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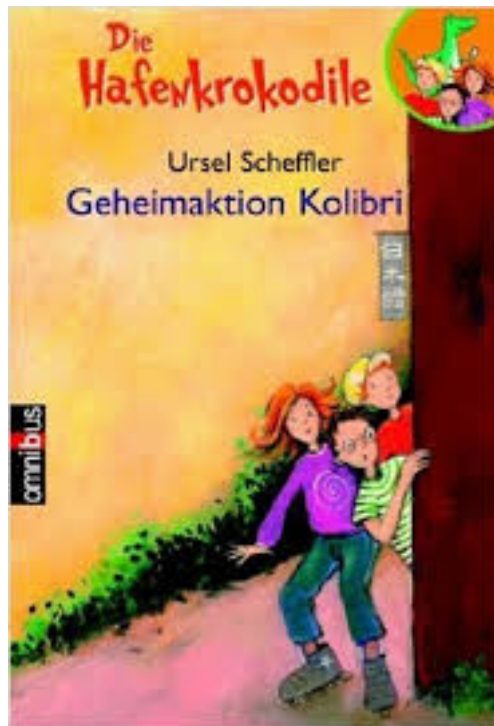


The Harbor Crocodiles

Case 2

Secret Comission "Kolibri"

Translation Paul Davenport



Wrong number?

It all began when Leonie's mother had to carry out a secret commission to do a photo reportage with the code-name 'Colibri '. It was top secret and extremely urgent. That is why she was hard at work already before breakfast in her darkroom...

The telephone in the atelier rang. Three times. But each time Ann Storm picked up the phone, there was no answer. When it rang the fourth time, she shouted to her daughter. 'Leonie, answer the phone please! I've got to develop my photos!' 'Okay, I'm on my way!' came a cheerful voice from upstairs, where the bedrooms were. Leonie hurried down the stairs and snatched up the phone from the little desk in front of the window. She had been in the shower and a towel was wrapped around her wet red hair.

'Nobody there!' she cried through the closed door of the darkroom where her mother was working on the top secret photos.

Leonie knew that if she opened that door when the red light was on she would ruin her mother's photos. She hurried back up the stairs to finish getting ready for school.

Ann Storm hung out the wet photos to dry. After that, she opened the door a crack and called up the stairs, 'Leo! Your breakfast is ready. I didn't wake you before because your first lesson is - '

'Thanks, Mom!' Leonie called down. 'I'll be right down, just got to dry my hair.'

Fifteen minutes later, as Leonie was having breakfast the telephone rang again. Again there was no one on the line but this time Leonie heard someone breathing.

'If you got the wrong number, you could at least apologize,' Leonie said angrily and hung up. Then she hurried to the kitchen where her breakfast was waiting for her.

Mmm! Granola with fresh peaches! For some time now her mother had taken a liking to granola and Leonie herself had begun to like it, too.

She had just started on her second helping when she looked at the clock. Good grief! She had to hurry. She had agreed to meet Pat and Ollie at school at 9 o'clock. They were going to talk about their plans for the Harbor Crocodile club house.

They wanted it to be a real detective bureau where they would meet regularly. Ollie's grandfather had offered to let them use his garden shed. They had helped him to clean it out. Now it had to be freshly painted and renovated. There was a lot to plan and to do. That would take time and money.

To get the money they decided to look for work. As Leonie was finishing her granola, she thought about a paper route. Would that be a good job for her?

Her mother finally emerged from the darkroom. She closed the door behind her and put the key in her pocket.

'Whew! That's that!' she said, relieved. 'The photos turned out well. HD quality. The lighting is super. The Colibri team will like them.'

'Can I see them?' Leonie asked.

'I'm afraid not. The photos are top secret. I already told you that. I even had to sign a statement for the head of the team saying that I would show no one the photos before the erlking is presented next week.'

'Erlking? Isn't that a kind of car?' Leonie shook her head in surprise.

'It is. But it's a top secret car. It has a revolutionary new body. The testing has been done on the quiet.'

'Oh, I see. That's why it's called erlking.' Leonie smiled.

'Borrowed from Goethe: Who is that riding so late in the night and the wind...We did that in our German lesson last week.'

'That's it. And that's why it's surrounded by a kind of mysterious veil.'

'Veil of mist? But how could you take pictures of it then?'

'I didn't mean that literally. I was at the company plant yesterday and took pictures of it in broad daylight. For two hours. After that, it was removed and locked away again.'

'What's so special about this erlking?' Leonie wanted to know.

'It has an environmentally-friendly motor, a roof with solar cells and stuff like that. Besides, it's got a particularly streamlined form. Designed in Milan. I can't reveal any more. I've already told you much too much.'

Leonie nodded but said nothing.

'Hey! I've got to run, sweetie!' Ann Storm said, after noticing how late it was. 'The Colibri Team expects me at nine. Do you want me to let you off at school?'

'No, thanks,' said Leonie. 'I'm meeting with Pat and Ollie.'

'Is it about a new case for the Harbor Crocodiles?' her mother asked anxiously.

'No new case, just a new detective bureau! Grandpa Bloom is letting us use his old garden shed.'

'Well, have fun!' said Ann Storm and gave Leonie a quick goodbye kiss on the tip of her nose. Then she grabbed the car keys and the briefcase with the photos and hurried to her car.

Hardly had the door closed when the telephone rang again. Leonie, on her way to the toilet, didn't answer it. Shortly after that, when she was packing her lunch in her schoolbag,

someone was watching her through the window, someone with a tall thin figure and long dark hair. A curious female jogger maybe? That often happened, as a popular footpath along the Elbe went past their property. The picturesque little house with the blue window frames and the front yard full of flowers was a very popular photo motive.

Leonie put it out of her mind.

She pulled down the sun blinds, took her schoolbag and left the house.

The new detective bureau

'Where were you so long?' Ollie said as Leonie arrived.

'You're never on time!'

'What do you mean? It just turned nine, didn't it?' Leonie stole a quick look at her watch.

Ollie shook his head. 'It's five past nine. And Pat hasn't showed up. I've been waiting to talk about my new idea!'

'Tell me about it,' Leonie said.

'I think I know how we can earn the money for our detective bureau!'

'Hey! Great! How? Where? What? When?'

'I was talking with Ada Wendell from *Pirates Corner* yesterday. We can work in her kiosk two or three hours afternoons unpacking goods, stocking shelves, selling fish rolls, ice cream and newspapers and stuff like that.'

'Super idea!' Leonie said. 'Pat will like it, too. Here he comes at last!'

'Sorry,' Pat muttered. He was gasping for breath. 'Breakfast lasted longer than usual. Grandma and grandpa had a lot to talk about...'

'It's okay,' Ollie said with a smile. 'It's not every day that you get visitors from Ireland.'

'How do they like Hamburg?' Leonie asked.

'Except for *labskaus* they liked everything!' Pat said with a broad grin. 'By the way, they'd like to meet you. They said we should visit them in Ireland!'

Leonie let out a little cry of joy. 'Oh, I always wanted to see Ireland!'

'Perhaps next year during the fall vacation?' Ollie said.

'But let's listen to Ollie's new idea now,' said Leonie. And as they crossed the schoolyard Ollie talked about his conversation with Ada Wendell.

There wasn't the usual pushing and shoving at the school entrance because the lessons for the other classes had begun two hours before.

There were only three fifteen or sixteen-year-old boys with green hair hanging around the bicycle stand. They had just lit up cigarettes, although that was strictly forbidden in the schoolyard.

'Showoffs,' Ollie said.

'Frogs,' Leonie said with a grimace.

'Or guys who want to become Frogs,' Ollie added.

They had had bad experience with some members of the Frog gang.

At the other end of the street Ralf suddenly appeared. He was sitting behind his brother on his brother's motorcycle. His brother was eighteen and attended vocational school. With a loud roar they made figure eights in the middle of the schoolyard.

'Two more showoffs,' Ollie growled.

Just then, the school bell rang, interrupting their conversation.

'Uh-oh! Math with Mrs. Holler!' Pat sighed. 'She's fanatical about coming on time!' Math was not Pat's favorite subject.

'Come on. Let's hurry,' Ollie said. They ran up the stairs, two at a time. Ralf followed them, keeping his distance.

Greetings from Shanghai

Susan Holler brought a surprise with her to the math lesson: a new student. It was immediately obvious that he came from

another country. He had a dark crew cut and a gold-brown complexion. Two dark, intelligent eyes behind lightly tinted glasses scanned the classroom, which just then seemed more like a beehive than a classroom. It was buzzing with activity.

'Who's that?' Ralf asked when he noticed the new student. He screwed up his eyes and pushed his chewing gum back and forth between his teeth as he looked the new kid up and down.

'That is Tschui,' Mrs. Holler said. 'He's from Shanghai. Please help make him feel at home here. He can't speak German as well as you, because he was born in China.'

'Just as I thought,' Ralf said.

'See? Chewing gum makes you intelligent,' Leonie said, straight-faced. 'I read it in the newspaper this morning.'

'Stupid cow,' Ralf said in a loud voice.

'They're at it again,' Ollie moaned. Why oh why must Ralf and Leonie always quarrel?

Embarrassed, Tschui looked around. He didn't know where he should sit.

'Maybe you can sit next to Pat. He's good at English. His father comes from Ireland. You can ask him when you don't understand a German word,' said Mrs. Holler, pointing at the free seat next to Pat.

Pat pushed his seat back so Tschui could take a seat.

'Hello,' Tschui said. 'And thank you!'

All eyes were on the new student.

To be sure, there were some children from other countries in the class. Ali was from Turkey, Maria from Greece and Antonio from Italy. But a student all the way from China - now that was something else.

'You can get better acquainted later. Right now we have to begin with the lesson. As you know, there's an important test tomorrow.'

Without another word, Susan Holler began the math lesson. She took special pains to speak slowly and clearly so Tschui could understand her better. When she wrote an equation on the board Tschui was relieved. He understood it. Numbers were easier for him to understand than words. When the lesson was over, Mrs. Holler went over to him and said, smiling, 'The next lesson will be a piece of cake for you. It's English!'

During the break Leonie and Ollie were trying to communicate with Tschui. They were doing well - until Ralf showed up.

'Say spring roll,' Ralf said with a sly grin.

'Springloll,' Tschui said and looked him in the eye. 'I know the words on the menu. I work in a lestaulant.'

'Lestaulant, lestaulant,' Ralf chanted in a mocking voice.

'Lestaulant mit springoll!' He let out a wild laugh.

At that moment Susan Holler entered the classroom to begin the English lesson. She noticed at once what was going on. Ralf was making fun of Tschuis' accent. Well, she would teach Ralf a lesson! When everyone was in their seat, she said: 'Tschui, can you come to the board please?'

Tschui got up and went to the front of the room. Mrs. Holler whispered something in his ear and gave him a piece of chalk.

Tschui smiled and nodded. Then he wrote Chinese characters on the board.

'Doesn't that look interesting,' Leonie said.

'It's Chinese,' Ralf said, surprised.

'You're sharp as a tack,' Leonie said with a grin. 'Didn't I say it: chewing gum is good for the brain!'

Ralf gave her an angry look.

'Who can read that?' Mrs. Holler asked when Tschui was finished.

The classroom fell silent.

'No one, of course,' Leonie muttered.

'Of course not,' Ollie murmured.

'What about you, Ralf?'

'Uh, no,' Ralf said with a silly grin on his face.

'Okay. Tschui is going to read it for you!'

Tschui read out the Chinese characters.

'Did anyone understand what that means?' Mrs. Holler asked.

When there was no answer, she looked around the classroom and said, 'None of us can understand it. Including me. Only one student: Tschui. Would you please translate for us what you've written.'

'It means: Good morning, my name is Tschui. Greetings from Shanghai!'

'I think that deserves respect,' said Mrs. Holler. 'Maybe he can't speak perfect German yet, but he speaks and writes English and Chinese fluently. Three languages! Which of us can match that?'

'Ali can speak a little Turkish and a little Greek, but he can't read or write those languages,' Maria said.

'Anyone who speaks a second language has an edge over others,' Mrs. Holler said.

'Mrs. Holler is great!' Ollie whispered to his friend Leonie.

'She showed the big showoff Ralf who's in charge here again!'

Mrs. Holler was Ollie's favorite teacher.

'And given Tschui some much-needed confidence,' Leonie said. 'She's sure got class.'

It was obvious whose side the students were on: on Tschuis' side.

'Can you write my name in Chinese?' Leonie asked Tschui during the lunch break.

Tschui wrote Leonie's name with a large broad felt tip pen on a piece of paper.

'Man, that looks great, doesn't it?' Leonie cried and held up the paper with her Chinese name.

Of course, now everyone else wanted their name in Chinese characters.

Tschui went from being an outsider to being the center of attention.

Susan Holler smiled happily as Tschui wrote her name in Chinese.

'It's a real work of art. I'm going to have it framed!' she said, admiring the mysterious black figures on the white paper.

'But who knows what he wrote!' Ralf whispered to his friend Bodo and wrinkled his nose. 'Maybe he wrote "Holler is a silly bitch"!'

'And now boys and girls, open your books!' Mrs. Holler said, signaling the start of the English lesson.

The nasty Surprise

When Leonie returned home, she shouted, 'Mom, we've got a new kid in our class. A

Chinese boy! Look here!' She held up the piece of paper with the Chinese characters. 'Can you read that?'

But Leonie's mother was not in the mood to read Chinese writing. She had a bigger problem.

'The police will be here any minute!' she said nervously.

'The police? Why?' Leonie was shocked.

'Someone broke into our house and stole my films.'

'The ones from your secret order?'

'Exactly.'

'But you still have the photos. They were in your briefcase.

Or is that missing, too?'

'No, I still have it. I kept a close watch on it all the time. But when I returned home, the films in the darkroom had vanished in spite of the fact that I took care to lock it before I left the house.'

'You can photograph the pictures again, can't you?' Leonie said. 'Or scan them. Ollie's got a scanner and a computer. He knows how to do it.'

'That's not the problem. My big worry is that the films end up in the wrong hands. That would be a catastrophe. Everyone would think that I had been careless. I'd never get another order from the company. I'd get kicked off the Colibri team!' Just then, Leonie noticed that the air smelled funny.

'Have you been smoking, Mummy?'

'Uh-uh. You know that I haven't touched a cigarette since Christmas. But now that you mention it, I think I can smell the odor of cigarettes, too.'

There was a trace of cigarette smoke in the air. 'Was the burglar a smoker?' Leonie thought and looked around for further clues like cigarette ashes or butts. She knew: in some criminal cases things like that led to the perpetrator.

But except for the smell there were no further clues.

'My films! Of all things my secret films! What bad luck!' Ann Storm muttered over and over as she paced back and forth between the living room and the atelier. 'What can I do?'

'Maybe the burglar doesn't realize that the films are so important,' Leonie said, trying to console her mother.

'In that case he would have stolen my expensive camera, my jewelry or our new video recorder, but not the films,' sighed the photographer.

'You think that someone was intent on getting the films and nothing else?' Leonie wanted to make sure she understood what her mother meant.

Her mother nodded. Just then, they saw a slender man through the window. He was coming toward the house.

'It's Inspector Voss!' Leonie was happy to see his old friend again.

She hurried to the door to let him in. She was surprised by the serious look on his face. 'Hello, Leonie. I'd love to chat with you but I'm sorry to say that I'm here on official business.' He turned to Leonie's mother. 'You said there was a break-in?'

Ann Storm nodded.

'After Leonie and I left the house this morning, someone broke into the darkroom. They stole some important films.' She told him about the erlking and the Colibri team, which was commissioned to do the advertising campaign for the new car. 'It's all top secret! No one should hear about it! And now the films have vanished!' Ann Storm said in a shaky voice as she led the inspector to the darkroom.

'Pried open!' the inspector said after examining the door lock.

'Of course I locked the door. The thief must have known that the films were here. I brought them with me yesterday evening. I developed them and made the prints this morning. Normally I keep secret films in the safe of the company I do them for until the obligation to secrecy expires.'

'Were there any clues?' Voss said as he scanned the room.

'I looked for clues,' Leonie said. 'I found a broken window pane and footprints in our radish garden. The thief came through the kitchen window. Look over here, Inspector!'

Leonie showed the inspector the half-open window.

'A pro,' Voss muttered. 'He cut a little hole in the glass and opened the window from outside! After that, he was able to

get in easily. If he knew where the films were, it didn't take him long to do the job.'

'What about finger prints?' Leonie asked.

'There probably aren't any!' Voss said. But to make sure, he brushed the places where the burglar must have supported himself when he cut the hole in the window with finger print powder. Then he monitored the results with a little flash light. But there were no finger prints, not a trace!

'The burglar wore gloves,' he said in a flat voice.

Leonie made a mental note that she must get some finger print powder and a good magnifying glass for the new detective bureau.

Now the inspector went into the garden to take a closer look at the clues there.

'The ground is dry. That makes finding clues difficult,' Leonie said, shaking her head. 'But it's obvious that he didn't have very large feet.'

Voss pulled a tape measure from his pocket and measured the length of the footprints. Immediately, Leonie added a tape measure to her mental shopping list.

'The burglar wore sneakers, probably size seven and a half or eight. Not an unusual size. That's no help to us,' he muttered.

'I think I know who it was,' cried Leonie in surprise. She had suddenly thought of what happened that morning: the face in the window when she came from the toilet.

'No dumb jokes,' her mother said. 'The matter is too serious.'

'This is no joke. Do you remember the telephone ringing again and again this morning? Well, I answered it but there seemed to be no one on the line. But the second time I answered it, I heard someone breathing. The third time I didn't answer it because I had to go to the toilet. The caller must have thought there was no one at home. That was when he came to the house. Or rather she. I saw the face of

a woman in the window! I thought it was probably just a jogger, looking in out of curiosity. But I'm beginning to think that she was checking to make sure the house was empty. That's logical, isn't it?' Leonie said.

'What did she look like?' the inspector wanted to know.

'She had long dark hair and a sweatband or a scarf around her head. She was a little taller than mum. She had to bend down to see through the window.' Leonie paused a moment.

'I'm afraid that's all I saw. It all happened so quickly...'

'If the face at the window was the thief, then your tip has helped us a great deal, my dear Harbor Crocodile,' the inspector said, patting Leonie on the shoulder. 'Good, but I still have a few questions about the case.'

He sat down together with Ann Storm and Leonie at the atelier table and pulled a pencil and notebook from his pocket. 'Who is interested in these films?' was his first question.

Ann Storm thought for a moment, then said, 'A reporter maybe? Or other car companies?'

'Who knew that you had these photos?'

'The members of the Colibri team. And two or three other people in the company, for example the head of the marketing staff and the woman in charge of public relations.'

The inspector made notes as she talked. When he looked up there was a very serious expression on his face. 'There's been a lot of this kind of burglary recently.

Thieves who spy on and steal plans, models and documents having to do with innovation. They save millions of dollars, money they would normally have to spend on research and development.'

'Are we talking about guys who steal and copy ideas?'

Leonie asked.

'Exactly,' the inspector grumbled.

'I'm shocked that it's happened to me,' Ann Storm said. 'The company I took the photos for wanted to commission me to do the photos for their new brochures and catalogues. That definitely won't happen now, not after this!'

'Let's just wait and see what we can find out. Maybe we'll find a clue,' the inspector said. 'What Leonie saw this morning is a starting point. But I don't want to give you any false hopes. It's too early in the investigation for that.'

'I could ask around the neighborhood if anyone has seen that woman,' Leonie suggested.

'Great idea! It's a perfect case for the Harbor Crocodiles,' said the inspector. 'You know the area like the palm of your hand. Ask around - mailmen, paperboys, people who walk their dog at that time of day...'

'Okeedokee, Inspector. We are in the boat!' Leonie said, proudly. She could hardly wait to tell the others about it.

A Case for the Harbor Crocodiles

That very afternoon the Harbor Crocodiles met in Grandpa Bloom's garden on the Elbe. They had planned to talk about the new clubhouse - about brushes, brooms and paint. But the break-in at Storm's was now the main topic.

'A case for us?' Ollie asked when Leonie told them about what happened.

'The inspector said we should ask around if anyone saw the woman,' Leonie said.

'Hot diggety dog!' Pat cried. 'Thieves and spies! That's serious business!'

'I'll talk to Floss, the mailman. He lives right next to us,' Ollie said.

'And I'll ask Captain Frisby,' Leonie added. 'He goes to the Pirate Corner for the newspaper every morning. He passes our house on his way.'

'Good idea,' Pat said. 'I'll talk to the baker.'

'Let's go!' Leonie said. 'What are we waiting for! We'll meet here again in fifteen minutes.'

The three detectives hurried off.

Ollie had to climb all the way to the attic to talk with Otto Floss, the mailman. After he finished his route, Otto usually took care of his pigeons. Unfortunately, he hadn't seen any dark-haired female joggers along his route.

'About 8.30 I had an espresso at the *Pilot Tower Café*,' he recalled. 'For my blood pressure - it's too low.'

At the bakery Pat wasn't successful either.

'Around 9 the bakery was quite empty. I would have noticed a dark-haired female jogger,' said the pretty baker.

Leonie was more successful. Captain Frisby remembered seeing a young woman who fit Leonie's description talking on her cell phone in the vicinity of Pirate Corner.

'But only from behind,' said the captain, taking a deep puff on his pipe. 'She was wearing a light gray jogging outfit and her hair was dark.'

'Was she smoking?' Leonie wanted to know.

'Hmm. Yeah, I think so,' Frisby said. 'Ask Ada Wendell at the kiosk. Maybe the jogger bought her cigarettes there.'

'Righto! Super idea, Captain! Thanks a lot!' Leonie cried.

'Don't mention it,' said the captain. 'Are you working on a new case?'

'A burglar broke into our house,' Leonie replied. 'Inspector Voss said we should try to find out if anyone noticed the suspect at the time of the crime.'

'Well, a thief is probably just as difficult to catch as a crocodile,' grumbled the captain, referring to the case he had helped them solve some time ago.

'And since we suspect that the thief called our number to test whether anyone was at home, your information about the woman with the cell phone is a very good tip, Captain! Once again, many thanks. I'm going to hurry and tell the others about it.'

Without a further word, she was off and away.

She ran directly to the detective bureau, where Pat and Ollie were waiting for her.

'I've got a hot tip,' she said in an excited voice. 'Come on! We've got to go *to Pirate Corner*. I'll tell you on the way.'

Ada Wendell had to smile when she saw the three of them approaching her kiosk. 'Well, there you are! Have you thought about my job offer?'

'We have,' Leonie said, 'but ...'

'You don't have to be here every day and you can take turns,' the kiosk owner said. 'Of course, it would always be after school and when you've done your homework. and once in a while on the weekend. I don't want to your parents complaining about me.'

'That's fine,' Ollie said quickly. 'But first we want to ask you an important question - as detectives. Can you remember seeing anyone around here this morning talking on a cell phone - about 9?'

'Don't tell me you three are working on another case?' Ada gave them a wary look.

'A case? Perhaps,' Ollie replied, trying to sidestep the question.

'We got some strange telephone calls this morning,' Leonie said. But then she fell silent, waiting for Ada to say something.

'About 9 a delivery van arrived with fresh laundry for the boardinghouse, 'The Sea-Devil, over there, on the other side

of the street. The driver drank a bottle of cola, then took out his cell phone and began talking, if I remember correctly.'

'Did he have long dark hair?' Leonie asked.

Ada Wendell giggled.

'That's a good one! He was bald.'

Pat, Ollie and Leonie looked at each other and grinned. Ada Wendell paused a moment. 'There were also three boys with dyed hair. They bought cigarettes from the vending machine. One of them made a call. But a short one. I would guess that the time was about quarter to nine.'

'Could be the smokers from the schoolyard,' Ollie murmured. 'I thought he was pretending to be a father, calling the school to say that his son had a stomach ache and had to stay at home. 'A well-known trick!' Ada Wendell said, rolling her eyes.

'Captain Frisby thought he had seen a dark-haired woman wearing gray sweatpants,' Leonie said.

'A woman? Why didn't you say that straightaway?'

'Because we're not absolutely certain. It could have been a man with long hair,' Ollie said.

'Sure, there was a dark-haired woman here.' Ada Wendell paused a moment, then said, 'She was at the phone booth opposite here. I noticed that because not many people use it nowadays. She called not just once but several times. Apparently whoever she was calling didn't answer the phone. Not that she gave them much of a chance. She hung up after only a few seconds.' After another short pause, Ada went on: 'After that, she bought a package of Lucky Strikes and a can of Cola light. The only one I've sold today. I know that for sure. Look! The can is right there, in the wastebasket!'

'Was she wearing gloves?' Leonie asked excitedly.

'Nonsense! In weather like this?' Ada Wendell laughed as she emptied the fresh rolls into a huge breadbasket.

'Very good,' said Leonie. 'We'll save the can as evidence. May I?' She took a napkin and a plastic bag that lay on the counter and carefully removed the Cola can from the wastebasket.

'Inspector Voss will be interested in this - because of the finger prints,' she said.

'Very professional!' Ada Wendell was impressed.

'Could you describe the woman?' Ollie asked. 'Do you have a piece of paper for Pat?'

'Yes, but you'll have to wait. Right now I've got a customer to attend to.'

An elderly man with a dachshund approached the kiosk. He bought three newspapers and a package of cigarillos.

When he left, Ada Wendell closed her eyes in concentration, trying to remember exactly what the woman with the dark hair looked like.

'She was about my size, but a lot thinner. And younger than me. Around thirty or so. She was wearing light gray sweatpants and a gray jacket or sweatshirt.'

'What about her shoes?' Leonie said quickly.

Ada Wendell put her hand on her chin. 'Hmm. She wore sneakers, I think. Yeah, she was dressed for jogging. The pants were narrow, like leggings. The sweatshirt was loose. Her hair was long, down to her shoulder. I remember how she pushed it back when she paid.'

'Something like this?' Pat asked and showed her the drawing he had made.

'Exactly!' Ada Wendell said, her mouth open in surprise.

'Wow! You're a talented artist!'

'He really is,' Leonie laughed. 'He gets it from his mother. She's an architect and also very good at drawing.'

'You're distracting the witness,' Ollie said suddenly. He was always a little jealous when Leonie praised Pat so much.

'Did she have a headband?' Leonie asked.

'Now that you mention it, she did, yes. I believe it was blue with white dots.'

'Thank you! You've been a big help, Mrs. Wendell!' Leonie said enthusiastically.

Just then a Touristbus approached and parked next to *Pirate Corner*.

'Well, would you look at that! Here comes a whole bus full of customers. Now's the time to help! come on, put on your pirate hats and get ready! This is your big chance to show what you're capable of! I want two of you to serve ice cream and one for the fish rolls and meatballs!'

'Sure thing!' said Leonie and put on the pirate hat.

It was a very warm, sunny afternoon and the people from the bus swarmed around the kiosk like bees around honey. They were hungry and thirsty and the three 'pirates' could hardly serve them fast enough.

Leonie and Pat were in charge of the ice cream. Pat served and Leonie was the cashier, taking the money and giving change. Not a difficult job. The pictures of the kinds of ice cream with the prices were on a sign on the wall behind them.

Ollie was busy serving drinks and fish rolls and hamburgers. Ada Wendell was the cashier. For what seemed like a long time, the cash register didn't stop ringing. Then, suddenly, the kiosk was empty and the bus was full again.

'You were great, guys!' Ada Wendell was over the moon.

'You're hired!'

The Identikit Picture

'Any new developments?' Inspector Voss said when the Harbor Crocodiles entered his office that evening.

'You bet!' Pat said and laid a picture on his desk. 'An identikit picture of the suspect!'

'Who drew that?' Voss was impressed.

'Pat,' said Leonie proudly.

'Not bad,' Voss said, nodding approvingly. 'You can have a job in our wanted persons department any time!'

'She smokes Lucky Strikes,' Ollie said quickly.

'Her finger prints are probably on this can,' Leonie added, carefully removing the piece of evidence from the plastic bag.

'Wow!' Voss was amazed at what the three young detectives had achieved. 'Brilliant work!' he said.

'She made the calls from the phone booth at *Pirate Corner!*'

Leonie said. 'and I thought crooks all have a cell phone nowadays!'

'Making calls with your own telephone is too risky for crooks,' the inspector said.

'Yeah, right.' Ollie nodded. 'All the numbers called are included in the bill.'

'Exactly!' The inspector smiled at Ollie. 'That's one more reason to think that we're dealing with a professional criminal in this case. I'm going to copy Pat's identikit picture. My colleagues will ask around at the *Colibri* agency and in the car company.

There's a chance that someone knows who the suspect is. In addition to that, we'll have a look in our database. Maybe she's in there for one reason or another.'

The Headquarters of the Crocodiles

The next morning the three detectives had to take a Math test. They would have preferred to solve their case rather than equations. All except for Ollie. For him math was a piece of cake. Surprisingly, for Tschui, too. He placed his

paper on the desk in such a way that Pat could see what he had written.

'Thanks a lot!' Pat said to him when the test was over. 'That was nice of you. Would you like to see our new detective bureau?'

'Sure would,' Tschui said shyly. 'But I haven't got much free time. I have to work in my uncle's restaurant evenings.'

Leonie was in a bad mood when she finished the test. 'Math sucks!' she hissed.

'It wasn't really hard,' Ollie said.

'I couldn't even cheat! Mrs. Holler didn't let me sit near you.' She shook her head angrily.

They looked at the answers Leonie had scribbled down on a piece of paper.

'It's like the playing the lottery. My chance of having the right answers is about a million to one!' sighed Leonie, who got one of the answers completely wrong.

Instead of going home after school, the three Crocodiles went to a do-it-yourself store to buy some stuff for the renovation of their detective bureau. They had earned the money the day before working for Ada Wendell. It was just enough to buy a can of green paint, two sheets of sandpaper and three paint brushes.

'We still need fingerprint powder, a magnifying glass and a measuring tape,' Leonie said.

'Sorry but there's no more money,' Ollie said. He was the club treasurer. 'But I can get a measuring tape from my grandfather.'

'Are we going to meet again at the bureau at three o'clock?' Pat wanted to know.

'Okeedokey!' said Leonie. 'Today's perfect weather for painting.'

'We'll be working for Ada Wendell again tomorrow. While we're earning the money for some more paint, the first coat of paint will be drying,' Ollie laughed.

Pat brought three of his father's old shirts. They made wonderful painting overalls.

Ollie had a tool kit with a hammer, screwdriver and a yardstick with him. 'Grandpa says he's got two each of these,' he said proudly.

The Harbor Crocodiles had decided their paint should be fir green because the color fitted in well with the name of their club. And it fitted in well with the surroundings: the clubhouse was hardly noticeable between the trees and bushes in the garden.

The air on the river was warm and not at all humid, so the paint dried quickly.

'It looks like we can put on the second coat this evening,' Pat said, smiling brightly.

Tschui showed up around four o'clock. The three friends were so busy painting that they didn't notice him standing at the garden gate.

'Hello Tschui! Come on in!' Pat shouted as soon as he saw him.

'Nice house,' Tschui said. 'But why green?'

'Because we're crocodiles,' Leonie laughed and explained quickly what she meant by that.

'You are real detectives?' said Tschui, surprised.

'Well, yeah, detective assistants,' Ollie said modestly.

'Who sometimes find valuable clues.' Leonie wanted Tschui to know that detective assistants are real detectives.

'Yesterday, for example,' Pat said. And for the next several minutes they talked about their work helping to find a piece of evidence for Inspector Voss.

'Wait a minute! Not so fast!' cried Tschui. 'I don't understand. What are you looking for?'

'A piece of evidence,' Pat repeated, 'is a fact, a statement or an object that help to prove that someone committed a crime. Like footprints or fingerprints.'

Tschui was impressed.

Just then, Grandpa Bloom appeared with a tray full of butter cake. 'I pinched them from the kitchen,' he laughed.

Then he looked at the green house. Perfect! You've done a good job! All that's missing is a crocodile over the door, am I right? The company nameplate, so to speak.'

Leonie let out a loud laugh. 'Should we capture another one?'

'I've done it for you! Look here!' He smiled as he removed a kitchen towel from the tray.

'Oh, how cute!' Leonie said excitedly, when she saw what he had hidden there. It was an image of a crocodile he had carved on a block of wood.

'I was planning to give Leonie this on her birthday next week,' Grandpa Bloom said. 'But then I thought you'd all like it. After all, it's not just for Leonie!'

'Oh, thank you, Grandpa,' Leonie cried and gave him a big kiss on the cheek. 'You sure did a good job of it!'

'Well, I did spend a few hours on it,' he muttered. 'Oh, by the way, if you need a table and chairs, there's some old wooden outdoor furniture from the café over there in my workshop. You can help yourself. Now they have got the modern plastic stuff. That's all you see nowadays everywhere, plastic outdoor furniture. Not my cup of tea. If I had my way I'd never have bought them, but my two women decide things here in the Pilot House Café.'

To avoid any misunderstanding: Grandpa Bloom didn't have a harem. He was referring to his wife Emma and his daughter Jenny, Ollie's mother. They were in charge of the café. As a retired pilot, he helped out from time to time,

working in the kitchen or serving guests in the garden when things were very busy on the weekend.

In his free time he liked to tinker in his workshop in the cellar. That was where he had sawed, carved and painted the wooden crocodile.

The children were pleased about his offer to give them some outdoor furniture.

'With a fresh coat of paint they'll look great!' Leonie said, inspecting the table and chairs.

'It was great talking to you again,' Tschui said, 'but I've got to leave now. I have to work at the *Jade Dragon* in the kitchen today. I've got to cook.'

'You can cook?' Leonie was amazed.

'Oh, yeah, I'm a good cook,' Tschui laughed. 'I learned it from my grandmother. She was a fabulous cook! If you'd like, I'll cook you a meal on one of my free days. Or perhaps on Leonie's birthday? Thanks for the cake!' he said as he got on his rickety bicycle. A moment later he was gone.

'He's really nice,' Leonie said.

Pat agreed. 'You're right about that.'

'And to think that a few days ago, we didn't even know he existed,' Ollie said.

Who is the Spy?

'Somehow someone must have found out about my secret commission. But not from me!' Ann Storm said as she told the *Colibri Agency* about what had happened.

'Are you implying that the information came from our company?' Ken Fitch gave her a sharp look. It was obvious that he wasn't pleased by what she had said.

'Or from the company of our client,' Ann Storm said. 'They didn't get it from me, that's for sure. I work alone. There are no others in my company.'

Fitch thought for a long moment, then said, 'There must be a leak somewhere. One of our drivers? A secretary? Or did one of us say something he or she shouldn't have said on the phone?'

'It wasn't me. I didn't tell anybody about the photo session,' Ann Storm insisted.

'Who knows about the theft?' Fitch said thoughtfully.

'I informed the police at once as well as three very good private detectives.'

'Did you have to do that? We have copies of your brilliant photos, and we can fulfill our contract on time,' Fitch said, irritated.

'I think I did the right thing. It isn't right to want to give our client the impression nothing happened,' Ann Storm replied, appalled.

'Of course not,' Fitch conceded, 'but it would have been better not to talk about this unpleasant matter before the big presentation next week.'

Ann Storm thought about the meeting all the way home. Fitch hadn't been as angry about the incident as she had expected he'd be. He seemed more interested in fulfilling the job on time and getting paid for it. What happened after that obviously didn't matter to him.

When her mother told her about Ken Fitch wanting to hold back the news about the theft of the negatives, Leonie was very angry.

'He's like that. Ice cold. To him, business is business. He doesn't think about the consequences. That'll be the last time he'll ask me to work with his team,' Ann Storm sighed. 'He wasn't amused at all when I said I had informed the police.' Leonie put her arms around her mother. 'Do you know what I like? I like your reference to "three very good private

detectives"! That was really nice of you,' she said and gave her mother a kiss. 'You just wait and see. We'll get to the bottom of this. It wouldn't surprise me if Fitch himself has got something to do with it!'

'Leonie!' Ann Storm was angry. She took a step back and said, 'That's going too far! You're getting to think like a criminal yourself!'

'I'm not so sure about that,' Leonie said. 'Someone must have informed the thief. And all those who knew that you had the films at home come into question, am I right?'

'Well yeah, almost everyone,' said Ann Storm hesitantly.

But the search for the informant, who was perhaps the person that engaged the thief, was unsuccessful at first. Inspector Voss didn't find out anything, either. No one recognized the young woman of Pat's drawing. And the doorman of the office building where the Colibri Agency team had their bureau also claimed he had never seen the dark-haired young woman.

Since there was still no suspect, the finger prints were of no help either.

'Maybe she pins her hair up and wears stylish clothes,' said Leonie when the crocodiles met in their freshly painted detective bureau that evening. 'She'd look very different then.'

'You could be right,' Pat conceded.

'Maybe, but we're certainly not going to solve the case this evening. It's late, time to go home,' Ollie said with a huge yawn. The real reason he wanted to get home was to try out the new computer game. His father, who was a sailor, had bought it for him
i Singapore.

The lead came the next day, from a surprising source.

'I've got to talk with you!' Tschui said the next morning in the school. 'I saw something - maybe it's important - something to do with your new case.'

'Is it about my mother's stolen films?' Leonie asked, wide-eyed.

Tschui nodded quickly.

Unfortunately, they had to wait until the German lesson and the Biology lesson were over before they could continue their conversation.

Finally, the bell rang for recess and Tschui and the Harbor Crocodiles went to a quiet corner of the schoolyard.

"We're all ears!" Leonie said. She couldn't imagine how Tschui of all people could know something about their case.

'I was working in the kitchen yesterday evening. But the restaurant became so busy that I had to help out serving the food. Most of the guests were from Germany. But at table 6 sat a Chinaman and two Japanese. I greeted them in Chinese. They asked me if I spoke Japanese. When I told them I didn't - which was true - they continued talking Japanese, so I wouldn't be able to understand them. I was serving the soup when I heard the words "Colibri". From then on I pricked up my ears.

'I can't believe it!' Leonie said excitedly. 'And then?'

'They talked about secret documents and a courier, who would deliver them two days from now, in the evening.'

'How did you understand all that, if you don't speak Japanese?' Ollie wanted to know.

'I don't speak it but I can understand it well,' Tschui said with a smile. 'I've got a Japanese cousin. We always spent our vacations together.'

'Mind-blowing!' Ollie said. 'Is there anything you don't know or can't do?'

'But where are they going to hand over the documents? And how do we know that the documents are the stolen films?'

Pat asked.

'We don't know but it's possible, isn't it?' Tschui said softly.

'Whatever, they plan to meet in the restaurant again today.

They reserved the same table for 6:30 for three persons. Do you want to come along and have a look?'

The three detectives looked at each other.

'I'd love to have an spring roll again,' Leonie said, grinning.

'What about you guys?'

'How about this evening?' Ollie asked.

'It's fine by me,' Pat said. 'I'm supposed to babysit my little sister Henrietta, but if I ask my brother I'm quite sure he'll swap with me. He's due to babysit on the weekend. His girlfriend has a handball match in Kiel then.'

At that moment, the bell rang for the next class.

'How can recess always be so short?' Pat said, looking at his watch. 'I sometimes wonder if they are cheating us. The recesses are short, the lessons are endless!'

As the three of them hurried up the stairs to their class, Ollie said, 'We should inform Inspector Voss!'

Pat thought a moment, then said, 'Shouldn't we try to find out more first?'

Leonie agreed with Ollie. 'Maybe we could stop in at the police station on our way home,' she said.

'I've got to be home on time for dinner,' Pat said. 'We're having Bavarian dumplings. They must be eaten fresh.'

'That's all right. Leonie and I'll go to the police station, you can enjoy your dumplings!'

Inspector Voss and Chance

Inspector Voss listened Ollies and Leonies report with great interest. For the next long moment, he busied himself sorting his ball point pens in his pencil tray according to size. 'I don't know your friend Tschui,' he said at last. 'Do you consider him dependable?'

'I think so,' Ollie replied.

'How long have you known him?'

Ollie smiled sheepishly. 'Only for a couple of days.'

'Hmm. Is it possible that he made up the story in order to appear interesting so he could become a member of the Harbor Crocodiles?'

'Tschui's not like that!' Leonie protested.

'I agree with Leonie,' said Ollie. 'He's very intelligent. He speaks three languages and can understand Japanese,' he added.

'By chance he was serving guests in a restaurant when by chance some people come there, who by chance are involved in our case? Hmm. That's a little too much 'chance' for me,' said the inspector, taking care not to let on that he didn't think much of the children's theory.

'Yeah, well, maybe they were just normal business people,' Ollie conceded. 'In the bird business,' he added.

'Bird business?' Voss raised his eyebrows.

'Yeah, they talked about "Colibris", didn't they?' Ollie said quickly.

'All right,' said Voss, 'I don't want to get your hopes up.

Detectives must be careful about hearsay.'

'But is it still okay if by chance we go for an spring roll at the Jade Dragon this evening?' Leonie laughed.

'Certainly,' the inspector said with a warm smile. 'The Jade Dragon is a good restaurant. Their spring rolls are excellent. I'd love to come with you but I'm afraid I have to meet someone this evening. He said he had some interesting information for me. Maybe he knows something about our

Colibri case, too.' He paused a moment, then said, 'Right. Off with you and take good care of yourselves!'

'We'll have the red cell phone with us - the one you gave us on the crocodile case, so we can reach you in case of an emergency,' Leonie said.

'Good idea. It has been useful so far, hasn't it?' Voss laughed.

'The inspector doesn't seem to think much of our theory about the crime,' Leonie said to Ollie on their way home.

'Maybe he's right, maybe not,' she added. 'But when the three men return to the restaurant this evening, maybe we'll find out more.'

'You'll have to take a crash course in Japanese!' Ollie said, grinning.

'We've got Tschui for that!' Leonie laughed.

Then they said goodbye.

'See you soon,' Ollie said. They had to work that afternoon together for Ada Wendell at the Pirate Corner. Two or three hours at least.

At the Jade Dragon

It rained that afternoon and business was slow at the *Pirate Corner*.

At 5:15 Leonie asked if she could go. 'I want to go home and change my clothes,' she said.

'Yes, yes, I know. The Chinese restaurant!' Ada Wendell said smiling.

Ollie and Pat stocked shelves for a while, then left, too.

The two boys had arranged to meet Leonie at the bus stop at Museum Harbor.

'She'll come too late again, you want to bet? Ollie said. But this time he was wrong.

Leonie came just in time.

Pat took one look at her and said, 'Boy oh boy, do you look old!'

Leonie had pinned up her hair and was wearing a long summer dress and a green pullover, borrowed from her mother.

'Don't I look good?' Leonie was disappointed but tried not to show it.

'Oh, yeah, really cool!' Ollie said quickly.

'Just a little unpractical when you have to run, right?' Pat laughed.

'I don't plan to do much running this evening,' Leonie said, straight-faced.

'What about bicycling?' Pat asked.

'We're taking the bus, dummy!' Ollie said.

Ollie was happy that they had decided to go by bus. He didn't like to go downtown by bike. His bicycle was new and he was afraid someone might steal it. Besides, it had started to rain again.

At that moment, the bus came around the corner.

The Jade Dragon was located in a side street. A few minutes later, they got off the bus and hurried to the restaurant.

Tschui was there, waiting for them. With a big smile he welcomed them as soon as they came in. 'I've reserved a nice place for you,' he said with a knowing look. 'Table number 7.'

The table was in a little alcove just behind a golden Buddha statue.

'Thanks a lot!' said Leonie, trying to sit down elegantly. She wasn't used to wearing long dresses.

Ollie chose a chair from which he could keep his eye on the entrance to the restaurant.

Tschui brought the menu. 'Would you like to order now?' he said with a smile.

'Jasmine tea and and spring rolls,' Leonie said. Ollie ordered sweet-and-sour chicken and Pat's choice was vegetables from the wok.

'Thank you,' said Tschui. While he wrote down the numbers of their orders, he whispered, 'The others have reserved table 6, right next to your table. They should be here any minute.'

'Jikes! I couldn't be more nervous,' Leonie said, trying to pin up a loose strand of hair with a hair clip.

'Do you realize we've never been to a restaurant together,' Pat said and looked around curiously. 'I'm going to enjoy this even if the mysterious men who reserved the table next to ours don't show up.'

Tschui brought the tea for Leonie and Cola for Ollie and Pat. 'They just arrived,' he whispered. 'Their car is in the yard. But there are only two Japanese, although they reserved for three.' He turned quickly and went back to the kitchen.

The door opened and two Japanese entered and went straight to the table next to the alcove where the Harbor Crocodiles were sitting. They began talking at once - in Japanese! The three detectives didn't understand a word. But then the door opened again and a blonde woman in a bright blue summer outfit came in. She put her umbrella in the umbrella stand and then headed directly for table number 6. The two men greeted her in a friendly way in English.

'Hello, how are you?'

Even Leonie and Ollie could understand that.

But when they started talking Leonie shook her head. 'I can't understand a thing,' she whispered. 'Urgent!' she said to herself. 'Improve your English as soon as possible!'

Then came Pat's big moment. 'It's only small talk so far,' he said. 'About the weather and what they're going to order.' At that moment Tschui appeared with three bowls of soup. 'On the house!' he said, placing a napkin first in front of Leonie, then in front of the others. 'Can you understand anything?' he whispered.

Pat nodded and said, 'Mmm! Soup with bean sprouts. Great! Thank you!' Then, leaning closer to Tschui, he whispered, 'They're speaking English. I understand everything, but so far there's been nothing about stolen documents. They're talking about stuff I don't know anything about. About business deals and contracts.'

Was Inspector Voss right after all? Were the men at table 6 really only ordinary businessmen?

But first things first: the three detectives dug into their food, eating with great gusto.

'Mm, the spring roll is really delicious,' Leonie said. 'I only wish it was larger.'

'It's only meant to be an appetizer,' Ollie said. He let her have some of his sweet-and-sour chicken. It came with lots of rice. That was filling.

Pat's vegetables from the wok were mouth-watering good and he let the others have some. When Tschui came to clear the table, the plates were clean.

'Desert?' he asked.

Leonie hesitated. 'We'd, uh, like to wait a little,' she said.

'I can't afford desert,' Ollie muttered after taking a quick look in his wallet. 'I'm afraid we'll have to go soon. After all, we can't just remain sitting here the whole evening,' he whispered.

'I'll tell you what. I'll order desert and you can each have some of it. I have just enough cash to pay for it,' Pat suggested.

At that moment Leonie dug her elbow into his side, causing him to yelp in pain. One of the men at table 6 had said the word "Colibri". It was like an alarm signal, and suddenly the three detectives were all ear again.

'We've decided about our desert now,' Leonie said to Tschui when he returned to their table a short time later. 'But only one - with three spoons, please!'

Just then, she smelled something. The young woman in the blue outfit had lit a cigarette. A Lucky Strike! And she was drinking a Cola light.

'If it wasn't for the fact that she's blonde, I'd say...!' Leonie whispered.

Pat drew a quick sketch of the young woman's face.

'Here! Look at this!' he said to Leonie and added dark hair to his picture.

'Yeah, that could be her!' said Leonie softly. 'Of course, I only saw her a few seconds. It was like a shadow on the window.'

'Whatever!' said Pat, 'Inspector Voss should have a description of the woman with short blonde hair. Just in case.'

The group at table 6 were keeping their voices down. Pat had to really strain his ears to pick up bits and pieces of their conversation. They were talking about dressmaking patterns, product samples, drawings and photos. The young woman promised to get all the things the two men needed.

Anyone else who had overheard this conversation wouldn't have thought there was anything suspicious about it. But to Pat their words were very interesting. He scribbled down notes as he listened.

'It's lucky for us that Pat is good at English,' Leonie whispered in Ollie's ear. She was sure that the blonde woman was an industrial spy, the kind Inspector Voss had talked about.

When they finished their meal, the two Japanese thanked the young woman and told her that they were more than satisfied with her services thus far.

'I'm afraid there's still a small financial problem,' she said.

'Our contact at *Colibri* is causing trouble. The police seem to suspect something. There's more of a risk now. We'll have to increase his pay a bit...'

Pat's ears grew red with excitement as he translated for his friends what he had heard.

'Yikes! I think we're really onto something!' Ollie whispered.

'Shouldn't we call the inspector?'

'Wait a minute,' Pat said. 'If the inspector came now, it might ruin everything. Maybe we can find out some more.'

'Listen, I've got to go to the bathroom. I'm going to try to call the inspector from there and tell him to come - but not with flashing blue lights!' Leonie said with a determined look on her face.

'He may not want to. He's meeting with someone else this evening,' Ollie said.

In the bathroom, Leonie tried to reach the inspector using the speed dial of the red cell phone but she only reached the answering machine. She was about to leave a message when she heard footsteps. Quickly, she turned off the phone and popped it into her little backpack pocket.

Apparently, she wasn't the only one to have the idea of combining a trip to the bathroom with a telephone call! The blonde young woman now entered the little room and pulled her cell phone from her white patent leather bag. Then she waited until Leonie went into a stall before she began dialing a number.

'Can you pick me up at the *Jade Dragon* in a half hour? The Japs are meeting with the Chinaman then. Yes, it's all going smoothly. I was even able to squeeze out more money from them for us,' she laughed.

When Leonie came out of the stall, the young woman was brushing her hair. To Leonie's surprise, it wasn't a wig. The short blonde hair was real!

Returning to her table, she said in a low voice, 'I couldn't reach the inspector but I overheard what the blonde said on her phone. I don't know who she was talking to. It was probably her accomplice. She was talking about the Japanese and about money. And she arranged to be picked up soon. That's our chance to find out who the other person is.'

Tschui served the desert with the three spoons. Ollie, Pat and Leonie finished it in no time.

After that, Tschui's uncle, who owned the restaurant, entered the room. He went from table to table, greeting his guests.

'Everything all right here?' he asked when he came to table 7.

'Just fine, thanks!' Leonie said.

'These are friends from school,' Tschui explained.

'Well, then bring them three more deserts on the house!' said the uncle, smiling at the sight of the three spoons and the empty desert plate.

'No thanks! We couldn't eat any more. Everything was very tasty,' Leonie said, smiling.

But when Pat stepped on her toes under the table she added, 'I spoke too soon. I shouldn't really say no to your offer. You might get the idea that we didn't enjoy our food. The fact is, it tasted great!'

'I'm pleased to hear it,' the uncle said and gave the three detectives a warm smile. He liked children.

Still smiling, he turned to table 6 and gave out a round of rice brandy.

After that, the table was cleared and the Japanese businessmen said goodbye to the young woman.

'Will you convey my greetings to your Chinese friend. I'm sure he'll be pleased with the goods,' she said, smiling brightly.

'We're returning to Singapore on Friday. Could you deliver the goods to us in our hotel till Friday morning? Here is our hotel address.' One of the Japanese handed her a card. 'Call first please and ask for Mister John Miller and don't hand over the stuff to anyone but us. That is very important. You'll get your money on delivery.'

The Japanese paid the bill. Tschui was given a generous tip and smiled all over his face.

'Shall I order a taxi for you?' Tschui asked.

'Not for me,' said the young woman. 'I've got a ride.'

'And we're going to walk,' one of the Japanese said.

A moment later, the two of them left the restaurant. They were in luck. It had stopped raining.

Leonie was upset. 'Now we can't follow them,' she said. 'All because we got to wait for our desert! Here it comes, served by the boss himself!'

'You couldn't have followed her anyway, wearing that strange-looking dress,' Pat laughed.

'Don't start that again!' Leonie said, watching the young blonde woman as she took out a little mirror and applied fresh lipstick.

'If we had one of those rice brandy glasses, we could get finger prints,' Leonie whispered nervously. 'We could

compare them with the prints on the Cola can. Then we'd know if she's the woman we're looking for.'

But Tschui suddenly appeared and quickly took the glasses with him. It was a matter of good manners in a Chinese restaurant not to leave used dishes on the tables longer than necessary.

'Maybe Tschui can bring us the woman's glass,' Pat said.

'How would he recognize it? There were three glasses,' Ollie said.

Leonie thought about that. 'Most likely there are traces of lipstick on it,' she said after a moment.

Unfortunately, it was a long time before Tschui returned from the kitchen.

'You want one of the glasses from table 6? Sorry! I just put them in the dish washer

with the other dirty tableware,' he said. 'I didn't realize - '

'Never mind,' Leonie sighed. 'Forget it. It's okay.'

'Madam, someone is here to pick you up,' said the host. 'He asks that you come outside. He wasn't able to find a place to park.'

The young woman got up quickly, grabbed her handbag and left the restaurant.

'We're in luck!' Leonie said. 'She forgot her umbrella. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?'

Ollie nodded. 'We'll take it with us and check it for finger prints!'

'I'll see if I can find out who's picking her up,' Pat said and hurried outside. A moment later he came back to their table.

'It's a lemon yellow Porsche. I got the license plate number.'

'A successful evening's work!' Leonie said as the three of them got in the bus for home again.

'Inspector Voss will be proud of us, don't you think?' Ollie asked.

'I'll try to reach him again,' Leonie said, pressing the speed dial of the cell phone. But all she got was the answering machine again.

She took a deep breath and said, 'It's us, the Harbor Crocodiles. We have some very interesting news we've got to talk to you about, Inspector! Right after school.'

Pat held the young woman's umbrella carefully under his arm. He had put a plastic bag around the handle so the finger prints would not get smeared.

Inspector Voss takes Action

'Well, well, there you are again,' the inspector said when the three Crocodiles entered his office after school the next day.

'I can't wait to hear your news!'

'We've got information that will - ' began Pat.

'Hey! Slow down, man. First things first,' Ollie cut in.

Then, taking turns, the three of them related all that happened at the restaurant the evening before.

When they finished, the inspector was wide-eyed. 'That cannot be for real!' he cried.

'Here's the umbrella,' Pat said proudly.

The inspector had it brought to the laboratory immediately.

'If we can make a connection between the dark-haired woman who made those calls, the one who probably stole the films, and the blonde you saw at the Jade Dragon yesterday - wouldn't that be great!' he said.

'She was definitely wearing a wig at the time of the break-in,' said Leonie.

'It looks that way,' murmured the inspector. 'And if the finger prints are a match, we've got proof!' He paused a moment, then said, 'I had a very interesting evening yesterday myself.'

I cannot tell you everything, but what I can say is that my colleague is on the trail of an international ring of industrial spies. They have already caused damage amounting to millions of dollars.'

'Wow!' Ollie cried.

'The fact that the three of them are going to Singapore fits well in the picture. It's possible that they belong to that group of industrial spies. Their headquarters is in Singapore according to our most recent information.

'Headquarters for stolen ideas!' said Leonie angrily.

'Right,' Voss replied. 'Do you know what hotel the Japanese are staying in?'

'I'm afraid not but whichever it is, they are using the name Mr. John Miller,' she said.

'That's a big help,' said Voss, picking up the telephone. 'I'm going to ask one of my assistants to call all the hotels. We'll find them for sure!'

'The license plate number!' said Pat, suddenly. 'The man who picked up the young woman at the Jade Dragon must be involved, too!' He pulled out the notebook where he had written down the number.

'Yes, yes. We're following that lead, too,' the inspector laughed. 'Whew! You sure know how to keep us busy!'

Surprisingly, the police computer was faster than Voss thought it would be. In a matter of minutes, it had found out the name of the owner of the lemon yellow Porsche with the Hamburg license plate. The inspector's mouth fell open when his assistant told him that the car belonged to a man named Egon Fitch. And that Egon Fitch was no other than Jens Fitch from the Colibri Agency!

'We've found the leak!' Voss muttered and got up quickly.

'That's why he was angry with my mother for informing the police immediately after the break-in,' said Leonie with a knowing look.

'Informing the police - and three diligent detectives!' laughed Pat.

'A real crook!' Ollie remarked.

'You're right. A wolf in sheep's clothing!' hissed the inspector.

'Makes a fortune by leaking his client's business secrets to the competition! These industrial gangsters think they can get away with anything! I'm going to inform my colleague from the industrial espionage department at once. He'll be amazed.'

As expected, the finger prints on the umbrella matched those on the Cola can.

When his house was searched and the stolen erlking film was found, Jens Fitch had no choice but to confess to the crime. A vacation photo of him with the blonde woman he had picked up at the *Jade Dragon* was also found. She was apparently not only his accomplice but also his girlfriend. At first, she denied everything, but when the police searched her apartment they found a dark-haired wig and other things she had used to disguise herself.

Besides, her finger prints matched those on the Cola can and the umbrella. Further denial was pointless. The Colibri Case was as good as solved!

The two Japanese and the Chinese business man were shadowed by the police up the time of their flight to Singapore. During that time they were in contact with three other spies.

When they approached the airport in Hamburg on Friday with well-filled brief cases and a laptop full of information, the police were waiting for them.

The colleague from the industrial espionage department was over the moon. Three big fish had landed in his net!

Leonie's Party

A couple of days later, Inspector Voss made a surprise appearance at Leonie's birthday party in Grandpa Bloom's garden. It was also the official opening of the Harbor Crocodiles' new detective bureau. The paint on the red lawn chairs had dried just in time.

Inspector Voss presented Leonie with a huge bouquet. 'Not only did we capture the crooks, but we also found enough evidence to put them in prison for a long time. Not least thanks to the Harbor Crocodiles,' he said. Smiling, he pulled a little bag from his pocket and handed it to Leonie. 'This is for your outstanding service: a little token of my appreciation!' 'That wasn't necessary,' said Leonie, nervously opening the bag. In it, she found a sachet with finger print powder, a brush and a magnifying glass.

Laughing, she looked around at the others. 'Thank you, Inspector!' Leonie, Ollie and Pat all said at the same time.

'By the way, our colleagues from the computer department found a coded mailing list on a laptop belonging to one of the Japanese. It seems like this is just the tip of the iceberg. If we can decode the mailing list, perhaps we can begin to make the iceberg melt!'

'This iceberg, too?' Grandpa Bloom had suddenly appeared with a huge ice cream bomb he had made especially for Leonie's birthday party. On top of it was a marzipan crocodile, handmade by Grandpa Bloom himself!

'Let me test it first!' Pat said with a big grin. 'I'm a well-known desert specialist!'

'And I just love crocodiles!' laughed Ollie.

The laudation in honor of the Harbor Crocodiles held by Inspector Voss in the presence of all the guests was the best birthday present of all, in Leonie's opinion.

'Well, well, you were working on a case again,' Ada Wendell said. She had taken the time to bake a cake for the occasion. Captain Frisby and Otto Floss the mailman had come to offer their congratulations, too.

Pat's parents and his sister had also stopped by.

Unfortunately, Henrietta had almost picked the bouquet for Leonie to pieces before she handed it over.

Smiling, Leonie's mother took the inspector aside for a moment and said, 'I'm so thankful that you solved the case. Now I can still work with the Colibri Agency, after Fitch has been fired. In fact, I've already been given the commission to do their new automobile catalogue!'

'Don't thank me, thank the Harbor Crocodiles,' the inspector laughed. After that, he said goodbye to everyone and left.

It had grown dark and the party guests had all gone home when Tschui arrived. 'I took some time off. I want to cook you a meal. I promised to, remember?' he said with a bashful smile. 'Your favorite dishes: spring roll, sweet-and-sour chicken and vegetables from the wok.'

It was one of those rare summer evenings when you could sit around outdoors until the moon rose over the trees. Except for a few mosquitoes, it was a perfect evening.

'Many thanks, Tschui! This time it tasted even better than it did at the Jade Dragon!'

Leonie said when she had finished eating.

'I agree, said Pat. 'This time I could concentrate on my food and not on the neighboring table the whole time,' Pat said with a grin.

Suddenly, Ollie stood up, looked Tschui in the eye. 'From now on you are an honorary member of the Harbor Crocodiles!' he said, putting his arm on Tschui's shoulder. For a moment Tschui said nothing. Finally, in a soft voice, he said, 'You are really very, very nice! All three of you!'

