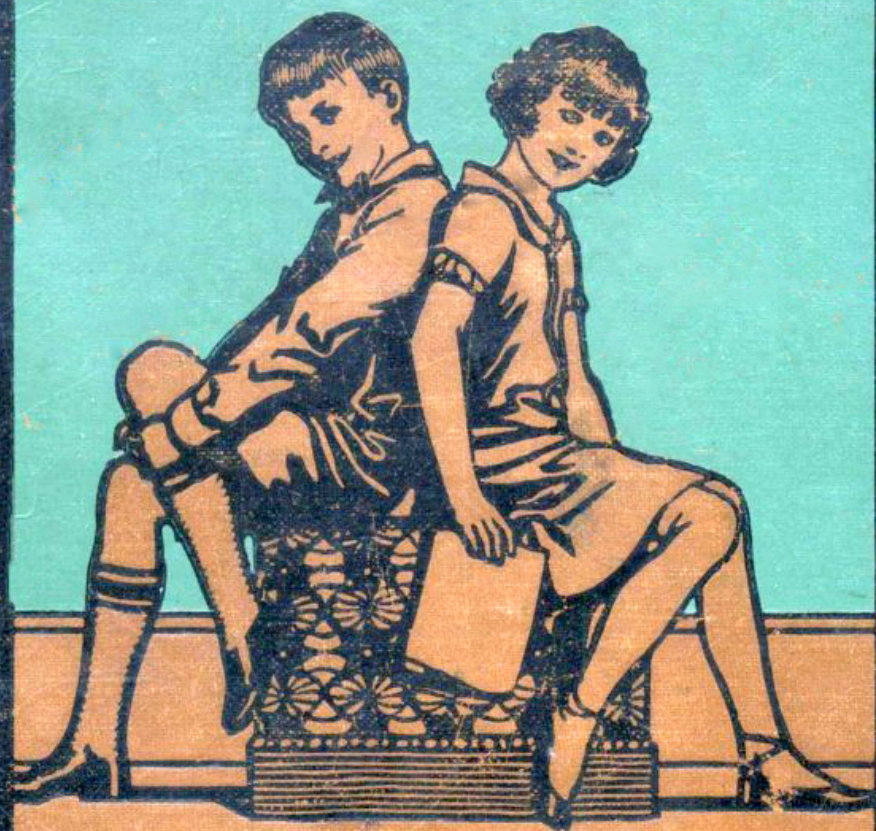


THE YOUNG TREASURE HUNTERS

Alfred Judd



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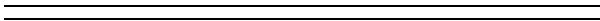
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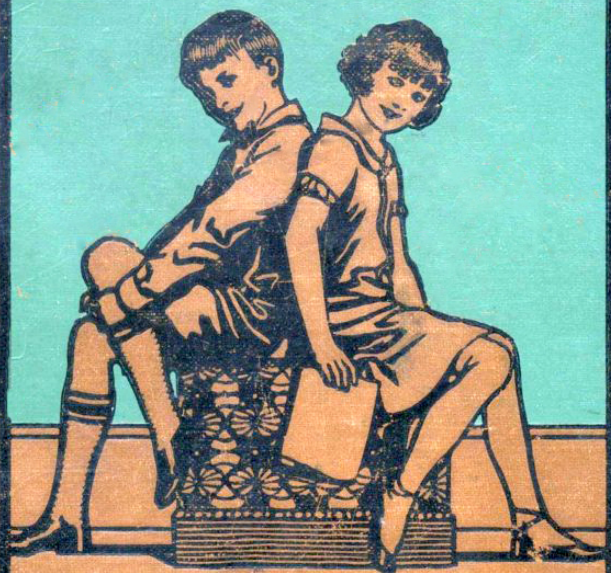
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THE YOUNG TREASURE HUNTERS

Alfred Judd



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The Young ❁ ❁
Treasure Hunters
By Alfred Judd ❁ ❁

*With Four Illustrations in
Colour and Black-and-White*

Cassell and Company, Ltd
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne

The Young Treasure Hunters

By Alfred Judd

*With Four Illustrations in
Colour and Black-and-White*

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First published 1924

Printed in Great Britain

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‘Here you are!’ Tony shouted; ‘I’ve found it! A window in the roof!’ ”

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(Frontispiece not available in this book.)

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The Young Treasure Hunters

CHAPTER I

TAKEN IN THE CHASE

JACK HARDING, panting, flung himself down on the sloping turf, and watched closely the gap in the beech-grown bank on the far side of the meadow. He had not long to look, for within a minute a couple of figures, lightly clad, came tumbling through. These were his brother, Morrice, and his cousin, Tony Wickham. They were the hounds; he—Jack—was the cunning hare.

And the cunning hare chuckled, for he had laid a false trail which his pursuers were almost bound to follow up. Surely enough, they did so. After hesitating for a few moments, Morrice was seen to beckon, and the two hounds scurried away in a totally wrong direction.

“Good!” cried Jack to himself; “that ought to mean my getting clean home. Whew, though—paper’s running short!”

Scrambling to his feet, Jack gazed into the school-bag which hung at his shoulders. He had been so liberal in flinging the “scent” about that the satchel was scarce a quarter part full. And there was still a long way to go.

“Bother!” muttered Jack. “But I must make it last out somehow.”

He jumped a gate presently into Westmoor Lane, and crossed at once to the broad fringe of gorse-grown grass on the opposite side. Here was a wire fence, marking the boundary of Farbrook Woods. The boy was about to leap over this when he noticed several scattered sheets of paper, which lay about in the deep, vigorous growth.

“Hooray!” exclaimed Jack, “the very thing I’m wanting!”—and with all speed he stooped and gathered the fragments together. Besides those pieces among the grass, there were two others caught in the furze bushes, and another which had blown over the fencing. Jack secured them all, stuffed them into his bag, and headed fleetly down the spinney, flinging scent as he went and picking his way between the thick-set bushes with practised caution.

The boy knew every inch of Farbrook Woods, but he threaded the spinney this afternoon with unusual alertness. For Captain Gawler had a new headkeeper now, and Jack was by no means certain whether the man intended to be “friendly” or not.

The “hare” gained the hazel-brake beside the brook, and he waded shoulder-deep in the young growth for some fifty yards, chuckling delightedly. “Those beggars will have a nice job to worm out the trail here!” he told himself, and started forthwith across the stepping-stones. Shadow-like, the lurking trout darted into the dim pool beneath the willows as Jack drew himself up on the far side. Swiftly, then, there was a flutter of foliage and a flash of blue plumage.

“The kingfisher!” gasped Jack. “Oh, I wish the others were here—and Joyce!”

In the diversion of the moment he had forgotten that he was a creature of the chase! Recalling this, he started across the damp bottom of the valley, his legs dashing against the ranks of wild iris which flourished here in all the glory of their yellow-green. It was when he had scaled the farther slope that he sank down to draw breath again and briskly inspect his stock of scent.

The broken bits of paper had dwindled to the bottom of the bag, and Jack pulled out those stray sheets which he had collected in the lane, intending to strip them up. In the act of doing so, however, he paused.

“How jolly queer!” he muttered to himself. “Looks like a sort of puzzle.”

For on every one of those loose sheets certain writing appeared, though in each case it was such an odd jumble of letters or figures that the boy could make neither head nor tail of it. Yet the characters seemed to have been formed with great care, and in ink which had become brown with age.

“Shall I tear them, or shall I keep them?” wondered Jack, and he little guessed what tremendous adventures depended upon that simple question. Finally, however, he stuffed them into an outer pocket of the satchel—a portion of one paper he had already destroyed—and proceeded to shred his original supply into much smaller particles.

“That ought to last me,” he reflected. “And now I’m off again!”

The slope down which he hastened now formed the most dense part of all Farbrook Estate, the giant elms and the slimmer beeches interlacing overhead so as to create a deep twilight, and the undergrowth being an endless tangle. Nevertheless, there were paths to be availed of by those who knew the place—paths soft with beech-husks and decayed leaves. Jack stole nimbly along between the saplings, till suddenly there was a challenging call away on his right.

With a final plunge the boy emerged upon the central footway, and gazed sharply around. Fifty yards distant was the familiar keepers’ hut, built of logs. A man had emerged therefrom, and it was this man who had raised his voice for

Jack to stop. It was one of the under-keepers, the boy believed, and probably one whom he knew, but he was not inclined to linger just then. Wheeling to the left, he darted along the avenue at top speed.

“Hold on, Master Jack—hold on!” The tone was not hostile, but the boy was in no mood to waste precious moments in discussion. With the other pounding close behind, he darted off again into cover, and went stumbling down the second part of the slope, using less care and catching a foot disastrously now and again in concealed rabbit-holes. Thus, wildly, he won to the bottom somehow, and slithered headlong into a parched ditch.

Panting fast, he pulled himself together and listened. Apparently he was no longer hailed. Creeping through the border of thick rushes, he was just about to sprint away, when a huge figure loomed up from nowhere in particular and grabbed at his arm.

“Well, young shaver!” said a voice with a rusty creak in it; “an’ what’s your game, eh?”

Jack’s captor was a raw-boned man, whose face and beard and clothing seemed to be all of one shade—a sort of unbleached, sandy hue. He was not at all an agreeable-looking customer. Jack guessed at once that this must be Tozer, the new headkeeper.

“I—I——” Jack squared himself a little. “It’s all right, really,” he declared. “I’m not doing any harm, and I—I often come here.”

“Do you indeed!” was the tart response. “An’ who give you leave?”

“Well, Mr. Rigg never minded——”

“No, perhaps not; but he would ha’ minded if he’d done his duty!” was the surly retort. “I’m put in charge of these coverts now, an’ it’s my instructions from Captain Gawler to keep all trespassers out. An’ I’m going t’ do it, too! There’s fish to be looked after an’ there’s pheasants to be reared, an’ I ain’t going t’ have a lot o’ young scorchers ransacking the place and upsettin’ the nests and——”

“Oh,” broke forth Jack, “but I’m sure we’ve never done a scrap of damage anywhere. I’m called Harding. We live at Burley Grange, and Captain Gawler is my father’s landlord. I feel certain he wouldn’t object——”

“Oh, now, wouldn’t he!” glowered the other, hardening his grip and administering a jarring shake. “Mark this, I’m giving you warning. There’s going to be no more of this scablashin’ and tearin’ of the place to bits! There——”

The boy was about to protest further when his intentions were woefully spoilt by a fearsome disturbance which smote suddenly upon their ears. It began by a shouting and a scampering high up in the wood.

Jack guessed at once what was happening. The two “hounds,” having missed the trail after climbing the Hall fence, had evidently decided to make a bee-line across the grounds, trusting to pick up scent again on the far side. Thus, they had probably chanced upon the same individual who had first challenged Jack.

At all events, there was a furious cracking and crashing, and down through the swaying bracken came reeling two dishevelled figures—figures which ended by thudding into the dry gully with even mightier force than Jack had done. Pushing up between the thick reeds, they scrambled to their

feet, to find themselves faced angrily by Mr. Tozer, whose fingers still enclosed Jack's arm.

Tozer's wrath flowed over. He lectured the hapless trio in terrible terms, and he waved the notched stick he carried as though he would like to have used it there and then. In the end, with alarming emphasis, he told them that they had now been warned; if caught on these acres again they should be "marched before Captain Gawler—and take the consequences." After which, with a final flourish of his wand, the dreadful Tozer bade them seek the straightest path out.

Joyce Harding, who had been helping Mrs. Newton with some jam-making, met the three boys as they came up the drive.

"Hallo!" she cried, "so they caught you, Jack! I was afraid they would. Whereabouts did——?"

"Oh, be quiet!" growled Jack. "We were *all* caught. Something has happened that has fairly spoilt everything. Farbrook Woods are barred to us—we aren't to go there any more!"

CHAPTER II

TONY SOLVES A PUZZLE

IT certainly seemed rather a melancholy beginning for a summer holiday, especially as our four young friends had planned so much in connexion with Farbrook Woods.

The Hardings' parents were just then visiting friends in Scotland, and the circumstances were such that it would be another eight or nine days before they would be able to return to Burley Grange. Thus, the young people were left to commence their amusements alone, being to some extent in the charge of the kindly old housekeeper, Mrs. Newton. "Apart from this," Mr. Harding had written to Morrice, "I shall expect you, as the eldest, to keep carefully out of mischief and to see that the others do the same."

Morrice was fourteen, and well grown at that, being head boy at the Preparatory School, of which Tony Wickham was also a pupil. The last-named, an orphan cousin, was of the same age, but much smaller; a quick-witted youth, with humorous black eyes and rather a brisk manner. The other two Hardings, Joyce and Jack, were somewhat younger and they had both, up to that time, been under the charge of a tutor.

Let it be said outright that this junior couple had come to be known in the neighbourhood as "the hardy Hardings," and it is to be feared that they had shared in more escapades than could possibly be set down here!

It was after lunch on the day following the curtailed paper-chase that this quartet was gathered in the big, comfortable playroom which overlooked the fir plantation "It's too horrid

altogether,” Joyce was declaring, as she twirled disconsolately on the music-stool. “Farbrook Woods are such great fun, and Tony *would* have enjoyed them.” Twisting a little more, she proceeded to thump on a piano which had long since been thumped out of tune.

“Oh, drop that racket, Joyce!” said Jack grumpily. “Let’s think what’s going to be done this afternoon. Now that we can’t picnic in Farbrook Woods, I vote that we go and picnic among the sandhills.”

Joyce swung round quickly. “Or else start another paper-chase,” she suggested. Then, as the boys smiled, “I’m sure I could run as fast as Jack!”

“Let’s hope you’d cast the scent better, anyhow,” answered Morrice, lolling back. “After Westmoor Lane we scarcely saw a morsel.”

“It almost ran out,” explained Jack. “I spotted some loose bits of paper down by the——” He stopped abruptly, sitting up.

“Jove! I’d forgotten all about them,” he ran on. “I found some scraps which I meant to break up so as to make more scent, but there was some queer writing on them which I thought I’d show you. They’re still in the outer pocket of the bag, Tony—it’s over in that corner. Just see if you can make any sense of them.”

Tony picked up the bag and drew out the fragments of which Jack had spoken. He uttered at once an exclamation, of interest.

“These things are written in cipher,” he declared.

“Cipher?” echoed Joyce, forsaking the piano. “What does that mean?”

“Well, sort of puzzle messages. You have to read them backwards, or something like that, to get at the meaning of them.”

The others gathered round, and Tony, after a moment of pondering, burst out with: “I’ve got one of them, anyhow!”

Upon the particular portion which Tony held, there appeared the following string of letters:

“Xobenoevactsewolehtfodneehttaxdekramenotsehthtaeneb.
,”

“Goodness!” cried Joyce, “whatever sort of message can be made out of that?”

But Tony was hugely excited. “It’s just as I suggested,” he exclaimed. “This is simply a sentence scribbled backwards, with the words all strung together. Half a tick, let’s see how it goes. ‘*Beneath—the—stone—marked—X—at—the—end—of—the—lowest—cave—one—box.*’ That’s it—that’s how it reads; just see for yourselves!”

“Oh, you’ve certainly hit it,” agreed Morrice, catching some of Tony’s eagerness. “Let’s see now what the other pieces have got to say.”

But it was soon clear that the “backwards” treatment did not unravel any of the other portions, and Tony remarked that no doubt each leaf would have to be puzzled out separately.

“Well, never mind the others now,” put in Jack, who was always fizzing like a mixture which wanted to pop off. “That one gives us something to work on, and we ought to see if there’s any truth in what it says. I vote we go at once!”

“Go where?” queried Tony. “What I mean is—*are* there any caves near by?”

“Are there? *Aren't* there, just!” exclaimed Joyce. “Old Ben Dobble—that’s a fisherman we know—says that there are not only caves, but tunnels upon tunnels, running one into the other and going right back into the cliff!”

Morrice laughed. “If you believe all that old Ben says ——” he began.

“Well, anyhow,” interrupted Jack, “it’s well known that those tunnels go much deeper than was once supposed; only falling sandstone has choked them up.”

Tony Wickham jumped to his feet. “I vote we get down to the beach at once,” proposed he, “and start some treasure-hunting.”

Joyce’s eyes sparkled. “Oh, if that should be true!” she began; but broke off with a laugh. “Anyhow, do let’s have a search—that’s if the tide will let us.”

Much depended upon the latter condition. Burley Grange, standing on the shoulder of the headland, fully overlooked Burley Bay and the Bar Rock Lighthouse some three miles out. Running at right angles with the cliff was a long stretch of rush-bearing sand-dunes and sloping shore, but beneath the cliff itself were low-lying ridges of rock, which stretched round the point to Burley Harbour and village. Twenty minutes later, then, behold our four adventurers scrambling over slippery, weed-grown crags, still full of shining pools from the previous tide, and now soon to be immersed again.

“We are safe, I suppose?” demanded Morrice of Jack. “The water won’t be up here for a bit?”

“No, we’ve heaps of time to have a thorough good peep. Hallo, there goes Tony!”

To step firmly on those raw edges of rock was an art itself, and Tony Wickham, unaccustomed to the process, had just slithered off and gone floundering into a pond, completely drenching one foot.

“Never mind, Tony,” cried Joyce, trying not to laugh at his struggles; “it’s salt water, and it won’t hurt you, even if it hurts your boots. If you give me your hand I will help you over the rest.”

“Get along!” gasped Tony, disdaining such assistance. “But, I say,” he added, moved to admiration, “you *do* do it well. However do you hold your balance like that?”

“Used to it,” was the cheerful reply. “Jack and I come here nearly every day. Keep inward now. That’s the first cave—do you see it?”

“No,” shouted Jack, overhearing this, “that’s the big one. The paper said the ‘lowest cave.’ It must mean the one round the corner.”

Accordingly they all pushed on, and were crouching, five minutes later, beside a low opening in the very base of the cliff. The aperture was shaped something like a wedge of cheese, and seemed by no means inviting.

“But—we can’t possibly get in there!” exclaimed Tony.

“Oh, can’t we?—we can just!” was Jack’s response. “Joyce and I have been in often.”

“What—by crawling?”

“That’s it—and one at a time. What a bother, though—it’ll be nearly dark inside; we ought to have thought of bringing a lamp of some sort!”

Whereupon Joyce produced from her pocket a box of matches and a short bit of candle. “A girl thinks of

everything,” exclaimed she.

“Good!” approved Morrice. “Now, young Jacker—you’re the one to lead.”

The three boys disappeared from view, Joyce remaining where she was to learn their report. About five minutes elapsed before Tony’s legs reappeared, backing out. The other two followed, red-faced with their efforts.

“Well?” was the girl’s sharp query.

“Opinions divided,” answered Tony. “There’s a heap of stone stuff lying about, and I believe I found what looks like a cross Morrice thinks so, too; but Jack declares it is just a natural mark, and not one made by hand.”

“Well, can you move the stone to look underneath?”

“No; we want something to dig with,” explained Morrice, “and I vote that some of us run home and see what is to be found in the tool-shed.”

Finally, Morrice and Tony went back together, Jack and Joyce agreeing to await their return. “But it’s not worth it,” the younger boy insisted, when the other pair had disappeared. “I’m cock-sure that what Tony spotted isn’t a made cross at all. Let’s wriggle in and have another look; you come too.”

A minute or so later both brother and sister were crouching together in the inner recess of the low, darksome hollow, and Joyce promptly agreed that the cross discovered by Tony was not a cross at all.

“Besides,” she added, “this isn’t what I should call a ‘stone’—it is part of the rocky floor. We could never dig it out!”

Jack, lifting the lighted candle, peered around. "I am thinking," he observed, "about old Bobbie's yarn. It would be great if we could find that maze of passages which he says were made long and long ago by smuggling folk!"

"Dad doesn't believe that story," was the answer, "nor does Morrice. At the same time, it *does* look as if there had been a falling-in just here, and——why, what is it? What do you see?"

For Jack had uttered a short exclamation. Shuffling about, he had worked to the extreme limit of the hole, and had then faced back towards the inner wall—with the result that the candle-gleam slanted for the first time upon an unexpected fissure. Next moment, to her complete surprise, Joyce saw the boy lie down and half disappear from view.

A moment later Jack had completely gone, and then his exultant voice was heard imploring his sister to follow. Aided by the feeble glow, she soon succeeded in doing so—and then their cries of astonishment mingled together.

CHAPTER III

UNDERGROUND

HERE, beyond all question, was a continuation of the outer approach, but a good deal loftier and merging away into blackness. They could see exactly how the sandstone, crumbling down, had had the effect of nearly stopping up the passage.

“Fancy our never spotting that little crack before,” cried Jack. “I say, we must explore now—come along! It seems to get higher, farther in. I believe we shall be able to stand straight up!”

And this actually was the case, for they presently branched to the right and found themselves in quite a comfortable corridor. The character of the walls had changed, too; instead of the insecure sandstone, they were now moving between faces of hard, black rock, dripping in some parts and utterly chill everywhere.

In the flush of discovery, however, our two young explorers did not notice the chilliness. They pressed ardently onward, Joyce’s eyes round with wonder and her lips slightly parted.

Presently the alley broke into two. Taking the right-hand first, they came upon a blank barrier, and, returning, they tried the one on the left. During the next few minutes there were many such cases, and the story as told by old Dobble began to come thrillingly true.

Suddenly, however, Joyce had a disquieting thought, and she stopped short, catching at her brother’s sleeve.

“I say, Jack,” she exclaimed, “I’ve just remembered something else that Ben Dobbie said!”

“Eh—what was that?” queried the other.

“Why, don’t you know—though we didn’t quite believe him then—he declared these tunnels were so muddled up together that it was quite possible to get lost in them!”

Jack, who had forgotten this, was decidedly startled by the reminder, but he was careful that his sister should not suspect it. “Why, of course,” he replied, “I remember old Ben saying that, but——oh, bother!”

The candle had burnt down to within half an inch, and the boy, to save scorching his fingers, had suddenly been compelled to drop it. Thus, on the instant, they found themselves in total darkness.

The girl gave a little cry, but Jack said, “What a nuisance!” and started fumbling at his feet. He secured the mite of candle at length, and set himself, in the blackness, to rub off the particles of grit which stuck to the warm wax.

“Yes,” he agreed then, keeping his voice as steady as he could, “I dare say we’d better go back. This atom of tallow isn’t much good now, I’m afraid, and, in any case, we’d better save it for a minute or so. But we ought to find our way back in the dark all right—and we can strike a match now and again.”

Having spoken thus heroically, he passed Joyce, directing her to keep close behind him and to hold on to his coat. In this fashion, very slowly, they fumbled along for awhile. Jack struck matches repeatedly, for the sake of cheering Joyce rather than with the idea of brightening the way. For the momentary illuminations thus obtained, lighting forward a yard or so only, were of little service to them; all they could

do was to press along in hope of presently regaining the point from which they started.

“Oh, Jack, what an awful place it is!” whispered the girl, beginning, despite her natural courage, to feel more than a trifle frightened.

“Rubbish!” retorted the other; “I think it’s awfully jolly—just as good as old Dobble described it!”

“Yes, but you—you know what he said. When he came here as a boy he used to load his pockets with a lot of that crushed shell from the beach and sprinkle it as he went along. That was how he found his way back.”

“Ripping idea, too!” declared Jack, trying to laugh. “We’ll try that next time, and we’ll bring a lantern. Hallo, which way now—along here or down there?”

After stumbling upon a middle column of rock, the boy had scratched another match. Before them, as the flicker shot up, gaped the mouths of two distinct alleys. It was impossible to say by which they had come. Doubtfully, Jack led into that which seemed to be the more direct of the two. After a further three minutes’ progress, however, Joyce tugged at his arm.

“Oh, Jack, I am sure we’re going quite wrong. For one thing, I don’t believe we are walking towards the beach at all! If we were we should have reached it long before this!”

Jack bit his lip in the darkness. Beyond all doubt they had completely lost their bearings, but for the safety of both he knew that he must not utter one word of despair.

“Well, anyhow,” he argued doggedly, “whether we’re going towards the shore or not, it’s certain that we can’t be very far from it. And that’s the main thing. I wonder if

Morrice and Tony have got down again? If so, it wouldn't be a bad notion to shout."

Thereupon they raised their voices, and, though the echo in that underground maze was very fearsome and eerie, they found that the sound of their own tones brought them singular relief. But there was no sort of response. When their cries had rolled and rolled away into the far, dim borings, there settled down a silence even more profound than before.

"But we'll stick to it," was Jack's staunch remark. "If we keep on moving and keep on shouting we are almost bound to get an answer in the end."

The boy spoke with confidence, whatever he felt, and he kept a tight hold on Joyce's hand. As for Joyce, it testifies to her fund of endurance that she did not completely break down during the next trying quarter of an hour, though it is true that there was a decided quaver in her later efforts to call. Jack's lungs, however, made up for any failing on the part of the little girl, till at length he ceased abruptly—to listen.

"What is it?" faltered Joyce.

She noticed presently a long, mumbling drone. "The sea!" she burst out.

"Yes, it must be—hooray!" Jack spent another match. "Let's turn off here; come along, it's something to have a notion of the direction. And now we'll shout again!"

They lifted their voices and paused. Was it fancy? Surely not! After the echoes had died to silence, there had surely sounded, above the purr of the sea, a repeated "Hallo—hallo—o—o—o!"

Without further word, Jack pressed into the shadows, his sister close at his heels, and a few minutes later Joyce cried

that she had seen a chink of daylight!

“Where?” questioned Jack. “I don’t see——”

“No, we’re beyond it, I think. Light another match. I believe we’ve just come past a by-way.”

They retraced their steps a little, and entering the new channel they were sure beyond doubt that they were now walking straight towards the sea. And a dim ray of daylight, very low down, glimmered ahead.

But even now their misgivings were not entirely dispelled, for on gaining that faint shaft of light they were able to go no farther. They were blockaded on every hand.

Jack was fumbling about him. Pulling out what remained of the candle, he managed to impale it upon the small blade of his pocket-knife. Then, when the wick was aglow, he let Joyce have the knife to hold. Before them was a jumble of broken sandstone, and it was between a mass of this that the light filtered through.

“Just as I guessed,” declared the boy; “do you see—it’s another collapse. But it



“Their retreat was cut off. The tide was entering the cave!”

looks as though a way might be cleared. Keep well on one side, Joyce.”

The confused pile had been shattered into quite small portions, and Jack, though he badly rasped his hands, had little real difficulty in lifting and flinging the stuff behind him. Every moment the patch of daylight became larger, so

that hope lent strength to the task. The candle-wick, burning off from the blade, fell fluttering and expired. But it was no longer needed. The cleared opening was already big enough for them to creep out.

“Bravo!” said Jack, and he promptly squirmed through, reaching back a hand to help Joyce. They stood erect, the knowledge of their whereabouts flashing upon them both. They were in the Big Cave—the one which Joyce had first pointed out to Tony! But—their retreat was still cut off. As they hurried forward they found themselves confronted by a foaming barrier of rising water.

The tide was entering the cave!

CHAPTER IV

JOYCE DISCOVERS SOMETHING

IT occupied Tony Wickham and Morrice something less than fifteen minutes to get up to the Grange grounds and back, and when they regained the beach, Morrice was carrying a gardener's pick and Tony a spade. It was hardly expected that both of these tools would be required, and indeed it was doubtful whether there would be room to wield them in the confined space of the cave, but they felt that they might as well be fully armed while they were about it.

Their first surprise was the great headway which the tide had made during the short period of their absence; already the foremost ripples were within a few feet of the mouth of Big Cave. Farther on, however, owing to the curving-in of the cliff, the breadth of shore not yet covered by the sea was much greater.

"We shall have to look alive," said Morrice, as he blundered over the crags, "or the tide will ring us in. We mustn't risk that."

"No," agreed Tony, "and from what I saw of the place, any attempt at digging in that hole is bound to be a stiffish job. We might just have one try now, and another shot to-morrow. Hallo—where are the others?"

Rounding a shoulder of rock, they had come within sight of where the lower cave was situated. But neither Jack nor Joyce was to be seen.

"They've gone inside, I expect," replied Morrice, and nothing more was said until they were crouching by the

opening. “Tally ho, you two!” shouted the elder brother. “Out you come!”

But, of course, there was no reply, and inspection proved that they were not there. Morrice did not search to the innermost limit of the cave, and, even if he had done so, it is hardly likely that he would have noticed the tiny side-cavity through which Jack and Joyce had crept.

“I can guess what has happened,” declared Morrice. “Jack, you know, didn’t agree about what we spotted being a properly cut cross, and I’ll bet those two have wandered farther along the shore to have a little hunt on their own!”

“But why should they?” asked Tony; “there aren’t any other caves, are there?”

“Not proper ones, but there are some deep crannies in the cliff about half a mile farther on, which are caves of a sort.”

Tony whistled. “If that’s so,” he declared, “they stand a strong chance of being cut off by the sea before getting back!”

“You’re right.” Morrice glanced about him in some alarm, a frown on his face. “They aren’t safe to be left alone,” he exclaimed, “and I ought to have thought of that. Tell you what—we’d better get back while it’s still passable and push out the boat. Then we can row steadily round and pick them off the ridges when we spot them coming back.”

“Good idea!” approved Tony, and the pair hurried at once to put the plan into action. The Hardings had a trim little sailing boat of their own, beached clear of the rocks beneath the sandhills. The younger couple, however, were not allowed to use it unless their father, the tutor, or Morrice was in command.

Having hidden their gardening implements among the rushes, our two young friends ran the boat out, but they had not nearly reckoned on the force of the incoming flood. For the first few moments they were helpless against it, though presently they learnt the trick of bearing up against the flow, and keeping their bow pointed away from the snags. Despite this, they made no progress, and at length, from sheer breathlessness, they were forced to give up—indeed, they were swung round and practically washed back to the shore.

While still in the thwarts, however, and before they had time for discussion, Tony lifted his head and cried out that a fishing-smack was bearing down on the tide.

Morrice gave a swift glance. “Old Ben Dobble!” he exclaimed; “that’s great, we’ll be able to ask his advice. And perhaps he’s come round from the village!”

Within a few minutes the solitary seaman in the other craft, having cast anchor, had sprung out, being greeted the moment he did so by Morrice, who was standing ankle-deep in the shallow water.

“Ben, ahoy!” was his shout, “have you come from the harbour?”

The old salt was about to lift out a round fish basket, but he set it back. “Cheer-ho, Mas’r Morrice!” he boomed, in response. “I didn’t know you was ’ome, sir!”

The old man waded up and gripped Morrice’s hand, jerking a genial nod at Tony. “No,” he answered, “I haven’t come straight from the harbour.”

Morrice rapidly described what had happened, and the smacksman shook his head. “I’ve ’ad a fair sight o’ the rocks from Bishop’s Point, and I’ve ’ad my eye on ’em, too. I’ve

seen not a critter. But——” Ben tugged his beard. “Are you sure they *ain’t* in that cave, sir?” he questioned sharply.

“Of course we’re sure,” was the ready response. “We crept in to see. They certainly weren’t there.”

Ben laid a hand on Morrice’s shoulder. “Mark me, lad—as I believe I’ve told you afore—that part o’ the cliff is a regular rabbit-warren. There’s a proper network o’ tunnels there, as I know well. They’ve got blocked up now, and people don’t believe it nowadays; but I say that it is so. Now, Mas’r Jack is a hactive young blade, and where ’e goes Miss Joyce’ll follow. I wouldn’t say but what——”

“You mean,” exclaimed Morrice, “that they’ve somehow worked their way in? I don’t think that’s a bit likely,” he added, as the old fellow nodded assent, “but we ought to do something to make sure. Do you think, if we all tried together, that we could get the *Merry Maid* along near there?”

“We’ll ’ave a try, anyhow,” replied Dobbie stoutly, “and we’ll try at once! Come along.”

Approaching high-water mark, the rush of the tide was now considerably lessened, and with Dobbie at the stroke oar they made strong, steady progress. As they arrived opposite the Big Cave, about whose mouth the waves were dashing and breaking, old Ben seemed suddenly to prick up his ears.

“Did you ’ear anything, sir?” he questioned over his straining shoulder.

“No, what——?”

“Ease ’er round, sir—put ’er head to the flow. That’s it. Keep a steady pull on ’er or we’ll be a’top the snags. What’s that?”

The other pair could not be certain whether they had heard a cry or not; but at Ben's suggestion they raised their voices together in a sturdy "Hallo!" A few minutes later there ceased to be any doubt; a thin call, as from the depths of the cave, had reached them above the rustle of the water.

It would be hard to describe the mixed sensations which Morrice and Tony underwent during the strain of the next five minutes. At the end of that period, however, a voice which was undoubtedly Jack's rang out clearly from the gloom of that gaping, wave-worn arch which they were watching so intently but which they dared not approach. They answered the cries, and presently they caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure far back in the cavern. Jack, removing his boots and stockings, had waded as far into the encroaching water as he dared.

It was Ben Dobble's lusty voice which now addressed him. "Are you both there, Mas'r Jack—both you and Miss Joyce?"

"Yes—both here!" came the response. "But we can't possibly get out!"

"No, no; but you'm safe enough. The tide won't reach the limit o' that cave, not by five good yards. And the water'll be dropping again now. Tell Miss Joyce that; tell 'er to keep 'er heart up!"

"Oh, it's all right," Jack assured them cheerfully; and certainly, after all that he had just been through, the youngster had full cause to be cheerful. "I say, Ben," he added shrilly, "we've found them. The tunnels!"

Old Dobble, in his momentary excitement, almost forgot to ply his oar.

"There now—what did I say!" he boomed forth. "But it was risky," he added more soberly, "most mortal risky. You

might both hev been lost, an' that's the truth. Can you hear, sir; how far did you get?"

"Miles, I should say!" was the shouted reply. "Anyhow, we *did* lose ourselves! We entered by the small cave and we wandered about till at last we found ourselves in this one!"

Dobble actually ceased to pull. "Sakes!" he gasped, "an' I would never quite believe it. Peter Cole, out on the light there, used to 'old that them two caves was jined up together, an' I never would believe 'im! Well, this is *something* to be larned an' no——"

Ceasing abruptly, he dug in his blade, for the boat was listing perilously towards the foam-spattered rocks.

Meanwhile, in the cave, young Jack had been recalled by a sharp outcry from Joyce. The latter, with her brother's jacket for a cushion, had been left perched on the hindmost ledge of the cavern. Wading back now, however, the boy found her kneeling on the sandy floor, her eyes fixed on something she had noticed there.

"What is it?" demanded Jack; "what have you found?"

Joyce pointed down at the lump of rock before which she bent. "Look!" she cried; "don't you see?"

For a moment, as a matter of fact, Jack could discern nothing. To aid his vision, therefore, he promptly struck a match, and instantly he saw what it was that had caused Joyce to exclaim. Her finger, indeed, was resting on a small cross, firmly carved into the hard stone!

CHAPTER V

CAN IT BE GOLD?

THE sight of the carved "X" came to Jack almost as a shock, for the later adventure had caused him utterly to forget their original object in coming to the beach that afternoon. But now he remembered. "Beneath the stone marked 'X' at the end of the lowest cave, one box." That had been the mysterious message which Tony had deciphered on one of those sheets of paper.

Well, they had visited the smallest cave, and there, as Jack firmly believed, no genuine mark had been found, but this—this was different! The cross at which Joyce was now pointing was no freak of nature; it must have been cut there by means of some keen instrument.

"And perhaps we can lift this slab up," Joyce was saying. "Oh, do let us try!"

Jack briskly lent his aid to the task, and for some minutes they both strove to loosen the great fragment of stone. Their labour, at first, met with no success, but presently they applied themselves to the opposite edge of it, being able there to get a better grip.

"It's shifting!" panted Jack, exerting all his young strength. "Stick to it, Joycie, it's coming!"

And come it actually did, being raised and wedged on its end like an opened oyster-shell. And then Joyce's voice shrilled out. "There's something underneath, Jack—a box—yes, I'm *sure* it's a box! Oh, I say, can we get that out as well?"

They struggled to do so. Reaching down, they strove with all their might to procure a firm hold on the object underneath.

“It’s no good!” gasped Jack, perspiring in his excitement. “It’s tightly wedged in the sand, and it will have to be dug out. If we—oh, I say!”

For there had been a sudden splintering noise, and the boy realized that in his efforts he had torn away what was probably a portion of the lid. Once again the matchbox was brought into use, and as the little flame spluttered over the pit they had made, both brother and sister joined in a sharp cry of wonder. Down went Jack’s fumbling fingers, and presently he held in his grasp a blunt looking bar of yellow metal.

“Goodness, isn’t it heavy!” he whispered. “I say, what if it really should be——” He stopped in sheer fascination, and then, rising to his feet, he hurried towards the daylight. Already the lapping tide seemed to be not quite so high as it had been awhile since, and, by stooping, Jack was able to examine their find in a fairly open light. Joyce came down towards him.

“Oh, do you really think——” she began.

“It is!” pronounced Jack; “I’m certain it is! Real gold!”

It may perhaps be imagined what a flutter of excitement possessed these two young people during the short period that followed. There was no longer any chance of their waiting being irksome, for at their very feet was an undoubted box of treasure. It wasn’t quite the sort of thing they had read about in Morrice’s story-books, for there it had always been “doubloons,” and “spade guineas,” and “pieces of eight.” But here, surely, was something equally, if not

more valuable, for the box they had disclosed seemed to be packed tightly full with these solid yellow ingots.

From the waiting boat there had come another call, telling them to be ready. The tide was really dropping now, and very gradually the peaks of the ridges were uprising above the white-margined ocean.

Jack and Joyce held a hasty conference, deciding between themselves that it would be better perhaps to say nothing of their discovery till all four of them had met together at home. Having reached this conclusion, they restored the splintered wood as best they could, and let the slab of rock back into the gritty depression. Jack, however, did not replace the one solid bar of metal he had taken out, for he found that he could slip this into an inner pocket of his jacket and then conceal it by buttoning the garment over.

The *Merry Maid* was now being hugged close to one of the rocky ramparts, under old Ben's expert direction, and Jack, seeing this, cried out that they would be able to reach it. The move seemed a rather risky one, especially as the water continued to break over the ledge at intervals, but Joyce also seemed confident that they could make a secure passage.

At first those in the boat dissuaded them, but presently, reflecting that the afternoon was drawing in, and that the cavern must be getting chilly, they consented to the attempt being made.

Morrice got out upon the rock, and Tony helped as well as he could by extending an oar, but there was a slight mishap before the other pair quite came into touch with them. Joyce half fell on the dripping causeway, and Jack waded in waist deep in the act of saving her from being wholly immersed.

Tony and Morrice cried out together when they saw this, but happily a ducking was the worst of it, for after that, with the elder brother's assistance, a safe passage was completed. The *Merry Maid* turned, and Ben pulled her strongly for the farther beach.

"Get up to the house as fast as you can run!" was the worthy Dobbie's advice, directly their keel ploughed the sand. "Never mind the boat. Leave me to haul that up. Sharp's the word!"

And, after heartily thanking him for his timely aid, they left the old fisherman there, and followed out his advice to the letter, only pausing to gather the couple of tools from the rushes.

They got up to the Grange quickly enough, and good Mrs. Newton, when she beheld the soaked plight of two of the party, threw up her hands in despair, following this action by weeping over Joyce. But she was a practical soul, and she postponed her remarks till "a thorough rubbing down" and a change into dry clothes had been completed.

Tea, at which the housekeeper presided, began with a chorus of halting excuses and downcast looks, for the dear old lady read them a despairing lecture. She had known from the first how it would be, she stated woefully; and she was only too certain that *something* dreadful would befall ere Mr. and Mrs. Harding arrived home!

Jack and Joyce, buoyed up by their own special knowledge, managed to keep pretty cheerful despite these mournful comments. Indeed, they were a graceless pair, and they ate toasted scone with relish while poor Morrice bore all the brunt of the blame. It is not surprising, therefore, that

their elder took an early opportunity to air a grievance of his own.

“Look here, you two,” he began, directly they were alone in the playroom, “I’m not going to have my holiday spoilt by being taken to task for your little capers! From what you’ve told us about those tunnels, it might have turned out even worse; you might, in fact, have got fairly lost in them.”

“You’re right there, anyhow,” admitted Jack, who, seated on the table, was swinging his legs. “Of course, I know we oughtn’t to have gone nosing off on our own, but it was awfully exciting to have spotted those old passages, and we were fearfully keen on finding the treasure.”

“Treasure!” echoed Tony Wickham. “Why, how queer! I’d forgotten all about that. You didn’t hit upon it, I suppose?” he added playfully.

“*We did!*” burst out Joyce, unable any longer to wait for her brother to speak—“we found it in the Big Cave! Oh, Jack, do tell them. How can you keep it so long?”

And Jack, thus pressed, unburdened the secret at once, bringing forth the shining yellow bar and dumping it on the table. Wickham, whose head was full of a hundred treasure yarns, fairly danced with triumph. “It’s gold!” he almost shouted; “it’s real, solid gold!”

Morrice alone was doubtful. “Is it?” he murmured. “I can’t understand this a bit. How in the world should it have come there?”

“Ah, that’s a mystery, of course,” said Tony. “But I thought, somehow, that those scraps of paper which Jack found looked musty and genuine. Of course, we could spend hours in making guesses about it. But what I think is that those boxes must have been buried years and years ago——”

“By whom?” cut in Joyce. “Old Ben says that those passages in the cliff were probably the work of men who used to smuggle things. But *they* wouldn’t have anything valuable to hide, would they?”

“Can’t tell,” was Tony’s answer, “and it isn’t much good bothering about that. I am only saying that *somebody* buried them, and that he made a note as to the whereabouts of each lot on these scraps of paper, hoping that no one but himself would guess how to read them. Well, we’ll suppose that the fellow who hid the boxes died, and that the papers, passing into other hands, were not understood and came to be reckoned worthless. Finally they were flung away.”

“And that’s how they came to be lying in Westmoor Lane,” suggested Jack. “But,” he ran on quickly, “do you really suppose that each of those papers will lead us to discover a separate hoard of stuff?”

“Quite likely. Anyhow, we’ll have a good shot at solving them. We rather misunderstood this first one, you see; by the ‘lowest cave’ it meant not actually the smaller of the two, but the first one to be reached when walking from the sandhills. But, look here—now that it’s tracked down, I don’t fancy letting the box stay there till to-morrow. I vote we fetch it up to-night!”

Morrice, however, would not hear of this. Mrs. Newton had been justly disturbed about their afternoon’s escapade, and, for the sake of peace, there must be no more faring forth that day. Both Joyce and Jack leaned strongly towards the romantic notion of stealing down to the cave with a lantern and bearing home their trophy under the cover of darkness—they were, indeed, still pleading with their brother when a sudden shout from Tony made them wheel round.

“I’ve got another!” chanted their cousin, on a top note.
“Hooray, I’ve captured another!”

CHAPTER VI

GONE!

TONY was seated at the table with those six mystic slips of paper spread out before him. One of them he whipped up, waved above his head and then presented for their inspection. It bore nothing but a string of figures:

“1, 20—6, 15, 15, 20—15, 6—2, 9, 7—5, 12, 13—13, 1, 18, 11, 5, 4—24—2, 5, 8, 9, 14, 4—11, 5, 5, 16, 5, 18, 19—8, 21, 20—9, 14—6, 1, 18, 2, 18, 15, 15, 11—23, 15, 15, 4, 19—15, 14, 5—2, 15, 24.”

“That one!” exclaimed Jack. “It looked too much like a sum to attract me! You must be jolly cute, Tony, if you can make any sense of that!”

“Why, it’s the simplest of the lot!” declared his cousin. “I was a stupid not to have spotted it at the very first glance. See, it begins with ‘1, 20.’ Tell me, what’s the first letter of the alphabet?”

“A,” grinned Jack.

“And the twentieth?”

Joyce was counting on her fingers. “T,” she briskly announced.

“That’s it—and ‘a-t’ spells ‘at.’ An infant could do this! That’s the first word—the next one is ‘foot.’ In half a jiffy I’ll let you have the rest.”

And the result, as worked out by Tony, read of course as follows:

“At foot of big elm marked X behind keeper’s hut in Farbrook Woods, one box.”

For the next moment or so, between them, there occurred a perfect clamour of tongues, and then Morrice cut in with the disquieting remark:

“But we daren’t go there! It was only yesterday that we had that row with the melancholy Tozer. If he catches us digging there——”

“Oh, but we *must* go!” was Jack’s cry. “Surely we aren’t going to let a little obstacle like that upset us. Once we had found the place, just one of us could dig while the others kept *cave*. We need only be careful, and I know scores of hiding-places there!”

“Besides,” chimed in Joyce, “I don’t believe that Captain Gawler himself would for a moment object; it’s only that horrid new keeper. If only dad were here——”

“But he isn’t here,” pointed out Jack, “and we certainly can’t wait a whole week before getting the second box. *Can* we now, Morrice?”

“Well, we’ll settle that to-morrow,” was the answer—“one thing at a time, you know. We’ll start the morning by paying our cave a visit, and making sure of the first lot first.”

“Hear, hear!” agreed Jack. “And, I say, we’d better take a wheelbarrow. That chest must be a fearful lump.”

Betimes, next morning—before breakfast, that is—behold our four young adventurers on the winding track which descended from the road. What with Morrice’s handbarrow, Jack’s pick and Tony’s shovel, the whole party looked sternly like business.

Joyce, eager to be there, skipped down some yards in advance of the others, so that she was the first to accost a burly, jersey-clad figure that was toiling up the steep. The

figure was none other than that of their robust friend, Ben Dobble, and he came to a halt in the deep, dry sand, swinging his familiar round fish basket off from his shoulder.

“Well, Miss Joyce,” he beamed, “and you’re a bonny sight this morning! Mighty glad to see it. So no harm came of the wetting, eh?”

“No,” Joyce assured him, and it was then that Morrice creaked down to a standstill with his wheelbarrow. Old Ben stared at the strange and fearful array of implements and gradually subsided into rumbling mirth. “Well, bless my heart!” he chuckled, and he would probably have questioned them as to their intended labours had he not suddenly thought of something else.

“Oncommon queer,” he declared, “but them caves yonder,” Ben jerked back a thumb, “ ’pear yesterday to hev bin the scene of great hactivities, so to speak. Neither o’ you young people had any call to pay ’em another visit last night, I s’pose, between ten and eleven o’clock?”

“Goodness, no!” Morrice made answer; “why, we were all safely in bed long before then!”

“Well, now, an’ that’s what I thought; yet I said to myself, I said—now maybe Mas’r Jack or the young Miss have lost some little trinket and hev sent down t’ see if it’s lying in the cave. You see, it’s an out-o’-the-way thing to see lights on the beach at that time o’ the night.”

Jack’s expression was a little blank. “Do you mean,” he questioned, “that somebody *was* in the Big Cave after dark, between ten and eleven?”

“Not a bit o’ doubt about it, sir. Me and Luke was in the smack, beating round for the harbour. The light I saw in the cave was settled-like at first, and then it came turning out and

moved slowly away. Making for this very path, sir, so far as I could calkulate.”

Ben shouldered his load and passed on with a bluff, cheery “Good mornin’,” little supposing that his careless words had left the quartet exceedingly fluttered. They said little to each other, however, but hastened on with their mission. Joyce still kept ahead, and it was she who first turned in at the Big Cave. The pick and shovel bearers were close behind her, and Morrice, leaving his barrow at the first ridge, stumbled after them. His ears, as he dived into the cavity, were greeted by a chorus of dismay.

“It’s gone! Somebody *has* been here, and the box is gone!”

It was a moment of bewilderment. The big lump of rock which Joyce and Jack had managed between them to raise had been dragged bodily aside, and at the point where it had rested there was now to be seen a pit of considerable depth. The case had been dug up and taken away!

“Well,” burst out Jack, who was the first to find words, “this is a facer, and no mistake!”

“Anyhow,” spoke Tony, “one thing is now certain: there are other people in this secret besides ourselves.”

“Unless,” suggested Morrice, “this stone was left rather loose yesterday, and someone who happened to enter here noticed——”

But both Jack and Joyce protested that they had been careful to settle the rock back just as they had found it. “No,” declared the girl, “I am sure that that is not the explanation. Tony is right—there must be somebody else in the secret. Perhaps at this very moment they are in Farbrook Woods, digging up what is hidden there!”

This reflection flurried Tony. "I say, if that should be so!" cried he. "We ought really to look sharp and get there! Perhaps the people who have forestalled us in this case have really no right to what they have taken, and it would be a fine thing if we could cut them out next time. It would be rather a score for us if we could save the stuff, and find out later the persons to whom it honestly belongs!"

"There's something in that," admitted Morrice. Then, more briskly, "Come along, let's hurry back and get breakfast over as quickly as we possibly can. Then we'll go straight to Farbrook Woods and see how the land lies!"

On one point, however, Morrice was firmly decided—the planned expedition must *not* include Joyce. That young lady was grievously upset when she heard this and she pleaded almost with tears, but the elder brother refused to give way.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but after what happened two days ago I'm not going to let you share the risk. That new keeper, Tozer, was fairly wild with us, as both Jack and Tony can assure you, and there'll be a fearful rumpus if he catches us there again. Strictly speaking, considering his threats, we ought none of us to go; I'm sure dad would be down on it."

"But not in these circumstances," interposed Jack. "How could we possibly keep away after solving the message on that paper? If there is something buried there——"

"Oh, I know," admitted Morrice, "and I'm just as eager to have a shot as you are. But if we are seen dad is almost bound to hear, and Joyce mustn't be in it."

"I'm not afraid," asserted the little girl stoutly.

"That's got nothing to do with it," was Morrice's answer.

However, in the end, a sort of compromise was arrived at. The distance from Burley Grange to the Westmoor Lane limit of Farbrook Estate was close upon two miles, and Jack clung to his former notion that something should be taken there in readiness to convey the hoped-for “treasure” home. There was a tiny triangular patch of coppice-growth at a turn in the lane, where the handbarrow might be concealed, and it was agreed that Joyce should remain there with it.

The axle of the wheel was duly greased to make progress both smoother and quieter, and within an hour of the completion of breakfast our young adventurers had arrived at the chosen spot. The barrow was easily wheeled into the thriving medley of gorse and bracken, being completely screened from the eyes of passers-by. Both Tony and Jack offered to remain with Joyce, but she declared that she would be all right alone, adding: “Hurry up, and be sure to bring something back!”

“You can allow us, say, three-quarters of an hour,” were Morrice’s parting words, “and if we’re not with you by then you had better conclude that we’ve had to make a bolt for it at some other point! In that case, meet us at home. Leave the barrow where it is; we can fetch that later.”

CHAPTER VII

MR. TOZER AGAIN

JACK had already jumped the fence and was going ahead, as a sort of pioneer. The other pair cautiously followed, the two digging tools upon their shoulders.

All was quiet in the spinney, save for the busy twitter of birds overhead and the small wood noises everywhere around. The brook being gained, it was safely forded.

Now came a run across the open, and this was accomplished after a most careful scrutiny of the winding valley.

“Good!” observed Jack. “We have cover all the way now. Warily does it! Let me still go ahead, and you stop if I stop. But keep me in sight.”

It began to be exciting, and hearts started to beat more quickly. They stalked the rise as it might have been stalked by raiding Blackfeet! The outing was quite after Jack’s own heart, and he led them across the crest with almost exaggerated caution. Not but what great caution was needed, for the very thickness of the bushes which shielded them so well was also an element of danger. This danger, of course, lay in the fact that they could never see more than a few yards ahead, and they might at any moment walk straight into the arms of lurking keepers!

Morrice ventured to make a sissing noise presently, between his teeth, to draw Jack’s attention. “I spot the roof of the hut,” he whispered, as the young leader paused; “why not strike right down at once?”

“No, no; the brambles are a perfect network,” was Jack’s reply. “I know what I’m up to; there’s a sort of parting a little farther on, and we shall be able to work down easily there. When we reach the place take good notice how it lies—it will be useful to know if it comes to bolting!”

“All serene, get along!” whispered Morrice, for he perceived that Master Jack was worthy to rank as guide. “But do wire in!”

Jack dived aside a few moments later, and down the others plunged after him, the young, springy growth bending to their bodies and lashing back at those behind. The rustling noise seemed tremendous, but do what they would it was impossible to prevent it, for the place was nothing less than a jungle. If this was the “sort of parting” mentioned by Jack, it certainly did not present anything of that appearance, for it looked to be all one with the rest of that leafy tangle. Rabbits shot from beneath their feet, and went scuttering into the far, green deeps.

“The centre path!” muttered Jack at last; “now’s the time to go easy. There’s the hut on the right. Gently does it!”

Jack stole across the track with its thick matting of beech husks, and peered into the thickets beyond. As far as could be judged, they had the whole woody domain to themselves, and it was now for them to make the very best of an opportunity. Every one of them knew the message of that second paper by heart—it wasn’t much to remember: “At foot of big elm marked X behind keeper’s hut in Farbrook Woods, one box.”

So now to find the big elm! But that, as Jack afterwards remarked, was in itself a “big order.” There were plenty of mighty elms to be seen, but they were all of one size, and none, as it happened, seemed to be “behind the keeper’s hut.”

Here was a poser at once, but by common consent the three boys divided, and proceeded to examine every tree trunk in the vicinity. The undergrowth was so dense that this was no simple task, and Jack got hung up in a holly bush, while Tony punished his fingers woefully in an unexpected bed of nettles. Each of the trio, when they drew together presently, was queerly decorated with goose-grass “buttons” and stray bits of thorn.

“Well?” questioned Tony, nursing his fingers. “This looks like drawing blank. I’ve seen no sign of a mark.”

The other two had the same report to make, and they were all smarting more or less from scratches and stings received. What with these, and a fear of failure, the risk of their trespassing came to be totally forgotten.

“I suppose,” began Tony, “there’s no chance of the hut having been shifted? I mean, was there ever a keeper’s hut somewhere else in the woods?”

“No,” said Morrice, “I never remember there being another, and this one has stood here for ages. You can see by the look of it that it’s fearfully old—the thatch is almost black and is beginning to fall off. But——”

He ceased speaking and became suddenly alert. “Jove—the elm!” he cried; “of course, it might have been cut down! What if——”

Morrice wheeled about, noting that the scrub immediately behind the hut was so close-grown for six yards or so that none of them had yet attempted to pass through it. Now, however, after swift deliberation, Morrice charged into the mass, contriving, by sheer dint of pushing, to make a passage. He stood in a sort of bush-margined depression, high with

fern and several clumps of foxgloves. But in the centre, trailed over with brambles, was a moss-covered tree-stump.

“Tony! Jack!” was the cry, and in an instant the other two were beside him.

The stump was only a short one, and it was so lichen-grown that any thought of finding a mark upon it seemed absurd. However, its position was certainly “behind the hut,” and they decided to commence digging at once. Tearing aside the creeping brambles, Morrice started to hack away with a pick, choosing the side nearest the hut as the one most likely to be styled “the foot.”

The soil was light and loamy, so that the spade came soon into use, and almost before they realized it a huge pit had been made. When next the pick came into play, Morrice asserted, at the second stroke, that he had “touched something!” This, only a few moments later, was amply proved, and the next shovelling disclosed undoubted signs of a flat wooden surface, and as Morrice dug on furiously, more and more was revealed.

Imagine the tense feelings of those three as the shape of a box came steadily into view. Small wonder, maybe, that Morrice, in his eagerness to dig around it, drove more than once into the case itself, splitting the wood and producing a clang of metal.

“Do be careful, old man!” gasped Tony, fearful for the safety of what they were bringing to light. “It’s no use to rush it now. If you just work easily round the edge——”

He broke off short. There seemed to have been no warning noise, yet there must have been something, for all three of them straightened their backs together and jerked around. On

the softly matted path, scarcely twenty yards away, the dreaded Tozer was striding up towards them!

Alas for wise intentions—how easily are they forgotten! Yesterday it had been Jack's shrewd proposal that one should dig while the others kept watch. But—well, no such guard had been further thought of, and here was the enemy right upon them!

Jack, describing this moment afterwards, declared that he was “never nearer collapsing in his life”; but certainly Morrice did all that was possible to save the situation. Snatching the spade from Tony's failing grasp, he called upon him to run. “You too, Jack!” he added sharply; “cut for your life! He mustn't spot what we're about! Draw him off—now.”

It was that last hint which most appealed to Jack; he saw the purpose of it. Therefore, springing clear of the bushes, he dodged past the hut and flew across the middle path, heading downwards much as he had done but two days since.

The ruse, however, was only partially a success. At first, though he scarcely glanced back, he fancied that the man was following, but half-way to the bottom he became aware that he was no longer attended. Next he knew that Tozer's voice was raised loudly, though, to all seeming, the keeper was stationary, and up near the hut. Jack groaned. He had not the least doubt but that their digging operations had been discovered!

Almost indifferent now as to whether he were caught or not, the boy began to creep back. Tozer's strident tones had ceased to be heard, and the youngster had a view of him standing upon the edge of the avenue. The keeper, at the same instant, caught sight of Jack.

“Come nigh with you!” were his words; “I ain’t going t’ chevvy after you, but I hadvise you to come right here. It’ll be all the worst for the others if you don’t. Come along, now!”

Jack was by no means keen on obeying that invitation, though he did not wish to escape if the others were really in for it. But—where *were* the others? The boy slipped nimbly off, running up in a wide circle, his object being to re-cross the path and see how things were behind the hut.

But Tozer, observing the manœuvre, prepared for it, so that Jack, scrambling upon the track, found the man within a few paces of him. Promptly the boy plunged off into the higher growth, but Tozer was not to be avoided, and bore down on him at the end of a dozen heavy strides.

The youngster’s arm was taken in a steely clutch, and he was dragged along to the hut. Then, suddenly, Jack guessed at the fate of Morrice and Tony. Across the door of the place was a stout wooden bar, which settled into a socket. When this was lifted down, Jack received a vigorous push, and he cannoned heavily into Morrice.

Tozer’s great form filled the doorway for a minute or so. “I told you how it would be!” he stated grumpily. “You was warned fair, an’ you didn’t heed the warnin’, and now you’ve got to answer for it. My orders is strict, and I’m goin’ straight away now to bring Captain Gawler here. ’E shall deal with you ’imself.”

With that, the door was deliberately slammed, and they heard the cross-piece thumped into place. “Well—I’m shot!” said Tony.

CHAPTER VIII

JOYCE TO THE RESCUE

THE doleful three stared at each other in the dim light. It was only too miserably clear that Tozer, taking them quite unawares, had had a fairly easy task. One by one he had managed to imprison them, Jack's having been the only troublesome capture. Tony, pausing in two minds whether to run or not, had been grabbed at once, while Morrice had stayed till the very last moment so as to cover what he could of their handiwork.

"And did the beggar spot anything?" was Jack's first sharp query.

"No, I don't think he did; we rather score there."

But Tony was gloomy. "We score only so far," said he; "it's bound to be all discovered presently. We were idiots to let ourselves be caught so easily, but, somehow, there was no time to think! He means business, eh?"

"Oh, he'll bring the Captain here, right enough," declared Morrice, "and we'll have to decide what we're going to say. Shall we——?"

"Half a tick," broke in Jack; "is there any hope of our getting away? This isn't an ordinary case; we're treasure finders, you know, and we've got to think of that first. If we see half a chance of doing it, we've got to save our find!"

"Hear, hear!" chorused Tony. "This seems a tumble-down old shop, and we might bang through the door if we really tried! Let's——"

“No, no!” broke in Morrice; “there’s going to be no damage done, anyhow; that would only make an unlucky case worse. After all, we are trespassers, and the fellow *did* warn us, though he’s certainly a beast. We’ll have to face the music.”

Jack was stamping impatiently about, inspecting the cramped quarters in which they found themselves. The old place was built of heavy balks of timber, and it was half full of pheasant-coops, barrels, and coils of wire-netting. Its contents, however, could only be dimly seen, for the sole light to penetrate into the hut came through two ragged holes in the thatch overhead.

Young Jack, noting these apertures, became even more restless than before. “I say,” he cried, “if we could only get up and worm through one of those!”

“The barrels!” suggested Tony, rolling forward an empty one as he spoke. “Here, both you and I can stand on this, Jack, and I’ll give you a boost up so that you may reach that lower opening. Come along!”

Morrice lent his assistance, for, in spite of what he had said, you may be sure that he was just as eager to be free as either of the other two. After all, they were on adventure bent.

It was an awkward undertaking; but, supported by his cousin, Jack contrived at length to put his head through the broken roof. But the solid framework beneath the straw prevented him from getting so much as an inch farther.

Tony continued to clutch manfully at Jack’s legs. “Can you—see anything?” he gasped out.

“Yes,” came back word from aloft, “I can see through the lower boughs nearly to the top of the wood. If only——”

He stopped short, catching his breath. Next moment, forgetful of how he was being held, he performed a sort of sharp wriggle, with the result that he, barrel and Tony came down together with a most fearsome crash! “Oh, you idiot!” spluttered Tony; but Jack, rolling to his feet, performed a swift caper.

“Whom do you think?” he burst out.

“What do you mean? Whatever——”

“*Joyce!*” was the answer. “I’m certain—I just caught sight of her! She was peeping through the higher bushes and trying to get a glimpse of the hut. We must let her know somehow. Help me up again, quick, and let me give a shout!”

Both the others were eager to assist, and presently, as loudly as he dared, Jack was making known his presence. As he gave the word to be lowered there was a patter of soft footsteps outside, a bar clanked, and the door swung open. There stood Joyce.

“Oh, whatever has happened?” she began. “I waited and waited, and when you didn’t appear I felt that I simply couldn’t go home as you told me to. I thought I might come to see——”

“Thank goodness you did!” declared Morrice, and he caught impulsively at his sister’s hand, while the others pranced gleefully around. “But, come along, we’ll make a bid for it, now. Tony, the chest—quick! Jack and Joyce, keep watch! My—but we’ll have to hurry!”

The next few moments were truly breathless ones. Fortunately, however, they had been on the point of extracting the long-buried case at the moment when alarm came, so that now it was chiefly a matter of scooping out the free soil which Morrice had hastily flung back. Still, some

care was needed, for the earth-clogged receptacle showed signs of being rotten, and had they treated it too roughly it might have completely fallen apart, despite the fact that two hoops of iron bound it.

However, four eagerly working hands got it loosened at last from the surrounding earth, and then it was dragged up.

“Great Cæsar, what a lump!” panted Tony. “And there’s simply nothing to carry it with. We ought to have brought some rope!”

“Too late now!” said the perspiring Morrice; “you and I must somehow carry it between us. Joyce and Jack—bring along the tools!”

They doubled back a little, advised by Jack, in order to pass up by the way they had come. For the two older boys the ascent was a long and furious tussle; for, their arms being fully occupied, they were defenceless to bush and bramble. Both left their caps strung up in the briers, but these Joyce was able to rescue.

Their final anxious glances had shown them that no one, as yet, approached along the middle avenue, and now, having struggled up the worst of the steep, they all plunged headlong forward, under the impression that whatever danger existed was being left behind. Even Jack, the “scout,” toiled boldly to the open crest, but next instant he had dropped and had darted back.

“Those hazels—quick; behind them—right into them! Oh, sharp!”

Those were his imploring words, and the others, luckily, complied without question. Morrice and Tony, though already limp with effort, made a spirited plunge, and fell among the nut-twigs in a heap, their precious burden beneath them. Jack

and Joyce, less encumbered, slipped nimbly to the farther side.

There was no time for so much as a whisper. Indeed, when Jack had stepped boldly to the summit, Captain Gawler and the gamekeeper had been within fifteen yards of him, toiling up the rise! Climbing with bent heads, however, they had failed to detect him.

But now—now was the one awful moment; for straight down upon the hazel-clump crashed the footsteps of the two men!

CHAPTER IX

ANOTHER PAPER SOLVED

CAPTAIN GAWLER was speaking, and his words were: “——birds’ nests, I suppose, that’s what they’re probably after, eh—eggs? When a boy comes to a wood, that’s what he’s always after, eh—eggs? Gaps in the hedges and torn trees; oh, you’re quite right—it won’t do. Of course, as they’re Harding’s boys, I shouldn’t like——”

All this the young culprits overheard, and they remembered it afterwards; but at the time they seemed to have ears only for those fateful footfalls, which came so close that the Captain’s norfolk coat swept the foliage behind which they trembled. Would there be any looking back—would there? No, rapture! the two men had disappeared from view!

The hidden watchers breathed again, and one of them hissed out an urgent whisper.

“What shall we do, wait or—cut?”

That was the question. Morrice promptly disposed of it! “Cut!” he rapped out; “it’s neck or nothing now. If we can get across the valley unseen—we’re safe!”

Hardly daring to breathe they gained the crest of the rise, and then, once on the other side, flung caution to the winds. Everything, now, must depend on speed.

The sensations of that stumbling dash across the open must have been very like those of the exposed fighter who knows that at any instant the enemy may espy him, and open a

destructive fire. Jack ran last, his eyes always turned over his shoulder, his voice cheering the leaders on.

And—yes!—the cover was actually gained. At the end of ten minutes they were sprawling on the bank in Westmoor Lane—their trophy on the turf between them—panting, conquerors!

But, even so, they did not linger too long—nor did they raise a voice of triumph. Experience, you see, was making of them *wise* adventurers! But when they were actually at the Grange—when their find was safely before them on the playroom floor, then—well, they actually cheered. Those cheers, after the crowded incidents of the morning, served somehow to relieve their feelings.

Joyce executed a *pas seul*. “This,” proclaimed she, “is simply the most ripping adventure that ever happened!”

That afternoon set in overcast, leading on to rain, so that our four young friends remained indoors to examine and discuss their prize of the morning.

Both Joyce and Jack were agreed that the box brought from the wood was of the same bulk and appearance as the one which, during the night, had so strangely disappeared from the Big Cave. It was similar also as regards the contents, for it had the same store of those bars of yellow metal which all four of them were now confident in naming “gold.”

“It seems too wonderful for words!” exclaimed Joyce, saying this for about the tenth time. “But I do hope,” she added, a trifle dubiously, “that we did right in bringing it away.”

“Of course we did right,” declared Jack stoutly. “At all events it would be a funny thing to hear of such stuff being

hidden and yet make no attempt to dig it up! Tony calls it ‘treasure trove.’ If it doesn’t belong to us—well, whom does it belong to?”

Morrice laughed at this. “You’d better not make up your mind that it will be ours for always,” he observed; “for of course we shall have to try to find out something about it.”

“How are we going to do that?” was the younger brother’s demand.

“Well, I don’t say it’s a matter that we need attempt, for it will be better to find out what dad thinks; he’ll know what to do. In fact, it’ll be best for us, perhaps, to say just nothing about it to anyone.”

“That’s what I think,” agreed Tony, looking up from the table. “And, meanwhile, we’ll look sharp and scoop in the rest! But these other rigmaroles,” he added ruefully, “simply floor me so far.”

Ever since lunch he had been wrestling patiently with the four puzzle sentences that remained, or, rather, with the three sentences and a half—for Jack, it will be remembered, had torn up a portion of one of the papers before deciding that they might be worth keeping.

“I’ll never be happy,” stated Tony, “till I’ve worried out all the rest.”

However, he received no inspiration that day, and the four retired to bed in painful uncertainty as to whether they would ever hunt treasure again! On that point, however, they were reassured betimes next morning, when Joyce was aroused by a violent thudding on the panels of her door.

“Get up, lazybones!” was shouted by Jack; “old Tony’s tracked down two more boxes. *Two*, mind you—hidden both

together, I mean. Make haste!”

Fifteen minutes later Joyce burst into the playroom, to find the other three eager in discussion. “Oh, do tell me!” she exclaimed—“which is it, Tony?”

“This one,” said the solver of mysteries, pointing to a jumble which ran: “Yvmvzgs ylziw nzipvw c, xzyrm lu Xfiovd, Yzi Ilxp gdl ylevh.”

“Simply a case of using the alphabet backwards,” explained the boy—“Z for A, Y for B, and so on right through. The result is—‘*Beneath board marked “X,” cabin of Curlew, Bar Rock, two boxes.*’ ”

“Well, I never. I say, you’re awfully clever. Still—I don’t quite understand. I mean—is the *Curlew* a ship?”

“It’s a *wreck*!” cried Jack; “why, surely you know! That old hulk on the Bar Rock! Come to the window—you can see it plainly from there. We’ve just been having a look through Morrice’s telescope.”

“How stupid of me—of course I know!” was the quick response; and she moved with the others to where a strong breeze from the sea was fluttering the window curtains.

Yesterday afternoon the sky had been a sullen grey dome, and there had been storms in the night. This morning, however, the rain had ceased; there was little sunshine, but the balloon-like clouds were scudding fast before a racing blow from the channel.

Three miles out in the bay the Bar Rock Lighthouse stood pale against the slate-coloured sea, a flock of gulls darting about it and curving wildly inland. On the lee of the rock, cradled upon a lower ridge, was all that remained of the good ship *Curlew*.

“You were telling me about it,” said Tony. “Stranded high and dry—how queer, isn’t it! Do you really mean that it has stood there like that for twenty years?”

“According to what old Peter Cole, the head keeper at the lighthouse, told me. It seems that the ship got in over the bar somehow on a fierce winter’s night, and was carried up just where you now see it—almost on an even keel. The after-part broke up, except for those few ribs, but the fore-part is still almost as sound as it ever was!”

“It looks,” observed Tony, with the telescope to his eye, “as though it had been propped a little on this side.”

“Yes, Peter Cole did that. You see, he’s an old sailor, and he much prefers a ship’s cabin to a poky little room in a lighthouse. So, as he knew the wreck had stayed there for many years without showing a sign of falling to pieces, he thought he’d make a sort of ‘snuggery’ of it—a place where he could go sometimes when he was off duty. So he has propped it outside, and has boarded up the cabin so as to make it as sound as it was when it sailed the ocean.”

“But that rather upsets us, doesn’t it?” suggested Tony, shutting the telescope. “Those two boxes, I should say, were probably hidden in the wreck some time before Cole took the cabin in hand and made it usable. So now they’ll be hard to get at.”

“Well, we shall have to explain to Peter, that’s all,” said Jack; “it can’t be helped in this case. The only thing is—d’you think he’s already found them there?”

“That isn’t likely,” declared Morrice. “I saw the wreckage before Peter took possession of it, and what remained of the cabin floor was then quite level and sound. I don’t expect he’s shifted a single board.”

“Well, that settles it!” cried Jack briskly. “I vote we man the *Merry Maid* after breakfast and run out to the Rock.”

“No,” said Morrice decidedly, “we shan’t venture there to-day unless the breeze drops or changes. We should have the wind on our starboard bow—it would mean sailing close-hauled. I doubt if we could do it.”

“Well, if it came to the worst, we could always lower our canvas and row,” persisted Jack.

“We’re taking no risks, anyhow,” maintained his brother. “We’ll settle it after breakfast. At present it looks as though it will be blowing a gale to-night.”

“Whoever heard of a gale in August?” demanded the venturesome Jack.

“I have—often,” was the brief retort.

And certainly throughout that morning there was no sign of the breeze abating, but after midday it veered round several points—its direction, indeed, being now quite in favour of a bracing run to the Bar Rock. But Morrice felt sure that the wind was strengthening still, and he half-wondered whether it would not prove too much of a blow for so slight a craft as the *Merry Maid*.

However, in the end he consented to embark, greatly to the delight of Joyce and Jack, whose pleadings had been constant. And when the sail was up, and the little boat flew out like a freed bird, he, too, felt that thrill of pleasure which can only come, perhaps, to those who voyage the seas in quest of hidden fortune!

CHAPTER X

ON THE ROCKS

IN the ordinary course, Morrice would have chosen to have run up to the lee of the Rock, where the landing was easier, but that would have involved the sailing difficulties which he had mentioned earlier in the day. Therefore, to make the best use of the wind, they were steering a straighter course out, with the idea of eventually going about and making the Rock from windward.

This little trip, it must be understood, was one which Morrice had managed often enough, and which Joyce and Jack had repeatedly enjoyed in company with their tutor, Mr. Marshall, or with their father. Therefore, though Tony, as a “land-lubber,” was secretly much concerned by the alarming way in which the skiff heeled over, yet the three Hardings, at the outset, felt no real misgiving.

Only by degrees did Morrice begin to regret the venture—only by degrees did he realize that the weather conditions were something too severe for his knowledge of the craft and of the bay. In some respects, the afternoon had deceived him; the sky had seemed so much brighter and less forbidding than yesterday. But he knew now that they would have been more secure in a rainstorm than in this blustering, down-beating wind, which grew worse with every minute.

Morrice bit his lip, and, had he chosen the right thing, he would have put about at once. Perhaps it was the “hardiness” of the Hardings which prevented him from doing this; for though more cautious than his juniors, he was just as eager not to be beaten.

The water, increasingly choppy, was slapping fiercely at their bow, sending over the gunwale a constant shower of spray which clung about them like mist and was whisked away in their wake. The senior Harding, fortunately, had insisted that all should wear rainproofs, and the wisdom of this soon became very clear indeed. But for these coverings the spray would have drenched them to the skin.

And worse was to come. At the start they had had the comparative shelter of the headland, but they were now in the middle-bay, and in the grip of the “mad currents” caused by the bar. The bar, it should be told, was a submerged sandbank, which very nearly spanned the inlet, rising to its greatest height at the Bar Rock. The Rock indeed, at low tide, crowned a hummock of shingly sand which sloped away into the water on either side. The presence of this sandbank explains why Burley Harbour did not lie in the shelter of the bay itself. Also it explains the lighthouse; for the bar, of course, was a great danger to ships of any size.

The whirl of the new currents, then, smote the little *Merry Maid* chiefly on her starboard beam, straining her to port and causing her to sag unpleasantly as she forged on in obedience to her dragging canvas. Now and then, after a momentary pause, she would shiver and plunge—much like a bewildered steed which is being pulled this way and that, and is at its wits’ end to know what is wanted. And now she was getting something more than spray, for every downward plunge brought in a rush of water.

Jack, seated near his brother in the stern sheets, was more than a little pale. The state of affairs, somehow, had rendered them all rather silent, but now the little boy turned and shouted above the stress of the wind.

“You might ease her a bit, Morrice!” he called.

Morrice’s eyes were fixed ahead and his hand was firmly on the tiller. “I’m afraid!” he shouted back. “We’re already running it rather close.”

As he spoke, the boat heeled over so violently on her beam that Tony was jerked from his seat. Joyce clung to a stay with a little cry, but the gallant craft came up again, and set her prow to the battling elements.

“Lower canvas?” came Jack’s shrill question above the blustering gale.

“Been thinking of that,” sounded Morrice’s answer; “but—no good! We couldn’t row against this current; at least——”

Morrice set his jaw hard as the boat careened, and now he let the tiller go a shade more to starboard. Never till now had he realized how treacherous a trap had Nature devised when she stretched that barrier beneath the masking waters.

And then, in the midst of these very thoughts, there occurred a sliding shock, and for a few dreadful moments the *Merry Maid* was held in a vice, at the mercy of both wind and wave. They were upon the bar. Then the boat tottered, the wind-driven spume snarled up to her, and in another breath she might have been swamped. But her very tottering saved her, for the stern was wrenched up sufficiently for the swelling water to lift it, and as the sail filled she drove over—free.

“Hooray!” gasped Jack, in the smallest of cheers; but he uttered no more than that, for they were breasting now the whole force of the angry channel. The skiff quivered from stem to stern, and they all held their breath till Morrice had warily put her about.

Then came a moment of relief, for the *Merry Maid* no longer fought against the elements, but rather went along with them, curving full into her destination. Then there was a sharp word from Jack as he half rose, holding to the mast.

“The rocks!” He spoke in a sort of harsh whisper, above the lash of the wind. “The rocks—they’re under water!”

For Tony the words had no meaning, but for those who knew the place they were ugly in the extreme. And they were only too plainly true. Even Morrice had not foreseen this difficulty, and it became clear at once that their voyage out must have occupied about twice as long as had been anticipated. The approach, sown with snags, presented only one natural channel through which a small boat might safely pass—when the danger-points were clearly in view. But with the tide up——

Morrice glanced right and left in that one wild moment of indecision. Behind were the raging wind and the fury of the open sea—on either side the sinister bar, from whose clutches they had but barely escaped a few moments since. Ahead were a few fathoms of perilous water, and then—safety. Morrice decided for the straight course, and bent his whole will to the task.

Half the critical distance had been covered when a rasping sound on the port beam made him touch the tiller sharply. It was no more than a touch, but a driving gust at that same instant carried them sharply to starboard. The young helmsman struggled to recover, but before he could do so there was a terrible, grinding thud, and all were flung heavily into the bottom of the boat.

Morrice, in that moment of chaos, kept a very level head; that, at all events, may be said for him, however much he was

blameworthy for having risked the voyage at all on such a boisterous afternoon.

The *Merry Maid*, after striking, staggered frantically in all directions, but before the wind could force her broadside on, Morrice, sprawling as he was, reached up and strongly righted the helm. The craft responded, though the canvas was still flapping and straining, and Morrice struggled into his place.

A keen glance forrard showed him that the lower strakes bulged badly, while a fountain of brine gushed up through a shattered garboard.

The other three had recovered, and Jack, aghast, turned to his senior as if for orders. "Look after the sheet!" rapped out Morrice—"we must somehow rush her in. Be sharp!"

And so the *Merry Maid* ran the rest of her gauntlet, leaking fast, and with all the waves of the channel hurling her blindly towards the sloping shingle. But she won clear, and ground an injured keel on the grit that fringed Bar Rock. And the daring voyagers were not the only ones to feel relief; for Peter Cole himself, having witnessed the late disaster, had come running down to receive them. The old light-keeper's visage was blank with concern.

"You didn't ought to have done it, sir—it was too close a thing!" he burst out, speaking to Morrice. "Knowing the shoal as I do, I'd hardly dare dodge it myself after flood had begun!"

"It was a bit of faulty judgment, Mr. Cole," answered Morrice. The boy's face was still white, but he was relieved beyond telling to know that all were safely in. "We had a fearfully difficult crossing," he went on, "and when I found

the rocks under water I had to decide quickly what to do. And it seemed less risky to come on than to turn back.”

Mr. Cole tightened his seaman’s cap as a great gust came up, bringing with it a cloud of spume. The light-keeper was short and sturdy, with a wealth of whisker which Joyce had once declared to be “like curly wire.”

“It ain’t a day fer that cockleshell to be out,” went on the old man severely, nodding at the *Merry Maid*, “an’ it’s a good thing you’ve bin well taught, for most younkers o’ your age would ha’ had her swamped before she’d made a knot.”

“But,” broke in Joyce anxiously, “how are we to get back, Mr. Cole? We’ve——”

The old man wagged his head. “There’ll be no going back for you to-day, missie—an’ you’ll have to make up your mind to that!”

CHAPTER XI

PETER SIGNALS THE MAINLAND

THERE went up a gasp of dismay.

“I say, though, we *must* get back—somehow!” exclaimed Morrice; but even as he spoke, the squall was tearing at their rainproofs as though bent on shredding them off, and the flying spindrift was already being carried about the lighthouse.

“It ain’t to be done, sir,” declared Cole. “The *Merry Maid*’s buckled up; she aren’t fit for a fair-weather crossing, let alone a fresh arternoon like this. And it’s goin’ to be worse come nightfall; a stiff breeze blowin’, and no mistake.”

Morrice knew well enough that a sailor-man’s “stiff breeze” means what would commonly be termed a gale, and Cole’s manner, even more than his words, showed that there were some hours of really bad weather in store. However, the boy made one further effort.

“I noticed your coble moored to the leeward buoy. I suppose you couldn’t lend us——”

“Ay, lend it to you, sir, that’d be all right—but I sartinly couldn’t let you go in it alone. Your father’s away, as I happen to know, or you wouldn’t be out here on sich a day as this! An’ I owe it to him not to be lettin’ you go back by yourselves. One o’ my mates, Brice or Jim Wallis, might have seen you to the shore, but I doubt if he could pull to the Rock agin sich a sea as this—and I can’t risk being short-handed to-night.”

“But, you see, I’m thinking of our people at the Grange,” said Morrice. “They’ll be scared nearly out of their wits when we don’t return!”

“An’ not the first time they’ve bin so scared on account o’ you!” was the answering chuckle. “’Owesome, it’ll be all right in this case, for I’ll signal to the mainland and hev word sent up.”

“It’s awfully good of you. And can you really put us all up?”

“In some sort o’ fashion; pervided you’ll be content with a shakedown for once. And if we’re really pushed to find room, there’s always the broken-down *Curlew* round the corner there. She’s pervided wi’ a couple o’ nice bunks, all fit and ready fer unexpected visitors!”

At the mention of the old wreck, the four youngsters suddenly remembered their purpose in paying the Rock this stormy visit, but they could not refer to this at once, for the worthy Mr. Cole was busying himself about the state of the *Merry Maid*, which had suffered considerably from the buffeting.

“She’ll want a deal of tinkering afore she’ll float again,” he was saying, “an’ that’s a lesson to ye, young folks. There ain’t no time to be lost, for the tide’s working up apace. We must get out everything portable, drag her to the leeward side, and there beach her as best we can.”

This, for three-quarters of an hour, kept them fully engaged, and by that time it was accepted beyond doubt that they could no longer hope to return that day. The blustering weather of the early afternoon had risen now to a long, whistling roar of gale and ocean combined, and when they came up the Rock after disposing of the boat, they were

amazed to find that they could scarcely keep their footing. Peter Cole called out that he would “send that signal at once,” and he invited them to come up and watch the process.

The entrance-door to the lighthouse was reached by climbing a short iron ladder clamped to the stone, and Joyce was warned to “hold tight.” However, it was a scaling feat she had performed before, and not at all unwelcome to her adventurous young soul. Truth to tell, now that the first alarm was over, she was secretly much delighted at the novel prospect of spending a night on Bar Rock. And, needless to say, this feeling was fully shared by the three boys.

After entering the lighthouse, one had by no means finished with ladders, for every one of its seven storeys was reached by that means. And the present excursion took them from the bottom to the top, with a slight pause in the service-room, where Cole got out some flags from a locker.

He paused with the bunting in his hand, eyeing Joyce keenly. “Didn’t think to ask afore,” he said, “but I suppose you’re all right and sound after that tricky run out! No wet stockings, nor anything like that?”

Joyce said “No,” and on that matter the others could also reassure their kindly old friend.

“That’s good. Well, then, perhaps you’d like to step out and see the show.”

Mounting the trimming-stage of the huge lantern, Mr. Cole opened a small door and assisted Joyce on to the outside balcony. “*Now* you’ll feel the breeze,” he warned, and she had to snatch at her cap quickly, or the wind would have whipped it away.

The light-keeper’s signalling operations were brimful of interest for every one of the four, yet did not receive their

undivided attention. Their present view of the channel, especially in the first moments, overwhelmed them. Three of them had been familiar with Burley Bay during most of their lives, yet they realized that they had not actually *known* it until now!

The sight of the sea—the vast, thrashing, racing expanse all around them—was nothing short of thrilling; and there was further awe in the reflection that their tiny bark, but a short hour since, had ploughed over some three miles of that foaming turmoil! For the far-flung bar, so far as appearance was concerned, did not now exist; from horizon to sandhills the bay was one throbbing waste of breakers.

Cole's signal was acknowledged by the mainland station, and he found his four young visitors clutching at the balcony rail when he turned about. By right, the tempestuous air should have flung him against the lantern; as a matter of fact, it did not in the least affect his balance. The old man chuckled loudly when he saw the wide-eyed wonder of his guests' faces; but the sound of the chuckle was lost on the galloping wind.

"Well, missie," he said to Joyce, whose streaming tresses looked as though they were going to be carried away, "and what do you think of it all?"

"Oh, Mr. Cole——" she began; but her tones were so absurdly small that the weather derided and choked them. She was not to be outdone. "I never thought it was going to be such a terrible gale as this!" she screamed.

Old Peter caught the word "gale" and broke again into mirth. "No," was his dry



“The light-keeper’s signalling operations were brimful of interest.”

response, shouted withal, “we don’t call this a ‘gale,’ exactly. But there may be a sorter one come nightfall; we shall see. In we go.”

Joyce relaxed her grip of the railing, and would have been blown promptly over but for Peter’s ready arm. He lifted her

through the doorway and the boys followed. They reached the service-room below with flushed and tingling faces, and Morrice promptly “got to business.”

“Mr. Cole,” he began, “there was some reason for our madness in coming here to-day, a very strong reason indeed. It’s to do with that old derelict on the other side of the Rock—the wrecked *Curlew*. How long has it been there?”

The light-keeper did not need to consider. “Nigh on twenty years, sir,” he answered briskly.

“And when you fitted up what remained of the cabin you didn’t discover anything in particular?”

The old man’s face was expressionless. “Nothing, sir,” he asserted.

“Well, we believe that there is treasure hidden there.”

Peter stared from one to the other, and then sniffed very deliberately. “Anything else, sir?” he said.

Of course, Morrice had scarcely expected to be believed, but he now told his story.

“Well, sir, we can but go and see,” was Peter’s practical conclusion; “and, what’s more, we’d best be going sharp. Our base will be awash in some fifteen minutes.”

Morrice was promptly fitted up with long sea-boots and oilskins—his own mackintosh being discarded by Peter with a word of contempt. These two alone were to form the expedition, Tony being told off to remain with the two younger Hardings in the lighthouse.

Descending behind Peter Cole, Morrice found the door of the structure closed. Directly this was opened, the frantic wind came rushing in as though it had long been leaping on

the threshold in hopes of being admitted. The air without was thick with a swirling fog of spray.

Cautiously they descended the ladder-rungs, turning off at once by the hewn path which led them behind the great granite column of the lighthouse. In a very short space they were climbing the fixed ladder which brought them on to the *Curlew's* deck. The cabin beneath was merged almost in twilight, but Peter had a lantern handy and he lit this at once.

It was really only two-thirds of a cabin, for the rear portion of it had been destroyed along with the after-part of the vessel, but the light-keeper had boarded this in, and had rendered the whole thoroughly snug and habitable. There was a table in the centre, on one side a bench, on the other side two sleeping-bunks, one above the other.

“Most of the deck above I remade,” explained Peter, “but the floor-planks here I didn’t need to touch. Now, then, sir—what does that paper o’ yours say?”

Morrice read out—“ ‘Beneath board marked “X,” cabin of *Curlew*, Bar Rock, two boxes.’ ”

“Well,” rejoined the other, swinging down his light, “now’s the time to prove that statement, if it’s ever goin’ to be proved. As far as—— What’s that, sir?”

Old Peter had been directing his rays aft, but he swung round at a sound from Morrice, who was kneeling by the forward bulkhead. “I believe I’ve spotted it,” he cried, “here on the central plank! The lantern, please!”

It was only a small cross that was cut there—a penny might have covered it—but beyond doubt it was the object of their search.

CHAPTER XII

MORE TREASURE

“WELL, now,” said Peter Cole, beginning to feel some animation, “that’s powerful strange. Fancy my having bin in and out this crib for many a year and never to have noticed it! But—how to get that plank up? Is it built——” Peter stooped, and peered closely. “No,” he hurried on, “it don’t underlap. Why, we’ll have that prized up in a brace o’ shakes, sir! Just wait.”

There was a brief journey to some dim corner, and then the light-keeper was back again with a heavy chisel in his grasp. With this he worked deftly while Morrice held the lantern, and in a short space the plank had been fully levered up. Cole held it aside, while Morrice lowered the light.

“There they are!” fell from the lips of both, and not another word was uttered till the adjoining planks had been loosened also, and the two ponderous cases extracted.

“They’re exactly the same as the other!” exclaimed Morrice, as the light-keeper, perspiring, stood back with a deep breath. “And I’ll bet they contain the same sort of bars and the same number. Isn’t it awfully strange?”

“It is, sir; but time’s slippin’ and we must be gettin’ back. It won’t do to leave ’em here, either, now that they’re exposed. They must be somehow shifted to the lighthouse. I wonder——”

Stooping, Peter crooked an arm about one of the chests, gave a muscular heave and stood up with it—proving thereby that he was just as tough a subject as he looked. Then, with a further strenuous effort, he hoisted it to his shoulder.

“Ay, I can manage,” he declared. “Off we travel.”

They came out beside a running channel of water, and as they clambered across the Rock a huge wave romped over the top and dashed down to meet them—proving clearly that time was indeed slipping. Reaching the lighthouse, they found themselves ankle-deep in surf—for the beating waves were now climbing to the lower round of the ladder.

“Joe, ahoy!” boomed Peter as he grounded the chest.

The door above was opened and the assistant’s head appeared.

“Drop a couple o’ lines!” was Peter’s order. “Pick out the new ones. A couple o’ nooses—two cases like this to be raised!”

“Ay, ay!” was the alert response, and the head darted back.

Morrice remained while Peter hurried back to the *Curlew*, and, in accordance with parting orders, he caught one of the loops dropped by Joe and pulled it taut about the box, which had been left standing on its end. By that time, Peter had arrived with the second one, and when this was roped and ready Morrice got the word to ascend.

“Careful, sir!” warned the old man; “there’s seaweed on them rungs now, and the wind’ll fetch you off if you don’t cling tight.”

Morrice heeded the timely advice, and swarmed up with steady tenacity. Joe Brice hauled him through the doorway, and he encountered Tony lurking in the background, while Jack and Joyce were to be seen at the head of the first ladder.

“Any luck?” demanded Jack’s voice eagerly.

“Yes,” was the response, “we’ve got them both—just going to pull them up. But you two had better stay where you are.”

The younger two, beginning to learn the value of obedience, followed the advice, but they consoled themselves by raising a cheer at the news. This cheer was heard again when the four figures in the doorway were seen to hoist up the first box, and it was repeated with even greater zest when the second one came into view.

“Ha!” said Mr. Cole, when the closed door had shut out the angry channel, “and now I’ll figure it that we’ve all earned a dish o’ tea. But we may as well get these boxes upstairs first; you and me, Joe, can manage that.”

This toilsome task was duly accomplished, and at once our friends forgathered in the lighthouse kitchen, a very homely apartment indeed; especially after the lamp was lit, and the table spread with such good and solid fare as the store-room provided.

And you may be sure that it was a very jubilant party, too—the younger portion of it especially being delighted once more by the thought of “something attempted, something done!” This was treasure-finding extraordinary; those scraps of paper found by Jack must be leaves from a magician’s wonder-book!

Much fancy of this sort the young people indulged in over fresh bread-and-butter and steaming cups of tea. The storm outside increased in violence, but for a time this passed unremarked, save now and then when the dull dirge of the wind uprose to a wailing screech. When this happened, cups would pause midway and sharp glances would be exchanged; but still “treasure” remained the ruling topic.

The boxes lay on the kitchen floor, and, the meal over, Peter fetched a tool and prized open a lid of each. Inside both

was the same close arrangement of heavy ingots which had been found in the cases previously opened.

“Tell us!” exclaimed Joyce eagerly; “is it really gold? What do you think, Mr. Cole?”

The old fellow sat back with one of the lumps in his hand. “It is—so far as I can judge, it is,” he stated, under his breath. “And to me it almost looks like——” He balanced the bar across his big palm, and then shook his head. “It’s mighty queer,” was all that he added.

“You’ve no idea how these cases came to be hidden where they were?” questioned Tony.

“No, sir—it beats me all round. But—do you youngers grasp what it means if all these really *are* solid golden bars? Why, every single box would represent a fortune! However, the question now is—what’s to become of them?”

“That’s a difficulty,” said Morrice. “The box we have at the Grange is stored in one of our playroom cupboards—that was really the best place we could think of. We should like, if you don’t mind, Mr. Cole, to leave these here for a bit. Could you find room for them?”

Mr. Cole considered. “Well, it might be done—until your father comes back. Mr. Harding, he’s a J.P., and one sartin to do the proper thing, so to speak. There’s a big locker up in the service-room which is all but empty, and I keep the key of it; they might lie there for days without a soul the wiser.”

“Thanks, that’ll be fine!” declared Morrice; and, the ropes being promptly fetched, the four of them engaged with Peter in getting the chests hoisted up three more ladders.

When this was completed, the evening was far gone, and the rest of the time before an early supper was occupied in

explaining to Tony the fascinating mysteries of a midsea lighthouse, while the squall increased to greater and even greater tumult.

The two bedrooms of the tower were being given up by the light-keeper and his assistants to accommodate the young visitors. Peter insisted on this. Joyce was to have the upper room, and the boys the double-bedded one beneath. “As for the wind, missie,” said Peter, “you’ll belike get used to that if you make up your mind to settle down and sleep. I promised you a sorter gale to-night, but, bless you——”

This had been said outside the kitchen door, as the four youngsters were about to ascend, but the light-keeper had broken off short to listen. Instantly a bell rang in a chamber near by, and then a voice called out sharply:

“Ship bearin’ down fast—seems disabled—just fired a rocket!”

At the first word the light-keeper had swung round, and was swarming up the ladders. As he went, a low distant boom sounded, even to the youngsters’ ears, above the thunder of the gale. By one consent they hastened in Peter’s wake, ascending to the brightly illuminated lantern.

CHAPTER XIII

A NIGHT OF STORM

THEY found the light-keeper sweeping the sea with his night-glasses; beside him, sturdy Jim Wallis, who was still on duty. The two men exchanged a few crisp words, and then, donning their oilskins, climbed to the trimming-stage and disappeared on to the outer gallery.

“Oh, Morrice,” whispered Joyce, who was pale with this sudden new turn of events, “do you think it’s really going to be a wreck? Go out and see. Those things you wore just now—put them on!”

Morrice, catching at the suggestion, darted away, and a few moments later reappeared in the long boots, oilskins and hat. Having made the others promise to remain where they were, he hastened up and pushed his way through the little doorway.

The fierce winds of the night dashed at him on the instant, and he was crushed backward. However, he stiffened himself and recovered, thrusting his way through the confused bluster to the windward rail of the balcony. Here the two men were leaning over, peering into the uncertain gloom, evidently able to make out something which he himself could not yet perceive.

The second assistant now fought his way out, and Morrice heard the light-keeper say something about “the signal,” putting out a hand, however, to stay Wallis from carrying out the order.

For now, plain enough even for the boy to observe, a fast-approaching dark blur stood out in the chaos of waters

beneath. Shapeless in the first moments, it took swiftly the form of a ship, bowed down before the terrific wind.

“Schooner-rigged!” bawled Wallis, who was crouching at Morrice’s elbow. “But what’s amiss? She ain’t crippled, that I can see. Bare poles,—no, there’s a flap o’ canvas on her fore-mast. Will she——?”

He stopped short, and the light-keeper’s voice boomed in with—“The bar’ll have her; bound to—unless——”

There was a tense, breathless pause, during which the wind roared on its mad career, and the sea tore at the rocks beneath them. The limp, helpless gait of the runaway ship had suggested to the three men of experience a derelict more than anything else—a craft with no one aboard her, flying aimlessly before the storm. But this idea was soon dispelled, for a thin cry presently filtered up to them through the gale. The schooner, passing the Rock diagonally, had met the bar at a more distant point.

“Now,” rapped out Peter, “down we go, Jim! You, Joe, stay behind and man the life-saving gear, but I don’t suppose we’ll need to use it. With luck she should have struck and laid over with an even keel!”

Morrice, thoroughly excited now, followed into the trimming-stage, and, after a brief word with the others gathered there, hastened after Wallis and Peter Cole. The outer door was open, and the men were just descending, having paused to pick up a couple of coils of line.

“You’d best stay there, sir!” bawled Peter, from the Rock; “we may be——”

“I can swim all right,” was Morrice’s answer; and this seemed to satisfy the light-keeper, for he made no further demur.

On this western side, only the lower levels of rock were covered by the wind-harried surf, for it was now the time of ebb tide, and the water had abated, even if the wind had not. Grown accustomed to the darkness, it was now a simple matter for Morrice's young eyes to make out the ghostly bulk of the disabled vessel, as she was held stationary above the slightly phosphorescent sea.

That she was fast on the bar there was no gainsaying—a fact which should have proved of singular service to any on board her. For at this time of ebb, under normal conditions, it would have been easily possible to wade from the lighthouse to the wreck. But now the high wind was lashing the waters, and the task was more perilous.

One of the ropes they had brought was rapidly fastened about Wallis's body, and he started forthwith to brave the foaming shallows. Apparently the water presented very little difficulty compared with the wind, and it was the latter with which he was actually called upon to do battle. Within a few minutes he encountered a swimming figure, and assisted it to land. Farther behind, two more fought through the troubled water, the one being assisted by the other.

As these three, considerably exhausted, gained the Rock, and the light-keepers were busy receiving them, Morrice noticed a fourth white face labouring through the far, swirling currents. As well as the boy could judge, in the murky light, the owner of these dimly-seen features was wading, not swimming—the sea being most of the time up to his shoulders. Then, even as he was gaining the higher reach of the sand, his body emerging above the waist, there was a sudden rush upwards of the water, and a back-breaking wave

created by the wind. Two arms shot wildly aloft, and the face was gone!

There had been not the slightest cry, so that nothing had been noticed by the bustling group of men on shore. Without pausing to inform them, Morrice tugged off the great sea-boots and slipped out of the oilskins—a swift process, for the borrowed gear was three sizes too roomy for him. Wading full into the sea, as far as he could, he plunged off towards the spot where he had seen the face disappear.

Morrice had said that he was a swimmer, and as a matter of fact he was quite a strong one, having swum from his early childhood. And this was indeed well, for never before had he been in such a conflicting maze of water as that in which he found himself striving now. He was, indeed, in those “mad currents” which had first distressed the *Merry Maid* on the previous afternoon.

But now it was night; and there was the wind, but no sign of what he sought! He had thought of diving; but, once immersed, the whole thing resolved itself into a fight to keep his head above the surface. Within a minute, indeed, he was breathless, and he seemed to be losing all sense of outward things, when his arm struck dully against some floating object.

Vaguely, Morrice supposed that this was what he searched for, and, taking a grip of it, he fought his way back. His feet touched solid ground, and dimly he remembered feeling his legs, and taking three burdened strides. Then he stumbled forward, and a pair of brawny arms closed about him.

When Morrice next opened his eyes he found himself in the lighthouse kitchen, before a fire which blazed cheerfully

in the well-kept grate. He appeared to be swathed in blankets; at his head was Peter Cole, beside him knelt Joyce.

The little girl's winsome face sparkled to life as Morrice struggled about and very deliberately sat up, and to Joyce's cry of delight was added those of the other treasure hunters who pressed around.

"Well, sir, an' how's the feelin'?" demanded the gruff, kindly tones of Peter Cole.

"I'm all right, thanks. Am I——oh, I remember! How about that other chap—did you get him in as well?"

"Oh, yes; here he is," declared Peter, jerking his thumb; and to Morrice's newly awakened senses the room seemed to be full of people.

He learnt the story by degrees; all there was to learn. The schooner was the *Norderney*, manned by foreigners whose names Peter did not propose to pronounce. They had set out from Plymouth short-handed, having aboard only three of the regular crew—two men and a boy. They carried one passenger, a British seaman home on leave, named Luff.

Morrice was a good deal of a hero, for it was agreed beyond dispute that he had saved the life of the big, shock-headed boy of about his own age, who came forward sheepishly and thanked him in guttural phrases. The others congratulated him too; and the English seaman from the schooner, a well-knit individual with bronzed face and steady eyes, wrung him admiringly by the hand.

"Pleased to know you, sir," he said bluntly.

Then, of course, came the renewed problem of sleeping space, for never before had the Bar Rock Lighthouse been called upon to accommodate so many as eight unexpected

guests! However, Mr. Cole “figured it out” presently, and decided that the previous arrangement need not be altered, save slightly in the case of the lower bedroom. And, “to match things up,” he would require two people to occupy those bunks in the old *Curlew*.

These last, finally, fell to the British sailor, George Luff, and Morrice. The latter’s faintness had clearly been due to passing exhaustion only, and he showed beyond argument that he was well worthy to be counted among the able-bodied. Therefore, when he had seen Joyce and the others safely disposed, he took the lantern which Peter handed him, descended the outer rungs, and led the way to the ancient *Curlew*.

The force of the gale had diminished surprisingly, and Luff, pausing on the *Curlew*’s ladder, pointed up to the starry sky. “By sunrise,” he predicted, “this little blow will be all over and done with, and very soon, mayhap, it’ll be shining weather again. It’s queer, and it’s wonderful. I’ve been on the ocean some seventeen years, but I’ve never ceased to marvel at it yet.”

Morrice felt little like sleep, and in the snug cabin below he tried to draw out his newfound friend as to life in the Navy. But Luff, evidently, was by nature as silent as most sailor-men, and the boy’s efforts did not meet with much response. Luff gave Morrice the choice of bunks, and then stolidly “turned in.”

Morrice, though really not particular about it, had elected to sleep in the upper bunk, and when the light was extinguished he lay musing upon the many events of that eventful day. His last thoughts were of the two boxes of “treasure” which, till that afternoon, had lain concealed so

long in this very cabin. What was the explanation of it all? Would they ever——?

Thus, lazily pondering, he slipped into a light doze, and it is possible that the doze merged into perfect slumber. However that may be, he came back through the doze again to wakefulness, breathing steadily on without opening his eyes, wondering in drowsy uncertainty if some slight sound had disturbed him. Then, somehow—still vaguely—he remembered the sound; it must have been the striking of a match. At that point the boy slowly opened his eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN MORRICE WOKE UP

MORRICE did not stir. He was lying so that he faced the fore-part of the cabin and he saw that his friend of the lower bunk, getting out, had re-lit the lantern, bearing it softly to the bulkhead. The action was deliberate. He stopped till he had found the cross which was cut in the plank, and then he carefully set down the lantern on one side.

Luff next attempted, with his fingers, to work the board up. In that he failed, though the light-keeper's treatment must have left it very loose. Presently, however, a stout sailor's knife came to the task, and within a few seconds the board was being lifted free.

This much achieved, the sailor bent down and inserted his free arm, feeling to right and left beneath. Later, to satisfy himself thoroughly, he let in the lantern, moving it this way and that. Then, evidently convinced that what he sought for was no longer there, he eased the plank softly in its place, returned the light to the table, and blew it out. After that Morrice heard him snuggling into his berth.

Morrice's feeling, at that moment, may perhaps be guessed at, for the sailor in the bunk below had, beyond all shadow of doubt, been groping for those two cases of ingots which had been removed only a few hours before! Here, then, driven upon the Rock by chance, was evidently someone who was concerned with that secret which he—Morrice—and the others were so anxious to solve!

Very weary, Morrice soon slept again, and he awoke to a bright stream of sunshine which came down into the little

cabin from above. He jumped out briskly, wondering what time it was, and noticed at once that the lower bunk was vacant.

In a few minutes the boy had quitted the cabin and was descending upon the Rock outside. A delightfully fresh breeze struck across his face, but it was clear that Luff's prophecy had come true: the storm had quite abated, and the dome of sky above was almost perfectly cloudless.

Morrice's first concern as he crossed to the lighthouse was to get a view of the stranded schooner, and he was astonished beyond measure to find that there was no sign of it to be seen. The water was well up over the western arm of the bar, and there was no hint of a sailing ship anywhere!

Morrice's sensations, at that moment, must have been something like Rip Van Winkle's, who slept for twenty years and awoke to find the world quite a changed sort of place! Certainly the boy was beginning to wonder how much he might have dreamt, when a cheery, familiar voice addressed him from near at hand:

"Oh, so there you are, sir! Well, you've had a nice long rest an' no mistake. It's nearly ten o'clock."

Mr. Peter Cole was standing in the door of the lighthouse.

"But—where's the schooner—the wreck?" cried Morrice.

Peter laughed aloud. "She warn't no wreck, sir, thanks to the bar; the old sandheap seems to have done good service for once. This morning's tide lifted her off, and she's made around now for Burley Harbour with all aboard."

Morrice, who had expected to see the ship perhaps partly broken up, was utterly surprised at this news, and he asked

quickly if the English sailor, Luff, had gone along with the others.

“Oh, yes, sir—he was awake betimes, and a right handy young man he proved himself in making the craft shipshape. From what he tells me, the schooner would never have got out of hand if the proper precautions had been taken earlier. But come along, sir, the rest of your party are busy about breakfast, and you’d best be joining them.”

None the worse for all that had occurred, the four from the Grange thus met together again, and Peter promised that Jim Wallis should take them ashore during the forenoon. It was something short of twelve o’clock when they bade the light-keeper a hearty farewell, having left their own boat to be patched up and conveyed across later.

They found good Mrs. Newton, as indeed they had quite expected to find her, overwhelmed with concern on their behalf; and their first fifteen minutes, on reaching home, were occupied in assuring her again and again that she need not have bothered on their account.

It was only by adopting this manner that they could succeed in pacifying the good lady, and she maintained that she would “never know a moment’s peace till it was all over”—meaning, of course, till the young Hardings’ parents had returned and were once more in command.

The housekeeper insisted on ordering a meal for the truants at once; and, knowing how it would reassure her if they could prove that their appetites were still good, they all did very hearty justice to the repast. After all, there is nothing like the adventurous life to make one really hungry.

A council of four, in the playroom, followed as a matter of course, and Morrice started the subject of the schooner’s

early departure from the vicinity of the Bar Rock. Tony and Jack, it seemed, had both been awake in time to see it got off.

“I only wish that you had come to the old *Curlew* and roused me up,” said Morrice.

“Well, we did visit you,” was Tony’s answer. “But Mr. Cole had advised us not to disturb you if you happened still to be asleep, so, of course, we left you in peace.”

“It’s an awful nuisance; if I had happened to be about in time, the whole mystery of those hidden boxes might have been cleared up.”

They all stared at him. “Whatever do you mean?” was demanded.

“I mean that that English sailor, George Luff, knows something about what is puzzling us so much; he knew, at all events, of the two boxes concealed on the *Curlew*!”

Then Morrice told of what had occurred in the night, and the others began to make all sorts of eager suggestions.

“Oh, Morrice,” cried Joyce, “what a pity, after what you say, that you didn’t speak to the sailor at once and tell him what you knew!”

“Well, why not try to find him now?” demanded Jack eagerly. “That schooner, you know, the *Norderday*, was putting into Burley Harbour, and it will have to stay a day or two to get repaired. Quite likely this Mr. Luff is still aboard. He struck me as being quite a decent sort of fellow, and there can’t be any harm in telling him what we know.”

This proposal was received with general favour, and they set forth at once for the cliff road to the harbour, having first convinced the housekeeper that they would keep rigidly out of mischief and return in good time for tea.

However, the little excursion had no fruitful result. The *Norderney* was docked for repairs, and they had no difficulty in finding her; but the skipper, in broken English, was able only to inform them that Mr. Luff, the sailor whom they sought, had left the schooner directly she had put in. He had paid what had been agreed upon for his passage to Plymouth, and the speaker did not expect to see him again.

“It seems a fearful pity,” said Tony, as the four walked back, “to have just missed a chance to clear up the mystery. Still, if Luff hangs about in this district, there is a fair hope of our meeting him again.”

“And meanwhile,” observed Jack, “we can just find out those other papers and collect the rest of the treasure.”

CHAPTER XV

MORRICE SEES A LIGHT

THE following day was a Sunday, and, ceasing for a while to be adventurers, our four young friends attended the rugged old church which was perched on a hill behind the harbour, and which seemed as staunch as the grey cliffs which it overlooked.

After service the three boys lingered by the red lich-gate, while Joyce exchanged greetings with a girl friend from Smalton House, a large building on the far side of Westmoor. The sight of Captain Gawler, of Farbrook Hall, turning out through the gateway, perturbed our young friends a little; but he gave them a friendly nod, and then, seeing Joyce, raised his hat.

Tony regarded the straight, retreating back, and then sharply whispered, "Was that——"

"Yes," came Morrice's answer, "the owner of Farbrook Woods! He looked civil enough, didn't he? I hope he won't turn rusty over that trespassing affair, for if he does it'll mean a sure row with dad."

"Well, he's a gentleman, anyhow," said Jack; "he wouldn't be likely to say things to us on a Sunday, even if he meant to later on. It rather——"

But at that moment Joyce joined them, and the four turned to walk back.

"I've got an invitation from Nancy Forde," announced Joyce. "She's staying with her aunt at Burley to-day, and

that's how it is she's been to church. She wants us to come out and spend a day at Smalton."

"Oh, no, thanks!" burst out Jack; "no 'visiting' for us! Time's too precious."

"But I don't see how we can refuse!" protested Joyce. "Besides, Tony would like to see Smalton. They've got a palm-house and an orangery——"

"Pooh! who cares?" said the graceless Jack. "Tony doesn't want to gaze at any orangeries. He wants to go treasure hunting!"

"Half a minute, though," put in Morrice. "Was the invitation a haphazard one of Miss Nancy's, or did her mother suggest it?"

"Yes, it was from Mrs. Forde. Bob is at home, and as you and Tony were such chums with him at Reddington, she thought you'd like to meet him."

"Oh, rather," agreed Tony. "Bob Forde was a ripping old stick."

"Well, then," pursued Joyce, grateful for Tony's support, "we'd really better try to arrange it. Any day will do, Nancy says, but Tuesday will be the most convenient, and, if we like, we can stay the night."

"We don't want to stay the night!" cut in young Jack, who disliked "visiting" even more than decimal fractions. "If we've got to go we'll just drop in and drop out again."

"Well, we can settle it on Tuesday," summed up Morrice. "It seems to be a sort of open invitation, so we needn't worry. After all, it's a jolly long way, and when we get there we may all be very content to stay the night."

"Not I!" persisted Jack.

On the morrow, however, a new consideration made every one of them quite eager for the proposed jaunt, for Tony began the week well by finding out the key to another of those magic sentences. In this case, however, half the sentence was missing, for it was the paper of which Jack had destroyed one portion.

The fragment remaining appeared as follows:

“ofz pg ljudifo
bmupo, pof cpy.”

Tony, guided by the idea that the last two groups of letters probably stood for “one box,” discovered presently that, for the real letter, the next one to it in the alphabet had been substituted in every case—*b* for *a*, *c* for *b*, *d* for *c*, and so on. By this means what was left of the sentence became:

“*ney of kitchen
alton, one box.*”

Now, this, of course, did not at first seem very promising; indeed, it was not much less puzzling than it had been before! They first dealt with “ney of kitchen,” trying to think of something likely to belong to a kitchen which would end with “ney,” and it was quite a long time before Joyce hit upon “chimney.”

“That’s it!” cried Tony, “you’ve got it, for a guinea! And it doesn’t surprise me, either, for I have heard before of things being hidden in chimneys. Not common, present-day chimneys, of course, but the sort you find in old-fashioned houses, built above hearths.”

“I know,” chimed in Joyce; “they’ve got one of that sort at Smalton, the house which we are going to to-morrow. It was shown me when I was there last year. It’s ever so broad at the bottom; and, by peeping up it, you can see the daylight quite plainly. I should think it’s——”

But Tony jumped excitedly to his feet. “What if it should be *there!*” he cried.

“Do you mean——”

Tony pointed at the paper. “Don’t you see,” he rushed on, “the line below is ‘alton, one box.’ The whole sentence might have read, ‘Hidden in the chimney of kitchen at Smalton, one box!’ ”

“Goodness!” Morrice exclaimed, “that’s an awfully cute suggestion, Tony; I wonder if it can possibly be correct! Yet I don’t see how it can. The Fordes have lived at Smalton for quite four or five years, and before that the place was occupied by somebody else. In fact, I can never remember its being empty, so how can anyone possibly have got in there to hide something in the chimney? Ha, ha! It sounds absurd, doesn’t it?”

“It all seems absurd to me,” put in Jack. “How could anything in the way of a biggish box be placed in a chimney at all? I mean—how might it be made to stay there?”

“Depends on the chimney,” declared Tony. “Heaps of those really old smoke-holes have niches or deep shelves just a little way up. But, look here: who lived at Smalton before your friends the Fordes took it?”

It was Joyce’s turn to get excited. “Why, old Mr. Blackwood!” cried she. “Oh, Tony,” she added, catching at her cousin’s arm, “we may now be on the point of clearing things up at last! Anyhow, this Mr. Blackwood was the

oddest man in the world; he used to live almost alone, and he was reported to have heaps and heaps of money, although nobody ever knew for certain. Wasn't that so, Morrice?"

"That's right enough. But are you trying to make out——"

"I'm saying that all those hidden boxes may have belonged to him! Anyhow, he *was* queer, and perhaps he took it into his head to hide them in all sorts of scattered places, putting one box up his own kitchen chimney. Of course, I know it sounds a little silly, but then the whole thing is dreadfully mixed up."

"Well, I'm bound to say that there may be something in the idea," allowed the elder brother; "anyhow, it rather settles about our going to Smalton to-morrow, eh?"

"Rather!" exclaimed Jack, thoroughly eager now; "we'll be there right enough. We might let Bob Forde into the affair, and get him to smuggle us down to the kitchen."

However, before the morrow dawned, something else was to happen which would provide another link to the chain of mystery.

We have not, as yet, found cause to describe Burley Grange itself, but we must now give some idea of how it was placed.

The drive was not a long one, because the house did not lie back so very far from the road; and the one lodge, curiously enough, did not stand at the entrance gates, but was built in a sort of low fir coppice which fronted the house across the open lawn.

Now this lodge, creeper-covered, was regarded as a picturesque possession rather than as a place to live in, for it had not been tenanted since Mr. Harding's entrance at the Grange, and was not therefore in the best of order. And when

Morrice, happening to awake on Monday night, fancied he saw a light in that old lodge, he naturally wondered what was happening! Morrice could see the plantation as he lay in bed, between the curtains of his window, but to obtain a better view he slipped out and moved very quickly across the room.

For a moment he imagined that his fancy must have misled him, for the night was rather dark, and he found nothing to see, across the lawn, but the clustering dimness of the firs.

As he waited, however, a soft needle of light filtered through for a second and was gone. There could be only one explanation of this: there must be a glow of some sort in an upper window of the lodge, and the gentle stirring of the intervening branches, now and again, was allowing a ray to be seen.

What could be the meaning of it? Certainly the old dwelling was quite empty and deserted; it contained not the meanest object for an ill-disposed person to come and steal! Yet—there was the light, right enough—flashing through again as the screen of foliage was moved by the scanty breeze.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SECRET OF THE LODGE

IT was a moment which seemed to demand prompt action, but not a moment for the rest of the house to be disturbed.

Except Tony. Tony might prove useful, but Master Jack was too small and too rash to tackle this sort of thing. Without waiting to dress, Morrice stole along to his cousin's bedroom and cautiously woke him up.

A few brief words sufficed. "Dress quickly and softly," was Morrice's whisper; "we must do this without scaring the rest. It seems a most odd thing, and we ought to get to the bottom of it somehow. Wait at my door as you come along, and we'll go out together."

It is surprising how sharply a boy can get dressed when there is something to make him really eager, and in six minutes the two cousins emerged from the side of the Grange and tiptoed noiselessly across the matted turf.

Morrice led the way cautiously between the trees, movement being simple owing to the fact that there was no trailing undergrowth to ensnare their feet. Also, they were able to take nearly a straight course, their hearts beating faster as they perceived that it was no will-o'-the-wisp which they pursued.

Gaining the margin of the small open space wherein the lodge was built, they had directly before them the black bulk of it, and the one glowing upper window. It was a squat little casement, with lozenge-shaped panes, and not, indeed, so very far from the ground, for the cottage was quite a low one. The two boys, as they halted, scarce knowing how best to act,

caught the fragrance of the honeysuckle which flowered about its walls.

“We must do something,” muttered Tony.

Morrice shuffled in the long grass of the clearing, and glanced back. “Look,” he whispered, “this fir! If I can only climb up it I shall get a good view straight into the room.”

“Fine notion!” approved the other; “here, I’ll give you a start.”

Receiving a first hoist, Morrice swung up deftly, gaining the first low branch without mishap and looking around. The position was favourable, but scarcely high enough to see down into the room. Morrice peered aloft. There were several forks, dimly marked, just above his head, and he reached out an arm to pull himself up. He could not see, of course, that the offshoot was a dead one, and next instant there was a crack which rang upon the quiet night with a noise far louder than a pistol-shot!

The decayed fork came away in Morrice’s hand, thudding to the grass beneath. His one swift glance towards the casement showed him a darting shadow and no more. He kept to his perch in bewilderment for a few moments, and then slid off to the ground.

Tony was not there, but he heard his voice from the other side of the lodge and sprang round to join him. The cousin, as a matter of fact, was returning, but he caught now at Morrice’s sleeve, and pointed eagerly at a bottom casement which stood open.

“Has he—did he—” began Morrice breathlessly.

“Yes—he’s gone! Bother, what a sell! Somehow, when I heard that branch snap, I quite expected that the light would

go out, and while I waited, staring, I heard a sudden swishing of grass on this side. He, whoever it was, had hopped through the window and was scooting away!”

“You saw him?”

“No, I just heard his footfalls, but I can’t say exactly which way he went. Towards the gates, I expect. Here, shall we _____”

“Yes, come on; but stick close together!”

From the lodge-clearing to the carriage-sweep there was a narrow, overgrown path, and along this the two boys raced. Gaining the drive, they swerved to the right and sped along till the entrance-gates were reached. But these were closed and safely fastened, showing no sign of having been recently opened. However, there were other and quieter means by which a fugitive might escape to the road without pausing to open the heavy iron portals.

The two boys, warmed up now to the situation, searched this way and that, but without result. Finally they determined to make their way back to the lodge, where they remembered the intruder had left his light burning.

Climbing through the open lower casement, they made cautious use of a box of matches which Morrice had the forethought to bring with him. With like caution, they mounted the narrow, dusty stairs which gave on to what was practically the only bedroom, the one other apartment above stairs being little more than a cupboard.

In one corner of the bare bedroom, then, upon the floor, they found the light which had lured them thither. It was an old-fashioned horn lantern, such as is now used only by farmers and village people, the form of candle being what is called a “dip.”

Tony picked up the lantern by its carrying-ring, and began forthwith to examine the place closely, with the idea of discovering the intruder's late intentions. But, whatever they had been, it was clear that he had left no sign of them.

Tony returned to the point where the lantern had been placed and gave that a specially careful scrutiny. Here there was a supporting pillar, jutting out after the fashion of a buttress, and creating, with the natural corner of the room, a kind of small recess. The ceiling was a timber one, apparently of oak, and a small square was noticeable in it, partly marked off by the niche described.

Tony raised the lantern. "That," he said, "looks as if it might be forced up—a sort of trap-door. Try! I think you can reach."

Morrice could reach well enough to get his palms flat against the boards, but all his upward pushing was of no avail. "No," he panted presently; "it's a part of the ceiling, or else it's tightly fixed. Anyhow, it isn't to be shifted."

But the other wasn't quite satisfied. "Tell you what," he said, "we'll come again in the morning, and have another look at it by daylight. But now, I suppose, we might as well be getting back."

They quitted the little place by the way they had entered. The catch of the downstairs casement had been eaten through with rust, so they could only pull the frame close and leave it so.

"Now for as much sleep as we're lucky enough to get," observed Morrice, laughing softly.

However, they both slumbered sufficiently during the remainder of the night to be beaten by Jack and Joyce in the getting-up process. The last-named couple, indeed, were out

upon the lawn with a tennis ball by seven o'clock, employing their early morning energies in a game of catch.

"Hullo, old slowcoach!" shouted Jack, aiming the ball at Tony's head when that youth appeared at his bedroom window; "this is the great day when we go treasure-hunting at Smalton, and don't you forget it! Are you going to get up to-day, or not?"

"Don't know. Anyhow, Morrice and I have been up a lot of the night, and that makes a difference. You wait till you hear what you've missed, my boy; real high adventure!"

This sufficiently whetted the appetites of the younger couple, and they spent a restless ten minutes till the others appeared. They were then hurried towards the old lodge, and supplied with the stirring story as they went along.

Tony had brought with him a couple of stools, and when they reached the higher room of the lodge he placed them in the corner, so that both he and Morrice could stand fairly high and put all their combined strength into thrusting against that square patch in the wooden ceiling.

"We shall never succeed," declared Morrice. "If it was ever intended to be moved it is certainly fastened now, though there is no shadow of a bolt."

"That's what puzzles me," answered Tony. "I am sure by the look of it that it was once *meant* to be moved, and that it must open on to the space between this ceiling and the roof."

"Perhaps something very heavy has been put upon it, to prevent it from being opened," suggested Joyce.

"Quite likely, or it may be fastened down. But how did the person who nailed it so, or put a weight upon it, himself get

out? He must have known of some other way. Let's go outside and have a look at the roof."

They trooped out together, standing back from the cottage and walking slowly round it. It was a quaint, pleasant little dwelling, the growth about it, during its unoccupied years, having come to a state of thick profusion. The radiant honeysuckle which clustered above the porch grew round to mingle with the bushivvy which completely covered the other side. The ivy, indeed, had all but cloaked one window and had gone up over a major portion of the red-tiled roof.

"I say," Tony burst out presently, "is there a short ladder which we can bring here? I should like to get up and have a good look at that creeper stuff which half covers the roof."

"Well, you can," Joyce told him. "There's that home-made ladder behind the potting-shed."

This object was promptly fetched, though the other boys could not help thinking that Tony was rather throwing away his energy in carrying the matter so far. However, he had noted that the slope of the roof was a very steep one, which argued that the large space beneath it ought to be accounted for somehow.

Having gained the tiles Tony left the ladder and stepped right in among the ivy, pressing it aside. Scarce ten seconds had passed before he became excitedly active, tearing off great strands and tendrils and flinging them down.

"Here we are!" he shouted; "I've found it! A window in the roof!"

CHAPTER XVII

MORE PUZZLING THAN EVER

MORRICE, at Tony's shout, swarmed up the ladder, closely followed by Jack; while Joyce stood on the grass beneath, calling out to know what sort of window it was.

"Not very big," announced Tony, "but big enough for a man to get through. Sort of skylight. Can't see through it—the glass is thick with dust."

"Can you open it?"

"I'm trying," was the answer. "Here, Morrice, your knife's the weapon for this—the big blade. No, that's the hinge side—over here, look!"

After a deal of persuasion, the frame gave up a little, and Tony pulled while Morris levered yet more. Thus, presently, an opening was effected, and the hinges worked with a dry creak as Tony turned the frame back.

"Good!" he exclaimed, and leaning down he put in head and shoulders. He was heard to utter a little gasp, and then, with some agility, he thrust in his legs and dropped through. Instantly there arose from him a further shout.

"What is it?" gasped Jack, and "*What is it?*" echoed Joyce from the clearing.

"*Treasure!*" was Tony's ringing answer, and by that time Morrice also had swung himself through, to be copied boldly by Jack.

They were in a sort of store-loft, and at one corner was the square trap-door they had tried to raise—firmly screwed

down. This latter fact, however, they discovered later, when some of the old thick dust had been scraped aside.

What riveted their attention at the moment was a bulky, iron-bound case that corresponded in every way with those which had previously been found. A slight lift also showed that it was of the same weight. Undoubtedly they had thus strangely hit upon another box of “treasure”—that wonderful treasure of which there seemed to be no end.

Except for this, there appeared to be little else in the place, save for a few articles of lumber, a rusty fender, some broken stovepipe, and a few lengths of rubber tubing, perished with age. Everything was thickly covered with cobweb and grime. Also there were a few coils of frayed rope; and, having tested one of these, Tony proposed that they should employ it first to raise the newly found chest on to the roof, and then to lower it to the ground.

“And we must look sharp about it,” added Morrice, “for it seems to be coming on to rain.”

The last speaker, being the tallest of the three, hauled himself back to a perch among the ivy, and then helped Jack out as well. These two, their cousin assisting beneath, managed at length to draw the case through, and after that it was not a lengthy undertaking to get it to the ground. The case was conveyed to the Grange forthwith, and space made for it on the top of the other in the playroom cupboard.

“Well,” said Joyce, after breakfast, “it will be nice to get at the meaning of all this—that’s if we ever do! Fancy our having played round that old lodge for years without even guessing what it contained! Really, I don’t think I shall be

surprised at anything that happens after our wonderful adventures of the last few days!”

“That’s just how I feel,” declared Morrice. “Only think of what has happened. Jack starts by picking up some bits of paper in Westmoor Lane, and through them a box of ‘treasure’ is found in Big Cave. During the night, however, that box mysteriously disappears. We track down another one in Farbrook Woods, and two further lots in the cabin of the old *Curlw*. Scarcely have the last couple been made sure of before an English sailor from abroad, named Luff, turns up and has a quiet but disappointing hunt for them. Next, a person unknown comes to the Grange lodge with a farmer’s lantern, evidently hoping to get at a further chest in an attic whose very existence we didn’t know of till this morning!”

Tony laughed aloud. “Yes, it’s great, isn’t it?” he agreed; “simply great! But it seems useless to speculate about it, anyhow; do what I will, I can’t make the pieces fit together. By the way, though, who was the last person to live in that lodge?”

“I can’t be certain. You see, this Grange belongs to Captain Gawler, and he lived here himself until Farbrook Hall became vacant. It was when he went to live there that dad took the Grange—nine years ago. So the last person to occupy the lodge was somebody connected with Gawler.”

“Well,” declared Tony, jumping to his feet, “our best plan is not to bother about it, but simply to go on treasure-hunting. We shan’t do any to-day, I am afraid, for it’s still raining quite fast. It looks as though our trip to Smalton will have to be postponed.”

“Oh, I say!” protested Jack; “who cares for a drop of rain? Let’s go in any case!”

“My dear chap,” said Morrice soberly, “you forget that it’s an eight mile walk! It isn’t a thing to tackle unless the weather’s settled.”

“They say it’s only six miles across the moor,” pursued Jack. “Bob Forde, if you remember, told us about that way when he was here at Christmas. He said that it was perfectly straight walking; you turn on to the heath immediately after passing Galton Farm.”

“Well, we can think about that when we go; I don’t fancy it’ll be to-day.”

However, after raining steadily until past midday, there was a gradual clearing up, and by three o’clock the sun was shining brightly in a perfectly clear sky. Then came the restless hour of uncertainty which most of us have experienced—*shall* we go or *shall* we put it off?

The younger pair were eager as usual, Tony silent and Morrice dubious. It was Mrs. Newton who finally decided the matter.

“Well, it certainly looks bright enough now,” said she, “and I think you might venture if you will promise to stay there the night.”

“Oh, we should have to do that,” responded Morrice, “now that we’ve left it so late.”

“Well, I’m agreeable for one,” urged Jack, ready for any condition which would mean their getting off. “I say, let’s!”

Morrice gave the word, and they bustled off to get ready. But Mrs. Newton had other stipulations: they were each to carry a wrap of some sort, and, if they were not inclined to wait and have tea, they must take a bag of sandwiches.

Finally, after a little grumbling, both wraps and sandwiches were accepted, and the four fared away.

The first half of the journey they completed in steady fashion, though Master Jack repeatedly threatened to “stuff his jolly mackintosh into a hedge and pick it up to-morrow!” However, with the air of a martyr, he continued to bear it along, and even took turns with Tony in shouldering Joyce’s as well. Slung to Morrice’s back was a satchel bulging with provisions.

When they approached Galton Farm, or rather the weedy lane leading down to it, their appetites informed them that it was high time for tea, and a halt for refreshments was voted for.

“After all,” admitted Jack, “that parcel of grub was rather a good notion; it’s queer how peckish a bit of tramping makes one. Let’s go down here and sit on the wall.”

Accordingly, they wheeled off the road and sat down, between neglected hedge-rows. Tony found the wall to be a crumbling, mossy one, bordering a little cress-laden stream which flowed to a mill-wheel, whose shattered bulk still clung to a great mass of masonry, the picturesque remains of a large habitation.

“Hullo!” said Tony, as they perched themselves on the stonework; “is that Galton Farm, then?”

“Yes,” said Joyce, “and it’s haunted. I wouldn’t enter it after nightfall for worlds.”

However, she said it calmly, helping herself from the proffered bag. “It isn’t so much a ruin as it looks from here,” she went on; “the other side of it is in much better order; there are rooms and windows quite complete.”

“Have you ever been through the place, then?”

“Often, all of us have, in the daytime. Oh, Tony, you would like it, it’s ever such a creepy place!”

Tony took a bite at a brawn sandwich. “I vote we have a look at it,” he said.

“Not now,” put in Morrice, “we mustn’t stay for that. But we’ll jog out again another day; it’s a place to explore at one’s leisure. Oh, good business, here’s a flask of milk!”

CHAPTER XVIII

ASTRAY

THEY kicked their heels in contentment against that mouldering wall till it suddenly occurred to someone that the sun was very near the western horizon.

“Goodness,” exclaimed Morrice, leaping off the stonework and tugging out his watch. “Hardly the civil thing, is it, to respond to an invitation of this sort by turning up in the middle of the evening?”

“Oh, no!” agreed Joyce, “do let’s be hurrying on. They’ll think it awful of us!”

“We have an excuse,” grinned Tony; “the weather.”

“Still,” went on Morrice, “I think perhaps we’ll have a look at the moor. That would save us a good two miles.”

Crossing the stream by stepping-stones, they slipped through a thin hedge and found themselves on the actual fringe of Westmoor, glimpses of which they had had constantly during the last two miles of their approach.

It seemed an endless wilderness of heath and bracken and granite-capped tors, beautiful in the mellow light. Two footpaths, meagre yet clearly defined, led away from where they had come through the gap.

“Here they are, just as Bob Forde said,” sang out Jack. “We take the upper one and keep right along it, skirting the foot of Ben Tor on our way.”

“The great thing is to spot Ben Tor,” added Morrice. “Come along. Tired at all, Joyce?”

Joyce said “No!” as witheringly as she could, and tripped ahead. Jack followed just behind, and presently there arose a slight dispute. The little girl, pointing to a lordly peak in the distance, proclaimed “Ben Tor!” but Jack promptly said that it was not.

Morrice, however, supported his sister. “That’s it, right enough,” he asserted.

“Well, I’ve never seen it look like that before,” was the younger boy’s retort. “Of course,” he hastened to add, “I’ve seen it at other times only from the road.”

“That makes all the difference,” said Morrice quietly.

Half an hour’s advance brought them to the foot of the hill spoken of, and Jack drew up to examine it closely. “Well, I suppose you’re right,” he observed, “and yet it seems most queer to me. I should have expected to see less granite; from the road it always looked as though the heather grew nearly to the summit.”

“Well, all the hummocks on the moor look different when one stands beneath them,” said Morrice. “The path seems to prove that we are right, for it skirts the tor just as Bob Forde described it.”

“Yes,” murmured Jack, “that part of it agrees all right. On we go!”

Morrice could not doubt but that they were striking a correct course. If he had not believed the short cut to be a simple and direct one he would not have risked it, for this side of the great Westmoor waste was familiar neither to Jack nor to himself. But, since talking with Bob Forde last Christmas, he had studied one of his father’s maps, and it had seemed to him that to get to Smalton from the point at which

they had joined the moor, they had merely to walk in a straight line.

Therefore, so long as he was satisfied that the peak now far behind them *was* Ben Tor he remained easy in his mind, but when they had trudged onward for more than another hour, without viewing anything ahead but the same sea of purple and green and flinty boulders, he began to experience very real misgivings.

Joyce brought the party to a halt. "I don't know what you think about it," said she, "but it seems to me as though we're marching straight into the heart of the moor instead of 'cutting' across it. Anyhow, if we had stuck to the road we should certainly have been there by now."

The others were silent, thinking deeply; then Jack said doggedly:

"Look here, Morrice, there can be no doubt about it—that wasn't Ben Tor. Which simply means that we must have chosen the wrong track at the very start!"

"But Bob Forde said 'the upper path,' and that was the one we took."

"I'm beginning to think that Bob is a bit of an idiot; anyhow, his notion of 'upper' and 'lower' must be different from ours. He must have meant the other one."

"Then he *is* an idiot," growled Morrice, frowning.

"Which doesn't help *us* much," laughed Tony Wickham. "Look here, we'd better be doing something; the evening is fast closing in and it'll be dark before we know it. Are we to go back, or are we to strike a new course?"

"Oh, goodness, don't let us go back!" cried Joyce. "Anyhow, if we do, we must give up any idea of Smalton. It

would mean arriving there at about ten o'clock, and we should certainly all be nearly dead!"

Joyce spoke in that way because, being a spirited young lady, she would not refer particularly to herself. She always liked it to be understood that what her brothers could do she was quite equal to also; but it was certainly very vexing that her right shoe should have started pinching so horribly since leaving the supposed Ben Tor. However, that was nothing. Only she didn't want to face that long drag back, with a four-mile walk at the end of it.

"Well, let's cut straight across here," said Morrice; "for one thing, it's a fairly sharp rise, and when we get to the crest of it we shall be able to spy out the land."

They made a straight plunge through the twisted, rooty scrub, keeping a sharp look-out right and left for other paths or signs of habitation. On their own side of the moor there were generally sheep to be seen grazing, but here, somehow, there was not even that evidence of life. They were in the midst of a thriving wilderness, made splendid by ling and golden gorse.

Having toiled to the top of the slope they halted again, and then it was that Tony pointed to a fairly lofty tor which uprose about a quarter of a mile to their right.

"Look here," he suggested, "the light won't hold good enough for us to see much longer, so why not shin up that and make a good inspection all round? We are almost bound to see some sign of life from there—a roof, or a church spire, or something like that. It seems to me now that we ought to forget Smalton for a bit, and make sure of getting *somewhere*."

“Just what I’m thinking,” agreed Morrice, in rather a grave voice. He had heard numberless stories about people being lost on Westmoor, and till now he had been somewhat inclined to smile at the idea. It was an uncomfortable thing to reflect that they themselves were to prove how easily it might be done!

Joyce and Jack stayed at the foot of the tor while the other two went up. Scaling was not so simple as it had looked, and the two climbers, when they had succeeded, were bitterly disappointed to find that a rising mist completely shrouded all distant points on every hand—that their efforts, indeed, had availed nothing. The sight of these mists struck a chill at Morrice’s heart. Before they moved again he hastily conferred with Tony as to their best plan of campaign.

“We’re completely out of our bearings,” said he; “it’s not a bit of use to deny that now, and it’s long past eight o’clock. The one object that remains is for us somehow to escape from the moor.”

Tony pondered over that. “This is the north side of it, you said?”

“Yes.”

“And where do you make the north?”

“We ought to have spotted that before the sun set. Let’s see—I should say *there*.”

Tony nodded. “That would be about it. Well, my advice is—strike out in that direction and stick to it. If we meet with a path, so much the better.”

“That sounds like sense. Let’s get down and tell the others.”

Joyce had been silently nursing her foot, and when she arose, hearing the others approach, she discovered that the brief rest had made it all the harder for her to put it to the ground. She paced about a bit, “to get used to it,” while Jack shouted, “Well?”

Morrice and Tony made their report, and the other pair were ready enough to make the recommended move. After a short five minutes’ progress, however, Morrice noticed that Joyce had lost her sprightliness, and she admitted that her foot was “a bit troublesome.” Morrice took her arm and saw to it that speed was slackened somewhat.

CHAPTER XIX

BACK TO THE FARM

BY nine o'clock the mists had closed around them, and after that they had to advance blindly. "I'd give a big box of treasure for a compass now!" said Tony, doggedly cheerful; "but, thank the lucky stars, we aren't doomed to wade through the heath!"

For they had been fortunate, almost at the outset, in chancing upon a faint track following precisely the direction they had fixed themselves. Morrice alone was called upon to scrape through occasional tangled patches, in order to give his sister freer passage.

As for poor Joyce, the burning in her foot was now scarcely bearable, and though she still bit her lip bravely, tears were forced to her eyes by the recurring pain of her efforts. Fog and darkness now cloaked her expression, but a little gasp caused Morrice to pull up and slip his arm about her.

"Look here," he said quickly, "it's worse than you make out. You can scarcely get along."

"It is—rather—horrid," she murmured. "Do you—I think that's a heap of granite; could we—just stop a minute?"

This was the first of many such halts, though it never seemed safe to remain still too long, for the vapour which enclosed them was of the nature of a heavy dew, and the surrounding vegetation was soon drippingly wet. Fortunately, despite these conditions, the night was not actually chill, and there were plenty of wraps available to spread over the scattered crags before Joyce was allowed to rest.

“We *must* keep moving,” Morrice told her kindly; “it is better for you somehow to bear walking than to risk staying still too long.”

“I know, and I’m awfully sorry to be keeping everybody about at such a time.”

Morrice gave her a fond squeeze, and they all went forward again, making long, steady advances. At five minutes after ten, however—the time being ascertained by the striking of matches—they seemed to be no nearer the end than when they took up the supposed northern course more than an hour ago. The boys—especially the two Hardings, who had heard so many disturbing stories about the moor—felt something of despair; but, considering Joyce, they were careful to utter no disheartening word.

It was about ten-thirty when they were all startled by a sudden shadow in their path, followed by a blundering rush. Jack was the first to guess what it was.

“A sheep!” he cried. “Did you notice—a sheep! If this is pasturage ground, it is pretty certain that we are nearing a road of some kind!”

This was really cheering, although, seeing that they failed to observe any further animals, it seemed likely that the one they had disturbed was a strayed creature—something like themselves. The sight of it, however, had happily quickened their pulses, and fifteen minutes later Jack’s tones were raised again.

“A house!” he shouted this time. “Oh, hip, hip, hip——”

And certainly, in the haze ahead, there uprose a great black bulk, though whatever sort of erection it might be, there was certainly no heartening sign of a light about it. Jack had noted this, which accounts for his jubilation being cut short, but

Tony supplied a prompt suggestion—"They've all gone to bed, I expect."

"Or else," added Jack, "the place is empty. Anyhow—Great goodness—do you see? *It's Galton Farm!*"

The sensations of that moment baffle description, for Jack's final announcement was only too thrillingly true. There are few events more disturbingly queer—and we speak from experience—than to grope about an unknown country for hours, and then to find oneself back at the exact point of starting. Thus, at this moment—on the fringe of Westmoor—our four young adventurers entered into a very new experience.

Tony mustered his vocal powers after a specially deep breath. "This beats everything!" he said.

"It does!" agreed Morrice decidedly. "But, anyhow, we have got our bearings. Joyce, *you* must decide now. The nearest house I know is about two miles away, partly across some fields; home, four miles; Smalton, four. Which is it to be? I know your chief need is a long rest."

He knew that because, during the latter stages, he had been almost carrying her, and she freely admitted now that she could journey no farther till she had been given a liberal respite.

"Which settles matters at once," was Morrice's rejoinder. "You said a while back that you wouldn't enter Galton after dark for worlds; but a crocked foot is a different thing. Lead on, Jacker. With your permission, we'll cross the stepping-stones and keep those spooks company!"

He spoke boisterously, partly because he was relieved to have escaped the moor, partly because he wished to banish Joyce's fears by making light of their cause. However, the

little girl had profound faith in her brothers; and at this moment she was far too limp to care or fear about anything. Therefore, with the greatest caution, she was piloted across the stones and the forbidding pile was approached.

How they got in Tony couldn't be quite clear, but Jack struck a match presently to reveal a paved, cavernous space partly blocked with debris. The cousin dimly guessed that this must be a portion of a hall, and beyond was the glimpse of a gaunt staircase. Properly speaking, it was the relic of a staircase, for here and there a step was missing, while all the balusters had gone; at the same time, from a view of the exterior, one could scarcely have expected to find any standing woodwork at all.

However, Tony remembered Joyce's words, that the place was not such a ruin as it looked. Having climbed up both that flight and another, he discovered these words to be correct, for they were now treading a perfectly firm corridor.

Jack and his brother seemed agreed as to the best point to steer for, and the younger boy, igniting a fresh match, presently turned in to the left.

They had reached quite a lofty, solid-looking room, with a timbered ceiling in the old-time style, and showing scarcely any signs of dilapidation. The fact that most of the window-glass was gone did not matter, for a pair of stout shutters still served their turn. All this, of course, was not revealed at once; for the glow of Jack's match merely lasted long enough to guide them to a cosy corner of which he seemed to know.

"Here we are!" he said. "Welcome to Galton! Sorry there are no chairs."

They spread their rainproofs; for, having nothing else to sit upon, they must needs sit upon the floor. The least agreeable

prospect was that of having to be in total darkness; but this drawback was removed by a happy discovery. Tony, having some wax matches of his own, had started round on a tour of inspection, and he was vastly interested to descry a couple of immense cupboards, one on either side of the window, but whose higher shelves were quite out of reach.

Tony's inquiring mind would not be content till he had clambered on to the lowermost shelves, with the object of finding out what the loftier ones were like. Quite how he managed it the others could not rightly say, but certain it is that he presently came thumping back to the floor with a rattle and a shout.

"What is it?" was the sharp query from Morrice.

There was a scratch, a slow spurting of flame, and Tony advanced with a lighted piece of candle some three inches long.

"Hooray!" cried the others, for that seemed to be the one thing needful.

Fortunately, Mrs. Newton, with her usual generous thought, had provided them with many more sandwiches than they could dispose of at five o'clock, the result being that half a dozen paper packets still lurked in the school-bag. The milk report was not so good, for there was only enough of that to fill the nickel cup once. However, having presented Joyce with this, Morrice made his way down, and refilled the flask from the stream.

"I don't know much about this water," he said, "but Jack and I have swallowed it before with no ill effects. Here you are, Tony!"

"Tastes topping," said Tony. "You might have brought up some watercress!"

Jack laughed. "We haven't any salt," he said. "I say, though, these sandwiches are proper—heaps better than they seemed at tea-time. For my part," he added, leaning back, "I'm quite comfortable till morning!"

Morrice, as a matter of fact, had already begun to think seriously of this idea. Joyce was thoroughly tired out, and it seemed cruel to be talking of going on. It was long past eleven o'clock. Their arrival at the Grange some time after midnight would scare Mrs. Newton, and indeed the whole household, very nearly out of their wits. On the other hand, they were not expected back, and there would therefore be no anxiety if they did not arrive.

"What do you think about it, Joyce?" he asked.

Joyce, propped against his arm, seemed almost too drowsy to reply. With an effort, she brushed back her hair and opened her eyes. "I don't want to move," she admitted, with a faint smile.

"Then here we stay. You aren't chilly?"

She shook her head. Nevertheless, Morrice covered her up with another wrap; and the satchel, at Tony's suggestion, was stuffed with handkerchiefs and other contributions to form a pillow. The boys, in similar ways, made use of the remaining wraps; and Tony, remarking that they had better save it, extinguished what was left of his precious candle.

They were very spent adventurers, and though there were some remarks exchanged in undertones, it may be said that they all went out with the candle. All heedless of the hardness of their couch, they slept.

CHAPTER XX

TRACKING THE “GHOST”

“MORRICE! Morrice!”

Morrice opened his eyes to complete darkness, and it was then that he knew how unyielding his bed was! He remembered things in a flash, and he guessed also that the sharp whisper in his ear must have been Jack’s.

“What’s the trouble?” he mumbled sleepily.

“*Ssh!* There’s somebody in the house besides ourselves! Hush!”

Morrice grasped that more clearly, and struggled to sit up. Jack’s whisper continued.

“It isn’t my fancy; somebody, I believe, has been in this very room; a board squawked horribly and sort of roused me. Anyhow, I am certain that someone was moving in the corridor, and I believe he’s now downstairs. Listen!”

Morrice listened, but he could hear nothing whatever save the low gurgle of water as the stream washed along the lower walls.

“Rubbish!” was his retort; but he arose to his feet, and moved carefully towards where he supposed the door to be. Jack as cautiously followed him, and together they stood peering into the draughty corridor. Suddenly the younger boy grasped tightly at his brother’s arm, and Morrice became very much alert.

There had certainly been some disturbance below—a stumbling movement, followed by a slaty rattle, as if some loose stone had been disturbed by a person scrambling over

it. Following that were two or three distinct footfalls, and then—silence again.

Morrice was frankly a little bit perturbed, and he instantly blamed himself for not having explored the place overnight, by way of making sure that other wanderers had not arrived before themselves and entered into possession. The rambling old place certainly offered a great opportunity to anyone in need of a temporary shelter.

“What are we to do?” quavered Jack’s voice again.

“Find out who it is!” whispered back Morrice at once. He tried to say this stoutly, but it seemed clear to him that they could not attempt to sleep again until they knew who their fellow-tenant might be. “I think you’re right,” he added; “there—there seems to be somebody down below. Come along; we’ll go together and have a look.”

“Shall I rouse Tony and get him to come as well?”

“No—that won’t do. If Joyce should happen to wake and not hear anyone near she’d be awfully scared. You and I—but quietly!”

Creeping along the corridor, they furtively descended the stairs, pausing on the lower flight to listen. Young Jack, plainly enough, could distinguish his own heart thumps; but there was nothing else save the silvery tinkle of the stream outside.

“W—we ought to have brought that bit of candle,” he began; but Morrice nudged him to be silent, stepping down to the level of the flagged hall. He was just about to pass into the open, when he happened to catch a faint glimmer far up the side-passage—a passage which led to the more tumble-down portion at the rear.

For a moment Morrice hesitated, then stole along in that direction. Twice they had a glimpse of the outer night through gaping cracks in the masonry; and many times they paused with stifled breath, for smooth progress was impossible here, especially in the darkness.

But close at hand now was a shining thread of light, proceeding—as they were both aware—from the dismantled kitchen. Here, curiously enough, the door had survived, and they moved up to find it half closed. They peered between the hinges, but could see nothing distinctly. Only they were certain now that somebody was shuffling about inside.

It would have taken a good deal of courage to have marched boldly in, and it is not to be wondered at that Morrice lingered a while in the hope of finding out what the unknown person was busy about. Undoubtedly he was busy, and at work, probably, in a keen current of air, for twice the light had to be relit. Finally, a tremendous commotion was heard—a sort of miniature avalanche—which caused both boys to jump from where they stood. In the throbbing quiet which ensued a cloud of dust assailed their nostrils, and then a voice within said distinctly:

“Whew! That was a near thing!”

Jack, at the moment of starting aside, had grabbed his brother’s sleeve, but now his clasp relaxed, and he cried out: “*Tony!*”

Thrusting open the door, they marched in together, and a flicker of match-light shot up in the well of gloom before them. It was Tony right enough; they could just see his scared features in the tiny circle of radiance.

“Goodness, old man,” burst out Morrice, “whatever are you up to? It’s rather a joke, though. We imagined you to be

safe asleep in the room we've just left; we thought we were on the track of a ghost! What on earth could have brought you down here?"

Tony recovered himself. "If I can only find that jolly candle," he declared, "I'll soon let you see. Great Cæsar, wasn't that a racket! I came very near to being buried. Ah, here we are! *Now* you'll begin to understand."



“ ‘Goodness, old man,’ burst out Morrice, ‘whatever are you up to?’ ”

The pale gleam of the candle fell on a muddle of stone and dislodged mortar, in the midst of which, like a half-sunken ship, there was cradled a four-cornered wooden object. This, on nearer inspection, proved to be a box, and a box of the sort which they had cause now to know particularly well.

“*Treasure!*” said Jack in amazement; “where—wherever did that come from?”

“It came down the chimney,” answered Tony, and then chuckled delightedly at the blank wonder which appeared on the faces of both. “Haven’t you guessed it yet?” he ran on; “don’t you see the meaning of it?”

They were both obliged to shake their heads.

“Well, remember the message on the torn piece of paper; it said—‘ ’alton, one box.’ We thought of ‘Smalton,’ and we were going to inquire about the chimney of the kitchen there; but just now I somehow woke up suddenly and said to myself, ‘It’s Galton for a guinea!’ The correct reading should be, ‘*Hidden in chimney of kitchen at Galton, one box!*’ ”

The Hardings, thus enlightened, stared at each other for a moment, and then back at their cousin. “Tony,” said Morrice solemnly, “you’re a genius.”

Tony laughed again. “Not a bit of it,” answered he; “the fact is, we have always spoken of the place as ‘Galton Farm,’ and that must rather have put us off the scent. Once I had found the kitchen, I soon found the box; but I had a fearful job to get it down. The wind in the chimney kept blowing the candle out, and when I *did* persuade the box to shift I brought with it most of the ledge upon which it stood. But, I say,” he broke off suddenly, “we’re forgetting that Joyce is alone upstairs. If she——”

“Jove, yes!” was the swift response. “Here, that will be all right where it is till the morning—let’s all get back at once!”

CHAPTER XXI

JACK'S EXCURSION

WITH the dawn came a solemn council of four. Joyce, despite all the discomfort, had scarcely stirred throughout the night, and she awoke much refreshed—almost her usual healthy young self. Of course, they were all sensible of a certain unwonted stiffness, but this began to pass as soon as they moved about.

Tony set the example of going down and dashing his face vigorously with water from the sparkling stream. He said that that was what explorers did when travelling in wild places, and it certainly had an enlivening effect.

Then came the council. Joyce's foot was a great deal better, and she announced herself quite equal to a walk of four miles. Indeed, it was she who suggested that they should go on to Smalton forthwith!

"What?" laughed Morrice; "you mean get there in time for breakfast? No, I'm afraid that wouldn't do at all."

"Why not? Nancy said, 'Come and spend a whole day with us.' It would only be acting up to the invitation! Also, she said, 'If you can't come on Tuesday, come on Wednesday.' "

Morrice shook his head.

"For one thing," he said, "I don't think you could walk as far as Smalton; in fact, with that swollen foot, you oughtn't to walk at all. I wish——"

It really seemed as though Morrice's wish were going to be fulfilled before he uttered it. He had been about to say that it would be the best plan for them to try to get "a lift," and now

upon their ears, from the roadway above, there sounded the rattle of wheels.

“I’ll see what it is,” cried Jack, and darted off; but before he was half-way up the grassy lane he realized that the vehicle was approaching *from* Burley instead of going towards it. The others remained where they had been talking, by the wall upon which they had rested yesterday, and they waited there now till Jack came scampering back.

“Here’s a chance!” he announced. “It’s one of Mr. Sampson’s carts—the man says he is going to Smalton House now!”

“H’m,” said Morrice. “It’ll be awful cheek landing there at such an hour, but I suppose we oughtn’t to let the opportunity slip. Is the driver willing to take us?”

“Yes, he says so; he’s waiting. But look here: what about the treasure? Wouldn’t it be a good plan to leave it where it is—nobody is likely to spot it—and call for it on the way back? Tell you what—I’m not keen on Smalton now, and I think, instead, it would be a jolly good plan for me to go back to the Grange alone and tell Redwood to have the dog-cart ready at two o’clock. He will then fetch you three from Smalton House, and you’ll just tell him to pull up here and get the chest aboard.”

Morrice approved of all this.

“Good notion,” he said. “And you’ll be able to explain things to Mrs. Newton. You don’t mind?”

“Not likely!” chuckled the other, rejoiced at having thus escaped a “visit.” “But do hurry up; that cart will be off without you.”

Tony whispered something to Jack just as the vehicle drove away, and Jack, as a result, visited the Galton kitchen at once and managed to pile up the scattered rubble, so as entirely to conceal the “treasure” last disclosed. After that he made haste home, meeting the housekeeper in the hall, and catching her by either arm.

“Good morning, Mrs. Newton!” he began boisterously. “But whatever makes you look so scared? The others are having breakfast at Smalton. I’ve come home because I’m ferociously hungry, and because I prefer to eat my big meals here!”

All of which was strictly true, so far as it went; though, towards the end of breakfast, he gently unfolded the details, leaving the poor lady affrighted.

“Two things I am thankful for,” she murmured then, pushing back her plate; “to-morrow your parents will be back, and next month Miss Joyce will be going to a proper school.”

“And won’t she jolly soon be sick of it!” chuckled Jack, tilting his chair. “Joyce is one of the right sort, but most girls are simply frocks and jabber. Poor old Joyce! She *will* miss the ripping times she’s had with us!”

“And a very good thing, too,” said Mrs. Newton severely. Then, as Jack prepared to quit the room, she added, “What mischief may one expect this morning?”

Jack hugged her like a young bear.

“You needn’t bother,” he assured her; “I’m going to have a really quiet day.”

This promise, so far as the morning was concerned, held fairly good; it was after the midday meal that he decided to

“have a go at worrying out those other two papers.” He was nothing if not an impatient youth, and he could not possibly have tackled a problem in Tony’s cool fashion.

But one of the remaining ciphers had this appearance:

Bea mp de eQne
etz uw io nuob
hdl le sf rayo
ine cs tB urrx

and Jack chanced, at his first glance, to see that the final letters of the lower three lines, read downwards, formed the word “box.”

This set the boy going; and, once he had made a fair start, it was perfectly clear sailing. The first letters of the four lines, looked at downwards, gave “Behi,” and the second letters, read upwards, made this “Behind te,” while the third letters downwards carried it on to “Behind teazle.”

Going on in this fashion, alternately up and down, Jack presently arrived at the following:

“Behind teazle clump, west side of Burne Quarry, one box.”

“Hooray!” shouted Jack, dancing round the playroom. “Here’s a surprise for Tony! A surprise for all of them! Still, I won’t give it away at once; I’ll see if they are able to spot it too.”

With this idea in mind, Jack drew a light pencil mark down through the first letters, turning it and carrying it up through the second ones, pursuing in this fashion the direction of the sentence. He made the pencilling seem like a wavy arrow, showing the right way to go.

“There,” chuckled Jack. “I should think it ought to come pretty plain to them now. I wonder about going to Burne Quarry, though; we ought to manage that to-day, somehow. Yet, if the others don’t arrive back here before——”

Jack ceased abruptly, struck by an idea. He glanced at the clock. It was just ten minutes to two, and the dog-cart would presently be starting for Smalton.

The impulsive Jack’s mind was made up at once, and he darted round to the coachyard. Redwood was just putting in the pony.

“I say, Tom,” began the boy; “I thought of driving there with you, but I’ve rather changed my mind. It’ll be all right, of course, if I don’t come?”

Redwood grinned and said that he supposed it would.

“Well, then, I won’t. The fact is, I’ve something rather important on. I say, I want a length of strong rope—the toughest I can get, and the longest. Only to borrow, of course. Is there any like that about, d’you think?”

Tom rubbed his head, sniffed twice, and turned towards the sheds. A few moments later Jack was in delighted possession of “just the thing” he wanted.

When Redwood drove out he passed the youngster on the drive. It is not to be wondered at that Redwood stared; for Jack, with the coil of rope about his shoulders, was trundling a gardener’s wheelbarrow laden with pick and shovel.

“Sakes alive!” cried the man. “Be ’e a-goin’ gold diggin’, sir?”

Jack laughed hugely.

“You’ve hit it first time,” he blithely replied, “though you little thought to, I expect. I’m off treasure hunting! You can

tell that to the others when you meet them.”

The cart rattled on, while Jack turned his steps towards Burne Quarry.

As for Tom Redwood, he duly arrived at Smalton House, and it was about half-past four when he safely put down the other three at the steps of Burley Grange.

Mrs. Newton received them.

“My poor dear!” she cried to Joyce. “That you should be made to suffer so much for the pranks of those boys! I have heard from Jack of all that happened——”

“Where *is* Jack?” broke in Morrice eagerly.

Mrs. Newton raised her hands as if to indicate that she might answer any question but *that* one.

“Tom says that he went off with a wheelbarrow just about two o’clock,” added Joyce rapidly. “He gave you no idea as to where he was going—left no message?”

“I’ve heard nothing,” was the despairing answer. “If it’s mischief—and I’ll be bound it is—he wasn’t very likely to tell me!”

“Well, he’ll be in to tea soon, I suppose,” said Morrice, “and then we shall know all about it.”

But Jack, when the tea-hour was long past, had still failed to present himself. Morrice grew anxious. Redwood had delivered the younger boy’s message to the effect that he was “off treasure hunting,” but still they were left utterly at a loss as to his whereabouts or intentions.

It seemed nonsense that he should wander off with a handbarrow for the sheer fun of the thing, without any sure knowledge; yet that seemed the only view to take. Queerly enough, it was not until they had made all sorts of other

guesses that Tony suddenly bethought him of the two unsolved papers.

“Can he possibly have found out one of those?” was the sharp query. “If so——”

“He couldn’t if he tried for a lifetime,” broke in Joyce. “He’s no better than I am at those sort of puzzles.”

“Still, that’s rather a notion of yours, Tony,” declared Morrice. “I say, where did you last leave those things?”

“Between the pages of a book on the playroom table. Let’s go up at once, and see if they’re still there.”

But Joyce had already started off upstairs, and, despite her annoying foot, she was the first one to be there. She uttered an exclamation when she saw the two sheets lying on the cloth.

“I can see that he’s been studying them,” she cried, “and he seems to have been marking one with a pencil. Look, Tony, it’s a sort of twisted arrow running through the letters. I wonder what made him draw that?”

CHAPTER XXII

A PERILOUS ATTEMPT

BURNE QUARRY was perhaps wrongly named, for it would have been more correct to call it Burne Pool. Of course, it had been a quarry once, but the oldest Burley inhabitant scarcely remembered its working days, and now its bottom was deeply filled with water from invisible springs.

When Jack arrived there this afternoon, warmly perspiring—for the last part of his journey had been over broken common land, the fringe of Westmoor—he found the place in all its summer glory. For Burne Quarry formed quite a little ravine, beautiful to look at. On the far side it sloped to the water gently, being there made verdant by blackberry thorn and graceful mountain ash. The pool itself was of a limpid, steely blue, and certainly of great depth.

On Jack's side, however—the west side—the aspect of the place was entirely different. Here there was no gentle slope, the descent being sheer and sharp. From most points one could lie flat and look straight upon the shining surface far below.

In days gone by, precipitous paths had zigzagged down to the lowest level, and signs of these remained in long, crumbling ledges, where flourished battalions of hardy weeds. Teazles, with their long stalks and prickly cones, were to be seen everywhere—presenting at once a very grave problem to the would-be finder of treasure.

“Behind teazle clump” had been the simple direction of the person who had invented those papers. In his time, quite possibly only one such clump was in evidence; but now there

were scores of them! Master Jack felt his heart sink at the extent of the task before him. As he lay prone on the brink, peering this way and that, it seemed to him that circumstances were very much in opposition.

At that moment he ought to have given up the venture and walked straight back; for it is one thing to be hardy, and quite another to be foolhardy. But there was a great mass of teazles about thirty yards down, which looked as if they might have been the original clump from which all the others had multiplied. What was more, they flourished on a much broader shelf; after the first ten or twelve yards descent would be fairly easy.

There was a fence bordering the quarry, to which he made fast the rope. Then, before quite deciding the matter, he essayed a few feet to begin with. It appeared all right, and now that he had started it began to look easier. Anyhow, he could make out footholds all the way down, some of them ladder-like, one below the other.

These last were the most treacherous. The rope had caught in a slight projection, and, feeling that he must have a good hold on it now, he strained up to free it, giving it a tug. Instantly there spouted upon him a little runnel of shale and crusted yellow earth, and he ducked involuntarily to avoid the sudden shower. Then his feet seemed to sink from beneath him, and he went down—down—down with a sweeping rush!

Sky and rock, for a breathless instant or so, whirled round in chaos, and then he lay huddled in a bed of spiky brambles, clutching at other spikes above him. He gasped out with the pain of pricking, but swift instinct made him endure it and

not relinquish his hold. That instinct alone saved him, for he was caught in a tangle of blackberry thorn and teasles.

For a moment or so he was at a loss, and then he perceived that he had struck into a lower extension of the very ridge which he had been endeavouring to reach. It was the narrower part of it, too; it became wider as it sloped up towards the greater body of brambles.

When the boy's heart had ceased to thump and movement was possible, he started to edge warily along, keeping close to the rockface, and avoiding another sight of the pool beneath. One glimpse had been more than enough.

The spiky cones through which he had to drag hurt his stockinged legs horribly, but natural grit made him bite his lip and think of nothing save the exacting task.

Every moment his foothold became less hazardous, and at length, looking backwards and upwards, he was able to view the course of his perilous descent. The end of the rope which he had lost grip of was not to be seen, having swung away to the right, but a part of the main coil was visible, and also the length which hung immediately from the fencing higher up.

But the line—any part of it—was quite out of reach! The foot-holes, insecure in the first place, had been completely destroyed in the course of his slip. Quite twenty feet of perpendicular stone divided this shelf from the next. The boy dodged here and there, but he soon perceived the futility and risk of any attempt to climb.

Buoyed up by the hope that someone might be near, Jack started to shout, and he went on shouting till the eternal ring of his own tones, echoing hollowly about the depression, made him abandon that scheme for a while. Then his mind flew back to the cipher: would Tony notice it, and, guided by

his marking, read it aright? If that happened—and his pulses leapt at the thought of it—they would be sure to come there, and all would be well.

Fortunately for his peace of mind, he was presently quite convinced that this would actually happen. But he felt that he must occupy himself somehow, and the only thing to do was to hunt for the “treasure.”

A teazle-patch, as may be readily imagined, forms a by no means inviting hunting-ground; this one had looked far pleasanter from above than it did when one stood on the fringe of it. The teazle-tops, as a matter of fact, reigned over a kingdom of stinging-nettles and thorn. Really, one required a pair of leathern gloves. Jack, however, worked with one hand, having first wrapped this in his pocket handkerchief.

The boy began by finding a rift in the lower part of the rock, and thereafter he penetrated deeper by stamping the herbage with his feet. The fissure in the rock broadened, being now choked at the bottom by masses of small weeds. With his swathed hand Jack fumbled, and when his fingers met with a familiar shape some of the old excitement returned. And this diversion lasted till the lumbering case had been somehow dislodged and coaxed forcibly into the daylight.

Well, he had found what he came for, but—what now? All the treasure in the world would certainly not alter his plight. He wondered what time it was; he could judge by his feelings that it must be well past tea-time. What an idiot he had been to venture here alone! With proper precautions, and with the others to assist, the job might have been managed in safety; but alone——

Jack sat on the case and stared drearily across at the swaying rowan berries; he was certainly having a sharp lesson on the penalties of rashness. He would think twice about things in the future, he told himself solemnly, and it was just after this reflection that he seemed to hear some distant sound.

Jumping to his feet, he shouted with all his might. And—yes!—there came an answer; help was at hand! A moment or so later Morrice and Tony appeared above, and Jack, his voice queerly husky, informed them of his plight.

The rope was rapidly drawn in, and the end of it flung down to the teazle-patch. A noose had been formed—Tony's knowledge of knots was worthy of a Boy Scout!—and this Jack managed to pass over the case at his feet. Then, gradually, the others put the strain on and raised it; not such an easy task, from their position, though they assisted themselves by working the line round a smooth upright of the fence.

Once the chest had been landed they tested the rope carefully right through, and by the time they were ready to drop it again Jack had crept up as far as he possibly could with safety. Catching the loop, he slipped into it, getting the support beneath his armpits. He then helped with his feet as much as possible, while a strong haul on the line more than half-lifted him out of danger. At length he was over the brink—safe!

Morrice did not say much, for he saw by Jack's scared face that he knew what a near escape he had had. If the puzzle-papers had not been thought of, and if Tony had not read at a glance the one concerned, it was hard to see how rescue would have been forthcoming.

CHAPTER XXIII

RIVAL ADVENTURERS

“WELL, and how have you been amusing yourselves? Kept out of mischief, I hope? I was glad to hear that Mrs. Newton had nothing bad to report about your behaviour.”

Mr. and Mrs. Harding had arrived an hour since, and the Grange party were now at dinner.

Morrice looked up.

“I’m afraid, dad,” he said doggedly, “that we’ve given Mrs. Newton a fearful time. But when you’ve heard all about it, I don’t think you’ll want to blame us as much as usual.”

Mrs. Harding tried not to smile at this naive statement, and the master of the house kept properly stern.

“The fact is,” added Morrice, before his father could speak, “we’ve been treasure hunting.”

Mr. Harding, as we can well imagine, was startled by this piece of news, but, by the time the meal was over, he had listened to a truly extraordinary story. Morrice started it, but the others could not hold themselves from joining in, and the whole table, finally, became an animated chorus. Joyce’s eyes shone, and her voice rang out.

“My dear child,” reproved Mrs. Harding, “you *must* try to be quieter!”

“But, mother,” came the protest, “it’s *gold—real* gold. One can’t help feeling jolly! And we’re all anxious to know what dad will do about it.”

“It would be rather a good thing to find the owner,” was Mr. Harding’s reply. “For, after all, it must belong to somebody. Anyhow, we’ll go and have a look at your ‘treasure.’ ”

A movement was made for the playroom, and when Mr. Harding held one of those weighty bars in his hand he seemed to catch some of the prevailing excitement.

“Unless I am much mistaken,” he said, his voice kept well controlled, “this is a piece of bullion.”

“Bullion?” echoed the others.

“Yes. The form in which gold is transmitted from one country to another.”

“And there are six such cases altogether?” queried Mrs. Harding, a rising wonder in her voice. “Why, goodness me! there must be a fortune lying in that old cupboard, not counting the two cases still at the lighthouse!”

Mr. Harding looked up.

“Altogether,” he said distinctly, “a sum total of many thousands of pounds!”

The room echoed to a prolonged “*Oh-h-h!*” This, undoubtedly,—as they had suspected for some time—was the veritable age of miracles.

Morrice spoke in a suppressed voice.

“What ought we to do about it, dad?”

“It must be carefully thought over,” was the reply. “But I haven’t seen those cipher papers yet; where are they?”

“Here they are, uncle,” said Tony, bringing the little sheaf forward.

“I understand,” said Mr. Harding, “that you have solved all save one of them?”

Tony's answer was certainly unexpected.

"No, uncle," observed he, "they're all plain enough now; I found out the last one a few moments before you arrived."

Joyce sprang up amid a buzz of voices.

"Oh, Tony," she cried, "and you never told us!"

"No," answered Tony, chuckling at the little flutter he had caused, "I thought I'd keep the news as a sort of final surprise! This is the one, uncle," and the boy picked out a leaf which ran:

"Afoosepssnhllleadienbxoeodsrwelidateetftot."

Mr. Harding shook his head over this.

"Come, Tony," he smiled, "we'll learn the solution from you. I can understand your not finding it very easy."

"Well, it was simple enough to invent, I daresay, but a teaser to worry out," was Tony's response. "You take the first letter at the beginning and the last at the end, the second at the beginning and the second from the end—and so on until you finally get to the centre. The result is: '*At foot of steepest sandhill, leeward side, one box.*' "

There was a little gasp of breath all round.

"Whew!" murmured Morrice; "if that isn't a downright poser! There are about two miles of sandhills between this and Binstow, and who can point out the steepest?"

"Well," said Mrs. Harding quietly, "if I were consulted I should vote for 'Mount Ararat!'"

"Hurrah for mother!" shouted Jack; and Joyce, respecting one tender foot, hopped gleefully around on the other.

“The children christened it that,” added Mrs. Harding, seeing that the others remained mystified. “And I quite think that it *is* the steepest hill of all.”

“Well, we might pay ‘Mount Ararat’ a visit in the morning; that’s if——”

“No, to-night, dad—*to-night!*” pleaded Joyce. “It doesn’t do to wait till the morning, really. We tried that in the case of the first box, and it disappeared! This is the last lot, you know; do let us get it to-night!”

“Well, I’ll agree on one condition: Miss Joyce must remain here with her mother. Treasure hunting, from all accounts, is not the best of pastimes for young ladies—it’s a bit too adventurous! Jack, of course, must come, to act as guide. Now, then, what shall it be?”

The condition was promptly accepted, though not without a wry grimace from Joyce, and the boys rushed away to prepare. Pick, shovel, barrow, lantern: all these seemed necessities, and were got together at once.

“The final enterprise,” chanted Tony, twirling the spade upon his shoulder as they crunched down the drive. “I’m awfully glad, uncle, that you are here to take part in it. This, not reckoning the cave box, will make seven in all.”

“Come,” was the genial retort, “that is counting one chicken too many! We aren’t sure of our ‘steepest sandhill’ yet.”

Jack, elected lantern-bearer, overheard this remark.

“It’s bound to be ‘Ararat,’ dad; that isn’t to be doubted a bit. Anyhow, you’ll see. It’s about half a mile distant, after reaching the shore. We’ll have a job with the barrow, I expect.”

Once the sand was gained, the barrow nearly refused to be pushed at all, and they were obliged to turn aside to the damp and firmer beach which ran near the water's edge. Later, they turned back again, leaving the barrow at a convenient spot and pressing forward on foot, Jack leading the way among the shadowy dunes, his lantern held aloft.

"We're coming near it," he announced, toiling up a rush-grown barrier. "That's the top of it away there, I believe; by daylight I could be more certain. Hallo, what's that?"

"What's what?"

"I fancied I saw a sort of glow."

"So you did; somebody's there before us! That is the light from another lantern. Look! It's moving!"

As Tony spoke, the little company slithered to a standstill in the drifted sand.

"A camping party, perhaps," suggested Mr. Harding. "We don't want to divulge our business to strangers, so we had better put out our light and advance with caution. Out with the lantern, Jack, and then go forward quietly."

Nothing can possibly be softer to the tread than bone-dry sand, and the party crept soundlessly on, the pulses of the younger ones beating high. The stillness of the summer night, with just the drone of the sea behind them, lent enchantment to the enterprise, and also a tinge of romance. But everything centred upon that point of radiance ahead. What did it mean?

Mr. Harding crept behind a smaller sand-peak, and the youngsters silently followed round at his rear. Negotiating a saucer-like depression, they could peer directly behind the lofty hill whence the strange lantern light issued, and they realized with a shock that they had been forestalled!

The idea that other treasure hunters might be abroad had not, somehow, occurred to any of them, and when they had now a sight of digging implements, with two figures bending over a gaping pit in the sand, they could scarce contain their voices. As it was, both Jack and Tony gasped quite noisily, but the two forms at the foot of “Mount Ararat” were far too busy to heed. It was clear by their action that they had made a find, and presently they were seen to be dragging at and lifting some dark, square object. Beyond all manner of question it was the final box.

Morrice swallowed quickly and managed to whisper:

“Dad, surely we——”

But Mr. Harding, standing suddenly upright, had stepped on a few paces. Then, boldly, he went straight for the mysterious couple, and the boys headed promptly after him.

As their approach was detected, a lantern was swung high, its pale light falling full on the features of the rival couple. Expecting strangers, the boys were astonished to find that they had met both of these persons before. One was Captain Gawler, of Farbrook Hall, and the other was their sailor friend of the Bar Rock, George Luff!

“Harding!” broke out Captain Gawler, who grasped the lantern. “Jove, how you startled us! We didn’t imagine that other people would be wandering on the sandhills at such a time. What brings you here, I wonder?”

Mr. Harding laughed.

“Our purpose,” he said, “was very like your own: we came here to dig ‘treasure.’ But we seem to be a little behind time; very wisely, you got here first!”

Captain Gawler uttered a cry of amazement, lowering the light.

“Can it be,” he exclaimed, “that—that *you* know about this too? How did you find out?”

“As yet we can be said to have found out nothing. My boy Jack, here, chanced upon some scattered sheets of writing in Westmoor Lane, which proved to be the guide to various boxes of——”

Again Captain Gawler broke in.

“What!” cried he. “Were those papers actually found? This is more than I had hoped for. It was I who lost them!”

There was a murmur from the boys at this piece of news, and then Mr. Harding said:

“It seems to me, Gawler, that we had better compare notes at once. During my absence these youngsters have been busy, and I came home to find them actually possessed of six cases of gold bullion!”

“Six! Do you mean that the other ones are actually rescued?”

“Yes; two are at the lighthouse, yonder, and we have four at the Grange.”

There was silence for a moment, and it required some few more sentences to convince Captain Gawler that he had heard aright. Finally, however, he fell in with a suggestion that they should all go to the Grange at once, and there hear what he had to tell.

They filled in the hole in the sand; then, having carried the seventh box of treasure back to the barrow, they set out for the Grange.

CHAPTER XXIV

CLEARED UP

HALF an hour later a numerous party was mustered in Mr. Harding's library, and Captain Gawler asked the sailorman, George Luff, to commence the narrative.

"Those boxes," began Luff, "were hidden by my uncle, John Hudson, and that is why Captain Gawler suggests that I shall start the story. It is a very plain story, really, and I'll make it as brief as possible.

"My uncle, then, was a diver, and a very capable one, too, employed during his earlier years by a well-known company whose business it was to deal with the contents of wrecks. In the prime of life, while still a very active and robust man, he had some little difficulty with his eyesight, and lost his berth in consequence. This was a great blow to him, for he quite failed to get further employment. However, he had been a saving man, and things worked out pretty well for him. His case was heard of by Captain Gawler, who kindly gave him a place as lodge-keeper. That was some sixteen years ago; Captain Gawler at the time occupying this very house, Burley Grange.

"And now," continued Luff, "my own part of the affair begins to come in. After my second year at sea, when home on leave, my Uncle John sent for me, and told me of a great plan he had in mind. Three months previous the steamship *Aurora* had gone down nor'-west of Burley Bay. She had been carrying thirty-six cases of gold bullion, only twenty-seven of which had been recovered. As Captain Gawler here remembers, the vessel sank at the outer curve of the bar, near

the estuary, where the sand is always shifting, and salvage operations were most difficult. They went on for upwards of a month, and were then abandoned. Nine cases of golden ingots were left somewhere beneath the sea!

“The idea of those riches lying there, free for anybody to pick up, sort of fascinated Uncle John. His old love for the diving business returned to him, and he wrote to those concerned, stating his readiness to try for the missing cases, provided he were promised so much for his trouble, and so much for every box recovered.

“Well, sirs, believing them ingots to be past man’s finding, these people simply laughed at my uncle, and would have nothing to do with his offer. What they said provoked him very much, for he was a proud old man where his diving was concerned. Finally, he decided to make his attempt just for the love of the thing.

“That was why he sent for me. He had brought all his old diving gear to Burley with him, including a one-man pumping apparatus, and with my help he proposed to go down.

“I need not tell you of all that happened; of the many hard-working though quiet early mornings we spent in the bay, I pumping from the boat and he underneath the water. I will only say that after hours and hours of such labour he dug out—actually *dug* out—eight cases from the banked-up sea-bed, where they were lying close together. He was obliged, finally, to forgo all thought of the other one.

“Well, there was my uncle with eight cases of gold bullion in his possession, which nobody laid claim to; and each of about four thousand pounds value! Now, you must understand that he was a queer old character, and he had odd

ideas; but he was certainly very honest. In the circumstances, he might have counted himself a rich man, and have made full use of what he had captured, but I am sure that would not have contented him.

“Instead, he wrote again to those wreck people, *giving no hint of what he had actually accomplished*, but repeating his former offer. This time he was snubbed for his pains, and he declared roundly that during his life nobody should benefit by what he had brought to light.

“He stuck to his word: there was no turning him. On the last night of my leave, we rowed out to the Bar Rock—there was no lighthouse there then—and settled a couple of those cases beneath the cabin floor of the old *Curlew*. Uncle John told me that he would dispose of the others in a similar sort of way, and he swore me to silence.

“I saw him only once or twice during the years that followed, but he would tell me nothing as to what he had done with the other boxes, and he always held me to my vow of secrecy. A few months since, while on a China station, I learnt of his death; and I wondered, of course, whether he had left any word regarding those cases of ingots.

“Fate played strangely with me. I came from Plymouth to Burley Harbour in a small schooner which ran aground one stormy night off the Bar Rock, as, no doubt, you have already heard from these young people. That night I slept in the old *Curlew* cabin, and had the curiosity to see if the two boxes were still there beneath the planking. They had gone.

“One further attempt I made with regard to my uncle’s secret. When we had first brought up those chests from the bay, all those years ago, they had been placed in a little store-loft above the old lodge belonging to this house. I wondered

if any of them remained there, for I learnt that the place was now unoccupied. I did not want to make inquiries, for if those cases were beyond finding, it seemed better not to talk of the matter at all. I got into the lodge one night to satisfy myself, but I was interrupted and did not try again.

“That, sirs, completes my part of the clearing up; Captain Gawler can explain the rest.”

“You must know”—Captain Gawler took up the narrative at once—“that John Hudson passed away quite suddenly. He was, as his nephew has shown, and as his actions prove, rather an unusual character, though a very silent man, and simple in his tastes. It is my opinion now that, having put aside those cases of bullion in his own chosen way, he had decided to regard them as something in reserve—just as another man might regard money in the bank—ready, as it were, for a ‘rainy day.’ And, just as a person may put money into many banks, so he concealed his boxes in many places, with the idea that, even if one were found, the others would still lie safely. To me, however—and he remained a lodge-keeper to the last—he never so much as hinted at their existence.

“Some three weeks before he passed away, John Hudson spoke to me about his savings. He was bequeathing these to his only relative, this same gentleman who now sits here with us, and he explained to me where the few documents he possessed would be waiting.

“When the time came, then, I went to the small iron box he had indicated, and there I found, besides the will, an envelope containing six separate sheets of paper. On these appeared what I guessed to be some sort of cipher-writing, and it

occurred to me that I would some time try to puzzle them out.”

Turning a little, the Captain nodded with a smile towards Tony.

“From all accounts,” he said, “this young man is an expert at the reading of enigmas, but it is to be feared that I am not. However, the papers remained in my wallet, and I was quite excited one day when I made sense of one by simply reading it backwards! That occurred during a few idle moments after lunch at the neighbouring town, and afterwards, driving home in the dog-cart, I set myself to ponder over the others. Then came catastrophe.

“It was when I was jogging along Westmoor Lane that I thought of copying those things into my notebook. The pony was going quietly, so I commenced the task at once. I had got down one of the sentences, and was just checking it off, when a sudden gust of wind whisked the whole lot from my knee and sent them scattering about the pony’s head. It was so unexpected that I was startled myself, and the little mare was nearly scared out of her wits. She pricked up her ears, and bolted down the lane as fast as she could move!

“Not till we were well at the bottom, half a mile distant, could I get full control of the pony, and then I dismounted and led her back. But those scraps of paper were nowhere to be seen, though I hunted for the best part of an hour. Your son here, of course, had picked them up in the meantime!

“I was prevented from doing anything at once, but on the night following I went with one of my men to a cave on the sands; for the sentence which I had deciphered spoke of ‘one box’ hidden there under a stone marked X. And, sure enough, we found a box and brought it away. We could see that it had

recently been tampered with, and that one of the ingots was missing.

“Finally, this gentleman, Mr. Luff, appeared, and I explained to him, as Hudson’s nephew, exactly what had happened. As I told you, I had got another of those papers copied into my notebook before the pony bolted, and this one we studied together, but could make no sense of it. Luff jotted it down himself, saying that he would puzzle over it, and see me again if he got it into shape. Well, to-day he found the meaning of it, and that is how you happened to meet us at the foot of the ‘steepest sandhill.’ ”

“Which brings us,” observed Mr. Harding, “to the present moment. And the question is, what shall be done? Altogether, there are eight cases of golden ingots to be dealt with. What is your wish, Mr. Luff?”

“I should like whatever seems right to be done, sir,” answered the sailor. “My uncle refused to make it known that he had found the boxes, but I should like you now to inform the proper authorities.”

Mr. Harding nodded.

“Yes,” he agreed, “I think that would be the honest thing to do. When does your leave expire?”

“Another month yet, sir.”

“Good; we ought, during that time, to get the affair fully settled. We will put our heads together and go into the matter thoroughly.”

During the days which followed a host of important letters were written and received, and at length there came an afternoon when the “treasure hunters” and their seniors met again. The companies which had sustained the loss of the

gold bullion were so delighted about its recovery, after the passage of so many years, that they were more than generous in their rewards. The old diver's nephew, George Luff, unexpectedly found himself a well-to-do man, while Peter Cole and Ben Dobbie both heard of "something to their advantage."

As for the young adventurers, by whose efforts so much of the gold had been saved, they received quite a surprising sum of money, more than they had dreamed of. With part of this they were allowed to buy a fine little yacht, which, besides being fitted with sails, could also be driven by a motor.

Nor was that all, for once again, to their hearts' content, they were free to roam Farbrook Woods; to arrange games there, or to hold picnics whenever they wished. The days that followed were certainly packed with happiness, while their various trips, both by land and sea, would often awaken some stirring thoughts of that wonderful hunt for treasure.

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