



Holiday
House

*Enid
Blyton*

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HOLIDAY HOUSE



Enid Blyton

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HOLIDAY HOUSE

Enid Blyton

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Holiday House

CHAPTER I A SPLENDID IDEA

‘There!’ said the doctor, slapping Pat on the back. ‘That’s the last time I shall be seeing you, old chap. You and your sister are all right now.’

‘Can we go back to school then?’ asked Mary.

‘Do you want to?’ asked the doctor.

‘Well—we like school very much, but we don’t feel *awfully* like it at present,’ said Pat.

‘I think they ought to go away for a holiday,’ said their mother. ‘Don’t you, Doctor?’

‘Well, yes, Mrs Terry, I do,’ said Dr Hibbert. ‘But aren’t you off to America with your husband? I wouldn’t want them to go on an exciting trip like that—they want to laze about by the sea somewhere.’

‘Oooh, yes,’ said Pat. ‘We can easily go by ourselves somewhere, Mother—we’re twins, and twins can always look after themselves!’

‘Oh, *can* they?’ said his mother. ‘This year, between you, you have had one broken arm, one sprained ankle, chickenpox, and now measles!’ She turned to the doctor.

‘I’ll arrange something,’ she said. ‘I have heard of a very nice Holiday House down in Devon by the sea. I’ll see if they can go there.’

‘Can we take Tippy, our poodle?’ asked Mary, anxiously. ‘We can’t leave her here all alone with Cookie, Mother. She’d be miserable.’

‘Yes, I think you’ll be able to take her,’ said Mother. ‘I know this Holiday House takes pets, too. Well, Doctor, thank you for all your care and trouble—and, much as I like you, I do hope we shan’t see you here again for a very long time, except on a friendly visit!’

Dr Hibbert laughed, said goodbye and went off in his car. The twins looked at one another in delight.

‘Not going back to school!’ said Mary, and gave her brother a delighted punch on the arm. ‘I love school—but we’ve had a jolly thin time lately, and I’d *love* a holiday all by ourselves, wouldn’t you?’

‘Rather! Mother, tell us about Holiday House,’ said Pat.

‘Well, all I know about it is that it is run by a Mrs Holly, and that it’s quite near the sea, almost on the beach, in fact, and that the food is very, very good,’ said Mother. ‘Mrs Knott’s children went there, and they loved it.’

‘I hope they’ll be able to get us in at short notice—and Tippy too,’ said Mary. ‘Do write at once, Mother.’

‘I think I’ll telephone,’ said her mother. ‘I’ve got the address somewhere. I’ll do it now.’

‘That’s the best of you, Mother—you always do things at once!’ said Pat, approvingly. ‘You never put anything off, do you?’

‘I wish I could say the same of you two,’ said Mother, looking in her desk for her address book. ‘Ah—here it is.’

She was soon at the telephone, and in a minute or two was talking to Mrs Holly. The twins stood nearby, listening. It seemed as if it would be quite all right for them to go to Holiday House!

‘Very well,’ they heard their mother say. ‘I will send them down tomorrow. They’ve had chickenpox and then measles, so I’m afraid they’ve been rather spoilt for about six or seven weeks—and they’re always a bit of a handful, anyhow. I hope they won’t be any trouble, though—they’re good at heart! Send them straight back if they make themselves a nuisance!’

‘Oh, *Mother*,’ groaned Patrick. ‘You don’t need to say all that, you really don’t!’

‘Sh,’ said his mother, and turned back to the telephone to finish her talk. She put back the receiver and smiled at the two children.

‘Well—that was quickly arranged, wasn’t it? Now you’ll have to help me pack. You may take three books each, and a pack of cards and two games. That’s all in the amusement line. And I *must* try on your swim-suits—you may have grown out of them since last year.’

‘Oooh—shall we be allowed to swim?’ said Mary, pleased. ‘I thought you’d say, “You mustn’t do this, you mustn’t do that. You’ve been ill, you *must* be careful.”’

‘Oh, you’re quite all right now,’ said Mother. ‘And, anyway, Mrs Holly is used to having children after they’ve been ill. I don’t expect she’ll stand any nonsense!’

‘Is she nice, do you think?’ asked Pat. ‘I don’t want to be ordered about, and told to do this and that. I hate that.’

‘It won’t hurt you not to be spoilt for a bit,’ said his mother, laughing. ‘Dear me—to think of all the hours I’ve read to you and Mary lately, and the

games I've played on your untidy beds, and the lost things I've hunted for in the sheets and blankets—honestly, I think I need a holiday myself!

'You've been a darling,' said Mary, suddenly realizing how patient and kind her mother had been. She gave her a quick hug. 'You have a good time in America, Mother—and don't you worry a single minute about us! I'll look after Pat and see that he behaves himself!'

Pat looked at her indignantly. 'Look after *me*! I like that! Boys look after girls, not the other way round. *I'll* see that Mary doesn't do anything silly, Mother.'

'Now, now, don't start squabbling,' said Mother, seeing Mary's face looking indignant now. 'Come and help me to pack.'

It was fun packing to go away, and, as usual, it was very, very difficult to choose which books to take, and what games. Mary tried on her swim-suit and announced that it was much too small. Patrick said the same, and pranced about the bedroom looking ridiculous in very, very tight swimming pants.

'We'll go down to the shops and get a few new things,' said Mother. 'You both want new sandals, I see.'

By bedtime, everything was packed and ready. The twins were almost too excited to sleep. Tippy, the poodle, had caught the excitement too, and had run about on her tippy-toes all day long, getting into everyone's way!

'It's a good thing Holiday House takes dogs, Tippy,' said Mary, giving the little dog a hug. 'I wouldn't have gone without you. Mother! are we going to take Tippy's basket?'

'No,' said Mother. 'I expect Mrs Holly will have an old cushion she will lend you. She is used to taking pets. Now do go to sleep.'

Next day was bright and sunny, and the twins were up early. 'We've got to go round and say goodbye to everything,' said Pat. Cookie overheard him, and laughed.

'Goodbye to the dolls, goodbye to the hens, goodbye to the horse in the field, goodbye to me, goodbye to the garden, goodbye to . . .'

'Don't be horrid, Cookie,' said Mary. 'We just *have* to say goodbye to everything before we go. We always do. Oooh—are those biscuits for us?'

'Yes. To eat in the train,' said Cookie, putting them into a bag. 'And mind you behave yourselves, now—no hiding in the larder at Holiday House and jumping out suddenly like you do to me! Good riddance to both of you, I say—and yet I'll miss you both, you rascals!'

'We'll send you a postcard,' promised Pat. 'There's Mother calling, Mary. Come on, it's breakfast-time.'

Mother put them in the train after breakfast and asked the guard to keep an eye on them. He was a grumpy old fellow with sharp eyes under shaggy eyebrows. He nodded his head.

‘Ay, I’ll keep an eye on them. And if they get up to any nonsense I’ll lock them into my van! Where are they to get out, did you say? Oh—Tolly Halt. Right, Madam, I’ll see to them!’

It was quite a long way in the train. Mother had packed them up a good lunch, and they ate it far too soon, so that they were hungry again long before they came to Tolly Halt.

‘Look—there’s the sea! *Surely* that’s the sea!’ said Mary, pointing to a bright blue streak in the far distance. ‘We must be nearly there!’

Soon the blue streak was a wide, sparkling expanse of water. The children felt suddenly excited. A holiday—all on their own—nothing to do all day long but bathe and paddle and row and fish! What fun!

The train suddenly lost speed and began to go much more slowly. Then it came to a halt, and stood puffing out steam. Mary put her head out of the window.

‘Pat! It’s Tolly Halt! This is where we get out. Quick!’

Pat opened the door and they got out. At the back of the train they saw the guard pulling out their two suitcases. He saw them and waved.

‘Here you are—Tolly Halt. There’s someone to meet you over there.’

The twins looked round, with Tippy, the poodle, dancing round their legs on her lead. They saw a small car not far off, standing in the narrow road that led to the halt. In it was a woman who waved to them, and a small girl. The woman called out gaily, ‘Are you Patrick and Mary? I’ve come to meet you. I’m Mrs Holly. Can you manage those suitcases?’

‘Oh yes,’ said Pat, and the twins took a case each. Tippy pulled at the lead, eager to stretch her legs after the long time in the train.

They walked to the car, while the train slid away from the halt and disappeared into the distance.

‘Hallo!’ said a sharp little voice, as they came to the car, and a small girl of about eight looked them up and down. ‘I’m Ruth. This is my mother. Get in the back.’

Mrs Holly smiled at the twins. ‘Welcome to Tolly Sands,’ she said. ‘I hope you’ll have a lovely time here!’

CHAPTER 2

HOLIDAY HOUSE

The twins shook hands with Mrs Holly. She was a real country woman, with bright red cheeks, and hair the colour of corn. Her eyes were very blue as she smiled at them.

‘She’s nice—but Mother would say “there’s no nonsense about her”!’ thought Mary as she got into the car. ‘We’ll have to be careful, or she’ll tick us off properly.’

Mrs Holly’s small girl, Ruth, watched the twins from her seat beside the driver. Her eyes were as sharp as her voice! She missed nothing at all.

‘The poodle mustn’t sit on the car seat, must he, Mummy?’ she said to her mother. ‘He must get down.’

‘She’s a she, not a he,’ said Pat. ‘And, anyway, she’s not on the seat. She’s on my knee. She’s as good as gold.’

‘She looks a dear,’ said Mrs Holly, driving off from the little halt. ‘What’s her name?’

‘Tippy,’ said Mary. ‘Short for Tippy-Toes. Poodles always look as if they walk about on tip-toe, don’t they?’

‘We’ve got a cat at home,’ said Ruth, in her sharp little voice. ‘A big tom-cat, black as soot, called Gruff. He doesn’t mind dogs a bit.’

‘He’s used to them,’ said Mrs Holly. ‘He’ll soon be playing with Tippy.’

‘Er—well, I hope you’re right,’ said Pat. ‘Tippy sometimes chases cats.’

‘He won’t chase Gruff,’ said Ruth at once. ‘No dog has *ever* chased Gruff. You can’t chase a cat that doesn’t run away. He just sits down hard and refuses to run.’

‘Are there any other children at Holiday House, Mrs Holly?’ asked Mary.

‘Yes,’ said Ruth, answering before her mother could get a word in. ‘There’s dear, darling Maureen and her sniffy nurse, and there’s Tessa, the ugliest baby you ever saw, and there’s John, who’s going tomorrow he’s a nuisance.’

‘That’s enough, Ruth,’ said her mother, sharply. ‘You’re not to talk like that. I’ve told you before.’

Ruth took no notice. ‘And there’s a very big boy called Graham. *I* call him Gloomy Graham.’

‘Why?’ asked Pat, rather amused with all this chatter from Ruth.

‘Well—because he’s gloomy, of course,’ said Ruth. ‘He’s a bookworm too—he sits with his nose buried in books all day long, he never plays a game,

and he never smiles.’

‘Oh, Ruth, how you do run on!’ said her mother. ‘Don’t take any notice of her tongue, children—it runs away with her. Graham isn’t really gloomy—he’s just working very hard for an exam. He’s fifteen. He had a tutor who stayed here with him, to help him, but he had a fall the other day and had to go to hospital—so now poor Graham is working on his own, all day long.’

‘So you won’t have anyone exciting to play with,’ said Ruth. ‘John’s exciting, but he’s going—he’s a bad boy, isn’t he, Mummy? I’ll tell you what he did, he . . .’

‘You are not to tell tales, Ruth,’ said her mother. ‘Now just be quiet. You talk too much.’

‘I don’t,’ said Ruth. ‘I’m just being polite to visitors now. I’m just telling Pat and Mary that it’s a pity they won’t have anyone to play with. Except me, of course.’

The twins felt that they really didn’t want to play with Ruth—she would want to boss them, though they were almost three years older than she was.

‘We don’t need *anyone* to play with,’ said Pat, firmly. ‘We’re twins, so we’ve always got each other. You needn’t worry about us, Ruth—we shall never be dull. We never are.’

‘Here we are!’ said Mrs Holly, turning into a long drive. ‘Holiday House. I hope you’ll have a lovely time here and come back again often—especially in the summer holidays when we are packed out with children—it’s fun then.’

The drive curved round to a very big house—almost a mansion. At one end was a tall square tower, built in the same grey stone as the rest of the house. Ivy grew up the walls and surrounded most of the windows of the old tower.

‘I like it,’ said Mary. ‘It looks old and as if plenty of things have happened here.’

‘They have,’ said Mrs Holly, getting out of the car. ‘But we’re quiet and peaceful now. Nothing tremendously exciting ever happens at Holiday House except things like picnics and parties. It’s a house for children. Come along in.’

Carrying their suitcases the twins went in at the big, open double doors into a hall whose stone floor was set with gay rugs. Flowers stood about in tall vases and there was a scent of roses as they walked down the hall. The twins sniffed in pleasure—but not only at the smell of roses!

A delicious odour of baking cakes came from somewhere too. ‘That’s Mrs Potts baking special scones,’ explained Ruth. ‘That’s because you’ve come. And she’s made a fruit-cake too, with cherries in. I saw it this morning.’

This sounded good. The twins felt very cheerful as they went up the big stone staircase on to a broad landing flooded with sunshine. Mary glanced out of one of the windows and gave a cry of delight.

‘Oh! Look, Pat, we’re almost on the sea!’

Pat went to the window and looked out too. Yes—the big house was almost on the beach, it looked so near. It was good to see the sparkling sea, heaving and swelling so close to them.

‘Your rooms look on the sea, too,’ said Ruth, reading his thoughts. ‘Mummy, I’ll take them to their rooms. I know which ones they are.’

Ruth seemed to know everything! Mrs Holly went downstairs while Ruth led the way onwards, with the twins and Tippy behind. Pat slipped the poodle off the lead and she darted away to sniff into the corners.

Ruth led them right down the corridor, and then off into a small, narrow passage with stone walls. It curved round after a bit and came out on to another landing, much narrower than the first one. From this a few little stone steps led up to a wooden door with an iron handle.

‘Here’s where you are to be,’ said Ruth, and turned the handle. The door swung open and Mary gave a cry of delight. The big window opposite seemed full of sea and sky! They filled the room with a great clear light.

‘This is really *two* rooms,’ said Ruth, and pointed to a small door in the wall. ‘At least, it’s one room, but Mummy’s had it made into two. You each get a bit of the window—the other half of it is in this room here.’

She opened the door in the wall, which was not made of stone, like the others, but of panelled wood, and the twins looked through the doorway. Another room, just like the first one, was there.

‘You take this room, Mary, and I’ll have the other,’ said Patrick, walking into the second room. ‘I say—Isn’t it smashing to be able to lean out of our window and look right down on the sea—it almost comes to the walls.’

‘In winter we have to keep all these windows shut,’ said Ruth. ‘Because the waves splash into the rooms if we don’t.’

‘Where’s the tower?’ asked Pat, going back into the first room. ‘I’d like to see that.’

‘Graham has his room there,’ said Ruth. ‘Gloomy Graham! It’s best to leave him alone. I think he’s queer.’ She went to the door and pointed to the end of the landing. ‘See that opening in the wall there? Well, that’s where the spiral stairway begins. It goes all the way up to the tower. Graham has the second room up. Nobody is ever in the top one, because it’s a bit ruined and is dangerous.’

This all sounded very exciting. The twins made up their minds to explore everywhere as soon as ever they could. Pat was now getting rather tired of Ruth, and thought it would be nice to get rid of her.

‘We’re going to unpack,’ he said. ‘You just show us the bathroom, Ruth, and then you don’t need to stay with us any longer.’

‘But I’d like to see you unpack,’ said Ruth. ‘I don’t mind staying.’

Patrick thought he had better put Ruth in her place at once. ‘We’d rather unpack alone,’ he said, firmly. ‘Now—where’s the bathroom. Show us that and then scoot.’

Ruth put on a scowl. ‘You might as well say straight out that you don’t want me,’ she said.

‘All right—you’ve said it!’ said Pat. ‘It’s nice of you to help, but we can manage now. Where’s the bathroom? It will soon be teatime and we really must wash.’

‘Find it yourself,’ said Ruth, rudely, and marched off. She slammed the door and then reopened it almost immediately.

‘Tea’s at five,’ she announced. ‘You’ll hear a loud gong—and you’d better come, or everything will be eaten.’

The door slammed again. Pat gave a laugh. ‘My word—anyone would think she ran this place!’

‘You weren’t awfully polite to her,’ said Mary. ‘She’ll probably tell her mother.’

‘Let her,’ said Patrick. ‘Miss Rattle-Tongue will have to be kept in her place, Mary, or we’ll never get rid of her.’

Mary giggled. ‘What an awful name for her—but honestly she *is* a rattle-tongue. She goes on and on. She’ll be awfully nosy too, I expect.’

‘Let’s unpack,’ said Pat. ‘It’s almost five o’clock. You go and find the bathroom, Mary, while I undo the cases.’

‘Right,’ said Mary, and went out of the door. She was soon back again. ‘It’s near where the stairway goes up the tower,’ she said. ‘It’s a *stone* stairway, Pat—and it goes round and round as it goes up.’

‘We’ll explore it,’ said Pat. ‘Gosh—there’s the gong; it must be five o’clock. Quick, let’s wash and go down—we’ll unpack afterwards. Tippy, where are you? Come along and have some tea!’

‘And look out for Gruff, the cat!’ said Mary. ‘The Cat-That-Can’t-Be-Chased, Tippy!’

CHAPTER 3

AT TEATIME

The twins went out of the room with the little black poodle, down the corridor, through the narrow stone passage and out into the wider corridor whose windows overlooked the sea. They paused for a moment to gloat over the big stretch of brilliant blue sea, and then ran down the shallow steps of the great stone staircase.

Ruth was waiting for them, of course! 'I was just coming to fetch you,' she said, 'in case you forgot the way.'

She led them to a door and into a large sunny room with many tables. A big one stood in the middle.

'This is the dining-room,' said Ruth. 'In summer, when we have lots of children, it is quite full. But now it seems very empty. You have to sit at this table here with Mummy and me and Graham and John.'

The twins sat down obediently, and Tippy lay down at their feet. She was really a very well-behaved little dog. Pat looked round the room. There were only three other people there—a woman in a nurse's uniform, very clean and starched, a small girl sitting on a cushion on a chair at the table, and a baby in a high chair next to her.

The baby banged on the table with a spoon. It certainly was rather ugly, as Ruth had said in the car, but it was a cheerful, merry little thing. The twins could not tell if it was a boy or a girl, for its curly head and big mouth could quite well belong to either.

The small girl, Maureen, was a very dainty little thing, with fine golden curls fluffed up, and beautiful manners. The nurse was cutting up bread and butter into jam sandwiches for her.

'She's spoilt!' said Ruth, in a loud whisper. 'She has everything she asks for. The baby's spoilt too. Fancy letting him bang that spoon without stopping!'

The nurse handed Maureen her plate of jam sandwiches. 'Thank you, Nanny,' said the little girl. Then she turned to look at the others.

'I had an ice cream this afternoon,' she said. 'And I had a new boat. I'll show you.'

'I've plenty of boats, thank you,' said Ruth. 'I'm tired of seeing yours. You have something new every day. Why don't you stop that baby banging like that?'

'Take no notice of Ruth,' said the nurse to Maureen, who looked as if she

was going to burst into tears. 'There, there, darling—don't cry. You shall show *me* your new boat after tea.'

'Poor darling!' remarked Ruth. 'She's always a poor, dear darling. I wish you'd stop that spoon-banging.'

'I shall complain to your mother about you again if you interfere,' said the nurse, crossly. 'What with you and that boy John, there's no peace!'

The door flew open at that moment and a small boy came in, about Ruth's age. He grinned round and then sat down at the table.

'Can't we begin?' he said. 'I heard the gong. Hallo, Ruth—where did you go in the car this afternoon?'

'Never you mind,' said Ruth. 'These are twins, Patrick and Mary Terry. I've told them you're going tomorrow.'

'Yes! Because you kept sneaking on me,' said John. He suddenly put on Ruth's sharp-sounding voice, mimicking the way she spoke. 'Oh, Mummy, John climbed up to the top of the tower today, though you told him not. Oh, Mummy, John bathed when the tide was in and you said he wasn't to. Oh, Mummy, John went into the larder and took some tarts. Oh, Mummy, he jumped out at me and hit me!'

The twins laughed. John really did sound exactly like Ruth. Ruth flew into a temper and gave John a punch. He caught hold of her hands and held them tight.

'Naughty, naughty! Temper, temper! Apologize, Mummy's little tell-tale, or I'll not let you go!'

The door opened again and in came two more people—Mrs Holly and a big dark boy with a gloomy face. 'Gloomy Graham, of course,' thought Mary. 'Good—now perhaps we can begin tea, and have a little peace from Ruth.'

'Haven't you begun tea?' said Mrs Holly, in surprise. 'I sent John to tell you not to wait for me.'

'Well, he didn't come and tell us,' said Ruth. 'He's only *just* arrived, Mummy, tell him to leave go my hands.'

'Apologize then, apologize, Mummy's little tell-tale, Mummy's little sneak!' said John.

'That's enough, John,' said Mrs Holly. 'Let Ruth's hands go, or leave the table. I will *not* have this behaviour.'

'Well, you won't have it much longer, Mrs Holly,' said John, letting Ruth's hands go. 'I'm leaving tomorrow, hurrah, hurrah!'

'I can't imagine what our two new visitors will think of you,' said Mrs Holly. She turned to the nurse at the table nearby. 'And how is that darling baby, and dear little Maureen?' she asked.

'I've got a new boat,' said Maureen. 'I'll show it to you after tea.'

'Do, darling,' said Mrs Holly, and caught sight of a sudden scowl on

Ruth's face. She sighed. Why was Ruth so difficult? Why wasn't she a bit more like that pretty, good-mannered Maureen? Really, she could be a very naughty little girl at times!

She caught sight of John putting jam and potted meat together on a slice of bread and butter. He grinned at her.

'You know you mustn't do that,' she said. John popped the whole sandwich into his mouth at once. He gave it one bite and swallowed it.

'Sorry!' he said. 'I had to eat it quickly in case you told me to give it to you. Shall I tell you all the bad things I've done today, before Ruth tells you?'

'No,' said Mrs Holly. 'I'm really tired of you and your behaviour, John. I'm sorry to say that I shall be very glad to say goodbye to you tomorrow—you'll be the first child I've ever felt like that about.'

The tea was very, very good—there were the hot scones that the twins had smelt as they entered the house, and big buttery slices of home-made bread, with jam, honey or potted meat to go with it. There were little curranty rock-cakes that melted in your mouth, a big fruit-cake, and a fat sponge sandwich with strawberry jam in the middle.

The twins were very hungry and they enjoyed their tea. Mrs Holly smiled at them, glad to see two well-behaved children. She had had a truly dreadful time with John, who had made Ruth even worse than usual—*what* a good thing he was going tomorrow!

'Would you like Ruth to take you down to the beach after tea?' she asked the twins. Pat shook his head at once, emptying his mouth quickly to answer.

'No, thank you, Mrs Holly,' he said. 'We've still got our things to unpack. We'll explore on our own when we've finished.'

Mary had been watching the big boy, Graham, eating his tea. Except for saying 'Hallo, kids,' in a rather surly voice when Mrs Holly told him their names, he hadn't said a single word.

'No wonder Ruth called him Gloomy Graham!' Mary thought. 'He looks as if he couldn't smile at all, and he's got quite a wrinkled forehead even though he's only fifteen. All the same, he has quite a *nice* face.'

Mrs Holly chatted away through tea, talking to everyone, the nurse included. She was a pleasant, cheerful person, not in the least like her sharp, bossy little daughter! She turned to the silent Graham and asked him a question.

'Well, how did you get on with your work today, Graham? All right, I hope?'

'Yes, thanks, Mrs Holly,' said Graham.

'Do you miss Mr Snell, your tutor, very much?' asked Mrs Holly. 'I hear he is getting on fairly well at the hospital. You'll be going to see him soon, I expect?'

‘Yes, when I’m allowed to,’ said Graham. ‘I do miss him—but I like being on my own.’

‘You’re on your own too much,’ said Mrs Holly. ‘I don’t like to see a young boy all on his own as much as you are! Wouldn’t you like to come for a picnic with us tomorrow?’

‘I’ve too much work to do,’ said Graham, hurriedly. ‘Thank you all the same.’

Tea was soon over—and nearly every plate and dish had been emptied, except for the one that held the big fruit-cake. The twins felt cheerful. If tea was like this, what would the other meals be like?

The nurse took Maureen and the baby out. ‘Come, darling,’ she said to Maureen. ‘We’ll fetch your new boat and you shall show it to kind Mrs Holly.’

‘But not to that horrid, disgusting girl Ruth, dear, darling Maureen,’ said Ruth under her breath. Pat laughed.

‘What’s wrong with Maureen?’ he said to Ruth. ‘She’s a dear little girl!’

‘Pooh!’ said Ruth, rudely. ‘She’s spoilt and fussed till I could scream to see her.’

‘I suppose it’s because you had influenza so badly and couldn’t go to school this term that you’re so bad-tempered, Ruth,’ said Graham, unexpectedly. ‘You’ll chase all your mother’s guests away if you go on like this.’

Mrs Holly had gone out of the room. Ruth made a face at Graham. ‘I don’t like Mother having to take other children in,’ she said. ‘She hasn’t enough time for *me*. You all take away her attention. I’m just nobody.’

‘Stuff!’ said Graham. ‘You’re so prickly that nobody wants you near them—that’s the reason why we don’t like you—and why your mother can’t get near you either!’

He stalked out of the room and went upstairs. Ruth’s eyes suddenly filled with tears. She turned away and stamped her foot.

‘He’s *horrid* to me!’ she said, fiercely. ‘He always is. So is everybody. And you twins are going to be the same.’

She rushed out of the room and the twins looked at one another in surprise.

‘Goodness—what a whirlwind!’ said Pat. ‘Take no notice of her, Mary. We’ve got each other and we don’t need to bother with Gloomy Graham, or Rattle-Tongued Ruth, or Dear, Darling Maureen!’

‘And John will be gone tomorrow,’ said Mary. ‘Though I half wish he wasn’t going. At least he’s cheerful and lively! Come on—let’s unpack, and then we’ll explore.’

CHAPTER 4

A LITTLE EXPLORING

The twins went up to their rooms and unpacked quickly, putting everything away neatly in the drawers of the oak chests there. It was lovely in the two rooms, with the glow of the sunlit sea lighting up the walls.

Pat bounced up and down on his bed. 'It's jolly comfortable,' he said. 'I like this place, don't you, Mary?'

'Yes, I do,' said Mary. 'I wish we could have a bathe this evening, but I don't expect we'd be allowed to, our first day. I'll just go and bounce on my bed too, to see if I like it.' Off she went.

'Have you bounced enough?' said Pat, appearing at the door of Mary's little room. 'I say, aren't our rooms neat? Mother wouldn't know them.'

'We'll have to try and keep them neat,' said his twin. 'Mrs Holly doesn't seem to have much help in the house. I expect she does most things herself, and has more help in when the place is crowded in the holidays.'

'Where's Tippy?' said Pat. 'Tippy, come here! TIPPY!'

But no Tippy came. 'She must have slipped out of the door when I wasn't watching,' said Pat. 'I ought to have shut it. Tippy! Tippy!'

'She's probably gone after the Cat-That-Can't-Be-Chased,' said Mary. 'Let's go and find her.'

Tippy wasn't very far away. She was sniffing about out in the corridor, not far from the spiral stairway up to the tower.

'Come along, Tippy,' said Mary. 'We're going down to the beach. And let me tell you that it's no good hunting for rabbits there, because rabbits don't live on beaches!'

Halfway down the big staircase was a small landing, where the stairs turned at right angles. Tippy tripped down lightly, and then stopped short at a very dark, solid black shadow in the corner of the little landing.

She growled. No sound came from the shadow. It merely sat still and waited.

Tippy ran back a few steps and sniffed hard. 'Cat!' she thought. 'Yes, cat!' And at once she rushed at the black furry shadow in the corner to chase it.

The shadow didn't move—but when Tippy came near enough it lifted a big paw and smacked her hard on the nose—biff! Tippy backed away at once.

Could this be a cat? Cats always ran when she came near. This one didn't. It just sat and waited to smack her. She barked, but the shadow still sat there. She ran at it again and—BIFF! She had an even harder smack that time. The

little poodle backed away in such a hurry that she missed her footing and fell down the stairs. Over and over she rolled, and the big black cat came out of his corner and watched.

Bumpity-bump! Tippy was at the bottom, astonished and out of breath. She crept cautiously up a few steps, and the twins, who had now come to the landing, watched in amusement.

‘Sssss!’ said the cat, warningly, as Tippy crawled up yet another step. And then he spat extremely loudly, making even the twins jump. Tippy turned and ran down the stairs at top speed, and waited at the bottom for Pat and Mary.

They bent to stroke the big, thick-furred cat. ‘Well, Gruff, so you’re the Cat-That-Can’t-Be-Chased,’ said Pat with a laugh. ‘Tippy, I hope you’ve learnt that!’

Tippy stayed cautiously at the bottom of the stairs. Gruff the cat came down solemnly and ponderously with the two children, purring like a kettle on the boil.

Tippy backed away, but Gruff took not the slightest notice of her, and walked past with his nose in the air. Then, just as he had passed Tippy, he turned and spat again very loudly indeed, and the poodle fled away in fright.

How the twins laughed! ‘Tippy will think twice before she chases another cat!’ said Pat, scratching the big cat’s ears. ‘Are you coming with us, Gruff? No? All right, we’ll go and find Tippy.’

Tippy joined them, tail between her legs, as soon as they were out of doors. They explored the garden thoroughly, approving of the swings and the big seesaw. Then they went through a little gate down to the beach.

The tide was high, but there was still a big piece of sandy beach to play on. ‘I expect the beach only gets completely covered at very high tides,’ said Pat. ‘I say, look, are those caves in the cliff over there, do you think?’

Mary looked where Pat pointed, some way down the beach, where the cliff rose high.

‘Yes,’ she said, excited. ‘They are! We’ve always wanted to explore caves, Pat. Do you suppose smugglers ever came here at all?’

‘No, I don’t think so,’ said Pat. ‘Not this part of the coast. What’s that place high up on the cliff, look, Mary? It looks rather like a ruined old house.’

Mary gazed at it. ‘Yes. It’s very tumble-down. See, the gulls are sitting on it now.’

‘That might be a good place to explore too,’ said Pat. ‘I vote we ask Mrs Holly for sandwiches some day, Mary, and go off on our own, exploring all round about here.’

‘Oh yes, let’s,’ said Mary. ‘We shall get out of Ruth’s way then, shan’t we? Isn’t she queer?’

‘Well—more bad-tempered than queer,’ said Pat. ‘She said Graham was

queer. I must say that I thought he was a bit strange, didn't you?

'Yes. Ruth is about right when she calls him Gloomy Graham!' said Mary, with a laugh. 'I thought he looked sad too, Pat—as if he had a Secret Worry!'

'He probably has!' said Pat. 'The kind of Secret Worry we get when we have to pass an exam and know that we haven't worked as hard as we should do!'

'Oh, well—we're not likely to come up against him much,' said Mary. 'Let's paddle!'

So they paddled in the warm little waves at the edge of the sea. Then they picked up shells as pink as the sky at sunset—the sands were strewn with them when the tide began to go out.

'I like all these big rocks everywhere,' said Mary, 'and the pools in and about them. Holiday House is built on the rocky cliff, Pat, although when we're in the house and look out of the windows, it seems almost as if it's built right on the beach!'

'Yes, but the cliffs are very low here,' said Pat. 'They rise up each side, so the house is sheltered in a dip. It looks nice in the evening sun, doesn't it?'

It certainly did. The windows glistened and shone as if they were gold, and the tall tower rose up proud and high. The two children gazed at it.

'Ruth said Graham had the middle room,' said Mary. 'You can see that the top is falling away a bit here and there. What a pity not to mend it!'

'We'd better go back,' said Pat, looking at his watch. 'I hope we don't have to go to bed *very* early here, Mary. I wonder if we have supper.'

'I hope so,' said Mary. 'I had an enormous tea, but I'm beginning to feel hungry again. Tippy, come along, we're going in.'

Tippy had been having a lovely time exploring the beach, sniffing at the bits of seaweed, scraping out shells with her paws, and chasing the waves when they ran down the beach. She soon ran away when they came *up* the beach.

'She doesn't like getting her feet wet!' said Mary, with a laugh. 'She's fussy, aren't you, Tippy?'

A voice hailed them. 'Oh, *there* you are! I've been looking for you everywhere. You're to come in now.'

It was Ruth, of course! She was standing at the gate, a sturdy little figure, very determined looking.

'Who said we were to come in?' demanded Pat.

'My mother did,' said Ruth. 'And she said, do you want any supper, because you can have some if you like, but not if you don't want to.'

'Oh—well, we *do* want to,' said Pat, climbing up to the gate. 'Are you going to have some, Ruth?'

'Of course. I always do,' said Ruth. 'It's sardine salad tonight, and red

jelly. Buck up.'

They bucked up! Sardine salad sounded nice, so did the jelly. 'You've got to wash first,' said Ruth, in her bossiest voice.

Someone nearby repeated this, mimicking Ruth's voice exactly. 'You've got to wash first, you've got to wash first!'

It was John, of course, in a corner of the garden. 'And don't forget to cut your nails and polish your ears and shine up your toes!' he chanted, still in Ruth's voice. She ran at him furiously, but he ran to a window, climbed in and disappeared. He was sitting demurely at the table with Graham when the others went in. Ruth gave him a scowl.

He gave her one back, making such a startling face that the twins gazed at him fascinated. He obligingly made a few more. Then Mrs Holly came in and he gazed at her with a most innocent expression. The twins thought he was a very surprising person and felt quite sorry that he was going.

Tippy settled down under the table. Gruff the cat arrived and saw Tippy there. He advanced majestically to the table, and Tippy fled to a corner of the fire-place! Gruff sat down on the very spot under the table where Tippy had laid herself down, purring loudly.

'Ah,' said Ruth, in a pleased voice. 'Gruff has already taught Tippy her manners, I see. Good old Gruff!'

'Sardine salad?' said Mrs Holly to the twins, and they held out their plates. Mary gave a sudden yawn. Mrs Holly smiled. 'Ah—you're tired! I thought you would be, you've had a long day. Bed for you both immediately after supper!'

'I'm going to stay up late tonight,' announced John. 'It's my last night.'

'You may stay up till half past eight, and no later,' said Mrs Holly.

'What time does Graham go to bed?' inquired Mary. 'Any time he likes?'

'Well, he's old enough to be sensible and choose his own bedtime,' said Mrs Holly. 'Now have you finished? Off to bed then, and sleep like tops!'

The twins went off together, Pat yawning as well now. 'See you tomorrow, Mary,' he said, as she went into the inner bedroom. 'We're going to have a lovely time here!'

CHAPTER 5

UP IN THE TOWER

It really was fun at Holiday House. The twins soon settled down, and enjoyed everything. The food was splendid, and they began to look plump and healthy after their long weeks of illness.

John, the naughty boy, had left. The nurse and Maureen and the baby were still there, but mixed very rarely with the others. Graham appeared only at meal-times, looking as gloomy as ever. His tutor was still in hospital, so he was working alone.

‘Doesn’t Graham ever play or bathe or do anything but work, Mrs Holly?’ asked Pat one day at tea-time. ‘I shouldn’t have thought that his parents would like him to work so hard. He looks awfully tired sometimes.’

‘He hasn’t any parents,’ said Mrs Holly. ‘Only an uncle who is very stern with him. He’s shut up his house and gone off somewhere on business, and that’s why Graham is here.’

‘Hasn’t he any brothers or sisters?’ asked Mary.

‘He’s got a brother,’ said Ruth, unexpectedly.

‘I don’t think he has, Ruth,’ said her mother. ‘He has never said anything about one.’

‘Well, the woman at the sweet-shop told me,’ said Ruth. ‘And when I asked where he was she wouldn’t tell me. There’s a mystery about the brother, I think.’

‘Oh, don’t be silly, Ruth,’ said her mother, impatiently. ‘And I wish you wouldn’t go and gossip in the village like that.’

‘I like gossip,’ said Ruth. ‘I’ve heard all sorts of queer things since I’ve been here, Mummy. I heard something funny about Jenkins, the gardener. He ...’

‘Leave the table, Ruth,’ said her mother.

‘Well, I won’t tell you if you don’t want to hear, but it’s very funny,’ said Ruth, not leaving the table.

‘LEAVE THE TABLE,’ said Mrs Holly. Ruth stared obstinately at her mother. The door opened at that moment and in came Graham. He apologized for being late and sat down. Ruth handed him the scones, not looking at her mother.

‘Graham, would you mind removing Ruth for me?’ said Mrs Holly. ‘She has misbehaved and I have told her to leave the table.’

‘Don’t you dare touch me!’ cried Ruth and shot out of her chair at top

speed. The door banged, and steps could be heard running down the hall.

‘Dear, dear—I *shall* be glad when Ruth goes to school again, and has a bit of discipline,’ said Mrs Holly. ‘Mary, have some cake, dear?’

Graham sat silently at the table, looking so forlorn that Mrs Holly felt worried about him.

‘Graham, you really are working too hard,’ she said. ‘You must *not* do any more work this evening—you must go down to the beach and take a nice long walk, I insist!’

‘All right, Mrs Holly, I will,’ said Graham, giving her a small smile that vanished almost at once. And immediately after tea the twins saw him going out into the garden and disappearing through the little beach-gate.

‘Well, I do hope he takes a nice long walk,’ said Mrs Holly. ‘I never knew such a lonely boy. He never gets a letter, he never seems to stop working, he’s up in that tower-room of his hours and hours on end!’

‘Oh, Mrs Holly, that reminds me—do you think we might go up to the tower this evening?’ asked Pat. ‘You said we might, if we were careful, but we never have.’

‘Yes, you may go,’ said Mrs Holly, feeling thankful for the hundredth time that the twins were nice, trustable children. She so often had ones that weren’t! ‘I’ll give you the key to the tower-room—it’s falling to pieces, you know, so I have to keep the door to it locked in case foolish children like John go to explore.’

She took a large key from her desk and gave it to Pat. ‘Here you are. Lock the door behind you when you come down and bring me back the key.’

The twins went off upstairs. ‘There ought to be a wonderful view from the top of the tower!’ said Mary. ‘Oh, blow—here’s Ruth! Pretend we’re going to have a game in our rooms!’

‘What shall we play at?’ said Pat at once. ‘Shall we play at Snap or Draughts?’

‘Draughts,’ said Mary, afraid of saying Snap in case Ruth decided to join in.

‘If you play Snap I’ll play too,’ said Ruth, coming up and patting Tippy, who was with them.

‘We’re not *going* to play Snap,’ said Pat.

‘You don’t want me!’ said Ruth. ‘Nor does Mummy. She sent me away from the table and I didn’t finish my tea. All the same, I *did* hear that Graham had a brother.’

‘Well, ask him if he has, if you are so interested!’ said Pat. ‘I never did know such an inquisitive person, Ruth—always bossing and interfering!’

‘The only person that *really* likes me is Gruff, the cat,’ said Ruth, mournfully.

‘Well, I’m not surprised. You’re very alike—both inquisitive and both bossy!’ said Pat. ‘Gruff biffs Tippy on the nose whenever he goes past her, and I always feel that you’d like to biff people you don’t like, too.’

‘I thought you were nice at first, but you aren’t,’ said Ruth, turning away. ‘I wish I was back at school. I can run lots of things there without being told I’m bossy.’

She went off down the stairs, and the twins went into their bedrooms. They waited there for a moment, in case Ruth was anywhere about. Pat looked out of the window and then called Mary.

‘Look—isn’t that Graham slouching along the beach? He’s going towards that old tumble-down house up on the cliffs.’

‘Yes, it’s Graham,’ said Mary. ‘He’s staring and staring at the house now. Isn’t he queer, Pat? Stands and looks for ages at an old house, and yet never notices the sunset on the sea or the gulls soaring over his head!’

‘I suppose he’s working too hard,’ said Pat. ‘Well, come on Mary—we’ll just see if that inquisitive little Ruth is hanging about. If not, we’ll go up the tower. Stay here, Tippy.’

They looked out of Pat’s bedroom door. No one seemed to be about at all, not even Gruff the cat. They made their way down the corridor to the stairway that spiralled up the tower.

They climbed up it, holding on to the rail, because the inner side of the stone stairs was very narrow. They came to a small stone landing, and saw a door standing open there—a stout wooden door, studded with great nails.

They looked inside. It was the first room in the tower, and was used for junk. Boxes, trunks, old unwanted crates were there, and extra chairs and tables for use in the summer-time when Holiday House was full of guests.

It was so full of stuff that the two children could hardly move inside. They came out and went up the stone stairway once more. It wound round and round, and came to another little stone landing, where there was another door, like the one below.

But this one was shut. ‘Shall we open it and peep inside?’ said Pat. ‘I’d like to see Graham’s room.’

They opened it. It was a bed-sitting room, untidy and full of papers and books. Evidently Graham *was* very hard at work! The table was piled high with reference books and paper that was scribbled on in small handwriting. The window overlooked the sea, and the room was very light in the evening sun.

They did not go inside but shut the door quietly. Then they went on again up the spiral staircase, and came to a third room. The door to this was locked. Pat took the key from his pocket and slid it into the lock. The door opened and the two children went in.

Part of the roof had fallen in, and the window was broken. It looked very desolate, this top room of the tower—but, oh, the view!! The children stood and gazed at it. The window looked out over miles of sea, it seemed, and the sinking sun turned it golden.

They could see the old house over on the cliff quite easily—in fact the tower they were in was so high that they almost looked down on the house. Pat suddenly pointed to it.

‘Look, Mary—Isn’t that someone standing at the window of the old house? See, towards the top.’

Mary looked hard. ‘Yes,’ she said at last. ‘It is someone. Let’s wave.’

‘No, don’t,’ said Pat. ‘I believe it’s Graham! He might think we’ve come into the tower to snoop round his room or something. He’s a queer fellow—never *has* asked us into his room. There—he’s gone.’

They stood in the tower for a little longer and then left it. Pat locked the door behind him and the two children went down the spiral stairs, holding on to the rail.

‘Well, that was quite exciting,’ said Mary. ‘I wish we had Graham’s room in the tower. It would be fun to sleep in a tower like this.’

They went down to the swings in the garden and swung to and fro, enjoying the swift flight through the air and back. Mrs Holly came out and called to them after a while, ‘Well, did you see the tower?’

‘Yes!’ called back Pat. ‘There’s a wizard view from up there. I wish we had our room there!’

‘Did you bring me back the key?’ asked Mrs Holly.

‘Oh, blow—I locked the door but I must have left the key in the lock!’ said Pat, vexed. He leapt off the swing. ‘I’ll go and get it straight away, Mrs Holly. I’m so sorry.’

He ran into the house and upstairs, along the corridors, and came to the spiral staircase set in the wall. He ran up it lightly, slowing down as he came to the top, for the steps were very steep. Yes—there was the great key in the lock!

Pat was just about to take it out when he stopped. He heard a noise in the locked tower-room! He stood and listened. Yes, there was the noise again—the scrape of someone’s feet on the stone floor! The someone cleared his throat and then there was the sound of a yawn!

But—the tower-room was *locked*! Pat tried the door softly. Yes—he *had* locked it when he and Mary came out. And yet, there was someone in there! Who was it? And how had that someone entered when the door had been well and truly locked?

He withdrew the key silently from the lock and ran down the spiral stairs. He must tell Mary! This was something very peculiar indeed.

CHAPTER 6

RUTH GETS INTO TROUBLE

Pat went out to the garden to find Mary. Mrs Holly was there, talking to his sister. He gave her the key, and she took it indoors with her.

‘Mary—come somewhere secret,’ said Pat, in a low voice. ‘I’ve got something peculiar to tell you.’

Mary was astonished. She slipped off the swing at once. ‘Where shall we go?’ she said. ‘Our bedrooms, I think, don’t you?’

So they went to Pat’s bedroom, keeping a sharp eye out for Ruth. Tippy ran with them, sensing their excitement, panting a little as she went, her tail wagging hard.

The children shut the door of Pat’s room. ‘Now—whatever is it?’ said Mary.

‘Listen—you saw me lock the top tower-room, didn’t you?’ said Pat, in a low voice. Mary nodded. ‘Well,’ went on Pat, ‘I left the key in the lock after locking the door—but, Mary, when I went to get the key *out* of the lock, just a few minutes ago, *I heard somebody in the room behind the door!*’

Mary stared at him. ‘You couldn’t have!’ she said. ‘There was no one in there when we left and locked the door. No one at all.’

‘Well, there is now—unless he’s gone,’ said Pat. ‘Let’s go and see. But be quiet, for goodness’ sake!’

They left Tippy behind and went quietly out of the room, down the corridor and up the spiral stairs. When they came to Graham’s room, they heard him whistling softly, as he sometimes did, and the sound of a book being dropped on to the floor.

‘He must have just come back,’ said Pat, in a whisper. ‘Don’t let him hear us.’

They went on up the stairs to the top room. They stood outside it, listening.

There was no sound at all this time. Not a scrape of a foot, not a yawn. They stood there for some time and then looked at one another.

‘Look through the keyhole,’ said Mary, in Pat’s ear. So he bent down and looked. The keyhole was large and gave a good view of the room. But it was empty—at least, all the part he could see was perfectly empty!

They went down the stairs softly, puzzled. ‘Somebody *was* in that locked room—and now he’s not,’ said Pat. ‘Who was it? And how did he get through a door, both in and out, when it was locked? There’s no key in the lock now—Mrs Holly has got it. It’s a mystery!’

Ruth met them at the bottom of the spiral stairway. 'I've been looking for you,' she said. 'Where have you been? Graham won't be very pleased if you keep on popping in to see him when he's at work.'

'We haven't been to see him,' said Mary, before she could stop herself.

'Oh—then have you been up to the top tower-room?' said the inquisitive Ruth. 'You can't get in. It's locked. I can get you the key though. I know where it is.'

'We can get it from your mother, thank you, if we want it,' said Pat. 'Er—do you often go up there, Ruth?'

'Never,' said Ruth. 'I did at first, but I soon got tired of it. There's nothing to see up there except miles of sea. Do come and have a game with me. I feel lonely.'

'All right,' said Pat, thinking that Ruth looked rather forlorn. He remembered that she had had hardly any tea, and he took her into his room, with Mary tagging behind, looking rather cross because she badly wanted to talk to Pat about the strange puzzle of the top tower-room.

'Have some chocolate?' said kind-hearted Pat, handing a bar to Ruth. She took it at once.

'Thanks,' she said. 'I do think Mummy was mean, don't you, sending me away from the table like that just because I said I'd heard something about Jenkins.'

'I don't think your mother's mean,' said Pat. 'I like her.'

'She likes you too, you and Mary,' said Ruth, munching away hard. 'She says you've got nice ways, and you're trustable. When she told me that I was quite sure she meant that *I* hadn't nice ways and that *I'm* not trustable.'

'Of course she didn't,' said Mary, irritated. 'She's too nice to say mean things.'

'Don't you sometimes think *your* mother's mean?' asked Ruth, finishing the last of the chocolate.

'Of course not. We love her,' said Mary, shocked. 'And anyway, if we ever did think her mean we wouldn't say so to other people, as you do about *your* mother. We'd think that was disloyal.'

'Oh, well—we're different, I suppose,' said Ruth. 'Did you see Graham when you went up to the tower? Is he back from his walk?'

'Yes,' said Pat. 'We heard him in his room.'

'You know, it's true that he's got a brother,' said Ruth, speaking in a half-whisper. 'And it's true there's some mystery about him. I think he's in prison or something. Anyway, the woman at the sweet-shop says she heard he was a bad lot, a very bad lot.'

'I think you're horrible to go listening to tales like that, when you know they may be absolutely false,' said Pat, disgusted. 'I don't believe there's a

word of truth in it. Why do you have to go snooping around, listening to tales about people?’

‘Well, it interests me,’ said Ruth. ‘I like hearing things about people.’

‘Especially nasty things, I suppose,’ said Mary, scornfully.

Ruth got up and brushed some chocolate crumbs off her dress. She stared angrily at Mary. ‘I don’t know why you speak in that horrid voice to me,’ she said. ‘Do you know what I’m going to do? I’m going to ask Graham if he’s got a brother—I shall ask him straight out!’

She marched out of the room, and the twins made little faces at one another. ‘I don’t like her,’ said Pat. ‘It’s a good thing you and I have no secrets, or anything we don’t want people to know about, Mary. Ruth would ferret it out in no time! Do you suppose she really will ask Graham about his brother?’

‘Yes. She’s bold enough for anything,’ said Mary, getting out some cards. ‘But I don’t expect this brother business amounts to anything! It’s just Ruth’s inquisitiveness—she *makes* people tell her silly tales. I’ve a good mind to tell her a few myself!’

‘Oooh, yes, let’s!’ said Pat, thrilled. ‘I’ll tell her we’ve got an uncle that the police are after, and you tell her we’ve got a cousin who—who . . .’

‘Who lets his horse sleep with him in his bedroom,’ said Mary, with a giggle, remembering a silly story she had once read.

Pat remembered the mystery of the top tower, and put down his cards. ‘About that tower-room,’ he said, lowering his voice. ‘We really must find out the explanation of how somebody got in there when the door was locked—and how he disappeared again while the door was *still* locked. Shall we tell Mrs Holly?’

Mary considered. ‘No,’ she said. ‘It sounds a bit silly, really—I don’t think she’d believe you. She’d probably think it was Graham who had gone up there or something. Or she’d say you hadn’t locked the door.’

‘All right. We’ll keep it to ourselves,’ said Pat, dealing the cards. ‘What do *you* say, Tippy-dog? Shall we keep it a secret? We ought to have taken you up to the tower-room with us to have a good sniff round!’

Tippy cocked her little ears and listened. She loved being talked to. She put a paw on Pat’s knee as if to say, ‘Do go on—I’m listening!’

Then, quite suddenly, she took her paw back, ran to the door and barked loudly, pawing at it. The twins looked at her in surprise.

‘What can she hear?’ said Pat—and then he and Mary heard something too!

They heard a noise of squealing, and of bumping and clattering—and then sobbing. Good gracious—whatever was happening?

Pat flung open the door and ran out, followed by Mary and Tippy. Tippy

raced down the corridor to the spiral staircase at the end. Sitting on the bottom step, howling, was Ruth. She was rubbing her right leg as if it hurt her.

A voice came down the stairs. ‘Howl all you like, you little beast—and don’t you dare come pestering me again when I’m working!’ Then a door slammed loudly.

‘What happened?’ said Pat. ‘Are you hurt?’

‘Yes,’ sobbed Ruth. ‘I think my leg is broken, or something. That hateful Graham!’

‘Your leg’s not broken,’ said Pat, and he helped Ruth up. ‘Come to our rooms and we’ll have a look at it. It serves you right, Ruth—you shouldn’t have gone pestering Graham.’

Ruth limped to the twins’ room and sank down on Pat’s bed. She rubbed the tears from her eyes.

‘Graham’s a beast,’ she said. ‘All I did was to go into his room—and I knocked on his door first for politeness, and I said—I said . . .’ She stopped and gave a little sob. ‘All I said was, “Oh, Graham, I’ve heard you have a brother. Is it true?” And he stared at me in a most horrible way—stared and stared—and he said—he said . . .’

‘Well, what *did* he say?’ said Mary, impatiently.

‘He suddenly SHOUTED at me,’ said Ruth. ‘He shouted, “What do you mean, have I got a brother? NO, I HAVEN’T, so clear out of here!” And then he got up and ran at me, and I was frightened and rushed out of the door . . .’

‘And fell down the spiral stairway, I suppose?’ said Pat. ‘Well, now you know that the tale you heard was untrue, and I hope you’re satisfied! And I advise you not to go and tell tales to your mother, or *she* may shout at you, too. Here, bind up your knee with this hanky, and stop howling.’

Ruth dried her eyes and looked obstinate. She began to tie up her knee. ‘All right,’ she said. ‘Say what you like—but *I* think Graham’s a story-teller. I BET he’s got a brother, no matter *what* he says!’

And how surprised she was to find the twins suddenly pushing her out of their room in disgust—pushing her so hard, too, that she fell down the few steps that led up to their rooms!

Slam! That was *their* door shutting with a bang. Poor Ruth—she really did make trouble for herself, and this time there was nobody to help her!

CHAPTER 7

THE PICNIC

A few more children came to stay at Holiday House, but they were mostly very young, all under four years old, too young for either Ruth or the twins to play with.

‘Dear, darling Maureen’ and her baby brother were still there, with their fussy nurse, who lost no chance of ticking off Ruth if she could.

And Ruth in her turn lost no chance of making loud remarks about Maureen and the baby. She really needed a good slapping, the twins decided. Maureen was a good little thing and Mary thought that the small boy was fun to watch, crawling over the beach in rompers.

‘Do you notice that if Mrs Holly makes a real fuss of any child, Ruth is sure to have her knife into him or her, and can’t find a good thing to say about them?’ said Mary one day.

‘Yes—you should see her face when her mother makes a fuss of Maureen,’ said Pat. ‘I think she’s jealous. I wish some children of her own age would come along, so that she could play with them—I get tired of her tagging along after us.’

The twins were now as brown as gypsies, and so plump that Mary was seriously thinking of writing to ask her mother if she could buy another swimsuit! They loved being at Holiday House, and, as more children came, it was fun to watch the little ones at play.

‘I am getting a couple of helpers in,’ said Mrs Holly one evening about a week after Ruth’s quarrel with Graham. ‘Mrs Potts, the cook, needs somebody to help her in the kitchen now that we have so many children, and I need someone else to help with the bedrooms.’

‘Who are you getting, Mummy?’ asked Ruth at once. ‘Anyone from near here?’

‘Yes—Mrs Tomms, from the village, to help Mrs Potts, and Lydia Jordans to help with the rooms,’ said her mother. ‘She came to see me yesterday—a pretty little shy thing who comes from Tiddington Town, not from our village. I like her very much.’

Ruth, of course, went to have a good look at Mrs Tomms as soon as she arrived. Mrs Tomms was tall and stout and red-faced. She also had a very loud voice, and made it quite clear to Ruth that she wasn’t going to have any children in *her* kitchen!

‘It’s Mrs Potts’ kitchen, not yours,’ said Ruth, indignantly, and went over

to the larder to see if Mrs Potts had made anything nice for pudding for supper.

But she found Mrs Tomms suddenly in front of the larder door. ‘Aha! So you’re after the larder, are you?’ she said. ‘Off you go, miss—and don’t let me see you here again, or I’ll report you to Mrs Holly.’

‘That wouldn’t be any good,’ said Ruth, jeeringly. ‘She’s my mother.’

‘Mother or not, I’ll go to her the first time you come near the larder!’ said Mrs Tomms, in her loud voice, and Ruth decided that it would really be best to turn her back and go!

She went off to find Lydia Jordans, who was making beds. Ruth stood in the doorway and looked at her. She was certainly a pretty little thing, with soft, golden hair round her face, and shy eyes that looked down at the floor when she spoke. Her voice was very soft too, quite the opposite of Mrs Tomms’ loud bark.

‘Hallo,’ said Ruth. ‘I’m Mrs Holly’s daughter. You’re Lydia Jordans, aren’t you?’

‘Yes, Miss Ruth,’ said Lydia, in her soft voice.

‘You come from Tiddington Town, don’t you?’ asked Ruth, and began to ply the soft-voiced, deft-handed Lydia with questions as she moved round the room, dusting.

Lydia answered politely but shyly. Ruth heard her mother calling her and went off, pleased with Lydia. She would make friends with her, and perhaps get her to give her a few things out of the larder, now that she was afraid to go into the kitchen with that horrid Mrs Tomms there.

Mrs Holly wanted Ruth to help to get ready a picnic lunch. ‘I just feel as if I *must* get away from the house for a few hours,’ she said to Ruth. ‘I’ve been working too hard, I think. You help to get the picnic basket ready, Ruth, and we’ll take the twins and Graham with us. We’ll go and have a picnic in that dear little cove just below the old house on the cliff.’

‘All right, Mummy,’ said Ruth. ‘You *have* been working too hard. You deserve a nice picnic. But don’t let’s ask Graham. He’s so GLOOMY, he’ll spoil everything.’

‘I want him to come,’ said Mrs Holly. ‘He’s another one that works very hard. Go and tell the twins and Graham about the picnic. They can all go in swim-suits if they take towels and jerseys too.’

Ruth went to tell them—at least, she told the twins and asked them to tell Graham. She had not said a single word to the big boy ever since the time she had fallen down the spiral stairs—but as Graham had never spoken much to her, nobody really noticed this except the twins.

They all set off for the picnic, Tippy too, walking over the warm sand to the little cove beneath the cliff on which stood the old house. This cove could be used only when the tide was out, for the sea came right up to the cliffs when

it was high, and beat against it tumultuously.

‘One day,’ said Mrs Holly, looking up at the old house, ‘one day there will come an extra big storm, and the old place will fall into the sea! Then this dear little cove will disappear under bricks and stone and rubble.’

‘Oh, Mummy—you don’t think it will begin to fall yet, do you?’ asked Ruth, in alarm, looking up at the old house, which did seem to lean a little over the cliff! Her mother laughed.

‘No. Don’t be afraid. It’s been like that for years. The owners left it because they were told that it was dangerous to live in—but possibly it will stay up there for a long, long time. The roof is going now, and the old place will soon be a complete ruin. Pass the basket, Ruth dear. I expect you are all just as hungry as ever.’

They were, of course—even Graham, who did not usually have much appetite. The gulls flew down near and gobbled the bits that the children threw to them. The sea sent tiny, lace-edged waves up the smooth golden sand, and there was a continual lapping noise round the nearby rocks, very pleasant to hear.

‘I do love Tolly Sands,’ said Mary, leaning back to sun herself. ‘It’s such a peaceful place. Another sandwich, please, Pat.’

‘Who made these sandwiches?’ asked Pat. ‘I’ve never tasted such nice ones before! What’s in them?’

‘Ask Mrs Tomms!’ said Mrs Holly. ‘She made them. I think she’s going to be a great help in the kitchen.’

‘I don’t like her,’ said Ruth. ‘She doesn’t talk, she shouts. I like Lydia, though.’

‘Who’s Lydia?’ asked Pat, who hadn’t yet seen her.

‘Her name’s Lydia Jordans,’ began Ruth, who always enjoyed giving information about anyone, ‘and she comes from . . .’

Graham suddenly interrupted her. He had been lying on his back, his sun-hat over his eyes, eating sandwiches. Now he sat up and looked at Ruth.

‘What name did you say?’ he said, sounding very interested.

‘I said “Lydia Jordans,”’ answered Ruth, ‘and she comes from Tiddington Town. She’s got a brother who’s been away at work, but he’s come back now, and a big sister and a little sister, and she likes needlework and going for long walks and dogs and cats and . . .’

‘Really! Need we have all these details about Lydia?’ said Mrs Holly. ‘I don’t know how you manage to get them, Ruth. I wish you wouldn’t talk to the staff as you do, finding out this, that and the other. They don’t like it—they think you’re prying into their affairs.’

Graham was still looking at Ruth, and the twins stared at him in surprise. He didn’t usually listen to anything that Ruth said!

‘Are you sure her name’s Lydia Jordans?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ said Ruth, surprised.

‘Did she tell you the names of her brother and sisters?’ asked Graham, in such a strange voice that everyone stared at him.

‘Yes. Her big sister’s name is Olive and her little sister’s name is Dolly, and her brother’s name is Wilfrid,’ said Ruth promptly. ‘Dolly goes to school, Olive is married and has got a baby called Fred, and Wilfrid has just come back from Scotland, where he’s been at work with his uncle. He’s working in a bicycle shop, Lydia says.’

‘Ruth! MUST you ask people about their intimate family affairs like this?’ said her mother in horror. ‘Really, you’ll be telling us next that the father’s got corns and the mother’s got . . .’

‘Well, he *has* got corns,’ said Ruth, sounding surprised. ‘That was a good guess of yours, Mummy. He has to go and have them . . .’

‘That’s enough, Ruth, that’s *really* enough,’ said Mrs Holly, with a groan. ‘I can’t bear any more, Graham—where are you going?’

Graham had got up suddenly, taken his jersey from the sand, and was now walking away over the beach. He hadn’t said a word of farewell, and everyone looked after him in astonishment.

‘Graham!’ called Mrs Holly. ‘I’m speaking to you. Where are you going? We haven’t finished the picnic yet—there is still plenty to eat.’

Graham turned, and the twins saw that he looked upset. ‘I’m going back to the house,’ he muttered. ‘I—I just don’t feel well. Touch of the sun, perhaps. Don’t worry about me, please.’

He went slowly over the beach, and the rest of the picnic party looked at one another, puzzled.

‘Gloomy Graham!’ said Ruth. ‘I told you I didn’t want him because he always spoils everything, Mummy.’

‘But he was quite all right until you began to go on and on about Lydia and her family,’ said Pat. ‘He was enjoying himself, and eating away just like we all were.’

‘Well, he can’t have been upset by Ruth’s silly string of facts about our new little housemaid,’ said Mrs Holly. ‘Really, it was *too* silly, telling us the names of the sisters and brother and all they were doing—you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Ruth!’

After that, the picnic was quite spoilt. Mrs Holly went back to Holiday House with the basket, Ruth wandered off to pick up shells and the twins lay on their backs and looked up at the old house leaning above them on the cliff.

‘I vote we go and explore it,’ said Pat. ‘Come on, Mary—we’ve always wanted to. Get up, lazybones, or I’ll go by myself.’

CHAPTER 8

A MOST EXCITING DISCOVERY

The twins made their way up a little path towards the old house. Like Holiday House it was built of stone, and was very solid-looking indeed.

Tippy ran up the path in front of the two children. She had enjoyed the picnic very much, having had a large number of tit-bits from everyone. No one could help loving the small black poodle, with her sharp little nose and soft, woolly coat!

The path was very crumbly, and the twins had to go carefully. They reached the top of the cliff at last and stood still to get their breath. They looked at the old house, which was now quite near. They stood in what once must have been part of the garden.

‘Half of the garden has tumbled over the cliff into the sea at some time,’ said Pat. ‘Look where this wall is broken in half, just at the edge of the cliff.’

The house looked forlorn and deserted and the gutter hung down here and there. The children went over to what had once been the back door. It was locked.

The windows were all fastened too, though most of the panes were cracked. Pat and Mary went round to the other side of the house. The front door was locked too.

‘I wonder how Graham got into the house,’ said Pat, puzzled. ‘That is, if it was Graham we saw in here the other day, standing at one of the top windows.’

‘Well, if it wasn’t Graham, it was *somebody*—possibly a tramp,’ said Mary. ‘He got in somewhere—but where?’

They went all round the house, but there was no sign of anyone getting in anywhere. It would have been dangerous to get in through one of the broken windows, for the glass was sharp and jagged.

There seemed to be absolutely no way of getting into the house at all, much to the twins’ surprise. How had Graham got in then—if it *had* been Graham? ‘No footmarks anywhere in the sand round the house,’ said Pat. ‘Not a sign to show that anyone has ever been here!’

‘We’ll ask Graham how he got in,’ said Mary, puzzled. ‘And if it wasn’t him, we’ll tell Mrs Holly that somebody’s prowling about!’

‘Well, it’s rather disappointing,’ said Pat. ‘I was looking forward to a spot of exploring.’

‘I know!’ said Mary. ‘Let’s go and explore a cave or two—we’ve never

been into any except that first little one with Ruth, because we've never had our torches with us.'

'We haven't got them now,' said Pat.

'I know—but we can easily go and get them,' said Mary. 'I'll run back to the house and find them. You stay here. I won't be a minute. I'll take Tippy and shut her into our room—she wouldn't like dark caves.'

She ran off over the beach at top speed, Tippy racing with her. In fifteen minutes she was back with the torches, and the twins began to climb up to the caves that lay like black shadows here and there in the cliffs.

They were very disappointing caves, shallow and low-roofed. The first one was so small that the twins could not stand upright in it. The next one went back a little way and had a higher roof, but it smelt of rotting seaweed and they soon came out.

'I don't think much of these caves,' said Pat. 'No wonder nobody ever bothers to go and picnic in them or explore them. There's nothing to explore.'

'Let's go and have a bathe,' said Mary. 'I'm bored with caves now.'

'We'll just try one last one,' said Pat, and climbed up to it, his torch stuck in his belt, for he needed both hands.

He found himself on a rocky ledge outside the cave. It had a very low roof in front, and the twins had to bend almost double to make their way in. But inside the cave roof went high up, and the cave broadened out well. In fact, it was the biggest one they had seen.

'Why, this is a fine cave!' said Pat, in surprise.

'It goes ever so far back. Come on, Mary, let's see how big it is.'

The cave was almost dark, for very little daylight came in at the low entrance. Their torches showed them a very spacious place indeed, and not at all smelly as some of the caves had been. They walked right to the back of it.

'This would make a wonderful place for a hidey-hole,' said Pat, flashing his torch round. Then suddenly he kept his torch pointing steadily at one place—right in the very corner of the cave.

'Look, Mary,' he said.

Mary looked at the spot lighted by Pat's bright torch. 'Why—what's that?' she said. 'It's a hole, isn't it? A hole in the rocky floor!'

They both bent over and looked at the hole. 'Does it lead anywhere, do you think?' asked Mary. 'It's not big enough for us to get into.'

'It might be,' said Pat, kicking away sand and old seaweed from the hole. 'It's partly stuffed up with all kinds of things—sand, seaweed, and, look, this bit of loose rock has fallen in from the cave-wall, and blocked it too. Help me to lift it, Mary.'

He and Mary tugged hard at the rock which had fallen partly into the hole. They dragged it away at last and then cleared out more seaweed and sand. Pat

shone his torch into the hole, and saw that it went down some way.

‘I can’t see if it goes down to another cave, or whether it has a rocky bottom to it,’ he said. ‘I know—take my torch, Mary, and I’ll let myself carefully down into the hole and see what happens. If I touch rock with my feet I’ll know it’s just a hole. If I don’t, I shall know it’s a way through to somewhere else—another cave!’

Mary watched him, half-frightened. He let himself down—but there was no rocky bottom to rest his feet on! Instead, the hole seemed to widen out tremendously. ‘I’m going to get out again,’ he said. ‘Then I want you to hold my feet, Mary, while I lean down into the hole as far as I can with my torch. I feel there may be another cave underneath—perhaps one that nobody has ever been in!’

‘Oh—*do* be careful!’ said Mary, anxiously. She helped Pat out of the hole, and he lay down full length, his shoulders and head right in the hole. He held his torch out at arm’s length down the dark hole, while Mary held his feet.

He gave a shout. ‘It goes into another cave or something! I can see another rocky floor down below. We can easily let ourselves drop down on to the sand!’

Mary pulled him back, and he got into the hole feet first again. There were ledges he could put his feet on as he went down—and then he let himself drop the last few feet on to soft sand below. He was out of the hole! He shone his torch round and called excitedly up to his sister.

‘Mary—it’s not another cave—it’s a tunnel—a kind of underground passage. Come down too—it’s quite easy!’

Mary got into the hole, her heart beating fast. This really was an adventure! She cautiously felt about with her feet, and let herself down gently.

‘Now let yourself go,’ called Pat. ‘Then you’ll drop on to the sand like I did.’

Mary let herself go, and fell to the soft sand below. Pat caught her and steadied her. She looked round in wonder.

‘You’re not frightened, are you, Mary?’ asked Pat. ‘Isn’t this thrilling? Who would have thought that the cave above had a hole that led to this passage!’

They stood side by side in the dark passage. The roof was only just above their heads, and they could touch the sides when they held their hands a little way out.

Pat shone his torch first up, then down the passage. ‘Where does it come from?’ he wondered. ‘And where does it lead to? Mary, which way shall we take? This way leads in the direction of Holiday House, and this way leads in the opposite direction.’

‘Oh—let’s take this way—the opposite direction,’ said Mary. ‘I don’t care

which! We can easily explore both ways if we want to! You lead, Pat.'

So Pat led the way, his torch making a bright pathway of golden light in front of them, showing up the passage as it twisted and turned deep down in the cliff. Once the roof became so low that Pat halted, afraid that he could go no farther. But just beyond the low part the roof rose again, and the two went on and on.

Suddenly Pat stopped once more and gave an astonished shout. 'Hallo! Look, what's this? Steps, Mary—steps leading upwards, look!'

Mary pressed close to him and looked over his shoulder. Yes—steps were there, hewn out of the brown rock itself many years gone by! They were rough and badly shaped, but they were certainly steps!

'Go on, Pat, climb the steps!' said Mary, in excitement. 'Wherever do they lead to?'

Pat went up slowly. The rough-hewn steps told him that other people had used this passage—many, many others, perhaps, in long-ago days. He and Mary were not the first ones to walk along this twisty tunnel in the cliffs, as he had imagined.

There were eleven steps, steep and rough. At the top was a doorway. Not a door, but a doorway. The door itself lay just inside, broken from its hinges, old and rotten!

Pat gave it a kick and some of it fell to pieces. He stepped over it and pulled Mary up behind him. Then they shone their torches round them. Wherever could they be?

CHAPTER 9

FOOTPRINTS—AND A LOCKED DOOR

The two children gazed round them in wonder. They stood in a vast underground place, dark and low-roofed. Great wooden stands or shelves ran here and there, many of them broken and rotting.

‘It’s a cellar, Mary! That’s what it is,’ said Pat at last. ‘Look, there are some old barrels over there. Maybe it was a wine-cellar belonging to some big-house.’

‘Pat—we can’t be under the old ruined house on the cliff, can we?’ said Mary, clutching his arm. ‘Those old places had enormous cellars, you know. There’s one at Holiday House—Mrs Potts told me, and she showed me the door down to it—a horrid, big dark place it looked.’

‘You may be right,’ said Pat, flashing his torch round. ‘We’ll see if we can find steps leading upwards, Mary—and then we shall soon see what house we are in.’

He led the way into the gloomy, musty place. A large spider scuttled away, and some small animal, a mouse or a rat, pitter-pattered behind them. Mary kept close to Pat, and held on to his arm.

Pat felt her trembling a little and he took her arm in his. ‘Don’t you be afraid,’ he said. ‘I shall look after you, Mary. That’s only a mouse you heard.’

The two children walked beside a line of wooden shelves, and came into a bare part of the cellars. Here old boxes and crates stood, covered with dust and cobwebs. Once Mary walked into a long cobweb and squealed when she felt it across her cheek, soft and clinging.

She brushed it away. ‘I’m silly,’ she said. ‘It was only a spider’s web. Oh, look, Pat—can those be steps leading upwards over there in that corner?’

They both shone their torches on the steps and then went towards them. They were ordinary stone cellar steps, and they led upwards to a stout wooden door.

Pat went first, hoping that the door would not be locked! He gave it a push. It did not open. ‘I believe it’s locked, Mary,’ he said.

‘There’s a handle. Turn it,’ said Mary. He turned it this way and that—and suddenly there was a click and the door swung open before them!

‘Come on,’ said Pat, and stumbled out into daylight. He pulled Mary up, and they both gazed round. Where were they?

They had no idea, except that they seemed to be standing in a stone-floored room, with a huge, old-fashioned stone sink at one end. What looked like an

old hand-pump stood near them. A low, dust-dimmed window let in daylight.

‘This is a scullery or kitchen, I think,’ said Pat. He went to the window and looked out. The sea lay there, heaving and glittering, immediately below him!

‘We *are* in that old house,’ said Pat. ‘We must be. Come and look round it and we’ll soon know.’

‘Pat—look!’ said Mary, suddenly, and she pointed down to the floor. ‘Footprints. Someone else has been here.’

There were many footprints there, criss-crossing one another, showing up clearly in the thick dust. A trail of them led out of the door into a bigger room beyond, evidently another kitchen.

‘A lot of people have been here,’ said Pat. ‘Or else one person has visited this place lots of times. I wonder why?’

‘Let’s follow the footprints,’ said Mary. So they trailed them out of the big kitchen and into a vast hall as big as the ones at Holiday House.

‘They go up the stairs,’ said Mary, suddenly beginning to whisper. ‘Look! Oh, Pat—you don’t think whoever comes here is in the house *now*, do you?’

Pat stood and considered this. Then he listened hard, his head on one side like a dog’s. Not a sound was to be heard except the wash of the sea outside.

‘We’ll chance it,’ said Pat in a whisper. ‘Be as quiet as you can.’

They went up the stairs silently, following the footprints in the thick yellow dust. Up to a big landing, up more stairs, on to another landing, and up yet another, narrower stairway. A small landing was at the top, with four doors opening off. The footprints led to only one door. It was shut.

Pat walked cautiously to it, his feet making no sound in the thick sandy dust. He tried the handle very, very carefully. It turned—but when he pushed against it the door did not open.

‘Locked!’ said Pat, with a groan. ‘Blow!’

‘Is it locked on this side or the other side?’ whispered Mary. ‘Look in at the keyhole and see if a key is in it the other side.’

Pat bent down and looked. There was no key the other side and he could quite well see into part of the room. He stared in surprise, then stood back.

‘You look, Mary,’ he said, ‘and tell me what you can see.’ Mary looked, in her turn, and then stood up, astonished.

‘Pat! There’s a mattress there—and a blanket. I could see part of them quite well. And I think I could make out a candlestick. Who sleeps here, in this old ruined house? And where has he gone? There’s nobody there now. Whoever comes here has gone out, and locked the door behind him.’

‘He may be somewhere else in the house,’ said Pat, and for some reason this really scared the two. Fear came into their excitement and they started off down the stairs, forgetting to be quiet and careful!

‘I don’t want to go down into the cellar again, and through that dark

tunnel,' panted Mary. 'Isn't there any other way out, Pat?'

'There's a little door here with a key in it,' said Pat, and ran to it. There were bolts at top and bottom and he drew them. They made a groaning sound, and Mary trembled. Pat turned the key and pulled hard at the door. With a sudden jerk it opened and he almost fell backwards. He took the key from the inner side of the door and pushed Mary out. He shut the door and locked it, putting the key into his pocket.

'We can't leave it open,' he said. 'Someone might get in and set fire to the place or something.'

'It looks as if someone is already in,' said Mary, thinking of the mattress and blanket in the room at the top of the house.

They made their way into the sandy, desolate garden, and down the steep little path to the beach.

'The person who sleeps in that room must be the one we thought was Graham,' said Mary at last. 'But it can't be Graham, of course. He sleeps at Holiday House—and there wouldn't be any sense in his sleeping at that old house, would there?'

'None at all. I do wonder who it is,' said Pat. 'Mary, shall we tell anyone about this?'

'No,' said Mary, who had now recovered from her feeling of fright and was thrilled at having such a secret. 'We won't tell a soul. But we'll get into that cave again and follow the passage in the *opposite* direction as soon as we can. And we'll keep watch on that room, Pat—at night, I mean. We shall be able to see if there is a light there if we look out of the window in that junk-room at the bottom of the tower! I noticed that the window there looks right over to the old house!'

'Good idea,' said Pat. 'We'll look tonight, Mary.'

Tippy was mad with joy to see them when they opened the door of their bedroom. She flew at them as if she had not seen them for weeks. 'You'd have been scared stiff of those caves and that cellar, Tippy,' said Mary, hugging the little dog.

Pat suddenly remembered how Graham had gone off by himself in the middle of the picnic and he wondered if he was all right again. 'I shall see at tea-time,' he thought, and washed himself thoroughly, for the caves and the cellars had dirtied him from head to foot.

Graham, came in to tea, looking more himself again. He said hardly anything, and Mrs Holly looked at him now and again, feeling worried. What a strange boy he was, with his moody silences! However, Ruth made up for his silence, for she chattered on and on and on.

She had met a new family on the beach, and had made friends with them. 'They've got an old aunt called Eliza,' she said, 'and this old aunt has a poodle

just like yours, Pat.'

'How do you know it's like ours?' said Pat, bored.

'And this family come from Halliwell,' said Ruth, 'and their name is Lockham. I didn't like the big boy, he said a rude word and . . .'

'That's enough, Ruth,' said her mother. 'We really don't want to hear about boys who say rude things. Has everyone finished? Have you had plenty, Graham dear? I never think you eat enough!'

It rained after tea, and Mrs Holly suggested that all the children staying in the house should go into the big playroom and have games such as musical chairs and blind man's buff. Ruth was pleased.

'I'll manage everything, Mummy,' she said. 'I know how to get those games going. I do it at school for the little ones. You leave it to me.'

And, before twenty minutes had passed, Ruth had organized everyone into one big and successful party! She was a little nuisance, a big bore, and a dreadful little nosy-parker—but she certainly knew how to boss all those small children and make them as good as gold! The nurses, who had taken their children to the playroom, sat back and thankfully let Ruth take charge—what a child!

'I don't like her a bit in the ordinary way,' said one nurse to another, 'but it's certainly a rest to sit back and let her boss the little ones! Just look how they obey her, the funny little things!'

After supper Mary and Pat went up to bed to read. They often did that, resting their legs, tired from swimming or running, reading an exciting book till it was time to go to sleep. Tippy lay first on one bed and then on the other, giving each child licks in turn.

Tonight the two children did not mean to settle down to sleep as they usually did. No—as soon as it was dark they meant to creep out to the spiral staircase and go to the junk-room in the tower. They wanted to see if there was a light in that little top room in the old house!

'Are you ready, Mary?' called Pat at last. 'Let's go then. For goodness' sake, don't make any noise!'

CHAPTER 10

A REAL PUZZLE

The twins left Tippy, the poodle, in Pat's room and went quietly into the corridor. They walked to the end and went up the little spiral staircase to the first tower-room, where all kinds of junk were kept.

They opened the door and went in. It was now dark, but Pat had his torch and switched it on. The room was not so full of junk and furniture as it had been when they last went into it, because Mrs Holly had taken a good many of the chairs and tables out for use, now that Holiday House was almost full.

The twins picked their way through the junk to the tower window. The night was very dark indeed, for there was no moon. They looked out of the window, straight across to where the old house loomed like a black, solid shadow against the dark sky.

It was completely dark from top to bottom. Mary gave a little sigh of disappointment.

'Whoever it is is not there,' she whispered. 'What a pity! Or do you suppose whoever was there has gone away now? Perhaps it was only a tramp, Pat—a tramp who comes now and again.'

'Sh! Look!' said Pat, excitedly. A light suddenly shone out from the top room they were watching! A flickering, uncertain light that was certainly candle-light!

'There you are,' said Pat, triumphantly. 'There *is* someone there tonight. I say—I wonder if Graham has ever noticed it—his window looks out across to the old house too! He may quite well have seen it. Let's go and ask him.'

They left the junk-room and went up the spiral staircase to Graham's room, the middle one in the tower. They knocked at the closed door.

There was no answer at all. They knocked again. Still no answer. 'He can't have gone to bed *yet*,' said Mary. 'He works till very late, Mrs Holly says.'

'Well, there's a light in his room,' said Pat, pointing to the crack of light under the door. 'Let's go in. Perhaps he's just fallen asleep in his chair.'

Pat opened the door and peeped in. Mary pushed in behind him. The twins stared round, astonished. Nobody was there! The big oil-lamp shone steadily on the table, but the room was quite empty, and the bed not yet slept in.

'He must have gone for a walk,' said Pat. 'Let's go and get undressed and then come back again.'

But even when they came back again in half an hour's time there was no Graham.

‘It’s funny,’ said Pat. ‘I know Mrs Holly locks the front door before this. How will he get in?’

‘Let’s sit in the junk-room and wait for him,’ said Mary. ‘We shall see him go by the door, and hear him too.’

So they went to the junk-room and sat down on a crate there. The light still shone in the top room of the old tower. Pat nudged Mary. ‘Do you suppose it’s Graham up there?’ he said. ‘You know we did think once it was Graham we saw there.’

‘No. It can’t be,’ said Mary. ‘Why should he go there to sleep when he’s got his room?’

‘Listen!’ said Pat, cocking up his head. ‘Isn’t that someone in Graham’s room now? I’m sure I heard a cough or something.’

‘You know that nobody has gone by us up the spiral stairs,’ said Mary. ‘If Graham or anyone had gone up to the middle room we should have seen and heard him.’

‘All the same—there *is* someone there,’ said Pat. ‘And I’m going to see.’

He went up the spiral stairway, followed by Mary—and as soon as they came to the shut door they heard a noise they knew very well indeed—Graham’s little cough!

‘It’s Graham!’ said Pat, in amazement. ‘But—but—how . . .’

Mary knocked on the door. Graham called ‘Come in!’ in rather a surprised voice, and looked even more surprised when he saw Pat and Mary coming in, wearing their dressing-gowns. ‘What’s up?’ he said.

‘Graham! You weren’t here when we came some while ago,’ said Pat, ‘and we sat in the junk-room and waited for you, but you didn’t go up the stairs past the junk-room door—and yet here you are! How—how did you manage to get here?’

Graham stared at them and said nothing. He gave a quick glance out of the window, and Pat did too. He saw again the gleaming little light in the window of the top room of the distant house.

‘Have you noticed that light too?’ said Pat, his words tumbling out one on top of another. ‘We’ve been watching for it tonight—we sat in the junk-room. We saw it, and we wanted to ask you if you’d spotted it, too. It’s queer, isn’t it?’

‘Yes,’ said Graham. His dark eyes looked at Pat and then away again. Pat went on eagerly.

‘Graham, we got into that old house today; we went upstairs—and we peeped in at the keyhole of that room where there’s a light, and . . .’

Graham was listening intently, his eyes fixed on Pat. He sat quite still, his breath coming a little quickly.

‘And what do you think we saw in the room?’ said Pat.

‘I—I can’t imagine,’ said Graham. ‘Tell me.’

Pat told him about the mattress, the blanket and the candlestick. ‘What are they there for?’ he asked Graham. ‘Is it a tramp, do you think?’

‘Possibly,’ said Graham, looking out of the window. ‘Yes, possibly.’

‘We’d better tell Mrs Holly, hadn’t we?’ said Mary.

Graham looked at her, frowning. ‘No,’ he said, ‘Not just yet at any rate. We’ll keep watch for a night or two more, shall we? I’ve never seen the light before tonight. Don’t let’s say anything yet. And now you’d better scoot off to bed. It’s eleven o’clock—and I’ve got some work to do. Goodnight.’

‘Well—goodnight then,’ said Pat, disappointed that Graham had taken everything so calmly. Why, he hadn’t even asked how he and Mary had got into the old house, and Pat was simply longing to explain about the cave and the tunnel.

He and Mary went out of the door and shut it quietly. They went back to their own rooms and Pat curled up on the eiderdown on Mary’s bed.

‘Graham’s never excited over anything,’ he said. ‘He’s very dull to tell anything to, isn’t he, Mary? I was so excited at seeing that light.’

‘Pat—don’t you think it’s *peculiar* that Graham didn’t tell us how he got to his room without our seeing him?’ said Mary, slowly. ‘He never said a word about that—not a single word.’

‘You’re right,’ said Pat, astonished. ‘I got so excited about that light in the window that I forgot about pressing him to tell us how he got back to his own room. After all, there’s no way to his room at all except up the spiral stairs!’

‘Or down them,’ said Mary. ‘But the top tower-room is locked, so he couldn’t have come from there. HOW did he get back—or was he hiding under the bed or in his wardrobe when we went in the first time?’

‘Now you’re muddling me,’ said Pat. ‘I must be getting sleepy. Oh, let’s leave this mystery for tonight and sleep on it. We may have some good ideas about it tomorrow. I’m going to my bed. Goodnight, Mary!’

Off he went and Mary heard his bed creaking as he settled down in it. She lay and thought about the exciting happenings of the day. The cave—the tunnel—the cellars—the old empty house—the top room, locked, and furnished with just a few things. And then the mystery of Graham going out for a walk and getting back to his room unseen by them. What did it all mean?

Well, perhaps it *wasn’t* a mystery after all—perhaps there was some simple explanation. But Graham was queer—Ruth was quite right, Gloomy Graham was queer.

Graham seemed quite all right the next day at breakfast and didn’t say a word about the happenings of the night before. The twins were not surprised at this, because Ruth was nearby all the time.

‘We’ll watch for the light again tonight,’ said Pat to Mary. ‘Let’s go and

tell Graham, and ask if he'll watch with us.'

But Graham was not in his room, and Mrs Holly told them he had gone off for the day to do some shopping.

'New socks and a swim-suit or something,' she said. 'I was glad he wanted to go—a whole day off will be a change for him. He will have a breakdown if he doesn't take time off now and again!'

Graham did not appear till supper-time that night, looking tired and white. He said very little about his day and didn't seem to have enjoyed it much.

'Oh—I just did a bit of shopping—and mooched around a bit—and went to a cinema,' he said. 'I feel a bit tired, so I'll turn in early, I think, Mrs Holly.'

The twins followed him when they left the supper table with Tippy trotting behind them. 'Graham!' said Pat, in a loud whisper, as they came into the corridor where their rooms were. 'Graham! Shall we watch for the light to shine in the old house tonight?'

'You watch if you like,' said Graham. 'I really feel too tired.' He went up to his room and shut the door. Tippy gave a growl as if to say 'Bad-tempered fellow,' and the twins felt like growling too!

Gruff, the cat, slid out of the shadows near Tippy and gave her a sudden slap with his paw. Tippy yelped and looked round, but Gruff had gone.

'Chase him, then!' said Mary, knowing quite well that Tippy wouldn't. 'Cowardy-custard! Come on downstairs, Pat—it's not dark enough yet to watch for that light.'

Later on, in slippers and dressing-gowns, they crept up the spiral stairs to the junk-room and settled themselves down by the window.

'There's no light yet,' said Pat, in disappointment. 'Let's wait awhile and see if it appears.'

But it didn't. The old house remained dark from top to toe, and the twins went to bed disappointed.

'There's no mystery any more,' said Pat. 'It must be a tramp who sometimes uses that room, that's all. Oh dear, I did enjoy that bit of excitement, didn't you, Mary? I wish it hadn't all fizzled out.'

'Oh well—perhaps something else will come along,' said Mary. She didn't know how right she was! Things began to happen the very next day!

CHAPTER 11

TROUBLE

The trouble began the next day, about tea-time. Mrs Holly heard loud voices coming from the kitchen, and went out to see what was the matter.

Mrs Potts and Mrs Tomms were arguing angrily. 'I tell you, there were five meat-pies in my larder and now one is gone!' said Mrs Potts.

'Well, what about my cakes then?' said Mrs Tomms, in her loud bark of a voice. 'Where's that fruit-cake I made? Not a slice cut out of it even—and it's gone.'

'Now, now—whatever is all this?' said Mrs Holly. 'Something missing?'

'Yes, Ma'am,' said both women at once, and told her at the tops of their voices, so that she had to put her hands to her ears.

'Well, I'm sorry about it,' said Mrs Holly at last. 'It's a puzzle where they have gone. I don't suspect anyone of *stealing* the things, though, do you?'

'Well yes, I do,' said Mrs Tomms, grimly. 'There's too many children come into this kitchen, Mrs Holly, Ma'am. That's what *I* say. Yes, and peep into the larder too!'

Ruth came in at the door, curious to know what the argument was about. Mrs Tomms scowled at her.

'And here's one of them!' she said, nodding at Ruth. 'Always prying and peeping about, that one. In my larder too last night—oh yes, I saw her!'

'I was only looking to see if all the trifle was finished up last night!' said Ruth, scowling back. 'Sometimes Mummy lets me finish things up.'

'You didn't finish up a meat-pie and a fruit-cake, I suppose?' said Mrs Tomms, who had taken a real dislike to the bossy little girl.

'Now, Mrs Tomms, that's enough,' said Mrs Holly, in her cool, firm voice. 'I can't have you accusing my daughter of a thing like that. We must just keep a good watch, that's all and find out who it is. No child may come into the kitchen from now on, not even you, Ruth! We do sometimes have trouble with hungry children, Mrs Potts, don't we? They come in after bathing, absolutely ravenous, and raid the larder!'

'Yes, that's right. It always happens,' said Mrs Potts. 'But a whole meat-pie—good gracious!'

Mrs Holly left the kitchen and took Ruth with her. Ruth looked rather white. 'I want you to come into my room, Ruth,' said Mrs Holly.

They went in and Mrs Holly shut the door. Before she could say anything, Ruth burst out into a torrent of words, tears pouring down her face.

‘I know what you’re going to say! You’re going to say it’s me! Just because I’ve sometimes gone into the larder and taken a biscuit or two or some jelly to finish up! You think it’s me, don’t you? You don’t like me, Mummy, you like the other children especially the—the—’

‘Ruth!’ said her mother, in horror. ‘Whatever are you saying? I wouldn’t *dream* of thinking it was you who stole a meat-pie from *me*—and from *my* larder! Why—I love you and trust you! What’s the matter with you?’

She put her arms round Ruth and gave her a hug. ‘Aren’t you silly? I *have* to be nice to all the other children, unless they’re impossible, as John was! After all, Ruth, this is our living—to run Holiday House for children, isn’t it?’

Ruth felt suddenly better. She dabbed her eyes and looked at the ground. ‘But—but—often you let the others do things you won’t let me do—you never scold them if they tell stories—you . . .’

‘No—because I’m not their mother, nor their teacher,’ said Mrs Holly. ‘Sometimes they come with their own mothers and sometimes with nurses or grannies or aunties. I must not interfere in the way they are being brought up, Ruth—it is their mothers and nurses and grannies who must scold them, not me. Be sensible—do be sensible!’

‘But do you *want* to scold them?’ asked Ruth. ‘Sometimes I think it’s only me you want to scold—and you never fuss me like you fuss the others, Mummy, do you?’

‘No. I’d like to—but you’re such a prickly little person!’ said her mother. ‘And believe me, I certainly would love to scold that naughty little Peter, and smack that selfish Janet, and send George out of the room when he behaves so badly at meals. But I’m not their mother, so I don’t.’

Ruth dried her eyes. ‘I think I *am* a bit prickly,’ she said. ‘I often think I’m not at all a nice person really—like the twins are, for instance. You like them, don’t you?’

‘Yes. So do you,’ said Mrs Holly. ‘But I wouldn’t change this prickly little girl for any other child in the world, so now you know!’

‘Oh, Mummy!’ said Ruth, and her face shone. ‘I never thought that.’

‘No. You’ve been jealous, haven’t you?’ said her mother. ‘And if you’re jealous you can’t possibly see what is true and what is not. Now listen. I brought you in here because I want you to help. Mrs Allen, George’s mother, has told me that she has lost her pretty brooch with the little blue sapphire in the centre. She’s worried about it—and I want you to hunt everywhere for it. Will you?’

‘Oh yes. Of course,’ said Ruth. ‘Goodness, is *that* why you brought me in here? I thought you were going to say dreadful things to me! I’ll go and look for the brooch at once. I know where Mrs Allen sat on the beach yesterday—it may be in the sand there.’

Ruth ran off. Mrs Holly smiled and sighed at the same time. What a pity Ruth had to share her with so many other children! Well, perhaps this talk had put a few things straight for her. She thought about the things taken from the larder. Who could have gone off with such big things as a meat-pie and a fruit-cake? She hoped that Mrs Allen's brooch *had* been lost, not stolen! It was very difficult to work happily when there was a thief in the house, and everyone suspected everyone else!

Holiday House was very full now and something exciting was planned for the older ones each day—long walks to some interesting place—picnics—coach rides to good bathing beaches somewhere else—parties and dances. It was really very exciting, and the twins loved every minute.

They were so tired at night that they could not even keep watch on the old house to see if the light was still shining there! Three nights went by, and they almost forgot about it, though they often talked about the cave and its exciting hole leading to the tunnel in the cliff.

And then one morning Ruth came into their room, looking very mysterious, with her finger to her lips. The twins looked at her in surprise.

'What is it? Why are you looking like that?' asked Pat, shutting his book.

'My mother said I could come and ask you to see if you could help us,' said Ruth, looking important and speaking in a very low voice.

'Well, what is it?' said Pat again. 'And why are you speaking like that? Nobody can possibly hear you in our rooms!'

'Even walls have ears,' said Ruth. 'Haven't you heard that saying?'

'In that case we'd better go down to the beach,' said Mary. 'There are no walls there!'

'Please listen,' said Ruth. 'Mummy's very, very worried, because if something isn't done about it she's got to get the police in at Holiday House!'

That made the twins sit up at once! 'Worried about *what*?' said Pat, impatiently. 'And why the police?'

'Well—things keep disappearing,' said Ruth. 'Food out of the larder, for instance—some goes almost every day, you know. And Mrs Allen's brooch went—and Nanny Hurst's bracelet—and now Mummy's watch has gone. Her nice gold one.'

'Good gracious!' said Pat. 'Do you mean they are *stolen*? Who can the thief be?'

'Well, that's what we want to find out,' said Ruth. 'Mummy says that it's much easier for us children to keep a watch because we're always running in and out of the rooms and we go everywhere—we must keep our eyes open and report anything unusual to her. Anyone going into someone else's room, and so on, and . . .'

'Are any other children going to watch?' asked Mary. 'Because if we *all*

know, it would be silly.’

‘Oh no—only you two,’ said Ruth. ‘You two and me.’

‘What about Graham?’ said Mary. ‘He’s been here a long time—he knows the whole house. Can’t we tell him too?’

‘No. Certainly not,’ said Ruth. ‘Good gracious me, no!’

She had put on a most peculiar look and the twins stared at her in surprise.

‘What do you *mean*?’ said Pat at last. ‘For goodness’ sake, don’t be so mysterious, Ruth. I don’t see why we can’t tell Graham—he looks so worried lately that it would do him good to have something exciting to think about.’

‘No. NOT Graham!’ said Ruth.

‘Anyone would think you thought he was the thief,’ said Mary, annoyed.

‘Well—perhaps I do think that!’ said Ruth, and turned to go out of the room. But Pat ran to her and caught her arm.

‘Oh no—you can’t say a thing like that, and then just walk out of the room!’ he said. ‘That’s a horrible thing to say—that poor old Graham is a thief! You just take that back.’

‘No, I shan’t,’ said Ruth. ‘I’ve seen him creeping about at night—and I’m *sure* he goes to the larder. I saw someone coming out of the kitchen last night, and it looked very like Graham.’

‘How do you know? Were all the lights on?’ asked Pat, in a most disbelieving voice.

‘No. It was dark,’ said Ruth. ‘Anyway, somebody *else* thinks it’s Graham—*she*’s seen him creeping about too!’

‘Who?’ asked Pat. ‘I thought you said that no other children knew about this.’

‘They don’t. It’s *Lydia* who told me!’ said Ruth, triumphantly. ‘She’s very, very worried about it, because, you see, *she* may be suspected of stealing things as she has to go into most of the rooms to make beds and to dust! *She* thinks it’s Graham!’

‘Well, *I don’t*,’ said Pat. ‘And instead of snooping and prying on him, I’m going to tell him everything and ask him to *help*. See?’

‘You mustn’t,’ said Ruth, lowering her voice so that it could hardly be heard. ‘Lydia told me something else. Something dreadful! Shall I tell you what it is—or not?’

CHAPTER 12

THE MAN WITH YELLOW HAIR

The twins stared at Ruth, wondering what to say. They really didn't want to hear any more horrid things about Graham, queer and gloomy as he always was. Ruth grew impatient.

'Well—shall I tell you this dreadful thing that Lydia knows about Graham, or not?'

'You'd better tell us,' said Pat. 'But if it isn't true I'll go straight to your mother about it, Ruth. So be careful.'

'Oh—it is true,' said Ruth. 'It was in the papers, Lydia said. Well—Graham's brother is a *thief*—a *burglar*! And he's been sent away to some very stern place—not prison, he's not old enough—where he's got to be for a long time.'

The twins didn't know what to say to this. It certainly was a sad piece of news. Poor Graham! So he *had* got a brother after all—but he was ashamed of him, and so he didn't talk about him at all—he had even said that he *hadn't* a brother when Ruth had gone to ask him. No wonder he had been angry with her for prying into his secret!

'Well,' said Ruth, 'aren't you going to say anything? Don't you believe me?'

'Yes—I think I do believe you,' said Pat. 'It all seems to fit in with Graham's behaviour—he's so gloomy and keeps himself to himself and hardly ever talks. But because he has a bad brother, it doesn't mean that *he's* a thief too, Ruth.'

'Lydia says he's as bad as his brother,' said Ruth, obstinately. 'And do you know how she knows? Because her brother knew the two brothers well. He was garden-boy at their school, and his name's Wilfrid. She adores Wilfrid. Well, after all I've told you, will you help to keep a watch on Graham? It's a shame that Lydia might be suspected to be the thief, if all the time it's Graham.'

'No. I'm not going to spy on Graham,' said Pat. 'Nor is Mary. This is only Lydia's tale! Why, Graham may not even have a brother—it's only Lydia who has told you.'

'The woman at the sweet-shop told me, too. Don't you remember?' said Ruth. 'Oh, it's true all right. Very well, if you won't be sensible and spy on Graham, I *will*. But you might keep a watch and see if you notice anything unusual at any time.'

‘We’ll do *that*,’ said Pat, and opened his book and began to read again. Ruth took the hint and went out of the room, giving the door a good slam. She was cross.

‘Blow Ruth and her gossip,’ said Pat, putting his book down. ‘What do you think about it all, Mary?’

‘All I feel is that I’m very sorry for poor old Graham,’ said Mary. ‘And I don’t think for one moment he would steal anything. But as things do appear to be spirited away by someone, we might as well keep our eyes open and catch the *real* thief!’

‘Right. I agree with you,’ said Pat. ‘I don’t like the way Ruth *gloats*, do you, when she has anything unkind to tell? I could slap her then.’

‘Let’s go out and find Tippy,’ said Mary. ‘She does so love playing with the small children who are here now that we hardly ever see her!’

They went out in swim-suits to find Tippy. She was on the beach with about a dozen two- and three-year-olds, having a perfectly wonderful time. The small ones loved the gentle, playful little dog, and crawled after her all the time.

She ran up happily to the twins. ‘Come for a walky-walk, Tippy,’ said Mary, and the little poodle yapped excitedly and ran round and round her. They all set off up the beach.

‘Let’s bathe,’ said Mary. ‘There’s a nice deep pool here by this rock, it will be as warm as toast!’

They lay down in the warm pool, resting their heads against the rock behind. ‘Oooh—a shrimp is tickling me—or is it a crab?’ said Mary. ‘This is like a warm bath, Pat. I could stay here for hours!’

They lay there, enjoying the warm water, till a little cold wave ran into their pool and made a ripple. ‘Tide’s coming in,’ said Pat, sitting up. ‘Look, Mary, we’ve got a good view of the ruined house up on the cliff. I wonder if the old tramp, or whoever he is, is still using that top room for a camping-out place!’

‘Yes. I wonder, too,’ said Mary. ‘Let’s go up into the garden and see if we can find any footprints. We couldn’t before, but we might now.’

They got out of the pool into the hot sun, and climbed up the cliff path. They were soon in the sandy garden, and looked all round eagerly.

‘Why, look—there are new footprints!’ said Mary, pointing to a trail of big ones that wandered here and there.

‘Yes. Those are new,’ said Pat. ‘Someone with fairly heavy boots on has made them. Some tripper perhaps.’

They sat themselves down in a warm corner to dry their swim-suits. The sun was so hot that they dried very quickly. They were just about to get up and go when Mary heard a sound.

She put her hand on Pat's arm. 'Someone's here,' she whispered. 'Let's see who it is. It may be the man who uses the top room here, whose light we saw.'

So they kept quite quiet. Soon a young man came round the corner of the house, a slouching young fellow with a cigarette at the corner of his mouth. He had yellow hair that was brushed back from his face, and was much too long.

He stood looking up at the house and then went to the little garden door out of which the children had made their escape from the old house a few days back. He tried the handle and then shook the door. He walked back into the garden again—and suddenly saw the two children sitting in the warm corner.

'Hallo!' he said, looking startled. 'I never saw you. What are you doing here?'

'Just drying ourselves after a bathe,' said Pat. 'What are you doing here?'

'Oh, just looking round this old house,' said the young man. He had a curiously soft voice, and his sharp eyes didn't seem to go with his voice. 'Do you know who owns it?'

'No,' said Pat.

'I suppose you haven't seen anyone about, have you?' said the young fellow.

'How do you mean?' asked Pat, cautiously, thinking of the camper up in the top room.

'Well—in the garden here, for instance,' said the young man.

'No,' said Pat again. 'Why? Are you looking for someone?'

The young man didn't answer. He was lighting another cigarette. He threw away the match, gave a puff and waved to the children. Then he turned away and disappeared down the cliff path.

'Who was he, do you suppose?' said Mary, in a low voice. 'Was he looking for the man up in the top room?'

'I shouldn't think so,' said Pat. 'I don't know.'

'I didn't like him,' said Mary. 'Horrid long hair and dirty finger-nails.'

'Yes. Beware of young men with long hair—that's what Dad says, isn't it?' said Pat, remembering. 'He says he never met a long-haired young man yet that was any good—so we'd better beware!'

'Well—we needn't tell Ruth about him!' said Mary. 'Or shall we?'

'No—he can't have anything to do with Holiday House,' said Pat. 'Come on—we must go. Mrs Holly is very sweet and kind, but she does look cross if we're late for meals.'

After their dinner Mrs Holly called to them. 'Will you two go with Ruth and pick red-currants and raspberries for a pie, twins? You will? Thank you!'

The twins loved picking fruit, especially as they were allowed to eat some as they picked. They took two baskets from the rack and lined them with cabbage leaves so that the fruit would not stain the baskets. Mrs Holly was

very particular about things like that!

They were just going off to the kitchen garden to begin their job when Ruth came up to them, looking mysterious. 'I've got some peculiar news,' she said.

'What?' asked the twins.

'Well, what do you think Mrs Potts found on the top shelf of the larder today?' said Ruth.

'A dead beetle,' grinned Pat.

'A mouse,' said Mary.

'No—she found a little pile of *money*,' said Ruth. 'About ten shillings, she said. And she says it wasn't there when she cleaned the shelf a little while ago. She didn't put it there, nor did Mrs Tomms.'

'Perhaps it's the larder thief, paying for his food,' said Pat, with a laugh.

'Don't be silly,' said Ruth. 'But it's peculiar, isn't it? Don't you think so?'

'Not very,' said Pat. 'I've no doubt one of the kitchen staff put the money there for a moment and then forgot all about it. Are you going to pick raspberries with us, Ruth?'

'Yes. I'll get a basket and join you in half a minute,' said Ruth, and ran off, disappointed that the twins didn't think much of her news.

Mary and Pat went into the quiet kitchen garden, where raspberry canes, thick and bushy, grew in rows higher than their heads, and currant bushes, hung with red, white and black currants, grew close together.

Pat slipped in between two high rows of raspberry canes, and then stopped, startled. Someone was hiding there! Someone who slipped quickly out of the other end of the row and ran off through a door in the kitchen garden wall.

'Mary! Did you see who that was?' said Pat, pushing his way through to Mary in the next row of canes. She was looking very startled.

'Yes, I did—oh, Pat, it was that young man we saw by the old ruined house just before we went home to dinner,' she said. 'What is he doing here?'

'I *thought* I recognized his long yellow hair,' said Pat. 'Well, this is very peculiar! As you say, Mary, what *is* he doing here?'

CHAPTER 13

GRAHAM TELLS A SECRET

The twins had no time to discuss the yellow-haired young man who had so strangely hidden in the raspberry canes, because Ruth came up at that moment with her basket. Pat looked at Mary and shook his head slightly. She knew what he meant.

‘He doesn’t want me to tell Ruth about the young man yet,’ she thought, and she didn’t say a word.

Ruth, of course, talked non-stop as she always did. ‘Mrs Tomms says this—Lydia says that—and *I* think so and so—and don’t you suppose . . .’

On and on she went without giving the twins a chance to say a word. Not that they minded. But they pricked up their ears when she repeated one thing that Lydia had said.

‘Lydia says that Graham’s room ought to be searched. She says that she’s sure he’s got stolen things hidden there . . .’

‘Well, she’d better not start searching the room herself, because if Graham discovers her there—or you either—he’ll fly into the biggest temper you’ve ever seen him in!’ said Pat at once. ‘Lydia has no right to talk like that, Ruth. Nobody has any right to accuse another person without real proof. You’re as bad as Lydia!’

Ruth sulked. Then she began again. ‘Well, something else went last night—Mrs Thomas has just reported it to Mummy. Her little girl’s locket has gone. Mrs Thomas says she *knows* she put it into her top drawer, and now it’s gone. There’s *somebody* getting through windows or doors, no doubt about that.’

The twins had the same thought at once—could it be that yellow-haired fellow? After all, he had no business to be hiding in the garden—he must have been up to no good. If only they could catch him stealing something, they could prove that Ruth was wrong—that it *wasn’t* Graham!

Where had he gone? Was he even now skulking about to find something to steal? Pat looked at his full basket, and made up his mind. He would take his basket to the kitchen and give in the fruit he had picked—but instead of coming back to pick some more, he would do a little skulking round himself!

‘Going to take in my fruit!’ he called to the girls and ran off. Mrs Tomms was pleased to see so much fresh fruit and gave him one of her new-made buns. Off he went again, his rubber-soled sandals making no noise at all.

There were no children in the back garden of the house—they were all either on the beach or in the front garden in their prams, because there was

plenty of shade there in the hot afternoons. Pat had the place to himself. He wriggled into the middle of a lilac bush and stayed there, quite still, making a little peep-hole for himself.

He could see almost all round him. From the distant kitchen garden he could hear Ruth's sudden laugh, otherwise all was still and quiet. No birds sang, not even the little yellow-hammer who sometimes trilled his 'little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheese' song from the top of a bush.

Pat kept absolutely still—and then he heard a noise. What was it? He peeped through his hole—and saw the yellow-haired fellow coming silently along the path, looking back every now and again to make sure he was not followed. He passed Pat's bush without a glance, and went on quietly towards the end of the house, where the big tower rose up.

Pat made another spy-hole and watched him. He saw with astonishment that the man was now climbing up the strong ivy stems which bore the thousands of leaves that clothed the tower. Where was he going?

The man climbed to the first window—the window of the junk-room—and peered inside. Then he began climbing up to the second window.

At that moment who should come padding along the path but Tippy, the poodle. She stopped by the lilac bush where Pat was hiding and sniffed hard, looking puzzled. Then she leapt into the bush, and barked madly, thinking that Pat was having one of his games of hide-and-seek with her.

'Wuff-wuff-wuff! Wuff-wuff-wuff!'

The yellow-haired fellow slid rapidly down the ivy as soon as he heard Tippy barking and dropped to the ground. He ran for the wall and climbed over it, just as Tippy realized that there was someone to chase! The little poodle raced over to the wall and barked again, trying her hardest to jump up the bricks.

Graham put his head out of the tower window. 'Stop Tippy barking!' he called, irritably. 'How can I work with that row going on?'

Pat ran to the tower. 'Graham! Someone was climbing up the ivy to your window just now—and Tippy barked at him.'

'What! Climbing up the ivy!' said Graham, astonished. 'Come up and tell me about it.'

Soon Pat and Tippy were in the middle tower-room with Graham. It was as untidy as ever, with books and papers all over the place.

'I was hiding in the lilac bush,' began Pat, quite out of breath with his quick climb up the spiral stairway to Graham's room. 'And he came by—and he suddenly began to climb up the ivy . . .'

'What was he like?' asked Graham, quickly.

'Horrid fellow,' said Pat. 'Yellow hair, much too long—and a soft sort of voice.'

‘Oh!’ said Graham, with a groan, and, to Pat’s surprise, he put his face down into his hands. ‘I was afraid it was.’

‘What’s the matter, Graham?’ asked Pat. ‘Do you know who the man is, then?’

‘Yes,’ said Graham, still with his head in his hands. ‘It’s Wilfrid.’

‘Wilfrid?’ said Pat. ‘Who’s he? Oh—is he Lydia’s brother? Of course—they’re awfully alike—yellow hair and soft voices! Why didn’t I think of it before?’

‘He’s the meanest, cleverest, most dishonest fellow in the world!’ said Graham. There was a pause and then he turned to Pat.

‘Pat—what have you been hearing about me? I know things have been said. Tell me truthfully—and then I’ll try and explain a few things to *you*.’

Pat sat down in a chair, and Tippy leapt on to his knees. ‘All right, Graham,’ he said, ‘I’ve been wanting to tell you a few things, actually. First—Ruth says that Lydia told her you’ve got a brother who’s a thief and has been put away somewhere—not in prison, because he’s not old enough.’

‘Anything else?’ said Graham, his face very white.

‘Yes. Lydia has told Ruth—and I suppose she’s told others as well—that *you’re* a thief too, and it’s you who are stealing the things that are always being missed now at Holiday House.’

‘I see,’ said Graham. ‘Do *you* think I’m the thief, Pat?’

‘No, I don’t.’

There was a silence and then Graham began to speak again in a low voice. ‘I *have* got a brother—although I told Ruth I hadn’t. And he *has* been put away into a hard school far away from here, because they said he had broken into a safe and stolen a box of valuable jewellery. But he didn’t steal it. Wilfrid stole it.’

‘How do you know?’ said Pat. ‘Why didn’t Wilfrid own up, then?’

‘You see, Peter, my brother, was at boarding-school,’ said Graham. ‘He was a dare-devil—you know, one of the sort who does things nobody else ever thinks of or dares to do. He’s fine, Pat—he’s—he’s the sort of fellow who gets the VC or some other medal for courage and daring when he’s grown up. He’s older than I am, and I thought the world of him. I still do.’

‘Your parents are dead, aren’t they?’ said Pat. ‘So I suppose your brother meant a lot to you.’

‘Yes, he did. I looked up to him no end; he was really all I had,’ said Graham. ‘Well, he got friendly with Wilfrid, who was the garden-boy at school—and Wilfrid was a bit of a dare-devil too. He and Peter once climbed up to the top of the school tower and hung the headmaster’s hat on the flag-pole there—that’s the sort of thing Peter did!’

He paused. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘to cut a long story short, Wilfrid said he would

show Peter how to open a safe—he was good at *that* sort of thing, too—and said it would be fun to stuff the safe full of cabbages and potatoes and carrots—and see what the head said when he opened the safe and found those inside!’

Pat gave a small laugh. ‘That’s quite funny really,’ he said.

‘Yes—but it didn’t turn out to be at all funny,’ said Graham. ‘Because when the head opened the safe next day, certainly the vegetables were all there in full array—but the jewel-box with his wife’s diamond necklace and brooches and ear-rings was gone!’

‘What happened then?’ asked Pat.

‘Plenty! Peter owned up that he had opened the safe with Wilfrid just to play a joke—but said, of course, that he knew nothing of the jewel-case. But that beast of a Wilfrid swore that he had been with Lydia, his sister, at the time the safe was opened—about midnight—and said that he knew nothing about the opening of the safe. He said that he knew Peter very well, and that Peter had stolen other things too, and had actually *told* him he was going to rob the safe.’

‘How simply dreadful!’ said Pat, horrified.

‘So the police sent Peter away, as I said, and I had to leave the school and come here instead to swot with a tutor for my exams. Wilfrid went up to Scotland or somewhere to work for his uncle till everything had blown over—but now he’s back again, as you see. I didn’t know he lived near here or I’d not have come here.’

‘Were the jewels ever found?’ asked Pat.

‘No. You may be sure that Wilfrid has got them safely hidden away somewhere till he thinks it’s safe to try and sell them,’ said Graham.

‘What’s he snooping round here for?’ asked Pat, after a pause. ‘Just to worry you and upset us?’

‘No. He didn’t know I was here at Holiday House till Lydia happened to take a job as housemaid—and *she* told him, of course,’ said Graham. ‘And do you know why he’s spying round everywhere? I oughtn’t to tell you, but I shall go potty if I don’t tell someone!’

‘Tell me,’ said Pat. ‘Do tell me, Graham.’

‘Well,’ said Graham, dropping his voice, and looking desperately at Pat, ‘well—my brother ran away from the place he was sent to—and came to me. And I’m hiding him, Pat. I *couldn’t* do anything else, could I?’

‘No, you couldn’t,’ said Pat, extremely startled. ‘Especially as he’s innocent. How does Wilfrid know he’s escaped, though?’

‘It was in the papers,’ said Graham. ‘As soon as I knew he had escaped, I guessed he would come to me, and I went over to Tiddington Town, where Wilfrid lives—that was the day you all thought I’d gone shopping—and I begged Wilfrid to own up to the robbery, and to tell me where he’d hidden the

jewels. I couldn't bear to think my poor brother would be caught and sent back to that place again. But Wilfrid only laughed at me.'

'The beast,' said Pat. 'And now I suppose he's hoping to find that you've hidden Peter somewhere, so that he can go to the police and tell them—and get a pat on the back. Mary and I saw him snooping round the old house this morning, and, and . . . Oh, Graham, you've hidden your brother in the room *at the top of the old ruined house*, haven't you?'

Graham nodded. 'Yes, yes—that's where he is—that's why I was so upset when you saw the light of his candle the other night, Pat. Oh dear—whatever am I to *do*?'

CHAPTER 14

THE TWINS ARE VERY CLEVER

Pat stared at Graham, feeling very sorry for him. He thought of the poor brother, shut up in the little top room that Graham had so carefully got ready for him when he had heard that he had escaped, guessing that he would be coming for help.

‘Graham, who’s stealing things at Holiday House, now—do you know?’ he asked. ‘Is that Wilfrid too?’

‘No. It’s Lydia,’ said Graham. ‘She’s as bad as Wilfrid. She was housemaid near him at another school, and things disappeared there too. If it hadn’t been for her telling the police that Wilfrid was with her at the time of the burglary, my brother would never have been found guilty.’

‘Where do you suppose the jewels are now?’ said Pat, after a pause.

‘Well hidden somewhere near Wilfrid’s home at Tiddington Town,’ said Graham. ‘I expect he’ll be digging them up, wherever they are, and trying to sell them, now he’s back from Scotland.’

A loud noise sounded through the window and both boys jumped violently. Tippy leapt off Pat’s knee and barked.

‘The tea-gong!’ said Pat. ‘Gosh, it made me jump. I’ve been here ages, Graham.’

‘Don’t tell anyone what I’ve told you,’ begged Graham.

‘Only my twin sister, Mary,’ promised Pat. ‘We tell each other everything. And if you want any help from us at any time, let me know. We’re absolutely on your side!’

‘Thanks,’ said Graham, looking a little more cheerful. ‘Don’t let that snooty little Ruth guess anything, though. And watch out for Wilfrid. Let me know whenever you see him. Spy on him if you can, in case he finds out Peter’s hiding-place. I couldn’t bear that!’

‘Come on down to tea,’ said Pat, standing up. Graham shook his head.

‘No. I don’t want any. Give Mrs Holly my apologies, and say I’m quite all right.’

Pat ran down the spiral stairway, his head in a whirl. What a story! He must tell Mary as soon as ever he could. But where? Ruth might come along at any moment—there was no getting away from her, especially after tea!

Mary was glad to see him. ‘Wherever have you been all afternoon?’ she said, and stopped suddenly when he gave her a little kick under the table.

After tea they went up to their rooms, and Pat shut the door carefully.

‘Let’s go into your room,’ he said to Mary, ‘and we’ll shut your door, too—then if Ruth comes snooping along she won’t hear us talking.’

They sat on Mary’s bed and Pat told his sister all that he had heard from Graham. She listened wide-eyed.

‘Oh—what a strange story!’ she said. ‘Poor Graham! That hateful Wilfrid! Why didn’t we realize he was Lydia’s brother this morning—they’re exactly alike! I bet Lydia is the one who’s been stealing the things here. I wonder where she’s hiding everything—not in her room—she would be afraid of it being searched!’

Tippy jumped down from the bed and whined. ‘Sh!’ said Pat, sure that the poodle had heard Ruth at the outer door. ‘Don’t make a sound, Tippy!’

Tippy stood and listened, then got back on the bed again. ‘Ruth’s gone!’ said Mary, with a grin. ‘Thanks for the warning, Tippy. Pat, what do you suppose will happen about Peter, Graham’s brother? He can’t stay hidden for weeks. What a dreadful life for him!’

‘No wonder Graham’s been so gloomy and mysterious and quiet,’ said Pat. ‘Well—that’s everything, I think, Mary. Let’s go down—and be sure to keep a look-out for that horrid Wilfrid, with his long yellow hair.’

They went out into the garden, and decided to play at the bottom where there was a small hay-field. Tippy raced in front—and then stopped at the hedge and gave a growl.

‘What’s the matter?’ said Pat. ‘What’s up, Tippy? Found a hedgehog or something—or is it old Gruff lying in wait for birds?’

Tippy barked, and someone stood up behind the hedge. The twins caught sight of a head of yellow hair—Wilfrid! He recognized them as the two children he had seen in the garden of the old house that morning.

‘Hallo,’ he said. ‘I say—can you give a message to my sister Lydia for me? I haven’t been able to get hold of her today. Tell her I want to see her this evening—about half past ten—on the beach under the caves, see?’

‘I’ll tell her,’ said Pat, and Wilfrid slunk away. Pat turned to face Mary and his eyes gleamed.

‘We’ll tell Lydia to meet him—and *we’ll* be there, too, Mary!’ he said. ‘We’ll listen to what Wilfrid has to say—he might even tell her where he’s hidden the box of jewels!’

‘But where can we hide?’ asked Mary.

‘There are plenty of rocks there,’ said Pat, ‘and it will be dark. We can hide behind the rock nearest to Wilfrid and Lydia when we see them meet.’

Mary felt excited. This meant that they would have to creep out quite late, in the dark of the night. She looked so excited that Ruth kept asking her all the evening what was the matter.

It seemed a very long time to wait, once they were in bed. ‘We’d better

creep out about a quarter past ten,' said Pat. 'In case Wilfrid or Lydia are early. We'll take Tippy. She is always perfectly quiet if we want her to be.'

At a quarter past ten the twins went silently out of their room and into the corridor. They unlocked the little garden door downstairs, shut it, and went out into the warm darkness. Pat had a torch to light their way. They went down on the beach, Tippy walking silently at their heels, delighted at this unexpected outing.

'Here are the caves,' whispered Pat. 'And there's a good big rock here. Let's stand behind it till we hear the others coming.'

They stood there, hearing nothing but the soft sound of the waves farther down on the sand. And then Tippy gave a small growl. The children knew that someone was coming.

It was Wilfrid, because they could see the glow of his cigarette. He walked right by them and went to a sandy place below the caves. He sat down.

Almost immediately, Lydia came, looking quite ghostly in a white coat. She gave a low whistle and Wilfrid answered. She saw the glow of his cigarette-end and went over to him.

'We'll slip across to the next rock,' whispered Pat. 'We shall hear better then.'

They made no noise in the soft sand as they slipped across to the rock near the brother and sister. Tippy made no sound either. They heard Wilfrid's voice as soon as they came near.

'And I know where Peter is now—Graham's hiding him in one of the top rooms of that old house. I'm going up there tonight to frighten the life out of him! I'm going to tell him I'm getting the police there tomorrow. That will make him squirm!'

'How did you find out?' said Lydia.

'I saw the light there when I came down here tonight,' said Wilfrid. 'I had a feeling that old house might be a good hiding-place—and when I saw the light I knew I was right.'

'Wilf—what about the jewel-box?' asked Lydia, dropping her voice a little. 'You said the place you'd hidden it, over in Tiddington, wasn't safe any longer.'

'That's right,' said Wilfrid. 'I buried it in a field that's going to be built over now, and I was afraid someone would find it. So I've brought it over here, Lydia. Can you keep it safe somewhere, so that I can get my hands on it when I want it?'

'Oh no, Wilfrid—I'd be scared to have it anywhere at Holiday House—especially now there's people snooping round for missing things,' said Lydia. 'I did hear that the police were coming tomorrow to question us all. But I've got my little lot safe—nobody can find them.'

‘Where did you put the things you took?’ asked Wilfrid.

Lydia gave a giggle. ‘Not far from here, Wilfrid. There’s a cave just behind us, with a rocky shelf right at the top. That’s where I’ve put everything I pinched.’

‘Good idea,’ said Wilfrid. ‘Look—here’s the jewel-case, Lydia. You put all your things into it, and then hide the box on the rocky shelf you’ve just told me about. I’ll fetch it when I’m ready.’

‘Let’s put it there now,’ said Lydia. ‘I don’t want to take anything back to Holiday House.’

They stood up and Wilfrid suddenly switched on a torch. Fortunately the light did not go anywhere near the children’s hiding-place. Wilfrid went to the cave with his sister. It was not one that the twins had explored. They watched eagerly from behind their rock, and Pat determined to get that jewel-box as soon as ever he could! What luck—it would have in it not only the jewels taken from the school safe but all the things that Lydia had stolen from Holiday House!

Wilfrid and his sister were not very long in the cave. They soon came down and stood talking. ‘Well, I’m going along to that old house now, to frighten Peter into fits,’ said Wilfrid at last. ‘What do you suppose he’ll say when I knock on his door and say “Peter! It’s old Wilfrid!”’

Lydia giggled. ‘He’ll be scared stiff—he’ll think he’s having a nightmare, Wilfrid. Well, I must be off. Goodbye.’

She glided away, a white blur in the darkness. Wilfrid went off towards the old house, whistling softly. Pat gave Mary a nudge.

‘Mary! Did you hear all that? My word—what a good thing we came down here!’

‘Let’s look for the jewel-box!’ whispered back Mary, excitedly. ‘Quick, let’s go to that cave.’

They made their way to it, with Tippy running in front as if she knew why they were going there. They climbed up to the little cave, and Pat flashed his torch above his head.

They saw the jewel-box almost at once, tucked away on a high shelf. It would have been quite invisible without a torch, even in daytime, for it was such a dark corner.

Peter climbed up and got it down. It was fairly big, a nice case in brown leather. He opened it and gasped. It was full of jewellery, though some was not very valuable, and among this were the brooches, necklaces and watch that Lydia had stolen from Holiday House. But the diamonds were magnificent, and the children gazed at them in wonder.

‘Mary, listen—I want you to go back to Holiday House and take this jewel-box to Graham,’ said Pat. ‘Tell him that Wilfrid has gone to frighten poor old

Peter, and that I've gone after him to see what he's going to do and say.'

'Oh no—don't do that,' said Mary, scared.

'Yes, I'm going to,' said Pat. 'I'll take Tippy with me. She might be useful. Go on Mary—do as I tell you. I'll come and report as soon as I'm back!'

CHAPTER 15

SOME EXCITING THINGS HAPPEN

Pat went after Wilfrid, leaving Mary to take the jewel-case to Graham. How delighted he would be to see it and hear the news! Pat wondered how Wilfrid meant to get into the old house—smash a window-pane to pieces and climb in carefully, without cutting himself?

Pat heard the sound of breaking glass as he went up the cliff path, feeling for the sandy steps with his feet. Yes, Wilfrid was getting in all right!

Pat felt in his pocket. He didn't need to get in through the window—he had the key of the garden door which he had brought back with him when he had been to the house by way of the underground tunnel!

He opened the garden door and went in quietly, Tippy at his heels. He stood and listened. He could hear footsteps going up the stairs—then loud voices!

He tiptoed up as far as the second landing and then listened to what was going on up on the top landing. Wilfrid had evidently knocked on the locked door there and awakened Peter. He was shouting at him:

'So you escaped, did you? But I've found you, and I'm telling the police where you are tomorrow, Peter—and back you'll go. That brother of yours thought he had done a clever thing to hide you, didn't he, when you came to him? And I shall be doing a clever thing—for myself, of course—when I give the police the news of where you are! That will be a good mark for me, Peter! A very good mark!'

Someone answered from behind the door. 'Leave me in peace, Wilfrid! You've done enough harm to me—I had to take the blame for what *you* did. Leave me in peace and don't set the police on me again!'

Wilfrid laughed. It was a horrible laugh that made Tippy growl and Pat shiver. It must have angered Peter, for there was suddenly the sound of a door being unlocked and thrown open with a crash.

'Oho!' said Wilfrid's voice, sneeringly. 'So we've come out for a breath of fresh air, have we?' Then his voice changed. 'Stand back, Peter—if you try fighting me you'll only get the worst of it!'

The listening Pat heard the sound of a blow, and then a shout from Wilfrid. 'You dare to hit me—I'll show you something.'

Then there came the sound of hurrying footsteps down the stairs. It was Peter. He had dodged the blow that Wilfrid had tried to give him in return for the one he had landed on Wilfrid's nose, and was now running for safety. Pat

was immensely surprised to see him, and so was Tippy. He was also very scared! He turned and ran down the next flight of stairs with Tippy behind, and a most astonished Peter a few stairs farther back still.

Peter had no idea who Pat was. He half thought he must be a friend of Wilfrid's, and when they came to the next flight of stairs he pushed Pat roughly aside and went on down in front of him, three steps at a time.

Wilfrid came pounding behind him, shouting in rage. He, too, was amazed to see Pat and Tippy in front of him, fleeing for their lives!! Down and down they all went!

Peter ran into the kitchen, searching blindly for some way of escape. By the light of Pat's torch he suddenly saw the open cellar door and ran through it, not knowing that it led down to a cellar. He lost his footing and fell from top to bottom, where he lay groaning.

Pat ran down the steps, too, with Tippy, anxious about Peter. But Wilfrid did not follow. He slammed the cellar door shut—and turned the key in the lock!

'Stay there!' he yelled. 'It's not so comfortable as your little top room, but a night in the cellar won't hurt you! I'll bring the police along tomorrow. As for that kid and his dog, they deserve a night's imprisonment for snooping here at this time of night.'

Then there was silence. Wilfrid had apparently gone. Pat spoke to Peter. 'I say—are you badly hurt?'

'No,' said Peter, who was now sitting up. 'No bones broken, anyway—but plenty of bruises, my word! I'd no idea that was a cellar door I hurtled through. I say—who on earth are you? Not a friend of Wilfrid's, I suppose?'

'No. I'm a friend of your brother Graham's,' said Pat. 'I know all about you. He told me. And listen—I've got some good news for you. I know where that box of jewels is! My sister and I listened in on the beach tonight when Wilfrid gave his sister Lydia the box—and she put it in a cave. We took it—and my sister's gone to give it to Graham!'

'Well, I'm blessed!' said Peter, amazed, still rubbing his shins. 'Do you mind saying that all over again, very slowly? I can hardly take it in, it's such wonderful news.'

Pat repeated it all, adding other bits of news too. Peter gave a funny choking laugh. 'I'd like to hug somebody!' he said. 'I can't believe it! I suppose I'm not dreaming, am I? Would you like to give me a pinch?'

Peter gave him a polite pinch. 'You're not dreaming,' he said. 'It's all true. Isn't it, Tippy?'

'Wuff,' said Tippy, and licked Pat on the cheek.

Pat shone his torch on to Peter's legs. They were certainly bruised and bleeding. 'You ought to have those seen to,' said Pat, worried. 'Can you

walk?’

‘Oh yes—but where to?’ said Peter. ‘That beast Wilfrid has locked the cellar door. It looks as if we’ll be here all night!’

‘I know a way out,’ said Pat. ‘Through the cellars and down an underground tunnel and out through a hole in a cave.’

‘You’re really a most remarkable fellow,’ said Peter, astonished. ‘I should think Graham is very struck with you, isn’t he?’

‘Oh no,’ said Pat. ‘Not a bit. Anyway, he doesn’t know this tunnel. I don’t think I’ve told him about it.’

‘I bet he does know it,’ said Peter, surprisingly. ‘He must have used it when he came to the old house to hide me.’

‘Really?’ said Pat, in surprise. ‘Now, can you stand? Try.’

Peter tried and found that he could stand quite all right, though it was very painful to walk. He set off through the cellars after Pat. Pat couldn’t help liking him. He was older and taller than Graham but very like him to look at.

They went to the end of the cellars and came to the old doorway, the broken door beside it. Down the eleven steps they went and into the underground tunnel.

‘We go some way along and then we have to crawl up through a hole into a cave, get down on to the beach, and walk up to Holiday House,’ said Pat. ‘I do hope you’ll be able to manage it.’

And then a dreadful thing happened. Pat’s torch flickered and went out! The battery had run down!

‘Oh, I say—my torch has gone!’ said Pat, in dismay. ‘We’ll just have to *grop* our way along now. I hope we don’t miss the hole that takes us up to the cave!’

They did miss it and were soon completely lost in a maze of cliff tunnels. They groped along and suddenly came to a full-stop against a rocky wall.

‘We’ve come into a blind alley,’ groaned Pat. ‘Turn back, Peter.’

They turned back, and groped along again, both feeling scared now. Tippy gave a little whine.

‘Well, *you* show us the way, Tippy!’ said Pat. ‘Take us back to the cellars! If you can do that we’ll be safe because we’ll wait there till the police come tomorrow.’

And good little Tippy, whose eyes could see no better than theirs, but whose nose told her the right way to go, led them safely back to the cellars, where they sat down thankfully on a big crate.

Pat wondered what Mary was doing. Was she fast asleep in bed, after having seen Graham and given him the jewel-case—or was she sitting and worrying about him? She would have to worry all night long, then!

Mary wasn’t in bed! She had gone safely back to Holiday House and had

climbed up the spiral stairs to Graham's room. There was a light under his door, so she knocked.

'Come in,' said Graham's voice, wearily. Mary opened the door and went in, carrying the jewel-case.

'What's that you've got?' asked Graham, surprised. 'And why have you come to see me so late?'

'To bring you this, Graham,' said Mary, and put the brown jewel-case down in front of him. 'Open it!'

He opened it—and the diamonds blazed up at him. 'Mary! Where—where on earth did you get these?' he said, his voice trembling a little. 'Are they—are they the . . .'

'Yes—they're the jewels that Wilfrid took from the safe while your brother was stuffing in the vegetables,' said Mary, smiling at him. 'Wilfrid was afraid for their safety in Tiddington, so he met Lydia tonight and gave the case to her for safe keeping. The other things in it are what *she's* been stealing, the little wretch.'

Graham sat and stared at the diamonds, and suddenly tears blurred his eyes. This box would prove that his beloved Peter was not a thief! He could go free, he could return to ordinary life, and he, Graham, could go back to school again with his head held high! He felt for his handkerchief, ashamed of his sudden tears.

'Here you are—have mine,' said Mary. 'I feel rather like howling too. It's all too wonderful for anything, isn't it?'

'You don't know how wonderful it is to *me*,' said Graham, accepting Mary's hanky, and thinking he had never in his life met such a nice little girl before. He wished she were his sister—how he would spoil her!

He gave her back her hanky. 'Where's Pat?' he said. 'Didn't he come back with you?'

'No—he followed Wilfrid to the old house. I haven't come to that bit yet,' said Mary. 'Wilfrid has guessed your brother is hiding in the top room there—he saw the light tonight—and he's gone to frighten him. He's going to tell him he's getting the police there tomorrow to take him back where he came from!'

'The beast!' said Graham, starting up from his chair. 'How dare he do that to Peter! I must go and see what's happening.'

'Can I come too?' asked Mary.

'No,' said Graham. 'You'd better not.'

'How are you going to get into the old house?' asked Mary. 'And, oh, Graham—please do tell me something. *How* did you get back to your room the other night without our seeing you? You didn't pass the junk-room or we'd have seen you—and that's the only way into your room, past the junk-room and up the spiral stairway.'

‘No, it isn’t,’ said Graham. ‘There’s another way. I’ll show you! It leads down underground, joins up with the tunnel that goes through the cliff, and leads to the cellars of the old house!’

‘Oh! Then it must join the tunnel we found!’ said Mary, in surprise. ‘How did you know all this, Graham?’

‘I stayed here with a friend of mine years ago,’ said Graham, ‘before it was made into a Holiday House. His mother owned the place—and he showed me the old maps of the caves. We had great fun exploring, but we found this way—the way I’m going to use now—quite by accident! Watch!’

He went to the old fire-place and stood upright in the great hearth. He stepped sideways—and disappeared! Mary ran to the hearth. Yes—he had vanished!

There must be a secret exit! So that was how Graham had got into his room the other night without their seeing him! He had visited the old house, taking a mattress and blanket for Peter, in case he came to him for help—and had used the secret passages and tunnel to go both there and back.

Mary sat trembling with excitement. She couldn’t go to bed. She *must* wait and see what was going to happen next!

CHAPTER 16

STRANGE JOURNEY—AND HAPPY ENDING

Peter and Pat sat with Tippy at their feet in the darkness of the old house cellars. Peter's legs were very painful and he couldn't rest. He couldn't help groaning a little.

Tippy went to lick him. The little dog could not understand this strange adventure, but she was quite happy provided she was with Pat. She was very glad she had led them to safety.

They sat there for what seemed hours—and then Tippy sat up and growled. Both boys sat up too and listened.

'What is it, Tippy?' asked Pat, in a low voice. Tippy growled again.

And then the boys heard a noise from the far end of the cellars, where the old doorway was, leading down to the tunnel. They heard someone coming up the steps, someone walking into the cellars—someone, thank goodness, with a brilliant torch.

The two boys sat absolutely still, not knowing who this unexpected visitor was. It might be that horrible Wilfrid. Tippy didn't growl any more. Instead she gave a joyful little bark and pattered off on tiptoe to the visitor.

'Tippy!' said a familiar voice. 'Where are Peter and Pat?'

'GRAHAM!' shouted the two waiting boys, and Pat leapt to his feet. Peter got up more slowly on his bruised legs. Graham went straight over to him and took his brother's hand in his. He shook it up and down, up and down, as if he would never stop! 'Good old fellow,' he kept saying, 'good old fellow! Everything's come right. Good old Peter.'

Then he flashed his torch down on to his brother's legs and saw how bruised and bleeding they were.

'What a mess you're in, Pete!' he said. 'Come on—follow me. Can you walk all right? I'll take you back to my room.'

'Yes. I can just about walk, that's all,' said Peter. 'My legs have got so stiff with sitting. But I'm all right, Graham. I'm fine.'

Graham led the way down the steps and into the tunnel. When they came to where the hole was that led up to the cave above, Pat stopped, and Tippy bumped her nose into his leg.

'Here we are,' he said. 'We go up here and into that cave. I hope old Peter will be able to manage the struggle up the hole!'

'We're not going that way,' said Graham, to Pat's surprise. 'I know another—the way I always use when I want to return to my room!'

They went right past the hole and along the tunnel again. It twisted and turned and suddenly came to a blank wall.

‘Now where do we go?’ said Pat, in surprise, and then, looking up, he suddenly saw a strong rope-ladder hanging down against the wall from above. He was gazing up a very narrow shaft!

‘We’ve come to the foot of the tower,’ said Graham. ‘We’re down in the foundations. The tower has double walls just here, and this narrow shaft goes to the very top. And each of the three rooms in the tower has an entry to this shaft by way of its fire-place! It must have been jolly useful in the old days!’

Pat was astonished. He gazed up the shaft in awe as Graham held up his torch. ‘Now I begin to see the answer to things that puzzled me and Mary!’ he said. ‘That time you got into your room without our seeing you, though we waited by the junk-room door to see you go by up the stairway—I suppose you entered your room by means of this shaft! No wonder we didn’t see you!’

Graham laughed. ‘Yes, I did. And do you remember another night, when you were outside the top tower-room—when you’d come back to get the key you’d left in the door?’

‘Yes! We heard someone behind it—in the top room!’ said Pat, seeing light at last. ‘It was *you*! You’d come up the shaft into *that* room, I suppose?’

‘Yes. I heard you outside the door and grinned to myself,’ said Graham. ‘All the same, I didn’t want you snooping about, I can tell you, discovering my little secrets! Now are you ready to climb up? Peter’s had a bit of a rest.’

‘I’m ready,’ said Peter.

‘Come on, then,’ said Graham. ‘I’ll go first with the torch. You next, Peter, and you last, Pat. Then we can push or pull Peter if he needs it.’

‘What about Tippy?’ said Pat.

‘Can’t you carry her under one arm?’ said Graham. ‘She’s small and light, and she doesn’t seem a bit frightened.’

Pat picked up the little dog, who immediately wagged her tail hard and tried to lick the boy wherever she could. Graham began to climb the swinging rope-ladder. Peter came next, finding it difficult because of his bruised legs. Then came Pat with Tippy under one arm.

Up they all climbed. They passed one opening in the wall of the shaft, which Pat imagined, must lead into the fire-place of the junk-room. Then they came to a second opening, and Graham climbed through this, pulling Peter in afterwards. Pat climbed in too, and found himself on a broad ledge.

‘Step down to the left, Pat,’ said Graham, and Pat obeyed. Hey presto, he found himself standing in the big fire-place of Graham’s room! He gasped in astonishment.

A squeal of joy greeted them. It was Mary, delighted to see them. Pat introduced her to Peter. ‘This is my sister. She took the jewel-case to Graham.

Mary, do you know where the bandages and things are kept? We really must do something about poor Peter's legs!

Mary stared at them in horror. 'Oh! We must wake Mrs Holly. Yes, we must. He can't go about with legs as bruised and hurt as that!'

And off she flew down the spiral stairway to wake Mrs Holly.

Mrs Holly, amazed and disbelieving, took her little first-aid case and followed Mary to the tower. Peter? Who was Peter? And whatever were these children doing in the middle of the night?

She heard the whole story as she bathed and bandaged Peter's legs. She could hardly believe it, as first one child poured out a bit and then another.

'And, Mrs Holly,' said Graham, at last, 'I've got a dreadful confession to make. Peter's not a thief—but I am! *I* took those things out of the larder—I took them for Peter because he was hungry.'

'Did you?' said Mrs Holly, smiling at him. 'And I suppose it was you, then, who put that money on the top shelf every now and again?'

'Yes. It was. I didn't know what else to do,' said Graham. 'I felt dreadful stealing your food.'

'*Buying* it, Graham, with your pocket-money, not stealing it!!' said Mrs Holly. 'There now—your legs will soon feel better, Peter. You can sleep with Graham tonight—and tomorrow we will have a fine time with the police! Goodnight, everybody! I'll see you to your rooms, Pat and Mary!'

In Mary's room Pat began to talk about all the happenings of the evening—but poor, tired Mary was fast asleep before he had finished the first sentence! Pat was tired, too—and soon Holiday House was its own peaceful self again!

In the morning, what a surprise for everyone when Graham proudly brought Peter down to breakfast and introduced him as his brother! Lydia, who was waiting at table, almost dropped the tea-pot she was carrying. She looked scared to death. What *had* happened after she had left Wilfrid the night before, and gone back to Holiday House? She couldn't imagine!

She soon knew, though, when two big policemen arrived, bringing an angry and surprised Wilfrid with them! Mrs Holly had telephoned to them and told them most of the story.

Wilfrid was taken to Mrs Holly's room and Lydia was sent for. Peter and Graham came in too, and last of all came Mrs Holly with Pat and Mary. Not *quite* last, though—Tippy came trotting after them, looking as pleased as could be at all the admiration she was getting.

Ruth longed to know what was happening, but nobody told her. 'Nobody will tell me anything,' she complained to Mrs Potts. 'What's happening? Who was that boy called Peter who came to breakfast? He *couldn't* have been Graham's brother. Graham hasn't got a brother. He told me so.'

'Yet you said that Lydia told you his brother was a bad lot!' said Mrs Potts.

‘You wait and see who he really is, if you can’t make up your mind, Miss Inquisitive!’

A very serious meeting was going on in Mrs Holly’s room. Wilfrid began to look extremely scared, and so did Lydia.

‘We want to know what you did with that jewel-case, Wilfrid,’ said the first policeman. ‘We know now that it was you who took it from the safe, and not Peter. What did you do with it?’

‘I never took it,’ said Wilfrid, sulkily.

‘Then how is it you gave it to Lydia for safe keeping last night?’ asked the policeman. ‘Pat, Mary—I believe you overheard this?’

They nodded. ‘Well?’ said the policeman, turning to Wilfrid again. ‘Do you *still* say you didn’t give that case to your sister Lydia?’

‘I never gave it to her, and she never took it,’ said Wilfrid, sullenly, giving Lydia a warning look.

‘You hid it on a ledge in a cave, didn’t you?’ said the policeman to Lydia.

‘I never!’ she said—and then, to her horror, the second policeman silently put the jewel-case on the table. She gave a little scream, and Wilfrid turned pale.

‘I think you’ve seen this case before, both of you,’ said the policeman.

‘Never! Never!’ said Wilfrid and Lydia together. The policeman opened the box. He took out the diamonds—and he also took out the other things that Lydia herself had stolen. ‘You put these in here, didn’t you, Lydia?’ he said. ‘They are the things you stole here, in Holiday House.’

Lydia began to sob. She broke down completely and confessed to everything, while Wilfrid sat and glared at her.

‘Yes, oh yes! I did steal those things! I did put them there. But Wilfrid stole the diamonds in the jewel-case. He did, he did! He took the case while Peter was playing that silly trick with the vegetables—stuffing the headmaster’s safe with them. Wilfrid *made* me say I was with him at the time of the robbery—he made me!’

‘I see,’ said the policeman. ‘So Peter here is completely innocent, it seems. Wilfrid tricked him into playing a stupid joke—and stole the case himself. Is that it, Wilfrid?’

Wilfrid made no answer. He sat and glared first at the sobbing Lydia and then at the table.

‘Take him away,’ said the first policeman to the other one. And Wilfrid was duly removed to a police car outside in the drive.

‘You can go, children, and you too, Peter and Graham,’ said Mrs Holly. ‘I have a few things to say to Lydia.’

They all went out, looking rather sober and serious. It was very satisfactory, but not very pleasant, to get hold of wrong-doers. Tippy, however,

was not at all impressed with the solemn meeting. She capered round the four, barking, and then jumped about as if she were on springs, so that they all had to laugh.

Ruth came up. ‘What’s it all about?’ she demanded. ‘Is he really your brother, Graham? You told me you hadn’t one!’

‘I made a mistake,’ said Graham, gravely. ‘I find I have one after all. A *good* one, Ruth, a first-class one!’

‘Oh, I’m glad,’ said Ruth. ‘You look different, Graham—sort of relieved and happy.’

‘Do you know,’ said Peter, smiling round suddenly, ‘it’s my birthday today! I’d forgotten it till now! Well, I certainly feel like having a birthday, I must say.’

Mrs Holly came up, smiling. ‘Your birthday?’ she said. ‘Oh, good, Peter! First we’ll go and buy you some birthday presents—some good clothes, to begin with! Then we’ll all go and have a wonderful lunch somewhere. Then we’ll come back here and bathe—and we’ll end up with a picnic down on the sands, with *everybody* invited, even Maureen’s baby brother.’

‘I’ll ask Mrs Potts to ice the big new cake she made yesterday!’ said Ruth. ‘And I’ll help you to make all the sandwiches, Mummy!’ She raced off happily, longing to tell the great and most surprising news.

‘You’re kind,’ said Peter to Mrs Holly. ‘I’d like a good birthday, I really would—after all those miserable months when everyone thought I was a bad lot—a mean, despicable thief!’

‘Forget it,’ said Graham. ‘Many happy returns of the day, Peter—so sorry I forgot!’

‘Mummy!’ shouted Ruth from the bottom of the hall. ‘How many candles, Mrs Potts says—for the birthday cake, I mean?’

‘Seventeen!’ shouted back Peter. ‘I’m getting very old indeed. I hope Mrs Potts has enough candles for me!’

She had—and now I think we’ll leave Holiday House having its birthday tea for Peter. There they all are on the yellow sands, with the waves running up the beach to have a look at the magnificent cake with its seventeen candles. What good times those four—no five—are going to have together now—Graham, Peter, Pat, Mary—and, of course, Tippy!

Can you blow out all your candles at once, Peter? It’s good luck to do that, and you do deserve some, don’t you?

Puffffff! He’s blown them all out with one breath, every one of them. It’s good luck then, good luck!

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Holiday House* by Enid Blyton]