# PAM AND THE COUNTESS

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PAM AND THE COUNTESS ***

Produced by Al Haines.

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*"I BELIEVE WE ARE GOING STRAIGHT OUT TO SEA." Page 70*

# PAM AND THE COUNTESS

BY
E. E. COWPER

*Illustrated by Gordon Browne, R.I.*

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## By E. E. Cowper

Gill and the Beanstalk.
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The Mystery of Saffron Manor.
The Island of Secrets.
Pam and the Countess.
Jane in Command.

Maids of the ”Mermaid”.

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"I believe we are going straight out to sea" . . . *Frontispiece*

She saw the face distinctly

"Get out, madam"

"I wish I were dead"

# PAM AND THE COUNTESS

## CHAPTER I

### In which Pam does a Good Deed, and sees a Strange Thing

Pamela sat among the rocks with her elbows on her knees and her chin on her hands. In spite of the entrancing loveliness of her surroundings she had been

reading with such interest that she had scarcely looked up in an hour. The book now lay face down on another round-topped rock, while Pamela stared at the sea, and thought about the contents of the book.

It was spring-time, and in spring Bell Bay was perhaps a thought more perfect than at any other time in the year. The wonderful little horse-shoe of its quiet haven was a jewel of colour in the dark setting of its cliff entrance. The semicircle of the high, rough stone sea-wall above the rock-strewn sands seemed to take on light from the flowering of the tiny rock plants, while the gardens at the Bell House behind that wall were just a mass of greenness and bloom.

Outside and above those gardens rose the sides of the valley, towering up into the blue of the clean, clear sky, and melting away into the woods inland. The bay was so small that the Bell House and its grounds filled the centre of it, as it were. There was no room for a ”sea-front”. No room for another house even–Bell Bay belonged to the Bell House.

Farther up the valley was Paramore's–the Temperance Tea Inn–to which parties came in the season by the one narrow road that ran along below the Bell Ridge–on the north side, that was. Farther still up the valley–also on the roadside–stood the tiny church, no bigger than a room, Fuchsia Cottage, where lived Anne Lasarge, and a few more cottages–not enough to make a village–that tailed away to Folly-Ho, a hamlet on the Peterock road.

On the south side of the valley–facing the long, grey front of the old Bell House–the woods fringed the heights like a green rampart. Just in one place glimmered the white walls of Crown Hill, the beautiful country place of Sir Marmaduke Shard, K.C.

That was all there was of Bell Bay–unless you count Mainsail Cottage, sitting like a gull's nest over the sea on the south headland, and Woodrising, the empty house so long ”To Let”, buried in dense woods right up at the back of the valley.

In the former lived Penberthy–pensioner–who looked after Sir Marmaduke's little yawl–the *Messenger.*

In the latter lived nobody but Mrs. Trewby, a caretaker; a mournful widow afflicted by bilious attacks, and living therefore in a cloud of her own creation.

Finally, as a last word in this explanation, the Bell House was the ancestral home of the Romilly family, and Mrs. Romilly was living there with all ”the family” except its head, away in command of that first-class battleship *Medusa*; and her eldest son, Malcolm, who was busy as lieutenant on the destroyer *Spite.*

Now Pamela, already introduced reading a book among the rocks of this miniature haven, was absorbed in a new idea, of which the book was an outward and visible sign. Pamela was by no means a self-constituted martyr, but at the same time she believed herself to be a sort of ”odd man out” in the family circle.

She was thirteen–not even a long way on the road to fourteen. It must be allowed then that thirteen bore no comparison to Adrian and Christobel, who had reached sixteen and seventeen, or to Hughie, who was but seven. Malcolm, of course, was out of it altogether, being nearly twenty, and at sea.

Christobel was the one other girl in a party of five. She was undoubtedly Adrian's chum, and when he was at Harrow her particular friend and companion lived close at hand as a rule–Mollie Shard, that is to say, the only child of Sir Marmaduke and Lady Shard. Mollie was eighteen, Christobel seventeen and a half; Mollie exceptionally clever, Christobel exceptionally in earnest, and tenacious as her father, whom she resembled so closely that in babyhood she had been nicknamed "Jim Crow", being a darker edition of the elder "Jim".

Pamela's admiring affection for her one sister never failed, but it must be admitted that the gap between "nearly eighteen" and thirteen is considerable. Moreover, Christobel had been to school, the same school as Mollie Shard. They had left for good together this Easter, and Pamela hugged the thought that she was to share the same rule, going to school next Easter, when she would be fourteen, for four years. At the same term, Hughie would go to a preparatory school, and the reign of Miss Violet Chance, their governess, would be over.

That was how the matter stood; also, it was the reason why Pamela studied a Girls' Guide Handbook, with zeal that was seldom present in the case of Arithmetic or French Grammar. Her high aim–her secret ambition–was to become a Girl Guide, a "Silver Fish" with power to wear at least twenty badges on her sleeve, and, by the time she was sixteen, a Patrol Leader.

Pamela was bitten deeply by the thought of this wonderful army of girls, who could do practically everything possible for girls to do. But there was no chance of joining in Bell Bay. The nearest corps would be at Peterock, four miles to the north; or Salterne, the big town on the estuary harbour, eight or ten miles to the south. Mrs. Romilly did not know anything about companies and patrols, and did not like the idea of Pam getting mixed up with all sorts of girls. She knew about the ambition, but had asked for it to wait till her anxious daughter should join the school company at Somerton.

So there it was. Pamela meanwhile fought with difficulties. She wanted to learn to cook; Mrs. Jeep, who had ruled long years in the kitchen, would not let her. She wished to wash and iron; but Miss Chance thought it was not quite nice for her to associate with Patty Ingles–between maid–who did these things three days a week. It was tiresome, but had to be put up with. Pamela perforce spent her zeal on the book, and on making secret signs whenever opportunity occurred. She tried to fulfil Scout Law, including one good deed every day, and she tried to hide what she was doing from Hughie–which was impossible, as he possessed an uncanny power of seeing everything, no matter how carefully hidden.

With intent grey-blue eyes fixed on the distance, Pamela considered life as matters stood.

At that moment Miss Chance came up to the sea-wall from the garden, and called her. When she looked round Miss Chance asked questions. It was a way she had, and quite exasperating at times, because she seemed to have a perfect genius for asking questions to which answers were obvious.

"Isn't the sand rather damp, Pam dear?" she inquired in an even voice. "I think you ought to be careful about chills now we have so much influenza about. Are you reading? Wouldn't it be better to come up to the garden?"

Pamela answered neither of these questions, but she got up, stretched, and shook her skirt.

"The others are not back yet, are they?" went on Miss Chance, shading her eyes with a knuckly hand and gazing towards the shining horizon. "Why didn't you go with them, dear?"

Pamela said she wanted to read; then she came across the rock-strewn sand towards the rugged steps that led up to a gap in the wall, and as she came certain sentences in "The Knight's Code" repeated themselves:–

"Defend the poor, help them that cannot defend themselves."

"Do nothing to hurt or offend anyone."

"Perform humble offices with cheerfulness and—-"

There are certainly moments when fulfilment is not easy—-

"When do you suppose they will be back?" asked Miss Chance.

Pamela explained that there was a strong tide, and a light wind, but they'd said they would be back by tea-time–meaning six o'clock and solid high tea, not the afternoon variety.

"How tiresome!" exclaimed the governess, "I do wish they would hurry."

"You can't hurry sailing-boats," suggested Pamela patiently, as she went up the steps.

"I should have thought you could put up more sails, dear," said Miss Chance, who had spent none of her valuable time in mastering the intricacies of yachts and their habits, "it really is most annoying!"

"They don't know anybody wants them back before ten. I believe they've gone up to Peterock; the tide served–Penberthy said so–besides Salterne is too far; they didn't start till after lunch, you see, there was a lot to do at Crown Hill, Mollie couldn't come before."

"Your mother wants a message taken to the station about the stores she expects to-morrow," said Miss Chance, as they walked along the terrace, "they may come to-night by the 9.20 from Salterne. She wants them sent out specially at once, because there is too much, she thinks, for Timothy Batt; besides, his cart won't go to the station again till Saturday."

”Did she want Addie to go?” asked Pamela, waking to the situation. Then she continued quickly: ”He won’t want to go after tea, Miss Chance, he’s arranged with Penberthy to do some painting on the yawl.”

”He must put that off,” said Miss Chance firmly.

”I’ll go to the station–now, before tea,” was Pamela’s answer, ”I cleaned my bicycle this morning. It looks smart enough to go out calling even on the station-master at Five Trees.”

She said this so gravely that Miss Chance was a little uncertain as to whether she herself was not being laughed at. You could not quite be sure about Pamela, she was rather an inscrutable young person–tall and slim like her lovely mother, with a small face, a square chin, and firmly closing mouth. She owned a distinguishing nose also, very delicately modelled and turning up the least bit in the world. The family alluded to it as a ”snub” at times, but there was nothing at all snubby about it, and it was full of character. For the rest, she owned a plaited rope of hair that fell below her waist, brown with more than a hint of red in it. Hughie was like her, but the other three followed rather faithfully in Captain Romilly’s pattern, except that Adrian was on the way to be tall–had outgrown his sixteen-year-old strength, in fact, which was no doubt why the influenza fiend had driven him home in term time.

”Well,” Pamela concluded with a question, ”will that do?”

Miss Chance thought it would. Mrs. Romilly, finishing letters in a hurry for the 5.30 post, thought it would too. The stores were very important, as Mrs. Jeep was ”out” of nearly everything that made life pleasing, and there was no fruit yet in the garden to help out puddings.

”Don’t tire yourself, darling,” murmured Mrs. Romilly, writing an address.

”I shan’t be back by six o’clock, Mummy–at least most likely not–coming back is easy but going will be uphill most of the way.”

”So it will.” Mrs. Romilly spoke as though this was a new idea. Then she turned her head and smiled at Pamela with serene large blue eyes, ”I dare say the *Messenger* won’t be punctual,” she said, ”so the others will be late, and anyway, dear child, tea can be kept for you, so don’t hurry–and thank you so much for going.”

Pamela wheeled the bicycle up the drive into the narrow road that ran up and up close under a towering hill-side. All along it, hanging over the road, were banks of fuchsia trees–in summer the whole track would be a sheet of fallen fuchsia blossom. She passed the Temperance Inn on her right, then the church upon the height among the fuchsias, and soon after that the little fairy house called ”Fuchsia Cottage”, where lived Miss Anne Lasarge, the small grey lady called ”The Little Pilgrim” by the Romilly family, because she was like a character in a book they loved.

Miss Anne had done wonders during the War; she had been out in the devastated regions of France working among the homeless peasants. She had only been back since Christmas. Pamela looked at the cottage as she passed. It was like a lovely toy–an ideal cottage–the atmosphere of Miss Anne made a distinct sense of peace cling to it all the year round. No one was in the garden, no one working on the three little terraces bright with flowers, that rose one above another to the lattice-paned bow window of Miss Anne's sitting-room.

Pamela was the least bit disappointed. There was perfect understanding between her and Miss Anne–who possessed a genius for understanding everybody, and everybody's worries. She knew that it was rather lonely to be a middle person in a family–cut off above and below. Pamela vaguely wondered where she was gone to; a natural conclusion being that some one must be ill in one of the farms.

Wheeling the bicycle on up the clean even road she left all trace of houses behind and came to the woods at the back of the valley. The road ran between an over-shadowing height on one side, and thick woods on the other–they bridged the centre of the deep to where the southern heights towered up, covered with more woods.

Presently a white wall began, and the trees behind it thinned a good deal. The wall was high and had broken glass along the top of it. There was a distinct suggestion of rebuff to an inquiring public. Pamela, looking at it, remembered Kipling's story in which "the invasion of privacy" is spoken of as a danger. In this part of the far west land there did not seem much need for walling yourself in, she thought. Moreover, no one lived at Woodrising but Mrs. Trewby the pessimistic caretaker, and it belonged to Sir Marmaduke, who wanted to let it, and had wanted to let it ever since he bought it before the War. There was the big square board–"To be let un-furnished". There were several boards at different points, but no one took the house. It required much money spent on the inside, and the large pretty gardens were neglected. No one worked in them but Peter Cherry, son of Mrs. Rebecca Cherry, the widow who ran the Temperance house in conjunction with her sister Mrs. Paramore.

As Pamela passed the big double gates in the wall, she glanced up at the house behind them. Little could be seen of it but slate roof and chimneys. It was a square, white house of moderate size; not pretty, but comfortable. There was smoke going up from four chimneys. Pamela noticed this as she noticed most things, and deduced from it that Mrs. Trewby was airing the rooms. She also decided that Sir Marmaduke must find the house–still unlet–a great expense. People said he had bought it because he did not want anyone in the valley of an uncongenial kind. He and the Romilly family owned the whole place in present circumstances. A third family–the sort that could afford a house and grounds

like Woodrising, might be in the way! That is what people said; no one knew anything actually, because the great K.C. was not a man to confide his affairs to the general public.

Pamela, having glanced at the chimneys went on her way still alongside the white wall with glass on its top. She was walking in the road and some impulse caused her to glance back at the gates when she had gone some little distance. She could just see that one of them had opened inwards, and within the opening stood two people in earnest conversation. One was short and slight, the other was tall and leaned on a stick. The short and slight person was Anne Lasarge, her grey cloak and grey bonnet with white strings proved her; the other was Major Hilton Fraser, the invalided army doctor, lodging at Mainsail Cottage, with the Penberthys. He was lame from shell splinters in the thigh; also four years spent in Mesopotamia and front-line dressing-stations in France had left their mark. Major Fraser was the hero of the Romilly family; Pamela could not mistake his figure. The question was: what could he and the Little Pilgrim be at, meeting at Woodrising?

She paused to gaze, making sure. Then she went on her way, wondering and interested. Pamela was always interested; some people called her "inquisitive", which is not so pleasant an accusation to have tacked on to one! But she could not help herself, for it was that which her nose stood for, with its delicate, keen lines and sharp outline. Just inquiry and the liveliest intuition.

"I daresay they are in love with each other," considered Pamela, reviewing the situation mentally, "they ought to be, they've gone through a lot together, but what has Woodrising to do with it, unless they know somebody who wants to live there!"

This seemed to her a reasonable explanation. She decided that he had friends who wished to take the house, and he had asked Miss Anne to come and look at the rooms for him. He might find difficulty in measuring rooms perhaps.

All the same he'd better not have depended on Miss Anne for that sort of thing. "I'd sooner be nursed by that angel than any living soul," thought Pamela, "but I don't believe she knows about houses, and paint, and carpets. She's perfectly vague and unpractical about prices. He'd better have asked Miss Chance–or Jim Crow–she'd be better than anybody. I wish he'd marry Jim Crow, then we could keep a hero in the family."

Pamela sighed as she decided that there was no hope of this glorious conclusion to friendship. "It's a pity she's too young–but he likes her better than Mollie Shard."

She reached the top of the long hill at the back of the valley, and, mounting, began the easier part of the journey–down and up, down and up, over the loveliest scented moorland road–till presently she came in sight of the miniature

railway station, looking like a good-sized hen-coop on its platform, and the shining rails stretching away north and south as far as eye could see, until the hills swallowed them.

Nobody was in the hen-coop. The booking office was locked. The person who did most things had gone off for some meal. There would be a train from Salterne through to Peterock at 6.45, and then the last one at 9.20. No rush of trains let it be said, as of course the up trains from Peterock did not count in this connection.

Pamela sat down on a seat to wait for a human being to appear. She hoped they would not be long, because she was hungry, but she was not in the least dull. She was always looking and thinking–years ago by instinct, nowadays with intention; it was part of the Scout training. She looked once at the shed of the platform opposite, then she shut her eyes and counted mentally how many posts supported it, how many scallops edged the roofing, how advertisements were hung within against the wall behind, and what they were all about. It was good practice. Anything could be used. The great idea, of course, was accuracy, and the power of noticing every detail in the quickest time. Pamela loved doing it, and she did not know yet, of course, that she had a special gift that way.

Time passed. At 6.30 a man sauntered into view wiping his mouth. Pamela went to him, and gave her instructions about the cases from London in a concise and definite manner. Then she hurried off to her bicycle, and made speed on the way home. She calculated that she should be back before seven; the sooner the better, because sun had set, and a veil of dusk was falling over the uplands–faint, sweet twilight.

Just at that moment the front tyre burst. There was a bit of broken glass on the road. As Pamela picked it up and threw it aside into the heather, she thought of Woodrising and that strongly-guarded wall–quite irrelevant, but better than losing one's temper. It was maddening, but there was nothing to do but walk home–about two miles from where she stood.

First, however, she made a try at mending the rent, and it was while she was at work–on what resulted in nothing but a waste of time–that a motor-car passed. It was a large car and strange to Pamela, which was not a surprising thing perhaps, though many cars paid visits in summer to beautiful Bell Bay.

The car was showing lights, and hummed past the girl at a good pace, but Pamela took in all details with her usual swift inclusion.

Luggage–a good deal. Certainly three people inside, and the window on her side closed. It was a large car, but, she felt certain, a hired one. The driver was no smart chauffeur, and the girl felt certain that no gorgeous private touring-car would have been allowed to carry miscellaneous trunks.

It was not the Shards' car. She knew that; it was a huge thing and painted

grey; besides, the Shards would have turned off seaward earlier, for Crown Hill was reached by a road that went to Ramsworthy, the other side of the southern heights. This road was the direct route to Bell Bay, and though Peterock could be reached by turning off to the right lower down, any car for that town would have followed a straight line past the station and away northward.

Who could be coming to Bell Bay, then, in a big, hired car, laden with luggage, at that hour?

Now here was a mystery, and if Pamela could have imagined all that was to come out of it, she would have felt even more thrilled than she did.

# CHAPTER II

### Mollie Departs, but Comes Back at Breakfast Time

Pamela failed to make anything of her repairing job, so, after fifteen minutes loss of time, she started off to walk it, wheeling the bicycle, for there was no place on the lonely way where she could leave it.

Dusk was now falling in earnest. Pam lighted her little lamp for company and made all speed. She had lost time over the tyre, but felt she was not far from home when the turn to Peterock was reached. From the top of this height now she could see over the long stretch of the Bell Bay valley, and the shimmer of grey sea beyond the trees–just a peep between the great headlands, Bell Ridge on the north above her home, and The Beak on the opposite side of the cove.

The evening was so still that the far-off mutter of the everlasting tide on the rocks came up to her. She lifted her head and sniffed the faint salt breath of the wind, and in that instant caught the throb of a motor. She checked and listened. Then went on again quickly. There was no doubt about it, a motor was coming up the long hill, out of the valley shadows. Then it must have gone to Bell Bay, for she was convinced it was the same car.

In a minute or two it passed her, going back to Salterne. The same car–big and dark, with powerful lights. The luggage was gone from the top where it had been placed, protected by a low fenced enclosure. Pamela saw all that at a glance, but her attention was centred on the occupant of the car–there must be someone inside there still, because she could see an electric lamp alight within the carriage. She stopped at the roadside, waiting for it, and as it went by fixed

all her attention on the person who was reading a newspaper by the light of the brilliant lamp on the wall.

She saw the face distinctly–clean shaven, the powerful heavy features so often associated with great lawyers. He was reading intently, and his soft hat was pushed backward from his eyes. Pamela opened her lips in a little gasp of astonishment. The last person in the world she had thought of!

[image]

*SHE SAW THE FACE DISTINCTLY*

It was Sir Marmaduke Shard. Alone. But he had not been alone when the car passed her the first time.

Pamela stared after the receding car till it was lost in the dusk; then she went on again at her best pace, very much surprised, for it would really seem that the great Sir Marmaduke had actually brought someone to Bell Bay, left them behind somewhere, and gone back to Salterne. It really was exciting, because there was nowhere to come to except his own house, and had he been going there he would surely have chosen the direct road.

Moreover, to leave again at once, like this! Pamela could find no answer to the riddle.

When she reached home, nobody questioned her lateness, because they were all, so to speak, rather busy being low-spirited–a condition that nearly always takes people's attention off others.

Poor Adrian was very sorry for himself; very sorry indeed; and there was much excuse for him. It seemed likely that there would be no more sailing in the beloved *Messenger*.

Christobel, on her part, was passionately sorry for Adrian. She understood fully what such a blow meant to him who found more delight in sailing than in anything else in life.

Mrs. Romilly was grieving for both of them, but as usual was most absorbed in trying to think of a way out of the wood, and how to substitute something that would do–nearly as well.

Finally, there was Miss Violet Chance–nicknamed the "Floweret" in happier moments, by the way–who paralysed Mrs. Romilly's efforts and made matters worse by bright endeavours at dispersing the cloud.

"After all," said the Floweret, "what *is* a yacht? Surely we can find something quite as jolly! What about rounders? Wouldn't it soon be good weather for croquet?" She suggested to Adrian a collection of moths, and asked him where

he had put the stamps he had been so proud of the year before last?

Adrian said:

”I’ve got them all, thank you, Miss Chance,” in a voice that went to Jim Crow’s heart, because the suppressed torture in it was so acute.

Because, then, this gloomy company was assembled in the drawing-room, Pamela found no one about, and going straight to the dining-room proceeded to make a good tea; and Hughie, hearing her come in, entered on the tips of his toes, sat down at a distance on the big leather sofa, curled up his toes under him–till he looked like a small soapstone ”god”–and waited patiently.

”Why aren’t you in bed?” asked Pamela, as she helped herself to some fresh cocoa brought in for her.

”It isn’t eight,” said Hughie.

”My dear child, it’s ten past!”

”Well,” Hughie glanced at the clock unashamed, ”they’ve forgotten me, you see. That’s why I came out here, for fear they should remember.”

”Miss Chance won’t forget,” warned Pamela with conviction.

Hughie set that aside.

”They are in a state of miserableness, so nobody is remembering things,” he said, ”it’s rather beastly, Pam, they can’t sail the *Messenger* any more—-”

”Who can’t?” interrupted Pamela sharply, pausing with a glass of potted meat in her hand.

”All of them–Mollie, and Jim Crow, and Addie, and the worst is that Addie will be cross most of the time now, which is a fearful pity; he won’t help me do my rigging, because it will remind him of the yawl. It’s most unlucky for everybody.”

”Why can’t they sail the *Messenger* any more?” asked Pamela, going on with her supper. The thought flashed through her mind that the sudden and brief appearance of Sir Marmaduke was going to be explained simply.

”Because the gardens at Crown Hill are in a mess,” Hughie went on with slow emphasis, ”they are in a *fearful* mess, and everything is growing too fast, and Mr. Jordan can’t do it, and there aren’t any men, because they’re mostly dead in the War. Miss Ashington says Penberthy has got to go in the gardens the whole while. Not a minute on the sea–and you know they can’t go without Penberthy, Sir Marmaduke won’t let them.”

”Beastly hard luck,” said Pamela firmly.

”I expect it’s Fate,” Hughie suggested thoughtfully.

”Why can’t they have Peter Cherry from Woodrising?” said Pamela, ignoring fate.

”It isn’t any good asking me,” answered Hughie, ”because, how can I tell? But anyway Woodrising is simply bursting with weeds, and the more there are, the more they come. He must stay and pull them out, and plant greens for Mrs.

Trewby. She eats greens, she told Mrs. Jeep she *has* to. He can't possibly go to Crown Hill, and Miss Ashington is worried about the garden, Mollie says she is."

The door opened and Miss Chance looked round the edge of it.

"Ah, *there* you are, little runaway!" she said with her usual sprightliness, "I've found you."

"I wasn't lost, Miss Chance. I was only talking to Pam," remarked the little runaway, letting himself drop over the back of the sofa in an ingenious and complicated manner.

Miss Chance turned her attention to Pamela.

"You've come back, dear," she suggested, "I hope it's all right about the Stores' cases; Mrs. Jeep will be so glad to have them."

Pamela explained her accident, mentioned that she had been obliged to walk back, and gave the message from Five Trees, namely, that the cases had not come, but should be sent on at once when they did. She added that she was just going in to tell her mother. She said everything she could think of to forestall the inevitable questions, and good Miss Chance swept Hughie away to bed, remarking that it was late, but that the days were getting longer, and the summer would soon be here.

"That's what will make it harder for poor old Addie, about the yawl," thought Pamela, as she got up from the table, and departed for the scene of woe. She was very glad that Hughie's information had "put her wise", as the folk of the far west say–it would have been so galling for Adrian if she had plunged in, and asked what the matter was to start off with. That was Pam's way of looking at it.

So she gave the story of her mishap; said she would have to send the bicycle to Salterne, it must go in on Saturday by Timothy Batt's cart; gave her message about the stores, and made talk of a mildly distracting nature.

Adrian was gloomily turning a magazine; he looked up.

"It's all knocked on the head about our sailing, Pam," he said, "pretty rotten! Fancy having to see the old *Messenger* moored out there the whole blessed summer, and have nothing but our dinghy to go out in! It's enough to make a person of sense commit suicide."

"Hughie told me something when I got in," said Pamela with sympathy, "I was awfully sorry; he said Penberthy is wanted at Crown Hill. Of course the gardens are too much for Jordan–there used to be three men."

Adrian muttered something biting about gardens generally.

Christobel broke in.

"Mollie told us–she is most horribly disappointed herself–it cuts off her fun too, but she says the gardens must come first, as Lady Shard hates seeing things go–as they are; and men are so scarce, they want every creature they can get on

the farms, of course. Oh dear, I wish one could get at Sir Marmaduke, he's always nice about the yawl."

"Why don't you ask him yourself?" suggested Pamela.

Both the others began to answer together in their eagerness; then Christobel dropped out, and Adrian went on.

"How can we, my good child? We can't exactly write letters to him asking him to hand over his yawl to us! As for talking, we shan't meet till goodness knows when–August at earliest."

Pamela suggested cautiously that Sir Marmaduke usually came for week-ends in the summer.

"Well, he may have, once in a way," allowed Adrian gloomily, "but he won't do it this year. Not a dreg of hope. He hasn't been down, and he's not coming. Government has put him on one of these hundred and fifty thousand commissions about miners' bath-rooms, or railway men's sofa cushions! It makes one ill. I wish the whole lot were at the bottom of Vesuvius. We can burn wood, and drive coaches, and go back to decent life. Anyway there it is. We can't get at Sir Marmaduke. Penberthy has got to do gardening—-" his voice ceased in a sigh that was a positive groan.

"One would almost think you three–I mean Mollie and Crow and you–would do as well without Penberthy," said Pamela, "Penberthy does nothing ever but talk, does he? Mollie is as good as any man, she's pretty well trained her muscles on the land–and all that—-" this was an allusion to the heroic efforts of Miss Shard on the Ensors' farm at Hawksdown during the holidays of two war years at least.

"Of *course* she could, Pam," Christobel interrupted hastily, noting Adrian's rising irritation, "but you see Mollie won't be here either."

"Mollie not here!" Pamela's face of startled dismay was satisfactory to the distressed pair.

"You see," said Adrian, "things have pretty well tumbled about our ears this afternoon! Well, the bottom has been knocked out of the whole show."

Pamela looked from one to the other, she did not ask another question, but her expression did, so Christobel answered:

"Mollie is going up to town this week-end to see her mother about crowds of things. She believes they've taken a cottage on the river just for–well, airing themselves. Mollie says Crown Hill is too far to come for week-ends; it is a long way, we know. If they have a cottage they can live out of London, and he can go up–I mean Sir Marmaduke can; he can't get down here, Mollie says–not yet anyway. The only person who will be here much will be Miss Ashington, and she'll look after things for Lady Shard, who says she can't possibly live here and leave Sir Marmaduke in London; besides she wants to present Mollie."

"Present Mollie!" echoed Pamela with awe. The world was simply changing swiftly.

Mrs. Romilly folded the paper she was reading, and said in her even, restful voice.

"I should have liked to have presented Crow at the same garden-party as Mollie, but it isn't convenient this year, so we must wait till next summer."

"When Hughie and I are at school," suggested Pamela, a little smile quivering round her firm lips.

Her mother's eyes smiled back sympathy.

"It's unlucky for Mollie and Crow not to be together," she said, "but of course Lady Shard wants Mollie and of course she can't leave Sir Marmaduke alone, so we others must e'en put up with it all. Something will turn up presently. I feel it in my bones," said Mrs. Romilly, "and meanwhile don't let's cross bridges before we come to them. I *know* nothing will be as bad as one fears, it never is."

She looked at Adrian, who made no response.

"Let's hope," said Crow.

"Has Mollie gone?" asked Pamela, suddenly thinking of an explanation for the motor-car. She put her foot in it, of course.

"My good girl, do have a grain of sense," begged Adrian, "how could she be gone, when she was out on the *Messenger* with us till nearly seven o'clock?"

"She goes to-morrow," explained Christobel, "not finally of course. She comes back about Tuesday–she's got to pack and take up things Lady Shard wants, you see. Then she'll go for good–I mean for about six weeks–after that."

Pamela made no comment. She was trying to fit that car piled with luggage into this sudden development of Bell Bay doings. Hitherto, the great K.C. and his wife had been to and fro constantly winter as well as summer. Miss Ashington–commonly called "Auntie A.", as her name was Adelaide Ashington–had been in residence nearly always. She was Lady Shard's sister, and a person positively made up of schemes–which never seemed to come off, and were, as a rule, dropped in favour of something more arresting. At present, the farming problem was her hobby, and she was full of an idea for milking cows once a day at eleven o'clock in the morning, so that land-girls need not get up so early, and farmers could do with less labour. The trouble, though, seemed to be that the cows would not agree to this excellent plan. However, Auntie A. did not despair of bringing them also to a sense of duty, and meanwhile she stayed at Crown Hill doing no one any harm, which was something to be thankful for.

It appeared then a settled question that the Shards would not come to Bell Bay until summer was well nigh through. Penberthy would no longer be available, and the lovely yacht would be on her moorings–useless to the Romilly party. It certainly was a sorrowful outlook for Adrian. As Christobel said afterwards to

Pamela: "If Addie had never been able to use the yawl almost like his own it wouldn't have mattered." But he had; and of course nothing could make up for it.

Pamela thought that week-end was one of the most dismal she had ever spent. Indeed it was so gloomy that she forgot about the motor-car mystery and surprising visit of Sir Marmaduke; all her mind and efforts–hers and Crow's–were spent in trying to devise a new and interesting way of passing time. Mrs. Romilly was willing to fall in with any plan, even to the extent of hiring a sailing-boat of a size suitable. She was ready to suppress her own feelings in the matter–they would have been distinctly anxious–and let Adrian go to Salterne and find something; an open boat with a sail.

However, on Monday, Adrian, as his manner was, shook himself free of this weight of care and announced that no one was to bother about him and his needs. The dinghy–which was bigger than the average dinghy carried by an eight-ton yacht, and which belonged to the Romillys–would do well enough for fishing, he said. And for the rest, he had made various appointments with John Badger of Champles–the farm on the Down above Bell House–connected with rats and young rabbits.

"Besides the lawn must be kept decent," he concluded; which was his way of saying that the ancient gardener, "Hennery" Doe, could not be left to bear what Mrs. Jeep called "the blunt" of the Bell House gardens.

So content was restored, and Mrs. Romilly wrote to her husband that "the children were perfectly sweet"; they were certainly of the kind that has a sense of responsibility very much awake.

On that day–Monday–Miss Lasarge came down to the Bell House, stayed to tea, and was a joy to everybody–especially Hughie, who adored her–but it struck Pamela that she was a little less talkative than usual; perhaps even a little absent-minded. She went away early and said she had gardening to do.

Nobody noticed this but Pam, and she, sitting at her window in the evening looking straight across the sea-wall, the rocks, and the tide rippling out over the golden sand, decided that the Little Pilgrim was in love with Major Fraser. "Why don't people settle things comfortably and be done with it," thought Pamela vexedly. "They are both nice, and they could live at Fuchsia Cottage."

On Tuesday morning, so early as the nine-o'clock breakfast hour, came a surprise.

It had been raining in the night, and was still drizzling, with an inclination to clear up, when Mollie Shard burst upon the scene in an atmosphere of wet wind and scent of salt.

She had not had breakfast. It appeared that Auntie A. was not down, and as Miss Shard had something to communicate that refused to be kept back till conventional hours she had left Crown Hill, in a "trench" coat and no hat, racing

down to the Bell House to see her friends, and tell her tale.

Everybody was down and beginning, except Pamela, and the conversation was a perfect rattle of questions and answers.

"Suppose," said Mrs. Romilly, "you let Mollie tell us what she has been doing."

Mollie explained that what she had been doing was entirely uninteresting. It was only what she expected–a little house on the river near Weybridge. "Yes, the usual little cottagey thing–with a lawn." Mollie liked it, and anyway it had to be because Dad couldn't leave London for ages. "It'll have to be put up with," said Mollie, "one must look forward to better times," but it seemed that was not the matter that was causing all this bubble of excitement and beam of smiles.

"Addie, I've got a message for you and Crow from Dad. Very special. You can have the *Messenger* to play with, till he wants her."

"*We* can!" gasped Christobel.

Adrian murmured "My hat!" and flushed red all over his tanned face.

"Yes. That's why I came bursting down, because why shouldn't we go out to-day? Do let's. I've got to do reams of packing, and I'm vowed to go back with the goods, next Monday. Mother lets me off till Monday. Well, anyway Dad says he sees that Crow and Adrian can manage the yawl just as well as he can, and he trusts her to you–only he says if you wreck her you'll have to give him another–that's all. Of course he knows Penberthy isn't vital. Especially when he has lumbago. She's not a heavy boat, and yawls are awfully convenient, Mrs. Romilly–aren't they, Addie?"

"Rather," agreed Adrian ecstatically; his hands shook a little with the thrill of the moment. Crow's grey eyes, so like her father's, seemed to shine with an inner light.

"Well, then, that's all settled. No, don't thank. Dad hates *Messenger* being on the moorings, just wasting. Hullo, here's Pamela, just in time to join in this jubilee. I say, Pam, why didn't you stop when I called you?"

Pamela slipped into her chair, took an egg, realized the amazing news from a few words of Crow's, looked from her mother's happy face to Adrian's, then attended to Mollie's question.

"How do you mean–'stop'–stop when?"

"Why, just now–when I was coming down the bay drive from Crown Hill, I was nearly at the end lodge, and you came down the road from Hawksdown, went to the edge of the cliff above Penberthy's and stared down into the cove. I called out to you, but you wouldn't answer, you must have heard."

Everybody looked at Pamela, who went on eating her egg slowly.

"It was my wraith," she said, "it wasn't me."

"Jolly solid wraith," declared Mollie, laughing.

"Well, but where did I go?" demanded Pamela, half laughing. "I mean, where did you think I went?"

"Don't know, my dear; I lost sight of you. It's for you to say where you went."

Pamela shook her head, and helped herself to marmalade.

"Well, it wasn't me," she repeated.

"'*I*', Pamela dear, '*I*', please," put in Miss Chance urgently. And everybody laughed.

# CHAPTER III

### In which Hughie is Ill-used

Some days after that joyous breakfast–Mollie being deeply engaged in the arduous duty of packing–the Romilly crew took out the white yawl in force.

Jim Crow was admittedly skipper. She was the eldest, and had a "sailing" bent undoubtedly. Captain Romilly, in training his family to understand the true inwardness of boats, had discovered the natural gift in his elder daughter. Adrian loved it–and loved the sea, but he was going to be a soldier in due course; Crow and Hughie were following faithfully in the Romilly record.

On this warm still evening–for the day was drawing to a close–*Messenger* floated lazily on a heaving oily sea. The sky was full of brassy clouds that seemed to have a copper lining; these, drifting, with scarcely perceptible movement, from the north and east, formed rather a serious barrier to getting home, because, given a good strong tide running out also, what is the cleverest yacht to do?

Earlier in the day, with mainsail set as well as mizzen, with big jib ballooning out in fine style, in fact, looking exactly what a well-kept yawl should look, *Messenger* had gone away down to the southwest straight before the wind and with the tide. The skipper had acted on a sound principle in this; but she was not very sure of her tides, and, having decided that the tide should be in their favour for the homeward run, was now disturbed and puzzled to find it had not turned yet–and the hour was six o'clock or after.

"Of course," said Pam, leaning with her head back against the deck-house, "of course that was where old Penberthy came in. He didn't do anything. He was fearfully lazy, but he was a perfect clock for tides."

"So shall we be, soon," murmured Adrian peacefully from under the brim

of a battered hat, ”but anyway what does it matter! We shall be home some day. Great Scot, isn't this A1!”

”It would be if I wasn't afraid Mother would worry. It's our first day without anybody, you see—-” Christobel suggested this in an apologetic tone.

”My good Crow–what do you call anybody, might I ask? Old Pen was simply luggage. And Mollie is only one more hand, naturally. I mean she couldn't effect a rescue if we went to smash, could she?”

”Of course not, but Mother—-”

”Mother is full of sense,” said Adrian with decision, as he sat up and looked about appreciatively. ”I never in all my life saw anything more perfect than the colours on the old Beak and Bell Ridge. I wouldn't have missed this evening for–well–really, Crow, what does time matter? It's as calm as a plate.”

That was true, but the skipper's eye glanced uneasily towards the dipping sun.

Hughie, sitting as usual like a small image of contemplation in a comfortable corner of the well, had said nothing, but listened to the argument.

”If I was at home I could say to Mum there's no wind,” he suggested.

”But you're not at home; the Floweret can say so,” said Adrian.

”She won't. She'll say 'dear Mrs. Romilly, don't be anxious',” remarked Hughie with grave assurance.

It was so very true that the elders looked at each other and laughed.

Then Christobel said humbly:

”It's all my fault. I made sure the tide turned in our favour at five o'clock. That seemed to give us heaps of time to pick up moorings and make all snug by half-past seven.”

”For any sake, Crow, don't be in a repentant mood,” urged Adrian, ”the tide is keeping a pleasant surprise up its sleeve. At present it's pretending it never comes in at all! Keep it in a good temper whatever happens. It will get tired of the merry jest in two jiffs and remember how jolly and warm the little bays are all along; then it'll go home in a hurry! Oh, I say–what a coast this is! I don't believe you can beat it round England anywhere.”

Adrian thus refused to be roused into worry, but Pamela was sorry for Crow. Crow had such a terribly tender conscience! She pulled herself together and sat upright with a decisive little movement.

”Give me the dinghy,” she said, ”and I'll go ashore and carry a message. Then, when you get back, the boat will be in the cove all right to take you off. There's no difficulty about it–it's as simple as–as anything.”

”Pam, it's three miles! You can't possibly—-” Christobel objected.

”Oh, my dear–it isn't. Not nearly three miles even from Bell Bay. What are you thinking of? I don't believe we are a mile from the Beak. It's nothing of a

row. Just look—-"

Christobel looked. First at the big headland, then at Adrian, who had made no comment.

Pamela went on explaining her plan.

"Suppose you make a little tack in towards Ramsworthy and the lighthouse. That will bring us quite near the easiest side of the Beak. Then Hughie can come with me. I'll land him and he can go up the sloping part into Ramsworthy, over Hawksdown, and into Bell Bay as quick as he likes–how far is it? Only about a mile and a half. *I*'ll row the dinghy along the shore. We'll just see which of us gets back first, won't we, Hughie?"

"*I* shall," answered the small person without hesitation.

"Depends on the tide," said Pamela, "if it turns pretty quick, I shall."

"My young friends, you are both in error," Adrian stretched amazingly as he spoke, "we shall–if the tide turns. You others won't have a look in."

"Well, if you do, you can pick up the moorings and wait for me to fetch you off. And anyway Mother will see you from the windows so she will be comfortable, and everybody will be comfortable," was Pamela's conclusion of the whole matter, as she got up.

Christobel was not satisfied, though she had acted on the suggestion of a tack in the direction of Ramsworthy Cove, to the right of the Beak head–looking at it from the sea.

"I don't like to think of you and Hughie going ashore–all that way–alone," she said.

"Crow, you are hatching difficulties," retorted Pamela, "what else can we do? If Addie puts us ashore he'll have to leave you. Ought you to be left all alone on the yawl? What do you think, Addie?"

Adrian cut the Gordian knot by a new division of labour and a very decided opinion.

"Mother wouldn't like you and Hughie to go home–I mean, go ashore, from here–by yourselves. We know she wouldn't, so it's no use arguing. I vote Pam stays aboard with Crow while I put Hughie ashore at Ramsworthy Cove. Hughie can cut away home over Hawksdown, and race us, because the tide's turning already. When I've put him out I'll come back here. That's all about it, come on, youngster."

Pamela was disappointed, but she said nothing. A sailing boat in a calm is deadly dull most certainly, and Pamela objected strongly to dullness and monotony. Her inquiring mind was always seeking new interests, and she loved surprises–she was always trying to surprise herself, in small ways. The idea of rowing Hughie ashore and then going along round the headland to Bell Bay had appealed to her desire for adventure. However–of course Adrian was right, Mrs.

Romilly would not have been pleased at such an independent excursion on the part of her younger children.

The dinghy started, and the mile of sea between lazily floating *Messenger* and the shadowy bay beyond the lighthouse point was quickly crossed. Adrian came back as quickly, and, as he sprang aboard and bent to tie up the tow rope, announced that the tide was flowing strongly.

"Wind or no wind," he said, "we shall get back before old Hughie. What a rum thing it is how that always happens. As long as you wait–you don't get it. Start doing something else, and there you are! Moral is–never wait. Always do something else. May as well tack, Crow–here's the wind too; breeze getting up with the tide of course!"

So the white yawl, leaning over very gently, gathered speed, and skimming through the smooth placid sea, made two tacks and picked up her moorings easily in half an hour.

The interest of this event is–what happened to Hughie, the human messenger.

Hughie, silent at all times, and almost as keen an observer as his sister Pamela, said nothing when this arrangement was made. At the same time he was well pleased to be put ashore with the responsibility of this small excursion upon his own shoulders. It was an adventure, and to Hughie, whose imagination was riotous, it might lead into all kinds of strange happenings.

Adrian landed him in the tiny cove beyond the great headland, on the point of which was a kind of fortress, walled and powerful–the barricaded strength of the lighthouse, which faced Atlantic gales through weather indescribable.

Outward and inner walls were white; all the low strong buildings were white, and the tower itself stood at the outer guard, smooth, round, and amazingly strong. Looking up at this as they rowed in Hughie felt a thrill–next to being a sailor like his father, he would have wished to be a lighthouse man–but this was a secret.

In the steep little cove lay the scattered bones of an old ship; weed grew in the staring ribs, and the massive keel was sunk deep into the sand. This was nothing new. The wreck had been there many years; it was that kind of thing that made Government build such a lighthouse. The Beak in old days had been one of the most relentless murderers of all the western headlands.

"There you are, old chap. Cut along home now, and tell Mother we'll be there before you," instructed Adrian as he pushed off, looking behind him as he went.

Hughie nodded, picked his way over the strewn wreckage, and went up the broken sloping steep at the back of the cove till he reached the road on the top. This went from the small village, Ramsworthy, over Hawksdown–which

was the bare lovely height on the moor above the lighthouse–and down into Bell Bay. Several roads branched off; one went along the point to the lighthouse settlement; one led away back across Ramsworthy moor to the station at Five Trees. Yet another went to Clawtol, the Ensors' farm, and on past that and the principal lodge of Crown Hill to join the main road from Salterne.

This was the way Pamela's mysterious motor-car should have come, had it been behaving in a reasonable manner.

Hughie ran and walked alternately till he reached the top of Hawksdown. Then he stopped to look round. The sun was dipping into the sea–far, far out. Here and there upon the sea was a sailing vessel, looking like a painted toy. Not distant a great way from the lighthouse was the *Messenger*, a glistening model of perfection, with her white sails drawing on this new breeze that rippled the water.

Hughie, gazing at the straining sail and the ripple, saw that they would get home first if he waited, so he started off at a trot, making quite straight across the moorland for the drop into Bell Bay between Penberthy's cottage and the Crown Hill gate. It was the shortest way home.

The sun had gone into the sea, and a purply shadow was creeping over the land–the whole world was a happy hunting ground for adventures, and Hughie would have asked nothing better than to follow one of the farm tracks and go on till he met something surprising. At the crossroad to Clawtol Farm he paused, and looked along it because it was pretty. It dipped away from the high pitch of the moor and went down and down between banks covered with gorse and heather. It was sheltered as well as pretty, and was one way to Bell Bay, of course, though roundabout.

Hughie, stopping to look along this road, saw something immensely surprising–about the last thing he dreamed of–indeed a dragon or a giant would have been less astonishing, because he was always expecting creatures of that kind. What he saw was his sister Pamela. She was walking rather slowly between the gorsy banks in the direction of Clawtol Farm. Even as he looked, she paused, went up the left-hand bank two steps, picked some flower, jumped back into the road, and walked slowly on.

Hughie stared at this vision. At first in unbelief; then with a rapid calculation of time; then in amaze. It certainly was Pam; but she must have been amazingly quick to get up there, though it was possible–well, of course it was possible, because there she was! His mind reviewed rapidly the idea that Addie must have gone back very quickly and taken Pam off at once, and put her ashore on the home side of the Beak–you could climb it, but it was an awful bit of cliff. Altogether that explanation did not appeal to a reasoning mind. Then he remembered the ripples on the sea, and the straining mainsail of the yawl as

she gathered speed on the homeward track. Of course that must be it. The *Messenger* had picked up her moorings and they had put Pam ashore to come up and meet him, while they stowed the sails. That was what would have been done–supposing they reached home first. Hughie concluded that he must have taken too much time over his journey–it was a most annoying conclusion to arrive at. Hughie shouted with vigour:

"Pam–I say–*Pam*!" and then stayed to watch the effect.

The tall, slim figure in neat skirt and jumper–such as Hughie connected with both his sisters–went on at a steady pace. It seemed that the headgear was a cap of the tam-o'-shanter kind. Pamela had one undoubtedly, but her small brother could not quite remember whether she had been wearing it this afternoon. Most likely she had. Anyway, the long, thick plait of polished hair was very obvious, hanging to the waist-line and below.

"Pam!" he shouted again, with greater energy.

The girl checked. She looked up and round, but not back. She seemed by the movements of her head to be listening.

"Hullo-o-o!" hailed Hughie, with force.

Pamela stood still with a startled pull-up, and turned round and glanced behind her. Hughie was conscious of surprise at the way she did it. He could not have explained clearly perhaps what it was that shocked him just a little in his sister's manner. His feeling was instinctive only.

She acted in a *guilty* manner.

Now this sort of thing was not only foreign to Pamela, but to the entire Romilly family. They did unexpected and independent things at times, of course–and explained afterwards. They did not do things they were ashamed to own up to, which was what Pamela appeared to be guilty of at this moment. Hughie flushed at the thought of it. Why was she running away; why wouldn't she make a sign?

He raised an arm, waved it round his head and started to catch her. She seemed to hesitate. Then she also distinctly made a gesture of the hand, and ran too. Away from him–in the direction of Clawtol.

Hughie had not a chance when Pamela ran. He knew that by long experience. His sister was a real "sprinter"; her long legs, light body, and excellent "wind" left him nowhere every time. At the same time he had no intention of giving in, though he was angry. It was a mean thing to do; especially after she had seen him and answered his wave.

He ran on steadily, though he knew the distance between them must be increasing fast, till he came in sight of Clawtol ricks and roofs, and the hedge-row fencing that began at the turn of the road. The dog was barking monotonously in that maddening way tied-up dogs do bark when anything interests them, and

Hughie reasoned that the dog had heard Pamela run by along the road.

He stopped at the gate to see if there was a person about, and became interested in the distant doings of Mrs. Ensor, who was trying to induce several families of chickens–thoroughly mixed up among themselves–to go to bed in correct parties. The open coops stood in a row; Hughie looked through the gate, as it was a high one, and observed the manoeuvres.

Mrs. Ensor was a short, dark woman, with pretty eyes and a distinct moustache. Besides the moustache she owned six little boys, in ages ranging from eight down to eighteen months. This last–an important member of the Ensor family–was staggering about among the rebellious chickens, like them, he had no particular bed-time, and fought against it whenever it was decreed. As Hughie watched, drawn away from his intention of questioning Mrs. Ensor about Pam, a small pig charged through the mêlée, upset the Ensor baby, scattered the chickens and caused an uproar that brought more little Ensors to the scene of action.

One of these saw Hughie, and pulled his mother's skirt to make her notice the visitor. Hughie therefore pushed open the gate, and advanced rather gingerly, because the noise was deafening and Mrs. Ensor was shaking the baby–as an example to its brothers of what happens when people are naughty enough to fall over a pig.

"Mother," urged Reube Ensor, who was six, and very small, "here be Master Hughie."

The tumult ceased as by magic, and Mrs. Ensor advanced to meet her visitor, with the baby surprised into silence.

Hughie shook hands politely. Then he asked if his sister had just been to the farm.

"I thought I saw her," he explained, "she was in the road, and I thought she might have come up for eggs."

This idea had occurred to him when he saw the hen-coops as a very possible explanation for Pamela's conduct. Her gesture to him might have meant that she was going on to Clawtol Farm in a hurry.

Mrs. Ensor had not seen anybody. Miss Pamela had not called for eggs. She turned to the row of listening little boys and demanded of them, "had anybody seen Miss Pamela?"

There was a certain amount of whispering and nudging, from which the farmer's wife seemed to gather that Pamela had been seen. It was "young Reube" who volunteered information, twisting his cap round and round in very small nervous hands.

Hughie looked at him with shy sympathy. He liked Reube, but could not explain why.

"Did you see my sister?" he asked gravely.

”Yes, I seen the young lady,” admitted Reube.

”Where did she go?” asked Hughie again.

”She went down along Crown Hill. She was running.”

That was all Reube said, or knew apparently. As he gave this answer he looked from Hughie to his mother with a puzzled expression which neither interpreted to mean anything but shyness.

”I think I’d better go home now, Mrs. Ensor,” said the visitor rather ceremoniously. ”I shall be rather late for our tea, shan’t I? I expect my sister has gone to Crown Hill to see Miss Ashington, so I shan’t go that way–it’s much longer.”

Mrs. Ensor and family–with an inquisitive escort of chickens and little pigs–came to the gate with Hughie and let him out.

”Good-night, Mrs. Ensor,” said Hughie, and lifted his cap with precision.

Young Reube stood in the background with a troubled expression on his small dark face. After Hughie was gone he ran about and drove chickens into coops, but all the while there was a sense of confusion in his mind, because he had no power to explain–words do not come easily when you are six!

Hughie raced back along the road to the top of Hawksdown. From there it was not very far to the drop of the hill down into Bell Bay. At a turn he came in full view of the lovely cove, and paused to look for the white yawl. There she was on her moorings. Sails stowed too, and he could see someone getting out of the dinghy on to the big flat rock where they usually landed. There was not enough light for him to distinguish persons, but seeing the *Messenger* was safely back home nothing else mattered.

He took to his heels and ran headlong down the steep road, past the lodge gate of the cove road. To Crown Hill, round the corner, down, and down, till he came to the sea-wall and gardens of the Bell House; and as he ran he became increasingly angry, which was a rare state of mind with Hughie. He considered himself swindled. He had been put ashore on purpose to carry a message, and had felt the importance of the trust.

It was a small thing that the yawl should be home first, though, as he had seen the dinghy coming ashore that would not have happened had he not been tricked into turning aside by Pamela.

The thing was distinctly unfair. Pamela, his partner in many interesting episodes, had gone back on him in this, she had treated him meanly and put him

in a silly position.

## CHAPTER IV

### In which Pam Makes a Move

The first thing people said to Hughie was, of course, ”What a long time you were!” It was exactly what he expected, and he felt extremely bitter about it.

There was supper on this night, everybody was hungry, and they had so much to tell Mrs. Romilly about the events of the day that no more than that comment was made at the moment.

Mrs. Romilly had not been anxious. She had observed the calm, had guessed the tides, and simply given orders that ”high tea” would be supper. She was rejoiced that this first attempt had been a success, but decided that her youngest son was tired out–he was so silent. She remembered the climb out of Ramsworthy Cove, the walk over Hawksdown–thought of the long day of hot calm–and put no questions at all about it. Indeed she diverted those that the rest of the crew would have asked.

Pamela, as usual, came in rather late. Hughie looked at her. She sat down, saw him, and said:

”I saw you running down the hill, aren’t you hot, poor Midget? It is stuffy as thunder, Mummy, and the wind is coming in little puffs over Bell Ridge; presently there’ll be a row–we shall hear the thunder tanks come wheeling along over our heads! I *am* hot!”

Hughie decided she had been running also. But he felt this was not the time or place to go into the question. He ate his supper in silence, and matured a telling and desperate plan for paying his sister back. He would ignore her presence. He would not say good-night to her.

Thus when bed-time came, Hughie, busy as usual with some infinitely small carpentering work connected with his latest boat, got up, put away his tiny blocks, pulleys, and fine cord, and went to kiss his mother. She was making sails for him–perfect sails with amazingly neat reefing knots and cord-stiffened edges. Nobody could make model boat-sails like Mrs. Romilly.

”Oh, Mum—-” said Hughie very low, and smiled.

”Tired boy,” answered ’Mum’, also smiling, ”go to bed and go to sleep, and don’t wake till eight.”

Hughie said good-night to Adrian, Christobel, and the Floweret; then he went off to bed, deliberately missing out Pam.

Nobody thought about it but Pam herself. The others were all busy, Addie and Crow playing chess and too much absorbed, the Floweret reading the newspaper to Mrs. Romilly. Pamela, very intently taking notes from her precious handbook, had turned her head ready for Hughie's kiss. He always kissed her as well as his mother. But Hughie walked down the room with short quick steps, opened the door, shut it very softly, and was gone.

This action was in no way lost on his sister. She not only saw it all, but she realized that it was a case of extreme measures on Hughie's part, and made up her mind to get to the bottom of the business.

Pamela's bedroom was a small one at the end of the house, and it looked out over the sea-wall and into the rocky cove. Hughie's room was a pair to it, farther along the little cross passage that barred the end of the long corridor down the centre of the house. Hughie's window looked the same way as Pamela's, and they were exactly alike–strong casements, deep window seats, with a view passing description for peace and beauty.

At nine o'clock Pam went up to bed; but she walked by her own door, to Hughie's, and without knocking, opened it softly and went in.

A young clear moon was rising up the purple sky, and there was light enough to show any movements, especially as the blind was up. The owner of the room was in bed, and no doubt ought to have been asleep, but the excitements already narrated had kept him awake–combined with the expectation of a visit from his sister.

He turned his head on the pillow and looked at her. Pamela closed the door gently, came to the foot of the bed, and leaning her crossed arms on the brass foot, said:

"What's the matter, Midget?"

Hughie was not the sort of person to pretend he did not know what she was thinking of. He retorted by another question.

"Why didn't you stop when I called you, Pam?"

"Called me! Where? When?"

"On the top of Hawksdown–where the road goes to Clawtol," said Hughie.

"But *when*?"

"Why, this evening, when I was coming home, of course."

There was a pause. Pamela seemed to be thinking deeply. Hughie made use of the interval to sit up in bed–indeed he sat on his pillow, holding the small pyjama-clad ankles of his crossed legs in either hand. He looked very much like an enlarged soapstone figure of an Indian god.

After a sufficiently long pause to make Hughie feel sure his sister was very

guilty in the matter, Pamela said:

"What was I doing?"

"I should think you ought to know," answered Hughie coldly.

"No, but tell me. I want to know just what you saw."

Hughie complied.

"So I waved–when I'd called; and you looked back and put up your hand. And then you ran away. I ran too, but I couldn't catch you–I never can–you know that perfectly well," he concluded.

He could see his sister's face quite plainly in the moonlight. She was frowning with a sort of puzzled intentness, and her keen features looked very sharp. Hughie, quick as she to observe, began to explain further. He told how he went to Clawtol, and how he inquired from Mrs. Ensor and her family.

"And Reube said he'd seen you," he ended.

"Reube said he'd seen *me*," echoed Pamela, "are you sure, Midget?"

Hughie considered; then he repeated carefully:

"Mrs. Ensor said 'did you see the young lady?' and Reube said 'yes'."

"Ah!" breathed Pamela, low, to herself. Then she left her position at the bed foot, and moved about the room in a restless silent fashion, her eyes on the ground. At last she came to a stand by the window.

Hughie made no remark; his eyes followed her, and he was much interested; there was plainly something on foot not understandable at first.

"How was I–she–dressed?" asked Pamela suddenly.

"Oh, your usual things–what you had on the boat," said Hughie vaguely.

"Brown shoes and stockings?" Pam demanded.

Hughie thought about it. Then he said he couldn't see so far.

"But I saw your pigtail hanging down. There was a bit of light on it, and it shone."

Pamela went back to the foot of the bed, and leaned there.

"Look here, Hughie," she said seriously, "if I say a thing you'd believe me, wouldn't you?"

Hughie gripped his ankles with either small brown hand and gazed back at her thoughtfully.

"I should *believe* you–if you said a true thing," he said.

"Well, I'm going to say a true thing. The girl you saw wasn't me–I mean, I."

"Oh!" said Hughie, "who was she, then?"

"I don't know any more than you do, but I'd venture to bet a shilling that she's the same girl Mollie Shard saw. Don't you remember when Mollie said she saw *me*, out by Mainsail Cottage on Tuesday morning. Well, I wasn't."

"Oh," murmured Hughie again–then, "I remember what Mollie said, but

why didn't you say it wasn't you, Pam?"

"I was thinking about something rather queer that I saw myself; kind of adding them together."

"What did you see yourself?"

Pamela did not answer this question at once, her mind was searching round for points, at last:

"One thing is plain;" she said, "there's a girl about who looks like me; but goodness knows who she is, or where she comes from. Look here, Hughie, will you keep your eyes open–now you know. I'll try and follow it up too, and I promise I'll tell you what I find out even if I don't tell other people."

"I see. Yes, all right, Pam," agreed the Midget with dignity. As a matter of fact he was really not quite sure whether he did see. It was all rather startling; why should there be a girl exactly like Pam–and with the same pigtail even? However, there it was. He had said he would believe what his sister told him.

"Well, good-night, Hughie; we shall see what happens next," said Pamela. She was not laughing at all, her face wore the same keen look. "And remember you promised not to say one word to a living soul, whatever happens."

"All right. I promise. Good-night, Pam," and Hugh raised his face to be kissed rather meekly. He felt as though all this was rather serious.

Pamela went away to her own room and sat down in the low window-seat to puzzle out the position.

There was a girl in Bell Bay so like herself that two people who knew her well had been completely deceived, yet nobody had arrived in the cove–publicly. Indeed, there was no place for them to arrive at, without the inhabitants being aware.

"The queer part is," thought Pamela, "that nobody is worrying with curiosity, because whenever anyone sees her they think it's I, and naturally they don't notice any more. Whatever that girl does will be put on my shoulders, and I can't go and say she's there because I don't know."

She looked at the silver, clear, clean moon, riding so gaily up and up, and at the inky shadows of rocks away down on the white shining sand of the cove. Everything was painted black and white, and the ripple of the sea was a laughing whisper.

Pamela was used to this fairy scene in all sorts of phases, but to-night–probably because of the Mystery Girl–she felt as though something uncanny were abroad, and to shake herself free from the feeling she opened her precious handbook, and proceeded to search through it from end to end. "What should a person do–what would a Patrol Captain, or any experienced Guide do, if she found she had a 'double'? Practical information about making jam tins into candlesticks, or how to meet a mad dog! Splendid directions for camping

and tracking–*tracking*!"

Pamela paused and thought about that. She studied the means for finding out a bicycle-track, what sort of bicycle–which way going. That might be useful if the girl rode a bicycle. Footprints might be followed up if she could be sure what sort of shoe the girl wore.

She shut up the book, and began to undress, gazing dreamily out at the moonshine all the time, utterly unconscious what that moonshine was to show her one night–in the near future.

Just before she went to sleep her mind fixed itself again on a previous idea. This business had surely got to do with Woodrising–with the strange motor-car–and with the secret visit of Sir Marmaduke Shard. She had no proof that he went that night to Woodrising, but she was perfectly certain he had done so. The first thing, of course, was to find out if anybody had come to Woodrising.

The next morning, warm, lovely–and far removed from any sort of mystery–arrived, in about five minutes. Mornings do arrive swiftly when you are thirteen and have been out sailing nearly all day before. Everything looked the same downstairs, and Pamela felt it difficult to believe she had a "double" and Bell Bay was the innocent scene of a surprising secret. She found that Christobel and Adrian were already planning a sail of some importance, and was met by a pressing invitation to go too.

"Where?" asked Pam lazily.

"Peterock. Addie wants his hair cut, and it can be cut at Peterock just as easily as Salterne. Besides, it's much nearer."

Christobel said this with intent, for though nearness was nothing to her and Adrian, she knew instinctively that her mother rather cherished the thought of their "keeping near home". So many people who have no experience of sailing believe that the safety is increased by keeping near land, whereas it is just as possible to drown in one fathom of water, as forty fathoms.

However, Christobel threw out the bait with purpose, and Mrs. Romilly, smiling happily, said:

"That would be nice, darlings. Won't you want lunch and tea on board? Ask Jeep for all you need."

Both Pam and Hughie excused themselves from this expedition. The day promised to be unusually hot and breathless, and Pamela, knowing exactly what it would be like, preferred a bathe and a book. Hughie wanted to test the new sails to his model boat.

This division of forces was so often practised that Mrs. Romilly took no notice. She was sure that the two elders could manage the yawl–and for the rest, a day in which there seemed to be neither wind nor waves, was very satisfying to her mind. Pamela liked being alone–she and Hughie spent hours in the cove

contented and harmless. All would be well.

The morning wore on in peace, and about midday the voyagers went down, basket-laden, and very happy.

"It will be thunder," prophesied Pam, who was sitting on a low rock, with her back against another, learning certain enthralling rules by heart from a certain book, "it will be quite calm and oily, and presently you'll have a cracking storm. I feel it in my head. Glad I'm not going. Crow, do you remember the day when we couldn't get anywhere, and we threw the slices of beef overboard and they went with us for *miles*–sort of cheek by jowl, sitting on the sea."

"That was before the War," said Crow, evading the thought, "one doesn't have slices of meat now, of anything, thank goodness. Beef and ham pies would sink."

"Not before we've eaten them," put in Adrian calmly, "come along, Crow. I say, Pam–supposing we don't get to Peterock, but go to somewhere down coast beyond Ramsworthy, do you mind suggesting to Mother that we are playing on the sands at Netheroot or Tamerton? Either would do, 'fraid there'll be no wind for Salterne."

"Can you get your hair cut at Netheroot?" asked Pamela.

"No, don't suppose so; why?"

"Only because Mother likes to picture you on shore most of the time, when you go sailing, I mean–it's so nice and dry; and the sea is wet as wet can be! If there is a thunderstorm you'll go ashore, shan't you?"

"Like a shot," declared Adrian, as he pushed against the rocky landing platform, and drove the dinghy dancing over the breaking ripples.

Pamela watched, sleepily, as the boat made for the white yawl. She rejoiced that she had remained on land, when the sails went up under Addie's strenuous hauling, yet admired wholeheartedly as the flop of the moorings' buoy set free the yacht, and, leaning over very gently, she drifted broadside on towards Bell Ridge–the northern headland.

Even as she drifted, silent as a shadow, the far faint rumble of summer thunder murmured from inland, and Pam said "thought so" contentedly. After that she shut her eyes and reviewed a succession of plans; something ought to be done now she had a day to herself, or an afternoon at any rate, no one to ask inconvenient questions either, for Hughie being in the secret required but a hint. He was the most circumspect person living.

Sitting there with her eyes closed Pamela arranged a practical plan. She would go for a walk after lunch, on the pretext of taking her bicycle to Timothy Batt's house at Folly Ho. Timothy was the carrier, and lived with his old horse, at the very small hamlet on the Peterock road beyond the turn to the station–and also, of course, beyond Woodrising. She would leave the bicycle, and coming

back she would take stock of that empty house, going round the big grounds encircled by the white wall. Surely something could be discovered that might help to elucidate this mystery.

The plan was excellent; when Pam and Hughie went in to dinner, she asked leave, and got it easily. Then came the thunderstorm–about which all details will be given presently–not only the details, but the results and consequences.

It was an exceedingly unusual and violent thunderstorm, frightening the household not a little; all except Pamela and Hughie, who for their own reasons did not mind in the least. Hughie wanted to test small boats in the water that rushed, seething, into the big horse-trough in the yard, and Pamela pictured footprints of a revealing nature, marking the wet soil all round Woodrising.

Good may come out of anything. And surely advantages might be expected from such rain as fell into Bell Bay on that afternoon.

Mrs. Romilly was certainly worried on account of the yawl, but Pamela told her what Addie had said about Netheroot or Tamerton. Also when the storm had passed she could see for herself that the water was hardly more rough. There was nothing to suggest danger. Later on the telegram came; but not till after Pamela had started off on her delayed walk.

She went after five-o'clock tea, into a wonderful washed world, where every plant, bush and hedge seemed to have been touched with a magic brush, and set in jewels. The sandy soil oozed beneath her feet, and rills of water streamed down the hill in winding gullies.

Pamela whistled softly to herself as she went; it was good to be alive on such an evening, and she felt very hopeful about her chances of making discoveries, chiefly because she felt so buoyantly cheerful.

Folly Ho was perhaps a mile from Bell Bay. Timothy Batt promised–or rather his wife promised for him–that the bicycle should go to Peterock next day but one. Next day was station day. Alternate journeys–Five Trees and Peterock.

"Pity we didn't have it this morning, missie, Batt's gone to Peterock to-day."

Pamela said "never mind", and meant it. Her object was Woodrising.

She sped back along the wet road with eager haste, and checked not till she came to the long hill, and the white wall enclosing those thickly wooded grounds and white buildings. Then she did what she had planned to do–got through the hedge on to the wooded hill above Woodrising, made her way down slowly through the trees till she reached the barrier wall, and then began to follow the course of the wall round the whole of the little estate. She believed there would be some chance, which she could make use of, either to get in, or see in, for surely there must be outlets! Gates, or gaps, or ladders, or something that could be made use of.

However, she went round two sides of it–the wall at the top, and the long

side wall down the hill–and found no opportunity. She knew too that she must not count on the wall edging the road, because no burglar even could attempt its slippery height. That was three sides! She was thinking of this, and that she might never see more than the top windows, slate roof, and chimneys of the tantalizing house, when she came on a ladder–a short ladder set conveniently up against the wall–positively inviting her to mount it.

She went up cautiously and looked over. It was at the corner, in the angles of the side and lower walls, and she saw that within was a high rubbish heap that obviously formed a bed for vegetable marrows. Heaped-up straw mould, and softness–the easiest thing in the world to jump down on to. But that was rather an extreme measure, so Pamela went back down three steps and considered the question.

Then she observed that the glass at this point was crushed and scraped till the wall top was smooth enough to pass with comfort. One might have supposed that someone made a practice of getting over just here; Pamela's mind leaped to the thought of Peter Cherry, the boy–it would of course be his quickest way home to the Temperance Tea House. No doubt a secret way.

She went up again and viewed the grounds. Immediately below were the kitchen-gardens–beyond that vistas of long shrubbery walks–lawns, fruit trees–every sort of tree, and everything overgrown and run riot. There was a wild luxuriance about the whole place which was natural to Bell Bay and its sheltered warmth. No one seemed to be about.

After a few minutes' hesitation, Pamela went "over the top" with a swift movement, and jumped down on to the vegetable-marrow bed. It was damp and soft. Pausing to reconnoitre she noticed two bricks missing in the wall on the inner side. The holes had all the appearance of steps made on purpose, and confirmed her opinion about Peter Cherry's short cut.

Then she went into the garden, making for the shelter of the nearest shrubbery. Keeping out of sight of window view she followed the paths in and out towards the house. Everywhere she looked for "tracks", for footmarks in the wet soil, and was pleased when she found the trace of a shortish square-toed boot with nail-studded sole. Certainly Peter Cherry! She felt she was getting on in experience. So absorbed was she that she confused the bush fringed paths, and got mixed up as to which she had inspected. Then, she came on the neat, narrow print of a woman's shoe, and stooped to examine it with intense interest. Here was a plain track, and she followed it some yards between overhanging, very wet apple-trees, till it turned the corner into a cross path. Pamela stopped and looked up and down. Surely she had been this way before. She looked back between the green walls and felt certain the look of it was familiar. A thought struck her and she slipped off one of her own shoes, and compared the sole to the shoe print.

Either it was her own track–which she was crossing unawares–or somebody else wore exactly the same sized shoe. It was a maddening dilemma.

She was puzzling over this when she became aware of voices, not far distant, and coming nearer–from the house. Somebody was talking in what Pamela would have described as a ”fussy voice”. She stood listening, and might have been caught on that instant if the talkers had glanced down between the apple-trees, for two figures passed across the end of the alley she was in, and went on towards the kitchen-garden.

Pamela made up her mind to see who they were, and looked about eagerly for a safe shelter. She reasoned that they would go round the bottom of the garden and back up the south side, so she hastened in the direction of the house, where very thick-growing shrubberies offered screens, and hid herself in the wettest possible bushes by the side of a direct path homeward.

Certainly ten minutes passed before anyone drew near. Then she was rewarded for her damp condition. Two women came along, talking. That is to say, one talked–never ceased to talk. The other, the silent one, was Mrs. Trewby, and she, looking as bilious and despondent as usual, listened with respectful misery stamped on her sallow face.

The person who did the talking puzzled Pamela's sharp examination. She was familiar, yet difficult to place. After they had passed, and the fussy voice chattered on, growing less audible, Pamela suddenly remembered who she was–Mrs. Chipman, Lady Shard's one-time lady's maid, and a well-known person at Crown Hill for some years. Her name had been Emily Baker in those days, when she was just as fussy and talkative. She married the butler at the Albert Gate house in London, and kept a lodging-house on the east coast. The War had done for the lodging-house, and the butler was slain by sickness in India. She had a pension and no doubt Lady Shard was kind to ”my good Chipman”, as she called her.

Pamela could just remember her at Crown Hill; now, she looked fatter, more dumpy, and more pompous, otherwise just the same. This discovery was a blow, because it was a simple explanation of the visitor to Woodrising–Chipman, sent down to stay with Mrs. Trewby, at the Shards' expense. Of course, but how dull! The girl could have nothing on earth to do with them.

As Pamela shook the wet off her skirt, she realized that she had been so intent on trying to remember Chipman that she never listened to a word she was saying. Rather depressed, she went back along the path to the corner, and as she went she heard Mrs. Chipman calling–”Countess–*Countess*.”

”If they are going to let a *dog* out I'd better run,” thought Pamela; and she

went over the wall briskly, into the wooded meadow.

## CHAPTER V
### The Adventures of the Yawl and her Crew

To go back to the start of the white yawl. After the mooring-buoy had ”plopped” into the smooth sea, the sails half-filled, and then, as the pretty craft righted herself, they slackened again in a succession of sleepy rattles. Then followed a period of drifting to leeward, the dinghy drifting also, and bumping softly against the yacht’s counter in a stupid manner.

Adrian flung himself on the deck and mopped his forehead; he said:

”I wonder why Mother always rejoices when there is no wind. It doesn’t appeal to me as a desirable state of things. Pam looks jolly comfortable over there–wish I was in her place! I say, Crow, don’t say we’re going to play the fool like this all day.”

”Why say anything in such a very short space of time, dear boy,” retorted the skipper lazily; ”we’ve hardly started–isn’t that thunder, hark?”

”It is thunder, my good woman,” allowed Adrian, ”which means growlings, heat and stickiness immeasurable. Don’t give way to optimistic hopes and picture–first a gentle cooling shower, and then a sweet little breeze that will waft us to Peterock without a tack.”

Christobel, obstinately happy, lay back in a comfortable position with one arm thrown over the tiller. Suddenly she sat up. A queer little breeze had dropped upon them from the heights. The slack sails filled, the yawl leaned gently to leeward and, with ever-increasing speed, began to cut steadily through the glassy heaving sea. Straight out they went–out and out into the world of blue–the cordage strained and creaked, the hard sails pulled, and *Messenger* sped through the water with a delicious bubbling hiss.

”How’s that, umpire?” demanded Crow, turning a smiling glance on Adrian, ”kindly remember next time occasion rises, that it’s never worth while looking on the dark side.”

”The hot side, you mean,” said Adrian unabashed, ”where are we going now?”

”Out,” answered his sister briefly.

”Good. Let’s get away from our native land for a bit–it’s stuffy. Besides I want to look at it from a distance, it enlarges one’s mind.”

So Christobel, like the master mariner in ”The Wreck of the Hesperus”, ”steered for the open sea”, and Adrian, whose appetite was enlarging as well as his mind, decided that dinner was of more importance than anything else, and diving into the saloon began fetching up plates, food, cups and lemonade; as *Messenger* was on an even keel, and the breeze held, the conditions were ideal and there was nothing to worry about. As they ate, they planned the excursion with precision. They were going out, but the ebbing tide was carrying them northward–Peterock way, that is to say; presently they would tack, and from a distance of some seven miles set a straight course on a ”soldier’s wind” for the pretty town. They fixed the hour at which they would arrive, how long they would stop, and how short a time it would take them to get back–under the very satisfactory conditions of fair tide and fair wind.

As a rule, this is the way of all ways to upset everything; and to-day the rule held good.

First the wind dropped–dropped–and ceased. One moment the sails were drawing with firm pressure; actually the next moment they hung limp–not a cord stirring. At the same time, as Crow said, ”someone blew the candle out”.

As it happened she gave an exclamation and looked up. A bank of dense black cloud had covered the high sun that had shone upon them till then. The sky was divided in two by a distinct line. To seaward, blue, clear, exquisite. To landward and above the vivid broken coast hung massed clouds of most fearsome appearance. Clouds above clouds–the lowest, greyish battalions tearing along at headlong speed; above them others of purple black, moving statelily at a different angle; above them again piled heaps of strange shapes, shot and lined with coppery tints. These were moving at a different pace, and in a different direction.

As far as eye could see over the hilly land was black. And the black was devouring the sunny blue.

Christobel looked up, round, and landward. Then she said in rather a small voice:

”How *horrid*!” and turned her eyes seaward.

Adrian contemplated the heavens with a frown, then he got up, saying one might as well put away the things. He put them away, and incidentally made everything snug inside; nothing was left loose to shift or roll.

Christobel heard him doing it and guessed that he expected it would be necessary.

Presently he came up the short companion-way, put his head out and stared at the sky again. The line of black was advancing swiftly over the blue.

”We shall have big rain, old lady,” he said. ”I don’t know how much wind!

Of course, it's only thunder, but—-"

Low down over the hills shot out a succession of wicked fiery darts. They stabbed downwards into the quiet land as though they would destroy it. Deep ominous rumblings followed.

"I think I rather hate it," said Crow uneasily.

"I'll get the mackintoshes out of the fore lockers, expect we shall find a use for them before we are through with this beano! You'll have to put yours on," Adrian said, then he laughed. "When it comes, it'll *come*."

Then they both laughed, and Christobel as usual found support and comfort in her brother's matter-of-fact way of looking at things. She was no coward. Her courage was of a high order, though she was not aware of it, but certain conditions affected her imagination and made icy thrills run all over her.

Adrian would have said "It's only a few clouds–what does that matter?" Equally he would have said of a dark night and its mysteries, "If it were daylight you wouldn't mind! What's the difference? There's nothing there."

While she gazed at the towering masses that hung over sea and land with dread in her eyes, Adrian thought about mackintoshes.

"When the rain comes I shan't mind," said Crow, "rain is only–well, rain."

"How true," murmured Adrian, "and being rain it wets."

They both laughed again, and the skipper felt better.

But even Addie was quite silent before the wetting part came.

The land was invisible now, except when those stabs of flame tore splits in the barrier; then the two watchers could see the dark breathless combes and the big headlands showing black and rugged. But it seemed as though there was no end to the piling weight of cloud that now almost covered the sea, the vivid contrast of the blue space over the shining horizon making it the darker. The growlings and rumblings had now turned to crashes, the noise adding to the dread.

At this phase Adrian questioned whether it would not be well to get the mainsail in–it would be so wet, he suggested, and they could do with the mizzen well enough; but Christobel did not agree.

"If the wind is bad we can drop the peak," she said, "after all it's not like a cutter mainsail–they are so huge. We've only just enough to send us along nicely. Besides, once we stow it it will take ages to set again. Let's risk it."

So they decided to "risk it", which was an instance of Crow's way of looking at things. She was not afraid to face a possible gale–but she was horribly afraid of the look–the influence–of that overwhelming pile of gloomy cloud.

"I wonder how many 'volts' are playing skittles up there," remarked Adrian thoughtfully, "great Scotland! If one knew how to box it all up and use it for transport power–engines of every sort and kind! Why can't I invent something!

It ought to be a British monopoly–we could switch it on to any nations that played the fool–and there we should be—- Hullo–see that tender drop, Crow? A wash-hand basin would hardly have held it–put this thing on."

"This thing" was, of course, the mackintosh.

The brother and sister were busy for a few seconds, then they sat down again armoured–in sticky, shiny oilskins, and sou'westers well drawn over their ears.

"Go inside, Addie, why should two swim?" said Crow, speaking loud through the deafening riot of crashes.

"Oh no," shouted Adrian with weighty sarcasm, "I'll go to bed, and light the stove, and tuck myself up with a hot-water bottle; better still, you could leave the tiller and tuck me up! By the way, that reminds me–aren't you about fed up with steering?"

Crow shook her head, and spread both hands out with a meaning gesture–only her elbow stayed the tiller in place.

Adrian understood; it was just a question of waiting, so he varied the monotony by going forward to batten down the forehatch, coil in loose sheets, make fast the anchor, and see that the peak halyard was nowhere hitched or encumbered. Then he returned aft and shut the door of the main cabin, commenting still on the size of one or two splashes, which he declared would have filled the kettle; the door slid along in grooves and was proof against heavy seas or torrents of rain. Then he turned an inventive eye on the dinghy, which was rocking sleepily under their quarter, and suggested that she might be used as a "wind anchor" if she filled up.

"Supposing we get a real howler," said Adrian, "we could make her fast to the bowsprit, you see, and just ride."

It was while they were laughing over this brilliant idea that Crow saw the grey wall coming, and sprang to attention as it were, standing up–an alert grip on the tiller.

It seemed to reach from the bank of blackness to the sea, and shut off the land like a blind. It was coming towards them–coming out to sea ushered by a noise like the rush of rapids–an immense volume of rain water, descending in lines straight as harp strings, and striking the level sea. It was very amazing, and Christobel gazed with awe; she had never seen anything quite like it, because a stretch of land has so many interruptions that you cannot see the *line* as you can on miles of water. Besides, water striking water like that is a very wonderful thing, foam fringes the edge of it all along, hissing like a boiler.

"This looks as though it meant to hurt our feelings–especially the dinghy's," said Adrian cheerfully, "she isn't used to bad manners."

Crow shrank instinctively as the rush of the advancing thing enveloped the

yawl. They were battered by such rain as she had never experienced before, yet once into it, all her dread was dispelled like a nightmare.

Rain fell on the deck like the rattle of bullets, and in a minute the whole place was a wild wash of water pouring through scuppers, water streaming into the well, water heaving and lifting everything that could be pushed out of place. Crow held on to the tiller, but there was nothing doing in the sailing way–yet–nothing but water which seemed to nail them motionless by sheer weight. She glanced aside at the little boat, and saw her filling up swiftly–"Oh, poor dinghy," she gasped aloud–but there was no time to do anything, or even consider doing it, for something was coming at the back of the rain that asked for all her attention.

A puff of strong, chill wind—-

*Messenger* leaned heavily to starboard, the flattened sea seemed to rise up in a line of foam under her quarter, water poured in at the streaming scuppers–and away she went–blinded–battered–drenched–away and away like a hunted creature flying for its life.

Certainly five minutes passed before these two adventurers began to take stock of their situation. So far, they had just let drive, steering the only possible course, straight ahead. At the end of five minutes the force of the downpour began to abate, but the wind was increasing.

As soon as speech was possible Adrian asked where she thought they were going?

The skipper laughed rather tremulously–it had been a strenuous five minutes.

"What about America? We might call on President Wilson. Please remember we can go where we please on the High Seas now! No more permits–no more 'out of bounds'. The question is, where can you get your hair cut?"

"Anywhere will do between here and Land's End," answered Adrian generously.

The rain was pouring off his sou'wester, over his nose. He looked very large and cheerful.

Now this was approximately the moment when Pamela assured her mother–on Adrian's authority–that the voyagers would be on shore at Tamerton or Netheroot! It was no doubt fortunate for Mrs. Romilly that she could not see the facts of the situation.

The straining yawl was driving her way through apparently limitless grey sea, of which the churning foam was taken by a wild wind and flung ahead in stinging mist. The sky, so far as it could be seen, was a froth of whirling cloud; everything was grey and confused–no land–no order–no outline.

"I believe we are going straight out to sea," said Crow.

"Do you?" Adrian was not impressed, "we may be going anywhere–all

ways look alike. Jolly untidy view I call it! And look here, what about that wretched dinghy? She's about full up, and to judge by the way she's towing weighs about two ton! In one of these jerks we shall snap the painter; and then–she'll sink like a ton of sand."

Of all things in the world Christobel dreaded what she called "playing with boats" in the open sea, under conditions like the present. She pictured a sickening lurch, Addie overboard–driving to leeward–swallowed up in hideous grey confusion, herself helpless! Her lips grew white, but all she said was:

"Plenty of time yet."

Adrian laughed, flecks of many colours dancing in his hazel eyes.

"How true! And the world before us! I say, Crow, isn't this absolutely top-hole?"

"Hum–hum–please remember, my dear child, that we've got to come back."

"Plenty of time," said Adrian, echoing her words.

"I'll agree with you, when the rain stops, and I can see where we are;" Christobel shook herself as she spoke, and then looked in an interested manner at the wet drippings.

Adrian reverted suddenly to his unpleasant idea about the dinghy. There was no doubt that she was a serious pull back–a heavy and dangerous drag on the yacht. Crow saw it was inevitable, so she made her conditions. Adrian should bail out if she might bring *Messenger* up into the wind and lie-to, while he chose to poise himself in critical attitudes.

"Otherwise, I simply won't," declared the skipper with decision.

Adrian saw no necessity, of course. There was more zest in a really dangerous operation! However, he made no objection and Crow put the helm hard down. The yawl answered like a horse with a tender mouth. Round she came on a sweeping curve, the wet sails first shivering, and then giving out a succession of loud reports. A moment after and they were on a level keel in comparative quiet, leaping at the waves with some sort of regularity.

"Phew! What a comfort!" exclaimed Christobel, stretching both arms. Then she lashed the jerking tiller, while her brother hauled over the foresail sheets, and braced in the mainsail close.

The wind rushed by them with the same force, but they did not feel it, of course, and there was time to take stock, and put their "house in order", so to speak. Moreover, the skipper had pleasure in the conscious knowledge that if Addie did fall overboard it would be easy enough for him to regain the yawl.

She laughed with sudden joyousness.

"What's the joke?" asked her brother.

"I feel like the frog-footman in *Alice Through the Looking-glass*, 'I shall stay here–on and off–for days, and days'. It's very appropriate to one's wishes."

”Well, we needn’t go home,” Adrian remarked as he hauled in the small boat cautiously, ”I mean we can go back by train, and leave the yawl—-”

”Where?”

”Oh, anywhere.”

This was not at all explicit, but Crow understood his meaning, which was that they were not bound to sail back to Bell Bay. They could make some port, and, putting the *Messenger* in safety, return by rail.

”We’ll see where we are when the clouds roll by,” she answered; ”it’s not going on, Addie. I believe firmly that we shall have a perfect evening.”

Adrian, divesting himself of his oilskins, and his boots–”in case the bally thing sank with him,” as he explained, made no answer to his sister’s expectations. But about ten minutes after, when he climbed over the counter, his work well done, he repeated that there was any amount of time, and it would be much better fun to go home some other way.

The storm had either dispersed or ”gone to America”, they thought. It had changed the whole aspect of the scene into a desolate waste of tossing grey sea and driving grey cloud, but there was no more lightning, very little rain, and a mere mutter of far-away thunder.

The voyagers found it was just on three o’clock, and Adrian suggested they should steer by compass. He wanted to know where it was.

”Mollie put it somewhere,” answered Crow, with cheerful vagueness most unbecoming in a skipper.

So Adrian unlocked the door of the main cabin, and slid it open.

”Wonderful how whiffy any boat gets when you shut her down, even for half an hour, with everything close,” he remarked, putting his head within and sniffing critically, ”commend me to an oil-stove on a small yacht for an A1 stench.”

Christobel sat still outside, waiting. Her mind was much easier. She realized that all conditions were quieter. She could certainly see farther. Adrian called out from below that he couldn’t find the compass, so she also dived into the saloon, and hunted exhaustively. No compass. They decided that Mollie or Penberthy had taken it ashore.

To let in more light upon the search Adrian unfastened the forehatch, and then lighted the stove, because there was a ”wonderful unanimity”–as somebody said, on the question of early tea, Adrian declaring he was full of salt, and Christobel that such a lot had happened since lunch.

All things then being in train for refreshment and start, the skipper hastened upstairs again, and the first thing she saw was that the dinghy had slipped her tow and gone off.

She called to Adrian, who appearing with swiftness took a comprehensive look at the shifting grey waste around.

”She can’t be far off,” declared Crow hopefully.

Her brother pointed to a dark blot that was heaved up by a wave, only to disappear behind another foam-tipped hill.

”Little beast,” he said shortly.

”Never mind,” Christobel urged cheerfully–she detected a fallen expression on his face, ”never mind, Addie, it’s nobody’s fault. We’ll soon pick her up.”

As they hauled the jib over and let out the mainsheet, she added:

”*What* a blessing it didn’t happen when the rain was pouring, and she was full of water! She’d have sunk to a certainty.”

Adrian allowed these cheering remarks to pass unnoticed.

”I thought I made her fast,” he said. Such mishaps rankle.

In spite of all their efforts that dinghy evaded capture for twenty minutes at least, if not more. If anybody thinks this improbable let them try to capture a small light boat in such conditions. Many tacks seemed to succeed only in passing just out of reach; running down on the wind ended in a miss, because the pace was too swift for the careful use of the necessary boat-hook.

Adrian stood ready in the bows of the yawl, holding to the forestay, only to fail half a dozen times, once narrowly escaping a dive. After that he pursued operations from the counter, making Crow very nervous.

”Hold on, child, for mercy’s sake,” she urged, ”do consider wretched me if you go overboard!”

Adrian was just in the heat of proving that it would be actually to her advantage if he fell overboard–couldn’t he reach the dinghy more easily–when Christobel, partly by sheer luck, brought the yawl up into the wind on the very spot, so cleverly that she seemed to stop side by side with the runaway. A swoop of the boat-hook, a moment’s tension, and Adrian had grasped the trailing tow-rope.

Christobel blew a very loud sigh of relief, she had been very intent on the capture. Immediately on that came an exclamation of surprise, and Adrian rose from his knees to see what new excitement was coming their way.

## CHAPTER VI

**”I wouldn’t have believed it of Pam!”**

The heavy atmosphere of spray, rain, and driven cloud that had enveloped the

yacht up till now was passing bodily over to seaward. From beneath the curtain of it towards the north appeared–in brilliant sunshine–a wonderful line of coast showing up in rain-swept clearness. Above it the sky was blue; the purple and emerald hills glowed in the setting.

”Oh, Addie, what a dream of beauty! We shall be in it directly–just look how all the murky stuff is drifting away over the sea! I say, though, aren't we a long way out–miles and miles!”

Adrian dived below to search for the glass, which fortunately had not gone ashore with the compass. Christobel with narrowed eyes, tried to distinguish landmarks. The sunlight over the coast was growing stronger every moment.

After bringing the glass to bear on the scene Adrian gave a joyful chuckle.

”Who'd have thought it, Crow,” he cried, pointing rapidly from place to place as he named them. ”See–there you are! The Beak miles behind us. There's the Bell Ridge, ever such a way back. There's the lighthouse–white as a big tooth. There's the high Down up above Ramsworthy–with the glass you can see the rows of new houses above Netheroot sands! Do you see where we are, old girl? Almost level with Salterne Harbour! Here's the Heggadon bluff exactly opposite, and, of course, just round the corner of that you get the entrance to the estuary. It is simply the neatest thing in life. Why, I pictured that we were somewhere between Peterock and Bell Bay, with all the hard work to do coming back against this northerly breeze–and here we are only a mile or two from the harbour with a fair wind, and please note tide in our favour still. Now look here–we chuck Peterock, of course, and make for Salterne while we have tea–go right up to the bridge and pick up some spare moorings. Put a decent chap in charge of the yawl. Get my hair cut, and go back by train. How's that?”

”And wire to Mum as soon as we get into the town,” added Christobel behind the glasses.

”Oh, that's of course,” said Adrian, who was restless with excitement, ”come on then, let's have tea–any amount of tea, I'm as hollow as a drum. Give me the tiller, you've been at it for an age. The stove's all ready–by the way, I told Mother Jeep to give us about a dozen hard-boiled eggs, I knew I could eat six! I say, Crow, isn't it the very limit to come out down here? Who'd have imagined such dazzling luck. When you come to think of it, losing the dinghy was about the best thing that ever happened to us—-”

And so on ... Adrian glowing with optimism which was his normal condition–when not in the depths of despondency.

Christobel was supremely happy too. The sun shone. Addie was very content, and Mrs. Romilly would receive a wire. She made tea, and sang under her breath.

It was nearly five o'clock when they crossed the humming bar, between the

lovely slopes of Peverell and Tamerton. The wind dropped suddenly, because the huge bluff called the Heggadon formed a complete screen, but the tide still acted a friendly part, for, though it was turning outside, the change was not completed inside, as harbours and all inlets of the sea are half an hour to an hour later than the main tide outside.

The *Messenger* swept in smoothly on the top of the flood, under the most perfect conditions possible. The beautiful estuary looked like an inland sea, with here and there the long back of a sandbank showing above the ripple.

"We'll do it again, Crow, won't we?" said Adrian, beaming satisfaction, "why, it's nothing."

"No," allowed the skipper, eyeing the wet sails thoughtfully.

"Look at the time, my good girl–look! Five o'clock. And when did we leave Bell Bay?"

Christobel thought it was about 11.30.

"So it was–well, what's that? Five hours and a half–and not plain sailing, mind you, either–but a rattling thunderstorm, and a lost dinghy! I call it great!"

Crow admitted that it was great.

"But I'm afraid we shan't get home till rather late," she added.

Adrian briefly reviewed the train time-table, which was decidedly limited in that part of the world.

"We shall want something extra to eat in the town," he said, "but mind you, one can do an awful lot in the eating line in ten minutes. I know, because I've tested. Let's say 6.20, Crow, and get to Five Trees at about 6.45—-"

"Addie, we *can't*," broke in Christobel, dismayed, "we are simply bound to miss that train. We are going awfully well, but it ought to take nearly an hour to reach the bridge, and then there's all the work of stowing, and finding a man–and your hair–and the wire–Oh, we can't do it!"

"Well, there's only one other train, the last one, what's that–leaves Salterne about five minutes to nine. Beastly few trains! Well, what do you say?"

Christobel considered with a disturbed expression of face.

"Well," went on Adrian, who quite refused to see any drawback to the joy of the situation, "well, look here, Crow. We'll *try* for the 6.20, and if we miss it we'll go by the nine o'clock."

There was no doubt at all about the missing. The wind lessened to a mere breath, and the tide was beginning to turn against them during their sail up the last long reach. They got to the bridge in a state of "sleepiness", as the skipper called it–so much so that they had to submit to receive assistance from a person of the "long-shore" kind, who had fastened a speculative eye upon them the moment they appeared at the turn by the big shipyard. He came to meet them, in a clinker-built boat, rowing weightily–he was very like the men in W. W. Jacobs' stories.

Adrian accepted a tow and the offer of ”a little pair o-moorings where the old *Fair Hope* lays when she’s in harbour”.

Adrian accepted, assuring Christobel over his shoulder that it was the only thing to do, and far the quickest.

The mariner went slow, slower; ”slow as the wheels of evolution”, as a certain story says. He hailed kindred spirits on the quay, and the small matter of picking up a moorings buoy was turned into a positive function–and would have to be paid for as such, of course!

Christobel groaned aloud, then laughed. It was no use worrying.

Adrian, whistling between disparaging remarks on the manners and customs of long-shore persons, took it easily.

”Lots of time before nine o’clock, Crow,” he said.

They went into the town about the time the 6.20 p.m. arrived at Salterne, and sent off their wire. After that the skipper resigned herself to calm enjoyment. The afternoon, since the storm dispersed, had been so beautiful that Mrs. Romilly could hardly have worried so far, and the telegram would secure the rest.

Adrian had his hair cut. The necessary feeding was not a matter of ten minutes, but a most delightful meal; finally Crow rejected a suggestion of ”The Pictures for about half an hour or so”–nothing would induce her to risk missing that train–and they sat in the station in the warm darkness. It was very quiet, and sparely lighted. She was happy enough, but Adrian was rather regretful about going at all.

”I see what we ought to have done,” he said, ”wired to Mum that we were sleeping on board in the harbour. What an awful pity. I suppose we couldn’t do it now, Crow?”

”Can’t send a wire now,” answered Christobel.

”Pity. That walk from Five Trees to Bell Bay is rather a grind. If we stayed on the yawl we could sail home to-morrow morning.”

”We can’t stay on the yawl–Mother would be in fits, when we’ve wired we are coming by this train. Addie, don’t have a fleeting mind. Let’s talk about something else.”

But the train came in from Riversgate–they could see it winding along out of the far hills to the south of the harbour and crossing the bridge like a mechanical toy–they got in, and went over to the end of the carriage from which the wide estuary was visible under the young moon. Such a wonderful sight, with sandhills exposed and a hundred different channels sending tides out to sea.

”I wouldn’t live inland if you paid me to,” said Adrian firmly.

”’And so say all of us’,” quoted Crow in an ardent whisper.

Then they were silent–looking out.

Twenty to twenty-five minutes after that, they drew into the little moorland

station, high, fresh, and lonely, under the moon. There were still clouds about, which made the shadows more eerie. It was all beautiful and mysterious as only the far west country can be. The brother and sister heartily agreed that the whole day had been well worth living.

"I'm not sure this isn't best of all," said Crow.

Adrian was planning arrangements for fetching the yawl, and they covered the long stretch of white road in quick time; no walking is so delightful as that in moonlight, with all the world to oneself. Owls hooted from the trees, and in a distant copse a nightingale suddenly began his song–more perfect for the space and loneliness.

The Romilly pair became silent. Conversation seemed almost irreverent.

They were approaching the Folly Ho turn. Suddenly into the quiet broke a monotonous light sound–the tapping of feet on hard ground; someone was running at an even pace.

"We're not the only people alive to-night," said Christobel in a low voice, "I thought we were."

"Coming from Peterock way," Adrian said, "we shall see who it is in a jiff; they are bound to come in front of us, unless they jump the hedge into the field. Sounds like a girl running."

"Why?" asked Christobel, "much more likely to be Peter Cherry, or someone like that. There are not many girls to run when one comes to calculate."

They were approaching the turn. The road before them was white and clear, the trees at the corner looking curiously distinct. With one accord both ceased to speak, and gave all attention to the light regular sound that drew nearer.

Pat, pat, pat–fell the running feet, and from the side-road appeared a figure. In a moment it was speeding down hill in front of the interested pair.

"*Addie!*" gasped Christobel, with startled emphasis.

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Adrian, "who'd have thought it."

"You see who it is?"

"Rather!"

"But, Addie, what's she doing coming from Folly Ho, this time of night?"

"Why ask me?" said her brother with reason.

"Mother thinks she's in bed, of course," went on Christobel in a troubled voice; "I'm sure it can be explained, but it is horrid. It's utter bad form. I wouldn't have believed it of Pam."

Adrian maintained a gloomy silence. Brothers never approve of unconventional explosions on the part of sisters; especially very pretty sisters of Pamela's age. It is taken as a matter of course that they are not old enough for independent action.

With one accord the two elders increased their pace to a fast walk, then to

a trot.

”We shall see her directly,” said Crow, ”she wasn’t going so very fast, and the road past Woodrising is perfectly straight for some way.”

They reached the corner. Ahead of them, some way down the hill, was a running figure.

Adrian put his fingers to his mouth and made a long, harsh whistle like a steam escape.

For a moment they saw a face, as the girl checked and glanced round. But she did not stop, she ran on again, evidently faster.

”Jolly well ashamed of herself,” said Adrian, rigidly disapproving. ”She can’t escape, Crow. She’ll be ahead of us–in sight–all the way home.”

It is a proverb never ”to boast”, that is to say, never to reckon on a hope as a fact–lest something unexpected spoils the hope. In this case the moon failed the pursuers. They had been so intent on Pamela that neither of them noticed a big patch of cloud sailing swiftly up from the north. In a moment the moon was shut off, and in a minute the darkness was pretty complete, for the cloud was a heavy one.

”Oh–dash it!” exclaimed Adrian irritably, ”just when we were sure.”

”Never mind, we can run just the same. We shall get used to the dark, and anyway, Addie, *she* can’t run fast any more than we can. One can’t help taking care, when one can’t see.”

”Hedges are getting clearer,” suggested Adrian, ”funny how quickly one gets used to things. This Woodrising wall is plain as the lighthouse.”

They ran on–down hill always, passed the long line of wall, and just as the overhanging shrubs and sheltering height of Fuchsia Cottage hill-side showed a big black patch on the right hand, the moon suddenly appeared again, and everything around–road, hedges, bushes, and towering steep above cottage and church–came out again as clear as a painted scene.

Adrian and Christobel both looked ahead down the road. It was empty. Not a soul in sight.

”Where’s she gone to?” said Christobel, stopping.

”Don’t ask me, my good girl,” Adrian was cross, unquestionably, ”I suppose she’s up to some trick.”

Such a suggestion did not please Crow.

”You shouldn’t talk like that, Addie,” she expostulated. ”Pam doesn’t play ’tricks’. She isn’t that sort of girl. None of us are. There may be something up we don’t know about that sent her up to Folly Ho. Perhaps Mother wanted a message taken to Timothy Batt–one never knows! The thing I don’t understand is, how she’s managed to disappear, considering the road is about as straight as a ruler, and the moonlight is bang on it, and there’s only one way home.”

Adrian said nothing; in silence, and at a quick walk they arrived opposite the shaded gate of Fuchsia Cottage. Here Christobel stopped again. ”She can’t have sunk through the earth, Addie, and she wouldn’t have jumped the hedge! I believe she went in here. Mother may have given her a message to the Little Pilgrim–why not?”

”Why not, of course!” echoed Adrian dryly. ”The sort of thing Mother would do–considering it’s just on ten o’clock.”

There was so much truth in this, that Christobel did not make any reply to it–she said:

”I’m just going to ask,” and opened the gate.

They went up the path, mounted three short flights of brick steps that cut the three little terraces, and found themselves at a deep porch half buried in roses. Apparently Miss Lasarge heard them coming, for she appeared on the threshold of the pretty sitting-room-hall.

”This *is* nice, dear children,” she said in the eager sweet voice that was one of her attractions, ”come into the dining-room–the cocoa is just ready.”

That was the cottage. A good-sized sitting-room hall with windows looking two ways, and a cosy little dining-room. Three bedrooms above. There was also the kitchen, where reigned Lizzie Sprot, a sturdy west-country young woman, who had lived eleven years with Miss Anne–from the age of seventeen. Lizzie Sprot had gone to bed, she always went when she had taken in the cocoa, and left Miss Anne to sit up and write letters as a rule.

”Is Pam here?” asked Christobel, as they followed the slim, grey figure into the dining-room, yet even as she asked the question she felt instinctively it was a foolish one.

”Is who here, dear? Sit down now, both of you–that’s right. Two cups from the corner cupboard, please, Crow–that is delightful. Now, what is it you were asking–something about Pam?”

Christobel asked again. Adrian said nothing, except to corroborate his sister’s story.

”So you think you saw Pamela come down the Folly Ho turn, and go–towards home?”

Now Miss Lasarge said this, a mere repetition of what she had just been told, in rather an uncertain tone.

Adrian said afterwards, that anyone could see she thought it was objectionable, but did not like to say so.

Christobel looked a bit anxious, but went straight to the point with the sincerity that was part of her sterling character.

”We don’t *think*, Little Pilgrim, we know. The moon was bright, and the road clear as day. Addie whistled to her, and she looked round. We saw her look

over her shoulder at us, but instead of stopping she only ran faster."

"Oh, that doesn't sound like Pam," murmured Miss Anne.

"But it *was* Pam," asserted Crow.

"Don't you think you might easily have mistaken some other girl for Pamela, dear? Moonlight is very deceptive–and you said that a cloud came directly after and obscured your vision. Really, I can't help feeling—-"

"It was Pamela right enough, Miss Anne," said Adrian firmly; "she was as plain as a hayrick, pig-tail and all. No other girl in Bell Bay has hair like Pamela. Besides, when it comes to that, what other girls are there about? Mollie Shard is not here now, and if she were, she isn't the least like Pam."

There was a pause. Christobel set her cup on the table and half rose.

"You needn't go for a few minutes," suggested Miss Anne, "Mother won't be anxious. She got your wire, I know, because I was there when it came."

Christobel asked if Mrs. Romilly was anxious during the thunderstorm; and recounted their adventure in a few words–as matter of fact, the yawl affair had been driven out of her mind by this business about Pamela.

"It was a horrid storm here," said Miss Lasarge, apparently pleased to talk about something else, "terribly noisy, and very heavy rain. But I understood that your mother wasn't really anxious. She hoped you were on shore–then it came fine–so lovely, too–I never saw anything like the colours–land and sea."

Christobel stood up to go. She apologized again for calling in at such an hour.

"We only just thought there was a chance of Pam–having come in with a message—-"

"I'm *sure* you'll find it was all right, dear Crow," said Miss Lasarge, kissing her; "I–I expect it was somebody else. You'll find Pam is in bed and asleep, unless she is sitting with your mother."

"No doubt we shall find Pam is in bed, and she'll tell us she's asleep," said Adrian, as they went out through the gate.

"Oh, don't, Addie," begged Christobel, "I'm sure there's an explanation."

Silence ensued, then she continued:

"Didn't you think Miss Anne was a tiny bit–well–confused? I thought so."

"*I* thought she believed it was Pamela, but tried not to believe it, and was hunting round for excuses anyway. She certainly seemed a bit uncomfortable–besides, it's sheer rubbish to tell us it might be somebody else. She knows and we know that there isn't anybody else. But she's an awfully kind person–in fact, she's a regular little saint, she can't bear to think anybody is wrong."

As they were opening the big gates at the end of the drive, Christobel asked:

"Shall we tell Mother? What *ought* we to do about it?"

"You mean about seeing Pam?"

”Yes. Suppose we find Mother knows nothing and is secure and comfortable as usual, and that Pam is up in her room. Well, what ought we to do?”

”Oh, I don’t know,” said Adrian irritably, ”it’s sickening. One can’t go clacking to Mother about Pam–it simply isn’t done,” he shut the gates with a vicious snap.

”That’s what I thought,” Crow was relieved, ”let’s wait and see what Pam says–I’ll go and ask her to-night.”

”Just as you like,” agreed Adrian indifferently, and they went in.

Mrs. Romilly was reading the paper; she was delighted to see them, and eager to hear all details. She said she had not been anxious, because Pam told her they proposed landing if the weather was bad. At this point Adrian turned his head discreetly to conceal a smile. When the storm passed she had been quite happy; and, when the telegram came, had considered it all a most wise arrangement.

”Your hair looks so nice, darling,” she said, looking approvingly at Adrian’s sleek head.

Pleading sleepiness the two went off to bed, and on the landing upstairs Christobel said: ”Wait a minute,” and slipped down to Pamela’s room at the end.

She knocked. There was no answer, so she opened the door gingerly, and put her head into the opening. A long heap in the bed stirred, and turned over with a jerk.

”Hullo, who is it; what do you want, Hughie?” demanded Pamela in the slurring tones of one but half awake.

”It’s not Hughie–it’s Crow. I just peeped in to see if you were awake,” said Christobel, not at all pleased with herself, because she felt a wee bit mean.

”Oh, you’re back. That’s all right. I’m so glad. Did you have a jolly time?”

”Awfully jolly–after the thunder cleared,” said Crow.

”Tell me about it to-morrow. Good-night, Crow,” murmured Pamela sleepily, and relapsed into slumber.

In the passage Christobel whispered to Adrian:

”She was sound asleep–*sound*. I woke her, but she was only half awake.”

Adrian whistled softly, and departed to his room without comment.

# CHAPTER VII

**Confidences in ”the Cave”**

A journey to Salterne next day was out of the question, because the weather had taken the bit between its teeth and was behaving badly. This happens so often after a thunderstorm that nobody was surprised; everyone simply looked out for something to do. Adrian plunged with vigour into a brief spell of mowing. It seemed wise to grapple with the rapidly growing grass while there was nothing better on hand. Christobel, feeling uneasy, sought an opportunity for private conversation with her sister. She was uneasy, because she believed it was somehow all right–though it looked all wrong–and she didn't know how to begin.

Pamela was alone in the library, sitting in the biggest leather chair after a style of her own, that is, inside the chair with her long slim legs hanging over the arm, and her knees forming a satisfactory rest for the inevitable book.

Christobel entered on this scene of peaceful comfort with a direct question, after her way:

"Oh, Pam, there you are. I rather wanted to ask you something."

She shut the door, and came forward to take a seat on the edge of the writing-table, near the big chair.

Pamela glanced at her and detected mystery. She did not say so, though, but let her gaze rest again on the interesting page and murmured:

"All right. Fire away."

"You don't mind my asking, Pam, but did Mother send you out–send you anywhere–last night?"

The inquiry was made awkwardly. Crow flushed rather pink.

"How do you mean?"

Pamela's intent blue gaze was raised, and she looked curiously at her sister's face.

"How do you mean 'send me out', Crow?"

"Well, is there any mystery about it?"

"About what?"

"About you being out last evening?"

Pamela remained silent for quite a minute; she was reviewing swiftly in her mind what the time was when she had returned from Woodrising–after her ineffective search-visit. Eight o'clock! She was back before eight, of course, because supper was timed for eight and she was in–with a brief period for dressing.

After that pause she answered:

"I don't know what you are driving at, my dear Crow."

But of course Christobel had noticed the hesitation. It made her feel rather stronger.

"Do you mind telling me when you did come in, Pam? I ask for a reason."

"Well, if you seriously want to know," answered the younger girl rather

stiffly, ”I was in just in time to change for supper–and supper was at eight o’clock–later than usual. That was because Mum had put the food back thinking you and Addie would be home.”

”Ten to *eight*?”

”Well, why not? It was nearly dark, but the moon had begun–besides, we’d been mewed up indoors an awful lot with the rain.”

Pamela was throwing out little feelers of excuse–as it were–for her wanderings round Woodrising, in case she had been seen. Somebody had told Christobel something, she believed firmly, and her defensive instinct made her rather stiff.

”Well, *I* was meaning about ten minutes to *ten*–not eight,” said the elder girl.

They looked at each other searchingly.

”I was in bed before that,” said Pamela. ”I don’t know the least what you are talking about, Crow, but you seem to have a lively maggot in your brain about me.”

”It isn’t anything in my brain–it’s a question of the eyesight of two people.”

”Who’s the other person?”

”Addie. We both saw you—-”

”Oh dear,” ejaculated Pamela in an exasperated voice, ”do you mean to say you think you saw me out of doors just before ten o’clock, because you may as well disabuse your mind of the idea at once. Addie doesn’t count, he leaps to conclusions. He’d say the Little Pilgrim was me for two pins, and believe it if he was in an imaginative mood. Well, you did *not* see me, Crow.”

”My dear girl, I’m awfully sorry you feel vexed about it.”

”Wouldn’t you be vexed, if people practically told you you were telling lies,” said Pamela, fingering the pages of her book with unsettled fingers.

”I don’t. I assure you I don’t,” said Christobel urgently ”but please do look at our side of the question. Now listen, Pam. We got in to Five Trees about 9.25, we came straight along with a moon as bright as day, and just before we came to Folly Ho corner we heard some one running. *I* thought it sounded like a girl–unless it was a boy in running shoes–the feet were so light. Of course we were interested–down past the little grass patch at the crossroad came *you*—-”

Pamela made a gesture of speaking.

”All right, then,” went on Crow, ”not you–a girl so exactly like you that there was no difference. She had a dark skirt and jumper–like yours–it was most certainly blue–lighter stockings and shoes–I mean not black. She had no hat on, and a heavy tail of plaited hair hanging down. As she ran I saw it swing–like yours does. Now, are you surprised we thought it was you?”

”What did you do?” asked Pamela.

”Simply stared. Then Addie gave a whistle shriek, fearfully loud. She

stopped and looked over her shoulder, then she ran on. Honestly I admit we were savage. Just consider, Pam; it appeared to be you beyond question, and we naturally concluded you were just out for the fun of it, and didn't want us to see you. Of course it looked as though you didn't mean to stop on purpose."

"Funny," allowed Pamela in a milder tone, "well, what did you do next? I suppose you saw where this very surprising girl went to?"

Christobel felt this was the weak part of her story, but she told it conscientiously.

"I see. So the girl was swallowed up by the cloud! Are you sure you ever saw her at all, Crow?"

"Never was so sure of a thing in my life," declared Christobel, slipping off the table edge, and going to the window-seat, where she took a more comfortable seat, "we saw the girl. Who she is, I don't pretend to say, as you say she is not you. It was just in that bit of road outside Woodrising that we lost sight of her. Thinking she was surely you I made Addie go into Fuchsia Cottage and ask Miss Lasarge."

"Why–on earth?" demanded Pamela, with a little frown of annoyance, as she shut her book smartly.

"Why? Because I thought you'd gone in there. It was the only way to account for your disappearance."

"For *hers*, you mean."

"Yes; of course. Only, remember we were certain it was you then."

"What did the Little Pilgrim say?" asked Pamela, with an accession of interest, as she pulled herself up in the chair, swinging her slim feet rather restlessly.

"Oh, nothing much. She just listened, and said you weren't there, and you hadn't been, and she was sure it couldn't be you–that was all. We thought she seemed rather nervous–rather sort of hesitating–but it might have been our fancy. You see, Pam, I was so sure it couldn't be anyone but you, that I had a feeling the Little Pilgrim thought it was, but meant to hold her tongue. She's such a little angel of kindness she'd always shield anybody she thought might be risking a fuss."

"I daresay," allowed Pamela in a non-committal way; then she added, "well, are you satisfied now, Crow? I can only tell you again that I was in bed–at that time."

"My dear old girl, if you say you were not the person we saw, there's an end," answered Christobel warmly, yet even as she spoke she was faintly uneasy–Pamela was keeping something back. She was sure. However, there was no more to be said. She changed the subject.

"Addie's bathing," she said, "he loves bathing in the rain, and at the present moment it is pouring anchors and marlinespikes–where's Hughie?"

Pamela was just going to say where she thought Hughie was, but changed the information to a vague:

”Oh–somewhere. You’re not going to fetch the yawl back to-day then, Crow?”

Christobel said the tide would serve much better in the afternoon a bit later. It could be done now, but they would have to be home by five o’clock, or they’d have the whole weight of the ebb against them.

”Better to have an hour or so to spare,” she added cheerfully and went out.

Pamela remained sitting in her nest, swinging her feet and thinking–thinking. ”Then there was something in Mollie’s and Hughie’s accusation.” She had come away yesterday from her venture at Woodrising persuaded that the whole thing was ”tosh”–that Sir Marmaduke had kindly given a lift to Mrs. Chipman for old time’s sake–being in the neighbourhood himself, perhaps for business reasons. It was so natural that Mrs. Chipman should pay a visit to Mrs. Trewby, for they were acquaintances of old days.

Last night, before she fell asleep, she felt assured that both Mollie and Hughie had made a mistake somehow–unlikely as it seemed. Now, the whole thing was awake again, and positively demanding attention. Poor Pamela felt the least bit gloomy about it; first, because she had read somewhere that if a person has a ”double” in the world they are sure to die promptly; secondly, because she was becoming a butt for false accusations on all sides. She felt instinctively that Crow, her best friend, was a little suspicious, and Addie, of course, would be frankly sceptical. Only Hughie believed her. Hughie was a very wise person, not to be despised as a partner in difficulty.

She slipped to her feet, and left the room, ran upstairs, and stood quietly listening at the top of the back stairs. No one was about. The voice of Mrs. Jeep conversing profoundly with Keziah, the house parlour-maid, was the only sound audible. The wide front stairs mounted from the hall into the long corridor, and were not used by servants. The backstairs came up from the kitchen passage to a lobby shut off by a green baize door, and went on upwards to the attics, which were large and charming rooms, with many cupboards, and the most perfect views in the house, out of quaint dormer windows.

There were four at least and wide passage space also.

Mrs. Jeep owned one; Keziah and Patty Ingles the between-maid shared another. One was a spare room for chance servant visitors, and the end one over Pamela’s and Hughie’s rooms was what is called a ”box” room. Here was ”luggage”–big, old-fashioned trunks, leather portmanteaux, large hat boxes. Neat piles of cardboard boxes–the sort that drapers and dressmakers send out–all sizes, and tidy stacks of brown paper–sacking–cords–all the odds and ends necessary for packing of any kind. There were chairs with burst cane seats, and baths

needing paint, cans that leaked, and baskets damaged in various ways–these had waited through the war to be mended, and waited still for workers; Mrs. Romilly was a most methodical, tidy person and detested waste.

Besides all this was the old nursery property of "dressing-up" chests–clothes for charades in winter–a rocking-horse, and the dolls' houses; the thousand-and-one things that belong to a family of children.

Hughie loved it all with a deep and faithful love. Secretly he played with the dolls' houses, and set the small china-headed dolls round the loaded tables for their silent meals with affectionate care. Pamela knew all about these matters, but she was far too loyal to betray the secret.

When she came into this big chamber of treasure trove she stood still and looked round. The fact that nobody was visible did not convince her that nobody was there.

"Hullo!" she said in a low voice.

"Hullo!" returned a small voice in an absorbed tone.

Pamela crossed the room and looked over a barricade of lumber. At first sight it seemed that a heavy oak dower chest, topped by a pile of boxes, was set against the wall. It was not. Between its bulk and the wall of the attic there existed a narrow space–so narrow that it would not appear possible as a retiring place even for the smallest boy.

Pamela looked over–as has been stated–and dropped a small paper bag.

"I brought you some chocolates," she said.

"Thanks," murmured Hughie in a slow drawl. Squeezed between the chest and the wall he was absorbed in most intricate stitchery. On his knee was set a cardboard box full of bits and scraps–both white and coloured–wee spars, small lengths of catgut, bits of fine wire. Also, sitting very upright, two neatly smiling dolls, with bran-stuffed bodies and china heads, dolls about three inches long–the large kind held no attractions for Hughie.

"How are you getting on, Midget?" asked Pamela with sympathy.

"It's rather trying," said the dressmaker, "their arm-sleeves fray out of the holes, and the button-holes are simply fearful. But they must have the things."

"They'll look jolly nice when they are finished," said Pamela, "can't I help you?"

Hughie rejected help.

"I've made a white ensign for the new boat," he said, nodding towards the tiny flag that lay finished on the box-top.

"Ripping!" exclaimed Pamela, picking up the bit of work. It was most beautifully made. Seeing her undoubted admiration Hughie fished out of his coloured heap a fine cord to which were attached a succession of wonderful little flags and burgees in many colours and designs.

”Signal halyards,” he said, ”it took me weeks–and months. It’s the whole code.”

”Hughie, you are rather surprising,” said Pamela, as she examined the extraordinary result of skill and patience. Then she pushed the boxes a little to one side and seated herself on the corner of the oak chest.

”I rather wanted to tell you something,” she began.

”I know,” said Hughie, adding as she paused in surprise, ”is it about the pig-tail girl?”

Pamela told him what had happened, and what Christobel had asked her.

Hughie made no comment.

”I wish they hadn’t gone to Fuchsia Cottage and asked Miss Anne about it,” went on Pamela thoughtfully, ”the more people who are dragged into it, the more bother it will be to—-”

”To what?” inquired Hughie, without looking up.

”Well, I was going to say–to find out. Then I remembered that probably there isn’t anything to find out. I mean, if there is a girl she is probably a relation of Mrs. Trewby’s.”

”I suppose you think she lives at Woodrising?” suggested Hughie cautiously.

”Crow said she disappeared just outside that wall–when a cloud made it dark. *They* thought she’d run on into Fuchsia Cottage gate–you see.”

”I know. It was the other gate more likely,” said Hughie in a deliberate manner.

”Well, I daresay. I don’t see where else she can be living. But what I mean is, Hughie, that it’s not exciting. I thought I’d just try and find tracks–or something definite–so I went all round Woodrising yesterday evening. One can’t get in; besides, I hadn’t the cheek to go and ring at the gate-bell and say ’Have you a girl like me anywhere about?’ I couldn’t do it, so I just—-”

”Scouted,” suggested Hughie, as he threaded a fine needle with silk with a view to button-holes, ”you got it out of your Scout book.”

Pamela coloured faintly.

”I rather tried to do as they say in the Rules, but there weren’t any tracks outside. Then I got over the end wall; there was a ladder against it outside, and I’m perfectly certain Peter Cherry uses it for a short cut. Inside there was a manure heap–not a smelly one–straw chiefly for marrows–so there was a good place to jump into. The garden was appallingly wet; and you never saw anything like the bushes, Midget–one mass. I saw Peter’s bootmarks as plain as a house–and then I found nice narrow shoes like mine, and made sure I’d got a clue, but it occurred to me that they might easily be my own feet! I’d been going up and down, and in and out–such a lot of paths and all so much alike—-”

”Next time I’d put a trail of pebbles if I were you,” suggested Hughie.

”You mean like Hop-of-my-thumb did, when he found the birds ate his bread-crumbs?”

”Or,” said Hughie, pausing in his work, ”you could blaze a trail on the bushes. That’s easy enough–tiny little breaks in the twigs–and leaves stuck on the ends of them. I would.”

”Yes,” agreed Pamela thoughtfully, ”if I go again I will. Well, anyway I had to hide, because two women came from the house and went to the end of the garden. One was Mrs. Trewby–looking as yellow as marmalade–and the other was that maid Baker. Lady Shard had her for years, and she married the London butler. Her name is Mrs. Chipman now. Do you remember her, Midget?”

”She came to tea with Mrs. Jeep when she was dressed in black. I hated her,” said Hughie, ”she says silly things to people about being mischievous. She calls it ’mischeevious’. She doesn’t understand anything.”

”She’d talk the hind leg off a donkey,” said Pamela with contempt. ”I should think the butler was very thankful when he died and could get away from her voice–it clacks. I couldn’t remember her at first, and I was so busy remembering that I forgot to notice what she said–it was all about people, though–you know how that kind of person talks. They went back past me to the house, and then the Chipman female began shouting for her dog, and I was so fearfully afraid of being caught that I fled along the path over the wall and came home.”

”How did you know she was calling the dog?” asked Hughie, opening the paper bag and looking into it with interest. ”How do you know she wasn’t calling the other girl?”

”Couldn’t have been; she called ’Countess, Countess, Countess’, just how people call dogs, and that sort of person usually call dogs by that kind of name; and the dogs are usually big, fluffy ones which never do what they’re told. Oh, it was a dog right enough, I’m sure. Well, that’s all. It isn’t a very bright prospect is it, Midget?”

”Not very,” allowed Hughie; ”what time is it, Pam?”

Pamela, consulting a wristlet watch, said it was about twelve. It must be, she concluded, because her watch was a quarter to one. ”I calculate it to be over half an hour fast towards the end of the week,” she told him, ”then I begin fresh on Sundays. It’s a bother, because you forget and are sure to be late for breakfast. However, it can’t be helped.”

”Don’t tell anybody I’m here,” Hughie requested, finishing the chocolate and smoothing out the bag. Paper bags came in usefully at times.

”Not Mother, do you mean? She may ask.”

”I don’t mind her, but not the others, Pam. It’s impossible to sew properly when people come bothering about and asking questions.”

Pamela promised, and departed light-footed.

In the corridor she met her mother, who promptly asked where was her youngest son.

"He's all right, Mummy–sewing, in the cave," said Pamela, "and he doesn't want anyone to know."

"All right. *I* shan't tell," said Mrs. Romilly, smiling. Then she asked about the yawl, and the plans of the older pair about fetching her from Salterne.

Pamela related what she knew, so far as it went. In a day or two the tide would serve better, as there would be a later ebb in the afternoon.

"The fact is, Miss Chance would rather like to make a shopping expedition to Salterne the same day–and couldn't she come back in the boat?" asked Mrs. Romilly, innocent of all this involved–as mothers so often are.

The silence that ensued was so full of meaning, that Mrs. Romilly answered it as though her daughter had spoken.

"I think, darling child, that you ought–all of you–to make things as nice for Miss Chance as you can. There are no regular lessons just now, because of Addie being sent home, and Crow finishing up at Easter; besides, it will soon be Whitsuntide now; but I think we ought to try and make it as pleasant for her as possible, don't you? She is always most kind."

"Oh, yes, awfully kind," agreed Pamela hastily, "but Mother, are you sure she likes going on the yawl? You know she'd be rather a responsibility for Addie and Crow; she doesn't understand a boat, she stands on the gunwale and expects the boat to wait as if it were a stone step! She truly might get drowned rather easily, you know, and what *could* they do, if she fell overboard?"

"I see," murmured Mrs. Romilly thoughtfully, "yes, I see. Well, she might come back by train. I'll talk to her about it. At the same time, if she really wishes to go by sea, I'm sure it will be all right."

To this Pamela said nothing, but she formed an inward resolve that she would have nothing to do with this expedition.

## CHAPTER VIII

**"Little Friend of all the World"**

On a certain evening, a couple of days or so after this, the sky cleared beautifully, and the sun went down with grand promise of fine weather again.

Miss Chance was correcting French exercises in the library when Adrian and Christobel entered, very hot and triumphant–the Bell House lawns were mown to perfection, and to-morrow would suit in all ways for the fetching back of the yawl.

”It must be done to-morrow,” Adrian threw himself with a crash on the springy sofa, ”*must* be–we can’t leave the *Messenger* at Salterne any longer. She must be on her moorings by this time to-morrow.”

”I hope you will have a fine day, then,” said Miss Chance, placing papers aside in a neat heap, ”you had a terrible storm the day of your last expedition–terrible. I always think though that thunder and lightning and such terrors must be sent for some good purpose–to teach us something.”

”They teach you not to leave your oilskins behind,” suggested Adrian from the floor.

”Oh, hush, dear boy–is that quite nice?” said the excellent woman in a shocked voice–and then changing the subject with rather laboured vivacity she went on:

”Really I wish dear Pam would concentrate more. She is having so few lessons now that she ought to be giving of her very best. One would think her mind was entirely distracted. I told her so, and her reply was *most* unconvincing–she said if she had twelve times as much to do she would do it twelve times as well! Most unreasoning.”

”I don’t agree with you, my dear Floweret,” said Adrian, ”I agree with Pam. If you are in for a fearful grind–well, there you are–you grind; you get acclimatized, so to speak, like people living on the west coast of Africa. After a bit you thrive on the beastly thing–in fact revel in it. Whereas if you make a snatch at it–well, there’s a hopeless failure.”

Good Miss Chance gave a crackling laugh; she was devoted to Adrian, especially when he slapped her on the back and called her the Floweret, or ”my good Blossom”–in cheerful allusion to her pretty name. She plunged into argument with zest therefore.

”The west coast of Africa,” she said, ”is not nearly so subject to pestilence and dangerous malaria as it used to be. Advancing science has taught us how to deal with these things–and what has it to do with French exercises! I am sure you cannot be thinking reasonably. What else can be expected from your position, which is exactly the opposite to what was intended for the use of a sofa.”

”I know,” said Adrian, ”I am aware of that, Miss Chance. But I never was a Conservative. My opinions might be classified as Republican-Imperialist. Let me reason with you. If the legs are on the sofa, and the head is on the floor, blood flows freely to the brain, and it swells with astonishing rapidity. Result, a vigorous crop of ideas. I’m full of them at this moment–my brain is, that’s to say.

They are sprouting so rapidly that I shall be able to impart to you information on many subjects in a brace of jiffs."

Miss Chance was about to plunge into further depths, when Christobel intervened politely.

"Don't listen to him, Miss Chance, he is talking the worst kind of piffle–suppose we go to bed. Addie, get up, your head was never intended for a carpet-cleaner. Come along and say good-night to Mum, she's gone up because she had a headache."

Crow stood up and stretched. Adrian, after a violent effort to get on to the sofa by muscular effort alone, came on to his feet in the ordinary way, and proceeded to shake himself into his garments with some regard to appearance.

"Now I wonder," said Miss Chance, gathering all her properties into order, and replacing some in drawers, "I wonder whether you two would give *me* a lift to-morrow. I want a day's shopping in Salterne, or some hours anyway–why shouldn't I go in with you–and sail out?"

There was one short pause strenuous with meaning! Then Crow, as usual, met the difficulty.

"If you want to shop, Miss Chance, it wouldn't fit in, you see we should have to go to the harbour and get the yawl out–and home. I am sorry, but really it would be difficult to get time for shopping, wouldn't it, Addie?"

"Well, well, we will discuss the matter in the morning," said Miss Chance, not in the least offended. She certainly was a "goodhearted soul," as Crow impressed on Adrian going upstairs.

"She may be," he declared desperately, "but her good heart won't be much use in the boat. She'll most likely be drowned, and we shall be responsible."

The depths of gloom are speedily reached.

Mrs. Romilly was sitting in an arm-chair before a little fire. She said she was cold after all that rain. She was dressed in a loose gown of the colour matching her eyes, and her lovely hair–just like Pamela's–was hanging round her like a shawl.

"I'll brush that," said Christobel firmly.

Adrian sat down on the fender-stool with his back to the fire and looked dejected.

"Is your head bad–or better, Mummy, dear?" asked Christobel, proceeding to the business of brushing. "Addie and I have been talking to Miss Chance, or we should have come sooner."

Mrs. Romilly said her head was better, also that she was very pleased they'd been talking to Miss Chance; finally she wanted to know if anything had been said about the sail from Salterne.

"If you go, and when you go," she concluded, "she wants to go in with you–

walk to Five Trees, I mean, and sail home."

"I don't think she'll enjoy it much, Mother," ventured Christobel.

"Why not, dear–*you* do?"

"Yes, but you see we don't mind knocking about, and wet, and spells of discomfort–she might be sick, most people are."

Mrs. Romilly was not blind to the trend of feeling.

"I don't see why she shouldn't have a try," she suggested mildly, "if she is ill, or hates it, she needn't go again. After all, poor thing, she never has been."

"Well, Mother, you see it was Sir Marmaduke's affair before this, wasn't it? And such a crowd with Penberthy and Mollie–as he didn't ask Miss Chance, we couldn't force her in, could we?"

"Well, there won't be a crowd now," persisted Mrs. Romilly, "even if you all go–only five."

"Only five!" Christobel looked at Adrian over her mother's head, she said the two words with her lips–soundlessly–and smiled.

But Adrian would not smile.

"If she'd been with us the other day, in the thunderstorm, she wouldn't have wanted to go again," said the boy darkly, "she'd have been in fits."

"But, darling, I thought you said it was lovely?" this, from his mother in an expostulating voice.

Christobel warned, with raised eyebrows, and headshakes.

"So it was when the storm was over," said Adrian, refusing to see the signals, "but she wouldn't have enjoyed the process of working through it. Of course we did," he added quickly, "we enjoy anything, no matter how beastly–but when it comes to being drenched, and battered, and shaken up, Miss Chance mightn't. And you see, Mum, we can't put her ashore–that's flat. If she comes, she must come. I can't undertake to land people."

"You landed Hughie one day."

"That was a dead calm."

"Well, but supposing there is a calm to-morrow?"

"If there is we shall go straight back to Salterne, that's all–and sleep on the boat," announced Adrian desperately; "surely Miss Chance would find it pretty uncomfortable to have to sleep on the yawl with four other people, and not even a toothbrush among the lot."

The unfortunate part of this episode was that it did not achieve its object, but only succeeded in making Mrs. Romilly firmer on the contested point. She did not believe in the discomforts Adrian had mentioned–which were perfectly true, of course–because they had been kept from her before.

She thought the young ones did not want Miss Chance to go–they certainly did not, but the reasons put forward were strictly facts.

She was sweet and sympathetic, but her mind was made up.

"Please make it as nice and easy for her as possible, dear children," she said; "I depend on you, Crow; after all she has never yet been on the yacht."

There was no more to be said of course. Christobel gave way without another word. Adrian was silent, but when they were saying "good-night" he suggested quite amiably:

"We'll give the Floweret as good a time as we know how, Mum, and by the way, it's only fair to remember it isn't our fault she's never been out in the *Messenger*–she's always been away in the holidays when we did all the sailing–and Sir Marmaduke was here."

Mrs. Romilly protested that she knew all this. The yawl had never been at their service in term-time before–Adrian being absent.

"Perhaps this is the beginning of good times," she said; "perhaps she will make a first-rate sailor."

Brother and sister looked at each other speechless, when they got outside. Then Crow whispered:

"Are we downhearted?" and sped away to her room, head turned over her shoulder with her lips forming a very decided "No–o–o."

Adrian stood at his window presently looking out at the sweet breathless night. There was no air, the stars were clear. "If it's a calm she'll be sick," he thought, "poor old Blossom"–and peace descended on his soul.

So the matter was settled, and, in order to give Miss Chance time for her shopping, the young Romillys went by an earlier train from Five Trees. They did not mind that at all. Adrian wanted to get to his beloved *Messenger*–the sooner the better.

The party consisted of four–because Hughie was included. Pamela simply declined. She wouldn't say why or wherefore. She looked at the others during breakfast remarking that four was an even number.

"All agog to dash through thick and thin," she murmured, "Crow can shop with Miss Chance and Hughie can go with Addie to the yawl. Three people jostling each other in front of shop windows is never comfortable, and I hate sitting on a hot deck at anchor. Home is nicer."

They all went off gaily, Miss Chance carrying a string bag besides her bag-purse, to Crow's annoyance. She could not bear "walking with a string bag," she said. However Miss Chance could not be parted from it. The necessary food was to be bought in Salterne, and they were to start back after lunch, and come home with the tide.

It sounded perfectly charming, not a hitch. Mrs. Romilly was well pleased. She and Pamela had lunch together, and the peace of the house was balm. The day held fine–very fine. About two o'clock there was about as much air as you

would expect under a vacuum bell.

Pamela called her mother's attention to it.

"Oh, I expect they've got some wind even if we haven't," said Mrs. Romilly; "I shan't worry, and, Pam dear, tea at half-past four, for you and me–and after that will you go up to Clawtol and get some eggs from Mrs. Ensor? A dozen or two dozen even–we eat such a lot now Addie has taken to demanding hard-boiled ones for the yacht. If I can't get enough from Clawtol, we must try the Badgers at Champles to-morrow or next day."

Pamela did not mind in the least. She had a plan in fact. Why not come back by Woodrising? A basket of eggs would prove her business. She need not do anything–at the same time she felt she could not rest till she obtained some knowledge of her "double". Having settled that the girl did not exist, she had been shaken out of that security by Christobel's surprising questions and confusion of her identity. It was not possible to pass it over. Fate had sent her another free day, clear of "family"; she must have one more attempt at Woodrising.

She and her mother followed the thought of *Messenger's* return with interest.

"If there had been a good wind they might have reached the lighthouse by now," said Pamela, spreading her bread and butter with a thankful heart, "as it is—-"

"What? 'As it *is*'" asked Mrs. Romilly.

"Well, Mummy dear, no wind. What can they do? They'll be coming down the estuary about now–perhaps crossing the bar. Miss Chance won't feel the swell till they get really out–a good way."

"Are they bound to feel the swell?"

"Mummy, they are. I can assure you it's the sort of heaving that makes one try hard *not* to think of bacon grease. If you do, you're sorry."

"Poor Miss Chance," said Mrs. Romilly, and laughed.

Pamela looked at her with eyes that were grey-green–sometimes they were blue, sometimes grey–it depended on the sky and the atmosphere.

"I'm rather afraid," she remarked, "that a bit of bad luck is coming to those poor ones. There is a mist. You know how it begins. Bits of ragged chiffon seem to float past one, going nowhere in particular. There isn't a breath of air, and yet a cold kind of draught has arrived."

"I *am* sorry," said Mrs. Romilly, with feeling, "but a fog won't prevent their getting home. If they keep close in, the cliffs are so very obvious."

Pamela made no comment on this; she simply said it certainly would not prevent her walk to Clawtol for the eggs, while through her mind ran the idea that nothing could be better than a good thick white mist–such as they got in perfection at Bell Bay–for her mystery hunting expedition.

She kissed her mother and went, feeling joyous and independent. Her plan was cut and dried, so to speak, all settled–and when plans are like that they are very apt to turn topsy-turvy, and land people where they least expected to be.

Pamela went the usual way, across the lawns, out by the wicket that led to the beach, and very slowly up the steep cliff road past Crown Hill lodge gates and on up to Hawksdown. A sea fog has the effect of producing a feeling of loneliness. It cuts you off, and it makes voices and distant noises sound different. She went on till she reached the summit, and arriving there, went along cautiously towards the cliff edge, to see if the *Messenger* might be within sight.

The land on top of the Beak was very wild, desolate even; as it sloped very slightly downward to the cliff edge it behoved a wanderer to go cautiously. The Beak was not perpendicular. It could be climbed by an expert, or even an agile, clear-headed person like Pamela, but as she said to herself, "It was not the sort of thing you'd pick out to do, unless you had a very strong mood on."

She thought that as she looked over, and out to sea. No sail was within her vision. The water was visible, but through a fluff of thick white haze, that moved with the ceaseless shift of a kaleidoscope. Very dazzling. It made her giddy to watch the curious floating rags of it–coming, coming, ever thicker. If the yawl were close she could not be seen.

Of course it will be understood that the bluff of a headland is not a narrow point. It is a long stretch of wild high land that juts out to sea. There are such things as actual peaks sticking out to seaward, but these are rock, sheer, bare rock, to be found–some at any rate–in the Channel Islands, where you see most kinds of rocky headland in every weird shape.

But the Beak on which Pamela stood was a very blunt beak. The lighthouse lay perhaps half a mile to the south–invisible from the top–and Bell Bay was certainly half a mile to the north; all between was wild cliff trending outward like a huge bent elbow.

Pamela sat down on a gorsy hump, and looked towards Ramsworthy and Netheroot sands. She could not see them because of the fog. Nor could she see any sail. It was profoundly lonely, except for the sea-birds which kept up a constant wailing cry. They had noticed a human being appear on the scene, and instantly rose in whity-grey clouds, crying and screaming, circling round and round uneasily. When nothing happened they settled down, and presently there was silence again–complete silence except for one bird, that wailed distressfully at short intervals. From the sound, Pamela thought it was young–or very old–or wounded. It was not quite like the others. However, it was impossible to distinguish, as when it cried all the others rose up and began again.

She sat there perhaps ten minutes, then she went off back to the road, and presently, at the turning, away down to the farm.

Mrs. Ensor was leaning over the gate with the baby in her arms. She greeted Pamela with some satisfaction and said she had plenty of eggs. They went in together to the dairy, and Mrs. Ensor, putting the baby down, proceeded to pick out eggs by dates pencilled on them. Meanwhile she talked.

"Suppose you don't happen to have met with our Reube–which way did you come, Missie?"

Pamela explained.

"I'm afraid he's more like to be Ramsworthy way or, for all that comes to, Folly Ho. Mischeevious young monkey he is to be sure," she sighed, but smiled also with conscious pride in the "mischeevious" one. "For ever up to something–and for *looks*, why there–you'd think he only wanted a pair o' wings to fly to Heaven."

"He's a dear little boy," said Pamela, "I like Reuben; he's only six, though, isn't he?"

Mrs. Ensor said he was six, but had "double the years of naughtiness in him". It appeared that he had detached himself from the party of children coming from Ramsworthy school, said he'd got enough dinner left to do for his tea, and departed all alone.

"There wasn't one of them with 'thority to make him do as he was told you see, Missie," said the anxious mother, "he knows I want him for all sorts. He's ever such a help. But there, once in a while off he'll go; he never come for his tea, because he know'd I should catch him."

Pamela sympathized secretly with "young Reube". When she said good-bye, she promised to look out for him, and urge upon him to return home speedily. Mrs. Ensor was very grateful.

"That's a weight off me, Missie," she declared. "Six ain't no age when it comes to that, and these sea mists do seem to worrit anybody, sort of squeezing you in."

Pamela departed, carrying her eggs carefully, and pursued her way towards Crown Hill, planning to cut through the park by a foot-track they were allowed to use, and go down into Bell Bay at the back of the valley, thus returning via Woodrising "according to plan". The last thing she saw of the farmer's family was a general action, so to speak, amongst the children and animals in the "muck yard". Into this Mrs. Ensor dived, dispersing the contending arms, and restoring order.

"I'm glad I shan't have to be a farmer's wife," thought Pamela, "it's funny how happy they are." She remembered Reube; then she sat down on a felled log by the edge of the road to think, for a curious conviction had awakened in her mind and, as she stopped, seemed to fill every bit of her brain. Most people understand that feeling of *certainty* about a thing they know nothing about. It comes of itself

and stays. Nothing will argue it away, yet there is no reason why it should be there.

Now the conviction that had taken possession of Pamela's mind was this:

"Young Reube" was in serious trouble on the rugged point of the Beak. And the queer intermittent cry, that she had noted as distinguished from the other bird cries, was the despairing voice of the child calling faintly.

There was no reason at all for this conviction except that Reube had not come back to tea, yet Pamela was convinced it was exactly as she pictured. She sat on for a few minutes thinking. She did not want to give up her plan at all. It was, in fact, a blow–then the danger of going down the Beak was considerable. Pam reviewed the idea of going to Bell Bay and trying to find a man. There was Major Fraser–he would have gone, but he was still lame. Adrian would have gone, but he was on the sea.

Suddenly she remembered that the first duty of a Girl Guide was to help anyone in distress, danger unconsidered. "Little Friend of all the World" was the very pith of the whole matter, "Be prepared" the motto, and secret sign.

Most surely there was only one thing to be done and that was to go and see, and take immediate action if necessary.

As she came to this conclusion, she straightened her shoulders and sat upright. She had been leaning forward with elbows on knees, chin in hands. And, as she moved, she heard a noise close by, and looked round.

By the roadside, a little farther down, was an open-front cart-shed, the sort that has a rickety roof on plank walls and shelters not only carts, but farm machines of various kinds. Pamela got up and walked a yard or two down to look. It might of course be "young Reube" hiding, which would clear her difficulties at once. There was no one in the shed. She went round the side to the back, called softly, "Reuben–Reuben–come out, I want to tell you something." She knew he would come if he were there. No answer, but a hen walked slowly out from the bushes clucking.

"Oh, you idiot!" said Pamela, annoyed. It must have been the hen. She walked slowly back to her basket, picked it up, and went off the way she had come.

## CHAPTER IX

**The Strange Adventure of the Curlew's Call**

Pamela went back steadily the way she had come, and reached the branching of the road with a full appreciation of the work she had set herself to do–supposing that "curlew" cry should be the desperate appeal of poor little Reuben.

The fog was thicker, she could but just see the water at the cliff foot; sometimes not that, because the mist shifted in patches–unequal patches. She sat down to listen, feeling as though she could hear better so. Her only guide would be the cry. Of course her return had caused a perfect bedlam of dismay among the birds, so she had to wait till they were reassured; then, when all was still except the everlasting wash of the water on the rocks, she heard the one wail again.

Listening for it with a new idea in her mind, she wondered that she had ever been deceived into thinking it was a curlew. She tried to place it, and the stillness of the atmosphere helped her. A little to the south of the central point, and down–certainly down.

If Mrs. Romilly could have seen her daughter at that moment she might have been excused for a nervous collapse. Pamela looked about for a safe place in which to dispose of the egg basket, finally planting it between two sturdy tussocks of coarse grass and heather. Then she pulled her little close hat tighter down, shifting the holding pin; looked to her shoe ties; and started onward slowly down the preliminary incline. There was no edge to drop over, instead, a very deceptive slope, that grew steeper and steeper until it became dangerous.

She fully realized what the child had done, and how he had been led astray by the apparent easiness of the first part. Probably some idea of birds' eggs had drawn him on–though it was too late in the season–or it might have been simply adventure. Pamela thought about it as she went on, and wondered why he stayed where he was instead of coming back. It was likely that he had hurt himself.

One of the dangers of this business was starting too fast. In some ways a cliff edge to get over would be less of a snare, because you went over with the full knowledge of your risks.

When she looked back, after perhaps five minutes of cautious descent, it was astonishing to note how a "cliff" had risen up behind her. She seemed to be a long way down, and the height at her back looked amazingly steep too. The time was near when she would have to take to her hands and knees, and crawl–then after a while she would be letting herself down by rock points, strong grass, and the rugged, uneven surface of the real cliff–but there were cracks, and little gullies made by rain and softer soil; these would help.

Every now and then she waited, listening intently, but there was a longish pause in the crying. It occurred to her that she might get an answer by calling–and moreover set at rest any lingering doubt. She called:

"Reuben, Reube, Reube–where are you?" Her voice was clear and pretty, a

sweet voice, the sound of it comforting in a way.

Quickly came an answer on a different note to the despairing wail of the earlier call.

"Here–Miss—-"

The question was very surely decided. Reuben knew who it was by the politeness of the "miss"–even in extremity. He recognized Pamela's voice. But the "here", was rather baffling! Where was "here"? She would have to find out, and anyway she knew it was Reuben, that was all that mattered much. Pamela started on down once more. Down, and along at the same time, partly because the call suggested it as the right direction, partly because it was easier.

She had to cross a most horrible slope of burned grass–very steep, yet smooth. It gave her some uncommonly ugly moments, but she forced herself not to look down, and on no account to increase her speed. She went by inches, digging her toes and fingers in and resolutely thinking of Reuben and the business in hand–not of possibilities.

"After this comes a nice broken-up bit," she said aloud, to keep herself sensible, "when I go up again, I'll try farther along. These slippery bits are no use."

Having reached the nice broken-up bit aforesaid, she cautiously turned over, and sitting on a big tufty ledge, looked about her.

A little smile flickered round her mouth.

"One in the eye for Addie," she said, "he declared I couldn't get up or down the Beak; and it's worse in a mist."

The mist was distinctly thick now. So much so that the top of the headland was out of sight, and the sea was invisible. She was like a very lonely bird in the middle of an ocean of drifting film. Probably this was what the eagles felt like–high, high up on a rocky peak in the clouds. She was not nervous–it was all so very exciting–but it was important to locate the lost one as soon as possible, because time was going rather fast.

"Hullo, Reube, call again!" cried Pamela.

There was no answer–there had been no cry, she thought, since the "miss" in the beginning. She waited a moment and then tried again. "Reube–I'm close by–I'm come to help you–where are you?"

All the birds started to shriek and scream with delirious riot. They rose in a cloud, and circled round and round. It was maddening.

"Oh you silly idiots," said Pamela.

As the clatter died down into isolated screams, she heard a voice say:

"I bean't afeard o' birds, Miss."

"That's right, Reube," she spoke in a hearty manner, because the words came in a detached weak tone, as though the speaker made an effort to say them.

He must be quite close, she thought.

Down she went again, with infinite care, because the surface of everything was greasy with mist that thickened continually. Down and down, and ever the mutter and wash of waves on rock grew more distinct.

Then the voice called, with more life in it.

"Here, Miss! You do be going too far."

Pamela checked and looked round eagerly. *Above* her, but more to the Ramsworthy side, in the loneliest and most inaccessible bit of the Beak, was a dark heap, a very little heap; and, small as it was, the great part of it consisted of a hump of coarse grass. On the ledge where this grew clung the human part of the heap.

"*I* see you," said Pamela, in a cheerful tone.

It was an heroic effort on her part, for, looking at the whole situation, up, down, and round, it was distinctly terrifying. After nearly ten minutes cautious climbing, she came within arm's length of the child.

He was lying on his face, arms grasping a snag of rock at the back of the grass bunch. He had never looked so small to Pamela, and, in an instant, she saw by his face what he had suffered; it was pinched and drawn–stained with tears and dirt.

She laughed. Not because she felt like laughter, but because she had neither water nor food, and something must be done to rouse the failing courage–*if* they were to get up the fog-shielded height that towered above them.

"I was mortal glad–when I heard you," volunteered Reube, gazing at her with sunken eyes: "I was pretty near asleep."

"Not at all a nice place for a doze;" said Pam, "now what on earth made you come here, young man?"

Reube said: "I dunno, Miss." He did not, of course. He had just started climbing down in a spirit of adventure, and found himself forced to go on in order to find a way up again. Here was the difficulty. Pamela saw that it would not be possible to go straight up from here. A cold thrill of dismay ran through her veins. They *must* move–they must start moving at once, there was no time to be lost. And she must find out the way of least resistance, so to speak; that way only could she get on with the exhausted child. And she could not see!

The mist dazzled her, wetting every grass blade with a glitter of tiny shining powder. She would have to move upward, even though difficulties forced her to go along the cliff face also. That was all that seemed perfectly clear. Also, and first of all, there was the condition of Reube.

He remained passive, his white face resting on his arm, his hands gripping the grass tussock. There seemed no sort of spring in him, and Pamela looked uneasily at his closed eyes. She realized that he was injured as well as exhausted, and said:

”What’s the matter, Reube–where are you hurt?” in very gentle tones.

Reube opened his eyes and tried to pull his scattered wits together.

”It’s me leg, Miss–and I’m that *dry*—-” he ceased.

Pamela felt acutely that water was impossible. Then an idea occurred to her–very inadequate, but still something. She spread her handkerchief on the grass–saw that it began to get damp at once–and so left it for a minute, weighted with a little lump of soil, while she looked at the leg.

The obvious injury was a swollen and bruised knee, very blue, and growing bluer. But what she feared more was the appearance of the ankle. The child was wearing rather clumsy laced boots, too large for him, probably his brother’s boots. It was probable that the boot had twisted, wrenching the ankle. Pamela hoped that it was only a bad sprain–not a break or a dislocation, but she did not know. The foot certainly looked queer. She wondered if she ought to take the boot off. But the laces were knotted in more than one place, and a terror of interfering seized her.

”If only I knew first aid,” she thought miserably.

The moment she got a chance she would learn the whole thing. Therein lay another immense advantage of being a real Guide. She would have known exactly what to do. But ignorant handling might make things very much worse. She moved the foot cautiously, Reube shrank and winced.

She was sure it looked all wrong. Suppose it was broken–what awful pain!

Pamela returned to examination of her handkerchief. It was quite wet–really wet. She pressed it between the child’s lips, feeling hopeful.

”Suck it, Reube,” she said, ”it isn’t much, but it might make you feel a wee bit better.”

Then she remembered that soldiers sucked pebbles when they were very hard put to it from thirst in front-line trenches. She considered the advisability of giving Reube a wet pebble to suck–if she could find one–there seemed to be none in the least suitable. After all, suppose Reube swallowed the pebble in a moment of half consciousness! That would be worse than anything. She returned to a very settled conviction that *the* important thing in life was to know first aid, and belong to the Girl Guides, when you would be armed with practical knowledge of what to do in all circumstances.

Reuben seemed the least bit revived. Whether it was the result of her company or of the handkerchief one could not tell, but the time seemed to have come to make a real start, if they were ever to get up the mist-veiled height above them.

From then on–for possibly twenty minutes, when she was completely played out–poor Pam remembered afterwards as a nightmare of the worst kind.

She started by climbing up two feet, and then grasping Reube by the arm, pulled him up to her. She urged him to use his sound foot, and just drag the

other. The slowness of the process was exasperating; the difficulty grew and grew, because the climb was steeper and more slippery. She persevered, Reube made heroic efforts–but at the end of fifteen to twenty minutes, he lay a dead weight.

He had fainted.

Pamela felt pretty desperate. They had come up some distance, but much of the time had been spent in going a long round, that was bound to be, because she was forced to pick the best foothold. Not much useful progress had been made, and what now? She could not revive the child. He might even be dead!

Pamela spoke aloud to herself.

"Well, dead or alive, I've got to get him up;" her teeth were set in this determination.

After resting for a few minutes she took sure footing, tested her position, and then, putting an arm around Reube's waist, heaved up the small body to a place perhaps a foot higher. This process she repeated six times. She had gained perhaps eight feet, but she was very tired. The child remained inert, with closed eyes.

Pamela rested again. This time her lips trembled just a little, and she blinked her eyes as she stared fixedly along that awful slope. It was so fearfully steep, and the foothold more and more slippery. If only someone would come! She had not called, because she knew there was no one about on the top of the cliff, and it seemed waste of breath and strength. She understood the curious stolidity of villagers. Supposing anyone passed along the road at the top he would take no notice of cries–probably would not hear.

Had there been no fog, Addie might have seen her and climbed up. Surely the yawl must be somewhere below, cut off from vision by that mass of elusive shifting whiteness. Then she remembered that there was also a calm, a dead breathless calm. Perhaps the yacht had not passed Heggadon, and might have to go back to Salterne when the tide turned.

Everything was against her, and against being found, because all the attention would be for the yawl and not for herself; it would be taken for granted she was safe on land. She remembered that the Floweret would certainly have said: "Where *can* dear Pamela have gone to! Surely she is very late." That might have drawn people's attention, but even the Floweret was lost to her now. There was positively no hope of help. Reuben's life, and her own too, for that matter, depended on her own unaided efforts.

She took a long breath, thought of all sorts of things in a queer rush of resolution to do what hundreds–thousands–of brave men and women had done in the fighting years. After all this adventure was not unlike getting a wounded comrade into safety from the lonely perils of No Man's Land. If a wounded man

could do it for another one worse wounded–surely she, who was sound, could do it for this little creature.

That was about the reasoning of her mind if it were analysed–but, of course, it all passed like a flash of realization, she did not reason. Then she began again, and had gone up in the same way another five feet, hardly more, when a sick feeling of fright seemed to choke her–she could not get higher. She had come to a place that was so steep as to be practically a wall. It was like that for some ten feet, after which it looked easier–but just here it was sheer. She must try and get round it, as it were–shift herself and the boy along. To that end it would be better to explore alone first–find out where her best road lay and come back for Reube? The question was dare she leave him, would he move if he returned to consciousness, and roll down into the sea.

She was considering her position, when she heard a call–actually a human call.

A wave of passionate thankfulness swept over her–nearly as possible she burst out crying from sheer relief. Who–who could it be?

Then she saw.

Rather above, and a good deal to her left, was a figure making towards them in a swift and capable manner.

Pamela was just going to answer with a cry of welcome, when a sense of dazed confusion checked her, and for several moments she remained just staring with an uneasy suspicion that she might have "gone off her head" from the strain.

For the person coming down towards her was the double of herself. No less, apparently.

Pamela looked away–shut her eyes, opened them and stared down at the sea, moving everlastingly through the shifting haze of the white fog. Everything was the same. Reube was still unconscious. She glanced at the poor foot, it still seemed the wrong way round. Then she looked back at the girl, and saw–certainly herself–to all appearance.

A tall slim creature in a blue serge skirt, tan stockings, tan shoes, a Japanese silk blouse, and chamois leather gauntlet gloves. It was almost a relief to realize that she wore a dark knitted tam-o'-shanter–which Pam was not wearing that day, though she often wore one. Over the shoulder of this double hung a thick plait of lovely bright hair. Pamela glanced down at her own plait to compare them, and her sudden thought was–

"Hers is lighter."

Pausing at a distance of some yards, the stranger stared hard at Pamela, and Pamela was so absorbed in staring at her in return that she nearly slid down the Beak into the sea.

"What is the matter?"

That was the first thing the double asked, and her voice was a little unexpected. It was rather deep, and she spoke slowly–carefully–with the least touch of something different in the accent.

Pamela cleared her throat; she felt nervous, she felt the least bit as though nothing were real.

”It’s little Reube Ensor,” she said, ”he’s hurt.”

”Reube Ensor!” repeated the other girl with care, ”how did he come upon this cliff?”

”He’s only six. He got away from the other children coming from school. I suppose he wanted to climb. Anyway, he’s hurt his foot awfully. I’ve been trying to get him up for ages, but it’s appallingly difficult, because he’s fainted and he can’t do a thing for himself, you see.”

She rushed the words with a sort of friendliness, yet all the while she was quite absorbed in the girl and hardly knew what it was she said.

”I shall help you,” said the stranger; and came along in an active, sure-footed way, glancing about as she came.

Pamela crossed over Reube’s small body to the right side, to make room for the other girl who, kneeling, looked at him, at his leg and foot–Pamela meanwhile looking at her.

”This is the boy of the farm on this hill,” said the girl, and raised her eyes, meeting Pamela’s. They stared straight at each other, and the original Pam–so to speak–was conscious rather thankfully that this interloping ”Pam” was not like her in the face.

She was handsomer. She was very handsome, but she had not Pamela’s elusive charm and daintiness of outline.

Her skin was fair and untanned; but her eyes were dark, long shaped, and of a red-brown colour, with dark lashes; her eyebrows were long and cleanly pencilled, set rather high above her eyes. Her nose was the least bit aquiline, and she had those cut-upward nostrils that give a curiously disdainful air; it was a beautiful nose. Her mouth was beautiful too, very well shaped, but with rather thin lips, and her chin was round and full.

She was certainly a very handsome girl, especially if you added her hair to the catalogue. It was golden–shades lighter than Pam’s–a real bright gold colour, thick and long.

She sat down sideways–all her attitudes were graceful, like Pamela’s.

”Why did you come for him?” she asked, making a sign towards Reube.

”Why did you come after me?” retorted Pamela; she *felt* instinctively something the least bit supercilious in the look and manner of the other.

”I was near the shed where carts are put, and I saw you. I have seen you before, and I wished to know—-” she paused, then went on, skipping what she

”wished to know”, ”I saw you put your basket on the cliff and go down. So I waited to know why you climbed in such bad weather. After a while I came after you to see what happened. If you had called I should have come more quickly.”

Pamela in return told why she had come back. She related what Mrs. Ensor had said. ”When I got to that cart-shed, it rushed over me all in one instant that the crying sea-gull was Reube. I *had* to come back. Don’t you have those sort of convictions sometimes–you know–when there’s no earthly sense in a thing yet you’re perfectly sure it must be.”

The other girl shook her head.

”Oh no. I don’t feel like that,” she said, ”I do what I choose, when I wish to do it, that’s all.”

Then she glanced up at the cliff just above them and went on with decision.

”We cannot take him by that way. It is less steep the path I came down. We must go along–then up. See, now, he is very small and light, we can carry him between us, it will be easy for two.”

# CHAPTER X

## Life or Death on the Beak Cliff

Afterwards, Pamela found she had rather an indistinct recollection of that journey to the cliff top. One thing was certain, she could not have done it without the help of her double. They carried Reube in a sort of sling made by their own cotton petticoats. It was the strange girl’s notion, and proved quite practical. Each girl wore a petticoat. One supported the boy’s head and shoulders, and one his legs–any other method would have been impossible, because of the injured foot, that is to say, without causing terrible pain to Reuben.

He came to himself while he was being trussed into this amateur sling, and stared at the new girl with such interest that Pamela felt it was as good as ”burnt feathers” for curing faintness.

”Hullo, Reube,” she said, laughing, ”now we shan’t be long–shall we?”

”No, Miss,” agreed Reube in a weak voice.

”Hold on this,” ordered the stranger.

”Yes, Miss, I’ll ’old to it,” he gazed from one girl to the other with interest.

That was the beginning. The end was on the top resting near the egg basket–with Reube like a mummy flat on the grass, and the pair of girls taking

breath.

"I'm awfully obliged to you," said Pamela, "really grateful beyond words. I should have had to stay there all night."

"All night, why?" asked the other, turning her head to look curiously at the speaker. In that moment Pam found herself wondering if the girl was really as supercilious as she looked–or whether the expression was caused by her disdainful eyebrows.

"Why! But you wouldn't leave a person like that, would you?" Pamela opened her big, grey-blue eyes as she answered with this question.

"Oh, yes. If it seemed to be the most sensible thing to do. I should put him in the safest place possible–then I would go and find help."

"He would have fallen down," said Pamela decidedly, "he wasn't conscious, and he couldn't hold on. One daren't be responsible for leaving him."

The other girl shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"Oh, well–where is the sense to kill two people instead of one? You are the most important."

"*I!* Not so sure," Pam laughed. "I'm only a woman, and this child will be a man some day. We've got too many women in England as it is–heaps too many, and we want all the boys we can get, they are fearfully important."

"Oh, for that perhaps! I was thinking of birth. You are Pamela Romilly, and your family is distinguished; he is but a common child."

Pamela was veritably startled by such an odd remark. The "common child" appeared to have much the same feeling, to judge by his round eyes. He looked at Pam–to whom he was devoted–anything she said was right, but he did not understand much about it anyway.

"That sounds rather like the Middle Ages–or the people of the French Court before the big Revolution, doesn't it?" she said cautiously, not wishing to offend this young person of strange views who had helped her so grandly out of a tight corner; "you see we don't have that sort of opinions nowadays. At least one never hears them–especially since the war. It brought us all close together. Our brother fought–and Mrs. Ensor's brother fought, and there you are. We've all got on the same ground and we want to stay like that–you can't put people back when they've done ripping things, can you?"

Reube closed his eyes. These were the sentiments he was used to from Romillys, Shards, Ensors, and Badgers, and all the rest of the valley folk; he could understand that.

"Did your brother fight?" asked the strange girl quickly.

"Oh, yes–Royal Navy–he's Lieutenant on the destroyer *Spite.* Dad's a sailor, you know, he commands the battleship *Medusa*, one of the new ones."

There was a pause, then the other girl rose to her feet.

”My father was killed,” she said in a sort of fierce, stifled voice.

Pamela jumped up also. She was shocked through all her sensitive being.

”Oh,” she exclaimed. ”Oh, I'm so horribly sorry. I oughtn't to have talked about the war, one never knows. How splendid–how utterly splendid!”

The other girl said nothing at all, but made a move to pick up Reuben. Pamela took her share–and the egg basket, and the two of them started off with the chrysalis slung between them. It was easy enough going through the longish coarse grass which was now so wet, and the drifting mist that still held. Pamela was thinking hard, but she did not speak, that last sentence spoken by the strange girl had been such a shock that she wanted her to do the talking. Perhaps matters would be explained later.

The hour was nearer seven than six o'clock, for all these doings had taken up time.

One after another questions rose in Pamela's mind. She was tired and strained without knowing it, so the questions seemed to be dropped without answers. They went on down the long lane between the gorsy banks. As the strange girl was leading she had command of the procession; she made for the cart-shed, went in, and stopped.

”Take your petticoat,” she ordered, ”then I will put this child on your back, and open the gate. You may take him to the farm.”

”Oh–but—-” began Pamela, disturbed and puzzled.

”I shall not come into the farm, if that is what you wish. It is not possible,” the other cut her short in a peremptory manner; ”quick now–we cannot stand here; someone may come and that would be annoying.”

Pamela found herself swept along in spite of herself. She mechanically did as she was told. The other girl was so strong and decided.

Just before she lifted little Reuben she said to him:

”Please say nothing to your family about me. Do you understand? It is better for everyone that people do not talk. If you talk Sir Marmaduke Shard will be angry with you.”

”Yes, Miss,” murmured Reube, awestricken and confused. A moment after he knew nothing, because when he was lifted he fainted.

Pamela wanted to get the business over as quickly as possible. The boy was a great anxiety. Also she felt as though her brain were entirely confused, and she wanted to set it in order again. She passed through the farm-gate–the dog began to bark furiously–then she called. On the other side of the stack-yard she saw a man hurrying, it was Ensor, the farmer; then Mrs. Ensor appeared, and immediately she found herself the centre of a small crowd, and heard herself saying that they ought to send for a doctor at once because the foot was very bad.

”It mayn’t be broken, but it’s all wrong,” she said.

Ensor did not talk, he was a silent man; everybody else did, and Pamela had to urge quiet and warm milk at once.

”I had nothing to give him and he was so thirsty, poor mite.”

”You look bad enough yourself, Missie. Down the Beak! Whoever heard tell the like. Naughty boy—-”

”Don’t scold him, Mrs. Ensor, he really has been through an awful lot,” protested Pamela. ”No, I won’t stay a moment. I must get back as soon as possible, or my mother will be anxious. If you like I’ll tell Major Fraser at Mainsail Cottage, probably he’s in now.”

But Mrs. Ensor would not have that–she had, as she told her husband, ”a better notion of what was becoming”, so the eldest boy was despatched–running–with a good deal of elbow action–and Pamela took her leave then, and went soberly surrounded by an atmosphere of intense loving gratitude. It was hardly spoken–it was in the air.

She felt as though she had small right to it, because, had it not been for the stranger, she must have been still on the face of that awful cliff–with dusk coming on, and the fog so chill. She shivered an instant, but at the same time almost her heart gave a little bound of excitement.

She had met the other girl; her own double! And who was she? What was her story? Where had she come from?

”I’ll ask her,” thought Pam, ”she will be waiting in the cart-shed.”

But no one was in the cart-shed. The place was bleak and shadowy, full of mist. The girl was gone.

It was a blow. Freed from the burden and care of the rescued Reube, Pamela had pictured that she and the girl would walk ”home”–she did not know where that was, but believed it to be Woodrising–they would talk. She would learn the girl’s name, and hear where she came from and why she was at Woodrising.

This break off was very irritating, because there was such a great deal of mystery, and it has been said that Pamela was inquisitive, or at anyrate always eager to know the ”why” of puzzling things. Then, suddenly, a few words spoken rushed to her mind. The girl had told Reube that if he talked Sir Marmaduke Shard would be angry. Well, that settled it from one point of view. Sir Marmaduke had brought someone secretly to Bell Bay; this was the person he had brought–he was behind the mystery!

”Woodrising is his house–they must have gone there, I thought that in the beginning. Now I wonder if that silly little Chipman creature is taking care of this girl.”

Pamela frowned as she reasoned it out. There is a game in which people hunt for hidden things and are told whether they are getting ”warmer”, as they

come near it, or ”colder”, as they get farther away.

Pamela was getting very warm indeed!

Just at that moment she saw someone in front of her. It was past the turn into the cliff road, and she was making straight for the steep drop into Bell Bay. Clouds and the persistent fog together were making an evening much too dull for the date, now days were lengthening out so much. For a moment or two Pamela was uncertain, then she realized who they were. Two figures–one tall, with the unmistakable walk of a flat-footed person who turns her toes in; the other small, very dapper and neatly made, walking with short steps.

The Floweret, and Hughie.

She was startled almost into calling; then it occurred to her to shirk persistent questions by keeping behind till they got home. However, that did not present itself as the right course to a member of the Romilly family, so Pamela decided that first thoughts were best and she shouted cheerfully.

Hughie stopped short, and checked his companion, who looked in every direction but the right one before she became aware of Pamela's slim figure speeding down towards them. Then she waved both her basket and her waterproof cloak, and in so doing knocked Hughie's hat off, while some of the contents of the basket fell on the road.

Hughie salved them, miraculously unbroken, and replaced them in the basket with precision.

”How delightful, dear Pamela!” cried Miss Chance beaming. ”Now where do you spring from? Do you know the most odd thing happened a short time ago! As Hughie and I were coming slowly up from the cove at Ramsworthy–very slowly–I was quite convinced that I saw *you* and another girl exactly your height, you seemed to be carrying something. Just for one moment I saw you in the mist, against the sky line, as it were. But fog is so terribly deceptive that I mistrusted my own eyes. It was only for an instant–you seemed to be just on the top of the cliff–then you disappeared.”

”Well,” said Pam, not at all afraid of the Floweret's acuteness–because it did not exist, ”I was on the cliff top, and I was carrying something. The fact is, Miss Chance, I've had a pretty lively adventure, and it's a bit of a mercy–it's a real big mercy, when one comes to think of it, that I'm here to tell my tale.”

She walked on with them, carrying her eggs, and recounted her story, very briskly–simply leaving out her double.

She told how she went over the cliff, because of the oddness of the sea-bird scream, found little Reuben, and hauled him out of danger. She said very little, laying no stress on the terrible difficulty and danger of the feat.

Hughie made no remark. Miss Chance asked many questions.

”Dear Pamela,” she cried, ”I can't bear to think of it! How did you manage

to lift him if his foot was injured?"

Pamela said she used her petticoat as a sort of sling.

"*Petticoat*–Oh!" gasped the Floweret horror-stricken, and pursued the matter no further in that direction. "We cannot be thankful enough that you are spared," she concluded.

"I gave him to the Ensors," went on Pamela, skating lightly over the interval. "Ensor was in the stack-yard–just going off to hunt–he'd never have found Reube, I'm certain. They sent off Joey to get Doctor Fraser–look there they come–I'm so glad."

This created a diversion. Miss Chance was thrilled also because she adored Major Fraser–and all brave men, for that matter–she was an excellent woman with high ideals, though her feet were flat.

The parties met and stopped for explanations.

"What's this story about little Reube found by you on the Beak, Miss Pam?" asked the Major, "Joey is a bit tongue-tied! Here, young man, run on and tell your mother I'm coming at once."

This order he gave in parenthesis, and then said to Pamela again:

"It seems to be a miraculous happening all round. Lucky for the child that you heard him call–and still greater luck that you were able to get him to the top! But I suppose it was not the worst part of the Beak?"

Pamela avoided the look of shrewd inquiry.

"It wasn't precipitous, of course," she said, "we should be having tea with the mermaids if it had been."

"Didn't the fog make it slippery?" asked Major Fraser.

"Oh yes, rather. However, we did it," then meeting his eyes she went on: "I shall learn first aid after this, Major Fraser. Do you know I hadn't a notion what to do with his foot. He fainted, poor tiny mite, and I hadn't a drain of water except mist on my handkerchief! It was simply beastly. I do hope you won't find his foot broken, but really it did seem to me quite the wrong way round."

"Well, I must get on and see to this wounded man–as for you, Miss Pam, perhaps Miss Chance will kindly act deputy for me and see that you have some strong soup and go to bed early."

He went on, thinking as he walked–not about Reuben Ensor. He was certain Pamela had kept back some important detail of her adventure. He knew the Beak. He knew the physical powers of a girl like Pamela, and the dead weight of a boy of six years old.

What was she keeping back, and why?

Meanwhile Pamela, having had quite enough of questions, and being heartily sick of giving answers with a reserve behind, changed the subject completely by demanding explanation from Miss Chance as to why and wherefore

she was–where she was? Also what had become of the boat.

The Floweret fell into the trap all standing–never seeing that it was intended to draw her mind from the Beak question. She had a very pallid countenance. Pamela had noticed that when they met; and she proceeded to explain it by the story of the day's sail.

Salterne, she said, was delightful. She had shopped to her heart's content; all the parcels were on the yawl. The sail down the river too was perfectly charming.

"Do you know, dear Pamela," said poor Miss Chance, "I felt quite sure I should prove a most competent sailor, and become quickly inured to the ups and downs of sea-life. Indeed, I told dear Adrian that I hoped to enrol myself as one of the crew of the *Messenger* now that Sir Marmaduke has lent her to the family. Adrian did not say much, and I must admit that when I got outside–I mean when the yacht was really at sea–it became a different matter."

"Were you bad–sick, I mean?" asked Pamela.

"Oh, *very*."

"How wretched for you. I am so sorry, Miss Chance, but you know one does get like that–when it is jumpy, and when it's very calm too. You mustn't mind about it. Nelson used to be sick, didn't he?"

"The great sailor Collingwood was martyr to *mal de mer*. Yes, dear, one must comfort oneself with such examples. And really," added Miss Chance with a touch of very earnest feeling, "I feel rather thankful that, unlike them, my duty does not oblige me to pursue the experiment. My work lies on land, and I think I shall remain on terra firma in future."

"Shan't you try sailing any more then?" asked Pamela in rather an innocent voice.

"No, dear, I think not," answered Miss Chance with fervour.

"But where is *Messenger*?" went on Pam, "I can see they dropped you at the Ramsworthy Cove, but what are they doing? Coming home, or going back?"

"They'll come home if they can," informed Hughie, speaking for the first time; "but Addie thought the tide mightn't last out. If it doesn't, I'm to tell Mum not to bother, because they'll just run back to the harbour and anchor inside the bar. It would be ripping. I wish I could have stayed."

"Mother might have worried about your being on the yawl, anchored out," said Pamela.

"She needn't," said Hughie rather sorrowfully–then he went on with more vigour, "some day I shall anchor in all sorts of places. In the Nile, and in the Zambesi, and in the Lawrence, and in the Danube, and crowds besides. It's only just waiting till then. I don't much care."

In a spirit of philosophy he lapsed into silence, opening the gate on to the

Bell House lawn with an absent air.

There was so much to tell Mrs. Romilly that her attention was distracted from the possible troubles of the yawl; besides, Miss Chance was so very sincere in her assurances about the calm.

Pamela added that it was as safe inside the bar of Salterne river as at the bridge.

"Much safer than Bell Bay."

"Addie says they'll come on the very early tide and be here by seven o'clock," Hughie repeated his message with care. "He says there is always a breeze in the very earliest morning."

"Did he tell you to tell me that, darling?" asked his mother, looking into the earnest eyes that held hers.

"He told me, because Miss Chance was so awfully sick that she couldn't listen," answered Hughie.

Pamela said she would go to bed when Hughie did, and as Major Fraser's order was definite, she had the soup and went. About that part of the adventures related to her, the point most tragic, in Mrs. Romilly's opinion, was Reuben's injured foot. She was deeply distressed about Mrs. Ensor, and made plans for sending up in the morning–inquiries and dainties.

"How fortunate we are to have such a doctor as Major Fraser resting here," she said to Miss Chance, "how thankful I am dear Pam heard the child. He might have died. I don't know the Beak, Miss Chance, is it very steep?"

The Floweret opined that it was certainly steep, she also mentioned the detail of the petticoat sling.

"Pamela told me that was how she managed to get the boy up, it was a most original idea you know, Mrs. Romilly, but Pam is so full of resource, dear child–it is wonderful. When we met Major Fraser he was in a hurry, but he asked questions. I rather fancied he was surprised she was able to do it, and you know I could not well mention the means she employed, it would not have been quite nice, I thought."

"I'll tell him," said Mrs. Romilly, "if he is puzzled. Of course, he would be interested to know when you consider Pam's age and limits. It's not like a man. Reube is a tiny boy for his age, but they are all fairly sturdy, and if it was very steep–Oh, my poor little Pam–I wish I'd been there! Yes, she is clever, and so plucky."

Meanwhile the person who was "clever and so plucky" had undressed in the shortest time possible, got into bed and fallen asleep almost before she laid her head down. For once in a way Pamela was worn out; not only had the long strain and hard physical exertion tried her, but she was in a mental fog about her mysterious double.

What to do about it! What to do—-

Ought she to tell her mother? Did it matter? If it did not matter, why was Sir Marmaduke so secret, and why did the girl herself refuse to go into Clawtol Farm, and lurk about in this queer way? An ordinary seaside visitor would come to the shore; why then did she never appear in the cove or among the rocks?

All these questions chased each other through her mind while she undressed and brushed out her long hair. Then, just before she lay down, came the realization of one fact. This strange girl appeared only very early, or late–never when Bell Bay was busy with ordinary life. Mollie saw her quite early. Hughie saw her in the evening. Crow and Adrian saw her after dark, very late indeed. Finally Pamela had seen her in late afternoon, but then there was such a thick fog that she could elude anyone.

"Oh, bother it all," thought Pam, "no good worrying any way, one can't do any more to-night."

Then she was asleep.

## CHAPTER XI

### In which Adrian holds a decided opinion about Pam

No one should count on anything. We say that often, yet we do the opposite. Pamela thought no one could bother her again that night, yet she was wakened about two hours after she fell asleep by the cautious opening of her door.

There was moonlight still, of course. The moon rose later, and was veiled by fog still, but grey light made things in her room visible.

"Pam!" it was Hughie's voice; he slid round the edge of the door, closed it after him, and came towards the bed on tiptoes, a quaint little figure in blue-and-white striped pyjamas.

"Well?" answered Pamela, not in the least realizing that no cause but an important matter would have made Hughie do this. She was hardly awake.

Hughie seated himself on the edge of the bed and looked at her.

"Are you awake, Pam, now?" he inquired.

"Yes, I am–now—-"

"Well, look here—-"

"Look here what? Why did you come?" Pam was still confused.

"A person threw a thing into my window. It went whack on the floor–not a bump–just a teeny whack. Then I got up and found it. See—-" Hughie stretched out his hand.

Pamela gathered her wits together and sat up. Then she bent forward to look, and took the something from his hand. She turned it over with caution, surprised, and still befogged.

"What on earth!" she murmured, and stopped.

"I'll light your candle," said Hughie.

Pamela glanced up.

"Get my torch, Midget, and snap it on while I look. We don't want a candle, it might be seen outside–or inside, for that matter; we don't need an audience."

Hughie did as he was asked, and stood by her side, bringing the little bright light to bear on the parcel she held. It was very small. A longish foreign envelope, containing apparently some little heavy things of irregular size that felt like pebbles. Pamela tore it open. Certainly pebbles, little gravel ones not even washed, were in the envelope, and a folded bit of paper.

Within the note were these words, written in a pointed narrow hand, not like that usual with schoolgirls.

"I wish to speak with you. Come to the Clawtol wood at 8.30 to-morrow."

There was no signature.

Pamela read it twice, then she said in a very wideawake tone:

"*Cheek!*"

Hughie watched her with interest. He was not able to master handwriting yet, but his wits were keen.

"Is it the other girl, Pam?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who is she, then?"

"Goodness knows," exclaimed Pamela, "but she's, well–she thinks a most awful lot of herself. Whether her opinion is justified I suppose her friends know best. *I* know nothing at all, yet."

"Does she want you to do something, then?"

"My dear Midget, she doesn't ask. She coolly *orders* me to meet her at 8.30 to-morrow–she writes 'to-morrow' and never says whether it's morning or evening–to begin with, that's idiotic! And why does she throw it into your window, I'd like to know? She must be raving mad, prowling about our house at–what time is it–eleven o'clock. It simply isn't decent."

Pamela was both annoyed and startled, at the same time she was intrigued, and a tiny bit flattered. This surprising stranger, who bore a very distinguished stamp on her personality, had picked out her–Pamela–as an acquaintance, not Christobel! Well, it was odd; she read the note again, and looked at the dusty

little pebbles in the envelope.

”She put those in to weight the letter, of course–but why your window?”

”She meant it for yours,” suggested Hughie.

”Hum–how did she know these two rooms were yours and mine?” Then a light broke on Pamela’s mind. ”I know, Midget–she’s been pumping Mrs. Trewby and Baker–I mean Mrs. Chipman, and they’ve told her things. Both of them know how we live and what we do with ourselves. She wasn’t sure quite which window, so she chucked it into the first one, which happens to be yours. I say though, it’s awful cheek! Fancy if anybody saw her.”

”Fancy if Addie and Crow were on the yawl and saw her in the garden–I say,” Hughie chuckled, ”they’d say it was you, Pam–they’d be certain this time.”

Pamela lay back on her pillow and frowned.

”I wish she’d leave me alone, Midget. I’ve a feeling in my bones that she’ll get me into a mess before she’s done. I don’t believe she has a shred of consideration, now she knows we are alike.”

”Has she seen you, Pam?” asked Hughie with keen interest.

”Seen me! Why, I perfectly forgot I’ve never told you a thing. Here, climb on the foot of the bed, and I’ll tell you exactly what happened to-day. I was so fearfully tired, and so busy warding off all the idiotic questions, that I never remembered I hadn’t told you.”

Hughie climbed up as suggested, packing himself like an Indian idol as usual, and listened to the true and complete version of the rescue on the Beak cliff.

When it was ended he said:

”Well, I thought it was fearfully funny that you got up Reube all alone. I’ve been down there—-”

”You have,” interrupted Pamela with sharp disapproval, ”then you’re not to do it again, Midget. Swear you won’t.”

Silence.

”Well–look here,” Pamela compromised, ”if you won’t promise, will you tell me when you go and let me come too. Honestly, it isn’t safe for you. Reube slipped and was nearly killed. Only my going saved him.”

”I’ll tell you, Pam,” agreed Hughie, impressed by her anxious tones.

”That’s all right–on your honour, Midget, you’ve promised. Well, to go back to this woman, genuinely I shouldn’t have got up alone with that child. It was so slippery–one simply could not get a foothold to grip.”

”Major Fraser was thinking about it while he talked to us,” remarked Hughie dryly, ”*he* was wondering, I saw him.”

”Well, he’ll have to wonder,” answered Pamela shortly, ”I’m getting fed up with this girl. By the way, Midget, her face isn’t like mine. She’s frightfully

pretty."

"So are you," said her brother with firmness.

Pamela turned pink.

"Oh no–not pretty. I may be interesting–I hope I am. And I know my hair's decent. But really and honestly this girl is lovely–and yet–she didn't exactly draw one. Some people make you love them on the spot."

"Like Miss Lasarge," said Hughie.

"Yes, she's simply adorable–and that reminds me of an idea that came on me at supper. I can't go into it now–but remember to remind me, would you, I might forget with all this rush of confusion. Oh dear! How tiresome people are sometimes–what was I saying?"

"You said the girl was pretty, and she didn't draw you," reminded Hughie with painstaking care, "was she nice, Pam?"

"I couldn't say. She's clever. It was she thought of the petticoat. She climbs like a cat; she isn't a bit nervous–somehow she has a look of being used to it. There's something about her that impresses one–her nose is a bit hooky." Pamela paused and considered the matter, Hughie watched her intently; then she began again:

"She's only told me one thing, Midget, and that came up by accident. Somehow brothers and fathers happened to be mentioned, and she said *her* father was killed in the war. Just that. She looked so queer when she said it, kind of fierce. She's got funny eyes–dark eyes, but not black–or hazel, there's a sort of tinge of red in them, and when she told me that, the red shone."

There was another pause, then Hughie remarked:

"We *did* see you, Pam."

"Who did?"

"Why don't you remember Miss Chance said that we saw you in the mist against the sky, and thought it was two Pams carrying something."

"I'd forgotten. Yes, you must have."

"I didn't say a word. She just thought she was mistaken afterwards. But I did rather wonder about it–especially when I felt pretty sure you couldn't have got up the Beak."

Pamela laughed.

"You have sense, Midget–heaps. Now, look here, you'd better go to bed, I'm sleepy."

Hughie slid off the bed.

"Shall you go to Clawtol Wood?" he asked.

"I don't know. I'm not sure. Besides, how can I tell which 8.30 she means?"

"She can't mean breakfast-time," suggested her brother with reason. "They'd tell her we have it at half past eight, and usually wait about till nine

in holidays. Besides, it's a bad time for hiding oneself considering everybody in Bell Bay is going back to work."

"So it is. Well, I must say going to meet people at 8.30 in the evening is rather a vulgar sort of action," Pamela lay down as she gave this distinctly sensible opinion. "I don't care about going. I don't think I will, Midget."

"I wouldn't," remarked Hughie decidedly, and went off–silently as he entered.

The crew of the yawl was good as its word, and turned up at breakfast-time–half past eight. Indeed they were in the cove much earlier, and riding on the moorings like a white swan on a pond. It was calm and fresh as fairyland. Mist seemed to have lasted most of the night, but cleared with sunrise, leaving a wonderful feeling of cleanness.

Christobel and Adrian were in high spirits, they had done what they most wished; anchored out all night, and slept on board–on their own responsibility, and they felt entirely satisfied with the experience, also, anxious to do it again. The more they did, the more they might be allowed to do without bother or question, for when Mrs. Romilly understood that they were as safe as in Penberthy's day, she would cease to trouble about them.

Addie shouted up to her window, and imparted news in cheerful tones. Crow went in to have a bath and do her hair before the bell rang.

There was a general stir of excitement.

In the middle of breakfast Adrian said:

"Pam was up as early as we were. I congratulate you, my dear girl–never saw anything so athletic in my life! Talk about our risks! They were jolly small compared to your plan of speeding about all over the Beak at sunrise–jolly slippy hour too."

Pamela sat up with a sort of a start, and sat staring at the speaker while a flush of colour crept over her face, saying nothing at first.

"No good you saying you were in bed–this time," continued Adrian with a good-natured emphasis on the last two words, "we saw you, as plain as we saw the old Beak–ripping it looked, too–didn't we, Crow?"

"We saw a girl climbing down the Beak–who looked exactly like Pam—-"

"Well, who else could it be *but* Pam," interrupted Adrian, "need we haggle over a thing like that? If we were in London, or even Peterock, one might see a few samples of girls, but not in Bell Bay."

Everyone was looking at Pamela, and for one wild moment she contemplated saying she was the person seen, just to stop the conversation. Then she remembered that nothing is so silly–apart from wrong–as a fib, even a harmless fib, because you are bound to tangle yourself up in a network of bother, and afterwards, when you do tell the truth, people will not believe.

”I wasn’t on the Beak this morning,” she said; ”I didn’t get up till nearly eight.”

There was silence of a tense kind. Adrian raised his eyebrows and looked at Christobel. Christobel winced, gazed at her plate and turned pink. Mrs. Romilly glanced from one face to the other, puzzled.

Hughie came to the rescue.

”Pam got up soon before eight. I know, because when she opened her door I heard.”

Poor Pamela cast a grateful look towards her faithful ally.

Then the Floweret–faintly conscious of uneasiness, but believing in everybody’s good faith, as usual–burst into the conversation.

”I call that quite an odd coincidence–don’t you, dear Mrs. Romilly? To think that Pamela should have risked her life to save that of another, on the Beak last evening, while we were all in ignorance. And that this morning when she was not there, Adrian should fancy she was! Most strange, is it not?”

Nobody entered into argument as to the strangeness of the Floweret’s ”coincidence”, but Crow demanded eagerly what was the story about Pam.

She was told–by everybody except Pamela, who sat listening. Christobel was intensely interested; Adrian asked many questions. Finally, it was decided that someone must go up to Clawtol and inquire about Reuben; then the party dispersed, the decision having been reached that Crow and Adrian would go up that morning, carrying certain delicacies for Reube; and Mrs. Romilly would go herself to see Mrs. Ensor later in the afternoon, probably after tea.

Nothing particular happened to the elder pair as they walked up, taking the shorter and easier way through Crown Hill park, except that Adrian gave it as his assured conviction–first, that Pamela had been on the Beak that morning; secondly, that she had not rescued Reube Ensor.

”Addie, how *can* you!” said Crow, almost tearful, ”besides, it’s silly. Hughie heard her get up; and how could she be telling a story about the Beak? Reube was brought up by someone–there he is, badly hurt. I think you carry things too far sometimes.”

”My dear friend,” pronounced Adrian weightily, ”I assure you on my honour that it would take every inch of muscle *I’ve* got to haul that child up the Beak.”

”But, Addie, Pam is as active as a cat!”

”She may be, but she can’t do impossible things. That cliff is fairly precipitous, and the mist makes the whole show as greasy as butter. I tell you, Crow—-”

”Perhaps she didn’t come up the worst bit,” urged Christobel eagerly.

”The place we saw her on this morning is the worst bit–well, as bad as any. It’s all bad. What did she tell that lie for, Crow, I ask you? *I* saw her. You saw her. Rum thing is she must have seen us. She was there the whole time we took

getting from opposite the lighthouse to the north of the Beak. Just crawling up and down, and moving along. Why, the thing was patent. It was blazing. I swear I don't understand what Pamela is up to."

Christobel was on the point of suggesting a lame excuse; because she certainly had seen Pamela, when they became aware of a lady wandering over the grass in the wake of a King Charles spaniel whose nose was buttoned up so high that it seemed miraculous he could live upside down, as it were. He was attached to a long lead, and as he ran round tree trunks the lady became a fixture at unexpected moments, because she never let go whatever happened. She did not see the Romillys because she was as short-sighted as the spaniel.

Christobel hurried towards her, with a cry of "Good morning, Auntie A.," unwound the dog and the lady, and started them again on a clear space.

"My dear children," said Auntie A., beaming, "how nice to see you both, and looking so well too, but surely it is not summer holidays yet–what? Ah, I should have remembered. I saw you last week I believe, dear Adrian, before Mollie went. I miss her so much, especially in the matter of Charles and his exercise–I do assure you he sets me at defiance. Indeed he does. The spirit of the age, is it not? So sad! Excuse me, dear Christobel, but is my veil on my hat, I believe Dickens put it there when I came out, I feel certain she must have done so, yet I cannot find it."

"It is under your chin, Auntie A.," said Crow gently and unsmiling, "I expect it got crooked and you pulled it down. Shall I undo it, and start again?"

"If you would, dear, I should be most grateful," said Miss Ashington, beaming, and she stood still while Christobel undid the veil, took it off, and put it on again neatly over the brim of her wide hat. She stood still, but she talked earnestly all the time about land girls and farming, which was her special hobby at the moment.

Adrian teased the King Charles. He hated it, and its way of making snuffling noises and barks like coughs. Auntie A. never noticed that the dog was being teased, but she heard the coughing barks, and said she must go home and give poor Charles some tea made from stewed herbs. She had invented the cure herself. She and Charles drank it–at least it was forced down the spaniel's throat when he became extra snuffly.

"I really think he ought to have something, Miss Ashington," said Adrian gravely, "he sounds as though he'd got congestion of the lungs, or bronchitis, doesn't he, Crow?"

Christobel said: "Oh no, I don't think it's as bad as that," reproachfully, but Miss Ashington turned homeward; she was pulling the edge of her veil–already it was coming slowly down.

"Of course you want to know about poor little what's-his-name," she said,

drifting on from the farm questions. ”I sent to inquire, because the milk boy told Mrs. Homer about the affair. Dear Pamela seems to have rescued the child in a most heroic manner. So difficult to climb up cliff's with a boy on your back—-”

”On her back,” echoed Christobel in a surprised tone.

”Mrs. Ensor–or somebody–Oh yes, little Joe said she was carrying the child on her back, and he was unconscious. Really, you know, my dear children, I think steps should be taken to obtain the Humane Society's medal for dear Pamela.”

”Isn't that to do with drowning, though?” murmured Crow.

”Well, dear, the child *would* have been drowned had he fallen from the Beak. It is practically the same thing. I will write to my brother and put the matter before him–something really must be done. I feel that we ought not to lose sight of your sister's courageous act. Sir Marmaduke would, I am certain, be the first to insist—-”

She was stopped suddenly by finding herself entangled in the lead. Charles had gone twice round a tree stem.

”Really,” murmured Auntie A., ”really, this is *most*—-” the rest of the protest was lost in the folds of the veil which was coming off the brim of her hat again.

Adrian picked up Charles and, walking backwards twice round the tree trunk, set the confusion clear.

Miss Ashington did not laugh–she had not the faintest sense of humour, but a very large heart. She beamed with gratitude from a space between the veil and the hat.

”Thank you, dear Adrian, how good of you. We must go home. I feel convinced poor Charles is not himself.”

Charles was not himself, if his normal condition was good temper. He was enraged with his persecutor and the worst of it was that he found it impossible to explain, except in snuffles, which did not count.

”Rosemary tea,” murmured Aunt A., jerking the string, ”or was it sage?”

”I should give him laurel water, Miss Ashington,” said Adrian in a serious tone, ”it has the most lasting effect on dogs of that breed.”

”Laurel water! Really, I must remember that. Thank you, dear Adrian–come, Charles, come—-”

She went–with the veil round her shoulders, and Charles coughing defiance at the enemy. Charles had heard the parting advice and knew perfectly well that ”laurel water” was only a polite name for prussic acid.

”How could you, Addie?” Christobel expostulated.

”Oh, it does them good–they both enjoy it,” said her brother, ”you heard what she said about Pamela.”

Christobel nodded. She was pleased. There was no doubt in the world that Pam had behaved like a heroine, yet Addie was trying to make her out something

of a criminal! The matter was still more decided when the two reached Clawtol. They were overwhelmed with gratitude and honour by little Mrs. Ensor in the first place, and Ensor himself in the second.

These two had removed their son from Pamela's shoulders, and referred several times to his disconnected recollections of that awful time on the cliff front.

"They 'adn't a drop of water, sir," said Mrs. Ensor to Adrian, her eyes full of tears, "if I'd a known, my cup o' tea would 'ave choked me. And boy says–Miss Pam takes 'er handkercher, and lays it on the grass–to get misty like, then she puts it in 'is mouth. 'Suck that, Reube,' says she 'an I wish I could do better for you.' Wonderful I call it. *Wonderful.* And she nobbut a child 'erself when it comes to years. He's asleep now, missie, or you could see him."

Ensor came to the gate with his visitors. There was quite a ceremonial of respect in his manner. Christobel gave the message that Mrs. Romilly would call in the evening, and the two went off home by the cliff road.

Adrian said nothing much till they reached the much-discussed summit. Then he went out over the ground, slowly descending, looking about as he went.

"Don't, Addie," protested Crow, following, "it's simply beastly. Just look!" She stood still.

After some minutes her brother came back.

"No time now," he said, "but I shall have a try later. In any case though, I shall stick to my opinion. I bet you everything I possess, old girl, that Pamela couldn't have done that job alone."

## CHAPTER XII

### In which Pam defies the Countess

Pamela was growing angry. This seldom happened with her, because though she had a temper "of her own", as Mrs. Jeep declared, it was well under control. She had a great contempt for people who are angry in a "senseless" way, that is to say, without adequate reason. In the present situation she considered she had reason, and therefore indignation was brewing up into serious anger.

"Why can't people leave other people's affairs alone," said Pamela to herself. What business had this handsome strange girl to mix up in Romilly affairs? She melted occasionally when she remembered the affair of the cliff. It was well never to forget that the cool courage of this inconvenient "double" had saved her from

tortures indescribable, and probably death. One must never forget gratitude, and a debt of honour like that; at the same time poor Pamela was grievously hurt at Adrian's suspicions and scepticism.

The worst of it was, they were true.

Addie knew, of course, she could not have done the work alone. Yet she dare not speak. She had heard what the stranger said to Reube–Sir Marmaduke Shard was at the back of this mystery, he was a great K.C. and a person of untold wisdom; if she talked she might set on foot a whole host of mischief; she might offend the Shards and endanger the present joys of the yawl. She might destroy the friendship between the Bell House and Crown Hill.

Pamela's imagination saw herself a perfect outcast, scorned by both families, because she had not been able to hold her tongue for a brief period.

The conditions were quite distinct to her eyes. Sir Marmaduke, having brought down the girl in secrecy–telling no one, not even Mrs. Romilly or his own daughter–must intend it to remain a secret, for the present anyway. And to prove it came the girl's warning to Reube.

It was plain that she went out early or late. She had been on the Beak again that morning at seven o'clock. Now was that by permission? Pamela believed it was not. She believed that her double gave the keepers at Woodrising a most anxious time.

"She would," muttered Pam, with her head against the window frame, "she would–she hasn't got that nose for nothing. She may trample on that wretched Chipman, and give Mrs. Trewby jaundice, but she shan't trample on me. I can't help looking like her, but there it ends–no human power shall turn me into a door-mat–to be ordered about by that nose."

These metaphors were confused certainly, but the intention was very distinct. Pamela had made up her mind about that message thrown into Hughie's window. She was going to proceed on direct lines–and at once. There, in the window-seat of her room, she had reasoned it out and come to the conclusion that she must take decided action.

Nothing should make her meet the girl in secret. She would go to Woodrising after tea, ask to see her, and tell her so, once for all.

Hughie asked no questions that day, he was a tactful child. Miss Chance had a headache, and the two elders were going out in the dinghy to fish for whiting, taking their tea. Pamela felt a pang when Crow said: "Won't you ever come in the boat, Pam?" It looked as though she had private concealments, and the horrible part was that she had–only they were honourable and with excellent intentions.

She excused herself with such anxious humility that Christobel's sympathy was with her entirely. Adrian said nothing.

Mrs. Romilly started for Clawtol escorted by Hughie. Then Pamela Romilly

made preparations to put her foot down with credit to her family.

She brushed her long hair, changed her blouse, and put on a different hat, a shady one. She got out clean washed gauntlet gloves, and polished her brown shoes. Then she went up to Woodrising.

She met no one by the way, and all the time was conscious of surprise at her own boldness–for no one can deny it was bold.

Arrived outside the carriage-gate in the wall she found it was locked. There was a pair of big gates with little spikes along the top, and in one of these was a small gate.

"Anyone would think it was a lunatic asylum," thought the girl, and from that sprang a sudden amazing question: "Was it? Was this strange girl a 'funny person'? She did not look 'cracked'," as Pam breathlessly put it, but one never knows!

The only thing to do was to summon Mrs. Trewby by the gate bell. So she rang it. As she stood waiting, she recalled that Mrs. Trewby had told Mrs. Jeep she always kept the gate locked, because of tramps and trippers.

"Anybody wouldn't believe how folk make free with a person's property," Mrs. Trewby had said. "Here, there, and everywhere–and to sweep up after them is not what I'm paid to do." So the gate was kept locked because of excursionists, not lunatics.

Mrs. Trewby came with slow steps, and Pamela heard her sigh as she undid the chain. The small gate opened, and the two looked at each other through the opening.

"Good afternoon," said Pamela politely, "could I see the young lady who is staying here?"

Mrs. Trewby looked as though someone had fired a squib in her ear. Her sallow face and melancholy eyes became distracted and rather frightened.

"Young lady," she echoed, and moved the gate a few inches as though to close it.

"Yes. We needn't pretend, need we, Mrs. Trewby. I've seen her, and she sent me a note last evening asking me to meet her. I must speak to her."

"Sent you a note, miss!" Mrs. Trewby repeated these words in a startled manner. "Who ever brought it? If it was boy—-"

In this way Mrs. Trewby let the cat quite out of the bag, and made it impossible to deny the presence of the young lady at Woodrising.

"She brought it herself," said Pamela, "if you want to know how she gave it in, you'd better ask her, I'm not here to tell things; I'm here to speak to her, it's important."

Mrs. Trewby stood in awe of the Romillys, and at that moment she was almost afraid of Pamela.

"Well, miss," she conceded, "if you'll step inside, I'll tell Mrs. Chipman. She will be in a way, but I can ask her. It's no business of mine–what I say is 'attend to your own business, it'll take all your time'–nobody can say I've put myself forward to interfere; it's not my nature; I never was one for forwardness, that I will say."

These comments on her own character were made by Mrs. Trewby as she shut the gate, locked it, and led the way across the gravel sweep to the square white porch in the square white house-front. Here again was a double-locked door she opened, and Mrs. Trewby led Pamela into the dim hall; then, with a murmured assertion that it was not her fault, she melted into some back passage.

In the briefest time, and before Pamela had time to do more than take in the fact that the hall ran through the house to a glass door at the end, and that there seemed to be several rooms, Mrs. Chipman burst upon her sight.

She was a little woman, stout, and extremely bustling and buxom. She wore the style of garment that used to be called a habit bodice–tight and firm, and bristling with bead trimming and buttons. Her neck was short, but she had a beaded collar fastened by a brooch. Nothing on earth could have been more respectable and farther from any idea of mystery than Mrs. Chipman.

"Good evening, Miss Pamela," she said in a quick bustling voice, suppressed to a low note, "I find Mrs. Trewby's communication difficult of comprehension. Do I understand that you have a message for–me?"

"I wish to see the young lady who is staying here, Mrs. Chipman, and to make things clear I may as well say that I've spoken to her. And she sent me a note–I've really come about the note."

"Excuse me, Miss Pamela, might I request—-" Mrs. Chipman motioned towards a door with a flourish of her fat hand, and then led the way to it, flung it open and let Pamela pass in, then she shut the door and practically stood with her back to it, thus barring the way out.

Pamela glanced round expecting to find the person she wanted, but there was no one in the room but themselves. It was apparently a dining-room, comfortably furnished in a very solid manner, and having a window at the end looking over the lawns.

Mrs. Chipman swept on without taking breath.

"I realized some such demand from words conveyed by Mrs. Trewby, but the mental capacity of persons dwelling in the country–as a permanency–being to a great extent limited, I believed she had mistaken your words. I am loath indeed to deny any member of the family what would appear a most reasonable request, but I assure you, Miss Pamela, I stand in a position of trust–nay, more–a position of great responsibility, and therefore I grieve to say that I could not accede–that is to say if there is a young lady at all. To begin with I cannot admit

that there is a young lady—-"

"Then you must be sillier than people think, Mrs. Chipman," said Pamela blandly, "we've all seen her–only the others take her for me—-"

"That is so–the case with many—-"

"Well, I don't like it then," Pamela cut her short with raised tone. "I don't like it, and I won't bear the burden of the things she does. So far *I* am the only person who has spoken to her–in our family–but unless you let me see her now, and speak to her, and settle things up, I will tell them all–every one."

Mrs. Chipman tried to speak. Pamela continued firmly,

"I don't want to be the least rude, but if you are responsible and all the rest of it, why don't you look after her? Do you know she threw a note into my brother's window last night about eleven, or half-past ten?"

Mrs. Chipman gave a squeak like a trapped mouse, then she pressed a hand to her tight bodice.

"Surely, surely, miss–I cannot credit—-"

"It was Hughie's window, the next to mine," went on Pamela, "*he* brought it in to me, because it was addressed to me. How she knew our rooms I can't say–but that doesn't matter–the point is, what was she doing in our grounds at that time?"

Then flashed into Pamela's mind the power of the whip she held–she went on:

"What would Sir Marmaduke say, Mrs. Chipman? If you won't let me see her, I shall certainly ask *him* if I may–and explain matters."

Mrs. Chipman was "taken all aback", like a full-rigged ship up in the wind. She hesitated.

"Far be it from me, Miss Pamela, to place obstacles—-"

"That's all right then," said Pam, "can I see her now?"

At that moment a bell pealed somewhere in the house. Really pealed, with the jangling force of a violently pulled bell.

"If you will excuse me, miss," said Mrs. Chipman, visibly perturbed. She opened the door, and hurried out into the hall, Pamela following closely with interest very wide awake.

Again the bell was rung, more forcefully than ever.

"Dear, oh dear!" muttered Mrs. Chipman, increasing her pace.

Pamela giggled.

But the bell-puller was unreasonably impatient. A door on the right hand of the hall–same side as the room they had quitted, but the last door–opened sharply, and the girl under discussion appeared. She wore no hat, and held a book in her hand.

"I rang twice," she said, "I heard voices, and—-"

Pamela came forward. Drawn up to her full height, her carriage and manner were at least as haughty as those of the other girl.

"*I* was talking to Mrs. Chipman," she said. "As a matter of fact I came to see you, and she was doubtful about it; so I told her I insisted."

"Excuse me, Countess," burst in Mrs. Chipman, "but I must protest now, and once for all against irregular conduct. I stand in the position of guardian. The grounds are open to you, and you have the option of gravitation to any portion of the wood, orchards, or gardens–there is no excuse—-"

"You talk too much," said the girl irritably, "be silent. You are not a guardian, you are my maid–Sir Marmaduke is my guardian, for the time. Come into this room, Miss Romilly, I will receive you here."

She turned round and went back into the drawing-room, leaving Mrs. Chipman blown out like an angry bird with feathers on end.

Pamela followed–thinking hard, "receive me! Cheek!" and the other revelation–"So Countess wasn't a dog! I wonder what sort of Countess!"

In the drawing-room with the door closed, the two girls faced each other standing. And Pamela was again struck by the beauty and imperious style of this odd "double". Also, she had to admit how wonderfully alike they were in general effect.

Pamela began the conversation.

"I've come about your–note," she said with a little gesture of her hand towards her skirt pocket, "I suppose you don't realize that you mistook the room and threw it into my brother's window?"

"Oh, the little boy's room. He gave it to you?"

"Yes."

"Did he read it?"

"I don't understand you," said Pam frowning.

"Did he open it when he picked it up in his room?"

"Naturally not," Pamela stiffened, "you don't seem to understand. No decent people open other people's letters."

Countess shrugged her shoulders.

"Just so. That is well then. But if you received my note why did you not come to the wood?"

"Come! When?"

"The hour that I appointed. 8.30."

Pamela raised her eyebrows.

"So you expected me to go to Clawtol at half-past eight this morning, because you wished it! Doesn't it occur to you that you are–well–rather presumptuous? Why–on–earth–should I?"

Pamela fired off each word, as it were, with a separate emphasis.

The girl seemed a little taken aback by this way of looking at things.

"Wretched creature," thought Pamela suddenly, with the broad instinct of fair play natural to girls of her upbringing, "she's always had her own way. She thinks herself a little tin god! She doesn't understand!"

"Can I sit down?" she said aloud, and without waiting for an answer took her seat on a big sofa, near the window.

The other girl moved a step or two nearer, and sat down at the other end of the same sofa.

"Well, look here," went on Pamela, "let's understand each other, if you don't mind, then there won't be any bother."

"Is there some bother?" asked the other girl.

Pamela controlled her temper with effort. The assumption of superiority was so aggravating.

"There will be a good deal of bother, if you do unreasonable things," she went on, trying to be indifferent. "If you want to send notes would you kindly leave them at the front door, because—-"

"Impossible," interrupted the Countess decidedly, "you see I am not supposed to go outside these grounds. If I were to walk to your house openly I should betray myself. I do not stay in the grounds of course, because I wish to go outside. But I employ my own means."

Pamela looked at her with a frustrated feeling. If only the girl were not so horribly "cock-sure"!

"Well, look here," she began at another point, "will you tell me your name? I find it a bit difficult to talk without knowing it."

A sort of glint flashed in the stranger's eyes. And Pamela's natural perceptions caused her to read the thought behind that glint on the instant.

The girl imagined she was fishing for information!

"You can call me 'Countess', if you wish to give me a name," she answered, "I have eight names, but I do not tell them to people in this place. You heard my maid say 'Countess'. Very well, then, you can also say Countess."

"Oh, thanks–that's very obliging of you," said Pamela, quite unimpressed, "it's as you please, of course. And after that, to get to the reason of my visit. I naturally supposed that you meant me to meet you at 8.30 to-night."

"Oh–to-night will do," allowed the Countess quite amiably, "I wished this morning, because I was in a hurry, but to-night will do as you have misunderstood my meaning."

"*Neither* would do, simply because I've no intention of meeting you anywhere, or at any time. It is just as well you should understand."

There was a pause. Then Pamela took up her parable again–rather enjoying herself.

"As I said to you a few minutes ago, why on earth should I? *I* don't want to be bothered with meeting anybody on the sly–we don't do it in our family. The others would soon notice and think I was doing a low-down thing. I don't know you–I don't know your name. You are no business of mine. I don't care what you've got to say if it is secret–if it isn't, well, be open. That's the whole position, please understand I came here because I wish to be open, and to tell you honestly."

The Countess sat still with her eyes gazing at the carpet, her glance had dropped from Pamela's expressive face and large clear eyes.

"You are unkind," she said, after a moment of silence. "I have no one–no one."

She clasped her hands together rigidly on her lap, and Pam saw that they shook. The corners of her proud mouth twitched a little. But she held herself severely in check, and controlled evident emotion.

*This* was worse than anything to a girl with a heart like Pamela's.

"I'm sorry," she said, "awfully sorry–but, what did you want me for?"

She was annoyed with herself for asking, it was a weakness, she felt that.

Countess raised her eyes to meet Pam's. There was a something the least bit softer over their hard brightness.

"I am troubled," she said, "and wished to ask advice from you. When we carried that boy up the cliff yesterday I dropped my brooch–it was a safety pin of rather large size, of gold, and with my first letter and the crown in diamonds. My mother gave it to me on my birthday when I was twelve years old–I would not lose it for the world.–It was in my blouse–here, you see," she touched the opening of her silk shirt. "I don't know what I should do, I cannot find it–but I cannot offer a reward–what shall I do?"

"You were on the cliff this morning looking for it, weren't you?" asked Pamela, full of sympathy, and realizing the reason for Adrian's attack on herself.

Countess nodded.

"Oh, for a long while, everywhere."

"My brother saw you. They were coming back from Salterne in the yawl, and passed under the Beak about seven o'clock. They thought it was *I*, you see," Pamela made a little grimace of disgust, "and said what was I doing there? I said I wasn't there."

"Did they believe you?" asked Countess, with a sudden interest that made her seem more girlish.

"Crow did."

"'Crow'!"

"I beg your pardon, I mean Christobel, my elder sister. She is Mollie Shard's friend, and she's going to be presented fairly soon–she's done with school–but

we are awfully good chums. *She* believed me, of course. She'd sooner mistrust her own eyes than my word, because we both know we wouldn't tell each other crammers."

"Is that lies?"

"Yes. She knows I wouldn't. *You* wouldn't tell your sister lies when you knew she trusted you, would you?"

Countess shrugged her shoulders with a faint air of amusement.

"I have no sister, so–well! But I should tell any person what I like, and whatever suited me to say. No one is bound to incriminate themselves. It is not 'lies', as you call it–that is business, and common-sense."

"Can't agree with you at all," said Pamela icily. "'Business and common-sense to tell lies when it paid'. Nice sort of ideas!"

She sat silent for a moment, then she asked:

"Are you at school?"

"Since I was ten years old, I have stayed–with a family–in England."

"Oh, then you are not *English*?" Pamela felt a sense of relief, though she always tried hard not to be narrow.

"No," said the Countess, adding, after a moment's pause, "I was to go to school next term after the summer holidays."

"Shall you now?"

"I don't know. I dare say not. I went for a while, it was horrible. I left soon; I don't know about anything."

"No wonder she left soon," thought Pamela, "her talk is simply full of 'I's', never heard anyone say so many." Again there was silence, because it was not easy to keep up conversation; the situation was so cramped and artificial to a girl of "open-air" temperament. Pamela began wondering if it would not be better to go now; she had said her say, and wanted to end it all.

"Well, I'm awfully sorry about your brooch," she pulled up her gloves, and made a move to stand up. "If I hear that anyone has found it, what shall I do? I can't claim it. Shall I give it to the Police–or what about Miss Ashington?"

"Who is Miss Ashington? Don't go yet–I want to talk to you–I want to know things."

Pamela settled down rather uneasily, for the Countess had laid a restraining hand on her arm.

"Oh, Miss Ashington is Lady Shard's sister," she answered the first question simply.

"Yes, of course, but I forgot. Chipman told me that, I remember now. No, how could I tell her, it would betray me, since the brooch is lost on the cliff, or the road. I cannot tell what I shall do–besides this Miss Ashington knows nothing of me–no one knows."

Again she conveyed an impression to Pamela that she was not telling the truth. Whether it was a true impression or not, it stiffened Pamela's resolution.

"I'm afraid I can't think of anything, then," she said, "if you don't know anyone *really*, and you won't let Mrs. Chipman offer a reward. If I find it, I'll leave it at the door with Mrs. Trewby. And now I must go, really and honestly."

"But you will come and see me," protested the Countess.

"How can I? You say yourself that Sir Marmaduke has put you here, and wishes no one to know. There must be some good reason for him to arrange that–he's an awfully kind, nice man, we all love him," said Pamela warmly. "I won't do sly things against his wish. Why, he's letting us use his lovely yacht now."

"That white yacht is his?" asked the other girl.

Pamela assented.

"And you go out on it when he is away?"

"He is allowing us to use her all the summer till he comes in September–it's awfully kind."

"Then who goes with you?" demanded the Countess; she seemed interested.

"No one, we manage her ourselves. There used to be a man, but they want him in the gardens at Crown Hill, so we go quite alone."

"Go where?"

"Oh, anywhere along the coast here. This morning Adrian and Christobel were coming from Salterne. They got caught in that thunderstorm the other day, and ran in there up to the harbour, left the yacht, and came back by train. Yesterday they went by train to fetch her, and came back early this morning."

Pamela was feeling a little more friendly as she talked about the *Messenger*. Memories rushed into her mind of the evening of the thunderstorm day and how the others had mistaken the Countess for her.

"That reminds me," she said, "on the evening of the thunderstorm day did you go out–to Folly Ho, on the Peterock Road, and come home late, quite late–half-past nine. Oh, nearly ten?"

The other girl considered. Not as though she did not remember, but as though she was not sure whether she would tell or no.

Pamela got up from her seat and walked a few steps; they walked together to the middle of the room, and paused there to say good-bye.

"Yes, no doubt I went out. I often do," said the Countess rather cautiously.

"Well, Addie and Crow–the others I mean–saw you. They were coming from the station. Didn't he whistle?"

"If you say so, I expect he did. I think I heard a whistle one night."

"He said you looked round and then ran. They thought it was I, and they

were cross with me."

At this moment Pamela noticed that the other girl's attention was fixed upon a long mirror on the wall opposite She also looked, and saw the two full-length figures, each with its long tail of beautiful bright hair. The same height! The same figure! The same dress!

"Oh!" ejaculated Pam in startled dismay.

The Countess laughed, for the first time.

Afterwards, as Pamela hurried home with rather a perturbed mind, thinking puzzled thoughts, the picture of that pair of girls was distinct, and tiresome. She did not like it.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Double "A" and a Diamond Crown

In a day or two Pamela had recovered from those pricking fears. After all, there was nothing to worry about. The Countess would not worry her any more, because she had been firm. "The great thing is," thought Pam, "to be firm. To let people really see that you mean what you say, then they won't 'try it on'." She felt that the Countess had been inclined to "try it on". There was no doubt about that. Now it was ended, and no one a penny the worse. Who she was, or what she did at Woodrising must remain a mystery, for the present anyway. It was tantalizing, but, as the girl had offered no explanation herself, Pamela felt it would be impossible to pry or ask servants, even if they would answer. She was sorry about the brooch, sorry for the loneliness of this strange young person; all the same, she felt instinctively that the Countess could very well take care of herself.

The sun shone, the wind blew, not too hard. Pamela, with something of thankfulness, threw herself into the boating plans, and went out fishing for whiting, which the family ate joyfully.

Three or four days of peace went by, and then a positive bomb of annoyance fell into her pleasure, scattering destruction on all sides.

Adrian put off things often. He forgot, or seemed to for the moment, but never for good. There was a strong underlying tenacity in his nature; he always did–ultimately–what he said he would do. Therefore, after apparently forgetting what he had said about inspecting the Beak cliff, he went off one day before breakfast–after an early bathe–and went down over the ground that had been so

much discussed.

The result was startling.

When Pamela came down to breakfast that morning she found everybody absorbed in the examination of some small thing Mrs. Romilly was holding. She, sitting in her place behind the urn, was turning this article in her hands, and Adrian, who had given it to her, was leaning over the back of her chair, Crow stooping over the tea-cups, Hughie enjoying a good view under people's arms, and Miss Chance pretending to see for fear of giving trouble.

Christobel looked up as Pamela entered.

"Oh, Pam–Addie has been on the Beak, and he has found the most adorable brooch–I wish to goodness Mum would feel we might keep it!"

"Why not? findings–keepings," said Adrian. "I present it to Mother. It's a ripper."

"Thank you, darling–but it wouldn't be possible to keep it." Mrs. Romilly held up the small object for Pamela to see.

Before she looked, she guessed, then taking it in her hand saw the guess was correct.

A gold safety pin about an inch and a half long, attached to it, the loveliest decoration, a double "A", that is two capital A's entwined, and above them a tiny coronet, the whole made in diamonds. It was stained with earth and damp when brought in, and Mrs. Romilly, putting it into a cup, washed it with hot water and rubbed it on her soft handkerchief. It was lovely, and obviously very valuable.

Pamela gazed at it speechless, turning it over in her hands, trying to think–but feeling too startled.

"Jolly lucky, wasn't I, Pam?" Adrian bent over and took the jewel from her.

"On the Beak?" questioned Pamela uncertainly.

"Yes. Just the place where you hauled up little Ensor. I 'reconstructed the crime', as the French Police do; result of reconstruction, can't think how you managed to do it! I couldn't. Found it took all the running I could do to keep in the same place, so to speak. Stiffish climb with no encumbrances. Just in a tuft of grass I found this thing stuck; it looked as though someone had dropped it and then trodden on it, squeezing it down fairly firm, but not burying it."

"How funny!" commented Pamela weakly. She felt it was weak, and that made her turn pink. Then, knowing she had turned pink, nervousness seized her and she became very white.

Christobel was looking at her, wondering, surprise visible in her honest eyes.

"I want Mum to keep it," said Adrian, "why shouldn't she? It's a mystery how it got there. It may have been stuck in that tuft for years. The person who owned it may be dead."

”Oh no, we must hand it over to the Police,” said Mrs. Romilly. There was a general cry of ”oh Mother!” as she took the brooch back again into her hand, and examined h even more critically. In that moment a thought struck her, and she looked up at her eager family.

”Crow dear–why shouldn’t it be Auntie A’s? Why, of course, my dear children–why not? Consider the letters, ’A’ and ’A’ entwined–it no doubt stands for Adelaide Ashington. After all, it is rather rare to have two ’A’s’ for your initials.”

”But, Mummy, the crown—-” suggested Crow.

”Coronet? Why not? Miss Ashington and Lady Shard are daughters of Lord Stilborough. They might have a coronet in a jewel, I daresay–just for ornament. Crow, isn’t Lady Shard’s name ’Amelia’?”

Christobel said it was, also suggested that Mollie’s name was Amelia Mary.

”Oh well, then,” went on Mrs. Romilly, ”I’m afraid, Addie dear, there isn’t much mystery.

”But look here, Mother,” Adrian interrupted eagerly, for he disapproved strongly of this explanation, ”I say–you’re not going to make me believe that either Lady Shard or Auntie A. wandered about the Beak cliff!”

”Oh no, not they, of course. But don’t you see, Addie, the thing might have been dropped and picked up by someone who wasn’t honest. It may even have been stolen. You know how utterly vague they both are, dear souls, they’ll forget and never miss it. Then the person who had it might have gone on the cliff front–some servant–man-servant from London, say–chauffeurs, anybody–I propose that someone goes up to Crown Hill and hands it over to Auntie A. It is most certainly theirs.”

”Once it gets into Miss Ashington’s hands no one will see it again,” said Pamela desperately.

”That sounds rather an awkward remark,” commented Adrian, as they all took their places round the table.

”I don’t mean she’ll steal it,” explained Pam, very hot and worried, ”but what’s the good of talking; everybody knows her. Whether it is hers or not she’ll forget Mother has sent it to her, and things will drift vaguely.”

”What would you do then?” asked Crow.

”Oh, give it to the Police, and tell them to advertise it. Then the real owner will claim it.”

So said Pamela in the despairing hope of giving a chance to the Countess, who would claim, of course, through Sir Marmaduke, if she did not wish to appear in the matter.

Adrian agreed with her, quite unexpectedly, for which she felt grateful.

”There’s a lot of sense in Pam’s notion, Mother,” he said, ”Auntie A. is no

more and no less than the White Queen in *Alice Through the Looking-glass*–with just as much sense. She's an old dear, we all know–but she'll give the thing to Charles to eat as soon as not; or hand it to a beggar in mistake for sixpence! She doesn't know the difference between her own hat and a church hassock."

"*Darling*," expostulated Mrs. Romilly, "is it as bad as that?"

"Well, Mum–you know Auntie A. I vote for the Police Station at Ramsworthy. Let me take it there."

"I think we ought to try Crown Hill first," said his mother, quietly persistent, as always, now the idea had once lodged in her brain. "Who'll go?"

A wild impulse rushed into Pamela's brain. Should she offer to take it, and return it to its rightful owner, trusting to the fact that Miss Ashington would never remember whether she had received it or not? But the thought occurred only to be rejected. It wouldn't do at all. It would be horrid, and after all, suppose the brooch was given to Auntie A., all she had to do was to tell the Countess, who could write to Sir Marmaduke Shard and explain that the strange jewel was hers. That was simple enough.

When the party dispersed after breakfast Pamela felt better. The path seemed less encumbered. She decided to write to the Countess and to take the letter herself and leave it at the gate. Miss Chance and Hughie conveyed the precious parcel to Crown Hill with a letter from Mrs. Romilly, and the other two went off to the bay to overhaul *Messenger* for a grand clean up and polish.

After several attempts Pamela wrote a note that satisfied her.

"Your safety pin brooch has been found on the Beak cliff and sent to Miss Adelaide Ashington at Crown Hill. Because the initials are 'A.A.' my mother thinks it must be hers or Lady Shard's. If you apply to them, no doubt you can get it back.–P".

Having read this once or twice and finding it met the case, Pamela folded the note neatly, sealed it with her own little silver seal, and went out. She did not go straight up the road to Woodrising, but across the valley, round through Crown Hill park, into the woods at the inland end, and down the hill from the station.

Finding the road clear she rang the gate bell with vigour, handed the message to Mrs. Trewby, with the sentence, "no answer, say, please," and departed–not down the road past Fuchsia Cottage, but back up towards Folly Ho, and over the hill behind on to the Bell Ridge above the church, and so home, down the steep to the Bell House–in time for lunch. The only person she met was Mr. John Badger of Champles, a large and heavy man with the smallest possible twinkling eyes. There was no harm in Mr. Badger–no harm at all, he was a kind man, but he had one weakness and that was gossip. The largeness of his body was the very opposite extreme to the size of his mind–which could not well have been

smaller. He was driving sheep from one fenced bit of his fields to another–there was not much for them to eat on the Bell Ridge Downs and they had to be kept to measured allowances or they would have wandered away to look for something better.

"All alone, missie?" said Mr. Badger in friendly spirit.

"I like walking alone," answered Pamela.

"Well, well, no harm can't come to you these parts. No tramps don't come up along these ways. You don't see no strangers about–can't call Mrs. Chipman to Woodrising a stranger, same as she lived down along Crown Hill some fifteen years."

"Oh," murmured Pamela, which was hardly a remark at all, but she felt as though her mind had best remain a blank to all these questions. As for discussing them, she did not wish to think about them, even.

"What a lovely view there is from here, Mr. Badger!" she rushed into generalities, "don't you wonder if sheep see anything? Can they enjoy a view, or do they see nothing at all?"

Mr. Badger opined that all the sheep cared about was a "belly-full", which was no doubt very true.

Pamela left him gazing after her, and wondering why she had come up there all alone. Mr. Badger saw mysteries and scandals in every movement of his neighbours, which made life very interesting for him.

Pamela could see "plumb down" into Bell Bay as she went lower and lower on a slope that rivalled the Beak, but was better holding-ground because of ferns and stubby gorse. It seemed as though you could take a flying jump on to the roof of the Bell House, among the twisted chimneys. She could see the *Messenger* at her moorings, looking like the loveliest toy–white deck, white hull, and gold line glittering in the sunshine. She saw the dinghy put off from her and come ashore–infinitely tiny, with wee figures rowing, dressed in white, Addie and Crow. She heartily wished that brooch had never been found; or if it was to be found, that it might have been her fate to find it. It was bad luck Adrian coming into the muddle. However, the Countess had only to write to Sir Marmaduke and he could claim the jewel from Auntie A. and settle the whole affair within three days. It was no use bothering about it any longer.

In this mood Pamela arrived at home, looking lovely and happy, only to be at once reminded of the business again by Miss Chance's report.

She and Hughie came across the lawn with the others, and the first thing Pam heard was Adrian's eager information to his mother, who was sitting on the terrace outside the drawing-room windows.

"Mother, the Floweret says Auntie A. swears it isn't hers. She'll have to give it up."

”But is it Lady Shard’s?” asked Mrs. Romilly.

”Miss Ashington appeared uncertain as to that–indeed she was a little confused—-”

”She always is,” Adrian interrupted.

”Hush, Addie; let Miss Chance tell me what was said.”

”It really was not easy to gather her opinion, dear Mrs. Romilly, because it seemed that Miss Ashington had been administering a decoction of herbs–I think on Adrian’s advice–to the spaniel. She was anxious and perturbed as she thought the poor dog was suffering.”

”Oh, laurel water! My only aunt, what a priceless situation!” murmured Adrian, and collapsed on the grass.

”I *hope* he won’t die,” said Crow, anxiously.

”What did Addie advise?” inquired her mother.

Christobel was careful.

”Mummy, she told us she was going to make tea out of sage or–I don’t know–some filth she’d heard or read about it. I expect she’s given Charles a dose; I don’t wonder he’s in pain. But, Miss Chance, did she say anything about Lady Shard and the brooch? That is the thing that matters.”

”I understood her to say that she would inquire, but her conversation was disconnected.”

”You bet it was,” said Adrian from his seat on the edge of the terrace.

”We must leave it for the present. There’s the lunch bell–hurry, everybody,” advised Mrs. Romilly, getting up and passing an arm through Christobel’s.

”Mother, I wish we’d never sent it to Crown Hill,” said Crow, as they went in at the big window. ”Will you promise to ask about its fate? Don’t let’s lose it. After all, Addie found it, and failing an owner he ought to have it.”

Mrs. Romilly promised to ask after a decent interval, and the matter dropped for the moment.

Nothing more happened about it except that, missing Hughie, Pamela sought him in ”the cave” later on, where he was absorbed in making a doll’s ulster out of a bit of checked fluffy material that had been given to Hennery Doe to make strips of, wherewith to fasten down the arms of plum trees on the north wall. Hughie, seeing infinite possibilities in the bit of stuff, had calmly annexed it, and it was now taking shape, the ”arm-sleeves” proving a tough problem, owing to the thickness of the stuff and the smallness of the doll.

”Well,” said the workman, when Pam looked over the barrier.

”There’s a new bother, Midget.”

”I know. I saw your face. Is it about that girl?”

Pamela explained about the brooch; telling the story of it.

”It’s rather tiresome,” allowed Hughie, turning the coat inside out.

”I wonder what she’ll do?” Pam’s tone was worried.

”She might go and ask for it.”

”She couldn’t ask Miss Ashington, she doesn’t know her,” said Pamela quickly.

”She’s the kind of person who might do things you didn’t think about. I don’t care for that sort of girl.” Hughie spoke as one with life-long experience. ”You’d better look out, Pam.”

”How can I look out?” retorted Pamela almost irritably. She was never cross with Hughie.

”Well,” said the Midget, recognizing that she had much excuse, ”we may as well both look out, for I’m pretty sure she’s rather a tiresome person.”

That was all the comfort Pamela received, but poor as it was, in a way it did comfort her; there was something so imperturbable about Hughie, it made her feel less inclined to exaggerate.

Evening fell, rather dark, because the moon rose late. Miss Adelaide Ashington sat outside in the broad tessellated piazza, that ran along the south-west front of Crown Hill house. It was a handsome house; white, in the Italian style; the gardens were beautiful when in good order. Auntie A. had her breakfast outside as a rule, often her tea–but not dinner, because lights being necessary–for eating at any rate, when your dinner-hour is late–she was afraid moths and other creatures would fly into the lamps. So she sat out after dinner, in the growing shadows, sipped coffee, and comforted Charles, who was recovering from internal disorder.

A tall slim figure came towards her from the gardens, walking with easy assurance among the shadowy flowerbeds. Charles heaved himself up on his cushion, and barked weightily in a strangled manner. Miss Ashington, looking about for the cause, said:

”Well–well–well–it’s only our dear Pamela–what a fuss–what a fuss.”

Charles choked in his endeavours to express disapproval, and ”our dear Pamela” came up to the piazza and greeted his mistress.

She said it was a lovely evening, but her feet were wet with the dew; she leaned against a pillar, and, turning up one slim foot, looked at the sole of her shoe. Miss Ashington looked at it also, in a vague kind of manner–she could not see, but she was disturbed to know it was wet.

”Surely it is late for you to be out, dear child,” said Auntie A., ”*hush*, Charles, be quiet, you know very well who it is–now let me call Dickens and she will find you dry shoes–what about Mollie’s–I really cannot allow—-”

”But I must go back at once,” said the girl, ”please do not call anyone,” as Miss Ashington hunted on her table for the brass hand-bell that was supposed to be at her elbow, but was always underneath other things, ”please do not. I came

from my mother to say, may she have the safety-pin brooch with the diamond crown that Adrian found on the cliff–that she sent to you–because the owner is found."

"Ah, the brooch with A initials–yes–yes–yes–now *where*," murmured Auntie A. "I think I had better ring for Dickens—-" she hunted for the bell and the table fell over.

Charles coughed himself into convulsions.

"Dear, dear–if you can find the bell–please ring it, dear child."

"Dear child" was on her knee hunting, with the bell safely covered by her skirt. She was searching among the overturned articles with the desperate hope of finding what she came for, instinct suggesting that it might easily be actually on the table.

It was. That is to say, it had been put into Miss Ashington's wicker work-basket, which, having fallen over also, upside down, had emptied its contents on the tiled floor. The brass bell clattered, the reels of cotton spun about driving Charles into delirium, but the searcher cared for none of these things, for she had seen the sudden glint of the diamonds in a ray of light that the drawing-room lamps threw out across the pavement.

"Here it is," she said, with a ring of joy in her voice, "let me make this right."

She set the table up, bundled the obvious contents of the work-basket back into place, seized the papers, books, wool, finally the bell–and put them on the table–in doing so she rang the bell, and on the instant was upon her feet, straightening her shady hat.

"Thank you, thank you, Miss Ashington–and I must now go–my shoes are so wet. You will forgive me that I go at once."

A maid appeared, coming out of the window in answer to the bell summons.

As Miss Ashington looked round to speak to her, Pamela melted into the shadows like a wraith.

"Is that you, Farr?" Auntie A. was rather flustered. "We had an accident. No, I didn't ring–not intentionally–the table fell over. Take care you don't slip on a reel, they are so treacherous and the pavement is very—- Oh, *poor* little Charles, he was so upset and quite resented a visitor at this time of night!"

"You must have been surprised yourself, ma'am," said Farr, making conversation as she chased reels, thimbles, and mysterious little bundles that were perfectly useless.

"Miss Pamela came for the diamond brooch–I think I told you that Mrs. Romilly sent it to me believing it to be mine because of the initial. Mr. Adrian discovered it–on the cliff–at least I fancy that was what–thank you, Farr—- You see my poor Charles was so ill this morning, that–however, I'd quite forgotten where I put it, but it fell out of the work-basket when—- Of course a summer

night is not like any other time of year, but I could not help feeling that Miss Pamela should have had an escort."

"I saw Miss Romilly from the window, ma'am," said Farr, picking up the coffee tray from its special stool, "tall young lady she's growing; very stylish too; 'er 'air is beautiful."

"So it is–so it is–lovely hair. I'm very fond of that child. I hope she has not caught cold. I fancied she was a little hoarse to-night, quite likely if she runs about like this in such a heavy dew. I think I'll come in now, Farr, if you will kindly carry Charles' basket."

# CHAPTER XIV

**"If anybody dies, it'll be her," said Hughie**

It must have been about a week after that when Hughie, passing by Pamela's door with a view to making himself tidy for lunch, heard a sound of stifled sobbing. He stood still, quite shocked. Here was an unprecedented state of things, and one outside his experience, because Pam was a cheerful interested person, always busy, never morbid. It was horrible.

Hughie had been in "the cave" since breakfast and was on his way to his room rather "delicately" like King Agag, because he knew his mother would wish him to be out of doors, and he had shirked the boat and the bay to finish some particular job of his own devising. Meanwhile something had been happening, obviously. But what?

He opened the door which was not locked, and put his head into the room. Pamela was lying on her bed face downwards, crying bitterly.

Hughie shut the door, then he walked close up to the bed, and very very gently pulled the heavy plait of hair that fell across her shoulders and on to the counterpane. Immediately there was a change in the tone of the sobs. A choke–then silence–then a faint cough, then a sigh–Pamela changed her position a little, and felt for a lost handkerchief. Hughie, noting the missing article on the pillow, put it into her hand. A minute after that she raised herself into a sitting posture, and looked at him; her pretty eyes were heavy and swelled, and her lips trembled.

"Pam," said Hughie, cut to the heart yet reserved, "I expect it's that woman?"

Pamela nodded and blew her nose.

"Well, what's she been doing now?" To show that he was come to stop, Hughie dropped noiselessly to the floor and sat cross-legged, clasping an ankle in either hand.

Pamela cleared her throat and said in a tone that tried hard to be indifferent and casual.

"Mother thinks–I've stolen that brooch–and told a lie–because—-" stifled silence ensued.

"Well," said Hughie, "that's very ridiculous."

"Not when you hear–what it's about—-" again there was a pause, then starting on a lower note altogether Pamela said:

"Mother wanted to hear about the brooch, Addie made her. So, after a week, you see, she wrote to Miss Ashington and asked what had happened and if it was hers–I mean if the brooch was. This morning Auntie A. sent down a note–all scrawly and covered with blots and half the words left out as usual," this description was emphasized bitterly, "and she said–she said that I fetched the brooch on the same evening you and Miss Chance took it–you remember, Midget, a week ago to-day."

"I know," agreed Hughie, "the morning Charles ate the laurel water."

"Yes, well she says, *I* came in the evening about nine, or half-past nine, and said Mother sent me for the brooch, and she gave it to me–she says a good deal more; something about her work-basket being upset; but anyway *I* took the brooch away, and there's an end to it."

"Why, it was the girl–my goodness, she's a funny person!" said Hughie.

"She's a beast. She's a perfect beast without any decency or sense of honour," declared Pamela in a stormy burst of indignation. "I told her to write to Sir Marmaduke and ask him to claim it from Auntie A. It was perfectly simple. Then she goes and plays this low trick again."

"You'd better tell about her," suggested Hughie with interest.

"I said I wouldn't. She said it would get her into awful trouble."

"Well, she gets you into trouble."

"I know, but, Midget, she's all alone–her mother seems to be dead; her father was killed in the War. Fancy being shut up with Chipman and no one decent to speak to! You see, I don't *blame* her for trying to get her brooch back–she might do that—-"

"It was rather clever," Hughie chuckled suddenly, "a sort of short cut, Pam."

"I daresay, but people oughtn't to use short cuts that hurt other people so awfully."

"She's selfish," said Hughie gravely, "*fearfully* selfish, she doesn't care when the others get hurt."

There was a long pause; then Pamela announced that she wasn't coming down to dinner; she told him that Mrs. Romilly had gone off to Crown Hill to see Miss Ashington.

"What did Mum say to you?" asked Hughie.

"Nothing. Not a word–she gave me the letter to read."

"What did you say?"

"I was feeling so sick and awful, I don't know what I said–except that I didn't go at all. It sounded so helpless in the face of that letter."

"I think I'll go to dinner," announced Hughie suddenly, and he picked himself up, dusting himself in an incomplete manner.

"You can have my brush and comb, Midget, if you like," suggested Pamela, lying down again in a languid manner. "Oh dear, I wish I was dead. People say when there are two of a person one always dies. I hope it'll be me."

This was very gloomy. Hughie gazed at her from under his brows as he brushed his hair. Then he looked at his hands, appeared satisfied that their condition would pass the eagle-eyed inspection of the Floweret, and walked to the door. From there he said:

"If anybody dies it'll be her," and went, closing the door quietly behind him. Pamela felt comforted.

Dinner was proceeding in the dining-room, in a horribly uncomfortable manner, because the three persons present all knew of this amazing state of things, and not one knew what to say. Hughie slid into his chair and was helped to mince without comment. Miss Chance was doing her best to keep up a pretence that nothing was the matter, and welcomed her youngest pupil as an ally, but Hughie was glum.

"Now," said the Floweret hopefully, "*do* let us settle about a picnic. I am sure Hughie will side with me. Adrian, what about an alliance between boats and pedestrians–to Ramsworthy Cove, for instance–or farther; the sands at Netheroot looked so inviting when we passed the other day, I always contend there are no such sands anywhere. Come now, what do you say?"

Adrian was talking to Crow in a low voice. He glanced up.

"Beg your pardon, Miss Chance, I didn't hear what you said;" then, dropping his voice,

"It's not a bit of good shutting one's eyes to facts, Crow. I confess I don't understand this latest business–it sounds insane–but Pamela's hiding something up her sleeve; besides, I'll swear she never got little Ensor up the Beak by—-"

"Oh, don't go on about that, Addie. I'm sick of the very name of that cliff. If the Ensors say she did, and Reuben declares she carried him–he told me so again when I went yesterday–it's idiotic to keep on nagging about it. Let's drop the Beak once for all, and as for this latest business, as you call it, I won't believe

it. I refuse to believe it on the authority of Auntie A.; she's so–well–perhaps I'd better not say what I think."

It was seldom that Crow was heard to speak thus savagely. She was quite unlike herself, just as Pamela appeared to be! But she was angry, chiefly with circumstances, and in any case nothing should induce her to believe such a thing about dear old Pam. It was outrageous. Pam, who was the soul of generosity and straightforwardness, to go to Miss Ashington and tell a lie to get hold of a valuable brooch! The thing was a glaring insult to her character and to the whole Romilly family. That was Crow's opinion.

Hughie looked up at his eldest sister with approval. Christobel was so gentle that an attack from her was an event.

"What do you think, Hughie?" she asked.

"It's silly," was the brief answer, "and can I have some gooseberry pie, Crow?"

"What does it matter what Hughie thinks?" said Adrian, feeling a little injured.

Hughie ate gooseberries and spoke not, but he wondered what they would say if they knew what he knew!

However, matters got worse instead of better. Mrs. Romilly came back sooner than they expected; she had not had lunch at Crown Hill, she had declined it saying she must go home. However, she would not eat, but went off to the drawing-room with Crow and Adrian. Hughie took the opportunity to collect food for Pamela. Tartlets, cake, and a tempting little veal pie from the sideboard. Laden with this he retired upstairs and entered Pamela's room again with difficulty, putting the plate on the floor while he opened the door.

"There was mince, and gooseberry pie as well, Pam," he said, setting the plate down on the bed, "but I couldn't bring it, because it was loose, these things are hard–it's rather a comfort there was some hard stuff about–but, any way, Jeepy would give me some."

"Jeepy" was Mrs. Jeep–cook, house-keeper, and adorer-in-chief amongst Hughie's train of admirers.

"That child's intelleck is beyond telling," was a favourite assertion of Mrs. Jeep's, and one with a good deal of truth in it.

The servants had, of course, picked up the rumour of strange behaviour on the part of Miss Pamela, and Keziah, keeping Patty out of it, of course, with sharp injunctions about "little pitchers" and "long ears", had whispered to Mrs. Jeep that there certainly was something in it.

"Times and times," asserted Keziah, "I've seen her lately. Well, out of my window one night; she was going along the terrace, here near eleven and after. I must say it's not pretty behaviour. And I'm not the only one neither. When I

went up to Badger's for eggs, he said to me: 'One of your young ladies seems to take her walks abroad.' 'Well, Mr. Badger,' I said, 'and why not? I suppose the country is made for walks. I'm walking myself,' I said, 'and so are you.' I said—-" she stopped, breathless.

"Glad you was brief with him," said Mrs. Jeep in a slow comfortable voice, "I don't hold with such folks being so free with gentry's names. They ought to know better, but there's a many don't know their places these times. The mistress is put out though; upset she is, and I don't like to see it, for you never see no bad feeling nor goings on in this house–nice children they are, and have been from babies–the lot of them. Mr. Malcolm just such another as Master Hughie, very inventive in his ways, always some notion in his head."

There was sympathy and curiosity too in the kitchen, though Patty Inglis the between-maid was allowed to ask no questions, and sharply reprimanded by Mrs. Jeep and Keziah for the least appearance of interest.

Meanwhile Mrs. Romilly sat in her chair in the drawing-room resting her cheek on her hand. Christobel on a stool close by patted the other hand reassuringly. Adrian looked out of the window, for of all things he could least bear to see his mother unhappy.

"I see no way out of it," said Mrs. Romilly after relating Auntie A.'s story, "of course she was vague and wandering, and repeated herself as usual–that's nothing–the thing that matters is perfectly clear–Pamela went there about half-past nine–she had gone to her room we all know–she stayed only a few minutes and seemed in a hurry. She would have been in a hurry naturally. Miss Ashington said she seemed nervous and unlike herself, and her voice was husky, or low–well, not quite the same. That also we can account for easily enough, because Pam is by no means a practised deceiver—-"

"I don't think it is *proved* that she is a deceiver at all, Mother, let alone practised!"

So said Christobel in a low voice, unshaken by evidence.

"Dear old Crow," murmured Mrs. Romilly in rather a choked voice, "I like you to feel so; but, well *Farr* saw her too, and remarked how tall she was growing and how lovely her hair is–so it is, lovely." Mrs. Romilly gave a little cough, and hastily changed her position; then suddenly a tear fell with a tiny splash on the back of Christobel's stroking hand.

"Oh, Mummy!" she exclaimed.

"How silly of me, darling. I didn't mean to–but I don't understand, and I can't bear to be–well–outside with you children–we've always got on so well, and had no secrets. This—-"

There was a tense silence.

Adrian, having spoken no word up till now, had been growing more and

more angry with the world in general.

”It’s a jolly old muddle,” he declared suddenly. ”Honestly, Mother, it’s not reasonable to suppose Pamela would be such a silly ass as to march up to Crown Hill and publicly say you sent her for a diamond brooch, and then swear she hadn’t been! I ask you now, is it feasible? It’s sheer blazing idiocy. *If* she did she’s mad and ought to be put in an asylum. It isn’t even criminal, it’s drivelling. As for Auntie A.–now *she* is mad. Always has been. Well, I should say she’d dreamed the whole business if Farr was out of it. You say Farr saw Pamela; did Farr tell you, or did Auntie A. speak for Farr?”

”Oh, Miss Ashington told me what Farr remarked about Pam’s—-”

”*There* you are then. Bet you the whole thing is some mad vision of Auntie A.’s! Sure of it. She was asleep on the verandah and when you asked for the brooch, having lost it, she says this—-”

”But, darling boy, she wouldn’t invent—-”

”Not intentionally, Mother, but she’s got a roving imagination, we see that every week. One time she’s teaching pigs to kill themselves in order to save the butcher’s feelings! Another time she wants to train calves to drive the sheep to market in order that land girls need never get up! *Don’t* believe her, Mother dear, and for any sake don’t sorrow about her rotten fairy tales. They’ll find that brooch in Charles’ stomach when he dies of over-eating–if she hasn’t been wearing it all the while herself. Oh, I say, *do* let’s shut up all this misery, Mum. An atmosphere of crime and sorrow is enough to make one ache to be back. Let’s cut it out, and cease persecuting wretched Pamela, because Auntie A. is a lunatic.”

If it did nothing else, this speech made Mrs. Romilly ”sit up and take notice”, as her son said cheerfully a few minutes later. Presently she went upstairs; and fortified by a ”nice cup o’ tea” made and brought up, and administered by Mrs. Jeep herself, really did begin to think there might be something in what Adrian said.

”Men are very level-headed,” thought Mrs. Romilly, ”they are not so emotional and impressionable as we are; after all, of course, poor Auntie A. is very vague.”

Out of doors Crow and the level-headed one went down to the bay in company. Sisters are given to a certain clearness of vision not always vouchsafed to mothers. Said Christobel:

”Addie–do you *really* think all that you said to Mother about Miss Ashington and Pam?”

”Of course I don’t,” promptly answered the shameless Adrian, ”Miss Ashington is mad, right enough–raving–ought to be chained up before she drives all the farmers dotty, but she saw Pam right enough–so did Farr.”

”But, Addie—-”

"Oh, I know–you're going to say one ought not to believe the evidence of one's own sight if it is against people you love. You must–till one's got something more reliable to see with than eyes. All the same life's not worth living if Mother is in a distraught condition–and nobody comes to meals except the Floweret trying to draw us all together by bonds of family love. If she's 'bright' again at tea-time I shall take the yawl to Salterne and stay there. If Pam has got the thing it's her look-out, she won't enjoy having it–as I said before, she's been awfully queer lately."

In order to check another allusion to the Beak, Christobel suddenly proposed bathing from the yacht.

"Time for a heavenly one before tea," she suggested.

Adrian forgot all the sorrows of the household in an instant and received the plan with a cheer; they two went with a rush, which carried them breathless and giggling on to the sands among the seaweedy rocks and the anemone-peopled pools. Here was Hughie–testing secretly a storm or wind anchor that he had invented. Adrian upset him into a sea pool–which Hughie did not mind, because it diverted attention from the wind anchor–then the two elders proceeded to haul the dinghy down and make preparations.

"Whole day since we came," remarked Adrian regretfully, "what waste!"

"She wants washing inside," commented Crow, rubbing certain dirt marks with her fingers. "Look, this isn't a tennis shoe–it's a heel!"

"I'd like to catch anybody messing about with her," said Adrian wrathfully, then Christobel suggested it might be the Floweret.

"She sits in the dinghy with a book sometimes you know, Addie, when the rocks are extra wet. I don't know why; probably it makes her feel adventurous and buccaneering."

They got the little boat down, and rowed off into the bay–lovely it was, warm and smooth, with a faint swell coming in from outside, the swell that causes a rushing ripple to rise over the hard ridged sand, filling the tiny rock ponds and making the littlest crabs wave their legs about and scamper for the shelter of miniature weed forests. It was a divine day, and a divine scene; brother and sister felt it and cast off the dreariness that had clouded the morning.

They reached the yawl in an utterly joyous frame of mind, and whirled on board anyhow. Then Adrian said in rather a startled voice:

"Hullo, Crow, didn't we leave that door open? Surely, surely we did, because we both said it was whiffy inside–who shut it then?"

"Wind, of course," said Crow indifferently.

"My good girl—-"

"Oh don't, Addie–hurry up–get into the fore-cabin or where you like, but hurry, or we shan't have half a swim. I won't say 'time flies', because it's too

copy-book–but I'll remind you that tea is half-past four. Get on."

So saying, Christobel took possession of the saloon–"according to plan", as we used to hear in the days of the War, and Adrian disappeared down the fore-hatch. This was the standing arrangement for bathing–as the whole party of Romilly boys and girls could swim like ducks; they learned when babies almost–it was family law.

Christobel did not take long to get ready as a rule, but she took longer than she meant because several small matters seemed to her to be differently placed, or untidy. As everyone knows who inhabits a yacht of say six to eight tons, there must be a place for everything, and everything in that place. It had always been so on the *Messenger.* Every shining hook had its cup, or jug. Every plate or saucer fitted into its own groove. Kitchen things–polished like looking-glasses–were placed along barred shelves, and kettles sat in wells made to fit them.

To-day something was a little wrong. Crow frowned at the hooks and racks, as she pinned her hair up under a rubber cap–this and that seemed to have changed places–or she thought so. The cushions on the settees in the saloon were certainly wrong–all on one side. Adrian must have been right about the door; that was perhaps part of the invasion. She thought of calling out to her brother and then decided not to, because if she said anything Addie would make a point of locking up the yawl every night, and the result would be that peculiar something in the stuffiness that always made her feel sick.

Christobel was not a perfect sailor like Adrian and Hughie–neither of them could be swept off their balance, but Christobel could. So much so, that she had at times borne agonies in silence rather than spoil Adrian's day. She was seldom actually sick, but she felt a horrible nausea and faintness, and the one thing that would precipitate this condition was that mixture of paraffin, varnish, cushion stuffing, and station-waiting-room-stale-sandwich smell, that came up from the saloon when the closed doors were opened; for once locked up there could be no ventilation naturally–without water getting in also; not in so small a boat, for the fore-hatch must be battened down and bolted inside before the companion door was locked outside.

All this occurred to Crow in time to stop her making remarks on her suspicions. After all, she could not remember who came out of the cabin last. Again Penberthy might have gone on board–he might even have taken Major Fraser with him, which would account for the gravel and dirt marks on the dinghy.

Just as she came to this conclusion she heard Adrian's dive and a few seconds after his shout for her, so she ran up, and went over the side with the clean

sweep of a first-rate swimmer. That was the end of questionings–for the time.

# CHAPTER XV

### In which Hughie takes Action

It has been said, even in this story, that important situations often arise from ridiculously small happenings. Everybody knows it so well that one apologizes for such a stale reflection.

However, in the present instance the thing that led up to the very small happening was tea at Fuchsia Cottage, to which all four were invited, and all four went. The Little Pilgrim's teas were "things of beauty, and joys for ever", the pleasure never palled, because she had particular scones, buns, cakes and jams that other people knew not of, and her table decorations were as original as they were lovely. She held a theory that people ought to eat a great deal at tea, which was delightful when it fell in with the idea of the guests. There was no "company" about it, from first to last it was sheer satisfaction.

This day was no exception to the rule, and for reasons that can be well understood the young Romillys positively jumped at the invitation. It would be freedom from the atmosphere that seemed to spoil everything at the Bell House.

True to Adrian's suggestion, Mrs. Romilly had ignored the mystery of the diamond brooch. She treated Pamela as always–or tried to. But she was pale and absent in manner, and it was a daily stab to poor Pam to look up suddenly and find her mother's eyes watching her with a sort of appeal in their blue depths. Pamela on her part was obviously unhappy, her small face was smaller still, and her grey-blue eyes looked darker. In spite of the heroic efforts of the elder pair, who pulled the business of life along like a pair of well-matched horses, it was not the same perfectly happy life that it had been in the spring and always before in the memory of the children.

Miss Lasarge saw there was something the matter, but the Romilly family had the sense to wash its own linen at home. No one in the house "confided" woes outside. Also, Miss Lasarge had, at the time, considerable anxiety on her own shoulders, which she kept to herself, of course; the sympathy being no less for everybody.

So she asked them to tea, and they came. And the party was one of the most perfect she had ever invented, with rose petals in all shades of pink making

a pattern round the delightful dishes. Tongues were loosened by the sense of festivity, even Hughie talked; everybody talked, except Pamela, who looked tired.

They stayed until after six o'clock, and then the Little Pilgrim walked down to the gate with them. Outside in the road they stood talking over the gate, as people do loath to go. Adrian was talking about the yawl, he and Christobel laughing over some of the adventures.

"We go out most days," he said.

Miss Lasarge looked towards the west and the clear sky over the sea.

"It is promising for to-morrow?" she asked; her gaze wandered to the white wall over the road, that high glass-topped wall that enclosed Woodrising.

"Oh, rather!"

"Don't you think you are very lucky?" She asked this question suddenly of Addie, in the soft hesitating tone natural to her.

"Lucky, I should think so! It's awfully jolly of Sir Marmaduke to let us have *Messenger*."

"I was thinking of something bigger than that–I mean, *wider*–than just a yacht. It's the *freedom*, Adrian. Of the sea, of the shore, of the woods–that's what I meant. You see, there are prisoners."

"Oh, not *now*, Little Pilgrim," Christobel expostulated, "we've got them all home, thank God, by this time."

"Ours! Oh, yes, I hope we have, I believe we have; but I was thinking—-"

"Miss Anne, please don't ask us to feel–well, sentimental–about German prisoners," said Adrian in rather a hard voice; he was digging a hole in the road with his stick, as a vent for his feelings, "they've had a good time in England."

"Oh no, dear, it was something quite different that was in my mind, I assure you. Only, what one feels is–value freedom–it is so wonderful really."

"Expect it is, one jolly well takes it for granted though, doesn't one, Crow?" Adrian strongly objected to strenuous remarks, whatever the subject. "Well, Miss Anne, thanks awfully, we've had a ripping time, your party was simply top-hole. Think of Crow and me enjoying freedom. Oh, by the way, it's 'the freedom of the seas', isn't it? Early to-morrow, all being well, we want to go to Salterne."

"For the day, or what?" asked Miss Lesarge, smiling.

"For the day," agreed Crow. "As usual, Addie wants his hair cut, and the only man he approves of is in Union Street. We anchor the yawl and come back late; the tides have come round by now, to a nice useful arrangement. Miss Anne, you know Mother doesn't mind now if we sleep on board, as long as we are inside the estuary. That gives us a grand long time to do things."

All this was said in the road, you will remember. Adrian and Christobel possessed clear voices that carried; they did not modulate them to any great extent; lastly the white wall was only the width of the road from this conversation.

Neither Pamela nor Hughie spoke, yet they two realized with a sort of shock what the meaning was behind Miss Anne's little eager protest about "prisoners". She knew, she must know! She was just thinking out loud her own gentle pity for the girl behind the white wall. Pamela saw it so on the instant, and with a flash of memory recalled the large dull old-fashioned drawing-room at Woodrising, and the girl sitting alone, trying to be interested in a book. And she can climb, thought Pam suddenly, perhaps she was used to mountains; why not? Anyway, she must be accustomed to great possessions, to woods and parks, to great estates! A new view of the case brightened Pamela's mind. Miss Anne was looking at her, their eyes met and the girl smiled, then turned pink, and looked away.

"I wonder!" thought the Little Pilgrim.

Pam was wondering also. Hughie had made up his mind, undoubtedly Miss Anne knew about the girl; that was interesting, but Hughie's estimate of the situation was not like his sister's; there was no sentiment, and no pity in it. He was purely practical. "She might have to stop inside Woodrising," he thought, "then it would be different. But she tells lies and comes out on the sly; she steals things and lets Pam bear the blame. Miss Lasarge doesn't know."

So he looked at Miss Lasarge with a shrewd pitying gaze as he lifted his cap for good-night, and made no remark on the way home.

The evening was uneventful, and a voyage to Salterne was planned for next day as Adrian suggested. Pamela was asked to go and said she would; Hughie refused, he had his own scheme.

Then the household went to bed, and to sleep, but let it be understood that the small matter, namely that little talk outside Miss Anne's gate, had set in motion a far more important event, which was yet to happen.

Hughie slept with his window open, of course; he was a very light sleeper, indeed he said he could hear the crabs' toes clatter as they ran out of one pool into another. This statement might have been exaggerated, but the fact remains that he could hear most things; therefore, when he woke up in the night he realized that a noise from outside had been the cause. He lay still and listened for sounds in the house.

All was still; also all was dark, because the moon did not rise till early morning, and at present was giving her best moonshine in the day-time.

Hughie waited with a sense of growing alertness, and presently slid out of bed, climbed on the window-seat, and looked towards the bay. Soft, velvety darkness, ripple of water, and faint reflected shine on the sea, was all he heard and saw.

"Tiresome!" considered Hughie, not reassured by all this peace. He felt trouble afoot.

Motionless he sat, as some small wild thing of the jungle; motionless, but

alive in every muscle.

From the bay came a sudden knock of wood on wood, just the noise a person recognizes who understands boats and would never mistake it for anything else.

”Dinghy,” thought the Midget, and, without more ado, he slid from his seat and put on some clothes that would not be conspicuous; so careful was he, indeed, that he got out stockings, articles he hated in summer; but bare white legs show in the dark. Presently he was complete. Serge knickers and sweater, blue stockings and sandshoes. Then he opened his door and looked out. No sound, a pitch dark, silent house.

Hughie's mind was intent on the garden door. The big front door was bolted and barred and would make a noise if opened. The back door possessed a terribly stiff key that turned with a shriek. Jeepy would not have it oiled; she would not have it touched for mysterious reasons of her own connected with the possible bad conduct of Patty Ingles! It was a far-fetched idea, but it kept the key rusty, so that was no good. There remained the children's door, as it had always been called, the door into the garden, just beyond Pamela's window. It would not do for her to hear. Hughie wanted to do this business entirely off his own bat, so to speak, and of all things he did not wish to have ”people making a row”, so he hoped the door would not betray him.

As it happened, poor Pam was sleeping rather heavily. She had had many restless nights, but something in those words of Miss Anne's had made a difference. Things were not so hopelessly unjust; she did not feel so ill-used quite. So she slept soundly, and Hughie, moving like Sherlock Holmes and ”Raffles” rolled into one, as only he could, got out of the house without a creak or a scratch, closed the door, and found himself on the end terrace under Pam's window close to the sea-wall.

Every stone being familiar, he went straight from there along the grass border of the walk, guiding himself by the wall. Once he stopped and listened intently, when he heard that little bump again–it was a slightly grinding bump at irregular intervals. Hughie knew now what it was–the dinghy against the rocks. It might mean that the little boat had got loose and was being shifted this way and that by the tide. There was nothing exciting about that, of course, but Hughie was convinced that something more was being enacted–there was human agency at work.

He came to the end of the wall, went through the gate, round, and then down towards the rocks. Now here was necessity for careful going, because of the darkness, and he wished heartily he had stayed to get the little electric torch that stood on the library writing-table. However, knowing the bay by heart made it easier, and every minute his eyes were more used to the dark.

The sand felt cool and hard; there was plenty of it, because the tide was just starting to rise steadily and creep into the pools. Hughie knew this must be so, of course–partly because he understood tides, but particularly in this instance owing to Adrian's plan for the morning.

They were to start early for Salterne, while there was still enough of the tide to take them. It could not have been long since the tide turned; he tried to calculate, and succeeded in realizing that the faint greyness that lay in the night was not "moon", but morning coming. And that was what made a chill, fresher than a night wind.

Presently he found the dinghy, and felt all over her with understanding hands. The sculls were there–rolling a little, improperly placed. She was broadside on to the beach, heaving up a little on the wash.

"She simply *never* went down by herself," decided Hughie, and thought over the matter deeply.

Her normal position was a good way up the shore. In stormy weather well above high-water mark–but last night in a comfortable position for loading a basket and oddments–on the sand, with her little anchor fixed between two rocks. The anchor had been lifted and was put in the bows. The dinghy could not have done that to herself! No need to argue; the question was answered.

*Someone* had taken the boat out, and sent her adrift! When you come to think of it, this was an odd thing to happen in the night–more than odd in Bell Bay. Almost unbelievable, because you might leave anything about and all your doors and windows open in such a garden of friends as the valley.

The conclusion Hughie came to was that no native of Bell Bay had done it. He had little doubt who was the offender, and stood still considering his next move.

*Why* should Pam's double want to go out aboard the yawl at such an hour? Crow having said nothing at all to anyone about her suspicions with regard to meddling in the saloon; of course Hughie knew nothing about that, and the idea came to him in all its startling freshness. However, having convinced his reason, he quickly decided on the next action.

"I'd better go and find her," said Hughie to himself in the low murmur with which he held "doll" conversations.

As the tide was rising he had small difficulty in pushing the dinghy down; she was the lightest make, varnished–a first-rate little craft with the power of standing much more than her slight appearance suggested. A very fortunate thing, as it proved afterwards.

The little boy got in, balanced himself in the stern to lighten the bows, and pushed off deftly; then he sat down, took the sculls, and looked about him into the dark. The sculls, small as they were, were too big for his hands, but he was

strong and amazingly tenacious–he never gave up what his heart was set on.

"She can't get away," he murmured again, and, as the idea took his fancy, he gave a sudden little wriggle of amusement.

Then he sculled out to the *Messenger* with very short light strokes, wonderfully noiseless. He went into the thick of the dark, thick because the mistiness of dawn was there–it was what people called "the darkest hour before the dawn", starless, moonless, softly thick. Having gone a short distance, Hughie turned the dinghy round gently by rowing one oar, and, having got his craft stern first, he began to push steadily with both sculls. He knew he would soon find the yawl–but all in a moment, and he must be prepared not to bump.

To his quick ear came a sound; he stopped and listened. It was water–rippling against an obstacle–the incoming tide driving past the bows of the yacht. He had not far to go, because *Messenger* was pulling the length of her chain cables inshore–a very different position from the one she would have held in a strong ebb, as she lay then almost under the shadow of the Bell Ridge point, the height to the north of the cove.

Hughie pushed his craft cleverly up to the counter, shipped his sculls, and gripped the stern rail as he stood up. It was neatly done. He pushed the dinghy a little farther, holding on till he got the bows in position, then he bent the towing rope–the painter–on to the rail, and climbed up. Being there he made sure of the painter–he never left things to chance like Adrian did, and he possessed in a remarkable degree the quick neatness of the born sailor's handling of things.

Having finished, he stood still and looked about.

The deck showed white. The mainsail was not stowed, but just let down and lightly lashed, ready to haul up quickly in the morning: there was nothing to hurt it but dew–dew was everywhere and the footing slippery. As he stood looking along the shadowy white outline against which the mast rose oddly black, and the rigging seemed like black spiders' web, Hughie again wished he had the torch. Then an idea struck him entirely to his taste. It was better certainly to be in the dark, especially as he knew where the matches were kept. All was well.

He stepped off the counter down into the well and looked at the companion doors–open half-way. Hughie gave a cursory examination to that, and then went along the deck to find out the state of the fore-hatch. That was lifted sideways an inch or two–Adrian had slipped a marline-spike under the edge of it to insure a draught. Without question this had not been touched. She was inside, and she had entered by the companion.

Hughie crept back along the side of the deck-house roof, let himself down, and took a seat on the companion steps. He wanted to listen, also he was reviewing the position and the probabilities. What would this girl do? He had never been at close quarters, or even near her, but when one is only seven and small,

without being a coward it is reasonable to calculate chances of warfare with a person double that age and strong.

Hughie considered the black, silent interior that showed through the opening, then he murmured in the faintest whisper–under cover of the tide-rush rippling against the bows.

"If she kills me she'll be hung." It was a comforting thought to have British law on his side. Sir Marmaduke would see justice done undoubtedly, in spite of his mysterious dealings with the stranger. "She's his prisoner," thought Hughie, which seemed simple enough.

He was as noiseless as a cat, and as wiry–he slipped through the gap into the darkness within and proceeded on all fours. In his mind was a certain small and neat lantern belonging to Adrian–it was plated, and fitted with a bit of candle in such a way that nothing disturbed its flame. He proposed to light this, and the thought occurred that some day, when this business came out, he would ask Addie to give it to him–when he went back to school. Surely the labourer was worthy of some sort of hire, and that lantern would add extraordinary joy to "the cave" in dull winter days to come.

Thinking all these matters over, Hughie achieved a noiseless passage through the saloon into the store pantry. He reasoned that the girl was more likely to be in the fore-cabin–as a more remote hiding place; at the same time she might easily be asleep on one of the saloon bunks; these formed cushioned seats in the day-time, and, when the lids were lifted, hammocks within, for which the cushions were used. She could not know about that, so she would lie down on the outside, and it made him tingle to realize that she might be within a few inches of him. He reached the pantry, amidships, without hearing or seeing anything, and there sat down again, his back against the partition, to listen and locate her whereabouts if possible before he betrayed himself by lighting the lantern.

The silence was profound; he could hear the water rippling along the hull underneath. Then he thought it might be wise to creep through into the fore-cabin; to that end he felt along the shelf for the admired lantern, could not find it, and realized that Adrian might have moved it; he could not find the matches either. It was tiresome, for he began to want light, and time was getting on without tangible results. Then the faint greyness along one side of the raised fore-hatch reminded him that he could mount the steps of the little ladder, push the hatch aside, and see better, without much trouble. It was still dark outside, but that was nothing to the profounder dark inside, where the only means of seeing at all was through the thick ground glass, double, along the top of the saloon above deck.

He went through into the fore-cabin, found the steps, mounted softly, and pushed the heavy hatch by inches from the deep rim over which it fitted. He had

to put out all his strength, but he made very little sound.

# CHAPTER XVI
## A Duel before Dawn

When Hughie had shoved the hatch far enough aside to allow his head and shoulders to pass, he went up one step higher and looked out. It was lighter. He could distinguish things on the deck for what they were, and see the water. He had hardly realized that, when he also realized something else.

A figure was standing on the counter holding to the little mizzen-mast, and pulling in the dinghy.

There was not a doubt of it. There she was. She must have been in the saloon when he passed in the dark. She had bided her time, slipped out and up the companion while he was shifting the hatch.

Hughie was exasperated; at the same time he generously admired her quickness of resource. She must not be allowed to succeed all the same. He squeezed up through the opening, got his woolly sweater caught on the big hook that clinched the fastening outside, released himself, losing valuable seconds, was on his feet and speeding along the deck in a few more–just too late!

He saw the slim dark figure descend into the dinghy with a reckless spring, and the boat drifted away as he reached the counter. It was an odd, shadowy drama, played out in the thick haze of dawn from which the night darkness was gradually peeling.

”Come back!” ordered Hughie with decision.

The girl was putting the sculls into the rowlocks quite deliberately; she knew she was safe, or, let it more truly be said, thought she was safe. The boat was rocking softly on a smooth heave, and going shorewards all the time.

The girl appeared to be surprised at Hughie, for she fingered the sculls in an uncertain manner while she gazed back at the small active figure poised on *Messenger's* graceful stern.

”You will stay there now,” she said, with an emphasis on the last word. She spoke rather low, but there was a triumphant ring in the tone.

”Why?” asked Hughie, watching her, and rather attracted by her voice, because of the measured way of speaking.

”Because I shall not fetch you.”

”How unkind!” said Hughie drily.

The girl in the dinghy did not quite like his tone. She expected a complete surrender and an anxious appeal. She thought she heard a very low chuckle, which was odd.

”You have no right to follow me,” she said, playing with the oars; ”it is very ill manners.”

”What about you trespassing?” retorted Hughie. ”I suppose you know I can give you in charge. You may have stolen any amount.”

”How dare you!” this fiercely.

”Stealing off yachts is awfully common, you know,” went on Hughie; ”that's why people keep them locked. We don't lock up the *Messenger*, because Bell Bay people are honest–I mean they always have been up till now.”

The girl appeared not to hear; she was looking over her shoulder towards the shore to which she was drifting. Her mind was turning over rapidly what course to adopt. Would it be wiser to take this child off and make friends with him, or to go home and leave the affair to chance? The latter impulse prevailed, solely because she was angry at being stopped in her intention, and the desire to vent her spite was very strong. She would leave him just as he was for the others to find, and they could think what they liked.

She began to row; then stopped, for Hughie spoke again.

”It's awfully silly of you to take the boat, because then everybody knows,” he commented. ”Come back; what's the good of being an idiot?”

”You are a rude little child,” said the Countess angrily. ”Now I shall punish you; you shall stay there.”

Hughie laughed. Then, to her utter amazement, he made a clean dive from the counter, hands over head, heels up, cutting the water with hardly a splash, and presently came up only a couple of yards astern of the dinghy. Then he shook the water out of his eyes and said blandly:

”I told you you were an idiot–now I think you are a full-sized one. You'd much better have come back when I told you.”

He turned over on his back, and splashed mocking heels at her, then started off homeward; and when the Countess pulled the boat inshore he was there first, and, running in, seized the painter.

”Get out, Madam,” he requested, ”and help pull the boat up; you are too heavy for me to drag, and the tide's coming up pretty fast.”

[image]

*”GET OUT, MADAM.”*

His tone was absolutely polite, at the same time the Countess had seldom felt less happy. He was so small, and so good-tempered over it all! She certainly felt rather like a "full-sized idiot"!

The dinghy was secured, Hughie fixing the anchor between two rocks.

The whole valley was wrapped in thick grey haze, but there was no light. The east being behind the high Downs made morning late in Bell Bay.

The Countess looked on at Hughie's efforts; then she said, almost against her will:

"You are very wet."

"Well, one is when one's been in the sea; you can't help it."

The girl coloured, but she pursued amicable tactics.

"I hope you will not catch cold."

"Oh, thanks," said Hughie, and he looked at her so expressively that she could not fail to remember it was her fault that he was wet.

"You'd better come through our garden," he went on; "it's shorter. I expect you know the way all right."

"I did not pass through your grounds," said the Countess quickly; "I came along the road," she pointed in the direction of Crown Hill lodge.

"How do you get out of Woodrising without the people knowing?" asked Hughie, as they climbed the beach among the rocks.

"You have no business to ask," said the Countess haughtily.

Hughie looked at her sideways.

"I think you are awfully funny; you'd amuse anybody," he declared thoughtfully.

"Amuse–I!"

"Yes, there you go again. You do such ridiculous things, and when people can't help smiling you cut up rough. You look like Pam on the outside–except your face," went on Hughie critically; "but you aren't a patch on Pam really–she's a sport."

"'Sport', how? Does she shoot then? I can shoot," said the Countess sharply. It was plain she did not wish to be thought inferior to Pamela.

"Can you, oh–that's all right. No, I meant Pam was awfully decent; she plays the game always."

"You English think of games and nothing else," said the Countess scornfully. "My father had a little gun made for me, and I could kill when I was–oh–as small as you."

"I'm seven," said Hughie, "and a good bit of eight as well."

There was a pause as they passed through the gate on to the terrace walk; the house was visible now, looking large and sleeping, with its shuttered eyes.

"We'd better walk on the grass, because of gravel noises," advised Hughie.

”I shouldn’t make it, but you do. And look here, it’s no use you trying to get on the yawl again, because she’ll be locked up.”

”Why?”

”I shall tell Addie to lock her. He’ll see the dinghy has been shifted; he’s simply bound to.”

Now this was obvious. The girl could not deny it, and an angry light made her brown eyes look reddish as she turned a quick glance on the boy. She checked speech though.

Hughie looked back at her curiously.

”What did you want to do?” he asked.

It appeared that she considered whether to answer or not, and then took the resolution to say something anyway.

”I wanted to go somewhere.”

”Where?”

”It does not matter. Anywhere. Salterne, or what is another place–Peterock. I am sick and weary of this place–I wish to see a new one. Surely there is no harm in that?”

She said this innocently enough, but in her eyes lay a something that was not so honest as her words.

”Why don’t you ask Sir Marmaduke?” asked Hughie. ”He’d let you go to Salterne or Peterock with Mrs. Chipman in the car. Why shouldn’t he?”

”He would not; it is verboten (forbidden),” said the Countess sharply.

”It’s what?” asked Hughie, frowning; he half recognized the sound of the German word, for he had heard Miss Chance helping Christobel with German holiday tasks.

”Nothing,” answered the Countess quickly.

They had crossed in front of the sleeping windows, along the turf edge of the lawn borders. Hughie avoided a straight crossing, because the track on the grey wet spread of grass would be apparent to the whole house. Along the narrow border he scrubbed it out as they went, walking behind his charge for that purpose.

When they came to the front door end of the house, and the drive, he told the girl to hurry, and hurried himself–always on the turf edge, this time to avoid the noise of footsteps on the gravel.

”You see,” he explained, ”those open windows up above the front door are Addie’s and Crow’s. We are only in view about two seconds, but you never know.”

The Countess asked why they couldn’t go out by the kitchen garden door. It seemed that she knew the geography of Bell House grounds.

”We can’t get out. Old Hennery Doe takes the keys away when he goes, and let’s himself back when he comes in the morning at half-past six. He doesn’t

hold with eight-hour days–he calls it 'silly muck'," said Hughie, adding sagely, "so do I–what's the sense of stopping just because it's eight hours, when the fruit is rotting and mice eat the peas. Look at my father–his work is never done. Nobody can stop in the Navy and the Army–how could they? Fancy if the battleships did that sort of thing!" the scorn conveyed by Hughie's tone was indescribable, and let it be said that on this point the Countess was entirely in sympathy.

Hughie opened the gate for her, and, being bare-headed, made a little gesture of salute as she passed through.

"I hope you will not catch cold," said the girl; her tone was patronizing, and Hughie recognized it–a sentence culled from Mrs. Jeeps' conversation came aptly to his mind.

"If you will be advised by me, you will remain in your own garden," said he gravely; "and thank you for your good wishes."

This ended the interview. Hughie shut the gate with care, murmuring as he did so: "We prefer your absence to your company," again Mrs. Jeep–and then he started off running at top speed down the turn to the stables and backyard, round the house and in at the garden door. That he locked inside. Then he pulled off his soaked shoes and stockings on the mat–rubbing stone-cold feet energetically to dry them well–sped along the passage, up the back-stairs, and away down to his own room, leaving no mark or faintest trace with his bare feet. Arrived "at home", he dragged off the wet garments–knickers and woolly sweater, not even a vest in addition–bundled the things up and put them with the stockings under his bed–as the shoes were always wet, more or less, they did not count; then he rubbed himself energetically with a rough towel, assumed the striped pyjamas, dived into bed, and was asleep within three minutes.

For Hughie the episode was successfully closed. For some others it had just begun.

It was said that when the two entered the drive from the terrace walk, Hughie hurried the pace in order to get his charge out of range of Adrian's and Christobel's windows. There was just about a minute in which that curve of the drive was in full view from the house. There were surely a thousand chances to one that the pair would not be seen at such an hour–not much after four o'clock in the morning. But as it happened, Adrian had waked–perhaps some odd instinct of doings on board the yawl had pricked him–the thousandth chance was against Hughie, and Adrian got up at that instant to look at the weather and see what sort of day was going to favour his project. His plan the night before had been a seven o'clock start and breakfast on board. It would be heavenly in the early morning, and nearly three hours tide to Salterne river would be theirs. He wanted to be off at half-past six, but Mrs. Jeep was firm about seven–she "didn't hold" with depriving people of their rest, she said. So seven it was to be–and Adrian, on the

alert at 4.20, saw something that surprised him so immensely that he was nailed to the floor, gazing.

The disappearing figures of Pamela and Hughie just rounding the curve of the drive towards the big gates. Hughie bare-headed–otherwise as usual. Pamela just as usual.

Dawn was piercing the "darkest hour", and the pair were fairly distinct in the mist. Distinct enough to remove all doubt as to who they were. Adrian gazed as they went out of sight, gazed at the empty drive; then he leaned from his casement and listened. No sound but here and there a faint "tweet" from a tentative bird, asking if it was time to get up.

Three or four minutes passed, then Adrian opened his door, hurried down to Christobel's room and knocked–once–twice–no answer; she was asleep; he went in.

"Is that you, Keziah?" murmured Crow–sleepily: "is it five?"

"I say, Crow," said Adrian in an energizing whisper, "wake up for any sake. I've seen about the rummest thing you ever heard of."

"Oh," Christobel answered thickly, "what a pity."

"Pity! How do you mean?"

"Because I want to go to sleep–it's rather early, isn't it?"

"It's soon after four; but look here, Crow, this isn't a false alarm–or a mare's nest–it's simply *the* most amazing eye-opener."

"Oh, is it?" Christobel roused herself to look at her excited brother; from long experience she felt sure that he would not be quiet till he had got the news "off his chest". She raised herself a little on the pillow and tried to be interested. "Go on," she said; "what is it?"

"Well, what do you say to Pam and Hughie walking up the drive to the front gate."

"Oh, Addie–what rot! Four in the morning!"

"My good girl, I stared at them till my eyes nearly dropped on the window-seat. I just happened to wake, and went to see what sort of a day it seemed–the window was open–there they were."

"Why didn't you hear them on the gravel first?" asked Crow in an unbelieving tone; she realized that here was another attack on Pam, only this time Hughie was included. She refused to believe a word on the spot; she made up her mind against this tale.

Adrian said the two walked on the grass-edge border–Pamela first, Hughie following; they did not seem to be talking, they went fast.

"Why didn't you call?" asked Crow.

"I was simply knocked out of time. I just stared, and they were gone round the turn. Then I came to you."

”Hum,” Christobel sniffed sceptically; ”how were they dressed?”

”I told you–I don’t know, I’m sure–same as usual–the kid no hat. I said so. Look here, Crow–what are we to do?” this in an urgent tone.

”Do? Oh, nothing; what could we do? Go to sleep again till we have to get up.”

”I must say, Crow, you are most awfully casual,” said Adrian in an offended voice. ”The thing’s about as strong as it can be, and you won’t move. Pamela has been behaving like a lunatic for weeks, and now she is taking her walks abroad at four in the morning and dragging the kid with her.”

”Well, you see, Addie, I don’t admit that Pam has been doing anything different from ordinary,” argued Crow in her sober, level way. ”I don’t believe it, and you can’t make me. As for *this*. I think the mist has deceived you.”

Adrian rose indignantly from his seat on the bed foot.

”Of course if you’re going to—-”

”Stop a minute, Addie. Here, give me my dressing-gown.” She sat up and put her arms in the sleeves, talking as she did so. ”How long did you say it was–you’ve only been here a few minutes–they were going *out*, not coming in. Well, it’s perfectly simple. I’ll go and see; if they were walking away up the drive ten minutes ago at the outside, they can’t be in bed now.”

Christobel flitted away like a shadow, down the long corridor, round into the cross passage at the end, and stopped outside Pamela’s door. She heard the sound of regular breathing in the stillness, and went in. There was Pam, sound asleep. Christobel’s experienced eye ran over the neatly-folded garments on a chair, the blouse hung deftly over the bed foot, sleeves inside out. The room was neat and in order.

”Absurd,” muttered Crow with emphasis.

Pamela stirred, turned over, and started up on her elbow, rubbing her eyes.

”What–what is it, Crow; am I late? Is it half-past six?”

”Oh no, half-past four. Don’t worry–I just came to look out of your window—-” Crow suited action to the excuse, lamely made, for she was not used to excuses.

”It’s going to be fine, Pam; there’s a mist—-” she laughed softly with a little sense of triumph, and slipped out of the room.

Pamela vaguely wondered, but it was obvious that her sister was ”not cross”–Christobel seldom was; she meant there was a very sympathetic atmosphere, which was true.

Crow went on and peeped in at Hughie. A small heap in the bed, the top of a sleek head, and absolute slumber, with the room just as usual.

She fled back down the passage and arrived in her own room rather inclined to giggle.

”Both in bed, both sound asleep, not foxing, but simply *sound.* I woke Pam; she was perfectly foggy, and wanted to know if it was time to get ready. When I said ’no’ she was practically asleep before I came away.”

”I suppose they bolted back,” said Adrian, though he was plainly surprised.

”Bolted! My dear Addie! Pam’s clothes were all as neat as a Chinese puzzle, her shoes put together, her blouse hanging out to air! Hughie’s room was the same–you know how tidy those two are; they beat us hollow. It’s not a scrap of use reasoning that they could have done all that in the time, because it isn’t possible, especially as you say they were going away, not coming in! After all, Addie, one must be reasonable.”

Adrian was reasonable. He went off in silence. He saw the force of what his sister said, but he had the evidence of his eyesight against it. The whole thing was staggering. It was part of the strange and complicated way that life had been behaving for weeks.

After that he slept fitfully, being worried, and at half-past six left the house to get things ready on the yawl, leaving the girls dressing. Pamela had come along the passage to Crow with a beaming face and her lovely hair like a bronze shawl over her shoulders; she wanted Christobel to plait her tail as Keziah was busy packing a basket. Adrian saw his sister, and was bound to admit she looked like a guiltless person who had slept soundly.

She said Hughie was asleep; as he was not going there was no need to wake him.

Crow was dressed and putting one short pin in a nice little close hat, when she heard Adrian come back. He came into her room, hardly waiting for the answer to his knock, shut the door, and leaned his back against it.

Christobel, instantly aware of something new, turned round; her brother was breathing rather fast, and there were sparks in his hazel eyes.

”Something is up, Crow–no question.”

”Why–what?”

”Oh, the dinghy has been used–she’s full of gravel and footmarks–sculls messed up–anchor shifted–painter wet and muddled up–whole thing anyhow, and up in a new place, not where I put her.”

Christobel exclaimed softly; Adrian went on:

”Someone’s been on board the yawl. The fore-hatch is hauled off! there are any amount of wet footmarks and gravel prints inside, on deck, especially on the counter. The companion door is wide open. Besides that, one of the bunks, the one you use, was all untidy–all the cushions were on that side–and sort of messed up. Once before I had a dim idea someone had been on board—-”

”So had I,” murmured Crow softly.

”You never said so.”

”Well, I thought I was mistaken. It was so unlikely.”

”It’s obvious,” said Adrian drily, ”that very unlikely things are the order of the day. In fact, it’s just as well not to say ’all things are possible’. Also there’s no use in pretending Penberthy or Fraser would do it, because it’s out of their line altogether. Somebody has been on board who doesn’t understand boats–I mean, that’s my impression.”

”Then it can’t be Pam,” interrupted Christobel hastily

Adrian saw the argument in her mind.

”Don’t ask me–don’t say ’can’t be’, anyway. I feel inclined to say ’I’m mad, you’re mad, we’re all mad’ like the cat in Alice. Anyway, it’ll take me an hour to clean up.”

”Oh, Addie, what about Salterne?”

”Never mind, we’ll go to Peterock instead; tide’s A1 for Peterock after nine o’clock.”

## CHAPTER XVII

### In which Amazing Things Happen

The only thing confided to the general public about this surprising development was that Adrian considered the allowance of tide all too short for reaching Salterne, which was true, and had decided therefore to make a day at Peterock. For the latter place everything was convenient, the out-going tide would begin to ebb soon after nine o’clock, and turn between three and four in the afternoon; could anything be better?

”I wonder you didn’t settle on that in the first place,” said Mrs. Romilly, a most reasonable remark. She did not know that Adrian cherished a secret hope to anchor out all night again in Salterne river, whereas Peterock was not the kind of harbour for such pleasures. It was not a harbour at all, in fact, but a lovely watering-place with a pier; within the pier was a makeshift mooring-ground, choked up with various craft. No born sailor would go to Peterock for enjoyment. However, these matters were not within Mrs. Romilly’s knowledge, and Peterock would do quite well for hair-cutting.

On finding the start was not immediate Mrs. Romilly made out a list of commissions, and Christobel was too busy hearing about these things to have any more time for the mystery. When she and Pamela went off there was a

serene atmosphere.

"Doesn't the dinghy look clean," exclaimed Pamela in warm admiration. "Addie, you've scrubbed the whole thing. She's lovely!"

Adrian, who was rowing, looked at his sister quickly. The sincerity of her face was unquestionable.

Thus the mystery grew, but Adrian was not ruffled as he had been in the morning. Then, Crow had him at a disadvantage; he could not prove anything; he was forced to feel even foolish in the face of the evidence Christobel brought about the peaceful slumber of the supposed culprits. Now it was different. He was justified by his startling discoveries, and good temper was the result.

Christobel looked round as they boarded the yawl, but saw no signs of disorder. All was neat as usual. She and Pamela packed the food into the pantry shelf and set about helping to get the sails up.

Poor Pam was very happy. She felt freer than she had done for a long time. Nothing could happen out here. The sea was glorious, and Crow was always the same to her; nothing could come between them, she thought.

The breeze was off shore–what is called a "soldier's wind", which means that it serves without tacking. The tide was strong, the sea, with such a breeze, of course was smooth; it was all as perfect as possible.

"The Floweret could have come to-day without being sick," said Pamela, gazing over the shimmering waste with half-shut eyes; "what a pity Midget is left behind."

"He looked rather tired," said Crow from her place at the tiller.

"Did he; I wonder why. He slept sound enough; he never woke till Keziah called him, and then he went to sleep again," said Pam.

Christobel smiled. This was exactly what she had felt sure of, and there was no effort at all in her sister's way of speaking.

The start was excellent, the sailing was perfect; "dull care" seemed to have been left behind in Bell Bay–but one never knows!

Lunch being planned for rather an early hour, the two girls went down to get things in order about twelve o'clock. Adrian took the tiller, and, steering with his eyes half shut, whistled softly to himself. Christobel began setting the swing table in the saloon–the plan was to lay-to upon the wind and have a proper lunch, as there was time; Peterock cliffs were already in sight, and they would be moving towards their destination all the while on the drift of the tide.

Pamela went through to light the stove–hot water would be wanted for washing up, which was never left indefinitely. She had just put the kettle on when she heard Christobel say something, and called out.

"What's that, Crow?"

"How *funny*!"

”What’s funny?” Pamela set a saucepan close to the kettle–with a view to egg-boiling–and then swooped through the low door full of curiosity. ”What’s funny?” she asked again.

Crow was sitting on the bunk seat which was generally called hers, holding something in her hand–a handkerchief. Not one of Adrian’s ”tablecloths”, nor one of the girls’ strong linen hem-stitched articles with the name letter in the corner. It was small and fine and lace-edged. Crow began turning it round slowly through her fingers, looking for some mark.

A spasm passed through Pam’s mind. She was beginning to be accustomed to that sudden sick shock, that meant ”danger ahead”, but it was none the less unpleasant.

Christobel came to a corner, and stayed.

”Goodness!” she murmured. ”I *say*, Pam, look here!”

Pamela had no need to ”look here”, she guessed.

”How *extraordinary*!” went on Crow with emphasis; ”the same letters that were on the safety-pin brooch–and a tiny little coronet. It’s awfully pretty, but–who on earth!”

She looked up at Pamela; their eyes met, and Christobel was acutely conscious that Pam knew something. She flushed scarlet; then the colour fled and left her very pale; her clear eyes shifted from Crow’s gaze, and in their depths was an uneasy, deprecating shadow.

”Do you know anything about this?” asked Christobel.

”About the handkerchief, no. Oh no, I don’t. How *could* it come here?”

It was perfectly true that she had no idea how the handkerchief came there, but it was not the sort of truth that was natural to Pamela Romilly, and as she said the horrid words she felt sick with herself. In a lightning moment she resolved to go to the Countess and tell her that she intended to state the whole position to Christobel–she would do it; she would warn the girl and have it all above-board.

Silence fell like a stone between the sisters. Christobel realized that Pamela *had* some secret; Pamela saw that she did.

Slowly the elder girl folded up the handkerchief and put it in her skirt pocket.

”What shall you do–about it?” asked Pamela nervously.

”I shall give it to Mother, I suppose. When one considers that the letters and the coronet are the same–well—-”

Her tone was cold–she was hurt because Pam would not speak.

A sudden strange inspiration came to Pamela in that desperate moment. Desperate, because Crow had backed her up and fought her battle right through–she could not bear this last misunderstanding.

”Crow,” she said, leaning forward; her voice shook a little, and her eyes

looked suspiciously limpid–"Crow–do you mind my saying something–about it?"

"Why should I?"

"Don't say anything to Mother, yet. Take it to Miss Anne."

"*Miss Anne*–Little Pilgrim?" Christobel checked her work, and gazed back startled. "Why?"

"I can't tell you why–but do. I am sure it would be the best thing to do."

The elder girl considered this, not with much sympathy it seemed; then she said:

"Oh well, perhaps. I don't know. Anyway, we may as well put lunch; Addie is awfully hungry."

So it passed, with a very heavy cloud left behind to darken the clear holiday sky!

Lunch was eaten and greatly enjoyed by Adrian. The two girls using a self-control such as only girls know how to call up when necessary, Addie saw no difference in either–but they saw it–in each other.

Then came the arrival at Peterock, the smart picking up of moorings, the convenient man doing nothing in a large clinker-built boat close by, with a pipe between his teeth, willing for a consideration to "oblige" and give advice.

Then the three went ashore with the afternoon before them, and to make it all more complete they decided to have tea at a gay and joyous tea-shop on the biggest esplanade, and start for home about five-thirty or six; even so with such a wind and the splendid flow-tide they would have ample time. Adrian had his hair cut, while the girls–more or less constrained–looked into shop windows. When they met again Christobel said she did not like the idea of waiting so long in the town, "suppose the wind dropped"–it was lighter. Adrian was disappointed, but he realized that they were not allowing themselves much time for possible accidents.

"Let's get off at four–about–and have tea on board," said Crow. As a matter of fact the "snap" in the day had gone out for her since that odd conversation with Pamela.

"*Tell* you what we'll do," cried Adrian suddenly, as a new move occurred. He loved new moves. "We'll get off about four; we'll sail down to the cove this side Bell Ridge–you know Champles Creek. We'll drop anchor there and have tea on shore. We shall be home then practically, as we've only got Bell Ridge between us and the bay, and can walk over if the worst comes to the worst."

"Why should there be any 'worst'?" asked Crow, not quite convinced.

"No reason, but one ought to have a bolt hole–always. All wild animals do, and their instincts are–hullo, there's old Timothy Batt–Peterock day, I suppose."

Timothy Batt's "van" was drawn up at the curb, bulging with parcels of

all shapes. He sat under the canvas hood, while people in shops came out and handed him more things. He was very well known.

As the Romilly trio came up he leaned out and made a gesture of summons to Pamela, who stepped forward to meet it.

Timothy explained that her bicycle was ready, "if so be" as she would be content to risk a probable collapse of the tyre at an early date.

"Them at the works," explained Mr. Batt, "can't make no job of it. A new tyre is what 'e wants–they don't take no 'sponsibilities."

"They've been such an age over it already," said Pamela, annoyed, "weeks–I must ask about the tyre–I wish I'd known, Timothy."

"Well, missie, 'twasn't for want o' me tellin' of you. 'Tis a matter of two weeks or more–us coming up along Folly Ho Road–pretty near dark it were, and that I marked because I says to the missus 'twas a lone place for you that hour. I called out, and stopped be roadside right enough to told you what they says down works. 'Thank 'e', says you–nobbut that, and on you goes. Bein' as I was home goin' and I didn't stop. There 'twas—-"

"Oh," said Pamela uncertainly. "Oh, I see—-" She moved on a step, then she turned back to the cart and told Timothy she would write to the works, "or Mother would".

Timothy Batt informed the missus that evening that "Miss Pamela looked 'pined'," and "she'd a lost way with her–happen she's growed too tall to be hearty," said the carrier.

Pamela certainly felt both "pined" and "lost" as she walked on with the others. She had no doubt whatever that this was another case of her "double", and glancing sideways at Adrian, as he walked along balancing neatly on the curb, saw the look on his face that she had begun to know now. Crow remained perfectly stolid, changing the subject at once to something far removed from bicycles and Timothy Batt.

In old days, both would have said to her at once, "What were you doing on the Folly Ho Road at that time?" Now, nobody spoke, and to poor Pamela it was a sort of brand proclaiming her outlawed from the family confidence.

On the top of the handkerchief affair it was rather shattering, and she felt a lump rise in her throat. However, she called up her resolution to hearten herself, swallowed the pain, and tried to take it all philosophically. After all, it would be explained presently, and in the meantime she was doing what she thought right by the girl who had asked for her silence.

Sails do not always turn out "according to plan", but this one did–as far as getting to the creek below Champles Farm was concerned. It was the loveliest place, though hardly worthy to be called a creek when it came to an anchorage. On such a day, with an off-shore wind, the place was perfection. And once more

the spirits of the three recovered the usual level. Adrian dropped the anchor, and the white yawl lay on the smooth sea exactly like "a painted ship upon a painted ocean", while her crew went ashore.

A stream came down through a glorious cleft in the rugged height. There were trees and ferns, the former a bit stunted from sea-wind; but Bell Ridge was a barrier on one side, and on the other, the coast-line trending outward made a shield.

Two thermos flasks and a weighty basket went ashore with the crew in the dinghy. It was some while after five then; but, as Adrian said the tide would be in their favour till half-past nine, the feeling of ease was delightful. No hurry. No bother about wind or tide. Home was just round the point by sea, and perhaps a mile by land, as the crow flies. More, of course, if climbing is allowed for.

Soon after six Adrian said he should bathe. Crow unearthed a magazine, and Pamela said she would climb to the top and look at the view.

Everybody agreed that it "was all right", and became absorbed in their different occupations. Time passed so swiftly that it had presently reached the hour of half-past seven. Then Adrian, who had become busy on the yawl in some unexpected direction, came ashore and said it was time to be lifting anchor.

Christobel shut the magazine, wishing next month was due to-morrow, and gazed at him with vague eyes.

"Wake up, old lady; we ought to be getting back. Where's that idiot Pam?"

"Oh, isn't she on the shore?" said Christobel, stretching. "How heavenly it looks!"

"Yes, I know, but it's about eight o'clock–or soon will be. We'd better get things on board; I can come and take her off."

"Whistle–call," suggested Crow, getting up from her fern seat.

Adrian did his best, which was something to be proud of, in the noise line. Christobel had to tell him to stop; she said the lighthouse at Ramsworthy would send the boat up, thinking it was a ship in distress. They both stood on the edge of the rippled sea, looking up at the cliff and the wooded gully that cut it from top to the rocky base.

"*There*!" exclaimed Crow.

"Pam–e–la, *hullo–o*!" Adrian's strong voice woke echoes that called and called again.

Clear of the bushes, on the summit stood the person they wanted, looking down at them apparently, but never a word said she, nor did she make sign or gesture. She just stared.

Christobel waved her handkerchief, waved her hat, joined in Adrian's shout:

"Go–*ing*!"

Anyone could have heard much farther off than the cliff top. True, it was high, but the scene was so still, the waves but a ripple, and the wind a breath.

"She's mad," announced Adrian; "she's raving, Crow. I told you she was. If she isn't coming, why can't she answer? I must say this positively passes–well, never mind–get in–we'll go. If she comes down I'll fetch her off, but I shall certainly tell her what I think. Otherwise she can walk home."

"I don't understand," said Crow.

"Of course you don't. People are not expected to understand lunatics." Adrian said that and a few more things more pointed than flattering on the way out to the yawl.

Meanwhile Pamela sat down on the edge of the cliff and watched them with apparent interest.

By that time the light was beginning to turn into shadow.

"I suppose it couldn't be anyone else!" ventured Christobel, twisting round in the stern seat to look up at the motionless watcher.

"Anyone else! My good girl, ask your own senses! Look at her hair! Look at everything! Besides, where is Pamela? Didn't we see her go up to that very place?"

"Addie, don't you think I'd better go back, and up to her and see if anything is wrong?"

"How could there be anything wrong? She looks perfectly healthy–there, she's going away. Well, of all the blazing bits of cheek—-"

It was true. Pamela got up, stood clear against a bit of bare ground so that they saw her figure distinctly; then she turned and walked away, disappearing on the instant from view.

Adrian gave a snort–it was nothing less–and boarded the yawl in silence.

The voyage home from the creek and the finish up took perhaps half an hour. Adrian left nothing to chance that night: he locked the companion door, he fastened the fore-hatch.

"You'll have to put up with stinks, Crow," he said bitterly, being most horribly cross; "with the whole of Bell Bay one seething mass of lunatics one has to take precautions."

Crow said nothing. She saw it must be so, also she was very much puzzled; there was the handkerchief of course, in addition, from her point of view; Addie knew nothing about that. However, amazements were not yet a thing of the past. When they two got in supper was just beginning–everybody was collected round a cosy, well-filled table, everybody, and–Pamela, who was cutting bread. She looked hot and rather tired.

"We're just about equal," she said. "I was so sorry to be late."

"*Late*!" came from the two elders in voices of amazed indignation.

”You were just off. I never saw anything so lovely as *Messenger*, just leaning over, and spinning along, with the dinghy streaming behind. It was no good then, of course, so I just went back through the gorse ridge and came down the usual way.”

”Do you mean to say we were sailing when you first saw us, Pam?” said Christobel, in a shocked voice.

”Sailing, yes–streaking along awfully fast. Have some bread, Addie?”

”But, my dear girl, we were on the shore when we first saw you,” persisted Christobel. ”We called and shouted till we were afraid of attracting public attention and being had up for nuisances.”

”Did you see Pam then, dear?” asked Mrs. Romilly.

”*See* her, of course, Mummy, but she wouldn’t answer. We called–we waved–we were on shore waiting by the dinghy, wondering why on earth she was so late. Then we saw her come to the cliff edge and look down at us. Addie made an awful noise, but she never answered. She just seemed to be staring straight at us. At last we couldn’t wait any longer and we put off to the yawl. She watched us reach the yawl and then she turned away and went off. That’s what *we* saw.”

”How *very* odd,” said Mrs. Romilly uncertainly. ”Tell them just what happened to you, darling.”

”I went up the cliff to the top,” Pamela answered, speaking rather quickly, ”then I thought I’d just go to Champles and fetch a few eggs, as it was easy to carry them by the boat. And coming away from Champles I went round above the church, because it was so lovely–and there was a most awful bother going on–Crow, you know where Mr. Badger has all those sheep penned, and the field where the mare and the foal are in with those calves. Well, *all* the sheep were out–hundreds–the whole place was covered, the mare had got into the cornfield where the young corn is just coming up green–and the calves had gone. I started to get the mare out, it took ages; then I saw the calves had gone into the field that’s nearly hay. It was particularly trying for Mr. Badger, because I knew he would be at Salterne market to-day and not back. Everyone else was gone home, of course. I got the mare back, and the calves, and some of the sheep. It took ages and ages; when I got to the cliff edge there was *Messenger* sailing away. Certainly I didn’t blame Addie for a second. I only went to look on the off-chance of her being still in the creek–it was very late.”

Adrian made no remark from first to last. He hardly appeared to listen, but ate his supper in absorbed silence. Frankly, he did not believe a word of the story, but he did not know what to think. How his sister could dare to assert that they never saw her, and that the yawl was on her way home, was past understanding.

Mrs. Romilly had come to the conclusion–from Adrian’s manner and Pam’s

nervousness–that there had been some tiff on board, and the separation was due to disagreement. She changed the subject, and peace prevailed on the surface.

# CHAPTER XVIII

**Mr. Badger calls at Bell House; and Christobel at Fuchsia Cottage**

Hughie most tactfully refrained from saying one word to add to Pamela's weariness that night. It was plain she was very tired–plain to her mother, who, for that reason perhaps, was a little inclined to be biased against the elder pair.

It was not kind to leave the child alone at Champles Creek, when by their own story they had seen her and called to her.

"After all, one of you might have gone up to see what was the matter, darling," she said to Crow later.

"But, Mother, *she* says we'd started."

"I think she is saying it to shield you both; Pam is very generous," suggested Mrs. Romilly.

"I suppose you mean that either way *we* are wrong," answered Crow, a little wounded.

"Well, do you think it was quite kind to leave her all alone? After a long tiring day? But never mind–a night's rest will put it right, and certainly Pam bears no malice."

That was how the affair looked to Mrs. Romilly. Christobel said no more. She was a wise, kind girl–moreover, she was becoming aware of some strange mesh of misunderstanding that had entangled them all. Pamela had had to bear the brunt of that horrible brooch affair–now *she* was accused of this!

The handkerchief was in her possession still, of course, and, as she examined it that night, Pamela's odd suggestion came back to her with new force. At any rate Miss Anne would bring another mind and imagination to bear on these entanglements.

Hughie, then, waited till next day, when he conveyed a secret invitation to Pamela to meet him in "the cave" at a certain hour for important conversation. Pamela went, and, curled up happily behind the barricade with her long legs doubled up under her, she heard the story of the Countess' raid on the yawl and the way she had been circumvented.

"Now what did she want to do?" said Pamela thoughtfully, her head against the big trunk.

"*I* rather guess—-" said Hughie.

"What?"

"She wants to escape from Bell Bay. If I was her," he went on, clasping his ankles as he sat cross-legged–"if I was her, I should escape, but in a more sensible way, of course."

"I see, escape to Salterne. I wonder if she has any money," considered Pamela.

"Sure to–lots."

"I wonder," went on Pam, "if Addie found out things on board; he never said a word to me."

"Of course he did. The dinghy was all filthy mess, and there must have been a whole *field* on the yawl! *I* couldn't stop to clean up. There was that girl, and besides, I was so wet."

"Midget, you haven't caught cold, have you?" asked Pamela anxiously.

"No. I say, Pam–because Addie found out the mess was why you didn't go to Salterne, don't you see? It made things late–then you went to Peterock. I guessed that was it."

Pamela saw also, in an instant. Then she told Hughie about the handkerchief; he nodded gravely.

"Well, if Crow takes it to Miss Lasarge, perhaps *she'll* go and tell Sir Marmaduke. I wish they'd take that girl away–she spoils all our fun." Hughie sighed, then he remarked, "I told her it's no use her raiding the yawl any more–I said Addie would lock her up. I said I'd tell him to, but he'll do it jolly well without me telling."

Pamela remained deep in thought as she reviewed this situation.

"I wonder what that girl will do next," she said at last, and sighed.

"Well, *I* wish she'd put her head in a bag," remarked the Midget with quite unexpected coarseness; "she doesn't seem to be any use."

Now if anybody is thinking that the trouble at Champles Farm began and ended with poor Pamela's anxious efforts, "he is deceived by his own vanity", as Mrs. Jeep would have said. The day was not ended before that worthy woman sent in a message by Keziah to know whether she could speak to mistress for a few moments. Mrs. Romilly departed to the housekeeper's room, and presently left that comfortable sanctum more confused in mind than ever.

It appeared that Mrs. Jeep considered it her duty to mention what "they" were saying about Miss Pamela. It was "all over the village" that Miss Pamela had removed the hurdle and had caused Mr. Badger's sheep to wander like the Israelites in the desert: some having been found at Peterock, one been run over on

the main road to the station, and several still lost. That Miss Pamela had opened the gates at both ends of Spill land–the senseless name of the field in which the mare and the heifers were pastured–and let the animals out.

”They will have it as Badger’s mare is so bad with the colic that she won’t get over it. Green corn’s shocking food for a horse–well, serve her right, the greedy creature–but the heifers, five of them, have trampled the field he’d laid by for hay something cruel. I’m repeating what they say, ma’am–there may be an ounce of truth to a barrel of lies–we know how they talk. But anyway, it’s laid to Miss Pamela. In my opinion, that Badger’s trying to make a case for himself. He thinks he knows where the money lays! I don’t hold with that Badger, ma’am; never did, he’s too free with his gossip. What I say is, Miss Pamela knows the rights of a field just as well as them Badgers. She was never one for mischief–not from a child. It’s silly nonsense, that’s what it is, ma’am, but I thought I’d tell you in case that feller comes round making out a case for damage.”

Mrs. Jeep stayed, breathless; she had been fighting the family battles since the milk came from Paramore’s in the morning. It was the milkman that first brought the tale; followed shortly by the postman and the baker. Hennery Doe had ”known ove night”, he admitted, but, as he disapproved of gossip just as decidedly as of eight-hour days, the story had remained with him.

”Oh dear, oh *dear*,” said Mrs. Romilly, ”it really is too absurd. Poor little Pamela seems to be in the wars all round. What is the matter? Why are people so hopelessly idiotic?”

Mrs. Jeep sympathized respectfully. She intended to uphold the family whatever turn the matter took, though in her secret heart she thought it not an impossible contingency that Pamela might have left a gate open.

”Unluckily she was there–in the evening,” allowed Mrs. Romilly; ”if only I could say she was at home!”

There it was.

Mr. Badger first of all wrote a letter to Mrs. Romilly. This he followed up by a visit, next morning, and poor Pamela was sent for to the library. She was pale and worried; there was an anxious look in her grey-blue eyes, for the situation was so entirely new to all her experiences that she felt like a convict.

Mrs. Romilly said:

”Pam dear, tell Mr. Badger what you saw, and what you did.”

Pamela told, in rather a breathless way, and one strong point in her favour was her visit to Champles to fetch the eggs that were always welcome at the Bell House. Mr. Badger admitted that she had reached Champles before seven o’clock–about a quarter to seven in fact. Badger’s contention seemed to be that she had opened the gates before that–soon after six, because witnesses had seen sheep wandering at half-past six.

"I didn't go that way, Mr. Badger," said Pamela with decision; "I began to climb up from the creek somewhere about six, and went straight to Champles. I came *back* round the farm and the field where the mare was. No one was about, and I tried for an hour to get the animals home–the mare couldn't have eaten a great deal; I got her out, but the calves wouldn't go."

"I dunno," said Mr. Badger, with a twinkling eye fixed on the cornice–*one* on the cornice, that is, *one* on Mrs. Romilly–"I dunno as I can save that mare; she's a turrable loss. If she dies the foal's sure to foller; he's full young. As for the hay, an' them sheep—-"

Mr. Badger believed he had a strong case. He said he could bring witnesses to swear that they saw Pamela about six o'clock going through the Spill land. The witnesses were vague rumour, really, but supposed to be people walking out from Peterock to Bell Ridge and back–these people "had passed a remark" on the subject when the sheep were all over the roads, and remembered a young lady in blue with a long tail of hair, walking in the direction of Peterock.

"How could *I* be going to Peterock, Mother? You *do* see how improbable it is, don't you?"

Mrs. Romilly was firmer than Mr. Badger had hoped. He had planned a "walk over", and pictured himself returning home with a cheque for at least twenty pounds in his pocket! The fact is that Mrs. Romilly was so convinced of Pamela's truth herself that she refused to be shaken.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Badger," she said; "at the same time, if, as you allow, people were walking out from Peterock to the ridge and back why should not one of them have left your gate insecure? Strangers are careless, we know. As for the young lady in blue with long hair whom they say they saw on the spot–the story is not convincing. They had heard the description of my daughter, and are shielding themselves behind it. I don't think we need say any more."

Mr. Badger went, dismissed icily by Keziah, who upheld the honour of the Bell House as first lieutenant to Mrs. Jeep; at the same time she remarked, in privacy:

"I've no opinion of Badger, Mrs. Jeep, as you know, but it takes some explaining to see why ever Mr. Adrian and Miss Pamela tell such different tales. Mr. Adrian's ever so gruff, won't hardly speak to Miss Pamela, nor Miss Christobel neither, so far as I can see. He *is* put out."

Keziah spoke truly, for Christobel could get no opinion from her brother either way. He refused to discuss Badger, or his woes. When Christobel said it was all a story–a fairy tale of gossip–didn't he think so? Adrian said:

"My dear Crow, did we see Pamela, or did we not see Pamela! You know what we did, and you know what she did? Well, what's the good of talking."

It was conclusive enough to drive Crow into her own room and a consul-

tation with her own mind as to the best course. There was still that suggestion of Pam's about Miss Lasarge. Crow sat in her wicker armchair and gazed up the carriage drive, on which Adrian still declared he had seen the younger pair at four o'clock in the morning. Madness–of course, yet, what about that queer invasion of the yawl? The whole thing was delirium of improbabilities; the more Christobel thought about it, the simpler it seemed to go and ask Miss Anne for advice.

So, about four o'clock on the day of Mr. Badger's visit, Christobel announced she was going for a walk, and "made tracks" for Fuchsia Cottage. Miss Anne was at home; she usually was at that hour; and she received the girl with pleasure visible in every line of her small pale face.

"Now of course you'll have tea with me, Crow; do you know, I was just beginning to pity myself for being all alone, and so you've saved me from a contemptible state of mind. I'll tell Lizzie–and what about the lawn?"

Christobel said it was rather windy; she did not want tea out of doors, it was too public. That settled it, because Miss Lasarge understood.

Everything went as is usual until the middle of the meal, when outside subjects of conversation had been exhausted; then Crow said:

"Little Pilgrim, I'm come really to ask you to help us—-"

"*Us?*" questioned Miss Anne, undisturbed.

"Well, it affects us all, so I'd sooner say us. We are in a strange kind of morass–I don't know what to call it. We've never had such a horrible state of things in the family before; you know how happy we are?"

"I know," agreed Miss Anne; "and so something has happened to spoil it! Suppose you begin at the beginning and tell me. 'Trouble shared is trouble spared', isn't it?"

"I'm trying to remember when this trouble actually started," said Christobel, leaning her head back on the cushion, and gazing at the flowers on the table with unseeing eyes.

"It was about the time Mollie went. The first we knew of it was when Pam saved little Ensor. She said, and they said, that she did it alone–you remember. Adrian said it was impossible. Some days afterwards he went to look at the place, and he found a most lovely diamond brooch with two 'A's' for initials and a coronet over them—-"

Miss Anne stirred in her chair. Crow paused.

"Go on dear," said Miss Anne.

Crow went on, she told the whole story of the brooch, with scrupulous accuracy, adding one after the other the appearances of Pamela in places where she should not have been at such hours. She went on, without interruption, through the very strange story of Adrian's vision at four in the morning, and

the even stranger relation of the condition in which the yawl and the dinghy were found. Finally there was the discovery of the handkerchief on board the yawl, and *this* latest affair of the picnic at Champles Creek and Pamela's amazing behaviour, followed so quickly by Badger's accusation.

Crow was very deliberate; she did not forget the episode of Timothy Batt even, bringing the whole relation up to the present moment, as it were. Then she ceased to speak.

Miss Anne was leaning her cheek on her hand, and her elbow on the arm of the chair; she did not look at Christobel, but very intently out at the lawn and flowers.

"What do *you* think, Crow?" she presently asked. "Have you any interpretation of your own?"

Christobel shook her head rather despondently; then she said:

"Anyway, I'm absolutely sure Pamela hasn't done anything dishonourable. I don't understand what's happening, but I do know Pam, and I've sometimes thought she might be aiming at some–well–some rather cranky sort of noble deed—-" Crow flushed and looked at her companion in a deprecating manner. "She's simply wild about the Girl Guide business; she's only waiting till she gets to school to be one. She reads it up, and soaks it in, and she's awfully set on doing a good deed every day, and helping people whatever it costs. Don't you see how it might lead to–to things, perhaps? One can't tell how, exactly."

"She might be shielding somebody?" suggested Miss Lasarge.

"Yes; if there was anybody to shield. Besides," added Christobel in a more matter-of-fact tone, "a lot of it is sheer muddle–the Badger business, I mean, *that's* sinful nonsense."

Miss Anne laughed; the fierceness in Crow's way of saying "sinful nonsense" pleased her very much.

After that they talked it all over quietly, and the upshot was that one thing especially seemed to puzzle Miss Lasarge, namely the surprising vision Adrian saw at four o'clock in the morning.

"He could hardly have been mistaken in Hughie," she said.

"Or in Pam," added Crow.

To that Miss Anne made no reply.

When Christobel had taken her leave, greatly comforted, though nothing had happened so far to lift the burden, Miss Lasarge looked at the clock; it was half-past five. She hesitated, then made up her mind–and a very firm mind too–because though Miss Anne was small and pale she had a great soul in that small body, and she realized that she must help innocent folk who were suffering through no fault of their own.

She put on a grey cloak and little close bonnet with a grey veil, and slipped

across the road to Woodrising gates like a grey shadow. It was a cloudy day, and the very young new moon was "lying on her back", as country folk say, which is a sign of tiresome weather. Miss Anne, looking up, saw the silver sickle, pale and slim, for the first time.

Mrs. Trewby opened the gate, sighing; she was more bilious than usual by reason of Mrs. Chipman's company, and a large housekeeping allowance. Mrs. Chipman liked what she called "a good table", meaning, of course, the things on it, not the table. Therefore, in doing her best to keep Mrs. Chipman in countenance, Mrs. Trewby had upset herself for weeks, probably months. It was a pity, because it made her very unhappy and darkened her life.

"I wish to see the Countess, Mrs. Trewby," said Miss Anne.

"Well, miss, I dunno'—-"

"It's very important," continued Miss Anne, quietly passing inside; "I will answer to Sir Marmaduke."

When Miss Lasarge spoke in that voice she was always obeyed, and so she presently found herself within the hall, and Mrs. Chipman discussing the matter with many creakings of the tight bodice.

"I assure you, Miss Lasarge, that I have agitated in vain," cried Mrs. Chipman; "coercion has been attempted in vain; the temperament of the Countess is opposed to isolation, therefore—-"

"I am afraid we cannot discuss that, Mrs. Chipman; the point is that Sir Marmaduke left orders which must be carried out. Now, if you please, I wish to see the Countess."

Mrs. Chipman was for the time suppressed–like the guinea-pigs in *Alice in Wonderland*–she was rather like a guinea-pig when you come to think of it. She ushered Miss Lasarge into the drawing-room where Pamela had seen the Countess, but nobody was there, and Miss Anne detected in a moment that Mrs. Chipman really was not sure whether she could produce her very self-willed charge. It was a matter of luck!

In that moment they both saw the girl in question going swiftly across the lawn towards a shrubbery lower down. Miss Anne did not hesitate; she opened the window–which was of the "French" kind–passed out quickly, and called.

The girl stopped, and stood looking to see who had summoned her; saw Miss Lasarge and remained, hesitating. Had it been Mrs. Chipman she would have walked away, that was obvious.

Miss Anne went over the grass towards her.

"I want to have a little talk with you, Countess," she said, without the least asperity. "Won't you come back and entertain me?"

They came back together, into the drawing-room, and Miss Anne shut the window, because she preferred to keep the conversation private.

She did not find this task at all easy, chiefly because the girl's attitude–in every sense–was so antagonistic.

Sir Marmaduke Shard had given her and Major Fraser a sort of partnership as watch-dogs over this girl–chiefly because one was a first-class hospital nurse, and the other a doctor–yet they had no actual authority, only moral authority. He wanted someone on the spot to oversee Mrs. Chipman, and be ready supposing her charge should be ill. He fancied that he had arranged for every contingency in a most complete manner, but being a man as well as a great lawyer, he had of course missed entirely the main points–the practical points–with results already shown.

Miss Anne and Major Fraser both had a reason for helping; this came to light afterwards; but even so they would probably have declined all association with the business had they realized how perfectly untamable Sir Marmaduke's ward was going to be.

Things had come to a head, though, and Miss Lasarge felt herself on firm ground when she began to talk. She told the girl that she knew everything–including the brooch business and the wanderings over the countryside.

The Countess watched her shrewdly–to see how much she really did know–and quickly realized that nothing was said about the night visit to the yawl. Miss Anne did not mention it, because she could not make up her mind about that. How could little Hughie be connected with this girl in such an excursion? It was not possible to understand it, and the Countess decided she did not know, and triumphed.

She excused herself about the brooch, saying it was her own; she had dropped it on the cliffs.

"When you met Pamela Romilly?" suggested Miss Anne.

"Was there any wickedness in helping to carry the farm boy?" said the Countess.

"Of course not, my dear; but you should not have been out. You promised Sir Marmaduke in my hearing that you would keep to these grounds for the short time you are staying–you break your word, and, if I am not mistaken, you induced Pamela Romilly to keep your secret, and so have involved her in all sorts of grief and misunderstanding."

"She need not keep her promise," said the Countess, with a little smile.

"But she would, of course. And you knew she would, didn't you?"

The girl gave that little shrug with which she met objections she despised, and, as Miss Anne looked at her handsome face and her arrogant supercilious expression, she found herself wondering how, when, and where it would ever be

possible to teach this untaught soul a code of honour.

## CHAPTER XIX
### The Trick

Miss Anne's visit at Woodrising lasted nearly an hour, which annoyed the Countess extremely, but she made little way on the road she had hoped to gain. She tried to awaken some sympathy for Pamela, but the girl appeared to find amusement in Pam's trouble. Because she had been brave over the cliff affair, Miss Anne hoped she felt for little Reuben, but she was in no wise interested, the farm people were ”common”.

At the end of the hour Miss Lasarge realized that the chief hold she had was in the fact that the Countess was afraid of Sir Marmaduke–of anyone in power, perhaps. It was a weapon Miss Anne could not bear to use, but she had to protect her beloved children at the Bell House.

”Well,” she said, ”then I'll say good night, and you will be wiser, my child, if you do as Sir Marmaduke wishes. You are making a mistake in acting as you do. I am obliged to say that I shall tell him if it does not cease.”

The Countess looked down at the little grey person who presumed to interfere with her amusement. It did not occur to her that she could not shield herself behind a lie. It would be quite easy to tell Sir Marmaduke that the girl who ran about in the evenings was Pamela Romilly. He would believe her, of course. She recalled with satisfaction that Miss Ashington was sure she had been visited by Pamela. There was nothing–nothing to prove in any single instance that it had not been Pamela Romilly. Mrs. Chipman would be silent for her own sake.

As the little grey lady stood watching her face she read the thought. Perhaps the Countess did not try to conceal it; perhaps she was not so well practised in deceit as to hide it all–after all, fourteen years is not a long time. In either case Miss Anne saw it quite plainly, and she said:

”You might deny all sorts of things, but you would have to explain to Sir Marmaduke how you came to leave your handkerchief on his yacht–on Tuesday night. It is a thing that cannot be denied.”

The girl stiffened, and stood rigidly still.

Then she said suddenly.

”It is a lie–you invent it to frighten me.”

"No," answered Miss Anne, looking at her with the clear grey gaze that seemed the essence of truth, "it is quite true. My dear child, you know it is true. There is your initial, and the little coronet–quite unmistakable. Now good night again–be wise, and be good, and you will be happy too. I tell you frankly that *I* have your handkerchief, but I shall not use any evidence against you unless you make me."

Seldom in her life had the grey lady felt so much pain as when she left the Countess standing in the Woodrising drawing-room with that expression of fear and anger together on her pretty face. Miss Anne had been used to girls as friends always, and had started by treating this girl in the same way as others. The Countess on her part started by pretending friendliness, and cheated! That was the difficulty–kindness, in her eyes, was weakness.

Miss Lasarge went home, and on the way made up her mind to write to Sir Marmaduke if there was any further trouble, but she did not wish to bother him needlessly, because she knew he was very busy at work on a Government Commission. Also, it did seem rather absurd that several women could not keep one girl of fourteen within bounds.

Left alone, the Countess sat down with some force and cried furious tears. Then she took her hat off and threw it on the floor–flung her gloves one way and her shoes another. Then she rang the bell violently, ordered Mrs. Chipman to pick the things up–and marched upstairs in her stockings with high held chin.

She would not go out–to-night–or to-morrow–perhaps not for one or two more days, but *wait*. She had plenty of money; she would not be trammelled by these common people–after all what could they do to her? That was the point naturally–what they could do that mattered? She had been in England a long time. Quite long enough to understand that nobody would hurt her, whatever she did; but not long enough to appreciate kindness at its true value–which was sad, in many ways. Therefore she settled her own plan, in her own way, went to bed and slept soundly.

At the Bell House life assumed something of the old peace. Nothing happened in the Badger line–having cast his bolt, the wily master of Champles Farm was not quite certain what to do next.

Christobel smiled on Pamela, who in her turn summoned up courage to ask what she had done with that handkerchief.

"Gave it to the Little Pilgrim," said Crow.

"What did she say?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't she say one word? Didn't she know *anything*?" persisted poor Pam, disappointed.

"She looked at the initial, and I don't think she was surprised. I don't know

why, but my feeling said she wasn't surprised. I told her about the brooch and–and a few things I'd noticed," went on Crow, turning a little pink under her sister's anxious gaze. "She nodded, and listened–that was all; but one felt she'd do something–quietly, without fuss! I don't know why one should always expect her to, but one does."

Pamela was thinking: "She'll help. She *knows*—-"

Her face cleared a little.

"Pam," began Christobel with a sudden impulse to get nearer this isolated little sister, "I don't like asking if you don't–I mean if you've something private. But do you mind telling me if you went on the yawl that Tuesday night–before our sail?"

Pamela looked startled, hesitated a moment, and then said:

"No–I was never out of bed."

Christobel, seeing a disturbed look in her eyes, answered with a questioning:

"Truly, Pam?"

"On my honour, Crow. Honour bright! I was asleep, and I never knew anything about it. I didn't know things had been disarranged, till afterwards."

"But Hughie?" Christobel brought out the two words as half exclamation, half question.

"I'd rather you didn't ask me about anyone else, Crow," said Pam imploringly; "I can only tell you that you needn't think Midget naughty. He is absolutely *wonderful*. His pluck and his sense too. I don't believe there's a child to equal him in England! If you only—-" she checked herself, and added in rather a choky tone, "Least said soonest mended, I suppose! 'Wait till the clouds roll by', dear old thing; they will, some day."

The weather began to be tiresome just about now, never two days alike, never morning and afternoon alike. Probably the old saying about an intoxicated moon had something to do with it. The crew of the *Messenger* were not deterred, however; they sailed in fits and starts, gaining excellent experience of management and a lot of good exercise and salt air.

"Sooner them than me," said Keziah, shivering ostentatiously as she closed a rain-spattered casement with a bang. "Every man to his taste, but however anybody can look to a sailor's life—-"

"*I*'m going to be a sailor," said Hughie from a kneeling position before a chair, on the seat of which he was preparing a diminutive brush, and equally small pot of varnish for use upon "blocks" no bigger than young green peas. "It's as good as any other way of living, Keziah. If you're drowned you can't be smashed in a railway accident, or die of small-pox. Even soldiers have to be buried–we don't. It's much the tidiest way."

Keziah departed in haste with a "Go on, Master Hughie, tidy indeed!" and told Mrs. Jeep that "the sayings of that child were past all knowledge".

Hughie chuckled to himself, well aware he had shocked Keziah, and went upstairs to wash his hands for lunch. He was looking forward to an afternoon after his own heart–nasty weather out of doors, and peaceful hours in the cave, finishing "rigging".

Pamela was rather distraite at lunch. After days of peace and ordinary "old-fashioned" life, as she called things as they were, a little letter had reached her that morning, not by hand–not thrown in at the window–posted the day before in Bell Bay probably, postmark Ramsworthy, the nearest office.

It was from the Countess. Its tone was kind, was friendly, was even a little humble. She was very lonely and unhappy, she had no one to speak to, and would Pamela please meet her for only ten minutes in the wood behind Crown Hill next day? She suggested half-past five–allowing time for Pamela's tea, she said–and declared that she would go in any case, just in the hope of seeing Pamela. She asked if Pam would wait till six o'clock if no one appeared, because it wasn't always easy to get out. Finally she asserted that she had been very patient and very miserable for a long, long time–nearly two weeks–and it couldn't hurt anybody if Pamela came and talked to her for ten minutes.

There is small doubt, perhaps, that Pam should not have considered such a proposition. But it must be remembered that she knew nothing at all about Miss Anne's strict injunction, or the importance of the rules set for the Woodrising household.

It was true that the Countess had remained a quiet prisoner through nearly a fortnight of dreary, windy, gusty, sunless weather, and Pamela's soft heart was melted towards her. After all, she was only fourteen, there was such an odd bond in the likeness and the age. Again, no one had been told but Pam that her father was killed, and she had been bandied about from house to house like a portmanteau of clothes left behind. Pamela did not know who she was, but guessed her of considerable importance, not that that mattered in her eyes, but it accounted for things. Pam's theory was that somehow "Government was responsible", in which belief she was "very warm", as people say in hide-and-seek. That explained Sir Marmaduke, who was always on Commissions, and cloaked in official secrecy–and blindness.

Anyway it would not matter if she met the girl once; she would soon see if the Countess was "getting nicer", as Pamela said to herself. So she decided to go, and talk to her for ten minutes, also, to tell no one, as she was adjured in the letter; no one, not even Hughie.

From that moment dated a most amazing adventure, one that might easily have cost the lives of several people, including this weighty charge of the great

K.C.

Adrian and Christobel went out for a short sail as usual, came back, moored the yawl–she was safe enough on her strong holding ground–pulled up the dinghy, and appeared at tea saying the weather looked beastly.

There had been over a fortnight of this horrible broken-up outlook, and according to Adrian there might be a month. Long sails had been abandoned. The persistent pair got a run out and back most days, either morning or afternoon, for two hours at the outside just for experience and exercise, as has been said already. They had never once remained out to tea; hardly ever for lunch. It was not tempting enough. They came in, on this particular day, before four o'clock, having gone out at two.

"No good," said Adrian; "silly ass the weather is. I say, Crow, why not racquets in the garage after tea–there is no car as it's gone to be done up–we shan't hurt the walls. Ask Mother."

Mrs. Romilly agreed placidly; she preferred it to sails in ugly weather, even if the plaster came down!

Hughie retreated again to the cave.

Pamela disappeared by herself. That was just about ten minutes past five.

One hour later Pamela was still up in the wood beyond Crown Hill park. She had gone through the grounds, reached the copse about the time fixed, and waited, sitting on a fallen tree in the glade. The place was sheltered from wind and all sound but the far away murmur of surf on rocks. Pamela waited at first in a strained sort of way, rather nervous, and wondering how she and the Countess would get on together after their one and only meeting at Woodrising. Then, when the girl did not come, she guessed there must have been some obstacle, and stayed from minute to minute, because she pictured the Countess arriving breathless, having run all the way, and being dreadfully disappointed at finding the place empty and chance lost. Pamela strolled up and down and gazed through the leafy tree-tops at the drifting clouds. They seemed to be going surprisingly fast, and there was a lot of vapour about; the intoxicated moon was invisible, but where she might be was a tiny misty patch, and away low down in the west was a veiled eye with a ring round it.

Presently Pamela realized that it was after half-past six; she could not wait. She went along in the Woodrising direction for some little way; no one appeared. She turned back and went off on the homeward track, looking over her shoulder every few moments just to see if the Countess was arriving at the eleventh hour.

Out of the wood she came, through Crown Hill park, down the drive to the lodge, and reached the gate at the bottom of the slope on to the horn above the bay. The road turned sharply here, of course, almost dropping to the sea-wall and Bell House lawns, but on the rugged exposed bit of cliff was Mainsail Cottage,

Penberthy's domicile, which had once been the coast-guard station. Part of this was let to Major Fraser, who was at the moment away in London.

Mrs. Penberthy, a little vague woman rather like "Mrs. Jellaby", was standing behind the white low wall of the wind-blown garden, looking out to sea with hands shielding her eyes. She was alone; no doubt Penberthy was working overtime at Crown Hill as usual. As Pamela reached the corner, the elbow of the turn, she forgot Mrs. Penberthy's interest in the sea, and stood looking down puzzled–very puzzled indeed.

On the sea-wall terrace, leaning over, stood Mrs. Romilly, with a handkerchief tied over her blowing hair; beside her was Mrs. Jeep, stout and dignified in starched cap.

Down on the edge of the rocks was a group: Hughie, Miss Chance, and Keziah–all staring out to sea with hands shielding eyes from the drizzly gusts that blew into the bay, not with violence, but nastily. The evening had closed in surprisingly early for seven o'clock; it might almost have been nine. So far as Pamela could see, there was not a sail in sight, yet at moments she thought she saw something grey and ragged rise and fall, far out.

Then she started off running down the hill, and half-way was checked by a cry from her mother. Pamela stopped and stared–they were waving–all were waving and calling out! *Why*? She waved back, and went on running, noting as she got nearer and nearer what an extraordinary state of excitement seemed to prevail. She remembered also that Adrian, Crow, and the yawl were not there.

Somehow or other she had not seen that in the first surprise. Now that she did see it, it came as a shock–a shock with dismay. But even now she did not in the least realize what had happened.

She hurried to her mother, and was greeted with–"*Oh*, my little Pam!" and an almost passionate clasp of arms.

"Mummy darling, what *is* the matter? Why is everybody—-"

"I can*not* understand," Mrs. Romilly interrupted, urgently talking. "I am worried about the others, of course, but the yacht is nice and solid–one feels they are really all right–but who on earth? It's like witchcraft!"

"What is?" demanded Pamela, looking to Hughie, who had come up with Keziah, and was the only person not chattering.

"*You*, in the dinghy!" said Hughie, returning her inquiring gaze with eyes so full of meaning that gradually a dawning dread took possession of her mind. She turned to Mrs. Romilly.

"Mother, I never went in the dinghy."

"Dear child, I see now, of course, but we all thought you'd gone off in her."

"Gone off in her! At this time! In such beastly weather–why?"

"But, Pam, we saw you go!"

”Saw me go!” Pamela echoed the words almost stupidly.

”To be strictly accurate, dear, no one saw you put off,” said the Floweret; ”had we done so, of course, we should have interfered, realizing how very unsuitable all conditions are. But Keziah saw you rowing out of the bay in the dinghy, and came running down–she was turning down the beds in yours and Hughie’s room—-”

”You could have knocked me down with a *touch*, I was so taken up,” put in Keziah. ”I screeked out, ’It’s never Miss Pamela’, and off I went. Mr. Adrian’d come in by then, so I banged on his door and I said—-”

”Where *is* Addie?” put in Pamela anxiously.

”Darling, they are gone after you; you see–” said Mrs. Romilly, trying to smile in a scared sort of way–”the thing is, I don’t understand. They’ll be all right, of course. They were out after lunch to-day and came back to tea, as you know. The thing that startles me so is—-”

”But how did they get on to *Messenger* without a boat?” demanded Pamela. ”I beg your pardon, Mummy–how rude of me to cut in–but I really am so awfully surprised.”

”*Swam*,” announced Hughie, with a spring that landed him side-saddle on the top of the sea-wall; then he laughed.

Pamela looked from one to the other with wide eyes; then she suddenly remembered Hughie’s plan for catching the Countess.

”Who thought of it?” she asked quickly; ”was it you, Midget?”

”Well, you see,” explained that young person, ”when Addie came down and saw you right out there in the dinghy, he said, ’How in thunder am I to get to the yawl?’ and Crow said nothing at all, and I said ’*Swim*’. Then Addie thought and thought and said ’How’s that?’ to Crow, and Crow rushed up home to get a bathing-dress—-”

”Oh but, Mother,” cried Pamela in distress, ”what on earth can Crow do on the yawl with no dress–she hasn’t got any clothes on board.”

”No, but Addie has, dear. Crow will do all right. Addie has two sets of flannels on the yacht always, often more. Crow will have one set and Addie the other, and they’ve got the oilskins, you see. Really,” reasoned poor Mrs. Romilly, trying to pretend it was all very amusing–”really, it is quite an adventure–and an awfully good idea of Midget’s. I don’t think Addie would have thought of it himself, somehow. It is very–well–unusual.”

”Horribly cold and rough,” said Pamela, shivering as she looked at the grey water surging restlessly in the pretty bay.

”Rough water isn’t always cold,” said Mrs. Romilly; she was using every possible argument to make herself think this business was nothing.

Pamela asked how long ago the yawl had started, and was told that she

sailed about half an hour since. Of course the swim, the dressing, and the start had all taken time. When had they seen the boat leaving the cove? Nobody seemed very sure. All that was mazy. The excitement had been so great, and the fear about Pamela so acute, that time had not been counted or noticed. Probably it was somewhere about six o'clock when the retreating dinghy was first seen.

A feeling of intense indignation gripped Pamela body and soul. She had never been so angry in her sweet-tempered life.

It was vile, it was treacherous!

The Countess had written that perfidious letter to draw her safely away and out of sight. That was all–not one word of honesty in the pretended loneliness and friendly overture. Pamela saw through the move clearly, now it was too late.

The girl calculated that she could pass down through Bell Bay grounds to the cove, and reach the dinghy without interference–under the guise of her double–Pamela. If the servants saw her on the beach no one would trouble.

Pamela realized also that she had satisfied herself of the fact that the yawl went out for short runs and back–her chances of finding the dinghy, and no one about, on such a day was a hundred to one, therefore–and as for the one chance against her, had Adrian been on the yawl and the dinghy in use, she would have strolled off–pretending to be Pamela–and tried again another day, no doubt.

Having been baulked in her plan of hiding on the *Messenger*, she had stolen the dinghy. Ignorant of weather conditions outside, no doubt she thought she could get to Peterock–anywhere.

Time went on. Eight o'clock. Nine. Ten. Then Pamela begged her mother to send for Miss Anne. *She* would have to explain; perhaps it would take off Mrs. Romilly's mind from the agony of waiting for the yawl.

Nobody went to bed. Every hour the wind grew stiffer–it had backed down into the south-west and settled to blow–dark as pitch, with horribly squally gusts. Pamela remembered that awful night as long as she lived, and the grey dawn that followed–when the wind screamed in the chimneys, and spray blew up the valley.

## CHAPTER XX

**The "Messenger" to the Rescue**

When Christobel came back to the shore after getting ready for that strange swim, she felt as though she was in a dream and the events happening to some-

body else. To be starting out in such uncanny fashion when the day was closing in and night–very threatening night–begun, seemed too unnatural. She did not like the notion of sailing into that uneasy grey waste beyond the cliff gates of the cove, but apart from the discomfort she was hardly afraid. Both she and Adrian had become practised in the last two weeks of choppy sea and gusty breezes.

The predominating idea, though, was the madness of Pamela.

Both Crow and her mother were absolutely dazed by this amazing act on the part of the younger girl. Why? *Why*? What was the use and what was the sense? Could it be anything to do with Badger? She had seemed so happy during this fortnight past. At tea-time there was no appearance of worry.

"Well, Mummy–I'm not sure. She was very quiet and absent at tea."

"So she was–yes—-" Then Mrs. Romilly went over the whole ground again, tearing her own heart with doubts, dreads, and misgivings.

But the upshot of the whole thing seemed to be that Pamela was demented. No sane girl would go off at that hour, and in such a sea, rowing an open dinghy with small sculls.

The swim was nothing–rather jolly in fact. Adrian climbed up first and let down the short white steps for her.

"What's the tide doing?" asked Crow, and she stood a moment on the counter looking round.

"On the turn, I think; however, considering we don't know which way she's gone—-"

"No; but won't she be forced to go the way the tide goes?" suggested Crow from the companion-way.

"I suppose so. What raving insanity it all is! I can't see a glimpse of her anywhere. You see, we don't know how long a start she had."

"Keziah said—-"

"Oh, I know–but Keziah's an idiot. Did you ever know her tell you a thing accurately?"

It will be seen that Adrian was cross. He was, very. Expecting a wet night, he had housed the mainsail and the mizzen in their covers, and now all was to undo, and do over again. It really was maddening. Also he had made up his mind to tell Pamela his opinion when they found her. Having restrained his tongue on the Champles Creek event, he believed it was now time to let go.

When the two were ready, they looked very business-like and fit sailor-men. Crow in flannels and oilskins, with sou'-wester tied down, and steady grey eyes looking from beneath the peak of it, was a most alluring personality. Addie looked big and square, and very much in earnest.

The first question to answer was, how much sail should be allowed. They had gone out that day with one reef down; the weather demanded that. Adrian

now decreed two reefs down, foresail and storm jib, no mizzen. The jib had to be changed, and reefs taken down; they both worked, but it took a little time, as everyone knows who has done these nail-breaking jobs in the circumstances that usually attend them–namely, drizzly rain, salt spray, and wind in aggravating gusts.

"We shall have to have the lights," said Adrian, groaning.

"If only it were morning instead of seven in the evening," murmured Crow.

"My good girl, what *is* the use—-"

Crow laughed.

"No use, Addie, only for goodness' sake let's buck up. We've got to go and search the briny main, so we may as well be cheerful. By the way, I believe Mother is going to send a messenger somewhere, too."

"How do you mean *somewhere*?"

"Ramsworthy."

"No earthly use. What could they do? I believe there is an old crank—-"

"The lighthouse men have a boat, haven't they?"

"Daresay–yes, believe they have. But you're not going to get them out ploughing the coast vaguely. They *might* go to pick someone off a wreck they could see, or hear. Mum might just as well save her trouble. Too late to wire. No one to wire to! It's up to *us*, old lady; we've got the only thing that's any chance–a sound, fast, sailing boat. There, that's done."

It was the last reef.

Then the mainsail went up, jerking and rattling, looking absurdly small, and quite useless. Also the wrong shape.

"We shan't capsize, anyway," said Crow, inwardly pleased at the small amount of canvas showing.

"No, but we might be pooped."

"Waves aren't big enough, child."

"You *wait*!" Adrian gave a "hollow" laugh; he noticed it himself. "I've often wondered what a 'hollow laugh' was, in books," he said; "now I've done it myself! Next time I shan't jeer at the miserable chaps who do it when they are hanging by one finger-nail to a crag five thousand feet above a torrent."

"*They* don't," corrected Crow; "*they* set their teeth till their jaws look like granite rocks. The person who gives the 'hollow laugh' is the villain who lured them to the crag, and is peeping over just before he goes back to marry the best girl."

Both laughed, not a "hollow one".

"Right-o," said Adrian; "let's sing the 'Marseillaise', Crow, and run up the White Ensign–we've no earthly right, but no one will dispute with us just now. I'll batten the fore-hatch, then 'Westward ho, with a rumbillo–and it's—-'" Adrian

gave a shout that could be heard right up the valley and made Crow jump, ending with "'my mariners all–O—-'" in a fantastic falsetto.

Then he cast off the mooring-buoy.

Hand-waving from the shore and the sea-wall wished them success. The white yawl, lying down to her work in a steady-going fashion, looked very business-like–no frills at all, sheer labour.

Christobel was steering, while Adrian watched the sails; the red and green lights made rays on wave-tops sometimes, and then the situation took on an eerie kind of feeling, very dramatic.

"I feel as though we were doing a film play," said Crow; "one might, you know, but it would be desperately difficult."

So they talked, and the *Messenger* ploughed her way, out and out, making a long tack, really for want of a better idea. Christobel hoped they would presently see the dinghy. The tide appeared to be rising–that would be going towards Salterne–but the wind was strongly from the south-west; consequently this went some way to nullify the force of the tide, and a small light boat might be expected to be affected much by the wind.

"What would she do; row, or drift?" said Crow.

"To tell the honest truth, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if she had landed at Champles," answered Adrian.

"Could she?"

"Why not? The tide is rising, and wind on the shore. She's the sense to know that the creek is sheltered by the Bell cliff."

"But, Addie, *why* go out, and then go back to Champles?"

"Don't ask me any more riddles, my dear child. Why go at all? The point seems to be that, as the whole proceeding is insane, we've got to calculate with perfectly impossible proceedings."

After this they talked in low voices, sitting close together in the well. Reasonably sheltered, comfortable after a fashion, but anxious and strained; going out and out, and always watching. At least once every few minutes one or other of them thought they saw something dark–on a wave–in a hollow–against a creaming smother of foam; yet always it was nothing.

They heard the thump of engines on the wind coming from the thick distance, and thought they saw a long trail of black smoke blowing forwards, as a steamer went out west by north. Also they certainly saw an old barque, close hauled, jamming away into the heart of the dirt.

"Evidently tide is rising," reasoned Adrian. "That old thing wouldn't be going up if it wasn't; she's tacking. They always use tides, whatever the weather is. Ripping sailors those fellows are."

About an hour from then it was dark as possible; the wind was fairly hard,

and kept the rain off, of course. Christobel tried not to think of her mother. The point was to get Pamela, and the likelihood pointed to the swamping of the dinghy. It sickened Crow to remember how probable that was, and to hearten herself she called up the memory of the little boat on the day of the big thunderstorm–whether towed or free, she had *lived*, anyway–and was this sea any worse? Christobel thought it was about the same, "Much of a muchness," she murmured; and Adrian asked: "What's that you are saying?" Crow told him what she was thinking.

"Oh, *this* is worse," said Adrian decisively; "we've had ten days of ups and downs to ruffle it, and the wind you get in a thunderstorm isn't the same as a bad turn like this. Crow, I'll get the night-glass. We might see something." Christobel gripped his arm, and suggested a change of direction.

If they made a course towards Peterock, they would have a fair wind, strong–but a tough tide against them. That would keep them from getting too fast–to nowhere in particular. Keep them neutral, as it were.

Adrian liked the idea, also said he: "Please remember we've had nothing to eat, my dear girl. I'm hollow, dying of hunger."

"So am I," agreed Crow, "and our strength must be kept up, whatever happens. Addie, why not lie-to?"

Adrian laughed, because he knew this was always the end and aim of Crow's manoeuvres in bad weather, and especially at food-times. The comfort of being able to do things while your craft managed herself was indescribable.

"I'll have a look round first," he said.

He had got out the night-glass, to which he was not well accustomed, and the result of using it was that he felt sure he saw something to leeward–something dark and small showing up on the foam.

They let out the mainsail and jib, kept the yawl away, and ran off in the direction indicated. *Messenger* strained through the tossing water, dipping her bowsprit till the little jib was drenched.

It was fruitless. Whatever it was, it had gone. After that they went on again in pursuit of another delusion, and, by the time a third black patch had disappointed them, Crow believed there was something the matter with the glass. Perhaps there was. Anyway, these things were snares.

About that time they really were very hungry and tired. Neither would betray anxiety, and both spoke of Pamela and the dinghy with calm certainty, as though the latter was an ironclad. Christobel would not confess her real handicap, because Addie laughed at such things. It was sheer fright of the *depth* and *power* of the water in such circumstances. On fine, sunny days this is forgotten and enjoyment reigns, because you feel that you are not helpless–but when darkness is added, and tossing, hungry wave-crests go and come everlastingly under

gleams of red or green light, the dread is apt to grow and grow till it becomes overwhelming. The victim begins to feel about as small and utterly useless as a spent match, and imagination forces her to realize the acres and fathoms, the miles of green, awful depth, cold, heavy, and supremely terrible, that, shifting always, and always, lie below the coppered keel.

"I won't think about it," Crow was saying to herself, and went on thinking all the time; so, of course, the best thing was to get busy over commonplace things, and she requested Adrian to haul the foresail across and prepare to wait awhile.

Just about then the siren from the lighthouse began to shriek. The regular "hoots", short and long, came across the wild waste in husky screams–immensely distant, so it seemed, to the brother and sister. They had expected the winking light, but had not seen it, no doubt because of the thick dark, which could only be pierced for a certain radius. The wail of the siren made everything more fearsome, and the only way to revive drooping courage was with food and hot cocoa.

They went below, trying to forget the outside horrors in the warmth and glow of the little saloon.

Crow was on tenterhooks, dragged all ways by anxiety and thoughts of her mother, but she tried not to show it, though she realized that Adrian's manner had changed in the last hour. He was feeling the same–and would not show it.

Suddenly an impulse to rush on deck seized Christobel. A thrill of excitement ran through her veins; she set her cup down and listened.

"What's the matter?" asked Adrian, watching her.

"Didn't you hear a–wait a bit, Addie, I must—-" She was up and through the door with a swift run. Adrian followed, not understanding.

The blackness seemed to strike their eyes at the instant–blackness and grey shapes moving up and down–across and across–flashes of white foam and with that douches of cold spray.

Christobel was up on the counter holding to the mizzen, and trying to see; the stem of the yacht rose and fell in nasty pitches.

"Come down, Crow," called Adrian; "you'll slip!"

The answer was an excited cry from his sister:

"Addie, Addie, *quick*–the boathook! Get her, get her, don't let the boat go–it's *Pam*!"

Adrian saw–to leeward of the yawl–quite close, too, something dark rise on a wave from under the stern almost. Someone gave a call which was blown away by the wind, only a faint echo of it reaching them.

Christobel held on to the mizzen and shouted directions.

"Row, *row*, Pam–come up to the red light; we'll get you–don't be afraid."

Adrian hurled himself forward with the boathook, and dropped the steps

into the hooks.

The figure in the boat was pulling. They could see a white patch of face, and–the hair.

Two minutes, and they had got hold of her.

Christobel did not know what she was saying; she was sobbing–yet not crying–a perfect frenzy of joy in feeling, actually *feeling* Pamela's arm–not a dream, a solid flesh and blood arm–and dragging her up the steps. She was drenched and speechless, and clung to Crow's hands with a frantic clutch.

"Oh, Pam–darling old Pam–it's all right now–don't be afraid–it's all right–you're safe!"

Crow was saying all sorts of things while Adrian was dealing with the dinghy–as far as he could see there was water washing about in her, nothing dangerous, but enough to cover the floor boards. However, he could not stop to bale now, unless it was absolutely necessary. Pam was safe! His hands shook as he knotted the painter with sharp tugs. No getting away this time! No time to be lost! He thought of his mother's face when they left, of how she would look when they got back–and brought Pam! He choked as he realized that a miracle had happened, and God had sent the dinghy across their path in that wild waste of confusion.

Having secured the dinghy, he plunged down the cabin steps just to have one joyous moment of triumph with old Crow before starting on the voyage–well, back. As he entered, his sister turned round; the hanging lamp shone on her face, and he saw, looking at her first, a curious scared expression; not shocked–*amazed*!

On the bunk-seat by her side sat a girl–not Pamela! Adrian was conscious of her good looks in a second, but also that she looked terribly ill, quite ghastly.

There was a moment or two of tense silence–from words, when the pitching of the yawl seemed more violent, and the noises of rattling, bumping, dashing, splashing, and creaking–the scream of the wind, and the monotonous jar of *Messenger's* bows as she crashed down on each succeeding wave–appeared louder than ever before in the memory of the Romilly pair.

"I say," said Adrian, sitting down, "what's up? Excuse me, but who on earth are you?"

"Yes, who are you–where's Pamela?" Christobel backed up her brother once he had spoken, almost fiercely.

The girl looked from one to the other. At first hardily, then her lips quivered, and she stared at the table, blinking back tears.

"I wish I was dead," she said.

"Oh, is that what you came out for?" Adrian retorted, with something like exasperation. "Well, you jolly nearly were dead. As you say you wish to be, I

[image]

*"I WISH I WERE DEAD"*

suppose you wouldn't have minded, but you seem to forget that you've risked our lives too–let alone the fearful anxiety to my mother, and—-"

"Don't, Addie," urged Crow; "what's the good–we'll settle all that afterwards. The point is, where's Pam?" Then speaking directly to the girl she asked: "Where is Pamela, my sister?"

"Oh, quite safe–on land–in the Crown Hill wood, I expect."

"How do you know?" suspiciously.

"I asked her to meet me. To come at half-past five. I asked her particularly."

"Why?" asked Adrian.

There was silence; the girl looked sullen; her eyes seemed sunken almost, so deep were the shadows round them.

"Why?" demanded Adrian again. "What was your object? If you wanted to borrow our dinghy why didn't you come and ask for it–not that we should have let you have it this weather," he added *sotto voce*, in an Adrian-like aside.

"Don't ask any more till she's had something to eat and drink," said Crow. "Here, take off your coat; you're awfully wet."

She pulled the coat off with a firm hand. There, fastening the silk blouse in front, was the diamond safety-pin. The light made it glitter with a hundred tiny rays.

"*Addie*!" exclaimed Crow.

"Well, it is my own," said the girl.

"Just so. We are beginning to see light–at least *I* am," retorted Adrian stiffly. "You've been posing as my sister Pamela, haven't you? Was it you who went to Miss Ashington and asked for that brooch?"

"It is *mine*!" flamed the girl. "Cannot I have my own?"

Adrian shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't seem to see that there are two ways of getting one's own," he said, "a decent way–and, well–a rotten one. Did you by any chance happen to let out Badger's sheep and his horses, and come along to the cliff above Champles cove the other day?"

"How can I tell? Perhaps I did. I think you are rude and unkind," said the girl in an aggrieved voice.

"Great Scot!" ejaculated Adrian. "Well, of all the extraordinary females—-"

Christobel was putting food on the table while this curious conversation

took place. She now interrupted it by ordering this surprising visitor to eat, which she did, heartily and hungrily. Afterwards Crow ordained that she was to take off her skirt, shoes, and stockings, and they could be dried at the stove.

”You can roll up in a blanket,” she said, ”and stay where you are; you'll soon be warm all through down here. Adrian and I have got to get home now.”

”I don't want to go home,” said the girl, untying her shoes.

”Why not?”

”I am not happy. If I go back I shall be very uncomfortable.”

”It looks as though you thought of no one but yourself,” said Crow. ”I dare say you don't *mean* it, but it sounds so.”

The girl took off her shoe and felt the wet foot. Then she glanced up at Crow, and said with more strength in her voice–she was revived by the food:

”But, of course, I mean it. Everyone is the most important person in the world to himself. You *must* think of yourself first, of course.”

Christobel was so startled at this point of view that she said nothing at all. She was not very ready with words at a crisis. So she contented herself by helping this young person into the bunk, with cushions and blankets; then she left the saloon, closing the door all but an inch or two; as it slid in a groove this arrangement was easy enough.

Adrian was outside; she could hear him on deck, settling matters shipshape, stowing down all loose ends and gear that might get free. The ”tug of war” was coming; she knew that well enough; they had got to get home.

”Hullo, old lady,” said Adrian cheerfully, coming down beside her, ”we've got to get home now. It's a straight-forward job, anyway, no side issues! 'All is safely gathered in',” he laughed, so did Christobel.

”I wonder where we are–about,” she said.

”Oh, can't be far off. We shall soon know when we've had a shot or two,” declared Adrian easily.

The idea of ”taking shots” at a lee shore, mainly consisting of rocks, in pitch darkness, with a strong wind behind you, would no doubt have been new and interesting to most sailors.

## CHAPTER XXI

**Ladders of Light**

"Pay off, pay off," cried Adrian; "we'll run for it! The wind should be on our quarter, considering where it comes from; when we pick up the siren from Ramsworthy lighthouse–or better still, the light–we shall know how to get into Bell Bay."

Christobel suggested that the bay would be too rough. As it was not possible to see to pick up the mooring-buoy, she proposed Salterne. It would be safe and calm within the estuary.

"Oh, *rather*–of course," Adrian agreed warmly; he did not intend to tell his sister all he thought about their position, but he assumed the tiller.

Christobel protested eagerly.

"Truly, Addie, I'm not tired."

"All right, you're not, old lady; but we've got a stiffish time ahead, you know. We're going to take this in turns, so save yourself for your watch. Why don't you go in and take an easy now?"

But Crow refused. She preferred the frenzied turmoil and Addie's company, outside, to the warm ease within, and the neighbourhood of this strange girl.

Brother and sister sat shoulder to shoulder in the spray-wet darkness holding the tiller between them, for it took one man's strength at least to keep it steady.

The white yawl ran like a terrified deer pursued by hounds. With her wet sheets straining hard as steel, she tore through, and over, the black cauldron of leaping water. Wherever sea is, there must be a little lessening of darkness, for dim reflection comes from somewhere in the sky. It is only darkness made faintly visible, just enough to show up its terrors. Masses of torn cloud raced above them with a mad speed that dazzled; heavy sea thundered along below. Walls of dread closed them in, shut them down, tried to force them back, opened for them below. And there was no sight or sound of human company, no possibility of a human hand to cling to, no chance of a word of human sympathy. Christobel had had some experience, but, she owned to herself, never one like this–and she prayed that, if they came through it alive, she might never see it again. It was so *cruel*.

In "running free" as they were, the strain on vessel and steersman is greatest. The ship, whatever her rig, does not run without using every mite of her power to escape from the pressure to which she is held. Her natural motion is, of course, to sweep clean round, because of the weight on the mainsail, but the rudder holding her to a straight line is in the power of the helmsman, and with all that force will she rush ahead to get away, as it were, from the drive of it. In this headlong flight, too, the least variation of the tiller causes her to swoop in a terrifying way, while she leaves behind her a path of bubbling foam as white as the wake of a steamer.

Once Christobel began to speak about the girl asleep in the saloon; she thought it would distract them both from the dread monotony; also she was cu-

rious about her. But Adrian refused.

”Let’s cut her out, Crow,” he said. ”I think there isn’t an ounce of doubt that she’s a young Hun. How she comes to be here we shall know in time–but her manners and customs are–well–you know. It does not beseem me as a male Briton to abuse a female, even a Hun female, so, if you don’t mind, we’ll cut her out. One thing I’ll say, I’m taking off my hat to old Pam all the time. She had a rotten time over that brooch, and over Badger too–while–oh, never mind!”

”Let me tell you one thing, Addie,” urged Crow, ”then I’ll not say one word till we are home.” She told him about the handkerchief, letting in the light instantly upon the identity of the person who had raided *Messenger.*

Adrian nearly loosed the tiller in his excitement.

”Crow, don’t you see now *who* it was the Midget was escorting out of our grounds at four in the morning? Good old Midget! I *say*, Crow, that kid has been sharpening his wits on other folks’ business; he’s certainly coming along! Wonder why he didn’t speak.”

”Probably Pam told him not to–then he wouldn’t, and I expect *this* girl appealed to Pam to hold her tongue. You know what she is–Pam, I mean–at any time, and just now she’s full up with notions about helping all the world–the Girl Guides’ profession. She’d bear anything, of course,” so said Crow, understanding her sister.

”And this young person would let—-” Adrian checked the comment. ”Hold up, Crow, let’s talk about the weather! Jolly fine for the time of year, isn’t it? Who was it said ’We’ve been having a lot of weather lately?’ We are to-night, about a month of weather in twelve hours!”

So these two laughed and ”carried on” through the bleak storm, while the one who had caused it all lay sleeping soundly among her pillows.

After a bit they fell silent, just doing their work, they were tired, of course, and talking against the howlings of the night was exhausting work.

An hour passed; it seemed a whole night; it seemed as though the horror had been going on through endless ages. Crow stood up and stretched.

”I’m going to make you some cocoa,” she said.

”Right-o!” agreed Adrian cheerfully.

Presently she came back with a big cup and two stout bacon sandwiches, a thing Adrian greatly liked.

”Now I’ll fetch mine,” said Crow; and did so, planting herself firmly. ”Can you manage your cocoa without spilling?” she said.

”I’ve drunk it,” answered her brother promptly. ”Addie, it was boiling!”

”Well, it’s boiling still for all I know. Ever so much warmer in the region of the waistband! Sandwiches don’t spill, thank goodness. Awfully decent grub this, Crow.”

When all the ”grub” had gone the way of the boiling cocoa, the pair felt more conversational.

”We don’t seem to pick up the lighthouse, Addie,” said Crow tentatively.

Adrian agreed; he also said that by all his calculations they ought to have run bang on to Bell Bay beach about half an hour ago.

”We’ve nothing to steer by but the wind,” he allowed, ”and that may change. One never knows. What time is it, Crow?”

Christobel said it was after twelve o’clock.

”I wish we could hear that siren. But, Addie, we may be going the wrong way!”

”Probably are, my child. I tell you honestly I’m not sure of anything in the wind line–and I’m not sure whether we are going with the tide or against it–well, naturally, considering I don’t know where we are going. It’s about the rummest old stunt I ever played up to–quite a new experience, in polite language.”

”I wish day would come,” said Christobel. ”Addie, do you remember the thunderstorm?”

Adrian looked round to see what the dinghy was doing. Crow laughed; then she said in a warning voice:

”And you *quite* understand that if you even dared to get out and bale her, I’ll scream. I’ll begin, and not stop. It would be worse than the lighthouse siren.”

”I won’t bale her out now, but I think I ought to shorten the painter,” said Adrian thoughtfully; ”the thing will snap–just look at that.”

*That* was a lightning forward swoop of *Messenger* on the back of a wave, followed by a check as she met the force of a curling crest; the dinghy checked also–in the trough behind. Then as the yawl leaped again the tow-rope tightened with a jar that sent out a perfect Catherine wheel of dazzling spray.

”Here, just a moment,” said Adrian, surrendering the tiller to his sister; ”I’d better just give it a—-”

”Don’t–Addie, *don’t*!” cried Christobel, with a sudden sense of desperation–it was the breaking-point of nerves, only she did not realize it.

Adrian jumped up on the counter, and stooping above the rail got hold of the tow-rope. At that instant, a long black wave-head swept after them out of the dark, carrying the dinghy on its crest.

The little boat nearly came on board, striking hard with her sharp bows; there was a sudden lift of the counter as the wave roared under their keel; Adrian lurched, fell over and rolled. Christobel let go the tiller, sprang up with a shriek so piercing that she did not recognize her own voice, and flung her whole weight on Adrian’s legs. It steadied him for the instant, and getting his balance he flung an arm round the mizzen, and directly after righted himself.

But *Messenger* had got her head! With the tiller loose she was free.

There was one appalling moment when she drove broadside on, heeling over almost at right angles. The water poured along the leeward rail, and she was almost buried to the mast in seething foam. It streamed into the companion–down to the saloon–everywhere. The noise was perfectly indescribable, one riot of roar, rattle, and storm. Then the white yawl finished her mad dash for freedom and suddenly righted on a level keel, gasping, as it were, while other sounds were lost in the rush of water pouring away through the scuppers.

Christobel did nothing. She was shaking from head to foot and sobbing in a distracted manner. Adrian, utterly amazed, patted her back, the while he seized the kicking tiller.

"Hullo, old lady–what's up? Get a holt on it. Why–nothing's happened, only this beastly row."

"Oh, Addie–Addie–Addie!" choked poor Crow, "if you'd–gone. I thought–I thought—-"

"No harm done. Miss is as good as a mile any day," shouted Adrian cheerfully above the din. "I say, Crow, look! If it isn't Miss Hun, come to inquire after our health!"

The Countess had pushed open one door, and was standing on the step looking about–evidently she could see nothing, her eyes being dazzled by the lamp within.

"Everything is falling down," she said in her deliberate voice. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing at all," answered Adrian. "My sister and I are playing hockey to warm ourselves."

"That is an untruth. Do you suppose I should believe it?" retorted the girl.

"Not at all. Why should you?" Adrian's tone was the essence of courtesy.

"Why do you say so then?"

"Ah–there you have me, Miss A.," said Adrian, leaning his head back and looking at her from under the peak of the sou'wester.

"Don't, Addie," urged Crow, on the verge of a fit of giggles, though tears still stood on her lashes; "it's no use. She can't understand, poor thing." Then she went to the door and suggested to their visitor that she should stay inside. She told the girl it was very rough, very uncomfortable, and they did not know where they were.

The Countess saw this was the truth.

"But I'm not afraid," she said. "I can come out too."

"You'll get wet," warned Crow.

The Countess shrugged her shoulders.

"If we must drown," she said, "I prefer to see. Also I can swim. I learned in

the swimming baths at—-" she broke off. Crow guessed why. She was put into an odd mackintosh coat, and sat outside. Adrian did not want her at all; he hated it; also she was in the way if anything happened. However, she just asserted herself as she always did, and there she was.

Hours went by–hours of black monotony, in which the lost voyagers hardly realized that the wind was harder and the sea rougher. They ceased to talk, but every now and then Adrian and Crow changed places. Also they took hot cocoa at intervals, and "hoped for the day", like St. Paul and his wrecked companions; it was their only hope. The girl was no trouble. She seemed to have courage and endurance; she did not complain, and said "thank you" when they gave her cocoa. The only remark she made in several hours was that she "did not understand why people did all this dirty work for amusement". She said she liked a big yacht with plenty of servants, but a small one was "menial work".

Adrian agreed; then he looked sideways at Crow, who was close to him, with such an absurd face, that she nearly burst into giggles again.

It must have been three o'clock in the morning when they two became aware of a sound in the air, a sound that was not wind or waves–a steady pulsing sound, rapid and regular, growing also in distinctness.

Christobel and Adrian looked at each other; they tried to locate it, but the dark smother and eternal driving of the tireless wind baffled them. It was something that steamed, for the swift beat of the engines was now clearly defined–louder, louder, drumming against the howling gusts.

Adrian was steering, head up and listening keenly; Crow was seized with sudden panic–her imagination leaped to the thought of collision, of being run down there–helpless and unseen.

Adrian realized, and said "Lights are all right." She felt easier–they all listened, staring into the black confusion as well as the stinging spray would let them. The air was full of the throb.

Then, all in a moment, a towering black shape materialized from the darkness, and bore down upon them with the rush of a railway train–out of the night, without lights, without warning, it passed. To them, as the yawl wallowed in the wake of its seething track, there seemed to be inches only to spare! Of course there was very much more, but the nearness was rather staggering all the same.

The three on the little yacht saw the keen knife edge of the bows speed by with high fountains of water flung up either side the cutting line.

It was a moment of tense excitement. Adrian gave a suppressed shout.

"Oh, Crow, did you see her–the beauty! A destroyer! I say, how awfully *alive* they are–isn't one jolly proud of them?"

"It was rather a near thing, wasn't it?" murmured Christobel, holding on as the yawl leaped.

”Jolly well worth it, though. I’ve never seen a destroyer pass so close, on her ’lawful occasions’,” answered Adrian, quoting a certain well-known story; ”nothing can take that from one.”

The drumming faded away down wind, and the Romilly pair settled again to wait for the slow-coming dawn, when suddenly Adrian gave a whoop–a positive wild Indian screech.

”Oh, I say, Crow, look–look! Of all the crowning luck, this is—-”

Moving over the ”face of the waters”, over the black tossing waste, was a ladder of dazzling white light. It searched in miles, it searched in inches, like some living, busy, sensing creature. Christobel thought of the fingers of light in the ”Martians”, that hunted for the victims. It was thrilling. Dumb, dazed, they watched the brilliant feelers creeping over the water.

Crow hardly breathed; she was standing, just petrified.

Suddenly Adrian slammed his hand down on the tiller.

”*They’re looking for us*!” he cried. ”Great Scot! Of all the—-”

”Oh, but, Addie, how could they have—-”

”My good girl, do you suppose anything escapes the Navy? The look-outs saw our little bit of a blink; they want to know who we are–they know everything–they are simply *It*.”

Adrian’s rhapsody was cut off on his lips; the dazzling feeler had found them. It rested on the white yawl, and stayed. He waved his arm wildly; Crow waved both arms. The Countess sprang to her feet, shielding her face with her sleeve, and the white light glinted upon her golden hair plait.

Under the searching brilliance Adrian and Crow put *Messenger* up in the wind, and she lay-to–wet, ragged, battered, shaken, most disreputable, with her drenched mainsail, her flapping storm-jib no bigger than a towel, while the poor little dinghy reeled alongside drunkenly, the water washing over her floor boards.

Before her crew had recovered from this visitation a splendid boat, as long as *Messenger*, if not longer, swept up alongside with a precision that never even touched the fenders of the yawl, which Adrian had rushed to throw out. He said to his mother afterwards, in a perfect passion of admiration, ”The bo’sun just hooked on–no fuss–no bother–and *Messenger* jumping like a mad-horse.”

The boy in charge was perhaps a year older than Christobel. His fair face was beaming with satisfaction. He was enjoying himself to the full! With engaging courtesy he put the two girls in the stern sheets and held a short parley with Adrian, who refused to leave the yawl.

”You see, sir, I’m responsible–she’s Sir Marmaduke Shard’s *Messenger*, and he—-”

”Your brother sent me to fetch you off, and two of our men will take over the yawl,” explained the boy.

"My *brother*!"

"Mr. Romilly, yes. We are destroyer *Spite*, and the men will see the yawl safe into Bell Bay; they are instructed."

Orders flew, while Christobel gasped out "*Malcolm*" in a choked voice as Adrian came down beside her.

"There's any amount of grub on board," said Adrian hurriedly, "cocoa and coffee. Please tell your men to—-"

"Thanks very much, sir; they'll enjoy themselves." Mr. Rodney Vane passed on the information, and the big galley swept away, along the ladder of light, towards the waiting destroyer.

"I suppose," ventured Christobel, recovering speech, "that Bell Bay is close by."

"Not so very close, Miss Romilly," answered Mr. Vane. "You see, you're in the Bristol Channel. We saw your lights, of course, and couldn't make you out, as you weren't a fishing-boat, and were–ahem–flying the White Ensign."

Adrian became crimson.

"That was a rag, sir," he explained hastily. "You see, my sister and I went off at a moment's notice on a funny sort of mission; we didn't think anyone would see–we ran it up for a rag–and forgot it."

Mr. Vane noticed my "sister" in the singular. He wondered about the tall girl with a golden pigtail, but of course made no remark.

Malcolm, in all the state of authority and gold lace, received them at the gangway.

"Hullo, Crow, this is awfully decent. Hullo, Pam—-"

There was a moment's pause as he and the tall girl with arrogant eyes looked at each other.

"Come along down to my cabin," he said. "I expect you want to rest."

At the earliest possible moment Adrian and Crow explained the meaning of this eccentricity on their parts, also all they knew, so far, about the strange girl they had rescued in place of Pamela.

"Poor little Pam," said Malcolm. "That reminds me, I've got three days leave due, and I'm coming along to look up the Bell House. How's Mum?"

"She'll be all right when we get back," answered Crow sagely; "just this moment I expect she's not over bright."

In course of time the white yawl lay on her moorings in Bell Bay, none the worse for this wild adventure.

In the same course of time the galley put in against the rocks–which were used as a quay–under the charge of Mr. Hedderwick, the bo'sun, while the wanderers carried Mr. Vane and Malcolm off to the Bell House to see Mrs. Romilly. That was in the morning early; no one had been in bed, or wished to go; every-

body was pale and shadowy about the eyes, and poor Mrs. Romilly had to meet her two recovered children alone first, before she could see Mr. Vane, and admire the wonders of the galley. The sight of Malcolm was the finest tonic of all.

Miss Lasarge was there. She had been there all night with Mrs. Romilly, and during that time had told her the story of the Countess–all she knew–no one knew everything but Sir Marmaduke.

White-faced Pam was hugged by Crow and even by Adrian. All was understood–all was forgiven.

Hughie went down to the cove to take the pattern of the galley and make friends with Mr. Hedderwick; when that resplendent person asked him if he was coming in Our Service, Hughie answered: "Of course, sir," and won Mr. Hedderwick's heart once and for all.

That evening, very late, Sir Marmaduke arrived from London. A wire, sent from Salterne very early in the morning of despair, brought him away on the instant. He came first to the Bell House, and talked to Mrs. Romilly and Miss Anne.

It was not his profession, or his nature, to cast aside reserve and tell secrets. Besides, it was Government business, and he was only an agent. However, the ladies understood that Pamela's double was a German, not only of good birth, but actually related to the Hohenzollern family. Her father was a brave soldier, and a gentleman, and had met his death early in the battle of the Marne.

He died in a British hospital, as it happened the one in which Miss Lesarge and Major Fraser were working. In this way they saw at least one German gentleman, and for that reason were ready to befriend his child when the need arose.

Her mother was very much a Prussian, and supposed to be in hiding owing to the revolution–she was not a popular lady. The girl had been at school in England, because her father wished it, then the War came. She was shifted from one German family to another. When trouble and internment came she was moved. Being a young person of importance, she became a perfect white elephant to the powers that be, and was finally handed over to the wardship of Sir Marmaduke Shard, who thought that he had solved the riddle when he sent her to Woodrising in the charge of Lady Shard's old servant.

It was manifestly impossible to let her go about or to let her identity be known; the country people would have been furious. Until she could be sent back to her own people, she must be put in some quiet place.

The result of Sir Marmaduke's clever plan has been told in this story. He took the Countess and Mrs. Chipman away with him next day. Woodrising knew them no more, and Mrs. Trewby became less bilious, but no one was told what happened to the Countess, even Lady Shard never knew, and as for Auntie A., she had forgotten about the matter. Charles had a fit, and when he recovered

she had a plan for making hens all lay their eggs at the same hour every day, being of course an immense saving of labour for everyone. Mrs. Ensor had ”no opinion” of it; she was extra busy, as Reuben was just beginning to walk again on his mended ankle.

When this strange hurricane cloud passed, it left the sky of the Bell House family blue and clear again. Peace came back, and the days were the same as before that stormy petrel disturbed life.

Pamela returned joyously to the study of Girl Guide rules, but admitted that it is perhaps as well to be careful about the nature and extent of your ”good turns”.

She often wondered about the ”Countess”, and would immensely have liked to know her eight names, and what the double ”A” stood for. She never did. Mollie Shard knew nothing; she heard the story from the Romillys when she came down, and the only time she ever saw the Countess was that morning, very early, when she mistook her for Pamela.

So that is the story of Pam and the Countess, from first to last, with its grief, misunderstanding, and danger. Whether anything more will ever be known, or whether Pam will ever meet her ”double” again, of course no one can say. For the present, the story has ended happily.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PAM AND THE COUNTESS ***

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