

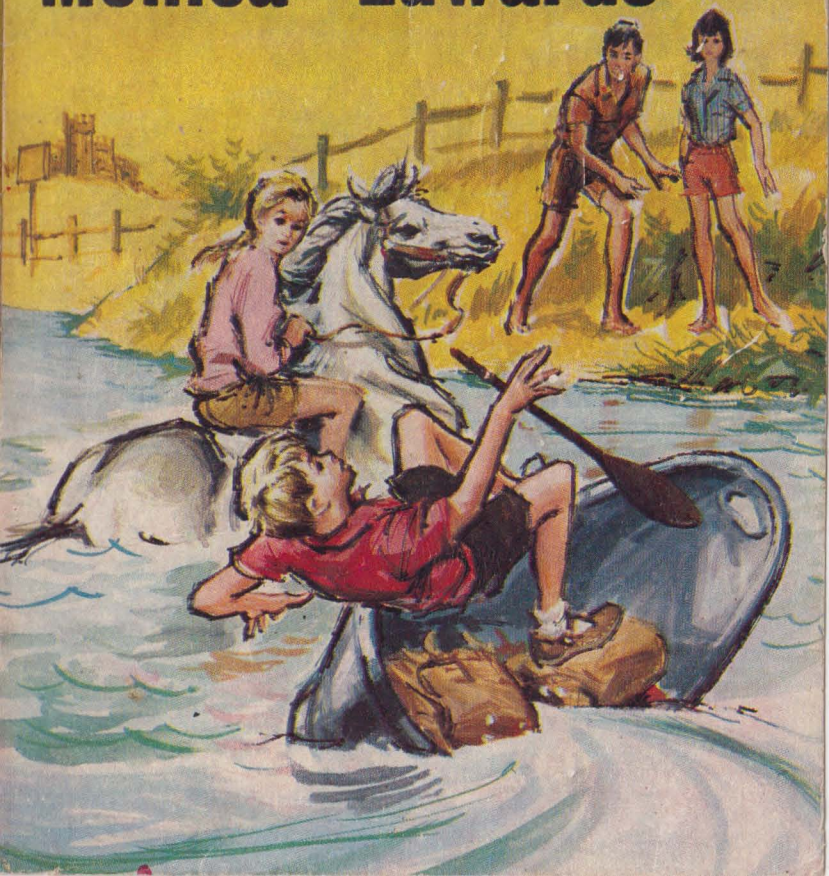


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ARMADA
PAPERBACKS for
Boys & Girls

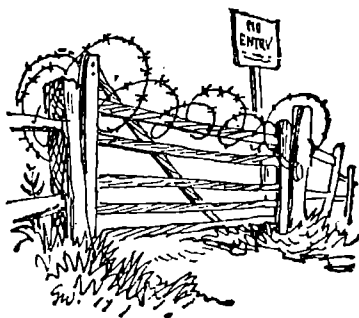
NO ENTRY

Monica Edwards



NO ENTRY

To
SHAUN



*BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR
ALSO IN ARMADA*

WISH FOR A PONY
PUNCHBOWL MIDNIGHT
THE NIGHTBIRD
SPIRIT OF PUNCHBOWL FARM
BLACK HUNTING WHIP
THE COWNAPPERS

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MONICA EDWARDS

No Entry

COVER ILLUSTRATION
BY PETER ARCHER;
TEXT ILLUSTRATIONS
BY GEOFFREY WHITTAM



ARMADA
PAPERBACKS
for Boys & Girls



"Right under, sir, head and all"

Germ of an Idea

"HURRICANE LANTERN," said Tamzin Grey, lying on her stomach on the attic floor and scribbling in a notebook. "Handkerchiefs, alarm clock, writing things—well we shall have to send a few letters home—oh, and matches, of course; fancy not thinking of them before."

Clarissa Birnie was squatting on her heels at the southward window, watching the fishing boats going down the river on the ebb tide. She said, "What about books? They never have any at Castle Farm, except *Black's Veterinary Dictionary*, and *The Sheep in Sickness and Health*."

"There's Mrs. Merrow's *Home Thoughts of a Homely Woman*," Tamzin grinned. Her pencil hovered, wrote the word *books*, hovered again, and then crossed out the *s*. "One book," she said. "They're so heavy, and take up such a lot of room; and somehow we never seem to have much time for reading at Castle Farm, even when it rains. There's always so much going on. And besides, if we all take one each, there'll be four between us."

"Postman coming down the drive," said Rissa, leaning on the window-sill. "I can't think how he can wear all that uniform on a hot September afternoon."

"Tin-opener," said Tamzin, "we shan't always want to cook."

Rissa said, "Have you put down everything for the ponies? Saddle-soap and their grooming tackle and everything?"

"No, but I shouldn't have forgotten those, anyway."

"It's just the obvious sort of things that people do forget," Rissa said. "Isn't that Diccon coming upstairs?"

There was a bang on the door, and Diccon came rushing in before anyone had time to answer. He was Tamzin's only brother, much younger than she was, being only just seven, but with the same honey-fair hair and grey eyes.

"Letter for you, Tamzin. I say, I've thought of a wonderful new game! Will you come out and play it with me?"

Shall I tell you how it goes? Well, you want four stumps and a ball——”

“I can’t listen while I’m reading my letter, tell me afterwards—oh, I say, this is too awful!”

“What is?” Rissa asked, turning from the window.

“Not a cricket-ball,” Diccon went on, “they’re too hard. A sorbo or a tennis-ball——”

“Be quiet, Dicky! Oh, this is the worst thing you can think of! Listen, Riss, it’s from Mrs. Merrow. She says:

Dear Tamzin,

Hoping you are all well at the vicarage, and the dear vicar not too tired after London, if it isn’t one thing it’s another as they say, but first we have to stop you coming because of our Mike and Joseph’s mumps, and now, believe it or not, I’m having to do it again.”

“Oh, Tamzin!”

“I know—she goes on:

It’s the foot-and-mouth disease. First in Pett, then Winklesea, and now, as you must know, in your own Westling. That’s all around us now, and our Dad with three hundred fine sheep out on the Castle grazings. He’s feeling proper old-fashioned about it I can tell you, so please don’t be too disappointed when I tell you he and Mike has fixed to put the farm into a siege, and no one won’t be allowed across the boundaries, in or out. Our Dad says it is the only hope. We shall all be very sorry not to have you here after all, but perhaps at the Christmas holidays instead, but in the house not camping then of course. Please tell Rissa and Roger and Meryon, as I’m in such a fluster as you wouldn’t believe, trying to think of everything we’ll need before the siege is on, I couldn’t write all this out three more times.

With much love, and hoping you understand.

Margery Merrow.”

Tamzin’s hand with the letter in it dropped abruptly to her side, and she and Rissa stared at one another in shocked silence. Diccon, in the face of such dramatic disappointment, hardly liked to go on about his new game without a decent interval.

His footsteps went slowly down the attic stairs, and Tam-

zin went on sitting on the edge of her bed and staring at a knot in the polished floorboards. Rissa suddenly pulled her own camping list from her blazer pocket and tore it into pieces with a defiantly cheerful gesture. She was the kind of person who sees in every set-back a challenge to new effort.

"We shan't need that any more," she said, dropping the pieces into Tamzin's wastepaper-basket beside the chest-of-drawers. "Come on, Tamzin, pull out of that gloom. Much better to go riding, or swimming—why not both? After all, camping at Castle Farm isn't the only thing worth doing in the world."

"I don't really want to swim, and Cascade has a shoe loose."

"Well, come and mark the tennis court. You simply can't sit here brooding till tea-time. Oh well, I'll go and mark it myself, then. Come down if you change your mind—and reading Mrs. Merrow's letter again can't possibly make it look any different."

When Rissa had gone too, Tamzin went over to the south window and knelt down to lean upon the sill and stare out through the wide open casement. There were five fishing-smacks sailing slowly down-river on the tide. Tamzin tried to give her mind to identifying each one, but all she kept thinking about was the awful disappointment of not going to Castle Farm after all, with school starting in three weeks' time and then the long dark winter to be lived through. It wasn't, as Rissa had said, that there was nothing exciting to do except camp at the farm. It was simply that Tamzin had planned and looked forward to it so much that now she felt empty and forlorn. Disappointment was a funny thing. You could feel it physically inside you, as if someone had taken something out and left a vacant place.

In the back garden Rissa and Diccon were mixing white-wash. Tamzin couldn't see them unless she went across to her north window, but she could hear their voices; Rissa's as clear and cheerful as ever above the noise of the mixing-stick banging round and round inside the bucket. It would be nice to be as cheerful as that; wonderful how old Rissa did it, really. . . .

Suddenly Tamzin jumped up and raced off down the attic stairs, her camping list left fluttering gently on the attic floor in the breeze from the open window.

"How about playing my new game?" Diccon greeted her hopefully. "It's a cross between rounders and cricket, so

I'm calling it crickers. Shall I tell you how to play it? You have one stump standing up like this——"

"Oh well, all right," said Tamzin. "It isn't long till tea-time."

They played crickers until Mrs. Grey called them for tea. Then, helping Diccon to collect the stumps, Rissa said, "Tide'll be too low for swimming when Meryon and Roger come. I say, they're going to hate the sight of Mrs. Merrow's letter."

"Hm," said Tamzin non-committally. And then, "I've had a germ of an idea about that."

"You have!" Rissa looked at her with sudden interest. "I *thought* you were unnaturally cheerful."

"What sort of idea?" Diccon asked, dribbling his ball across the tennis lawn.

"You mean going to Castle Farm despite all?" asked Rissa. "Oh, come on, what do you mean?"

"I'm not quite sure yet. I said it was only a germ. But it might work. It might be the best thing we've ever done. I'll tell you when the boys come, in case anyone has any more notions, because there's still an awful lot to think out."

"What?" said Diccon, stopping in his tracks. "After I've gone to bed? And not tell me now?"

"I will tell you, Dicky, but not anybody just now. It's got to be frightfully secret or we shan't be able to do it. And after all, you've nothing to worry about anyway, as you weren't going; you've got Cousin Alan coming for the rest of the holidays."

Diccon said, "So I have. And I must say it'll be fun having someone really my own age to play with; and Alan's got a super model battleship. We took it down to the river every day, last time he came, and I got Jim to row me over the ferry, and we spent simply hours just sending it across the river to each other. And now, of course, we'll be able to play crickers as well."

Even Mr. Merrow Would Approve

MERYON FAIRBRASS and Roger Lambert arrived from Winklesea on bicycles just as Tamzin and Rissa were

leading the two ponies out of the stable where they had been drowsing through the afternoon because the flies were so bad in the paddock. Cascade, Tamzin's half-bred Arab, clinked his loose shoe on the cobbles of the yard as he walked across it swinging his long tail. Diccon's small brown Banner fussed after him, not looking where he was going because his head was screwed round sideways in his effort to move faster than Rissa.

"Water need filling up?" said Meryon, propping his bicycle against the stable wall. At sixteen he was by far the eldest of the four of them and looked rather like a gipsy, or perhaps an Irish tinker.

"Thanks," said Tamzin over her shoulder. "It always does."

Finding Cascade's bucket, Meryon dumped it under the stable tap. Roger, who came somewhere between Tamzin and Rissa in age, fetched another bucket from Banner's stall. He was a second-cousin of Rissa's, living in Hastings where he and Meryon were at school, but spending most of his holidays in Winklesea with Meryon. No one ever made the mistake of taking them for brothers, any more than they did of thinking Tamzin and Rissa might be sisters; for where Meryon was dark and wild and dominant, Roger was brown-haired, amiable and likeably ordinary.

"Someone's got to have brain, to-night," Tamzin was saying a few minutes later, watching the first bucketful splash down into the trough by the paddock gate.

"Can't be old Meryon, then," said Roger, tipping in the second lot. "What do we have to have brain for, anyway? I never have any in the holidays."

"She's had a cancelling sort of letter from Mrs. Merrow," Rissa explained, "but after a lot of preliminary gloom in her attic—you know the way she is—she suddenly cheered up and said she'd had a notion."

"But it isn't enough of a notion," Tamzin said. "Look, let's sling these buckets and halters into the stable, and then I'll show you the letter."

In the stable she hung up Cascade's halter and then sat on the corn-bin drumming her heels while Roger and Meryon leaned on the half-door reading Mrs. Merrow's letter. Rissa reached for a dung-fork and started tidying Banner's stall, and as she worked her thick Egypt-

tian-looking hair swung like heavy dark-brown curtains on her shoulders.

Coming to the end of the letter Roger let out a surprised descending whistle. Meryon said, "I should have thought that was that. If the Merrows don't want us to go, I don't see how we can go."

"I say," said Roger, swinging himself on to Cascade's manger, "think of old Merrow being as independent as all that! But isn't it just like him? Oh, stow it, Rissa! No one else is going to start mucking-out until we've got this Merrow business straight. It messes Meryon and me up properly, because Meryon's folks are going to London for the next three weeks, and I don't want to spend the last lap of the holidays in Hastings."

Meryon said, "I don't particularly want to spend it in London—not that I would. Come on, Tamzin, cast off that Mona Lisa look and tell us what you thought."

Tamzin became absorbed in pressing the pleats into her kilt with her fingers, so that she could look the way she wanted without comment. "The first thing I thought," she said, "was how even more glorious than usual it would be, to be at Castle Farm with a siege on."

Rissa said, "I hope the next thing you thought was a good deal more intelligent than that, because we've all of us thought that already, several times." She was leaning on the dung-fork as a compromise until Tamzin had delivered her idea.

"So of course I started thinking about foot-and-mouth disease, and all the things people usually do to avoid carrying infection when they go to farms and places—when there's an epidemic on, I mean."

Roger said, "At the farm near us in Winklesea they have a shallow trough full of disinfectant at the gate, and a notice that says everyone must dip their shoes before they go through the gate."

"Yes, I know," Tamzin said. "So they did at the Deep-roses, here in Westling, but it didn't stop their getting foot-and-mouth."

"Which is obviously why the Merrows think it isn't good enough," Rissa said. "And after all, they've got it absolutely all round them now, except for where the sea is."

"All the same," said Meryon, "I never heard of any-

one else going into total siege, not ever in my life. And so the next thing you thought——” He looked at Tamzin.

“Was whether there was any way of killing *all* the germs we might have on us, instead of only the ones on our shoes, so that even Mr. Merrow would approve; and, well, the obvious answer seemed to be, to dip the whole of us.”

Everyone stared at her for a moment, thinking about this, and Tamzin added, “That was the germ of the idea. I didn’t get much farther with it, because there are so many snags. The tents, and Cascade, and all our things—lots of them would be spoilt by dunking in strong disinfectant—and then the problem of how and where to do the dunking.”

“I say, but it jolly well is an idea,” said Roger admiringly. “Mrs. Merrow could hardly turn us away when we arrived at her door, dripping from the hair downwards.”

“We’ve got to get over the boundary first,” said Meryon. He referred back to the letter. “Yes, it says here ‘no one won’t be allowed across the boundaries, in or out.’ I suppose they’re going to patrol them.”

“It would be fun!” sighed Rissa, her eyes shining. “If we were there we could help.”

“This is the point where brain is wanted,” Tamzin said. “How and where do we totally disinfect four people, one pony, a trap, two tents, and a cart-load of camping gear? And then get them all past a defended boundary?”

Meryon leaned his elbows on the stable door, carefully folding Mrs. Merrow’s letter into a paper boat. He said, “I’m not sure that’s the way to go about it. My way would be to see first what we can throw overboard. Always lighten the ship in an emergency, you know. I mean, it’s better to get there with half one’s cargo than not to get there at all.”

Rissa pitched into Banner’s bedding again, impatiently. “Do you mean some of us not to go? or what?”

“All of us to go, but not to camp,” Meryon explained.

“But Mrs. Merrow mightn’t have room for us in the farmhouse. She mightn’t even want us. And anyway, it would be awfully dull and domestic, after camping. Beds, you know, and washstands, and housework and all that.”

Tamzin said, “It wouldn’t be so dull living inside Castle farmhouse as camping in most other places. And Mrs. Merrow always wants to get us indoors. You can’t have

forgotten how every time we've camped there she's done her best to fuss us safely into the house with her."

"Especially when it's wet or cold," Roger agreed.

"And she never believes we aren't starving for want of good home cookery," Tamzin added. "And as to room—there must still be the two spare rooms because Mike always sleeps in the attic and Joseph's got the little bedroom over the kitchen."

"And another thing," said Meryon, "they ought to be pleased for the extra help. There'll be miles of boundaries to watch, as well as all the usual farmwork, and I dare say only the Merrows themselves and old Mr. Tewmell to do it, because they can hardly kidnap the farm-men and hold them prisoners on the place."

"Lots of housework," Rissa persisted, a little uncertainly. "Think of cooking and washing-up for eight."

"We're all wandering from the essential problem." Meryon said firmly. "Now, first a list of all the absolute necessities to take with us, and then see if we can cut the list by half. After that, when we know what has to be disinfected, the problem of how and where we're going to do it. Can I write on the back of Mrs. Merrow's letter, Tamzin?"

"Put Cascade down first," Tamzin said. "I've got to have him. We'll need him for hundreds of things, including watching boundaries; and then there'll be four ponies at the farm, with the two shepherd ponies, and Rissa's Siani being kept there anyway."

"I'll put him down," said Meryon, "but I don't see how we're going to immerse anything his size in disinfectant water. Or even that he'd let us, if we could."

Tamzin said, "We'll think of that later. There must be a way."

"Now what's the very minimum in clothes and things?"

"Just what we stand up in," said Roger, "and a spare lot."

Tamzin said, "We can't all use Mrs. Merrow's handkerchiefs, and she'd never have enough towels for so many—and what about tooth things, and brushes?"

"We don't need a spare lot of *everything*," Meryon said, scribbling with the letter held against the door-post. "No one's going to need a change of jacket and shorts in three weeks—or if they are, they can't have it."

"Pyjamas," Rissa said, propping her fork in its corner and reaching for the broom.

"She's like a sand-flea," Roger complained, watching her, "always at it." Prospecting in his pockets for his mouth organ, he found it, blew the fluff and dust off it and started softly playing *Waltzing Matilda*.

"If you call this waltzing, my lad——" said Rissa, lifting the richly-smelling broom, "and anyway, it helps me to think. In fact I've thought a jolly good think this very minute: what about the sheep-dipping tank, for the disinfectant?"

"Just the thing, very likely," said Meryon, scribbling faster.

"Where is it?" Roger asked, stopping his tune for two seconds.

"Not far behind the lifeboat house."

"H'm, might do, if we can get there without being seen," Meryon said. "How do they fill it, does anyone know? It'll have to be quick and easy. And we'll need to find out what it holds, so that we'll know how much disinfectant to get."

"What a thought," Rissa said. "It's a rather big tank. I hope it won't ruin us in disinfectant. I'm very low in cash by this time of the holidays."

"If it won't do," said Tamzin, "we'll have to think of something else. We can't possibly give in when we've got as far as this. Perhaps a groundsheet—three of us could hold up the sides, and we could fill it from the sea——"

"That'd rule out Cascade," Rissa pointed out.

"Oh help," said Tamzin. "Well, I'll find out about the dipping-tank. Someone in the village'll know. I think they fill it from a tide-creek, but I don't know what it holds."

"Now—time of day," Meryon said. "What's best for zero hour?"

"When are the Merrows most likely to be indoors?" asked Meryon.

"Meal times," Tamzin said. "But they may be eating in shifts, with a siege on. Anyway, there'd be less of them doing the boundaries. The biggest meal would be best—that'd be about a quarter past one."

"Saturday next, one-fifteen," Meryon said.

"Two days to find out everything, and get the disinfectant," Tamzin said. "I've got to go to Dunsford any-

way to-morrow, to have Cascade shod. If I can find out before then about the dipping-tank I could get the stuff while I was in there, but we'll all have to help to pay for it."

"What are we going to tell our families?" Roger suddenly asked. "I expect they'll feel bound to stop us, if they know what we're doing, because of Mrs. Merrow's having asked us not to go."

"To say nothing of our planning to walk a mile or more in soaking clothes," Rissa said, "and with nothing to change into when we get there except more soaking clothes. Grown-ups always feel strongly about that kind of thing."

"I don't think mine would worry," Meryon said, rather apologetically, for it was sometimes a sore point with the others, the way his parents accepted so calmly the wildest things he and Roger might do. But Meryon was unique in having a direct descendant of a famous Sussex pirate for a father, and a mother who had explored the tributaries of the Amazon. One expected people like that to take a wider view than ordinary parents.

"Perhaps we ought to leave a note," Tamzin said, frowning anxiously. "Two notes from me—I promised Diccon I'd tell him before we went. Oh dear, I do hate doing this sort of thing. No, I don't think I will. I'll explain it to Mother and Father. I'm sure they'll understand."

"Mine wouldn't," Rissa said. "It'll have to be a note for me. And then I shall be fortunate if there isn't any trouble."

"Tamzin, I've had a thought about Cascade," said Meryon. "If we do succeed in dunking him, we can hardly dunk a saddle, can we? Wouldn't it ruin it?"

"Would it? Just a quick dip?" asked Rissa.

"I suppose it might," Tamzin said. "They have so many nooks and corners, and we'd have to be pretty thorough. It doesn't matter anyway, I don't mind having him bare-back, so long as I have him."

"Then we seem to have thought of all we can, for one evening. There are still two days for any more brain-waves. And Tamzin, don't begin explaining everything to Diccon till the day arrives, in case it gets round to Rissa's folks before she's ready, and they stop her."

Folding Mrs. Merrow's letter, Meryon pushed it into

his blazer pocket and suddenly swooped on the dung-fork that Rissa had discarded.

"Barrow's in the yard, Rodge. Now, Rissa, you can sit back and watch us tackle Cascade's place. 'Fairbrass and Lambert, Limited; The Horsy Helpful Bureau. Try us for all your stable problems. Money back if not delighted!'"

"You great ass, Meryon," Tamzin said, grinning at him. "Well, see you do buck up, anyway, and there'll still be time for a set of tennis."

"Or crickers!" said Rissa dryly.

Drains and Dustbins and So Forth

THROUGH THE NEXT DAY Tamzin was even more occupied than usual, though she generally found every day in the holidays much too short for all the things there were to cram into it. There were always the routine jobs in the house and stable to start with, and on this Thursday they seemed to take longer than ever.

"Don't forget the saucepans, darling," her mother said, seeing her about to pour the dish-water away after breakfast, "and the cats' dishes are still on the floor."

"Oh, help," said Tamzin, whirling round to pick them up.

"I'll dry up for you, dear," said Mrs. Grey, "as you seem in such a hurry. Just a minute while I find a clean tea-towel."

"Oh, *thank* you, Mummy darling! I am in a spin. All the spoons and things are done, and this saucepan. . . . I say, Mother, do you know how much water a sheep-dipping tank holds?"

Mrs. Grey looked at her blankly. "I'm afraid I've no idea. Are they dipping at the Merrows'? You're going there on Saturday, of course; I nearly forgot."

Pouring away the dish-water, Tamzin opened her mouth to begin the tale of the letter and the germ of an idea; saw Diccon still in the doorway angling a stump for a spider behind the top hinge, and changed her mind, saying instead, "I was only just wondering about the tank it doesn't matter. Diccon, if you're coming with n/

you've jolly well got to wash your face. We all had blackberries for breakfast, but no one else is blue."

She was already through the doorway and dashing upstairs, her hands only half-dried and feeling like damp wash-leather. In a single sweeping gesture her bed was made, and in another her kilt was stowed inside the wardrobe: she had jodhpurs on this morning, for the shoeing. The room still looked a sight, littered with drawing-paper, sandals, slippers, books, a ball of string and camping things stacked in a corner. But there was no time now; it must just be hoped that no one would look inside. Tamzin tore downstairs again and out of the front door, racing down the drive to the village street. Who would know about the dipping-tank? There were the Deeproses, of course. But then they actually had the foot-and-mouth disease within their farm. It would be best to be on the safe side, even with proper disinfectant, and not to go on infected land. She would try Smiling Morn the grocer. But he was even gloomier than usual this morning and thought Tamzin was taking the liberty of asking him a riddle:

"And me the busiest man in Westling, this very minute."

Perhaps old Jim might know, she thought, racing round to the ferry hut, but Jim wasted nearly five minutes in suspecting she was up to no good, and then could only make a guess:

"We-ell, perhaps a hunnerd gallons, gal. I couldn't rightly say. And my advice to you is, whatever it is you're thinking of, don't do it."

"Oh *Jim!*" said Tamzin, exasperated. Then, "You can't think of anyone in the village who would know, can you?"

"Surelye," said old Jim, chumbling at his pipe and looking thoughtfully at Tamzin. "Who better nor the Deeproses?"

"Well——" said Tamzin. "Yes, I suppose so——well——never mind!" and dashed away again. In the end she had the brilliant notion of telephoning Mr. Wilson of Woolpack Farm, near Winklesea, where she knew the farmer just well enough to get away with it. She had to use the post office call-box, because of keeping things secret, and regretfully spent threepence of her pocket-money which was all too likely to be needed right to the last ha'penny for buying disinfectant.

"I know it seems a funny thing to ask," she said to Mr. Wilson, wedging herself into a corner of the call-box because there was a large nesting spider, complete with eggs, in the opposite corner, "but I do want to know, and I knew you would be able to tell me. You see, I was trying to work something out. . . . Not really 300 gallons? Do they *have* to have so much in? . . . Oh help, it must cost a fortune in disinfectant. . . . Not disinfectant they use, but sheep-dip? Yes, I know, I was thinking of something else. . . . Oh, and Mr. Wilson, have you ever heard of anyone putting a pony through a dipping-tank? . . . Oh gosh, yes, I'd forgotten the drop down into it. They only go up a ramp *out* of it, don't they. . . . Oh no, we were only talking about it, and none of us really knew, so I said I'd ask you. . . . No, Father isn't keeping sheep. . . . Yes, very well, thank you, and I hope you are too. . . ."

Well, that's just about put the lid on that, she said to herself, edging past the nesting spider and then rushing down the street again towards the vicarage, where she heaved herself over the back garden-wall and ran across the tennis court to the stable. 300 gallons! she thought, we'd need a barrelful of disinfectant. Now what was I thinking about using a gathered-up groundsheet? And—oh help—if we do, what about Cascade?

"I have washed my face," said Diccon, "but it won't come off. And I've caught Banner, and now I'm grooming him."

"I'll go and get Cascade," said Tamzin.

In Dunsford, Diccon was persuaded to stay at the forge while Tamzin rushed to the chemist's in the High Street, so he sat on a bench outside in the sunshine, with a farmer and an old retired sailor.

Tamzin ran up the hill that was once the sea-cliff of the ancient town, before the sea had gone away and left it more than two miles inland. She ran on along the old High Street, not because there was really such a particular hurry but because walking always seemed to her to be such a waste of time; so it was rather annoying to have to wait for her turn at the chemist's when she got there. She was studying a chart giving average heights up to sixteen years when someone tapped her on the shoulder.

"Rissa!"

"I saw you going in here. I was in Jones's, getting cakes for Mother. Are you buying the disinfectant?"

"I'm hoping to, but what d'you think a dipping-tank holds? It's 300 gallons. I phoned Mr. Wilson at Woolpack. Think of buying enough stuff for all that!"

"Obviously, we just can't. How about trying a ground-sheet, the way you suggested?"

"Or only partly filling the tank and lying down in it—oh yes, thank you," she suddenly said, swinging round to the counter. "I want some disinfectant."

"What sort would you like?" the assistant asked.

"Oh, the cheapest kind you have, I think."

"Do you want it for floors and drains, that kind of thing? or for personal use, Miss?"

Tamzin turned and looked at Rissa. "What would you say?"

"Oh help," said Rissa. "Personal, isn't it?" Then to the assistant, "It would have to do for dipping clothes, as well as for—as for——"

"Putting in the bath," suggested Tamzin with sudden inspiration.

"Oh, I *see*," said the assistant, looking at them as if they had just come out of a yellow-fever ward. "For infectious illness, you mean." He reached for a bottle from a shelf. "This is what we generally recommend; five shillings the large bottle, quite harmless in the bath and non-poisonous."

"How much water will it disinfect?" Tamzin asked doubtfully.

The assistant peered at the label. "It says, 'Epidemics, one tablespoon to a pint of water.'"

"Oh dear," said Tamzin. "That sounds a lot of stuff. There can't be many tablespoonfuls in that bottle."

"Sixteen ounces," said the assistant. "That's thirty-two tablespoonfuls."

"Thirty-two pints," Rissa said, making mental calculations. "Eight pints, one gallon; eights into thirty-two go four—I say, Tamzin, it'll only do four gallons."

"One bucket, two gallons," Tamzin said. "Gosh, that's two-and-six a bucket. How awful. We can't possibly do it." She turned to the assistant again. "Are you sure you haven't anything cheaper?"

"Much cheaper," said Rissa.

"Well, how much water did you want to disinfect, Miss?"

"How much? Well—er, um——" Ought they to say how much? or would it cause suspicion? Perhaps if she cut the quantity by half it would sound better, and they could always double the answer. "About 150 gallons, or so—thereabouts."

This time the assistant really did stare. "Mm—well—150 gallons. Perhaps I'd better see what the manager says."

Rissa's eyebrows went up in despair as the man vanished through a doorway, but Tamzin said, "It's all right, it's much better. I know him."

"How little water can we manage with?" Rissa asked, lowering her voice because of people in the shop.

"Several bucketfuls, at least, even if we use the ground-sheet. What would that hold, drawn up into a bath?"

"Good morning, Tamzin," said the manager. "I hear you're going in for disinfectant in a large way. No one ill, I hope? Father and Mother all right?"

"Oh, yes thank you, Mr. Bridger. I mean, no one's ill. We want it for something else—it's a bit of a secret at present, I'm afraid, or I'd tell you—but we want something really cheap, you know, because of using so much water."

"Really 150 gallons? is that right?"

"At least that," Tamzin admitted. "I think it's going to ruin us. We never have much money."

"Ruin you? I should say it will. Cost you pounds, even with the cheapest I can give you. Now I have one here. . . ." He studied the label on the bottle. "'For general disinfection, use two tablespoons to each gallon. One-and-eight the eight ounce bottle.'"

"Eight ounces," Tamzin said, pondering. "Work it out, Rissa; I never can."

"That one's easy," Rissa said. "Ounce to the gallon; it does eight gallons, four buckets. Much cheaper than the other."

"If we manage with just six buckets, instead of filling the tank," Tamzin said, "it'd cost us one and half one-and-eights."

"But you'd have to buy two bottles," the manager said. "We can't do halves. So it would cost you three-and-four."

"Oh, we can afford that," Tamzin said, much relieved.

"It'll mean a lot of planning, to manage with so little, but we'll have to do it."

"One point," said the manager, "can you tell me what you want it for? I mean, this cheaper one is all right for drains and dustbins and so forth, but I gather you thought of putting it in your bath?"

"Well," said Tamzin, "sort of bath—yes."

"Then you'll probably find it stings a bit. Might even bring you up in a rash, you know. It isn't even meant for personal application—now *this* one, this is used in hospitals—perfectly safe. I should really advise——"

"Yes, but think of the price!"

"I'm against it," Rissa said firmly. "Even if we could afford it—all that extra money, just to avoid going pink."

"*And itching*," the manager reminded her. He was holding a bottle in each hand and looking at Tamzin and Rissa with just the same courteous attention he would have accorded to the matron of the Cottage Hospital.

"Shall we itch for long?" Tamzin began doubtfully; then, with sudden briskness, "but it doesn't matter, we can't afford not to. We'll have two bottles of the cheap one, please."

"Certainly, two bottles: and don't forget it's not to be taken internally. Don't go gargling with it, or anything like that. Three-and-fourpence—thank you."

"Gargling," Tamzin said thoughtfully. "I wonder if we ought? I suppose we should, if we're going to be really thorough."

"Not with——" began Mr. Bridger firmly, half reaching for the bottles again, but Tamzin said, "Oh, it's all right; we've got some gargling stuff at home. Thank you so much."

She and Rissa were just going out of the doorway when Mr. Bridger caught them up.

"Oh, Tamzin! Just a minute." He had another bottle, half full of a pink solution, in his hand. "A small present—calamine. Just half a bottle I had by me. You'll need it afterwards."

After they had thanked him and gone their way, Mr. Bridger paused a moment in his doorway, debating with himself whether perhaps he really ought to telephone Tamzin's parents at Westling Vicarage. Then suddenly he pushed the thought aside. Luckily he never had much difficulty in remembering his own youth—and what was a pink

itch, anyway? Small price to pay for an adventure; and if he knew her as well as he thought he did, that was just what Tamzin Grey was brewing up.

At the forge Diccon saw them coming down the hill. Tamzin had a black bottle sticking out of each pocket, and Rissa swung a basket as she walked.

"Hallo, Dicky. We've got an ice-cream each and one for you. How's Cascade getting on?" She looked inside for a moment. "They're still doing his hind ones, so we've time to eat these here."

"Chocolate covered!" said Diccon. "My favourite kind. What are those two black bottles in your pockets? They look awful."

"I'll tell you," said Tamzin, "on Saturday morning, at just about half-past eleven.

Tin Sou'-wester

ON SATURDAY MORNING Tamzin was helping her mother to tidy up the kitchen dresser.

"A hair-grip, two safety-pins, a grocery bill and a Meccano spanner. None of these need be here at all. You know, Mother, this dresser could look quite nice if it wasn't always cluttered up."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Grey, putting clean paper in the knife-box. "I dare say it could. But I have to remind you there were also a hoof-pick, a tin of saddle soap and an old letter addressed to Miss T. Grey."

"Oh—I'd forgotten. Well, I'll have to be careful, too. Not that I'll be here to *be* careful, for the rest of these holidays."

"Oh yes, of course, what time are you going?" her mother asked, looking up at the clock. "I'm sure you haven't got everything ready. I haven't seen you doing any packing at all. Perhaps you'd better leave this and get on with it, or the others will be here and waiting for you."

Tamzin added two packets of shampoo and six paper-clips to the other rejected items and began dusting the cleared space.

"Well, you see—actually—well, we aren't any of us doing any packing this time."

"Not *packing*?" Mrs. Grey looked at her curiously. After thirteen years she was almost immune to shocks from her daughter, but generally the shocks had come after the event.

"No. I thought at first I'd just go, and leave you a note, because you and Father have always understood when we've done things like that. But then I thought, if you were going to understand anyhow, I'd much rather you did before we went than after. And the fact is, Mrs. Merrow doesn't know we're going."

"But I saw the letter she sent inviting you."

"Yes, but we've had another since then—I'd show it to you, only Meryon's got it. She asked us not to go after all, because of foot-and-mouth. She says they're going into total siege—no one in and no one out. Not even the grocer and people like that. But Mother, we thought up a wonderful notion of *completely* dipping ourselves in disinfectant—right over our hair and everything. Well, you see how that hampers any packing. We can't take much, and then only things that won't be hurt by dipping." She suddenly stopped dusting to turn and look intently at her mother.

"Oh, Mother! Don't say we mustn't go! I was sure you'd understand. And honestly, Mrs. Merrow can't object. Not if we haven't a single germ on us anywhere. We even thought of gargling, just to make sure."

"I wasn't going to say you mustn't. I was wondering how it will all work——"

"Oh, *Mother!*" Tamzin's long brown arms went round her mother's waist, dancing her round the kitchen table. "You're an angel—I simply knew you'd understand. I told Meryon and Roger that you would."

"——how it will all work," repeated Mrs. Grey firmly, though laughing. "To begin with; how are you going to do the dipping? And what are you going to change into afterwards? And what about Cascade? At least it's a warm day," she added thankfully. "Mrs. Merrow wouldn't thank you to land four cases of pneumonia into her hands, on top of all the extra work and worry she's bound to have already."

"We're old enough not to do anything so silly as that," Tamzin said, with rushing reassurance. "We'll run all the way, if you like; we'll be nearly dry before we reach the farmhouse. We thought of using the sheep-dipping tank,



Tin Sou'-vester

or even a groundsheet, held up like a bath, but Meryon said he might have another idea by this morning. And I've got two bottles of carbolic disinfectant, and all you need supply is a little salt or something, for gargling."

Mrs. Grey found a revolving pencil and a horse-shoe tie-pin behind a pile of saucers.

"This dresser," she said, holding them up, "could look quite nice if——"

"Oh, I *wondered* where they had got to! My silver pencil!"

"You can't disinfect that, anyway. And Tamzin, I do hope you'll all do your best to be really helpful to the Merrows. You know they're sure to be simply spinning with work, if they're absolutely isolated. What an extraordinary thing it is! I mean the total isolation. But it's quite what one might expect of William Merrow, I suppose. And by the way, when I said 'help the Merrows' I really did mean both of them. Not just doing the exciting outdoor things with Mr. Merrow and Mike and Joseph, but the humdrum indoor things like beds and dishes and dusting."

"We always do," Tamzin said. "We've even cooked, and once we kept house¹ for her for days."

¹ Told in *The White Riders*.

“So you did. Well, that’s all right, then. Now, the things you’re going to take: not your navy cardigan, anyway, or that lovely kilt. They’d be ruined with a carbolic dip. You’d better have your old dark-green jersey, I think, and your linen shorts. . . . I’ll look them out.”

“Anything, anything you like, darling Mother! You’re the nicest, wisest mother in the world—did you know it? Oh, there’s the back gate; that’ll be Rissa.” She gave her mother another breath-squeezing hug and rushed through the back door.

Not only Rissa, but Meryon and Roger too had arrived. They all carried rucksacks and were in the shorts and shirts they generally wore through the summer holidays and week-ends. Meryon appeared at first to have an enormous tin sou’-wester on his head, but when he came out of the tree-shadows over the path Tamzin saw that it was an old-fashioned portable hip-bath.

“What on earth——” she began, staring at him.

“It’s all right, it’s the idea he said he might be having,” Rissa said. “I met them by the bridge and he’s explained it on the way down.”

Meryon said, “You’d be surprised how it complicates cycling. For one thing, you can’t look round behind you; and for another, it keeps coming down over your eyes.”

Roger leaned his bicycle against the plum tree by the back door.

“We had a wonderful game with it, on the quiet bits of road. Old Meryon said it made his arm ache, holding it up, so he let it right down over his face and went on bicycling to Rissa’s and my directions.”

Rissa said, “We just shouted ‘Right’, ‘Left’, or ‘For heaven’s sake stop!’ You never saw anything like it.”

“Have you got everything settled with your mother?” Rissa asked. “Mine was very puzzled over my sparse packing—the way it all stowed into this rucksack.”

“Yes, and she’s looking out some dip-proof clothes for me. She was most serene about it.”

Rissa sighed. “It must make life so much simpler. But I did leave a very explaining sort of note in a very prominent place. And when I pointed out how near we were for fetching more clothes and things if we wanted them, and also that we weren’t absolutely sure how long we’d be there, Mother did see the point of travelling light.”

"And the bath?" Tamzin asked, poking it with her sandal.

"It's for dunking, of course," explained Meryon. "I got it off a chap I know who used to keep coal in it, underneath his caravan. But I've cleaned it since, of course."

Tamzin grinned. "And what does he keep coal in, now?"

"I swapped him a derelict dog-kennel I got off another chap I know, who kept a hen in it."

"Don't ask him where the other chap keeps his hen, now," said Rissa briskly. "That kind of thing can go on for ever. Let's get on with it. The bath isn't only for dunking, Meryon says, but he wouldn't bother explaining the rest till we got here, because he said it made his ears ache talking with a bath on his head. Go on, Meryon."

"Rodge and I were talking to some chaps we know——" began Meryon.

"Who had a wash-house they kept pigs in," interrupted Tamzin.

"Shut up, Tamzin," said Rissa.

"And we got the talk round to foot-and-mouth and the Castle Farm siege; and they said they'd heard the Merrows were riding the boundaries with guns. But the important thing they said was that the sea boundary was being watched as much or more than the others, and they said they thought it was because of holiday people on the shore."

"Oh, help!" said Tamzin. "I hadn't thought of that. I'd thought it would be much less guarded. And anyway, there aren't a great many holiday people in September."

"Never mind, there are some," Meryon said. "Well, those chaps said the only boundary that seemed to be left to look after itself was the river one."

"Of course," said Rissa. "People aren't likely to swim to the farm, I suppose."

"Not ordinary civilised people," Roger said. "But that's not to say it can't be done."

"We can all swim," Meryon said. "Even Cascade."

"And as we've got to get the bath across anyhow," Roger said, "one of us can paddle it over, like a coracle—we've made a rough paddle—with all our things inside; because if things are already wet before you disinfect them, the germ-killing isn't half so thorough."

"I say, I hope you've got the stuff?" Meryon asked.

"Two bottles," Tamzin said. "We've got to divide three-

and-four by four, because of paying for it. And I say, the bath really is a find, because we couldn't have afforded dope enough for the dipping-tank, anyway. And the groundsheet would have been a bit tricky. If anyone had let their corner slip, we'd have lost all the stuff inside it."

Mrs. Grey appeared beneath the plum tree with a bundle on her arm.

"Tamzin, I've got your things here. You'd better change before you forget, because if you go in that kilt I'd have to follow you. And Diccon says you've promised to tell him a secret before you go. He was sailing boats in the bathroom when I saw him."

"Back in a minute!" said Tamzin, jumping up. "You can stow your bikes in the shed while I'm gone."

In ten minutes she was whisking out of the back door again, in her old dark-green jersey and shorts, and with her change of clothes in a rucksack over one arm and her lunch in a parcel swinging from her hand.

To reach the neutral river-bank they had to travel the whole length of the narrow marsh road to the bridge near the Winklesea Road, and at one point they had the excitement of seeing Mike Merrow riding down the east boundary with his dog at heel and his gun across his shoulder. He was a field's breadth away, and they saw his hand go up in response to their waving.

"That's Tinkle he's riding. Bet he wonders where we're going, with rucksacks and the hip-bath and all," Tamzin said smugly, clasping the bath against her leg as she rode. "Anyway, as he's going away from the river we'll probably just do it nicely without his spotting us from the distance."

"So much for thinking they'd all be indoors at midday," Rissa said. "They must be eating meals in shifts."

At the bridge they crossed over and then turned sharply to the left, following the sheep-track that wound along the northerly bank. The day was warm and sultry, and the sheep lay languidly beneath the sparse shade of scattered thorn trees, their yellow eyes following the walkers on the bank. Rissa was riding now, holding the hip-bath clutched to her right leg.

"Certainly seems to be no one about," said Roger, screwing up his eyes to study the land beyond the river. "Where do we cross?"

"If we don't eat our lunch first," Rissa said, "and the bath capsizes, there won't be any lunch."

"Of course it won't capsize," Meryon said. "And it seems a pity to waste time eating, when any moment someone may appear."

"Well, I'm not going to risk it," Rissa said. "If only I can juggle this dreadful bath to balance itself I'm going to eat mine as I go."

"Pass it down," Meryon said obligingly. "Roger and I can carry it between us; it's got handles."

"We can put all our gear in it," Roger said. "Tamzin too, if she likes."

"Fairbrass and Lambert, Limited," said Meryon. "Sedan chairs in Best Modern Taste, compare our prices, trial trips by appointment."

"The thing is," said Tamzin, crunching a crispbread sandwich and taking no notice of Roger and Meryon, "who's going to skipper her?"

"Tamzin's the lightest weight," Rissa said, thankfully flexing her bruised knee against Cascade's side, "but she'll want to swim Cascade, I expect."

Roger said, "I'm next lightest, I should think. Rissa or me."

"Good place the other side of that fence," Meryon said. "River's narrower, and there's a good landing place, and that clump of gorse gives fair cover from the grazings and the farm."

Tamzin studied the place, noticing happily how the smoke curled up from the chimneys of the farmhouse half a mile beyond it, and all the old familiar details of crumbling Cloudesley Castle in the foreground, with the hot sheep huddled in the dark shade of it, and the bright white line of the sea across the grazings.

"A good place, yes," she said. "Isn't it perfectly wonderful to think we're going there after all? The mere thought of Mrs. Merrow, in her flowered apron, and the kettle always on, and the way their kitchen always looks——"

"And Siani in the orchard," Rissa said, "and the looking ponies too, and fancy *having* to ride, and knowing you're being helpful doing it."

"And Mr. Merrow playing his fiddle in the evenings," Roger said, "and me joining in with my mouth organ if

only I had it, but it'd never have stood dunking. And seeing Joseph again, too."

"No one's even mentioned Mrs. Merrow's larder," Meryon said, opening the gate in the fence for Cascade to go through. "I should have thought it was quite the first thing that anyone knowing her would have thought of. Think of the cream——"

"And that apple-pie she makes," said Roger.

"And her currant cake," said Tamzin.

"Oh, do stop it!" said Rissa. "I've finished all my sandwiches and I know I shan't last till tea-time—why does one never bring enough for outdoor meals?—but all the same," she added suddenly, "think of home-made bread, and the butter so thick——"

"This is the place," said Meryon, swinging his rucksack off his back, "and now is the time. All luggage into the boat, please—shoes as well, it's easier to swim without them."

Danger from the Castle

RISSA SLID DOWN OFF Cascade's back, handed the reins to Tamzin and began to argue with Roger about which of them should paddle the hip-bath.

Meryon said, "I'll toss up."

"Heads for me," Rissa said.

"I'm always tails, not that it matters," said Roger, watching the coin spinning brightly in the sunlight.

Meryon bent to pick it out of the grass.

"Just as well you were, this time—tails it is. Do your best to balance her, she's carrying all we possess. Here's the paddle." He untied it from the strap of his rucksack.

"We made it from a bit of old weatherboard," Roger said to Tamzin, who was looking at it. "It's rather rough, but it'll do."

"She really ought to have a keel," Meryon said, "but we can't do anything about that; you must just keep her steady." He was packing Tamzin's sandals down between the rucksacks and the side of the bath. Rissa pushed her own shoes in.

"Can't we do the disinfecting *this* side of the river?"



Meryon shoved him off

Rissa asked. "Then we needn't take the bath over at all, or the carbolic stuff. We could all just swim, and then collect the bath and bottles when we go home."

"Better not risk it," Meryon said, dragging the bath-tub nearer to the water's edge. "Some people think rivers carry foot-and-mouth infection—in the water, you know." He pushed the bath gently afloat, where it swung at the end of his arm looking rather prim because of its old-fashioned upright back for leaning on. "Now, Roger, get in very carefully. She's flat-bottomed and she's not designed for open water. Keep her head well into the current, and make for a point higher up the river than the landing place."

Roger was cautiously trying one foot inside the bath. "What an awfully good thing it is that no one *is* about. We couldn't possibly pretend to be doing the washing or anything, now," he said.

"Steady does it," said Meryon, while Rissa squatted on her heels watching the embarkation and Tamzin stood with Cascade at the river's edge, looking for the best place to swim a pony across.

"Hey, don't leave go for a moment," Roger said, wobbling down into a squatting position among the rucksacks and reaching for the paddle Meryon was holding. "Now!" he said, sitting with the paddle ready, and Meryon shoved him off. The bath began slowly to circle on its axis, and Roger shouted, "You shoved her sideways!" frantically paddling on the starboard side.

"Stop shouting, you ass! Someone'll hear you," Rissa said, wading carefully into the water, testing the bottom for a foothold.

"Pull her into the current," Meryon said, grinning. "Rissa and I'll race you across. This is where our shorts are so useful—you never know when you're going to have to swim in all your clothes."

Paddling at a great rate, Roger began to spin suddenly clockwise.

"Darned thing doesn't answer to the helm," he said. "Tamzin, for mercy's sake don't plunge your great horse in, just yet, or I'll founder in his wash. Just a moment while I get the hang of her."

Tamzin watched him, grinning, from the bank, and Cascade snuffled at the water, drinking a little.

"All right," she said, "but buck up and get a move on. Anyone might be coming along, any minute."

Rissa and Meryon were themselves making enough rough water to rock the hip-bath as they swam across the river.

"Try alternate paddles each side," Tamzin said to Roger, who still waltzed in the hip-bath a yard or two from the near shore. Cascade began to paw the wet mud of the bank and Meryon was already out on the other side. Rissa's brown hair looked nearly black as it flopped under water at every turn of her head for breathing; then she was out too, crawling up the farther bank with the water running from her shirt and shorts, and her bare toes squelching in the mud.

Roger suddenly made a full yard of direct progress. There was even a gentle ripple of a bow-wave fanning from the blunt nose of the tub.

"I say! she's jolly well going!" he called.

"Keep it up," Meryon encouraged, flattening the water from his hair with both his hands.

"One-out, two-out," chanted Rissa, in time to the paddle.

"I'm coming!" Tamzin said. "Daren't hang on any longer: they can still turn us back until we're truly disinfect-ed."

Grasping Cascade's white mane with one hand she swung herself on to his bare back. The pony snorted, stepping forward and slithering in the mud as he felt her weight. He was used to deep water, having swum with Tamzin in the sea on many summer mornings, but this was rather different. The bank was slippery, and it shelved so suddenly; he wasn't sure of his feet and struck out strongly as he felt the ground dropping away from him. Tamzin sat lightly on his back with a loose rein, her legs hunched up like a jockey's to help him all she could. The pony's strong shoulder muscles flexed and relaxed under her knees, and the cold river-water lapped her waist. There was a churning of water around Cascade's threshing forelegs, and suddenly Tamzin realised that the bath-tub was again circling.

"She's losing way!" Roger said, working at the paddle.

"Well, of course," Meryon called from the bank. "She's full in the current now."

"Hold back Cascade!" shouted Roger, flailing at the water now. "She's rocking already."

"Can't possibly," Tamzin called back. "Not in mid-stream. He can't tread water."

"Well, circle outwards then, or turn back—look out! oh,

look *out!*” There was no time to say any more. The hip-bath gave a last buck, circle and tilt, and sank suddenly from sight leaving Roger, the four rucksacks and the wooden paddle floating on the surface. Meryon gave a sudden shout of laughter, his hands coming down slap on his knees; then the laughter was as suddenly cut off, in the way Meryon had.

“Catch those rucksacks while they’re afloat!”

He was back in the water, forging towards the canvas blobs that drifted slowly on the current. Roger, swimming fast, had already captured one, and Tamzin leaned from Cascade’s back to reach another.

“I say, what about the bath?” Roger said, towing his capture shorewards.

“Have to dive for it,” said Meryon. He was swimming on his back, holding his two rucksacks as if they were a person rescued from drowning.

Cascade found his feet and came out with a rush and a lot of heavy breathing to the bank beside Rissa. Slithering off his back, Tamzin turned to watch Meryon reach the shore.

“I’m awfully sorry if it was my fault. I didn’t realise Roger’d got becalmed again.”

Cascade shook himself, starting at his head and finishing with his tail, like a spaniel, but nobody took any notice as everyone was wet through already.

“How deep d’you suppose the river is?” Meryon said, looking at the slow smooth slide of it.

“Not very,” Tamzin said. “Perhaps ten feet.”

“The snag will be seeing the bath, in all that mud and black water,” said Roger. He was pulling wet clothes out of his rucksack. “Now why didn’t we think of bringing a rope? Someone could have hung to to the end of it all the time, and we’d only have had to haul.”

Meryon said, “Wishing won’t help. I’ll go down first.”

Tamzin made Cascade stand very close to the river, because of his not being disinfected yet, but he pulled gently on the reins, trying to reach the grass. She watched Meryon wade into the river and swim out from the bank.

“You’re just about where Roger was shipwrecked,” Rissa called. “No, a little farther upstream—there.”

Meryon’s head ducked under the surface and his feet came out, like hands waving for help. Then there was nothing on the water but a widening ring of ripples.

"No luck," Rissa said, watching him reappear a few yards down the river.

Roger waded in, ready to take a turn, but Meryon had dived again.

"He's got it!" Tamzin suddenly said, watching the second emergence. Then, "What on earth——?"

"He's got something, anyway," said Rissa.

Meryon rolled over on to his back, lifting in his hands a large bottomless bucket. Liquid mud poured from it like black treacle, running down his arms, as he hurled it back into the water.

A long "oh" sound came from the bank and Roger was swimming out into the stream.

"Thought I'd got it that time!" Meryon said. He was wiping his eyes and blowing, treading water. "Can't see a blessed thing."

"Here?" Roger called to the bank.

"No," said Rissa, "a bit farther out."

Roger's feet were waving above water now. Then there were just the ripples again, and Meryon alone visible, still treading water and pushing his black wet hair back. Tamzin and Rissa dripped and oozed on the bank, and steamed in the hot sun and waited, thinking it was surely time he came up now. Suddenly he did, but much farther upstream than they expected, panting and gasping with his eyes shut and hair streaming.

"Found it—but—can't shift it," he said.

"You have?" Meryon called back. He started swimming to Roger.

Like ducks on a farm pond, the boys up-ended together and vanished under the shining blackness. Cascade pulled at his bridle to reach a lush green patch and the two girls watched the sliding water. Three dark blobs shot up almost at the same time—Meryon's and Roger's heads and the upturned bottom of the hip-bath. Tamzin and Rissa let out a smothered cheer, quickly looking round in case anyone might have heard them; and Rissa, still waist-deep, reached out a hand to help tow in the wreck.

"Turn it right way up now, so it comes in full of water," she said. "Got the carbolic, Tamzin? We've wasted hours already."

"Ten minutes," Meryon said.

"There's someone with the sheep behind the Castle," said Tamzin. She was looking out past Cascade's head.

“Probably Mr. Merrow or Shepherd Tewmell, as we’ve seen Mike riding boundaries—it’s too tall for Joseph. Anyway, if he sees us he’ll come straight for us. Oh, do buck up; here’s the disinfectant.”

“Pour it in,” said Meryon. He and Roger dumped the brimming bath down on the grass, as close to the river’s margin as was possible.

“Bring it a bit farther this way, so that the gorse hides us,” Rissa said, gathering up the sodden rucksacks and sandals.

“But it’s hiding us from the farmhouse where it is,” objected Roger.

“Danger from the Castle’s nearer,” said Rissa. “Oh, do hurry!”

“How much do I put in?” Tamzin suddenly said urgently, pulling Cascade a yard or two along the bank nearer to the gorse patch. “How much water does the hip-bath hold?”

“Does it matter?” Roger asked. “Probably ten gallons. I should tip one bottle in.”

“Ounce to a gallon,” Tamzin read, looking at the label. “If we tip a little water out it’ll do.”

Meryon slopped a little over the brim and it ran in a silvery trickle back to the river.

“Stir it up,” Rissa said, watching the thick, pungent liquid run into the water, making milky clouds.

Tamzin stirred it with the empty bottle.

“Spare clothes and towels and sandals in first,” Rissa said, briskly sousing her own, dumping them up and down in the bath. “And the rucksacks.”

Roger and Meryon threw theirs in while Tamzin sorted among her own wet things. “Now where’s that gargling stuff? What a mercy Mother didn’t put salt in for it, after all. It’s a little bottle with some Dettol in.”

Rissa finished buckling her wet sandals on. “Here,” she said to Tamzin. “Give me Cascade while you do yours. Have you brought a mug or something to gargle with?”

“Oh help, no! We’ll have to use our cupped hands.”

“Every criminal always forgets some vital point,” said Meryon.

“Who’s going to be dunked first?” asked Roger.

Tamzin said, “Does it matter? We’ve all got to be. Come to think of it, I will; the water will be cleaner.”

Nobody answered this, but when Tamzin was crouched

in the hip-bath, dipping her head, Roger gave it an extra shove under. Meryon grabbed one of his own sandals and used it as a ladle to pour the cloudy water over her back and down her neck. "Now sit up, so that we can pour it down your front."

"I should think she's pretty well soused by now," said Rissa. "My turn next. Here, take Cascade, Tamzin. I wonder how he'll like it when it's his turn?"

Tamzin's long fair plaits ran with water, dripping on to the grass. "It jolly well does sting," she said. "I'm glad I remembered that half-bottle of calamine Mr. Bridger gave us." She was hunting in her rucksack.

"You can't use it now!" said Meryon, looking up from sousing Rissa. "You must wait until you're dry."

"You're pouring it in my ears," complained Rissa loudly in the bath-tub.

"Have a look round that gorse-patch, Tamzin," said Meryon, ladling hard and fast, "and see if that chap with the sheep is still there. You're safe on the grass, as you're dunked, and I'll hold Cascade."

"Gosh! you're going pink already," said Roger as she passed him to peer round the prickly thicket.

"I feel pink," she said, as she cautiously poked her head out. "Oh help! Oh my aunt! he's half-way here. It's Shepherd Tewmell—I can see his beard—and he's got his dog with him."

"Sh, quiet everybody! He can't have seen us," Meryon said. "Heave out of it, Rissa, and get on with the gargling while Roger and I souse."

"They haven't left much stuff," said Roger disparagingly, as he stepped in.

"There's another bottle in my rucksack," Tamzin said, taking Cascade's reins from Meryon.

"No time to get more water for it, now," Meryon said. "We'll have to make it do. The thing is, you're wasting so much. Look at you both, dripping all over the grass."

"We can't drip over the bath, when Roger's in it," Tamzin pointed out.

"Gosh, doesn't it sting," said Rissa, wiping her face on her sleeve.

"Rubbing will only make it worse," said Meryon. "Now me, Roger."

"Here's the Dettol, Rissa," Tamzin said. "Get some river-water in your hands and I'll pour a spot in for you."

"It doesn't matter about river-water being dangerous to drink," Rissa said, leaning with cupped hands over the water's edge, "because the gargle stuff will kill all its natural wild life." She held her hands out to Tamzin, who tipped the Dettol bottle.

Rissa opened her mouth, tilting her hands against it. Some of the gargle lost its way and went down her neck, but she couldn't say anything because of the rest being in her mouth.

"Sh! don't gargle so loudly," Tamzin said nervously, peering through the gorse.

"You're just as loud yourself," Rissa said, when Tamzin had got going a moment later.

"The secret is in not making a singing note while you're at it," said Meryon, coming out of the tub. "Nearly everybody does, but all you really have to do is to breathe steadily outwards. Where's that chap Tewmell, Roger? Can you see? Here, give me that gargle stuff, Rissa."

"He isn't actually coming any quicker," Roger reported, "but he's still coming."

Rissa wrinkled her nose as she passed the gargle bottle. "Don't we *smell*. I should think our smell will arrive at the farm long before we do. Tamzin, we've got to do Cascade now, poor fellow. I only hope he doesn't prickle as much as I do; we haven't enough calomine for him as well."

Tamzin was looking anxiously into the bath. "There's nothing like enough left. We'll just have to fill up at the river before we souse him."

"You'll jolly well have to be supersonic then," Roger said over his shoulder from the gorse patch. "Tewmell's only a hundred yards away now, and still coming."

"Meryon, quick!" Tamzin said, grabbing a handle of the bath. Meryon snatched the other one and they swung the bath into the dark water, hauling it up brimming again and splashing over. Tamzin tipped the last bottleful in with one movement, her nerves twittering at the maddening slow way the liquid had of going plop-plop-plop in little bursts, instead of rushing out like tap-water. "Your sandal again, Meryon; it's the biggest. Bring Cascade a bit nearer, Rissa, and for goodness' sake calm him down as much as possible. Now, Meryon."

Cascade was very good on the whole, as Meryon ladled disinfectant over him. Tamzin made a pad of her spare shorts and washed his underneath. "I'll do his face too.

We mustn't pour stuff over his head in case it gets into his eyes."

"We can't make him gargle, anyway," Rissa said, rubbing his muzzle gently.

Meryon and Roger lifted the bath up while Tamzin dipped the pony's long white tail. Then Tamzin produced a hoof-pick from her pocket. "That was a final brain-wave I had; the hoofs are the most likely place of all for carrying infection." She picked them all out carefully, dipping each one into the bath as it was cleaned, and holding it there for a moment.

"He doesn't seem to be feeling very itchy yet," Rissa said, stroking his wet face. "Perhaps he won't; perhaps his skin is tougher. And anyway it's keeping the flies off."

"I'll wash him down again with water, at the farmhouse," Tamzin said. "Now, Meryon—oh, jumping gin bottles! Good afternoon, Mr. Tewmell."

Everyone looked up, and there was old Shepherd Tewmell, standing beside the gorse thicket with his collie dog, Shep, looking at them without a word, though his beard moved up and down. This was a most ominous thing to those who knew him, for it meant that Shepherd Tewmell was much too full of words to get them out.

Every Stitch and Button

THERE WAS ONE good thing about Shepherd Tewmell's speechlessness, and that was that it gave Tamzin, who knew him best, time to rush in first with an explanation.

"We were invited, of course, Mr. Tewmell, and Mrs. Merrow only put us off because of the siege. But they must need help now, much more than ever, and we can't have a single germ left between us—you can *see* we're totally dipped, even Cascade. We can't even breathe infection now, because we've gargled—you can smell it in our breaths——"

Mr. Tewmell's mouth stayed open this time long enough for him to say "Hrmph——" but Tamzin rushed on, her hand on Cascade's sodden bridle: "And after all, the boundaries can't be properly watched, can they, with only three men and Joseph to do them all, as well as everything

else? I mean, look how we've got in. It might easily have been someone else who wasn't disinfected the way we are. But now, of course, there's four of us to help as well."

Suddenly Shepherd Tewmell achieved a complete sentence.

"Properly speaking I should oughter throw you all back into the water."

"Yes, I suppose you ought, really; and we can tell Mr. Merrow you did your best to stop us, only there are four times as many of us as of you, and we've got Cascade, and can all run very fast besides, and haven't much luggage. He can't help but see you couldn't defend the boundary against so many and so strong—I mean, it isn't as if we were four old ladies—and that all goes to show, too, how much you need extra hands."

"You could allus twist yerself round anything, young Tamzin," said Shepherd Tewmell, grudgingly recovering from his shocked indignation. "You and the rest of you. We-ell now," he said in his slow Sussex drawl, "you get along an' see iffen you can twist yerselves round old Mus Merrow. But you better hope and pray you ent brought the sickness with you, or I'll lay the old man'll shoot the lot of you, ar, and not think twice about it, neither. He got three hundred fine sheep out on these grazings what'll all be done away with if the sickness comes."

"But we can't have brought it with us," Tamzin said. "We're simply steeped in carbolic—you can see how pink we are with it—nothing could live on us."

"We wouldn't dream of endangering Mr. Merrow's sheep, sir," Meryon said quietly. "If he tells us to go back, we'll go at once."

The old man looked at him suspiciously, his glance softening perhaps a fraction under Meryon's honest look. "Hrmph," he said. "Come on, Shep!" and he trudged away across the short-grazed turf along the river.

"Happy welcome to Castle Farm!" said Rissa dryly. She turned suddenly back from watching his departure and began to stuff her sodden clothes into her rucksack. "Let's hope Mrs. Merrow will be a little more pleased to see us."

"She always overflows with motherliness," said Tamzin, trying to reassure herself and everyone else. "Look how she adopted Joseph, when no one knew anything whatever about him, and she wasn't a bit put out by his awful language and how dirty he was, or anything."

Meryon was slowly tipping up the hip-bath, letting the water disinfect the ground they had stood on.

"Everyone got everything?" he asked. "I'll shove this old coracle under the gorse, with these empty bottles—we'll tidy them up when the plague has passed from the land—and we'd better move on at once, before we meet anyone else."

Setting their faces to the distant farmhouse they trudged on, over the wide green acres of the Marsh, among tranquilly grazing sheep who didn't know they were beleaguered creatures, threatened with total destruction. Cascade was swishing his wet tail, and Rissa squeezed handfuls of her thick hair from time to time because it was dripping down her neck. Tamzin tucked the reins under her knees while she extracted the half-bottle of calomine from her rucksack.

"At least our faces are dry enough to put some on. But it's my waist that feels worst. I suppose that's because of my shorts' belt rubbing the stuff in. Hold Cascade a minute, Rissa; I can't control him with my knees."

She shook the bottle and tenderly dabbed the thick pink liquid over her face. "It does feel a bit better," she said, passing the bottle down to Rissa.

"You look worse than ever," Roger said, grinning. "The calomine's even pinker than you were."

"Oh well, never mind," said Tamzin. She gathered up her reins again. "The worse we look, the more Mrs. Merrow's heart will go out to us."

"Always providing we don't look so awful that she doesn't recognise us," said Meryon.

Far from appearing like a defended fortress, the farmhouse seemed utterly deserted. No dogs lay on its sun-warmed back doorstep, no man moved about the farmyard where hens scratched lazily in late-summer dust.

Cascade's shoes on the stones of the yard made a clatter that rang against the thick stone walls of the farmhouse, but no one appeared at the door.

Tamzin jumped down. Her legs had dried stickily and were pink and white and tanned, with carbolic, Cascade's hairs and sunshine. Roger knocked on the open door and Rissa slung her rucksack off her shoulders, pulling at her shirt which was sticking to the skin of her back.

"Well! Bless my old soul! Sakes alive!—oh, my dears—don't you let our Dad set eyes on you——"

Mrs. Merrow, leaning from a window in the deep brown thatch, had seen them before they saw her. Tamzin glanced up, screwing her eyes against the gay blueness of the vast Marsh sky.

"Oh, Mrs. Merrow! oh, please listen just a minute——"

But Mrs. Merrow was not listening. She had not even stopped talking; she was far too agitated. "——and if you take the Cold Harbour track, and go round by Winklesea Beach, you'll just do it, if you're quick. Dad and Joseph's out Westling way, and Mike's seaward——what a mercy we had an early dinner. Whatever made you do it, love? We can just hope as no one sees you, till you all get safely on the road again——"

"But Mrs. Merrow! We've almost drowned ourselves in disinfectant——can't you see? That's what the pink is."

"——only hope our Dad's not got his rifle loaded——"

Mrs. Merrow had not once stopped talking in her agitation.

"We've even gargled," Rissa said. "You can smell our breaths if you come down."

"All our clothes and everything are dunked," said Roger.

"Cascade's dripping," said Tamzin.

"It was very strong carbolic," said Meryon. "Every inch of us."

"Every hair," said Tamzin, holding up a sticky plait.

"Look!"

Rissa had extracted her bedraggled bundle from her rucksack and now displayed the whole of it, hanging limply from her fingers like wet washing.

"All our spare clothes, too," she said. "We kept them under for a whole minute. We haven't got anything at all that isn't truly disinfected."

Suddenly, what with the pathetic sight of Rissa's luggage, and all their bright pink faces, and their hair so plainly in need of immediate loving attention, all Mrs. Merrow's motherly instincts pushed to the surface of her mind with a rush, and she stopped talking at last and began to realise what they were saying. Noticing this most characteristic and happy state of affairs, everyone below began at once to repeat everything they had said while Mrs. Merrow hadn't been listening.

"... every inch ..."

"... under for a whole minute ..."

"... smell our breaths ..."

"We did want to come so much," said Tamzin truthfully.

And at that Mrs. Merrow's loving heart filled too full for her, and she vanished from the muslin-clouded window in the thatch, hurrying through the old house to the kitchen.

"Oh my!" she was saying as she appeared in view of the back door, coasting across the scrubbed stone flags of the kitchen floor in her full flowered apron like a schooner with chintz sails, "Oh my! Oh bless my soul! You poor things. Tamzin, put that pony in the orchard with Siani, and come inside, all of you. The kettle's on the boil. You've every one of you to have a good comforting wash and a hot cup of tea, and then it's bed till I've rinsed and dried your things."

"But Mrs. Merrow, I must just wash Cascade over first," Tamzin said firmly. You had to be firm, or be swept right away in the tide of Mrs. Merrow's motherliness. "In case the carbolic prickles him, you know. It does us, awfully. And I won't be a minute. I'll just ladle some water over him from the trough in the yard. You know you'd never forgive yourself if all his hair came off and it was because I hadn't done him," she added wisely. "And after all, we can't all wash at once, can we?"

Mrs. Merrow looked anxiously at Tamzin's pony. "Well," she said doubtfully. "Well, you mustn't be long. I really ought to do you first, with all that long hair——"

"Are you going to wash our *hair*, Mrs. Merrow?" Rissa sounded rather shocked.

"Of course I am, ducks, the state it's in. Now come along, all of you. Eh, and your shoes as well! Soaked to the marrow, you are—every stitch and button."

"Don't we smell lovely?" Roger said, paddling over the clean pearly-coloured floor in her wake.

"And don't you like our rosy faces, Mrs. Merrow?" Meryon asked her, swinging his rucksack off his back.

"I wish it was only faces," said Rissa. She looked longingly after Tamzin and Cascade for a moment, before surrendering wholly to being made dry and clean and comfortable and then sent to bed, in the middle of a golden summer day.

"What a good thing I've got my kettle on," Mrs. Merrow was saying, as if there was ever a time when it wasn't on. "Boys in the scullery, girls in the kitchen here. Roger love, fetch me that large enamel basin and I'll give you your hot water. Meryon, you're old enough to see he does his

hair and everything thorough, and oh, bless me! even your knees are pink, too."

"We're pink all over," Roger said cheerfully, dumping the basin on the table and unbuttoning his chest to show her.

"We had some calomine, but we used it on our faces," Meryon said.

"I'll mix you up some bicarbonate, that's what," said Mrs. Merrow. She tilted the kettle over Roger's basin. Steam veiled her face as she went on, "And what you're going to do about pyjamas I just don't know, all yours being soaked as wet as dish-cloths. But I dare say I'll find something. There you are, Meryon, you two will have to share this basin, and Tamzin and Rissa the other one. Top to toe, and every stitch off and left for me to rinse through." She was refilling the kettle at the long stone sink and now she dumped it back upon the stove, where it sizzled and hissed with overflowed drips, like an engine at a station.

"I got a pair of Mike's," she was saying thoughtfully, "and a pair of our Dad's. Joseph's woulda done better for you, Roger, but I got 'em set for mending. Rissa, you and Tamzin'll have to have my nighties; I got me winter flannel ones, not being used yet. Now, you get on with your washing, the lot of you, while I goes and looks 'em out."

Tamzin came dancing in, like a sticky pink changeling.

"I've washed him down and put him in with Siani. She's delighted. Oh, isn't it wonderful to be here after all? Where are the boys?"

"Scullery," said Rissa, peeling off her clothes. "Washing from top to toe, hair and all. This basin is for us. And Tamzin, you won't believe it but we're going to bed, with hot cups of tea, in Mrs. Merrow's winter flannel night-gowns."

"What? And Meryon and Roger?" Tamzin looked up from fishing in her rucksack for her towel and flannel.

"Of course not, they're having Mike's and Mr. Merrow's pyjamas," Rissa said. "You may as well leave that towel on the table with the other stuff, it's far too wet to dry you."

Loud cheerful noises of whistling and laughing and washing began to come through the scullery door while Tamzin and Rissa were still stripping off the last clammy garments and exclaiming over pink backs and fronts. Mrs. Merrow

clumped carefully downstairs again carrying a pile of night-wear and clean towels over her arm.

"Now Rissa love, you nearly done? Oh, my! if I ever saw such skins then I'm a blessed hat-stand. Do they hurt much, lovies? Gently, now. No need to scrub. Give me that flannel, Tamzin, and you be undoing them long plaits."

Tamzin submitted to being tenderly washed, her fingers working on her wet sticky hair.

"Everything's just the same!" she was saying happily. "The cats on Mr. Merrow's chair, and the grandfather clock still with only one hand, and the teapot on the table, and everything smelling of sun-warmed geraniums."

"Don't talk to me about smelling," said Mrs. Merrow, dabbing Tamzin's back. "I never smelt nothing as was less like geraniums than you four, and that's the truth. Rissa, you do your hair, ducky, and I'll be coming to your back. Then I better see what's all that rumpus in the scullery. Put a couple boys together any place and you surely got it coming. Our Dad allus said the same of boys as worked on the farm."

"We're all going to work," Rissa said, her voice sounding queer because her head was upside down in the basin. "In the house and out of it. You must tell Mr. Merrow that, as soon as he comes in, before he has a chance to tell us to go home."

"I'll see he don't do that," said Mrs. Merrow firmly. She bustled across the kitchen for a towel to wrap round Tamzin. "But you know he's in a proper state about this foot-and-mouth, he is; though he allus thought the world of having all of you about the place. Now Rissa, take your head out that basin, I got to change the water."

"Any towels anywhere?" Meryon called out. "Or do we mangle ourselves?"

"Shall I throw these two in, Mrs. Merrow?" Tamzin asked. She was drying herself by the fire, wrapped in a large white towel; the singing kettle at one side and the singing cats at the other.

"Do, love. And then get quickly into your nightie. Stop wriggling, Rissa love, I can't help it if you're ticklish, for it's gotta be done, so it has."

Tamzin said, "Look at me in my ball-gown," pacing barefooted in Mrs. Merrow's embroidered white night-gown, with her hair all loose and damp around her shoulders.

A bedouin-looking figure appearing in the shadows of the scullery said, "For heaven's sake, stop that Ophelia business and throw a chap some pyjamas."

Urgent Journey

"TRANSFORMATION SCENE!" said Tamzin, posing in Mrs. Merrow's flannel nightgown in the sunshine that came pouring through the bedroom window. "The redskins turn palefaces."

"I think she mixed the bicarbonate too strong," said Rissa. "Gosh! if our mothers could see us now, they'd think we were going into a decline." She was kneeling on her bed, turning up all the pages of a Great Thoughts calendar to read the bits for each day, and every now and then she stopped to rub her damp hair with a towel.

"I say," said Tamzin suddenly, staring out of the little window, "someone's riding in from the Castle, absolutely hell for leather."

Rissa's bare feet landed on the polished floor-boards with a smack and she rushed to the window, lifting her skirts like an early Victorian young lady.

"It's Joseph!"

"Golly! so it is. I didn't know he could ride like that."

"I expect he's being run away with," said Rissa, leaning out over the brown thatch. "No one in their right minds would gallop on a day as hot as this is."

Tamzin said, "Patsy and Tinkle have been too old to run away with anyone for years. He's doing it on purpose. You can see him urging her on."

"Then it can only be an emergency," said Rissa. "Perhaps we'd better warn Mrs. Merrow. She hates shocks."

"She'll be annoyed with us for getting out of bed."

"Don't be silly," said Rissa. "We are out. And you were never even in."

"He's made her jump the tide-dike!" Tamzin said, leaning farther out in her astonishment. "I shouldn't have thought he *could*."

Rissa came backwards into the room again. "I'm going downstairs," she said, running over the floor between the

candlewick-covered beds and pulling the string that lifted the wooden door-latch. Tamzin padded after her, pausing to knock on the door of the boy's room as she passed it, because their window faced another way.

"Joseph's galloping in from the Castle at a great rate. We thought we'd tell Mrs. Merrow."

The door flung open and Meryon and Roger leaped out like boys who have been kept late in school. Roger's pyjamas were enormously too big and were turned up at wrist and ankle.

"We'll come along too, in case the shock makes her feel faint," he was saying hopefully. "Well, it's sure to be a shock," he added, bounding down the staircase, "if it's making Joseph gallop. Last time we saw him he was still holding on to manes."

Mrs. Merrow turned from the oven where she was just putting in a baking of huffkins for tea, and stared at the four in the doorway.

"Back you go, now, every blessed one of you. There's not a stitch as'll be dry this side of tea-time, even if the sun and wind is ever so."

"We thought we ought to tell you," Tamzin began, as soon as she could get a word in, "that Joseph's riding fast from the Castle direction."

"We saw him from our window," said Rissa.

"And if anyone needs any help," said Meryon, "that's what we're here for. I know we aren't presentable, but it can't really matter in the depths of the Marsh, and we've got quite as much on as we usually have."

"More," said Roger. "I usually have bare legs in summer."

Any more conversation was prevented by a clatter of hoofs in the yard, and everyone crowded to the open kitchen door. Joseph, a brown-skinned boy of thirteen or so in khaki shirt and corduroy trousers, was jumping down from Patsy's back at the stable door. Taking no notice at first of Mrs. Merrow and the oddly dressed people with her, he put the pony quickly into the stable and then turned to face them.

"Couldn't be a better time to see you," he said, looking with enormous relief at Rissa and the others, just as if no siege existed and nightgowns and pyjamas were the most usual styles in the world for outdoor wearing. "I've

got to have Siani and the trap, and I don't know much about harnessing. Our Dad's hurt himself, out at the Castle—no, it's not too bad, Mum," he said reassuringly, as Mrs. Merrow's face went white, "but he knocked himself out a bit, and I couldn't lift him on to Patsy. I left Turk there guarding him."

"I'll get Siani now," said Rissa, gathering up her skirts and dashing for the orchard.

"I'll help," said Tamzin, following, her damp hair swinging.

"We can get the trap ready," Meryon said. "Come on, Roger."

"You've nothing on your feet!" wailed Mrs. Merrow, hardly knowing what to think or do next. "And you in your night-clothes and all."

"Never mind, Mum," said Joseph. "They're used to bare feet. I reckon Dad'd like a blanket in the trap," he added. "Shall I fetch one?"

"Oh my!" Mrs. Merrow came to her wits with a bump. "Surelye, Joseph, fetch the top one off your bed, and I'll go and get me kettle forward. He isn't hurt bad, is he? How'd he do it?"

"Trimming the feet of that ole roman-nosed ram," Joseph said, hurrying to the kitchen door. "Caught a kick as sent him down, and knocked his head on a stone from the Castle. Hurt his arm a bit, too."

Tamzin and Rissa paused for a moment on the way to the orchard, looking in at the harness room to snatch a pair of stirrup-leathers for hitching up their nightgowns—"In case Siani thinks we're someone else and won't be caught"—and a halter and some oats. Cascade, who had so recently been turned into the orchard with Rissa's pony, looked up from his grazing in surprise; but Siani had been expecting something in this line ever since Tamzin's first appearance. For with Tamzin was usually Rissa. And Rissa was never at Castle Farm for long without going to fetch Siani.

"I'll get her; you keep Cascade back," Rissa said, climbing the fence beside the gate and having to hitch up her nightdress farther.

"Imagine life in the endless ages when they always wore things long," said Tamzin, marvelling. She scrambled over the fence herself.

Ponies and owners warily approached each other, stepping over windfall pears and apples.

"I've got Cascade."

Rissa said nothing for a moment, concentrating on the slow and cautious movements that were essential to getting a rope round Siani's neck. Then, "All right. I'm taking her straight out."

Tamzin held Cascade by the forelock until Siani was through the gate, then hurried through the grass and over the fence, her hands full of flannel nightgown and her damp hair loose upon her back. Cascade trotted, whinnying, to the gate. He leaned over it, watching the chestnut pony led away from him, so soon after he had found her again. Tamzin wished she could have led him out too, and ridden him beside the trap, but what use was anyone on horseback in a nightgown?

Outside the cart-shed the trap and harness were ready. Joseph was bundling a blanket in at the back and Meryon and Roger picked up the collar and bridle.

"Who's coming?" Rissa asked, pulling the bridle carefully over Siani's ears. "I'm coming, to drive."

Joseph said, "We'll want Roger and Meryon, to help get Dad into the trap, if he hasn't come-to."

"Then I'm not going to be the only one left behind," said Tamzin. She was pulling Siani's tail through the crupper. "After all, we can all walk back. It isn't far."

"Shall I buckle the reins on?" Roger was threading them through the rings on pad and collar.

"I'll do one side," said Rissa. Then, "Shafts up, please, and I'll back her in."

"Mind your bare feet," said Joseph, "with her iron shoes so handy. Never told me yet why the lot of you is all got up for bed?" he added, having for the first time a moment to think about it.

Rissa said, "Tell you when we get going. Hook the traces on, Meryon, can you? Quickest harness-up we've ever done."

"In with everyone," said Meryon. "I'll open the gate."

"Look at all our clothes!" said Roger as they drove into the yard and past the line where all their possessions were blowing and swinging in the wind.

Mrs. Merrow came to the back door as they passed it.

"Bring him back careful, now! No trotting. And look out for bumps."

"We will," Tamzin called, then leaned over the side to watch the gatepost as Rissa drove through on to the Castle track.

Siani had not done any work for some weeks, on account of mumps at Castle Farm, and now she felt so full of herself that five smallish people in a well-sprung trap were nothing at all to her. A very fast trot was the speed required of her, but Rissa had constantly to restrain her from breaking into a spirited canter. Resenting this, Siani swished her long tail so strongly and vigorously that it kept catching in the trace-hooks. And whenever it did this, Siani gave a series of little bucks in the shafts, which might have been quite dangerous on a busy and slippery road.

"You can see why they used to dock harness-ponies' tails," Roger said, leaning over the front to unhook Siani's tail for the second time.

"No need at all," said Rissa, standing braced in the middle. "They could tie them up, the way they do polo-ponies' tails. In fact, if I had a bit of string here I'd do Siani's—it'd only take a minute and save us much more in the end—but all our stuff was in our pockets."

"I've got a piece," Joseph said, pulling it from his trouser-pocket.

"I forgot there was still one of us not in nightclothes," said Rissa, bringing Siani to a halt. "Thanks. Hold on to her, Tamzin, while I jump out and tie it up. And I only hope she doesn't kick the front out of the trap while I'm doing it."

"If it comes to that," said Meryon dryly, "so do we all. Is she likely to?"

Rissa said, "I shouldn't think so. Anyway, you can take your minds off the thought of it by telling Joseph how we came, and why we've got the Merrows' pyjamas and nighties on."

Joseph said, "Knowing you all, and with the siege on as well, I've thought most of it out for myself."

Meryon and Roger and Tamzin began all at once to tell him everything he might not have thought out, and by the time Rissa got in again Joseph knew nearly all that mattered. Siani was in such a fret with being kept waiting, even for a couple of minutes, that she shot forward, swishing her tail more than ever.

"Swish away, my lass," said Rissa. "Now we really can get on."

"And must," Joseph said. "I don't like to think of our Dad out there, alone except for Turk, but I couldn't help leaving him. I had to have help."

Meryon said, "How much is he really hurt, Joe? I could see you were breaking it rather gently to Mrs. Merrow."

Joseph stared at the track ahead of Siani, watching it swiftly vanishing under her hoofs.

"Well, I don't know about his head. Just stunned, really, I think. But his arm isn't too good. Caught it with his knife as he fell. It bled a fair bit, and I thought of putting a tourniquet on—I could've made one with my guernsey sleeve—but I wasn't sure how long it's safe to leave one on, and I didn't know just how soon I'd be back. So I bound it up tightly with my handkerchief."

"Where is he exactly?" Rissa asked, when they came nearer to the Castle ruins.

"By the seaward wall."

Rissa swung the trap out and round the spreading walls of Cloudesley Castle, and almost at once everyone saw old Mr. Merrow, with Turk the sheep-dog lying by his side.

"There he is!"

"He hasn't moved," Joseph said, half rising in the trap as it bumped over the short turf below the Castle. "Let me get out."

Rissa pulled Siani in to a walk, and over the side of the trap went her passengers, one by one—all except Tamzin who was prevented from such athletics by her nightdress.

She and Rissa drove on, watching the others running over the grass towards the figure that lay so quiet near the wall.

"A pity it's a tub-cart," Rissa said, picking the best way for Siani. "All the wrong shape for an unconscious person. How are we going to fit him in?"

"Time enough to think of that," said Tamzin, "when we see how he is. Poor Mr. Merrow! How he'll hate it, just now, when there's so much depending on him."

Pulling up close to the boys and Mr. Merrow, Rissa jumped out and went to Siani's head. Tamzin bent anxiously over the old farmer.

"Good dog, Turk, it's all right. We've come to help," she said to the dog, absently patting his head as she looked at Mr. Merrow. "Oh dear, he is rather white. If only we had a doctor to tell us just what we ought to do. You must have done that arm awfully well, Joseph. It doesn't really seem to have bled a lot." She had turned up the guernsey sleeve, exposing Joseph's tied handkerchief.

"Better loosen the bandage a bit now," suggested Meryon, then knelt to do it himself. He moved light fingers over the bush of grey hair. "I don't think there's any head injury. We must get him back as quickly as we can now, and see what Mrs. Merrow and Mike say."

"Here's the blanket," Roger said. "Wouldn't it be easier to carry him in it?"

"Probably would," said Meryon. "And less likely to hurt him." He laid the blanket out smoothly, rolling one-half of it up. "Up you get, Turk old fellow. Good dog! Take the other end, Roger, and we'll put it beside him. Then you and Joseph can help me lift him over the rolled bit, into the middle. That way, we'll only have to move him a few inches."

"I know one thing we ought to do," Roger said, bracing himself to take his share of the farmer's weight. "Loosen any tight buttons—especially at the neck. It was in a first-aid lecture we had at school—remember, Meryon?"

Meryon was folding the sides of the blanket across Mr. Merrow's broad front. "I don't think he's got any tight buttons, though, unless there's one under his guernsey collar." Kneeling on the grass, he turned back gently the heavy knitted rib of the collar. "Not a really tight one. Anyway, I'll undo it. Now we've got to lift him in, somehow."

"I'll help too," said Tamzin. "That makes one at each corner."

"We shan't be able to get him really comfortable, whatever we do, in that trap," Meryon said. "It'll have to be the floor, I think, and two of us keeping his head and shoulders from bumping—you and I, Joseph. Everyone else'll have to walk. Ready now?"

"Ready," said Joseph and Roger and Tamzin, at their corners of the blanket.

"Then lift! Very carefully. Joseph and I'll go first—

out of the way, Turk old man. That's the idea. Can you back the trap about a yard, Rissa? That's enough."

"This'll be the worst bit," Tamzin said. "Getting him through the door."

"It'll be all right," Meryon said. "I'll have to manage my end by myself. Now you get in, Joseph. And look out for me, coming backwards, because I can't look out for you."

Rissa said, "Lean over the front of the trap, Joseph, to balance all that weight on the back." Even so, the shafts jerked upwards, smacking the girth under Siani's ribs, as Meryon's and most of Mr. Merrow's weight came on to the step. Siani swished her tail again and laid her ears back, but Rissa jiggled the bit in her mouth and talked to her soothingly. Down came the shafts with another smack into the harness, as the weight slowly eased forwards in the trap.

"His legs don't go in properly," Roger said, "unless we bend his knees up."

"Bend them up a little," Meryon said. "No, that doesn't look comfortable. Leave them as they were then, and just see that the door stays wide open and doesn't knock against them. Now, Joseph, if you can get your arm round here, behind his shoulders, and link with mine—that's the idea. Pull the blanket up a bit more your side."

"Roger and I'll walk behind and steady his feet and the door," said Tamzin. "Oh, wait a minute while I get his shears—I saw them near where he was lying." She ran across to the place and found them. "I'll put them under the seat."

"Now, ready I think, Rissa," said Meryon. "Lead on slowly. And look out for bumps. Sorry we can't balance the trap any better, but we can't help having most of the weight forward."

Carefully, slowly, and silently the pony-trap began its urgent journey to the farm. Everyone had more than enough to think about: Rissa plotting ahead the smoothest way, keeping Siani walking steadily, and trying not to place her own bare feet upon sharp-edged stones in the track; Meryon and Joseph foreseeing every movement of the trap, and keeping aching arms exactly right for Mr. Merrow's comfort; Tamzin continually stumbling on the descending hem of her nightgown; and Roger in almost as much trouble with pyjama-legs that would not stay

rolled up and a trap that went on moving whenever he wanted to bend and roll them up again. And it was, of course, impossible to pick a good way for bare feet, following so closely behind the trap as they were.

Behind them all, with tail, ears and muzzle hung low and dejected, walked the sheep-dog Turk. But every time Roger or Tamzin spoke to him he would raise one ear a little, and slowly, hopefully, wave his plumed tail.

“High-skilled Surgical”

TO EVERYONE'S GREAT RELIEF, Mike, the Merrows' grown-up son, was waiting at the yard gate holding it open. Mrs. Merrow herself and the other sheep-dog Jock stood in the gateway, staring down the track towards the Castle.

“Is he all right?” she asked anxiously as the trap came up to the gate.

“All right, Mum,” said Joseph reassuringly.

“The front door, Rissa,” said Mike, as she passed him. “Then we can take him straight upstairs.”

Rissa led her pony round the grey stone walls, in the shadow of the overhanging thatch; Mrs. Merrow walking by the wheel and never taking her eyes off her husband's face. At the front door Rissa turned and backed the trap close up to the threshold, and Mike was there, waiting, filling up the doorway with his broad bulk.

“We'll have to turn him round,” he was saying to Meryon and Joseph. “I can take his shoulders and Meryon his legs. Dare say I could carry him myself, but he'd be more comfortable with the both of us.”

“Can I do anything?” Roger asked, rolling up his pyjama-legs.

“Only just keep out of the way a bit, there's a good lad,” said Mrs. Merrow. “Mike and me done everything ready here. What we really want,” she added to Mike, “is the doctor, and quick. But I'll lay our Dad'd never forgive us iffen we fetched him, with the siege on and all, unless he's real bad.”

Mike was now backing into the doorway with the old man's shoulders in his arms. He said quietly, “I doubt

he's as bad as all that, Mum. Fact, I do believe he's coming round! You and Joseph go along and get the teapot, now. We'll manage him to bed."

Mr. Merrow certainly was beginning to come round. His vague powerful movements as he did so made Mike's and Meryon's work in carrying him far more difficult, for the staircase was narrow and winding, and the stairs were all sorts of sizes. Tamzin had rushed up ahead of them and now was assuring them that the bed was all ready, with hot bottles in it.

"Hot bottles?" Mike queried, puffing upstairs backwards. "This weather?"

"Oh, Mike," said Roger, following up behind, "even I could've told you people lose a lot of heat with shock and injury, in any kind of weather. When we had that first-aid lecture at school——"

"All right, we know," said Meryon. "Or at least, if we don't we can't pay attention now. Why not help Rissa with the trap?"

"Still in my pyjamas?"

"Of course. You've done plenty in them, so far. Sorry, Mike, he's kicking rather, and I missed the step."

"But that was an emergency," said Roger, half-way up the stairs and longing to do something in the first-aid line.

"So's this," said Meryon shortly. "Leaving a girl to put a pony and cart away in her nightgown—I'm on the landing now, Mike. Carry on."

Tamzin stood like a seraph by the bed, her hair long and loose, her nightdress now descended finally to her feet.

"Do we put him between the sheets in all those working clothes?" Meryon queried.

"Mum said so," said Mike, lowering the old man's shoulders to the pillows. "She said she took no account of sheets, so long as our Dad was warm and comfortable. Reckon we'll help him change later."

"Where's Joseph?" Mr. Merrow suddenly grunted, lifting heavy lids and dropping them again with a groan. "Whozzat?" he said, opening them again and staring perplexedly at Tamzin. "I ain't dead, am I? Lord sakes!"

"He thinks you're an angel!" said Mike incredulously. He was drawing up the blankets. "Oh, my poor Dad! Now look," he added urgently, "you better both go, quick,

before he properly do recognise you. There'd be the devil to pay then, with the siege on and all. He'd only make himself worse, getting all worked up about it. And tell Joseph to come up, will you? Say as Dad asked for him."

Tamzin and Meryon were already at the door, and the old farmer was mumbling to himself again now, about how his head was aching, and where their Mum and Joseph were.

"You know, I really do think he ought to have a doctor, don't you?" said Tamzin, rather worried, as they went downstairs.

"Of course he ought, at his age too. But that's for Mrs. Merrow to decide. Besides, if he's coming round he may refuse to see one, and he might easily make himself much worse worrying about the foot-and-mouth risks, if they insisted. Mrs. Merrow would know that. It's an awfully tricky situation."

"I expect she's simply torn with indecision," said Tamzin compassionately, turning down the flagged hall towards the kitchen. "We'll just have to help her all we possibly can."

The kitchen door opened as they came to it, and Mrs. Merrow emerged with a tray of tea-things, Joseph close behind her carrying a kettle and warm towels.

"He's practically come round now," Tamzin told her, "and he was asking for Joseph. Mike thought we oughtn't to stay and be recognised."

"Ee, bless us! that you better not. Nor you mustn't make a mite of noise, indoors or out, case he hears and starts asking questions. We mustn't have him getting himself into a state, not till he's better. Just make yourselves at home, the way you always do, only a whole heap quieter." She started to toil up the stairs. "I don't know how long Mike and Joseph and me'll be upstairs with him. And oh, bless me! if I haven't forgotten me huffkins what I put in the oven before Joseph came."

Tamzin said, "We'll see to them now," and hurried with Meryon into the kitchen.

"Gosh! it's amazing she didn't smell them burning," she said, snatching the oven-cloth from its hook and opening the door. "I suppose she must have been too worried to notice—poor Mrs. Merrow."

"Burnt to a cinder," Meryon said sadly. "And her huff-

kins are always wonderful. Oh well, this is no time to think about that. Better put them outside, because of the smell."

"There's a chicken-bin round the corner; I'll put them in that."

Rissa was outside with Roger, going the length of the clothes-line and feeling their clothes. "Dry!" she said. "Or as near as matters. Never thought I should be so thankful for a good drying wind."

"Can't be thankfuller than I am," said Roger. He was unpegging his shorts. "After half a day in pyjamas three sizes too big for me, the bliss of wearing my own gear again can't be imagined."

Tamzin was scraping the oven-sheet into the bin. "I expect that's true of all the ordinary things, really. You never guess how wonderful they are until you have to do without them," she said philosophically.

"Did someone say they were dry?" asked Meryon in the doorway.

"Dry enough," said Tamzin. Rushing into the house with the blackened oven-sheet, she tore out again and joined the others in sorting and unpegging clothes. "It's a blessing that Mr. Merrow's bedroom is round at the front," she was saying. "It makes me feel so nervous, creeping about and hardly daring to breathe."

"Mrs. Merrow won't like us wearing our shirts un-ironed," Rissa said, "but it can't be helped."

Roger said, "You only have to scrumble them up in your hands a bit, and it takes the creases out wonderfully. Look!"

There was a rush for the house.

"If we get them on quickly, she won't be so likely to say we oughtn't to," Roger said.

"And if we wash out these nightgowns and things," said Rissa, "there won't be anything left for us to change back into, and we shall be doing Mrs. Merrow a good turn as well. After all, it's Saturday, so they'll probably need them ready for to-night. Besides, we can be much more useful when we're in our workaday get-up."

In the scullery and kitchen the second transformation was completed in about a tenth of the time the first one had taken.

"Now the washing," Rissa said.

Roger and Meryon carried water in kettle and dipper, and Tamzin made suds in the sink.

"Someone coming downstairs," Roger said.

The doorlatch clicked and Joseph came in.

"How is he?" Tamzin and Meryon asked together.

"Come round fine," said Joseph. "He's simply busting to get up, but Mum won't let him. She's been trying to persuade him into seeing Doctor Hargreaves, but he fair boiled over at that."

Tamzin and Rissa were standing sideways at the sink, thumping clothes about and looking at Joseph. Roger stood with shovel in hand, in the middle of making up the kitchen range.

"Does he know we're here?" Meryon was sorting and folding all their spare clothes and towels on the table.

"Hasn't said nothing about that, yet. He's much too thratched about being laid up, just when he's wanted most, and about fearing Mum'll have the doctor, despite what he say."

"She wouldn't do that," said Tamzin. "Put a bit more soap in, Rissa, the lather's all gone."

"Trouble is," said Joseph, "it's his arm. Wants stitching, Mum says, and Dad says Stitch it then. She says, What, with nothing but a nornary needle and cotton, all covered with germs? and no gas to put him to sleep, nor nothing? And she says she'd faint at the thought of poking anything into him. So he says Mike can do it, then."

"I expect that's him coming down now," said Roger.

Mike was looking both scared and determined.

"Never thought," he said weakly, "as I'd live to see the day I'd be a surgeon."

"Oh, Mike!" said Tamzin. "Are you really going to do it?"

"He say I got to. And I never even done a stitch of domestical sewing, let alone highly-skilled surgical."

Meryon said, "If he knew for certain we were here, I'd be willing to have a go at it. I mean, I wouldn't mind the surgical aspect I'll probably be a doctor some day—and I can use a needle all right for mending clothes. Roger and I always do our own in camp. But if he doesn't know we're here, I'd probably only upset him, and we'd have to start explaining all over about the disinfectant and everything."

"True," said Mike, regretfully. "Much better not to pile on too much shock until he's better. Mum says he got a slow pulse, and that's shock, see, and loss of blood, I reckon."

"I expect it'll be quite enough shock," said Tamzin, "having his arm stitched without any anæsthetic."

"Oh well," said Mike, visibly bracing himself, "what's got to be, has got to be. No good putting it off. I better go and find our Mum's work-box."

"I'll get it," said Tamzin, drying her hands. "I know where it is."

Rissa dumped the wet clothes into a basin. "Work must go on, I suppose," she said, "despite emergencies."

"Like the circus when people break their necks trapezing," said Roger.

"Come and turn the mangle for me," said Rissa.

Mike said, "Speaking of work, Dad fare to be proper worried about some of the jobs he got on his mind. Boundaries, for instance; he say someone got to go round them again before dark, and then once arter. And he say there's still three 'No Entry' notices what've got to be fixed."

"We can do any of that," said Joseph. "Do we take guns?"

"Lor' bless us," said Mike, "not anybody younger'n Meryon, and he's young enough to carry arms again the public. But you can take one of the dogs."

"Not even an empty gun?" Joseph asked. "There'd be no harm in that, but it'd look just as dangerous to the trespassers."

"We-ell, probably you could——"

"Here's the work-box," said Tamzin, coming into the kitchen again and setting the box on the table.

Mike frowned at it. "I suppose I better get that job over first. Joseph, you and Roger could fetch the cows in and start the milking. Then I may be finished and able to give me mind to the gun and them three notices."

"I can't milk," said Roger, from the scullery where he was still mangling, "but I'm an expert mucker-out and cow-escorter."

"Then it's time as someone learned you," Joseph said, going through to the dairy for the bucket.

Tamzin was hunting through the work-box. "Needles; I don't know what size you want, Mike?"

"Gor blimey! better be a big un, with my fingers blunt as thumbs, the way they are."

"You'll make a much bigger hole with a darner, Mike," said Rissa, from the scullery. "You've got to think of that."

"Well gimme a small darner, then. Let it be a long un, anyway."

"It's more to push through," persisted Rissa.

"What kind of cotton?" Tamzin asked. "Better be white, I suppose, but there are several kinds of white. This looks a good strong one—not too thick, like this button-twist."

"Don't forget you've got to sterilise it," Meryon said, looking uneasily at the chosen implements on the table.

"There's a little Dettol left in the bottle we brought for gargling," Tamzin said, but Meryon suddenly interrupted, "Heck, no! If we've got to do this thing at all—and I don't think we should—we've got to do it properly. Really, I think we ought to fetch a doctor, whatever Mr. Merrow says, and not dabble in anything so skilled ourselves, but if Mike says we can't, we can't."

"Dad'd fairly die of rage," said Mike. "Tidden a big cut, really, and they had to manage in the days when there weren't no doctors, after all."

"All right," said Meryon, "but at least there's no need to make the mistakes they made when they didn't know about germs. To begin with, you've got to scrub up, Mike—hands and arms—all surgeons do. I know, because my uncle's one, and I've watched him—been in the theatre sometimes, too, when he's been operating. And put Tamzin's Dettol in the scrubbing water. It's on the table there, with our stuff. Don't use it all, you'll need some for cleaning the wound."

"What about the needle and cotton? We'll want some for that," objected Tamzin.

"You won't. They've got to be boiled. They always are. Find me a small, clean saucepan, Tamzin, will you? Oh, darn, who's emptied the kettle? I thought it was always full and boiling in this house."

"It was," said Tamzin. "We used it for washing out those nightclothes. You know we did."

"Then I think whoever actually empties it should always fill it and put it back. Would've saved us minutes, now; but never mind, I suppose Mike can scrub up in cold. I'll get the saucepan going for the sterilising."

The mangling rumbled to an end in the scullery, and Roger tore out after Joseph. Risa carried her basketful into the yard for pegging out, and Tamzin cut off lengths of white cotton, dropping them with the small darner into her saucepan.

"Got a clean milking overall, Mike?" Meryon was saying. "You can't possibly operate in those clothes. I expect there's an aura of germs sticking out a yard all round them."

"Who said anything about operate?" Mike asked nervously. "I only said I'd darn 'im up a bit. Wishing I hadn't said that, now," he added, scrubbing his large hands at the sink.

"Same thing, Mike," said Tamzin consolingly. "I expect it's a term that covers anything surgical."

Mike finished scrubbing and began to reach for the roller towel, but Meryon leaped to stop him.

"Great heavens, man!—sorry, Mike—but you can't touch that, it's simply crawling with bacteria. Besides, you haven't rinsed your hands and arms in fresh water. Ought to be running water really, but do them in this. Then I'll get you a clean towel."

"Phew!" said Tamzin weakly. She was finding Meryon's sudden energetic command of the situation rather exhausting. "Clean towel here—it's one of ours—just been disinfected *and* washed."

Mike, now thoroughly nervous and afraid of doing anything on his own initiative, was dabbing his hands delicately on the corner of Tamzin's clean towel.

"Overall—clean one," said Meryon. "And you must have a white cloth to tie over all that hair, and something over your mouth and nose—butter muslin'd do—now where?"

"Dresser drawers—one or the other," Mike said in a thin small voice, still dabbing.

Meryon rummaged, found the things and began enveloping Mike inside the overall. "No, don't touch it, Mike; don't touch anything whatever with your hands, now you've scrubbed. I'll do it. Instruments boiling yet, Tamzin?"

"Like anything," said Tamzin. "Shall I stir them?"

"My good woman——" began Meryon, very shocked.

"Oh, all *right!*" said Tamzin, trying not to feel scratchy. "We aren't all budding surgeons; you'll just have to have patience with us, or we'll go all to pieces."

Meryon stared at her a moment, queerly. Then suddenly everyone realised that his old sanguine calmness was back, and all the electric tension of his energy relaxed. Mike and Tamzin sighed their relief and Tamzin had a sudden mental vision of nurses and sisters scurrying round and quailing before Meryon Fairbrass, F.R.C.S., in some future time; and a small flicker turned up the corners of her mouth.

"You'll have to wash the wound," Meryon said now, adjusting the cloth on Mike's head. "Kettle's nearly boiling—not that you have to do it with boiling water!" he grinned, seeing Mike's horrified face, "but it's got to be boiled. Have you any cotton-wool?"

"Lor' bless us!" said Mike, "an' what would we be wanting with that, on a sheep farm?"

"Have to use a clean handkerchief, then, and it'll have to be cut in four pieces, because the same piece mustn't touch the wound twice. Now let me just tie this muslin mask—it's so that you don't breath on the wound while you're working, you know."

"Cor, darn take it," said Mike, through the muslin, "I'll lay I never looked such a sight in all me natural."

Tamzin found the handkerchief, cut it in four and put the pieces in a small bowl. The kettle boiled suddenly, and Meryon poured the steaming water into and over the bowl.

"Now tip in the rest of the Dettol. Here you are, Mike. Instruments in this one—swabs in this. I'll come up and open the door, as you mustn't touch anything except the sterilised stuff now."

Tamzin followed, prepared to listen anxiously on the landing, and thankful that Risa was pegging out clothes in the yard and Roger and Joseph busy with the cows.

All went well until the door had closed behind Mike. There was a moment or two of indistinguishable murmuring, then Mr. Merrow's irate voice suddenly roared out:

"Why in thunder can't you be getting on with the tarnation job? Standing there and doddering!"

There was a short dreadful silence, and then Mike's anguished voice; "I can't do it! I can't do it!" He rushed from the room into the listening figures of Meryon and Tamzin on the landing. "I can't do it! Not with me own Dad! Stands to reason. . . ."

Doctors Get Used to Anything

RACING DOWNSTAIRS in a high-tension of excitement and anxiety, Tamzin followed Mike and Meryon into the kitchen.

"Oh, there you are," said Rissa, straightening up from stowing the clothes basket under the mangle. "Have you finished already, Mike? Gosh, you jolly well do look funny in all that get-up."

"Not near so funny as I feel," said Mike, tearing the tea-towel from his head. "Stickin' things into me own Dad, and cold-blooded, too. Either I got to have a coupla double whiskies or fetch the ruddy doctor."

"Mike! You don't mean you'd operate *drunk*?" Tamzin was shocked.

"Ridiculous idea," Meryon said. "You've got to be cold-sober in the theatre, any surgeon'll tell you. And as for fetching the doctor—you must remember what you said when I suggested it?"

"That were different, then," said Mike, undoing the overall. "And I didn't mean drunk. Only there's some things you can't do in cold blood; and sewin' up your own Dad's one of them. I aren't a-going to do it," he added finally, dropping the overall on to the table.

Tamzin and Rissa stared at each other while all this settled in their minds, and Meryon frowned and stared at nothing, unless it was at the heap of abandoned preparations on the table. Suddenly he looked up, his bright blue eyes piercing with inspiration.

"Listen! I've thought it all out. Mike, I'll do it for you, but you'll have to help, like this; your father mustn't know it's me. Now you go up and tell him you've decided you can carry on if you can't see him but only the area to be stitched. Tell him that's how it always is in hospital theatres—it is, you know; everything else is covered up, or under the rubber mask thing—and say he's got to stay behind a sheet that Mrs. Merrow and Joseph will hold up—just putting his arm under it, on the bed-cover. Rissa, fetch Joseph in, will you? I'll be scrubbing up in here while

you explain to him, and then Mrs. Merrow can be finding the sheet. And when everything's in position, you go in—I'll have to creep, in bare feet—and you keep talking to him, so that he doesn't guess anyone else is there, and I'll be getting on with the job."

Mike looked at him suspiciously for a moment, then relief slowly began to spread over his features. "I bet you would, too," he said with grudging admiration.

"Not only would—will," said Meryon. "Go on and tell him, Mike. I'll be ready in five minutes."

Tamzin grabbed the kettle, feeling that there was little enough she could do to help in this great moment of Merrow history.

"It isn't boiling—it never seems to be, now—but it's better than cold." She poured it into the basin at the sink. "No more Dettol. Oh dear, what shall we do?"

"Shove some salt in," said Meryon. "That's an antiseptic, isn't it?" He was rolling up his sleeves.

Rissa rushed in with Joseph. "Here he is; he's left Roger having a go at the milking."

"I'd nearly finished," said Joseph.

"We want your help upstairs," Meryon explained, "holding up a sheet with Mrs. Merrow, so that Mike can't see his father's face while the stitching's going on."

"Meryon's doing it," Tamzin said proudly, refilling the kettle.

"I know," said Joseph. "Rissa told me. Well, it's wonderful practice, if he wants to be a doctor, but I'd sooner him than me. And I must say I wish it wasn't our Dad."

Meryon was scrubbing his arms now. He said, "I'll be so careful with him, Joseph, he'll hardly feel a thing. And you must keep talking to him, to take his mind off it. Now, off you go! And mind you don't say a thing to me in the bedroom. I'm not supposed to be there."

Tamzin helped him on with the white milking overall, while he stood with his scrubbed hands held outwards, and Rissa tied the tea-towel over his ramping black hair. Mike came clumping downstairs and Tamzin said, "Nothing is ever so bad as it seems—remember, Meryon."

Rissa said, "He docsn't need a word of sympathy, you're wasting it on him," as she tied the muslin mask tightly behind his head.

"Ready, Mike?" asked Meryon, sounding muffled through the mask. "Look, have you got a first-aid box

anywhere? I'll have to finish off with a dressing and bandage, and though I've thought of it late, I have thought of it."

"There's this old Oxo tin in here," said Mike, rummaging in one of the dresser drawers. "That got some bandages and stuff in, or it always used to have."

"You'll have to carry it," Meryon said. "It's me that's sterilised this time. And will you open the doors for me? Thanks."

They went through the hall and up the crooked stairs, Tamzin and Rissa following anxiously.

"Sh!" said Meryon over his shoulder. "Sounds like a herd of bullocks coming up."

"It isn't really us," Rissa whispered, "it's all these funny stairs creaking."

"Tread on the sides of them," advised Mike, feeling calm and kindly now the terror had been lifted from him. "Coming, Dad!" he called out cheerfully, whistling to drown the noise of creaks and breathing.

"No need to sound so joyful," Mr. Merrow's voice replied edgily.

"Well Dad, I feel so much better about it, now I've thought of that screen," said Mike, stepping cautiously into the bedroom, then turning to beckon Meryon.

Tamzin and Rissa saw the door close in their faces. They stood on the landing, waiting, listening, and thinking. Both were thinking about Meryon, the situation being what it was, but Tamzin was thinking how like him all this was; there was nothing really that he couldn't turn his hand to if he wanted. And Rissa thought, Fancy old Meryon keeping so close about being a doctor—and what a thing to be, when there's always the sea, and ships to sail on it.

"Now don't worry, Dad," came Mike's voice, very brisk and bracing. "Soon be over now, and you'll never know I've done it."

"Too true!" whispered Rissa.

"I think he's overdoing the cheerfulness," Tamzin whispered, even quieter.

"Tent me as is worrying, is it?" said Mr. Merrow. "Nor never wasn't. Twadden me as wanted all this screen set-up. Ah! Aw! Gor blimey, son, you're sticking it into me."

"Well Dad, I can't very well sew it up without, now, can I? But I'm trying not to hurt you. Keep your arm as still as you possibly can, now."

"I ask you, *aren't* I keeping it still? Can't keep it no stiller, I got to breath. Aw! Ow! Oh!"

"Don't fuss, Dad! It isn't really hurting, surelye?"

"My blessed ancestors!" said the farmer. "You wanter be me, and see fer yourself fer a bit. How much more've you got to do?"

There was a moment's silence in which Tamzin imagined Mike bracing himself to look. Then, "Oh, only a couple more stitches, I shouldn't wonder."

Joseph's voice was recurrently audible, saying such comforting things as:

"Roger and me've fetched the cows up and milked. We gave 'em the same amount of dairy nuts that you do, and they looked wonderful healthy—no foot-and-mouth about *them*." Or:

"We'll do the boundaries directly we done this, and we'll put up them notices too." Or:

"Is your head better, Dad? You surelye did whack it."

"Finished!" said Mike triumphantly. "Now, don't you feel better? I only got to bandage it up, and all's in order."

"Tingles something shockin'," said the farmer, but he sounded calmer and was telling Joseph where to nail the notices. "One on the fence that goes down to the river—some fool might try to cross that—one by the lifeboat house, and one where the path goes out to Westling. They're all rather far apart, son, but Mike and me put up the first ones as scattered as we could, and that left scattered places still wanting 'em."

Mrs. Merrow's voice could be heard next. "I do surelye hope you nearly done, Mike, for I got such pins and needles holding up this blessed sheet."

"Half a minute, Mum, I nearly finished."

The door opened silently and Meryon slipped out; bare-footed, overalled, masked and turbaned, and with the small bowl in his hand. Winking solemnly at Tamzin and Rissa he glided past them and downstairs. Silently, they followed, and a moment later Joseph was at their heels as they entered the kitchen. Meryon was washing again, bending over the sink.

Joseph said, "Worked perfectly! He never even dreamed it wasn't Mike. And you didn't really hurt him much, did you, Meryon?"

"No, not much. I gave myself a few shivers, though—at least, until I got going."

"Doctors get used to anything," Rissa said. "Don't you remember, Tamzin, about those medical students in a dissecting room, who used to prop their books——"

"Yes, I do," Tamzin interrupted, "and I don't want to hear any more about them. Have you thought, it must be getting time for tea? Hadn't we better be putting it on?"

"Meryon's emptied the kettle again," Rissa said, looking into it.

"*Again?* This is the first time I've emptied it without filling it up, and I had to wash before I could do that."

A shadow moved in at the back door, and after it came Roger with the milk for the house. "I couldn't get much more after you'd gone, Joseph," he said, taking it through to the dairy. "How did the operation go? Patient sitting up, all ready for fruit and flowers?"

"It went jolly well," Rissa said, whisking the tablecloth into place. "You should have heard Mr. Merrow."

"He didn't really hurt him," Joseph said. "I was there. He made a lovely job of it, just like a real doctor."

Meryon was pulling off the tea-towel, running his fingers through his hair.

"That's better," said Roger, emerging from the dairy again. "Gave me the creeps, seeing you like that. Especially when I have to sleep with you."

Rissa laughed. "He thinks old Meryon might get in a bit of practice, after dark! Where's the tea kept, Tamzin? You ought to know. Won't anybody help me get the table laid?"

Roger said, "What, me? with cow-smell all over me?"

"I will," said Tamzin, "when I've strained the milk. And we mustn't forget a tray-tea for the patient."

"Just let me climb out of this overall," said Meryon. "It has cunning fastenings."

Joseph began taking plates from the dresser, saying thoughtfully, "See, how many are we? Must be only seven, but don't it seem a dunnamany more?"

A Little Banditry

IN THE MORNING, over an early breakfast, the household was planning its day. Outside, a heavy sea-mist hung like

curtains at the windows; but indoors the old black range glowed behind its bars, the kettle sang, and Mrs. Merrow sat behind the large brown teapot in her second-best flowery apron.

"I will say his arm do look wonderful," she said, "but I don't like him having all these headaches. Come at him like lions pouncing, he say, and then gone as sudden. But they do lay him out when he got them, asperings or no."

"Then it seems we can say he won't be getting up, not for to-day, anyway," said Mike, who had four fried eggs on his plate—one more even than Meryon. "So you do the nursing, Mum, and we'll settle the work between us."

"Including the housework," Tamzin said, trying hard to look enthusiastic, but longing to be out in the white mist, riding with the others.

"I don't reckon I'll need such a wunnerful lot of help with that," said Mrs. Merrow, stirring inside the teapot, which emitted heat and a small plume of steam, like a baby volcano. "I can keep popping in and having a look at Dad between jobs."

Rissa said briskly, "Well, we may as well do the dishes, anyway. We have to at home. Only I think the boys should help too, and not have all the most exciting jobs just because of being boys."

"Fair enough," said Mrs. Merrow. "I always see our Joseph does one wash-up a day, and I taught 'em both to be handy in the house. Stands to reason one woman can't do all. Tidden like the old days, when there was girls in plenty willing to take work inside the farmhouses."

"Nor we couldn't afford 'em if there was," said Mike.

Meryon pulled a small notebook out of his pocket. "We'll have a rota," he said, turning pages of navigation rules, constellation maps, books he wanted to read, and a page which said, "Ask Mother about bigger pyjamas: "Remember remind Wilkinson about book I lent him: " and, "Send for deck-plan Cutty Sark."

"Four lots of dishes a day, and five of us, counting Joseph," Rissa said.

"That's a good thing, really," said Meryon. "We can shift on one step every day, so that no one gets the dinner lot each time. If we go in order of age, eldest first, no one can complain. That gives me to-day's breakfast things and to-morrow's dinner."

"Cheers!" said Roger. "Tea ones for me to-day. No pudding plates, no saucepans."

"Sh!" said Rissa. "Mr. Merrow'll hear you."

"What about the one that hasn't any wash-up?" Rissa said. "That's Joseph to-day. He's youngest."

Everyone looked at Joseph, who said, "There's always sweeping the kitchen. I sometimes do that."

"Kitchen," said Meryon, writing it down.

"Everyone makes own beds," said Tamzin, who was trying to help herself to butter without spoiling the imprinted cow in the middle.

"Goes without saying," said Meryon.

"And no noise, so's Dad'll hear and get suspicious," said Mike, "or I won't answer for the consequences."

Mrs. Merrow said, "You want to get out of doors all you can. There's no call for hours of housework—but do keep away from the housefront. Pass the marmalade to Tamzin, Mike, and then I'll fill up your cup."

"Boundaries," said Mike, passing the marmalade with one hand and his cup with the other. "Someone really ought to be riding them all the time; in shifts, perhaps."

"Like a sort of relay race," suggested Roger.

"Two at a time's best, son," said Mrs. Merrow. "One don't carry no authority, especially young, as most of you are."

Mike said, "How about Roger and Tamzin first, after breakfast? I've got to be seeing to the sheep till midday, and Meryon'll be washing up."

"Then Rissa and me," said Meryon. "And she can dry the dishes."

"Then Joseph and Mike," said Tamzin. "That gets in three shifts, anyway, and someone might do a fourth one later on. And can I use your saddle, Rissa? as you won't be wanting it yet."

"Yes, but if you alter the leathers please leave them as you found them."

Everyone began to bolt last mouthfuls, drain cups, and push back chairs.

"What's Roger riding?" Rissa asked, helping to clear the table.

"Patsy," said Mike. "Tewmell's got Tinkle at his cottage, for looking this morning."

"Mist's lifting," said Tamzin, staring through the win-

dow, "but not much. Come on, Roger, let's make our beds and go and get the ponies."

Making beds was a breathless enterprise of silence and barefoot creeping, especially "near Mr. Merrow's door. But mercifully Mrs. Merrow and Joseph were upstairs too, and any small noise the others made could have been attributed to them. Once downstairs again, Tamzin and Roger made for the back door. Out in the wet white mist they ran to fetch halters, moving through the milkiness like ghosts. Cascade was hard to see, his white coat merging with its background; but when Patsy was caught he came trotting, out of his own curiosity, and Tamzin's hand went to his forelock.

"Mind you don't let Siani out," she said to Roger at the gate. "She'll hate being left behind, but Rissa will be taking her next."

Riding through the mist was like swimming in milk. Nothing was visible until very close, and then loomed unusually large. There was no colour to speak of, no distance and no sky. Just the long post-and-rail fence, coming out of and vanishing into the soft fleece of the mist. Then there was the river, black and gliding; then the place where they had crossed, and the vague humps of the gorse bushes where the bath-tub was hidden. Sheep's bleating sounded eerie, coming through the white barrier, and ships' fog-horns moaned. Then, like a genial enchantment, the dull smother of the mist was slowly filled with shining light. It hung incandescent, floating, lifting, gently dispersing. And stronger and stronger came the sun's rays soaking through it.

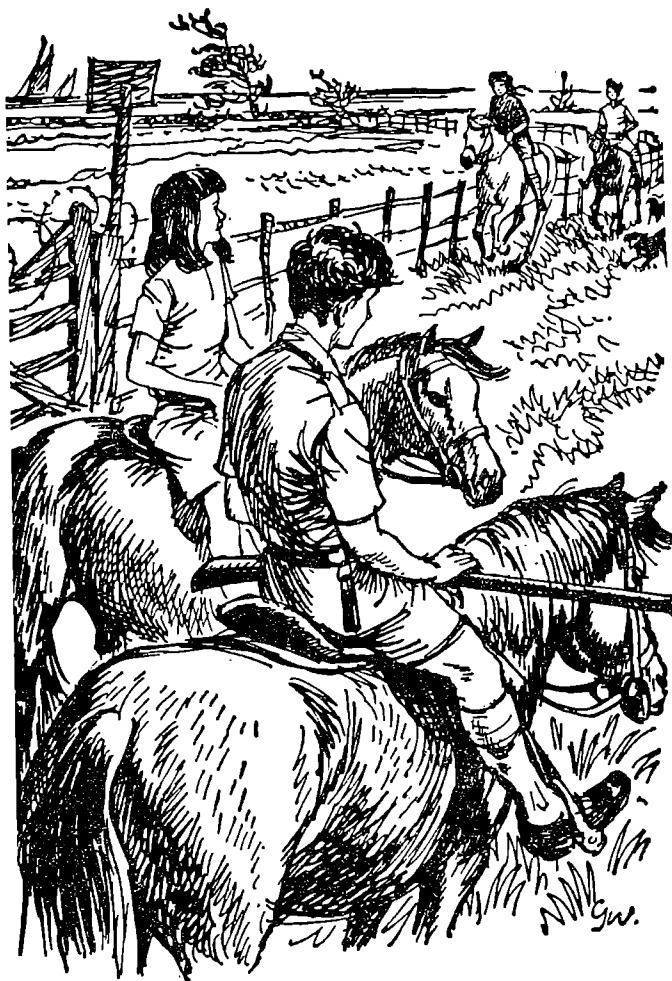
"Now we can canter," Tamzin said. "It's like riding through light—as if light were a thing you could touch."

Roger said logically, "But really there must be more light when there isn't a mist."

"There *seems* more now," persisted Tamzin, letting Cascade quicken his stride. "And everything's turned silvery."

"My clothes and hair are soaking," Roger said, bumping along beside her on old Patsy. He never troubled to learn the skills of riding.

"Not really soaking," Tamzin said. "It's all on the surface, and when the sun gets through it'll be gone in no time. Look, there's Westling! There's the church, and the Harbour Mast, and the Martello tower. The mist has almost gone already."



The first of the patrol came riding in from the sea

Before they had completed the wide ring of their patrol, Meryon and Rissa had washed, dried and put away the last small teaspoon and were getting ready for their ride. Old Shepherd Tewmell had brought the second looking pony back from his cottage near the Castle still quite fresh after a short amble round the flocks, and Meryon was adjusting the leathers to his long legs, looking over the gun he would carry, and oiling the water-stiffened leather of his and Rissa's sandals. Joseph and Mike were away with the sheep, and Mrs. Merrow fussed about the house, going up and downstairs like a spider on a thread.

"I do wish his head would feel better," she said to Rissa, who came into the kitchen carrying her jersey. "I wholly don't like it. Though I must say his arm's as nice as one could wish."

"Don't worry, Mrs. Merrow! He'll be all right, even if we have to kidnap the doctor. But I expect he'll feel better in the evening. I don't want my jersey, the mist's clearing and it's going to be hot."

"And another thing," said Mrs. Merrow. "He got it on his mind as he seem to think he saw Meryon, somewhen—course it was when Mike and Meryon was carrying him upstairs, and he were starting to come-to. I tell him he's just fancying things, on account of having a headache, but he say he can't help thinking what he thinks. And what's more, he say, he seem to think he saw an angel by his bed."

"Oh well, in *that* case," said Rissa, much relieved, "you can explain it must be owing to the headaches. People don't see angels, really. Meryon and I are going to do our round before dinner, unless there's anything else you want done first?"

"You go along, love. I'm getting on fine, with me dishes and kitchen all done for me. And mind you don't be late, now."

Over the last mile of boundary the first of the patrol came riding in from the sea. Meryon and Rissa sat in their saddles by the farmyard gate, watching them come.

"Anything to report?" asked Meryon.

"We haven't seen anyone." Roger said.

"Not near the boundaries, anyway," said Tamzin. "Actually, we couldn't see anything much at all, for the first half-hour."

"It's jolly well hot," said Roger, jumping down from

Patsy's back. "What I want now is a long cold drink of water."

Meryon and Rissa turned their ponies to the river.

"Back for dinner! And Mike says, if anyone has time, there are the pigsties to muck out."

First they inspected the padlock and notice at the main farm gate that led to Winklesea and the Beach.

NO ENTRY for any reason WHATSOEVER
These boundaries are patrolled by Armed Guards
Foot-and-Mouth Precautions

Signed, Wm. Merrow

"That looks all right," said Rissa, hoping the innocent-looking woman with a shopping basket, passing down the lane, had noticed the gun across Meryon's saddle and would duly spread the tale. They rode on down to the river and along beside it.

"Bath-tub's still there!" said Meryon, grinning, noticing the tinny gleam of it beneath the gorse.

"It was only yesterday," Rissa said.

"So it was! Seems years."

Far down the river, leaning on the gate across the Dunsford track, were a couple of young women.

"Can't they read?" snorted Meryon, urging Tinkle onwards.

"Well they are the other side," Rissa pointed out.

"*They* are. But what about their dogs?"

Suddenly Rissa saw them and realised the danger. Dogs, running around and about, here and there, back and forth, all over the riverside grazings.

"If there's any infection on them," said Meryon, "they're spreading it, as no human would walking quietly down the track." He pressed the sedate Tinkle to a canter and Siani shook her head, wanting to race. At the gate, the women watched the ponies approach. One of the dogs saw a rabbit and raced madly out towards the Castle. With a blowing and a scatter of stones, the ponies pulled up.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to call in your dogs," said Meryon with perfect civility. "There is a notice on the gate, which perhaps you haven't read."

"Read it?" repeated the older woman, "of course we have. And what harm are our little dogs doing, may I ask? Your notice says nothing about dogs."

"It says 'No Entry', and that means all traffic. Dogs are quite as likely to carry foot-and-mouth as anything else—in fact, more so. Please call them in at once; there are three hundred sheep on these grazings."

"Certainly not!" said the woman. "And you can't make us—can he, Mabel?"

"Makes me laugh," said the other, looking superior.

With a swift movement, Meryon had clicked back the hammer of his gun. "I assure you," he said, "that I can. And if you don't call in your dogs at once, I will."

"Don't you start trying that nonsense on me," snorted the elder woman. "You wouldn't have the nerve. You can't go round shooting people in this country. They'd hang you, like the common murderer you'd be. Pointing guns at people! And a couple of women, too. I'll report you to the police, that's what I'll do—won't we, Mabel? It's banditry, that's what it is; anybody can see you're just a gipsy."

"Madam," said Meryon with icy politeness, "if I may point out to you—it is your dog I am covering—not yourselves."

Rissa looked from the women to Meryon and thought she had never seen him so coldly inscrutable. But his quietness was frightening. The women began suddenly to panic, screaming at their dogs and glaring nervously at Meryon as they shouted.

"Dinky, Dinky, *Dinky!*"

"Christabel, Christabel—shoot a poor innocent little doggie, would you? Bel Bel, *Bel!*—I'll report you to the police—Christabel!"

The dogs came lolling over the grass, not hurrying, in two minds about disobeying. But something in the anguished shrieking of their names must have made them keep going. The muzzle of Meryon's gun moved slowly in a half-circle with the movement of the dogs. But he said nothing at all and seemed not to be listening to the women. As soon as the dogs were through the gate he broke the gun and clicked the hammer to safety. Laying the weapon back across his saddle he watched the departure of the women, still abusing and threatening him, with their dogs on the end of tartan pattern leads.

"It wasn't even loaded," said Meryon. "We don't want to make trouble for the Merrows. But I thought that would be enough to shake them."

Rissa grinned, suddenly relaxing. "Well, at least they know a gipsy when they see one!"

"And a bandit!" said Meryon, grinning too.

Rissa suddenly laughed. "If they'd known about your notorious ancestor they'd have fallen into fits."

The fence from this gate, past Westling to the sea, was unmarked by any kind of incident. Rissa was almost disappointed, for Meryon's manner with trespassers might have been interesting. There was something exhilarating about crushing politeness: though of course there might never be another situation when Meryon would consider it necessary.

Where Castle Farm lands marched level with the sea the ride was pure delight. Most of the way it was possible to ride in sight and sound of the sea, though never to go over the beach banks and down to the water, because of long-shore fishermen and boulderers whose boots bore Westling dust, and might carry infection from Harbour Farm. Today, the mild wind was heavy with salt and sea-smells, and the sound of distant church bells. It was rich with the ripeness of early autumn. There was the high brilliance of a clear sky, and the faraway circle of a horizon unbroken in its ring around them.

Everyone was hungry at dinner-time, and Mrs. Merrow had managed, despite having her hands full with nursing and her mind full with anxiety, a chicken pie with runner beans, followed by apple dumplings.

"Dad, he don't seem to fancy no dinner," she said, picking at her own small plateful. "It's on account of his head keep aching so, he say."

"You really are quite sure the arm's all right?" asked Meryon. "It doesn't look pink or puffy or anything? You've had the bandage off?"

"Had it off and changed it," Mrs. Merrow said. "Looked healthy as my own. And he say it don't throb."

Meryon said, "I believe we'll have to take the stitches out sometime—I wish I knew when. Probably a week or a fortnight."

"How long does the danger go on from the foot-and-mouth?" Rissa asked. "I mean, I suppose there's a sort of quarantine period or something, the way there is for human diseases."

"It's anything up to three weeks," said Mike. "Only we can knock nearly a week off that, here, because the last

outbreak in these parts was six days ago, and of course they slaughtered all the animals. Unless," he added, "there's another outbreak starts."

"Looks as if we'll have to do the stitches, then," said Meryon, "if the siege is still on. I hoped we'd be free to get a doctor, sooner than that."

The afternoon swung into its stride, with Rissa doing the dinner-dishes, Mike and Joseph walking the boundaries with the dogs—to give the lookering ponies a rest—and Tamzin, Meryon and Roger working at apple-picking in the ponies' orchard. Basket after basket, piled with apples, was carried to the house and down into the dim cellar, where the walls were lined with wooden racks. That afternoon was afterwards always remembered as a time of chequered contrasts. There was the picking, with one's head in the rustling branches, face in bright dappling sunlight, and leaves in one's hair. Then there was the storing in the twilight of the cellar, where most of the light was a milky-pearly reflection from the whitewashed walls and ceiling. The cellar smelt a hundred times more pungently of apples than the orchard did itself. Here and there green leaves had fallen on the red-brick of the floor, and in the apple-racks the red and yellow and green globes crowded, row on row.

"Apple pies for months and months," said Tamzin, bending over her basket.

"Apple sauces, apple dumplings," Meryon added.

"And just apples," said Tamzin appreciatively. "Crisp and juicy, and cracking when you set your teeth into them."

In the evening, Mike and Meryon made a last ride round the fences. Joseph milked, making his anxious investigation of the cows' mouths and feet before he did so; and when Rissa and Roger fed the pigs they inspected each one just as anxiously. Tamzin was helping Mrs. Merrow with the supper, making the awkward discovery that there was no bicarbonate of soda, and not enough baking powder either for the two remaining weeks of the siege.

"That was using up all me bicarb for your skins!" said Mrs. Merrow, coming to peer into the cupboard at Tamzin's shoulder. "Clean forgot. I did, as I shouldn't be able to replace it. Oh, my! Well, we'll have to go easy on the baking powder, now."

"Never mind, Mrs. Merrow," said Tamzin. "We'll manage somehow. Perhaps Mrs. Tewmell may have some at

their cottage. And the soda did do its job—haven't you noticed that none of us is even the least bit pink any more?"

Sousing a Stranger

MR. MERROW made little progress during the next day, and, as the week moved on, it became plain to all that something must be done. He was a very awkward patient, working himself up into a fever of anxiety whenever mention was made of fetching a doctor, so that Mrs. Merrow forbade her sons to speak of it before him. Towards the end of the week the household called a meeting among themselves, after the evening feeding and milking and just before Roger and Rissa went out to ride the boundaries.

Mrs. Merrow herself was not bearing the strain any too well. She had been up a great deal at night since the accident, and the continual anxiety was also beginning to have its effect.

"I don't know how I'd have got through, without you children doing so much in the house and garden to help," she said, sitting limply by the fire, even her crisp flowered apron looking limp in sympathy.

"We haven't really done much *each*," said Roger, "only there are so many of us to do things."

"Well now," said Mike, sitting at the kitchen table, "we called this sort-of-meeting to decide what we're going to do about poor Dad. Mum says he's wholly bad, and I thought he didn't look too grand, meself, times I been in to see him."

"He didn't want to talk to me at all," said Joseph.

Meryon said, "Of course, I haven't seen him for several days—not since I did his arm—but you really are quite *sure* it's nothing to do with his arm? I've been having it badly on my conscience, because no unqualified person ought ever to do a job like that. I can't think now why ever I did it at all."

"I expect because somebody had to, and nobody else would," said Tamzin.

"Bless you, boy, his arm's fine—pretty well healed up it is," said Mrs. Merrow. "I been changing his dressing night

and morning, and it look near as good as new. It's his head what worries me. Been aching off and on ever since he hit it, but it do seem to be worse and oftener, lately. And another thing, he begun to say he can't bear the light. Even when the curtains is drawn it's just the same, and I had to put up a dark pair. And worse still, he seem to be dozing all the time, and when he do wake up he seems dull in the mind. That wholly do worry me."

"Anyway," said Meryon, "it's pretty obvious that he's got to have a doctor, and what we have to think out is how to get one."

"Could we take him to the doctor?" Rissa suggested. "Whoever took him would have to stay away until the siege was over, of course, with whatever vehicle they used."

"What vehicle is there?" asked Mike. "Only your liddle tub-cart, what brought him here, and you can't take a sick man—a very sick man—all the way to Dunsford in that, choose how."

"Couldn't we get an ambulance?" Joseph asked.

"Well if we did," said Mike, "either it'd have to drive right up to the house, with foot-and-mouth infection all over it, most like, and making Dad fair die of rage and worry for the sheep—or we got to carry Dad down to the gate and put him in it. Either way ent too good."

Meryon said, a little diffidently, "I don't think, really, he ought to be moved at all—not even just out of bed—without a doctor's permission."

"Then what?" asked Mike. "We can't just let him go on getting worse."

For a few minutes people just thought. Tamzin played absently with the two cats on the hearth-rug, and Joseph pulled burrs from the long coats of the sheep-dogs.

Rissa said suddenly, "I've just remembered something I said without thinking, a few days ago. It might sound a little silly, but the more I think about it the more I think it might work."

"Lots of things you say sound a little silly," said Roger, "so unless you tell us, we shan't know which one you mean."

"I didn't say it to you," said Rissa coldly. "I said it to Mrs. Mellow—oh, a long time ago—the day after we came, I think. She was saying something about Mr. Mellow's headaches, and I said, 'Don't worry, he'll be all right, even if we have to kidnap the doctor,'—or something like that."

Everyone stared at Rissa, thinking this over.

"I didn't mean it then, of course," Rissa added. "Not really mean it. But thinking about it now—well, why shouldn't we?"

"What? Kidnap Doctor Hargreaves?" Mike looked astonished. "Why shouldn't the man come without? Supposing we saw fit to ask him. You don't have to kidnap a doctor, not in this country, to fetch him to a case."

"No, but you might have to, to souse him totally in disinfectant," Rissa explained. "You said yourself that Mr. Merrow would probably die of rage and worry if anyone walked in from outside, most likely bringing the infection."

"He certainly can't stand no upsets, with his pulse so low, the way it is," said Mrs. Merrow.

"Well, we could tell him we've properly dunked the doctor—or Mike and Joseph could, since we aren't supposed to be here."

"Yes, but how are we *going* to dunk the doctor?" Tamzin asked. "No, don't tell me—I think I know."

"If you do, you know more than I do," said Rissa. "I hadn't thought as far as that."

Tamzin said, "I haven't thought very far myself, but I've thought as far as phoning Doctor Hargreaves—it had better be me, as I know him best, and after dark, I think—and saying there's been a serious accident near Castle Farm—well, there has, though it was longer ago than he'll think—and he will come at once."

"Why *near* Castle Farm?" asked Roger.

"Because of dunking him at the boundary, of course," said Meryon, beginning to see the whole thing. "We'll have to have the bath-tub there, all ready, and enough people to see he really does it—right under, I mean. And, oh gosh, I suppose Tamzin will have to dunk again, too, after going out to the phone."

"But you can't bring the blessed doctor here soaked through," said Mrs. Merrow, sitting upright. "And at that time of night—or there'll be two people ill where there's only one now. I can get you people dried and changed all right, but I don't know about Doctor Hargreaves."

"Yes, I know," said Tamzin, "and it would probably spoil a good suit. That's what I meant when I said I hadn't thought very far myself."

Meryon said, "It seems to me we've only two choices. We can't ruin the doctor's decent suit. Very well, either

we take some overalls or something from the farm, and then persuade him to change before we souse him; or we ask him when we phone to change into something quite old, because of the place he has to go to. We can have a blanket or something to wrap him in, afterwards, or even a complete change of clothing."

"I suppose he wouldn't see reason and souse himself?" asked Tamzin. "It seems rather awful, setting on an innocent man and pushing him under disinfectant."

"I don't think he would," said Roger decisively.

"I don't really, myself," said Mike. "I think he'd say, 'To blazes with all this nonsense! Nobody else is doing it,' and walk in."

"Yes, I'm afraid he probably would," Tamzin agreed sadly. "I think we'd better ask him to come in old clothes, but we ought to have some farm ones handy in case of need."

"We could give him a fair chance to co-operate," said Meryon. "We could explain the situation, and how the sousing is quite necessary, and then say, 'Here it is, do get in; but we're afraid we'll have to help you if you don't want to,' sort of thing."

"Yes, we could do that," said Tamzin.

"Where are we going to have the bath-tub?" Joseph asked. "Not where it is now, because we'd never be able to get the doctor across the river before we disinfected him. He wouldn't swim in his clothes, the way you did."

"That is a bit awkward," Meryon admitted. "There wouldn't be a boat on the farm anywhere, I suppose—no, of course not. We might make a raft, but he'd never see why he couldn't drive right round."

"As I see it," said Mike, "there's nothing for it but to put the tub by the gate, and let him drive up to the outside, just hoping no one is about. We can point out the gate's padlocked, and tell him Dad's got the keys——"

"Which he has," said Mrs. Merrow, convincing herself that everything was above board.

"——so would he mind walking up the track," finished Mike.

"And then," said Joseph, his mind suddenly alight with excitements from his rough childhood, "as soon as he's out of the car, whip a rope round him, show him the muzzle of your gun, Mike, and tell him to jump in, or else."

Mrs. Merrow smiled a little wistfully at the adopted one. "No need to go about it that way, Joseph son," she said gently. "Very likely the doctor will co-operate. And anyway, even if he don't, there's no call for rough handling."

"There won't really be any need for it, either," said Meryon, reassuring her. "We'll be six to one, so I expect he'll come quite peacefully."

"When?" asked Roger. "When are we fetching him?"

"Must be in the dark," said Mike, "whenever it is."

"He do seem pretty low to-day," said Mrs. Merrow anxiously. "And I suppose if it must be done it may as well be done sooner nor later."

"It's dark in less than an hour," said Meryon, looking at the clock.

"Just time for Roger and me to ride fast round the fences," said Rissa, jumping up, "while the others get everything ready."

"What on earth," said Tamzin suddenly, "are we going to do for disinfectant?"

"You come along of me," said Mike, "and we'll see what we got in the harness-room. Sheep-dip, I know——"

"But you can't use that, son! It's got arsenic in it." Mrs. Merrow's voice was agitated.

"'Course we won't, Mum. I was only saying we got it, ticking off the items in me mind. I'll go and look, and I can pop in and have another look at them pigs as well, while I'm out. One of 'em was slaving a bit, last time, but it mighta been just eating something he shouldn't."

In the harness-room, on a shelf crowded with bottles and tins and jars of different veterinary preparations, Mike found a bottle of carbolic disinfectant.

"Oh good," Tamzin said. "That's the same kind we used ourselves."

"It'll make the doctor go pink," said Roger. "Remember us."

"Being a doctor," said Rissa, reaching for a halter for Siani, "he'll know what to do to unpink himself. Come on, Roger, we'll have to ride hard and fast this evening."

"Bottle's a bit dusty," said Mike, rubbing it down the back of his trousers. "You better take it, Meryon. Now, Tamzin, you get along to the phone—here's the money

—and do your best. And if you get back to the gate before we've got the bath-tub there, you see you wait for it, for we've got to put you through it as well, don't forget."

"Of course I won't. I wouldn't dream of coming straight in from outside. Only get the tub there quickly if you can, so that I can dunk and get changed and be back to help with the doctor. He's pretty hefty, and we may need all the help we've got."

There was still a little time on Tamzin's hands, as it was important that the doctor should not arrive before dark, so she stood for a moment at the farmyard gate listening to the fuss the pigs made over Mike's examination, and watching Rissa and Roger setting out on their round, the ponies and dogs moving briskly in the cool evening air. She could see Meryon and Joseph too, swinging along the river path to fetch the hidden bath-tub. The sky was a bright flaming curve, and under it rose the first slow mists of the autumn evening—milkiest where the river lay, so that presently Meryon and Joseph vanished into it. The squeaking and grunting in the pigsties suddenly ceased as Mike came across to the gate.

"How are they, Mike?" Tamzin turned just in time to see the last red crescent of the sun swallowed into the sea.

"Do seem all right now," said Mike. "Must've ate something, that's what. It's all this milk they're getting, most likely, since we can't send any off the farm."

"I must go now," Tamzin said. "Oh gosh! what shall I do if he can't come? He might be out already, or having a day off."

"Fetch another. There's always someone."

"It'll be awful, sousing a stranger. But worth it, of course, for Mr. Merrow."

It was queer, being outside the farm boundaries after all those days. Tamzin felt almost like an escaped prisoner as she climbed the gate and hurried down the lane, hoping she would not be recognised and have to explain anything to anyone. It was a problem, too, knowing where to go for the phone. Their usual place, the Ship and Anchor, wouldn't do, because she and the Merrows were known so well there, and the phone was not very private. There were houses, of course, along the lane, and some had telephones; but in the end Tamzin went the extra distance to the nearest call-box.

Why, oh *why* does everything seem to go against me whenever I'm in a hurry? she thought, having made two detours to avoid people she knew, and having arrived at the call-box to find it already occupied; and then, as a final slap from fate, when she was at last inside and asking for her number, to be told it was engaged. No, not quite a final slap, either, because three minutes later, when she was through to Doctor Hargreaves' number, she was told that he was out.

"Now, who? And it's no good getting into a flap," Tamzin told herself, turning pages in the directory and peering at them in the dimness. "Doctor Roberts is nice, but too old for dunking. Doctor Hamilton would be charming about it all, but then he isn't supposed to be very good. It'll have to be Doctor Page. Everyone says he's cross and awkward past belief, but terribly clever. We simply must have someone clever, with Mr. Merrow the way he is."

Surprisingly, after the way things had been going, she got through almost at once to Doctor Page and gave her message.

"I'll come straight away," he said brusquely.

"Oh, thank you!—Doctor Page! Don't ring off for a minute, I wanted to explain that you'll need very old clothes, because of where you'll have to go to reach Mr. Merrow. Good ones would be quite spoilt. I suppose you haven't any old overalls? . . . Oh well, just the oldest possible things you can find."

For a moment Tamzin stood there, still holding the receiver though it had banged down at the other end. Was Doctor Page annoyed? It was difficult to say, he generally sounded so abrupt, but this time he had practically cut her off. She supposed it *was* awful, being fetched out in the evening after a long day's work. People often expected doctors to be available night and day impartially, as if they never needed sleep and leisure, like ordinary humans . . . However, this really was an emergency.

Out in the street again, Tamzin looked around cautiously in the dusk for any sign of a face she might know, then set off fast for Castle Farm. It was almost quite dark when she was jogging up the last bit of lane towards the gate. Turning the corner from the Sea Road she sud-

denly saw the rear light of a parked car, and then a murmur of voices reached her from the gate.

"It's only me—Tamzin!"

"Sh!" said Meryon. "We're just explaining to Doctor Page that we mustn't be heard in Mr. Merrow's bedroom."

"Well, really," came the doctor's voice, very acid, "the child said wear old clothes, but I hardly expected this. I think you'll have to be reasonable and let me see the man in the ordinary way. You must admit it's all rather absurd! I've been to several farms around here lately, and not one of them has sprung this immersing nonsense on me."

"Sorry, sir," said Mike. "You said yourself as you'd been to several other farms. That makes it much more likely you're infected. Stands to reason we got to do our best to save three hundred sheep, to say nothing of the cows and pigs."

"Good gracious, man," said the doctor, "I ought to know as much about infection as anyone here. Do you suppose they lurk around doorways in the hospitals, sousing doctors and surgeons as they go from ward to ward? And it's people they're in charge of there, not animals."

"True, sir," said Mike, on the farm side of the gate, "but if one person in a hospital gets typhoid because of a doctor's walking around, they don't slaughter every blessed soul inside the building. That's what they'll do to our sheep, sir, if one of 'em gets foot-and-mouth."

The doctor shrugged, making an exasperated snorting noise.

Meryon said quietly, "You see it can't be helped, sir. Here's the tub, just over the gate. We won't do anything to assist you into it, if you'd like to manage by yourself. But I'm afraid we'll have to see it's done. We've brought a complete set of spare clothes, in case you'd like to change in your car. It really would be better, because there's no point in spoiling even an old good suit; and in any case you'll need to take off your watch, and anything else that might get spoilt."

"And in the house there are some more clothes, warming by the fire," said Rissa, "so that you needn't examine Mr. Merrow wet through."

For a moment the doctor wavered, obviously in two minds about going straight home. Then suddenly he took

the clothes from Meryon and disappeared inside his car, slamming the door shut behind him. Mike jumped, looking round at once to the faint square of light that showed where his father lay.

"It's all right, Mike," said Rissa. "He'll think it's just any old car on the lane. It's a jolly good thing," she added, "that I thought of bringing a hot kettleful. Cold water would just have been the last straw."

"Got the gargle?" Roger asked.

"Yes, a strong one, in case he's fairly immune to it, being a doctor."

"Anyone want any help?" called a voice from the lane; someone had noticed the parked car and the dark shapes of people by the gate.

"No, thank you!" Meryon answered, as loudly as he dared. "Good night!"

Doctor Page opened his car door and presented himself in Mike's overalls, shoes much too big—and presumably Mike's underwear as well.

"I'm not putting my bag in that stuff, whatever you say," he announced firmly, climbing the gate.

"I don't think it need go in, need it?" Tamzin asked. "It must be pretty sterile inside. We can just wipe down the outside."

Rissa had unwrapped her kettle from the blanket which enfolded it, and was pouring very hot water into the mixture in the tub. She said, "We did our best to think of everything to make it as nice as possible for you. And of course the kettle's warmed the blanket up, for wrapping round you afterwards."

"I'm sure it couldn't be nicer," said the doctor frigidly, stepping into the tub and stirring the water gingerly with his foot.

"*Right* down, sir," said Meryon courteously, but laying an ominous hand on Doctor Page's shoulder.

"It can't be cold," said Rissa, putting the kettle down beside the mug of gargle.

"Carbolic!" said the doctor, shocked and disgusted. "What do you take me for? A stable floor? This'll take the skin off me."

"Well, not quite, sir," said Meryon. "It'll make you go pink, I dare say—it did with us—but you'll know how to deal with that *Right* under, sir, head and all."

"I shall not do anything of the kind!" said Doctor

Page furiously, waist-deep in the tub. "This is quite enough——"

"Sorry, sir," said Meryon, as the doctor hauled himself up, "I'm afraid we'll have to help you a bit, in that case."

At once, Mike's, Joseph's, Roger's and Meryon's hands came down firmly and gently on the doctor's shoulders, and down he went. Rissa was dipping an old enamel mug and pouring the pungent liquid over the back that humped out of the water.

"What a good thing it's a warmish evening," said Tamzin, anxiously awaiting her turn.

The doctor was allowed up, spluttering and pouring disinfectant.

"Oh, please don't splash any more over than you can help!" begged Tamzin. "I've got to go in next, before we do the ground."

"He's soaked it up like a sponge," said Roger.

"You know what it is," said Rissa, reaching for the gargle. "When we were dunked we were wet already. Now, Doctor Page, there's only the gargle, and then we'll take you to the house."

"Gargle?"

"Yes, sir," said Meryon, coming to Rissa's assistance. "We could, of course, help a little with that——"

"Give it to me!" Snatching it, Doctor Page took a mouthful, tilted his head and gargled loud and professionally.

"Oh gosh!" said Tamzin under her breath, getting into the tub which was now down to low tide, "I hope no one heard that."

From Now On

ONCE IN THE FARMHOUSE, and comfortably changed into another set of clothes, the doctor began to seem quite human. Mike and Mrs. Merrow hurried him upstairs while the others rushed a good supper on in the kitchen, in case he cared to stay and be tempted by cold ham, bottled raspberries and cream.

Tamzin had sponged herself down in the scullery and now emerged, changed into her spare outfit, to make a

large saucepan of cocoa. Rissa was saying, "Really how clothes alter people. You can't feel half so awed by the great man, now he's wearing old corduroys and a darned guernsey. In fact I keep thinking he's a sort of second Mike, don't you?"

"There isn't much to distinguish them," admitted Roger, who was making fresh mustard.

Meryon reached the cocoa mugs down from the dresser. "He's supposed to be quite brilliant as a doctor," he said, "whatever he looks like. Hadn't I better put glasses as well, in case he doesn't like cocoa?"

"There isn't anything else but cider," said Joseph. He took the jug from the mantelpiece. "I'll go and draw a jugful."

Meryon said, "It isn't really the right thing for supper, but it can't be helped. And there's always water."

The supper was barely on the table, under the large copper oil-lamp, and the cocoa just coming up to the boil in a creamy head of froth under Tamzin's stirring, when Mike and the doctor came down again.

"Please may I wash my hands and these instruments? Oh, thank you."

Meryon was pouring hot water into a basin at the sink. "I'm afraid we're rather primitive here, sir."

"Here's a clean towel, anyway," said Rissa, thankfully discovering one in the drawer.

Coming up from the cellar with the cider and a basketful of apples, Joseph halted in the doorway. "How is he, Mike? How's Dad?"

Mike shook his head miserably, but Doctor Page turned round, drying his hands.

"Your father is very ill now, but he has every chance of making a good recovery after proper treatment. He will have to go into hospital, of course, and probably undergo an operation, but there's no reason why he shouldn't soon be home and perfectly well again."

"Hospital?" repeated Joseph, aghast. "When?"

"To-night," said Doctor Page, handing back the towel to Rissa. "Now, in fact, with your mother, in my car."

Joseph stared. They all stared.

"Now?" said Tamzin feebly. "Mrs. Merrow too?"

"She wants to be near him, naturally. She will stay in the town for a bit, she tells me, with friends."

"You won't have supper first, sir?" Mike offered dully, fending off the rushing moment.

"No, no supper, thank you. I really ought to get back, if I'm to have your father settled in to-night. I suppose you'll be wanting these clothes? It all takes time, this changing business. However, five minutes is neither here nor there; I'll go along to my car and get them off. As soon as Mrs. Merrow has packed her things, wrap your father up well, in two blankets, and get young Fairbrass here to help you carry him down to the car. You know how to make a chair with your arms?"

"I do," said Meryon. "But Mr. Merrow doesn't know I'm here. He doesn't know any of us are."

The doctor looked at him. "You stitched this man's arm, and now you say he doesn't know you're here."

"No, sir—I mean, yes, sir. You see we rigged a screen, and Mr. Merrow thought it was Mike doing the stitching."

Mike said shamefacedly, "Me stummick turned against it, at the last minute."

"Well it seems to me, Fairbrass," said the doctor, "that you'll have to make a clean breast now. Probably do the old chap good, knowing he's left willing workers on the place—that is, if he takes in what you say. And after all, if I, a stranger, can carry it off, why can't you? We've all," he added pointedly, "been dunked. Don't let your mother be long, Mike."

"I won't, sir. But, Doctor, you said an operation—what's the matter with Dad, sir? Is it just his head?"

"Yes, Mike, just his head. No doctor likes to be too sure of a first diagnosis in cases of this kind, you know, but I think it's probably a slow haemorrhage; and we can relieve that by an operation. In fact, if I'm right, an operation will be absolutely essential. Mrs. Merrow also showed me the stitched arm," added the doctor, looking round with quizzical interest at Meryon. "Your surgery, Fairbrass."

"Yes sir, I could hardly help it, sir, in the circumstances—everything was properly sterilised—I hope I didn't make things any worse." Meryon sounded rather ashamed of himself.

"Not at all—not at all," said Doctor Page generously, shutting his bag with a snap. "I've seen worse. In fact, a very creditable job. You ought to think of going in

for medicine, Fairbrass. Er—one point—if you ever have to do such a job again, use horse-hair. Much better than cotton, if boiled well. Or better still, a nylon fishing cast. However—you won't be long, Mike? And don't worry! he'll be all right."

There was silence in the kitchen for a moment after the doctor had gone. Then, "Mum, too!" said Joseph bleakly. "I wish it were me. I wish they could operate on me, instead of on our dad. I wish I could do something."

"You can, old young 'un," said Mike kindly. "We all can. Fact we got to. There'll only be us now, to run the house and farm and everything. And we're going to keep the siege up, aren't we? for Dad's sake. That'll cure him faster nor any medicines, knowing we're keeping the boundaries."

Roger said, "We wouldn't *think* of giving up the siege."

"And we can send him letters to tell him all about it," said Tamzin. "It's only letters coming *in* that we can't have."

"How are we going to get news of Dad, then?" asked Joseph. "We got to think of some way. We couldn't just have no news at all."

Mike said, "First things first. We'll fix that later. Just now I got to hurry up our mum."

Tamzin clamped a lid on the cocoa and put it back at the edge of the stove. "All this supper wasted," she said.

"Cheer up," said Meryon. "Just see what I'll put away when I get back. No good going off your food with every emergency. And Mr. Merrow wouldn't like it, either, would he, Joseph?"

Joseph shook his head. "He'd fair despise it."

Mr. Merrow was too dull and drowsy with his head to take much notice of anything said or done to him. When Mike and Meryon went into his dimly-lit room with their blankets he lifted heavy lids, stared vaguely for a moment and let them fall again.

"Said I seen 'im," he muttered, half to himself. "Said I seen 'im. An' an angel too. Said it, I did. . . ."

"Hallo, Dad," said Mike softly. "We're going to carry you to the doctor's car. An' he's going to make you better, see, so's you can go riding to the sheep again."

"Said it, I did! I seen 'im," said the farmer drowsily.

Saying nothing, Meryon helped to wrap the blankets

round the old man. There seemed no good in stirring up trouble here and now.

"I can carry him downstairs," Mike said. "He do seem to have gone terrible light, since the day we carried him up."

"People do, in bed," said Meryon reassuringly, holding open the door. Mrs. Merrow came fussing down the landing with the suitcase. "Oh dear! Oh, my poor Will! To think this got to happen to us."

"Sh, Mum," said Mike gently, leaning to balance the weight in his arms. "You'll only upset our dad. Got everything packed, have you? Things for Dad an' all? Come on, then, and cheer up, for his sake."

Mrs. Merrow wiped her eyes. She had been too distracted to dress properly, and now her fruit hat drooped rakishly over her brow, white tendrils of hair escaping from underneath it, and her coat was buttoned up with one button over at the top.

In the dark hall the others waited silently.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Merrow," Tamzin whispered. "We'll look after everything perfectly."

"Indoors and out," said Rissa stoutly, dedicating herself firmly to the housework she hated.

Mrs. Merrow kissed everyone impartially, even Meryon, who was a head and shoulders taller than herself and was going with her as far as the gate in any case. At the front door he and Mike joined hands to make a comfortable carrying-chair for the farmer, and they strode out into the darkness, Mrs. Merrow hurrying sadly after with her fruit hat nodding and tinkling, and Joseph carrying the suitcase by her side.

"I think she'd rather we didn't all follow," said Tamzin wistfully.

"He's backing the car to the gate," said Roger.

"To save old Meryon and Mike having to dunk themselves afterwards," said Rissa. "One step into foreign territory can hardly matter, can it?"

To Mike and Meryon, however, it mattered enough to cause them to stand inside the bath-tub, calf-deep, for a moment or two before walking back with Joseph to the farmhouse.

"And we put our hands in it, too," said Meryon when he got back, "because of touching the car; and here are the clothes the doctor wore—we dunked them as well."

Supper was a solemn meal. Mike carved the cold ham, which had been brought out in honour of the doctor, and Tamzin warmed up the cocoa on the range, standing astride Meryon's drying sandals which were stuffed with paper on the hearth.

"You're going pink again," Roger told her, as she poured the cocoa into people's mugs.

"There's no more calamine," said Rissa, "and no bicarbonate either. In fact, unless someone goes down to see if Mrs. Tewmell's got some, we haven't even enough baking powder for more than about two large puddings."

"Well we could do that," said Joseph, "easily enough."

"It'll be nice for the puddings," said Tamzin, "but I expect the pinkness will wear off by itself, in time. Were the animals all right, Mike?"

"Couldn't see nothing wrong," said Mike. "But torch-light isn't the same as daylight."

Everyone was trying not to mention Mr. Merrow, but in the end it seemed impossible to keep the conversation off him.

"How about them letters?" said Joseph. "We got to have some news of Dad somehow."

"Any ideas?" asked Meryon, who was finishing his supper with an apple.

"I did think of one," said Joseph. "Supposing Mum were to write to Jim Decks at the ferry, and tell him all the news about Dad and that. Then we could fix up to wait at the Westling gate on the boundary, when we ride round, and Jim might come to the other side on his tricycle—we'd have to fix a time—and read us the news across the gate."

"No," said Tamzin, "it won't do. Not with Jim, anyway. He never knows when he can leave his ferry and when not. And in the busy season he often takes his meals to his hut. But it's a good idea, if we can think of the right person. . . . Gosh! I know," she said, a minute later. "How about Diccon? He'd love to do it, I know. Mrs. Merrow could send the letters to Mother, and Mother would send Diccon to the gate with them. It's no distance for him, really, now he's seven."

"It sounds a fair enough idea," said Mike. "And he'd be sensible enough to take our own letters too, would he?"

"Yes, I think so," Tamzin said. "He isn't half so vague and dreamy as he used to be."

Tamzin said, "I'd better write to Mother and Diccon this evening. And Mike could write and explain the plan to Mrs. Merrow."

"Then if we take the letters down to the gate in the morning," said Joseph, "someone's bound to pass along the lane before long, and we could hand them over."

Rissa glanced at the one-handed grandfather clock and jumped up. "Heavens! look at the time. If everyone helps to clear this lot away, we can get the dishes and letters done and go to bed. There's only us to do everything, from now on, and we'll simply have to get up very early."

It Only Needs One

IN THE COWSHED, very early the next morning, Joseph and Roger were chaining up the three Jersey cows. Two of these were in milk, and one dry and in calf. Joseph was saying, "It isn't only losing the money with not being able to sell the milk as usual, but it's having to waste the milk. Well I mean, it really is waste, isn't it, giving such a lot of good milk to pigs and chickens?"

"Mm," said Roger, who was very absorbed with Primrose in the end stall.

"And if the siege is still on when May Day calves," Joseph went on, "I don't know what we'll do—unless we bath in it." He began to wring out the cloth for udder-washing.

"I say, Joseph, can you come here a moment?"

Joseph's rubber boots rustled in the straw of the standing, then padded down the cowshed to Primrose's stall.

"Look!" said Roger in a stricken voice. "Her mouth."

Joseph's eyes suddenly opened wider.

"Do they usually dribble like that?" Roger asked anxiously. "I haven't noticed it myself, before."

Staring, Joseph shook his head. "Not like that, they don't."

Roger suddenly sat on the rim of the low manger.

"*Joseph!*" His voice was horrified, shocked. "Surely it can't be? Not after all everyone's done. . . ."

"If it is," said Joseph, "it'll just about kill our dad. On top of all his illness." Kneeling in the straw, he looked closely at the cow's black muzzle. "I can't see any sores."

"Her feet look all right," said Roger, examining each one. "Do they have sores, too?"

"Well, they go lame, I do know," said Joseph. "Did you notice, when they came in? They looked all right to me."

"And me. Better have her out and try her."

Joseph was undoing her neck-chain, turning the cow in her stall with his hand on her broad leather collar.

"Wait a minute," said Roger. "We'd better not take her in the yard, had we? There's no need to worry Mike until we know. He'd feel so awful."

"I'll walk her up and down inside the shed, then, and you watch careful. Watch from behind when I go up, and in front when I come back."

The tension in the cowshed was high enough to be felt all too uncomfortably, as Joseph walked Primrose down the length of it, and Roger stood watching intently. Even the other two cows screwed round to stare at the unusual sight of one of their number pacing up and down the shed at milking time. A sudden gusty sigh from Roger eased the atmosphere a little.

"She seems to walk perfectly well."

"I surely do hope you're right," said Joseph, standing back a step to look at her. "Cor, but she do drool. Can't be right, that. . . . Have a look at the others while I chain her up again."

There was a clink of chains while Primrose was fastened up, and May Day was moved over.

"This one seems all right," said Roger. "Couldn't be righter."

Joseph came round and looked too. Then they both went into the next stall and carefully examined Buttercup.

"Can't see anything wrong," said Joseph. "Seems like it's only Primrose, so far. Still," he added tragically, "it only needs one, for them to come and slaughter all the lot. Even the sheep—every single one of them."

Roger was looking thoughtfully at Primrose. "You know, Joseph, she *looks* all right. Perfectly well, I should say. Don't they *feel* ill, too, with foot-and-mouth?"

"Well they do, of course," said Joseph, "but I don't know how soon it comes on." He stared a minute at the cow. "Look at her now! She's only picking at her food. Hardly touching it. And have you noticed she opens her mouth and sort of flaps her lips?"

The two boys went at once to the manger, picking up handfuls of the crushed oats and dairy-nuts, holding them under their noses and peering at them. Primrose shook her chain, tossing her head up and down and blowing in the manger.

"Smells all right to me," Roger said, letting the stuff fall back.

"And me. And look, she seems to want it all right, but can't somehow bring herself to eat it. May Day's has all gone," he added, looking over the partition, "and it come from the same bins."

After a moment Roger suddenly said, "Look, Joseph, we don't want to worry Mike just yet—not until we're a bit more sure, one way or the other—but they'll soon be wondering in the house why the milk doesn't come in. Hadn't we better get that done, and then see if we can find out any more about the food, or the manger, perhaps—or could she even have a bad tooth? Anything like that. Then there mightn't be any need to scare anyone at all."

Joseph nodded. "All right. And say nothing if anyone comes in."

For a while there was silence in the cowshed, except for the singing and frothing of the milk in Joseph's pail, and the slow irregular squirt in Roger's, for he was still a learner.

"I say," Joseph said. "I just thought. If Primrose has got it, her milk'll likely be infected."

"Oh gosh!" said Roger. "What do we do about that?"

"Can't give it to the pigs."

"What about the chickens and ducks? And can humans catch it?"

"Only cloven-hoofed animals, I think," Joseph said. "But you better look it up in the vet'nary book and make sure. My reading isn't so smart, yet," he added, not needing to remind Roger any further of his unschooled earlier boyhood,¹ when he had been a ship's boy without family

¹ Told in *Cargo of Horses*.



Joseph kept it up for about ten seconds

or friends. "Anyway, keep it separate, till we know. And what are we going to do about turning her out? Mike'll surely see her drooling if we do."

"But if we don't, he'll see she isn't out," said Roger, whose milking was getting slower and slower, as his wrists and fingers ached more and more.

Joseph had finished, stripped out and hung his stool up. "I'll finish her off for you, shall I? Then you can take Buttercup's milk in, and have a look in the vet'nary book while you're there."

When Roger got back, Joseph had tidied up all the cows' beds and was leaning on the partition of Primrose's stall, staring at her again as if she were some sort of puzzle that could be solved by much contemplation.

"It says only cloven-hoofed animals," Roger said, "and Tamzin said to tell you breakfast's been ready for ten minutes, and the bacon's getting hard."

"Well, looks as if the milk would be all right for the house, then, if humans can't catch it," Joseph said. "I been trying to see inside her mouth while you were gone, but one person can't open her up wide enough from below, and you can't look in from above."

"I think you'd better do the opening, then, and I'll do

the looking," Roger said. "You know her best. And turn her round to the light."

"Did you look at the pigs?" Joseph was undoing Primrose's neck-chain.

"Yes. They looked just the same as usual. I see Primrose hasn't finished her food."

"Gave up trying," said Joseph, turning the cow to face the doorway. A bell rang from the house and Roger said, "That's for us. I told them not to wait."

Halting Primrose near the open door, Joseph backed her against May Day's partition-post, so that she couldn't move any farther backwards, and then firmly gripped her muzzle with both hands.

"Ready? Soon as I open, you look. I mightn't be able to keep it up."

"Wait till I wipe her mouth, then. I don't want my face under that. . . . Now."

"There is *something*," Roger said, getting to his feet. "Her teeth look all right, but there's a sort of reddish place—it looked a bit swollen—inside her right cheek."

"Gor, no! you don't say." Joseph was distressed. "Have another look."

Roger wiped Primrose's mouth gently again with a wisp of soft hay, and resumed his kneeling position, head screwed round and upwards.

"Ready?" Joseph asked. "Open up then, little lass; good girl, Primrose, good little cow."

"I say, Joseph—oh, can't you keep it open longer? I can't get a proper look. But I was going to say, there's only one place, so far as I can see."

Joseph shook his head bleakly. "One's enough for a start. You're dead sure there *is* a place there?"

"Dead sure," Roger said, almost apologetically. "The only thing was, I couldn't really examine it, she shut her mouth so quickly. And she didn't even keep very still when she had it open."

"What we'll have to do," said Joseph, rubbing Primrose's head between the horns, "we'll have to try again, with the others to help keep her still. Soon as Mike's gone out with Tewmell to the sheep."

"But then Tamzin and Meryon will be out riding the boundaries. We'll want Meryon particularly, as he's the strongest."

Joseph frowned, thinking hard. "Who rides with old Mike, when it's his turn?"

"It's you, I think, to-day. First thing after dinner, because I go with Rissa, second shift this morning."

"Would be! Still, it's got to be someone, I suppose. Well, we'll have to try to get Tamzin and Meryon before they go. Anyway, we'll just have to put the cows out now, and go on thinking at breakfast. They'll be coming out to see what we're doing, if we don't turn up soon."

No one noticed, at breakfast, the comparative silence and preoccupation of Roger and Joseph, for everyone was far too busy allotting the work of house and farm for the day.

"But if there's only Mike and Mr. Tewmell to do all the shepherding, we can't possibly expect Mike to do any housework," Tamzin was saying reasonably. "After all, none of us can do the shepherding, except Joseph perhaps a bit."

"Counting Mike out, then," Rissa said, "there's five of us. Or four and a half, if Joseph's putting in time with the sheep."

"He's doing the cows, anyway, the same as I am," Roger said.

"Well, Tamzin and I have been doing the pigs," said Meryon.

"I nearly always do the hens," said Rissa.

"And we all ride boundaries," Mike remarked. "Seems to me as everyone's got some outdoor work, so it's fair enough for all to do their share of indoors, me the same as the rest. Only not so much, because I'll be too busy with the sheep. I'll light the old kitchener, see, same as I generally do, and keep her clean as well."

"Then there's the cooking," Tamzin said. "And we'd better divide the cleaning into upstairs and downstairs."

"Mrs. Tewmell will come along and scrub, if it helps any," Mike offered. "She often do, when we're busy shearing and that."

Tamzin said, "She'll cost money, even if it isn't much. And the farm's losing money, isn't it, with not being able to sell milk and eggs and fruit and things. There are five of us—we ought to be able to manage between us what Mrs. Merrow did single-handed."

"She didn't ride boundaries, gal," Mike pointed out, passing his cup.

"Well, *need* we be scrubbed? I know! we'll have a grand scrub-up when the siege is over, just in time for Mrs. Merrow's home-coming."

"Suits me," said Mike. "Have you sugared it? Thanks."

"Talking of Mrs. Tewmell," Rissa said, "if anyone's near their cottage to-day, will they please call in and ask if she has any spare baking powder? or bicarbonate will do. As it is, we'll have to think of something for dinner that doesn't need it. We've simply got to hang on to the last tin for bread."

"Pancakes," Tamzin said. "They don't. Or any pastry."

"Let's have another apple pie!" said Meryon. "And put the cream-pan on the stove to make Devonshire cream for it."

"The cats get into it," Joseph said "Mum tried, time and time again, but they jumped up all the same. She used to put the pastry-board across the top, but then they sat on that and licked the cream through the gaps."

"And she said their hair got into it," said Mike.

"I'll think up some way to keep them off," Meryon said. "Fancy not making Devonshire cream, with all this milk on our hands."

"All right," said Tamzin, "think something up. But just now we're supposed to be dividing jobs." She was doodling the outline of a cat, with crumbs, on the table-cloth, her hands and face still showing a little pink through their tan, because of the second carbolic dipping. "Cooking. I'll do it, if everyone likes."

Rissa said, "You're welcome. Cooking's bad enough when you've got the ingredients, but when half the things the recipe says aren't there, and you can't go shopping——"

"You've got to use your initiative," Meryon told her. "Don't keep trying to make things that have the wrong ingredients. Or, if you must, then improvise."

Rissa said, "I've no imagination in cookery. I can't work it up on anything so dull."

"Well you needn't," Tamzin said. "I am. So shut up. Now, upstairs cleaning? . . . What, no offers at all? It's easier than downstairs."

"Downstairs ought to have two people. then." said Rissa.

"All right. Joseph's a half, because of the sheep, so he'd better help upstairs. Who'll do upstairs with Joseph? Roger, you'd better. It'll work in with you and him doing the cows together."

"What's that?" asked Roger, suddenly dragging his mind off Primrose's worrying state. "Upstairs? Oh well, all right."

"Everyone still makes own beds and tidies own rooms," Meryon said. "And that leaves Rissa and me to clean downstairs."

"Table-laying and clearing," Tamzin said. "I think everyone ought to help with that. It takes one person ages, but all together we'd do it in two shakes."

"Then if everyone's finished," Mike said, getting up, "I'll do my bit now. I promised Tewmell I'd be out early to-day, as we're going to examine each sheep separate."

"First boundary patrol is Tamzin and Meryon," Rissa said. "Tamzin, see you're back in time to cook that apple pie——"

"And Meryon'll have to do his share of the cleaning when you both get back."

Meryon said, "No one must make a dust in here while my cream-pan's setting on the stove. I'll fetch it now, and get it started. It'll be done when we get back, with any luck."

Roger looked at the dish-washing rota which they had hung on the wall beside the sink. "It's me," he said. "It would be. Just my luck. And bacon things, too. Why do we always have bacon on my wash-up day?" Then suddenly he noticed the two sheep-dogs leap up from the hearth, and saw that Mike was making for the back door at last.

"I say, Tamzin!"

Tamzin and Mike both turned round.

"No, it's only Tamzin I want."

"I'm in a hurry," Tamzin said. "You'll none of you get any dinner if you hinder the cook."

"Oh, never mind the dinner," Roger said, talking fast and low and urgently as Mike swung on round the corner of the house to the grazings with the dogs at his heels. "We'll all help with the veg. or whatever you like. This is something that really matters. Joseph and I've been itching to get you all in private, because we don't want to worry Mike until we're certain. Look, come over to the cows' paddock—Meryon too—and we'll show you."

"Don't be silly," Meryon said. "If I leave this now, the pastry-board'll fall into the cream-pan and then the cats will pretty soon follow."

"Put the cats outside, then," Joseph said. "Just for a minute. It's really urgent, just as Roger says. Fact is, we think Primrose is starting with the sickness."

"That's why we were so late for breakfast," Roger said.

If Trouble Comes

THE CATS were hastily put out, Roger grabbed a torch, the door was shut, and everyone walked quickly to the cow-pasture, their faces set with anxiety.

"I only hope," Joseph was saying, "that Mike didn't go and have a look at them before he went to the sheep. If he did, he's certain sure to have noticed."

Meryon said sensibly, "I don't think it would really matter very much if he did know. After all, he's a man, and a tough one. And if it is foot-and-mouth he'll soon have to know."

"He's right down the track there," Tamzin said, pointing, "so he'd hardly have had time to go to the cow-pasture. But I do see what Joseph means. If it *isn't* foot-and-mouth, it would be an awful pity to distress him when we needn't, however much a man he is. Especially when he's got all this worry about Mr. Merrow, and all the farm on his shoulders, too."

"He do think a terrible lot of it, the farm and that," Joseph explained, shutting the yard gate behind them. "I don't like to think how he'd feel, seeing Primrose now."

"Well in that case," said Rissa briskly, "we'd better make up our minds to stay with her till we've diagnosed her. Because if he'd feel as bad as that suspecting trouble, what'll he feel like if trouble comes?"

Primrose was not enthusiastic about being taken away from Buttercup and May Day, so soon after milking and with the morning sun on the pasture. She walked reluctantly after Joseph and Roger, who pulled her along by her collar, the others slapping and pushing at the rear.

"She isn't even shutting her mouth, now," Roger said uneasily.

"But she don't go lame," Joseph pointed out, clinging to that hope: He pulled her along at arm's length, looking

backwards at the way she walked. "She walks as well as we do. Anyone can see she don't go lame."

Roger said, "Wouldn't it be a good idea to tie her to the ring in the wall outside the kitchen? We'd be able to see much better in the open, and we could wedge her flat against the wall."

"I'll get a rope," said Tamzin, dashing through the yard.

Primrose cared for this arrangement even less than for the cow-shed. She trod on people's toes and swished her tail in their faces; she tossed her head and poked them with her horns.

Meryon said, rubbing a trodden-on foot, "If Roger has had two looks, we ought to get another opinion this time."

"Not you," Rissa said. "You're the strongest for holding her head still. I'll look, shall I?"

"Here's the torch," Roger said. "I'll help wedge her to the wall."

"Mind you don't shine it in her face and frighten her," said Joseph, patting the cow's neck. "Quiet, little cow," he said, "quiet then."

"And don't talk loudly when you're underneath her head," advised Meryon, getting a firm hold of the small curling horns.

"It must be awful for Primrose," Tamzin said sympathetically, with both her hands braced against the cow's warm flank. "I suppose she can't imagine what we're doing to her."

"Carry on," Meryon said. "Open up, Joseph."

Primrose snorted loudly, but was unable to do very much more for a while because of the pressure of attendants.

"He's right," Rissa said, after a moment. "There's a nasty-looking place. It's in her cheek."

"Don't put the torch inside her mouth, gump," said Roger, peering sideways. "She'll break her teeth if she clamps down on it."

"Does it look like foot-and-mouth?" Joseph asked her, letting Primrose shut her mouth at last.

"I don't know what foot-and-mouth looks like."

"Does anybody here?" Meryon asked.

"It just says 'sores' in the book," Roger said.

"Oh help—well, let's have a third opinion," said Meryon, "if Rissa can't tell us any more than that. We know that much already."

"I'll look," Joseph said, "if Roger can open her up."

"No harm in trying," said Roger.

Taking the torch, Joseph went down on his knees.

"Ready?" said Roger. "Here we go."

Primrose, now growing exceedingly cross, switched her tail with such painful accuracy as to make Tamzin's eyes stream.

Grabbing the black plume of it, Tamzin held it firmly against the cow's side.

"Gor blimey," said Joseph suddenly, right into Primrose's mouth, causing a sudden upheaval that sent cow and attendants yards from their original places.

"Jumping gin bottles," said Tamzin, "that was my foot again. Must you shout into her mouth?"

"Tell you what I saw!" said Joseph, looking as if he'd just struck gold. "You'd never guess! It's a ruddy ole splinter! Big as a stake."

"*Joseph!*" Tamzin stared at him, wild relief battling with doubt in her voice. "Are you *sure?*"

"Look for yourself," said Joseph, grinning happily, wiping his hands down his trousers.

"No need for that," Meryon said. "It'll only upset the cow worse. And if you're certain, that's enough."

"Runs right up to her cheek, it do," grinned Joseph. "She must've took it in with her rations."

Everyone was grinning now. Not because a cow with a splinter in her mouth struck any of them as being funny, but because it was so small a thing compared with foot-and-mouth as to seem almost ridiculous. The relief, too, was quite overwhelming, and if they hadn't grinned they might have shouted, which would have upset Primrose. And that would never have done, in view of what now lay before her. Tamzin suddenly threw her arms round Primrose's neck and hugged her like a lost sister.

"One blessed surgical job after another!" said Meryon, smiling broadly. "Anyway, so long as I'm wanted to hold the patient, I needn't offer for this one."

Rissa said, "Well, whoever does it, I trust you aren't going to start all that ceremonial with masks and stewed instruments."

"What we want is a pair of tweezers," Meryon said. "Could the splinter be grabbed with tweezers, Joe? or is it too deep?"

"There's a bit of an end sticking out," said Joseph, "but you could search this old place for tweezers."

"You don't say!" said Rissa, looking shocked. "What on earth do you use for plucking your eyebrows, then?"

"Oh, I hoe them out," Joseph said solemnly, "and then touch up the edges with a flame-thrower."

"What about this blessed cow?" demanded Meryon. "No tweezers—and I suppose it's no good asking if Mrs. Tewmell might have a pair. So what?"

"The problems of besiegement!" exclaimed Rissa. "It makes you realise a bit of what they went through in the old days, in castles hung round with waiting enemies."

"Improvisation—and more improvisation," said Meryon.

Tamzin suddenly suggested, "How about Mrs. Merrow's sugar-tongs?"

"They're silver!" Joseph said, rather shocked.

"Perfect," said Meryon. "No meaner metal will do."

"But they were a wedding present. She never uses 'em."

"Then it looks as if she's going to, now," said Meryon. "If only we can get them to pinch tight enough."

"I'll fetch them," Tamzin said. "I know where they are—on the sideboard in the sitting-room."

The sugar-tongs were very ornate, with vine leaves and grapes all over them.

"Pretty fancy, aren't they?" Meryon said doubtfully. "Lots of corners for germs."

"Now look here, Meryon," said Rissa, "we aren't going to boil these, so jolly well shut up, and think of all the insanitary things cows usually have in their mouths. Well, look at grass, to begin with. To say nothing of the water they drink."

"Yes, but they don't usually have open sores in their mouths," persisted Meryon. "It isn't the stomach that matters with germs, it's the bloodstream."

"Oh well—perhaps I'll just dip them in the kettle," Tamzin said. "It's on the boil."

"Now," said Meryon when she came back, "let's see how they pinch. Perhaps if I just bend them a bit—it's all right, Joseph, silver's a very soft metal, I'll soon get them back the way they were. Now, how about that?" He worked the tongs like a bird's beak. "Lovely!"

"Not so good as tweezers, perhaps," said Rissa, "but better than fingers."

"Who's for it?" inquired Meryon. "We want a firm hand, a steady wrist and a good eye."

"And ambidexterous," said Rissa, "so that when she's bitten off their right hand they can still use their left."

"I always wondered what ambidexterous meant," said Roger. "Well, I'm not it. Anyway, I don't mind trying. If I'm going to do cows at all, I may as well do them thoroughly."

"That's the style," said Meryon. "What's the use of being able to milk if you can't even pull stakes out of cow's mouths with sugar-tongs? You must master all branches."

"Even branches in their mouths!" said Rissa. "Well, what are we waiting for?"

"Nothing at all," said Roger stoutly. "Man your positions."

On discovering that these new attentions were not designed to let her go, but only to haul her mouth open again, Primrose rebelled. For a full minute she was a bucking, snorting fury. Everyone hung on to their positions, but it was no good, no good at all.

"We'll have to tie her legs," Joseph said, breathing hard. "It's the only way."

More rope was found, and Meryon and Joseph tied firm half-hitches round the slender antelope-legs.

"You'd never think, to look at her, that she'd have all that strength and spirit—would you?" Tamzin said. "She looks like a shy wild deer."

"Wild, all right," said Rissa.

"She can only buck with two feet together, now," said Meryon.

"She won't do that," said Joseph. "Only you want to look out she don't fall over."

"Action stations!" said Roger. "I'm ready with the weapon."

"Poor little Primrose!" said Tamzin, bracing herself once more against her flank. "How lucky we are, not to be cows."

"Now!" said Joseph, looking like David struggling with the lion.

Torch in one hand, tongs in the other, Roger peered into the red cave of Primrose's mouth.

"See it easily, now," he said, under his breath. "Gosh! it is a snorter."

"Shut up!" hissed Joseph, between clenched teeth, "and get on with it. We can't keep this up much longer."

"She's leaning on us, like anything," Rissa said, leaning too.

"It isn't so easy as you think," said Roger. "She's dribbling all over the operation site, as well as down my arm. It wants one of those saliva things they have at the dentist's . . ."

"I'm going to let her shut it, in a minute," gasped Joseph.

"Infirm of purpose, give me the dagger," said Meryon, still gripping the black horns.

"Got it!" said Roger. "Here it comes! I'd have had it before, if you people hadn't kept nagging at me. *Look at it!* Isn't it a beauty?" Holding up the sugar-tongs, he was displaying a long, sharp wooden splinter. Meryon and Joseph abandoned their places to stare at it, marvelling at its length and beastliness.

"To think we might have had the hull lot slaughtered," said Joseph in awed tones, "and never known it wasn't foot-and-mouth."

"Quick!" said Tamzin urgently, "we can't keep her upright."

"You doddering lunatics!" cried Rissa. "What's the use of curing her of a splinter, and then letting her crash in pieces on the ground?"

"Gosh! I'd forgotten her legs were tied," said Meryon, leaping to add his weight to the buttresses of Tamzin and Rissa.

"She nearly went flat that time," said Tamzin.

"If she had, she'd have gone bust too, on these cobbles," said Rissa. "Cut the ropes, Joseph, if they won't undo quickly. Gosh! doesn't she *lean!*"

Roger said, "It's because you're leaning against *her* so hard, I expect. Try pushing a bit less, and see if she does the same. I'm cutting this rope, Joseph—it's pulled too tight."

Suddenly the rope gave, and Primrose found her feet, lurching like a ship in half a gale.

"Don't let her go, yet!" said Meryon, seeing Roger's hand on the collar-rope. "We've got to put some antiseptic on the place."

"Oh, look here, Meryon," began Rissa. "Not all that riot again. The morning's half over and we haven't done a thing. I haven't even taken the letters to the gate, yet."

"We've done the best thing for days," said Meryon. "You should try to cultivate a sense of proportion. And what's the good of relieving her of a splinter and then letting her die of blood-poisoning?"

"There isn't any antiseptic," Tamzin said. "You know we used the last for Mr. Merrow."

Meryon frowned, looking thoughtfully at the cow. "I know! we've got some methylated spirit, haven't we? There must be some, for the Primus Mike makes early tea with. Well, that'll be all right. Quite a good antiseptic, in fact."

"Cor, I never knew that," said Joseph, rushing to fetch it.

"And a wad of cotton-wool, Joseph," Meryon called. "Oh, bother! of course there isn't any. Never mind—bring a bit of butter-muslin."

Joseph was as quick as anyone would be, who had worked to the spur of a rope's end all his life. "Here you are. And the butter-muslin."

"Thanks, Joe. Now, all to your guns for the last time. Here you are, Roger, you may as well finish the job you started. Dab it well, not only where the hole is, but all around it too."

"She'll only lick it off," Roger said, taking the bottle and muslin.

"It'll kill the germs first," said Meryon.

"Ready, now?" said Joseph. "Here we go then."

"Heave ho! up she rises," said Meryon. "Hold her down, mates, she's got her legs loose this time."

"Nearly done," said Roger. "Keep it up a second longer."

"Poor old Primrose!" said Tamzin, leaning hard against her.

"Oh, my foot *again!*" wailed Rissa. "Same one, too. And the same place. I think three toes have come off."

"Finished," said Roger. "Up with her anchor, now, if you like."

"Oh, do try her again with her food, that she left when you were milking," Tamzin said. "She must be awfully hungry."

"We can try," said Joseph, "but I don't expect she'll eat it, not while her mouth's feeling so sore."

"I'm going to take those letters," Rissa said. "And Roger, you've got all that wash-up waiting."

Roger fainted at once upon the bench beside the door, but no one took any notice, so he came to.

"Come on, Tamzin!" said Meryon. "We'll have to ride hard this morning."

The White Lake

THE DINNER was not the success it should have been. Tamzin and Meryon, having started so late, were back with little enough time in hand for cooking and cleaning, and Meryon's contribution in Devonshire cream was quite ruined.

"It was when I dashed in to get the meth and butter-muslin," Joseph said apologetically. "I must've forgot to shut the back door. Well, everyone was in such a state, with old Primrose."

"I might have done it myself, I suppose," Meryon admitted gloomily.

"You didn't remember to go in and have a look at it before you went round the boundaries," Rissa said. "If you had, you'd have seen the cats before we did, and probably rescued enough to go with the pie."

"Never mind," said Tamzin. "What's done's done. Let's get on with the rest of the work. I must say, I'd never have thought it was so difficult planning menus without meat or fish—perhaps we'd better have another cheese pie. Did anyone think to scrub any potatoes?"

"I ask you!" said Roger plaintively. "With all those dishes?"

"I might have," Rissa said, "but I'm afraid I didn't think of it. There were a lot of clothes to wash, so I got on with it, as well as sweeping the kitchen."

"Oh well," said Tamzin. "But you did say you'd all help with the veg., after all that to-do with poor Primrose. Did she eat anything, do you know?"

"A bit, I think," Rissa said. "Joseph knows all about that, but he's done his stuff upstairs and dashed off to help Mike with the sheep. He was awfully keen to tell him about Primrose. Oh, and he said he'd call in and ask Mrs. Tewmell about the baking powder. Meryon, I've left you all the dusting to do—kitchen and sitting-room and stairs."

"At least half the stairs are upstairs work," said Meryon. "Aren't they, Tamzin?"

"Oh gosh, I don't know, I haven't thought. It isn't very easy to do stairs in two halves. And anyway, does it really matter? We've all got so much to do anyhow, I shouldn't have thought a bit extra, one way or the other, made much difference."

"She's like a woman with nineteen children," grinned Meryon suddenly, "who took in an orphan no one else would have, because 'one more wouldn't be noticed, among so many.' Is the cream really past all salvage? Seems a shame, doesn't it? with apple pie."

"You wait, young man," said Tamzin, tying herself into one of Mrs. Merrow's floral aprons. "I'm not sure that I can make a pie, yet. I never have. Mrs. Tewmell sent us the last one, and I only warmed it up."

The pie was so good, in fact, that Tamzin's plan of saving half for supper was swiftly thwarted. Roger licked the dish, saying he couldn't think why people didn't make two while they were at it; and Tamzin marvelled at her astonishing beginner's luck, deciding in the end that it must be because of having real butter and lard to cook with, and an oven 'drawing' perfectly. Mike said it was nothing of the sort. He said people were born either cooks or not-cooks, and that Tamzin must have been one of the first kind.

"Well, she can easily find out," said Meryon. "She can have a bash at a cake for tea, with the baking powder Joseph brought back, and if it's all right she's what you say, and if it isn't she isn't."

"It's not your wash-up, Tamzin," Roger told her hopefully, "so you'll easily have time."

"And she isn't riding boundaries," said Joseph, "not till after tea. It's Mike and me, now."

"Oh well——" said Tamzin, and was persuaded. "Though I'll have to try a batch of bread sooner or later. We've finished all that Mrs. Merrow left, and we can't keep letting Mrs. Tewmell send it up. That was hers we had yesterday and to-day."

The cake would have been perfectly all right—not counting a little burn on the crust, owing to the oven having overdone the "drawing" for it—if Tamzin had remembered to grease the tin.

"I knew it *should* be greased," she said sadly, "but I just simply forgot."

"I know!" said Roger, who had tried running a knife round the tin, and shaking the whole thing, upside down. "Turn it over on the cake-rack and bang the bottom—like this. . . . There," he said, after making a loud noise like Death knocking on the Door of the Soul, "I heard it flop out."

"You didn't," Rissa said. "No one could hear anything with that fusillade going on."

"I did, it made a noise like snow falling off a roof."

"Oh gosh! my cake!" said Tamzin, crying with laughter and disappointment as she lifted up the tin.

"It's all right," said Meryon, patting her shoulder, "it's only broken in half."

"It'll taste just as well," said Roger. "We can eat it with spoons. Can I try a bit now?"

"I know!" said Rissa, "we could scoop it all up and mix it with milk and jam and things——"

"I shouldn't *think* of it," said Tamzin, tenderly putting together the fragments of the half that had shot out to Roger's knocking.

"I don't see why not," Rissa said. "It'd make a jolly decent trifle."

"We'll have it with spoons, the way I said," persisted Roger. "I say, it's a bit puddingy in the middle, isn't it?"

"I like them puddingy in the middle," said Meryon loyally. "When I was quite small, I used to get into terrible trouble for banging the oven door when Ma was cooking. It always made the cakes wonderfully squadgy inside."

"How are you going to get the bottom half out?" Roger asked. "Shall I have another go at it with the hammer?"

"I don't think I care any more what *anyone* does with it," Tamzin said suddenly, pushing the thing away from her. "When I think of all the time I've wasted—and all the butter and sugar and eggs——"

"Never mind," said Roger stoutly, eating crumbs with enjoyment, "what I say is, it's a jolly great relief to think you *aren't* one of those frumps that are born cooks, the way Mike said. Well, I mean, cooking is all very well—at least the eating afterwards is—but think of the awful

fate of having been *born* to it, so that there's no getting away from it, ever."

"Pass me that knife, old chap," said Rissa. "if she really doesn't mind any more what we do with it. We'll have trifle for tea."

One way and another, after the excitements of the cow and the pie and the cake, it was a relief, Tamzin thought, to be away out on the cool quiet grazings again; and with only Meryon, who never chattered, and the ponies and the dogs. She was thinking, as they rode along, of how to-morrow they might be seeing Diccon at the Westling gate, probably with Banner too. And then she thought of how co-operative and neighbourly the local people were being about the siege. They had really had no trouble at all, except for people like the two women with the dogs at the Dunsford gate, and once or twice some hikers, and a touring couple with a sports car who proposed to drive right out to the Castle.

"We'll see Diccon here to-morrow, with any luck," Meryon said as they rode past the gate.

"Just what I was thinking—at least, I was a few minutes ago," said Tamzin, checking Cascade's eager stride to keep in step with Patsy's middle-aged walk. "I suppose they'll get our letters by this afternoon's post, and if Mrs. Merrow catches to-night's from Dunsford, it'll be at the vicarage in the morning early. I say," she added suddenly, "look at the mist coming up! I didn't notice it before."

"It's been thickening for twenty minutes," Meryon said.

"Oh—I was busy thinking."

"It's going to be that kind of mist that cuts the legs off everything. Those bushes, over there, already haven't any trunks."

"They look like green dumplings floating in a thick white soup," Tamzin said. "Everywhere above the mist is perfectly clear, still."

"It's still quite clear in lots of places on the ground," said Meryon. "Watch those sheep! they'll walk right into it and vanish, in a minute."

"Going—gone!" Tamzin laughed. "And do look at that heron. It must be standing by the creek, I suppose, but it looks like a swan on the water. And what's that

thing bobbing about, beyond it? A sort of dark thing—do you see?"

"Is it too dark for a sheep?"

"Oh yes! don't you think so? And you don't get one sheep by itself. Oh—it's quite vanished."

"Either the mist's higher, or the ground's lower, just there," suggested Meryon. "Funny thing, though. And too far away to see properly."

"Come to think of it, it's really a *very* funny thing—funny-curious, I mean. It was moving, wasn't it? Well, it couldn't be a bush, then. It was the wrong shape for any bird. And, except for the sheep, there aren't any animals nearer than the cow-pasture."

"Might have been a big dog," said Meryon. "In which case we ought to see about it at once. Dogs are just the worst possible things for carrying infection. Look, you ride round that side of the mist-patch with Jock, and I'll ride round the other with Turk, and we'll see what comes out. But we'd better keep the dogs at heel till we know. If it's another dog, don't frighten it away, because that'll only spread its tracks farther. Try to call it to you, and we'll get it off the grazings by the beach."

"When you say, 'see what comes out,' you give me nerves," said Tamzin. "Well, think of all the things it could be."

Meryon said, "I can only think of one, and that's a dog; pity they can't read notices. Darned nuisance, whatever it is."

Turning their ponies away from the boundary fence, they rode across the short-grazed turf towards the long low pool of pure-white mist in which the dark object had vanished, like a porpoise disappearing under water.

The sheep which had vanished into the mist now began to emerge, one by one, on the farther side; fence-posts stood up like rows of top-hats floating; small isolated trees were buoyant, and the mist was a white lake under the fading day. The heron suddenly lifted his wide wings and rose, unflustered, before the approaching ponies. His legs trailed out and he was black against the dimming sky. A fence-post moved, was utterly submerged, then reappeared suddenly in the shape of a hat. Staring at it, unconsciously pressing Cascade into a canter, Tamzin saw it rising higher and higher, till it was the shape of a head and shoulders, and then just as suddenly it had gone again.

Had it submerged or had the mist moved? Was it really what it seemed—a person? And if so, what, why, who, where . . . ?

“Did you see?” asked Meryon, cantering up to meet her where the mist was thin like the spindrift at a wave’s edge. “A man.”

Tamzin had pulled up. The ponies’ breath mingled, mist above mist, and the dogs were vaguely grey. “That’s what I thought. I—what shall we do?”

“Find him, of course. He must have seen us. But he obviously doesn’t want to meet us, or why did he duck under the mist again?”

“I suppose it can’t possibly be Mike or Mr. Tewmell? seeing to the sheep?”

“What? at this time of night?—well, it’s nearly twilight—and without the dogs? And ducking coyly about in the mist instead of saying Hallo? Mike was mending the cowshed window, anyway, when we left. Look, we’ve got to ride into the mist and see if we can find him, whoever he is.”

Riding into the peculiar concentration of low mist, so characteristic of the Marsh, was like setting out upon a new element. The feeling of strangeness was made more acute by the expectation of suddenly seeing an unknown person rise out of it; and Tamzin, at least, felt uneasy prickles of fear at her nerve ends, despite having Jock at her pony’s heels and Meryon with Turk and a gun only a few steps away across the whiteness. They rode on carefully into the middle of the mist without seeing a thing that wasn’t known and familiar. Meryon pulled up, looking all around him. Then:

“Hallo! Who’s there?” he called loudly.

Tamzin had stopped too, and now sat in her saddle watching and listening. Nothing could be heard except the near-distant sea-sigh, bleat of lost sheep, curlew’s heart-breaking call—the very essence of the Marshland—and, farther away, the beat of Mike’s hammer in Castle farm-yard, and the joyful noise of bell-ringing practice in Dunsford church tower.

“Who’s there?” Meryon called again, pressing Patsy on. “I could have sworn he was somewhere in here,” he said to Tamzin, riding nearer.

“Look! Over there.” She was standing in her stirrups, staring with wide eyes.

"Gosh! the hat again. How on earth did he get over there?"

"It's a different mist-patch. He must have been right out in the open since we saw him first. And we never noticed!"

"Unless there is more than one stranger on the grazings. Come on, keep your eye on the spot. I can just see the hat, but it isn't so visible as it was."

"Do you really think there might be more than one?" Tamzin was now definitely uneasy, keeping Cascade close to Patsy as they rode.

"No, not really," said Meryon, sensing her fear. "He could easily have got across the clear patch by going along the creek. But don't ask me why. Can you still see the hat?"

"I think so. Are you going to shout again?"

"Let's get a bit nearer first."

Emerging clear of the mist, like swimmers coming from the sea, they rode on towards the farther pool of it. The hat was only just visible, like a tea-leaf floating in a milk-jug.

"He thinks we can't see him," Meryon said. And then the ponies stepped into the mist again, their legs vanishing from underneath them, and the dogs were swallowed up entirely. There was no more speaking, just in case the stranger under the hat might be unaware of their precise nearness. The ponies' footfalls—always quiet on the springy Marsh turf—were muffled almost out of existence by the denseness of the mist they walked through, and they were very near to the hat before suddenly it rose, like a trout coming up for a mayfly, and revealed beneath it a face with a beard, then a brown tweed jacket, and the top of a pair of tweed trousers; the rest remaining a mystery in the white lake of the mist.

Meryon and Tamzin pulled their ponies up before him.

"Haven't you seen the notices, sir?" Meryon began politely.

The stranger smiled with a queer mixture of courtesy, annoyance and dignity. "My dear young fellow, notices around these grazings would hardly apply to me, I think. I have roamed around them since before you were born, and with the full permission of the farmer."

"Then I'm very surprised, sir, that you didn't know about the state of siege. No one is allowed over Castle

Farm boundaries because of the risk of foot-and-mouth disease. There are notices on all the gates, and some along the fences, too. I thought everyone in the district must have known, by now."

"Dear me! is that so?" The stranger seemed genuinely surprised and distressed. "I must say, I am very sorry. Not living in the district, you know—I come from Maidstone—I hadn't heard about it."

"But you must have come through one of the gates, sir. Over one, that is, as they're all padlocked."

"I did, certainly I did. My car is at the Dunsford gate now. I admit I wondered about the gate being locked—but I supposed Merrow was having trouble with holiday people leaving it open."

"And the notice? It says 'No Entry' in very large block letters, and then it says why."

"I am afraid," said the stranger simply, "I didn't see it. Sometimes I don't notice things—it must seem very silly to you, but that is all there is to it. I understand you would like me to leave the property?"

Meryon and Tamzin looked at each other questioningly. Certainly, the sooner the alien went off the land, the better; but wouldn't it be as well to find out more about his business?

Tamzin suddenly said, "We thought it was rather odd, your dodging us the way you did. I mean, if you thought you had a right to be here." And Meryon added, because courtesy demanded courtesy in return, "I hope you don't think us rude, questioning you like this, but we're having to guard the boundaries while Mr. Merrow is in hospital."

Tamzin said, "There are only Mike and Joseph and us to look after the whole place. You can see we have to be careful. And you did dodge us, after we first saw you."

The stranger suddenly smiled—the vague, sweet, courteous smile of the intellectual thinker. "Dear me, I believe I did. As a matter of fact, I generally do, you know. People disturb my birds. That heron, you remember—you put it up. Oh, I'm sure you'd no idea! Please don't think I am attaching any blame whatever. I just hoped you would go away, so that there would still be a little daylight . . ."

"Oh, I see, sir! an ornithologist," said Meryon, sud-

denly understanding. "I should never have thought of it. The mist must have been a bit of a handicap, sir."

"You would be surprised how little. There are still fighting birds—of very great interest on this Marsh—and the trees are clear themselves, while the mist below can be a useful cover for the observer. And my dear young sir, perhaps you won't mind my adding that the mist does not frighten away my birds! However—I must not trespass any longer—if you will be so kind as to direct me along the path where least damage will be done, I shall follow it."

The Wandering Bird of Death

"AH, THAT'D BE OLD Sir Richard," said Mike, at supper by lamp-light later. "Clean forgot about him, I did; and I'll lay our dad did, too, or he'd a-let him know. Writing a book about birds, or some such frolic."

Meryon said, "I'm awfully sorry he got in, Mike. You know, there was a car parked near the Dunsford gate—his, I suppose—when we passed it, but I didn't think it had anything to do with us."

"I shouldn't worry, old young 'un," said Mike consolingly, carving up the cold ham. "He come from a big place at Maidstone, do Sir Richard, and they don't keep no sheep and that. Say he gets in his car at his house and drives right down almost to our gate, see, and then he climbs over and poddles after his birds. Not likely to've picked up much infection that way, isn't Sir Richard?"

After the evening's demonstration of how easy it was even for intentional trespassers to pass unseen within the boundaries, it seemed altogether too much when Rissa hammered loudly on the boys' bedroom door about half an hour after bedtime.

"All right, open it! What on earth's the matter?"

"There's someone else on the grazings," Rissa said, bursting into the room in her pyjamas and carrying a candlestick. "Anyway, there's a light—you can see it from our window. Tamzin's gone to tell Mike and Joseph." Then she had dashed back to get into her clothes.

Meryon and Roger were dressed as quickly as anyone,

and crowding with everyone else at the girls' window, which looked straight out across the grazings, to the sea.

"There! It's as plain as anything," Rissa said. "Nearly as bright as a lighthouse; the mist's all cleared."

"It's just beyond the Castle, I think," said Roger, staring out into the darkness.

"Cor, tarnation take it," said Mike, still buttoning up his jacket. "What the heck——?"

"We'll soon find out," said Meryon. He was fully dressed but his hair looked like a squall at sea. "Are we all going?"

"Don't see why not," said Mike. "No one won't want to be left behind, if I know it."

The cats and dogs in the kitchen showed great surprise at this united uprising, so soon after the family had left them all in peace on the best chairs and in the middle of the hearthrug.

"We'd better take Jock and Turk," said Mike. "You never know. And both the guns, but I'd rather yours wasn't loaded, Meryon."

"Torches, too," said Joseph. "It's only starlight."

Outside in the yard the air was crisp and chilly, with the touch of autumn already on it.

"Well, there's one thing," Rissa was saying hopefully. "Whatever it is, it can hardly be terribly dangerous, showing a light as bright as that."

"You never know," said Roger. "Think of radio-activity. Probably there was a nest of international fanatics, getting things going, and a helicopter has just lifted them all off. I dare say Sir Richard was in league with them—bobbing about in the mist the way you say he was."

"Don't be silly, Roger," said Tamzin, but her heart gave a funny little dip. After a few minutes of walking in the starlight and the dew, Joseph said, "It is a very *white* light. It almost looks reflected."

"And did you see that?" Roger exclaimed. "A man, or a man's shadow, crossing the light."

"It did look like it," Rissa said. "Wonder what on earth he can be doing?"

"You know what that light is?" Meryon said after a while. "One of those power torches, shining on a sheet or something. You can see the beam."

"You're jolly well right," said Rissa. "I was thinking

the light looked squarish, somehow, but of course that's the sheet arrangement."

"Bet you it's hung over the fence," said Joseph. "Look, you can see the man pretty plainly now. He keeps bending about in front of the sheet thing."

"Isn't he enormous," Tamzin said uneasily.

"You're looking at his shadow on the sheet," said Meryon. "He's quite ordinary-sized himself. Look, that's him, just this side of his shadow."

"Oh, gosh, yes," said Tamzin, relieved.

"All the same, it's still frightfully sinister," Roger said hopefully. "I bet you he's trying out some new lethal ray. We'd better be careful how we approach, in case he gets scared and turns it on us."

"Roger!" said Tamzin irritably. "Keep your ideas to yourself, if that's what they're like."

"Look out for a plank over a dike, just hereabouts," Mike said. "Might need a torch; the bank's a bit muddy, when we come to it."

They found it and went over one by one, with Rissa's torch to light the slippery plank.

"Now," Mike said, "no more talking, and no switching on torches any more. I'll say what's got to be said, when we get there."

They walked on, stumbling sometimes over the uneven ground, because all eyes were on the strangeness of the lit-up sheet and the shadow that bobbed and dipped upon it. Fantastic thoughts and fears rushed through puzzled brains, but nothing was said as the silent party plodded on, their sandalled feet wet with the heavy dew on the grazings.

Then, suddenly it seemed, they were there, they had been seen, and were being stared at by a pair of astonished eyes—confronted by a face dramatically lit and shadowed in the beam of the big torch, which was hung low in a thorn bush.

"I'm Merrow—farmer here. What d'you think you're doing?"

"You mean I'm trespassing?" The man stepped out of the glare, looking quickly from one to another of Mike's party.

"You are indeed, sir," said Mike deliberately. "Didn't you see the notices we got up? 'No Entry, for any reason whatsoever.'"

"Well, hardly. I came in after dark. I do apologise, however, and, if you say so, I will naturally leave at once. Though this is the first time I have been asked to go off any part of the Marsh, and I've been here before many times, since I was a schoolboy."

"Things is different now, sir," said Mike firmly. "We're up against foot-and-mouth disease, on all the lands around us. We don't mean to let it in to our flocks, if we can help it. We can't control birds and that, I do know, but we try to keep every living creature off as far as we can do."

"Oh, I see. I had no idea. I will certainly leave at once."

"Not until you've answered two questions," Mike said stolidly. "Sorry, sir, but we have a right to know. Now first, what're you doing with that sheet and that light an' all, and in the middle of the Marsh and after dark? Seems a bit fishy to me, I must say."

Meryon and Roger suddenly burst into smothered laughter. "Rodge and I can tell you, Mike! We know some chaps who go out every fine night in the summer——"

"Well, look at the sheet!" Roger said, nodding at it, still grinning broadly. "Funny I never thought of it before."

Mike looked. Tamzin and Rissa and Joseph had all been looking, fascinated, for some time. The sheet crawled with moths and the shadows of moths. They fluttered and circled, landed and took-off, here, there, and everywhere.

"That's it, sir," the man said, smiling apologetically. "Nothing, you know. Wonderful hobby. You'd be surprised what you come across, in a short summer's mothing."

Mike stared, his face as straight as a bean-pole. Then suddenly he smiled too—but not much, for after all, infection was infection, whether it came by way of an internationally crooked scientist or a simple English moth-man.

"Have you got any rare sorts?" Roger asked eagerly, now that the situation was approaching friendly levels.

"Excuse me, sir, but isn't that a Death's Head Hawk?" Meryon asked, coming nearer. "That huge one over on the bottom right-hand corner."

The stranger swung round. "If it is, it's the second I've had to-night. Yes—a Death's Head all right. I believe

they're coming over from the Continent. The winds have been favourable this summer."

He was capturing the insect with a net which had been propped beside the sheet. "This stuff smeared on the sheet is beer and treacle. They like both the smell and the taste. Now, look at this beautiful fellow! Have you ever heard them squeak?"

Everyone was crowding round now, peering over shoulders and round elbows.

"Squeak?" inquired Rissa curiously. "Can moths squeak?"

"The Death's Head Hawk can. Now, listen." The moth-man gently touched the moth at the base of its proboscis, and suddenly there came an unmistakable small high sound, a little like a pencil on a slate. Among admiring and incredulous murmurs from the watchers the man spoke lovingly of the moth on his hand, beneath the net.

"There are more legends about this one than about any of the rest," he said. "It's the skull-mark on its thorax, you know, that does it. They call it the Wandering Bird of Death in some parts, and its scientific names are pretty awful, too. And then the wing-dust, you know—people thought it caused blindness, falling on to a sleeper's eyes when the moth came flying in a bedroom in the night. In any case, even seeing the moth was said to bring news of death, disease or misfortune."

"Well, I hope it doesn't to-night," Mike said fervently, looking at it with distrust. "We got 'em all threatening us this minute—the whole three of 'em."

"Oh, Mike!" said Rissa cheerfully. "Nobody believes any of that, now. It's just a very beautiful and unusual moth, and couldn't possibly do anyone any harm."

"People used to believe anything, in the old days," said the moth-man, "before science took away all the mystery."

"I hope you're right," Mike said. "Howsumdever, we got to be getting back. Shorthanded, you know, and everyone gets up early. But I still got to ask you me second question, sir. That is, where did you come from, afore you come here? We got to know, you understand, because of the infection."

"Folkestone," said the moth-man. "I'm sorry if it's the wrong place. Born there, you know. Couldn't help it."

"Wrong?" repeated Mike starkly. "Couldn't be wronger. Folkestone! You come poddling over all them marshes,

what are riddled with the sickness? Cor, tarnation, Lord save us!"

"Of course, I came in the car," the man said helpfully, sounding distressed at Mike's anxiety.

"Left it by the Dunsford gate, of course—I know," said Mike exasperatedly. "We had some more of that, earlier on to-day. Well, all I can say is, folks'll have to look out for barbed wire along the top of that gate, from tomorrow morning time."

"Yes, I'm sure that would be a very good plan," said the moth-man, anxious to be helpful. Letting free the Death's Head Hawk Moth—"I don't want another of these"—he began to pack his things. "In fact," he added, "I don't do much collecting at all, these days, unless I catch something most unusual. I have a pretty good collection at home, after years of doing this sort of thing, and mostly I just keep records."

"I reckon you caught something more unusual with your light, to-night, than what you bargained for!" said Mike, with ponderous humour. "It was that what fetched us, same as the moths."

The stranger was scribbling in a notebook against his raised knee. "This is my name and address," he said, tearing out the page. "Fletcher—Tom Fletcher. If ever any of you are in Folkestone, and let me know, I'd be delighted to show you my collection, and give you tea, too, of course."

"Thank you. We'd love to see it," said Meryon, accepting the page and putting it into his pocket.

"Now, sir," said Mike, "if you was to take the exact same path back, as what you come by, it'd keep infection down to a minimal, as they say. . . ."

Walking home, after he had gone, Rissa said, "We've had an ornithologist, and now an ety—what's the word for a moth-man, Meryon?"

"Isn't it ento-something?"

"Well, one of those," said Rissa. "And both on the same day. What next? Any botanists, or zoologists, or geologists used to wandering over your land, Mike?"

"Or astrologers, or astronomers, or climatologists, used to using the wide Marsh sky?" suggested Tamzin.

"Cor, darn take it," said Mike, "ent two enough? Tell you one thing, though; that's one spot er ground I can disinfect, good and thorough. Not the path he poddled

in by, I'll allow, but all that liddle place he did his mothing on. I marked it down in me mind."

Meryon suddenly laughed out, as if amused by his own thoughts.

"Tell us," said Roger.

"It's a funny story I once heard—years ago," Meryon said. "I just remembered it because of Mr. Fletcher. It was about a small boy who was very interested in moths, and one day he saw a book in a bookshop that he thought was just the thing to help him. So he saved up, and saved up, until he could buy it. The man in the shop looked very surprised when he asked for it, but he took it home, and he opened it, and then he saw why the man had looked so puzzled. Do you know what it was called?"

"No, go on, tell us," said Rissa.

"It was *Hints For Young Mothers*," said Meryon solemnly, smiling broadly in the darkness.

My Dear All

EARLY IN THE MORNING Tamzin was sleepily making bread. She was sleepy because of having had so little rest the night before, and because the kitchen was warm and drowsy, with the great black range stoked up for baking, and because it was quiet, everyone else being somewhere out of doors. They were all milking, or feeding pigs and chickens, or looking at the sheep, or carrying water to the ponies in the orchard; and only Tamzin, the cook, had to stay indoors, because the bread in the larder was insufficient for the day.

Yawning, she weighed the golden-brown flour into the large yellow mixing basin, staring at Mrs. Merrow's old recipe book which was lying open in front of her, as she did so.

Meryon rushed in.

"Mike says how long to breakfast? Is there time to go down to Tewmell's? He says the barbed wire's at his cottage, and we're to nail it on the gates when we ride round, after breakfast."

"There might be," Tamzin said. "I wasn't cooking any-

thing special, because of the bread, so he can have it when he likes."

"Seems a shame to be indoors on a heavenly morning like this," Meryon said, in the doorway. "I tell you what—let's have breakfast late, so we can have the hot new bread, and I'll go and tell Mike. Then I'll come back and help you—cook's assistant, you know—so that we'll all get out sooner, and there'll be two of us to remember all the things like greasing tins, and whatever else you forgot last time."

"I didn't forget anything else, last time," Tamzin said. "Unless it was not cooking it for quite long enough."

"That," said Meryon, "was the crowning touch of perfection." And he dashed out into the morning again.

With Meryon's help, the baking took on new aspects.

"Oh, can't we put some raisins in it?" he suggested, watching Tamzin stirring milk into the flour as he industriously greased the bread-tins. And then, "We used to have a German maid—her cooking was generally quite uneatable, but she made glorious bread. She said it was the honey she put in it."

"There's a large jar of it in the larder," Tamzin said.

The raisins and honey were just a beginning. Next, they added a little butter, a handful of rolled oats—"It ought to make a wonderful crust"—and an apple chopped up in little pieces. "We had walnut and date bread, when we were in Devon, once," Meryon said, but Tamzin wouldn't risk any more.

"This is enough variety for one batch," she said. "Tomorrow we can make walnut and date bread—if we've got any walnuts and dates, that is. We'll have to bake nearly every day now, I expect."

They made patterns on the tops of the loaves with sharp knives, cutting diamond and square designs, stripes and diagonals. They painted one loaf with melted butter, one with egg-yolk, one with milk-and-sugar, and left one just dusted with flour. "Then we can see which comes out best," Tamzin said. "I think egg-yolk is really meant for pies, but you never know."

When the bell rang at last for breakfast, the hungry people came rushing in.

"Oh, my!" said Rissa sniffing ecstatically. "*What* a smell! Are we having them for breakfast?"

Roger leaned his nose over the whole rackful of cooling, steaming loaves, shut his eyes and said "Ah!"

Joseph said, "It's just like as if our Mum was home," and Mike said, "If it tastes as good as it smells—well!"

"I'm half-afraid," said Roger, suddenly rushing to wash his hands, "that she's probably a born cook after all!"

"Only when I'm cook's assistant," said Meryon, grinning. "Practical cookery by T. Grey; unorthodox ideas by Fairbrass. You can't go wrong if you have both."

Too much new bread was eaten, by far, at that breakfast. By the time Meryon had bull-dozed to the end of the large dish-washing, everyone except Joseph had fallen victim to plain old-fashioned tummy-ache. Joseph said his own immunity was owing to his early diet at sea. "Lucky to have any age of bread, those days, so I reckon I could grind up cow-cake and not notice it, now."

"The thing is, what have we got *for* tummy-ache?" said Roger wistfully, clutching himself round the middle.

"There's castor-oil," said Joseph. "I know that, as I used it for oiling the ole grandfather, once, when he struck forty-six without stopping."

"But it isn't *that* sort of tummy-ache," Roger said hastily. "It's higher up—here," he added, gently tapping the place.

"Indigestion," Meryon said, as he scoured at the sink. "New bread always does it, if you guzzle. And if it's hot as well as new, and you gorge as well as guzzle—then you're bound to go down like skittles."

"Do you mean to say you haven't got it?" Tamzin turned round from hanging cups on the dresser, her face astonished.

"Of course I've got it. You don't expect me to resist that sort of bread, do you? After all, I as good as made it!"

"What have we got that's good for indigestion, then?" Roger asked. "It's tying me up into a bowline."

"There's only one thing that I know of," said Tamzin, as no one else seemed to have ideas.

"Mm?"

"And that's bicarbonate of soda."

Roger uttered a loud groan and subsided on the floor. "Isn't there anything at all, that's any use for anything at all," he demanded plaintively, "except bicarbonate of

soda? And if it's so beastly indispensable as all that, why on earth don't housewives lay it in by hundredweights?"

Riding round the boundaries was a help to Meryon's and Tamzin's digestive arrangements, and, before they had dismounted at the Dunsford gate to nail the barbed wire into place, all was well with them. They hitched the ponies to the fence beside the gate, and Tamzin held the wire in place along the gate-top while Meryon drove in the small staples.

"Peace for days and days," said Tamzin, gingerly holding the wire between the barbs, "and then we get two thorough-going trespassers within twenty-four hours."

"Pretty rotten luck, really," Meryon agreed, hammering steadily. "I hope it isn't a beginning. I mean, the more people get in, the longer we'll all have to wait before we know if the farm's escaped infection."

"We shan't know, now, before school starts again," said Tamzin sadly. "I wish we could stay on and see it through."

Riding on towards the Westling gate, they saw Diccon sitting on the top of it long before they got within hailing distance.

With him was the boy Alan, who was spending the last part of the holidays at Westling Vicarage; and beyond them both could be seen the long brown tail of Banner, swishing away the flies that were so plentiful after the stretch of warm dry weather.

"He must have got a letter!" Tamzin said. "Oh gosh! I hope it's good news. It's awful to think we don't know one thing about poor Mr. Merrow since we saw Doctor Page drive him away."

"He might have come just to say there isn't a letter," Meryon pointed out, to save her disappointment. "And in any case, they oughtn't to be sitting on the gate."

"Because of the hinges? or the infection?"

"Because of both, but mostly the infection."

"Sorry," said Diccon, jumping down, when they rode up telling him. "We didn't overhang much on your side."

"Have you got a letter for us?" Tamzin asked eagerly, trying to stop Cascade from overdoing his pleasure at seeing his stable-mate again.

"It's in Alan's pocket. We fixed up that the one who didn't ride Banner could read the letter. I'm riding him to-day, but the next time it'll be the other way round."

Alan was rummaging in a pocket full of shells and pebbles. "It must be in this one, then," he decided, trying a pocket full of dried seaweed. "Yes, I've got it. Shall I read it now?"

"Perhaps I could come close enough to see it?" Tamzin suggested, being eaten with suspense.

"No nearer than we are," said Meryon. "Honestly."

Alan held up the unfolded page and Tamzin screwed her eyes up. "No, it's no good. I can't even see 'Dear Tamzin.'" Hurry up, Alan, he may be dead for all we know. Read it quickly."

"It doesn't *say* 'Dear Tamzin,'" Alan said, frowning at the letter. "It says 'My Dear All.' I say, her writing's pretty awful, isn't it?"

"Really, Alan, you don't mean you *can't* read it?"

"She says, 'Poor Dad has had it——'"

"*What?*" exclaimed Tamzin, suddenly sitting bolt upright in her saddle.

"Oh, sorry—I think it's A.N.—'an'—'has had an emergency.'"

"Oh, surely not—already?" said Meryon, resting his notebook on the stock of his gun and waiting to take down the letter as Alan read it.

"Is it 'emergency'?" suggested Tamzin. "Emergency treatment—emergency operation?"

"Oh yes," said Alan, "that's it, 'emergency operation'—you should just see her writing!"

"We know, we've seen it before," said Tamzin. "Go on. Or if you can't, see if Diccon can do better."

"'same night as he came in,'" Alan read with a rush. "I say, I got that right first go off! Then she says, 'Too soon to pray'—no 'too soon to *say* how he is, but Sister says he sat in factory.'"

"That can't be right," said Tamzin. "It doesn't even make sense; it must be 'satisfactory.' You look, Diccon."

"I promised that if I rode Banner——"

"Oh, never mind that! If you get stuck with the next letter, Alan can help you."

Still holding Banner's reins, Diccon leaned sideways and read round Alan's elbow. "Yes, it's 'he's satisfactory.' She doesn't join up her letters."

"I do hope so, anyway," said Tamzin.

"'I do hope so,'" said Alan.

"What d'you mean? I just said that," Tamzin said.

"Well, it says it here, too. Then it says, 'Bless you all, and don't bother about the housework. I'll write you every day, Love from Margery Merrow.'"

"Well, I suppose that *is* right," said Tamzin doubtfully. "No P.S. or anything?"

Alan held the letter up for her distant inspection.

"At least the news seems good, what little there is of it," said Meryon, pocketing his notebook and pencil and collecting up his reins.

"We must ask her to write in block capitals," Tamzin said. "I'll write to her as soon as we get back—oh, gosh no! I've got the dinner to cook. Well, after that. Dicky, did Mother send any message?"

"Oh yes, I think she sent her love, or something."

"Well, send her mine—and Daddy too. Banner looks lovely; you must have been looking after him awfully well. Are the cats all right? and did you remember about watering my cactus?"

"Yes," said Diccon to all this. "Have you got foot-and mouth, yet? Do their feet really fall off?"

"Of course not," Tamzin said. "See you both tomorrow, unless someone else does the boundaries at this time."

"It's going to rain," Meryon said, looking up and south-westwards. "You'd better hurry back, you two; you've only got one pony between you. Tamzin and I can gallop if we have to."

"I thought it was too fine to last," said Tamzin, "when I was mixing the bread." Then, a little later, when they were riding at a slow canter along the sea boundary, she followed up the remark. "First a break in the peace of the siege—and a very marked one—then suddenly a break in the weather. Things aren't looking quite so good, are they?"

"Oh come! Nil desperandum," said Meryon cheerfully. "What's a drop of rain and two trespassers? Nice couple, too, I must say—birds and moths!"

"I wish it hadn't been moths—I wish we hadn't seen the Death's Head. I hate its other name, The Wandering Bird of Death. I know it isn't reasonable and all that, but I can't help wishing we hadn't seen it." Tamzin shivered a little under her thin linen shirt and hoped Meryon would think it was the chill wind before the rain.

Dark News

MIKE AND JOSEPH rode the boundaries that afternoon in steady rain and a high wind. They wore yellow sou'westers and oilskins buttoned to the chin, and left Rissa and Meryon organising a grand polishing afternoon, which involved all the brass and every bit of polished wood in the farmhouse. Tamzin had written her letter to Mrs. Merrow, including notes from everyone else all down the back of the page, and Mike had taken it with him, in the hope that some friendly outsider might be seen, despite the weather, who would take the letter to the post for them.

The old farmhouse rang with cheerful activity. Tamzin had got over her moment of "creeps" that morning, and was seeing everything in a new light of hopefulness. Roger was being downright racketsy, sliding up and down the landing on an old vest—"to bring up a high polish," he said, but really to let loose his high spirits. He would have done the same on the banisters, only they were too close to the wall. Meryon polished chair-seats so that they squeaked when people sat on them, and Tamzin and Rissa rushed at the brass, piling it up with a clatter on the kitchen table; horse-brasses, saucepans, kettles, warming pans, tankards, bowls, plates—Mrs. Merrow was a great collector, and one who loved a twinkling house.

"It does seem funny," Tamzin said, "to be making all this noise. I still keep catching myself thinking Mr. Merrow's in his room, and will hear us if we make a sound."

After the polishing they lit a log fire in the big sitting-room inglenook. "Because if we've got to be indoors, anyhow, we may as well spread," said Rissa. "And it'll air the room, and it's lovely for roasting potatoes in the evening."

"We could really have tea by the fire," said Roger. "And I say, we'd jolly well better remember to eat Tamzin's bread with caution. It's still newish, even if it isn't hot."

Mike, however, was in no mood for fireside pleasures



Mike and Joseph rode the boundaries in steady rain and a high wind

when he and Joseph came in at last, the water running from them on to the flagged kitchen floor.

"Anything wrong, Mike?" Tamzin asked. She was cutting up one of her loaves for tea.

"Wrong? I'll lay there is, old young 'un."

Everyone looked up, listening for what could be the worst news possible on a sheep-raising farm, at that time. But it wasn't as bad as all that, and breath came again with an audible sigh of relief.

"It's them diddikai gippos again. You remember how they camped behind our orchard, on that bit of common land, time you bought Banner off of 'em?¹ Well, they're there again, now."

"Oh, Mike!" said Tamzin gravely. "But do you think they'll trespass? They didn't last time, did they?"

"Does anyone ever see a diddikai trespass?" Mike demanded, pulling off his oilskin coat. "No. What you do see is, you see a horse-collar's pinched, the next morning, or a basket, or even a bike. They come in, all right; there's no stopping 'em, for all their smooth talk. But it isn't only that as worries me—nor yet that worries me most. It's them lurcher dogs they got."

"I suppose they won't tie them up?" said Meryon. "No, I don't suppose they would, if they're the same disobliging lot as last time."

"You're dead right," said Mike, "they won't."

Joseph pushed his feet into his slippers. "We saw them both racing about in the orchard, barking at Siani and Cascade, when we went to get the ponies," he said.

"So I yelled over the hedge," said Mike, "and said to call 'em off dreckly minute, or I'd shoot the both of 'em. That dirty little feller—you know the one, Tamzin—he called 'em back, and they creeps in under one of the wagons. But when I says will he keep 'em tied, and explains the circumstances, he just shrugs and says they ent got no collars."

"Silly old fool," said Meryon. "He could make them with a bit of rope and a bowline."

"I says to him," went on Mike, washing his hands, "as I'd have no choice but to shoot iffen I finds 'em on the place again: and we disinfected the ponies' feet before we rode them all round the land, just to make sure."

¹Told in *The Midnight Horse*.

"And when we got back," said Joseph, "there they were again."

"Gosh!" said Tamzin, much concerned. "And did you shoot them, Mike?"

Mike looked a little sheepish, as he scrubbed away at the sink. But he also looked worried and determined. "Well, no," he said. "I thought, hang it, give them one more chance. Ponies don't catch the sickness, see, and we needn't even put them in the orchard for a while. They're in the cow-pasture now. Besides, I reckon if I do find I'm forced into doing it, they'll strike back somehow—and hard. But I gives him another shout over the fence, and says tie 'em up, or it'll be the last time I let 'em go alive."

"And what did he say?" asked Rissa. She moved the kettle to the centre of the range.

"I wouldn't repeat it, gal," said Mike. Then suddenly changing the subject, "Cor, bless us!" he added, turning round with the towel in his hands, "you surelye have made a grand shine-up! Do our Mum good to see that, so it would."

Mike and Meryon did their best, after this dark news, to keep the spirits of the household high. But all the evening, despite roast potatoes and cheerful talk, and books by the fire, and an exciting play on the wireless, there was the sinister, slow undercurrent of uneasiness about the diddikais. It was like a sort of doom that gradually approached, staying with them through the night, and being found still in their minds the next morning. So that, in a way, it was just as well for everybody that the feared thing, once threatened, crashed into their lives without further suspense and delay. Everyone on the farm heard the shots, carly that morning, and it was only necessary to give one look at Mike's face, at breakfast, to know the truth of it.

"Mike," said Tamzin suddenly, "you've shot the lurchers." It wasn't a question, but a statement.

Mike nodded, buttering his bread.

"They was right over by the Castle, chasing a hare. We couldn't have that."

No one had anything else to say, Mike's case was so indisputable. But everyone felt the threat, like a physical weight, of the diddikais' revenge. Mike tried to reassure himself about the rightness of his act.

"I gave 'em fair warning. No one can't say as I didn't give 'em fair warning. Every one of you could prove I warned him first, not once, but twice," he said. "I got the law on my side, choose how."

Throughout the whole of that Sunday the garrison on the farm was preoccupied and jumpy, listening for some sudden noise—any unexpected noise—to herald the awaited vengeance of the diddikais. But nothing out of the way occurred, the day moving on serenely in its usual way, with housework and cooking, with milking, feeding, mucking-out and rounding up the sheep for their daily inspection. Tamzin thought the diddikai camp was quieter than usual, and she was inclined to think this sinister; but Meryon said they only *seemed* quieter, because everyone was subconsciously listening. Mike himself had been perfectly straightforward, reporting to the camp, over the hedge, of what he had been forced to do, but he could make nothing of their brief and evasive comments.

The day passed. Two, three, four days passed, and still nothing happened; but the diddikais were still behind the orchard, still staying and doing nothing that might definitely justify suspicion, and still making no sign of departure. Gradually the tension eased a little in the farmhouse. Anxiety began to flow instead towards old Mr. Mellow, who wavered in a post-operative state of neither recovering nor deteriorating. Mrs. Mellow kept the garrison posted daily with what news there was, but that was little. They, in their turn, kept her posted with all the good news, all that was amusing, and all that might set her mind at rest about the house and farm. They told her nothing about the bird-man, the moth-man, or the diddikais. Nothing about the shortage of baking soda, or the more recent shortages of matches, paraffin and soap powder.

Rissa said the boys used too much soap powder when they washed dishes, but the boys said there was too much dish-washing being done, and suggested a sixty per cent saving in soap if one big wash-up was arranged for every evening. This plan might have been tried, if there had been more dishes available, and much more space around the sink for piling them. But as it was, a rationing of soap was decided on—to be measured by spoon, and not tipped in, as usual, from the packet.

The paraffin shortage had been caused by an outbreak

of lice among the pigs, and, "Would you believe it?" said Mike, "but we ent got a single grain of louse-powder. It'll have to be paraffin, or we'll have them all with sore backs in no time."

The days slipped on, one seeming very like another, because of the strange isolation of the farm. It was difficult to know, sometimes, which day it was, as there were no newspapers, no tradespeople, and no letters. And then the wireless battery ran down and there was no way of knowing the date at all, except asking Diccon and Alan in the mornings over the fence; or, as Meryon suggested, making Robinson Crusoe notches on a stick. And still the diddikais were there, behind the orchard, still silent and inscrutable, showing neither enmity nor friendliness towards the pony-catchers in the orchard, the late apple-pickers and boundary riders, when they came within hail.

The tension, slackening daily in the farmhouse, was almost gone as the days crept into the middle of the last week of the school holidays. There was quite enough to think and worry about, without getting into a state about the improbable. By now, there was no soap powder left at all. Each dish-washer had to grate his or her small ration from a bar of scrubbing-soap, and if anyone were seen to put the tablet in the water when washing their hands, there was an immediate uproar. The ration of matches, held by Mike, was one a day, to be used only for lighting the kitchen range. For everything else tapers were the only method. They were whittled in the evenings from bits of thorn-wood, or twisted from old newspapers brought out of the store-shed.

"We could have made old-fashioned rush-lights, from the reeds," Mike said, "if we'd had enough fat to dip them in. Beats me," he added, "how our Mum didn't lay in double what she did. Autumn-time, too."

"No one can think of everything, Mike," said Joseph loyally. "What strikes me is how she thought of everything she did. And the paraffin wasn't her fault."

"Nor the bicarbonate," said Tamzin.

"They was acts of God," admitted Mike.

"And the main thing is," said Roger, "at least we're not short of things to eat."

Early that week, the news suddenly began to be better from Mrs. Merrow in Dunsford.

"Our Dad's properly looking up, eating better, and

wanting news of home,'” she wrote. “‘Doctor says he’s Turned the Corner, and now it’s only a matter of time and patience.’”

This was such a joyful thing that it called for a celebration. Tamzin made a cake—she was getting much better at it now. Having burnt three and undercooked two, she was beginning to get the knack of knowing just the critical moment for removing them from the oven. This cake was a coffee sandwich one, as Mrs. Merrow seemed to have laid in such rows of bottles of coffee essence, and everyone always wanted tea or cocoa to drink. It was iced with coffee icing, as there was no shortage of sugar and a packet of icing sugar was found among the rest in the cupboard. But Tamzin was quite defeated by the lack of walnuts for the top, and so wrote “Mr. Merrow, to his Good Health” on the icing with a skewer dipped in neat coffee essence.

Joseph borrowed the skewer and added, “And the Sheep, Cows and Pigs” round the outside, because he said it was also a celebration of the successful dodging of the foot-and-mouth infection.

“Don’t be in too much of a hurry to celebrate that,” Mike said. “There’s still time. There’s half a week until the quarantine for the Deeproise outbreak is up, and then there’s still a risk from the trespassers.”

But Joseph said it was worth celebrating the good bill of health up to now. They celebrated with the cake, with jellies made from bottled fruit-juice and gelatine, and with date bread baked by Meryon. And, after the evening jobs, they celebrated with a cheerful log fire in the inglenook—lit by tapers—and with games and a sing-song, Roger playing the farmer’s old violin. It seemed as if the old fear and uneasiness had quite gone. Even Tamzin had forgotten her anxieties about the Wandering Bird of Death. If anyone still had any worries about the diddikais, after all this time, it was Mike. And he said he would stop being uneasy after they had departed.

In the morning, very early, it was seen that they had indeed departed. Nothing was left on the camping ground but the kicked ashes of their fires, the marks of their wheels in the grass, and the untidy pile of rusting tins, old bottles and cardboard packets that they had pushed beneath the bushes.

“Flitted in the night,” said Joseph, staring over the

hedge in the early dawn-light. "Think of that. And never looked like moving, did they, yesterday?"

"We-ell, that's the way they often do," said Mike, though his voice had a doubtful tone. "Never do anything open-handed and above-board, iffen they can help it. An' another thing, they leave debts all up and down the country, often as not, or people suspicious about things as bin stole. That's another reason for flitting in the night."

The real reason, however, became plain in a very short while. Tamzin was frying some of the Merrows' home-cured ham for breakfast, Joseph and Roger were milking, Rissa and the boys were feeding pigs and poultry, and Mike had ridden off with the dogs for a quick first look-over of the sheep. He was back so quickly and so fast that everyone rushed out of house and buildings into the yard at the sound of Patsy's drumming hoofs.

"What's up, Mike?"

"Anything wrong?"

"I said they'd get their own back," said Mike, jumping from the saddle. "There's more than a hundred sheep missing—clean gone."

"Oh, Mike!"

"Perhaps they're still somewhere about," said Meryon. "Perhaps they got out. Have you looked round at all, Mike? Though you haven't had much time."

"No need," said Mike grimly. "Gates was shut. They didn't let theirselves out. They was the flock of breeding ewes, what I put down by Cold Harbour. They been druv out, that's what."

"Oh, but they might still be on our own land, Mike," said Joseph. "Perhaps the diddikais' revenge was mixing up the flocks. After all, that makes plenty of trouble on a sheep-farm. They'd know that."

"But not enough trouble for them, lad," said Mike. "Anyway, I'm not saying it's impossible, I'm only saying I don't think they're hereabouts. Howsumever, rush your jobs through and grab a bite of breakfast, and we'll comb the whole blessed place."

"Someone's got to meet Diccon and Alan, for the letter," Tamzin said, as they all turned and hurried back to their work.

"We'll fit it in," said Mike.

There was no time to appreciate properly the tender fried ham, bolted in hasty mouthfuls, or the home-made

bread and butter, hardly touched at all. Washing up was postponed because of the emergency, beds were left unmade, and the entire garrison departed at once, each to search a particular area of Marshland allotted by Mike. All four ponies were used, and both the dogs. Meryon, whose area lay nearest to Westling, was to collect the daily letter from Diccon and Alan, and the boundaries were to be patrolled in sections with the areas lying near to them. No one was to expect a proper dinner, as Tamzin would probably be too late home for any cooking; and, in the event of the discovery of the ewes, the finder was to ride to the Castle and wave a white rag or handkerchief from the top of the outer wall.

The farmhouse might have reminded a casual observer—if such had been permitted—of that mysteriously abandoned ship, the *Marie Celeste*. It looked—especially in the kitchen—as if the entire household had just arisen and vanished, in the middle of their daily occupations—which was, indeed, exactly what had happened. The red heart of the kitchen range glowed and crackled, the squat black kettle hissing cheerfully above it; the sink and draining boards were piled with dishes, the floor was unswept, the ashes overflowing, the old grandfather marking time in his corner, and the back door standing open to the morning. Only the cats lived and moved in the place, and even they looked surprised at their desertion.

Out on the wide windy grazings, the searchers rode and walked in solitary despair. For soon it was plain to each of them that no lost ewes were to be found in any allotted area of the grazings, and no white rag fluttered from the walls of Cloudesley Castle.

Returning searchers hunted in the creeks and ditches for possible gruesome findings. They hunted in the Castle itself, for four-footed prisoners, and even in the cramped and dirty vaults beneath. All of them came back without news. But a further detailed inspection of the gates by Mike and Meryon revealed traces of the passage of sheep through the seaward gate beyond Cold Harbour.

“But Mike, it’s padlocked!” Tamzin said, when they returned to the pot-luck dinner she had scraped together from left-overs.

“So it is,” agreed Mike. “But the trouble with padlocks is that lots of them can be opened by the very same key. They’re made too much to standard, that’s what.”

"And think of all the time they've had," said Meryon. "to keep getting different keys and trying them—after dark, I expect."

"Probably that's why they stayed so long—biding their time," said Joseph. "And then as soon as they found the right one, they ups anchor, and takes the sheep with them."

"D'you really think they've taken them *with* them, Joseph?" asked Roger.

"Well, it is an idea," said Joseph. "The only thing is, I don't see how we can find out, as we can't ride beyond our own boundaries."

"Cor, darn take it," said Mike wretchedly. "To think of saving 'em all for so long, and then over a hundred gets out, an' probably pattering around all over infected land, some place. Even if we gets to hear news of 'em, how in thunder can we fetch 'em back in?"

"I suppose you'd have to isolate them," suggested Meryon.

"But supposing they goes down sudden to the sickness, on this land—we'd still have to have every cloven-hoof animal on the place done away with. What's the use of isolating? And me Dad's best breeding ewes, too."

"Perhaps we'll think of something," said Tamzin hopefully. "The thing now is to think how to get news of them."

Hunters' Tale

"THE OBVIOUS THING seems to be the police," Meryon said at dinner. "We could send a message by anyone passing the gate, to the Ship and Anchor Inn, who would phone them for us. They'd get on to them straight away, and it ought to be fairly easy for them to trail the diddikais."

"Especially if they have over a hundred sheep with them," said Rissa.

Mike was not enthusiastic. He said, "Naturally I thought of the police—it's the first thing anyone would think of. But there's two things again it. Are they going to respect our siege? And what about the lurchers? Another thing is—no one won't find those ewes still with the diddikais,

and the whole camp will lie like anything about ever having set eyes on 'em."

"But Mike, you said you had the law on your side, about the lurchers," said Tamzin.

"I know I did. An' most likely I have. The thing is, I couldn't rightly swear to it. An' supposing they make out I haven't? Might be awkward, choose how."

"Then who else is there, who could find out anything for us, privately?" asked Roger.

Meryon said, "Why not some of us go out and scout around? We can always dunk when we get back."

"Can you, though?" said Mike. "What in? We used the last of the disinfectant for dunking Doctor Page."

"There's some sheep-dip in the harness room," Joseph suggested.

"Cor, now if that isn't an idea!" said Mike. "Not so much for dunking us, as there's arsenic in it, but for the ewes, iffen we find 'em."

"Put them all through the dipping-tank! That's a notion, Mike," Meryon said. "Unless they've actually got the virus in their blood, it ought to wipe out all infection carried on their feet and fleeces."

"I say, we are all rather silly," Tamzin suddenly said. "About disinfectant for dunking, I mean; because anyone already outside, on detective work, could easily buy another bottle; it's not like the bicarb, it will disinfect itself."

"So they bally well could!" said Roger. "Who is it going to be? Can I be one of them, Mike?"

"Well, I think we'll rule Tamzin out, for one, this time," Mike said, "as she went out to phone the doctor. Who else wants to go? Oh, all of you—well now—and I was thinking of going myself."

"Couldn't we all go?" Tamzin asked. "Oh, why not? It'd be more to do the scouting."

Mike shook his head. "And not leave anyone here to look after the farm? There'd be folks coming over the fences, cattle getting loose, and probably the whole place on fire, and no one here to do anything about it."

"Besides," said Rissa, "think of all the wet clothes, with everyone being soused."

"And nobody to stop the police or anyone from putting all the ewes back in with the others, iffen so they find 'em some other place while we're out," said Joseph.

"And there's a double lot of dishes waiting to be

washed," Tamzin said. "We've nothing clean left for tea. It really isn't my wash-up, but if I'm staying I'll do them."

Mike suddenly said, "Joseph and I'll stay, for two more. I don't really like putting off the work I got waiting in the flock."

"Oh, Mike!" said Joseph.

"I got two hundred sheep to count and look over, and fifty odd to treat for fly and foot-rot," Mike said. "Stands to reason Tewmell and me can't do it all. And no one else, here, is half so good as what you are, when it's sheep to be looked. Besides, I want to be around the place, meself, if them police turn up."

"I'm sure they won't, Mike," said Tamzin, "as we haven't even asked them to look for the ewes."

"You never know," said Mike.

In the end, they decided that Rissa and Meryon and Roger should go, leaving Tamzin in charge of the house and Mike and Joseph with the remaining sheep and the farm.

"Come to the Sea Road gate and shout," said Tamzin, "when you get back. I'll have the bath-tub handy, but we'd better not leave it ready filled by the gate for you, in case the village children drop things into it."

"We'll be late," said Roger, "unless we've got good news. We'll go on and on until we find out something."

"Not too late," said Mike. "I don't want anyone out after sundown."

"Have some warm clothes ready for us to change into," Rissa said.

"And plenty to eat," said Meryon. "We can take some sandwiches, but we're bound to be ravenous by the evening."

Tamzin and Joseph watched them go. Outside the Cold Harbour gate they spent a long time, casting backwards and forwards on the shingle and rough grass that stretched for half a mile between the grazings and the sea. "Looks as if they can't pick up a proper trail," Joseph said, standing on the pigsty wall to see better.

"It isn't easy, I expect, on shingle," Tamzin said. "Anyway, we can't help by standing here watching. I'm going to get on with all those dishes."

When Joseph had gone too, Tamzin had the whole farmhouse to herself. No one but she, in the whole silent

house, in the yard, or in the buildings. She toiled to the end of the high-piled, double wash-up, dried the things that had no room to drain, and put them away. She made up the fire, cleared away the ashes, and started tidying the uncleaned kitchen. Time seemed to stand still, and work seemed endless. Much of it she left undone, because after all it was almost to-morrow, when all would need to be done again. Work was not half so dreary when there were others to share it with you.

Sometimes she went out, pausing in the middle of making beds or shaking mats, to climb on to the pigsty wall and look out across the Marsh for a sign of Mike's and Joseph's return with the ponies and sheep-dogs. Or, better still, for the joyful sight of an early return of the searchers.

The Marsh dreamed a golden dream under the September afternoon sun. It lay tawny, like a lion, where the long shingle banks ran thrusting into the grazings. It was green and white dappled where the sheep were; softly hazy over the dikes and tide-creeks. Mike and Joseph could sometimes be seen among the sheep, with the bent old figure of Shepherd Tewmell. The looking ponies were tied beneath a copse of thorn bushes. Tamzin knew they were there, but could not see them because of their dark colour and the distance.

She laid the tea ready on the long kitchen table, put the teapot to warm and cut up a loaf from the latest baking. Still no one came home, though it was now past five o'clock, so Tamzin got out the little barrel butter-churn, tipped in all the cream they had saved since the last churning, and took it to the bench outside the back door. She had finished churning and was washing the butter at the sink when Mike and Joseph rode into the yard, the dogs waving their plumed tails at the thought of home and hearth and supper.

"Not back yet?" called Mike, dismounting at the harness room door.

"Not a sign," said Tamzin at the open window.

"Ah, then they likely haven't had good hunting. Tea ready, gal?"

"All ready. And I've made the butter, as we were a bit low."

At tea, they avoided talking much about the three who had not yet returned. What was the use of speculation?

It was anybody's guess where they were, what luck they had had, and when they would return.

"It's proper grand news, it is, about our Dad," Mike said, making a sandwich an inch thick with Tamzin's bread, Mrs. Merrow's damson jam and a good slice of farmhouse cheese. "Better every day. You got the note of this morning's letter on you, Tamzin? What did it say—sitting up and asking about the farm? Cor, won't it be grand to have the ole man home again!"

"Not forgetting Mum," said Joseph, drinking tea that looked strong enough to float the sugar.

Tamzin could have said, "Yes, but not before the ewes are found—not till the infection is over," but she didn't. "I wonder if he'll begin remembering seeing us four here?" she said. "Do you think he'll be furious, if he does?"

Mike said, "All depends. I mean, if we get it, and all the stock's slaughtered, he'll likely always think it was perhaps because of you. But if we don't—well then, he can hardly help being everlasting grateful, since Joe and me'd have had more'n too much, with every blessed thing to see to, on our own."

"The house would have been a pigsty," Joseph said. "We'd never've had time."

"No cooking," said Mike.

"No washing," said Joseph.

"But think," said Tamzin with a dry smile. "No shortage of bicarbonate or soap powder!" Then, "I wish," she added, suddenly wistful, "that the others would come home."

When they did come home, it was after dark, in spite of Mike's orders about not being out after sundown. Joseph heard them calling at the gate, as he went out to shut up the hens.

"Mike! Tamzin! They're back."

The three who had stayed ran down to the gate to meet the three who had been away.

"Any luck?"

"Any news about the sheep?"

"Oh, there you are at last," Rissa said, sounding tired. "We thought you'd never hear us."

"We've been looking out and listening every ten minutes," Tamzin said. "Here's the tub—tell us the news."

"No news," said Meryon, climbing the gate. "No news at all. We'll tell you later, but let's get indoors now."

He was pouring disinfectant into the tub as Mike and Joseph tipped in the buckets full of water they had left ready near the gate.

"Oh dear," said Tamzin. "I am so sorry. I hoped perhaps——"

"Never mind," said Mike. "P'raps when we hear what they have to say, we may be able to pick up something useful. Now, Rissa first—ladies, you know."

"Isn't there any hot?" Rissa asked. "There was for Doctor Page."

"I've got it here," said Tamzin. "There you are. Now, right under . . ."

The sousing was completed in the faint light of the rising moon. Each emerging figure had shaken itself and started running through the darkness to the house. "It'll get you warm," said Mike.

"Your clothes are all airing," said Tamzin, "but don't forget to wash first—hair as well. There's another kettle ready on the stove."

She and Mike and Joseph emptied the bath-tub and dragged it under the bushes again, collected all the buckets, the kettle and the torch, and followed the others to the yellow-lighted windows of the farmhouse.

There was much splashing and shivering going on in kitchen and scullery. Mike and Joseph obligingly went for a last look-over of pigs and cows so that Rissa could have the privacy of the kitchen sink till she had finished, and Tamzin went in to start turning the laid tea into a "knife-and-fork supper." Over this meal the unfortunate hunters told their tale.

"Of course we started badly," Meryon said, "in not being able to pick up clear tracks at the beginning. It looked to us as if the sheep had been zigzagged about, with the deliberate idea of spoiling their tracks."

"We spent ages around that stretch of shingle," said Roger, "trying to find the place where they had gone off in some sort of order. In the end we went to Winklesea Beach and asked lots of people——"

"Almost everyone we saw," said Rissa. "But no one seemed to have seen or heard a thing about them."

"We separated there," said Meryon. "Rissa went to Pett, Roger to Winklesea and inland nearly as far as Udimore, and I went along the Hastings road, through Icklesham, nearly to Guestling, and back along Panel Lane. We all

asked lots of people if they'd heard or seen anything that might have been the ewes, but no one had."

"Though Roger and I both got sent miles out of the way after sheep that turned out to be honestly owned—and branded—by other people," Rissa said.

"We had to follow up every clue," said Roger.

"It does seem a shame," said Tamzin. "All that effort and hope for nothing. It will be simply awful if we don't find them before we go home on Saturday. Think of going away and not even knowing what has happened to them."

"You'd have thought they'd been lifted straight off the earth," said Meryon, "for all the signs of them we've come across in half a day's hunting."

Mike said, determinedly jovial, "And to think I looked out that ole sheep-dip, and got the tank ready an' all."

"Never mind, Mike," said Joseph. "It'll do for next time. We're sure to come on 'em some day, sooner or later."

During the evening the dunked ones began the old complication of itching and pinkness.

"Oh, why are we *always* wanting bicarbonate for one thing or another?" Tamzin said. "And to think I hardly knew the stuff existed, before we came here."

"Well, I suppose most people don't go dunking around in strong carbolic," explained Mike, "nor yet over-eating new bread, with lots of fancy ingredients in it. Tell you what, though," he added. "You could try a spot of milk. I remember my gran doing that once, for sunburn it was. Worked wonderful."

"But we drank gallons at supper," Roger said, looking pinker than ever.

"Not drinking," said Mike. "Dabbing."

"Oh, I see. Well, it's worth trying. Shall I go and fetch a jug?"

"I'll get it," Tamzin said. "If it works with your arms and legs and faces you can do the rest at bedtime."

"Full-cream," called Mike, as she went into the dairy. "The fat helps. And Lord knows we got plenty. Cor, I shall be glad when the day comes we can sell it again."

The milk was immediately most soothing.

"I'm sure you don't even *look* so pink," said Tamzin. "I wish I'd thought of it when I went to get the doctor. I was in a state for days."

Rissa was so delighted that she said she was going straight to bed, even though it was a little early.

"I'm tired, after all that tramping in sandals, and I want to soak in milk, like an Oriental princess."

"You can't soak in a jugful," said Roger, but Rissa said "Good-night" and went.

"Our skins are leatherier," said Meryon, stretching out his feet to the stove and accepting a cat on his knee. "Mine, at least, can wait another hour or so. Throw me an apple, Joseph, and I'll roast it on the toasting-fork."

Sitting up to the table with a writing pad, Tamzin said, "Isn't it *difficult* knowing what to write to Mrs. Merrow, when such unmentionable things keep happening all the time? I nearly told her about the milk-cure, and then I suddenly realised she'd wonder what we'd been dunking for."

"Tell her," said Meryon, "about the batch of bread I made—she'll never believe it. And ask her if she knows a recipe for soap."

Tamzin went on writing for another fifteen minutes or so. Meryon's apple was sizzling in front of the fire; Roger and Joseph were playing noughts and crosses and Mike was silently thinking his own thoughts, with the other cat balanced blissfully on one knee.

Suddenly the hall door opened and there was Rissa. Everyone looked up at her inquiringly. She was in pyjamas, a candle in her hand.

"I say, can you all come upstairs quickly, and bring a torch? the strongest one."

"What the——" began Mike, jumping up and grabbing the poker.

"Don't be silly, Mike, it isn't burglars. But do come quickly—I think someone's signalling, over towards Westling. I was standing dabbing the milk and looking out of the windows at the moon on the sea, and suddenly I noticed . . ." They were all hurrying upstairs now, with the big farm torch. "I noticed something flashing. It looked a bit odd—too regular for anyone doing it by accident. So I tried to do the same with my candle—shielding it with my hand, you know. But I don't think it could have showed up. Look!" she said, as they all crowded to the small bedroom window. "There it is!"

"Jiminy," said Roger. "You're right."

Beyond the High Wall

HOLDING THE BIG TORCH in the middle of the open window, Mike started flashing—long-short, long-short, in answer to the distant signal. At once the faraway torch switched off, then reappeared in the unmistakable irregular flashes of the Morse code.

Rissa groaned. "This is when we all kick each other for not having kept up our Morse."

"Well of course, that applies to me too," Meryon said, "but I have got it written out—at least, I ought to have." He had pulled his notebook from his pocket and was turning the pages by the light of Rissa's candle.

"Buck up," Roger said, peering through the window round Mike's shoulder. "He's signalling like anything, and Mike's stopped."

"Then the first thing we must signal back is 'Slow down,'" said Meryon. "Here's the page. It might be easier, Mike, if I have the torch, because I still remember some of the letters, and so ought to be quicker than you, if you're looking each one up."

"Surely," said Mike, handing it over and making room. "I must say I hully do hope this is someone knows about the ewes."

Meryon began carefully signalling. "S-L-O-W D-O-W-N." Before he had got to the dot-dash-dot-dot of the letter L, the other torch had suddenly stopped flashing.

"He's seen; he's watching," Tamzin said.

"When he answers," said Meryon, ending the first word, "everyone help to decipher. I'll say the dots and dashes."

At the end of the message the distant signalling began again. Everyone bent and stretched and twisted themselves to read the code in Meryon's notebook as he said the dots and dashes. Rissa was writing down the result on a spare page she had torn out, as the others deciphered aloud Meryon's reading.

"W-H—oh dear, it's still too fast—O, end of word . . ."

Roger said, "I'll write down the dots and dashes, so if we miss any we can check it afterwards."

"Shut up," said Rissa. "Did you say A? Oh dear—
R-I . . ."

"E, not I," Joseph said. "It was only one dot."

"Who are . . ." Tamzin read, over Rissa's shoulder, but Rissa was dashing on as Roger and Joseph supplied the letters.

"Y-O-U. It's 'Who are you?' Mike."

"Tell them 'Castle Farm,' Meryon," said Mike.

"Right," said Meryon. "Give me the code, Joseph; and Rissa, can you hide that candle?" He began to flash the message. The others watched, keyed up for reading the answer, that might mean so much to the farm. It could be bad news, good news, even a hoax. At last it came.

"J-E . . ." Roger was saying.

"No, I," said Joseph.

"M," said Tamzin. Then, "It's *Jim!*" she exclaimed delightedly.

"The ole ferryman!" said Mike.

"H-E-R-E, end of word."

"Go on," said Rissa. "But do remember to say 'end of word,' or just 'end'."

"L-O-O-K . . . end," said Joseph and Tamzin together.

"O," said Roger.

"N . . . end," said Tamzin.

"F-I-R-E . . . end."

"That's 'Look on fire'," Rissa said, puzzled. But the message went on; "H-I-L-L-S . . . end."

"It's the Fire Hills," Joseph said. "He means the Fire Hills."

Mike said, "Ask, 'Is it the sheep?' We don't know what he means is on the Fire Hills."

"Oh, but it must be the sheep, Mike," said Tamzin. "What else could it be? But *think* of it! they'll be back before we go home, after all."

Meryon had begun the message, flashing it out into the darkness while the others checked through their own results.

"I wasn't far from the Fire Hills, to-day," Rissa was saying. "Mostly I was around Pett Level."

"How on earth did Jim find out, d'you suppose?" Roger asked.

"He has his ways," said Tamzin. "Look, he's signalling back."

At once they were absorbed again, Tamzin writing

down the code as Meryon passed it on from the window, Roger and Joseph looking up the letters and Rissa writing out the final message.

"S-U-R-E-L-Y—oh, there's an E . . . end of word," murmured Rissa as she wrote. "How lovely! He spells it the way he pronounces it. . . . B-U-T . . . end, I . . . end, D-I-D-N-T . . . end, T-E-L-L . . . end, Y-O-U . . . end."

"He means he doesn't want us to say he told us," Meryon said.

"Think of it!" said Mike. "Our ewes! On the Fire Hills all the time. Cor, but this is good news, whatever funny way it come."

"Funny place for the sheep to be in, too," said Roger. "All out in full view like that. You'd think they'd have hidden them up."

"Do you want any message sent back, Mike?" asked Meryon.

Mike considered. "Just 'Thank you'," he said.

"Oh, that's not thankful enough, Mike," said Rissa. "Not for news like this. Couldn't we say, 'Thank you very much indeed, most grateful,' or something like that?"

"Thanks is thanks," said Mike, "however flowery. Just say, 'Thank you.'"

Meryon flashed the message. It was acknowledged by a series of dashing circles, which Meryon repeated, and then all was darkness again, and stars, and the rising moon.

"He's gone," Tamzin said.

"Now, the sheep!" said Rissa. "When are we going to fetch them? Now? Shall I throw some clothes on?"

"You look here——" began Mike.

"Oh well, all right," said Rissa regretfully. "I didn't really think there was any hope, before morning."

"Be practical," said Meryon. He was pocketing his notebook and pencil. "We couldn't even find them very efficiently, if the moon goes in, let alone get them through the dipping-tank."

"But the moon mightn't go in," persisted Rissa. "It's a fairly clear night, and not even so windy as usual."

"I'm not having the lot of you walking round in your sleep, all to-morrow," said Mike. "Bed for everyone, now. The sooner we go to bed the sooner we can get up. And in any case there's not enough paraffin to spare for running the lamp any later."

Mike himself got up at four. Meryon heard him, and

woke Roger. In three minutes Tamzin was awake and shaking Rissa.

"They're up. Come on and dress."

Sleepiness wore off after a cold splash and everyone got down to the jobs which could not be left; pigs, poultry, cows and breakfast—all attended to in cool starry darkness because of the earliness of the hour. Mike insisted on everyone eating a good breakfast because of the long hard trudge ahead of them, and somehow everyone put enough to please him into excited stomachs that would have been far more comfortable without. During the meal, which was the first time since they got up that everyone was in the same place together, Tamzin asked the question they all had in mind.

"Mike, who's staying at home? I suppose someone must."

"Whoever stays home," said Mike, "is holding the fort, keeping the siege, as you might say. 'Tisn't everyone, your age, as gets a chance to do that—nor yet in a lifetime, neither."

"I know, Mike, but finding the ewes will be much more exciting."

"Why," asked Rissa, "are all the noblest things the least exciting ones?"

"They aren't *always*," Meryon said reasonably.

"The point is," said Rissa, "I know I'm going to be one of the noble ones who Only Stand and Wait. Because I went out last time."

"No one who stays at home will do much standing," said Mike. "Nor yet much waiting. They'll have everyone else's work to get on with, and the boundaries thrown in. And that's you, for one, Rissa."

"I knew it."

"And Roger."

"Oh, Mike!"

"Stands to reason," said Mike, "I got to have Joseph, as he knows the sheep; and between you and Meryon I can't help but pick on the oldest and strongest for this job, as we don't know what we're up against."

Tamzin said, "There are a lot of socks and some shirts needing washing, Rissa. Roger'll turn the mangle for you."

"Yes, I know," said Rissa. "And no soap powder. I take them down to the creek and bang them with stones, I suppose, the way the natives do."

"Even rubbing them about in hot water makes them smell sweeter," said Tamzin.

"All I can say is," said Roger, "don't you three lucky dogs go and forget to buy some carbolic for dunking you in. Or we shan't be able to allow you back in."

"That's the idea," said Rissa. "We're in charge of the frontiers."

"Never you mind," said Mike. "We can always go through the dip with the ewes. Arsenic'll run off me like water, once I've found 'em, I'll be so smug."

Satisfied that everyone had eaten enough, he pushed his chair back. "Extra pullovers on," he said, "since you got no coats. It'll be cold, this time of day, and there's a wind up on the Fire Hills, times, worse than any on the Marsh."

Outside the sun was just rising, but with it was rising one of the quick white mists of a Marsh September. The sun shone through more and more faintly, till it was no clear than a strawberry smothered in whipped cream.

"I dare say it'll suit us better," said Mike, as they swung across the grazings with the dogs at heel. "We'll go the sea wall way. It's quicker and quieter."

It was queer walking along the lonely sea wall, hearing but not seeing the breakers so close at hand, chafing fretfully on the groynes and rumbling among the pebbles of the beach. It was strange to hear the seagulls, their pathetic call making sound-patterns to a flight that could not be seen. Foghorns moaned their desolate warning at sea, visibility being now about three yards; quite enough to see where one was going, but no more.

"Nice weather to hunt for a flock of sheep," said Meryon cheerfully.

"And them the same colour as the mist, nearly," said Joseph.

"It may suit us," repeated Mike. "Them as we can't see, can't see us. And you never know."

"What beats me," said Joseph, "is how the old ferryman found out where they were. Or even that they'd gone."

"He knows everything. Probably he'll tell us, one day," said Tamzin.

"And probably he won't," said Meryon, who knew him well. "The thing that surprises me is, no tracks. We couldn't see a sign of sheep yesterday, except the muddled tracks on

the shingle, and they just petered out. D'you think they could have used lorries, Mike?"

"That's anybody's guess," said Mike. "The thing is, gotten 'em back."

At Pett they left the shore and went up on to the cliff-edge path. It was still too early in the morning for many people to be about, and no one else was on the path. The crash of breakers was now far below them, sounding muffled and a little queer.

"I shouldn't like to be walking along this path," Tamzin said, "if the mist were any thicker. Shall we have to drive the ewes back along it, Mike? Or round by the road?"

"Let's find 'em first, shall we?" said Mike.

"It's rather Biblical, really," said Meryon. "Walking through the mist to find the sheep which are lost."

"You start looking out, right now, old son," said Mike. "We're not on the Fire Hills yet, but we're getting near."

To anyone not very familiar with the details of the country—and it was out of the way for all of them—it was difficult to know exactly where they were.

"Do you suppose we've passed Fairlight Cove?" Meryon asked. "I know the Hills are just past there."

Tamzin said, "I know they're just this side of the Coast-guard Station, if we'd been able to see that."

"Well, we can't," said Mike. "It's a long time since I was this way, but I reckon I'll get us there, all right."

After only one false sortie inland, he did get them there.

"Now, all we got to do is find 'em," he said with dry humour, staring into the white wall that surrounded them. "Turk! Jock! Where's them ewes?"

The two dogs lifted their ears at his voice, waving their tails.

"They don't know," said Mike. "They ent got the direction of 'em, yet. And I don't much like sending 'em off into the mist, and me not being able to see 'em. No knowing where they'd fetch up. Bad enough having to look for sheep in this lot, without having to look for dogs and all."

"Supposing we separate," suggested Meryon, "and try to quarter the Hills."

"And all get lost from each other?" Mike didn't care for the plan.

Tamzin said, "If we all walk as far as we can *away* from the foghorns, and then, at the end of the Hills, turn and walk *towards* them, we're bound to hit the cliff path some-

where. Then we've only got to walk easterly for a bit, and wait, and we're bound to meet."

Mike shook his head. "Too risky. And wastes too much time. We'll comb the Hills all right, but we'll go in a line, each one just in sight of the next. And a dog at each end. When I turn up on to the Hills, we all do."

Presently Mike turned off from the cliff path. Tamzin saw, and turned too. Meryon and Joseph turned, and the spaced line began their march across the Fire Hills. Sometimes it was very difficult to keep together, as the visibility allowed no margin for negotiating the innumerable gorse bushes which rose incessantly in their path. But when Mike decided it was time to turn and work seawards again, they were all there, just within sight of one another, and the dogs at either end. There had been no sign of sheep anywhere, and the dogs had shown no sudden interest. Meryon and Tamzin, who had only sandals to wear, were scratched by encounters with gorse bushes, their sandals wet with the heavy dew on the grass. But Mike and Joseph, in boots and corduroys, were immune to all that. The dogs, it seemed, were more expert at walking prickly country.

Stumbling, blundering, eyes straining, the four searchers reached the cliff path again and stood there for a moment, getting their breath, or rubbing scratched legs and shaking twigs and stones from sandals.

"Now," said Mike, "ten or twelve paces westerly and off we go again."

Silently they trudged the length of the Hills again, peering into white mist for mist-coloured sheep. Sometimes a rabbit would leap out from almost under their feet, but no sheep were seen or felt or heard, and the dogs walked onwards calmly at the ends of the dim line of seekers.

"Wind's the wrong way, that's what it is," said Mike, when they paused before returning seawards. "Sou'-westerly—what there is of it—stands to reason the dogs won't get no scent till we're right on top of the ewes. What we should do is go up to the nor'-east quarter of the Hills, and see how they make out there."

"That's easterly from here," said Joseph. "Do we still keep spaced out?"

"We do. As I always say, you never know."

Tamzin's legs were bleeding now. There was a sticky small trickle of blood between her sandal and her foot, but she supposed Meryon must be the same. The smallest gorse

bushes were very hard to see, until you had stepped right into them.

At the far north-easterly corner of the Fire Hills, Mike came to a halt. "Turk! Jock! Where's them ewes?"

The dogs grinned, their long pink tongues hanging out as they panted, their plumed tails slowly waving.

"Well, I'm jiggered," said Mike. "If they'd a smelt 'em, they'd a pointed."

"They must be somewhere here," said Tamzin. "Jim wouldn't have said so if he wasn't absolutely certain."

"We got the whole tarnation Fire Hills sou'-westerly to us, now," said Mike.

"Perhaps the fog muddles up the scent," suggested Joseph.

"It ought to make it lie better," said Mike. "They bin moved away, that's what."

"Shall we go on quartering?" Meryon asked.

Suddenly Tamzin said, "Listen!" Then, "Look at the dogs."

Everyone strained their ears. The dogs were certainly sniffing the air with new interest, but their muzzles were facing northerly, away from the Fire Hills.

"I'm sure I heard bleating," Tamzin said.

"You can hear anything when you're listening for it," said Mike, staring at the dogs. "Funny thing, there's only a house or two there, and then the road." He thought for a minute, and then said to the dogs, "Get on and find 'em."

At once the dogs made for a stone wall that loomed in the mist a few yards to the north.

"They've gone clean over it!" said Joseph, whose eyes were better than most people's. "Into the garden."

"Well now," said Mike, "that's what we better do, too. Though it do go against the grain, barging into folk's private property——"

"Oh, *listen!*" said Tamzin, suddenly stopping.

"Gor blimey! darn take it," said Mike.

"It *is* the sheep," said Meryon.

"In the ruddy garden," said Joseph, not believing it. They rushed forward.

"Give you a leg up?" said Meryon to Tamzin.

"Gor! bless us all," said Mike, "there must be a gate somewhere. We better do things decent."

They were running now, round the high wall of the garden. Anyone could have heard the sheep from here, now

the dogs were with them. It was wildly exciting, hearing beyond the wall the one thing in the world they wanted to hear, and urgently seeking a way in.

"Here we are! Wicket gate," said Mike, swinging it open. They all rushed through. The gate clanked back and they walked into a garden full of sheep.

Strange World

"I MUST SAY, I was never so relieved to see anyone in all my life," said the man in the potting shed.

Mike and the others were standing round the open doorway of the shed. Behind them was the large misty garden, so full of milling, bleating sheep it sounded like a Dunsford market day. Before them was the earth-smelling potting shed, and the harassed, shirt-sleeved owner of the property.

"Not near so relieved as what we are to see them ewes," said Mike.

"The fact is," said the man, "I've only recently bought this place—came down ahead of the family to start getting it in order—but look here, there's no need to stand out in all this mist; come along indoors. There are only a few packing cases, yet, by way of furniture, because I'm expecting the decorators to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir," said Mike, "but we're pretty filthy."

"Never mind that, so's the house," said the man. "And, for that matter, so am I, after shepherding your sheep for a day and a half."

In the kitchen they all sat on packing cases and on an up-turned drawer from the large built-in dresser. Their host, who introduced himself as Mr. Knowles, produced two bottles of cider from the larder, and these were passed round with the one large cup which was all the house could muster.

"You see, it was really for the garden that I bought the place," he said.

"Gor, lord's sake, sir," said Mike, "then I reckon that's just about done it, with they ewes marlacking about in it, all this time."

"Oh no, I don't think so," said Mr. Knowles. He was

sitting on the edge of the sink. "I meant to reorganise the existing garden completely, in any case. Flowering trees and shrubs are my line, you understand. I don't want any of that lay-out, out there now, of beds and borders and such-like. Nothing formal."

"Well, looks like you won't have nothing formal, anyway, now sir," said Mike dryly. "They ewes a-seen to that. I doubt they'll a left you a blade, let alone a leaf or a flower."

"It isn't that that I mind—delighted, delighted," said Mr. Knowles. "They've helped enormously with the clearance, as the gipsy fellow said they would. What's been worrying me has been looking after *them*. In no time at all they'd cleared the garden stuff—well, look how many they are, and the size of the garden—and the few house-scrap I could scratch up for them went just nowhere. Then water! People say sheep don't drink much, but I've been carrying buckets practically without stopping, ever since the night they came."

"Think of that!" said Mike. "Beats me, I will say. What for did you go a-letting of 'em in for, if I may ask, sir?"

"Well now, you know what a nice night it was, the night before last?" said Mr. Knowles. "Warm and fine. Well, I slung my outdoor light in that tree, there——" They all looked out of the window where he pointed. "I was having a very pleasant hour or two before bed, going over my planting plans, and after a bit I heard a lot of bleating on the Fire Hills. I went over to the wicket gate and had a look, and there were all these ewes, and a comic-looking fellow with them—boots much too big, you know—looked like a stage character. Well, we got talking; I like talking to strangers, you never know what interesting people you may meet; and I mentioned how I was going to clear the garden for new plantings, just as I did to you. And suddenly he got very interested and said there was nothing like a few sheep to do a really good clearance job. And he said he wouldn't mind lending me his for a day or so, for a small consideration——"

"You don't mean you *paid* him?" demanded Mike.

"Well, not much, he seemed quite reasonable. And he said they wouldn't need any looking after, and he'd be back in a day or two for them. It was only after he'd gone that I thought about water. And then, of course, he was badly out in estimating that the garden stuff would last them.

They cleared it like a swarm of locusts. Do let me open another bottle of cider?"

"No, indeed, sir! And thank *you*." Mike got to his feet, the others with him. "We got to be getting along home with them ewes. Seems to me, sir," he added regretfully, "as how you've been done, as they say. Paying him, too! Ah well, can't be helped now. And anyway, I'll lay we're a hull lot pleaseder to see the creatures nor what you are to be shut of 'em. They're me Dad's best breeding ewes, and him in hospital, too. Feller what fetched 'em out here were allus a bad customer. Knew he'd have a swipe at me, I did, after I were forced to shoot his lurchers, what was trespassing on land shut up for foot-and-mouth precautions."

Tamzin said, smiling, "There's not much use offering to wash up after ourselves! One cup."

Mr. Knowles said even if there had been a dozen he wouldn't have dreamed of it. It had been a pleasure. And he hoped they would all come back in a year or two and see his flowering shrub garden. It would be a sight worth coming for, especially in May, when the cherries and azaleas would be at their best, or in April, if they preferred magnolias. . . . Mike took his leave firmly, politely and gratefully.

The journey home, in a lifting mist, was arduous and long; but it was so coloured with happiness about the ewes that no one noticed scratched legs, blistered heels, tiredness, hunger or the slowness of the pace set by the sheep. The dogs swung cheerfully from side to side and end to end of the flock, keeping them all together and hurrying on the stragglers that would have stopped to graze below the sea wall. The sun began to stream its midday gold through the vanishing mist, and all the world was floating in a soft golden-pink haze.

It was early afternoon, and clear as a June day when they came within sight of Castle Farm. They were seen from afar off by the watchers on the pigsty wall, and, before they reached the Cold Harbour track, a torn old Union flag was flying from the aerial pole on the cart-shed roof. Rissa and Roger were at the gate to meet them. Roger, in fact, was doing a victory dance along the top bar of the gate.

"I knew old Jim would be right!" he yelled, waving his arms.

"The ew-oos are coming, hurrah! hurrah!" sang Rissa in a loud triumphant voice. Then, as the flock came nearer,

pattering on the hard stony track, "Have you got the carbolic? We can't let you in if you haven't. Farmer's orders!"

"Joseph got it at the Beach Stores," Tamzin said. "Oh, I've never been tireder, or lamer, or hungrier, but I've never been happier, too."

"Here they are!" said Mike. "Every blessed one of 'em. Open up the gate, Roger. Dipping-tank all ready?"

"Yes, and we've put the hip-bath beside it." Roger was swinging back the gate. "It does look perfectly silly there——"

"It looks silly anywhere," said Meryon. "It can't help it. It's its shape."

"And we've got some gorgeous news for you, too," said Rissa, watching the sheep crowding through the gate. "This morning's letter says Mr. Merrow's so much better, he's suddenly remembered quite clearly all about seeing us here, and he was simply furious——"

"I don't call that gorgeous news," said Joseph. He was coming through behind the flock.

"Yes, but after Mrs. Merrow had explained everything to him, and showed him some of our letters, he began to think differently. And now, she says, he's simply tickled to death——"

"She said he was pleased and proud," corrected Roger.

"Oh well, same thing. But isn't it wonderful? And when he knows about the ewes——"

"Time enough," said Mike, "when we know they ent brought the sickness."

The evening of that day saw the farmhouse garrison tired right out, but happier than they had dared to be for a very long time. The dipped ewes were returned to their old grazings, the hip-bath ritual had produced four more pink people well-dabbed with new milk, and the washing-line was strung with its familiar assortment of wet clothing.

It was dreadful to think that, for the four from outside, all this would be over in two days. School loomed sadly near in their future. But no one could feel very depressed about this, because everything was rounding off so beautifully. It would have been awful to go back, not knowing where the lost ewes were, or what the diddikais were going to do in the way of vengeance, or whether even the first lap of the quarantine had been safely negotiated. The ewes and the diddikais were now already past history. And to-

morrow they would know about the quarantine, for on that day the time was up for the Harbour Farm infection.

It was a day of the most thorough, searching, and repeated inspections. Cows, pigs, sheep—every separate animal was examined most minutely, and by at least two people at different times. There was an air of suppressed exhilaration on the place, no one daring to lift the lid off the brewing excitement until the last inspection had been completed for the second time—and all had come through clear. Then the lid did come off. Even old Shepherd Tewmell dabbed his eyes and smiled his gappy smile and sat down very suddenly on a bank of yellow shingle.

Everyone else went mad for a few minutes, until Mike pulled himself together and soberly reminded them, "There's another three weeks from to-day until we know about the ewes."

Even this, and the thought of leaving the farm in the morning, could not cast much of a cloud on the happiness of that evening. So much had been done. Their breaking through the boundary, their uninvited, unwanted arrival, had been justified and forgiven. Without their presence the burdens on Mike and Joseph would have been enormous. Even Mr. Merrow, now, was "pleased and proud." It was impossible to feel sad.

In the morning, packing their handful of spare clothes in their rucksacks and fetching Cascade from the orchard, they said good-bye to the much reduced garrison they were leaving behind.

"It won't be for long, Mike," said Meryon. "The siege will soon be over, and Mr. and Mrs. Merrow back, and then we'll be coming along at week-ends."

"Don't forget to let us know the *minute* you're clear of all infection," said Rissa.

"We'll go and visit Mr. Merrow, until he comes home," Tamzin promised.

"You won't have half such big wash-ups," Roger said to Joseph. "And much less run on soap and matches."

"Go on," said Joseph. "The fun was worth the wash-ups. Besides, I'll have 'em all to do, now!"

"It's better than school," Rissa told him. "You can't think how lucky you are, not having to go."

"He is going, next term," Mike said. "But not while the siege is on. No schools inspector on earth can budge me

over that. 'No Entry,' it says on Dad's notice, 'for any reason whatsoever.' Ar. An' I'll see to it as no one does. Single-handed if I am . . ."

The wrench of leaving Castle Farm was partly eased by the excitement of being home again. Families, friends and animals to see, one's room to rush into and inspect, questions to ask and answer—the whole freedom, too, of knowing one could rush out into the roads, into other people's houses and shops, and not be committing an unspeakable crime in so doing. It was a strange world of unlimited soap, lights that turned on to a switch, clean and plentiful clothes, and no cookery problems. A world of sudden leisure—no urgency of fitting in endless jobs, of riding boundaries in rain and mist, of making and mending and contriving. It was a world of books and newspapers; of letters to hold and read yourself instead of listening to slow innaccurate versions read over the fence; of people coming to the door and being admitted in all friendship. It was indeed a time of sudden contrast—almost like going abroad.

Tamzin didn't lose much time before dashing round the Point to see Jim Decks. He was there, as usual, on the bench outside the ferry hut, knitting a new guernsey. He was always knitting a new guernsey, because generally the old one wore out before the new one was finished. He raised his bushy white brows and looked up as Tamzin sat beside him.

"Ar. It's you, gal."

"Yes, it's me. I hope you're glad, Jim."

"Oh, ar."

Tamzin looked at the guernsey and remarked on the advanced stage it had reached in her absence. She looked at the sunlit river and said she supposed business was slackening off a bit, now. Then she looked at the masts of the fishing smacks moored in the Harbour and said she hoped Jim's young Jimmy had had good fishing, it must be getting near the herring season. She asked if they were going to cure any bloaters, and how Mrs. Decks was, and whether Diccon had been much of a nuisance round the Harbour. And still the old man hadn't said a word about what mattered. He was an unbelievably irritating person, Tamzin decided, and she suddenly said right out, "Jim, how did you find out where the ewes were?"

"Well now," said Jim placidly, as if he hadn't known she was bursting to hear it, "it was thisaway. Our Jimmy

were fishing along the Bay, inshore a bit, late that night. There wuz a great ole moon, you unnerstand, and things stood clear as daylight."

"Yes, Jim."

"Now I don't have to telly, do I, how struck all-of-a-heap he were, when he saw a valiant great flock a sheep druv down on to the beach and almost to the water? No, I don't. Well, he wur. All of a heap he were struck. Folks don't drive sheep be night in these parts, let alone drive 'em on the foreshore. Well, he thought, blow me iffen there ent some monkey business going on here. So he puts off in the dinghy, see, very quiet-like, and lands away ahead of them sheep. Then he waits for 'em, behind Joe Craddock's net-shed. When they comes padder along past him, see, he waits till they got a fur-ish distance, for safety, and then he ups and follers 'em."

"Oh, Jim."

"Ar. And he see all. There's not much our Jim don't see, supposing he wants to. We-ell now, when he come home, we reckon they musta bin Merrow's sheep. Telly fer why. It were that same diddikai what camped sider his orchard, time before. And Jimmy, he were almost sure he seen the Merrow brand, but it were a fairish distance to be too sure of that."

"Well they were, Jim. They were his best breeding ewes. We might never have found them before they'd picked up foot-and-mouth, except for you."

"S'all in a lifetime," said Jim comfortably.

"Jim—I suppose that's why we couldn't find any tracks! They drove them along below the tide-line."

"Ar. Cunning devils. Think of anything, they do, providin tidden helpful to anybody. An' you, now—I reckon we'll be having you all around the boats again, ay? Bin quiet, it has, these past few weeks."

No matter how quiet the past few weeks had been in the Harbour, they couldn't have approached the feeling of quietness and waiting-for-something that the next three weeks brought to Tamzin, Rissa, Roger and Meryon. It was particularly hard for Roger, who was now at home in Hastings, but all of them felt weighed down with growing suspense as the time moved towards its end. The ultimate and fateful day was a Friday. Tamzin and Rissa had arranged to call on Mrs. Merrow after school, at the Dunsford house where she had been staying since the night of

the old farmer's departure. Mrs. Merrow saw them coming down the street before ever they could have seen her, with the long lace curtains hiding her. She was at the door, sweeping them both into the house with her plump arms, clasping them to a front which was like expensive upholstery, soft and giving.

"Oh, Mrs. Merrow! It's all right?" Tamzin could hardly breathe.

"We've been in a state all day," gasped Rissa.

Mrs. Merrow sat down weakly on the stairs, her stays creaking to the strain.

"Me knees is that weak . . ." She began to dab her eyes, and Rissa suddenly feared the worst, but Tamzin knew her better.

"When did you know? Is the siege really over? Are you going home, Mrs. Merrow?"

"It's really over. Seems I can't believe it, times. But our Mike come out all the way with Patsy, just to tell Dad and me. First time he set foot outside the blessed place since the Trouble began—oh, I tell a lie!" she suddenly said, checking herself. "He told us about the ewes. We been wondering a lot why he'd made the siege hang out so much longer nor we thought it should, but he said in the letters it was for extra safety. It was because of the ewes, of course—and them trespassers you had. My, but our Dad was in a state when Mike told him. Howsumever, he soon calmed down when Mike tell him all. And the doctor says the best cure in the world for him is knowing that we're clear of the infection."

"No more notices, no more riding boundaries for anyone," said Tamzin, marvelling.

"No more hospital for our Dad," said Mrs. Merrow, "and me in me own kitchen again!" She blew her nose loudly. "We're going home to-morrow, Dad and me! And the first thing we're going to do is have a party. That'll be to-morrow week—I must have a week of cooking for it. A proper bust-up of a party, for a thankful celebration. Everyone's coming. All of you, and that Jim Decks—old rough though he is—and all the neighbours, and the tradespeople what've been so good about the notices."

"Oh, Mrs. Merrow! How simply glorious!" said Rissa.

"But there's one thing I will insist on." She spread out a large hand. "Thanks be to Him to whom thanks is due. Everyone who comes to my party comes on one condition.

Church on Sunday morning. We all got something to thank Him for, but Castle Farm got so much it'll fair be busting out with it. Them who shares in the farm's celebration can share in its thankfulness, too."

"Oh, yes!" said Tamzin, "of course everyone will! I'd be there anyhow, being a parson's child, but the others usually go, too. Only this time it will be special." She swung round. "Rissa, I'm going to bicycle like smoke and get home to phone Meryon. You phone Roger, and then I'll phone you, and we can tell each other what they said. It won't matter how long we are, because to-night's Friday night; so we needn't do homework."

"Just think," said Rissa, suddenly laughing, "of all the shopping they'll be laying in at the farm, in the morning! Packets and packets of soap powder!"

"Paraffin!"

"Matches!"

"And sacks of bicarbonate of soda!"

THE END

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No one must come on to the farm. That dread disease, foot-and-mouth, was rampant in the county and if it spread to Castle Farm three hundred fine sheep would have to be destroyed.

It meant that a night-and-day patrol would have to ride the boundaries, to keep out animals and humans who might bring the disease with them.

The Romney Marsh friends undertake the task. It becomes dramatic when mysterious strangers invade the farm, one who shines a light on a sheet after dark. . . .

NO ENTRY

