming ahead of him, the whale glided down. Deeper and deeper. Deeper than Pete, or even Constance, could follow him.

Jupe was keeping his eyes on the television monitor in the cockpit of the boat. Slater, at the wheel, was intently watching it too.

It was fascinating, Jupe thought. Like watching a space probe. The circle of light on the small screen seemed to be exploring the sky. A hazy, sometimes cloudy sky, across which swarms of fish suddenly darted like insects.

Whenever Fluke got too far from the boat, the circle of light began to dim. Immediately Slater steered toward the shore, keeping the tower and the chimney in line, following the direction Fluke had taken.

When the circle of light grew brighter again, he held the boat steady and motionless once more.

A patch of sand and gravel, a clump of weed, appeared on the screen. Fluke had reached the bottom of the ocean. The television camera on his head was scanning it foot by foot.

Pete had halted his dive far above Fluke. He didn't dare go any deeper. He knew from his scuba lessons that when the pressure on the human body becomes too great, the diver feels a curious sensation like drunkenness. He becomes overconfident and can do wild, stupid things that may endanger his own life.

Far below him he could see the gleam of Fluke's searchlight. Lucky Fluke, he thought. His body was better adapted to the depths. Some whales, Constance had told him, could dive down a mile and stay underwater for as long as an hour.

Pete raised his hand to straighten his breathing tube. He ran his fingers along the curved length of it to the air tank on his back.

Funny, he thought. He couldn't find any kink in the hose, and yet ...

He fumbled desperately along the tube again. There must be a kink in it somewhere. There had to be, because he couldn't get any air into his lungs.

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Danger in the Depths

He couldn't breathe.

He snatched at the buckle of his weighted belt. Hold your breath, he told himself. Take that belt off.

Hold your breath and surface. Don't panic, you idiot. Get that buckle undone.

But there no longer seemed to be any feeling in his fingers. And there was something wrong with his eyes. The water around him seemed to be slowly changing color. It was turning a pale rose and then a deeper and deeper red. So deep it was almost black.

He was gasping for air now, trying to kick with his flippers, trying to force himself up through the darkness, trying . . .

A brilliant light suddenly flashed in his eyes. He felt a great solid thump against his chest. Something, something as powerful as a bulldozer, was lifting him, forcing him to the surface.

He didn't try to resist. With his last, failing strength he clung to it, to whatever it was, this powerful mass that was lifting him up.

His head broke the surface. A hand reached out from beside him and snatched the mask from his face. He opened his mouth and took a great lungful of fresh air.

The red darkness was slowly clearing from his eyes. He looked down and saw a blurred surface beneath him. He brought it slowly into focus.

He made out a canvas harness. A flashlight. A camera.

He was lying stretched out on Fluke's back.

Constance was floating beside him. It was she who had snatched the mask from Pete's face.

"Don't try to talk," she said. "Just take long, deep breaths. You'll be okay in a minute."

Pete did as he was told. He lay quietly with his cheek pressed against Fluke's back. Gradually breathing became easier. He was no longer panting. That terrible red darkness had cleared from his eyes. He felt strong enough to talk at last.

But before he asked any questions, before he tried to find out what had happened, there was one thing he wanted to say first.

"You saved my life, Fluke. "

"Well, you saved his life once too, didn't you?" Constance laid her hand on Fluke's head. "He wouldn't forget — "

She broke off as the boat pulled alongside. Jupe, who was steering, brought it to a stop. Oscar Slater was leaning over the rail.

"I saw it," he shouted. And now his bald head seemed to be gleaming with excitement. "It was just a glimpse on the monitor. But I know I saw it. Your father's boat, Constance."

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Danger in the Depths

He turned to Jupe. "Hold her steady right here. The wreck must be directly below us. It flashed across the screen as Fluke turned to surface, and then I saw Pete. So it has to be — "

"Never mind that now," Constance interrupted him curtly. "The first thing is to get Pete back on board and find out what happened, what went wrong."

"But I tell you — " Slater was thumping the rail with impatience.

“Later,” Constance told him. “You get back to the wheel, Mr. Slater. Jupe, come and give us a hand.”

Slater hesitated. But he knew Constance was in command. At least for the present. Without her help he could never get that stuff off the sunken boat. He nodded sullenly and relieved Jupe at the wheel.

Between them Jupe and Constance helped Pete on board. Still feeling a little weak, Pete sat on the deck while Constance brought him a mug of hot coffee and Jupe unfastened the straps and lifted the air tank off his back.

“Okay. What happened?” Constance asked. “I could tell you were in trouble, but I couldn’t tell why. What did you feel? It couldn’t have been the pressure. You weren’t deep enough. What was it?”

“I just couldn’t breathe.” Pete sipped the coffee. It tasted wonderful. “I couldn’t get any air through the tube. I thought there must be a kink in it. But there wasn’t.”

He described how everything had seemed to turn red and then dark red and then black.

“Carbon dioxide,” Constance told him. “You were breathing in carbon dioxide instead of air.”

She picked up the air tank and opened the valve. There was no hissing sound.

“No wonder you couldn’t breathe,” Constance said. “The tank was empty.”

“But we checked it out.”

Jupe examined the pressure gauge. The indicator needle still pointed to Full. He showed it to Constance.

“Looks like someone jammed the gauge,” he said. “And then let all the air out of the tank.”

Constance agreed. It seemed the only explanation.

“Where did this scuba equipment come from?” Jupe asked her.

“Ocean World. I brought it aboard myself last night. And it was all in perfect condition then.”

She walked over to Slater.

“Pete’s air tank was deliberately tampered with,” she said accusingly. “I want to know — ”

“You don’t think I did it, do you?” Slater turned angrily from the wheel. “All I want is to get the stuff off that wreck. I didn’t touch your equipment after you brought it on board. Why should I? You think I like all these stupid delay-us? All I want . . . ”

He went on excitedly about what he wanted. They were right over the sunken charter boat now. Those pocket calculators were in an airtight metal case in the cabin. He had all that money tied up in them. Why couldn’t they get on with it and haul the stuff on board?

Jupe knew Slater was telling the truth about one thing. He had had no possible reason to jam that pressure gauge. But somebody had.

“Could anyone have come aboard the boat last night or early this morn-ing, Mr. Slater?” he asked.

“No.” Slater shook his head. “The boat was moored at the marina, and I slept on board. I never went ashore after Constance left.”

“Did you have any visitors?”

“No. Only my old friend, Paul Donner. He came down and had a drink with me. But I can’t believe Paul — ”

“How long have you known Paul Donner?” Jupe cut in. “Who is he? What do you know about him?”

“Questions. All these idiot questions.” Slater clutched at his gleaming scalp. “Never mind all that now. Let’s get on with it, haul that case — ”

“Answer him.” Constance was standing over Slater with her clenched hands on her hips. “You answer everything Jupe asks you. You answer it right now, Mr. Slater. Because I’m not going near that wreck until you do.”

“Okay,” Slater gave in grudgingly. He had to give in. “How long have I known Paul Donner? Is that what you’re asking?”

Jupe nodded.

“I met him in Europe a few years ago. We had some, well, some business dealings there. And then I saw him again in Mexico.”

“When?”

“Several times.”

“The last time you were down there, Mr. Slater?”

Jupe persisted.

“Sure. I guess so. He was running a small printing business in La Paz. And, well, we were old friends. I always saw him when I was there. What’s wrong with that?”

Jupe was silent for a moment, thinking.

“Anything else, Jupe?” Constance prompted him.

“No. No, that’s all I wanted to know,” Jupe said.

“Good.” Slater turned back to Constance. “Then can we get on with it now?” he demanded.

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Danger in the Depths

“As soon as I check my air tank.”

Constance walked back on deck. Jupe watched her as she opened the valve. He heard the hissing sound of the air escaping before she closed it again.

Whoever had tampered with the scuba equipment hadn’t had time to jam the gauges on all the tanks. Or perhaps he had hoped that a single serious accident would be enough to put an end to the whole salvage operation.

Jupe walked over to Constance.

“I think we better find out what’s in that metal case before we turn it over to Slater,” he whispered.

Constance considered his suggestion.

“Okay,” she said thoughtfully. “We’ll do it your way, Jupe.”

“Thanks.”

Jupe was grateful to her for her confidence in him. Because he thought he was close to knowing most of the answers now.

The jammed pressure gauge. Slater’s old friend from Europe, Paul Donner. The trip to La Paz. The crease, like a scar, under Donner’s right eye.

It was all beginning to fit together in the First Investigator’s mind.

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14

Fluke's Song

"I can't dive deep enough to reach the wreck." Constance was standing in the cockpit, facing Slater.

"Then how — ?"

"Please don't interrupt me, Mr. Slater. Just answer my questions. I need all the information you can give me. Okay?"

Slater stared at her for a moment. Jupe could see the anger in his eyes.

"More questions," he said. "Okay. What do you want to know?"

"Where is it exactly? The metal case with those — those pocket calculators in it."

"Well, the valuable stuff — " Slater was trying to meet her eyes. "The only stuff worth bothering about is under the bunk in the cabin."

"Is it lashed down?"

"No." Slater glanced uneasily away from her. "Your father was trying to launch the life raft. We were going to take the box with us. And then — there wasn't time. The boat swamped — " He shrugged bitterly. "We had to leave it there."

"Is the cabin door locked?"

"No. It's fastened open. You know — "

Constance nodded. She had been going out fishing with her father since she was ten years old. She knew every detail of the charter boat.

"I know," she said. "Those heavy brass hooks in the deck. Dad used them to keep the door swung back so he could nip down to the cabin from the wheelhouse to get a beer."

"Yeah." Slater met her eyes again.

"What does the box look like?"

"It's dark green. Made of steel. About two feet long. A foot wide. Maybe nine inches deep."

"Has it got a handle on it?"

"Yeah. Like . . . well, like a cashbox. It's got a metal handle on the lid."

Fluke's Song

“I’ll need a line.” Constance paused. Jupe guessed she was figuring the best way to get the box off that wreck. “A good, long, strong line and a metal clothes hanger.”

“Sure.”

Jupe took the wheel while Slater found what she needed. Constance pushed in the sides of the clothes hanger, bending it into a diamond shape. Then she twisted the hook until it was at a right angle to the frame.

She looped the strong nylon cord into a coil and knotted the end of it to the wire hanger.

“Okay,” she said. “I’m ready to go now.”

Pete stepped forward.

“If you like — ” he began.

He didn’t want to go with Constance. After what had happened, he felt he had had enough scuba diving to last him a long time. But he had to offer. He knew, in some way he couldn’t explain, that he would feel wrong about himself if he didn’t.

“I’ll go with you, if you like,” he said.

Constance smiled at him.

“No, you stay here, Pete. I’d sooner have you on board in case anything goes wrong.”

Pete smiled back gratefully. She was probably letting him off easy. But the way she put it made him feel a lot better.

He watched her as she hung the coil of nylon cord over her shoulder, adjusted her mask, and let herself topple gently backward into the ocean.

Fluke had been dozing a few yards from the boat. He opened his eyes at once as Constance swam toward him. He went to meet her in his usual eager way. For a minute Constance stroked his back, pressing her face close to him.

Pete could see that she was talking to the little whale. But she was too far away for him to hear what she said.

When he thought about it later, he could never really figure out how Constance managed to explain to Fluke what she wanted him to do. Not in words. But perhaps they didn’t need words to understand each other.

He remembered what he had felt watching them play in Slater's pool. The friendship and trust between them was so deep that they seemed to share a common will. Whatever Constance wanted was what Fluke wanted too.

He saw them submerge. Constance had her arm around Fluke. They appeared to dive together like two halves of the same person.

Jupe kept his eyes on the monitor in the cockpit.

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Fluke's Song

He saw the circle of light appear on the screen as somewhere deep in the ocean Constance switched on the searchlight attached to Fluke's head. He watched the light probing down and down through the cloudy water. A host of little fishes darted across the screen.

And then there was the floor of the ocean again. A round patch of sand and gravel, a barnacle-covered rock.

Slater was standing at the wheel behind him. Jupe felt him straighten with sudden excitement.

Fluke's camera had picked out the stern of a boat.

"There it is." Pete stepped up beside Jupe.

The stern of the boat was growing larger, filling the circle of light. It swept quickly past, like a sign on the freeway. The light was moving across a deck. Jupe glimpsed the spokes of a wheel. The circle clouded for an instant, then reappeared, brighter than before. Jupe could make out the shape of a chair, a porthole.

Fluke had swum right into the cabin.

For several seconds the images on the screen jerked back and forth so quickly it was impossible to make out what they were. Jupe could feel Slater grow rigid with impatience.

The dancing, flickering images gradually stilled. The camera held fast on a single object. It came slowly into sharper and sharper focus.

It was a metal box.

"That's it." Slater was leaning forward over the wheel as though trying to grab the box off the monitor screen.

The box grew larger and larger, filling the whole circle of light as the camera on Fluke's head moved closer and closer to it.

It lurched abruptly downward, disappearing altogether. There was nothing to be seen on the screen but a blank circle of white.

It puzzled Jupe at first. Had something gone wrong with the camera? Then he realized that Fluke had his head under the bunk in the cabin. The camera lens was pointed at the white-painted bulkhead on the far side of the space under the bunk.

For a minute the camera held it, almost motionless. Then everything lurched into movement again. The images on the screen swept past so quickly it was impossible to distinguish them. Jupe thought he caught a blurred glimpse of the boat's rail.

It vanished and the familiar circle of cloudy water replaced it. Fluke was surfacing.

"Stupid beast." Slater was swearing softly, his hands gripping the wheel. "It didn't even try to get that box out." He turned angrily away, looking toward the shore.

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Fluke's Song

Jupe paid no attention to him. He had just seen something on the screen that Slater had missed — a flash of Constance swimming forward. Now her hand reached out toward the lens. The light on the monitor shrank to a pinpoint. The screen went black. Constance had switched off the camera.

"Here. You take the wheel." Slater grabbed Pete's arm. "And try to hold her steady."

Jupe watched Slater hurry over to the rail of the boat. He followed the man slowly as Pete took the wheel. But Jupe didn't join Slater at the rail. He walked softly past him to the stern and stood by the locker there. He kept his eyes on the surface of the ocean, waiting.

He didn't have to wait very long. Twenty yards away Constance's head bobbed up. Jupe could see she no longer had the coil of nylon cord over her shoulder.

Fluke was swimming beside her. As the little whale raised his head, Jupe saw something else too. The camera and the searchlight were gone. In their place, bound to the canvas harness on Fluke's head, was the flat green metal box.

Jupe opened the locker and snatched out the sealed plastic bag Pete had hidden there. He tore open the bag and took out the walkie-talkie. He pulled the antenna to its full length and switched the walkie-talkie on to Send.

"Bob," he said urgently into the speaker of the walkie-talkie. "Bob. Start playing."

He glanced at Slater. The bald man was leaning far out over the rail. He was shouting at Constance.

“Bring it in!” Slater yelled. “Bring that box in, you hear?”

“Start playing, Bob!” Jupe repeated insistently. “Start playing Fluke’s song.”

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The Lost Box

“Roger, Jupe. Over and out.”

Bob switched off the walkie-talkie and put it on the rock beside him.

There was no sight of Slater’s boat from the cove. He had no idea how far away it might be. But he knew from his research in the library that whales had incredibly acute hearing. They had no external ears, the way people did, only tiny pinpricks in their skin just behind their eyes.

But their internal ears were much more efficient than humans’ were. They could pick up their own sonar, the echo of their own voices, so accurately they could tell the exact size and shape of any submerged object hundreds of yards away.

They could hear one another’s greetings or calls of distress for miles un-derwater.

Bob shucked off his sweater and sneakers. Then he picked up the recorder in its airtight metal case and waded into the sea. He lowered the case into the water and held it there while the tape slowly unwound. Fluke’s song, the recording of his voice, was being broadcast at full volume out into the ocean.

No human ear would be able to hear it. But maybe Fluke would.

On board Slater’s boat Jupe was still standing in the stern. He slipped his walkie-talkie quickly back into the locker.

Twenty yards away Fluke and Constance were floating side by side. Slater was still shouting at her to bring the box on board.

Jupe raised his hand in the signal he had arranged with Constance. It meant he had managed to get through to Bob at the cove.

Constance waved back. She had understood. She patted Fluke’s head and they dived together.

Slater straightened from the rail. “What’s going on?” he yelled. He hurried to the cockpit and pushed Pete away from the wheel. Gripping it himself, he swung the bow around until he was headed for the spot where Fluke and Constance had disappeared.

The Lost Box

He was almost there when Constance bobbed up. Slater brought the boat to a stop beside her and gave the wheel back to Pete.

“Hold her right here,” he ordered as he ran back to the rail.

“Where’s that box?” he shouted down to Constance.

She didn’t answer. She was holding the searchlight and the camera in one hand. She gripped the rail with the other and swung herself on board.

“Where’s that whale?”

Constance still didn’t answer. She took off her mask and slipped the air tank off her back.

“Where is it?” Slater was peering over the side. “Where is it? Where did it go?”

Constance shrugged. “Your guess is as good as mine, Mr. Slater.”

“What do you mean?” Slater turned to Jupe. “Give me those binocu-lars.” Jupe handed them over. Slater raised them to his eyes, searching the ocean around him.

There was no sign of Fluke. Wherever he was, wherever he was heading, he was swimming underwater.

“Whales can be funny that way,” Constance explained. Slater had his back to her. She glanced at Jupe and winked. “They’re so friendly and then, I don’t know, they get a sudden yen to be free and they just go off and leave you without even saying goodbye.”

Slater lowered the binoculars. “He’s got my box!” he shouted. “You tied it to his head.” He glared suspiciously at Constance. “Why did you do that?”

Constance shrugged again. “I had to,” she said. “It was the only way I could get it to the surface. You must admit Fluke did a wonderful job. He swam right down into that cabin and under the bunk. He had the clothes hanger in his mouth and he managed to slip the hook under the handle of the box. He pulled it out of the cabin. Then I hauled in the line and brought the box up — ”

“Why didn’t you bring it to the boat?”

“Please don’t interrupt me, Mr. Slater. I was a long way down. There was no way I could swim to the surface with that great heavy metal case containing all those — ”

“It wasn’t so heavy. It was — ”

“I asked you not to interrupt me, Mr. Slater.” Constance was looking down at him with her clenched hands on her hips. “The only way I could possibly manage to get that heavy metal case

with all those calculators in it back to the boat was to take the camera off Fluke's head and tie the box to his harness instead."

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The Lost Box

She picked up the towel that was hanging over the rail and began to dry her dark, feathery hair with it.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Slater," she went on. "But it's just as bad for me. Half those calculators belong to my father. I lost as much as you did when Fluke swam away."

"Swam away," Slater repeated. There was a bitter helplessness in his voice. He raised the binoculars to his eyes again.

"Where would that stupid, ungrateful animal swim to?" he demanded. "Where did he go?"

Constance glanced at the First Investigator. "What do you think, Jupe?" she asked.

"It's just a guess." Jupe's mind was working fast. Fluke had at least fifteen minutes start on them now. Even at full speed Slater could never catch up with him. And Bob was alone at the cove. He might need help.

"It's just a guess," Jupe repeated. "But I think it's possible Fluke re-turned to the cove. The place we put him back in the ocean this morning."

"Why would he do that?" Slater was glaring suspiciously at Jupe now.

"Sort of a homing instinct," Jupe suggested innocently. "I told you it was just a guess, Mr. Slater."

"Mmmm —" Slater looked toward the shore. "Okay," he decided. "You take the wheel, boy, and head back to the cove."

He walked quickly away onto the forward deck. Jupe took the wheel from Pete. "Full speed!" Slater shouted down to him, raising his binoculars.

"Full speed it is, sir," the First Investigator answered.

Full speed suited Jupe fine. He was just as anxious as Slater now to get back to the cove. He wanted to see if their plan had worked, if Fluke had responded to his own song and returned there with the metal case.

Because if he had, Jupe wanted to open that box and see what was inside!

81

The Face of the Faceless Giant

Twenty-five minutes, Bob saw, glancing at his waterproof watch.

He had been playing Fluke's song for twenty-five minutes now. Another five minutes and the tape would run out. He would have to rewind it and then start it again.

As he crouched there, holding the recorder underwater, he kept stamping his feet and wiggling his toes. The water was so cold he was afraid his legs would freeze solid unless he kept moving them.

He straightened slightly. Maybe it was just his imagination but it seemed to him he had seen a movement, a quick turbulence in the smooth, swelling ocean a hundred yards offshore.

There it was again. This time Bob knew he hadn't imagined it. He was so excited he even forgot to stamp his feet as he waited, staring out to sea.

He saw the metal case first. It rose out of the water only a few feet from him. A moment later Fluke's head broke the surface. He glided in and pressed his nose against Bob's knees.

"Fluke. Fluke."

Bob no longer cared how cold the sea was. He tumbled forward into it, clutching at Fluke, stroking him, hugging him.

"Fluke. You made it."

Fluke seemed glad to see him too. He raised himself straight up, as though standing on his tail, and stared at Bob expectantly.

"I'm sorry, Fluke." Bob switched off the recorder. "I guess we did kind of trick you."

He wondered what the little whale had expected to find at the end of his long journey. Another whale? Or had he recognized his own voice? Had he only felt the same kind of curiosity Bob would have felt hearing his own voice played back to him?

"Never mind, Fluke," Bob said. "I'll take your harness off, get that metal box off your head, then I've got something for you."

The Face of the Faceless Giant

Constance had brought a bucket of fish to the cove with her that morning. Bob had the harness loose in a few seconds. He lifted it clear of Fluke's head.

The metal box felt surprisingly light.

“Stay, Fluke,” Bob told him. “Stay and wait for me here. I’ll be right back with your dinner.”

He turned and waded toward the shore, holding the green metal case against his chest.

He had almost reached the dry sand when he saw the man standing there, halfway up the beach, watching him, waiting for him.

He was a tall man, wearing a Windbreaker, and the brim of his hat was tilted down over his eyes. But the thing Bob noticed first about him was the breadth of his shoulders, the thickness of his arms.

The second thing Bob noticed, as the man advanced down the beach, was that he didn’t have any face. None Bob could see anyway. It was hidden by a nylon stocking pulled down over it.

“All right,” the man said. “Give me that case.”

Although he had only heard it once before, over the phone at Headquarters, Bob recognized the voice at once. The man didn’t say “case.” He said “cay-us.”

The last time Bob had seen him he had been sprawling on the floor as Pete tackled him around the knees and the Three Investigators rambled and scrambled into the night.

“Give it to me.”

The man was advancing more quickly. He was only a couple of yards away now.

Bob didn’t say anything. There didn’t seem to be anything to say. Hug-ging the metal case against his chest, he backed into the ocean.

“Give me that cay-us.”

The man lurched toward him. Bob kept backing away until he was up to his knees in the water. He stepped back again as the man reached out to grab him.

Unfortunately Bob didn’t move fast enough. The man’s fingers had closed on the case. He was trying to tear it out of Bob’s hands.

Still clutching the metal box, Bob couldn’t fight back. Not that it would have been any use trying to fight anyway. Bob had never seen anyone with such a powerful chest and shoulders as this giant.

All Bob could do was keep his grip on the box and try to struggle farther out into the ocean. The water was already up to his waist. The man was grappling with him. Another moment and, Bob knew, the giant would topple him back into the sea, force him underwater. He would have to let go of the metal case.

The Face of the Faceless Giant

Just as Bob felt himself losing his balance, the man suddenly reared up. Bob saw him rise straight up as though he had been lifted by a crane.

Up, up, up the man went. Then he was flying backward through the air. He fell with a great splash full length in the water. He struggled and spluttered there for a second.

Then Fluke's head was beneath him again. With a flip of his powerful body the little whale tossed him up once more. Fluke was playing with him as easily as he would have played with a beach ball. He was tossing him farther and farther out to sea.

The man was shouting now, shouting for help. He was struggling on his back, sinking below the water.

Fluke was diving beneath him, ready to give him another toss. As the man cried out Fluke paused. He raised his head and looked at the struggling giant, then began to nudge him gently back toward the shore.

But the man was still sinking. Lying on his back, thrashing with his arms and legs, he was going down as though forced underwater by some great weight across his chest.

A moment ago Bob had thought this man was his worst enemy. But Bob couldn't help himself now. He felt sorry for the man. He couldn't stand there and watch him drown.

He hurried to the beach and hid the metal case behind a rock, then he ran back and waded out to the giant.

By the time Bob reached him, the man was almost submerged. Only his masked face was still clear of the water. Fluke was floating beside him. His friendly eyes looked puzzled.

"Under him, Fluke," Bob said. "Don't toss him around anymore. Just see if you can lift him and keep him from drowning."

Whether Fluke understood the words or not, he knew what he had to do. He glided to the man, got his back under him, and gently began to raise him. In a moment the man's head and huge chest were clear of the water.

He was still struggling, his hands tearing at his Windbreaker. He was trying to unzip it and get it off.

Bob found the metal tag of the zipper. He pulled it all the way down. The Windbreaker opened. Bob pushed it up over the man's shoulders and pulled it free of his arms.

Bob stared at the man's chest. He stared at the Windbreaker he was holding in his hands.

He could understand now why the man had looked as though he were being forced down by some great weight on his chest. The whole inside of the Windbreaker was stuffed with foam rubber! It had absorbed water like a sponge, swelling and gaining weight until the man was helpless.

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The Face of the Faceless Giant

Without his padded Windbreaker the man didn't look like a giant. He looked thin and weak and a little pathetic. Between them Bob and Fluke helped him ashore. When they reached water that was too shallow for Fluke to swim in, Bob took over alone. He gripped the man by the ankles and dragged him up onto the dry sand.

The man lay there on his back. He was panting, exhausted, barely con-scious. He had lost his hat in the sea. The nylon stocking was still pulled down over his face.

Bob lifted it off.

He saw the long thin nose, the slightly sunken cheeks. He saw the crease, like a scar, under the man's right eye.

He was looking down at Paul Donner.

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Inside the Box

"There he is," Slater shouted excitedly. "There's that way-ul."

He lowered his binoculars. "You were right, boy. He's there in that cove." He hurried down to the cockpit and took the wheel from Jupe.

Constance had seen Fluke too. As Slater steered the boat into the cove, she leaned over the rail.

"Fluke," she called. "Fluke."

He heard her at once. He raised his head and swam eagerly out to greet her.

"The box." Slater half turned from the wheel. He was staring at Fluke's head. "He's lost the box," he yelled.

Jupe had his eyes on the shore. He saw the man lying there on the sand with Bob standing beside him.

Bob waved, then lifted his circled thumb and forefinger in the okay signal.

“I think the sooner we get ashore the better, Pete,” Jupe said. “Before Slater figures out what happened.”

“Sounds like a good idea.” Pete was still wearing his wet suit. He slipped over the side and swam quickly to the beach. Jupe peeled off the shirt he had borrowed from the ship’s locker and followed Pete as fast as he could.

“Paul Donner.” Jupe and Pete stood looking down at the drenched, gasping man stretched out on the beach. “What’s he doing here? What happened, Bob?” Jupe asked.

Bob hastily explained everything that had happened at the cove since he saw Fluke swim in. He told them how he had taken the metal case off Fluke’s head, how the giant had attacked him and Fluke had come to his rescue, then his discovery that the giant wasn’t a giant at all. He was only a tall, thin man wearing a padded Windbreaker. He was Paul Donner.

“He almost drowned,” Bob finished. “But I gave him artificial respiration and I think he’ll be okay now. He isn’t very strong, and he’s just exhausted.”

Jupe glanced quickly over his shoulder. Slater had brought the boat in

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and anchored it as close to the beach as he could. He was wading ashore toward them. His bald head was gleaming with determination. He looked angry and menacing.

“The metal case?” Jupe whispered to Bob. “What did you do with it?”

“I hid it — ”

Bob broke off. Slater had reached the dry sand and was standing facing him.

“All right, boy.” Slater had hardly glanced at Paul Donner. He didn’t seem in the least surprised to see him there. He didn’t seem interested. His whole threatening attention was focused on Bob.

“All right, boy,” Slater repeated. “Give me that box.”

“What box?” Bob nudged Pete. What was needed right now, he thought, was one of the Second Investigator’s flying tackles. A flying tackle and a ramble and scramble to grab the metal case and take off on their bicycles.

“Cut that out.”

It was as though Slater had read his thoughts.

“No tricks now, boy.”

Slater was wet up to his waist, but the short denim jacket he was wearing was quite dry. He reached inside it with his right hand. When he brought it out again he was holding a small snub-nosed pistol.

He pointed it at Bob.

“The metal cay-us,” he said. “The one that whale brought in to you. I want that cay-us.”

Bob glanced helplessly at Jupe. Jupe was looking at the pistol in Slater’s hand. Although he had never fired one himself, the First Investigator knew a lot about guns. In theory. The one Slater was holding had a very short barrel. Its accurate range couldn’t be more than ten yards, Jupe decided. But Slater was holding it less than a foot from Bob’s chest.

“Okay, Bob,” Jupe said. “You’d better give it to him.”

Bob nodded. He couldn’t help agreeing with him wholeheartedly.

He walked up the beach to the rock where he had hidden the case. Slater followed close behind. Bob pulled out the box. Slater reached for it.

“N-o-o-o!”

For a moment Bob couldn’t understand where the anguished scream had come from. Then he saw that Paul Donner had managed to struggle to his feet and was lurching up the beach toward them.

Slater half turned. The scream had startled him too. As he spun around to face Donner he had his back to Bob. Jupe was only a few yards away. The First Investigator nodded, stretching out his hands. Bob threw him the box. Jupe caught it.

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Inside the Box

“You cheat.” Paul Donner had reached Slater. “You traitor!” he screamed. “You liar. You blackmailer.”

He was clawing at the bald man’s chest, straining to get his hands around his throat. Slater lowered his gun and tried to push him away. Paul Donner fell backward, pulling Slater on top of him.

Jupe was still holding the box. Pete was standing ten yards away down the beach. A little way out at sea Constance, who had been busy with Fluke, had heard the scream too. She was swimming rapidly in toward the shore with Fluke beside her.

Jupe threw the box to Pete.

Slater rose slowly to his feet, leaving Donner lying on the sand. All the fight had gone out of the tall, thin man. He climbed weakly to his knees.

Pete had caught the box.

He saw Constance swimming to shore. He saw Slater look at Bob and then at Jupe, searching for the precious case. Pete didn't wait for Slater to look in his direction. Hugging the box against his chest, he raced for the ocean.

Slater ran after him.

Pete reached the sea's edge. He waded out until the water was up to his waist. Slater wasn't far behind him now.

"Stop!" Slater shouted.

Pete couldn't see him. But he could feel that gun pointing straight at his back. It was one of the most unpleasant feelings he had ever had in his life.

He stopped.

"Here." Constance lifted her arms out of the water. "Pete, here."

Pete hesitated. He could feel that gun so clearly it might have been pressing against his skin. He could feel the light metal case in his hands. He could see Constance's raised arms.

Pete had played a lot of basketball. He was pretty good at it. For an instant he reacted as he would have done in a close game. For an instant he forgot Slater. He almost forgot Slater's gun. He was holding the ball. Constance was shouting at him to throw it.

He bent his knees, lowered his elbows, then, quickly straightening his whole body and shooting up his arms, he threw the box in a long high curve out to sea.

Constance caught it.

Pete ducked underwater.

He stayed there as long as he could, holding his breath. When he couldn't hold it any longer, he slowly, cautiously raised his head. Constance was twenty yards out. She was treading water, watching the shore. Fluke was floating beside her, holding the flat metal box in his jaws.

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Keeping his head low, Pete turned and looked toward the beach. Slater had put his gun away. He was standing at the water's edge with his bald head lowered in a way that reminded Pete of a snorting bull. A bull that had lost its momentum for the present and was gathering its strength, waiting to see what would happen next.

Jupe and Bob were standing in front of him. Jupe seemed to be doing all the talking. Pete waded ashore and joined them.

"We're not trying to rob you, Mr. Slater," Jupe was saying. "We agree that half of anything in that box belongs to you. All we're trying to do is to protect Constance and her father. All we want is to see that she gets her fair share."

Slater didn't say anything for quite a long time. He was breathing hard through his nose.

"What are you suggesting, boy?" he asked.

"I'm suggesting we take that box into town. I think we ought to take it to Chief Reynolds. He's the head of the Rocky Beach police. He's a very fairminded man. And there's no question of anyone having broken any laws. You just tell him your story. And Constance can explain her father's side of it. Then Chief Reynolds can decide how much of the contents of that box belongs to you. And how much of it belongs to Constance."

There was another long silence. Slater looked out to sea, where Constance and Fluke were floating side by side. There was no way he could ever get that box away from Fluke. Not without Constance's permission.

"Okay." Slater nodded sullenly. "We'll all get back on the boat and sail around to the marina in Rocky Beach. Then we can go and see this Chief Reynolds you're talking about. That suit you, boy?"

Jupe shook his head. Slater had put his gun away, but it wouldn't take him long to pull it out of his pocket again. Back on his own boat he would just wait for the right moment, his chance to get his hands on that box and make off with it.

"There's no need to go all that long way around by the coast," Jupe suggested politely. "We can just call Chief Reynolds from here. He'll send a squad car for us."

"Call him? How?" Slater was beginning to snort again. "You think there's a phone at this cove? Boy, the nearest call box —"

“The nearest call box is less than a mile down the coast road,” Jupe said. “At the Clifftop Cafe. Bob can bike down there in a couple of minutes and call Chief Reynolds.”

“Can do,” Bob agreed.

“Now, if you wouldn’t mind leaving your gun on your boat, Mr. Slater,” Jupe continued pleasantly, “Constance will tell Fluke to bring in the box and

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then we’ll all go up to the road to wait for the police car. Don’t you think that’s a good idea, Mr. Slater?”

Slater obviously didn’t think it was a good idea at all. He looked as though he thought it was a terrible idea. But he nodded anyway. There was nothing else he could do.

Bob went ahead to phone Chief Reynolds. Constance fed Fluke while Jupe and Pete made sure Slater put his gun back in the boat locker. Then Constance said goodbye to Fluke. She told him she would be back in a little while to see that he was all right. Fluke seemed to hate to see her leave. He came in close to the beach to watch her go.

It wasn’t until all four of them were walking up toward the road, with Constance carrying the metal case, that Jupe suddenly remembered Paul Donner.

He had disappeared.

They didn’t have to wait long before Bob reappeared and the police car picked them up. Fifteen minutes later they were all being shown into Chief Reynolds’ office.

Jupe couldn’t blame the chief for staring at them as they entered. The Investigators had picked up their sweaters and sneakers from their bikes, and Pete had brought Constance a terry-cloth robe from the boat, but they were a strange, bedraggled-looking crew. They must have looked as though they had all just walked in out of the ocean.

“Now what’s this about, Jupe?” Chief Reynolds asked as soon as he had found them all chairs.

The chief had known Jupe for years. There were times when he thought the Three Investigators went too far on their own in working on their cases. They were only kids, and the chief didn’t approve of the way they sometimes stuck their necks out. But he had respect for Jupe’s brains. There had even been times when the First Investigator’s ideas had helped the chief solve one of his own police cases.

Jupe looked at Slater. “This is Mr. Oscar Slater,” he explained. “I think it would be best if he tells you his whole story himself.”

“Go ahead, Mr. Slater.”

Slater stood up. He pulled out his wet billfold and showed Chief Reynolds his ID. Then, while the chief had one of his men check it out, Slater started his story.

He told the chief quite frankly about his smuggling trip to Mexico with Diego Carmel. He told him about the storm, the wreck of the boat, the way they had salvaged the metal case from the cabin.

“My young friend, Jupiter Jones here,” Slater went on, “thought it would be a good idea if we opened the case in your office. That way there wouldn’t

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be any arguments later about how much of what’s in it belongs to me and how much belongs to Miss Carmel’s father. And, I must say, I thought that was a pretty good idea, too, Chief.”

He took a key out of his pocket and handed it to Chief Reynolds.

“If you’ll just bring the box over, Constance,” he suggested.

Jupe couldn’t help admiring the way Slater was handling it. He was behaving like an honest citizen who only wanted to see justice done. He watched Constance set the box on the chief’s desk.

He watched the chief put the key into the lock and open the metal case.

He saw the surprise on Constance’s face. Even Chief Reynolds seemed a little startled for a moment. Jupe stood up and, with Bob and Pete beside him, walked over to the desk.

Bob and Pete both looked as though a sudden bright light had been flashed into their eyes.

The First Investigator felt no surprise at all.

Inside the box were thousands of crisp new ten-dollar bills.

They were arranged in neat stacks held together with rubber bands. Fig-uring five hundred bills would be about an inch thick, Jupe calculated that there must have been close to a million dollars in the box.

“So there it is, Chief,” Slater explained smoothly. “The proceeds of my trip to La Paz. Part of that money — ”

He broke off as the phone rang on the chief’s desk. Chief Reynolds answered it and listened in silence for a few seconds.

“Go ahead, Mr. Slater,” Chief Reynolds said, replacing the phone. “Your ID checks out clean. No record. No warrants out for you anywhere. You were saying part of this money — ”

“Yes, Chief. Part of it is what Captain Carmel and I received for those pocket calculators we sold in La Paz. The rest of it is mine. The proceeds of the sale of some private property — several acres of land and a small hotel I happened to own down there. Now if Miss Carmel will just tell me how much of it she wants to claim as her father’s share in those calculators, I guess we can get this whole business over with.”

Chief Reynolds nodded thoughtfully. “Just as long as you keep things straight with the tax people, Mr. Slater,” he said. “I can’t see there’s any-thing wrong with your suggestion.” He looked at Constance. “How much do you claim as your father’s share, Miss Carmel?”

Constance smiled. “I don’t know. I just want to pay his hospital bills,” she said. She glanced at Slater. “Ten thousand dollars is fine with me.”

“Ten thousand dollars it is.” Slater leaned forward to pick up the box. “If you’ll come to the bank with me tomorrow morning, Constance, I’ll give you a cashier’s check for the whole amount.”

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He had his hand on the box now. He was closing the lid. Another moment and he would be out of the office with the money.

Jupe pushed his way forward.

“Chief Reynolds.” The First Investigator was pinching his lower lip. “I don’t want to interfere. But do you mind if I make just one small suggestion?”

“What is it, Jupe?” Chief Reynolds was handing the key to Slater so he could lock the box before he took it away with him.

“If you’d just look at the serial numbers on those bills.”

“The serial numbers, Jupe?”

“I think you’ll find a lot of them are the same.”

Jupe let go of his lip and, opening the box, took out two stacks of the crisp new ten-dollar bills.

“And if you call in a Treasury expert, Chief,” he went on, “I think you’ll find that all of this money is counterfeit!”

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Sebastian

“The police soon picked up Paul Donner,” Jupe said. “He was trying to get away to Mexico in that battered old limousine of his and it broke down near San Diego. When the police took him in, he made a full confession.”

The Three Investigators were sitting around the patio table in Hector Sebastian’s enormous living room. They had come to give him a full report on the case of the kidnapped whale, as Bob called it in the notes he had made.

Mr. Sebastian was leaning back in his rocking chair while he listened attentively to their story and asked an occasional question.

“Paul Donner confessed he had printed the counterfeit money?” he in-quired.

Bob nodded gloomily. Even though it was Paul Donner who had disconnected the brakes on Constance’s pickup truck, and had tried in every way he could to stop them from salvaging that metal case from the wreck, he felt a little sorry for the tall, thin man.

“Oscar Slater forced him to print it,” he explained. “He blackmailed him into it.”

“Blackmailed him? How?”

Hector Sebastian glanced in the direction of the kitchen, where Hoang Van Don was preparing lunch for them. He surreptitiously slipped a bag of candy from his pocket and offered it around to the Three Investigators.

“I know it’s weak-minded of me,” he admitted, popping a jelly bean into his mouth. “But I can’t help it. I get so hungry.”

“Is Don still feeding you brown rice, Mr. Sebastian?” Pete asked sympa-thetically.

“It’s worse than that now, Pete, I’m afraid,” the mystery writer told him. “It’s . . . well, you’ll see for yourself what it is. Sorry, Bob. Go on. Oscar

Another Visit to Hector Sebastian

Slater blackmailed Paul Donner into forging those ten-dollar bills. How?”

“They had worked together in Europe,” Bob went on. “Paul Donner was a highly skilled engraver and he did the forging and the printing. Slater handled the distribution end. He had an organized ring passing counterfeit bills all over the continent.”

“Until the police caught up with him?” Hector Sebastian asked.

“They never did catch up with Oscar Slater,” Jupe told him. “He slipped away without a trace and with most of the profits. But the French police did get after Paul Donner. They had a warrant for his arrest. They would have sent him to jail for years. But he just managed to evade them and escape to Mexico.”

“He had made up his mind to go straight,” Bob put in. “No more counterfeiting. And he was going straight, running a small printing business in La Paz until — ” Bob shrugged. “Well, until Oscar Slater happened to run into him there.”

“And of course Slater knew Donner was wanted by the French police.” Hector Sebastian nodded understandingly. “He knew the French would extradite Donner if they could ever find him.”

He slipped another jelly bean into his mouth. “That gave Slater a lot of leverage. He could force Donner to go back into their old counterfeiting racket.”

He chewed thoughtfully for a moment.

“But how did you guess those bills were counterfeit, Jupe?” he asked.

“It was mostly that crease under Paul Donner’s eye,” Jupe said. “I tried to think of all the people who use a jeweler’s glass. Then it suddenly struck me that Donner might be an engraver.”

“Pretty smart, Jupe.” Sebastian smiled. “It must have seemed to Donner like the best and luckiest thing that had ever happened to him when that charter boat went down with all those, forged bills on board,” he said. “Is that the way you figured it out, Jupe?”

“More or less,” the First Investigator admitted, trying to look modest. “I kept wondering, why was Slater so anxious to recover that box? And why was someone else trying so desperately to stop him?”

He pinched his lip.

“And then I realized the forger was the one who was taking all the big risks. Because forging, well, it’s like painting in a way. A first-class engraver can’t help having his own style. It’s almost like a signature on his work.”

He accepted another piece of candy from Mr. Sebastian.

“As soon as those forged ten-dollar bills started showing up in banks,” he continued, “the Treasury agents would recognize them as Paul Donner’s

work. Then they'd be after him, too, as well as the French police. And it wouldn't be long before they traced him to La Paz."

There was a chopping sound from the kitchen. Hector Sebastian hastily slipped the bag of candy back into his pocket.

"And after that you put two and two together, Jupe," he suggested. "And saw Donner must be the one who didn't want that box found?"

"For a long time" — Jupe really did look modest now — "for a long time I kept putting two and two together and getting three. Three suspects. Oscar Slater and Paul Donner and the man who called us and offered a hundred dollars' reward to get Fluke back into the ocean."

He glanced at Bob.

"It wasn't until Bob took Donner's mask off on the beach that I realized suspect two and suspect three were the same person."

"When Paul Donner called and offered you that reward," Hector Sebastian said. "When he spoke in that peculiar way, saying 'way-ul' and 'cay-us' — do you think he was deliberately imitating Slater's voice, trying to make you think it was Slater who was calling you?"

Jupe shook his head. "I don't think he was, Mr. Sebastian. He was just trying to disguise his own voice. It's like an actor —"

Jupe knew a lot about acting. He had once been a child actor himself, although it wasn't a period of his life he enjoyed being reminded of. His professional name had been Baby Fatso.

"If you ask an actor to change his voice," he went on, "the easiest way for him to do it is by imitating someone else. Using someone else's accent. Paul Donner, with his European background, had a very distinctive way of speaking. The best way he could hide it was by using another distinctive voice. Talking the way Slater did."

Sebastian reached for another candy in his pocket and then changed his mind.

"How did Donner first get on to you three boys?" he asked. "When he met you in San Pedro and told you he was Captain Carmel, he knew you were the Three Investigators, didn't he?"

"Paul Donner was one of the two men on board Slater's boat that first morning," Jupe explained. "He saw us rescue the stranded whale. He was still pretending to be working with Slater then. When Slater told him about his plans to have Constance train Fluke to find the wreck, Donner decided to go to Ocean World himself the next day. I guess he was just trying to find some way to stop Slater. Then he saw us there. He recognized us as the three boys he had seen on the beach. He saw us go into Constance's office. Then he found our card on the desk after Constance had left. So he called us and offered a hundred-dollar reward to get Fluke back in the ocean. To

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make sure Slater couldn't use Fluke to find the wreck."

Sebastian considered that for a moment. He nodded.

"But why did Donner go to Diego Carmel's office in San Pedro?" he asked. "I can understand that with his skills it would be easy for him to make a key to the door. You say he was snooping around. What was he hoping to find?"

"I think he went there to inspect Constance's scuba equipment," Jupe said. "I think it had already occurred to him that that might be one way to stop the whole diving expedition, by tampering with the air tanks. Later, when Constance decided to use the equipment from Ocean World, Donner had to go aboard Slater's boat to empty one of the tanks and fix the pressure gauge."

"Then once you realized the —" Sebastian looked at Bob. "What did you call him in your notes, Bob?"

"The masked giant," Bob told him. "Except that he wasn't a giant, of course. He was just padded out to look like one."

"Once you realized the masked giant and Paul Donner were the same man, everything else began to fit into place —"

He broke off as Don entered. The Vietnamese houseman was carrying a huge wooden bowl. He set it proudly on the table in front of Sebastian and the Three Investigators.

"Lunch," he announced. "Very healthy food. All natural. All unpre-served."

Pete looked into the bowl. It was some kind of salad. At least it had lettuce and slices of cucumber in it. But most of it seemed to consist of thin pink slivers of some unidentifiable substance.

"What is it?" he asked. "What's that pink stuff in it?"

"Fish," Don told him. "Raw fish."

"Raw?" Pete tried to keep the dismay out of his voice. "You mean it isn't — it isn't cooked?"

"Cooking very bad," the Vietnamese explained.

"Very unhealthy. Destroys all natural vitamins."

"But you used to cook the brown rice," Pete argued. "You said the television guru —"

“That guru wrong guru.” Don shook his head sadly. “His show canceled. Have new afternoon-time guru now. This one much better. Especially for cooks. He say cooks no cook. You eat your lunch, please.”

“But we haven’t any plates,” Bob objected. “No plates or knives or forks or anything.”

“You eat with fingers. Dip in bowl. New guru say better put your hand in your mouth than unnatural metal instrument. Same with plates. China

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Another Visit to Hector Sebastian

unnatural too. You eat from healthy wooden bowl. Much better.”

“Much better for dishwasher, anyway,” Sebastian suggested. “New guru says dishwasher mustn’t wash dishes.” He sighed as the Vietnamese went back to the kitchen.

“Oh, well, dip in,” he said. “That cucumber doesn’t look too bad. At least we can have jelly beans for dessert.”

While the Three Investigators dipped their fingers into the bowl and nibbled the lettuce and the cucumber, Hector Sebastian asked them how Constance’s father was getting on and how she had managed to pay the hospital bills.

“Captain Carmel’s fine,” Bob told him. “He’s out of intensive care, and they’re going to discharge him next week.”

“As for the hospital bills,” Jupe added, “that worked out okay too. The Treasury people are paying Constance a reward for recovering those forged bills and leading them to the arrest of Slater and Donner. It won’t be as much as ten thousand dollars. But at least it’ll be in legal currency.”

“There’s a chance Constance may be able to recover some money from Slater too,” Bob said. “After all, he did sell those pocket calculators in Mexico and got paid for them — ”

He broke off, looking at Pete.

“You’re eating it!” he exclaimed. “You’re eating that raw fish!”

“Well, I’m hungry,” Pete defended himself. “And it isn’t too bad. It’s really quite interesting once you get used to it.”

He popped another sliver of fish into his mouth.

“And besides,” he went on, “it is good for you. Good for your brains. Look at Fluke. He never eats anything but raw fish. And look how smart he is,”

Hector Sebastian had to admit there was something in that. But he still stuck to the cucumber and lettuce.

“How is Fluke?” he asked.

“He’s fine,” Jupe told him. “He was pretty sad for a while. He just hung around the cove. Constance was afraid it was because he couldn’t get used to being back in the ocean.”

“And now?” Hector Sebastian prompted him. “Has he got used to it now?”

“No,” Bob answered. “Constance realized that wasn’t the problem. The thing Fluke couldn’t get used to was being without her. He’d grown so fond of her. He missed her too much.”

“So she took him to Ocean World,” Jupe explained. “And he seems very happy now. She gave us all free passes. So we can visit him any time we want to.”

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Another Visit to Hector Sebastian

The First Investigator looked up as the Vietnamese houseman returned.

“Come to think of it,” Jupe said. “If Don would give us a doggie bag — I mean a whaley bag — we could visit Fluke this afternoon and take some of this interesting raw fish with us!”

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