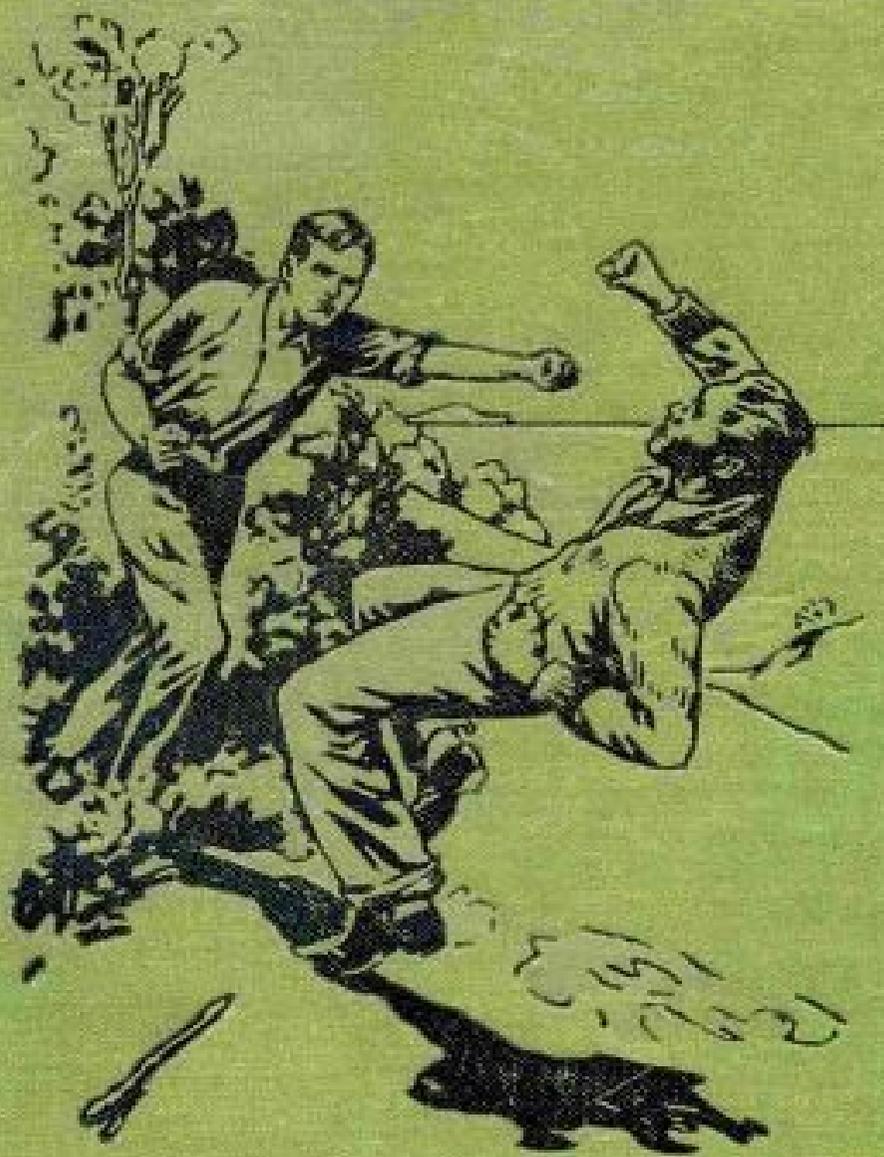


SEAHAWK



MARY-GRANT
BRUCE

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STORIES BY
MARY GRANT BRUCE
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“Mrs. Bruce has a story to tell, and she sets about doing it in her own straightforward way, without resort to padding. Her style is never laboured, it matches its subject in its naturalness. Smiles and tears, humour and pathos, blend in her books as they do in life itself.”—*The Queen*.

JIM AND WALLY
NORA OF BILLABONG
TIMOTHY IN BUSHLAND
GRAY'S HOLLOW
GLEN EYRE
FROM BILLABONG TO LONDON
A LITTLE BUSH MAID
'POSSUM
DICK
CAPTAIN JIM
DICK LESTER OF KURRAJONG
BACK TO BILLABONG
THE STONE AXE OF BURKAMUKK
THE TWINS OF EMU PLAINS
BILLABONG'S DAUGHTER
MATES AT BILLABONG
THE HOUSES OF THE EAGLE
THE TOWER ROOMS
BILLABONG ADVENTURERS
GOLDEN FIDDLES
THE HAPPY TRAVELLER
BILL OF BILLABONG
ROAD TO ADVENTURE



“A long tongue of flame shot up . . . and a form sprang into the sea.” (Page 240.)

Seahawk]

[*Frontispiece*

“SEAHAWK”

BY
MARY GRANT BRUCE

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“SEAHAWK”

CHAPTER I

TWINS

“I N here, Jill!”

The long country train, backing slowly into the platform of the Sydney station, came to a standstill with a clash of buffers. Four girls dived simultaneously at a door-handle, their united assault proving too much for a stout man who had marked it as his own. They tumbled into the carriage pell-mell, casting their belongings on the seats in a fashion calculated to convince any intruder that no unoccupied space remained, and gathered about the doorway flushed and laughing.

“Really, girls!” The tone was meant to be reproving, but the young teacher’s mouth twitched at the corners.

“Oh, Miss Traill—we don’t want forty people in the carriage! You always have to be ready to grab when this train comes in.”

“I should be sorry for the forty,” said Miss Traill. She smiled at her charges; the burden of term-time was slipping from her shoulders, and she looked not much older than they. The tallest of the four smiled back.

“Miss Traill, you want to get away, don’t you? You’ll have an awful—I mean, a horrible—rush for your own train if you wait.”

“But——” hesitated the teacher.

“Oh, we’ll behave like lambs. I’ll keep them in order—truly I will!”

“Well,” said Miss Traill, obviously relieved, “if you’ll be responsible, Jill, I think I might go. Girls, you won’t leave the carriage again?”

“Only over my dead body,” Jill Sherwood said. The three giggled delightedly and promised to do anything and everything that might be required of them. Miss Traill hurried off amid a chorus of farewell.

“Good business!” ejaculated Moira Ford. “I like old Traily, but thank goodness there’ll be no more teachers for a month.” She thrust her head through the window. “Isn’t your brother coming on this train, Jill? Seen him yet?”

“No,” answered Jill to the second question. She was keeping a watchful eye on the hurrying throng on the platform. “He will turn up: he always does, generally at the last moment.”

“Hope he’ll come before anyone else grabs the spare seats.”

“Oh, Derek won’t come in here,” Jill said calmly. “He always travels with his own crowd.”

“Callous people, brothers,” commented Angela Ware. “Mine look on me as fit to sew on buttons, and that’s about all. But yours is your twin, Jill, isn’t he? I had an idea that twins had an affection for each other.”

“I don’t see why,” remarked Moira. “I think twins must feel rather annoyed with each other. Fancy having only half a birthday! Do you have to go halves in everything, Jill?”

“Not so that you’d notice it,” said Jill absently, scanning the platform.

“It’s much worse when both twins are girls,” said Angela. “Or do you say when each is a girl? It’s like talking about measles—I’m never certain whether they’re singular or plural——”

“You stop using words like that!” said fat Greta Payne from her corner. “Term’s finished!”

“Sorry,” apologized Angela. “I mean, when twins are girls their fond mothers dress ’em alike, and once they get the habit they can’t stop. Joan and Anna Burton’s mother did that. It was all right for Anna, because everything suited her, but poor old Joan looked like nothing earthly in green.”

“Joan and Anna weren’t a bit alike in looks,” said Moira, “but they were rather funny, all the same. They always shared their illnesses—if Anna had to go into the San. for anything Joan always got the same thing. And they used to dream alike. Do you and your brother go in for that sort of thing, Jill?”

Whatever Jill Sherwood might have answered was lost as she suddenly leaned farther out of the window. A knot of boys had come into sight, racing down the platform; long-limbed fellows, wearing the same school cap. One of them swung aside with a quick—“Keep me a seat, you chaps!” and with a stride was at the window, gripping Jill’s hand.

“You all right?” asked a casual voice.

“Quite, thanks, Derek. Better hurry—the train is pretty full.”

“Oh, the others will fix me up. Want any papers or things?”

“I’ve got plenty. Have some chocolate?” She produced a bar.

“Sure you can spare it?—well, thanks.” A bell rang. Porters shouted “All aboard!”

“I’d better get a move on, I think,” said Derek calmly. “The guard is semaphoring at me with his little green flag. See you later.” He ran off, swinging himself into a carriage as the train began to move. A wrathful porter banged the door. Jill withdrew her head, smiling slightly.

“He takes things easily,” said Angela. “Jill, he’s the image of you! If he came back to St. Bridget’s in your clothes nobody would know. Wouldn’t it be a lark!”

“He went to a tennis-party in my things, and nobody did know—until he began to play,” said Jill laughing. “Then they realized that the style wasn’t mine. It lacked the St. Bridget’s deportment!”

“And where were you?”

“Oh, I was in his clothes. They hadn’t found me out. I was handing tea to all the old ladies, and I heard one of them say, ‘What nice manners that Sherwood boy has!’ So we fled—I because I was laughing too much to stay, and Derek because he had split my best tennis frock. Mother made us go over next day and apologize. But it was worth it.”

“Our voices would give us away if we tried to be boys—but yours is so deep,” said Moira. “Deeper than your brother’s, I believe. And when you laugh you don’t squeak, like most of us do. But what about your hair?”

“Oh, I had an Eton crop then. It was after that tennis-party that the parents made me grow it a bit longer. They said one son was enough. Derek was glad, too—I don’t think he minded my looking like him, but he was awfully afraid of looking like a girl!” She laughed. “The tennis-party business brought home the danger to him.”

They were leaving the northern suburbs of Sydney behind them; already the train was running into open spaces where big trees dotted the paddocks. Jill turned to the window and drew a long breath.

“How I hate streets!” she said. “To think that for a whole month I shan’t see one—unless it’s the street of a little country town, and that doesn’t really count.”

“What are you going to do in the holidays?” Moira asked.

“Oh—the usual things. Ride, and boat, and bathe and fish. It won’t be quite as good as usual, because Father is away; he’s had to go to Queensland to buy cattle. But Mother always plans lots of things.”

“Well, you can have your country!” pronounced Angela. She flung her hat aside and gave a few deft touches to an unruly mop of yellow curls. “I’m glad my father chose to be a doctor. Give me a decent town where you can see life in the holidays—we don’t see much at St. Bridget’s. Mother’s going to give a dance for me.”

“I’m going to be a doctor,” stated Greta solemnly.

“Horrible life!” Angela’s tone was that of one who knows. “You’ll never be able to call your soul your own. People ringing the bell all day and night—generally the wrong bell—and calling you out when there’s nothing wrong with them. Grubby crowds in the consulting-room, and queer smells all over the house. I’d like to go on to the University, but not to cut up frogs and things there.” She shuddered delicately. “What are you going to do, Moira?”

“Oh, write, of course,” Moira answered. “That’s the only thing in the world worth doing. Fancy seeing something you’d written, seeing it in print in a

paper, with your name at the top! I'm going to do a long poem these holidays and see if a paper won't take it."

There was an awkward silence. Moira's "poems" were well known in the school. It was believed that the wastepaper-basket of the editor of the *St. Bridget's Magazine* overflowed with them. No event during a term was too slight to induce Moira to pour out her soul in verse.

"Well, you stick to it, old girl," said Jill Sherwood firmly. "That was a jolly good poem you wrote when we beat Surrey Hall at cricket. It's the only time I ever saw myself in poetry, so I cherish it."

Angela quoted softly:

"And then, to see our Captain, Jill-oh!
Brandishing her bat of springy willow!"

and Moira flushed scarlet, with an appealing look at Jill.

"Jolly good rhyme," said Jill. "I don't see why they wouldn't put it in the Mag. You keep on, Moira, and you'll make old Masfield sit up yet."

"What are you going to do, Jill?" asked Moira hastily, to change the subject—afraid that other quotations were hovering on Angela's lips.

"I? Oh, I don't know. I'd rather help Father on the station than anything else, but Mother says I ought to learn Domestic Economy—cooking and things. You see, I haven't got any brains like you people. Exams make me go all creepy. But I rather like messing about in a kitchen. Anyhow, I haven't got to think about it yet—I'm to stay at school until I'm seventeen—perhaps eighteen, Father says. Don't see the good of it, though."

"Well, you're the best all-rounder at games we ever had," Moira put in eagerly. "And the best runner."

"What's the good of that?" said Jill lightly. "It's fun, of course, but it doesn't get you anywhere. My reports are just a catalogue of horrors: Father's eyebrows go up into his hair while he reads them. My only comfort is that Mother says he never passed an exam himself!"

The girls said nothing. Jill's attainments—or lack of them—on the path of learning were well known to them. They also knew that no girl of sixteen at St. Bridget's had more influence; that she stood for straight-going and fair play in all things, and that the teachers who bewailed her indifference to her place in form relied on her in all other matters. These, however, were details not to be mentioned in Jill's presence. They took refuge in magazines and chocolates.

The time slipped by. Station succeeded station, with increasing distances between them; the country grew wilder and more open. One by one the girls gathered up their possessions, to alight on a familiar platform, met by a welcoming group—fathers and mothers, with an excited rabble of small brothers and sisters. Angela was the last to go.

“Sorry to leave you all alone, old thing,” she said. “I suppose your brother will look you up sooner or later.”

“Oh, I suppose so,” said Jill lightly. “His friends don’t go all the way. Have a good time, and don’t come back too grown-up!”

She leaned out of the window, watching her go down the long platform, the centre of a chattering group. Far down the train she could see Derek’s head; he also was saying good-bye to a schoolfellow. Then the train began to move slowly, and Jill returned to her corner.

She was not sorry to be alone. Leaving-day, with its bustle of last-minute arrangements and good-byes, was always tiring; very jolly, but the time came when it was good to be quiet. And Derek would come soon, now. He never came until she was alone: what he termed “a mob of strange girls” was more alarming to Derek than any beasts of the jungle.

They understood each other very well. It was entirely right, in Jill’s eyes, that her twin should appear to treat her casually, that he should herd with his fellows as long as there were fellows to be with. She would not have had it otherwise, even had he been willing to brave the society of the “mob” from St. Bridget’s. Equally, she must remain with her friends. It was quite enough to know that he wanted her: that presently he would come swinging down the long line of corridors to find her. To be very sure he would be glad to come.

She went back in thought to the girls’ chatter about twins. Yes, twins were curious. She and Derek had never really wanted anyone else as friends. Always they had seemed to know each other’s thoughts, to fit into each other’s ways. They had done the same things, even to sharing illnesses and dreams. Jill had thought that things would be different when they went to school, but the separation had not changed them a bit.

Of course, the giving was on her side. That seemed natural. She had always been more boy than girl, able to do all that a boy did; so that Derek had never needed any other comrade. They had grown up on a lonely Queensland station, knowing no other children, living the free “out-back” life, their only playmates dogs, horses, and the country. Not a girl’s life—which Jill had not realized until they came South to live, and she had met other girls. She liked them, for she was a friendly soul, eager for all new experiences. But their lives seemed curiously devoid of interest to her. She had known freedom and the sharing of men’s work, while they had been playing with dolls and going to parties: and more elaborate playthings and parties still seemed to make up their existence. Even after two years at a city school it all struck Jill as very queer.

She straightened up suddenly, and a light came into her eyes. A little thread of sound drifted to her; the snatch of a song that they called their “signature tune.” It was always their private signal; not to be used lightly, but only when one had need of the other. She whistled back:

*“For we’re riding—riding—riding,
Riding home again.”*

Then there was a quick step in the corridor, and Derek came in. He sat down opposite her. They looked at each other steadily for a moment before they broke into smiles.

“Well—you’ve shed them all?” he said.

“All,” returned Jill thankfully. “You too?”

“Oh, there’s one left. But he’s deep in a thriller. I left him to it. I say—you’ve grown!”

“Not more than you. Let’s stand up and see.”

They stood back to back in the swaying train, twisting their necks to see what the mirror told. The likeness was extraordinary. Jill had all the boy’s lithe slenderness, and almost his breadth of shoulder. The two heads were exactly level; the brown thatch was the same, with a hint of a wave in it; brown eyes, straight noses, firm lips, square chins—feature for feature the two faces were alike. They had the same clear olive skin; the same hands, long-fingered and capable. They laughed at each other in the mirror.

“Nothing to choose between us,” said Derek, as they sat down. “How long do you think it would take Mother to spot us if we swapped clothes now?”

“Oh, Mother would know. She’s the only one we’ve never been able to puzzle. Father wouldn’t know, so long as you kept on your hat. But we couldn’t do it now, Derek: you couldn’t get my shoes on.”

“No, though there’s not much difference even there. You’ve a pretty hefty foot for a girl, haven’t you?”

“Yes, rather. Angela Ware says it’s a tragedy. She has feet half the size of mine.”

“H’m,” said Derek. “Can she run?”

“She can’t. She wouldn’t want to do anything so undignified. But you ought to see her dance, Derek!”

“Don’t want to, thank you. I suppose I’ll like dancing some day, but it bores me stiff now. Seems so silly to grab hold of another fellow and go shuffling round!”

“We might practise a bit in the hols, if you like,” suggested Jill. “Mother is keen on our dancing well.”

“Not a bad idea,” he assented. “If we have time—and there will be more time, with Father away. Pretty rotten, isn’t it? I wish we could have gone with him. Though that would have been a bit slow for Mother.”

“Oh, we’ll have plenty of fun,” Jill said. “Anything will be good, after school. Any excitement this term?”

He shook his head.

“No—it’s been very quiet. I seem to have dodged trouble in an amazing way—I was always in hot water the term before. Of course I haven’t done any good in work. Not so bad in form-work, but exam results—whew!” His whistle was a comical mixture of amusement and disgust. “How about you?”

“Very much the same, only form-work not so different to exams,” was her rueful answer. “I get decent marks in English and history, but other things simply won’t stay in my head. Derek, I often wonder if you and I did really share one brain between us! We don’t seem to have the average allowance.”

“Book-work isn’t everything,” said her twin stubbornly. “I’ll back you against other girls in everything else. And school doesn’t last for ever. Not that I’m in any hurry for it to end: I get a lot of fun out of it. But when it’s over, what will things like Latin matter? Much Father remembers of all the Latin he says he used to know!”

“If he did, I don’t see how it would help him to judge cattle any better,” Jill remarked. “But the teachers say it’s not so much the actual subjects—it’s the way your brain grows when you learn them.”

“Pity my brain, then!” he laughed. “Oh, teachers have got to say things like that, I suppose. Anyhow, I’m not going to worry over it now. We’ve a whole month without lessons, so why think of them? If you want a really comforting thought, just remember that Father will get our reports up in Queensland!”

“That’s the only good thing about his being away,” she agreed. “Won’t it seem queer not to find him waiting on the Brandan’s Point Station!”

“Beastly!” Derek affirmed. “Oh, well, there’s a hope that he’ll be home in a fortnight. And meanwhile there’ll be Mother.”

“And Joker,” she added, smiling.

“And Joker. That’s one of the things I always look forward to—the way the little chap goes nearly off his head when I come home. He’s the most faithful little dog I ever knew. I had a letter from Mother yesterday, and she said he’d been terribly excited for several days, in and out of my room all the time. He always knows.”

“I would like to see him when it’s time for them to start to meet us. Mother always says, ‘Come on, Joker—it’s time to go to find Master.’ And he races for the car, and all the way to the Point her only fear is that he’ll burst!”

“And Mother says she’s not much better herself,” he said, smiling. “Getting home is certainly jolly: I’m going to ride all day to-morrow: I never feel that I’m really home until I’ve ridden all round the place. Coming?”

“Rather!” she said happily. “And we shall have lots of fun in the *Seahawk* this time, Derek. The wet weather spoiled that last hols.”

“Yes, but we learned all about running her, thank goodness. Otherwise we couldn’t have taken her out, with Father away. I’ve been picking up all the points I could from other fellows whose people have motor-boats. We’ll get

out to the islands at last, Jill.” His face was eager. “There’s heaps of exploring that we can do now.”

The miles flew by while they made plans for a dozen excursions by land and water. So intent were they that they did not notice the conductor when, an hour later, he came along the corridor, pausing in the doorway. He greeted them cheerfully.

“Getting home again? It seems only a few weeks since you went back.”

“Not to us!” said the twins in one voice.

“Well, I s’pose not. Your father was sayin’ he’d miss you; he went up with me last week. Hard luck, him having to go away. Ready for dinner, are you? We’re just slowing down for the refreshment-station.”

“Rather!” Derek spoke with confidence for his twin. “Come along, Jill—let’s be ready to jump for it. You don’t want a hat.”

He held her arm as they stood by the doorway in the corridor while the train ran in to the brightly-lit station. It was one of the stages in the journey home that Jill loved. Not the meal itself, though that was never unwelcome, and there was a feeling of excitement in choosing a dinner after the months of routine meals at school. But the freedom; the leap from the train before it had quite stopped; the rush across to the dining-room to seize a table and a waitress before the main horde of travellers surged in: the sense of being independent, grown-up. It never grew stale to Jill.

They were the first into the dining-room to-night, after a quick dash across the platform. The waitress they liked best greeted them—“Ah, I thought you’d be through to-night!”—and fled to bring them soup, confiding to them in a stage-whisper that, to-night, mutton was more to be recommended than beef. The room filled rapidly, everyone eating at top-speed, since the halt was but for twenty minutes. At a distant counter hungry people shouldered each other, clamouring for coffee and sandwiches and pies, to be eaten standing. Amid the din of voices, the clatter of knives and forks and plates, came the shrill cries of newsboys, shouting the evening papers.

Then, suddenly, the clang of the five-minute bell. Jill and Derek said good night to their friendly waitress—“See you this day month!”—and escaped to the platform for a quick walk in the cool air that was welcome after the reek of the dining-room. Two sharp marches up and down the length of the train, swinging aboard as the guard’s whistle blew: and they were off again, rushing through the night.

Then it seemed only a little while, so much was there to talk about, before the conductor was at the door: “Brandan’s Point next!” They gathered up their scattered possessions and stood in the corridor to catch the first glimpse of the sea that rippled under the moonlight: and forgot sea and land and everything else as the train came to a standstill by a platform where there was only one

figure that mattered—a little woman whose hands were fully occupied with holding back a frantic wire-haired fox-terrier that strained on its lead, barking madly. Her face was alight with welcome as the twins dropped from the train and raced to meet her.

CHAPTER II

PLANS GO ASTRAY

“**B**REAKFAST’S nearly ready, Derek!”

“Ugh!” groaned Derek. He raised a tousled head from his pillow, and let it drop back with a thud. “Why didn’t somebody wake me?”

“Someone did. Twice, I believe.”

“Then let them wake me again to-morrow. Good night, Jill. Shut the door as you go out.”

“Time you got up,” stated Jill unsympathetically. She made a quick movement, grasped the bedclothes, and removed them. The legs of the pyjama’d figure thus uncovered beat frantically on the sheet, while their owner uttered a despairing howl.

“Pig! Give me my blankets!”

“Not if I know it,” said Jill cheerfully. “The next thing will be a large, cold, wet sponge. Get up, you bleating creature!”

“Well, you have first bath,” said Derek from his pillow.

“I had it half an hour ago,” returned Jill loftily. She took the pillow.

“You’d rob a starving dog of his last bone!” said Derek, becoming suddenly very wide awake and sitting up. “As if a fellow who rode about a thousand miles yesterday wasn’t entitled to a little sleep at the end of the night, instead of being tortured by a great hulking animal who simply wants to swank because she’s dressed first and——” The flow of words ended in an ear-splitting school war-cry; a form hurtled through the air. Jill found herself picked up and cast upon the bed with the pillow over her face. As she struggled up, with Joker barking ecstatically, the door of the sleeping-out room crashed. Through the wire screens she beheld a long figure careering along the verandah in kangaroo-like bounds. It shed its pyjama coat as it went, giving a view of a very brown back. Sounds of song came from the bath-room, mingled with the splashing of the shower.

“Not often you catch me like that, my lad!” laughed Jill; “I might have known something was brewing when you let me get away with the pillow.” She reduced her hair to order, and joined her mother in the corner of the verandah where breakfast was laid.

“Will he be long?” asked Mrs. Sherwood, smiling.

“He will not,” said Derek’s voice. He came through a window, dressed but looking rather damp, and kissed her.

“Ugh!” she said. “Derek, you horror, there’s water trickling down your

neck. And did you comb your hair with your towel? It looks like it.”

“I don’t remember noticing a towel much,” returned her son. “Never mind: I’ll have a hat on presently, because we’re all going fishing.”

“Who told you that? Did you dream it?”

“I made that excellent plan while I had my bath,” said Derek with dignity. “In the absence of Father I am head of the house, and it is the place of women to obey. I say, melon! Good business!” He attacked a large slice.

“Fishing sounds good,” remarked Jill. “What do you think, Mother?”

“I think it is good if we take the launch,” answered Mrs. Sherwood. “Not so good in a small boat.”

“She’s tired!” affirmed Derek, ceasing to eat melon. “I say, Mother, did we take you too far yesterday? I was a bit afraid we did.”

“I took myself—you simply came too,” Mrs. Sherwood said loftily. “No one has any responsibility for my old bones, except myself. But—well, I am slightly conscious that I’ve had two days of pretty hard riding. I love it, of course, and we shall have more long days, but I think a launch with a nice cushioned seat sounds better to me than a rowing-boat.”

“We needn’t go out at all if you’d rather have an easy chair,” Derek said. “There’s plenty to do at home.”

“But I want to go. I have not been fishing for ages. Father has been too busy lately to take the *Seahawk* out.”

“She’s in perfect order: I overhauled her the day before yesterday,” Derek said. “It’s rather a good thing Father was so stern about my learning all her innards last hols, isn’t it? I was a bit sick about it then, because she was a new toy, but I’m jolly glad now.”

“It’s quite easy to be the man at the wheel—until something goes wrong,” his mother smiled. “Father wanted you to be quite independent of him. We agreed when we bought her that you must know everything about the engine before you ran her.”

“Well, I think I’m up to all her tricks now,” Derek remarked. “I ought to be: Father came down on me like a load of bricks if I was a bit sketchy over anything. And Jill knows nearly as much as I do. ’Member the day he kept us making twists and turns among the rocks, and bringing her alongside the jetty, Jill?”

“Do I not!” said Jill. “And each of us quaking in case the other scratched half an inch of her precious paint!”

“He was quite pleased with you that day,” Mrs. Sherwood said.

“Was he?” said Derek, astonished. “Pleasure was the last thing we’d have thought he felt, wasn’t it, Jill? His eye was like our Sergeant-Major’s on an inspection day. He did tell us at the finish that we could take her anywhere we liked, but we thought that was because he felt too worn to teach us any more.

And then it rained and rained, and we never got out again.”

He jumped up and perched on the verandah rail, with Joker making ineffectual attempts to lick his shoe. Jill strolled over to them. Mrs. Sherwood looked at her twins with a little smile. They wore the same kit—grey shirts, grey flannel trousers, and gym.-shoes; even a mother might have been excused for thinking that both were boys.

“I didn’t think you were so very much alike as people say when you came home in respectable clothing,” she remarked. “But really, when you wear those things, Jill, I have to look twice to make sure that I’m speaking to my son. If you could be persuaded to wear different ties it would be less strain on the household!”

“Bother the household!” Jill said lightly. “Who’d wear ties with open-necked shirts? I’d love to dress you up this way, Mother—you’d never put on anything else if you only knew how comfy it is. Why shouldn’t you?—You’re just about as young as we are. Wouldn’t it suit her, Derek?”

Derek pondered.

“No, I don’t think so,” he said at length. “She’d look nice, of course, but it wouldn’t be like her. And can’t you see Father’s face! It would be worth trying, just for that.”

“It took all my tact and eloquence to make Father allow it for Jill,” laughed Mrs. Sherwood. “I wouldn’t advise trying him any further. Someone must maintain respectability about the house, and as far as I can see I’m the only one who is likely to do it. Derek, is it really good for Joker to eat so much gym.-shoe?”

“I don’t think it hurts him as much as it hurts the shoe,” said Derek placidly. “He can digest anything. Down, Joker, you greedy brute!” He tipped the little dog over with his foot, and Joker made ecstatic efforts to reach the verandah rail. Jill picked him up and gave him to his owner, and he cuddled down into the grey shirt.

“This is very peaceful, but we must get busy, Jill,” remarked Mrs. Sherwood. “Will you see to the picnic-basket while I go to the kitchen for a heart-to-heart talk with Susan? And Derek, you will have to be responsible for all the fishing-gear. I won’t insult you by asking if you’re sure we have plenty of petrol.”

“Better not,” threatened Derek. “When do we start?”

“Oh—when we’re ready. I should like to wait until Joe brings the mail, but he will be back very soon now. Will you take Joker?”

“Not fishing,” said Derek. “He gets too excited when anyone gets a fish—I don’t want a tangle of line. Joker, and a big schnapper, all mixed up in the bottom of the boat. All right, Mother, I’ll go and see to things.” He vaulted over the rail and strode off, the terrier at his heels.

Jill came out to the verandah half an hour later, bearing a laden basket. She put it in a corner shaded by a dense tangle of tecoma that climbed over the roof, and went back for a second load.

"That's all," she said. Turning, she saw her mother in a deck-chair, a pile of letters on her knee. "Mail come? Is there anything from Father?"

"Yes—he's well," said Mrs. Sherwood absently, continuing to read.

"Sure?" Jill asked, looking at her keenly. "Is anything wrong, Mother?"

"Not with Father," said Mrs. Sherwood, putting down her letter. Her pretty face was troubled. "But there is worrying news about Grannie. She has had a fall—a mat slipped with her on a polished floor. Her ankle is badly wrenched—they are afraid it is broken."

"I say!" uttered Jill. "Poor old Grannie!"

There was real concern in her voice. Mrs. Sherwood's widowed mother was, the twins were wont to say, the sort of grandmother who grew younger as she grew older. She understood them—chuckled delightfully at all their jokes. They suspected that their school escapades interested her far more than their places in form. That Grannie should be hurt was a thing to hurt all the family who loved her.

"She is in great pain, the nurse says—the doctor put in a nurse at once. Of course the fall in itself was a shock."

Jill set her lips.

"You'll go to her, Mother, won't you?"

"Oh, bless you, Jill!" said her mother. "I was wondering how to say it."

"But of course you must. Why, if it were you—do you think I could get to you quickly enough! You can't leave her without anyone belonging to her."

"No, I can't. But—to leave you and Derek—and Father away!"

"Derek and I will be all right. We'll have heaps to do."

"What have I got to do in heaps?" asked Derek's voice, as he came round the corner. The situation was explained to him, and the cheerfulness died out of his face.

"There's only one thing to do," he said. "And you haven't got anyone to think of but Grannie, Mother. Jill and I can look after ourselves."

"I shall think of my twins every minute," said little Mrs. Sherwood dolefully. "And we were having such a beautiful time!"

"You won't be away so very long. Trust Grannie for that—once her foot is fixed up and the pain eases, she'll send you flying back to us. I'll bet she wouldn't let you come, if you asked her—so the only thing is to go without asking. And don't you hurry back, Mother—not until you feel happy about coming."

Mrs. Sherwood looked from one young face to the other, her brow puckered. Jill put her arm round her shoulders and laughed at her.

“Now, you needn’t look at us as if we were trying to be little heroes! You know perfectly well that we simply hate letting you go, and we’ll be ready to jump out of our skins when we hear you’re coming back. But we’re not going to make a song about it. Will Susan run the show in the kitchen, or am I housekeeper?”

“Oh, you can leave things to Susan and Mary. They are steady girls. And you’ll just carry on as if I were here—I know you will be careful in the boats. Perhaps it will be only for a few days; Grannie won’t want me to stay, once she feels better.”

“You be firm with Grannie,” said Derek. “She’s the one who will try the little-hero stunt: but you stick like a clam if she needs you, Mother. Perhaps you’ll be able to pack her up and bring her back with you. That would be rather a lark.”

“It might be possible.” Mrs. Sherwood brightened. “You’re very heartening, twinses. Now I must go to pack a suitcase. Come with me, Jill, and help.”

“You’ll catch the train after lunch, I suppose?” asked Derek. “The two-thirty?”

“Yes—tell Joe I’ll want the car. And will you write to Father, Derek?—tell him I’ll write from Grannie’s. I must talk to Susan and arrange everything. We must start early; I shall have to go to the Bank for money.”

“I’ve got lots,” said the twins together.

“Have you? What bank have you been robbing?”

“Well, Grannie sent us each some,” Jill explained. “She said it might come in handy in the hols.”

“And it might,” agreed their mother, smiling. “I believe the cinema at Brandan’s Point is rather good just now. I won’t borrow from you—there will be plenty of time to go to the Bank. By the way, you might as well stay for the cinema after my train goes.”

“That’s an idea,” said Derek. “We’ll take Joe. He told me yesterday he had never been to one. Well, I’ll go and see him about the car.”

The next few hours passed in an atmosphere of determined cheerfulness that deceived nobody. It was almost a relief when the ten miles to Brandan’s Point were behind them, and Mrs. Sherwood safely installed in the train, with an enormous bunch of such flowers as the twins considered would be soothing to a damaged grandmother. They hugged the traveller heartily, and maintained large artificial smiles until the train was out of sight.

“Rather feels as if the bottom had fallen out of everything, doesn’t it?” remarked Derek, relapsing into gloom. “Oh, well—we’ll have to think up something. Let’s see what Joe’s emotions are at the flicks.”

Joe, an elderly retainer who had been in the Sherwood service for twenty

years, sat at the wheel of the car with an expression of deep melancholy.

"Well, now, don't this smash up your 'olidays!" he mourned.

"No, it doesn't!" snapped Derek. "You stop looking like a funeral, Joe; we're just beginning to enjoy ourselves. It's high time you saw a movie, and that's the next thing on the programme. Step on it—the cinema in Beach Road."

"I never seen one of them things," said Joe, "stepping on it" as ordered, but without enthusiasm. "Mary an' Susan's always talkin' about 'em, but I don't 'old with them. You an' Miss Jill go in, Master Derek; I'll smoke me old pipe outside."

"You're coming in," said Derek masterfully. "We won't go if you don't."

"Oh, well, if you put it that way—but I'd rather have me old pipe. I'm too old to go in for new-fangled things. Them girls'll have the laugh at me for goin'."

"You needn't tell them," said Jill. "We'll promise not to give you away, Joe. But you'll probably want to take them every Saturday night after this."

"Not on your life, Miss Jill!" uttered Joe. "Once'll do me, an' a bit over."

He maintained an attitude of deep gloom for the first half of the programme. This was not to be wondered at, since the opening picture was a tale of tangled love which Derek bitterly described as "utter slush." This having dragged itself to an end, Joe eagerly looked for his hat. Being forcibly restrained by Derek, he subsided, grumbling, just as "Mickey Mouse" capered across the screen.

The effect upon Joe was electrical. For a moment he gaped in bewilderment: then a sudden "Haw-haw-haw!" shook the air around him. No child of six was ever more completely conquered by "Mickey Mouse" than was old Joe. He roared with joy at each victory over misfortune: he slapped his knee with a force that re-echoed through the building. "Go it, little 'un!" he shouted at a tense moment. "Go it!"

Derek and Jill, at first embarrassed, strove to check this outburst; then, finding they might as well have tried to check Niagara, resigned themselves, and became weak with laughter. They were still speechless when Mickey disappeared, and Joe came back to earth.

"By gum, that was great, Miss Jill!" he declared at the top of his voice. "Will he come back?"

"No—but here's something else," Jill managed to utter; and Joe, now quite docile, hastily glued his eyes to the screen.

The picture held him instantly. It was a Wild West story, and horses and cattle were nearly all that old Joe's life had known. He palpitated throughout it—panting audibly at exciting moments, half rising to his feet, to the loudly-expressed disgust of those who were unfortunate enough to sit behind him. He

saw no reason why he should not shout encouragement or warning to the actors, and accordingly he shouted both, quite unconscious that the bitter hisses of “Sh-h-h!” were levelled at himself. Indeed, when one such utterance, wrathfully prolonged, forced itself upon his attention, he twisted in his seat to cry, “Wot yer ’issin’ ’im for?—ain’t ’e doin’ ’is best?”—and turned back with a warm conviction of having boldly championed a good cause. A gale of laughter swept the audience.

Thenceforward the picture, as an entertainment, suffered by comparison with Joe. As the story developed, his comments became more and more excited. When the heroine allowed herself to be tricked into going off with the villain, his loud remark was probably what many would have wished to utter—“Actin’ like a fool, she is—anyone can see the chap ain’t straight!”—and he promptly lost all sympathy with the deluded damsel. But in the final scene, where the hero, on his trusty mustang, plunged down the mountain-side to her rescue, his enthusiasm soared.

“’E can’t do it—’e can’t do it—I tell yer, Miss Jill, no man could take an ’orse down an ’ill like that at a gallop! ’E’s down!—no ’e ain’t—’old ’im up, lad! By gum, ’e ’as done it! ’E’s got ’er! My word, I never seen a chap ride like that!” He subsided, panting heavily. The picture ended on a scene of reunited love, and Jill and Derek dragged their unwilling companion away, thankful to escape before the lights went up.

The effect of his experiences lingered with Joe on the road home. At times, the twins, chuckling together in the back of the car, heard deep rumbles of laughter that were clearly connected with Mickey Mouse. Then there were intervals when Joe absent-mindedly weighed upon the accelerator until he reached a speed he had never known before, taking corners on two wheels and passing other cars by a hair’s breath, his mind plunging over the Western prairie with the hero and his mustang. Broken ejaculations came to them:

“Cowboys! I thought them yarns about their ridin’ was all bosh! . . . By gum, I’m glad ’e got that feller with a bullet—good enough for ’im, too! . . . A fool, that’s wot she was! . . . ’Ow they ride in them pants beats me!”

“Well, you liked the last part, Joe?” Jill asked, as they reached home.

“Fair knocked me, that bit did, Miss Jill,” he admitted. “Can’t say I think much of their cattle, but those chaps can ride! They talk funny, but you’d get used to that. I reckon I’ll go again—there’s worse ways of spendin’ a bob or two.” He looked sheepish. “Guess I’ll have to own up to Mary an’ Susan!”

“What will you say if they ask you to take them on Saturday night, Joe?” asked Derek.

A slow grin spread over the old face.

“I reckon I’ll have to say—‘It’s O.K. by me, honey!’ Master Derek!”

CHAPTER III

THE "SEAHAWK"

"WELL, we've laughed until we ached, and we've made Joe into a film-fan; and that's more than I thought we could have done this afternoon," remarked Derek. "But it doesn't stop the house feeling awfully large and empty to-night, does it?"

Jill shook her head.

"It's not so funny . . . being without Mother. Everything seems to have fallen to pieces, somehow. What are we going to do about it, Derek?"

They were sitting in the smoking-room, each half lost in the depths of a large leather arm-chair. Joker was curled up on Derek's knee; he alone was unaware of anything lacking towards complete happiness. They had tried the wireless, which crackled under a burden of atmospherics, and the gramophone, which seemed only boring, and had finally relapsed into silence.

"Oh, well, we aren't going to bleat about it," Derek said firmly. "I expect things will feel better to-morrow. We'll go fishing, anyhow, as we didn't go to-day."

Jill nodded absently. She was thinking.

"Derek," she said presently, "I have a plan. You know the Temples are always asking us to go over and stay with them at the Point. Suppose we go?"

"They mightn't be able to have us. Pity we didn't think of asking them when we were over there to-day."

"Oh, they're the kind of people who like to have a crowd always. Doris said they could put us into a tent last hols. We might take over some blankets, in case they were short of them."

"It would be rather fun," said Derek. "Peter Temple's a good sort. Did you think of going over in the car?"

Jill considered this.

"No, I think that would be dull. Joe would have to take us if we did. I vote we go in the launch. We could fish in the morning, have lunch on the water, and turn up at the Temples' in time for tea."

"I say, Jill, it's a bit of a brain-wave!" said Derek. "A few days over there would just fill in the time before Mother comes back. You're sure you'd like to go?"

"I think it would be wise," said Jill sagely. "If we had known we should be alone here, we'd have been prepared, and quite happy. It's just because Mother has been whisked away unexpectedly that everything seems to have flopped.

So the best plan is to do something that is—well, different. And we're sure to have fun with the Temples. Anyhow—we'll go looking for adventures."

"Right-oh. And we'll find 'em!" cried Derek. "I feel bucked-up already. Will it matter what we wear?"

"I don't think the Temples would notice if we lived in bathing-suits from morning till night," laughed Jill. "I might put in a frock just in case it was wanted. But they would run us over in the car if we really needed more clothes."

"I'll take you, old man," Derek said, pulling Joker's ears. "Couldn't leave you alone to look after the place with all your belongings away. And if you fight with Temple dogs you'll get whacked." At which Joker, clearly understanding, became wildly excited, barked enthusiastically, and ended by licking his master's nose.

The morning broke clear and still, promising a day of unusual warmth for autumn. Not the best of days for fishing, Derek reflected, as he carried blankets down to the boat-house and stowed them in the launch. The tiny bay below the house was like glass, sheltered on both sides as it was by low cliffs, clothed with tea-tree scrub. He ran the launch out, made sure that he had plenty of petrol and that all was well with the engine, and brought her alongside the jetty. Joker, established on the fore-deck, surveyed these preparations with grave approval.

"Looks well, old chap, doesn't she?" Derek asked him, jumping out, and turning to run his eye over the *Seahawk*. Her brown paint was fresh; every part that could be polished shone brightly. "Come along; we're not off yet." With the little dog at his heels he went whistling back towards the house—quickenning his steps as he saw Jill, laden with bundles and baskets.

"Couldn't you have waited until I got back, you old duffer!" he reproached her. "There's no need to make yourself into a pack-horse. Is there anything else to bring?"

"No, that's all," she answered, not sorry to give up some of her burdens. "You've got the fishing-gear?"

Derek nodded. "Those clams I got for bait must be a bit ancient, but the fish like 'em that way. Anyhow, we can soon catch something for fresh bait. What about getting Mother's letters?"

"I told Joe to send on anything for us. And I've written to Mother, saying we were going to the Temples'. So everything's fixed up."

Heavy steps pounded down the hill in their rear.

"Well, now, Miss Jill—you hadn't ought to 'ave gone off on me like that," Joe rebuked her. "I was only 'avin' a word with the girls in the kitchen, an' you know you'd a right to get me to carry them things." He annexed all that she was holding, together with Derek's largest basket, and strode downwards.

“Films?” queried Derek, with a grin.

“Films.” She nodded. “I hadn’t the heart to interrupt him—he was in full career, with Mary and Susan gaping at him. I see all Joe’s savings going to support that cinema.”

“He’ll end by importing cowboy kit to ride after cattle. And that will make things very bright when the other fellows see him,” chuckled Derek. “Well, nobody can say we haven’t given Joe a new outlook on life. We’ve done our good deed for the holidays, and now we can be as slack as we like!”

Joe had arranged everything in shipshape fashion in the launch. He stood on the end of the pier as they moved slowly out.

“Don’t stay away too long, Master Derek! This place’ll be pretty lonesome until you all get back.”

“We won’t be long,” Derek called. “You’ll know where to find us if we’re wanted.”

“Right-oh!” He waved his hat. The launch slipped out of the little bay, tossing gently as she met the long, lazy swell of the open sea. In a moment they were out of sight beyond the southern headland.

Twelve miles up the coast Brandan’s Point ran out, a long, narrow finger dotted with houses, ending in a bluff that dropped sheer to the water. In the other direction there were no headlands: the line of hummocks was unbroken, clothed towards the land with scrub, presenting precipitous sandy slopes towards the sea. It was a lonely stretch of coast, with few houses to be seen, and only at a very few places was there any shelter for boats. Their own little bay seemed due to an accident, perhaps a whim of Father Neptune, which had flung great rocks to the shore, so close together that in the course of ages sand and scrub had drifted over them. Other rocks were scattered in the water, rough brown shapes that made careful steering necessary for a little distance.

Beyond was open water. Here and there, towards the Point, a buoy marked a dangerous bank or a submerged rock. Farther out, islands were dotted about, some mere humps of sand and rock, with five or six larger ones, covered with trees. They were islands of hope to Jill and Derek. Since they had first come to live by the sea the islands had represented to them the undiscovered country which they must some day explore. That was out of the question while they had only a rowing-boat; but the purchase of the launch, a few months back, made longer sea-trips possible, and both twins had looked forward eagerly to an island expedition during the holidays.

They ran down the coast for a few miles before turning outwards to a bank where fair schnapper-fishing was generally to be found. There they anchored and dropped in their hand-lines, weighted with heavy lead sinkers. The ancient clams were not especially pleasant to prepare as bait, but it was soon evident that the schnapper appreciated a meal with a flavour; in a few moments Jill’s

line quivered, tightened and jerked, as the fish tugged furiously. She hauled in, hand over hand. Joker became wildly excited when a broad shape, darting hither and thither, gleamed in the water; and in a moment a big pink-and-silver fish was flapping madly in the bottom of the launch.

“Keep back, Joker!” shouted Derek. “I’ll get him, Jill—don’t let him tangle the line more than you can help.” He gave his own line a couple of twists round a cleat and strove to disentangle the fighting fish, while Joker, yearning to be in the fray, barked furiously. Twice the schnapper eluded the boy’s grasp; then Derek had him. He ended his career with a quick blow, holding him up in triumph. The sunlight flashed on the beautiful sides and on the ugly bull-nosed head.

“Some fish!” uttered Derek. “Well done, old thing—good beginning!”

“Quick—there’s something on your line!” Jill cried. She snatched the fish as Derek swung round to find his line taut and jerking.

“He’s sending up Morse messages from below!” grinned Derek, gripping the line; “and, my hat! he can pull. Get your gear clear, Jill—I don’t want to land this chap on top of it.”

“All clear!” sang out Jill; “and Joker thinks a whale is trying to kill you.” She grasped the little dog’s collar as he struggled to go to his master’s aid. “Be quiet, Joker—lie down, sir!” The fish was hauled in to the accompaniment of a fusillade of barking.

“I’ll have to teach that dog fishing-manners,” said Derek with annoyance, as he wound up his line. “Come here, Joker.” He dangled the schnapper by its tail in front of the terrier’s nose. “Take a good look at it.”

Joker did so, and said exactly what he thought of it. It was clear that he regarded it as bad medicine.

“No, you don’t—you’re not to bark at fish,” his master told him. “Be quiet! Well, if you won’t——” He rubbed the wet black nose with the fish. Joker protested violently.

“I wouldn’t like it myself, so I can guess how you feel about it,” grinned Derek. “Stop yapping: I’ll rub your nose every time you do it.”

“I’ve got another!” cried Jill, from the stern.

“Bring it in—it will help to train Joker.” He silenced a bark with a quick dab of fish. “You’ll get it every time, old chap. Little dogs must learn to be quiet in boats. Now you get up for’ard and hold your tongue.”

Joker escaped to the bow, where he showed that he considered himself free to bark; finding, to his disgust, that further applications of fish were his reward. The lesson continued for twenty minutes, during which Jill landed three fish. Derek felt that his sternness had been worth while when Joker watched the third arrival in silence. He quivered like a bundle of springs, but he did not bark; and was given praise and a biscuit.

“Now you’re a sensible fisherman’s dog—good old chap!” said Derek, rubbing his ears. “You stay there and be quiet. I’ll leave your object-lesson near you, just to remind you what will happen if you get above yourself again.”

Joker looked at the schnapper in deep disgust. He retired to the farthest possible point of the bow and sat down to reflect on the difficulties of life.

“You can be pretty patient when you like,” Jill told Derek. “I think I should have given it up and whacked him ten minutes ago.”

“Whacking wouldn’t have been half as good,” said Derek. “He knows now what fish means to his young mind.”

“Yes, when I catch them. But he may not be able to bear it when he thinks Master is attacked by a sea-monster.”

“We’ll see.” They fished for a few minutes before Derek’s bait was again taken. Joker, who had remained coldly aloof just before, when Jill had hauled one in, was on his feet in a moment, bristling. He gave one short yap.

“Stop that!” commanded Derek, waving his free hand towards the schnapper lying in the bow, and Joker said no more, though he stood quivering as if about to spring. Derek landed his fish, killed it, and stowed it in the basket. Then he turned.

“Good dog! Come here.”

Joker came with a bound. This was not the stern-voiced Master who rubbed his nose with a hideous sea-monster: it was the Master who knew just where a dog liked to be tickled, whose voice was, beyond all other sounds, able to send one little dog into the seventh heaven. Joker rubbed that fishy nose into his arm in ecstasy.

“Very good dog!” said Derek. “Now you get back, and we’ll all have a good time.”

Joker went back, passing the schnapper with a look that bespoke utter contempt. Sea-monsters, the look said clearly, were beneath a dignified dog’s notice: when young, he had imagined that they were to be barked at, but now he had grown old and wise. He watched the fishing with interest, but without comment, since that was evidently the way Master wished to be helped.

“I think we’ve got enough,” remarked Jill after a tune. “The Temples will never be able to eat all these.”

“Oh, they can give them away,” Derek said carelessly. “But I’ve had enough fishing. It’s better fun with a rod: I vote we bring rods out next time.”

“Yes—and now we’ll have lunch.” She wound up her line, and they cleaned the launch with cotton-waste. Derek pitched Joker’s sea-monster overboard, to the little dog’s obvious relief. The sight of the lunch-basket brought him to his feet, wagging his brief tail. He looked sideways at Derek, and bounded into the stern at his whistle.

“Susan seems to have packed enough for an army,” said Jill, investigating the basket. “Sausage-roll or sandwich?”

“If you put them between us we shan’t have to make up our minds,” grinned Derek. “I’m hungry enough for an army. Can you see Joker’s package? I asked Susan to put in some special bones. Sandwiches are not much good for him.”

“Here you are—all labelled.” She tossed him a brown-paper bag, and he made Joker happy with a juicy chop-bone. They ate in contented silence, basking in the sunshine.

“Well—I’m beaten,” announced Derek after a time. “That is good cake—but solid. There’s an awful lot left. Shall we ground-bait the schnapper with it?”

Jill’s prudent mind revolted at this.

“Oh, it might come in handy—you never know. I think we’ll keep it.”

“Well, I suppose the Temples keep fowls,” he said. “They’ll eat it, if nobody else will. Oh, and I’m so lazy! I don’t want to fish, or pull up the anchor, or anything. I think I want to sleep.”

“No reason why you shouldn’t,” Jill said, packing up the lunch-basket. “It’s rather jolly to think there’s no hurry about doing anything. Why do we feel so lazy in the first week of the hols?”

“Because we live by a time-table all through term, I suppose. We just go from one thing to another then, because we’ve got to. Then we come home, where time doesn’t matter, and we go slack.”

“Like old elastic,” suggested Jill.

“Just that. Now I know what I feel like.” He gave a great yawn, dragged himself up to the decking, and stretched out on his back, pulling his soft felt hat over his eyes.

Jill laughed to herself, yawned as she laughed, and followed him. Joker followed Jill, finding a place in the sun between them, where a little dog might put his nose between his paws and go to sleep. Silence fell. The launch rocked gently on the long sea roll.

The quick beat of a motor roused them half an hour later. Joker greeted it with a yap, and Derek rolled over. Jill was on her elbow, watching a boat half a mile away out to sea.

She was a long grey launch, almost the colour of the sea at evening. Two men sat in her, and she was headed for Brandan’s Point. The sea boiled away under her forefoot; her wake was a long path across the water.

“My hat, what a beauty!” uttered Derek. “Wonder whose she is? I didn’t think there was such a boat round here.”

“Well, she mightn’t belong here, because she could certainly arrive from anywhere else pretty quickly,” Jill said, laughing. “Do you think she’s a naval

launch?"

"I don't think so—she's not quite their colour. They're a darker grey. Whoever her owners are they're lucky blighters. She's a super-thing in launches." His face was eager as he watched.

"They're going in to the Point. I say, Jill, let's go, too. We might have a chance of seeing her at the pier."

Together they tugged at the anchor, coiling up its rope hastily, with something less than the shipshape manner enforced by their father. Derek started the engine; they dashed off at a pace considerably swifter than their leisurely progress of the morning, though it was slow travelling beside the speed of the grey launch. But the leading boat did not keep up her rate. She was still some miles from the Point when her engine slowed down, and she ran in quietly. Watching, the twins saw her berth by the pier steps. The men made her fast, ran up the steps, and walked off towards the township.

"Good business!" said Derek. "We're safe to see her now."

He kept his engine at high speed, and they were soon near the pier. It was deserted, save for a lone fisherman at the far end. They berthed at the other side of the steps. There was little to see in the grey launch, though her beautiful lines were a joy to any boat-lover. Her engine was carefully covered: everything about her was as spick-and-span as paint and polish could make her. Two rods in canvas cases were stowed along one side, a big fishing-basket near them. Derek sighed with joy over her.

"Lucky blighters!" he repeated enviously.

"Well, I think our own boat is just as good. For us, I mean," retorted Jill.

"Oh, for us, of course she is. She's just a good family affair. But you don't understand, Jill—this one's altogether out of the common. Wouldn't I like to get to know her owners, and have a spin in her!"

"So you might, with luck. You never know," Jill suggested.

"Too much luck to hope for. Well, I've seen her, anyway. Now I suppose we had better get up to the Temples'. We'll leave the kit until we have seen them, won't we? Peter can come and help us carry it up."

"Yes—probably they will send the car down when they hear we have that pile of blankets. But we might as well take the fish, Derek."

"It would look better," agreed Derek. "Like the people that arrived bringing their provender in the mouth of their sack. We haven't got a sack but a fishing-basket's the next best thing."

He slung the basket on his shoulder, and then hesitated.

"I vote we put on blazers. It's as well to make a first appearance looking slightly respectable."

"Right," agreed Jill. "Chuck mine up."

The blazers did little to mark any difference between them—each being

dark blue, alike save for the school crests on the pockets. With Jill's hair covered by her grey felt hat no stranger would have dreamed that they were not brothers. They fell into step, marching along the pier, with Joker at their heels, and took the steep path towards the town.

CHAPTER IV

THE YELLOW FLAG

THE town of Brandan's Point straggled back from the sea, the road to the pier winding up the sandy headland. Not a good road for horses with laden vehicles, and motorists disliked it heartily, especially when rain turned it into a water-course. To-day, however, it was at its driest, and the fine sand made walking a heavy matter.

"Jolly hot!" said Derek, as they gained the level road above. "We'll collect old Peter and have an ice when we come back, Jill." He looked longingly at a small confectioner's shop which bore the magic legend "Fresh Ices."

"Oh!" said Jill blankly. "I didn't bring any money!"

"I did. Fact is, I brought too much. I meant to take some out of my little wallet, and I forgot."

"Oh, that's all right," said Jill, much relieved. "Then we'll certainly have ices. There are your men from the launch, Derek."

"Where?" he asked eagerly. "Oh—I see—over the other side."

The men who had left the grey motor-boat were standing under the verandah of a shop across the street. One was a tall fellow, with a keen, dark face, clean-shaven and good-looking; his companion, short and thickset, with fair hair and a trim little moustache, had somewhat of the air of a cheerful little dog. They were dressed in sweaters and grey flannels, and both were hatless. The tall man was looking at his wrist-watch.

"They look pretty decent," Derek commented. "I wish I knew who they are."

"The Temples may know," Jill suggested. The men did not interest her; at heart she was a little hurt that their launch had led Derek to disparage their own *Seahawk*, which represented to her all that was most desirable in boats.

"They may—but they haven't been living here long, you know," said Derek, moving on reluctantly. "Still, Peter has a way of picking up things. We'll ask him."

They turned from the main street, following a tree-shaded side-road for a few hundred yards. The Temples' house, set in wide grounds, and half-hidden by shrubberies, faced them as the road curved. A boy's figure could be seen at the gate.

"There's Peter!" said Jill. "I'm glad he's at home. Whistle to him, Derek."

Derek whistled, and the boy looked up quickly. He stared at them for a moment; then waved his hand, continuing to busy himself with something at

the gate-post. This showed itself, as the twins drew near, as a small flag of a particularly bilious shade of yellow, its staff thrust into a hole in the post. It drooped in a depressed fashion, and the boy drooped over the gate beside it, as if in imitation.

“What on earth is he up to?” uttered Derek. He raised his voice. “Whose flag are you flying, Peter? What’s your game?”

“Unclean!” said Peter in a hollow voice.

The twins stopped, staring.

“Do you mean us?” demanded Derek.

“No; you look beastly clean. We’re not. Are you coming to see us? Because you can’t.”

The bewildered twins moved forward.

“Keep back!” warned Peter. “Don’t I tell you we’re unclean? You ought to know a yellow flag when you see one. We’re . . . er . . . diseased.”

“Peter, what’s the matter? Anyone ill?”

“Ill!” said Peter gloomily. “We’re simply *greasy* with measles! Doris has got ’em, the two kids have got ’em, and now the cook’s got em. Bright holidays, and all that, I don’t think! And everyone’s watching me eagerly to see when I’ll blossom out in spots.”

He drew a small mirror from his pocket and inspected himself earnestly.

“None yet. The one on my nose is a mosquito-bite. It’s pretty foul, you know—the family actually *wants* me to blaze out in spots. They say it would be ever so much simpler if all of us had it at once. They’ve simply wished it on Doris. And now they’re wishing it on me!”

“Oh, Peter, I’m awfully sorry,” Jill said. “Is Doris very ill?”

“No. Nobody’s very ill. Doris seems pretty cheerful, considering, and the kids are sitting up now, doing jig-saws on trays. I don’t know how the cook is—and I don’t care. You never saw such a house. It’s simply sticky with aunts. They all had measles about forty years ago, so they’re not scared, and they came in herds to help Mother. You chaps got any aunts?”

“Not a single one!” said Derek. “We’ve always thought it was rather hard luck.”

“Oh, yeah?” drawled Peter expressively. “Don’t you waste any grief on that. Aunts think that because they’re aunts you’ve got to love them, and they’re entitled to boss you. Mine kiss me twice a day. Large moist kisses. I’m fed-up with life.”

The twins, rendered almost speechless by the starkness of this tragedy, uttered incoherent sympathy.

“Can you come out?” Derek asked. “We’re not afraid of measles—we had ’em years ago.”

Peter shook his head.

“Had to give my word I wouldn’t go outside the place. The doctor says he doesn’t mind how many Temples have ’em, but he bars us spreading germs all over Brandan’s. So you see what that means. Whenever I’m in the house I’m falling over aunts, so I’m reduced to wandering outside like—like a beast in the jungle.” The twins exploded in a sudden shout of laughter. Peter glared at them for a moment, and then permitted himself to grin.

“I suppose it has its funny side,” he said. “Especially when you’re on the right side of the gate. Sometimes I think I’d just as soon come all over spotty and be done with it, if it weren’t for the aunts. You see, once I go down I’ll be at their mercy, and they’ll sit on my bed and talk to me. Improving talk. Unless you’ve had any of your own you can’t imagine the line of chat aunts hand out to a fellow.”

“I wish we could kidnap you and take you over to our place,” Derek declared.

Peter sighed heavily.

“Do you mind not talking about it?” he asked. “I might break down. Tell me about yourselves. Having good hols?”

“Well, rather. The parents are away, so it’s a bit dull. The fact is,” admitted Derek, “we came over to see if we could stay with you for a few days. Your mother was jolly kind asking us last hols.”

“Doris talked of our camping in your garden in a tent,” added Jill. “We thought that would be fun. Peter, we even brought our blankets!”

“Well, that puts the lid on things!” mourned Peter. “What larks we could have had! I say, you know, I’m awfully sorry. It seems pretty rotten to have to turn you back at the gate.”

The twins assured him handsomely that their feelings were not to be considered.

“All the same, it’s foul,” stated Peter. “But I don’t see what I can do about it. How did you come over?”

“In the motor-boat. We left our kit in her. We’ve been fishing all day. These fish are for your mother, by the way,” Derek added. “Can you let them in, or will they get measles?”

“I think we can chance it. What are they—schnapper? Good business,” said Peter. “Most of my meals are tail-ends of the stuff they make for nourishment. And you two free and independent blighters are out on the loose with a motor-boat and blankets! Why don’t you go and camp somewhere?”

“That’s what we meant to do,” said Jill. “But it rather depended on you.”

“I don’t see that. We’d have loved to have you, of course. But if you don’t want to go home—well, you’ve got your boat and your kit, and you could easily pick up some grub. And there’s lots of Australia to camp in!”

“We haven’t got a tent.”

“Who wants a tent?” demanded Peter loftily. “You’ve got a big launch. I’ve slept in a canoe before now. Though I’ll admit I never knew in how many places I could ache until that night!”

The twins looked at each other doubtfully.

“Tell you what I’d do, if I had your chance,” said Peter eagerly. “I’d go and camp on one of the islands. I’ve never been there, but I believe they’re ripping—good bathing, good sand, and fishing-grounds all round ’em. And there are caves—lots of ’em. A chap told me that the water is always deep in some of the sea-caves; so deep that you can stow a launch away.”

“I say!” uttered Derek, his eyes kindling.

“It’s nothing of a run out, with a motor-boat,” Peter said. “You could buy a frying-pan and things in the town, and you’d nearly live on the fish you’d catch. And you could run over here every day for anything you wanted. What would your people say? Would there be a row?”

“I don’t think so,” said Derek slowly. “Father said I could take the boat anywhere. Do you know if it’s risky for a boat the size of *Seahawk*?—currents and sunken rocks, or anything like that?”

“I fancy not. Two fellows were out there in the summer, and neither of them knew much about a boat. I heard all I know of the islands from them. They had a fortnight there, and they said it was marvellous.”

There was a pause, devoted to profound thought by the twins.

“Well—why not?” they said suddenly in perfect tune. Peter grinned.

“You’re a funny pair,” he told them. “Do you always think like that? One brain between you?”

“It’s a good thing for you that you’re the safe side of the gate,” said Derek threateningly. “Do you think it’s really all right, Jill?”

“I think it’s a gorgeous chance,” she answered. “There’s nothing to go home for, and nobody to worry about. I’m game, if you are.”

“Oh, I’m game. We’ve always wanted to explore the islands. And if we go now and find that they’re as good as Peter thinks they are we’ll make Father and Mother come out another time. I’m not sure that we wouldn’t explore them better on our own: parents have such a way of thinking that perfectly easy things aren’t safe.”

“Mine are a bit trying that way,” agreed Peter. “I took the kids out in that canoe I built, and Mother was quite fussy about it.”

“That’s the one that sinks unexpectedly, isn’t it?” asked Jill.

“Oh, well, she did, once or twice. But I’d altered her after that. She was really a jolly good boat until I stove her in on the Black Rocks. She wasn’t much good after that. By the way, you haven’t got a dinghy with you, I suppose?”

Derek shook his head.

"It's a good thing to have one at the islands. The chaps I was telling you about came in and hired one: they said you could get into lots of places in a dinghy where you couldn't take a big boat. There's no landing for a launch on some of the islands, but you can anchor, and go off exploring in a dinghy. You can have mine if you like."

"Oh, but you might want her," objected Jill.

"Me? I'm booked for measles. There isn't a hope that I can dodge, with the aunts all concentrated on it. And, anyhow, I'm not allowed outside the place. You might as well have her. She's a tiny thing, but she'll take you anywhere."

He fished in his pocket and produced a key.

"That's my private key to our boat-house. There's another up at the house, so you can keep that until you come back. You know our boat-house, don't you? It's painted green, and it's got our name on it. Just east of the pier."

"Jolly good of you." Derek hesitated. "But I don't quite like taking her. It's all rot, you know, making sure you're going to catch the blessed measles. You may find you want her any time."

"Well, look here," said Peter, brightening. "If I don't get 'em, and the doctor lets me out, and if you're not back, I'll go over in our launch and find you at the islands. You wouldn't mind if I came and camped too, would you?"

"Rather not!" cried the twins, and Peter grinned again.

"You make up your mind that you're not going to catch them," advised Jill. "And keep out of the house as much as you can. Probably, if they saw you looking horribly fit they'd be glad to send you out of harm's way. We'll keep a look-out for you."

"You'll see me if I can get half a chance to escape," Peter said. "This is the first gleam of hope I've had for a week. Catch this key, Derek—I hope it hasn't got a measles on it!" He tossed it over the gate.

"Oh, stop talking measles—don't even think of them!" exclaimed Derek as he caught the key. "And smash that rotten little looking-glass—if you keep looking for spots you'll find them."

"Can't you get busy at something, Peter?" asked Jill. "You're sure to catch the disease if you go on acting the wandering beast in the jungle. You're awfully good at carpentering—why don't you begin to make something in the workshop? Then you would get interested and forget all about spots."

"That's rather a good notion," Peter said. "You two are pretty good at bucking one up. Before you came, if I'd thought of making anything it would have been my own tombstone—but now I believe I'll tackle something else. I need a new box for birds' eggs."

"More than you'll need a tombstone," remarked Derek. "That's a job that can always be left to some other fellow. What about these fish, Peter? We shall want the basket. Shall I hurl them over the fence one by one?"

"You leave them on the grass, and I'll collect them when you've gone. I can string them together. But you'd better keep some for yourselves for supper to-night."

"We might keep a couple in case we haven't time to catch more." Derek tipped out the fish in a shining heap, and Joker hastily withdrew to a dignified distance.

"You got some beauties," remarked Peter admiringly. "Mother will be jolly glad of those. Did you see many people fishing?"

"No—we were the only people in sight. Oh, I say, Peter, we saw a ripping launch: a long grey one, with a marvellous engine. Do you know anything about her?"

"I saw her the other day—a beauty, isn't she? Three men have her, but I don't know who they are. Father heard they were camping up the coast, somewhere beyond the Point. Not your way. You see, I haven't had a chance to find out anything; we went into quarantine two days after I got home."

"I was hoping she was a local boat," said Derek. "But if they're only visitors I don't suppose they'll be here long. My word, she can go! I thought she was a speed-boat when I saw her first. It would be rather sport to get to know those fellows, and have a run in her."

"Well, you might. If they're fishing anywhere near the islands you'll probably come across them——" He stopped, listening. From the direction of the house came a long call: "Pe—ter!"

"That's Aunt Cora," he said bitterly. "She's always on my trail; I believe she'd break her heart if she wasn't the one to find my first spot. Sometimes I think she and Aunt Eva have got a bet on about it. There she goes again!" He uttered a shout. "Coming!"

"I'd better go, I suppose. No choking her off: she was meant for a bloodhound. And when I get busy in the workshop she's sure to come along with her knitting and keep me company." He broke off. A grim smile dawned.

"Got a brain-wave?" asked Derek.

"A beauty. There's some fish-glue in the workshop—perfectly foul stuff; you can smell it a mile off. I'll melt it and paint a board or two. It'll be too strong, even for Aunt Cora!"

"Pe—ter!" The voice was nearer.

"Oh—*coming!*" he called disgustedly. "Good hunting, you two—I'll be over if I have any luck." He disappeared among the shrubs.

The twins looked at each other and laughed.

"Poor beggar! And he's left the fish!"

"Oh, he'll come back for them," Jill said lightly. "Trust Peter. Come along, Derek—we've got to buy about forty thousand things, and get the dinghy, and sail off to the Never-Never. It's going to be the most gorgeous adventure!"

CHAPTER V

HOW ADVENTURE CAME TO JOKER

“POST-OFFICE first,” said Jill, as they went briskly back to the main street. “We must arrange to have our letters kept for us. Mother is sure to write to-day, so we shall know all about her plans to-morrow.”

The post-mistress greeted them as an old friend.

“I’m glad you came in. There’s a telegram for you: arrived about an hour ago,” she said, producing it. “It didn’t seem urgent, or I would have found some way of sending it out.”

Derek tore open the envelope hastily, while Jill looked over his shoulder.

“‘Grannie better, but must remain several days with her,’ ” he read. “Well, that’s not as bad as it might be. Anyhow, we needn’t worry about being away from home. We’re going camping, Miss Smith—will you keep our letters here? We’ll call for them.”

The post-mistress promised, adding a wish that she could go camping too, instead of being in a stuffy office: and the twins, feeling that nourishment was necessary, went in search of a tea-shop. Over strawberry-ices they discussed their plans.

“We needn’t buy much food to-day, as we shall have to come in to-morrow for the mail,” Jill said. “A big loaf of bread, and some butter and jam and tinned things. Got a pencil, Derek?”

They jotted down a list on the envelope of the telegram.

“It mounts up, doesn’t it?” observed Derek. “Frying-pan, billy, matches, tin-opener—oh yes, and tinned milk. I say, Jill, what about water?”

“Water!” said Jill blankly. “I’d never have thought of it.”

“Neither would I, until tinned milk made me think of tea. Put tea down, by the way. Isn’t housekeeping complicated! Probably there isn’t a drop of water on those islands. I suppose we could get a bucketful from the store, just to carry on with.”

“We shan’t need such an awful lot; sea-water will do for everything but drinking,” Jill remarked. “How about buying some bottles of soft drinks. Orange-squash,” she added pensively.

“Yes, we could do that. It strikes me we shall need to hire a pack-mule to get everything down to the shore. I think we had better go and consult Mr. Barker at the store. He may know something about the question of water on the islands—and he is sure to be able to remind us of all the things we’ve forgotten to put down.”

Mr. Barker proved both interested and helpful.

“You’ll have a good time. Some day, when Brandan’s Point becomes better known, we’ll have half Sydney coming to camp there,” he said. “As it is, very few people have ever set foot on them. My boys used to sail out there before they went to live in Victoria. Two of the islands have springs—the biggest ones. I don’t know about the others; but with a motor-boat you could always fetch water, supposing you took a fancy to a dry island. I can lend you a couple of clean petrol-tins.”

The twins thanked him, much relieved.

“You’d better fill them up before you go,” he said. “My little store-shed down by the pier has a water-tank, so all you need do is take ’em down empty. I’ve petrol there too, any time you want to fill up. Now, how about your stores? Don’t over-load yourselves; you can always come over for more. This weather is going to last for a week.”

He ran his eye down their list, and suggested other details.

“You’ll want fat for frying; I suppose you’ll pretty well live on fish. The butcher would fix you up some dripping in a jar; I’ll give you one. Pepper and salt—and how about knives and forks? Got any?”

The twins looked sheepish and confessed that knives and forks had not entered their minds.

“Can’t do too much of the Robinson Crusoe business,” said Mr. Barker, grinning. “I’ve got some cheap ones that’ll do you fine. Take plenty of fruit—you can get that up the street while I’m packing your other things. Cups?”

“We have them,” said Jill. “But no plates.”

“Three or four enamel plates,” said the storekeeper. “Then you can cover up your second helping of fish. Why not take some chops for to-night’s supper? Nothing’s better than a chop cooked in the open air. And how about bacon? And eggs?”

“No eggs,” Derek replied firmly. “They’re beastly to carry. But we’ll get chops, because Joker will have the bones.”

“Yes, you can’t neglect him. Great little dog, isn’t he?” remarked Mr. Barker, looking at Joker, who was lying in a patch of sunlight by the door, taking a deep interest in their proceedings. “Your mother tells me he fair haunts your room while you’re at school, looking for you.”

“Yes, and he always knows when Derek is coming back—he gets terribly excited just before the holidays,” Jill put in. “We think he must have a calendar in his head!”

“Wonderful what a dog knows—a dog that’s been made a chum,” said the storekeeper. “I had an old collie once that knew whenever my name was mentioned. He might be sound asleep, snoring for all he was worth; but if anyone said “George”—brought the name in quite un-concerned-like—the old

dog's tail 'ud go thump, thump, thump, though he never stopped snoring. I felt as if a bit of myself had gone when that old fellow died." He sighed. "Run over by a car, he was. It's not so easy to keep a dog now, with cars all over the place—and youngsters drivin' them that never look where they're goin'. Speed's all they think about. What's a dog to them!"

"I'd like to shoot any fellow that ran over Joker!" said Derek hotly.

"Sure, you'd like to. But there's such a prejudice against shootin'. If I could have caught the fellow that ran over my old Bluey there's several things I'd have liked to do to him. But he knew too much—just trod on the gas and went off at fifty miles an hour. And I was too busy pickin' up Bluey even to take his number. Well, there's no use thinkin' of it—but you keep a sharp eye on your little Joker when you're in Brandan's Point: there's always cars flyin' through. Now, is there anything more, Miss Jill?"

"I don't think so—thanks to you, Mr. Barker," she answered. "Derek, if you'll get the fruit and the chops I'll run over and have my hair cut. It's a nuisance to have it long when I'm bathing—and I have only a little comb to keep it in order."

"If you have it much shorter neither of you will know which is which," grinned the storekeeper.

"Oh, we'll chance that. I'll be back in a few minutes." She ran across the street to the barber's, and Derek went off on his errands.

The whistle that told of the incoming afternoon train sounded as he returned to the store with his parcels. He put them down, and stood in the doorway, watching the people who straggled down from the station. The post-office handcart passed, pushed by two boys: one or two motors, laden with passengers and luggage, whirred off in different directions. Then among the people on the footpath, Derek saw three men who excited his interest.

Two were the men he had seen in the grey motor-boat. With them was a man whose dress showed that he had come from a place that demanded more than the sweaters and flannels which were fashionable apparel in Brandan's Point. He wore an overcoat over his light tweed suit, and Derek's first thought was that so fat a man must be uncomfortably hot in it. The clean-shaven face under his neat hat did not suggest fatness: it was curiously out of keeping with his bulky body.

Not a pleasant face, Derek thought. He scanned it closely as the trio drew near, and decided definitely that he did not like it. Little hard eyes, set too closely together under dark brows that met in a continuous line; a coarse, fleshy nose; the thin, firm lips held a hint of cruelty. He was very dark: his cheeks had the blue tint that suggests a beard even after the closest shaving. There was a faint hint of something foreign about him. He was speaking rapidly, in a low tone, his companions listening intently. They crossed the

street just before they reached the store, and entered a tea-shop.

“Queer-looking chap, that fat man, isn’t he?” The storekeeper had strolled from behind his counter.

“Yes, rather. Don’t much like the look of him. Who are they, Mr. Barker?”

“Can’t say I know their names. They’re camping up the coast somewhere; city men, I should say, out for a holiday. They come in here now and then; the fat chap has to go off on business, so he gets the train from here. They told me he couldn’t leave his office for too long at a time. They buy their stores here. Civil chaps, but not what you’d call friendly. But then, lots of the city men are like that. They come to the country to loaf, and they don’t want to spend their time talking to the country-people.”

“I suppose not,” agreed Derek. “They’ve got a great boat, Mr. Barker. Have you seen her?”

“Yes, she’s a fine bit of work. Best I’ve seen down here—there’s lots like her about Sydney. But that boat of your Dad’s is a nice one too. Lets you run her, does he?”

“Oh, yes—but not until he had given me a pretty stiff breaking-in,” replied Derek, smiling. “Father said he wasn’t going to take any risks with *Seahawk*.”

“Yes, I guess your Dad would be like that. He’s thorough, he is. Come to think of it, it’s pretty silly to be stuck with a boat, miles from home, just for want of a bit of knowledge. You won’t be sorry you know all an engine’s little tricks. There comes Miss Jill, and I’d say she’s had a close crop: her hat looks too big for her!”

Jill came running across the street, bright-eyed.

“I hope I haven’t kept you very long: I had to wait my turn. But I feel splendid!” She took off her hat, revealing a head as closely shorn as Derek’s.

“Whew-w!” he whistled. “Mother will have words to say about that, won’t she?”

Jill laughed.

“Oh, it will be a bit longer before she sees it! And it’s simply silly to have a mop of hair to manage when one’s living on an island—with nobody but you and the seagulls to look at one. I’ll be comfortable, and that’s all that matters.”

“Well, I said your Dad was thorough, and I guess you take after him, Miss Jill,” said the storekeeper. “Though I wouldn’t say it doesn’t seem a pity, like. What would they think of it at your school?”

“They think I’m too much of a boy as it is,” was Jill’s cheerful answer. “But of course the mop will have plenty of time to grow in a month. Have you got everything, Derek? Can’t we start?”

“Only been waiting for your shearing,” he said. “Oh, and I haven’t paid my bill! How much, Mr. Barker?”

“Oh, you leave that until your trip’s over,” the storekeeper answered.

“You’re sure to need other things. Fact is, I’d put everything down to your Dad’s account.”

Derek shook his head.

“That won’t do—this is our show. But we can settle it afterwards. Jill, we’ll have to load up like pack-horses: there’s an awful lot to carry.”

“Not you, Miss Jill,” said Barker. “My boy’s doing nothing, and he can go down to the pier with you.” He shouted to a lank lad, loading him with bundles and petrol-tins. Jill possessed herself of the frying-pan, while Derek shouldered the fishing-basket and the remaining packages. With the storekeeper’s friendly “Good luck!” in their ears they followed the lank one, who clanked loudly down the street, Joker keeping to heel with an alert air that said more clearly than words that he was glad that his gods had decided to begin adventuring.

“I’ve put the chops in with the fish,” remarked Derek. “Hope they won’t flavour each other too much!”

“What does it matter?—both flavours are good,” Jill responded. “Nothing matters! Derek, I believe I’m beginning to feel excited!”

“That’s being light-headed,” he grinned. “But it is rather jolly to think we’re off on our own. This is the first time we’ve never been responsible to anyone but ourselves. It’s rather a queer feeling.”

“A jolly good feeling,” Jill affirmed. “And after this we’ll be able to say we can look after ourselves, and Father won’t be nearly so fussy. After all, we’re sixteen!” She did not dwell upon the point that their birthday was but a fortnight old, and Derek refrained from reminding her.

“I don’t believe parents even realize that their kids grow up,” he said. “Perhaps it’s natural. You know, it’s queer, but I feel like that about you. I’m sure I’m years older than you are!”

“I like that!” scoffed Jill. “Why, everybody knows girls age much more quickly than boys.”

“Sez you!” he grinned. “Anyhow, I’m captain of this ship, and you’ve got to do as you’re told. There can’t be more than one captain.”

“You can be captain when we’re afloat, and I shall be in command ashore,” decided Jill. “That’s what’s called a joint command. It means that you will always do the washing-up!”

“Trust a girl!” he jibed. “I’ll take Peter instead of you next time, if you don’t behave yourself.”

They had reached the pier, where the boy, having deposited his burdens in the launch, was filling the petrol-tins from the tank by the shed. Joker, with a joyful little bark, raced along to the steps, pattered down them, and leaped aboard the *Seahawk*. He took up a commanding position on the foredeck, barking orders to his gods to be quick.

“Look at the little beggar!” said Derek. “He’s even more excited than you are. I believe he smells adventures.” He raised his voice, calling to Joker. “Coming presently, old chap!”

“Will I put these tins aboard?” asked a melancholy voice. The lank one stood looking at them sadly, a tin dangling from each hand.

“Yes, please. And you might stow these things for’ard with them,” Derek said, putting down his load. “We have to fetch a dinghy from Mr. Temple’s boat-house.”

“That’s Temple’s,” said the boy, placing a tin on the wharf so that he might jerk a thumb towards a bright green building some distance away. “It’ll be locked, though.”

“I’ve got a key. Here you are—and thanks very much,” Derek said, slipping a shilling into the grimy palm. “Come along, Jill.” They ran off along the shore.

Peter’s dinghy lay ready for use, just inside the boat-house: a slender little craft, exactly what they needed, as Derek commented happily. They launched her, quaking lest they should scratch her paint, and pushed off.

“We’ll paddle round the end of the pier quietly, and take Joker by surprise,” grinned Derek. “He doesn’t know where we’ve got to. I thought he would have been after us in a second.”

Joker had been puzzled. His gods had suddenly disappeared; and when he would have pursued them his way was barred by a strange boy who invaded his launch and placed gifts at his feet. He sniffed at the gifts, recognizing the smell of fish with a feeling of repulsion, but interested by an aroma that was certainly that of meat. The strange boy reappeared with further gifts, pushed all into the locker, and went his way.

Why these things should be was beyond Joker, but as guardian of the launch he felt that he must investigate the proceedings. So he squirmed into the crowded locker, sniffing busily. Deciding that there was nothing dangerous, although Master certainly ought to know about it, he backed out, jumped upon the bow, and looked round anxiously. Where was Master?

A voice he knew fell upon his ears: not coming from above, whence it might have been expected, but across the water, and from the far side of the pier. He cocked an ear, peering under the wharf. It was Master; it was both his gods, and they were in a strange small boat, pushing off from a sloping platform. Joker wasted no time. One leap, and he was scrambling up the steps, and racing across the pier. He looked down anxiously. Master could not possibly have decided to go without him—and in a strange boat!

It was just at this moment that Derek, hearing footsteps on the pier, glanced up.

“I say, Jill,” he said softly, “there are the men belonging to the grey launch.

Look—on the pier. I saw them in the town.”

“But who’s the third?”

“He’s one of them. They collected him from the train. And a nasty bit of work he looks, I think: I believe he’s a foreigner.”

“He’s awfully fat,” said Jill disapprovingly.

“All but his face. That’s rather thin, and I didn’t like it. Hullo, Joker’s on our scent—look at him!”

Joker had made up his mind that there might be some hope of rejoining Master if he got down to sea-level. He set off along the pier shorewards, his heart hot with anxiety, barking as he ran.

The fat man’s shoe-lace had come untied. He stooped to fasten it, while his companions swung on towards the steps where their launch lay. It occurred to Derek that all three looked angry, as though their meeting and their tea had not been altogether a success.

Joker encountered the leading couple first. He swerved to avoid them, the men scarcely glancing at him, so deep in talk were they. Joker’s swerve, coupled with his anxiety, carried him into collision with the fat man just as the latter straightened up after tying his shoe-lace. He recoiled, with a short, angry yelp; then dashed forward, trying to pass on the edge of the pier.

Possibly the fat man may have thought that the small, determined dog was actually trying to attack him. Perhaps he was willing to think so, that he might have some object on which to vent the ill-temper that showed plainly on his dark face. He uttered an angry exclamation and kicked savagely at the little running body. There was a smothered yelp, and Joker shot over the side of the pier. The man did not trouble to glance after him. He quickened his pace, following his companions to their launch.

Jill caught her breath.

“Oh, the brute!” she gasped. “Quick, Derek.”

There was no need to tell Derek to be quick. After one deep exclamation he had saved his breath for pulling. The boat flashed through the water; in a moment they were beside the little form that paddled feebly, barely able to keep afloat.

“Can you get him, or shall I?” Derek’s voice was very quiet.

“Back water—just a stroke—I’ll get him.”

She leaned over, watching her chance, and drew him towards the boat, working her hands under him—noting, with a throb of uneasiness, that he made no effort to help himself. With a great effort she lifted him into the stern, putting him down gently. Derek shipped the oars, and was beside her.

Joker lay very still. One foreleg was twisted in a way that made Jill catch her breath to see. Blood was oozing slowly from a cut on his head; Derek parted the wet hair gently, trying to see the extent of the injury. The little dog

did not wince. Only, as the tender hands moved upon him his tongue came out in a half-conscious effort to lick Master.

The boy gave a dry sob.

“I believe the beast has killed him. He must have hit something when he fell—the kick broke his leg, but it couldn’t have done this to his head.” He glanced round: they had drifted almost against the pier. The throb of the grey launch’s engine came to them as she shot away across the water.

“That’s what he struck!—some fool’s waterlogged boat. I’d like to tie its owner to that hulking brute and drown them both! Jill, will you pull ashore: I think he likes to feel my hands.”

Jill ran the dinghy on the shelving sand. Someone caught the painter and helped to pull her up. It was the lank boy.

“Is he hurt bad?” he asked. “I seen that pig kick him in.”

“He’s about killed, I think,” Derek said savagely.

“ ‘Arf a sec.,” said the boy.

He went off at top-speed, and was back in a moment with a soft canvas sack.

“You roll ’im in that,” he said. “He hadn’t ought to get too cold. There’s a man along the beach as knows all about dawgs—I’ll show you the way.”

“You’ve got sense!” uttered Derek gratefully. He swathed Joker in the canvas, with Jill’s aid, keeping the broken leg uncovered.

“I wish he’d show that he felt something,” breathed Jill. “Oh, Derek, do you think he’ll die?”

“I don’t know,” the boy said wretchedly.

“Takes a lot to kill a dawg,” said their unexpected helper. “You come along with me, ’s fast ’s you can. Look here—I’ll tear on ahead an’ get Mr. Willis. You can’t miss his house—it’s the little white one near that clump of trees.” He fled along the beach, making great footprints in the wet sand.

The twins had almost reached the white cottage when the door opened and a stout man came out, the lad at his heels.

“Brought me a patient? Well, I’m used to them,” he said. “Bring him inside: we’ll put him on the table an’ have a look at him.”

“Mind his leg,” warned Derek.

“I’ll mind it.” He ushered them into a room that was half a workshop, sweeping a pile of wood and shavings from a table in front of the window. “Half a minute—we’ll give him a towel to lie on. Now you let me have him.” He unrolled the canvas with gentle hands, murmuring softly to Joker as he did so.

“H’m. Nasty cut, but he ain’t goin’ to die of that, nor of a broken leg neither. Question is, is he hurt inside? Well, I’ll get the leg set before he comes round, an’ then he won’t feel it. Can you keep your hands on him, in case he

flinches?”

“Yes,” said Derek between his teeth.

Jill felt suddenly queer. A wave of heat seemed to run over her, followed by another that was ice-cold. She turned, and went outside, blindly staggering as she moved. Outside the gate she sat down on the sand, thankful for the fresh air.

“You—you fool of a *girl!*” she told herself angrily, as the sick faintness left her.

She felt that she had failed Derek. It was hateful to be a girl. Boys did not go queer all over when there was work to be done—work for a little, hurt dog. Only girls. She found, to her angry astonishment, that she was crying—hot, uncomfortable tears that made her eyes burn. She—Jill—who had not cried since she was six. She fought the tears back and sat staring out to sea, desperately ashamed of herself, knowing she was not brave enough to face that room again. And if Derek came out to tell her that Joker was dying—what could she do to help Derek?

“Oh—and we were so happy!” she uttered almost angrily.

Her mind went back to Derek’s merry face as they had brought out the dinghy. He had been so delighted about their freedom and their adventure—making ridiculous jokes, and yet there had been a new air of responsibility and strength about him; as though one caught a glimpse of the grown-up Derek behind the light-hearted boy. All that happiness had crashed when he saw his dog hurt. It was so cruel—so needless.

The time seemed very long before she heard the door open. There was a step on the path. Jill could not look round—she was afraid to see Derek’s face.

But it was not Derek who came out. It was Mr. Willis, stout and comfortable, and he was smiling down at her.

“Well, you needn’t be thinkin’ of the little feller’s funeral yet, missy,” he said. “I guess we’ll pull him through.”

“Truly?” gasped Jill.

“Oh, I guess so. That’s a pretty bad cut on his head, of course—it’s the cut and the shock that knocked him out. But ’s far ’s I can find out there’s no internal injuries. The leg’s only a detail, of course.”

Jill shuddered, remembering the little twisted leg that had drooped so helplessly.

“Not nice to see, I’ll grant you,” said Mr. Willis understandingly. “Makes you feel a bit sick, ’specially if you care for a dog. But that leg’s goin’ to be as good as any of the others—it set beautiful, though I do say it. Nice little dog. He come-to when I was settin’ it, an’ it was pretty to see how quiet an’ sensible he lay d’reckly he heard your brother’s voice. That boy’s got the right way with a dog. I guess he’d rather it had been his own leg I was settin’. But

he stuck it well.”

He took out his pipe and filled it slowly, talking on in his slow, quiet voice. Possibly the man who understood dogs knew something of helping a human mind that had been hurt.

“Lucky you two were so near when he got kicked in. He couldn’t have kept afloat more’n a minute or two. Your brother told me you got him into the boat. Not too easy, I’ll bet, and him heavy with water an’ all helpless.”

“I—I was awfully afraid of hurting him,” Jill whispered.

“Yes, you would be. But you managed it, an’ that’s the main thing. Must have good muscles. It’s queer what a dog can stand. I get any amount of accident cases, ’specially since motors got as thick as they are now. Sometimes you’d never dream they could be patched up, but if they get help soon enough you’d be surprised how many get well. I’m always extra glad when I can turn a motor case out cured, ’cause I reckon he’ll go and teach other dogs to keep out of the way of cars.”

“Do you think they teach others?”

“Sure they do. We think we know a lot, but we’ve mighty little notion of how dogs talk together. You watch a young sheep-dog out with his mother, an’ see how she puts him wise to what he can do with sheep—an’ what he mustn’t do. My little girl, she read a yarn about a boy that made friends with a fairy, an’ she gave him some sort of a cake to eat; an’ when he’d eaten it he could hear all the animals talkin’. I’ve often wished,” said Mr. Willis, with a deep chuckle, “that I knew where to buy them cakes!”

“I’ve often thought that horses talk,” Jill said eagerly. “When you see them standing close together in a paddock wouldn’t you think they were telling each other things?”

“I’m jolly well sure they do. An’ they do it head to tail, did you ever notice? You’ll see two horses standin’ that way for a bit, the head of one across the back of another: an’ after a while they’ll go off together, just as if they’d decided what they were yarnin’ about, and were going to do it. I’ve a theory,” said Mr. Willis, “that they send the message along the spine, right up to the brain.”

Jill opened her eyes very widely.

“Well—spines are queer,” Mr. Willis answered her look. “I’ve seen a good many in my line of business. Man or dog, they’re just sort of relay-stations for brain-messages to the body—that’s my notion, anyhow, though I never had the courage to ask a doctor about it. There’s times when I think we ought to think of ourselves as hangin’ from above by our spines an’ all their trimmin’s, rather than connected with the earth by our feet. But there—my missus says I’m full of funny ideas. Now, how would you like to go an’ see the little dog, missy? He’s all tucked up an’ comfortable, an’ I’ve given him something to put him to

sleep, an' your brother's sittin' watchin' over him like an old broody hen!" At which Jill broke into unexpected laughter, jumped up, and found that she felt very much better.

Joker lay snuggled in a wide basket, only his head visible. His eyes were closed; the blanket that covered him moved quietly with his breathing. Derek sat cross-legged on the floor beside him—a position which lent some colour to Mr. Willis's simile of the broody hen. He looked up at Jill with a smile.

"He's going to be all right," he said cheerfully. "My word, Jill, he was plucky!"

Jill smiled back. She let her hand rest on Derek's shoulder for a moment; an unusual caress between the twins, whose habit it was to condemn all demonstration as "slushy."

"He'll be right as rain," affirmed Mr. Willis. "An' now, the quieter he's kept, the better: a good long sleep's what he wants, if he's to wake up feeling like a new little dog. You're from Rocky Bay, aren't you? Well, you go home an' leave him to me for a few days."

"Don't you think he'll want me when he wakes up?" Derek asked anxiously. "I'd rather stay here all night than run the risk of his fretting."

"There's lots of owners think that," said Mr. Willis. "But dogs in hospital are very like kids in hospital—once their mother's out of the way they're as happy as bees. I never had a dog here yet that fretted, no matter how much of a pet he was at home."

"If you're sure——" began the boy doubtfully.

"I'll tell you the truth," said Mr. Willis; "and that is, he'll be a lot better without you. Sounds hard, but it's a fact. You see, when you come along he'll want to get up an' make a fuss about you, but with me he won't want to do anything but lie still. An' lyin' still, with no fuss, is his med'cine."

"That's right, I suppose," Derek agreed. "I don't like leaving him, but—well, I know it's all right to leave him with you."

"Him an' me will be great chums," stated Mr. Willis. "An' there's my missus: an' she's as good a nurse as me. So off you go home. An' if I have the luck to meet that bloke that done it—well, I promise you he'll be sorry he didn't keep his foot to himself."

Derek got up slowly. His face had darkened.

"I'll make him pay for it if I wait five years to do it!" he said, his voice low. "I'd go to the police now, only you said it wouldn't be any use."

"Not with the way it happened. You might bring him into court—but he'd swear he thought the dog was tryin' to bite him, an' that he kicked out in self-defence. Silly, of course, with a dog that size; all the same, old Patten the policeman wouldn't handle it for you. Patten's never on for a job—too fat! An' we don't know this man's name, nor where he comes from. Chances are he

mayn't come near the Point again."

He grinned suddenly.

"If he does, an' he goes into Barker's, I reckon Barker'll tell him where he gets off. Barker's a dog-lover. An' young Tom will let him know all about it."

"Is that the boy?" asked Derek quickly. "Has he gone? I wanted to speak to him."

"Tom? Oh, he slipped off the back way as soon as he knew Joker was all right. Guess he knew Barker would be wondering where he was."

"Well, I owe him something," Derek said. "He turned up just when he was wanted, and he helped us no end. I'm jolly grateful to him."

"He lives near here, but you'll find him at the store any day. Good boy, Tom, though he does look a bit like a scarecrow."

"We had better go, then, Jill," Derek said. He bent down for a last look at the sleeping Joker. "You'll be all right, old man," he said gently. "Good-bye, Mr. Willis, and—and I just don't know how to thank you." He put out his hand.

"Don't waste time tryin'," said Mr. Willis, shaking it warmly. "Jolly glad I was in, that's all. Keep your mind easy about him; me an' the missus'll look after him 's if he was a baby."

"You'd rather I didn't come to see him?"

"I'd rather that little dog didn't even hear a voice he cared for—just for a few days. It's the kindest thing you can do for him. Give him a few days with no excitement, an' old Mother Nature'll do his doctorin'—with a little bit of help from me."

He shook hands with Jill.

"You have a good sleep to-night, missy, an' forget all about seein' him hurt. It's over, an' rememberin' only hurts you. I'd advise you to do a bit of forgettin' about the feller that did it, my lad, too—if I thought it 'ud be any good!"

"It wouldn't," Derek said savagely. "He's a gentleman I don't want to forget—not until I have a chance of paying what I owe him. And I'll pay that debt some day!"



“Jill leaned over, watching her chance, and drew him towards the boat.”

Seahawk

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CHAPTER VI

SEA-CAVES

BEYOND Brandan's Point there were white horses dancing on the wave-crests as the evening breeze came in from the west across the open sea. The *Seahawk* lifted to them merrily, shaking them from her forefoot, save when from time to time she caught one as she rose, sending a shower of spray scattering across her passengers.

Jill and Derek had hurried to the pier, with only one thought between them—to get away as quickly as possible; to get busy; to catch back the spirit of adventure which had fled from them, will-o'-the-wisp fashion, an hour before. With their curious twin-understanding of each other's minds, they had been quite silent while they paddled the dinghy round to the *Seahawk*, made her fast to the stern, and hurried aboard. Jill cast off the launch's moorings while Derek started the motor. Within ten minutes of leaving Mr. Willis's cottage the *Seahawk* was standing out to sea.

The fresh breeze fanned their hot cheeks and blew away something of the cloud that hung over them. The twins had touched what to them was tragedy—tragedy, because it involved a deliberate cruelty that had never entered their lives before. But when you are sixteen, with freedom and adventure before you; when you are at sea, with a good boat under you, and blue sky meeting blue water in a golden shimmer of sunlight—there is little place for gloom. Their hearts lifted as the launch lifted to the dancing waves.

“Going like a dream, isn't she?” said Derek, listening fondly to the contented purr of the engine. “We'll go out as hard as we can.”

“The sooner we're there, the better,” agreed Jill. “It's pretty late, seeing that we don't know where we're going, and that we have to find a camping-place. But everything will be all right.”

“Rather. We'll find one of those sea-caves Peter talked about. It won't matter if we have to sleep in the boat.”

“I think it would be fun,” Jill said.

“You'd enjoy a bed of dry bracken fern more,” said Derek, who had had camping experience with a party of school-fellows in the summer. “Even sand that seems soft to begin with gets a bit hard before morning. As soon as we settle definitely on a place we can cut bracken, but that may not be until tomorrow, unless we are lucky this evening. It occurs to me that we should have brought a hatchet of sorts.”

“Oh!” said Jill. “And there's another thing; a hurricane-lantern. I never

thought of one when I was packing this morning.”

“Well—why would you, when we thought we should be at the Temples’? But I put in my two electric torches, the big fellow and the little pocket one. We can manage with those, and there will be the camp-fire. We shan’t want to sit up late.”

“I’m beginning to feel as though I should like bed very early,” Jill said. “It seems a long while since this morning. Derek, the islands are getting nearer!”

“That’s a wise observation!” grinned Derek. “Seeing that we’re approaching them at the rate of knots, it would be curious if they weren’t!”

“Like the Happy Islands in the story that receded whenever the poor mariners got near them,” she suggested. “That’s a good name for them, Derek—I vote we christen them the Happy Islands.”

“I hope they won’t behave like the others, then,” he answered. “Wouldn’t it be queer to go chasing after an island in *Seahawk* and find that it dodged whenever we came close. Like trying to yard a stubborn bullock!”

“I wonder what would happen if we made the painter fast to a rock, and the island dodged then,” mused Jill.

“I should say it would be uncommonly awkward,” Derek laughed. “Well, these look fairly solid. What about making for that big one in the middle, Jill?”

“One smiles to me as much as another. But I suppose a big island would be more likely to have big caves—and a cave is what we want to-night.”

The largest island, as they drew nearer, opened out surprisingly into little bays and headlands, with glimpses of sandy beaches. Here and there was a bare cliff-face, rising sheer from the sea; the western end seemed to be all cliffs, against which the waves lapped gently. There were many tall trees, rising out of dense undergrowth. One giant gum, on a hill-top, marked the highest point of the island. Below the hill was a slope that ran down to the sea, bearing only a few bushes: the grass upon it looked like green velvet in the sunlight.

Derek slackened speed.

“It’s time we went carefully,” he said. “Jill, will you go right up into the bow and keep your eyes skinned for sunken rocks? I’ll go in as close as I dare, and then we’ll hug the shore and crawl round. Be awfully careful, won’t you? It wouldn’t be a bit funny if we stove her in.”

He throttled down the motor and they crept towards the shore, while Jill lay flat on the decking, scanning the water. It seemed all honest water; there was no sign of dark fangs below. So clear was it, as they neared the beach, that she could see the shells on the ribbed sand. Derek headed west, and they passed bay after bay until they were abreast of a cliff. Jill uttered a cry.

“There’s an opening—a big one! It must be a sea-cave, Derek!”

“It is—and as dark as a wolf’s throat,” said Derek. “I don’t think much of

it, do you?" He shut off the engine, and they drifted nearer, peering into the grim opening.

"No—it looks uncanny. Let's go on a bit farther." The engine throbbed softly again, and the launch gathered way.

Beyond the headland there was another, at a distance of not more than fifty yards. Between them the shore curved backwards in a half-moon of golden beach. The second headland was hollowed out like the first, but part of its eastern side had fallen away, so that they could look into the cave before they came abreast of its mouth. The fallen rocks lay in confused heaps on the sand, but elsewhere all was clear.

"I say, Jill, I don't think we could do better than this," Derek cried. "It's absolutely sheltered in here—even in a storm it would be pretty calm. I believe I could bring her alongside that flat rock; it looks as good as a pier."

He stopped the engine and sprang forward.

"We won't take any risks. I'll drop the anchor, and we'll go ashore in the dinghy and make certain."

"Right," said Jill happily. She ran to the stern, drew in the dinghy, and dropped into her. Derek followed, and they paddled ashore, pulling the boat up on the beach. They scrambled over the fallen rocks until they reached the flat one, which ran out into the water parallel with the cliff.

"Couldn't beat it," was Derek's verdict. "She'll lie there as if she were alongside a wharf. Now, what about a camp?"

"We'll see what the cave is like." Jill capered back over the rocks with the agility of a goat and jumped down inside.

"Derek, it's a gorgeous place!"

"My hat, it is!" agreed Derek, following.

The light poured into the cave through the opening where they stood. The sea ran far back into it, so far that they could not see where it ended; but where the wall had been broken there was a wide stretch of sand, fine and soft. Old dry shells showed that most of it was above high-water mark. Some of the rocks had fallen within, but for the greater part it was clear sand, where twenty people could have slept and still left room to spare.

"Made to order, I think," said Jill gaily. "I've been a bit afraid that all caves were dark and airless, but this will be as good as sleeping in the open, with a roof over us in case it rains."

"It's a perfect camp," Derek said. "Now we've got to get busy, if we're to be settled before dark. I'll go back and bring the boat in, and you pick up sticks for a fire." He ran off to the dinghy, while Jill made for the nearest trees.

There was plenty of firewood to be had—dead sticks lay everywhere, brought down by the winter storms. Jill collected a large armful, staggering down under it to the beach just as Derek completed the fore and aft mooring of

the *Seahawk*.

“We’d better divide the work, and we’ll get on more quickly,” he said as she joined him. “I’ll cart the blankets ashore and fix up beds in the cave. Did you notice any bracken?”

“Yes—there’s lots in a hollow just above the beach.”

“Good business! we’ll sleep comfortably. You get the tucker ready, Jill, will you? Don’t take more ashore than we’ll need to-night.”

“What’s the order for supper?” asked Jill, as she dived into the locker.

“Supper!” said he wolfishly. “I could eat a horse! Let’s see. There are two schnapper that ought to be eaten, and a whole lot of chops that might be lonely if we left ’em. Then there are things in tins, and bread and butter and other oddments——”

“Did you say I was only to bring ashore what we needed?” interposed Jill.

“Well, aren’t I telling you what we need?” said her twin, much aggrieved. “I’d only just got started. Oranges and apples and bananas will be found under the——”

“Oh, get along with your blankets!” Jill laughed. “If you have luck you’ll get one schnapper and one chop——”

“Then all you’ll get for bedding will be two bits of bracken!” threatened he, departing under a load of blankets. She heard him singing in the cave:

*“Oh, it’s ‘Westward ho!’ for Trinidad, and ‘Eastward ho!’ for Spain,
And ‘Ship ahoy!’ a hundred times a day!”*

and smiled to herself as the gay voice rang out. It was good to have the boy Derek again—not the Derek whose face had grown old as he looked at Joker.

To get everything done meant a race with daylight. Already the sun was out of sight beyond the western headland; and in Australia darkness follows swiftly on the heels of sunset. The twins ran to and fro, exchanging incivilities when they met on the rocks. Jill breathed a thankful blessing in the direction of the thoughtful Mr. Barker, who had saved them from a search for water; and carried the petrol-tin ashore as carefully as though it were a baby. She had the fire alight while Derek was still coming and going with loads of bracken. Presently she called to him.

“The billy is boiling! Will you be ready, if I cook the fish?”

“Oh, I say, hold on!” said Derek, appearing in the cave opening. “I meant to clean those fish.”

“The deed is done,” she said, cheerfully. “You can’t be housemaid and kitchenmaid too.”

“I could, if I’d remembered in time. Sorry, old thing. That’s my job in future, and don’t you forget it.”

“That depends,” said she. “Well—may I cook them?”

“Carry on,” responded Derek. “I’ll be ready in two minutes.”

They ate schnapper that they pronounced superior to any fish that had ever been caught, and chops that were voted a special award as a discovery in cookery, since the communal frying-pan had imparted to them a fine flavour of schnapper. Neither twin was likely to be critical about such a detail as a needless washing of the pan. They drank tea until the billy gave out. Finally, they sat on the rocks and ate apples, throwing the cores to the sea-gulls; friendly and inquisitive gulls that had not learned to be afraid of humans.

“This is better than being at the Temples’,” pronounced Derek. “Can you imagine what Father and Mother would say if they could see us now?”

“I can,” said Jill, “but I don’t want to.”

“Better not, perhaps,” he said, laughing. “Not sorry you came, are you?”

“Goodness, no! It’s the greatest lark we’ve ever had. And the parents will be quite happy about it when we tell them. So why worry?” She put her hand into her pocket for another apple, and sighed to find none there.

“The thing that will worry us,” said Derek, “is packing up the food in the dark. And that’s what we shall be doing, unless we make a move. Or did you think of leaving it for the gulls to find in the morning?”

They secured the food-supply against the gulls, after which it seemed that nothing was so attractive as the prospect of bed. Jill undressed by torchlight while Derek went to make a final inspection of the boats. He came back whistling, and rolled into his blankets.

“Like your bunk?”

“In spots,” she answered. “The spots I don’t so much like are where bits of bracken-stalk stick into me. And even if you despise me for it, I could do with a pillow. But I’ll get used to it.”

“And I thought I’d made you a really superior bunk!” he mourned.

“So you did, for an island. What are you doing over there? Are you falling out of bed?”

“You can’t fall out of this one—but I’m getting up.”

“What on earth for?”

“Oh, just an idea that came to me. Back in a minute.”

She saw his torch gleam in the opening, and lay wondering at the restlessness of boys. In a few minutes he was back, and standing beside her.

“Here’s your pillow.”

“What——” began Jill, and subsided as something dropped on her face. She struggled to free herself, and broke into laughter.

“The launch cushions! Oh, Derek, aren’t we bright!”

“You aren’t,” said he, with dignity, returning to his bunk. “Neither was I, until a moment ago, but better late than never. Mine’s jolly damp with dew, by the way. I hope you like yours dewy.”

"It is dewy and hard, and it smells of varnish—but I like it better than any pillow I ever had," she said, cuddling her cheek into it.

"You want too much luxury for an explorer," Derek said serenely. "That's the worst of girls." He yawned loudly. "Good night."

Jill lay watching the oval of faintly-lit sky that showed through the sea-mouth of the cave. It was strange to be there, in that lonely place—only that no place could really be lonely, with her twin but a few feet away. The tide was nearly at its height; the waves rolled slowly into their cave, so near to them that it sounded as though the gentle ripples must come washing over them. She thought lazily that it would be disconcerting if an unexpected tidal wave should come roaring in, spreading from wall to wall. But tidal waves, she believed vaguely, happened only in China. "At least, I've never heard of one on the Australian coast," she reflected. It did not seem worth considering. She shut her eyes.

Sleep would not come, however. Her mind went back to the events of the afternoon, and she lived again the cruel moment when they had seen Joker attacked—seen him transformed from a happy, racing ball of energy to a half-dead thing, maimed and helpless. Jill knew that it was foolish to dwell upon it, but the thoughts would come, and she grew more and more wakeful. Derek's face, savagely angry, came vividly before her. That was, perhaps, the worst memory, for she had never before realized that Derek could look like that.

Presently she heard him move restlessly.

"You awake still?" she asked.

"Can't get to sleep," he said irritably. "I wish I knew how Joker is."

"Derek, he'll be fast asleep," she told him firmly. "Mr. Willis was quite happy about him."

"Easy for him," said Derek. "Oh, I'm sure he'll get better; Willis hadn't any doubt. But he may be lonesome, for all that. He never sleeps away from me when I'm home."

He was silent for a moment.

"I'd looked forward to having the little beggar on this trip. Wouldn't he have been wildly excited, to be sleeping in a place like this! He'd have been out as soon as it was light, hoping for rabbits."

"We'll bring him camping when he is well," suggested Jill.

"He won't be well enough these hols. Jill, I feel just murderous when I think of the brute that did it. I want to hurt him—you know—to hurt him physically. That's all he's fit for—the greasy, fat swine! And I don't know how I'm going to do it."

"I don't see how you can," said Jill. "It's so difficult, with a man. If he were your own size you could bash him—supposing you ever came across him again."

"I've been thinking how beautiful it would be to bash him," Derek said. "Over and over, until he yelled. I'll bet he couldn't fight. The sort of brute who'd kick a dog like that would be only a cur if he had to stand up to a man." And Derek, who was light-weight champion of his school, relapsed into dreams of what he might do to the fat man, should Providence deliver him into his hands.

"Well, you never know," Jill said, with an attempt to console her twin. "Even if you can't hurt him—and I don't see how you can—he will find things pretty unpleasant in Brandan's Point, if he shows up there again. They buy their stores from Mr. Barker, and he won't hesitate about telling him what he thinks of him. If there were a lot of people in the shop he would hate that more than being hurt."

"I wouldn't get the same satisfaction, though," said he.

This seemed unanswerable, and Jill was silent. She had worrying thoughts of her own.

"Derek," she said, after a while, knowing from his movements that he was still awake, "I was an awful ass this afternoon. I—I felt as if I'd let you down."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked a surprised voice.

"Well—I fuked it when Mr. Willis was going to fix up Joker. Couldn't help you hold him—or—or anything. I . . . I got all queer, and I just had to go out."

"Of all the old duffers!" It was Derek's own voice again: the hard, bitter tone had gone. "Do you think I didn't know? I wouldn't have let you stay, anyhow—I was just going to tell you to go out. It wasn't girls' work, and there were three of us there."

"Well, yes." Jill's voice was still troubled. "But he was ours. I knew I ought to have pluck enough to stay, in case I could help. And I just hadn't."

Derek raised himself on his elbow that he might speak more energetically.

"There was no need, I tell you. And that was just it, Jill—you knew there wasn't. That made all the difference. Suppose I hadn't been there—suppose it had been you, alone with Willis. I'll bet anything you would have held Joker without turning a hair, because you'd have known he needed you. You'd have forgotten everything else."

"Do you think so—truly? I've been horribly ashamed, Derek. You don't know how queer I felt—all cold and swimmy. And useless. I thought it was just because I'm—a girl!" The last words came miserably.

"Girl be hanged! It's one thing to help in a job like that, when you haven't time to think: it's quite another to stand by and see it done. Lots of men can't do that—I've heard Father say so. I say," he asked, with concern, "you didn't faint or anything, did you?"

"Oh, I wasn't such an ass as that. I just felt queer."

“It isn’t only girls that faint,” retorted Derek. “I never knew one that did, anyhow; but I’ve seen big strong fellows in the Cadet Corps do it, on parade on a hot day. It’s standing to attention for a long time—a fellow will suddenly go down like a stone, rifle and all. Makes you feel queer to see it—if one boy goes another generally follows.”

“Truly?” asked she, much relieved. “That makes me feel better, somehow. If boys do it——”

“Well, they do—and men too. And look here, Jill; don’t talk rot about letting me down. You’ve never done it yet, and I don’t believe you know how. I never see any difference between you and a boy,” said Derek, handsomely.

No testimonial could have been dearer to Jill’s heart. She glowed in the darkness.

“So you just go to sleep,” said the stern voice. “I’m going, anyhow. Good night.”

CHAPTER VII

THE ISLAND

“DO you think it’s time to get up, Jill?”

Derek’s tone was an indication that he, at least, had no desire to rise. He yawned widely, looking towards the cave-mouth. There was no reply from Jill.

“She’s asleep,” he thought, and became more wakeful himself. “Jill! Wake up!”

Still no response. Derek was conscious of a pleasant feeling of superiority. He rolled over, composing a suitable speech—and discovered that his twin’s blankets were empty. Jumping up, he slipped on his shoes and hurried outside.

Jill, in her pyjamas and barefooted, was peacefully sitting on a rock in the blazing sunshine, looking out to sea. She was eating an apple. Her whole attitude bespoke complete happiness.

“That you?” she called, without looking round. “The apples are close to you. Come up here—it’s lovely.”

Derek joined her. He glanced at her bare feet, and kicked off his shoes.

“What a morning! It’s hot enough for midsummer. Oh, and I slept like a top! Did you?”

“Yes, until I dreamed that a crab was walking over me. That woke me up, but there wasn’t any crab. By the time I had finished looking for him my bed was all anyhow, so I came out.”

“I’m glad you had that dream to yourself,” he remarked unfeelingly. “I never stirred until the sun came across my face. The rock is quite hot—this place is a regular sun-trap. I think we made a good find, don’t you?”

“It couldn’t be better. At least, I think it couldn’t, only we don’t know what we are going to find on the other islands. It’s rather jolly to think that we’re able to explore every single one, isn’t it?”

“As long as you don’t fall in love with each, and want to shift camp every night,” he said, laughing. “Cutting bracken for beds is something of a job, with no tool but a pocket-knife.”

“I don’t feel like shifting camp at all,” Jill said. “Too much bother. We can spend days on the other islands, and come back to this one to sleep. Bed-and-breakfast arrangement.”

“Good idea.” He lay flat on the rock and gazed skywards. “Would you like to bring me my breakfast up here?”

“I would not,” she responded firmly. “It’s too early for breakfast, anyhow:

I want a swim. There's a splendid place to dive from out beyond *Seahawk*."

"Do I want it?" he pondered. "Or do I want to go to sleep? Ow!"

The last remark was a long-drawn yell, due to a deft application of Jill's finger between his ribs. She fled to the cave, and when he appeared in the opening, bent on vengeance, he received his bathing-suit, rolled into a ball and flung by an arm well trained to throwing-in at cricket.

"Beast!" he said. "I'll duck you for that. Race you in!"

The water, at so early an hour, had a sting of cold. One dive and a hard swim out and back was enough even for Derek. They emerged, crisp and glowing, hurried into their clothes, and set about preparing breakfast. The scent of wood-smoke and sizzling bacon brought the seagulls flocking round them.

"It's rather alarming to be housekeeping," said Jill. "I never realized how quickly food disappears. We ought to have bought a side of bacon, instead of a silly little pound."

"I could eat another pound, too," he said. "And how I wish I hadn't discouraged old Barker about eggs! We'll need more stores—there's only enough bread left for one more meal. We must go over to the Point to-day for letters, so we can stock up. What a good thing Grannie sent us that cash!"

"I've been thinking," observed Jill. "Wouldn't it be a good thing if we ran up to Rocky Bay as well? There are heaps of things we'd have brought from home if we had known we were coming here. We want a hurricane-lantern and a hatchet, and it would be rather jolly to have some books: and then we could get bacon and eggs and lots of other things from Susan. She always has lots of cakes made, and a big cake would come in very handy."

"It would," said Derek pensively. "I could fill up with petrol, too. Our own money will go much farther if we do as you suggest: and after all, the parents are supposed to feed us!"

"They've never seemed unwilling," laughed Jill. "Suppose we explore the island now, because we must make sure that there is water. Then dash home in time for lunch, which will be a great saving of trouble to everyone except Susan. Then load up *Seahawk*, make all sail for the Point for letters, and back here in good time." She looked at him inquiringly. "How is that for a plan?"

"I never knew anyone with such a head," he said admiringly. "How do you do it?"

"It's no effort—comes quite naturally. Is there anything you'd like to add to it?"

"Only that if we're going to do all that we shall have to get a move on. We must leave all the camp shipshape." He rose, stretching himself. "You pack things away, and I'll wash up. Why do people wash up some things, and wash down others, by the way? That's a detail I've never been able to understand."

“I don’t know—and you wash some things round. And it’s all just washing.”

“And if we went to sleep too near the water’s edge we’d be washed away,” he grinned. “Well, it must give foreigners a pain to learn our language!” Still pondering on the mysteries of English, he seized the frying-pan and went to scrub it with sea-weed.

The camp was all in order when they set off a little later on their expedition of discovery. Fortune guided their footsteps, so that the search for water was quickly over. A bright green patch of grass under a little hill caught Derek’s eye not far from the shore.

“That looks hopeful,” he said. “I think we’ve found our spring.”

Where the spring came from they could not see, but there was a steady trickle of water from under a boulder. Some previous campers had lined with stones the basin the water had worn for itself in the soil. It was a fairly deep basin, brimming with water that showed crystal-clear against the stones. The overflow crept away into the grass.

“Whoever did that was a good scout,” observed Derek approvingly. “I wonder if it was Peter’s friends. I could dip out a bucketful easily—and you can’t always do that with a spring.”

“I’m beginning to feel that things are going too easily for us,” said Jill, laughing. “First we find the ideal home almost without looking for it, and then we discover water laid on close to the back-door. It’s too much like the Swiss Family Robinson!”

“Rather jolly, I think,” returned Derek. “I shall expect to happen across a bread-fruit tree, complete with cottage-loaves and fresh rolls, any minute. A herd of goats would be useful. I’d let you milk,” he added generously.

“That’s nice of you. All the same, this isn’t adventuring—and I expected to adventure.”

“Hardships and what-not,” said Derek. “You’d better be careful with your longings, or you may get more than you’re looking for. It’s possible to have adventures even without going half a mile for water. I feel a tingling in my spine that tells me that a dark man will cross your path and give you a sticky time!”

“Go on,” begged Jill. “Will he come across the water?”

“He can’t very well do anything else unless he drops from an aeroplane,” grinned the prophet. “My spine tells me you had better beware, for you have tempted Fate, and Fate will strike back. The worst of my beastly spine is,” he added, “that it tells me that, whatever happens, I’ll be in it too! And I never asked for any trouble!”

“I like your talkative spine,” said his twin. “Go on.”

“I refuse to listen to it any more,” said the prophet firmly, smiting his back.

“There: I’ve switched it off, and this is Derek Sherwood calling. For the next half-hour listeners will hear the sound of heavy breathing as the party ascends yon hill.” He set off with long strides.

“Perhaps we’ll find my dark man at the top,” Jill suggested hopefully, as she caught him up. “Probably he’ll be dressed in wallaby skins and carrying spears and boomerangs!”

“In which case listeners will hear howls of horror from the party in full flight,” grinned Derek. “It would rather take the edge off things if we came across a blackfellows’ camp, wouldn’t it? No leaving our camp unguarded then.”

“I suppose there were plenty in the old days,” Jill remarked. “This would have been a pretty good place for them, with plenty of water and plenty of fish. It would be rather fun if we came across a kitchen-midden on one of these islands—we might find some stone axes.”

They reached the hill-top after a hard, climb. There was no sign that anyone had ever been there; the great gum-tree stood in majestic loneliness. It was a noble tree, with a wide butt, its mighty lower limbs near enough to the ground for the twins to scramble into them. They climbed until their way was barred by a stretch of smooth trunk.

“I say, what a view!” uttered Derek.

They looked out upon all the islands that dotted the sea on either hand. The coast of the mainland was spread like an unrolled map, Brandan’s Point, with its lighthouse, running out towards them. On the heights above Rocky Bay they could catch a glimpse of their own home half-hidden among its trees. To the east glittered the open sea, its blue unbroken save by the smudge of smoke that told of a far-off steamer ploughing her way south.

“How close can ships come in on this part of the coast?” Jill asked.

“I don’t know, exactly. The big passenger-boats keep well out—there’s nothing for them to stand in for. But you never know what smaller ones will do; tramps that touch at the little ports. They say their captains know every yard of this coast.”

“It would be rather fun to own a big steam-yacht and cruise out there,” Jill said.

“Wouldn’t it!” Derek’s eyes were eager. “I want to go and explore the Barrier Reef some day. One of our fellows at school had a brother who was with a party of scientists who lived for months on the Reef. He had dozens of his brother’s photographs. They must have had a gorgeous time! You would get all the adventures you wanted there, Jill!”

“Oh, I don’t know. That was a civilized sort of expedition; they had their supply-ship and everything they wanted, hadn’t they? Somehow I feel that it’s better here——You wouldn’t feel that things would happen unexpectedly with

a crowd of people round you, and your meals cooked in a galley, and all that," said Jill, rather vaguely.

"You're full of hope, aren't you?" said Derek, laughing. "What on earth do you expect to happen on little tame islands like these?"

"Well—look at your spine! Think of what it chatted about."

"I cannot look at my spine," stated Derek with dignity. "I've always wanted to, because I'm sure it's an unusual one, but there it is—and it stays there, and as I haven't got a neck like a giraffe I've never seen it."

"I have, and it's quite ordinary," said Jill cruelly. "Anyhow, it warned you."

"Well, it warns me now that we'd better stop playing the goat and get down from this tree," remarked Derek. They slid down rapidly, swinging from a low bough like monkeys and dropping with a simultaneous thud.

"That was good," said Jill. "I haven't climbed a tree for an age. Wouldn't Miss Eversham shudder if she saw me! She says she has given up all hope of teaching girls deportment, but she still faintly hopes for something dimly resembling lady-like behaviour. Isn't it a mercy Mother hasn't got like that? Moira Ford says that her mother nearly fainted when she wanted to wear shorts."

"I don't wonder, if Moira looked like some of the girls I've seen in shorts at Manly," said Derek. "You do see queer things on the beaches these days. But you look all right, in trousers, at any rate." Which was, Jill felt, as much commendation as one could expect from a brother.

"I shouldn't wonder if this island were an extinct volcano," remarked Derek, as they went down the hill. "This peak looks rather like it, doesn't it? The whole thing might have been thrown up from under the sea ages ago." To which Jill responded that she didn't care where it came from, so long as it went on being extinct.

Below the hill the scrub grew thickly. It was full of birds; the air rang with their chirping and calling. So tame were they that they scarcely fluttered aside when the twins came near.

"It's a real bird-sanctuary," said Jill delightedly. "We must come here in the nesting-time; I'd love to see them when the young ones are out."

"Yes—if we kept very still they'd soon treat us as part of the scrub," Derek agreed. "And shouldn't we get splendid photographs! I should have to leave Joker tied up, though, and that would annoy him—but it would be worth it." His ear caught a rustle; he glanced round in time to see a stump-tailed lizard disappearing under a bush.

"See him, Jill?" He parted the bush gently, and the squat, grotesque little creature showed for a moment before slithering away.

"Now, I wonder how he got over here," questioned Jill.

“Most likely his ancestors got a free passage across on a log. When big logs get carried out to sea on a flooded river they often carry quite a lot of living things,” Derek said. “I like the little stumpies; they’re tame little chaps, for all that they’re so ugly. But I hope their ancestors’ log didn’t carry snakes as well.”

They saw no sign of snakes; except for the fat lizards, of which they met another specimen, birds seemed to be the only living creatures on the island. There were no tracks of animals—even the persevering rabbit had failed to make the journey from the mainland. But the birds made up for the absence of four-footed inhabitants. It could never be a lonely place; their busy presence made every bush and tree a centre of gay companionship. Not since the twins had left their home in the Northern bush had they seen anything like them in numbers and in fearlessness.

The scrub ended at last, and they came out on the farther shore of the island; it had taken them longer than they had expected, but that was chiefly due to the birds. Here there were longer stretches of clear sand with fewer rocky headlands. Making their way westward, they were blocked by a bluff running out into the sea. To get round it might have been possible at low water, but the tide was at the full, and the waves were washing up against the foot of the cliff. There was no going on.

Derek glanced at his watch.

“I think we had better get back. The beach is heavy going, and it would take us a long time to go round by the shore. I vote we cut across country again at a different angle and start for Rocky Bay.”

“Right,” agreed Jill. “And this time we must be severe with ourselves and not look at birds, or we shall be awfully late. It’s a long run home, and we have plenty to do when we get there.”

This time, as if the island were in sympathy with them, they found more open going: clear slopes and little valleys clothed with springy sea-grass where they could walk fast. There were curious boulders here and there, looking as though they had been scattered about by giants who had used them as playthings; Derek began to think that his idea that the island was of volcanic origin might have good foundation. It was different to any country they had seen. There seemed no set pattern in it; wherever they turned new features met their eyes.

“You’d never grow tired of this island, I think,” Jill said. “It’s always taking you by surprise. Look at that rock—it’s just like a hippopotamus.”

“Most of the rocks have curious shapes,” Derek answered. “I believe they have all been heaved up from the sea-floor, or from whatever is under the sea-floor. It’s a queer old world!” he added profoundly.

“They say the sea was once where quite high mountains are now,” she said.

“Or else the mountains were under the sea—anyhow, there are shells on them. Miss Traill was talking about it in a geography lesson, and she’s pretty sensible. I wonder, did it happen suddenly? Wouldn’t it be remarkable to be on a mountain and to find it sinking under you!”

“Yes—and to see the sea coming up, sweeping over all the lower land and blotting everything out,” was Derek’s contribution to this cheerful picture. “Mounting up and up until you had only a little bit left to stand on! I wonder would one wait for it to take that little bit, or if it would be easier to take a header and finish it?”

“Me for the header!” said Jill quickly. “One wouldn’t want to stay alive, anyhow, because everything one cared about would have gone. And where would be the sense in waiting?”

“Not much, certainly. But I think a good many people would hang on as long as they could—afraid of getting their feet wet!” said Derek, laughing. “Well, it’s queer to think it all really happened once.”

“If we talk about it any more I’ll begin to feel the island sinking!” declared Jill.

“Who began it? Anyhow, we’d better make for the boat and save ourselves!” He uttered a war-whoop and raced down a slope, his long legs taking wider and wider leaps over the sparse bracken-fern. Jill chuckled, and followed scarcely less rapidly.

She came out upon the beach of their little bay, to find him already in the *Seahawk*, apparently making feverish preparations for escape. He waved frantically, shouting to her to make haste before the island disappeared. The engine started as she jumped on board. They crept out of the bay.

“Saved!” exclaimed Derek dramatically, as they gathered way and the land receded.

“You’re an ass—but a nice ass,” was Jill’s disrespectful comment. “I wish you could see yourself when you run downhill; I never can make out why you don’t tie your legs in knots, the way ostriches do when they stampede.”

“Well, it’s time to be sane again,” said Derek. “That island of ours is beginning to go to our heads, I believe: it has a demoralizing effect on us. Anyway, I am now captain of this liner, and she’s going to show what she can do. She feels frisky, too, but that’s because she hasn’t got Peter’s dinghy tied to her tail.”

Jill perched herself cross-legged on the bow. The *Seahawk*’s speed increased until the prudence that was never very far below the surface of Derek’s nonsense asserted itself, and he decided that she was doing all that could be expected from her. It is safe to say that her absent owner had not dreamed that she would be asked to do as much. They headed straight for Rocky Bay, singing as they went.

CHAPTER VIII

THEY MAKE A RAID

“YOU back already!” Susan greeted the twins as they appeared at the kitchen door. “My gracious, Miss Jill, where’s your ’air?”

“I mislaid it in Brandan’s Point,” Jill laughed. “And we’re only back for a visit, Susan. We want food, please.”

“Well, you’ve come to the right place for it,” affirmed Susan comfortably. “I made an ’ot-pot that’s big enough for six. I’m funny that way when I make an ’ot-pot: I get sort of carried away with all the odds an’ ends that go in, an’ it always ends up by bein’ too big.”

“It can’t be too big to-day,” said Derek. “And were you going to have a pudding, Susan?”

“If you was to make me cross me ’eart an’ speak the truth, Master Derek, I’d ’ave to say we was not. But that’s not sayin’ there won’t be pancakes for you!” She seized a bowl and whisked into the pantry in search of eggs.

“Susan, you’re a dream——” Derek told her.

“Pretty solid dream!” put in Susan.

“And you’ve got to be even more of a dream, because we want lots of food besides dinner. We’re camping.”

“Well, that’s what you expected to be, ain’t it? Don’t Mrs. Temple feed you?” demanded Susan, whisking eggs.

“She would if we were there, but we aren’t.” The situation was explained to her, and she gasped.

“On them islands! Well, I’d be scared. You mean to say you slep’ there last night?”

“We did,” laughed Jill. “And we loved it.”

“An’ who’s cook?”

“I was. But I don’t mean to keep the job all to myself.”

“I dunno what you’ll look like when you come ’ome if you let Master Derek do the cookin’,” Susan doubted. “An’ I dunno what your Ma will say in any case. But that ain’t my business. All I can do to save your lives is to start thinkin’ what tucker I can fix up for you.”

“I’ll come and cook breakfast after we come home, just to show you what I can do,” threatened Derek.

“Well, just give me warnin’, an’ I’ll have mine first,” grinned Susan. “I never yet see a man as was any good in a kitchen, barrin’ a feller that cooked in an ’otel where I ’ad a job as kitchenmaid. Big fat feller in a funny white cap.

They called 'im a Sheff."

"Could he cook?"

"You bet 'e could. I never see anything like the sweets that Sheff feller turned out. But was 'e dirty! Oh, boy!" breathed Susan, in the best film manner.

"Are you calling me 'Boy'?" demanded Derek.

"That's only a manner of speakin', Master Derek," explained she, slightly confused. "What I mean to say is, it 'ud give you the creeps to see that Sheff chap's dirty ways. 'E'd stick 'is finger in things 'e was cookin', an' lick it, to see if the flavour was right. An' 'e smoked all the time, an' 'ow much cigarette-ash people ate with their food I wouldn't like to mention. Well, I lef' in a 'urry, 'cause boiled eggs was the only thing I could bring meself to eat there, an' me indigestion got beyond me."

The twins shouted with laughter, and Susan regarded them severely.

"Well, you may laugh. But it wasn't so funny to be there, though I will say I picked up most of me cookin' from that Sheff. Not 'is way of tastin' things," she added hastily. "But 'e was a fair wizard with aspic jelly."

"If Susan tells me any more horrible secrets I won't be able to eat any hot-pot," said Derek, getting off the table; "and that would be a tragedy. I'll leave the food business to you, Jill, while I go and hunt up things." He went off whistling.

"Well it's nice to see the pair of yous again, even if it's only for a fleetin' moment," said the cook soulfully. "The 'ouse is 'orrid lonesome, Miss Jill. An' Joe's funny enough to make a cat laugh—spends 'is time persuadin' Mary an' me to go to the movies. 'E 'ad us near dead last night, tryin' to act Mickey Mouse!"

The vision was too much for Jill, who collapsed again.

"'S a pity you didn't see 'im. I told 'im 'e ought to go on the films 'imself, an' all 'e said was, 'Oh, yeah?' 'E's got it very bad. Mary an' me pretend we've lost all fancy for movies, just to draw 'im on."

"You'll find it exciting if you go with him," laughed Jill. "Be ready to hold him down in the thrilling parts, and don't be surprised at anything he shouts to the actors."

"Lor'!" said Susan, wide-eyed. "Does 'e do that? But 'e'd get chucked out, an' wouldn't that be confusin' for us? So public. I guess we'll have to ejjicate 'im a bit before we say we'll go with 'im. Well now, Miss Jill, what am I to give you to take back to them 'orrid islands? I won't sleep a wink this night, to think of you wrigglin' on a 'eap of bracken. Couldn't you take out a little mattress?" she added coaxingly.

This appalling suggestion having been hastily negated by Jill, they drifted to a discussion of foods. Susan was efficient and helpful, save that her

ideas soared far beyond the possibilities of camp storage.

“Oh, well, don’t you worry,” she said at length. “I’ll ’ave everything packed in biscuit-tins, an’ then you’ll ’ave a few places to keep things in. An’ I’ll put in a big piece of butter-muslin, same as you can cover up meat an’ fish. You gotter be careful about flies, which was more than that Sheff feller ever was.” She shuddered at secret memories, but mercifully refrained from relating them.

“You’re a dear, Susan,” Jill told her. “Now, I’ll go and find books and things.”

“Is them all the shoes you’ve got?” demanded Susan, casting a stern eye on gym.-shoes which had once been white. “I thought so. Now, Miss Jill, just you pack up another pair, an’ for Master Derek too, an’ some spare shirts an’ trousis. If you get rain, or tumble off the boat, or anything, a nice pewmonia you’ll be gettin’ with nothin’ to change to.”

“All right,” said Jill, escaping. “You’ll make me take evening dress if I stay here any longer!” She was gone, the last words drifting back as she ran.

Short as their stay on the island had been, it seemed strange to eat at a civilized table again, with fresh flowers and shining silver instead of Mr. Barker’s best efforts in cheap cutlery spread out upon a rock. The twins put up with the civilization for the sake of Susan’s cooking, which was all that could be desired; and having done the fullest justice to it, felt unable for anything but chairs on the verandah for half an hour. Then, Susan having announced that her packing was done, they assembled their loot, which presented such alarming proportions that Joe, Mary and Susan insisted on helping to carry it to the boat, so that their departure took on the nature of a procession. The three retainers stood somewhat mournfully on the jetty as the *Seahawk* slid away.

“Don’t be too long!” shrieked Susan. “An’ do be careful, Miss Jill!” She turned to Mary, who was waving her apron wildly.

“I dunno if we hadn’t ought to write to the Missus. She’s a right to know what them young imps are up to.”

“You leave well alone,” growled Joe. “What’s the good of worryin’ the Missus? Master Derek can run ’is own show.” He sighed heavily. “Well, I’ll be glad to see ’em safe ’ome, all the same.” They made their way slowly up the hill.

The twins had no misgivings. They were well-fed, and their future needs were provided for, with a gratifying economy where their private funds were concerned. Their sky held no clouds as the launch sped towards Brandan’s Point. Derek took the shortest line, and it seemed but a little time before they were nearing the pier.

“Jolly to think we shan’t have to carry a lot of bundles down this track,” Jill said as they ploughed through the dusty sand of the hill road. “I think we’ll

get all our stores from home while we're on the island."

"Who said it was a bit tame to have a supply-ship to depend on?" grinned Derek.

"Oh, well—that's different," said she vaguely. "We're going to do everything for ourselves out there. But we've got to get food from somewhere _____"

"And there isn't any sense in buying it when we can get it for nothing," yielded Derek, remembering the way in which money had seemed to melt during the previous day's shopping. "And I rather enjoyed having a look at home again—just for a little while. And now I'm glad we're off on our own again. I say, Jill, I want to find that boy of Barker's: I never thanked him yesterday. We'll go there first."

At the store good news met them. Tom had visited the white cottage during his dinner hour and reported, with a wide grin, that Mr. Willis was delighted with Joker's progress. As a visitor not likely to excite the patient, he had even been permitted to see him.

"Looks as comf'table as anything," he said eagerly; "lyin' there in 'is basket just 's if he knew 'e was in 'orspital. Mr. Willis says 'e's got more sense than lots of people's got. Takin' food all right, too. 'E's great mates with Mr. Willis—you can see that."

"Good business!" uttered Joker's relieved owner. "Did you hear if he slept well?"

"Mr. Willis said 'e put the basket in the kitchen, so's they'd hear 'im if 'e moved. Never give a sound all night; an' when Mr. Willis come out in the mornin', there 'e was, lookin' at 'im out of one eye just 's if 'e was sayin' ' 'Ullo!' 'E's a great little dog," ended Tom admiringly.

"You've no need to worry about him when he's with Willis," put in Mr. Barker. "That man's a genius with dogs. Lucky you got the little chap to him so quickly."

"That was thanks to your Tom," said Jill—and the lank boy reddened with pleasure.

"Well, it was a dirty trick," Mr. Barker said disgustedly. "I could hardly believe my ears when Tom told me about it. Those fellows always seem decent, quiet chaps when they come in here."

"I don't think the two we saw first knew anything about it," Derek replied. "It was only the fat man. The whole thing was over in a flash, and the first two were going down the steps to their boat. I don't believe they knew."

"Tom thought that—though I'd think they'd have heard something. Anyhow, it was their fat friend's doing. If he shows up in here I'll let him know pretty clearly what decent people think of cruelty to a dog. One thing—I'll bet he's no Australian. Looks foreign to me, though I never heard him

speak: it's his friends who do the talking, and not too much of it from them, either. They pass the time of day when they're buying their stores, but you wouldn't call them chatty. Not like some people," said Mr. Barker, who dearly loved a gossip. "And how's your camp on the island, Miss Jill? Must have taken the edge off your fun, to leave the little dog behind."

Derek drew Tom aside while Jill answered.

"You came in jolly handy yesterday, Tom. Here's something to remind you of Joker." He tried to slip some money into his hand, but the boy drew back, flushing.

"No, thanks. I don't want it."

"Oh, rot!" said Derek. "I owe you more than that. You take some of your pals to the pictures."

Tom shook his head, looking desperately uncomfortable.

"It wasn't work. Don't want it, thanks."

"But——" began Derek.

"There's someone callin' me," said the boy. He fled out to the back of the store and was lost to view.

"That's a queer boy," remarked Mr. Barker, who had taken in the little scene out of the corner of one eye. "You won't get him to take any money for a thing like that—and goodness knows he hasn't much to bless himself with. All his wages go to his mother; she's a widow, and it's all she can do to get along. But the boy's mad on animals. To tell you the truth, I was getting a bit heated yesterday because of the time he'd been away; but when he came in, out of breath from racing up from Willis's, he took my wrath away telling me about Joker. Never knew Tom had so many words."

"But it's utter rubbish that he won't take a few shillings," Derek protested. "Look here, Mr. Barker, can't you fix it? If they're so poor, couldn't you send some food or clothes to his mother? You could work it, and they needn't know it came from us."

"I dare say I could—but it'll have to be done carefully," said the storekeeper, taking the money. "He certainly needs a new pair of pants, if ever a boy did. All right. You leave it to me."

"Thanks—and if it comes to more, just put it into my bill, will you?" said Derek, much relieved. They said good-bye, and sought the post-office. A letter from Mrs. Sherwood awaited them. They tore it open eagerly under the office verandah.

"Can't come back for a week—whew!" Derek whistled. "That's tough luck."

"It seems a very good thing she went, though," said Jill, reading on. "Poor old Grannie was pretty bad. I say—she actually cried when she saw Mother! I can't imagine Grannie crying, can you?"

“Shows she must have been all anyhow from shock,” remarked Derek. “Old people can’t tumble round like you and me. Well, she’s better, Mother says. Going to X-ray her ankle, are they? My word, I hope I’ll see the picture!”

Jill giggled.

“Sympathetic little boy, aren’t you?”

“Well, I can’t help Grannie—and I’m awfully interested in X-rays,” Derek defended himself. “And Mother says she hopes we’re having a good time, so now we’ll go and have an ice!”

This duty discharged faithfully, there seemed nothing further to keep them in Brandan’s Point. A suggestion that they might call on Peter was put aside by Derek on the ground that it would be cruelty to animals.

“Besides, he promised us to get busy in his workshop: we wouldn’t be likely to find him moping under his yellow flag,” he added. “I tell you what—we’ll send him a postcard!” They bought a view of the islands as seen from the shore, scrawled a message on it, and dropped it in the letter-box.

“There’s our good deed!” observed Derek. “Now for the boat!”

It seemed to Jill that the island welcomed them as they drew near. She did not say so, because Derek might have considered it a silly notion; but the feeling grew as the features of the land grew clearer. At first it had been the great gum-tree on the peak: it looked fatherly, protective, spreading wide arms towards them. Then lesser hills and deep gulleys opened out until she could pick out the brown rocks among the bracken, playthings of the giants who had once lived within the peak. Sea-giants, Jill thought they must have been, who had brought their playthings from the country under the sea. She wondered idly had they gone back there when they grew tired of their game in the sunlight; or had they been transferred by old Father Neptune to play in other oceans, making other islands where boys and girls might camp. She hoped it was that; giants who had known open air and sunlight couldn’t, she felt, ever be really happy in the cold dark country under the sea.

She dreamed on, living in a kind of sea fairy-tale, and became aware that the boat was rocking idly on the water, and Derek watching her.

“What are you thinking about?” he asked curiously.

“Sea-giants,” she told him, half-afraid that he would laugh at her. It all depended on Derek’s mood of the moment. Sometimes he would be fiercely practical, nothing but boy, slangy and energetic; but there were rare moments when he, too, would dream. “I was wondering if they could be true—if fairy-tales had anything behind them. Sometimes I think they have.”

Derek did not laugh.

“How does anyone know?” he said. “We’ve got a new master at school, and I yarn to him sometimes—or rather, he yarns to me. He says fairy-tales are really rather important to people who are studying about different races and

countries. Because it's awfully queer how the same stories are repeated among native races all over the world. You get them told by people who couldn't possibly have had any connection with each other: people who never knew what a book was, or had any way of learning anything. But they have the same stories of giants and dwarfs and all sorts of beings like that."

"You mean—a tribe living up the Amazon might have the same legends as an African tribe?"

"Yes—and an Eskimo and a Maori might have the same. Where do they all come from? You'd think there must be something like a general fund of knowledge that leaks out in different parts of the world."

"But if that's so—wouldn't that knowledge have something in it that was true?"

"That's what Mr. Garrod says. Of course, most of our chaps at school would simply howl at the bare idea. All the same, it seems to have enough behind it to make a good many scientific people keen on poking into it. Mr. Garrod says that folk-lore and legends are the history of races that have no books—so it does seem to show that a good deal of history is identical, doesn't it? That queer sort of history, I mean."

"Well, if you boil that down to brass tacks——" said Jill. She paused, as Derek went off into a shout of laughter.

"I do like the way you put things," he apologized, recovering. "Sorry—go on."

"Well—if you do," she said, laughing; "I mean, if those stories are history, and if they are identical, you have to come to the conclusion that there must have been giants and dwarfs and things going about pretty freely. If that's so—where are they now?"

"Search *me!*" was Derek's answer.

Jill thought for a time before she spoke again.

"I wonder what they were for," she mused. "It says in the Bible that there were giants in the earth once. It seems to me they must have been needed for something—not just to wander round like dinosaurs or those other queer creatures. They must have had minds, you see—supposing they really were there."

"I've got ideas wandering round my head sometimes—like your dinosaurs," Derek said. He stopped for a moment, and when he began again his voice was hesitating. "I wouldn't talk about them to anyone but you, because people would think them all rot. But—if you think of the world being made—this world and all the thousands of worlds that the scientific chaps say exist—you think of some great Power making them all, don't you?"

"Well—that's God," said Jill bluntly.

"God is what this world calls that Power; other worlds may have other

names, but it's all the same."

"Ye-es?"

"Well, I can't picture that tremendous Power going into every little detail. Continents and oceans and all that—yes. But what about all the odd bits: islands here and there, and little hills and gulleys, and funny little lakes that seem to have no reason for being in a particular place?"

"Didn't they just happen?"

"I don't believe anything just happened. Now, you think of any big work that's done; there's always somebody in command at the very top, and then people under him, not quite so important; then more and more people, not important at all, but each doing a bit of the job. Like a regiment; like building the Sydney Bridge."

"Yes, but that's the sort of thing that ordinary people do. Not . . . not the Power."

"I . . . wonder," he said slowly. "It seems to me a pretty practical idea to think that the little details might have been handed over to . . . well, call them workmen. Craftsmen. Think of the earth, slowly cooling down till it was fit to handle; and a worker being told off to go and do the best he could with a little bit of it to make that bit fit to be part of the whole scheme. He'd have been given the general idea, of course, and he couldn't go outside that; but within those limits he'd have freedom to try out his own notions. And wouldn't that account for all the places where mistakes seem to have been made!"

"Perhaps I wasn't so far wrong when I was thinking of sea-giants tossing up our island," Jill suggested.

"You felt that if they really existed once they were used for something," he said quickly. "Think of them—huge beings, with minds and with tremendous strength! I don't believe they were made just to live; not used for some work."

"But what about dinosaurs and mastodons and all that zoo which used to roam round the earth?" demanded Jill. "You don't think they had jobs, do you?"

"Shouldn't think so," Derek said. "I suppose they were the sort of creatures that were suited to the earth as it was then. You can't think of them as you can think of giants, because they hadn't minds." He hesitated. "Don't you see, Jill?—the Power could only use workers that had minds. Workers would have to think, and plan, and make things."

Jill thought a long while over this, ideas crowding upon her.

"Well—where do you stop?" she asked abruptly. "You picture giants doing things with the earth, and then that job ended—at least, it seems so, as there aren't any giants nowadays. But people go on thinking and planning and making. Do you reckon we're all just workers like the giants—being used?"

Derek's eyes opened widely.

“I never thought of that. It’s a pretty big idea.” He relapsed into silence.

“Well, it’s too big for me,” said Jill presently. “I’ll have to turn it over in my mind for a year or two. Let’s get back to the giants. Your idea is that they were busy, useful people, but all the stories make them out to be rather a public danger. Nasty habits, and unpleasant tastes in food. How do you account for that?”

“Oh, I had a long think about that,” Derek said with a grin. “I came to the conclusion that their job ended, and most of them died out, or perhaps went back——”

“Where?” came the swift question.

“Oh—somewhere. To Mars, perhaps. There are heaps of somewheres. And a few got left over, and they hadn’t anything to do, so of course they got into mischief and developed awful tempers; no wonder, with inquisitive little people poking into their houses and making rude remarks about their size. So they took to eating the little people, just like you eat oysters. There’s really far less excuse for you, because the oysters never annoyed you!”

Jill giggled happily. “Go on.”

“Then, of course, all the little people got together and chattered about it; and disgusting boys, who were usually named Jack, saw their chance to get into the front page of the newspapers, and laid nasty traps to kill the poor giants. So they all perished miserably; and the little people made songs and stories to show how brave they had been. Some day,” said he dreamily, “I shall write a book called, ‘In Defence of Giants.’ ”

“And what about dwarfs and fairies?”

“Oh, I don’t know anything about them. Too small. I only study full-sized specimens. All the same, I shouldn’t wonder if they’d had their jobs too.”

He glanced at their island. They had drifted a long way, and it now lay far astern.

“If you gaze at the Peak,” he said, “you’ll see our tame giant waving his handkerchief to us and calling ‘Come home!’ ”

CHAPTER IX

VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY

“IS there any more bacon?”

“None,” replied Jill.

“Pity,” observed Derek, carefully mopping the last remnants of fried egg from his plate with a piece of bread. “We must cook more to-morrow. Marmalade, please.” He spread a large slice thickly, and sat on the edge of the rock-table to eat it, looking out to sea.

It was a glorious morning. The sun shone warmly on the twins’ bare heads, still damp from their early swim. The smoke from the smouldering embers of their cooking-fire drifted upwards in the motionless air. Outside the little bay the sea showed scarcely a ripple. The twins had slept for ten hours, had swum and dived energetically, and had eaten with the appetites credited to hunters. They felt at peace with all the world.

Derek finished his breakfast and licked his fingers with the air of one who wastes nothing.

“We can do several things to-day,” he remarked. “Fish, explore islands, or be utterly lazy and lie in the sand with books. Which do you vote for?”

“Oh, islands, don’t you think?” Jill answered. “We have lots of food, and I don’t feel a bit lazy. And I do want to see if the other islands are as good as this one, don’t you?”

“I shall when once I start, but at this moment I don’t want to do anything but lie on this rock and feel well-fed,” he said. He lay back with a long yawn, which changed to a disgusted howl as his head encountered the frying-pan. “Bother you, Jill! why do you leave things like that on the breakfast-table! How much bacon-grease have I got on my hair?”

“Not a whole heap,” said the delighted Jill, when she was able to speak. “Never mind; I’ll rub you down with sea-weed presently.”

“You and your sea-weed!” He rubbed his head very hard with his handkerchief and smelt it delicately. “Nice nourishing smell. Now, as you’ve spoiled my time for reflection, I think we’d better clear up.”

To-day the dinghy trailed astern as the *Seahawk* left the bay, and Derek was content with easy speed, having no great confidence in Peter’s airy assurance that sunken rocks were not to be feared. They visited island after island. Sometimes it was possible to moor the launch to jutting, shelf-like rocks: more often they took no chances, but dropped anchor in deep water and paddled ashore in the little boat.

There was no island without its charm. Some were barren stretches of sand, where wiry grass had established a scanty footing; but even on these there was fascination in the steep hummocks down which the twins slid to find resting-places in the hollows between, where the sand was so smooth that Jill declared that the sea-giants had finished it off with a plane. Shells of a thousand varieties strewed the beaches; sea-birds ran off as the strangers approached, and then wheeled overhead, uttering long cries. But the real interest was centred in the rocky islands. Like Peak Island, as Derek had christened their special property, they were honeycombed with caves, and no two caves were alike. They found a score of places as suitable for camping as their own, though on only two other islands did they discover water. One had a spring so strong that the water that bubbled from under a boulder had cut a bed for itself, so that a tiny stream wandered towards the shore, its sides fringed with ferns and maidenhair. They ate their lunch beside it, in a gully where birds chattered busily in the trees overhead.

“This is the next best thing to our own island,” Derek remarked. “And the cave just below here would be a topping camping-place.”

“Do you want to move?” Jill asked. “We could shift camp if you liked.”

“Oh, it wouldn’t be worth while. Peak Island is bigger, for one thing—more country to explore. And our own cave is topping, too. Besides, I should have to cut fresh lots of bracken.”

“Someone will have to cut a bit more for my bunk,” said Jill; “most of the spring seems to have gone out of my mattress.”

“Mine, too,” he said. “They always get a bit flat after a couple of nights. I’ll get some more when we go back. It’s deceptive stuff; you cut what looks enough for a haystack, but pretty soon it feels like a pancake.”

“I’m glad you don’t want to leave Peak Island,” she observed. “It has a home-y feel now; I felt last night as though it were quite glad to see us back. Do you ever feel as though some places were friendly, Derek, and others not?”

“Yes, I do. It’s a queer feeling, and you can’t ever tell what causes it. It’s not a question of cities; neither of us likes big towns, but they haven’t got any feeling about them; it’s just that we don’t fit in. You didn’t mean towns, did you?”

She shook her head.

“No; I only get that feeling in country places. Don’t you remember that gully on the Queensland place where we never could bear to go?”

“The place we called ‘Hateful Hollow’—yes, rather!” he answered quickly. “It was funny, too, because it was rather a jolly place to look at. But we hated having even to ride across it. When I began to ride down one side of it I used to feel as if something were pushing me back.”

“Father never noticed anything about it,” Jill said.

“Well, we never asked him. He would only have thought we were silly asses. I remember riding out one day to find him, and he was sitting on a log down in the hollow, eating his lunch happily. It wasn’t the place I would have chosen to eat anything.”

“We used to make up stories about it, do you remember?” Jill said.

“Yes—yarns about murders having been done there, and that sort of thing. All rubbish, of course—only we had to pay the place out for making us scared of it!” he said with a laugh. “I suppose it’s only kids who have those silly feelings. If we ever went back there we wouldn’t think there was anything wrong with it.” He paused. “Or—would we?” he added thoughtfully.

“I don’t feel as if I wanted to try,” Jill said. “But I haven’t come across any really unfriendly places since we came South. It’s the other way round—I feel that our island is extraordinarily friendly. I’m sure it likes us.”

“Shows its sense,” said Derek lightly. “All the same, I believe I feel it, too. Anyhow, I don’t want to camp anywhere else.”

Jill rolled over on the grass and looked at him, propping her chin on her hands.

“Wouldn’t it be horrid if we couldn’t talk to each other about all the funny things that come into our heads?” she said. “We’re great chums with Mother and Father, of course, but somehow we couldn’t tell them things like Hateful Hollow.”

“Nor giants helping to make the world,” added Derek, smiling.

“No—certainly not giants. And it isn’t that they would laugh at us. They would always be nice about it. Only—we just couldn’t.”

“Don’t you think all kids are like that?” Derek asked. “It isn’t any want of—well, friendliness. It’s because we’re on different levels, if you know what I mean. And all kids have secret places of their own, that they don’t talk about—secret places inside their thoughts. Only—you and I seem to have the same places. It’s rather lucky, I think.”

“Wonder if we’ll grow out of it?” Jill pondered.

“I’ll tell you that in five years,” said Derek, laughing. “I don’t want to grow out of it, but people get awfully different when they grow up. In five years I’ll be helping to run the place, and most likely you’ll have got married to some poor wretch that——” Further utterance was checked by a swift movement on the part of his twin that resulted in his being gagged with his own felt hat.

It was late when they returned to Peak Island—so late that they supped by the light of the hurricane-lantern, thankful that Susan’s provision of cold meat saved them from the necessity of cooking. Derek even hesitated over lighting a fire to boil the billy, but decided that to go without tea was unthinkable.

“But I draw the line at washing-up,” he declared, when they had finished.

“There’s another day to-morrow.” To which Jill agreed enthusiastically, and the weary explorers sought their blankets.

Morning found them disinclined for any strenuous exertion. Derek inspected somewhat ruefully a pair of shoes that showed many signs of having resented rock-climbing—brightening considerably when he learned that—again, thanks to Susan—Jill had packed a second pair for him.

“Women have their uses,” he declared handsomely. “I thought I’d have had to go barefoot. Anyhow, that is what I mean to be this morning; I propose to walk just as far as that sunny patch of soft sand, taking a book with me. What about you?”

Jill had no improvement to suggest to this plan, and they spent a peaceful morning, moving only when it was necessary to roll over as the shadow of the rock encroached on their sunny spot. Not until hunger had forced them to prepare dinner, and dinner had restored them to energy, did they feel equal to making new plans.

“I vote,” said Derek, “that we now circumnavigate the island. I want to see what it looks like from the water on the other side. There’s that bluff we couldn’t get round the other day, and I have a suspicion that it might not be possible to get round it even at low tide: it runs a long way out.”

“There’s probably a cave there,” Jill suggested. “If so, it should be a pretty big one.”

“Well, we’ll run round and see, and we’ll take the dinghy. If we don’t find that there’s much to see we can run out and do some fishing. I feel as though schnapper for supper would help me to eat a good meal.”

“When I think of the dinner you have just eaten——” began Jill.

“You needn’t. Your business as cook is to concentrate on the captain’s supper,” he explained, patiently. “My appetite may need a little tempting by the evening. So we’ll go off for a cruise.”

They kept close to the shore, with Jill perched on the bow as look-out, her legs dangling over the edge. The western coast of the island consisted almost entirely of rock, here and there showing wide sea-caves into which the waves surged; often they heard a hollow roar as the water crashed back from the dark and hidden depths.

“There must be a great deal of sea under this island,” observed Derek. “If we could see the whole thing sliced off just above sea-level it would look like a succession of inlets—at this end, at any rate. I wonder how far the water runs in. It would be rather interesting to see how far inside we could take the dinghy on a calm day.”

“Rather dark and grisly,” was Jill’s opinion. “We might find one of my sea-giants living there. Perhaps he has a home in a sea-lake under the Peak.”

“If there is any truth in all the stories about sea-serpents, wouldn’t one of

those deep caves be just the place for him to live—nice and quiet and retired, where he could rear his family in comfort, just going out for a wander now and then to do a little hunting,” Derek said. “Jill, I wonder if there are any breaks in the rock above, over these caves? If so, there might be some splendid blow-holes.”

“We haven’t heard any sound like a blow-hole,” she said. “That one we saw in Tasmania made a tremendous noise.”

“Yes, but the island is pretty big, and we haven’t explored it all. And a blow might not make much noise unless the weather were rough. I should think that the rock crust over the highest caves must be pretty thin in places. We’ll keep a good look-out when we’re walking round ashore. It would be rather peculiar to have the ground give way under one, and find oneself swimming in a cave.”

“Not so pleasant,” Jill said, with a little shiver. “Especially if a sea-serpent were there first.”

“The thing would be to grip hold of his tail and let him tow you outside,” laughed her twin. “You would have to be careful which way he was heading, though, or he might take you to his home under the Peak for his little serpents’ dinner. Well, I don’t feel as though any of these western caves would be any fun to explore to-day; they are all as dark as pitch. It would really be a job for a wet day, when there was no sunlight to leave. We’ll go on and see what that south-west bluff looks like.”

It was soon clear that even at low tide the water washed the end of the bluff: and at first they thought that it was solid rock, for there was no appearance of a sea-cave. As they moved slowly onwards, however, a narrow opening came in sight: not a cave, but a gap between two frowning walls of rock. As the *Seahawk* drifted by, they caught a glimpse of wider water beyond the gap, ending in a sandy beach that seemed to run up to a cliff face. Then they were past the gap, and it was scarcely possible to see that there was any break in the wall: and in a moment more they were in sight of the beach where their progress had been blocked two days before.

“There’s certainly something worth exploring inside that place,” said Derek eagerly. He turned the launch westward again until they were opposite the gap. Jill hove the anchor overboard, and the twins hurriedly got into the dinghy. They rowed in between the walls of rock, to find themselves in a curious natural harbour.

The bluff that looked so solid was little more than a shell at its seaward end, where the waves, having found an entrance, had gradually eaten out the interior. On either side the walls ran back until they merged into the hillside, enclosing a wide patch of smooth water ending in beach that shelved steeply downwards. The hill was all rock, crowned with a thin skin of earth where

sparse shrubs struggled for existence, high above the beach. Its seaward face was broken by the wide mouth of a cave.

“I say!” breathed Derek; “this is the most interesting place we’ve struck yet!”

Jill said nothing. It seemed to her that a sense of chill hung over the quiet place. The hot sunshine poured down into it: the strip of beach gleamed golden. But there was something in its silence that was vaguely oppressive. For the first time their island was unfriendly. Derek noticed nothing. His eyes were bright with excitement.

“What a place to bring a launch! It beats our camp into a cocked hat, Jill. Come and look at the cave.” A few strong strokes sent the dinghy flying across the water, and, jumping out, they pulled her up the shelving beach.

“Will she be safe?” Jill asked. “It would be awkward if she drifted out.”

“Safe as houses—the tide is on the ebb. Come along!” He led the way towards the cave.

They had not seen such a cave as this. It was very lofty, wide at the entrance, and winding into the hill, narrowing as it went. They passed from the sunlit glare into dimness, and Derek switched on his torch. He halted suddenly, as they rounded a curve.

“Hullo—someone has been camping here!”

He swept the light round in a circle. They were standing in a part of the cave that was roughly square. Against the walls were two or three empty packing-cases; a ledge of rock held the end of a candle that had been stuck down by its own wax.

“This must have been where Peter’s friends camped,” Derek said. “I suppose they had bad weather, or they’d never have come so far in. Or perhaps they used this part as a sort of store-room.”

“When was it Peter said they were here?” Jill asked.

“Oh—months ago. The summer hols, I fancy.”

“Then it can’t have been Peter’s friends. Can’t you smell tobacco-smoke? Someone has been smoking here, and not very long ago, I should think.”

Derek sniffed energetically.

“By Jove, you’re right. I didn’t notice it. I wonder who they were.”

“Well they have left their library,” Jill said. “Look, Derek—there are some books on a ledge. Let’s see what they are.”

“This is becoming exciting,” Derek cried. They inspected the books with the feeling of having made a tremendous discovery, although, considered as books, the find was not very thrilling: a few cheap novels, some tattered magazines, and a Sydney guide-book. The most dignified volume in the collection was one on engineering.

“You’d wonder they’d have left that,” said Derek, turning over its pages.

“Seems rather a decent book: I think I’ll annex it.”

He put it down, turning the light in a new direction. A dingy biscuit-tin caught his eye.

“Something else! Look here, Jill.”

The biscuit-tin contained some extremely dry crusts of bread. A fusty smell came from it.

“They might as well have given those to the gulls,” was Derek’s comment. “Well, that’s all here. Let’s go on and see where the cave leads to.”

It led on, the darkness becoming grimmer. Twice they came to side-passages, which, being explored, were soon found to be blocked. Just beyond the second the cave widened out into an irregular chamber, where it ended. The far wall shelved backwards a little above the floor, leaving a dark space.

“It looks as if it might go on under there,” Derek said. He crouched down, flashing his torch into it.

“No—it only peters out into a dead end.” He scrambled to his feet, turning the torch towards a dim corner. Simultaneously they cried out, leaping backwards, so that they collided violently. In the impact the torch was knocked out of Derek’s hand, clattering to the floor. It went out; they plunged for it, hitting their heads together with force enough to illumine the darkness with stars.

“Stand back, Jill—I’ve got it.”

Derek fumbled with the torch, and both gasped with relief as the light flashed out again. He thrust himself in front of Jill as he threw the light into the corner. Then he laughed—but the laugh was a little shaky.

“It’s only an old mackintosh, kid. I say, it did look a bit queer, didn’t it!”

Jill drew a long breath.

“I—I thought it was a man hanging there!” she uttered. “Didn’t you?”

“I did,” he admitted. “It certainly looked most uncommonly like it. My word, it made one feel queer, coming on it suddenly like that! I’m awfully sorry I was such a fool, dropping the torch, Jill. Beastly enough for you without that.”

“My fault,” she said. “We’re a nice hardy pair of explorers, aren’t we? But people really shouldn’t leave booby-traps like that about.”

“It isn’t a bad coat,” remarked Derek, examining the relic, which hung from a projecting fragment of rock. “Rather too good to have been left behind. Jill, does it strike you that these campers haven’t left at all?”

“I have been feeling that for the last ten minutes—ever since we found those books,” she said. “The place doesn’t feel deserted to me.”

“What, you don’t mean that you think there’s anyone about in here?” he answered, somewhat startled.

“No—we’ve been everywhere. But I’m sure the owners have only gone

away. It feels . . . oh, occupied, somehow. I don't think I like it, Derek; it's an oppressive sort of place."

"Well, the air is fresh enough," said the literal Derek. "Funny how fresh it is, right back in the hill as we must be, here. You'd almost think there must be air coming in from somewhere." He raised the torch, scanning the roof. "Look," he went on, "there's a crack up there; I'll bet there's not much between us and the hill-top. I wish I had some sort of a stick, to see if I could poke through."

"Oh, bother the roof!" broke out Jill. "I didn't mean fresh air—there's plenty of that. But the whole place gives me the creeps, I don't know why."

"I believe you're scared!" uttered her twin in astonishment. It was something outside all previous experience to find that Jill could be afraid of anything. "I say, old girl—do you feel well? Not queer, like you were when Joker was hurt?"

She laughed at him then, slightly ashamed of her outburst.

"Oh, I'm as well as you are. Only—well, it's a dismal sort of cave, I think, and we don't belong here. And someone else does, and it would be rather horrid if he came in and found us examining his home—wouldn't you be annoyed if you found strangers poking round our cave? I vote we go."

"And I thought we had made the find of our lives!" mourned Derek as they turned back. "So we had, too; it's a frightfully interesting place, if only some interfering people hadn't found it first."

"It isn't a patch on our own," said Jill sturdily. "You only think you like this, because it's different from anything else. If we camped here I should feel like a fowl shut up in a yard. Why, you can't get out of it except by water—think what a nuisance that would be!"

"Yes, that would be rather a bore," he admitted. "And it's far better to have a camp that faces north. When one thinks of all the practical considerations this place doesn't smile so much, but it certainly thrilled me at first. It's different, as you say—a regular pirates'-stronghold sort of cave. Couldn't pirates hold this place against attack! With a gun trained on the outer gap they could discourage any number of invaders."

"Until the invaders starved them out—or cut things short by finding a way over the side walls," said Jill, unwilling to admit any advantages about their discovery. She paused as they came to the square part of the cave. "Don't you think we had better leave the pirates' books as we found them, by the way?"

"It might be better," he agreed, holding the light as she put the books in order. "I shan't be able to take that engineering one after all. Well, unless they see our tracks in the sand they won't know that anyone has been here."

To come out into the sunshine again was to Jill like emerging from prison. She went quickly to the dinghy and began to push it towards the water.

"You're in a hurry," Derek grinned, as he went to help her.

"I want to get right away from here," she said. "Ugh! it's a horrid place, Derek."

"I don't see why," he objected. "Jolly interesting bit of your old giant's architecture; I think he must have enjoyed making it. You didn't mind it until you found that he had tenants already."

She shook her head.

"No—it isn't only that; I don't like places where the light can't get in. And there is a queer feeling about it; it isn't friendly."

Derek laughed, paddling gently towards the gap in the rocks.

"Oh, well, you need not come here again. But you mustn't get ideas into your head about our island. You were so certain it was a friendly island—and so it is. It's rather letting it down if you think it has a bad spot."

"Perhaps it's the people who were there," said Jill uncertainly. "If a high tide could get right up inside that cave and spring-clean it, washing away all their old coats and books and mouldy crusts, it might feel all right. But it needs that."

They climbed aboard the *Seahawk*. Derek made fast the painter of the dinghy, but he did not immediately pull up the anchor. He sat down on the decking, looking thoughtfully at the bluff that held the hidden cave.

"It may be rather a bore if those fellows come back," he said. "Do you think Peak Island is big enough for us and another camping crowd?"

"That would depend on what the others were like," Jill answered. "We certainly wouldn't care to be here if they turned out to be unpleasant."

"Well, I suppose the only chance of their being unpleasant would be if they were a crew of rowdy fellows from one of the towns," he said. "I shouldn't let you stay on the island if they were."

"It couldn't be the same if there were any strangers here," Jill declared. "The island seems to be our very own now—it would be altogether different if we never knew when we might come across other people. No, I think we should have to go, Derek, don't you? After all, there is almost as good a camping-place on the other island."

"It would be a bit of a nuisance to have to move," he began. He broke off, smiling. "Oh, it really wouldn't: we should have plenty of fun over fixing up another camp. It's not worth bothering about: we're not going to let it spoil things, whatever happens."

"And it's silly to bother at all, because these people have evidently been away some time, and they may not come back while we're here," she said cheerfully. "Anyhow, I mean to forget all about them and their old cave. Let's finish circumnavigating the island, and then we can get some fish for supper."

She hauled up the anchor and they ran on round the coast, finding, on the

eastern side, only little bays with pleasant sandy beaches. The land sloped gently towards the sea, thickly covered with scrub and stunted trees.

“Not worth landing now, I think,” Derek observed; “though there must be lots of jolly places to explore in there. We can do it across country. All the rocky part seems to be towards the west—there’s not a single cave on this side. Well, we’ll run out a bit and try for schnapper.”

In the excitement of fishing and the light-hearted business of cooking and supper the shadow that the cave in the bluff had cast over Jill’s spirits fled from her altogether. Derek was full of nonsense; and when the mood of playing the fool took possession of Derek it was impossible not to laugh. All the friendliness of their island came back. Their gay voices echoed long after dusk had fallen, and when at length they turned in to their beds of sweet-smelling bracken they fell asleep almost immediately.

Jill half-woke, hours later. It was very dark in the cave; the water rippled gently, a soothing sound. Drowsily turning on her hard little pillow, it seemed to her that she heard the throb of an engine, faint and far away. Then it ceased, and in a moment she was asleep again. She had forgotten all about it in the morning.

CHAPTER X

STRANGE VOICES

“**T**HAT is our last piece of bread,” remarked Jill, cutting it carefully in half.

“And very stale it is,” returned her twin, accepting his share. “It’s just as well that it’s finished. Anyhow, we want to run over to the Point for letters and other things. Don’t you think some chops would be a good idea?”

“I always do,” she said. “We might buy some steak, too; we could hang it in the cave in butter-muslin, and it would keep for a while.”

“Not for a long while, at the rate at which we eat out here. Why not some onions to go with it?”

“I’ll fry them if you promise to cut them up,” agreed Jill. “I hate cutting-up onions; they make me cry.”

“I’ll cut them; I hate my meals to be wept over,” he said. “When shall we go?”

“The sooner the better—then it will be over. It seems such waste of time to go to a town when we might stay here. But it won’t take long. Derek, I think we might go to inquire after Joker.”

“Rather! I wonder will Willis let me see the poor little chap? He ought to be able to stand it now. Isn’t it perfectly beastly to think of all the fun he’s missing! I’m certain he looks forward to the hols as much as I do—and all his have crashed.” The boy’s face clouded.

To Jill came the thought that they were lucky to have Joker alive, but as this struck her as the irritating kind of thing said by well-meaning people, she did not put it into words. She got up, instead, and began to clear away the remains of breakfast.

“Well, we’ll have him here another time,” said Derek. “Here, give me that frying-pan!” He scraped into it the skeletons of several schnapper and ran off along the rocks to throw them into the sea at a point where the tide would carry them away from their bay.

It was still early when they reached Brandan’s Point. They hurried along the shore to the white cottage, where they found Mr. Willis smoking peacefully outside his gate.

“You two don’t waste much time in the morning, do you?” he said, shaking hands. “Well, the little chap’s doin’ fine. He’s a great little patient—that sensible an’ quiet. You don’t need to worry yourselves about him at all.”

“That’s good,” said Derek, with relief. “Can I see him, Mr. Willis?”

The stout man hesitated.

“I’d hate to send you away without havin’ had a look at him,” he said. “Guess I know how you feel about it. Well, I don’t think it would hurt him—he’s got sense enough not to try his leg.”

“I won’t go in if you think it would be better not,” Derek said.

“Aw, no. I think the patient deserves a treat. Look, I’ll go first an’ just keep my hands on him, in case he tries any tricks—not that I fancy he will. Then you come in unconcerned-like.”

They followed him to the door of the workshop. There came a short, excited bark, at the sound of which Mr. Willis’s movements ceased to be deliberate. He made a quick stride, disappeared, and they heard his voice:

“Quiet there, little chap! Might a’ known you’d scent your master, mightn’t I? That’s a good dog, now—you lie still—he’s comin’, all right. Come in, lad!” he called.

Joker was lying still, obediently enough, but quivering, his ears pricked as he tried to twist his head towards the door. He greeted Derek with a yelp of utter delight. The boy went down on his knees by the basket, catching the eager head in his hands, and what they said to each other was not a matter for outsiders.

“Quick, wasn’t he?” Mr. Willis chuckled. “That’s the first time he’s made a sound since he came here, missy—an’ there was no mistakin’ what that bark meant. I shouldn’t wonder if he’d known your brother was near before ever he got to the house. You come along now an’ have a word with him.”

Joker greeted Jill with interest and a friendly lick, but it was clear that the one person he really desired to talk to was Master. Mr. Willis, however, could be stern where a patient was concerned: he hinted presently that the visit had been long enough.

“He’s weaker still than you’d think,” he observed, ramming the tobacco down into his pipe with a horny thumb. “He’ll go off to sleep now, just like a baby. Leave him a few days before you come again, lad.”

“You don’t think it has hurt him, letting me in?” Derek asked anxiously.

“Done him good. He’ll know now that you’re sure to come back. But if he’s lookin’ for you every day he won’t rest so well.”

“You lie quiet, old man—I’ll come back all right,” Derek told the little dog, with a final pat; and Joker snuggled into his blankets obediently, with an air of complete understanding.

“We bring him in every night, but it’s more interestin’ for him in the workshop in the day-time,” said Mr. Willis, escorting them to the gate. “I’m always messin’ about in there with some odd job or other, an’ he watches me all the time. Never tries to move, though: he knows well enough that his leg isn’t meant for usin’ just now. But he’s real interested in everything that goes

on now; the first two days, all he wanted was to sleep. He'll be as right as rain; don't you worry. Seen anything of the chap that did it?"

"No." Derek frowned. "Their launch isn't anywhere about."

"They've probably gone away for good. Well, they ain't much loss to anyone—not the fat feller, anyway. But I'd like to have a few quiet words with him," said Mr. Willis, with longing in his voice.

"I want more than words," was Derek's angry answer.

"Don't blame you, either. Well—good luck to your campin'. Havin' a good time?" The twins assured him that they were, and set off towards the town.

There was little to keep them in Brandan's Point. They hurried through their shopping, finding time to gossip with the post-mistress and Mr. Barker, since each so plainly hungered for a talk. They exchanged greetings with Tom, who wore a new pair of trousers and seemed abashed by this unwonted splendour, probably having his own suspicions as to its source. They wrote hasty postcards to Mrs. Sherwood and to Peter, and addressed to their grandmother a more striking card, bearing a picture of a distracted bather in a scarlet costume with a large crab affixed to her toe.

"That will cheer her up," affirmed Derek, surveying this token of affection with satisfaction. "Shall we sign it?"

"No need," was Jill's answer. "She won't suspect anyone but us!"

This seemed probable, so the card was posted unsigned, and the twins went off to the *Seahawk*. They made the run back to the island in leisurely fashion, Derek declaring himself too lazy to get up speed. Once home, the preparation for dinner was a matter demanding concentration; Derek sliced onions until the air reeked, following which Jill became scarlet with heat over their frying. It then became necessary to light a second fire, so that the cook's mate might keep the onions hot between two plates while the cook fried the steak. Both declared themselves charred when the process was complete.

"Jolly good," approved Derek, "if only I hadn't burned two fingers. We need a couple of frying-pans, Jill, one apiece. I never thought cooking was such a complicated business. People in books always seem to prepare awfully elaborate meals with nothing much to cook in, but when you come to tackle it you're up against all sorts of unexpected snags. I had an idea we should just push the onions and the meat all in together, and leave them to look after themselves for an hour or so."

Jill chuckled softly.

"You might suggest that method to Susan and get her views on it."

"Susan would be crushing," said he; "I'd never dare to try any of my theories on her. She wasn't a bit sympathetic that time I had a shot at making toffee, and it burned black. And how was I to know it was the saucepan she

loved above all others?"

He sighed, looking affectionately at a well-cleaned plate.

"I thought I sliced up such a lot of onions, but I wish there were more. Funny how they seem to fade in the cooking. No, I don't think I'll have an apple now; I'll wash up first. You stay where you are—you did all the hard grind. I'll have these washed in two two's." He gathered up everything and went whistling down to the water.

Jill brought books from the cave and was lying on the sand when he came back. A large red apple sat on Derek's book.

"What a beauty!" he said, sitting down and digging his teeth into it. "Washing-up isn't so easy, in cold sea-water. Thank goodness your giant provided his island with plenty of sea-weed; there's nothing like kelp for a dish-rubber. Now I shall make a pillow of sand and go to sleep."

He broke into a sudden laugh.

"Oh, and talking of pillows," he said, "I had such a fearsome adventure over one this term at school. I never told you about it."

"Tell me now," suggested Jill.

"It was one night when something or other had kept me a bit late in the study over prep., so that when I got up to our dormitory most of the other fellows were ready for bed. I'm the senior of the dorm., and as I wasn't there to keep order they were having a war."

"Which would not have happened if you had been there?" suggested Jill politely.

"Well—perhaps not," laughed Derek. "Anyhow, it was rather a merry war, pillows flying everywhere. I got into pyjamas, and just then someone sent a pillow out through the window. That was serious, because anyone found outside the house after lock-up is liable to be shot at dawn. And there wasn't a chance of going downstairs without being caught: the outer doors make an awful row."

"There would be a strong chance of meeting Mr. Perrott, too," said Jill, well aware that her twin had a prudent respect for his house-master. "And Mrs. Perrott might have been even sterner if she had met you, I suppose?"

"Quite likely. No one was game to risk going out through the house, anyhow. But the pillow couldn't be left sitting in the garden. So the end of it was that I had to go down for it by the fire-escape."

"You hadn't thrown it," objected Jill.

"Oh, well—someone had to go. You know our patent fire-escapes?—endless ropes that work on a ratchet affair, and as soon as one fellow is down it winds up for the next. Well, I was going down pleasantly, until about twelve feet from the ground I happened to look down—and what do you think I saw? Just Mrs. Perrott on the path below me, looking up at me with the utmost

interest!”

“Derek!” gasped Jill. “What did you do?”

“I stopped the rope and hung on, and I looked at Mrs. Perrott. There wasn’t anything else to look at, except the moon, and I wished that weren’t so bright. Then it seemed up to me to say something, so I explained in my best drawing-room voice that I was going down for a pillow.”

“And the pillow at her feet!” Jill giggled.

“Certainly it was. Well in view. Jill, you’ve no idea how hard it is to produce a drawing-room manner when you’re hanging in mid-air, in pyjamas and bath-slippers. And there was a deadly silence for what seemed like a week. Then she said something in a muffled sort of voice, and walked off—leaving me to wonder if she’d gone to tell Perrott. I felt I’d rather be back in the dorm, before he came, so I got down to earth and sent up the pillow on the rope. The chaps above were all paralysed with horror, but they pulled it up. And then—they couldn’t pull me!”

“Too paralysed?”

“No, not that. You see, we’d forgotten that those escapes aren’t meant to take a weight up, only to let one down. It wouldn’t wind up with me on it.”

“What did you do? Did you have to throw yourself on the Perrott mercy?” laughed Jill.

“Not much! I climbed up the rope. It’s very slender rope, perfectly beastly to climb—you can’t grip it. The chaps hauled, and I stuck my feet into any bit of the wall that gave a hold—not very useful, in bath-slippers. I hadn’t much skin left on my hands when I got up, not to speak of my knees from hitting the brick wall. And I fully expected to be worse next day when Perrott dealt with me.”

“Derek, she didn’t tell him!”

“Guessed it in one,” said Derek cheerfully. “Jolly decent of her, wasn’t it? And she never looked at me with a meaning eye, either—you know, the sort of look that says, ‘I am keeping your secret!’ I couldn’t have stuck that. Only I wished she’d made her intentions clearer when she walked off.”

“I expect she was laughing too much,” suggested Jill.

“Well, that did occur to me. And I must have looked pretty funny. I wondered sometimes did she lie in wait behind the bushes to see how I got back. If she did, she owes me something for a circus act!”

“I wish I could have seen you!” Jill uttered. “How was the pillow?”

“The fellow who had to use it said it was pretty earthy. But I wasn’t that fellow,” he said cheerfully. “I don’t know what the housemaids thought in the morning. Housemaids at school get used to finding worse things than that in our dorm. after a war!”

“Boys have a much better time than girls,” said his twin enviously. “Girls

think it's exciting if they have a midnight supper and that's the only adventure we ever seem able to manage. Somehow, it never seems to me that there can be any real excitement over eating things at the wrong moment."

"What if a teacher comes along?"

"Oh, there's always a scout to give warning. And you just dash into bed with a sausage-roll or something under your pillow, and pretend you're asleep—and your bed is full of crumbs, and you feel greasy. That's not an adventure—it's only a make-believe. But it's all that girls can work up," she ended mournfully. "It's much more interesting to be born a boy!"

"It doesn't sound much in the way of a thrill," he sympathized. "But we are pretty quiet, as a rule. It's only now and then that a battle breaks out."

"I often feel that I should like one," Jill murmured.

She picked up her book, stretching out in the sunlight. Derek followed suit, and for an hour there was no sound but the gentle swish of the waves below them and the calling of birds among the wooded island-slopes. Then Jill's book dropped from her hand and Derek, glancing towards her, saw that she had fallen asleep.

Restlessness came over him presently; his book ceased to interest him. He put it aside, and lay watching the gulls quarrelling on the rocks. Then, cautiously, he rolled over, rose, and went, cat-footed, up the beach, feeling the desire to be astir. Jill would not mind, he knew, if she awoke and found herself alone. The twins never made undue demands on each other.

He wandered through the scrub, taking the way that led past the spring and up a long valley, pausing often to stand motionless under a tree to watch the birds in their ceaseless activity overhead. Some came so close to him, big grey wattle-birds, that he could almost have touched them. Derek was sorry that he had not his camera, and made a resolve to run over to Rocky Bay for it next morning. Even though it was not the nesting-season he knew that he could get splendid photographs. The birds looked at him curiously, not in the least resenting the slight figure in grey shirt and trousers that moved so quietly among them, blending into the grey-green of the scrub. Had he moved his hands, they might have been afraid, but Derek knew better. He kept them thrust deep into his pockets, and whistled very softly as he went along, as happy as the birds themselves.

He came out upon a ridge after a time, and realized that he was close to the bluff they had visited the day before: presently he could catch a glimpse of the sea, far out, as the bushes grew more sparsely. A thought came to him.

"I must be somewhere over that cave," he muttered. "I wonder if there are any holes up here communicating with it. There's precious little soil here—it's nearly all rock."

He began to cast about, looking closely at the ground as he went. Here and

there were cracks that seemed as though they might have access to the hollows below, but though he found a stick and poked into them he could not make it go far.

He took his bearings carefully, moving until he judged that he must be nearly over the winding cave. It could be only a rough estimate, he knew; he decided to test his accuracy by going forward, following what seemed to him the right line, until he reached the edge of the bluff, where, by leaning over, he could see the cave-mouth.

“I might even find a way down,” thought he. “That would be rather a lark—though we didn’t see any sign of a way yesterday. I would rather like to have a look at that cave again.” The prospect was lessened by the recollection that he was without his torch; but this, though annoying, did not check his desire to find a point where he might clamber down. He reflected that it was as well that he was alone, since Jill had taken so deep a dislike to the cave and all its surroundings. She would not have been at all keen on visiting it again.

He shut his eyes for a minute, striving to follow mentally the turnings of the cave as it led towards the mouth; then, opening them, he moved forward.

“I’ll keep my eyes on the ground, though,” his thought ran. “If I look towards the edge of the bluff it will only mislead me, but if I find myself above the mouth when I see the ground ending in front of me I’ll be rather pleased with myself.”

This was interesting, and he bent all his powers of concentration on remembering the cave. His feet moved mechanically as yard by yard he retraced the outward journey he had taken with Jill.

The test, however, was never completed. He was still a dozen yards from the edge when suddenly his head went up and he straightened, coming to a standstill. He listened intently.

Voices came to him; deep, subdued tones, coming from sea-level a little ahead. They ceased a moment, and in the pause he heard the awakening sputter of a motor. Derek bit off an impatient exclamation, realizing that the absent campers had returned. He slipped into the cover of the bushes on the eastern side of the bluff and wriggled through them until he could look down into the little bay before the cave.

CHAPTER XI

THE ENEMY IN SIGHT

IN the bay lay a motor-launch, moored to the flat rocks at the west: and as Derek looked at her his brow darkened, and for the second time he checked an exclamation of anger.

It was the long grey launch. The little man was crouched over the engine, while his tall companion cast off the moorings. In the stern sat the one person in the world whom Derek regarded as an enemy—the man who had kicked his dog over the side of the pier at Brandan's Point.

The boy's face hardened as he watched them. To-day they were in good spirits; he heard an occasional laugh as the launch moved out. All three were in bathing-suits; the fat man wore in addition a striped cape of red and yellow towelling, which, under his dark face, gave him a curiously theatrical appearance. Derek likened him mentally to an unpleasant species of beetle.

"If I only knew how to get even with you!" he muttered.

The launch crept through the gap, headed eastward, vanishing behind the rock-wall for a moment, and reappeared. The throb of the engine ceased; there was a splash as the tall man hove the anchor overboard. She came to rest, rocking gently. The tall man turned, poised an instant with upraised arms, and took what even Derek was grudgingly forced to describe as a perfect header. He swam strongly out to sea with powerful over-arm strokes. In a moment the little man had followed him.

The fat man was in no hurry. He was smoking; he waited until his cigarette was nearly consumed, watching his companions as they floated some distance away. Then, tossing the butt over the side, he went forward with a quick, light step, dropped his cape, and plunged in. There was nothing of the finish of the other men in either his dive or his swimming, and he did not go far out. They were still alternately swimming and floating when he headed for the shore. He waded for the last ten yards, came up the beach, and flung himself down in the hot dry sand close to the bluff where Derek crouched, watching.

The boy peered forward, his face puzzled.

"Queer," he pondered. "He's not nearly as fat as I thought he was."

The man was strongly built, but even in the closely-fitting wet bathing-suit, revealing every line, it was clear that he was not fat. Derek felt bewildered. There was no doubt that it was the face of his enemy; he had studied it closely in the street at Brandan's Point, and he knew that he would recognize it among a hundred others, his memory sharpened by the final glimpse on the pier, when

it had been turned savagely towards Joker. But the strong figure lying below him was utterly unlike the heavy one he had seen at the Point.

“Well, that beats me!” he muttered. “I can’t be making a mistake.”

He crept with cautious movements into a clump of bushes that gave him an even better view of the beach, while screening him completely, and grew no less puzzled as he watched.

The man on the sand turned luxuriously on his side. His companions were close in-shore, beginning to wade. He raised himself on his elbow and called to them.

“Can you bring cigarettes? They are with the matches in the tin box.”

The tall man turned without replying and swam to the launch. He scrambled on board, and a moment later slipped into the sea again and struck out for the beach, holding the tin above the surface.

“You ought to have a black boy to swim about after you, Brodsky. Can’t you get along without a smoke for ten minutes?” He tossed him the box half angrily, and lay down on the sand.

“What need?” asked the man called Brodsky, lazily. He selected a cigarette and lit it with an air of unconcern. “You swim like a fish, Harvey, and that is more than I do. I should be sorry to risk the cigarettes, even in a tin box—all my hands are needed for my swimming.”

Harvey grunted something that was not clear. He lay flat on his back, staring up at the sky.

“I’ll have one, at any rate,” he said. “Pass ’em over, please. You, Marks?” He handed the box to the little man, and they smoked for a time in silence.

“I’ll need more petrol to-morrow,” the little man said suddenly.

“Stores, too,” added Harvey.

“Well, you can go to the Point for them. I will not come.”

“You’re not over-keen on the Point, are you, Brodsky?” said Harvey with a laugh.

“I am not keen on any of these dull little towns. I see enough of them. And it is as well for one of us to stay.”

“To keep the home fires burning?” asked Marks, sniggering.

“If you like to put it that way, yes. I shall do it by lying on the beach with a book. Harvey, you might try to pick up some books when you are ashore. I have read everything at least twice.”

“All right,” said Harvey. “Thrillers, I suppose?”

“Oh, I am sick of thrillers—the bad man, the so-stupid police, the so-marvellous detective. They are all alike, and not in the least as things really happen. Try to get me Shakespeare—if Brandan’s Point has ever heard of him!”

“Shakespeare!” uttered Marks. “That’s pretty dry stuff when you’re

camping out!”

“But he is never the same twice—and that is all that matters, even on so pleasant a holiday as this,” said the lazy voice, and it seemed to Derek as though the other men winced. “If you can persuade Brandan’s Point to yield a Shakespeare you will not have to complain that I am bad-tempered—or not so much, perhaps.”

“Too much to hope for, old man,” said Harvey. “You weren’t meant for wild life in the great open spaces, even with Shakespeare to soothe you.”

“But we’ll rake Brandan’s Point to get him,” added Marks hopefully.

“You think anything is worth trying, don’t you, my friend?” Brodsky said, a faint sneer in his tone. “Well, do your best, but I am afraid you will have to fall back upon the thrillers. You can put me ashore here before you go; that little water-pen in front of the cave bores me.”

“You might dig for clams if you felt energetic,” suggested Marks. “We’re right out of bait.”

“That would be another pleasant seaside occupation. I cannot see why I should ever feel dull,” said Brodsky plaintively. “At all events, I am certainly beginning to feel cold. This sand seemed hot enough to bake me when I first lay down, but it has cooled. Are you coming?” He did not wait for a reply, but gathered himself up and went down to the sea with his curiously light step.

“Never saw anyone walk just the way Broddy does,” remarked Harvey, watching him.

“I did. He was a dancing-master, and French at that,” returned Marks, his tone conveying that he had not cared for the professor of dancing. “Broddy is as quick with his feet as that fellow was. I wish he had been a bit less quick with them when he met that dog on the pier over yonder.”

Overhead a listening figure stiffened suddenly.

“I wish he’d told us about it sooner,” Harvey said. “I’d have gone back if I had known. Broddy’s a foreigner, and he never seems to understand how Australians feel about a thing like that. He seemed rather amused. I wish he hadn’t done it. It’s no wonder he isn’t keen on going over to the Point. If anyone happened to see him do it we shall be likely to hear about it tomorrow.”

“Too right we shall,” said Marks irritably. “Oh well, it takes a lot to hurt a dog—the chances are that the little brute just swam out wondering what he’d met.”

“Hope so.” Harvey stood up. “No good bothering about it, anyhow; we can say with truth that we saw nothing. It’s getting chilly, don’t you think?”

An impatient hail came across the water.

“Broddy certainly is,” Marks grinned. “He doesn’t seem to find that gorgeous cape of his very comforting. I suppose we had better go and take him

home.” They ran down to the sea and plunged in.

Derek watched them swim to the launch; watched them climb in and set off for the gap in the rocks. Not until they were safely out of sight did he venture to wriggle out of his hiding-place. He went softly for the first fifty yards, then took to his heels and raced down the valley and across to the northern beach.

Jill was reading peacefully. She glanced up at the sound of the running feet, and with a quick movement was up, and hurrying to meet him.

“Anything wrong, Derek?”

“I’ve got heaps to tell you!” he panted. “Come and sit down. I’ve run right across the island.” He caught her arm and drew her down on a rock.

She listened breathlessly to his story.

“And you hid up there all the time! Derek, weren’t you scared!”

“Scared? There was nothing to be scared about, except that I was afraid to move,” he said. “I can tell you I didn’t like eavesdropping, but I couldn’t possibly have moved without being heard. And I knew they wouldn’t stay there long in their wet togs, even though it was pretty warm. Too late in the year for much sun-bathing.”

She nodded agreement.

“It would certainly have been rather horrid if they had caught you.”

“I’d have felt a bit of a fool,” he said. “You see, all I thought of at first was getting a good look at the blighter who kicked Joker: I never thought they’d come and camp literally under my nose. Anyway, they didn’t talk secrets, and I’m glad I know that the fat one is the only one who wanted Joker hurt. Oh, and he isn’t fat after all, Jill!”

She stared at him.

“Not fat? But I saw him!”

“Well, so did I,” agreed Derek. “We saw him being fat, didn’t we? It must have been his clothes, because he really isn’t when you see him in bathing-togs. I had to have a nearer look to make sure it was the fellow himself.”

“Are you quite sure?” Jill asked. “I can’t understand it. He looked as fat as . . . fat!” she ended weakly.

“I know he did. Oh yes, I made quite certain—and then the other men talked about him and Joker, as I told you. Fat or thin, he’s a pretty considerable beast, I should say; you’d hate his voice. It’s a soft sort of voice, with a rasp behind it. Like iron filings in oil,” he decided, after searching his mind for a comparison.

“Sounds nice,” said Jill, laughing. “But you didn’t think the others were disagreeable, Derek?”

“They seem fairly decent fellows. There’s nothing much about them, one way or the other, except that the tall chap can swim better than most people. But they’re a queer crowd, Jill. They don’t give you the impression of enjoying

themselves. They're on a holiday, with one of the best motor-boats I ever saw, but you'd say they were fed-up with everything."

"Then I wish they'd go home," said Jill promptly. "I wonder why they don't."

"Search me!" said he. "I suppose they have a certain amount of leave, and so they feel bound to stick it out. Marks and Harvey would be better by themselves, I would think; I'll bet anything they don't like Brodsky." He thought for a moment. "I'll tell you what—most likely the launch is Brodsky's, so he's their host, in some degree."

"That sounds probable," agreed Jill. "You can't very well tell your host you've grown to dislike him, and so you want to go home."

Derek nodded.

"It would account, too, for the way he spoke to them—almost as if he were the one to give orders. And yet, that idea doesn't altogether seem to fit in. They're a curious lot."

He sat thinking deeply for a few minutes. Once Jill saw his hand clench.

"It was no wonder you didn't like that cave!" he broke out suddenly. "Only, I ought to have been the one to feel it, not you. To think it may have been that swine's coat I handled—I wouldn't have touched it with a barge-pole!"

"Derek, it's no use thinking about him," said Jill earnestly. "It will only spoil everything if you do."

"Oh, I know," he said. "I thought I had pigeon-holed him at the back of my mind, and then he turns up, and I feel all murderous again. And I don't see what I can do, that's the worst of it."

"You can't tackle three men," she said.

"I couldn't tackle even him alone; he's a powerful brute. But it doesn't make me feel any better to know it. And when I think of him telling the other fellows about Joker—being rather amused, they said—well . . ."

She put a hand on his knee.

"Let's think of what we are going to do."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"Well—are we going to stay here? Don't you think we had better move to the other island?"

Derek stared at his shoes for some time in silence.

"Would you much rather go?" he asked at length.

"I'd much rather stay, only it might be unpleasant. We don't want to meet them, and there would be a risk of that at any moment. You couldn't be civil to that man."

"I should think I couldn't!" he exclaimed hotly. "What I want is a chance of being uncivil to the cur."

“And there are three of them, so that would be rather like what Uncle Jim calls ‘bucking the tiger.’ Don’t you think it’s as well not to chance it?”

He hesitated.

“Unless we went home altogether we’d stand the chance of meeting them anywhere,” he said. “They might land on the other island, or we might run into them in Brandan’s Point, or even out fishing. Just what I was hoping to do when I first saw that launch. Of course, I know we’re far more likely to encounter them on the same island—still, it’s a pretty big island, and they’re right on the far side from us.”

“All of which means you don’t want to go,” said she, laughing.

“Well—I hate being driven out, and so do you. It does seem a bit thick to have to give up our camp because of them. Then, too, they might not stay any time here. They seem used to coming and going. Barker thought their camp was up the coast, so this might be only a place where they run down for better fishing.”

“You seem to forget we’re twins,” Jill said protestingly. “Why don’t you say straight out what you’re really thinking? You might just as well, for it’s quite clear!”

Derek’s grin was a little shamefaced. He looked again at his shoes.

“You want to stay because you’re hoping for a chance of being unpleasant to Brodsky,” she said. “Own up, now, Derek!”

“Well, I do,” he admitted. “I don’t see in the least how it’s to happen, but I’d give anything to pull it off, Jill. If we move to the other island I can’t hope to do it.”

“In spite of all those meetings you were prophesying?” They laughed together.

“There’s no throwing dust in your eyes,” he said. “But look here, Jill—whatever I want, I’ve no right to risk any unpleasantness for you. I believe we ought to go. Only . . .”

“Only you’d hate to,” she finished for him. “Well, if you look at it that way, so do I. As for my part of it, the only good thing about being a girl is that they would leave me out of the unpleasantness—I don’t fancy that even your friend Brodsky would attack me.” Into her mind came the thought that in her presence might lie some protection for Derek, should protection be needed; which thought she chose to keep to herself.

“It’s all pretty difficult,” said Derek, knitting his brows. “I’m responsible for you, whatever you may think about that, and I’m responsible for the *Seahawk*.”

“We share all responsibilities,” interrupted his twin sturdily.

“That’s rubbish, Jill. You know jolly well what Father would say about it. I don’t want to rub it in that you’re not a boy, but there it is, and I’m not going

to shift my responsibility. I can't run any fool risks, either with you or the *Seahawk*, just to gratify my own wish to get even with Brodsky."

Jill found herself becoming more light-hearted in proportion to his perplexity. A Derek who gloomed about responsibilities was clearly one to be cheered up.

"I don't see that we need imagine all sorts of tragedies," she said. "One would think that the Dauntless Three were likely to put me in the *Seahawk* and sink us both! Look here, Derek—suppose we put it this way. We'll stay on for a day or two, at any rate, and see how things go. It's our island, and my nice old giant is friendly—he may give you some chance you don't expect. Only—you've got to promise two things."

"Yes?" he asked inquiringly.

"One is that you won't go looking for trouble unnecessarily. And the other is that you won't get down in the dumps about it. You're all different when you think about Brodsky—as if you wanted to pull your hat over your eyes and go striding about the island looking for a club to brain him!"

Derek solemnly removed his hat and placed it on the rock.

"Right-oh!" he grinned. "I'll promise. We'll go on our own lunatic way and leave it to your giant to provide something nice and unpleasant for friend Broddy. You're rather a brick, Jill, you know. I hope I haven't been making a pig of myself."

"No, you haven't—and you needn't think I don't know how you feel, because I feel just the same myself when I think of Joker. Only it won't bring us any nearer a chance for getting even, to be gloomy about it. Chances come to people who look for them joyfully," stated Jill with conviction.

"We'll make it so, then. And if you see me standing on a rock in the morning making a speech, you'll know I'm addressing your giant, asking him to send luck my way. How about taking a schnapper up the Peak and laying it at the foot of his tree—propitiatory offering to the island god?"

"First catch your schnapper!" laughed Jill. "There isn't even a head of one left."

"Then we'll go and catch some. Whether the giant gets his or not depends on how hungry I am when we come back."

They came back late, singing, and the giant did not get his schnapper, since bed seemed the only thing possible after supper. But, late as it was, Derek found a job after Jill was snugly within her blankets. He pulled his bunk carefully over the sandy floor, leaving a trail of bracken fronds as he went. To-night he preferred to sleep across the mouth of the cave.

CHAPTER XII

HOW DEREK PAID A DEBT

THEY went up the Peak next morning, and Derek solemnly scraped a hole in the loose soil and buried therein a schnapper whose glazed eyes seemed to protest mutely against so unusual a finish for a sea-monster.

"There you are, Giant, old man!" he cried gaily. "Bring me my luck!"

In the moment's silence that followed they seemed to hear a rustling murmur in the branches above.

"Might almost be the old tree answering," Derek laughed. "I suppose it's the only mouthpiece the Giant has. Well, it sounded friendly, so I suppose he's a fish-eater, and he's accepted our offering."

"Of course he has," Jill affirmed. "I've known all along he adopted us as soon as we came—that's why his island has felt so friendly. All except the Brodsky cave, of course, and you couldn't wonder at that—what I felt there was simply the Giant's shudders of disgust."

"Saying, 'Keep away, my dears; this is no place for nice people!' I suppose," added Derek. "He has good judgment, that Giant. The only thing I wonder at is that he didn't stage an earthquake to dispose of Brodsky. It would only have needed a bit more shuddering."

"You seem to forget that an earthquake would have disposed of us, too," said Jill.

"Yes, that would have been awkward. Perhaps he's waiting until we are well away in the *Seahawk*. It will be rough on Marks and Harvey, but they shouldn't keep bad company, even if he does own a ripping launch. Now, I'm going bird-watching. Are you coming?"

"Not with you—we shall see much more if we go singly, don't you think?"

"Well, yes, I do," he answered. "And if we accustom them to seeing us moving about in the scrub quietly they won't be uneasy when I bring the camera. We'll go over to Rocky Bay this afternoon and fetch it, and get some more grub. Shall we meet at the cave at one o'clock?"

"I may be there earlier, to get dinner ready," Jill replied. "But don't you hurry." She turned, but looked back to add, "Derek, you're not going near that cave, are you?"

"No—I promise. I'll leave it all to the Giant," he said, laughing, and Jill went off contented.

Derek ran down the southern slope of the Peak and struck up a valley where trees grew thickly. Almost at once he was in the bird-country; and in

that happy companionship he lost all thought of anything so unpleasant as the noxious Mr. Brodsky. The grey banksia trees, the masses of low-growing tea-tree scrub, were alive with wattle-birds, big, handsome, chattering fellows: honey-eaters fluttered here and there, and minahs called shrilly to each other. A host of tiny, twittering things hopped in the thick shelter of the bushes, only to be spied out if one stood very still. Derek wondered at the courage that had brought such little wings beating across the long stretch of sea from the mainland—and then smiled to remember what he knew of the journeys made by migrating birds in European countries. That was adventure, if you liked! the strange urge that carried the English swallow across the Mediterranean to North Africa, that brought the snipe to Australia from its breeding-ground in Siberia.

He found a humped grey rock thick with lichen; and sat on it for a long while, watching contentedly. Once he heard the beat of an engine out to the east, and knew that it was the grey launch going on her journey to Brandan's Point, but it did not disturb his peace. After a time he slid from his perch and wandered aimlessly, brushing through the white and yellow everlasting daisies that seemed the only flowers on the island. They grew thickly in the hollows, making a starry carpet as he looked down from the slopes. He came upon a spring which they had not found before; there were tracks round it that indicated that it was the source of the other campers' water-supply. It trickled down a little hillside, falling into a natural basin. Derek drank from it, glad of the ice-cold water. He crossed the ridge and wandered on.

He had worked round to the eastern side of the Peak now, and he began to catch glimpses of the distant sea through the breaks in the trees whenever he was on a ridge. The scrub thinned presently: to his left were open spaces, low hills and hollows gradually sloping to the beach. Derek decided to go on until he came to the eastern shore and then to make his way home along the sand.

He topped a low rise that dipped at once into a saucer-like depression, and stopped dead. Leaning against a rock a few feet below him stood Mr. Brodsky, clad in sweater and flannels, and very much at his ease. He was also cheerfully employed at the moment. On the rock lay a number of short lengths of stick which he had evidently collected as ammunition for the benefit of a bewildered stump-tailed lizard—a stout and harmless individual that had rarely seen a human, and certainly had never before encountered one willing to hurt it.

Derek's eyes blazed as he stood motionless, watching. The lizard was having all the worst of the game. Again and again it made futile little rushes to get away; but the loose sandy soil of the slope held it back, and each time a stick caught it neatly and turned it downwards. One beady eye was closed—Mr. Brodsky's aim was uncannily good; the other tried, terrified, to do double duty. Its tormentor, well amused, watched it, anticipating every rush with a

missile.

A scornful young voice broke in upon his pastime.

“Are you afraid he’ll hurt you? He’s perfectly harmless.”

The change that came over Mr. Brodsky was remarkable. He whipped round in a flash, in almost a defensive attitude, and his face, as he saw Derek, became a curious mixture of anger and dismay, as if he were ashamed to be caught in such an occupation. For a moment he stared at the boy without a word. The lizard took advantage of the interruption to escape.

“Who are you?” he shot out.

Derek saw no reason to answer the question. He continued to look at Mr. Brodsky with the expression of one who has encountered a bad smell.

“Who are you? Do you hear me?”

“Oh, quite plainly,” said Derek. “You speak very loudly.” Even in his feeling of anger and disgust it struck him as droll that this unpleasant person should speak as though he were a schoolmaster; and that sense of amusement gave him coolness—the coolness of the schoolboy who rejoices in the chance of being uncivil. He felt quite equal to Mr. Brodsky.

“Then why can’t you answer, you——?” The man stopped himself before uttering an epithet that would clearly have been far from polite.

“Why should I?” returned Derek. “I don’t want to know who *you* are.”

“Oh, do you not? Are you sure of that?” The flush deepened on the man’s dark face.

“Certainly I am. Who wants to know anyone that will torture a poor little brute like that?” asked Derek coolly.

“You are impertinent, my young friend,” said Mr. Brodsky, controlling himself with an effort. He came nearer. “You took me by surprise; I am not accustomed to boys who creep about like you.”

“Oh, I didn’t creep. You were too busy with the lizard to hear me.”

“And what is your business on this island?”

Derek grinned.

“Protecting lizards,” said he blandly.

Mr. Brodsky’s colour deepened. There was something infuriating to him in the contemptuous boyish voice. He glared in silence for a moment, and his voice, when he spoke, reminded Derek of his own words—“like oil with iron filings in it.”

“I think you need a lesson——”

“What about you?” Derek was watching him, cat-like. “You’ll get one in a decent country if you go about hurting animals.”

“Hurting animals? That loathsome reptile——”

“Not as loathsome as you!” snapped the boy. “What about the dog you kicked off the pier at Brandan’s Point?”

Mr. Brodsky recoiled a step.

“I—kick a dog——!” he began.

“Oh, there were plenty of witnesses,” the boy cut in. “I’m one of them. He was my dog.”

The smile that showed Mr. Brodsky’s teeth was evil.

“Yours? That at least is a satisfaction. A mongrel cur that needed to be taught manners—like his master.” With the last word he made a sudden spring at the boy.

There was no thought of prudence in Derek, though he knew himself no match for his assailant. Prudence was lost in anger and in the joy of battle. Not for a second had his eyes left Mr. Brodsky’s: he was ready for the rush, his whole body tense as a coiled spring. The height on which he stood gave him an advantage, and the boxing-ring at school had taught him to put his weight behind a blow. The clenched fist that met Mr. Brodsky’s right eye appeared to that gentleman to have the force of a cannon-ball. He staggered, tripped, and rolled headlong down the slope.

“That’s for my dog!” said Derek joyfully. He paused a moment to enjoy the spectacle of his enemy on his hands and knees spitting out sand. Then prudence reasserted herself, and he turned and ran.

Behind him, presently, he heard flying feet, and a glance over his shoulder showed him Mr. Brodsky in pursuit. Derek grinned as he ran. He had not the slightest fear of being unable to shake him off; there was cover enough on the island to hide fifty men, and he felt reasonably certain that his foe could not touch him in speed. His whole being sang with happiness—this game of hide-and-seek was the perfect end of a glorious occasion.

“All I’ve got to be careful about,” he said to himself, “is not to lead him anywhere near our part of the island. It won’t do for him to run into Jill. Wish I knew where she is.” He glanced at his watch. “Oh—she’s sure to be back at the camp, getting dinner”: and somewhat relieved by the thought, he trotted up a long ridge that led southward.

Mr. Brodsky ran well: Derek had to admit, watching him now and then, that he must be in fairly good training, besides the fact that fury lent wings to his feet. But he had a quick-witted boy to deal with, one who used to the full every advantage of country, doubling and twisting so that his pursuer constantly lost ground and had to run uphill. Finally Derek decided that the game had gone on long enough. He dipped over the edge of a ridge and took cover in a belt of scrub that gave half a dozen exits if the enemy should appear.

“But I think I’ve diddled him,” he chuckled, as he sank down, panting.

Jill, meanwhile, had spent a peaceful morning, divided between birds and a book, happy in the knowledge that her twin was having just the time his soul loved, though the full ecstasy to which he had attained was yet to be revealed

to her. When her watch warned her that the hour was approaching when a conscientious cook should become busy, she strolled slowly towards home, pausing now and then as a bird caught her eye. It was in one of these pauses that she heard the sound of someone crashing through the scrub some distance above her.

She swung round, searching the hillside with eager eyes. Presently, she saw the figure of a man running uncertainly. He stopped, evidently trying to pick up some quarry, and as he turned in her direction, she started.

“I believe it’s that man Brodsky!” she uttered. “I wonder what he’s running after?”

The man began to run again, and, following the direction he took, she saw Derek on a ridge farther away. He dodged behind some rocks, and the man ran faster. Derek crept from his shelter, took cover behind a bush, and the next moment was running lightly in the opposite direction. Jill watched this peculiar game for some moments, at first in anxiety—which gave place to laughter as she saw how neatly her twin was playing it.

“All the same, Derek’s trying to shake him off,” she said to herself. “I wonder if they’ve had a row. I wish I knew what has happened.”

The game was hidden from her for a time, and she moved on, longing to catch sight of it again. Then she saw Brodsky on a ridge, again at fault. There was no further sign of Derek.

“I hope he’s lost him,” Jill uttered. She watched eagerly, unconscious of the fact that she herself was now partly visible over a bush. Only when she saw the man suddenly begin to run in her direction did she realize that he had seen her.

Her first impulse was to dodge back into cover, and she followed it. Then her mind moved swiftly. If Derek wanted to shake off his pursuer, could she not help him? Nobody could distinguish her from her twin at that distance, as she very well knew. The idea made her shake with laughter.

“Lovely notion!” she chuckled. “I’ve only to stay near here to lead him so far from Derek that he’ll never pick up his trail again. Come along, dear Mr. Brodsky!”

She moved to a rock out in the open, deliberately allowing him to catch sight of her, and the deluded Mr. Brodsky, fired with new hope, plunged madly down the intervening slopes. Jill heard his heavy breathing as he drew near, and for the first time a faint shade of nervousness crept across her.

She shook it off, laughing at herself. Mr. Brodsky was unpleasant, but men did not war with girls. She sat down on a stone, leaning back against the rock and opening her book; and a moment later Mr. Brodsky dashed round the corner.

“I’ve got you, you young whelp!”

Jill looked up with an air of mild surprise, seeing a vision of fury—the dark face, crimson from running, and now ornamented by an eye that bore signs of battle. Mr. Brodsky saw a slight figure in grey shirt and trousers; surely the figure that he had sought so painstakingly: and yet, was it quite the same? It was more the air of utter unconcern with which he was greeted than anything else that made him pause, his hand almost clutching the slender shoulder.

“I *beg* your pardon?” Jill’s voice held polite inquiry, tinged with faint amusement. She lowered her book, keeping her finger in her place.

“I—I——But it *is* you!” he shouted.

“It is certainly I,” said Jill, with a correctness of diction and a dignity of bearing that would have been balm to the head mistress of St. Bridget’s. “Did you—er—desire to speak to me?”

He fell back a step under the calm gaze, his hand dropping to his side.

“Bah! It is a girl!”

Jill’s momentary hesitation was due to the regrettable fact that she very nearly answered, “Sez you!” She repressed this impulse severely, raising her eyebrows in a manner which she fervently hoped expressed outraged propriety.

“I am really at a loss to understand you,” she stated coldly. “Perhaps you expected to find some wild animal—perchance a kangaroo?” She was seized with a wild desire to laugh, which she covered by forcing an expression of stern disapproval.

Mr. Brodsky recoiled before it.

“I—I beg your pardon,” he growled. “It was no kangaroo, but a boy, that I was looking for. Your brother, I would say.” His left eye flashed: the right one was incapable of flashing.

“My little brother? I am sure he would be glad to meet you. He is so *fond* of foreigners,” said Jill pensively.

Mr. Brodsky choked. He made an effort to speak, found that no suitable words would come, and decided to withdraw. Without the ceremony of farewell he turned on his heel and strode away. As he disappeared he caught her final remark.

“Extraordinary person!” she drawled.

She waited until she could no longer hear his footsteps, and then gave herself up to laughter. When she ventured to peep over the rock there was no trace of him: every slope was deserted.

“Now, I wonder if he’s watching to see where I go?” reflected Jill cautiously. “All right, Mr. Brodsky, I’ll stay here.” Sitting down again, she opened her book. It failed to hold her attention, however: she could only recall her gentle passage of arms with the enemy, and chuckle helplessly.

“I wish Derek could have heard!” she murmured. “And I wish I knew what he has been doing—and that I could be certain that Mr. Brodsky has gone

home to his dinner.”

A sound came to her presently, and glancing seaward she caught a glimpse of the grey launch, out to the east and travelling swiftly in the direction of the island.

“Oh, good!” said Jill. “He’ll have to go back now, because the others will be expecting to find him at the place where they are to pick him up. I hope they haven’t been able to get him a Shakespeare,” she added unkindly.

She waited until the launch had had time to pass the island; then hurried towards the cave, reflecting that Derek would probably be hungrily wondering what had become of her. Long before she reached it she saw him standing on a rise, looking in every direction, anxiety written all over him. Catching sight of her, he waved his hat, uttered a war-whoop, and raced to meet her.

“I was beginning to get scared about you,” he cried, as he came up. “Where on earth have you been? There’s a nasty brute walking round the island, and I was afraid you had met it.”

“I did!” Jill laughed. “But it didn’t stay long.” She looked at him keenly. “Derek, you’ve been up to something—tell me, quick!”

“Oh, I’ve had the time of my dreams!” he cried. “Jill, I’m going to give your old Giant another schnapper, because he staged a miracle for me. It doesn’t seem possible when I think of it—but it happened!”

“*What* happened? Oh, do hurry!”

“Jill, I knocked the blighter down,” he said solemnly.

She gasped.

“Derek—you couldn’t!”

“But I did, I tell you. Look at my knuckles.” He presented a scarred fist for her gaze.

“It wasn’t you,” said Jill faintly, “who gave him that eye?”

“Does it look beautiful? It ought to.” He grabbed her arm. “Come on, and I’ll tell you about it. But it’s a miracle!”

She heard the story as they went back to camp, and her delight and excitement equalled his own.

“Of course, it was an absolute fluke,” he ended. “He could beat me with one hand if it came to a square fight. It was just that I had the advantage of the rise, and that he didn’t think I could hand out a punch. Oh, if you’d only seen him—grovelling, and spitting out sand! I did wish I could stay to see what his eye looked like, but I knew it was time for me to go, if I wanted to keep any whole bones. He looked as though murder was the least thing that would satisfy him.”

“That’s how he looked when he found me,” laughed Jill.

“He didn’t speak to you, did he?” Derek asked sharply.

“We had a lovely chat,” she gurgled. “You see, he thought I was you!”

“But—Jill, the brute didn’t touch you?”

“He stopped just in time, but the effort nearly killed him. He was so sure he had you, poor dear!” She gave a dramatic recital of her interview with Mr. Brodsky, and Derek collapsed on the ground and yelled with laughter.

“I didn’t think you had it in you,” he choked. “Why wasn’t I near enough to hear! ‘*Perchance a kangaroo*’—Jill, you absolute idiot!”

“Nice word, ‘perchance,’ don’t you think?” she chuckled. “I got that out of the theatrical show we had at school—if I hadn’t been in that I should never have been able to keep my face straight with friend Brodsky. But I did; partly because I was so interested in watching his face. He’s just what you said he was, over at the Point; a rather nasty piece of work.”

“Well, I don’t think he’ll feel any unholy joy when he remembers Joker,” was Derek’s grim comment as he rose. “And I fancy he won’t want his dinner as much as I want mine.”

“He won’t be a merry companion for the other two,” Jill remarked, falling into step with him. “Derek, what about it now? Shall we have to go?”

“To the other island, you mean? I don’t know,” he said. “I’ve been studying over it, wondering what is best to do.”

“Do you think they will all come looking for your blood? I don’t want to run any risk of that.”

He shook his head.

“They won’t, Jill. I’ll bet Marks and Harvey aren’t that kind—and you know they didn’t strike me as over-fond of Brodsky. They would be much more likely to let him fight his own battles. Especially as you’re here. The presence of ladies has a calming effect on blood-thirsty men—even Brodsky!” he grinned.

“If you ask me,” Jill said shrewdly, “he won’t tell them about it. A man like that isn’t going to admit that he was knocked down by a boy. Of course he can’t hide that eye, but he can easily say he ran into a branch of a tree, or something of the sort.”

Derek considered this.

“I believe you’re right,” he observed. “All the same, he may tell them that we are here. You know, Jill, there was something a bit queer about friend Brodsky. He was so awfully taken aback at seeing me—and I don’t think it was because I caught him at his beastly work. He wouldn’t regard it as beastly. But there was no doubt he was disgusted at seeing me.”

“Oh, well—weren’t we disgusted to find there were strangers on our island?” Jill said. “Lots of campers would feel like that, when they had imagined they had a jolly place to themselves.”

“I suppose it was that,” he said slowly. “Well, if they did want to punish me they could do it just as well if we moved to another island. Nothing to

hinder them from calling on us anywhere—and their boat could walk round the *Seahawk*. So we should do no good by moving.”

“No: if we moved it would be better to go home,” Jill said.

“Would you like to do that?” He watched her face keenly.

“Not a bit,” she answered with decision. “We’ve won the first round, and I don’t believe there will be a second. It is far more likely that Brodsky will prefer to go back to their other camp, wherever that is. He won’t want to meet us again. His only chance of getting even with you would be to catch you alone, and you will just have to watch out for that.”

“Trust me!” he laughed. “You know, Jill, I should hate to go. I’d feel as if we had been driven out, and I’d lose half the satisfaction of having damaged his pride—to say nothing of his eye!”

“So would I,” agreed his twin. “So I vote we stay here with all the honours of war.”

They were clearing up after dinner when Derek produced a new idea.

“Jill, I’ve been thinking. Suppose those fellows do come scouting round here to-day to find out where we are camping—and they may do so if Brodsky tells them there are strangers on the island—how would it be if we staged a disappearance?”

She looked at him, puzzled.

“How do you mean?”

“Well, we’re going over to Rocky Bay. Suppose we take all our kit, blankets and everything, scatter the bracken round the cave, and make the whole place look as if we had broken camp. It wouldn’t be much trouble, for our stores are nearly out. Then, if the Dauntless Three come on an expedition of discovery, they won’t have anything to discover.”

“Great idea!” said Jill, beaming. “And then one of two things would happen; either they would forget all about us, or they would get another unpleasant shock if they met us again!”

“Just that,” he grinned. “Then we had better get busy, or they may turn up before we are ready to start.”

They flung themselves upon the possessions in the cave, and in a very short time everything was in the *Seahawk*. This time there was no neat stowing-away: blankets were piled on the deck, cooking-utensils well in view, mingled with suitcases. At the bow the battered frying-pan was lashed as a figure-head.

“It pains me to think what the poor old *Seahawk* imagines we are doing,” laughed Jill, as they stood back to admire the completed effect. “She’s always ship-shape to the very last end of rope—and now she looks like a jumble-stall!”

“We’re the perfect city campers,” Derek agreed. “All we need now is to

leave the camp littered with paper bags and orange-peel, and the mischief is, we haven't got any. But the ferns look as if pigs had been rooting among them. If anyone looks into the cave he'll have no doubt that the happy home is broken up."

The *Seahawk* slipped out of the bay, the dinghy towing astern. As she drew near the western point of the island Derek suddenly looked up at Jill, who was perched on the pile of blankets. He grinned impishly.

"Hear it, Jill? Couldn't have been better timed."

The "chuck-chuck" of an engine came softly. Derek changed his course a little to the north, putting on speed. They shot into the open just as the grey launch came round the western headland, her three occupants suddenly manifesting a lively interest in the *Seahawk* and all that she contained. Voices came across the water, talking disjointedly. The distance between the boats widened. The grey launch continued eastward, while the *Seahawk* sped towards Rocky Bay, her crew breaking out into song that drifted across the water:

*"For we're riding—riding—riding,
Riding home again!"*



“The boxing-ring at school had taught him to put his weight behind a blow.”

Seahawk

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CHAPTER XIII

THE HIDDEN TRACK

THEY crept back to Peak Island towards dusk, having taken the precaution to run so far along the mainland coast that, when they turned, their approach would not be visible to anyone who happened to be about the southwest of the island. Derek throttled down the engine to its softest note, and the *Seahawk* glided into the little bay with all the stealth of a pirate craft.

The twins unloaded her rapidly. New ferns for bedding were the first necessity; they gathered them almost in silence, Derek cutting the tough stems while Jill carried great armfuls to the cave. To-morrow they would make a bonfire of the old ones, the spectacle of which, withered and draggled, was an offence to well-trained campers. To-night there was no need to make a fire at all; they had returned loaded with food, including a large thermos flask of coffee.

It was dark when they had finished their preparations. They ate supper in the cave, lit by a hurricane-lantern, enjoying like children the air of conspiracy that had lent an air of adventure to their return.

"Of course, we can't keep this up," said Jill. "It has been rather fun to-night, but we're not going to pretend we're not here to-morrow, are we?"

"Rather not!" was Derek's answer. "I don't care whether we meet them or not, but it may be just as well if they're not on the look-out for us."

"They are sure to see us fishing."

"Only if they go to the Point; and in any case, to see us out in the *Seahawk* would not tell them we were living on the island. Do you notice, they don't seem to fish out this way? I suppose they find it easier to go south, since their camp faces that way. Not that distance would matter, with a boat like theirs." He took a banana and ate it in silence.

"Everyone knows that the best fishing is between here and the mainland," Jill said. "But perhaps they are not keen, and only want to catch enough for an occasional meal."

"They're queer beggars," said Derek briefly. "There's something about them that's not a bit like ordinary people on a holiday. Can't say what it is, exactly, but I feel it. Oh, well, probably they'll move on soon."

The twins turned in early, Derek again sleeping across the opening of the cave. With all his recklessness there were moments when he realized his responsibility: he wondered, lying awake, if it would not be wiser to go home. Had Jill been a boy there would have been nothing to worry about, but the

wearing of boy's clothes made her no less a girl, as he reflected a little anxiously; he had no right to risk angry encounters with Jill in his care.

But to go home meekly was so dull: such a come-down after their gay plans of freedom. Jill had scoffed at the very idea. It wasn't as if she were the clinging, nervous type of girl; she could take care of herself, was almost as strong as he, could do everything as well as he could. "Some things a jolly sight better," he mused. He felt that Jill would think him rather a failure if he suggested giving up their adventure. Certainly his only reason for doing so would merely excite her to laughter—unless it moved her to one of her rare fits of depression because she had not been born a boy.

And he wanted keenly to stay. Partly because he had punished his enemy and would gladly have the chance of meeting him again: but beyond that natural ambition, Derek was curious. Something about the men of the grey launch filled him with questioning; he could not put words to his questions, but they flitted in his mind in a vague and troubling way—not worrying, but insistent. He knew that he did not wish to lose sight of them. They were queer, he hardly knew why. And again and again he puzzled over Mr. Brodsky, who was not fat now, but who had been noticeably fat.

He pondered over these matters until he fell asleep, and for once he did not sleep well, starting up from time to time with a conviction of someone being near. These fancies are not to be indulged by the sleeper who desires to maintain any comfort in a bed founded on bracken-fern: after an unusually active wriggle he found it necessary to roll out of his blankets and rearrange his scattered mattress. He was kneeling in the sand trying to accomplish this in the darkness when he raised his head suddenly, listening.

This was no fancy, though it was not near. Somewhere, far to the south, an engine throbbed; at first the sound was soft, but gradually it drew nearer, more distinct. Then again it lessened, as though the motor were throttled down, and finally ceased, leaving no sound in the night except the soft heaving of the waves as they rolled into the cave, the sucking and gurgling in the rock-crannies as the water flowed back.

"I'll swear that's the engine of the grey launch," Derek muttered.

He listened awhile, but nothing came, and he finished tucking in the ferns and crept cautiously between his blankets. The luminous dial of his wrist-watch showed three o'clock. What on earth, he asked himself, took people out at that hour, and on a night when there was not even a moon? Night-fishing attracted some enthusiasts, but even the keenest did not go sea-fishing so late as that.

"Oh, how do I know what they have to take them out!" he muttered impatiently. "They may have gone to see friends up the coast, or have been to a dance: there are a dozen different things. Go to sleep, you fool!"—and

somewhat to his surprise, he did.

He told Jill in the morning of the sound he had heard. She made light of it.

“I seem to remember having heard them another night,” she said. “But what does it matter? Whatever they choose to do with themselves at night doesn’t concern us. Let’s go and dig for clams.”

So they dug for the broad yellow clams that make the best bait for sea-fish and the best soup for landsmen, and afterwards proved their worth on the fishing-grounds, coming home gaily to cook the catch for dinner. No sign was there of the grey launch; presumably her people were resting after their late night excursion.

“What about taking the dinghy and having a look at those sea-caves on the west?” suggested Derek.

“You said that was a job for a wet day,” Jill responded lazily.

“Yes, and so it is. But a wet day seems as far off as Christmas, and we may hear at any time that Mother is coming back. I’d like to explore that coast before we go home, wouldn’t you?”

Anything that her twin planned was acceptable to Jill, although sea-caves where no light penetrated did not seem especially fascinating when contrasted with the sunlit slopes above. But Derek was keen, and that was all that mattered.

“All right,” she agreed. “It would be a pity not to see them while we have the chance. I’ll take a book, I think, Derek; if I get tired of caves before you do I can find a nook in the rocks where I can read.”

“Good idea: I shan’t mind how long I stay if you’ll do that. Sure you want to come?” he added. “I know you are not such a cave-y person as I am. I’ll do anything else you like.”

“No—I’ll love it,” Jill assured him. “Only I may feel more like reading after awhile. Don’t forget your flash-light; I brought mine from home yesterday in case yours gave out.”

“It won’t: I put in a new battery,” he answered. “But we’ll take the big one as well. Some of those caves will look jolly well when they are lit up.”

The tide was on the ebb; a little breeze blew from the east, gently ruffling the waves as the twins paddled out into the open. Once round the north-west headland, however, the low cliffs sheltered them, and they found themselves in still water that lapped the rocks gently and flowed in and out of the caves almost in silence. No day could have been better for cave-exploring; the lazy water had nothing of the surge and hurry of an incoming tide, when a little dinghy needed careful handling to avoid being washed against the rocky walls.

Jill took both oars, while Derek knelt in the bow, directing her as they stole into the first cave. His powerful torch illuminated the frowning walls of stone: rough above high-water mark, below it smooth and wet, with dank green trails

of slimy sea-weed clinging to its face. There was no landing anywhere; the sea met the rock on all sides, its dark surface suggesting hidden depths. High above, the vaulted roof was lost in blackness until Derek turned the light upward, when it gleamed in a hundred places.

“It’s like a cathedral on a small size,” Jill said. She glanced over her shoulder: the opening of the cave looked no larger than a church door. “Derek, what echoes there would be if a choir could sing in here!”

“Yes—with an organ,” he agreed. “That would wake up your giant. Let’s try!” He lifted his voice in the triumphal shout of Blake’s words, and Jill joined in:

“Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!
I will not cease from mental fight
Nor let my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England’s green and pleasant land!”

The young voices, each deep and ringing, ceased. Above them the roof rang with the sound, gradually dying away until it seemed to blend with the faint whisper of the flowing sea.

“By jove, that sounded well!” was the boy’s comment. “Great battle-song, isn’t it? but I’d like to get a men’s choir to sing it here. If you and I could wake the echoes like that, what would they do!”

“I expect that the giant is awake, even with us,” Jill laughed. “And what about the Dauntless Three? Don’t you think they will have turned in their slumbers?”

Derek looked back to the far-off mouth of the cave, and shook his head.

“Unless they were prowling near I shouldn’t think they have heard a sound. We’re so shut-in, you see; and this cave is a long way from the southern shore. It sounded tremendous here because the sound couldn’t travel out.”

“Mr. Brodsky certainly wouldn’t have appreciated it, so it’s just as well,” she said. “He has no feeling for ‘a green and pleasant land’ anywhere.”

“Not unless he can find something to hurt in it,” responded Derek. “Pleasant beast, Brodsky. Well suppose we move on to the next cathedral.”

There was nothing cathedral-like in the next cave. It was broad and low-roofed; the water so shallow that Derek kept a sharp look-out for sunken rocks. A little sandy beach lay at the far end, a few feet above high-water mark; they landed on it, because it seemed the correct thing to do, but even Derek could not find anything thrilling in it. They passed on to another that was much the

same, and then found one which was more promising, since it was divided into two chambers. The rock-wall that seemed to end it held an opening, just wide enough for the dinghy with shipped oars, within which was an almost circular cave, where they floated on water that looked like ink. Derek switched off the torch; the darkness seemed to spring at them like a live thing, and Jill shuddered.

“Ugh!” she said. “Beastly! Do light up again, Derek.”

“Pretty grim,” agreed Derek. He pressed the switch, and both felt relieved as the light flashed back. “Fancy being trapped in a place like this! It would be worse than one of the dungeons they used to have in old castles.”

“Oh, ever so much worse,” said Jill. “In a dungeon, at least you’d know the worst, but here you wouldn’t know what might happen to you, with the water whispering horrible things to the walls all the time. If you drop that torch, Derek, I shall yell loudly!” He was leaning out over the bow, trying to pierce with the light the gloomy water that heaved gently.

“Not you,” said Derek cheerfully, returning to an upright position. “Anyhow, my other little torch is in my pocket—though it would look pretty silly in here, I’ll admit. Not going, are you?”—as she took up the oars.

“I am,” said she firmly. “I’ve had enough of dungeons—and this is the sort they used to call an *oubliette*, where they hove the poor wretches of prisoners in and forgot all about them. What brutes people used to be! I’m glad we don’t live in those times.” She shipped the oars, and they glided through the opening into the comparative daylight of the outer cave.

“There are plenty of brutes still, only not in the same way,” remarked Derek. “I’ve learned that since I took to reading newspapers. If ever I go into Parliament——”

“*What!*” gasped his astounded twin.

“Don’t get excited—it isn’t likely to happen,” he said, grinning. “But if ever I did, it would be for just one thing—to try to get a law passed that every man that hurt a child or a woman—yes, and I think an animal, too—got the lash, whatever else he got.”

“Some people say that the lash only makes a brute more of a brute,” remarked Jill.

“Oh, tosh!” said the would-be legislator. “Nothing could make some brutes worse. Anyhow, pain is the only argument for them. If they knew that really unpleasant pain was coming to them automatically, they wouldn’t do things to risk it. My law would make friend Brodsky sit up and think before he broke a dog’s leg, at any rate.” He gave a satisfied sigh. “It’s a comfort to think I’ve got ahead of my law with Brodsky! Only I wish I could think his black eye would last as long as poor old Joker’s leg.”

An hour went by while they slowly worked their way along the western

coast of the island. Sometimes the cave-openings were too low for them to have any desire to enter; at other times they were wide and high, but in no special way differing from those which they had seen first. Only as they drew near the south-western bluff did they find a new species.

It was a broad cave, where the sea dwindled to a mere stream, ending in a sandy beach shut in by the rock-wall. Round the sides the rocks were worn into smooth ledges, a strip of sand separating them from the water, so that it was possible to walk all round the cavern, except at high tide. The opening was so large that the sun poured in freely. No cave that they had seen was so attractive, at least to Jill's eyes.

"This is what I should call a grotto," she said. "I've never quite understood what a grotto was, but it is borne in upon me that this is one. I vote we land, Derek: I'm tired of sitting in the dinghy."

They pulled the little boat up on the sand and wandered round the horse-shoe beach. Jill had prudently brought some fruit from their stores; they sat on a sunny ledge to eat it, watching the gannets soar and dive far out at sea. Derek rose as he tossed his last apple-core into the water.

"I'm going to poke round. Shall I bring you your book?"

"Please," she said. He brought it to her and she slipped from the ledge to the hot sand, stretching out happily. She was lost in the story of *Huntingtower* when she heard Derek call.

"Jill! There's a little opening here behind a rock. I'm going to see where it leads to."

"Want me?" she asked lazily. The sun was a caressing warmth, and *Huntingtower* at a thrilling point.

"No—not if you don't want to come: I don't fancy I can get far." He hesitated, and came back to her.

"I suppose it's all right to leave you? The Dauntless Three are not far away, you know; their cave is just round this point."

"I'm sure I don't mind if they go past," said she carelessly. "They couldn't bring their launch in here—she would ground, with the tide so far out. They could only look at me, and that would be very nice for them!"

"Oh, yes—you'll be all serene," he said. "I won't be long." He went off, and Jill returned contentedly to her book.

The opening he had found was a mere crack behind a rock, scarcely wide enough to admit even the boy's slender body. He wriggled through it with some difficulty, finding that it went on for some distance in a straight line. Derek walked on, holding his torch, his elbows touching the walls on each side, the roof only a foot above his head. He saw rock ahead of him, and thought it was the end of the cleft.

It was not the end, however. The cleft turned at a sharp angle, becoming

wider. Then it curved, wriggling on as though it might have been a track left by the sea-serpent of which they had joked a few days ago.

Derek grew excited. The floor was good going, with no fissures to be seen, and there was ample head-room. He found himself running gently, his rubber-soled shoes making no sound on the rock, slowing down at the curves to make sure of his footing, hurrying on again when the way showed clear. The spirit of adventure leaped up joyously within him. He felt as if he were on the brink of some tremendous discovery.

So that his spirits fell when presently the roof sloped down ahead of him and it seemed that further progress was impossible. He persevered, stooping until he was bent double; but the roof grew lower and lower, and he was unwillingly forced to conclude that if he wished to go on it must be after the manner of the sea-serpent, who presumably had not troubled to provide for head-room greater than his own requirements.

“Blow!” muttered Derek, subsiding to his knees. “And I thought I was on to something really good. I suppose I had better chuck it.”

He hesitated. There was always the possibility that the roof would slope up as abruptly as it had sloped down. Perhaps a few yards more would show an improvement.

“I’ll chance it for a bit, anyhow,” he thought. “It’s quite wide enough to turn, so I shouldn’t have to wriggle out backwards—there wouldn’t be any fun in doing that for long. But it’s easy enough to crawl here, even if it’s not good for the knees of my trousers.”

He crawled on. The torch became a nuisance to hand-and-knee progress and after a careful look ahead to fix the next curve in his mind he switched it off, dropping it into his pocket. Round the curve he crept cautiously, and immediately his head came into contact with the rock, and he dropped flat. He backed a little, feeling for the torch; but as his hand was upon it he checked himself, staring in front of him.

A faint light showed some distance ahead. Derek’s heart leaped. It was a find, after all; the sea-serpent track must be leading into the open. He switched on his light.

The rock just before him shelved down so that even crawling would be impossible. He must lie down if he were to wriggle under the overhanging mass. Had he come to it before he had seen that glimmer of light, it would not have occurred to him to go on; but now he knew that there was free space ahead, and it was unthinkable that he should not reach it.

He pocketed the torch again, flattened himself, and wormed his way forward. There was just room, and no more, for the first yard or two; then he found that he could raise his head a very little. Even that little was a relief, however; he could look forward, seeing the welcome light. Faint as it was, it

beckoned in a heartening fashion, telling him he was nearly through. He rested for a moment before reaching forward to get a new purchase with his hands on the uneven floor.

Then, just as he pulled himself on, he checked. His head went up, bumping the roof violently, but he did not feel it. For—so near that he thought for an instant the words were for him—a man's voice was speaking.

CHAPTER XIV

AT THE BACK DOOR

DEREK'S first instinct was to retreat as quickly as his peculiar position would allow. He had a bad moment of something very like panic, during which his heart seemed to leap into his throat. It passed, however, as he abused himself mentally for a fool. No one had heard him: the voice was serene, unconcerned. He had only to wriggle backwards and find his way out again.

With the realization of this comforting possibility came the conviction that he did not in the least want to go. He was devoured by curiosity. There could be no doubt that he had stumbled upon an unsuspected way into the part of the island occupied by Mr. Brodsky and his friends. He desperately wanted to know more about it.

Scarcely daring to breathe, the boy lay still. The voices were clear; evidently the Dauntless Three were present in full force. Derek tried hard to calculate his position, working back in his mind to the point where he had entered the cleft and the line it had taken through the hill. Even allowing for its windings it seemed to him that it had kept to one line; a curve in one direction had usually been succeeded by a swing back. He recalled the day when he had tried from above to recast the direction of the cave into which he and Jill had trespassed; again he went over it in memory.

"I believe I've hit their cave at the far end," he thought. "I'm at that place where it seemed to tail off into nothing. And it doesn't; it looked awfully like it, but it simply carries on into the way I've just come. I'm at friend Brodsky's back door, and he doesn't know he's got one!"

The thought struck him as irresistibly funny. He shook with silent laughter, burying his face in his sleeve lest a splutter should betray his presence. He was in no danger of rough handling, he knew; even if they heard him he could escape before they could reach him. They might be able to crawl under the rock, but it would be a slow business for full-grown men. An impish desire assailed him to startle them with a war-whoop.

"Not much good, though, if I couldn't see their faces," he reflected. "I wonder if it would be safe to go a bit farther forward."

He decided to risk it. Mingled with his reckless desire to startle them was a vague wonder as to their presence in that part of the cave, a dark hole which could present no attractions that he could imagine. It was all part of their queerness, he reflected, as he drew himself forward, inch by inch. He hoped they would not go before he came within view of them.

The light grew stronger as he crept. It showed him, presently, the dark bulk of a rounded boulder a few feet ahead, lying against the wall of the passage; above it the roof began to rise very slightly. Derek recognized the possibilities of the stone gladly, altering his course so that he took cover behind it. Along the wall he wormed his way until he reached it. Then, pulling his soft hat well down over his forehead he slowly raised his head until, hidden but for his eyes, he was able to look over the boulder.

He found that he could see the greater part of the rock chamber for a few feet above the level of the ground. This was enough, for, as Derek noticed with surprise, the three men were all seated. Marks, on a flat boulder, held a hurricane-lantern on his knee. Brodsky and Harvey were seated on the floor; and what they were doing puzzled their unseen watcher intensely.

Spread over Brodsky's knees was a mass of material of which Derek could at first make nothing. Then, peering cautiously, he saw that it was an overcoat, its inner side uppermost. It was smoothed out carefully, and Brodsky was bending over it, apparently doing something with its lining, for his hand was thrust deeply into it. He wore no coat; his right sleeve was rolled up, as if to allow him to work more easily. Derek knitted his eyebrows. What on earth was the man doing? All desire to startle them was lost in curiosity as he watched.

Between Marks and Brodsky sat Harvey. There was a wooden box beside him; between his knees was a little pile of what looked to Derek like thin packs of cards, neatly stacked, and in colour a dull grey. They were not cards, however, for presently he put his hand into the box, took out another, and added it to the pile. It slipped as he put it down, and there came a faint clash of metal.

Brodsky glanced up, frowning.

"Careful!" he said.

"Oh, you can't hurt 'em," Harvey answered easily. He drew out another, balancing it on his hand. The light of the lantern fell upon it, and Derek saw that there was, in one end, a small round depression like a soldered-in lid.

Brodsky's hand and arm came out of the lining of the coat. He held out his hand, not looking at Harvey, who dropped the grey canister into it. Brodsky turned it end ways, seemed to fit it into some aperture in the coat, and again his hand and arm disappeared.

"Well, thank goodness, it's the last consignment down here," Marks said suddenly.

"Same here," said Harvey. "I get jumpy if we're in one place too long."

There was a pause. It was broken by Brodsky, and his voice was scornful.

"You have very little to grumble at. You live well, you are paid well, and you have only a fraction of the risk. It is I who should get jumpy—if I were fool enough."

“Oh, there’s risk enough for all hands,” Harvey answered. “You haven’t a monopoly of it, old man.”

“My share is more than either of you could handle,” came back the swift reply.

“Your share of the profits isn’t, though,” Harvey said sourly. “Precious little we get, compared with what you pull off, Brodsky!”

“You are amusing,” the cold voice answered. Brodsky held out his hand for another canister. “I supply the organization, the capital, and—I think I may add—the brains.”

“Some day,” said Harvey. “I may forget what it is like to be out of a job; and then I may kick you, Brodsky!”

“Once, perhaps. Not twice,” said the other evenly.

“Oh—*can’t* you two give it a rest?” asked Marks plaintively.

“All your brains wouldn’t take the boat out yonder in any sort of weather, Brodsky,” went on Harvey. “You’re glad enough to stay ashore and leave that part of it to us.”

“Is not that what you are paid for? What is it that you do, after all? You run about in my boat; you take off consignments—and even if the weather may be a little rough, it is a good boat—and you put me ashore. You risk a wetting now and then—but what is my risk?”

“Mighty little, I believe,” retorted Harvey. “That coat is a very protective dodge. You might use it for a year without anyone guessing. I’ll say it’s a clever piece of work.”

The bewildered eyes in the passage stared very hard at the coat in question.

“Would you care to wear it—once? You would not be anxious for a second experience. To sit in the train, sweating with the heat of it; wondering if by any chance the line of a tin showed, in spite of the padding: asking yourself whether the stupid-looking yokel opposite you was, perhaps, a detective who had noticed the man who kept his coat on, although the day was warm, and therefore thought him worth considering a second time—do you think you would enjoy it, Harvey?”

“I’m jolly well sure I shouldn’t—any more than you would enjoy going out on a rough night to meet your Chinese friends. Marks and I do some wondering on our own account on those little jaunts; there’s a beautiful uncertainty as to whether a riding-light belongs to the craft you’re looking for or for a police boat that’s looking for you!”

“Do not risk it any longer than you wish,” Brodsky advised gently. “The cities are full of bright young men who are able to run a motor-launch—and are not afflicted with nervousness!”

“Oh, what’s the use of holding a competition in risks!” mourned Marks. “*Cut it out, you two!*”

Harvey relapsed into sullen silence. All the time, Brodsky had steadily pursued the task of packing the canisters into the coat-lining, while Harvey as steadily kept him supplied. There was never a pause; their routine was evidently one long practised. The last tin was handed over; Harvey turned the box upside-down, rose, with an air of relief, and shook himself. He sat down on the box, lighting a cigarette.

Brodsky was still on the floor of the cave. He turned the coat right-side-out, looking at it with something like admiration, in spite of his self-pity at having to wear it.

“As you say, Harvey, a pretty piece of work. The little Sydney tailoress who made it was worth the twenty pounds I paid her. I wonder how many pounds’ worth of Chinese cocaine it has carried!”

“Let’s hope nobody in the train with you to-morrow afternoon will do any wondering,” said Harvey acidly. “Just as well we’re changing this spot—that storekeeper in Brandan’s Point looks at you in a way that gives me the creeps.”

“Oh, well, hang her up and let’s get out of this hole,” said Marks, brightening for the first time. “I could do with some fresh air and a glimpse of daylight. You’ll go over just in time for the two-thirty, I suppose, Brodsky?”

“As usual,” said the other. He held up the coat. “Hang it up carefully, Harvey. Which of you is to sleep here?”

“My turn, worse luck,” replied the tall man. “I hate the nights I’m on guard—this place has a nasty resemblance to a cell.”

“Yes—and a fellow feels trapped down here,” said Marks. “It wouldn’t be so bad if there was any getaway, but you’d be caught like a rat if the police knew enough to make a raid.”

“It is because there is no getaway that it is so valuable a place,” said Brodsky. “You two are fanciful; and as for your police, do you think the plump old gentleman in Brandan’s Point is coming raiding?”

Harvey made a response that sounded ill-tempered, but it was lost in the shuffling of feet as the three men made ready to go. Marks led the way with the lantern. Derek had a view of three pairs of legs walking away. The light grew fainter as they went along the passage, then disappeared altogether when they rounded a curve.

Derek waited until the last sound of their voices had died away before he ventured to move. There was no need to wriggle backwards: he turned, squirming round with some difficulty, switched on his torch for a second to get his bearings, and made his way under the stone as fast as he could, sighing with relief when he gained a place where he could stand upright at last. He was stiff and cramped; for a moment he stood in the darkness, swinging his arms to ease their aching. Then he set off along the passage at a dog-trot.

He was burning with anger. Like most schoolboys, he had heard and read

of the evil, the cruelty, of the drug-traffic. There were always stories going about of the innumerable stratagems of the cocaine-smugglers: a schoolfellow was the son of a chief of the water-police, and his tales had kept the dormitory breathless on many a night, long after "lights out." Derek had come to Sydney as a raw boy, fresh from an out-back station, and smuggling, to him, had seemed something rather fine and daring: people one knew thought nothing of "dodging the Customs" with a silk frock or a box of cigars. But he had quickly learned that not even the most reckless boy had a good word for the smugglers of drugs. That was the one form of smuggling which was altogether detestable and vile. "Only fit for Chinks," the boys said, "and no decent Chink would touch it!"

That Brodsky should be the leader in a thing that every decent man would scorn seemed entirely natural to the boy who had seen him deliberately cruel twice. All the fury that still slumbered in Derek's heart over Joker's broken leg woke up and seethed within him as he hurried along the passage. Brodsky was the unspeakable thing: a man who lived on cruelty and enjoyed it. Marks and Harvey were bad enough, but it was clear that they were in it as paid hands—and Derek knew enough of the sufferings of the workless, very often men who had held a good position, to make him judge them a shade less harshly. They were tools; the man who used them was the plotting, scheming brain behind the evil thing, who grew rich on the ruin of bodies and souls.

What could he do? For once he was keenly conscious of his youth and inexperience. He turned it over and over in his brain, but no solution came to him. It was a relief to reach the end of the narrow cleft, to come out into the clean sunshine and fresh air. Jill, lying at ease on the sand, had never seemed so good to look upon: Derek felt that it rested his mind just to see her, happy and clear-eyed, turning to smile at him.

"Hallo!" she said. "Have you——" Derek made a signal for silence, and she was on her feet in a moment, running towards him.

"No—nothing wrong," he whispered. "Only we must get away from here quickly. The Three may come along, and I don't want them to see us. I'll tell you presently."

Bursting with curiosity, Jill helped to launch the dinghy. Derek took the oars and paddled out quietly, making every effort to prevent the sound of a creaking rowlock. Slowly, gently, they crept northwards along the coast.

Jill sat quietly in the stern, watching Derek's face. Her heart sank a little, for all its gaiety had vanished, and it wore the set and grim expression that had made him look suddenly old on the day that Joker had been hurt. Once or twice he smiled at her, as if to reassure her, but the smile was a very brief one and the dark look wiped it away. She asked herself a score of questions. What had happened? Why should he be afraid now to meet the three men?—he had

been quite willing to do so an hour before. Why did he look like that?

Then she shrugged her shoulders, refusing to be worried. Whatever might have happened, Derek was all right; Brodsky had not hurt him in any way. Nothing else signified. She might be going to hear that they must break camp and leave the island at once, but what if it were so?—it would all be part of the day's work.

Nevertheless, it was a relief when they ran into their own bay. Derek broke silence as they beached the dinghy.

"Come over to the rocks and talk."

He led the way. They settled themselves in a sunny spot: Jill noticed that Derek sat where he could see the island-slopes, instead of looking out to sea as was his custom.

"Those three blighters are worse than we thought they were," he said shortly. "Jill, what do you know about drugs—cocaine and other muck like that?"

"Oh, not much," she said, astonished. "The girls talk about them at school now and then, but I've never been interested. Frightfully bad for people, aren't they? I've heard that it's a million times worse to take to drugs than to take to drink."

"Rather!" he said. "They kill people—body and soul. And the poor wretches who take them can't do without them—go nearly mad for them, would strip themselves of everything, down to the last penny, to buy them. And the brutes who sell the stuff get the most fabulous prices for it. It's about the most profitable trade in the world."

"I thought it wasn't allowed," said Jill. "Isn't there some law against it?"

"Yes, of course there is, and a jolly strict one. But when there are such profits to be made there are always people who will take the risk and smuggle them in to sell privately. A drug smuggler can make a fortune in a few years."

"What happens if he gets caught?"

"Oh—awfully heavy penalties. Long terms of imprisonment and tremendous fines. But they go on chancing it. The stuff comes chiefly from the East—the Chinese are very crafty in getting it into these countries."

"But what has this got to do with the Three?" asked Jill perplexedly. "Have you been finding out that they take drugs?"

"No. But I've found out that their game is smuggling them in to sell," he said grimly.

Jill whistled softly. "How?" she asked in a breathless whisper.

"I found a rock-passage that leads into the end of their cave, where I could crawl through—and they were there."

"Did they see you?" flashed her question.

"No. I only went on for a lark—I'd a silly idea of startling them with a yell

and then clearing out. They'd never have known where it came from. But they were sitting there, packing the stuff, and talking. It's queer," said Derek unhappily; "I've always reckoned that an eavesdropper was about the meanest thing that crawled, and here I've done it twice in a few days!"

"You couldn't help it—don't talk rubbish!" said Jill stoutly. "Tell me all about it."

She listened intently while he told his story. Her knowledge of the unsavoury business was scanty; it was strange to her to see the scorn and disgust on his face.

"You look as if you would like to kill them," she said when he had finished. "Is it so very awful, Derek? You look worse than you did when you thought he had killed Joker."

"Joker!" he said in a tone of amazement. "Joker's affair was—well, nothing beside this—just nothing!"

"Well—if you can say that——" she began.

"Jill, it's the vilest thing," the boy said gravely. "A straight-out murderer is far more decent than the fiend who smuggles drugs. That's what I think, anyhow. And I'd give everything I've got in the world to land these three where they ought to be—in jail."

Jill brightened at once.

"Well, can't we? We've only got to run over to Brandan's Point and tell the constable there."

"It isn't half as simple as that," he said, shaking his head. "You know what that constable at the Point is like—a nice, fat old thing who spends most of his time pottering about in his garden because there isn't anything else for him to do. Don't you remember how Willis spoke about him?—he knew he wouldn't bother himself over Joker. With three men like these, old Patten would be just about as much use as—as a wet hen!" finished Derek lamely.

Jill nodded. "Yes, of course," she said. "But we could tell Mr. Barker."

"I don't know that Barker would be any better than Patten. He's a nice old thing, too, but you wouldn't call him a warrior, exactly. I don't think there's a soul at the Point who could tackle the job."

He frowned impatiently.

"You see we're so jolly young! Everyone there looks on us as just a couple of kids. And we are, too: it's no use pretending anything else. I've been thinking and thinking over it, and I can't see what to do. I thought of sending a telegram to the police at Cranstone—there's a big police-station there—but even if they could get men here in time, would they come? Would they take any notice of a telegram from a stranger? Most likely they would telephone to Patten to ask who I was, and Patten would tell them I was a schoolboy having a rag with them. And that would be the end of that."

"I say, it's awfully difficult, isn't it?" uttered Jill, rather appalled.

"You've got to realize, Jill, that these men—Brodsky and his mates—are the sort who would stick at nothing. Drug smugglers haven't pretty ways—I've heard a lot about that from Warner, at school. They're certain to be armed, and they'd shoot if necessary. Even supposing we did get men from the Point to come over here some of them would probably be hurt—perhaps killed. It isn't a small thing that we are up against."

"No," she agreed, and was silent for a few moments. "And another thing, Derek," she went on; "if the Three were to be attacked here it would be perfectly easy for them to get rid of the stuff. They could dump it into one of the rock-pools, and a hundred people could hunt for it without finding it."

"Yes—and they would act the injured-innocent campers and make everybody feel fools. Us most of all. I wouldn't mind looking a fool, but I would mind horribly if they got off scot-free. It isn't only that I want to see them punished——"

"I do!" said his twin with decision.

"Well, so do I, of course. But the chief thing is that if they were caught it would close one avenue by which the foul stuff comes into Australia. A pretty big avenue, too, I should say."

"Yes, I see. Derek, where do they get it from?"

"Oh, there are lots of ways. Men may bring it in to Brisbane or Sydney on an Eastern ship. It's awfully risky to try to land it in a big port, because the water-police are very canny; but it's not so difficult to slip it into a motor-boat lying out in the harbour on a dark night, or even into a big fishing-boat. Then that boat runs down the coast to a quiet place like Brandan's Point and tranships to people like Brodsky."

"And Brodsky takes it quietly off to Sydney as an ordinary passenger in a train," nodded Jill. "It does sound simple."

"Yes, but you've to remember that they never know where the police may be. If they don't change their plans pretty often they may be noticed. I told you how Brodsky said he looked at every man in a train wondering if he were a detective. They know every detective would give anything to catch them. That must be why he wears that hold-all of a coat. A man carrying a suitcase might be suspected—not an innocent-looking fat man strolling along empty-handed. And probably he won't wear it long—he'll try some other dodge."

"Perhaps he doesn't even go into Sydney by that train," suggested Jill. "He could easily get out at a suburban station and take a tram."

"Very likely: Warner says the big stations are very carefully watched always. Or he may be met by a car somewhere, which would be simpler still. Most likely he tries not to do the same thing twice. I suppose," he added thoughtfully, "that is why they have another camp up the coast. They must

work on a different route from that one.”

Jill was silent, turning the matter over in her mind. It was somewhat bewildering to be suddenly flung into this atmosphere of recklessness and crime. Yet there came with it a feeling of excitement that was by no means unpleasant. There was certainly a thrill in it, for campers sixteen years old!

“I had an idea,” Derek said presently, “of trying to get hold of their boat. I could swim there easily after dark and sneak her out of their bay——”

“Oh, Derek, it’s too much of a risk,” she interrupted breathlessly.

“I don’t think so. I’d do it like a shot, if it would solve the problem, but, you see, it wouldn’t. They would be marooned here, and they’d make signals and attract help from the Point; and the rescuers would find three protesting holiday-makers, but there would be no sign of the evidence. The coat would be burned and the tins dumped in a hole. We should have no proof.”

Jill sighed. It was maddening to feel so helpless—to think of Brodsky leaving cheerfully for Sydney next day, unhampered by anything they could do. And it was the last consignment from Peak Island; there would be no further chance. She looked compassionately at her twin’s gloomy face.

“I vote we have a quiet think,” she advised. “We’re only talking round it now, and getting more and more bothered.”

“We are,” he agreed ruefully. “My brain feels like a squirrel in a cage.”

“Well, we won’t speak for twenty minutes,” she said, smiling at him. “Perhaps our friendly old giant is waiting for a chance to give us an idea, and he can’t do it because we talk too much!”

“Shall I go and give him another schnapper?” suggested Derek, smiling in his turn.

“I don’t think he’ll expect it,” she answered; “I’m sure he isn’t a greedy giant. Now I’m going to be quiet.”

She slipped down to the sand beside the rock and lay flat on her back, looking up at the sky, as if she expected help to come out of its clear blue. Above her, Derek sat with his hands clasped round his knees, watching the hillside. They looked very young to be confronting so weighty a problem.

Peace crept over Jill. There were no actual thoughts in her mind; she was not conscious of trying to make any plans. Her eyes closed presently. She had a vague feeling of hope, almost of expectancy. The moments slipped away while she lay in this dreamy, placid state.

It was just twenty minutes later when Derek looked at his watch. Simultaneously his twin sat erect suddenly.

“Derek—I’ve got an idea!”

CHAPTER XV

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

“HAVE you?” Derek looked down at his twin with interest. “Well, it’s more than I have; my ideas refuse to be caught. Let’s hear yours, old chap.”

Jill hopped up on the rock beside him.

“My idea just floated into my head a second ago,” she said eagerly. “It was funny—all of a sudden I seemed to see that coat of Brodsky’s, hanging in their cave. It occurred to me how frightfully important it is. Derek, you and I have got to get hold of that coat!”

The boy stared at her with widening eyes.

“How on earth——?” he began.

“You wait a moment! The coat is the evidence, you see. If we had it to hand over to Patten he would have to lock it up. If he wouldn’t, we’d jolly well take it to Sydney! There would be the coat, and the drugs, and we could describe the three men—and their launch. Then the rest would be up to the detectives.”

“Yes, of course,” said he impatiently. “But do you imagine we have the slightest chance of getting that coat? You’re mad, old girl!”

Jill laughed excitedly.

“But it’s easy! Listen—you heard the Three making their plans for tomorrow. Brodsky is to catch the two-thirty train. They must have lunch in good time—most likely about one o’clock, perhaps a bit earlier. They won’t sit and watch the coat in that dark cave-end while they have lunch—it isn’t common sense, when they’ll feel it’s perfectly safe. They will lunch happily out in the sunshine at their front door——”

Derek uttered a delighted shout.

“While I nip in by their back door——”

“Yes—the back door they don’t know they own!” gurgled Jill.

“And trot out with it calmly! Jill, you’re a genius!”

“’Twasn’t me,” said Jill modestly. She looked faintly puzzled. “It all seemed to float into my mind from nowhere. Why, it’s the giant! I knew he’d give me an idea,” she laughed.

“If you’re sure it’s the giant, one of my next jobs is to bury sixteen schnapper at the foot of his tree!” stated Derek. “But I think I’d just as soon give your brain the credit, kid,” he added handsomely.

“Then my brain acted independently of me!” she said. “I didn’t seem to

have any hand in it. Oh, never mind where it came from—we've got to plan it all out. Derek,"—she looked at him pleadingly—"I think I ought to be the one to wriggle through and get the coat. I'm a bit smaller than you are, don't you think?"

"Have another guess!" jeered Derek. "Let you into that cave? What do you think I'm made of, Jill Sherwood, may I ask?"

"I would much rather——" she began.

Derek grinned widely.

"You only get brainy in streaks," he informed her. "It's rather a relief: I was beginning to feel horribly impressed by your wisdom, but now I'm not. Be sensible, old kid—you know I couldn't let you do it. And there's no need for you to worry. I know exactly where that coat is hanging; I shan't even need to switch on my torch."

Jill accepted the masculine authority with meekness, though she sighed.

"I suppose it was too much to hope for, but it would have been rather a lark," she said. "Girls get so few adventures! Well, how shall we plan it? We can't take the *Seahawk* round there, can we? They would hear her engine."

"No, we can't risk it. It's a pity, for we could get away much more quickly," he answered thoughtfully.

"Oh, but we shall have plenty of time," she said. "I think we should be ready at their back door before they are likely to go to lunch. Perhaps they may be up that way; then, if they went away saying they were off to lunch, it would be very comforting, because we should know that the coast was clear."

"All right. We'll pull round very quietly in the dinghy in good time. Then we wait for the moment to dodge in and grab the coat, get back to the dinghy as hard as we can, pull round here, tumble aboard the *Seahawk*, and break all previous records across to the Point with the loot. How's that?"

Her flushed face and dancing eyes answered him. Derek looked at her. A little wave of uneasiness came to him like a shadow. Was he letting her run too much risk?

"You know, Jill, there's really no need for you to come to their back door at all. It's only a one-man job. I could do it even more quickly by myself."

Jill's mouth went down at the corners.

"Derek, I've *got* to come. I simply couldn't bear not to be with you. Think what it would be to wait in the dinghy, not knowing what was happening! And I should be perfectly safe—you said you didn't think a man could get under the stone."

"Well, I didn't at the time. But a determined man like Harvey might manage it," he said uncertainly.

"If he did, we could easily get away from him in that cleft. We must study it thoroughly, so that we know every turn; then we'll be able to run hard on our

way back. Harvey couldn't get up any speed. And there's another thing about my being with you—you may be very glad of a flash of light to show you your way when you are creeping back. I could have the torch ready.”

He shook his head.

“I'd rather not risk the light, in case one of the Three happened to be coming along. Remember, we wouldn't hear them—they all wear rubber-soled shoes. But there is really something you could do, and it would be a great help.”

“Bless you!” said Jill gratefully. “What is it?”

“That coat is a bulky thing,” he said, “it is not going to be very easy to bring it under the stone. If you could lie flat, half-way through the back door with your hand thrust forward as far as possible, you could take it from me and pull it through. I'll have the neck of it ready to put into your hand.”

“Ripping idea!” approved his twin, beaming upon him. “I'll feel I'm doing a bit of the job then.”

“You'll have plenty of the job,” he told her. “We'll both pull when we get to the dinghy—I'll risk their hearing us then. No bad thing if they did; it might make them a bit cautious about starting out. Then as soon as we reach the *Seahawk* I'll hop aboard and get the engine running while you make the painter fast, stow the coat away, and cast off. My own notion is that we'll be half-way across to the Point before they have finished their lunch.”

“Why take the dinghy to the Point? She'll lessen our speed.”

Derek thought awhile.

“We might need her. I don't suppose it's likely, but I think it's worth taking her on the chance—apart from the fact that she's Peter's, and I don't quite like leaving her. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that they did get on our track sooner than we expect, and chase us; we should have no earthly chance against their launch unless we had a good start. But we might fool them.”

“How?” she asked eagerly.

“You could pull the dinghy alongside and drop into her. I would throw you my mackintosh—it's almost the same colour as Brodsky's coat—and cut you loose. Then you would pull like a maniac for the beach, and I'd keep on for the Point. It's a fairly good chance that they would think you had what they wanted and go after you, giving the *Seahawk* a chance to get clear, don't you think?”

Jill exploded in laughter.

“Talk of brains!” she cried admiringly. “And I would hide the mackintosh as much as I could by sitting on it, and dodge when they came near, and hold them in gentle talk, while you fled!”

“You might ask Brodsky if 'twas, perchance, a kangaroo he was after!”

chuckled Derek. "I wouldn't feel at all anxious about you, because even that crowd wouldn't dare to put you in any danger in full sight of Brandan's Point."

"I almost hope it will come off," she breathed. "It would be frightfully funny!"

"I certainly hope it won't. And there's very little chance, I should say. With any luck we should never encounter them—at least, until the coat is safely locked up. After that's done I'll fairly ache to meet them. But we shan't, of course, because they will never come near the Point again when they find the coat has gone. They will leave for parts unknown as hard as that launch can go. And that is some pace," said Derek, thinking regretfully of the boat in which he had once hoped to voyage.

They did not talk much as they prepared supper; although each was thrilling with excitement, there was much to think over and to plan mentally. It was to be their last night on the island, for Derek had decided that once the three men knew them as open opponents it would be distinctly risky to remain. Brodsky, he felt, would take any chance of reprisals—even though the grey launch departed, she might slip back under cover of night. That was not to be risked, for Jill's sake. And Jill agreed—for Derek's.

"We couldn't have stayed much longer, anyhow," she said, as they strolled on the beach in the twilight. "Mother's week is almost up: I do hope there will be a letter to-morrow to say she is coming back. But how horrid it will be to have meals inside four walls, and to put on a frock in the evenings! You will look all wrong when you wear a collar and tie again."

"I'll feel all wrong," he said. "Still, we've had a ripping time, and you're certainly finishing up with the adventure you were looking for. We never could have imagined what we were going to strike in this tame little island."

"It seems to me that it is a pretty wild island," retorted Jill. "What with a giant and three smugglers——!"

"Well, we haven't seen the giant," he laughed.

"No, but we feel him. You needn't say you don't—because you did give him a schnapper," she said. "I think he is as real as the smugglers, and very much nicer."

"I hope he will continue to back us up to-morrow," remarked Derek. "Jill, do you realize that we may not be nearly finished with this adventure yet—I mean, after to-morrow? If the police catch our three friends through the evidence of Brodsky's coat, you and I will be horribly in the limelight. There will be a trial, and the poor Sherwood twins in the witness-box!"

Jill came to a standstill, looking at him with her mouth open.

"Do you mean to say I'll have to go into a police-court?" she demanded, horror-stricken.

"How do you imagine you're going to get out of it?" he grinned.

“But—but we shall not be the people who catch them,” Jill protested.

“No, you old donkey!” said Derek with brotherly frankness; “but we shall be the cause of their being caught. It all hangs on the coat, you see. Without that coat’s cargo the police would have nothing to arrest them for. You realized that, surely, when you had your bright idea of capturing it?”

“Yes, of course I did,” she said slowly. “Only I never thought of being dragged into the business afterwards. My goodness!” She pondered a moment. “Now I wonder did my old giant do me a good turn at all!”

Derek broke into laughter at her dismayed look.

“No use bothering your head about it, old girl.” He patted her on the shoulder in a friendly way; they walked on slowly. “It will be worth it to have those blighters put out of business. I’m not looking forward to being mixed up with a trial any more than you are, but it may not be so bad after all.”

“Perfectly awful, I think,” mourned Jill, refusing to be comforted. “Fancy standing up in a witness-box with people looking at you, and a horrible lawyer asking questions and doing his best to put you in a hole! I’ve read ghastly things about lawyers!”

“Don’t you worry—a lawyer won’t have any chance to cross-examine you much. I’ll have more of that than you will. You can only tell your story, and the lawyer for the prosecution will help you over it with nice sympathetic questions—he’ll probably be a fatherly old bird, and you’ll feel quite at home with him.”

“Then it will be after he has done with me that the prisoners’ lawyer will be not so nice and sympathetic and fatherly?”

“Most likely. But he can’t catch you out in anything, Jill. You see, there will be nothing for him to get hold of. Anyhow, no lawyer would be rough on a schoolgirl. I think,” said Derek, grinning, “that you’d better turn up in a gym.-tunic with a white collar, looking about twelve—if you could manage to speak with a lisp it would be disarming!”

“Yes, especially when I forgot half-way through! And Miss Traill says I look like a hop-pole in my gym.-tunic, so I don’t think your ideas are very bright.”

“You’ll have to practise speaking your little piece,” chaffed her twin. “I’ll rig up a witness-box at home, if I stood you in a manger in the stable it would do quite well. Mother and I can be the lawyers: I’ll do the cross-examining—and when I’ve finished with you, no Sydney lawyer will ever be able to scare you!”

“You!” said Jill with profound scorn.

“I think you had better knock off using slang from now on,” said Derek, warming to his work. “It would have an awful effect in the Court if you alluded to Brodsky as a blighter! They’d say it showed personal animus, or

something of that sort. If you practise very hard all the rest of the hols you may manage to look a gentle, sweet-faced creature with a low voice with just a hint of tears in it——”

“Hint of your grandmother!” said the justly-annoyed Jill. “And what are *you* going to practise looking like?”

“I’ll probably look like a bear with a sore head, no matter what I practise,” he said. “I’ll simply hate having to admit that I listened-in when I’d no business to. A cross-examining barrister will have a thoroughly good chance there.”

Jill forgot her own anxieties in the endeavour to deal with those of her twin. She knew how keenly it stung him that he had been led to do something that transgressed his code of “the decent thing.”

“I don’t see that the first time you overheard them need come into the matter at all,” she said, after a pause. “The trial will only be concerned with the part that deals with the smuggling. Do you say that the prosecuting lawyer makes things easy for the witnesses?”

“For witnesses on his side. He isn’t out to smooth the path for those against him,” Derek said. “I believe he interviews his witnesses beforehand and gets all they have to tell. Then, when the actual trial comes, he asks them just the questions they need to help them to tell their yarn in the right way. So you’d feel you knew him already, and it would be quite easy.”

“Then if I were you I’d tell him just how you feel about the listening,” Jill said firmly. “He’ll understand, and he’ll bring it out at the trial so that everyone will see the truth—that you simply had to listen. You couldn’t help it when you saw what they were doing.”

“Yes, that’s a good plan,” said Derek, somewhat cheered. “I suppose anyone would have done it, after all. But I think you’re wrong in fancying that anything about the island will be kept back. We’re sure to be asked what we knew about the men—if we had met them, and all that.”

“Yes, and a good thing, too, for in that case the business about Joker will come out,” Jill put in eagerly. “I would like everyone to know just what a sweep Brodsky is!”

“When are you going to start practising?” grinned Derek. “‘Sweep’ isn’t polite.”

“Never; there aren’t any polite words to use about Brodsky. I shall just have to chance what people think of me at the trial. I say, Derek, won’t Father and Mother be awfully disgusted about it? They wouldn’t have wanted us not to get the coat, of course, but how they will hate all the fuss of the trial! I thought it was pretty dreadful at first, but now that we’ve talked it over it doesn’t seem so bad: indeed, I believe it will be rather a thrill!”

“Jolly interesting, once we’re out of the box,” he agreed. “I hope the

parents will let us stay to see the finish—we'll have earned that.”

“It would be soothing to see Brodsky removed ‘with gyves upon his wrists,’ ” assented Jill poetically. “I told Angela once that I had always wanted to see what handcuffs looked like, and she said I was a horrid little beast.”

“Even if you are, I’m afraid you won’t get your wish at the trial,” he remarked. “They don’t handcuff ’em in the dock so far as I know. I say, Jill, there’s another point that is going to horrify the parents.”

“Oh—what, Derek?”

“The papers!” he groaned. “*Think* of ’em! Reams of tosh about the heroic Sherwood twins—and all that the little heroes will have done will be to steal a coat out of a cave and take it for a run in the *Seahawk*! But the newspapers will make the most awful song about it, just because we aren’t grown-up. I’ll never hear the end of it at school: the fellows will chaff my head off.”

“Derek,” Jill said faintly, “will they . . . will the papers put our photographs in?”

“You bet they will! Us and the *Seahawk*, and the island, and the cave, and Father and Mother. Then they’ll probably make a job of it and take Susan and Mary and Joe! My hat!” said Derek with dismay, “I never realized what we might be letting ourselves in for when we decided to interfere with Brodsky and Co.”

They looked at each other blankly. Adventure was all very well, but criminal courts and undesired publicity seemed likely to be a highly-unpleasant sequel to adventure.

“I . . . I suppose we’ve really got to get that coat?” Jill hesitated.

Derek laughed at that.

“Oh, we’ve got to do the job,” he said firmly. “The rest of it’s a jolly nuisance, but we’ll have to stick it. Buck up, old girl—we’ll dodge the cameras as much as we can. There may be some fun in doing that!”

He thought for a minute.

“Unless they want to take Joker,” he exclaimed, his eye lighting. “I’ll do all I know to block them from getting my photograph. But I’d simply love to see my old Joker in a paper!”

CHAPTER XVI

A BRUSH WITH THE ENEMY

DEREK stood near a stunted banksia tree, holding his camera in both hands. He was quite motionless, and he was beginning to find it a little difficult to maintain his position, for he had stood there for what seemed to him quite a quarter of an hour, though it was probably not so long.

They had awakened very early, as people wake when they are going on a journey or know that urgent business is before them. Too restless to stay in bed, they had bathed, dressed and breakfasted an hour before their usual time, had packed up everything for going back to Rocky Bay, and had seen that the *Seahawk's* petrol-tank was equal to any demands that might be made upon her. There still remained hours to be filled before it was time to embark in the dinghy. Jill had suggested taking photographs, and Derek had jumped at the idea, glad of anything that needed concentration. The prospect of their raid on the cave weighed upon them. For himself he had no thought of nervousness or hesitation, but he knew he would be heartily glad when Jill was well away from the island.

Jill was perfectly cheerful. The whole thing seemed to her a very simple matter; a job which she and her twin could manage with no very great effort, and with a good deal of amusement. The vision of Mr. Brodsky and his friends on finding their precious property vanished moved her to frequent inward merriment; she only wished that she could be present in person to enjoy the effect. But, though herself light-hearted, she knew that Derek was jumpy, and she also knew why. The camera had been an inspiration to occupy his mind.

They had agreed not to be far apart, and Jill had settled herself in a sunlit gully that sloped towards the sea while Derek prowled among the trees. He had decided to restrict himself to wattle-birds, since not only were they more fearless, but their size and their dappled plumage would mean better pictures; and soon he had found two in the banksia, and had crept by inches towards them, watching for his chance.

The wattle-birds were intent upon their own affairs. They hopped busily from one branch to another, apparently intent upon some object which refused to be found. Their harsh scolding and chattering attracted others, which flew in to see what it was all about, talked excitedly and rudely, and then went off again with the air of having far more interesting matters to attend to. The original pair treated them with contempt, continuing their ceaseless journey among the boughs, but refusing to remain for a second in any place accessible

to the camera.

Derek held his ground patiently. His restlessness had left him, and within him was the quiet certainty, that unreasoning conviction known to every bird-photographer, that sooner or later they would come where he wanted them. Finally, as though they decided to yield to his will, they came down in a great hurry to an exposed branch not far from him, where he promptly snapped them, hurriedly winding on the spool. He gave a silent chuckle of triumph.

The birds, having given in, seemed anxious to do the thing properly. They took no notice of the still figure, being engaged in a loud discussion about their new perch: it ended in one hanging head-downwards while his mate admired him and applauded his gymnastic efforts. The camera clicked again, and Derek's smile widened.

"I believe I'll get the whole spool!" he thought.

The sound of a stick snapping underfoot a little distance away came to him, and he frowned; it was not like Jill to come near when she knew he was stalking birds. He narrowed his eyes, watching his quarry intently, trying to anticipate their next movement. Then he heard something else. It was a man's deep laugh; and birds ceased to exist for Derek. He wheeled, listened for a second, and dashed to the edge of the scrub.

Harvey and Marks were walking slowly across the island below him. They seemed to have no purpose in view; their manner was careless and their voices unconcerned. Derek hesitated, wondering if he should take any action. Then, searching with his eyes, he saw Jill, and knew that the line of their path would take them close to her.

He came out of the bushes immediately and strolled down the slope. The men did not see him at once—they were looking seaward, where Brandan's Point showed faintly across the water. When they turned to resume their walk Derek was not far from them.

They stopped dead. For a moment their faces betrayed a mingling of amazement and disgust—he heard rapid words pass between them, and even in his anxiety the boy could scarcely keep from laughing, so completely were they taken aback. They came up the slope towards him.

"Nice morning," said Derek.

The keen eyes scanned him closely as he stood swinging his camera, looking, he fervently hoped, the picture of an innocent schoolboy on holiday.

"H'm—very nice," Harvey said. There was a threatening note in his voice: he frowned as he looked the boy up and down. "Staying here, are you?—camping?"

"Not now," Derek answered, thinking with satisfaction of the blankets safely stowed out of sight in the *Seahawk's* locker. "Just getting snaps of birds. Jolly good place for them."

The men glanced at the camera, and back quickly to his face.

“You’ve been here before,” said Harvey accusingly.

Derek looked mildly surprised.

“Rather. I live over there.” He jerked a hand vaguely towards the mainland, and decided that it was his turn to be questioner. “Are you camping?”

There was a slight hesitation before the other replied.

“No; we’ve just looked in for a bit. We’re fishing.” It was clear that he was uncertain what to do.

Marks broke in.

“You’re the fellow who made himself objectionable to our friend the other day, I think,” he said curtly.

“Am I?” Derek’s voice was bland.

“He asked us to keep a look-out for you. There’s something owing to you, young man!”

“Why doesn’t your friend pay his own debts?” demanded Derek.

“He’ll pay them fast enough if he meets you. I should advise you to get off this island pretty quickly, if you don’t want your beauty spoilt.”

“There’s no reason why we shouldn’t deal with the matter for him,” Harvey said. “You played him a dirty trick, and you need a lesson—to throw a heavy stick at a man’s face isn’t——”

“Did he say *that*?—the *funny* man!” said a clear voice behind him.

They whirled round. Jill was standing there, smiling quietly, as though faintly amused. Marks and Harvey looked from one to another: as if to save them this trouble she moved to her twin’s side. From head to feet there seemed no difference between them, save for the feminine touch of a corner of blue-edged handkerchief that peeped from the pocket of Jill’s shirt. The two men gaped.

“Well, I’m hanged!” uttered Marks. “Which of you is which?”

“Not your business,” retorted Derek curtly. “Jill, you cut along to the boat. You haven’t got anything to do with this.”

Jill did not stir. Instead, she turned upon the men a look which might almost have been called melting.

“Oh, but *do* tell us about the funny man!” she begged artlessly. “Did he really say it was a stick that he met?”

“Your brother knows all about it,” growled Harvey. “Better do as he tells you and go to your boat. You can have what’s left of him presently—and then you’d better take it home, in case we come along again.”

“You leave my sister out of it!” shouted Derek. “Don’t you dare to speak to her!” He gripped her arm. “Jill—do cut along—I’d much rather you did. Please!”

Jill looked injured.

“It’s all very well, but I *did* want to hear what the funny man said,” she protested innocently. “Because he seems better than the Arabian Nights!” She looked back to Marks and Harvey, her brown eyes appealing. “Before I go, won’t you tell me if he told you anything about the dog he nearly killed at the Point? That’s a nice story, too!”

The men exchanged glances. Harvey’s voice, as he answered, had lost its assurance.

“What do you know about it?”

“Well—we were there. You see, he’s our dog—what is left of him.” The mild brown eyes held a gleam as she flung his own words back. Harvey’s eyes dropped before them.

“And if he told you I slung a stick at him, your cowardly brute of a friend lied, that’s all!” flashed Derek. “Not that it wouldn’t have been good enough for him!”

“But——” began Marks.

“What happened to his eye, then?” interrupted Harvey.

“Derek,” said Jill plaintively, “won’t you show these gentlemen your knuckles?”

He yielded to the grasp of her hand on his wrist, clenching his fist instinctively as he raised it. The men looked with incredulous eyes at the half-healed scars.

“I fancy if you’ll bring your friend here you’ll find that fits his eye,” he growled. The memory of his perfect moment swept over him, wiping out his anger against Brodsky’s friends. He grinned widely.

“Well——!” said Harvey blankly.

“Did you do it—straight?” uttered Marks. He beamed suddenly as the boy nodded. “You might tell us how you managed it, son.”

Derek stiffened at the word. Jill, conscious of the tide turning in their favour, answered for him quickly.

“You see, your friend told my brother that he was glad he had hurt his dog. And then he tried to hurt him, too. And it was so *lucky*—my brother was standing on a rise, and he put out his hand quickly, and—well—it met your friend’s eye. *Quite* hard. So he rolled down the hill!” she finished.

“What!” The word shot simultaneously from both men. Then they dissolved in laughter. The twins smiled gently.

“Well, when your hand goes out quickly it seems to have some push behind it,” chuckled Marks. “I’d certainly like to have seen that push.” He looked questioning at Harvey. There was an awkward pause.

“Oh, well, as it was your dog the quarrel’s between you and him,” Harvey said. “We’ll leave it at that—and I may as well tell you that neither of us knew anything about it. How’s the dog?” he added abruptly.

“Oh, he’ll live, but we thought he was dead at first,” was the boy’s short answer. “Your friend broke his leg.”

There was another silence, this time a more awkward one. Harvey broke it with an effort.

“Well—I’m sorry,” he said. “I wish I’d known in time to pick the dog up; I wouldn’t have left him if I’d known. And I’m rather glad you got a bit even. All the same, I wouldn’t hang about the island, if I were you. My—the other man, I mean—is pretty sore about it, and there would be some sort of unpleasantness if you met. Take my tip—go and photograph your birds on another island.”

“Oh, I’m not going to stay,” Derek answered gruffly. “Not because of him, though; we had planned to go soon, in any case.”

“Good thing,” said Marks with relief. “There’s not room on this island for you and him to be roaming about. Why, you might hurt his other eye!” He seemed to welcome the prospect; Harvey frowned.

“Well, you don’t want a rough-and-tumble with your sister here. Better make tracks soon, don’t you think?” He turned to Jill as he spoke; and in her mind leaped a swift fear that they might insist on seeing them go. She pouted, hoping she was doing it convincingly, since pouting was not one of her normal accomplishments, and succeeded in looking like a naughty child.

“Oh, but we’ve planned to eat our lunch on that nice little beach!” she protested, the wave of her hand including any section of the north shore. “We’re not afraid of your friend, truly. If you think my brother might hurt him, couldn’t you keep him occupied in the other direction? We won’t be long.”

“Oh, all right,” said Harvey. “We’ll find him and take him off to lunch.” His smile was rather forced. “We’ll leave you the north shore if you leave us the south—is that a bargain?”

“We won’t go near the south shore,” promised Jill earnestly. “Come along, Derek.” She slipped her hand through his arm. “I’m hungry.”

There were no further leave-takings. The twins, arm-in-arm, marched shorewards, while Marks and Harvey struck rapidly up the slopes towards the north. When Jill and Derek glanced back as they neared the shore there was no sign of their late antagonists; the scrub had swallowed them.

The twins went helter-skelter down a hummock, rolled into a hollow at its foot, and gave themselves up to mirth.

“You’re a priceless ass!” he told her joyfully. He patted her shoulder with a force that was altogether complimentary. “When you arrived, things were beginning to look nasty. How on earth do you manage to look like a baby that’s escaped from its pram?”

“I practised it all the way over,” she admitted. “You see, it was the only thing to do. They’re not like Brodsky—I knew they wouldn’t be savage with a

mild little girl about.”

“A mild little girl, if ever there was one!” hooted Derek. They collapsed again.

“Well, there’s one good thing about it,” he said presently, sitting up. “I was jumpy this morning, but I’m not a bit now: I feel as if the whole thing’s just a lark.”

“Of course it is, and as easy as A B C. I don’t see how there can be a possible hitch,” Jill said gaily. She held up a hand—“Listen! That’s their boat starting.”

“So it is,” Derek assented, after a pause, during which the faint “chuck-chuck” was unmistakable. “Good-oh! that means they’re starting back to their cave. I was half-thinking they might hang about to watch what we did, but they have evidently no suspicions of the mild little twins.”

Jill rose, shaking several pounds of sand from her person.

“Well, I told them we were going to eat our lunch on the beach, so that has got to come true,” she said.

“We weren’t going to bother about lunch at all,” said he. “It’s all packed.”

“Some has got to be unpacked, if it’s only a biscuit apiece,” was Jill’s firm reply. “If I had to tell a lie to outwit a smuggler I should do it like a moss-trooper—but this time I needn’t. Besides, I believe I could eat a few Ry-Vita biscuits!” she added pensively.

“So could I!” exclaimed he. “Let’s hurry.”

They trotted along the shore until they reached their bay, where the *Seahawk* lay with her bow pointing seawards. Jill rummaged in the provision-tins, collecting a varied assortment of eatables, while Derek hurried to the spring for water. They sat on the beach to eat, wasting no time over the meal.

“I thought we had had our last picnic here, but it seems I was wrong,” Derek remarked, as they finished.

“Why, we shall have lots more,” protested Jill. “We’re going to bring Mother here—and Father too, if he’ll come. I expect he will, if he’s not too disgusted over the whole thing; but there’s a risk of that, if we get the name of Sherwood dragged into the newspapers.”

“Oh, he’ll get over it; after all, he’ll be glad if we managed to spoil the game for Brodsky and Co.,” Derek answered. “I expect we shall have them both out here, lots of times. But it won’t be quite the same thing.”

She looked at him questioningly.

“It will be jolly, of course,” he said rather gruffly. “Only . . . not the same as this. On our own, and all that. We’ve had a ripping time, haven’t we? Best fun I’ve ever had. You—well, you’re rather a decent pal, you know, kid.” He looked at her, half smiling, and Jill went down to the dinghy treading on air.

CHAPTER XVII

BACK DOOR VISITORS

THE twins pushed off in the dinghy and paddled softly round to the cave on the western shore, keeping as close to the cliffs as they dared, so that they might be hidden from anyone who chanced to prowls above.

“Not that it’s likely,” Derek whispered. He was rowing, with Jill facing him in the stern. “By my reckoning they should be thinking about getting their lunch ready: we’re pretty early. They certainly are not likely to be outside that bay of theirs.”

“It’s a great comfort that they can’t leave their camp except by boat,” Jill answered in the same low voice. “We shouldn’t know where they were straying if they could stroll in and out as we do.”

Derek nodded, and paddled on for some time before he spoke again. Then he leaned forward.

“Jill—I’ve been thinking what we must do if, when I get into their cave through the back door, the coat is not there.”

“I don’t let myself think of that,” she said firmly.

“But we must. There’s quite a chance that they may take it to the front cave while they have lunch. Thinking it over, I don’t know why we should be so sure they would leave it. What if we find it’s gone?”

“Then everything will be—squashed!” she said, her face falling.

“Well, I’ll have one kick left,” the boy answered stubbornly. “I vote we go straight over to the Point and tell old Patten. He may not believe us, but after all, he’s a policeman, and he may think it’s worth sending a telegram to headquarters in Sydney so that they can look out for Brodsky.”

“Yes—but suppose Brodsky does not go right into Sydney?”

“I thought of that. Whatever Patten does, Jill, I’m going on that train!”

“Derek!” In her astonishment she raised her voice, and his hand checked her swiftly. “Sorry,” she whispered. “But what can you do?”

“I can watch him. I’ll get a seat in a carriage not too far from his, and I’ll keep my eyes skinned at every station, and get out where he does. If I’m careful I should be able to keep out of his sight. Then at least I’ll find out something about him to tell the Sydney police.”

“O-oh!” breathed Jill. “Do you think I could come too?”

He shook his head.

“It wouldn’t do, old chap. One of us may dodge round without his seeing us; together we shouldn’t have a hope.”

“Yes, I see that. Derek—you wouldn’t run into any risks, would you?”

“Of course I wouldn’t,” he said, with an air of assurance that utterly failed to impress his twin. “My job would only be scouting. I’d hate going without you, but it’s the only thing to do. You could get home all right in the *Seahawk*?”

“Oh, rather!” she said a little drearily. “Don’t you worry about me.”

“It’s a good thing I’ve enough cash,” he said. “Grannie did better for us than she knew, didn’t she?”

“It’s a good thing you’ve got your blazer,” she returned practically. “I’ll have to dig it out of your suitcase. It will look fairly respectable, though it’s probably a mass of crumples. But when I think of you going into Sydney in those trousers——!” She cast a disparaging eye on grey flannels that bore many marks of camping and sea-water.

“Oh, bother my trousers! They don’t matter. I say, though, Jill, I haven’t got a pair of socks!”

“We can get a pair at Barker’s,” she reassured him. “You’d look funny in the train in bare feet—I mean, you’d look even funnier!” Derek made a face at her, and they went on in silence, finding much to think about in the new plan.

The mouth of the sunny sea-cave came in sight. Derek paddled in softly, and they found a ledge of rock where the dinghy could be moored so that no time would be lost in boarding her quickly and getting out to sea.

“That’s all set,” said the boy, as he rose from knotting the painter carefully. “Now we’ve got to move like mice, Jill. You keep close to me.”

He led the way behind the boulder and into the narrow cleft. Each carried a small torch, and as they went they studied every yard of the rocky way, noting the curves and angles the path took, with an eye to their return journey. Jill felt bursting with excitement. It was all just as she had dreamed it would be: Derek had described it so often that she felt she knew the path already. When he turned, checking her, to tell her that it was time to crawl she hailed the announcement with joy.

“Mind your head,” he whispered. “It’s hard, if you hit the rock—I’ve tried it!”

“I’ll be careful,” she answered softly.

“Well, keep exactly behind me, and not too close, in case I kick you.” She knew that he was laughing in the darkness, and her heart leaped at the knowledge. There was nothing jumpy about Derek, now that he was on his job.

They crawled on. Their plan had been arranged: he was to tap three times with his foot when the roof sloped down again and made crawling impossible. Then, at the “back door” itself, she was to lie behind the loose rock that had given him cover on his last visit, stretching her arm out to receive the coat as he came back from his raid. He would know just where to find that

outstretched hand. Jill wondered to what impossible length she could thrust it, to take his burden sooner.

The signal came: she flattened herself, finding serpentine progress anything but pleasant. It did not last long: again he signalled, and she lifted her head cautiously in the utter blackness, until she felt it touch the roof. Then Derek's hand came back as they had planned. It felt for her, passed over her bare head and pulled her ear gently. She wriggled forward until they were side by side, their heads together. On her left she could feel the cold rock-wall of the passage.

Derek's lips were at her ear.

"The stone on the floor is just in front of you. Go on."

She crept on, knowing that he moved noiselessly beside her. Her hand touched the stone in a moment: she wriggled until she could rest her chin on it. Very carefully she felt all round it, adjusting her position so that when the time came her right arm would go beyond it. Then there was nothing to do but wait.

It was eerie waiting, lying there in the black stillness. They had planned to lie quietly for ten minutes by Derek's luminous watch, by which time it might be fairly assumed that the men were at their lunch: but long before the ten minutes were up Jill was firmly convinced that they had had time to eat a dozen lunches. Never had minutes crawled so slowly. It was maddening to think that had they not waited at all Derek could have had the coat long ago: already they might have been in the dinghy, pulling back to safety.

She sighed impatiently. It was desperately uncomfortable, too; Derek had his face pillowed on his arms, but the stone on the floor kept Jill from easing her position in the same way: she could only rest her chin upon it, and it was a hard resting-place for a soft chin. She found some relief by folding her handkerchief into a pad and interposing it between chin and rock. Then she set herself to counting steadily, resolving not to think until she had reached a thousand.

She was in the "eight hundreds" when the foot-signal came again to show that Derek was going forward. The moment had come: she felt his body move, felt his shoulder, then his hip. Then he stiffened suddenly, and a low, urgent "S-sh!" came from him.

Jill's heart seemed to turn over within her. She lay there, scarcely daring to breathe, her mouth dry with fear. For a moment she heard nothing, saw nothing: then, in the blackness into which she stared came a gleam of light, and the sound of a voice came, drawing nearer. Fear left her as suddenly as it had come, driven away by exasperation. They had left their raid too long—Brodsky was coming for his coat! She could have cried with anger and disappointment.

She peeped over the stone, seeing the lower part of a hurricane-lantern and

two pairs of moving legs that came swiftly towards her. The voice grew louder. It was Brodsky speaking: she saw his legs, neat in grey tweed—a contrast to the shabby flannels of the man who was with him.

“I think you and Marks might have managed to get your bedding out earlier,” said the rasping voice.

“Forgot all about it.” Harvey’s tone was careless. “I’m always glad to get out of this hole as quickly as I can in the morning.” He was stooping, evidently rolling up blankets.

“You forget too many things. If I had not remembered this you would have kept us back at the last moment while you went for it.”

“You’d be lost if you hadn’t something to grumble at, wouldn’t you, Brodsky? There’s any amount of time, even if I had forgotten. And I’m not asking you to do anything except hold the lantern: it’s not easy to do that in a narrow passage, with one’s arms full of things.”

“Well, make haste then: Marks will have done his cooking.”

Harvey straightened up, his arms encumbered with a heavy roll.

“I’m ready. We may as well take the coat now, too.” Brodsky hesitated. Two hearts not ten feet from them sank to zero.

“No, we will not,” Brodsky rasped. “It is safer not, until I am ready to wear it. If those young rascals are prowling about the island as you say, they might come prowling to our cave.”

“Well, they wouldn’t get in past us if they did, would they?” said Harvey in surprise.

“I do not know: I think they are crafty,” Brodsky said irritably. “We will take no risks.”

“Oh, you’re getting as nervous as a cat, Brodsky——” began the other.

“If I am, what is it to you? I shall not ask you to come back for the coat.” He swung the lantern impatiently.

“Oh, all right—carry on!” Harvey said with unconcern.

Brodsky swung round, leading the way out with the lantern. The four legs moved quickly, growing dim as the light receded. Then they were gone; and almost as the last glimmer died away Derek was wriggling forward.

Jill, her heart thudding like a hammer, moved out a little, stretching her arm forward. There was profound silence for a moment—a very long moment. Then came a rustle, and a faint whistle—a tiny thread of sound. She strained her arm towards it, and felt something thrust into her hand—the neck of Brodsky’s coat.

Jill gripped it frantically and began to worm her way backwards, dragging it after her. Derek passed her, wriggling at furious speed, until there was space to turn: then he was beside her again, taking her burden.

“Stand up as soon as you can and show a thread of light,” he breathed. “It’s

quite safe now.”

She did not wait for sufficient head-room to stand; when she was able to crouch she switched on her torch, covering the bulb with her fingers. Derek made swifter progress, turning towards the light: and presently the anxious and painful time of crawling was over and they gasped with relief as they stood upright.

“Top-hole!” said Derek joyfully. “Now we can run.”

He snatched out his own torch and they ran like rabbits, Derek clasping the bulky coat to his chest. Round the curves they fled, choking with laughter and triumph, and so came—with difficulty for Derek and his burden—into the blessed light of day again, where the dinghy rocked lazily on the sunlit water of the sea-cave.

No speech was to be risked. They bundled into the dinghy and pushed out: Jill took an oar, and they put all their weight into long swinging strokes that carried the light boat swiftly northward. Mr. Brodsky’s coat lay in a hump in the stern, the only evil thing in a boatload of delight. Derek, at the stroke oar, looked at it, wrinkling his nose with disgust: he was conscious of a keen regret that its value as evidence prevented him from pitching it into the sea.

On and on, past the grim sea-caves and the tall cliffs, skirting rocks narrowly, spending every ounce of strength in the knowledge that each second was of value. Jill was panting, her brow beaded with sweat, but her arms did not slacken. She wanted to shout and sing—since that was denied her there was relief in sharing the effort that sent the little boat shooting over the water. The sea was kind to them; the waves were only lazy swells that seemed to help them, never to hold them back. “The giant is still on the job,” Jill thought, laughing. “It would have been a pretty bad pull if the sea had been rough.”

She wondered, pulling steadily, what stage the three men had reached. Harvey had spoken carelessly of the time; they were not likely to hurry, for they had every reason not to arrive in Brandan’s Point until it was time for Brodsky’s train. Jill reflected comfortably that they all looked as if they possessed good, hearty appetites. Brodsky would certainly not wish to go into the dining-room at the refreshment-station: therefore it was reasonable to think that his lunch would be no makeshift affair, but something that would stand to him for hours. They had said that Marks was cooking. And if their launch were leaving the island for good—and their need for removing Harvey’s bedding pointed to that conclusion—all the paraphernalia of cooking and provisions would have to be stowed away. That would take time. Well—they had time to spare, she thought, gaily, and gave herself up to blithe pictures of Brodsky’s face when he found that his coat was gone.

“There’s the last headland!” cried Derek, his head over his shoulder. “Nearly there, Jill—my word, you’ve pulled like a good ’un.”

“Gorgeous pull!” she panted. “Keep it up, old chap!”

They rounded the point and found that they had a reserve of strength for a last dash to their bay. Its mouth showed at length; they slackened, turning in. Derek shipped his oar as they glided alongside the *Seahawk*.

“Sure you’re all right?” He looked with concern at her scarlet face. “Can you manage the coat?”

“Rather—carry on!” she cried. He sprang nimbly aboard and ran to the engine, breaking into a song as he went.

Jill twisted the painter of the dinghy round a cleat and threw Mr. Brodsky’s heavy coat into the launch. She followed it, raced to cast off the *Seahawk*’s moorings, and then ran back to make the dinghy more secure. It was done; she pounced on the boat-hook and stood ready to pole the launch off-shore when Derek should give the word. She called out to him gaily.

“Say when, Derek! I’m ready to shove her out.”

Derek was crouched over the engine, making swift adjustments. She waited impatiently, thinking that she had never before known him so slow in getting away.

Then she realized that his song had ceased. He was frowning heavily as he worked, his lips set in a tight line. When he glanced up he almost snapped at her.

“Hold her, can’t you, Jill?—don’t let her drift. I can’t get the beastly engine to start!”

CHAPTER XVIII

TRACKED

HARVEY and Marks went up the hill side by side. At the edge of the scrub they paused, turning to look downwards; which gave them a final view of the Sherwood twins gaily hurrying to the sea, arm-in-arm. Even their backs conveyed an impression of good spirits. The men smiled in spite of themselves.

“Nice pair of youngsters,” was Harvey’s comment. “The girl had pluck, coming up the way she did. She must have seen that the conversation was a trifle heated.”

“Ye-es,” said Marks. “I wonder if she’s as simple as she looked.”

“Think not?”

“Not by a long chalk, I should say. Did you notice her eyes once or twice? I reckon she could fight as well as the boy if she was put to it. And he must pack a pretty good punch, judging by Broddy’s eye.” He gave a deep chuckle. “By Jove, I’d have given a week’s pay to see it!”

“Broddy gets nastier ways every day,” Harvey said, as they entered the scrub. “Perfectly needless lie, to tell us the youngster flung a stick at him.”

“He wouldn’t admit how it really happened—I don’t know that one could expect it,” Marks said.

“No, but he could have spun some other yarn that would have done just as well.”

“Not for Broddy. He’s got a brain that calculates; he knew that if he set us against the boy we’d make it warm for him if we ran across him. And I’ve never seen him in such a black rage as he was when he came in that day. Broddy gives me rather the creeps when he’s like that. He doesn’t say much, but it sort of oozes out all round him. Like the time we lost the stuff in the gale.”

“He certainly was tough to live with that time,” Harvey agreed. “I’d like to have seen *him* trying to tranship it in the sea that was running that night. He knew better than to come out. But then Broddy’ll never be friends with salt water: it’s too clean, I suppose!”

Marks grinned. “Where are we off to next; did he tell you?”

“Not he. I only know it’s farther north. He’s jumpy about this beat lately.”

“He’s not looking forward to going through the town at the Point this afternoon,” said Marks. “Your account of public opinion there over the boy’s dog didn’t soothe him a bit. I reckon he wishes the Point owned a taxi that he

could take from the pier up to the station.”

“If it did, the driver would most likely refuse him as a fare, I believe,” Harvey answered. “Broddy’s name is mud over there. I shouldn’t wonder if he didn’t enjoy his walk up the main street—he certainly won’t if that storekeeper catches sight of him.”

“And good enough for him!” uttered Marks contemptuously. They tramped for awhile in silence.

“My word, I am sick of all this!” Harvey suddenly broke out. “It’s a dog’s life—dodging about in holes and corners and thinking you hear the click of handcuffs every time you catch sight of a policeman. I’ve nearly forgotten what it feels like to talk to anyone decent.”

“Oh, what’s the good of worrying? The job pays us well.”

“Pay isn’t everything.”

“When a man’s got a wife and kids it’s a good deal of everything,” stated Marks.

“Well, I’ve a mother, if I haven’t a wife. And she’d turn me out of her sight for good if she knew where her money comes from,” said Harvey grimly. “Thinks I’ve got a job on a yacht, bless her! But what’s a man to do? I was walking Sydney for six months looking for work before I ran into Brodsky—and my only pair of boots had gone.” He laughed mirthlessly. “Funny what a little thing will turn the scale! I believe I’d have knocked him down when I found out what he wanted me for—only I could feel the pavement through the holes in my boots.”

“I know.” Marks nodded comprehendingly. “Seems to take all one’s courage away, somehow. You can keep a lot of pluck till your boots wear out, I’ve always found.”

“Oh, well, it’s no good fighting it,” Harvey said. “I’m in it now, and I’ve got to go on with it. I believe it was meeting those youngsters that made things seem worse than usual. Nice kids . . . clean . . .”

“You’ll feel better when Broddy’s gone and we’re heading up north in the old boat. A change always does us good. And he says we’re to have a week off after the next consignment. I won’t be sorry to see home again.”

“No, it bucks one up—in some ways,” Harvey answered. “Well, I suppose we had better get back, or Broddy will be getting fussy.”

“Let him—there’s plenty of time,” rejoined Marks placidly. He lit a cigarette, and they strolled on until they reached the bay where they had left the grey launch moored to a ledge of rock.

It was only a few minutes’ run to their own camp, where they found their comrade unnaturally neat in shore-going clothes. His temper, however, was the reverse of sunny; the business of shaving, with a mirror propped upon a rock, had revealed to him with merciless clearness that his eye was likely to excite

remark wherever he went, its bloodshot glare surrounded by an area of puffiness enlivened by multi-coloured streaks. It was, moreover, exceedingly painful, and afflicted by a constant desire to close. These considerations were distressing to one whose greatest desire was to pass unnoticed among his fellow-men; so that Mr. Brodsky looked forward unhappily to his journey. His feelings when he thought of Derek—and he seemed perpetually to feel the impact of a hard young fist—were of a nature that would have caused Derek the keenest enjoyment.

It was anything but soothing to him to learn that the twins had been seen on the island once more. He snapped out angry questions, refusing to be reassured by the men's statement that the invaders were about to leave.

"I wish I had been with you. You did nothing to punish the boy for his attack on me? Why?"

"Oh, well—he said it didn't happen the way you said," Marks answered, smothering a grin; at which Mr. Brodsky turned purple, and for a moment was without words.

"And the girl was there," put in Harvey. "No sense in starting unpleasantness. After all, it's your quarrel, not ours. We saw to it they were going to leave the island, and that's all we care about. They won't come nosing round here." He walked off to busy himself with the launch, leaving Mr. Brodsky to vent his ill-temper on Marks, who was usually more placid under it. Nevertheless, Marks raised a protesting voice before long.

"Oh, cut it out, Brodsky! How's a man to cook, with your voice going on like a buzz-saw? You go and read your Shakespeare, or I won't guarantee you any dinner at all."

Mr. Brodsky subsided, muttering. It was some relief to him to turn to Harvey presently, asking snappishly if he had brought out his bedding; and still more to be ungracious when Harvey, admitting cheerfully that he had not, asked him to carry the lantern while he retrieved it from the inner cave. They returned to the bay, where he waited impatiently until the meal was cooked.

Marks did not hurry himself. He knew that they would have time on their hands, and it amused him to know that their chief was steadily working himself into a worse temper. He potted over his cooking-pots in a way that was peculiarly exasperating, while Harvey, stowing away baggage in the boat, chuckled over his deliberate methods.

"Oh, what's your hurry, Brodsky?" he heard Marks' plaintive voice. "The train won't go any sooner for you. You'll end up by having a nice long wait on the platform at Brandan's Point, with all the population anxious to chat to you. They're really keen to meet you, over there." His words trailed on, despite the fact that Mr. Brodsky had retired from the contest and was doing an angry quarter-deck march up and down the little strip of beach.

Dinner was a cheerless meal, except for Marks, who seemed to be suddenly possessed of a fund of good spirits, coupled with an enormous appetite. Mr. Brodsky ate little, and showed signs of impatience at the time occupied by his companions. Finally he went off to a rock with his book, endeavouring to soothe his gloom by reading *Hamlet*. Peace fell upon the camp until Marks and Harvey had completed all their preparations for leaving.

“We can go whenever you like, Brodsky,” Harvey called out from the launch.

“Right.” He shut his book with a snap. “Have you the lantern? I will go for my coat.”

“The lantern’s packed—here’s a torch.” Harvey gave it to him, and watched him as he disappeared within the cave.

“He’s about as sick of us as we are of him,” Harvey said lazily, sitting down on the gunwale. “Only he can’t replace us; I know that, for all his talk about the numbers of bright young men who can run launches. They won’t all take the risks we do.”

“They’re too wise,” grinned Marks. “You and I, Harvey——” He broke off, listening. “Now, what’s the matter with our exhibit, I wonder? He’s bellowing like a bull!”

Shouts were heard, rapidly coming nearer; in a moment Mr. Brodsky, purple-faced, appeared in the opening of the cave, gesticulating with the torch.

“The coat has gone!”

The men were on their feet with a bound.

“It can’t be! You’re mad, Brodsky!”

“I tell you, it has gone!” His eyes blazed at them suddenly. “Is this some little trick of either of you? You have been very amusing to-day at my expense.”

“Oh, don’t be a fool, Brodsky,” cried Harvey. “You can’t have looked thoroughly. It may have slipped to the floor.”

“Go and look for yourself, then. Take the torch—ah, no, it is useless, for in my surprise I let it fall, and it is broken! The lantern, quick!”

Harvey turned with an impatient exclamation, sprang into the boat, and rummaged in a suitcase.

“I’ve another somewhere—here it is! Get out of my way, Brodsky!” He brushed him aside and raced along the cave, Marks and Brodsky following.

They found him feverishly examining the rock-chamber where the coat had hung, flashing his light into every corner. His face was sharp with anxiety.

“There’s nowhere that it *can* have gone to! Brodsky—is this some game of yours?”

“Mine!” The fear in the coarse face was sufficient answer, and Harvey’s threatening attitude relaxed.

“No, I suppose it can’t be. We couldn’t have kicked it into the dead-end here when we were fixing the blankets?—but I saw it after I had picked them up. Still——” He went down on his hands and knees, sending the beam of light under the sloping rock.

“It’s not there.” Suddenly he peered farther into the darkness. The ray had fallen on the loose rock far back. Something white showed faintly, lying on it—and in a second he was crawling towards it, while Marks and Brodsky shouted hysterical questions at his disappearing form.

He was out in a moment, and with a lithe movement was on his feet. Marks found the torch thrust into his hands.

“Hold that—steady, or you’ll smash that one too.” He shook out the white thing he held. It was a small handkerchief, blue-edged. Marks uttered a cry.

“It’s that girl’s! I saw it in her pocket this morning!”

“So did I,” said Harvey between his teeth. “Well, there’s a track through there that we don’t know about, and I’m going to see where it leads. Wait here, you fellows.” He snatched the torch from the other’s shaking hand, flung himself on the floor and was out of sight.

To worm his way under the stone was no easy task for a full-grown man, but Harvey was desperate. He managed it, after sticking fast several times, and came out into the passage, his head ringing from being continually bumped against the rock. Then, it was easier going; and the twins themselves had not gone faster than did Harvey along the curving path. The daylight showed at last; he squeezed through the narrow mouth of the cleft and dashed out into the cave, uttering a savage exclamation of disappointment when he realized that no one was there.

But there were tracks. His keen eyes took them in quickly: marks of feet that crossed and recrossed each other to the water’s edge.

“There’s no way out,” he muttered. “They couldn’t have brought their launch in here—oh, by Jove, they’ve got a dinghy! And I’ve only wasted time in coming here, confound it! Well—here’s for that little trip all over again.” He ploughed through the sand to the cleft and retraced his steps at the top of his speed, abusing himself for not having taken the grey launch in pursuit from the first. His mind was in a whirl. Those bits of youngsters! What had put them on the trail of Brodsky’s coat?

Marks and Brodsky, waiting in the pitchy darkness of the rock-chamber, were in a state bordering on mania when at length they heard their companion returning. The light of the torch heralded him. He wriggled into view, and was on his feet, panting heavily.

“They’ve cleared out with it, sure enough, the young fiends! They’re gone—can’t follow them that way—it leads into a sea-cave.” He was running along the passage as he spoke, the others at his heels. “The boat is our only hope: we

may catch them yet.”

“And when I do——!” Brodsky gasped. The rest was left to his hearers’ imagination.

They panted out into the open, racing for the launch, leaping into her, fumbling at her moorings. Marks sprang to the engine, and at his touch it woke with a roar.

“Which way?”

“Oh, the west coast—it’s shorter.”

The launch crept through the narrow opening. The engine roared again as she swung westward, the water boiling away under her forefoot.

Harvey ran forward, crouching on the fore-deck, straining his eyes for anything ahead as they turned the bluff and headed north. In the stern sat Mr. Brodsky, his hands caressing an automatic pistol.

CHAPTER XIX

PURSUIT

THE leaden minutes crept by. To Jill minutes were as hours while she stood on the fore-deck steadying the *Seahawk* while her twin toiled at the stubborn engine.

After his first moment of blank dismay Derek pulled himself together, struggling to remember all that he had learned concerning the pranks that a motor might play. It had all seemed simple enough, three months before, when his father had been beside him, coaching him patiently. He thought he knew it all then. Now his brain whirled in the effort to recall details, and the engine seemed to have become suddenly a mysterious jumble of parts, the very names of which kept just beyond the reach of his thought. And all the time he was listening—listening; each moment imagining that he heard the beat of another engine, coming from the south.

Jill had not spoken save for a brief, “Don’t get worried—you’ll fix it.” She watched his efforts, finding her own brain refusing to suggest anything new. The obvious question trembled on her lips, but she hesitated to put it. As if he guessed her thought, Derek answered it, though he was muttering to himself rather than to her.

“Petrol-tank’s all right—I tested it when I filled her up this morning. Terminal wires—yes, they’re all serene. Nothing jammed that I can see.” His voice became indistinct as his fingers worked busily. Again and again, after some adjustment, he would try to start the motor, and each time Jill bent forward breathlessly, her heart leaping: only to feel the thrill die as there was no response.

He looked up at last, his face haggard with anxiety.

“Nothing doing; I’ll have to try cleaning the plugs. Though I’d have sworn they weren’t dirty. Jill, are you listening for the other boat?”

“Yes,” she said. “I’ll do all the listening, old chap. You just forget all about her—I’ll warn you in plenty of time when I hear her.”

“If you hear her,” he said, “tell me quickly, and I’ll take that coat and sink it in a rock-hole with a chunk of stone on top of it. Then we’ll row out in the dinghy and pretend we’re just paddling round. They have nothing to connect us with the coat if they do come and find us there. It’s the only thing we can do.”

“Right,” she said. “I’ll get the dinghy ready in that case while you’re hiding the coat. But it isn’t going to happen, Derek. We’ll get away. I expect

it's the plugs."

"I wish I thought so," he muttered.

He unscrewed them with feverish haste, hating himself because his fingers refused to be steady, cleaning each with his handkerchief. They did not seem to need much cleaning, as Jill saw with sinking hope. One after another was taken out, polished, replaced: all with a deliberation that was maddening.

"And we'd have been half-way to the Point by this time!" uttered Derek bitterly. The plug he was cleaning slipped from his fingers: he gasped, swooped, and caught it just before it reached the bottom of the boat. "I thought that was gone—Jove, I am an idiot!" He stiffened, his head on one side. "Listen, Jill!"

"It's nothing." Her voice was serene. "I'm listening hard, Derek—carry on!"

She stood straining her ears, yet it seemed to her that half of her whole being was working with Derek. "*You are going to fix it—it's all right—it's all right!*" The words came, over and over, in a whisper too low for the boy to hear: she hardly knew that they were coming steadily from her lips in a subconscious urge to help.

"That's the longest job I ever did in my life!" said Derek, fitting the last plug into position. "There's nothing wrong with *them*, anyhow." He stooped to the starter. "Say your prayers, old girl!" But Jill was doing that already.

Then he looked up at her with a shrug of despair. The engine had not moved. Again he tried, with no response.

"No good. I'm beaten, Jill. Now for the coat!"

Her lips still moved soundlessly as she stared at his set face. Derek went aft, picked up the coat and folded it carefully. His foot was already on the gunwale when he checked himself, put the coat on a thwart, and ran back to the engine.

"What is it?"

"Something I thought of," the boy said in a low voice. "I don't know—but it's worth trying."

She leaned over, her whole strength going out to him in a last effort to help. He was crouched over the petrol pipe: she could not make out what he was doing. Then she saw him cover his mouth with his grease-stained handkerchief and blow through it into the disconnected pipe. Three times he blew: then he was screwing up the pipe again, working with shaking fingers. He jerked himself round to the motor.

There was a sputter: a low "chuck-chuck-chuck," and the motor was purring in regular pulsations. Derek gave a howl of joy.

"Got it! Pole her out, Jill!"

The *Seahawk* came to life, edged away from the rocks and shot out of the

bay, heading north-east for Brandan's Point. Derek was crouching before the engine, crooning to her.

"Go it, you old beauty! Listen to her, Jill—she's talking like a contented cat! We'll give her a bit more." He did so, and the *Seahawk* leaped forward, her purr changing to a roar. "Oh, I thought we were done—licked altogether! And to think of the time I wasted doing the wrong things!" He ran his oily fingers through his hair, laughing excitedly. "I didn't think there was a single thing left to try. Jove, wouldn't Father think I was a fool!"

"What was it that you did?" Jill, her eyes dancing, hopped down beside him.

"What I might have remembered to do sooner—realized that water might have got into the petrol-jet. So I took a shot at blowing it clear—and it worked! It worked!" His voice was a cry of triumph. "I clean forgot there was a possibility of it until I picked up the coat: then I had a brain-wave. And in two more minutes friend Brodsky's coat would have been under three feet of water! Well, I'm glad the old brain worked in time."

"Did that handkerchief taste nice?" she laughed.

"No, it tasted foul, since you mention it; I didn't notice it at the time." He made a wry face. "It tastes foul still. But I'd have drunk engine-oil if that would have set her going. My hat, I'm thirsty! There's no water, I suppose, Jill?"

"No, but there are oranges." She ran aft, coming back with one in her hand. "I'll peel it for you."

"No need." He seized it with his free hand, bit into it, and glued his mouth to the hole. The orange shrank rapidly.

"Topping!" he said, releasing it with a happy sigh. "Have one, Jill—I'll bet you're thirsty too."

Jill realized that this was a mild statement of her condition, and went for another orange. They sucked in blissful silence, while the *Seahawk* flung the waves aside, leaving a long wake of foam astern.

"Jolly rough on you," said Derek, when there was no more orange-juice to be extracted. "I think it's far harder to have to stand still and do nothing. I had a job, even though I messed it up. But you had only to stand there and watch me fiddling. All the same, I felt as if you were helping, somehow."

"I wanted to pretty badly."

"I knew that jolly well. But you stopped me from listening, and that was a huge help: I was trying to do it and think at the same time, and my brain simply blithered!" He drew in a long breath of sea-air, his hair blowing on end in the wind of their going. "Isn't the old bird making up for lost time? She knows we're in a hurry, I believe."

Far off, a sound floated to Jill's ears. She looked round sharply. The grey

launch was rounding the north-west headland of Peak Island.

“They’re coming, Derek!”

“Where?” He looked over his shoulder, following her pointed finger.

“Can you give her a bit more?”

“She’s doing pretty well all she knows already.” He did his best, and the speed of the *Seahawk* increased a little.

“Keep your eyes on them all the time,” he said very quietly. “Watch how they gain on us. They’ll catch us, of course—our only chance is to get close enough to the Point to make it risky for them to attack us.” He altered his course a little. “I won’t try for the pier—I’ll run on and beach her near Willis’s cottage if I can keep my lead. If Willis is about he’ll help.”

They sped on, with no sound but the beat of the engine and the rushing water. Derek cast a hasty glance astern and looked back again towards Brandan’s Point. It seemed terribly far away.

“She’s gaining fast, Derek,” came Jill’s warning voice.

“I wish they’d strike a rock!” Derek said fervently. “Only there isn’t one.” He set his lips firmly. In his heart was bitter regret that he had ever brought Jill into this wild business.

“I’ll wait until we’re opposite that hill on the mainland,” he said. “Then you’ll have to drop off in the dinghy, Jill. The shore runs out there a bit—it won’t be quite such a long pull for you.”

“If they decide to continue chasing the *Seahawk* and find the coat they may let you go,” she said, speaking more cheerfully than she felt. “Then you’ll come and pick me up. But I hope to goodness they’ll chase me instead—and your old mackintosh. You will reach Willis’s easily if they do.”

“Yes—but I can’t stick the idea of their going after you,” he said miserably.

“Why, they won’t do anything to me, Derek,” she laughed. “I shan’t be putting up any resistance—except trying to dodge them when they come close. I could gain a few moments for you that way.”

“Well, don’t be foolhardy,” Derek begged, his hands tight on the steering-wheel. “They’ll leave you as soon as they find you haven’t got what they want—only don’t annoy that brute Brodsky. The others are decent, compared to him.”

There came a little sound, sharply clear. Straining her eyes towards the pursuing launch, Jill saw that there were now two figures on the fore-deck. The sound came again; just before it reached her she saw a tiny flash. She gave an excited cry.

“Why—they’re shooting at us, Derek!”

“The swine!” said Derek with conviction. “It’s only bluff, Jill—they can’t possibly hit us at this distance.” He glanced round again as a third shot

sounded. “Sheer bluff—but they think we’re just kids, so they’re trying to frighten us. All the same, it’s time you were off. Pull up the dinghy, old girl.”

“Derek—promise me you’ll stop and surrender if they shoot at you!” She gripped his arm, her face white with sudden anxiety.

“Rather! It wouldn’t make any difference if I didn’t—if they could get near enough for revolver-shooting they could overhaul the *Seahawk*, I promise you I’ll know when I’m beaten. Jill, we must hurry—we’ve left it late enough for you to get away. We can’t afford another minute if you’re to pull any distance before they catch you. Here—you steer while I haul her alongside: I’m stronger than you. Keep her heading just past the end of the pier.”

He left her at the wheel and raced aft. Revolver-shooting was no new thing to the twins; it had been an amusement to their father to train them in marksmanship on their Queensland station. Derek had an excellent idea as to the carrying distance of a bullet. Still, if the enemy were disposed to send bullets after them he preferred that he, not Jill, should be astern.

He gripped the taut painter of the dinghy and hauled in, hand over hand; not an easy pull, as she strained in the *Seahawk*’s wake; Derek was glad he had not left it to Jill. The grey launch was overhauling them fast. He could make out the two figures on the fore-deck more clearly now.

“Harvey and Brodsky, I should say,” he muttered. “I’ll bet it’s Brodsky who’s playing with the little automatic.” As if in answer, another shot sounded. The boy grinned as he worked the dinghy alongside the *Seahawk*, bringing her on until she lay amidships, scraping the paint of the launch in a way that would have caused the twins the liveliest anxiety at any moment less tense. He made the painter fast, looked about for his mackintosh, and flung it into the boat.

“You jump in, Jill,” he ordered as he took the wheel. “When you’re ready, sing out: I’ll leave her running for a moment while I cut you loose. You couldn’t cast off when we’re going at this pace, so don’t try: you might easily lose a finger if you got it caught in the painter.” He held her arm a second. “You’ll take care, old chap?”

“Yes. You too, Derek?”

“I promise. Hurry, Jill!”

They smiled at each other, and Jill turned, swaying with the swift motion of the *Seahawk*. Derek, feeling for his knife, suddenly jumped at a cry from her that was almost a scream.

“Derek! Look—quick!”

He glanced round. Jill was standing as though petrified, pointing astern. The boy looked—and gasped.

Smoke was streaming astern of the grey launch, thickening as it poured up from amidships. On the fore-deck two figures were moving in agitation; they reached the mast and stood upright, holding to it. The boat’s speed slackened

suddenly, as though the engine had been switched off. She yawed violently and ran off on another tack, zigzagging here and there helplessly.

A long tongue of flame shot up into the dark smoke. Simultaneously a form sprang into the sea from amidships. There was a second's hesitation: then the two on the fore-deck dived in, one from each side. Three heads broke the surface, swimming frantically away from the boat.

There came a fresh rush of flame, then an ear-shattering roar. The grey launch reared on end, poised for an instant, and plunged headlong to the bottom, leaving only the three dark dots that were heads, and the smoke drifting away across the dancing blue of the sea.



“That’s our man, Harrison!”

Seahawk]

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CHAPTER XX

DEREK TAKES PASSENGERS

“GREAT Cæsar! what a pity!” burst out Derek. “The best launch I ever saw!”

He had switched off the engine instinctively, and the *Seahawk* had slowed down. The twins stood staring at the place where the grey pirate had plunged.

“What are we going to do, Derek?” Jill asked quickly. She, too, was horrified so far as the grey launch was concerned. Otherwise she was conscious of profound relief that the aforesaid launch no longer supported the forms of Mr. Brodsky and his companions. Something had to be done about the bobbing heads; but she felt that it was undoubtedly better that they had ceased to hurtle forward at an incredible speed towards the *Seahawk*.

Derek thought rapidly. Then he switched on the motor and the launch gathered way, racing onward. Jill opened her mouth to speak in astonishment at this callous behaviour, but her twin was first.

“They’ll be all right for a few minutes. Brodsky is not much good in the water, but the other two will look after him. Have they got to him yet?”

Jill watched. Two heads were converging on the third.

“Nearly,” she said. “Now they’re all together.”

“Nestling happily,” said Derek with a grin. “We’ll let ’em nestle for a bit: the water’s fairly warm. I’ll run you on until you’ve only a short pull ashore; then you can take the coat to Willis and let him do what he thinks best. I’ll go back and pick up the bathing-party.”

“Couldn’t we run back now and cast the dinghy adrift so that they would be able to get it?” Jill suggested. Derek’s plan did not appeal to her at all. He shook his head.

“It wouldn’t do—she’s such a cockleshell. They’d probably swamp her in trying to get in, and then we should have to take them aboard after all—and with the coat waiting for them.”

Jill saw this, but she was no less uneasy. “But, Derek, they’ll simply take possession of the *Seahawk*—and of you!”

“What can they do?” He smiled at her. “They can’t murder me in full sight of the shore, even if they wanted to. They may run me somewhere up the coast and dump me——”

“And go off with our launch!”

“We’ll get her back. The whole coast will be looking out for them. They’ll be pretty helpless, with nothing but the wet clothes they’re wearing. Anyhow,

old girl, it's the only thing to do, and I fancy I had better turn back now."

The launch slowed down. They were not far from Brandan's Point: on the pier could be seen excited and gesticulating people, brought hurrying down by the noise of the explosion. Jill threw Mr. Brodsky's coat vengefully into the dinghy, feeling as if it were something on which she could vent her anxiety. She scrambled in after it, and Derek cast off the painter.

"You'll be all right," he called. "Go easy, old chap."

"Do be careful, Derek!" The space between the boats widened; he waved his hand with a cheery "So long!" springing back to the steering-wheel. The *Seahawk* swept round in a curve, and Jill picked up the oars with a heavy heart and pulled shorewards with all her might.

Derek had affected carelessness about the shipwrecked men, but he was a little uneasy as he raced back. Their "bathing-party" had been a trifle prolonged: visions of possible cramp or exhaustion troubled him, with the feeling that he would be responsible if any of the enemy had been unable to keep afloat. It was with a throb of relief that he saw the three heads above the surface.

He sent the *Seahawk* at her utmost speed, thinking hard as he steered. Although he had laughed at Jill's fears he realized that they were well founded. He would be dealing with three furious and desperate men, ready to seize upon any chance of escape. That they would not add to their crimes by hurting him he felt quite sure; however angry they were, they were not fools. But he had no intention of being kidnapped.

If he could prevent it——?

His brain worked rapidly as the bobbing heads came nearer. It was time to shut off the power and slow down. As he did so, a thought came to him that made him break into quiet laughter. A good thought: he was still chuckling over it as the engine ceased to beat.

The heads were together, Harvey and Marks supporting Mr. Brodsky. Derek brought the slowly-moving launch as close to them as he could; then ran forward, picking up a rope. He threw it strongly; it whizzed over the three men, to be caught by Harvey. They were alongside in a moment, and the boy helped them to scramble aboard.

To ship Mr. Brodsky was no easy matter. He was awkward, and he was also angry: it was clear that his bath, whatever it had done for his body, had failed to cool his temper. It was a spluttering, cursing bundle that was dragged over the side, to be dumped unceremoniously in the bottom of the boat.

Harvey and Marks paid no further attention to him. They were shivering violently, their teeth chattering, but otherwise they had stood the immersion well. To them bodily inconvenience was nothing at the moment: they had weightier matters to think of. Harvey shot a peremptory question at Derek.

“Where’s that coat?”

“Ashore, by this tune,” the boy answered coolly. He had retreated to the fore-deck, feeling that increased elevation was somehow an advantage. There he stood, holding the mast lightly, and looked down upon the three dragged castaways. Almost he could have felt pity for them, shivering and desperate as they were.

Harvey and Marks uttered simultaneous curses. There was no doubt in the mind of either that Derek had spoken the truth. But Brodsky lifted a dripping head and gasped an order.

“He’s lying, ten to one. Search the boat.”

“You can search anywhere you like,” came Derek’s contemptuous voice. “The coat’s ashore. Better look in the locker—there are blankets there, anyhow. Put ’em round you.”

No notice was taken of this handsome offer. The three men conferred in low, hurried voices, Harvey and Marks bending over Brodsky’s huddled form. Derek caught a fragment of a phrase—“the other camp.” It was clear that they had come to some conclusion: Marks shot a command over his shoulder at the boy.

“Start your engine, and be quick about it!”

“Where do you want me to go?” asked Derek, without moving.

“Start your engine and don’t ask questions, unless you want to be thrown overboard!” came from Brodsky with surprising energy.

“Oh, all right,” drawled Derek. He came down from the fore-deck in a leisurely fashion, and crouched before the motor, busying himself with the starting-gear. Behind him the three voices talked urgently; Brodsky’s was gaining strength, and his power to plan was coming back to him. “We can do it from there,” Derek heard him say: and then, “Help me up: I cannot breathe down here.” He was conscious that Brodsky was on his feet, slapping himself with his arms, breathing heavily. Then there came an angry shout.

“Will you start that engine, you boy!”

“Well, aren’t I trying?” demanded Derek ungrammatically. His voice was sulky, his back humped over his task. Harvey made a leap towards him.

“Won’t she start?” he cried.

“Well, she’s jolly obstinate,” Derek answered. He turned a sullen face towards his questioner. “She stuck me up like this once before to-day—gave me an awful time. But I’ll get her going sooner or later, I expect.” He resumed his attentions to the starter.

Harvey watched him for a minute. Then Derek found himself seized and flung roughly aside.

“You’re a bright boy—I don’t think!” said Harvey angrily. “I might have known you were fooling me. Get out of this—I’ll take over the engine.”

Derek withdrew to the fore-deck, raising his eyebrows in pained protest as a volley of venomous remarks came from Brodsky. Marks moved impatiently nearer Harvey, who was manipulating the starting-gear without producing any effect.

“Wasn’t the little brute trying to start?” he asked.

“Not he. And I don’t see . . .” He muttered angrily to himself, crouching lower. Derek strolled as far as the fore-deck would allow, turning when he reached the bow. He stood with his hands in his pockets, his attitude conveying complete boredom with everything pertaining to boats.

“Oh, get her going, Harvey!” shouted Brodsky savagely. “What’s keeping you?” He came a step forward. “Do you want to have all that confounded town out here!”

Harvey paid not the slightest attention to him. He was studying the motor with anxious eyes.

“Can you make anything of her, Marks?” he asked. “Seems simple enough, but I can’t get a move out of her.” His hands were shaking with cold; he stood up irritably, beating them against the sides of his legs. Marks took his place, with no better result, while Brodsky fumed and stamped behind them, sending anxious glances towards the shore. The *Seahawk* rolled gently on the quiet waves.

Minutes went by. The men had their heads together over the engine; their voices were sharp with anxiety. Suddenly a roar came from Harvey. He pointed a shaking finger at the magneto.

“The young wretch has taken out the make-and-break!” he shouted.

One spring took him up on the fore-deck. Derek’s right hand came out of his pocket with a swift movement, flipping something that looked like a hair-pin into the sea. The light caught its platinum points as it fell. The boy sighed.

“Pity to have to scrap it. But it’s safer there.”

Harvey checked his rush, his hands dropping to his sides. Derek, bracing himself to endure what he expected to receive, saw the anger die out of his dark face in a curious way.

“You win, youngster,” he said. His shoulders sagged as he turned back. He dropped down amidships, slumping on a seat with the air of one who has no further reason for either effort or hope.

“That’s finished it,” Marks said, not moving.

“Do you mean——?” shouted Brodsky.

“I mean that the make-and-break that ought to be in the magneto is in the sea,” explained Marks, his voice flat. “And now we sit here until someone calls for us.”

Brodsky choked in a way that was almost alarming.

“And you—you sit there! Let me get at him—I will kill him!”

He made a savage rush forward. Harvey's leg came up suddenly, and Brodsky tripped over it, his chest catching the edge of the fore-deck with a thud that shook the *Seahawk*. He rolled over. Marks and Harvey hauled him roughly to his feet and pushed him towards the stern.

"No, you don't!" Harvey said curtly. "We're going to get all that's coming to us without that. You keep your distance, Brodsky; the boy's beaten us fairly, and I won't have him touched."

"Same here," said Marks, with chattering teeth.

"You——!" began Brodsky in a hoarse scream. Harvey cut him short.

"There's just one thing to be thankful for about being beaten—that I'll never be under your orders again. And if you don't keep your mouth shut I'll hold your head under the sea until you've lost all wish to speak. Sit down!" His hand shot out, pointing authoritatively, and Brodsky sat.

In the dead silence that followed the sound of a boat crept across the water. Round the headland of Brandan's Point came a long grey launch, darker in colour than the one that slept somewhere under the waves near them, and much larger. Derek whirled round, repressing a shout.

The newcomer was clearly on urgent business. She came with a rush, with a scatter of foam, heading straight for the drifting *Seahawk*. Marks glanced at Harvey, raising his eyebrows in a silent question, and Harvey nodded grimly. They did not look again.

She drew near, slowing down. Derek, watching her, his heart pounding, saw that there were half a dozen men in her; men in blue, with peaked caps. Excitement seized him anew when he caught a glimpse of more than one revolver. Competent men, they looked; purposeful. There was a ring of sharp command in the voice that hailed him.

"What launch is that?"

"*Seahawk*; Rocky Bay," the boy answered clearly.

The officer's eyes rested on him for a glance only. They travelled past him.

"That's our man, Harrison!" His outstretched hand pointed to where Mr. Brodsky huddled, leaden-faced, in the stern.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAW TAKES CHARGE

DEREK remarked to Jill, later on, that an arrest was a far less exciting affair than he had imagined it. Newspapers represented smugglers as invariably putting up a desperate resistance, fighting until overpowered by weight of numbers; but the smugglers on the *Seahawk* made no fight at all, merely shivering in their wet clothes, and answering the questions that were put to them in as few words as possible. Brodsky remained huddled into his corner in the stern, his head sunk on his chest: Harvey and Marks were stoically indifferent. And, although Derek had always been ambitious of seeing men handcuffed—and, indeed, had no objection to beholding Brodsky so adorned—he found that when Harvey and Marks were ordered to hold out their wrists, he didn't like it at all. He turned away, staring seawards.

His own share in the proceedings was brief. The officer commanding the grey launch surprised him by saying, "You're young Sherwood, I suppose?" and showed considerable curiosity to know why the *Seahawk* was drifting. Derek explained, with a grin, the sad fate of the vital part of the magneto, and was rewarded by a grim chuckle and a slap on the back.

"You'll do!" was the curt comment. "Well, you've saved us a long run: I expected to chase your boat for miles. We shall have to tow you in. Care to come on our launch? I'm putting men aboard yours to look after the prisoners."

Derek accepted joyfully. He slipped aboard the grey launch and gave himself up to happy inspection of her engine, slightly hampered by the fact that the man in charge of it was not nearly so anxious to explain its parts as to hear about the smugglers. The tow-rope was adjusted; they moved off slowly, the *Seahawk* wallowing ungracefully in the rear, as if resenting being turned into a prison-hulk. Derek found himself beckoned aft by the officer.

"I expect you're wondering how we turned up. We've had our eyes skinned for these gentry for some time: they've given us the slip twice. They'd have fooled us this time, too, but for you youngsters. We had information about their camp up the coast, and we came up that way two days ago, but drew a blank. Hadn't a notion that they had a camp on this island as well. So we dropped down to Gowra Bay, the other side of the Point, to see if we could pick up anything new. Willis came over to see us there, and——"

"Willis!" uttered Derek in astonishment.

"Oh, yes. Willis is an old sailor, and we've had many a bit of information

about suspicious characters from him. Most useful man. He told us a little about these three men—he was very hot about a dog of yours having been hurt by one of them—and we told him we'd stay a day or so and have a look round. Something he said made me want to have a look at the dog-kicker: I knew the man we wanted badly had an unusually quick, light walk. It puzzled me that he was described as fat. But a man can disguise his figure more easily than his way of walking—I had a hunch that I'd like to see him. That's how Willis knew where to find us when your sister turned up at his place."

"But you were at Gowra Bay!"

His companion smiled.

"Willis is a man of action. He grabbed your sister—and the exceedingly valuable evidence she was carrying—took a short cut to the town, commandeered the first car he met, and made 'em come over the hill to us at the rate of knots. Caught us just as we were going out patrolling—they'd have missed us if they'd been three minutes later. So we got the story from your sister." His firm lips twitched at the corners. "At least, we got all we needed to go upon; we weren't allowed to wait for more. Your sister has a way of getting things done in a hurry!"

"Did Jill . . . ?" Derek hesitated, looking up questioningly at the amused face.

"As far as I remember, she took me by the ear and shoved me into my boat! Told me she wasn't going to talk while you were being done to death in various ways, or words to that effect. So we naturally hurried. I was somewhat relieved to find you apparently alive!"

Derek burst out laughing.

"I can imagine Jill," he said. "It was pretty rough on her—having to go off by herself. Was she all right, sir?"

"She seemed . . . er—bursting with energy. Very glad to hand over the coat to me, and very much more so to see me start off to find you. Great youngster. I expect you'll find her waiting on the pier."

Jill was there, together with Mr. Willis and most of the inhabitants of Brandan's Point. The twins greeted each other with gruff off-handedness, conscious of many eyes watching them; and were about to make a modest exit when they were hailed by the officer. He saluted Jill, his manner expressing awe.

"Very sorry to bother you," he said. "But I've got to get a lot of details from you, and a signed statement." At which the twins exchanged glances of horror and murmured in one voice, "It's begun!"

"I'll make it as easy as I can," he promised. "Perhaps there is some place where we could go for a cup of tea. I'm sure you want one badly, Miss Sherwood."

Jill, remembering biscuits on the island beach at a time that seemed to belong to the Dark Ages, admitted that she did. Derek's expression needed no putting into words.

"Well, I'll just see the prisoners off. The launch can take them round to Gowra Bay and come back for me. How are you going to get home to Rocky Bay, by the way? Your boat's out of commission. I don't suppose you'll get another make-and-break in the town?"

"Not a hope," said Derek gloomily. "It means sending to Sydney. Oh, we'll manage somehow."

"Then you had better let me manage for you. I'll run you home when my launch comes back."

"Oh, that's too much trouble!" said the twins in chorus. Equally in chorus was their unspoken but fervent hope that their politeness would be disregarded. This was set at rest by his reply.

"Too much trouble? You don't seem to understand what a good turn you've done us. That's settled, then—I'll be with you in a moment."

The twins turned away, feeling no wish to join Brandan's Point in watching the transhipping of the handcuffed prisoners.

"They didn't touch you, Derek?"

"Not they. Brodsky wanted to, but the others blocked him." He chuckled at the memory. "My hat, he was funny! But I'm a bit sorry for Harvey and Marks. Jill, have you seen Joker?"

"No, but Mr. Willis says he's splendid. What did that man mean about the make-and-break? And why were they towing the *Seahawk*?"

Derek explained, and they retired behind the wharf shed to laugh. Here they were found by Mr. Willis.

"Nice games you've been up to!" said he, shaking a finger at Derek. "Cap'n Bryan's looking for you—here they are, sir."

"Ready?" Captain Bryan asked.

"Well—not quite," said the twins together. They dashed down the steps to the *Seahawk*, dived into suitcases, and found two very crumpled blazers. These they put on, to the great edification of the populace of Brandan's Point, who, being deprived of the prisoners, were free to concentrate upon the twins.

Mr. Willis did not share in this wish. He shook hands firmly, said, "Come an' see the little dog when you can, an' tell me all your goin's-on," and stumped off to his cottage. But the people of the Point made up what he lacked in curiosity, so that their journey up the long hill resembled a procession in which they were the principal figures.

It was an embarrassing experience; they were thankful to escape into the shelter of the tea-shop, deserted at that hour—for the twins were astounded to find that it was still early for tea. They ate and drank largely, while Captain

Bryan, who seemed indifferent to food, let his tea grow cold as he drew from them the full story of their experiences on the island, making notes as he listened. Only when they had time to discuss the matter afterwards did the twins realize how completely the quiet man in blue had turned them inside out, his skilful questioning extorting every little detail. “If *that’s* how a cross-examiner works,” said Jill apprehensively, “I’ll be telling him the whole story of my life before I get out of the witness-box!”

“Well, I think I have all I want,” said Captain Bryan at length. “There’s no doubt you two took chances, but you managed to pull off a very good job. I shouldn’t have cared myself to bump into Brodsky at your age. Brodsky isn’t his name, of course; he uses several, and we’ve wanted him for quite a long while. He’s an unpleasant person to tackle, and you’re well out of it.”

The twins hastily disclaimed any idea of heroism, assuring him that it had been a tremendous lark.

“Queer how things turn out,” he said, turning to his neglected tea. “I should say you two were friendly souls; you’d never have had the slightest notion of annoying Brodsky if he hadn’t kicked your dog. It’s going to prove an expensive kick for him; he’ll be quite a long time paying it off. I won’t go so far as to say that I’m glad he hurt your little Joker, because you might throw a cup at me!—but I’ll say that a dog never suffered in a better cause.” He smiled at them. “I rather think I owe Joker a new collar. May I send him one?”

“I’d love that!” Derek’s eyes danced. “And it really *is* all owing to him, so he’s earned it. I say, Captain Bryan”—he leaned forward, his face serious—“Harvey and Marks will get off more lightly than Brodsky, won’t they? I do think they’re not really bad. Anyone could see they simply hated the whole thing. And they were awfully decent to me.”

“Yes, it will tell in their favour that they prevented Brodsky from attacking you—I’ve got that down,” said Captain Bryan, glancing at his notebook. “They will have to take their gruel, of course, but it won’t be as thick as their chief’s. You can help them a bit by bringing out any detail in their favour when you’re in the witness-box.”

The twins were silent at this casual reminder of what awaited them in the uneasy future. They exchanged doleful glances.

“Captain Bryan,” said Jill earnestly. “Father’s got a station up in Queensland, you know. Do you think it would matter if Derek and I went up there quietly, and just lay low until all the trial business was over? You see, we’ve told you everything, and you’re just as good as a judge!”

Captain Bryan’s mouth twitched.

“Do you realize that you’re trying to corrupt an officer in the execution of his duty? I think I’m entitled to put you under arrest and keep you in solitary confinement until you’re wanted in court!”

Jill sighed, and then laughed.

"I was afraid it was too much to hope for. And poor Father *will* be so sick about it all!"

The big man's eyes were very friendly as he looked at them.

"Will he? I wonder. Fathers are pretty understanding, you know; I fancy you'll find you can lean back on yours as hard as you like. Anyhow, if you were my youngsters——" He pushed his chair back. "Now I'm afraid we shall have to make a move. I shall have a good deal to see to after I have taken you home."

They went out into the street. The afternoon train had come in; people were straggling down from the station, just as on the day when Derek had first seen the three men of the grey launch. It seemed incredibly long ago.

"May we call for our letters, sir?" he asked. "It's two days since we had a chance of getting them, and there's sure to be one from Mother."

"Of course you can," replied Captain Bryan. They turned towards the post-office. "Anything else you want to do? No?—then we'll make for the launch as soon as you've got your mail." He glanced shrewdly at Derek. "Would you care to run her over? She's a bit bigger than your *Seahawk*, but I think you would handle her all right."

"Care to!" The boy's eyes danced. "It's awfully good of you——"

He broke off, seizing Jill's arm.

"Jill! Look!"

He pointed up the street. On the footpath, coming towards them, was a little woman. Her face bore a puzzled expression—not unnatural in one who had confidently expected to be met at the station, and had found nobody.

"Mother!" gasped Jill.

Captain Bryan suddenly found himself alone. Up the street, galloping like long-legged colts, fled the twins, scattering people before them. The little figure disappeared as their arms engulfed her.

"But I wrote——" uttered Mrs. Sherwood when speech became possible. "The car—isn't it here?"

"No, darling—we didn't get the letter."

"Oh, then we can all go home in the *Seahawk*. How lovely!"

"You can't," laughed Derek. "Engine's wrong."

"Don't you worry, darling," Jill said kindly. "We'll all go home in charge of the police!"

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Seahawk* by Mary Grant Bruce]