

THE SECRET OF
FOUR NOTCH

TRACY SABIN

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CHAPTER ONE

BAD NEWS

They had proposed, kicked around and agreed upon just about everything. From the first week, camping in the twins' back yard under the old walnut tree to the last days of summer at the LA County Fair. But just four days to go, **BOOM!** Out of nowhere, it wasn't going to happen. Not that summer. Or any other summer. Ever again.

Danny caught Jen's eye. "Go get everyone!" He raced up the stairs, two steps at a time.

"O-kayyy," said Jen, uncertainly. She shoved the back screen door open and crossed the backyard, squeezing through the gap in the fence. Monica sat on a swing reading a book.

"Come with me," said Jen.

Monica looked up. "Why? What's going on?"

"Well, actually, I'm not sure, but... Danny's freaked out about something. *Again.*"

“Oh jeez. Let’s get the twins.”

They ran to Sue and Gene’s house.

Mrs. Campbell met them at the door. “What’s the hurry?” she said.

She was cleaning a small paintbrush and squinted to see them clearly in the afternoon light.

“Can Sue and Gene play?” Jen asked.

“Sure, come in a second.” Mrs. Campbell turned to the family room and shouted, “Sue. Gene. You have visitors.”

They stood for several seconds. Mrs. Campbell shouted again. “Su-u-z-ie ! G-e-e-ene!”

Sue walked through the arched doorway of the family room, rubbing her eyes, “Oh, it’s you,” she said, waving to her friends.

The TV switched off, then Gene appeared, his straw-colored hair going every which way.

“What’s up?”

“Um, Danny needs to see us,” said Jen.

The four friends made their way to the front door when Mrs. Campbell said, “Gene, be a dear and turn the TV back on. I want to hear President Eisenhower’s speech. You kids be home by 5:30.”

Jen, Sue and Monica ran down the sidewalk. Gene turned the TV on, then hurried to catch up. They ran along Jen’s side yard to the back of her house. Gray siding walled in the area under the deck where Danny stood at the doorway, a battery in each hand.

“Come in,” he said.

Entering one at a time, they ducked so their heads wouldn’t hit the beams. Danny, in the lead, stopped suddenly, confused by the darkness. His sister and friends slammed into each other.

“Jeez, *you* guys are real swift,” Danny said.

“Don’t *stop* then!” Monica shot back.

Entering last, Gene stepped inside. A spring pulled the door shut.

A gap in the far wall barely lit the space. The smell of stale paper filled the air. Danny and Jen’s parents kept old magazines under the deck. After months of meetings, the magazine stacks resembled a circle of lopsided stools. In the center, a cardboard box held supplies; a flashlight, a worn deck of cards, a stack of comic books and seven miniature plastic swords their parents used to spear olives.

Danny replaced the batteries in the flashlight, flicked it on and set it in a loop of wire hanging from a beam. The yellow light, shining on his face, deepened the orange of his neatly parted hair. His freckles looked like a spatter of rust across his cheeks and nose.

“I can’t believe it!” Danny began. “Our plans for summer are ruined!”

“Hunh, “ said Monica, puckishly. “I thought you didn’t *have* to go to summer school.”

“Very funny,” said Danny. “*Really*. This is serious. I can’t believe my parents would do this to us!”

“Well, what is it, then?” Sue said.

“Something terrible is going to happen,” Danny paused to take a deep breath.

“Why all the *drama*, Danny?” said Jen.

“Just. *Listen!* I was sitting on the stairs and mom was talking to dad on the phone... and I heard her say we’re *moving* this summer, as soon as school is out. We’re moving to Washington state.”

“What?” his sister said. “I never heard anything about that!”

“See? I told you it was bad,” said Danny.

“That can’t be true. They wouldn’t do that to us.”

“I swear it’s true.”

“Maybe you misunderstood,” said Gene.

“I didn’t misunder-*stood*, you dork,” Danny said.

Gene glared at Danny. “Hey, man! I didn’t mean...”

“Danny,” Monica said, “We don’t like this news any better than...”

“We’re *moving*,” Danny interrupted, “and there’s nothing we can do about it! Mom said we start packing this weekend and Dad is leaving tomorrow to find a place for us to live.”

“But,” said Sue, “we were gonna camp in the back yards and do roller skate races.”

“And swim at the pool, and... look for new trails.” Gene pointed to the green hills that rose up at the far end of the street. In a few weeks, the summer sun would bake the hillsides a mottled brown.

“And the carnival rides at the Fair!” Monica moaned.

“Yeah, *you* guys get to do that stuff, “ said Danny.
“But we’re moving to *stupid* Washington. I bet they don’t have swimming pools or sidewalks or...”

There was a bang at the door. Everyone turned around.

“Who’s there?” Danny said.

“It Tabor,” said a tiny voice.

“Go away, Tabor!” Jen said.

“No... it’s okay. We should let him in for once.”

Keeping her head down, Jen made her way to the door. Tabor staggered in the dark, his hands held out like a miniature Frankenstein. He didn’t need to duck under the beams.

“Here, Tabor. Sit here,” Danny pulled a pile of magazines into a makeshift stool. “This affects you, too, little brother.”

Tabor flopped down on the pile of magazines with a satisfied grunt.

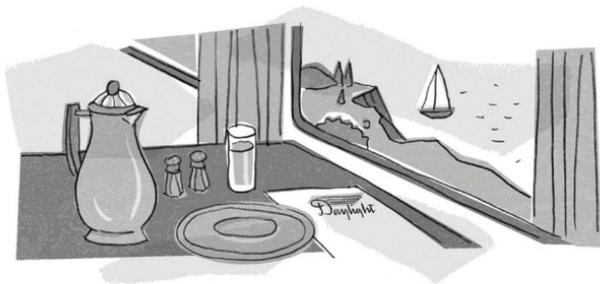
“I bet you never thought you’d be part of our club,” Danny said, patting Tabor on the back.

“My club!” said Tabor.

They spent the afternoon in the dark under the deck, complaining about their bad luck. Reliving past summer exploits, they briefly forgot about the bad news. It was Danny who reminded them that everything was about to change. Danny, Jen and Tabor were losing their home, their amazing summers, and worst of all, their best

friends.

That night, Danny lay in bed, wide awake. He had too many questions with no answers. Why were his mom and dad doing this to him? How could he stop this move? What would their new home be like? How much would he *hate* it?



CHAPTER TWO

THE COAST DAYLIGHT

The next morning, Danny and Jen listened from the stairs. Their mom and dad were in the kitchen drinking coffee.

“I know it’s going to be hard for you,” their dad said. “Ten days is a long time. I wish I could stay, at least to help you pack.”

“I’ll manage. Just... find a nice place for us.”

“I’m not too worried. It will probably be outside Seattle. Rent is expensive in the city... might be out in the sticks.”

“It could be nice for the kids to be in the country.”

“It’ll be a big change, *that’s* for sure,” said their father.

Jen looked at Danny. He sat with his head in his hands, staring at the floor.

It didn’t take long for things to get weird. Their Dad left in the car, which meant they had to walk everywhere. A few days later school ended. Piles of furniture and

clothes appeared all over the house.

Monica, Gene and Sue came to the door, asking if they could help.

“Well, we’re not taking *that* stuff,” said Danny pointing to a pile of books and toys. “Mom says you can take whatever you want.”

“Really?” said Gene, picking up a model airplane. He started zooming it around above his head.

“You don’t want these books?” said Monica. After inspecting them, she set three aside. “I haven’t read these. Thanks!”

“I know you collect animals, Sue,” said Jen, picking up two horse figurines. “Do you want these?”

“Sure!” said Sue.

Out of the blue, Tabor screamed, “Mine!” pointing to one of the horses.

“Hold on,” said Danny. “He’s right. Sorry Sue. That one’s Tabor’s.”

He handed it to Tabor.

“My horse,” Tabor sniffled, clutching it to his chest.

“Wow, your house looks really different!” Gene said.

Furniture was piled against the walls and there were half-filled cardboard boxes everywhere. Bright areas in the rug marked where furniture used to sit.

Sue noticed two pairs of skates sitting next to a box packed with toys.

“Think we could do one more round of races before you leave?” she asked.

“Aww... I don’t know,” said Danny, gloomily.

“Go on,” said their mother. “We’re done for today. You kids go out and play.”

One last time, Danny, Jen, Monica, Sue and Gene ran the roller skate races.

Gene won the race to the lemon tree and back. He was almost always first at sprinting. Jen won the race to the end of the block. As usual, Monica, who really wasn’t *that* interested in racing but who liked to be the judge, sat out the around-the-block tag team.

Danny and Gene were neck and neck as they circled the block. Danny tagged Jen and Gene tagged Sue. Jen and Sue were evenly matched, rounding the last corner.

“Danny and Jen by a whisker!” shouted Monica as the girls crossed the finish line.

“Shoot!” Gene said to Sue. “We’ll get them next time.”

Danny laughed, then caught himself. There would *be* no next time.

“Yeah, right,” he said. “Welp, it’s probably time for dinner.” Without a goodbye, he turned and walked away.

“Jeez. What happened to happy-go-lucky Danny?” Gene called to him.

“He’s not going to Washington. I can tell you that,” Danny yelled back.

A few days later, the packing boxes were taped up. Two men in grey uniforms loaded the boxes in a big orange truck.

Early the next morning, their mother woke them and told them to get ready. Mr. Foster, one of their neighbors, was standing on the porch. They heard his car, softly rumbling in the cool air. They quickly got into their clothes and rolled up their sleeping bags.

“We’re going to eat breakfast at the Foster’s,” their mother said.

Mr. Foster helped them load the sleeping bags and luggage into the trunk of the car. They slid into the back seat, half asleep. The car had a strange smell, like leather and scrambled eggs.

Jen asked, “Are we having scrambled eggs for breakfast?”

Mr. Foster turned with a smile and said, “No, sweetheart, Mrs. Foster is making waffles. Do you like waffles?”

Jen yawned and said, “Yeah.”

Mrs. Foster was mixing a bowl of batter when they entered the kitchen.

“Hope you kids are hungry,” she said as she poured batter into a waffle iron.

“Danny, you help Tabor into the chair. You can sit on the other side, Jen,” their mother said, motioning them over to the dining table.

“All right, my man,” said Danny. “Hands in the air.” Tabor raised his arms so Danny could lift him into the chair.

“Um, mom,” said Danny. “I think he needs a book or

something.”

Tabor’s forehead was barely visible above the table.

“Oh, right! How about this?” Mr. Foster pushed a pot, upside down, next to Tabor, who scrambled to get on top.

“OK, now,” Mr. Foster said, rubbing his hands together. “We got apricot jam, honey or molasses. What would you like on your waffles?”

“Do you have syrup?” Danny asked.

“Take whatever you’re offered,” his mother whispered.

“Sorry, we don’t have syrup. Molasses is *sort* of like syrup, though. How does that sound?”

Danny slumped in his chair. “I like syrup,” he said.

His mother gave him a look and said, “Molasses is fine.”

Danny and Jen didn’t like the waffles. They were dry and gritty. And the molasses was awful. It was too thick and it wasn’t as sweet as syrup. They fiddled with their breakfast, cutting up the waffle, moving the pieces around their plates, sipping the orange juice, only nibbling.

“I think it’s too early for them to feel hungry,” their mother said.

Soon they were back in the car on their way to the train station. Mr. Foster parked at the curb and helped them with the luggage. Their mother thanked Mr. Foster for his help. Danny watched the car drive off, going back

to what used to be *his* neighborhood.

The station entrance opened to a big room filled with wooden benches. People were standing in lines along one wall buying tickets at a row of windows.

The deep voice of a man they couldn't see called out over a loud speaker, "Sunset Limited, Phoenix, El Paso, San Antonio, New Orle-e-eans and points east. Now boarding, gate five."

A woman stood up and shouted at her two little girls. "That's our train!"

She picked up her suitcases. Seeing the crowd at the gate, she said. "Grab my coat. We have to go!" They waddled in a single line out the doorway.

"Mom. They look like ducks," Danny said.

His mother smiled, "That poor woman."

The unseen man bellowed again, "Coast Daylight, Santa Barbara, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle and points north. Now boarding gate five."

"Ok, kids, now it's *our* turn," their mother said.

"Mom, do we really have to go?" Danny whined.

"Danny! Don't cause trouble now."

They made their way through the gate and out into the hazy morning air. The sun was just coming up. The sky was pink.

"Where to?" a man with a red cap asked.

"Seattle," their mother said.

"All the way to car number two," the man pointed toward the front of the train.

Walking along the passenger cars, their mother said, “Let’s sit on the left. That side has the best views.”

They found seats that faced each other so they could sit together.

Jen and Danny sat near the window, watching the people board the train. A man and woman stood hugging each other a long time. The woman was crying. When she turned and stepped onto the train, the man stood like a statue, staring at car number two.

The train lurched forward. The man kept staring until the train swerved and a building blocked the view.

Jen and Danny watched the houses and streets, people and trees passing by. After fifteen minutes, they started to tease each other.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” their mother said. “I got a travel game.”

She opened her purse and pulled out a small checker set with magnetic pieces.

Leaving Los Angeles, the views started to change. Looking up from their checker game, they saw the Pacific Ocean stretched out forever, as far as they could see.

When they grew tired of the game, their mother said, “Let’s take a walk.”

She showed them how to move from one car to the next. At first, it was bewildering. Walking through the car, they could feel the train moving underneath them. At the end of the car there was a door with a big metal

handle.

“I can’t get it open,” Danny complained.

“Brace your feet and pull with your whole body. OK, good... now hold it open for Jen.”

The little hallway between the cars was loud and a bit crazy. It had soft walls, with folds like the bellows of an accordion. The walls would stretch and squeeze as the cars moved. The floor bounced around because the car they were leaving was moving differently than the car they were entering.

“I’m afraid I’ll fall down,” Jen said, looking at the wacky floor.

“If you fall down, just get back up,” her mother said.

“I don’t think I can do it,” Danny said.

“You can,” his mother said.

The first time Jen and Danny crossed the little hallway, they *did* fall down.

“I don’t like this,” said Danny. “Can we go back?”

“You can do this,” his mom said, pointing forward. “On to the next car.”

When they entered the next hallway, their mother said, “Hold your arms straight out. That will help you balance.”

By the fourth car, they were walking through the hallways as if they’d known all along how to do it.

Entering a car filled with little tables, their mother said, “Here it is! The dining car. What do you think? Are you ready for breakfast number two?”

“Really?” said Danny.

“Can we?” said Jen.

“Let’s find a seat.”

A man in a white jacket handed them a menu.

“Hmm. The Chef’s Special looks good. What do you think Danny?”

“Let’s see.” Danny, read from the menu. “Fruit cocktail, French toast with syrup, hot chocolate... Do you think it’s *real* syrup?”

“I’m sure it is.”

“I want that, too,” said Jen.

After their fabulous second breakfast, they continued their tour of the train, then returned to their seats. They played checkers a few more times, then ate a lunch pulled from their mother’s suitcase; peanut butter sandwiches, chocolate chip cookies and slices of apple.

They returned to the dining car for dinner. Danny liked eating at the little table, with its white tablecloth and napkins embroidered with the Coast Daylight logo.

The trip lasted two and a half days. Staring out the window, Danny saw lonely little towns, tan hills covered with oak trees, bone dry deserts and ancient forests filled with giant trees.

Passing the border into Oregon, Danny noticed the land turned green and wild. Washington was greener and wilder still, with mountains and forests all around.

His mom reported how many hours they had traveled. But to Danny it seemed just the opposite, as if time was

going backwards, as if they were time-traveling to an ancient world.

Danny knew what he was leaving behind, but he had no clue what lay ahead.



CHAPTER THREE

PINE RIDGE

Their father met them at the station in Seattle. The luggage was loaded into the trunk of the car. Highway 99 took them north. It was a gloomy day. Dark clouds completely covered the sky.

“Is it going to rain today?” Jen asked.

“Jen, it rains practically every day here. You’ll have to get used to that.” her dad said.

“Great,” Danny muttered, under his breath.

“It’s so green here,” Jen said. “It looks like somebody painted this whole place green.”

Jen’s mother turned to her. “That’s what you get when it rains every day. Lots of trees and plants!”

“I liked it better in Pomona where it was sunny all the time,” Danny said.

“I know it’s going to be hard at first,” his mother said. “It takes a while to start over. But you’ll learn to like our new home.”

“I doubt it,” said Danny. He leaned his forehead into the back of his dad’s seat.

“Are we going to live in Seattle?” Jen asked.

“No, I found a house near a little town called Edmonds. The drive to my new job isn’t too bad. Edmonds used to be a sawmill town. The last mill closed ten years ago. The house is old, about a hundred years. It needs some fixing.”

Danny sat quietly, staring at the strange countryside. He tried to imagine what their new home would be like. Finally, he asked, “Why did we have to move here, dad? We like our old place.”

“Yeah, we don’t want to move,” Jen pitched in.

“I know you’re not happy about this move. My job transferred here and that’s just the way it is. You kids should be grown up enough to understand that sometimes we have to deal with big changes in our lives.”

“I don’t want to be grown up. I liked being a kid in our old neighborhood,” Danny said.

“There’s no point thinking like that,” their mother said.

Lost in his thoughts, Danny absentmindedly kicked the seat in front of him.

“That’s enough of that young man, or I’ll have to stop the car,” his dad snapped.

Danny stared out the window. “Well, is there at least a pool where we can swim, like at our old place?”

“Well, no... maybe you can swim in the *lakes*. We’re in the woods. We don’t have many neighbors. There’s a little country store at a place called Five Corners,” their dad paused. “Would you like to know why they call it Five Corners?”

“Why?” Jen asked.

“Five roads come together. They say the roads were once Indian trails. One road goes down the hill into town. That’s Main Street.”

“Do the Indians still live there?” Danny asked.

“They moved away a long time ago.”

“Are they Apache Indians?” Jen asked.

“No, they’re the Coastal Salish. They’re basket weavers and salmon fishermen. Expert wood carvers, too, I’ve heard.”

“Are they the ones that make the totem poles?” said Jen.

“Those tribes are further north, in Canada.”

“If we don’t live in the town, where *do* we live?” Danny asked.

“There’s a road that turns off Main Street. It makes a loop and turns back on itself. Our house is at the far end of the loop. There are trees all along our road; pine, red cedar, Douglas fir. Can you guess what they call the road?”

“I can’t guess,” Jen said.

“Umm... Tree Loop?” Danny said.

“Good guess! It’s called Pine Ridge. That’s where we

live. Pine Ridge. Look up ahead. That's Five Corners."

They stopped where the five roads came together. Their dad turned down Main Street.

"Over there. That's the store."

"That's a store?" Danny asked. "It looks like a shack."

"Well... there *is* a proper grocery store about 10 miles away. But this place is good for small things. I've been in a few times. I think you'll like it."

He slowed the car so they could get a better look. "Hey, a place that has sour apple bubble gum and comics can't be too bad, can it?"

"Does it really?" Danny asked.

"And baseball cards..." his father said as he turned onto the gravel road.

The road darkened in the shadows of the trees. They saw a road on the right that looked like the entrance to a cave of trees.

"Is that the end of the loop?" Jen asked.

"That's it."

Just then, Tabor smacked his palms against the window and said "Trees!"

"That's right, Tabe," said Danny. "Gazillions of dumb trees."

The road went uphill, then levelled off. Where it curved to the right, a little shack covered with black tarpaper came into view.

"That's not our house, is it?" Danny asked.

“No. I haven’t met those people yet. Our house is up ahead. It needs some work. But I think it has good bones.”

“Good bones?” said Jen.

“That means, even though a house has problems, underneath, it’s still solidly built,” said her mom.

The road curved right again, and they saw, deep in the trees, the outline of a white clapboard house.

“It’s big!” their mother said.

“The sawmill owner used to live here. The sawmills were a big deal, back in the day. They cut down giant trees all around here. After they cut all the big ones, they moved away. The house was empty for a few years but we get to live in it now.”

“Lucky us,” said Danny.

“*Danny!*” said his mother.

They drove up the dirt driveway to the house. A grassy field opened to the right of the house. Fruit trees grew along the left side of the field and beyond the fruit trees the land curved steeply down into a dark, wooded area. Speckled with lichen, a couch-sized swing chair with a green canvas awning sat at the far end of the field.

The house was old and needed some paint. Moss grew on the roof. Two windows and a balcony poked out of the main roof, each topped with their own miniature roof.

It crossed Danny’s mind, though he wouldn’t admit it, that it seemed like a friendly sort of house and, after

nearly three days of travel, it was good to be home, even if it was only a *pretend* home.

Still, something was really weird about this neighborhood. There were almost no houses on their street. What kind of place was this?



CHAPTER FOUR

KIP YOTTER

The first days in the new house were as strange as the last days in their old house. They slept on the floor in sleeping bags. When the moving truck arrived, everyone worked together unpacking clothes and toys and dishes, scrubbing floors, painting walls, trying to figure out where to put things, rearranging the living room three times until their mom was happy.

Just before noon on the third day their mom said, “Let’s take a popsicle break.”

They went upstairs to the balcony.

“We’re up in the trees!” said Jen.

“Yeah, it almost feels like we live in a tree house,” said Danny.

Licking their popsicles, they stared at the thick forest that was their back yard.

“See those cone-shaped trees?” their dad said. “Those

are evergreens. They keep their green leaves all year. And those,” he said, pointing to some broad-leafed trees. “Those trees have leaves that change color and fall to the ground in winter. The autumn colors must be stunning.”

“Autumn colors?” Jen asked.

“We didn’t have those in Pomona,” said their mom. “But you’ll see. This fall, these woods will burst with color. Reds and yellows and purples.”

“Listen, kids,” their dad said. “The woods are whispering to us.”

They stood quietly, looking into the forest. Small animals hopped around in the branches, making all sorts of strange sounds.

“What’s that chirping noise?” Danny asked.

“I thought it was a bird at first,” said their dad. “But then I saw a squirrel was making the sound.”

“I hear tapping, like an elf making shoes?” said Jen.

“There are no elves, Jen,” said Danny.

“I know that...”

“Woodpeckers. They tap all day long,” their dad said.

Just then, they heard a loud, scraping sound.

“Is that a frog?” said Danny.

“I think you’re right.”

“It sounds like he has a sore throat,” said Jen.

Her dad laughed and said, “These woods are filled with critters.”

After they finished their popsicles, they went back downstairs. The wood steps squeaked on the way down.

Back on the ground floor, their dad pointed to a little door under the stairway.

“We can store our luggage and other odds and ends in here,” he said, opening the door. It led to a narrow room.

“Looks like a good place for a clubhouse,” Danny thought to himself.

The sky had been gray, not just that day, but every day, and it would rain from time to time. But it wasn't like the downpours they had in California. It was more like a mist, as if the air was so full of water it had to let some go once in a while. Danny wondered if he would *ever* see the sun again.

Jen and Danny spent that afternoon walking Pine Ridge loop. They had two neighbors. There was the tarpaper shack they had seen the first day they arrived. Down the road in the opposite direction was a weird, ramshackle house. The middle looked like a log cabin. An addition on the left was covered with boards painted blue and an addition on the right was covered in tarpaper.

Two days passed before they met a boy who lived on their street. Their first encounter wasn't great.

Jen, Tabor and Danny were sitting in the swing chair reading comic books when they heard a branch snap in the woods behind them. Looking up, they saw a shadow move through a patch of giant ferns at the edge of the forest.

“Do you think it's a bear?” Jen asked, worry in her

voice.

“No, I think it’s Big Foot,” Danny mocked.

Then the thing began to growl. Jen and Danny jumped to their feet and ran toward the house.

Tabor, unaware of any danger, got up and walked toward the ferns.

“Get back! Get away from there, Tabor!” Danny shouted. “It might be a bear or... or a mountain lion.”

The growl grew louder.

“Tabor! Get away!” said Jen frantically.

“Hah!” a voice laughed from the ferns. “You must be city kids.”

A boy parted the ferns and marched into their yard. He wore heavy leather boots, a plaid shirt and a hat with fur-covered earmuffs. He was about Danny’s age.

“You guys move into the Brackett house?” he asked.

“No. We moved into *this* house,” Jen said, pointing to their new home.

“That? ... That *is* the Brackett house.”

“Maybe it *was* the Brackett house but now it’s *ours*,” Danny said.

“Yeah, well ... I saw your dad move in a couple weeks ago.”

“Where do *you* live?” Jen asked.

“I live down the road in the blue house.”

They stared at each other for several seconds. The boy turned his eyes away and said, “Want to see my fort?”

“Do you mean like a tree house?” Danny asked.

“No, I mean like a fort. I built it. Well, my dad helped me. It has a lookout tower and there’s a tire swing.”

“Where is it?” Danny asked.

“It’s behind my place, back in the woods. Here, I’ll show you.”

The boy turned and headed out to the road. Danny, Jen and Tabor trailed behind, keeping their distance. Danny wasn’t sure what to make of the boy, but the thought of a fort in the woods, especially one that had a tire swing, sounded interesting.

They walked down the road toward the blue house, but before they reached it, the boy turned onto a trail through heavy underbrush. The trail gradually widened to an open patch of dirt.

Five enormous stumps, some as wide as a small car, stood like ancient guards around the clearing. The bark on the stumps was mostly stripped away, leaving the rust-red remains of what were once giant cedar trees. Along one side of the clearing, the land rose uphill. Steel-gray rocks scattered the hillside between the trees.

“Here. The fort’s over here,” the boy said.

He walked up the hill, past the rocks, to a level area where the fort stood. It had the unmistakable craftsmanship of the builder of the ramshackle house. Scraps of weathered plywood, rough-hewn logs and rusty automobile parts, formed a shell. The roof was made of a piece of clear plastic and a splotchy green

tarp. And there it was, the tire swing, hitched by a length of rope to a branch above the fort.

“This is a fort?” Danny said. “Looks a car crashed into it.”

“It’s a better fort than you could ever build,” the boy shot back.

“Look,” Danny said, pushing gently on a car fender that was attached to the fort. “It looks like it’s going to fall apart.”

Danny hadn’t meant it, but the fender really *was* loose and started to tip, then fell, clanging loudly down the hillside.

“Hey! Don’t mess with my fort!” the boy shouted, giving Danny a shove.

This boy had irritated him when they first met, but now Danny’s annoyance turned to anger. He picked up a pine cone, one of hundreds on the forest floor, and threw it at the boy. It bounced off the boy’s shirt.

“Oh, you asked for it, city kid!” the boy said. He knelt to pick up a handful of pine cones.

Danny and Jen ran down the hillside, Tabor close behind. They found a fallen tree to hide behind as a barrage of pine cones whizzed past them.

“Get pine cones, “ Danny shouted.

They furiously scraped together piles of cones. After a second blast flew overhead, Danny stood up and quickly sent some missiles of his own.

“Hah, you missed me,” the boy sneered, letting more

pine cones fly.

“You couldn’t hit the broad side of a barn!” Jen shouted, throwing a handful.

Tabor, feeling the spirit of the moment, picked up his own pine cone and walked out from behind the log saying, “I get you! “

At that moment, the boy let fly a new batch of cones. One hit Tabor square in the face. Tabor stood motionless for a few seconds. Then he let out a terrible moan and started to bawl. Danny and Jen ran to him.

“Why don’t you pick on someone your own size?” Danny screamed angrily.

“I didn’t mean to hit him,” the boy said, dropping his handful of pine cones.

“You should be careful where you throw things,” Jen scolded.

“Hey, you guys started it,” the boy said. “Is he OK?”

“It looks like he got hit on the cheek. See that red mark?” Danny said.

The boy examined Tabor carefully, then put his hand on Tabor’s shoulder. “Sorry, little fella, I didn’t mean it.”

“His name’s Tabor,” Jen said. “And mine’s Jen, and that’s my brother, Danny.”

“What’s your name?” Danny asked.

“Kip Yotter,” the boy said.

Was this a new friend? At this point, Danny wasn’t sure.



CHAPTER FIVE

MR. WOLF'S CABIN

The next morning, Kip knocked on Danny and Jen's door.

"You guys want to play?" he said.

"Can we?" Jen asked.

"Of course," said their mom. "Just... stay off the streets."

"You mean the roads made of *dirt*?" Danny said.

"What I *mean* is, watch out for cars."

"Um, I don't think that's going to be..." Danny began.

"Will do, mom," said Jen as she lightly punched Danny's arm.

Jen, Danny and Kip walked down the driveway.

"I could show you guys around the neighborhood," Kip suggested.

"That should take about two minutes," said Danny.

"Hey, there's more to see than you might think."

They walked down the road until they came to the tarpaper shack.

“Little Joe lives there,” said Kip, “His dad is Big Joe. I don’t play with Little Joe, though.”

“Why not?” said Jen.

“He’s mean.”

“What does he do that’s mean?” Danny asked.

“Well... Like... One time I caught a garter snake in the trail behind my house. I wasn’t going to hurt it. I just wanted to let it go in our garden. You know, ‘cause they eat bugs and stuff. Anyway, I ran into Little Joe and one of his friends on the trail. They told me to hand over the snake. I told them it was mine. Then Little Joe pulled his pocket knife on me and made me give up the snake. After that, I found it dead on the trail.”

“Gross!” said Jen.

“What happened to it?” said Danny.

“They put a piece of bark on it and stomped on it.”

“That’s terrible!” said Jen.

“Little Joe does stuff like that.”

“I’m never going to play with him, either,” said Jen.

When they arrived at main street, Kip pointed to the right. “We could go to the top of the hill. You can sorta see Edmonds from there. Someday, we can walk into town.”

They made their way up the hill. At the crest, Main Street dipped sharply downhill into a forest. They could see a few rooftops through the trees and, in the distance,

a large body of water.

“The school’s down at the bottom of the hill. If you keep going, you get to the town.”

“Is that a lake?” Jen asked.

“A lake? Hah! No, that’s not a lake. That’s the Puget Sound. And, see that land, off in the distance? That’s the Olympic Peninsula. At the end of Main Street there’s a dock where you can take a ferry to Kingston.”

“What’s Kingston?” Danny asked.

“That’s the town on the other side of Puget Sound.”

Kip turned around and retraced his steps back down the hill. Danny and Jen followed him.

They passed the turnoff to Pine Ridge and made their way uphill again, walking past three little houses. Kip pointed to one of them. The green paint was peeling off the walls and the yard was full of tall weeds. “That’s Old Man Bigg’s place. He collects Mercury head dimes. He’ll trade you a quarter for one. But... I’ve never seen a Mercury head dime.”

“Is he mean, too?” Danny asked.

“No, he’s just crazy. He thinks the world is going to end. He says there will be fires everywhere and water will flood all over the place. He says the weather will go crazy with giant storms. He’s nuts.”

They arrived at the country store.

“Do you guys have any money?” Kip asked, opening the screen door.

“No,” said Danny.

“That’s okay, I have a nickel. My treat.”

The store was tiny. Vegetables and fruit were nestled in a row of small wooden boxes. A refrigerator with a sliding glass door held milk, meat and cheese. A big chest cooler was filled with sodas and next to it, magazines and candy sat on shelves. They huddled around the candy.

“Dad was right, they *do* have sour apple bubble gum,” said Danny.

“Go ahead,” said Kip.

Danny picked up a big yellow gumball, spattered with red specks.

“Looks kind of like your face,” Kip joked.

“Hah! Hmm. Maybe that’s why I like it so much!” Danny said, popping it in his mouth.

“I like grape,” Jen said, holding her hand over a purple gumball. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah, you can treat me next time,” said Kip. He picked out a red cherry gumball for himself.

Loudly smacking on their gum, they walked across Main Street.

“I can show you a shortcut to your house,” said Kip, blowing a big bubble that popped across his face. He pulled the wad off his nose and stuffed it back in his mouth. “This way.”

Just off main street, they entered a trail that led into the woods. The trail took them downhill, then leveled off and skirted around a small pond where ducks raced

into the cattails. Past the pond, the trail ran along a small stream that meandered through a valley.

Kip stopped at a large clearing. “This is ‘Indian Camp.’ See the mound?”

An area the size of a kickball court rose a foot above the forest floor.

“If you dig into this mound, you’ll find clamshells, pieces of old baskets, rocks with black smudges like they were in a fire, bones and other stuff.”

“Was it really an Indian Camp?” Jen asked.

“Well, people who’ve lived here a long time call it that. I don’t really know,” said Kip. “I found two arrowheads when I was digging in the mound. And a cool piece of wood with some carving on it.”

“A piece of wood?” said Danny.

“Yeah, I was messing around with my kickball when I saw a piece of wood sticking out of the ground. I tried to pull it out but it was buried pretty good. It looked like there was some carving on it so I came back with my mom’s garden shovel and dug it out.”

“What does it look like?” Danny asked.

“It looks... I can show you when we go to my house,” Kip said. “Hey, want to see the only old-growth cedar left in the woods?”

Jen and Danny nodded.

“It’s over there.”

Kip pointed to a huge, deformed tree just up the hill from Indian Camp. The giant trunk came out of the

ground, curved back down touching the ground, then rose in a bending arc into the sky.

“This is ‘Squirrel Tree,’” Kip said.

“Why do you call it that?” Jen asked.

“Because tons of squirrels live up there.” Kip pointed to the thick branches above them.

“Well, duh!” said Danny.

Kip, Jen and Danny sat on the deformed part of the trunk as if they were riding the hump of a camel.

“My grandpa says the loggers didn’t cut this one down because it’s too twisted up. This tree is at least 500 years old.”

“How do you know that?” asked Jen.

“Well... If you cut through this trunk, you’d see a ton of rings. Count the rings to find out how old it is. One ring for each year.”

“I know about tree rings. It’s just that, this isn’t cut... so, why do you think it’s 500 years old?”

“Oh! My grandpa taught me how to guess the age of a tree by the size of the trunk. My grandpa used to be a lumberjack back in the sawmill days.”

“Wow, that’s cool!” said Jen.

Leaving Indian Camp, they walked along the stream until they arrived at a smaller clearing filled with the faint sound of burbling water.

“There’s the waterfall,” Kip said, pointing to a ravine where water spilled across a scattering of rocks and into the stream.

“I wouldn’t exactly call that a waterfall,” said Danny.
“Well, it’s a better waterfall after it rains hard.
There’s the trail to your house.”

Soon they were huffing and puffing as they hiked up the steep hill. The roof of the white house appeared through an opening in the trees.

“Let’s go to my house. I can show you some pictures of my grandpa when he was a lumberjack.”

They walked down Pine Ridge Loop to Kip’s place.

“My dad still has a lot of work to do on the outside,” Kip said as they entered the front door.

The outside of the house was a jumble but the inside was beautiful. Kip’s dad had built all the cabinets and shelves, the custom benches and tables and the patterned floors. Days later, Danny’s mom would call the woodwork, “A masterpiece of Craftsman style.”

Kip showed them a photo album from his grandpa’s lumberjack days. There were pictures of men hanging from ropes wrapped around tree trunks high in the air. There was a picture of a dozen or more men standing next to a huge stump with a giant toppled tree laying on the ground.

“That’s my grandpa,” Kip said, pointing to one of the men.

There were photos of logs splashing down chutes filled with water. The chutes were held high in the air on tall wooden legs.

In another photo, Kip pointed out his grandpa, one

of several men standing on logs floating in a pond. The men were holding long poles, pushing logs around in the water.

“My dad made this fireplace.” Kip leaned against the cascade of rocks that filled a corner of the room from the floor to the ceiling.

“These are river rocks.” Kip ran his hands over the smoothly rounded boulders.

“And that’s my grandpa’s ax from when he was a lumberjack.”

In the place where a painting might go, a beat up, double-bladed ax was mounted on a board, above the fireplace mantle.

“Oh... and this is one of grandpa’s favorite things.” Kip pulled a book off the mantle. There was a photo of giant trees on the cover. Two men looked like toys standing next to the trees. One man pressed his hand on a massive tree trunk, the other held an ax. The title read “This Was Logging.” Along the bottom were the words “Superb Photographic Study of Logging in the Pacific Northwest from the Collection of Darius Kinsey.”

“My grandpa thinks Darius Kinsey was a genius photographer,” said Kip.

They looked through the first few pages, then Kip said, “Let’s go to my room. I’ll show you the carving.”

Hanging above his bed, a strange face was carved in a round, gleaming piece of wood. The eyes, nose and mouth were formed from simple shapes; circles,

rectangles and chiseled lines.

Kip's mom came into the room.

"You must be our new neighbors. Would you kids like something to eat? I made an apple cake."

Back home, even after the day's diversions, Danny couldn't shake his somber mood. He missed his old house. He missed the sunny days. He missed the paved streets and the sidewalks shaded by walnut trees. He missed his friends.

The next day, when Kip arrived at the door asking if they wanted to play, Danny said, "Aw, I don't know. I think I'll just hang out here."

"We can play," said Jen. "What else are we going to do?"

"I, uh... I was thinking I'd organize my comics."

"Danny, you've done that a million times!"

Kip looked at Danny. "Are you missing your old home?"

"Yeah, a little, I guess."

Kip thought for a minute then said, "I know... we could go to Mr. Wolf's place."

"Mr. Wolf?" Danny asked.

"Yeah, he has a shack not far from here. He's hardly ever there."

"So?" said Danny

"So, you want to go see it? It's pretty cool."

"I don't know..."

"Well, *I* want to see it," said Jen.

“Okay. Okay, what the heck,” Danny said, halfheartedly.

There was no road to the shack, only a small trail through thick forest for a quarter mile. Kip, Danny and Jen trekked through the overgrown path. It was a beautiful day. The sun was out for a change and even though the trees were tall, an occasional flash of sunlight would reach all the way to the forest floor. The air was warm and humid, like it feels after you take a shower. And there was a smell, sweet and woody.

They came to a broken-down gate. A faded sign said “NO TRESPASSING.”

“We should turn around, right?” Danny said.

“Hang on a second.” Kip squinted his eyes, peering at the shack, moving his head up and around. “He’s probably not home. You guys stay here. I’ll check.”

Kip squeezed past the gate. Crouching, he made his way toward the curious shack. Unpainted wooden boards ran vertically around the sides and the slanted roof was supported by logs that stuck out beyond the walls. It was much more than just a tarpaper shack. It was quite splendid.

Paying attention to the ground, Kip carefully stepped over a branch. He slid along the outside wall and came to a window. He peeked inside.

“All clear,” he declared. “Come on.”

Danny and Jen cautiously joined him. They stared into the window. It was dark inside.

“What a mess!” Jen said. Dirty dishes were piled next to the window and dust covered everything.

Making their way to the next window, they passed the door. At that precise spot Kip stumbled, lost his balance and fell against the door. It gave way. Kip tumbled headfirst into the shack.

“Let’s get out of here!” Jen shouted and ran off, over the gate and away from the path, hiding in the woods.

The boys followed, leaping along the trail like two startled jack rabbits. They knelt behind some bushes waiting to see what would happen. Nothing happened. Except for a squirrel chattering in the branches, the forest was quiet.

After a few minutes, Danny said, “Let’s go, we *really* shouldn’t be here.”

“We can’t go without closing the door,” Kip said. “Mr. Wolf will know someone’s been here. He might get mad.”

“He’s right,” Jen said.

They crept back to the shack.

“Let’s just close the door and get out of here,” Danny said. Once he reached the open door, he couldn’t help peeking inside. Danny saw something out of the corner of his eye, just as Kip closed the door.

“Wait,” he said. “I saw something.”

“Hurry, Mr. Wolf might come,” Jen pleaded.

“Pshhh. Don’t *worry!*” said Kip. “He’s hardly *ever* here. What did you see?”

“Over there in the corner,” Danny pushed the door open a crack. There it was. A bird’s head, carved out of wood. Feathers were glued along the top and real teeth were attached to the beak. The design used the same kind of shapes as Kip’s carved piece of wood.

“What is it?” Jen asked.

“Indian mask?” Kip wondered.

They looked around the room. There were rusty soup cans piled on a rickety table. Empty bottles of beer lay on the floor next to dirty socks and crumpled jeans.

“Hey, look at this,” Danny said.

A basket decorated with woven designs was filled with paint tubes and brushes. Beside it, a small easel held a painting, covered with a towel.

“Is he an artist?” Jen said.

“What’s the painting?” Kip said.

Jen lifted the towel. It was a painting of a long wooden building with a forest behind. The front of the building, facing a lake or an ocean, had no walls. People were huddled in several rooms. Two strange-looking boats floated on the water in the foreground.

“What do you think it is?” Jen asked.

“Not sure,” said Kip. “Looks like an Indian place.”

“That’s cool,” said Danny. He motioned toward a pair of buckskin pants and a buckskin shirt laid out on a cot.

“What’s that?” Jen said, pointing to what looked like a small wallet-sized piece of glass laying on the shirt.

Kip picked up the glass and turned it over. It lit up.

“Whoa!” said Kip.

A row of lines appeared along the top. A grid of numbers was underneath.

“What, the...” Kip said.

“Put it down,” Jen said.

“Let’s get out of here,” Danny said.

But they couldn’t. A voice outside the door boomed in at them, “What are you troublemaker’s doing!”

A dark figure blotted the light of the open door.