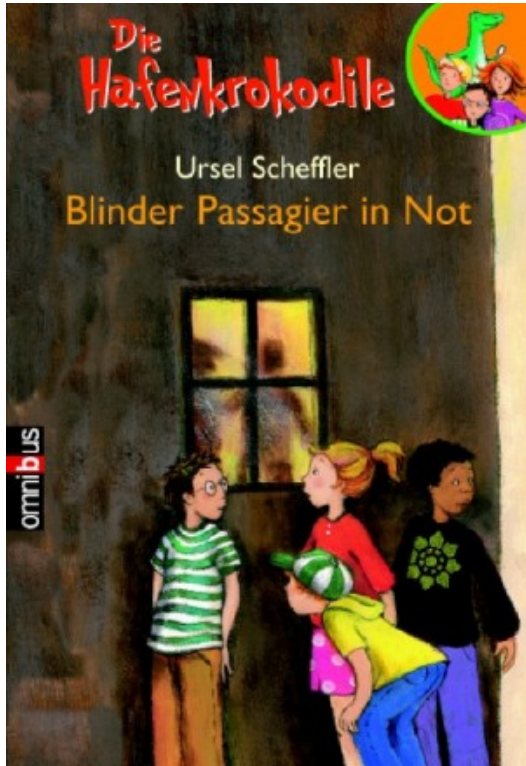


**Ursel Scheffler/Blinder Passagier in  
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## **The Harbor Crocodiles**

Case 4

### ***Stowaway in Danger***

*In search of his father Jim has come from Africa to Hamburg as a stowaway. But his father is on the run, hiding from the mafia boss Black Uncle. Ollie, Leonie and Pat decide to help their new friend.*

*But before father and son can be happily reunited, the three detectives must overcome many obstacles. Their cleverness and even Grandpa Bloom's karate skills are needed to solve the case.*

# Stowaway in Danger

Translation by Paul Davenport

## A Stormy Night

*It all began when Ollie's father, the helmsman Hardy Bloom, was unexpectedly granted shore leave and set off for Hamburg just when a winter thunderstorm was gathering over the Elbe river...*

'It's going to be a stormy night!' Grandpa Bloom said during supper. He had heard it on the radio. It was an old habit of his to listen to the shipping forecast before the evening meal. 'Will you help me remove the tables and chairs from the café garden, Ollie?'

'Sure,' Ollie said as he took a last big bite of his salami sandwich.

'Don't forget the wastebaskets,' Jenny bloom cried as they hurried outside. 'They turn into torpedoes in a storm!'

It was pitch dark outside.

'Turn on the garden lanterns, will you?' Grandpa Bloom said to Ollie.

'They don't work,' the boy replied. 'Someone stole the bulbs!'

'That's the last straw!' Grandpa Bloom shouted angrily. Ollie hurried over to the detective bureau of the Harbor Crocodiles, right beside the café, to get two flashlights, one for him and one for his grandfather.

Using the flashlights, they soon completed the job of securing the café garden before the storm hit.

'What in the name of God is that!' Grandpa Bloom cried suddenly and shined his light on the white retaining wall, which was sprayed with green symbols.

'Those are tags,' Ollie said. 'Something like the autographs of graffiti sprayers.'

'I call it smearing.' Grandpa Bloom was angry. 'I just finished painting that wall a few days ago!'

Ollie touched the spray with his finger. 'It's fresh! It must have been done a few minutes ago, probably while we were having supper. They used one color: green! Maybe it was the Frogs.' The Frogs were a gang of punks that colored their hair green. They often caused trouble.

'If I could get my hands on those idiots, I'd give them a lesson they wouldn't forget!' Grandpa Bloom snarled.

After that, the two of them returned to the house.

'We won't be able to take our trip tomorrow,' Ollie said, deeply disappointed, standing at the window and watching the rain pour down. He had made a date with Leonie and Pat, the other two Harbor Crocodiles, to go on a bicycle tour on the weekend.

'Storm warning. And your father is out there somewhere on the high seas!' sighed Jenny Bloom anxiously. Ollie's father was a sailor and came home only every couple of weeks or so for a few days.

'His ship should be in the English Channel about now,' Ollie said. Using a marine chart, he was able to keep track of his father's ship. 'That's where the center of the storm is!'

'Sometimes storms are worse on land than on the water, my boy!' his grandfather said, trying to calm him. As a former pilot on the Elbe who had only recently retired, he knew all about wind and weather.

It was around nine thirty and Ollie was in bed when the storm struck. The wind shook the trees outside his window. Tiles were blown from roofs. There were sea-sized waves on the Elbe. Ollie plugged his ears with the pillow. He couldn't sleep! He was thinking of his poor father. He got up and turned on the light. He looked for the *Inspector Quizly* detective story he had begun reading the day before, hoping it would take his mind off the storm.

Suddenly, he heard footsteps. The doorbell rang. Ollie ran to the window and looked out but he could see no one. Then he heard a familiar whistle.

'Dad!' he cried as he ran down the stairs in his bare feet. Quickly he removed the door jammer. (His mother had bought it recently because there had been a break-in in the neighborhood.)

'Weren't you going to let us in?' Hardy Bloom laughed when he saw the door jammer.

'Dad! We weren't expecting you till tomorrow at the soonest!' Ollie's eyes were wide with surprise. He threw himself into his father's arms. Suddenly, it dawned on him that his father had said 'we' and then he noticed a dark shape in a rain coat, standing behind his dad.

At that moment, Jenny Bloom came downstairs. She, too, had heard the doorbell but her son had been faster.

'Jenny!' said Hardy Bloom and embraced his wife. 'I've brought something for you.' He nodded at the boy who stepped cautiously inside and looked around with anxious eyes.

'This is Jim.'

'Hello Jim!' Surprised, Jenny Bloom held out her hand to him. The boy hesitated, then reached out and shook her hand. 'Hello,' he said softly.

Wiping her nose, she turned to her husband. 'We thought you were coming tomorrow! What about the boy? Come on in and get on some dry clothes!'

Ollie took a closer look at the boy. He was really black! 'Hello Jim!' Ollie said at last.

'Hello,' came the timid reply. Hardy Bloom led the thin boy into the house and said, 'I thought he could stay with us for a couple of days. At least until I get things sorted out.'

'I'm eager to hear about that,' said Jenny Bloom, 'but it can wait. Right now come into the parlor. Please be quiet. Grandma and grandpa are asleep.'

She led the way up the stairs to the parlor, which was on the second floor. On the first floor was the restaurant *To the Pilot House*, run by her and her parents-in-law.

Hardy Bloom and his little friend took off their wet clothes.

'Is your name really Jim?' Ollie asked. The boy gave him a puzzled look. 'I mean Jim like Jim Knopf in my favorite story. He appeared one day out of the blue just like you but in a postal package.'

Embarrassed, Jim shuffled his feet nervously. He had no idea who Jim Knopf was and what Ollie was talking about. He turned to Hardy Bloom for help.

'I'm afraid he doesn't understand you. He can only speak English. On the ship he learned a little German, but not enough to tell you his story,' Hardy Bloom explained. 'So I'll do it for him - at least the few things I've learned about him.'

'I'll make you some orange tea with honey,' Jenny Bloom said. 'That'll warm you up.'

While Jenny Bloom was making the tea, her husband told Ollie what he knew about Jim. On their return journey from the West African coast they had discovered a completely exhausted and under-cooled boy hiding in one of their life boats.

'He was half frozen and almost unconscious,' Hardy Bloom concluded.

'He is - he was a - a stowaway?' Ollie's voice shook with excitement.

His father nodded. 'Exactly! As far as we could find out he sneaked on board when we were on the Pepper Coast. He didn't want to tell us the details. Except that he is searching for his father, who is supposedly in Hamburg. He begged us to let him stay on the ship. That wasn't as easy as it sounds. Technically, the captain is bound to hand stowaways over to the police in the nearest haven. At the latest in Rotterdam where we unloaded the ship. But I was able to smuggle him out with me. I took him with me on shore leave and got on the next train to Hamburg. So here we are. Now we've got to find his father.'

'Do you know where his father lives?' Ollie asked.

'That's the problem. He doesn't know that,' sighed Ollie's father.

'Hamburg's a big place,' Jenny Bloom said as she poured the steaming tea into the glasses.

'Two million people,' Ollie mused. Full of pity for the boy, he thought: If only I could talk with him! But then his face brightened and he said, 'Dad, tell him to get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow we're going to see Pat. He speaks English fluently. His dad comes from Ireland, you know. Pat and Leonie and I will search for Jim's father.'

'I see,' said Hardy Bloom with a playful smile. 'You mean the *Harbor Crocodiles* will take on the case?'

'Right,' Ollie said. 'If Jim's father is really in Hamburg, we'll find him for sure.'

'Good idea! But we'll inform the police so they can search for him, too. And maybe the Red Cross as well.'

'Maybe we could ask at the registration office, too,' Jenny Bloom suggested. 'Do you know the father's name?'

'His name is Noah Kinto but I doubt whether he's officially registered - not from what Jim told me about him...' Hardy Bloom replied, shaking his head.

'Well, go and get yourselves a warm shower before you go to bed,' Ollie's mother said forcefully.

'I'll show him to the bathroom,' Ollie said.

'And I'll get the spare room ready,' said his mother.

### **The silent guest**

When Ollie woke up the next morning his first thought was *Jim!*

The spare room was opposite his bedroom. It was meant for a little sister, but he never did get a little sister.

Ollie opened the door a crack and peeked in. *The bed was empty!*

Had he dreamed the whole business about Jim? Or had the boy got up early and run away? Ollie looked at the clock. Five to seven. He went to his parents' bedroom. They weren't amused when he shook them awake and cried, 'Jim is gone!'

'How? What? Overboard?' Hardy Bloom shouted and jumped from his bed. It took him a few moments to realize that he was home in Hamburg and no longer on his ship. He put on his slippers and went with Ollie to the spare room.

'There he is!' Hardy Bloom sighed with relief and pointed at a bundle of blankets in the corner between the closet and the window. A tuft of dark hair disclosed what was under the blankets.

'Maybe Jim was afraid to sleep in a high bed. He's not used to that! If, as I suspect, he comes from a little African village, he probably sleeps on the ground.'

Ollie could hardly wait until it was late enough to call up his friends. It was a good thing it was the weekend and they didn't have to go to school. Luckily, it had stopped raining, too.

Pat and Leonie came almost at once. *A stowaway!* That was the kind of case they liked.

'Hello Jim!' Pat said. 'How are you?'

'Fine,' Jim answered, a smile lighting up his face.

'Maybe it'd be better to let the two of them talk alone first,' Ollie's father suggested. 'Jim is a little shy.'

'Shy but brave,' said Ollie. 'Traveling around half the world as a stowaway to look for his father is nothing less than awesome, if you ask me. Can you say that to him, Pat?'

Pat liked being the translator.

'But why did he do it?' Leonie wanted to know.

'I hope that Pat can find out,' Hardy Bloom said. 'He didn't want to explain that to us. He wouldn't say why. He seems to be terribly afraid but I don't know why. That's the reason we didn't ask him any further questions. And we were happy that he had survived.'

Surprisingly, Pat was able to gain Jim's trust within a short time. He found out that Jim had three siblings, that he had learned English in a mission school and that up till now had always been at home, in the little village of Nibu on the West African coast. Jim told him that there had been a revolution in his country and that his father was persecuted and fled with a group of other men to the nearest harbor. A couple of days later, men in uniform came to his house and took his mother away. Jim and his siblings managed to hide from them. After that, they lived for a while with their uncle. But he had four children himself. When his mother didn't return home, Jim went back to the harbor. From a sail maker he learned that his father and five other men had gone on board a ship heading for Hamburg. 'I didn't really know where Hamburg was or how far away it was,' Jim sighed. 'That's why I hung around the harbor waiting for a ship destined for Hamburg. When one finally came, I helped load it and then hid on board. My hiding place in the lifeboat was really quite comfortable at first. Warm, too. But the longer the journey lasted and the further the ship sailed to the north, the colder it got. I was terribly hungry, too.'

'It's a good thing Ollie's dad found you, otherwise you'd have starved or frozen to death,' Pat said.

'I had no idea that Hamburg was so far away!' Jim shook his head. 'It was a horrible journey. And I was really scared of the men in uniform.' (By that he meant the sailors and stewards on the ship.)

'You shouldn't have been afraid of them,' Pat said.

'I thought they were soldiers or policemen!' Jim said softly. 'I don't trust them any more! Men in uniforms took my mother away!'

'The sailors would have helped you,' Pat said. 'Ollie's father is also a sailor and he sometimes wears a uniform. But he's a great guy. I've known him for several years. Would he have taken you with him on shore leave and brought you to Hamburg otherwise?'

That made sense to Jim. He nodded and said, 'I didn't know that Hamburg was so big. Two million? That's more than I can count. Our village has 35 huts. Everyone knows everyone else. How can I find my father in such a big city?'



'With the help of the *Harbor Crocodiles*!' Pat replied proudly. 'You can count on us!' And then he explained to Jim that he and his friends had their own detective bureau. Of course, Jim didn't know what a detective bureau was, so Pat explained it to him.

'I understood that, too,' Leonie said when Pat had finished with his explanation. 'You want to show him our bureau now, right?'

'Exactly!' Pat laughed. 'And he'll become an honorary crocodile and we'll take care of him until we've found his father. Is that okay with you?'

'Okey-dokey!' Leonie cried. 'What are we waiting for?'

They ran through the rain to the bank of the Elbe, where they had their new detective bureau in Grandpa Bloom's old garden house.

Jim wasn't used to the cold and wet weather. He was wearing the rubber boots and warm socks Ollie had lent him and Jenny Bloom's thick sweater and jacket that was much too large for him.

'The important thing is that you don't catch a cold,' she had said when she handed him the clothes.

The storm had damaged the Harbor Crocodiles' bureau. The wooden sign with the crocodile on it lay on the ground, and one of the shutters had been half torn from the wall. The rain had changed the meadow into a swamp. From a distance the sound of fire trucks could be heard, coming to pump out all the flooded cellars.

'It's beautiful here in the summer,' Pat said to Jim. 'Believe it or not, it's almost like Africa. But in the winter it's often cold and miserable. Maybe we'll even get some snow.'

Jim smiled happily. 'That would be super. I've never seen snow!'

'Come on in!' Leonie cried impatiently. 'Ollie is building a fire. In a moment it'll be cozy and warm.'

It was a good thing that Grandpa Bloom had repaired the little oven, and that they had gathered a plentiful supply of firewood from the riverbank that summer. Soon it would be warm enough for them to take off their jackets.

'And now we're going to make a plan to find your father, Jim,' Ollie said. Pat translated his words. Leonie took notes.

'First of all, we'll ask about him at the registration office,' Ollie said. 'Secondly, we'll ask the employment agency,' Leonie added. 'He must have tried to find a job. He has to make a living, doesn't he?'

Pat nodded and said, 'And thirdly we could ask Inspector Voss to check the police computer to see if there is any record of him.'

'The police?' Jim asked anxiously, after Pat had translated his words for him.

'Not to worry. Inspector Voss is our friend. We've often helped him. He'll be glad to do us a favor,' said Leonie with a smile.

'We could get our friend Captain Frisby to ask around at the harbor, and ask Benno Marek to write a newspaper article about him!' Leonie mused. 'He still owes us a favor!'

'Super idea! *Stowaway in need of help!* An article like that would get a lot of attention. Marek wouldn't want to pass up that opportunity, that's for sure!' Ollie laughed.

'Do you think Jim's dad reads the newspaper?' Pat was skeptical.

But Leonie pressed on. 'It's enough when someone who knows him or has seen him reads the article!'

'We should ask Inspector Voss if he thinks that's a good idea. Maybe he'll give us the red cell phone again!' Pat said. The red cell phone with the speed-dial with the inspector's number had been a big help in other cases.

'Right, let's be off! Dad went to see him this morning. Inspector Voss is in his office. He has the weekend shift!' Ollie said.

## **The Old Swede**

Inspector Voss looked up from a pile of papers when the Harbor Crocodiles entered his office.

'I can guess what this is about,' he murmured when he caught sight of Jim. 'I've already spoken with your father, Ollie. We'll do everything possible to make sure Jim can stay with your family for the next few days,' he said.

'Where can he go to without a father and mother?' Leonie sighed.

'We're going to try to find Mr. Kinto as quickly as possible,' Voss said.

'His name is Noah Kinto, as in Noah and the ark,' Ollie said.

'Only this Noah was in a container ship,' said Voss. 'We found out that much, but after that we lost his trail. Strangely, he hasn't applied for asylum.'

Leonie thought about that a moment, then said, 'Maybe he didn't know how to do it.'

'If I've been correctly informed, the *Harbor Crocodiles* are interested in working on this case,' Voss said with a playful smile.

'Right you are!' Ollie said. And then the three children took turns explaining what they intended to do.

'That's a good plan,' the inspector said when they were finished, smiling his approval. 'We've already contacted the registration office and the employment agency. Using the press is a very good idea. Searching for him with the help of the newspapers is certainly better than relying on the police only, especially since I wasn't able to find anything about Jim's father in the police computer.'

'That's too bad,' Leonie murmured.

Voss shook his head. 'On the contrary, that's a good sign. It shows that he hasn't become a criminal.'

'Jim's father is definitely not a criminal!' Ollie said in an angry voice.

'Unfortunately, it often happens that inexperienced fugitives and people seeking asylum fall into the hands of gangs. The gangs act as if they want to help them, but then they force them to deal in drugs, steal, smuggle or do even worse things.'

Pat didn't translate the inspector's last comments, not wishing to cause Jim to worry.

'Promise me that you won't do anything rash or dangerous,' the inspector said.

The three children looked at each other and nodded.

'Are you going to give us the red cell phone again?' Leonie asked. 'So we can contact you in case of an emergency?'

'And so Benno Marek or people who read his article can contact us,' Pat added.

'You've convinced me,' said the inspector and took the cell phone from his desk drawer. 'Here you are. Keep me in the loop - as always.'

Just as the children were about to leave, the telephone on his desk rang.

'Stop! wait a moment! I forgot to give you the battery charger,' the inspector said as he picked up the receiver.

At the door, the three detectives waited for the call to end.

They couldn't hear what the other person said. Whatever it was, it got the inspector's blood boiling. '...nothing but trouble...dirtbags...as if we had nothing else to worry about...'  
The children had never seen him so angry.

'It's a good thing you're still here,' the inspector said after slamming down the receiver. 'Maybe you can help me again.'

The Harbor Crocodiles were all ear.

'It's about those graffiti sprayers. One of my officers just called. A brand new building in Övelgönne is covered with graffiti. And they messed up the entrance to the museum in Altona. It's really infuriating and of course, it costs a lot to clean up, too, money that's badly needed for other things.'

'They sprayed the freshly painted wall of the Pilot House yesterday,' Ollie said. 'Grandpa's hopping mad!'

'I've got an idea,' the inspector began. 'Leonie, you've got a camera, haven't you?'

Leonie nodded. 'Yep. From my mom.' Leonie's mother was a photographer.

'When you're doing your patrolling you could take pictures of the characters made by the sprayers. Maybe we can link the tags to certain sprayers.'

'I can scan the photos of the tags,' Ollie said in an excited voice. 'And create a database on my computer, and then we can compare them and link them to the different graffiti gangs.'

'Bravo! You catch on fast, Ollie. I've found the right man for this case!' Inspector Voss laughed.

The telephone rang again.

This time the call didn't last long. The inspector put down the receiver and shook his head. 'That was Captain Frisby. He said he was out walking when he noticed that *The Old Swede* is covered with green-colored graffiti!'

'*The Old Swede*? Outrageous! Leonie cried. 'Where's the respect? It was just restored after all those years at the bottom of the Elbe only to be messed up by a bunch of hooligans!'

Wide-eyed, Jim listened to the loud dialog but even if he could understand German, he wouldn't have known that *The Old Swede* referred to a giant stone that a crane had lifted up while dredging the Elbe. Geologists had learned that it was almost two billion years old and had come from Sweden 200,000 years ago with the so-called Elster Ice Age. The people of Hamburg had soon grown fond of their 217 ton boulder.

'We were all present when it was officially given the name *The Old Swede*,' Ollie said proudly. 'It was the sixth of June, 2000, on Pat's birthday.'

'That's interesting, but it's time to get to work. Come on, Crocodiles,' the inspector cried. 'What are you waiting for?' He laughed and said goodbye to the children.

Pat was sitting in front of the police station. Suddenly, he looked at his watch and cried, 'Yikes! I got to get home and take care of Henrietta. My parents are going to an exhibition opening and my brother has handball practice as usual!'

'I'll call Benno Marek and then get my camera,' Leonie said. Then they all went off in different directions.

### **A reportage makes waves**

Benno Marek, the reporter, was quite surprised when Leonie called him.

'Oh, *Miss Harbor Crocodile!* What an honor,' he joked.

Leonie explained quickly what had happened that weekend. What she told him was so interesting that he immediately agreed to write an article about it. 'It'll be in the Wednesday edition,' he murmured after glancing at his schedule. 'Can I interview the young man?'

'If you can speak English,' Leonie replied.

'Of course I can,' he said in his typically arrogant way.

'Monday after school at our detective bureau - say, 2 o'clock. Is that okay?' Leonie asked.

Marek glanced at his pocket calendar and said, 'Just fine!'

'Okey-dokey!' Leonie said. 'See you soon.'

Marek showed up on Monday with his video recorder.

As he approached the club house of the *Harbor Crocodiles*, it was snowing hard.

The Harbor Crocodiles were playing in the snow and didn't notice the reporter at first. Jim was running about trying to catch as many snowflakes as possible, putting them in his mouth and tasting them. To a boy from the Pepper Coast, where it never snowed, it was a unique experience!

Click, click, click went the camera as Marek took pictures of Jim laughing in the snow. The black boy in the white snow. That would make a great article!

And then came the interview. Marek and the others sat in the old garden house, now the detective bureau of the *Harbor Crocodiles*. Jim was no longer laughing. He answered Marek's questions cautiously. He told Pat he didn't want to say anything that would get his father in trouble.

'It's important that as many people as possible read your story,' Pat explained. 'We hope that maybe one of the readers knows your father! Is there anything about him that would make him easy to identify?'

Jim hesitated a moment, then said, 'Above his right eye there's a white streak in his hair. About as wide as this,' Jim said, making an opening of about three centimeters between his thumb and index finger. 'The rest of his hair is as dark as mine. Mom always said that I look a little like him.'

'A white streak of hair - very good!' said Marek from behind his camera. He made a couple of close-ups of Jim and murmured, 'His picture will be on the front page of Wednesday's paper! Can I call you in case someone contacts me?'

'Of course,' Leonie said quickly. 'I'll give you the number. You can include it in your article.'

### **A first lead**

Leonie's red cell phone rang as she was on her way to school Thursday morning. It was a familiar voice, that of Gee Gee, the bum, whose real name was Georg Gutbier. The children had often visited him at the jetties, where he could always be found selling *All and Sundry*, the newspaper for the homeless.

'I know you!' he said when he heard Leonie's voice. 'Leonie Storm! You and your friends found that crocodile in the Elbe!'

'Right,' Leonie replied. 'We are the *Harbor Crocodiles!*'

'I still remember that great salami sandwich you gave me!'

'Leonie let out a loud laugh. 'You can get them at Pirate's Corner, Mrs. Brand's kiosk. My friends and I work for her from time to time. If you want, I can bring one with me.'

'If it's no trouble,' Gee Gee said, a little embarrassed.

'We're not looking for a crocodile this time. We're looking for Jim's father and we would be thankful for any tips.'

'Well, maybe I have one for you,' Gee Gee said. 'But not on the telephone. You'll have to come to me.'

'We'll be there after school tomorrow,' Leonie promised.

'And you'll bring the salami sandwich with you?'

'Of course I will!' Leonie laughed.

'You two go alone to see Gee Gee,' Ollie said, when Leonie told him and Pat about the call. 'I've got to go home right away because of Jim. Dad spoke to the police again about the residence permit. I hope that Jim can stay here a while!'

'I hope so, too. After all, he's been made an honorary Harbor Crocodile,' Pat said.

Right after school Pat and Leonie went to the jetties. The promenade was covered with snow and ice, so they took the subway to get there. It was only one station away.

'I'm eager to hear what Gee Gee has got to say,' Pat said to Leonie.

'He must know something, otherwise he wouldn't have contacted the newspaper. He knows almost everyone who works at the harbor and all the latest news.'

'Well, well, there you are,' Gee Gee laughed, as the two children approached him. 'You're curious to hear what old Gee Gee knows, is that it?'

'That's it,' said Leonie with a big smile. 'And I've brought you a salami sandwich with pickles and salad. Made by my mother. She's almost as good as Mrs. Brand.'

Gee Gee took a large bite of the sandwich and with his mouth still full said, 'I've heard something about a group of illegal Africans. They're from the West coast and they live on one of those ships for asylum-seekers. It could well be that Jim's father is among them. At least someone there might know where he is. One of my friends says he's seen a colored man with a white streak in his hair there.'

'Okey-dokey! Thanks!' Leonie was over the moon. 'That sounds very promising! Come on, let's go!' she said to Pat.



'I think it's best if I come with you,' Gee Gee said, getting up quickly. 'You never know. And thanks for the sandwich. It was really tasty.' He shook the crumbs from the bag into the Elbe, where seagulls came swooping down to pick them from the water. Then he covered the newspapers with a blanket and asked his buddy Owl, who sold hot wine from a little stand a few meters away, to keep an eye on them.

It turned out to be a good idea to have Gee Gee with them. The ship for asylum-seekers was hard to find and there were many suspicious-looking characters hanging around there. When they asked about an African man with a white streak in his hair, all of them just shrugged and moved off quickly.

One of them, a man with his leg in a cast, wasn't able to move as quickly as the others. Maybe he didn't want to. He listened to Leonie's story and said, 'Yep, I read about it in the newspaper yesterday and said to my buddies: Hey! that's Banana, isn't it? We call him that because he worked for the banana man at the fish market for a while.'

'Why didn't you call the number in the newspaper, my friend? The boy is searching for his father, man!' Gee Gee said in an angry voice.

'Because...' began the man with his leg in a cast as he lit up a cigarette. '...because he's wanted by the police and I doubt he'd like it if I told them where he is.'

'Wanted by the police? What for?'

'Setting fire to the asylum-seekers' hostel! I don't know if it's true or not. When a fire suddenly broke out in a hostel in Ottensen, he was seen running away. A friend of mine told me the drug mafia set that fire to pin the blame on him, so that he'd go into hiding and begin working for them. Poor Banana! How could he ever prove that he was innocent? If he got caught and convicted, he would be deported immediately. Something he definitely doesn't want. That's why he can't be found. Got it?'

Leonie nodded. 'Do you have any idea where he could be hiding?'

'My feeling tells me he's not far from the harbor. The harbor's where a strong man like him can get a job. And he's a decent man. I can vouch for that. I forgot my wallet in a washroom one evening when I'd had too much to drink. He found it and

brought it to me the next morning. There wasn't a cent missing!

'Thanks for the information!' Gee Gee said. He had Leonie write her cell phone number on his cigarette box and handed it to the man. 'If you hear anything else, dial this number,' he said.

Just then, a black Mercedes S Class came driving up the street.

'Quick! Hide!' Gee Gee hissed and they ducked behind a dumpster.

The three of them watched as two men wearing sun glasses got out of the elegant automobile and made their way to the houseboat.

They had on black polished shoes and dark suits with vests. They walked into the houseboat as if it belonged to them. A few moments later, they came out again. Two young men followed right behind them, obviously very reluctantly.

'I'll bet a million bucks that those guys belong to *Black Uncle*,' Gee Gee muttered.

'Who's *Black uncle*?' Ollie asked, wired-up and wide-eyed.

'An influential godfather of the local drug mafia,' Gee Gee whispered anxiously.

'Not a scene for the *Harbor Crocodiles*. They're not in your league. I'd keep clear of them if I were you!'

'We're only trying to find Jim's father, that's all,' Ollie said softly.

When Gee Gee wasn't looking, Leonie took down the license plate number of the Mercedes in her notebook.

'At least we've got our first hot lead,' Ollie said as they were on the bus again.

'And we know for sure now that Jim's father is really here,' Leonie said with a little smile.

When Leonie and Ollie reached the Harbor Crocodile bureau, Pat was already there. He had brought his little sister with him along with a large box of *Lego* blocks for her to play with.

Ollie had to go home but Leonie stayed and told Pat all about what they had found out.

After that, she called Inspector Voss to inform him, too.

'Interesting, very interesting,' Voss murmured.

'Gee Gee believes that *Black Uncle* is an influential drug dealer,' Leonie said.

'We know all about him,' Voss said quickly. 'We also know that the dealers have contact men on the asylum-seeker ships. But when we get a hot tip and raid one of the ships, they're gone, vanished in thin air. They've got spies everywhere to warn them so they always get away in time.'

'At any rate, I took down their license plate number,' Leonie said.

'Good. I'll have it checked,' Voss said, typing the number into his computer. The result appeared almost immediately on his screen.

'The number isn't registered! It must be forged! That's proof that there's something fishy about our two "gentlemen"! he muttered.

Leonie thought about that. 'Have they taken Jim's father away?' she said.

'Why do you think that?' Voss asked.

'Because we can't find him.'

'Maybe he doesn't want to be found - because of the fire they want to blame him for.' Voss paused. 'Whatever, we're going to follow up every lead. As soon as I find out more, I'll let you know. Take good care of your young friend. You never know...' the inspector said in a serious tone.

'You bet we will,' Ollie promised.

'He can count to a hundred in German already!' Leonie was obviously proud of him.

'You're really good, do you know that?' Voss laughed. 'Oh, I almost forgot. Have you taken photos of the *tags*?'

'We'll take them this afternoon,' Leonie promised.

## Photo safari

'Can I take the good camera with me, Mom? It's important,' Leonie said.

'I don't mind, but take care of it like it was made of gold, you hear?'

'Yeah, Mom,' Leonie cried and hurried off with the valuable camera on her way to pick up Ollie and Jim. Together they went to Pat's place. But - oh, no! - he had to babysit again! He was in a huff because it was his brother Sven's turn really. But Sven had just called from Bergedorf to say that his moped had broken down.

'A breakdown my eye! That's nothing but an excuse. His latest girlfriend lives there - in Bergedorf,' Pat grumbled.

'Hey! It's all right,' Leonie said with a smile. 'We'll show you the photos of the tags. It'll be as if you were there.'

And then they were off.

The first photo Leonie took was of Jim and Ollie in front of the Harbor Crocodile bureau. The second was of the graffiti on Grandpa Bloom's wall, and the third was of Mrs. Brand and her kiosk at Pirate's Corner. They told Ada Brand the whole story about Jim. When they finished, she gave them each a big ice cream cone. Leonie laughed and said, 'You get a 'star photo' of your kiosk for that!' Click! And the photo was taken.

'Just like your mother, a real professional photographer!' Mrs. Brand laughed. 'Look! Here comes your old friend, the captain!'

'Hello, Crocodiles!' Captain Frisby cried happily. 'Is that a new club member?' he said, nodding at Jim.

'As a matter of fact, yes. He's an honorary member,' Leonie said. 'We're looking for his father.'

'I read about it in the newspaper,' Frisby said. 'I'll ask around for you at the harbor.'

'Super!' said Leonie in a loud voice. 'Maybe you'll find out something about the graffiti gang while you're at it. That's our second case!'

'Are you talking about the pigs that messed up our *Old Swede*?' growled the captain.

'Right on!' Leonie said. 'I'm taking photos for Inspector Voss and Ollie is going to collect them in a data bank in his computer.'

'You're sure smart kids,' murmured the captain as he lit his pipe.

'We hope we can match the different tags with graffiti gangs, when the sprayers get caught in the act,' Ollie explained.

'Good idea!' Frisby growled. After talking with the children, he bought a newspaper and a package of pipe tobacco from Ada Brand. He said goodbye to the children, and then went off in the direction of the museum harbor. Leonie, Ollie and Jim continued along on their photo safari. They took pictures of the graffiti at the school wall and at the museum. Finally, they went to the *Old Swede*, which was covered with several layers of green-colored graffiti.

'I hope all that paint can be removed,' Leonie said.

'Yeah, such a beautiful stone!' Ollie said sadly. '200,000 years it lay buried under the sand of the riverbank. No sooner had it seen the light of day when it was disfigured like that! That really sucks!'

'It was the *Frogs*! I'd bet anything it was them!' Leonie cried. She pointed at a green figure that looked like a frog.

'Hunches don't count. We've got to have proof!' Ollie said with a sigh.

'Just wait and see! We'll get the proof we need,' said Leonie. 'In any case we've got a bone to pick with the *Frogs*.'

They photographed the graffiti on the huge stone from every side. Then they took a picture of Ollie and Jim standing next to it. How small they looked beside the giant boulder!

Leonie pointed at the graffiti. 'Bad boys,' she said to Jim. 'Bad, bad boys!'

'It's many millions of years old,' Ollie said to him and knocked on the stone.

Jim nodded. 'Very old,' he said, rubbing the stone gently with his hand. He understood exactly what Leonie and Ollie meant. An awe-inspiring old stone like this one could tell its story in its own way. In his village there was also a large old stone that was honored like a shrine. If anyone had dared disfigure it, they would have been excluded from the group.

### **Sunday at the fish market**

The man with the nickname *Black Uncle*, whose real name was unknown, had a sudden craving for fresh fish on Sunday morning. He sent his nephew Adolfo to the fish market to buy some plaice right off the cutter.

By a strange coincidence, Adolfo went to the stand of the fish trader where Jim's father worked. When someone had taken over his job for the banana trader, he had been left with no other choice than to work for a fish monger. He had dyed the white streak in his hair black, so he couldn't be identified so easily.

Noah weighed the fish for the customer and covered it with cellophane. He then took a newspaper to wrap it in. He didn't know enough German to understand what was in the newspapers he used. But just as he was about to wrap the fish in the Wednesday edition of the evening newspaper, he noticed the photo of Jim! Full of excitement, he showed the photo to the fish trader. But he was busy with an important customer who had just ordered ten kilos of sole and five large lobsters for his restaurant. 'Later!' he growled and pushed Noah away. 'I got no time right now to talk about newspapers. We have to sell fish!'

'Hey! I'm in a hurry. You can talk with your boss later!' Adolfo ranted. He wanted his fish at once.

But Noah ignored him. 'No, now! No, now!' he said to his boss, poking his finger at the photo. 'Can you just read what's under the picture? Please!'

When the fish trader finished serving his customer, he rubbed his hands on his apron, put on his glasses and read: *Wanted: black father with white lock of hair!* He skimmed

through the article and then explained in broken English what it was about: 'A boy from West Africa look for his father. He hide in ship and come all the way to Hamburg.'

Jim's father turned away to hide his feelings.

'Interesting,' Adolfo said, joining in the conversation. '*Black father with white lock of hair?* That must be that *Banana*, the guy who set the fire to the asylum-seekers' hostel. I know someone who's looking for him. And the police are after him, too.'

'You know as well as me that he didn't set that fire,' grumbled the fish trader.

'And how do you know that?' Adolfo asked in a menacing tone of voice.

'From an insider! So. Now pay for your fish and be off with you. I'm busy.' He nodded at the long line of customers behind Adolfo.

'That's no way to talk to me, Freddy!' Adolfo protested angrily. 'I'm going to tell my uncle about this!' He paid, grabbed the package of fish and stomped away.

After he had gone, the fish trader turned to Noah and whispered, 'Be careful! He belongs to *Black Uncle's* gang!'

Freddy, the man with the weatherbeaten face, was deep down a decent and helpful person. Even though he could get impatient and loud occasionally and at times cheated a little when weighing his customers' fish.

'It's a good thing you dyed your white hair, Noah. Otherwise he would have become suspicious when he saw how you reacted to that newspaper article,' Freddy said with a grin.

'That boy is my son!' murmured Noah, shaking his head in bewilderment. 'My Jim is here! I can't believe it. I've got to find him.'

'It is really hard to believe,' muttered Freddy, slowly realizing the full meaning of the article. 'Take care, Noah, that no one disturbs your reunion with Jim and calls the police to take you under arrest...'

Freddy turned his eyes to the market hall, where Adolfo was talking with two suspicious-looking characters.

'What a bummer!' muttered Freddy.

'What's wrong?' Noah wanted to know.

'Those guys talking to Adolfo belong to the *Black Uncle* gang. They collect protection money from traders. I'm afraid they'll be coming to see me soon. You'd better get out of here fast!'

But that didn't happen. Suddenly, it seemed as if the entire city of Hamburg wanted fish from Fish-Freddy, and the fish trader and his helper had more than they could do serving the customers.

Noah put the newspaper clipping with the telephone number in his pocket. He could hardly wait until noon, when the market closed for the day.

Then he rushed to a pay phone.

### **An important call**

Leonie was sprawled out on the floor, working on a complicated crossword puzzle. Suddenly, she heard the sound of the red cell phone ringing from inside her backpack beside her desk.

Whoever it was on the line was speaking English. Leonie hardly understood anything. It was only when she heard the words *newspaper* and *Jim's father* that she realized that someone was trying to tell her something about Jim's father.

'Sorry,' Leonie said. 'I can't understand you very well.'

'The address! Give me the address!' the man said.

'Sure. Of course!' Leonie answered.

Damn! The battery beeped and the connection was broken. The battery had gone dead, something that shouldn't happen to a detective!

Leonie was mad at herself. She plugged in the charger quickly and inserted the cell phone. At the same time, she made a mental note to learn English as soon as possible. That was a huge advantage to a detective. 'Hopefully, he'll call again!' she murmured. 'Hopefully!'



Leonie had arranged to meet Pat at the detective bureau that afternoon. He was helping her with her English homework. She was telling him about the strange call when the red phone in her backpack started ringing again!

'Take it, please,' she said and handed Pat the receiver.

Pat began talking. The caller was none other than Jim's father!

Pat told him that Jim was being well taken care of and that three friends were looking after him.

'I've got a problem. I can't get away at the moment. I'll come as soon as possible. Maybe this evening. Can I have your address?'

Just then there were strange sounds in the background: a chair fell over, glass clinked and someone cried for help. Then there was a loudspeaker announcement and the connection was cut off.

'Man oh man! Something's wrong!' Pat cried. 'What can we do?'

'We've got to inform Inspector Voss immediately,' Leonie said. 'Maybe Jim's father has been kidnapped!'

'Could be!' said Jim. 'At any rate, he was forced to end the call. It sounded like he was calling from a pay phone - there was a loudspeaker announcement in the background...like in a train station. And glass or dishes breaking...maybe he was in a bar at the train station,' Pat said, thinking aloud.

They decided not to tell Jim about the call so he wouldn't worry about it.

Leonie called Inspector Voss at once. He was gasping for breath when he answered her call.

'Is something the matter?' Leonie asked anxiously.

'It's nothing,' he panted. 'I'm running around the Alster, training for the Hanse Marathon!'

'Oh, I see!' Leonie breathed a sigh of relief. 'I thought you were being chased or something like that.'

'In a way, I was. Chased by the pressure I put on myself!' said the inspector. 'What's up?'

'Jim's father called,' Leonie said. 'But someone tore the phone out of his hands.'

Pat took the receiver and said, 'There was a cry for help and suddenly, the connection was cut off.' He went on to tell the inspector about the background noises he had heard during the short conversation.

'Yeah, that definitely sounds like he was kidnapped,' Voss said anxiously, leaning against the railing of a dock. 'I've had a look at the files about the fire in the asylum-seekers' hostel. According to one of the witnesses the suspect looks exactly like Jim's father! He claims to have seen a dark-skinned man with curly black hair with a streak of white at the scene of the crime shortly before the fire broke out. Carrying a gas can!'

'I think we should take a closer look at that witness,' Pat suggested.

'He's well known to us. He's not very dependable. He was convicted of perjury a few years ago. The claim that Jim's father set the fire is a way to blackmail him, I think. It wouldn't surprise me at all if someone was trying to put pressure on him and force him to perform criminal acts for them. Could you do me a favor?'

'Sure. What do you have in mind?'

'Keep a close eye on Jim. Because of that newspaper article the mafia gang might get the idea that their prisoner has a son.'

'Are you saying that Jim might be kidnapped, too?' Pat said in a shaky voice.

'Not necessarily. Just maybe. You should be very, very careful!' the inspector advised. Then he smiled and said, 'And now I must be off to search for Jim's father!'

### **Grandpa, the karate master**

Believe it or not, there is such a thing as a sunny day in Hamburg in November! Grandpa Bloom decided to take advantage of the warm weather by taking a walk. He first went to Pirate Corner and bought himself a newspaper from Ada Brand.

'Have the Harbor Crocodiles found Jim's father yet?' the curious owner of the kiosk asked.

'Not yet, but they're on his trail,' Grandpa Bloom said.

'Aren't they great?' said Ada Brand. 'I hope that the Harbor Crocodiles will work for me again this summer. They were really a big help to me.'

When some customers entered the kiosk, Grandpa Bloom said goodbye and left quickly. He decided not to go straight home, but to make a little detour and read his newspaper in peace and quiet while sitting on a park bench in the sun. It wasn't easy to read the paper at home because his wife and daughter kept him on the go all the time.

He soon found a bench with a lovely view of the Elbe. He sat down and smiled as he unfolded the newspaper.

The snow had thawed out the ground. The ground was dry and an ideal track for the three skaters who came speeding along and docked on the bench Grandpa Bloom was sitting on.

'Hey, you're in our way, granddad!' cried one of the skaters brashly and pushed aside his newspaper. They sat down and practically shoved Grandpa Bloom off the bench.

Grandpa Bloom got up, calmly folded his newspaper and put it in the litter basket. He looked at the boys, who were busy taking off their skates and putting on baseball shoes.

'Hey! Didn't you know? Staring is impolite. Get the hell out of here, old man! We've got important things to talk about,' said the biggest boy, planting himself directly in front of him.

Grandpa Bloom slowly took off his glasses and put them in his jacket pocket. Then he pulled his stocking cap down tightly over his ears and looked the young man deep in the eye.

'Shut your face, boy!' he said to the young man, whose mouth fell open in surprise. 'And defend yourself if you can.'

Suddenly Grandpa Bloom's right arm and then his left shot forward. There followed two or three lightning-fast karate holds and a quick leg move that tripped up the boy and sent him flying through the air. The sports bag in his hand fell to the ground, too. Three cans rolled out of it. Green spray cans!

'It looks like I taught the right guy a lesson,' Grandpa Bloom said more to himself than to the boys, who were suddenly in a big hurry to leave.

'Does anyone else want to try their luck?' Grandpa Bloom asked as he approached the two others, who were helping their buddy to get back on his feet. That wasn't so easy with their skates half off.

'Well, all right,' Grandpa Bloom said, taking his place on the bench again, 'be more careful in the future! "Grandad" can do karate!'

'Wow!' muttered Captain Frisby, who had watched the scene at a distance. 'I was about to come to his rescue but he didn't need my help at all,' he laughed.

'Kids like that are not as tough as they pretend to be,' said Grandpa Bloom as he watched the three boys hurry away. They were in such a hurry that they forgot their sports bag.

Grandpa Bloom pointed at the spray cans on the ground. 'We should save those for the harbor Crocodiles. They just might be an important lead in the boulder case.'

'That's quite possible,' growled Captain Frisby. He lit his pipe and sat down next to Grandpa Bloom on the bench. 'I'm all for teaching those rowdies a lesson they won't forget. They messed up one of my vintage cars in my museum. Yeah, they're a lot like dogs that pee all over the place to leave their scent behind.'

'Why do they do it?' Grandpa Bloom mused. 'If I had known for sure that that boy was the one who ruined my freshly painted garden wall, I would have given him a good thrashing, I can tell you that!'

'Forget it,' Captain Frisby said. 'Your moves were as good as Bruce Lee's! Your grandchild can be proud of you.'

'Well, yeah, I'm not quite ready for the scrap heap yet,' Grandpa Bloom said with a bashful smile. 'Of course, the element of surprise was on my side, too.'

'They were most likely *Frogs*,' Frisby said. 'Like the time in my museum when my crocodile disappeared - I recognized

them from the green strands in their hair. And the tattoos on their wrist.'

'Frogs?' Ollie said that, too,' muttered Grandpa Bloom. 'In that case I'll go straight home and take the sports bag with me.'

'I was careful to use gloves when I handled the cans,' Grandpa Bloom said to Ollie as he handed him the sports bag. 'Because of finger prints.'

'Great,' Ollie said with a smile. 'We'll take them to Inspector Voss at once. Would you be able to recognize the three boys?'

'From a hundred meters away! I had a good look at them,' Grandpa Bloom assured him.

'It would be good if you could come with us. Maybe Voss would let you look at his photo album...'

Inspector Voss was well informed. 'I met Captain Frisby while jogging during my lunch hour and he told me all about watching you. He said it was like seeing a scene from a Bruce Lee movie,' he said, grinning. 'Does that mean that you've become a *Harbor Crocodile*, too, Mr. Bloom?'

'For heaven's sake!' Grandpa Bloom laughed. 'I've got enough problems with my two women!' By that he meant his wife and his daughter, who kept him, a retiree, busy helping out in the restaurant.

With the help of the photo album Grandpa Bloom was quickly able to identify the three suspects.

'Well, well,' Voss said. 'It's our old friends Stan, Pete and Gunnar. We had always suspected them but we couldn't nail them. But if their finger prints are on the spray cans, things don't look good for them. Are you going to file a charge about your wall?'

Grandpa Bloom thought for a moment and then said, 'If they apologize and repaint it, I'll forget the whole thing.'

'Anything new on Jim's father?' Ollie asked in a tense voice.

'I'm afraid not!' the inspector sighed. 'We've checked all the bars in the vicinity of the train station, but no one knows anything about a colored man with a white stand of hair, let alone about a kidnapping.'

'What was the result of the investigation of the arson case?'

'Combustive agents were used - old cloths soaked in gas. A gas can was found. That's also an important clue. It looks bad for Jim's father if the witness sticks to his story.'

'The witness himself could be the one who set the fire,' Ollie said.

'Right! But that would have to be proven,' said Voss, shaking his head.

## **Harbor City**

The next important clue came Friday evening, suddenly and from an unexpected source: from Pat's brother Sven. Pat was sore at first when his big brother asked him again, if he would take care of Henrietta in his place.

'I have to go to Bergedorf tomorrow afternoon. It's urgent!'

'What's your problem this time?' Pat said sarcastically.

'No problem. I met a girl, a really nice girl, and we're going to take a walk in the Sachsenwald forest,' Sven said with a little smile.

'And what do I get for doing it?' Pat asked.

'A hot tip!' Sven said.

'A hot tip?' Pat said, suddenly all ear.

'You're looking for Jim's father, aren't you?'

'Yes, yes. Don't tell me you know where he is!'

'Not exactly, but at breakfast I was talking with a buddy from the repair shop where I work, and he told me he had seen two white men drag a colored man from a boat and take him to one of the warehouses in Harbor City.'

'Why did you wait to tell me this?' Pat cried angrily.

'Well, I wasn't sure if he was the one you're looking for. But the more I think about it...my buddy believes that the two men belong to the *Black Uncle* gang. We are not to tell anyone about it. He was at the harbor spraying graffiti when he saw what happened.'

'Spraying? Is he by any chance a member of the *Frog* gang?'

Sven nodded. 'They made a bet: who could spray the best tags on the most dangerous places! And this guy chose to do his on one of the old warehouses in Harbor City. He did the spraying from the water side. He gets extra points for that.'

'Incredible!' Pat said, wide-eyed.

Sven looked Pat in the eye and said, 'You better not rat on my buddy! If you do, I'll never tell you a secret again.' He turned and went to the bathroom, Pat right behind him.

'Okay, I promise. And I'll take care of Henrietta the whole weekend, if you can find out for me what warehouse Jim's father was taken to.'

'That puts me in an awkward situation.' Sven hesitated. 'All right, I'll give it a try,' he said finally. 'In any case, my buddy owes me a favor. I subbed for him the other day when he skipped work,' Sven shouted from behind the shower curtain.

'Can you ask him today?' Pat pressed.

'Yeah, I'll stop at his place on my way to Bergedorf,' Sven promised.

'I'll give you our cell phone number. Call us as soon as you find out something.' Pat scribbled the cell phone number on a piece of paper and handed it to Sven.

After the hopelessly lovestruck brother raced away on his moped in a cloud of deodorant and aftershave, Pat called Leonie and Ollie and told them to go to the detective bureau at once. He then put Henrietta and some of her favorite toys in the handcart and he, too, headed for the Harbor Crocodiles' detective bureau.

'What's up?' asked Leonie, who arrived almost at the same moment as Ollie.

Pat informed them about what he had learned from his brother.

'In Harbor City? That's a large place. We'll never find him there!' Leonie muttered.

'Let's just wait and see,' Pat said.

'Are you talking about my dad?' Jim wanted to know.

'We've got a promising lead,' Pat said. 'I think we'll find him soon!'

Suddenly, the cell phone rang. It was the long-awaited call from Sven.

'My buddy will tell you what warehouse it was, if you get him back the sports bag with the spray cans that Ollie's grandpa took with him.'

'That's a good deal. We'll do it!' Ollie promised.

Leonie looked at him and shook her head. 'And how are we going to get the bag? The police have got it, you know!'

'Not to worry. We'll get it.'

Inspector Voss was not in his office.

Officer Willy handed them the bag with a grin and said, 'We got the fingerprints and we'll keep one of the spray cans as evidence!'

The red cell phone rang again. Again it was Sven.

'What did you find out?' Pat said, his voice shaking with excitement.

'It's in one of the warehouses behind the spice museum. Directly opposite it, on the other side of the canal, there are green graffiti tags on the walls.'

'Who'd have thought it? Graffiti is good for something, after all!' Pat said and ended the call.

Pat informed the others of what Sven had said.



'We've got to call Inspector Voss immediately to make a search of that warehouse!' Leonie cried.

She dialed the secret number but only reached the mailbox. She took in a deep breath and recounted everything that had happened. 'We're going to go there and keep a watch on that warehouse, Inspector,' she said. 'If we see anything suspicious, we'll call you again.'

'I can't come with you because of Henrietta!' Pat said sadly.

'I can't either. Because of Jim! He'd be noticed wherever we go.' Ollie shook his head.

'Jim can stay with me and Henrietta,' Pat said. 'Leonie can't go to Harbor City alone.'

'Okey dokey,' Leonie said. 'Let's be on our way.'

'We'll pretend we're tourists,' Ollie laughed. 'With our backpacks and camera we look the part.'

The two of them put on their jackets.

Pat looked at them and said, 'Perfect! You would pass for tourists any day!'

'Take care, all three of you!' Leonie said.

Henrietta waved to her. She was always in a good mood when her big brother took care of her. And she took an instant liking to his new friend. She hesitated a moment, then said, 'You are totally black! Does it come off when you take a shower?'

Pat translated her words.

'No, it stays on,' Jim laughed. He demonstrated by rubbing his skin with spit.

'What about your curls? Do they stay curly when it rains?'

'Yep, they're always that way,' Jim said. He bent down and let Henrietta touch his curly hair.

'Boootiful!' cried Henrietta, stroking his hair.

'Tell her I've got a sister who's the same age as her!' Jim said to Pat. His voice sounded quite sad.

But Henrietta cheered him up again. She showed him her building blocks.

Building blocks were something entirely new to Jim. He was fascinated by what he could do with them. Her little play cars fascinated him, too.

'Boootiful!' she said when Jim completed his first building block house.

'Boootiful,' Jim echoed.

'The word is beau-ti-ful,' said Pat slowly as he placed some fresh firewood in the old oven. 'You should learn English from me and not from her.' Was Pat jealous?

### **Between pepper sacks**

A cold November wind was blowing through the streets of Harbor City. It was so cold outside that Ollie and Leonie's noses got as red as Rudolph the red nosed reindeer after they left the bureau of the *Harbor Crocodiles*.

The tall and narrow warehouses with their typical brick fronts framed the canals, the so-called *fleets*. The rear sides of the houses could only be reached by boat, the front sides were connected by streets.

The first thing Leonie and Ollie did was to go to the spice museum, because from there they had a clear view of the canal. And from there, some distance away, on the other side of the canal, they spied the green symbols Pat's brother had spoken of.

Leonie took some pictures using the telescope lens.

'They look exactly like the symbols on Grandpa Bloom's wall,' she muttered.

Ollie counted the buildings that lay between them and the one with the graffiti, because they wouldn't be able to see the symbols from the street side. After that, they left the museum.

'That must be the right warehouse,' murmured Ollie, standing in front of the huge iron gate of one of the warehouses.

'We'll never get inside there!' Leonie said with a sigh. Taking a step closer, she read the words "Retail offices for coffee, tea and spices" on a very old sign.

'Let's just wait and see,' Ollie said.

At that moment a dark-colored car driven by a chauffeur drove up.

'I recognize that car!' Leonie whispered.

It was the car they had seen in the vicinity of the asylum-seekers' ship!

'The license plate number is different but the driver is the same,' Ollie said as the driver opened the car door. Out came two men, a young man and a not-so-young man.

Leonie and Ollie acted as if they were just tourists looking for good photo motifs in the old part of Harbor City. But the photos Leonie took included the men and the car. Then, to avoid attracting attention to themselves, they returned to the museum.

From there, Leonie took a look through the telescopic lens of her camera.

'I knew it! Both of them have just entered the warehouse! And the driver - he's switching the license plates!'

The dark-colored car drove very slowly past them. It now had the same license plate number Leonie had written in her notebook some days ago!

The two detectives looked at each other. 'The door is open. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' Leonie asked.

'Yep! We'll take a closer look at that warehouse,' murmured Ollie.

Cautiously, they approached the open door. Stepping inside, they heard footsteps going up the stairs.

'They're going upstairs. Is that where they've hidden Jim's father?' Leonie thought aloud.

Ollie peered into the dark entrance area but saw no one. 'The coast is clear!' he said.

They tiptoed along the dark hall, keeping their eyes open. On the right hand side were office rooms, on the left were crates and sacks. Just as they were about to go up the stairs, they heard voices and footsteps.

'Damn! They're coming back!' Ollie whispered.

Just in time they hid under the stairs. The two men passed within inches of them and opened the door to one of the offices.

'We mustn't make any mistakes tonight, Adolfo! It's a good thing we caught, uh, what's his name? Noah. He's a guy with a lot of influence on his compatriots. He could have exposed our whole ring. Who does he think he is? He can go to hell!'

Adolfo grinned. 'Take it easy. We've got the ideal hiding place for him. No one will find him here. We'll keep him here till our big operation is over. After that, we'll decide what to do with him...'

'Have you got everything organized as usual?'

Adolfo nodded.

'The ship from Venezuela arrives on schedule with the tide at nine o'clock. Then it will be unloaded. Our man with the customs is informed. I've reserved us a table again at the *Four Seasons* for the time when all that is taking place. We'll be dining there with two very pretty young ladies. That will be our alibi in case something goes wrong...'

'Nothing will go wrong, Adolfo. We're talking about three million Euros!'

'I know, I know. It's a piece of cake,' his nephew said calmly. 'As soon as the sacks with the coffee pass through customs, we take out the cocaine. It's as simple as that!'

'Somehow I'm more nervous than usual this time,' said *Black Uncle*.

'That's not surprising. We've never had such a large delivery before. But you needn't worry. It's all been perfectly planned.'

The sacks will end up in the warehouse where the "coffee beans" will be processed. After that, our experienced workers will quickly cut the cocaine into small portions and then distribute them to our dealers. By early tomorrow morning there will be no trace of what went on. There will be nothing but coffee in those sacks.'

Leonie and Ollie huddled in their hiding place under the stairs, hardly daring to breathe! What they had just heard was incredible!

'I'll bring him something to eat. He doesn't have to starve,' said Adolfo.

'I'll call the chauffeur,' the uncle answered and pulled out his cell phone.

When Adolfo passed just over their heads on his way up the stairs, Ollie and Leonie huddled even closer together.

Then they heard a car drive up and the iron gate open. 'The uncle is leaving!' Leonie whispered. 'But Adolfo is still here.'

'Forty-four steps,' Ollie said. He had counted the steps as Adolfo climbed the stairs.

It seemed to last an eternity before he came back down the stairs. His uncle had grown impatient, too. The chauffeur honked the horn. Adolfo ran down the last few steps, then hurried outside. The next moment the door was shut and a key turned in the lock. Inside, it was now pitch black.

'Oh, great!' Leonie laughed ironically. 'We're stuck here now like mice in a trap!'

'The cell phone!' Ollie cried.

'I'm looking, I'm looking!' Leonie dug into her backpack. It was there! And the battery wasn't dead this time. Unfortunately, Inspector Voss didn't answer her call.

'No, not again! What a bummer!' Leonie grumbled. 'What are we going to do now?'

'Call Captain Frisby!' Ollie said. He helped us once with his little motorboat! He can dock on the water side of the warehouse and pick us up.'

'And how do we get to the water side?'

'I'm not sure. Maybe by climbing through one of the office windows!' said Ollie.

Leonie shook her head. 'They're all barred,' she said. 'What now?'

'We'll check out the other floors!'

But the iron doors to the storerooms on the upper floors were all locked.

'There's no way we can get those doors open,' Leonie sighed. 'How are we ever going to free Jim's father?'

'We'll leave that to the police,' Ollie said.

But they hadn't given up - not yet. They climbed another set of stairs.

'Step number forty-four,' Ollie gasped. 'Jim's father must be somewhere behind this door!'

They shouted and banged on the door. But no one answered.

'He's probably tied up,' Ollie said.

'The cargo hatch!' Leonie cried. All of the warehouses in Harbor City had cargo hatches through which goods from the water or the street could be hoisted.

Finally, on the next to last floor they got lucky. The cargo hatch there was locked, but only from within. They carefully opened the wooden door and looked out. Below them was the canal and above them in the gable was a little wheel with the cable for the hoist hanging from it.

While Ollie was thinking about how they could use the hoist to escape, Leonie finally reached Captain Frisby. "SOS Captain! Harbor Crocodiles need help!" she said and went on to describe the difficult situation they were in.

'I'll be right there!' Frisby cried. 'Stay put till I get there. Don't do anything stupid!'

Leonie told him exactly where he could find them. 'The best way to reach us is from the water side, directly opposite the wall with the green graffiti!'

'I'm on my way!' growled the captain.

Luckily, he was in museum harbor, not far from his motorboat. Five minutes later he was in it and on his way to Harbor City.

He found the right warehouse quickly. And when he looked up to the top of the tall building, he saw Ollie's dark mop of hair in the cargo hatch.

Ollie waved to him and shouted, 'I'm going to throw the end of the cable down to you. We'll get into the harness at the other end...'

'Are you afraid of heights?'

'No problem,' Ollie shouted down. His words were only half true. Heights were no problem for Leonie, but they made him feel dizzy. 'I must be strong,' he thought to himself. 'What can go wrong?' he shouted to the captain. 'At worst we'll land in the water, but so what? We're both good swimmers!'

'Well okay and good luck!' the captain said.

Ollie threw one end of the cable down to the captain. He fixed it to an iron ring and carefully lowered Leonie down, then himself. Like sacks of coffee, they hung in the harness as they glided slowly through the air.

'Thank you!' Ollie shook the captain's hand. 'You did a great job of that!' he said, breathing a sigh of relief.

Leonie had a sad look in her eye. 'I only wish Jim's father was here beside us,' she said.

'Don't worry. Inspector Voss will take care of that!'

'I've tried to reach him several times but he doesn't answer,' Leonie said.

Frisby called the police station and was told that Voss was somewhere in the harbor.

'Right. Let's see if we can find him!' said the captain and started up the motor.

Not long after, they spied the police boat and docked along side it. Voss was amazed to see the three of them.

'What's the problem?' he said, a bit annoyed. 'As you can see I'm with the drug squad here - definitely not a place for children to be!'

'I think you should listen to what the *children* have to say, Inspector! It just might help you with your drug investigation!' the captain said and smiled.

Voss was astounded to learn that the ship with the drugs, the one he was looking for, was due to arrive that night!

'I'll notify the customs officers immediately!' he said.

'Be careful!' Ollie said. 'One of the officers is a spy for the gang!'

'Jim's father is probably on the fourth floor of the spice warehouse, somewhere between some sacks of pepper,' said Leonie. 'Can you break open the door and free him?'

The inspector thought a moment and then said, 'Maybe you won't understand this, but I think it's better not to free him just yet, not before we crack down on the crooks. Otherwise they might get suspicious. In the meantime we'll keep an eye on the warehouse to make sure he's safe.'

### **Waiting for Noah Kinto**

The *Harbor Crocodiles* weren't around to see what happened after that. All of them, including Jim, the honorary crocodile, were with Grandpa Bloom in the Pilot House Café, sitting around and waiting for Inspector Voss. He had promised to drop by, even after midnight if need be.

The clock was striking midnight when he finally came - with Jim's father at his side! What a happy reunion! Jim's father put his arms around his son and held him tight. Both of them were weeping.

Inspector Voss was happy, too. 'Thanks to the Harbor Crocodiles the case has been successfully closed,' he said. 'When the ship with the coffee came into port we carried out a large scale raid. We let the goods go through the customs. It was the buyers we were after. Thanks to you we knew where they were: in a ware house in Harbor City. They had met there and had just received the goods when we suddenly showed up. They were caught in the act, as the



saying goes. We then surprised Adolfo and his uncle as they were having desert at the *Four Seasons!*'

Rarely had the Harbor Crocodiles seen Inspector Voss so relaxed and happy as he was that night.

But the best news came the next morning: The African ambassador called from Jim's land and said that the revolution had ended successfully and that all those who had fled the country could return home now.

'Will you really go back?' Ollie said to Jim and his father as Jim packed his things. The boy nodded. 'We must return and look for Mom!'

'Maybe we'll visit you some time!' Ollie said, as the Harbor Crocodiles said goodbye to Jim and Noah Kinto at the Fuhlsbüttel airport.

Leonie laughed. 'Yeah, sometime in ten years or so,' she said. She and Ollie and Pat all waved goodbye as Jim and his father went through passport check and disappeared in the crowd.