

Chapter 3

Nice day for a walk

Early on Saturday morning Bob knocked on Chris's bedroom door. Chris was still in bed.

Bob said, 'Come on. Hurry up. Our train leaves in an hour. We don't want to miss it. The next train is in the afternoon.'

Chris said, 'Do we have to go?' But he said it softly and his father did not hear him.

When Chris was dressed he went to the kitchen. His mother was there but he was pleased his sisters weren't. He could hear Milly and Tilly playing in the garden. He couldn't see Rose. *She must still be asleep*, he thought. *I wish I was*. He ate his breakfast slowly while he read the newspaper.

Donna was putting clothes, food and bottles of water into Chris's backpack. In the living room, Bob was putting the tent in his own backpack.

'Hurry up, Chris,' Donna said. 'You've got to go soon.'

But Chris was looking at a picture in the newspaper and reading the story that went with it. 'Hey, Mum,' he said. 'Listen to this – Emma Dixon, nineteen, has been missing from home since Monday night. Police fear for her safety.'

He showed the newspaper to his mother.

'Emma Dixon,' she said. 'Wasn't she at your school, Chris?'

'Yes,' Chris said. 'She left school last year. I didn't really know her, but she was very pretty.'

'Her poor parents,' Donna said. 'They must be so scared.'

Bob called, 'Are you ready now, Chris? It's time to go.' He put his backpack on his back. Chris picked up his backpack. It was very heavy. He almost broke his mother's favourite lamp as he walked to the front door.

Donna kissed them goodbye at the front door. Bob and Chris called goodbye to Rose, who was now walking around in

her pyjamas. The little girls ran out of the house and along the street beside Bob and Chris. Bob picked them up, kissed them, then put them down again.

‘Kiss me, Chris,’ said Milly. She pulled his arm.

‘Me too,’ Tilly said. She pulled his other arm.

‘Get off,’ said Chris. He was laughing, just a little. He pushed them away from him. The little girls ran home happily.

It was a beautiful winter day. The sun was shining. There was no wind. Bob walked quickly.

‘Couldn’t Mum drive us to the station?’ Chris said hopefully.

Bob looked at him. ‘No. We’re going on a long walk. Okay?’

Chris wasn’t happy. His backpack was heavy. He followed his father down the street.

The train was late. Chris and Bob sat down to wait. Chris told his father about the girl the police were looking for. Bob was sorry to hear the news. ‘If it was one of your sisters...’ he said.

‘You know,’ Chris said, ‘she’s not the only girl who’s gone missing from my school.’

Bob was interested. ‘Really?’

‘Another girl, Beth Fox, went missing last year,’ Chris said. ‘But people said she ran away. She was always in trouble.’

‘I remember that,’ said Bob. ‘People talked about Beth after the school fire. They said she started it.’

‘Yes. But now I’m thinking that maybe she didn’t run away.’

‘Maybe she didn’t,’ Bob said. ‘The police will think of that too.’

They heard the train coming.

It was hard to get the backpacks through the narrow doors. The train was on its way again before they sat down. It wasn’t a long journey. The town where they lived was almost in the country. They got off the train at a small station and sat on a seat while they ate some cake and fruit and drank some water.

Bob showed Chris a map of the forest. It looked a long way from the station.

‘Okay, Chris, let’s go,’ Bob said.

They began to walk down a narrow road. In the middle of the road a dog slept in the sun. There were a few houses and a small shop close to the station. Bob and Chris soon left the little town behind them. They walked past fields of cows. They didn’t talk. The sun was hot on their heads. Chris was glad that he was wearing a hat.

Bob and Chris walked on and on. Bob looked at the map sometimes but there was only one road to follow. They stopped to rest every hour. They ate lunch by the side of the road. They were in wild country now. There were many trees and thick bushes. The road became narrower.

Chris’s feet were hurting. ‘How far is it from here, Dad?’ he asked.

‘This road ends soon,’ replied Bob. ‘Then we walk along a track through the forest.’

‘I’m getting tired,’ said Chris.

‘Me too,’ said Bob. ‘But it’s good to be out in the fresh air, isn’t it? It’s so quiet!’

‘It’s quieter than at home,’ Chris said.

They were walking in the middle of the road. Suddenly they heard a car driving very fast behind them. They looked back and a green car came around a bend in the road. The driver blew the car’s horn, and Bob and Chris jumped to the side of the road.

‘That’s the first car we’ve seen for hours,’ Bob said. ‘Where’s he going in such a hurry?’

The man holds his hand on the car horn. Beep! Beep! *What are these fools doing out here?* he thinks. *I’ve never seen anyone out here before.*

He has to keep going. He has something important to do.

‘Don’t worry,’ he says to the big brown suitcase on the back seat of his car. ‘You’ll be home soon.’

Bob said, ‘We’d better walk on the side of the road. We don’t want anyone to run over us.’

‘He was going too fast,’ said Chris.

‘Some people are always in a hurry,’ said Bob.

They walked on for another half an hour. Walking became harder as the road went uphill. They came to the place where the road ended and they saw the green car. It was parked beside a tree. The driver was sitting in it. Chris and Bob tried to see the man’s face as they passed but he was wearing a hat and his face was turned away from them. But they both saw a large suitcase on the back seat of the car.

‘He can’t be hiking with that suitcase,’ said Bob.

‘Good,’ said Chris.

Bob said, ‘Let’s walk faster.’

Chris moaned. ‘My feet hurt!’

‘You’re young and strong,’ Bob said. ‘Come on!’

Now they walked on a track through the forest. They soon left the green car and its driver far behind.

‘This is great!’ said Bob.

‘Great?’ said Chris. ‘I wish I was at home.’

‘Stop moaning,’ Bob said.

It was getting late in the afternoon. They walked more slowly. The track was not easy to walk on. It went up and down hills, and there were lots of sticks and stones on it. All Chris wanted to do was sit down.

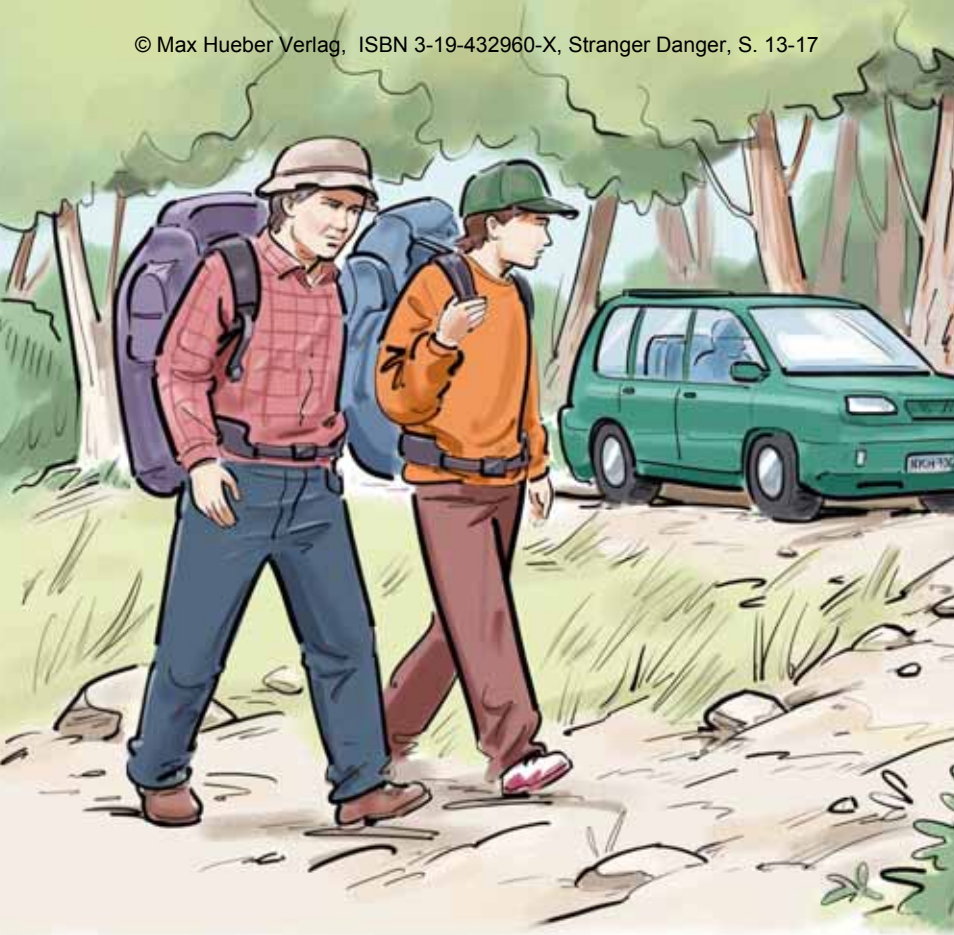
Bob stopped and looked at the map. ‘We turn here,’ he said.

‘Where?’ asked Chris.

‘This way,’ said Bob. He pointed into the forest. ‘There’s a nice place to camp through here.’

‘But there’s no track that way!’ said Chris.

‘No – we have to walk through the bushes and trees,’ said



Bob, smiling. 'It's not far. Come on, this is when hiking really becomes fun!'

Chris moaned, 'I can't feel my feet. All I can feel is pain.'

But he followed his father off the track and into the forest.

The man sits in his car for a very long time. He knows he has to give the hikers time to get far into the forest before he can drive on. He loves the forest. He listens to the wind in the trees. He talks to the big brown suitcase.

'You'll love it here too. All my friends come to the forest.'