21

IT WAS UNCLE VICTOR who had spoken. It took some minutes for Mrs. Lundstrom and Peter to recover from their astonishment. When they did, they realized that they were being shown up a fir-screened gangplank. At its head stood Rolls, the mate, with a hand to help them alight on the dancing deck.

"But you're not the ones to be surprised," Victor was saying. "What about me? I was expecting the two teams as usual. Instead I find only you two and Bunny and his friends."

The *Cleng Peerson* was a fishing smack of fifty tons. She had been built long before Uncle Victor's time for the

They were being shown up a fir-screened gangplank.

herring industry. She carried a sloop rig and could set a course and square sail. But Uncle Victor had installed a thirteen-horsepower engine. So the *Cleng* had no need to wait for a wind but could travel under her own force at all times.

When newer and finer boats were built in the shipyards of the coast, people would ask Victor Lundstrom why he didn't get one.

"Why do you sail that tub?" they would question, knowing he could afford the finest.

To people who spoke in such fashion, Uncle Victor had little to say. But Peter knew what his uncle thought about the *Cleng*.

"There never was such a ship in the whole history of navigation," he once told Peter. "She's the sturdiest thing afloat. And she's as easy to manage as a kitten. As for capacity, well, for her size, she's the best of anything you ever heard tell of. Why, I could carry food and fuel for five years if I ever decided to make a polar expedition!"

When Uncle Victor bought the smack years ago, he changed her name. There were those who asked why the name *Cleng Peerson*. But Peter knew why his uncle called the boat he loved after one of his heroes. Cleng Peerson

was the Norseman who went to America and who, because of his bravery in the face of hardships, was called the Norwegian Daniel Boone.

"I'll give you tea, although I didn't expect visitors." Uncle Victor showed them into his cabin.

One of the greatest thrills of Peter's childhood was to have tea aboard the *Cleng*. But alas, invitations were hard to get. Uncle Victor was a busy man with his fishing crews, and the *Cleng* was at sea much of the time.

It was all so cheery and bright aboard the ship. In the cabin Peter could see his face reflected in a dozen different surfaces. It was spotless as only a ship's cabin can be. Leather bunks along two sides served as seats in the daytime. Over one of these were two portholes, darkened now by the camouflage shrubbery outside. But there were peepholes in the shrubbery and through them came a jagged broken light. A large round table centered the cabin. It was fastened to the deck, and above it hung a lamp on a chain. About the only other thing of importance was a large map of Europe as it was in the nineteen thirties. The map was draped with the red field and white-bordered blue cross of the flag of Norway.

"And what is the news of Lars?" Victor asked about his brother.

"There's little to tell," Mrs. Lundstrom said sadly. "His regiment got to Trondheim, and that's about all we know."

"There's been fierce fighting there." Uncle Victor lit a spirit lamp. He told what he had been able to learn about the army. His visitors listened eagerly. Then Mrs. Lundstrom explained the purpose of their visit.

"We didn't come to make a social call," she said. "I don't dare leave Bunny and the others very long. They may get tired and wander away. We came to warn you that someone may be watching you. Helga Thomsen said she heard something and saw someone move down here yesterday. Then Peter saw a German soldier on skis come out of the trail from here that cuts the road near the Holms'."

Uncle Victor looked grave. "It could have been Rolls or me that Helga saw. We've been watching every move these youngsters make. They haven't come once that one or the other of us hasn't stood guard."

"Yes, we thought as much," Mrs. Lundstrom said. "We talked of that last night when Herr Holm brought the news. I wouldn't have given it a thought if Peter hadn't seen the soldier on skis come out of the trail."

Uncle Victor had set the kettle on a spirit lamp and now lifted the lid to see if it was boiling.

"You could tell from the snow prints," Peter suggested.

"Yes, we could. After a distance. But it's pretty well trampled around here with Rolls and me going out night after night to bring the gold aboard. But one of us will go up the trail tonight and see," his uncle answered.

"But the curfew?"

Uncle Victor only laughed. He made the tea and poured it and passed the cups to his guests. There were spice cakes that Rolls brought in from the galley.

"There's no such thing as being too cautious about spies," Uncle Victor said after a time. "But if anyone had been here in the daylight, surely Rolls or I would have seen him. Of course I did take forty winks yesterday afternoon when the children were here. You see, when the two of us dig up and carry on board almost a thousand pounds of gold, it's pretty late and we're tired. We've things to do in the morning to get ready to sail. So we have to catch up on our sleep when we can. But Rolls was around, weren't you, old fellow?"

"Yes, I was. But when I saw Peter, I knew everything'd be all right. I'd left my pipe on board, and I came back just long enough to smoke a pipeful."

"Then someone could have been around and neither you nor I would have known."

"Is there much more gold to load?" Victor asked his sister-in-law after a pause.

"No. You have nearly all of it. Per Garson's been checking. The last of next week will finish it. And it won't be six weeks until Tuesday. We've been lucky, Victor. Think, if the thaws had come earlier."

"Well, you can't get it down here too soon to suit me." He stirred his tea. "This business of hanging around isn't exactly safe."

"You mean you're ready to sail?" Peter asked. "As soon as the gold's loaded you can go to America?"

"That's right, son. That's exactly what I mean."

"Then you know where the mines are laid?"

"Sure, I've known that for weeks, since we entered the war on the side of Britain and France. So hurry and get the gold down here so I can be under way. It'll be bad enough for the rest of you if we're caught, but Rolls and I would be shot."

"Oh, Uncle Victor!"

"But don't worry. We're not going to get caught. It's too much money to give the Germans and, anyway, I'd like to see New York again."

22

UNCLE VICTOR wasn't going to get shot if Peter could help it. He resolved then and there to do all he could to hurry the rest of the gold to the Snake so the *Cleng* could lift anchor and get away.

"There's nothing to do but what we've been doing," Victor Lundstrom decided. "We'll have to chance that this spy, or whatever he is, is still mystified and wants to learn more about us before he tells on us. He probably doesn't know that the bricks are gold bars because not one of them has been touched. Every sled load has been accounted for. So the best we can do is to get the rest of it here and let me get away while there's still a chance."

They agreed they had no choice in the matter.

"Yes, we've started it," Mrs. Lundstrom said. "The only thing to do now is to finish it."

The visitors dared stay no longer aboard the *Cleng* because of the little children.

"This is good-bye, Victor." Mrs. Lundstrom kissed her brother-in-law. "God bless and keep you always. You've undertaken a mighty task. Only a man as brave as you would attempt it."

Uncle Victor disclaimed the heroism.

"Not at all," he said. "I'm the lucky one. I'm going to get out of this while the rest of you have to stay and face it. Rolls and I have it easy. It's Lars and the ones who have gone to fight who are the brave ones."

Again Peter had to precede his mother along the beach past the German camp. He waited for her up on the road beyond the bend where he could not be seen from below. When at length she reached him, he tied his sled to the end of the bobsled, and together they pulled up the steep hillside.

At the Holms' farm there was a flurry of excitement. That much was evident the minute they turned in from the road. Fru Holm wanted to tell them something. But she was silent until the small children had eaten their bread and milk and were tucked into bed.

"There's something strange going on." She waved a wooden cooking spoon. "But first—" She went to the door and looked out. Then she bolted it and came over to where they sat beside the fire.

"Today, just before you came, I saw a German soldier in my woods. He was wearing skis. But why would he be skiing about my place? I ask myself. He comes cautiously, as if he's looking for something. I watch and he comes close to my barn. Then he slides himself along with his poles and pulls himself up the runway into my barn. *Into my barn*, I tell you!"

Peter and his mother had no word to say about this new menace. Was the German spying around the Holms' farm because he knew the boys were sleeping there? Peter wondered. Fru Holm went on.

"I think I will call out to him, 'Get out of my barn, you loafer.' But then I think, No, that's bad. It might make him angry, and he would turn me over to the officers. So I say to myself, I'll say nothing till I've talked with Fru Lundstrom."

"Then what happened?" Mrs. Lundstrom asked.

"I just waited and waited. By and by, he came out and started back the way he'd come."

"Perhaps he's on a mission to get food for the soldiers," Mrs. Lundstrom suggested.

"Then why doesn't he come right up here and ask me or Papa?" she answered with spirit. "He needn't go around looking in people's barns."

None of them knew what to make of Fru Holm's visitor. Peter tried to find out what the soldier on skis looked like. He was anxious to know if he was the same soldier he had seen himself the day before. But he remembered he had seen nothing of that one but his back. So he could hardly compare the two.

Whatever the ski soldier was doing in Holms' barn, it could only mean danger for Uncle Victor. Peter determined they would make even greater haste getting the rest of the gold to the Snake. He and Michael and the bigger ones would have to take heavier loads, five bricks instead of four.

Then if the women were going to pull the long sleds, they could take some, too.

Things were happening too fast.

Well, he could always warn Uncle Victor. There was some comfort in knowing where to find the *Cleng*.

The next day, and for some days after that, Mrs. Berg and a number of the other women joined the children in their trips. They would take the bobsleds and on each was a small pile of gold and over the gold sat the smallest children.

The next week the pile of bricks in the cave was nearly down to the ground. There were less than a hundred to be sledded to the Snake. The children danced around in great glee.

"The snow's holding, and we've done it!"

"We've done it! We've done it!" Helga was the noisiest.

"Shhh," Per Garson warned. "You've not done it yet. There's still nearly fifty sled loads. You can't say you've done it till this cave is bare as a miser's cupboard."

Nothing further was seen of the German soldier on skis. Peter was always on the watch. But not once did he see the gray green uniform.

Late one afternoon he was unloading his sled in the Snake. He untied his rope and removed the sack covering and placed the bricks in the hole he had made in the snow.

He took two handfuls of snow and began to make his snowman. He patted it hard. As he reached for more, something made him look up. It was just the merest noise—soft like breathing.

He looked into a pair of blue, blue eyes. Their owner was wearing the dull-colored uniform of a German infantry soldier.

23

SO IT WAS ALL OVER.

They'd been discovered.

The Nazis knew what they were doing and had come to stop them.

Peter knelt in the snow, trembling. The blue eyes under the fringe of fair hair were familiar. Even in his fright, Peter knew he had seen this private before. He'd seen him the very first day they'd passed the Nazi sentries. He had been helping unload the supplies. He was the one who had seemed to want to go sledding, too. More. He was the soldier who came to the *konditeri* for the *smørbrød*.

Then Peter had another surprise. The brush behind the soldier parted, and Uncle Victor sprang out. He grabbed the soldier's arms and pinned them behind him, and before he could make an outcry he had a gag over his mouth.

Behind Uncle Victor came Rolls, the mate. His revolver was pointed at the captive. When the latter made no effort to free himself, it was lowered. Then the men turned back into the brush toward the *Cleng Peerson*.

It all happened so fast that no one but Peter saw. Not even Helga, a few feet away, knew what took place. She was hard at work on her snowman.

"Helga, take my team back with yours," Peter asked. "I want to see Uncle Victor."

Helga wanted to see Uncle Victor, too, and to go aboard the *Cleng*, now that Peter knew where to find it. But Peter was president of the Defense Club. All of them had to obey him. When he refused to let her come with him, she had to do as he asked.

Peter had no idea whether or not his uncle would allow him aboard the boat. But he was going to find out. What was happening on the smack was something no boy of twelve was going to miss if he could help it. So he hurried through the brush to the side of the water.

From below the deck came strange sounds. Not to

Uncle Victor sprang out. He grabbed the soldier's arms and pinned them behind him.

miss any of the excitement, Peter almost fell down the companionway in his haste.

Uncle Victor and Rolls had untied the prisoner's arms and had taken the gag from his mouth.

Then the captive soldier drew off his round army cap and threw it on the floor and tramped on it. He beat it with his feet, up and down. Then he tore at the insignia on his collar and tried to rip it off. All the while he was making hideous faces.

"What is it, man? Speak. Your mouth is no longer tied," Uncle Victor commanded sharply.

Then came a torrent of words, Norwegian and some other tongue Peter did not recognize.

"I'm no German even if I do wear the uniform. I'm a Pole. They took me and made me serve them, and the deceit is theirs, not mine."

"But what are you doing with a German army of occupation?" Uncle Victor asked.

"I tell you it is not my fault. It's theirs. I'm no more to blame than, than—than that boy there."

He pointed at Peter and now Uncle Victor and Rolls saw him, too. But Uncle Victor made no move toward Peter. He gave him a glance that seemed to say, "It's all right. At your age I wouldn't have missed it, either."

"I want to go to the United States," the Pole went on. "If you'll take me on this boat, I'll cook and I'll scrub the decks. I'll sew the sails and carpenter. I'll stand watch. I'll do anything you ask. Only don't leave me here with those merciless machines, those Germans."

"What's he talking like that for?" Uncle Victor turned to Rolls. "What makes him think I'd take a man in a German uniform anywhere? How do I know he's a Pole and hates the Germans? Does he think I'm a baby to take him on his own word?"

Then he turned on the Pole and spoke severely.

"Come, now, tell us what you know. How long have you been following these children?"

"If I follow the children, it's only because I'm lonely. It's because I want to be with someone I can like and trust. I will not make friends with the Germans. They don't even speak to me unless I can do them a service." Tears came into his blue eyes.

"Come, now, that's absurd. You have been following these children because you are spying on them. You want to find out what brings them here on their sleds. Then you go tell the Commandant and win a promotion. I know your sly German tricks."

"No. No. No. I have no sly German tricks. I'm a Pole.

I have no love for the Germans. To me, they have done every wrong short of putting me to death. If I follow the children, it's not to do them harm."

He spoke convincingly. Peter believed he told the truth. Even Uncle Victor seemed inclined to believe him, for his next question was put in milder tones.

"But if you wanted to be with the children, why did you not make yourself known when you were here last week?"

"I was on the other side of the fjord. I could not cross over."

"But what were you doing in Holms' barn?" Peter asked. "For it was you, of course."

"If one is lonesome, even cows can be companions."

Uncle Victor turned away.

Peter spoke again. He was sorry for the captive, believed his story. But with so much at stake they couldn't afford to take chances.

"But it was you who were in the *konditeri* the day you posted the notices about going back to school. Why is it you can have so much liberty and the others have to go back to the barracks?"

"They don't have to go. It's by choice. When they found the Norwegians were ignoring them they decided

they would stay together entirely. And then when the epidemic came, they were frightened."

"Weren't you frightened, too?"

"Not I, because death, it is nothing. I live only that some day I can help my country. Poland is my country."

Uncle Victor cleared his throat. If he was going to say something, the Polish boy didn't give him a chance.

"But won't you take me with you to America, for surely that is where you are going?" He looked about the cabin. "From the other side of the fjord, I saw the boat in its clever disguise, and I knew you'd be sailing soon for that country. I'll be no trouble if you take me. And when I get there, I've a place to go. I have a married sister in Pittsburgh."

"But that's utter nonsense," Uncle Victor protested. And his voice was again loud and angry. "Even if I didn't think this some sly Nazi trick, how could I land you there? They wouldn't let you in without a passport."

24

UNCLE VICTOR wanted to know how his prisoner came to be wearing a German army uniform, and this is the story the Polish boy told:

"My name is Jan Lasek. My home is in Kraków near the German border. I was born the year of the Armistice, 1918, when Poland declared her independence.

"Until last summer I was a student of languages at the University of Kraków. Always I wanted to go to America where I could practice my English and study it further. But there were six in our family and to spare the money was out of the question. My sister went to Pittsburgh to marry one of our countrymen. My grandmother was

already living there. When grandmother died, she left me some money. The legacy was in a bank in Pittsburgh, and it was easier if I'd go there to get it. So I was to have a year of study in America, after all.

"All last summer when there were signs of trouble, my father would say, 'Jan, you go to America.' But I had a job tutoring and was making money, and so I waited until just before the University of Pittsburgh would open. I waited too long.

"The last week in August I went to Gdynia to take the boat for America. I had my ticket and my passport. But when I turned them in to go aboard a strange thing happened. Two men wearing police uniforms came up and took me by the shoulders.

" 'You're to come with us,' they said.

"I had to go along. There was nothing else to do. But instead of taking me where someone would tell me what was wanted of me, they threw me into a dark basement, and there I stayed for two days and nights without so much as a crust of bread or a drop of water. It was because they'd forgotten me.

"In the meantime the Germans crossed into Poland and bombed, I think, twenty-three cities. But this I learned later. Then I knew only what I could guess from

what had troubled my father and from the sound of the bombs dropping all around.

"After two days they remembered about me and brought me food and water. I inquired what had happened, and they told me that Germany and Poland were at war. I asked about my ticket and passport, and they only shrugged.

" 'The boat left on schedule,' they said. 'Jan Lasek was aboard.'

"Little by little I began to understand. They had wanted my passport for someone else. So I was locked up, and that other is masquerading in the United States, doing I don't know what harm. The men who arrested me were not Polish but German secret police in uniforms they brought with them from their own country. For in the house where I was kept prisoner, I saw every kind of uniform or costume you could think of.

"There were disguises for clergymen, even the robes for a bishop. Men's formal dress included the ribbons and medals of a diplomat. For the women were all kinds of clothing from the cap and apron of a parlor maid to the furs and jewels of a countess.

"One of the people in that house wore the black dress and inverted collar of a cleric. Here is one who will help

me, I thought, before I knew about the disguises. This man of God will advise me in my troubles. One day when I had a chance, I spoke to him. 'I'm being kept here against my will,' I said. 'Will you help me to get back to my own people?'

"He laughed to put me to shame. 'So you think I make a convincing-looking clergyman?' he said. 'But you flatter me.' When next I saw him, he was wearing the uniform of a German gestapo.

"But he did not hold my question against me. I thought he seemed to like me, for he spoke to me often, which was more than the rest of them did. One time I saw him packing a valise preparatory to going away. But first he had to unpack it. He took out the uniform of a streetcar conductor.

" 'This is what I wore when I first came to Poland two years ago.' He held up the cap for me to read the letters of its insignia, and then he showed me the coat and trousers. From one of the pockets he drew out a book of streetcar tickets.

" 'I learned more about Poland in one year of riding the Warsaw tramcars than most people will know in a lifetime. And I found my knowledge very useful.'

"I asked him why so many different kinds of dress were found in one house.

" 'But it's wise to have many changes of dress. Come, I'll show you.' He opened a large wardrobe and from it he drew out a suit of Scotch tweed. Plaid cap, rough shoes, and a heavy blackthorn stick went with it. Then he began practicing his Scottish dialect.

" 'The dress of a Scotsman was verra, verra helpful to me,' he mocked. 'It got me into the British Embassy, and there I drew more than one piece of information out of the servants—information that was gratefully received at home.'

" 'Who wears the nurses' uniforms?' I asked.

" 'Who would wear them but our women agents? They get employment with an influential family where they can learn much that our country wishes to know. So, what does it matter if the employer or the maid furnishes the uniform? It's only a few marks one way or the other. One of our girls was able to bring us information about a depot of ammunition our other agents didn't know existed. It's been blown up!' he finished.

" 'Spies!' I said, entirely without regard of what he would do to me. But it didn't make him angry. He only shrugged his shoulders.

" 'Call us that, if you like. We describe ourselves as patriots.'

" 'Patriots? Yes, you can call yourselves that if you

mean coming into a peaceful country and getting control of it by lies, sneakiness, bribery, and corruption.'

" 'But that's the highest form of patriotic duty to one's own country,' he said, and I'll say this much for him. He was speaking the truth as he knew it.

"One of these disguises was given me. It was the uniform of a German army private. I had to put it on, or I'd be shot.

" 'But what do you want of me?' I asked the woman who kept that house.

" 'Our Führer needs your passport for work of his own in America,' she said.

" 'But why must I wear a German uniform?' I asked.

" 'You ought to be glad to wear it. You might have been left to die in the basement.'

" 'Why do I owe my life to this uniform?'

" 'You were locked in. Nobody meant you should die of starvation, but you were forgotten about. We've more important things to think about than one Pole. But we needed someone who knew languages—not one or two but many foreign tongues. Your papers say you are a student of languages. So you will be an interpreter for the army.'

" 'Never,' I said. 'My country's at war with Germany, and I'll do nothing to help an enemy.'

"'Don't worry,' she said. 'In a short time there'll be no war. Poland will have surrendered.'

"One day I was taken out of that house and, with a body of German guardsmen, I was put on a train and sent south to my own city of Kraków.

"I was in Kraków for months after that. You can imagine my shame when one of the few old neighbors that were left saw me in a Nazi uniform.

"My father was dead. He was shot when he went to the assistance of an old priest who was dragged off the altar at mass. My mother was not there. They said she got to Romania and took my little brother and sister. Two of my brothers died defending our city. My home I saw. There are hardly two bricks standing on top of each other.

"I make no mention of the humiliation of our people or of how the Germans stole our money, our homes, our farms, and the very potatoes in our fields. I say nothing of what they did to our priests. Or of how they took our young men and made them work at hard labor for themselves. Nor of how they turned the women and children out of their houses overnight and sold those houses to people in Germany. All these things I saw with my own eyes.

"Me they treated with civility. Always I've had enough

to eat and a bed. I translate orders from the officers into whatever language is needed for posting to the civilian population—Polish there, Norwegian here. If I refused, they'd shoot me, and all the while I'm hoping to live for Poland.

"Norway has seen little. It's Poland that has suffered. Here you think the Germans are decent, and they have behaved better in your country than in mine. Perhaps it is because they think of Norway as a part of Germany. So they have not yet taken all your food and left you to starve. Poland they used as an example. It was to show what would happen to you if you did not submit.

"Now you know why I am not spying on you to tell the Germans and win a promotion. You know why I've watched your children because, if you belong to a country that has been invaded as mine has, then you are drawn in sympathy to people that have similarly suffered. You know now why I must get to America."

25

"WELL, WHAT are we going to do with him?" Uncle Victor asked when Jan Lasek had finished his story. They had put him in the hold while they discussed the problem.

"We daren't turn him loose, that's certain," Rolls replied. "We can't take the risk that he won't tell the Commandant."

"He'd never do that," Peter spoke quickly.

"His story sounds true enough," Uncle Victor decided. "I can well believe what he's told us. We know about the disguises ourselves, about men who came to Norway dressed as sports lovers but who turned out to be

secret police. But I think it's dangerous to let him go. Whether he meant to or not, he could accidentally say something that would put the Germans on our trail."

"But what shall we do with him?"

"He'll have to be kept in the hold. We can't stand guard over him. I've a crew coming on tomorrow, but, even so, I cannot spare a man just to watch him."

Rolls was laying the table for supper. Since it was so late, Peter was to spend the night aboard the *Cleng*, and there was no place on earth he would rather be. His mother would not miss him that night, for he was supposed to be at the Holms' farm.

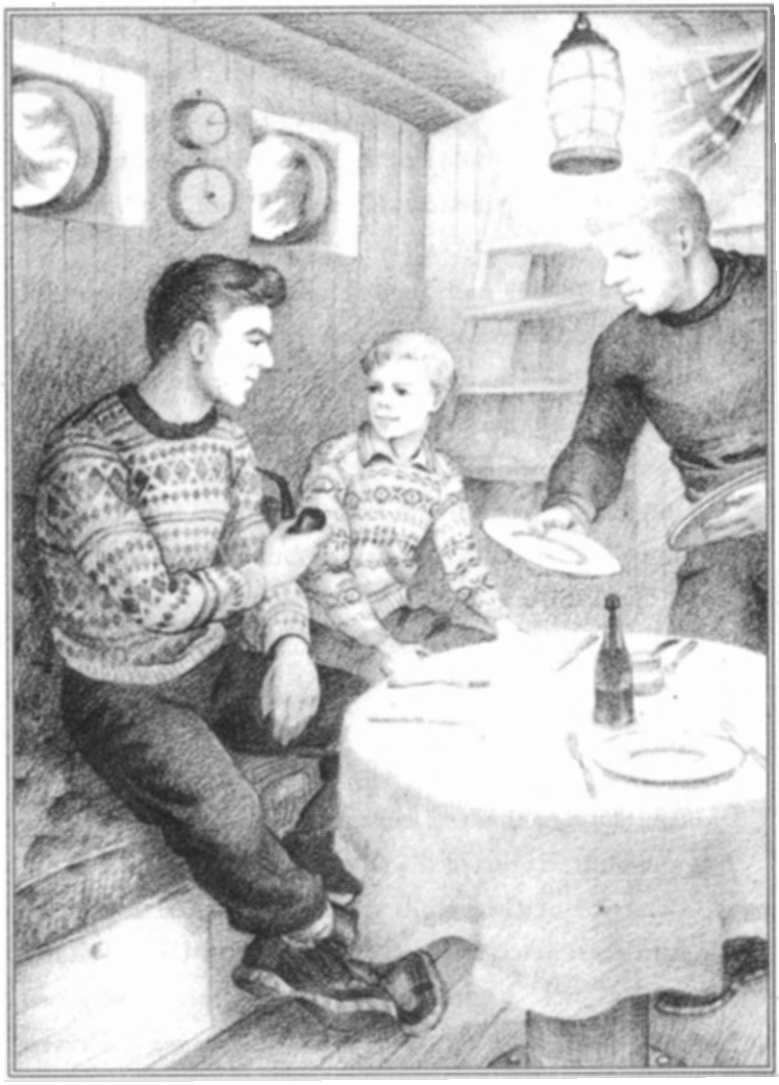
"Couldn't you take him with you to America, Uncle Victor?" Peter pleaded. "It seems a shame he can't go."

"But I *can't* take him without a passport. That's all there is to that," his uncle said shortly.

"It would be a terrible thing to go that distance and be turned back at the end," Rolls explained.

"I could sign him on as a sailor," Uncle Victor answered. "But he'd be interned because I'm not planning to return. I'm afraid that would be pretty hard on him after all he's gone through."

"You could land him somewhere along the coast where the fighting is going on," Rolls suggested. "There are Poles with the British army."



Peter was to spend the night aboard the Cleng.

"Too dangerous," his captain replied. "Once I get out of this fjord, I'm going to stay out to sea. Overnight the Germans have been capturing our towns. I might run into an enemy occupation. Once I get past, I'm going to stay past."

The Polish boy had been frightened when they told him they would have to lock him up for the night.

"Nothing will harm you," Uncle Victor said. "You won't have to go back to the barracks. We're hiding and you can hide with us."

They had to wait for the long twilight to fade to bring in the gold that the children had buried that day. They didn't dare carry a light.

"You see now why I had you build the snowmen?" Uncle Victor asked Peter. "We just have to feel our way. So all we do is feel for a snowman, and under him is the gold."

With three of them at work, it wasn't long before they had the bullion aboard the *Cleng*.

"Fifty-one bricks," Rolls grunted in satisfaction.

"And each brick is worth five thousand United States dollars," Uncle Victor spoke cheerfully. "That's two hundred and fifty-five thousand dollars we collected from these snowmen. Quite a lot of money."

"Uncle Victor, that's just about all the gold in the cave. One day more'll bring it all out. This morning I asked Per Garson how much was left, and he said a hundred bricks. Well, here are fifty-one of them right here."

"That's what I've been hoping. As soon as this Polish boy is missed, the Germans will start searching for him. They may come here. Even with the camouflage, it's dangerous if they get too close. If I had my crew, I think I would sail tonight. Although I'd have to leave the rest of the gold, I'd do it to be safe."

Before he turned in that night, Rolls quizzed Jan Lasek about when he would be missed at the camp.

Jan said that he *might* be missed that night, but they couldn't help noting his absence at roll call in the morning.

When Rolls told his chief, Peter thought his uncle looked solemn.

"Then the search may start tonight." He went to the porthole to look through a slit in the fir branches.

"You don't expect them here already?" Peter asked.

"No, I want to see if there's any sign of my sailors. They'll come at night."

"But the curfew, Uncle Victor?"

"It'd be a lot safer for them at night. But don't worry.

Hans Torp and Sten and Dino are resourceful fellows. They'll manage. I told them to be here no later than tomorrow, and they'll be here."

There were voices out of the night beyond the portholes. From the direction of the beach came calls. Crowded at the peepholes in the fir branches, the three in the cabin waited. The voices grew louder. Outside in the snow were several squads of Germans.

"So the search has started," Victor spoke softly. "And they're even looking here. Whew! What a narrow squeak! If they'd come an hour earlier, they would have found us out there with the gold!"

26

IT HAD TAKEN the Germans until taps to miss the Polish recruit.

Then the hunt for him had started.

Nearer and nearer to the *Cleng Peerson* came the searching party. But Uncle Victor was calm.

"If you couldn't find the boat in the daytime, knowing it was here, they're not going to find it at night," he comforted Peter. "So let's not worry about their finding us. I'm only hoping that Torp and the other two don't pick this time to come aboard."

The Germans trailed up the valley well beyond the two fallen trees. But here the snow was clear of footprints, as

the three in the cabin knew. So their trip only served to churn the snow and widen the hunt. For with many footprints on the ground, later search parties would have more territory to cover.

Uncle Victor, Rolls, and Peter continued to crowd at the peepholes in the fir branches over the ports. After a time, they saw the Germans turn back toward the cliff and the beach.

"If they search the woods, they can't help coming on the ski trail of our friend here." Uncle Victor meant Jan Lasek. "That'll lead them here by the back way, and you can be sure they'll do some close searching."

The next morning the Snake was quiet as always. The Germans evidently had not yet found the ski trail, and Uncle Victor hoped to be at sea before they did. Just before dawn, Hans Torp and the two other sailors came aboard. They took turns watching for the enemy's approach, but the morning wore away and they neither saw nor heard anything. The last of the gold would be brought down that afternoon. When it was dark the *Cleng* could sail.

It was going to rain, Peter noted with satisfaction. It wouldn't matter now. The gold had been saved.

Lovisa's and Michael's teams came to the Snake that day. Peter went out to join them, for he would be going

back to town with them. He longed to remain in the Snake to see Uncle Victor set sail. But for the safety of them all and for the accomplishment of all they had set out to do, he made no protest when Uncle Victor said he must go back to town.

"Oh, Peter! We did it! We did it!" Lovisa threw her arms around him. "Every last brick's out of the cave. It's all down here. We fooled them! We fooled those old goose-steppers!"

"What about the soldier that's missing?" Peter wanted to know at once. "Was there a search for him in town last night?"

"Was there? Well, you should have been at home! In the middle of the night they pounded on the door. Per Garson went to open it. They almost knocked him down, pushing past him. They started searching the house. They looked in closets, even with Mother's dresses. They woke up Bunny, and he started hollering. Mother told them she didn't know what they were looking for but if they'd tell her she'd know how to help them. But they just went on poking behind curtains. Do they think we'd hide one of their men? Why are they making this fuss?"

"I guess on account of his being a Pole. And forced against his will to join their army."

"Was he? How do you know that? How do you

know he's a Pole? Nobody in town said he was a Pole."

But Peter wouldn't tell. Lovisa went on:

"There's a notice on the school door. It said that anyone with information about this missing soldier must report at once to the Commandant, and if anyone is found to know something and *hasn't* told, he'll be punished with death. Ugh, these Germans!"

"Whew!" Peter whistled.

"Mother's afraid for the Holms," Lovisa went on. "She thinks the missing man might be hiding around their barn, and she's going down this afternoon to warn them to get him out. For she said if they did find anyone there it'd be pretty hard to make the Nazis understand the Holms didn't want him. She'll be there when we get back."

Peter nodded. "Let's get these bricks down and get out of here."

Lovisa turned back to her sled and Peter, watching her, saw her stiffen in fright.

"Look, Peter," she whispered.

Into the Snake filed a company of German soldiers and an officer.

"They've come to search," Lovisa said.

"They did that last night. I guess they've come to look again."

"Peter, what'll we do? They'll see us with the gold."

"Right." He snapped into action. "The kids'll have to hurry. Get your bricks in the snow. Quick, team," he lowered his voice. "Here come the Germans."

Like squirrels burying nuts, the children burrowed in the snow. It flew in all directions.

"Not so deep," Peter directed. "Just lay the bricks down and start the snowmen. Faster. They're coming."

Mittened hands had unloaded the sleds. Now the snow was being patted into hard lumps. The children were well practiced after so many months of winter. Soon a fine army of snowmen was standing.

Michael's team was farther up the valley by the farthest of the two fallen trees. Peter gave the whistle they used at school when Mr. Anders was coming.

Michael whistled back. Then he must understand. He'd know that someone was coming, that danger was near.

"All right, Lovisa, let them come," Peter dropped on his knees in the snow and began another figure. It was easier to do that than to stand waiting for the Germans. In all the weeks they'd been coming to the Snake, this would be the first time the Germans had come there at the same time. Lovisa thought something of this, too.

"They had to wait for the very last day," she grumbled.

"They let us bring every last bit of gold out. Then they come and find it."

"Shhh," Peter cautioned. "Don't let them know you think anything is out of the ordinary in their coming here. They're only looking for the runaway soldier, you know."

It was Lieutenant Sit Down who led the company into the Snake. They came plodding through the snow to the level space between the two trees, and here the ground was dotted with children and snowmen.

"There's no one here but these youngsters," he told the sergeant. "There's no use to ask them if they saw anyone, for they won't answer. I think we might as well go back."

The sergeant drew up stiffly. "Pardon, Herr Lieutenant," he said, "the Commandant comes."

27

NEAR THE CLIFF Peter could see the bulky figure of the Commandant, the head of the German forces at Riswyk. He was picking his way up the valley.

Peter and Lovisa continued playing in the snow. Peter had begun a snowman, and Lovisa was making hers a fancy hat.

They wanted to get up and start for home, but they didn't dare move. They felt they would be less noticed if they stayed where they were.

The Commandant came puffing along. He seemed to have trouble lifting his feet in the deep snow. In his hand he carried a light little cane, a swagger stick.

He plodded along until he came to the children. When he got there he stopped in his tracks.

"If he'd only go on," Peter growled to himself. But he didn't dare look up to see. His hands were busy with the snow. His head was hot and his mouth dry and there was a buzzing in his ears.

What would happen now? What if the Commandant found the bricks buried under the snowmen? Why, there were more than a million kroner right here at their feet!

"We're searching for a German infantryman," the Commandant announced to the children. "Have any of you seen a man in these woods?"

Of course there was no answer. He turned aside to whisper a few words to Lieutenant Sit Down. Then he spoke to the children in a loud voice, "I said we are looking for a German infantryman. It's very important for you children to tell if you've seen one on this part of the coast. There's a severe penalty attached if anyone has seen him and has not reported it."

Still the children said nothing.

"I've a good mind to give you children a lesson in manners." His voice was angry. "When you're spoken to, it's only right that you should answer. Has no one taught you that? Now then. Yes or no? Have you seen a German infantry soldier in this fjord?"

The children acted as if they had not heard him. Lovisa sat back on her heels to admire her handiwork. But Peter, for all he tried to be cool, felt a terrible thumping in his chest. His cheeks must be red as rowanberries. For if any snowman were to be knocked down . . .

The Commandant strode across the snow and stood above Lovisa.

"Little girl, tell me, did you or did you not see a German infantryman?" he screamed in anger. "Answer me."

Lovisa only turned her big blue eyes up at him. Not so much as a nod did she give him.

"Don't you know I can make you talk? Don't you realize that we Germans can make anyone do our will? We've only to command to be obeyed."

Peter remembered the pact they had made the day they had started their undertaking. They had sworn on the sword they wouldn't give information about what they were doing. Of course, this wasn't the same. But even so, they weren't to talk to the Germans for fear they would say something to make them suspicious. But no need to worry about Lovisa. Pledge or not, she wouldn't talk.

The Commandant's eye fell. There was something he didn't like about Lovisa's snowman.

"Bah, you Norwegians!" With his stick he slashed off the snowman's head. It was as if he would do the same to Lovisa's. Then he raised the stick and cut the snowman neatly in two. The upper part rolled beside the head. Only the haunches remained.

"Down you go." He shouted in his rage. "Just the way all people go who stand in our Führer's way. The way Norway goes. And Holland and Belgium and France and England and all countries that oppose the German will."

Lovisa was near to tears, Peter could tell. But she winked them back.

"Now, little girl," the Commandant went on, "you see what will happen to all your people if you do not help the good Germans who have come to save you from the hardships your country makes you endure."

"Hardships!" Peter had to bite his tongue to keep from saying. "It's you who bring the hardships, you with your talk of 'the good Germans.' "

"So, little girl, let this be a lesson." The high officer was still in a rage. "Unless you want yourself and all who belong to you to go rolling over like that—and that—and that—"

He began kicking the stump of Lovisa's snowman. The snow flew out in a shower. With each kick, Peter winced. For the Commandant's foot could only be a few

It landed exactly on the Commandant's right ear.

inches from her two bricks. In their haste that day they had not been able to bury deep but had to count on the snowmen to hide the gold.

The high officer had evidently decided to give Lovisa a thorough lesson, for he lifted his foot for another kick. Like a football player he stood back to swing at what was left of the snow figure.

In another minute he'll stub his toe against the bricks, Peter thought.

Then he gathered up a handful of snow. He rolled it into a hard ball. Then he stood back and took aim.

It landed exactly on the Commandant's right ear as Peter meant it should.

Then Peter took to his heels and ran for the woods.

28

"THERE HE GOES! After him!"

Peter had little chance to escape. Lieutenant Sit Down and almost his whole company were chasing him.

But Peter knew these woods and the foreigners did not. He hoped to cross the Snake above where it was narrower and take the ski trail up the mountain. In the forest above, he had a good chance to hide.

But he was cut off before he could get upstream far enough to cross. The Germans spread out in a circle and blocked all points. Peter felt like a rabbit facing a pack of hounds.

Rough arms were around him, and he fell to the

ground. There was a tussle, and Peter all but succeeded in throwing off his captor. But the others came up and he was one against many, a boy surrounded by men.

There was nothing to do but submit. They dragged him to his feet. He fell in step with them. They were marching him off to their barracks.

But the snowball trick had worked!

He had succeeded in distracting the Commandant. The outrage of being snowballed by a Norwegian boy was enough to make him forget the lesson he was giving Lovisa—showing her how the Norse would be treated by the German conquerors. And so, he had not uncovered the gold she had buried beneath the very snowman he was kicking.

Yes, the snowball trick had worked! When Peter was led back to the place between the two fallen trees, he saw the Commandant was leaving. The snowmen were still standing, and the children were filing out of the Snake.

Peter did not mind being a German prisoner if he had saved the gold.

How much of this had Uncle Victor seen? he wondered. No doubt every bit of it.

But could he do anything to help him?

Frightened as he was, not knowing what was going to happen, he still didn't want any aid from Uncle Victor.

His uncle's only concern was to get the gold out of Norway. If he did that, it was all that anyone could expect of him.

But Uncle Victor wasn't the one to let a fellow down, Peter knew. He had always been ready to help before. But in a case like this, with so much involved—the money, maybe their very lives—Peter didn't think his uncle could do much.

A soldier marched on his right and one on his left. Ahead and behind were others. When they reached the sentries, these sprang up, their rifles on their shoulders. So they were quite a little company when they turned into the barracks they had built before the fishing wharf.

The heavy boots of the Nazis clumped in rhythm over the wooden boards of the barracks floor. *Thump, thump, thump, thump,* down a long hallway they pounded. Then they stopped. Peter was shoved into a box of a room no bigger than a clothes closet. A key was turned in the door. Then the *thump, thump, thump* of the soldiers as they left him alone in the twilight.

He stumbled against something like a low shelf. It was supposed to be his bed, he guessed. There was a window at one end of the tiny room. It was barred. Through it he could see the beach, snow covered to the very edge of the black, lapping water. Through the snow the sentry

stepped, up and down, up and down, his legs swinging straight out from his hips like those of a toy soldier wound with a key.

What were they going to do with him? Peter wondered. Would he be tried at a court-martial?

Up past the window stepped the sentry. Then he turned and followed his own footprints back in the direction he had come.

Was it a serious offense to snowball a high German officer? Peter believed it was. It had something to do with order and respect for authority. Well, he didn't care how serious it was. They could shoot him if they liked. He was glad he had thrown that snowball.

But still, he was horribly afraid.

Would even the Germans put a boy to death? He couldn't be sure. From the stories of what they did in Poland, he could believe almost anything. Still, these Germans in Norway didn't seem so bad. The captain who had gone away had moved his troops out of their sled track, and they had all been very decent and had kept to themselves and had not even raided the food supplies as they had done in other countries. They had all been very friendly, except this Commandant. But even he had offered to have an orderly help Mrs. Lund-

strom pull the sled on which Bunny and the others sat on thousands of kroner of gold.

But Jan's story of Poland kept coming back—of how they had turned the people out of their houses and had taken the priest off the altar at mass.

When he thought of Jan, his mouth was hot and dry again. For whether or not he was in serious trouble for having snowballed the Commandant, he knew he would be if it were known he'd seen the escaped Pole. Lovisa said there was a notice on the school door saying that anyone who was found to know something about him and not telling would be punished by death.

By death.

How cold it was in this barracks! Even in his Windbreaker and heavy outdoor clothes he felt cold. His teeth were coming together and apart like hammers.

The sun had gone down, and there was only a dim gray light coming from the outside. It seemed to be raining. Maybe that was why it got dark so early. Anyway, the northern afternoon was over. Outside it all seemed so wet and sad, down here by the fishing pier.

After a time a soldier came to the door. He brought Peter a deep dish of stew and some dark bread.

The soldier spoke to him. "I come back to get your

dish. Then I will take you to the Commandant," he said in German.

Peter couldn't eat. He tried to, but it was no use.

Later there were footsteps in the hall. A key turned in the lock. The time was up. The soldier had come to take him to the Commandant. He stepped into the cell. Even in the dim light Peter could tell it was not the same soldier.

29

THE SOLDIER came inside and shut the door and leaned against it.

Peter looked hard at him. He could see so little from the streak of light from the window. But there was something familiar.

The soldier was Jan Lasek, the Pole. But, no. That couldn't be. Jan was on Uncle Victor's boat in the Snake. Peter had seen him there that day.

"Shhhh," Jan put his finger to his lips. From his tunic pocket, he dug a scrap of paper. It was so dark Peter had to go over and over it before he could make it out. It was a note from Uncle Victor. Peter read:

"Jan Lasek is risking his liberty and perhaps his life for you. Follow him at all costs, wherever he goes. On that depends your safety and his."

There was no signature but Peter knew well his uncle's bold handwriting. He nodded to show he understood.

Jan kept listening for a sound. What was he waiting for, Peter dared not ask. From afar Peter could make out a kind of din, a rattle like knives and forks, pans and mugs. When the rattle became much louder Jan seemed satisfied. He looked out the door. He stepped outside and closed it.

When he came back into the cell, there was high excitement in his whisper.

"Come now," he said. "Quickly!"

They were out in the hall. Jan stopped to turn the key in the lock outside the door where Peter had been kept prisoner. Into his pocket went the key.

And now Peter could hear the *tramp, tramp, tramp* of boots. It came from a distant end of the barracks, but it grew noisier with each step.

"We'll have to run," Jan whispered.

All the time the sound of the marching soldiers came closer. They seemed to be coming down a hall that would meet the corridor at right angles. And now Peter could

hear nothing because of sound in his own ears. He wanted to run in the opposite direction. Why go this way? he wondered. We'll only run into them.

The marching men must be nearing the corner. But Jan only kept going faster toward them. Uncle Victor said he was to follow Jan at all costs. So behind him ran the breathless, frightened Peter.

And now, on the right, Peter saw a door. Through it Jan pulled him. There was just time to close it softly. The Germans were turning the corner as Peter could tell by the sound of their steps on the other side of the door.

Peter fell into the wet snow of the beach. They were outside the barracks and, for the moment, safe.

Jan flattened himself against the wall of the building and Peter stood up beside him. The shadow of the barracks hid them. The rain was loud on the crusted snow.

"We're lucky the sentry was going up the beach, not down," Jan whispered. "Otherwise he'd have seen the light when we opened the door."

Peter felt a throbbing in his ears. He tried not to pant but his breath was loud. Now there was another soft *pod, pod, pod*—more marching. Against the snow they could see a dark figure. It was the sentry returning. He walked up to a point on a line with the door, the very door over which he stood guard. He was not ten feet away

from where Jan and Peter were flattened against the wall.

Slap, slap, slap, his heavy leather mittens thumped his shoulders. He changed his rifle from one side to the other and changed it back again. Then he turned and began goose-stepping back in the direction he had come.

Jan tugged at Peter's sleeve. It was now or never, he seemed to say.

Peter was not prepared for what happened next. Jan led him down the beach to the very edge of the fjord and then right into the water itself.

The cold water bit his body. The breath left him. He didn't think he could stand another minute of it. He wanted to run back to the beach, but Jan kept wading out and Peter, remembering the warning in the note, found himself following him.

It seemed forever, these few minutes they waded in the water. And now Jan was swimming, and Peter found himself doing the same. But you couldn't swim in that close-to-frozen water. You had no strength. Peter felt the breath going out of him. But somehow or other it seemed better to freeze to death out here than to stay in those barracks and wait for no one knew what. Then there was a numbness over him. He closed his eyes.

Strong arms were pulling it toward the fishing smack.

He must be dreaming, for nothing like this could happen in real life. A hand reached out and grabbed his arm and he was pulled into a boat. Someone put a flask to his mouth and told him to drink. But the fiery stuff made him sputter, and it ran down over his chin. A heavy coat was put over him and a pair of arms were cradling him.

Rolls, Uncle Victor's mate, was holding him. There was another sodden mass on the bottom of the boat. It was Jan Lasek. Peter heard them say his name.

But now he found he was beyond caring about anything. The boat, he knew, was the *Cleng Peerson*'s lifeboat. Strong arms were pulling it toward the fishing smack.

30

PETER WAS DRY and warm in Uncle Victor's cabin.

The coast of Norway was somewhere out in the blackness. The Atlantic rolled and the *Cleng Peerson* pitched and Peter was jounced up and down with the wash of the waves.

Ahead lay America!

So Peter was going to America!

He was going to see New York and go to Pittsburgh with Jan Lasek and then travel to Minnesota where his uncle was a professor in St. Olaf's College in Northfield.

Uncle Victor could arrange it, he said.

"You can be admitted as a minor in my custody. Our

minister in Washington will do that much for us. He'll be only too glad to do something in return for all this gold."

"But what about Jan Lasek?" Peter asked. "How can he go without a passport?"

"But he *has* a passport—the one that was stolen. There'll be a record of it in Washington, and they'll be grateful for the information about the one who is masquerading in his name. They won't be long finding him."

Peter was overjoyed with this good news for Jan. Since he had risked his life for him, there was no reward too high. Uncle Victor said something like this.

"It wasn't as easy for Jan as it looks, Peter. He ran a grave risk. He did it simply because I didn't feel right about sailing and leaving you there. Of course he knew the routine of the camp. He knew that at supper hour the barracks would be deserted, except for the mess hall. And he knew about the side door and the sentry. But he was still in danger of being caught himself. If one little thing had gone wrong, he would have been caught."

"He had his uniform, too," Peter mused. "One German uniform looks pretty much like another."

Then a thought struck him. "But how did he get the key to open the cell door?" he wanted to know.

"The keys are kept on a panel in the guardroom. The room was empty while the guard was at mess. All Jan had to do was to slip in and take the key marked *das Gefängnis.*"

His uncle went on. "All that part was easy. The only hard part was getting him to the barracks without his being seen on the way there. For he was being looked for everywhere. So we didn't dare have him go by foot from the Snake to the beach and barracks.

"It was Rolls who solved it for us," his uncle went on. "He suggested that, since the roads were being watched, we make a landing by water. The *Cleng* was pretty well covered by camouflage so she could be moved to the mouth of the Snake where it meets the big fjord. We were lucky it was a bad night. The rain and mist shortens the day. When it got dark, Rolls and Hans Torp and Sten lowered the lifeboat and rowed him right up to the fishing pier. But they couldn't wait for him because it was too dangerous. They had to get back to the cover of the *Cleng*. That's why you had to swim so far."

"But how did Jan get past the sentries into the barracks?"

"Just the way you got out. He waited for one to come up, turn, and start back. The minute his back was turned, he stepped inside the door. It isn't bolted till taps and Jan knew that. The sentry was there to guard

that very door, but there are ways to get past sentries if you can think of those ways."

"Wasn't Jan afraid he'd be caught when he got inside the barracks?"

"Of course. Terribly. But he had to risk it."

"He did it for me?"

"For you and because I said I'd take him to America if he got you out."

"We heard the soldiers marching in the hallway. Were they coming to get me?"

"Whether they were or not, you and Jan would have been in a pretty tight place if you'd run into them."

Peter fell back in the bunk. "So I'm to go to America. But what about Mother and Lovisa and Bunny?"

"Peter, I know you think it high-handed of me to be taking you this long distance without so much as asking if you wanted to go. But there was nothing else to do with you. I couldn't go all the way across the Atlantic Ocean without knowing what would become of you. And when I got you on board, there was nothing to do with you but to take you along. We daren't turn back with all this gold."

"Oh, Uncle Victor, it isn't that. Only—only—"

"Only what?"

"Well, when Father left, he said I was the man of the family and was to look after the others."

"Peter, don't worry about your mother's not being able to look out for herself and for her children. And although I'm sorry to have to tell you this, your father may soon be home. The British have withdrawn their forces from much of the coast. Our army is putting up a magnificent defense, but it's only a question of time until it can no longer hold out. Then the order will come to cease firing."

Peter thought about the night his father had gone away, the night of the first blackout. And of all the things that had happened since.

"It's a shame, Peter, for you to be leaving without so much as saying good-bye to your family and Helga and Michael and Per Garson and the others. But your mother was glad when I told her what we were going to try to do. You know she had gone to the Holms to warn them that the missing Nazi might be in their barn. When Lovisa got to the farm with the news of what happened to you, she strapped on her skis and took the back trail through the woods to the Snake.

" 'Take him to America by all means,' she said. 'I want him to grow up in a country where people are free.' She

asked to have you promise that you will always remember you come of liberty-loving people who think freedom is a greater heritage than gold."

There was a clatter of steps in the companionway. Rolls came into the cabin.

"Submarine off starboard," he said.

Uncle Victor jumped to his feet in alarm. Then he saw the sheepish grin on Rolls's face.

"But it's a British sub," he spoke lamely. "The *Cleng*'s doing five knots in this sea," he added.

"She ought to ride well," Uncle Victor answered. "She's got a cargo of gold for ballast."

The flag of Norway was draped above the map on the bulkhead.

Into the cabin came the notes of a cornet.

"It's my old horn. I lent it to the Polish boy," Rolls explained.

In the galley Jan Lasek was practicing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

DID THIS STORY REALLY HAPPEN?

On June 28, 1940, a year after World War II broke out in Europe, the Norwegian freighter *Bomma* reached Baltimore with a cargo of gold bullion worth $9,000,000.

When the *Bomma*'s captain asked for a police escort while unloading the bullion, a strange story came to light. The gold, it was reported, had been slipped past Nazi sentries by Norwegian boys and girls! Under the very eyes of the enemy, the story went, these children had pulled the gold on their sleds to a freighter hidden in a fjord off Norway's coast. So that no harm might come to the brave children, the captain would not tell the location of the fjord.

For many years the story was believed true. But over sixty years later, there is no proof that it ever really happened. We do not know. But we do know that the story captures the courage of many children who, caught up in war, have helped their countries in times of great danger.