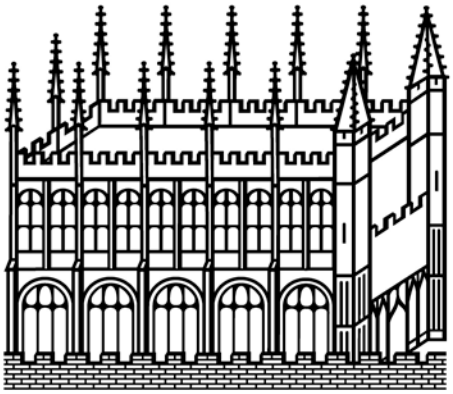
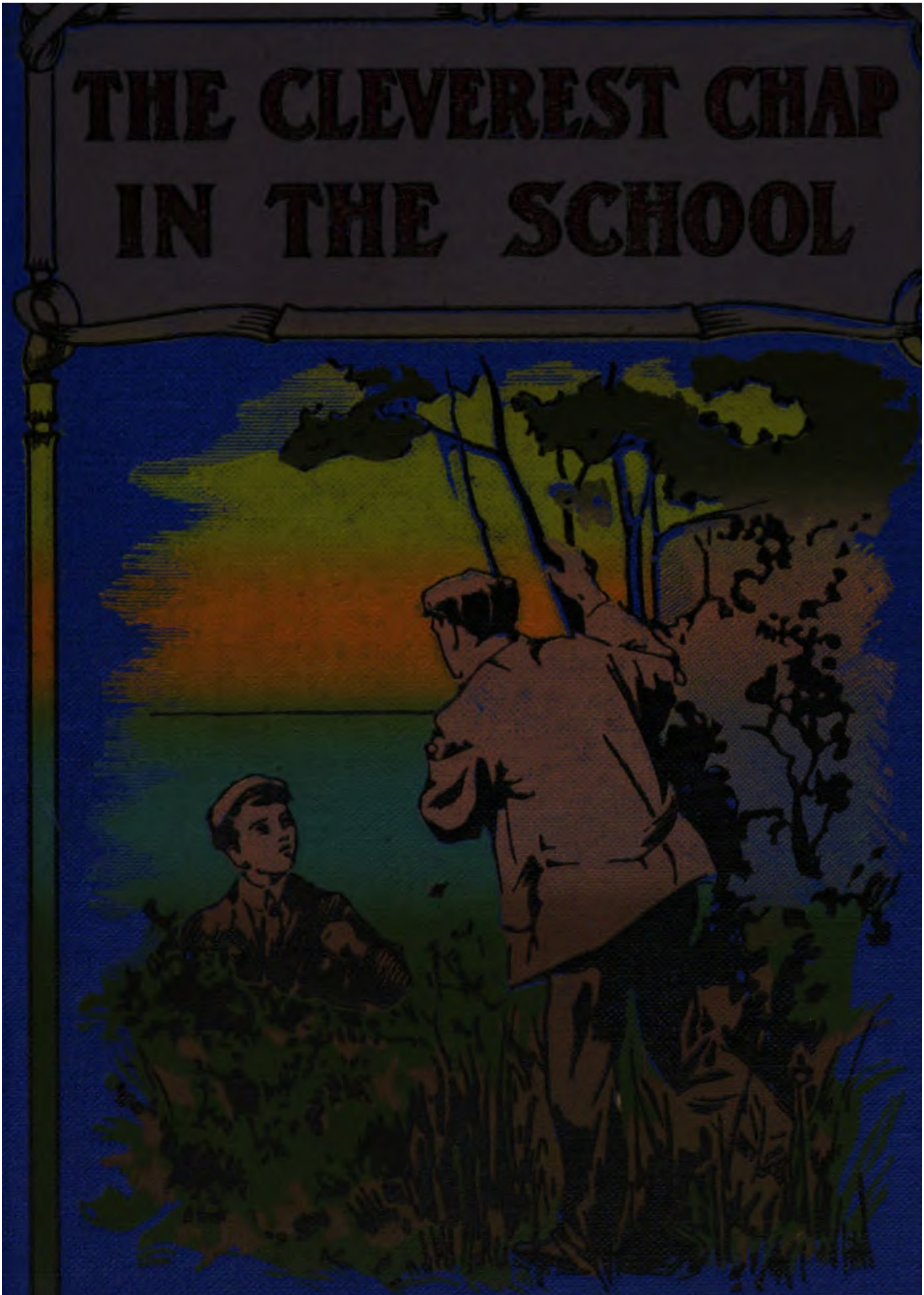


THE CLEVEREST CHAP IN THE SCHOOL



ROBERT LEIGHTON


JARROLDS
EMPIRE
REWARDS


W.G.E.

THE CLEVEREST CHAP IN THE SCHOOL

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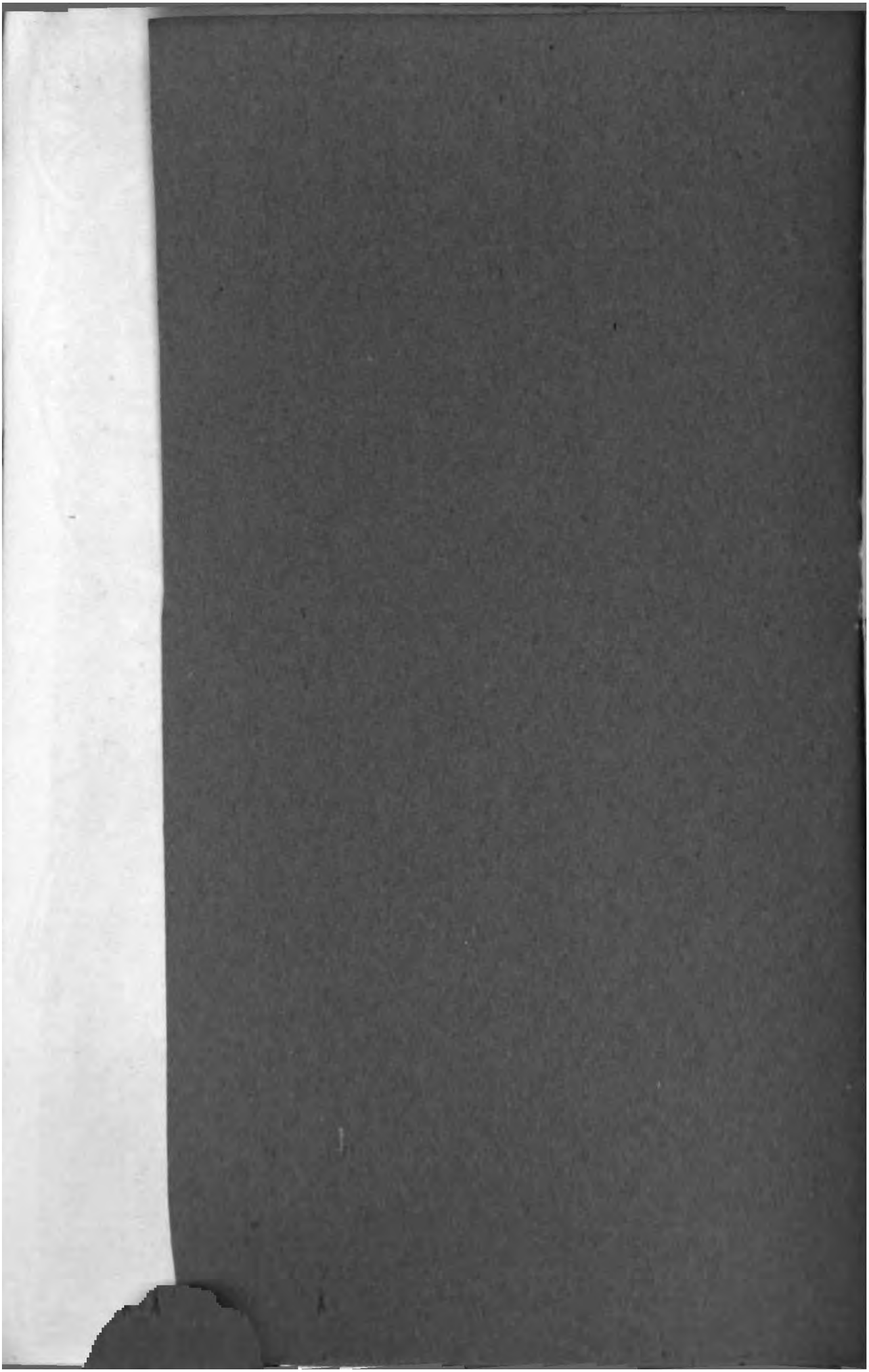

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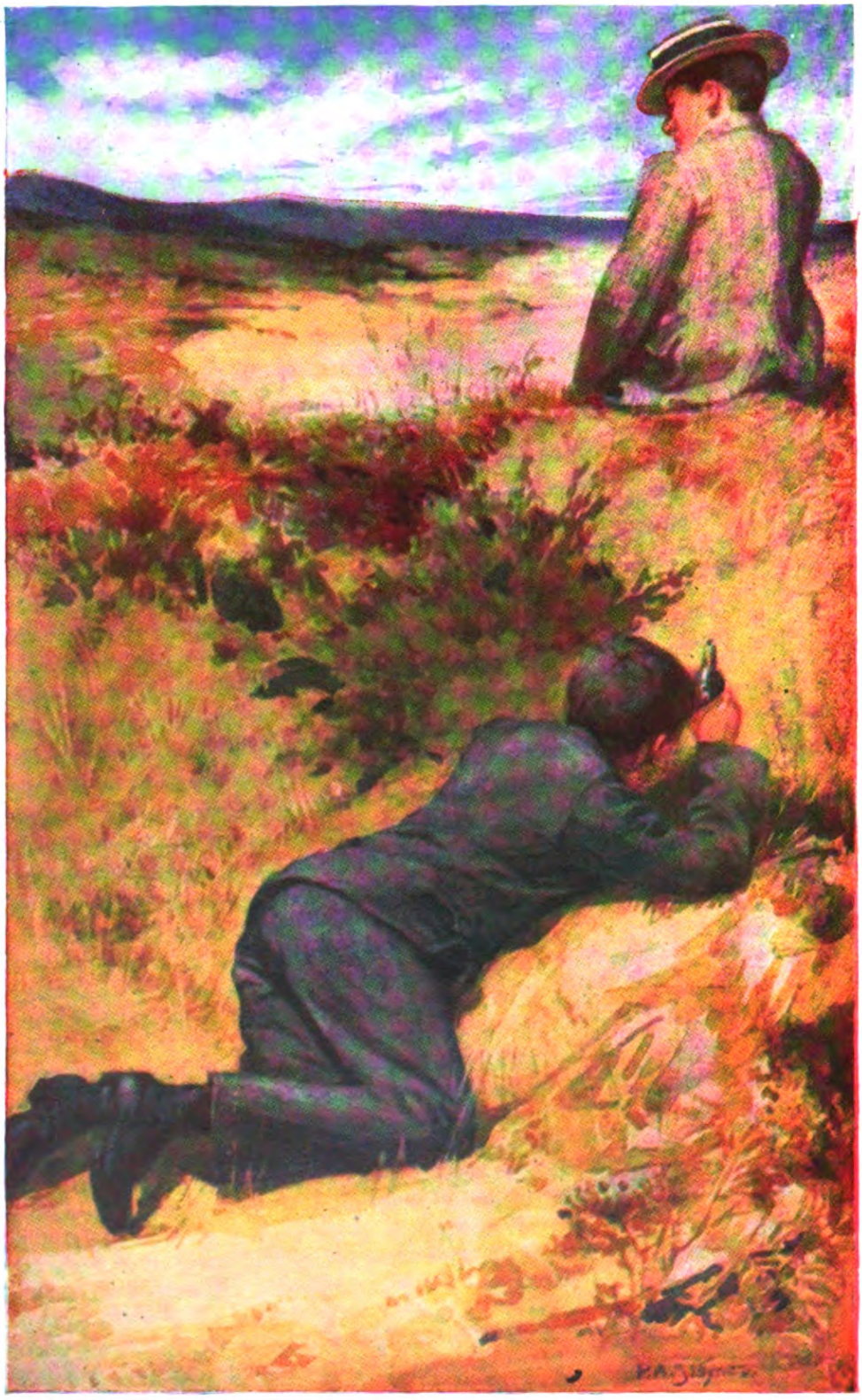

HE HAD BUT TO DRAW HIS FINGER NOW AND MAURICE WRINKLEBURY WOULD BE DEAD.

Frontispiece] [Page 213.

THE CLEVEREST CHAP IN THE SCHOOL

BY

ROBERT LEIGHTON

AUTHOR OF "MONITOR AT MEGSON'S," "WITH NELSON IN COMMAND," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY P. A. STAYNES

LONDON

JARROLD & SONS, 10 & 11, WARWICK LANE, E.C.

To Evelyn I. R. Leighton.

Dear Evelyn,—You asked me to write a schoolboy story for you. Here is one, which I dedicate to yourself.

Your affectionate father,

ROBERT LEIGHTON.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I

WHAT TONY SAW IN THE LOCKER

"PINKNEY's easily the cleverest chap in the school," observed Tony Mumford, struggling to fasten his collar on a stud that obstinately objected to the operation, "and I consider him quite the nicest fellow I know, and the nearest to being a gentleman."

"I don't deny he's clever," agreed Iddles, buttoning his waistcoat, and taking up the towel from the deck to dry his wet hair. "He wouldn't be head of a school like ours if he wasn't. Yes, he's clever; that goes without saying. But he's too stuck-up and exclusive for me. He thinks it's good form to be exclusive, and not to have any truck with fellows he considers socially beneath him."

"Nobody can find anything to object to

in Pinkney," interposed Nubby Newgass, who had been the last to come out of the water, and was not yet half dressed. "He excels in everything. You see, he has so many sides."

"And therefore has no reason to put on any side," smiled Mumford.

"He jolly well won that match for us this afternoon," continued Newgass. "We'd have looked sick without him. That was a magnificent cut for three he made in the second innings, and his catch at long field was simply lovely. He's a ripping cricketer, even if he isn't a born gentleman. But who expects any of us to be born gentlemen, I'd like to know? We're not a public school, or even a preparatory; we're only a Grammar School, and there's a heap of difference."

"If Pinkney weren't so beastly stuck-up," resumed Iddles, "he'd have come out with us here to have a swim. Bulstrode asked him, and he contemptuously refused the invitation, saying he preferred bathing like a respectable person in a respectable place; as if the *Nancy* wasn't respectable!"

"The respectability of the *Nancy* is a

matter of opinion," put in Bulstrode. "Her record isn't above reproach, you know."

"I don't suppose Pinkney has inquired into her history," suggested Tony Mumford. "Anyway, he's never been on board of her. I heard him say so."

"Her record's got nothing to do with the fact that she makes the best place in all Budmouth for getting a good dive into deep, green water," Iddles decided. "But, of course, we don't want her to be turned into a public bathing-ground."

"That's never likely to happen," rejoined Mumford—"at all events, so long as old Dave Quiller owns the craft. Dave has always allowed the Grammar School to use her. Joe Garvice, who is now at sea on his second voyage, was the first to ask him if we might come on board sometimes; and when Joe explained that we wanted to play at being pirates and buccaneers, Dave laughed and agreed; because, you know, he's an old pirate himself."

Iddles looked up from his work of tying his bootlace.

"I've often heard fellows mysteriously hint that old Quiller was a retired buccaneer," said he; "but I don't believe it. Nobody has ever given me any proof. It's a cruel libel on him if it isn't true."

"But it's as true as anything," persisted Mumford. "He was a rover on the South Seas, where chaps take to piracy like ducks take to water or Teddy Felkin to cribbing. The schooner isn't really called the *Nancy*. Her real name is the *None-so-Pretty*, of Honolulu."

"I wonder why he sticks on shore always and never goes for a cruise?" queried Nubby Newgass. "I should, with a schooner like this."

"So would most people," agreed Tony. "She'd make a ripping fine pleasure yacht, with a fresh coat of white paint. She's got a tremendously swagger saloon. You can see into it through the portholes, or if you drag aside that tarpaulin from the skylight where Bulstrode's sitting."

"Let's go down and look at it," said Bulstrode excitedly, jumping up.

"You've got to remember," Tony interposed, with conscious superiority, "that

the one condition of our being allowed on board at all is that no one shall attempt to enter the saloon."

Iddles had already laid hold of the heavy tarpaulin that covered the hatchway abaft the foremast, and others helped him to drag it off and to remove the hatch covers, which were not barred. A ladder led down from the coaming to the floor of the shallow hold, and one after another the boys went down. Tony Mumford alone remained on deck. He strolled forward to the prow to lean over by the bowsprit and watch the tide racing past the schooner's sharp cutwater. But he presently grew weary of this profitless occupation, and was turning aft, when his foot tripped against the bar of the cuddy hatch. To his surprise, the padlock with which the bar had formerly been fastened dropped off and slid a few inches along the deck. He drew the loose bar aside, and ventured to lift the hatch of the manhole and look below. It was decidedly inviting to his curiosity, and he knew of no prohibition.

The cuddy was lighted by a shaft of

sunshine that came in through one of the portholes. He had explored the schooner many times, but he had never yet been down here. Raising the hatch and swinging it back, he put his foot on the top rung of the ladder, and slowly went below.

It was a small, narrow compartment in which he found himself, with bunks on either side, a flap table running fore and aft in the middle, and, at the wider end, a cooking range, red with rust. He considered it an exceedingly comfortable little cabin, in spite of its untidiness and the smell of bilge water; and he pictured to himself a crew of bronzed pirate seamen seated on the lockers which served as benches at either side of the table. The shaft of sunlight, moving as the vessel swayed on the tide, shone upon the dusty top of one of these locker seats; and he noticed, casually at first, but with growing interest, that the lid was scored with finger marks, which showed plainly in the layer of dust. This seemed to indicate that the locker had been recently opened. He wondered by whom and for what purpose,

since nobody was supposed to have been below here for months past. The marks were certainly fresh.

Idle curiosity drew him irresistibly to this particular locker. He looked at the keyhole; then, leaning against the table, he lifted his foot to the projecting edge of the lid and raised it an inch or so, revealing a corner of sackcloth. Then he pushed the lid farther open and peeped inquiringly within, drawing aside the sackcloth to see what it covered. Something glittered with dazzling brightness in the narrow beam of sunlight.

"I say!" he cried in astonishment, now flinging the lid wholly back. "I say! how splendid!"

Never before in all his fifteen years had he set eyes upon such gorgeous, bewildering wealth, such blinding brightness. Its brilliance—the brilliance of sparkling gems and burnished gold and silver—filled the whole cabin with its scintillating light. He could hardly believe that it was all real, and not a dream.

He drew back nervously, feeling almost guilty. Then again he was drawn to the

sight as by a magnet. He glanced for an instant over his shoulder to make sure that he was not being watched. Dared he put forth his hand, only for one thrilling, ecstatic moment, to touch and grasp such fabulous riches? He trembled at the thought.

Then the boisterous laughter of his schoolfellows coming from the adjoining hold restrained him. He covered the tempting treasure with the sackcloth and quietly closed the locker, leaving it just as he had found it. Very slowly he retreated. And when Newgass, Iddles, and the rest of them returned on deck they discovered him leaning over the schooner's bulwarks, idly staring into the deep, green water.

CHAPTER II

MUMFORD'S MISSION

WHATEVER grounds Tommy Iddles may have had for considering Arthur Pinkney stuck-up and exclusive, Tony Mumford, at all events, was innocent of any such uncomplimentary feeling. He regarded Pinkney, indeed, as a hero beyond reproach, excelling all others in school games as he excelled them in scholarship; manly and sincere in conduct and character, a boy equally to be honoured as an example of integrity and loved as a companion. Tony, who was privileged to be Pinkney's chum, had often gone to him for advice in his difficulties at school, and he wanted to go to him now to confide in him and tell him—what he had not yet dared to tell any one else—of his extraordinary discovery on board the schooner.

For Tony was already overwhelmed by a strange, uncomfortable agitation, oppressed by a sense of grave responsibility in holding a secret knowledge of the treasure so insecurely hidden in a place accessible to any one who might venture upon the neglected schooner lying at her moorings in the bay. To whom did it rightfully belong? and what was its signification? It had seemed to him, as he bore in mind the nature of the trade in which the *Nancy* was reputed to have been formerly engaged, that the contents of the locker might reasonably be taken to represent the proceeds of some adventurous, piratical voyage, and that these glittering diamonds and vessels of silver and gold had been gained by desperate fighting on the high seas. What precious lives had been sacrificed, what innocent blood spilled, in their acquirement! Tony made these conjectures; but even to Tony's inexperienced eyes there had been something too new and clean about each and every article in the rich hoard to justify the belief that the treasure had been brought across the

seas from foreign lands. Surely no conventional pirate, in his supreme disregard for the artistic value of such property would take the trouble to keep these cups and vases so carefully polished and free from tarnish, or these jewelled rings and brooches so scrupulously bright and clean! Yet if the hidden store of wealth had no connection with piracy and illicit plunder, how came it to be on board the *Nancy* at all, presenting a temptation to any dishonest person who should chance to find it?

Tony's perplexity had begun to oppress him before even he had closed the locker. It had troubled him as he sat silent among his schoolfellows in the boat coming ashore. The weight of his suppressed excitement was so heavy when he got home that he dreaded to think of going to bed with the mystery still unexplained; and now that he had had his tea he had come out again with the settled purpose of laying the whole matter before Arthur Pinkney and acting upon Pinkney's advice.

It was already dusk when he walked along the quay in the direction of Pink-

ney's home. He looked out across the water to the *Nancy* with a newly-awakened interest, almost proudly conscious that he was probably the only person in the port who knew her secret. Just as he was about to cross the street he caught sight of Pinkney some distance away, hurriedly turning the corner of a narrow passage leading to the High Street. Tony followed him, but it was a Wednesday night, and the High Street was busy, and Pinkney was quickly lost in the throng. Tony went on, however, trusting to run against him in the middle of the town. At last he saw him once more, walking with quick determination, as if he had pressing business on hand in the direction of the harbour; but again he suddenly disappeared. Tony could only believe that he had turned into a side alley to make a short cut homeward, and he gave up the pursuit. But some ten minutes afterwards he was surprised to see his schoolfellow at the edge of the quay. This time Pinkney was not alone, but was conversing with evident familiarity with a stranger, whose disreputable appearance

was in itself an eloquent contradiction of Iddles' complaint that Arthur Pinkney was stuck-up and exclusive. Even Tony Mumford was surprised at the ill-assorted companionship, for the stranger looked like nothing so much as a man who had recently been discharged from a convict prison.

Pinkney seemed to be nervous. As he spoke he glanced anxiously from side to side, as if he did not wish to be discovered in such questionable company. Finally he touched the man's arm, and the two went down the jetty stairs; and when Tony crossed to the place where they had stood he saw them seated in a boat, both pulling at the oars. It seemed probable to Tony that they were going out for a night's fishing. Pinkney was fond of this sport, although it was seldom he took any one with him, unless it was one of the Grammar School boys.

Tony did not stay to watch them. It was obvious that he had missed the opportunity of speaking with Pinkney to-night, and, as he had his preparation to do for next morning's school, he

strolled slowly homeward along the esplanade.

He had not gone very far when he almost came into collision with a tall, bearded man, whom he recognised as the owner of the *Nancy*.

"Good evening, sir," he said in greeting as he came to a halt.

"Good evening, Anthony," returned Captain Quiller. "Well, did you enjoy your swim this afternoon? I saw you at it. You're improving, but you've all got a lot to learn yet. You ought to see the Pacific Islanders in the water. They'd show you what swimming really means."

Tony paid little heed to the remark. He was nervously making up his mind to tell Mr. Quiller what he had intended to tell Arthur Pinkney.

"Mr. Quiller," he stammered awkwardly, "I want to speak to you. I want to tell you something—something about what I found on your schooner."

"Eh?" exclaimed Quiller. "She hasn't sprung a leak, I hope?"

Tony lured him to a seat under one of the plane-trees, and there told him pre-

cisely and fully all that he had done and seen.

The astonishment with which his interested listener heard his story convinced him beyond all doubt that Captain Quiller knew absolutely nothing concerning the contents of the locker. He desired the boy to describe to him exactly each article that he had seen, and he paid particular attention to Tony's mention of silver spoons and his description of a coronet of large diamonds.

"Others than the boys of the Grammar School seem to have been taking liberties with my schooner," he reflected aloud. "But leave it to me, my lad. I will go out first thing in the morning and investigate. In the meantime——" He paused, and looked down at the boy at his side. "You left the locker just as you found it, did you?" he asked. "You didn't fasten it up in any way?"

"There was nothing to fasten it with, sir," Tony replied.

Mr. Quiller thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out a bunch of keys, selected one, and detached it from the ring.

"This is the one that fits," he said, handing it to Tony. "If you can spare the time—if I might ask you—I wish you would pull out to the schooner. Thew will lend you a boat. You will need a lantern, perhaps. We can buy one at the chandler's shop yonder. You know what to do. Simply turn the key in the lock, and bring it away with you. You can return it to me here in the morning. I'd go with you now, but I must send off an important telegram."

"I understand," nodded Tony.

Together they went to the chandler's, and a handy bull's-eye lantern was bought and lighted. Then they went along to the yacht club sallyport, where a dinghy was procured. Tony seated himself on the thwart, put the oars in the rowlocks, and pulled out.

He was more comfortable in mind now that he had relieved himself of the burden of secrecy, and he felt that to tell Mr. Quiller was better even than telling Arthur Pinkney. Mr. Quiller had assumed all the responsibility, and would no doubt act with a man's wisdom and caution in

restoring the hidden property to its rightful owners.

Tony wondered who the rightful owners might be. There were very few people in Budmouth rich enough to be the possessors of so much that represented the mere luxury of wealth, and it seemed to him that the owner of the beautiful coronet of diamonds must be little short of a princess.

The *Nancy* was not moored in a part of the bay where there was any traffic, and she carried no riding-light. Tony was too well acquainted with her position to have any difficulty in finding her in the dark. He pulled to her starboard side, which was the nearer, hitched the boat's painter to her main chains, and climbed over upon her deserted deck. Even if there had been any one below in her cabin they would not have heard him walking forward, for he still wore his cricket shoes. Not till he had opened the cuddy hatch did he draw the slide of his lantern. He placed the lantern on the flap table, so that its light fell upon the keyhole of the locker. He took out the key, but

before inserting it he gently raised the lid to reward himself with one more look at the diamond coronet.

To his amazement the locker was empty!

He drew back from it, thinking for an instant that he was at the wrong side of the cabin. But no; it was the same locker, and everything, even the piece of sacking, had disappeared.

Suddenly he was startled by a sound on the deck above him. He looked up, and saw an arm stretched across the open hatchway. His heart thumped furiously against his ribs.

"Who's that?" he cried.

But before there was time for an answer the hatch cover was shut with a bang. The bar was flung across it, a key was turned in the padlock, and he was a prisoner.

CHAPTER III

TRAPPED

THE shock of finding himself a prisoner here in the schooner's cuddy was paralysing to Tony Mumford. For many moments he could only stand gripping the end of the flap table and stare upward in blank consternation at the closed trap door. It had been purposely, deliberately closed upon him. Of this there was no room for doubt. It could be no accident. He had clearly seen it done, had heard the vindictive stamp of a heavy foot upon the hatch cover, the clang of the iron bar, the adjusting of the staple, and the final turning of the key in the padlock. Perhaps his unknown enemy had silently watched him as he knelt beside the empty locker. Certainly no one could have stood there on the forward deck without seeing

the gleam of his lantern and discovering his presence. Yes, unquestionably it had been purposely done, and for more than a mere practical joke!

"Help! help!" Tony cried aloud.

He stepped upon the ladder, and reached up to the trap door, pushing against it with head and hands, hammering upon it with his fists, crying again and again for help.

He listened for a response. There was a movement of feet on the deck above him; then there came, as it were, the echo of a mocking laugh, followed by the sound of some one scrambling down into a boat and pushing off. Faintly in the silence he could hear the dip of oars and the swish of water, as if strong arms were pulling.

His nervous consternation increased now to frantic alarm, and he renewed his insistent hammering, but only at the expense of straining his wrists and barking his knuckles. He shouted and whistled his loudest, but his enemy, whoever and whatever he might be, did not intend to liberate him; and the muffled sounds were

too feeble to be heard from the land or even from a passing boat, if indeed one should chance to be passing in this unfrequented part of the bay. Nor could he hope that Arthur Pinkney and his strange companion were near enough to hear him. They had started fully half an hour before him, and had rowed out along the opposite shore, far away from the anchorage of the *Nancy;* and if, as Tony believed, they had gone out for a night's fishing, it might be hours before their return.

Tony flashed his lantern light from side to side of the tiny cabin to survey his situation. The comforts of the place which had appeared to him so inviting in daylight had all vanished. A convict's cell could not be so bare and forbidding. There was no food, of course, but it was not long since he had had his tea, and the prospect of hunger and thirst did not alarm him. There was no bedding in the bunks, but he did not yet fully realise the need for sleep. Indeed, he was now so nervously restless and excited that it was painful for him to remain still for two

moments together. Again and again he returned to the trap-door in the vain expectation of being able to force it open. He felt like an animal caught in a trap from which there was no escape. In the bulkhead beside the cooking range there was certainly a door admitting to the passage leading aft to the saloon, but this was securely locked, and the key which Mr. Quiller had handed to him was ridiculously too small. In the floor there was a closed hatchway, which he pulled open. It gave entrance into the dark cable tier, and the smell of bilge water was so foul that he was glad to shut it down.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed in disgust. "I should think all the stinks of the tropics were being saved up in that beastly well!"

He flew to the porthole for a breath of fresh air, but even this was tightly fastened.

In his frenzy of despair he began to imagine all sorts of fatal ends to his predicament. He might go mad; he might die of hunger or suffocation, only to be found when he was turned into a grim and ghastly skeleton.

What were his chances of rescue?

He knew that his mother must already have missed him, but, although she might spread the alarm, no one would dream of coming out to the schooner to look for him. He had a sudden bright hope in the thought that Thew might be waiting for his return with the dinghy, but as suddenly remembered that Thew had told him to bring the boat back and tie it up at its usual place. As for Mr. Quiller, who alone knew where he had gone, he had no reason to disturb himself about Tony, and would probably not give a thought to him. But Tony remembered with some comfort that Mr. Quiller had promised to pull out to the *Nancy* early in the morning to investigate. So at the most this imprisonment could only last for some ten hours.

The lamp went out after a while, and in his solitude he began to puzzle over the mystery of the disappearance of the treasure. Who was it that had taken it? Had some one else less scrupulous than himself found it accidentally and carried it away? He was forced to the belief that

that person was the same who had imprisoned him in here. He had not noticed any boat other than his own when he came aboard, but one might easily have been lying at the farther side, hidden by the bulwarks, and its occupant, already in possession of the treasure, had probably watched him and waited for an opportunity when he was below to shut the hatchway upon him, and to escape unseen and unrecognised.

As he lay on the hard planks of a bunk thinking this over, a new explanation of the mystery occurred to him. Might it not be Mr. Quiller himself who had entrapped him? The more he thought of this the more convinced was he of its probability.

Tony had been in no haste to enter the rowing boat, and Quiller had not waited to see him leave the yacht club stairs, but had made the excuse that he was going to the post-office to send off an important telegram. But had he really gone to the post-office? Had he not instead hurried off somewhere else to get another boat and row out to the *Nancy?* Tony had pulled slowly, and there had been ample

time for Quiller to get to the schooner well in advance of him, go below and rifle the locker, remove the treasure in the sack, and stow it away, perhaps in the saloon, perhaps in the boat, before Tony came alongside. Then he had cunningly hidden himself in the darkness, waiting and watching until his victim should disappear.

Tony thought that he understood everything now.

"What a double-barrelled ass I was ever to tell him!" he reflected. "I don't wonder at his being so anxious to know whether I'd told any one else. He didn't want any one else to know. That's why he sent me out here into this trap, that I entered like a lamb. That's why he locked me in—so that I should be jolly well out of the way while he removed the swag to some other place! And I daresay he'll come out and liberate me in the morning, and pretend to know nothing about it. I wish I'd told Arthur Pinkney instead! He'd have turned back if I'd only shouted to him when he was pushing off."

The schooner was heaving more violently now. Tony could hear the waves breaking against the sides. The wind was moaning dismally. The darkness made him feel more than ever miserable and lonely. He crawled out of the bunk and felt for the lantern, and had found it before he remembered that he had no matches with which to relight it. The vessel gave a lurch. He felt giddy and sick, and tried to make his way back to the bunk; but his brain reeled and he sank upon the floor, and lay there groaning and groaning until he forgot his miseries in sleep.

CHAPTER IV

AN INTERRUPTED GAME

"BEASTLY steep Latin exercise old Theophilus gave us yesterday!" complained Nubby Newgass, hitching his bundle of books under his arm. "I was over an hour doing those verbs last night."

Tommy Iddles bowled an imaginary full-pitcher at imaginary stumps, recovered his balance, and then nodded in agreement.

"Why Latin was ever invented I can't make out," he objected. "It's all very fine for fellows like Pinkney and Mumford and Bulstrode. They've got a sort of instinct that way, but I'd sooner do anything than Latin myself."

"Even Pinkney hasn't found it so easy this time though," resumed Nubby. "He was swotting over his primer on the way

to school. I passed him a minute ago, and he nearly bit my head off when I asked him why he hadn't done his prep. last night. Here he comes, still wrestling with his impersonal verbs."

They were in the thronged playground before morning school. Pinkney closed his book as he approached them. He was a tall, athletic-looking boy, with handsome features and fine dark eyes, and he was more precise in his attire than most of his schoolfellows. In appearance at least he endeavoured to live up to his desire to be considered a gentleman.

"Didn't you call for Tony Mumford?" Iddles asked him.

Pinkney shook his head, and answered lightly:

"No; I was a bit late—overslept myself. I suppose I was tired after the match, and—and besides, I went out fishing last night."

"Catch anything?" inquired Nubby.

"Not much; only a whiting or two. It came on to blow hard, and we turned back."

"Tony was with you, of course?" said

Iddles, as if it were quite to be expected that the two should be together.

Pinkney turned his gaze towards the sunlit bay, and more particularly to the spot where the *Nancy* lay at her moorings.

"No," he answered absently; "I didn't see Tony at all last night. Where is he? Do you know? I want to compliment him on his bowling. It was awfully fine of him to take two wickets in three overs."

"Tony hasn't turned up yet," Iddles explained, moving to join the procession of boys entering the school door. "I expect he waited to the last minute for you to call for him."

Pinkney coughed uneasily, and again glanced in the direction of the schooner. What especially interested him in that direction was not apparent, for there was nothing unusual about the vessel's appearance to make him linger behind the others of his class before following them into the school.

"Good morning, boys." Mr. Theophilus Grummel, the Headmaster, spoke from the dignified altitude of his desk. His voice

was like that of a harbour-master shouting through a speaking-trumpet. His cough, the boys all averred, was enough to knock you down.

"Good morning, sir," the school responded in unison.

The Head folded up the newspaper which he had been reading, and proceeded to conduct prayers. The roll was then called from each class. Much to the surprise of Mr. Grummel, Anthony Mumford, who was usually a model of punctuality, did not answer to his name.

"Does any one know why he isn't here?" questioned Mr. Grummel. "Pinkney—you—why isn't he here? Where is he?"

Pinkney looked confused, and went very red in the face.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," he answered haltingly, adding in an undertone, "I'm not Mumford's keeper."

He was at the top of the class for the Latin lesson, and was getting ready his books. On looking up to see the cause of a shadow across his desk he gave a curious gasp of astonishment, and his face,

from being red, went suddenly ashen white. Tony Mumford was standing near, waiting to take his place.

The eyes of all the class were upon Tony. He was haggard and untidy; his unwashed face was pale, and his eyes were heavy and darkly shadowed. His hair had not been brushed, his collar was dirty and crumpled, and there was about him a general air of hunger and distress. He took his usual seat next to Pinkney, and on being requested to show his preparation, he could only say that he had done none, offering no excuse for his neglect. Pinkney had certainly attempted to do something, but his work was so faulty that he got only reprimands where usually he received the fullest possible number of marks.

"It is evident to me that your cricket match yesterday has done you no good, you two," complained Mr. Grummel in his sternest and loudest tones of condemnation; and he gave the defaulters an extra dose of Latin to prepare for the next day, while Newgass, who was perfect in his task, was for once rewarded with a hundred marks.

In the middle of the morning there was an interval for recreation in the playground. When the sixth class was filing out, Tony Mumford drew Pinkney aside.

"I want to have a jaw with you, Arthur," he announced invitingly.

Pinkney regarded him curiously through half-averted eyes. He appeared to be less eager than his companion to engage in conversation.

"I intended to do a bit of bowling," he objected. "I must keep my hand in, you know. Come on; let's have some practice."

"What I've got to say is more important than cricket," pursued Tony.

Pinkney raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Go on, then," he nodded, beckoning to Bulstrode to accompany them. "What's up? Anything serious?"

"Do you know where I spent the night?" Tony began confidentially.

"At home in bed, I presume," returned Pinkney, with calm indifference. "Where else should you spend it?—although now that I take stock of you," he went on, regarding Mumford with more critical ex-

amination, "you certainly don't look as if you'd had a particularly restful night."

"You haven't been home," interposed Bulstrode. "I know that much. Half the town was out searching for you. Even the police were informed that you were missing."

"Perfectly true," assented Tony, looking from the one to the other. He appeared to be somewhat proud of his adventure now that its discomforts were past. "I've been cooped up all night out there in old Quiller's schooner." He nodded in the direction of the *Nancy*. "And I've been as sick as a dog all the time."

Pinkney drew apart from him without making any comment of surprise.

"What on earth possessed you that you should do a mad thing like that?" questioned Bulstrode. "You came off with us after our swim. Why did you go back again?"

Pinkney was all alert now to hear the desired explanation. It was to Bulstrode that Tony addressed himself.

"I wasn't quite so mad as you may think," he responded. "You remember

when you chaps went down below? Well, while you were below I went down into the seamen's quarters forward. It was sheer curiosity that took me there—I'm always being told that I'm too inquisitive—and I lifted the lid of one of the locker seats, and there I found——"

He broke off abruptly, looking at Pinkney, who had become curiously agitated.

"Are you taken bad, Arthur?" he inquired sympathetically. "You look queer."

"Queer?" repeated Pinkney, apparently amused. "I'm all right. What was it you discovered—a dead centipede? The carcase of a tropical cockroach?"

"No," Tony resumed; "it was a whole heap of jewellery—rings with precious stones in them, diamond brooches and coronets, gold dishes and cups, and no end of silver spoons and things."

"Glory!" exclaimed Bulstrode in astonishment. "And you never told any of us! You kept it all to yourself and never said a word! Well, I call that mean—beastly mean! Don't you, Pinkney?"

Pinkney meditatively rubbed his chin.

"I'm not so sure about that," he said slowly. "If he'd told all you fellows, you'd have made a raid on the stuff and carried it all off; whereas, I presume, Tony was sensible enough to leave it where he found it and say nothing, knowing that the law of treasure trove doesn't recognise that findings are keepings. No, I don't consider him mean. I consider him commendably honest and honourable."

"I knew you would see it in that light," Tony smiled in satisfaction. "I wanted last night to ask you what I ought to do. I watched you go out fishing—at least, I suppose it was fishing that you went with that rather villainous-looking customer who was in the boat with you—but you were too far off for me to call you back."

Arthur Pinkney glanced at Tony in momentary surprise.

"You watched us?" he muttered uncomfortably. "I wish I'd seen you. I'd have asked you to come with us. Of course I should have told you that you'd done quite right not to touch what didn't belong to

you, and not to tell every Tom, Dick, and Harry you met what you'd seen."

"Unfortunately," resumed Tony, "I was silly enough to tell the whole affair to Captain Quiller, whom I met on the esplanade; and that's where all the misfortune came in. But as it was on his schooner that the swag was hidden, I naturally thought it right that he should know. You'd have told him yourself."

"Certainly," Pinkney promptly agreed. "I suppose it was his property. Why else should it be there? It's queer, though, that he should have left it unprotected, and exposed to the cupidity of any Johnnie that came along. It's rank carelessness. If, as you say, he shoved his table silver into a locker that wasn't locked, why, anybody that liked could carry it away. You might even have carried it away yourself and nobody been the wiser." He fixed his eyes upon Tony accusingly. "Perhaps you did, eh? Perhaps that's how you were occupied all night—burying it somewhere, or disposing of it to some fence."

Tony looked hurt at this insinuation against his honesty.

"I don't know what you mean by a fence," he retorted.

"A fence," Bulstrode explained, "is a receiver of stolen property—a man who buys things from burglars and pick-pockets."

"Well," urged Pinkney, "and what did Quiller do and say when you informed him of your discovery?"

Tony then told of how, at Captain Quiller's request, he had gone out with the key, and of how, when he entered the cabin for the second time, he found the locker empty, the treasure gone, and then of how the trap door was shut down upon him.

Bulstrode recognised the serious possibilities of such a predicament, but Pinkney seemed to see something quite amusing in the adventure. He even permitted himself to chuckle. Somehow, at that moment, Tony was reminded of the mocking laugh of the person who had entrapped him.

"I kicked up no end of a row," he went on; "but nobody heard me, nobody came to my rescue; and so I spent the night

in the most abject misery, as you may well imagine."

"In the end, then," suggested Pinkney, "I suppose you found that you hadn't been locked in at all, but had only to open the door and walk out? Or was it the Quiller man that brought you out of the land of bondage?"

Pinkney made these suggestions lightly, but his lip twitched as he spoke, and any one carefully watching him would have seen that he was studiously hiding his eagerness to know the means by which Mumford had been liberated.

"It was Thew—the yacht club boatman," Tony explained. "He saw his boat that I had borrowed lying alongside the schooner, with nobody in it, and he came out. I heard him prowling about the deck; and when at last I got him to understand that I was imprisoned there, he managed to break open the trap door and help me out and bring me ashore. I'd only time to run home and get a bite of breakfast. You know I was late for school, and naturally I'd done no preparation.

No, Quiller wasn't likely to come out and rescue me. It's my belief he didn't intend me to be rescued."

"Do you mean by that," said Bulstrode, "that you seriously believe it was Captain Quiller who locked you in?"

"Decidedly I do!" Tony emphatically affirmed.

"I'll bet you anything it was Quiller." Pinkney spoke with confident assurance. "He's just that sort," he added.

"I don't agree with either of you," protested Bulstrode. "Captain Quiller's an out-and-out gentleman. I know him better than either of you do. What's more, I saw him in the post-office, sending off a telegram, at the very time when you say the thing happened, and——" He gave a sudden start. "I say, you fellows, I've got an idea!" he cried excitedly. "That treasure, as you call it—it must have been stolen. Has either of you seen the newspaper this morning? Has neither of you heard of the great burglary at Wrinklebury Hall—Lady Wrinklebury's place? Over two thousand pounds' worth of jewellery and plate have been taken. I'll be bound

it's the same swag that Tony saw on the schooner! There were two at the job—a man and a boy—so the newspaper says. And the police are on their track."

"I *say!*" ejaculated Tony.

Pinkney was gnawing his under lip. His countenance had grown ashen pale. He swayed for an instant as if he were going to faint, but recovered himself with an effort, and diverted his attention to a very fine motor-car which had just stopped at the entrance to the school-yard. Then he drew back.

"Time's nearly up," he faltered, "and we've been stupidly gassing here instead of having a good game of catch."

He took a cricket ball from his jacket pocket and made a throw to Nubby Newgass, who was approaching him. Nubby caught the ball dexterously, but did not return it; for at that moment all play had suddenly ceased, and the boys had found a new attraction in the sight of two men and a lady, who had alighted from the motor-car and were entering the school-yard. The men were quickly recognised as Captain Quiller and the super-

intendent of the local police. Their companion was Lady Wrinklebury.

The superintendent glanced quickly among the boys, and strode up to one of them.

"Your name is Anthony Mumford, I believe," he said. "I am sorry to interrupt your game, but you must go with me. You are my prisoner. I arrest you on the charge of burglary."

CHAPTER V

WHAT PINKNEY READ IN THE NEWSPAPER

Some of the fellows who had stood near had overheard the ominous words, "You are my prisoner. I arrest you on the charge of burglary," and they had seen the blank look of stupefied amazement that had come upon Tony Mumford's usually imperturbable face. What did it mean? Tony Mumford, their honoured and respected schoolmate, arrested—made a prisoner—and for burglary! They were not less astonished than Tony himself. The mere thought of such a thing seemed impossible. Yet some had heard, or read in the local newspapers, that a burglary had been committed at Wrinklebury Hall, and the presence of Lady Wrinklebury herself here in company with the police superintendent was apparent proof that

this same crime was the one with which Mumford was associated in the dreadful accusation.

At first they watched his arrest without comment. Whether he was guilty or innocent none could guess, for his demeanour gave them no indication of either dread of punishment or confidence of acquittal. But when the superintendent put out his hand to take the boy by the shoulder, Tony drew himself back.

"I think you've made some mistake, sir," he murmured, and turned an appealing glance first upon Lady Wrinklebury and then upon Captain Quiller.

In Lady Wrinklebury's beautiful, aristocratic countenance there was an expression of severe condemnation. She did not appear to have any doubt that Tony was guilty of the theft of her diamonds. In the bronzed and bearded face of Captain Quiller there was merely calculation. He was regarding Tony with keen scrutiny, as if, before hastily condemning him, he were coolly considering whether or not he was a boy likely to have committed such an offence.

"No mistake at all," returned the superintendent. Then he added, glancing aside at Captain Quiller: "This is the right boy, Captain, is it not?"

"Certainly," Quiller nodded in answer. "That is Anthony Mumford—the boy you want."

Tony's eyes flashed a look of bitter hatred in Quiller's direction. How dared this man, this retired pirate and cut-throat, cast the guilt of his own crime upon the shoulders of an innocent and unoffending schoolboy? Tony asked himself, astonished at the man's audacity. He was about to burst forth in a torrent of indignant denial, but was calmly interrupted.

"Now, my lad," cautioned the superintendent, not unkindly, taking him by the sleeve, "you had better keep silence. Anything that you say now may be taken in evidence against you. Come quietly with me to the police-station. You'll get fair play, I assure you."

Then Tony turned an appealing glance at the crowd of his schoolfellows. He looked for Pinkney, but Pinkney was

nowhere within sight. Newgass and Bulstrode were near him, however.

"Tell Mr. Grummel where they're carting me off to, Nubby," he requested, yielding himself without an attempt to struggle.

Heedless of the imperative ringing of the school-bell, the boys eagerly watched him as he was conducted out of the playground and given a seat at the back of Lady Wrinklebury's magnificent motor-car. Just as the car was about to move off, Mr. Theophilus Grummel hurried excitedly across the yard, signing to the chauffeur and calling aloud:

"Hi! stop!"

From the window of the little room which he dignified with the name of his library, where he had been quietly enjoying his ham sandwich and glass of milk, he had caught a glimpse of Lady Wrinklebury's poppy-red parasol. That so great a personage as her ladyship should deign for any purpose whatsoever to call at the Grammar School was to him an event of supreme importance, and he hastened to prepare himself to receive her with the

ceremony due to her high position in the town and neighbourhood. Sweeping away the remains of his frugal lunch, he changed his coat, adjusted his necktie, smoothed down his hair, drew down his coat sleeves to cover his frayed and soiled cuffs, and seated himself in expectant readiness until she should be announced. He waited very patiently, but to his intense disappointment no knock sounded upon the library door, and he realised with a pang of humility that it was not to see himself that Lady Wrinklebury had called. Then he had hurried out bare-headed into the yard, only to see to his astonishment that one of his own pupils was actually entering the car, and, as it seemed, coolly seating himself within the reflected brilliance of the red parasol—a privilege which he, Mr. Theophilus Grummel, would have given his best hat to enjoy.

The boys saw the Headmaster lay his hand upon the door of the vehicle as if to arrest its progress, although it had not yet moved. He spoke imperatively to the representative of the police, but they dared

not linger to learn the result of his demand for an explanation of why one of his pupils was being taken off without his express permission.

At the porch Pinkney elbowed his way in between Iddles and Newgass. Pinkney, it seemed, had been searching for his cricket ball, and in consequence had missed the excitement which had thrilled his companions. But he had seen and recognised Superintendent Rabbidge, and had divined that Tony Mumford's prospective drive in the automobile was not to be one of pleasure.

"Tony's arrested," Newgass informed him.

"What on earth has he been up to?" Pinkney desired to know.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing, I'll swear," returned Newgass. "The police have found a mare's nest, that's all. It's a way they have. They're clever at dropping on the wrong person."

"But they wouldn't arrest him for nothing at all," pursued Pinkney. "They must at least have suspicions against him. I wonder what for?"

"It's in connection with the Wrinklebury burglary," Iddles told him.

Pinkney drew a deep breath. Tony was his particular pal, and it was natural that he should show concern.

"Burglary?" he exclaimed in genuine consternation. "A Grammar School boy arrested for burglary! Good gracious! It seems hardly possible! At Wrinklebury Hall, you say it was? That's surely the affair that Bulstrode was beginning to tell me about a few minutes ago. I haven't seen the newspaper yet—don't often look at one except for the cricket news. When did the thing happen? Do you know?"

"Why, Tuesday night or yesterday morning—before daylight," Iddles answered him.

"H'm!" ruminated Pinkney. "Of course, none of us can suppose for a moment that Mumford had anything to do with a crime like that. It's simply ridiculous—idiotic! And yet——"

He broke off, stroking his chin as if pondering over some problem.

"Yet what?" questioned Newgass.

"I was only thinking," resumed Pink-

ney. "You know, Tony's sister is lady's maid at Wrinklebury Hall. He often goes there to see her, and—well, it looks suspicious, but, as a matter of fact, I happen to know that he was there on Tuesday night. He told me he was going there, though you'd better not say so to anybody. It might go against him, you see. And then—you don't know what he was up to last night. By his own account, which I don't doubt, it looks innocent enough; but it'll take a lot of explaining away. I wonder if any one actually saw him at the job?"

Bulstrode was behind him as he spoke.

"Tony will be able to explain everything in proof of his own innocence," Bulstrode declared, with firm confidence. "And I don't know how anybody could say they saw him if he wasn't there at the time of the burglary."

"Still," argued Pinkney, "it's queer that Mumford should be arrested if the police have no evidence against him."

"The only evidence of the sort that they can possibly have," said Bulstrode, "is that the burglary was committed by two

persons—a man and a boy, who left their footprints on the flower-bed under the window by which they entered the house."

Pinkney looked round sharply.

"Does it say that about the footprints in the newspaper?" he inquired. "I wish I could get hold of one and see the particulars. It's hateful to suspect a pal of doing a low thing like breaking into a house."

"There's a paper on old Grum's desk if you can lay your hand on it before he comes in," suggested Nubby Newgass. "He was reading it all the time while we were at algebra."

Pinkney drew Bulstrode aside.

"I say, Bullie," he said, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, "this looks fearfully rocky for Mumford, don't you think? That yarn he told us about finding the swag in the schooner's locker, and then about it having mysteriously disappeared, is all very well. But supposing it turned out to be a faked-up story?"

Bulstrode turned upon his companion a look of angry reproach.

"Do you mean to insinuate that Tony

Mumford's word isn't to be believed?" he interrogated. "It's the first time anybody has doubted him in my hearing. Even the fact that he was at Wrinklebury Hall on Tuesday night—even his arrest—doesn't shake my confidence in him. What do you mean?"

"I don't insinuate anything at all," averred Pinkney. "He's as straight as any of us, as a rule. But he may be shielding some one by hiding the truth, you see. There's nothing but his own unsupported word to show that the silver and stuff that he spoke of was ever on board the schooner at all. Nobody but himself is said to have seen it there, and yet there was a whole squad of you fellows on board at the time he says he opened the locker. Did you yourself see him go below, Bulstrode?"

Bulstrode thought for a moment, then shook his head.

"No," he acknowledged, "I certainly didn't. We left him alone on deck while we went down to have a look into the saloon, and when we came back after a minute or two he was still there, leaning

over the side and looking into the water as if nothing unusual had happened."

"It's not likely he'd have behaved like that, and not say a word to his chums, who were close by, if he'd really and truly come suddenly upon such a heap of treasure as he describes," said Pinkney out of the depths of his wisdom.

Bulstrode was silent for a while. Then he said slowly:

"Certainly it's strange he never spoke about what he'd seen. If it had been any other fellow than Tony Mumford I should be inclined to think there was a lot in what you suggest—that perhaps he'd really seen nothing in the locker after all. But if he didn't see it on the *Nancy*, how could he have known anything about it?"

"Why," rejoined Pinkney, "how else and when else than when he and old Quiller were occupied in committing the burglary?"

"Silence!" commanded the thunderous voice of Mr. Theophilus Grummel, who now entered the classroom very much perturbed. "What's all this talking about? Pinkney, stand to the line, and you, too,

Bulstrode. I will make an example of you both."

The two delinquents left their places and took up their positions like penitents by the side of the master's desk, there to await the punishment that was in store for them.

Mr. Grummel was taking the class in mental arithmetic, and while he stood facing the forms, flinging his perplexing questions from boy to boy, his back was turned from his own desk, upon which he had left his morning newspaper lying open. The account of the Wrinklebury burglary was exposed to view, but, unfortunately for Pinkney's convenience, the reading matter was turned the wrong way. Pinkney saw the large headlines, and he thirsted to read the details of the interesting crime and to discover to what extent Tony Mumford was implicated. He watched his opportunity, and then, boldly leaning forward, he adroitly and silently drew the paper round until the printing was upright in front of him. The type was small to be read at a distance, but his sight was good, and he ran his eye down the column,

nervously taking in the information. Once or twice his lips twitched with a half-formed smile of satisfaction; once or twice his brows contracted in anxious concern.

The burglary, he read, had been committed late on the Tuesday evening, while the family at the Hall were still in the dining-room and the servants were at their supper. Pinkney reflected that it must have been just about that time that Tony Mumford was at the Hall. The burglars had entered by the library window, which they were believed to have forced open with the help of the broken-bladed knife that was afterwards found among the geraniums. Their footprints had been left on the soft, newly-watered soil—the heavy prints of a man's rough boots and those of a youth's smaller cricket shoes with ribbed soles. The safe in a corner of the library had been skilfully opened, and the whole of its valuable contents abstracted. It was the barking of a terrier that had alarmed the butler, who had opened the library door in time to see the thieves escaping by the window with the spoil, which they carried off in a sack. He had

run out in pursuit, armed with a loaded revolver. Overtaking the thieves in the shrubbery, he had had a struggle with them. The younger of them had tried to wrest the revolver from him, and in the struggle the butler had been seriously wounded, so seriously that he had been unable to give a description of the thieves. The value of the property was estimated at between two and three thousand pounds.

So deeply absorbed was Arthur Pinkney in what he was reading that he moved an inch or two forward to the desk, straining to catch every word. He even dared to put forth his hand and turn over the newspaper to follow the lower half of the printed column. Never before had he read anything so exciting. For was not his particular companion, Tony Mumford, involved in the crime?

He read on, giving no heed to Bulstrode's whispered warning to be careful. He was recklessly interested; nor was he aware of the approach of Mr. Theophilus Grummel until suddenly a stinging whack of the master's new cane came down with three quick, merciless strokes upon his shoulders.

Bulstrode was so startled that he stepped backwards suddenly, and collapsed in one horrible smash with the blackboard. Instantly the class was in an uproar. One boy emptied the ink down another's neck in sheer delight, and another stood on his head on a form.

"How dare you! How dare you!" cried Mr. Grummel with each stroke. "I'm amazed at your presumption—actually reading my newspaper under my very eyes! Hold out your hand, sir!"

Pinkney meekly obeyed. He took his punishment stoically, and returned to his place in class, deeming the stinging of his palms and fingers and the smarting of his shoulders a small enough price to pay for the information which he had surreptitiously acquired.

"Tony ought to be let off all right," he jauntily remarked after school, as he was walking homeward with Bulstrode and Newgass. "Nobody actually recognised him—not even the butler; and unless that penknife which he was silly enough to lose under the window is identified as his, he can't very well be convicted."

CHAPTER VI

TONY MUMFORD'S SUBSTITUTE

TONY MUMFORD did not return to school that week. No one seemed to know why, and inquiries of his schoolfellows failed to elicit an explanation of his absence. Pinkney declared his belief that Tony was in gaol, awaiting the magistrate's inquiry; but this theory was knocked on the head when Felkin informed him on the Friday morning that he had seen Tony rigged out in his best clothes sitting beside Lady Wrinklebury's chauffeur in her ladyship's motor-car, driving in a cloud of dust along one of the country roads.

Pinkney took advantage of Tony's absence to forge ahead of him in class, and so diligent and well behaved was he that he quickly regained the good opinion of Mr. Grummel. If it had not been that

Mumford was an important member of the school eleven, Pinkney might not have regretted his absence. But there was to be a return match on the Saturday afternoon against Newton's Boarding School for Young Gentlemen, who had given Grammar School a fearful beating, and Pinkney, who recognised Mumford as his best bowler, could only count ruefully upon Felkin as a lame substitute, and look forward to the ignominy of another defeat.

He had hoped that Mumford would turn up at the eleventh hour to save the credit of the school, but the eleventh hour arrived without Tony; and Pinkney was on his way to the cricket ground, contemplating the humiliating prospect of doing without him, when to his surprise a note was pushed into his hand by an errand boy, who immediately disappeared. Pinkney opened the envelope, took out the note, which bore no address, and read:

"My dear Arthur,—I can't possibly be at the match to-day, for reasons which I can't explain. So I am sending you a

substitute. He is not one of our own lot, and you will have to explain to the other side. I did want to have the satisfaction of bowling out Gregory, who is by a long way their best man; but I hope you will come out triumphant this time.

"Yours in haste,

"A. MUMFORD."

Pinkney wondered exceedingly at this curious message, but more than all who his anonymous substitute might be, and whether he would be justified in blindly accepting Tony Mumford's rather audacious suggestion. He supposed that the fellow would make himself known to him on the ground. More than likely he was a visitor. There were a great many summer visitors in Budmouth already, even though the schools had not yet broken up.

As he went up to the pavilion, Pinkney was met by a young fellow of about his own age, who was dressed in a rather shabby blue serge suit and wore a straw hat. Could this be the chap? If so, he might have had the decency to wear

flannels. Pinkney himself was proudly wearing an entirely new outfit, including an exceedingly swagger pair of cricket boots.

"You're Pinkney, aren't you?" the stranger began, lurching up to him with his hands deep in his pockets. "I'm Mumford's substitute. He thought you might care to take me in his place."

Pinkney stared at him, not conscious of ever having seen him before.

"I don't think I know you," he responded rather superciliously. "What's your name?"

"You can call me Snooks," said the other, returning the captain's stare.

"Are you any good?" questioned Pinkney. "I mean, are you worth anything at the wickets or at fielding and bowling? Because the man whose place you want to take is a ripping all-round cricketer."

Snooks raised his eyebrows in self-deprecation.

"Well, I play a bit when I'm at school," he modestly answered—"in fact, pretty often. I'm fond of the game."

"Felkin's a rotter, and we can't very well have a worse one," Pinkney decided, continuing his way to the pavilion. "I'll risk it, anyhow, in the emergency. You may come."

"Thanks, awfully," nodded Snooks, accompanying him. "You'll excuse my togs, of course. I don't happen to have brought my cricket rig with me." He thrust his finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket. "By the way," he said, still walking at Pinkney's side, "I wonder if you happen to know to whom this penknife belongs?" He drew out the knife, and held it in the palm of his hand. The hand was exceedingly well shaped and aristocratic.

Pinkney stopped and glanced at the knife. In an instant he knew it to be the one that had been found among the geraniums at Wrinklebury Hall on the night of the burglary. He drew back, confused and agitated. His face went red and white by turns. Beads of perspiration came out upon his forehead. He began to tremble from head to foot; but with an effort he controlled his agitation.

"Why do you ask me?" he stammered, staring at the knife.

"I thought you might happen to know," returned Snooks.

Pinkney raised his eyes, but quickly averted them again. Who and what was this stranger? What was he trying to get at?

"Yes," he answered. "It happens that I do know. It is Tony Mumford's."

Snooks nodded, and returned the penknife to his pocket.

"Thank you," he said. "Excuse my asking for the information." He looked around the field, where many spectators had already assembled. "You've got an awfully fine ground here," he remarked approvingly. "You're quite sure you don't mind my taking Mumford's place?"

Pinkney shook his head, inwardly satisfied at the abrupt change of subject from the penknife to cricket.

"Not at all," he answered lightly. "The other side may object, but you can't make much difference; and, after all, we couldn't go on with the match without a full eleven against such a team as we're

meeting to-day. Their captain, whose name is Gregory, and who is the son of a barrister, is quite a demon at bowling. He's a decent bat, too ; so we shall have to look out. But don't be afraid. I'll put you where you won't have too much work to do."

" Thanks, awfully," returned Snooks, in a tone which implied that if his own feelings had been consulted he would much prefer to be in the firing-line. " I daresay I'm a rank duffer, compared with Mumford, but I'm willing to do my level best " ; he added—" if only for his sake." And he turned away to examine the pitch.

Grammar School lost the toss, and the ten of them came out from the pavilion, looking a little dejected. Pinkney, who was a fast right-hand bowler, carefully ranged his men for the first over, with Newgass as wicket-keeper, Iddles at mid-off, Bulstrode at cover-point, and Snooks as extra slip. The batsmen were two of Newton's chosen players, including the redoubtable Gregory, who in the last match had scored eighty-one not out.

The game began badly for Grammar School. Pinkney sent up a wide, his second was a daisy-kisser, but his next ball was a good, straight one at full-pitch, which was swiped to boundary.

"Well bowled!" cried Snooks, at which Pinkney glared. Were not all his balls well bowled? He rather resented the unsolicited praise of this fellow Snooks.

Gregory's next hit went over the head of mid-off for a two. Pinkney spread out his field, only to find that he had made a mistake, for Bulstrode missed a sure catch by being too far off. At the end of the second over the Newton score was thirty-three with the loss of one wicket. Snooks had not yet touched the ball. Pinkney made a change, venturing to place the stranger at mid-off. Gregory's partner was batting, and he seemed to pick out the man in blue serge as a novice who was certain to let the ball pass him. He tried a hit in that direction, but it was a feeble drive that hardly crept as far as the bowler. Snooks, however, seemed to have divined his intention, and was ready, although he did not appear to

be so. He saw the next ball rise from the bat; he watched it, measured its curving flight, stepped back a couple of strides, and then, calmly lifting his left hand, caught it.

Pinkney nodded his reluctant thanks, believing at the same time that the catch was nothing but a lucky fluke. His opinion was only altered when Snooks repeated the performance.

"That chap seems to have played before," he said to himself. "I wonder if he's any good at bowling. This fellow Gregory looks like carrying his bat."

Snooks thought so, too; but he had the additional belief that Pinkney's bowling, which never varied, and which exactly suited Gregory's play, was the matter chiefly at fault. He approached Pinkney during an interval after the fall of the third wicket.

"I think if you gave your ball a little more of a leg twist, sir, you'd get that man out," he remarked politely in passing.

"That's what I'm trying," returned Pinkney, who was quickly losing his keenness and his temper; "but the better

I bowl the harder the beast hits. I wish to goodness you'd take my place for the next over."

Snooks demurred.

"Just as you like," he said, adroitly catching the ball that was unexpectedly tossed to him.

Pinkney was more than half afraid that in the interests of his side he had acted unwisely in relinquishing the bowling to an untried stranger, who hadn't even shown enough interest in the game to roll up his sleeves ; but he had a vicious desire to make Snooks look ridiculous. Snooks began with a slow left-hander, and Gregory saved his middle stump by a dexterous short-arm hook. The next ball was a high full-pitch, delivered swiftly. Gregory lifted his bat an instant too late, and looked round in astonishment to see two of his stumps turning somersaults and the wicket-keeper staggering, while the ball was bouncing gaily to long leg.

Pinkney bit his lip in vexation at seeing Snooks do what he couldn't do himself. He was beginning to consider the fellow an unmitigated bounder.

Snooks bowled during three overs, and took two wickets, which still further incensed the Grammar School captain against him. The rest of Newton's eleven were easily accounted for, and they ended their innings with a score of ninety-seven runs.

Pinkney and Iddles went in first for Grammar School. Pinkney played his best, mainly with the desire to demonstrate to Snooks that he wasn't the only man who could play cricket. But he was unfortunate enough to be run out in the third over in an attempt to make a four when a three should have satisfied him, and he returned to the pavilion in an obvious bad temper. Bulstrode followed him, and raised the score to twenty-eight. Snooks went in at fourth wicket down. At first he played a defensive game, but presently Gregory took the bowling, evidently intent upon paying him out for his own disaster. Snooks then began to show the Grammar School that Tony Mumford's substitute was a real master of the art of batting. If Newton's had had thirty fielders, he would have placed his balls

where none of them could have reached them. His play was as easy and confident as if he had merely been practising at the nets ; his forward drives were magnificent, his late cuts and leg hits, his glance playing, and his pulling were little less than amazing in their dexterity and finished style. The spectators applauded his every hit as if he had been a veritable professional. Half through the innings he had himself beaten the Newton score off his own bat. Their best bowlers tried their hardest to get through his defence, their fieldsmen were like grasshoppers, all over the ground, and all the time Snooks himself was as calm and cool and confident as if he were playing solely for his own amusement. He carried his bat for 107, and might have prolonged the innings indefinitely but that Nubby Newgass, who was his last partner, unfortunately drove the ball clean into Gregory's hands at cover-point.

The second innings of Newton's was what Iddles described as a ghastly spectacle, in which the score was only remarkable for its achievements in duck's eggs.

Even Gregory made no more than six, and the match was finally won by Grammar School by an innings and five runs.

"Really, Snooks, you played rather well," said Pinkney in a patronising tone as they were leaving the pavilion. "You'll improve. You ought to make quite a decent cricketer with practice."

"Played rather well!" exclaimed Nubby Newgass in derision of the inadequacy of the compliment. "Why, he played splendidly. He has saved us from defeat, and more than saved us; he has covered us with glory!"

Snooks buttoned his jacket, and smiled in acknowledgment of this more genuine praise.

"I hope you'll play for us again—next Saturday," proposed Bulstrode. "We're having a match against Hartland College second eleven, and they'll beat us hollow if you're not there, and we have a reputation to keep up after to-day."

"Yes," added Iddles. "It would be a certainty for us if you were to come, Snooks. Will you? The railway fare's only fourpence, third-class return."

Pinkney did not second the invitation. He seemed to think that the match at Hartland was a safe win for the Grammar School even without the help of an outsider like Snooks, and he inwardly hoped that the necessity of paying a railway fare would prove a sufficient obstacle to the possibility of that young person's participation in the match.

Snooks demurred, but not on account of the ruinous expenditure in railway fares.

"Well, you see," he said, looking from Iddles to Bulstrode, and from Bulstrode to Pinkney, "I'm only home on long leave. I've got to be back at Eton on Monday morning."

CHAPTER VII

PINKNEY HAS HIS SUSPICIONS

"ETON?" Pinkney almost staggered backward. He had a profound veneration for everything connected with that famous public school, and now he was shocked at his own presumption in having dared to suggest that Snooks's playing was capable of improvement. "Eton?" he muttered with a new respect. "Good gracious! are you an Etonian? Why, I thought you were a friend of Tony Mumford's!"

"So I am," smiled Snooks; "at least, I hope I am. If I were not I should hardly be here as his proxy."

"I should hardly have expected an Etonian, who is necessarily a gentleman, to call himself the friend of a fellow who has just been arrested by the police on a charge of burglary," sneered Pinkney.

"Arrested?" repeated Snooks in surprise. "Tony Mumford arrested?" He laughed aloud. "Oh, no. Mumford had nothing to do with the burglary. He had no more hand in it than—well, than you or I had. Why should you think he had?"

Pinkney shrugged his shoulders.

"Only because there seems to be a good deal of evidence against him," he answered. "He was at Wrinklebury Hall at the time. He knew the ways of the house—when the family would be at dinner and the servants out of the way; where the safe was kept, and at what time it was most likely to be left unlocked. He left the impression of his rubber shoes on the flower bed under the library window, and he lost his knife there, too, the knife that he opened the window with, and that you've got now in your waistcoat pocket, although I don't exactly see how you happen to be in possession of it."

Snooks glanced at Bulstrode and Iddles. They seemed to understand that he did not wish to speak about the burglary in their hearing, and they politely withdrew

themselves, strolling away beyond earshot. Snooks signed to Pinkney to accompany him in the direction of the gate.

"Mumford had certainly been at the Hall earlier in the evening," he said. "But he went away at twenty-five minutes past six, and was home a good hour before the burglary was committed. He posted a letter in the town which caught the seven post, and which I received at Eton the next morning. And he wasn't wearing his cricket or boating shoes, but a pair of black lace-up boots."

Pinkney drew a long, deep breath, contracting his brows into a frown. Who was this fellow Snooks, that he should know so much? Was it possible that he was not, after all, an Etonian, but a boy detective? Pinkney had heard that the detective force at Scotland Yard were exceedingly tricky in their methods of investigating crimes, and that they not infrequently employed boys as well as women to act as their ferrets. Snooks's next remark went far to convince him that the surmise was correct.

"The impressions made on the gera-

nium bed were certainly those of a youth's cricket or boating shoes," he said, "and the ribbed design on the soles of them was rather unusual. I have looked at the shoes of all the fellows playing cricket here to-day, but none of them have soles anything like those that left their mark under the library window."

Pinkney drew to an abrupt halt. His face was very red after his exertions at cricket. He lifted his left foot and rested it, sole upward, upon his right knee. Snooks seemed to guess his purpose.

"Oh, there wasn't any use in my looking at yours," he smiled reassuringly. "Yours are quite new. You've never worn them before to-day. I notice that they pinch you a bit. They'll grow easier when you've worn them a time or two. I always buy mine rather loose, and tighten 'em up with the laces. There's nothing so bad for your feet as running in boots that aren't easy."

Pinkney certainly looked uncomfortable just then.

"If you'll excuse me," he faltered, "I think I'll go back to the pavilion and

change them. I left an old pair of boots there last time."

But Snooks detained him by laying a hand on his arm.

"There's the matter of the knife," he reminded him. "You ought to know exactly how much or how little of truth there is in the supposed evidence against Mumford. If one of my own schoolfellows was suspected of such a crime, I'd jolly well want to know the whole story, if only to relieve my anxiety."

"Naturally you would," agreed Pinkney, feeling that he couldn't very well break away without being suspiciously abrupt. "And I, for one, want to know what on earth the police mean by casting suspicion upon Tony Mumford. It's simply ridiculous. Although, of course," he added quickly, "none of us in the Grammar School believe him guilty."

"I should think not, indeed," nodded Snooks. "Neither does any one else, so far as I can find out."

Pinkney looked at him furtively, trying to get at the meaning of his interest in the Wrinklebury burglary.

"You seem to have been fairly busy finding out things," he remarked with a supercilious curl of the lip. "I suppose you are one of those detective fellows, and are only putting it on when you make out that you're at Eton. What have you found out about the penknife, I'd like to know?"

"Well," returned Snooks, taking no notice of the remark about Eton, "Mumford doesn't deny that the knife was his until about a fortnight ago, when he lost it or had it nicked from him. It certainly wasn't in his possession on Tuesday. There's no doubt that it was the identical instrument that was used to open the library window, because the broken-off half of the big blade has been found inside the room, and there are marks on the window sash where the knife was thrust in to force back the catch. Taken all round, it was rather a dummy burglary, and might have been better stage managed. They made a bad break when they let the butler see them, and a worse one when they put a bullet in him. It might have been a case of manslaughter; as it is, the butler isn't out of danger."

Pinkney glanced anxiously in the direction of the pavilion, as if he were contemplating making a bolt for it. But he restrained his eagerness to escape from the embarrassing presence of his inscrutable companion.

"They seem, at all events, to have got away with the swag," he casually remarked; "and with all your clever investigation you don't appear to be any nearer to capturing them."

"Perhaps we are nearer than you think," retorted Snooks. "But I don't seem to be gaining any ground with your assistance. When I asked you just before the match if you knew whose knife it was, I was hoping that you'd be able to tell me who had it after Mumford lost it; but you don't seem to know."

"How should I?" questioned Pinkney. "I was not even aware that Mumford had lost it. I am not in his confidence—at least, I've not been since he became connected with this discreditable affair; although, to do him justice, he did tell me a little about the silver spoons and things that he is supposed to have discovered

on board the *Nancy*, and about their mysterious disappearance."

"Mysterious?" repeated Snooks. "There's not much mystery about it. Who could have removed the things—who would have shut Tony up in the cabin—but the burglars themselves?"

"The owner of the schooner, for one," Pinkney suggested. "Captain Quiller was told that they were in the locker, whether he knew it before or not, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised to learn that he himself put them there."

"Nonsense!" rejoined Snooks. "You're talking sheer rot now. You suggest that Captain Quiller was a party to the burglary? You might suspect Lady Wrinklebury herself!"

"Are you quite sure," Pinkney then said, "that Tony Mumford ever saw anything in the locker at all? Don't you think it possible that he was simply romancing?"

Snooks stared at him accusingly.

"That's a nice thing to say of a schoolmate, isn't it?" he asked.

"Well," returned Pinkney, "even if his story is true that he saw two or three

silver spoons in the locker, there's nothing to prove that what he saw were the proceeds of the Wrinklebury burglary."

"Excuse me," interrupted Snooks with some warmth, "there's a lot to prove it. Mumford saw the stolen property hidden away in the locker, and he has described what he saw, and among other things a gold challenge cup, which I myself won in games at Eton, and which the burglars carried off with the family plate and a lot of jewellery belonging to my mother, Lady Wrinklebury."

Pinkney started back as if he had received a physical blow.

"Good gracious!" he cried in blank amazement. "Your mother—Lady Wrinklebury! I—then you are Maurice Wrinklebury! I didn't know you. You said you were a friend of Tony Mumford's and that your name was Snooks. I thought you were a detective, spying round. It's years since I saw you last, and—how you have altered! I didn't recognise you."

Wrinklebury smiled.

"I didn't mean to deceive you," he said, turning to leave the field. "But I saw

that none of you recognised me—partly, I suppose, because none of you expected me to be down here in the middle of term. Goodbye. I hope you'll have a good match next week. Don't forget to put a little more leg twist into your bowling."

Pinkney watched him as he went to the gate. Not until now did he notice that a white motor-car was waiting there under the trees. Wrinklebury mounted the front seat beside the chauffeur, and they drove off.

"Drive round by the front," Wrinklebury ordered. "I want to call at a house opposite the harbour—Pinkney, the shipping agents. You know it, I suppose?"

They drew up opposite a house bearing the double character of office and dwelling. Wrinklebury pulled the bell, and the door was presently opened by a woman, whose untidy appearance betrayed that she had been surprised in the midst of her Saturday cleaning.

At sight of her unexpected visitor she staggered back in astonishment. She saw the motor-car waiting at the kerb, and recognised its white panels and rich red

upholstery. Wrinklebury raised his straw hat, and stood back from the threshold.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Pinkney," he said. "You don't know me, perhaps. Your son didn't when I saw him along at the cricket-ground. Those new cricket boots of his pinch him, and I thought I'd call and ask you for his old ones, which I can take to him, as I am going back that way. Do you mind fetching them for me?"

There was a look of alarm in her wide-staring eyes that were fixed upon him with strange intentness.

"Know you?" she echoed with a curious catch in her breath. She pressed her hand to her side. "I should know you anywhere—anywhere, however much you may have changed. Oh, Mr. Maurice, how kind and thoughtful you are to come to see me—to see your old nurse!"

Wrinklebury saw that her hands were nervously trembling. Her eyes were still fixed upon his face in a sort of adoration, which was extremely embarrassing to him. She had been his nurse; he knew that, well enough. But why should she look

at him in this strange way? He wanted to get away from her—quickly.

"What about the cricket shoes, Mrs. Pinkney?" he urged. "I wish you'd get them for me. He can hardly walk home in those wretched new ones, that are miles too small for his feet."

She seemed to awake as from a dream.

"Eh?" she exclaimed. "Did he—how dared he ask you—*you* to fetch and carry for him? Let his boots pinch him. Let them lame him, and serve him right!"

Now, Wrinklebury had a particular reason for getting hold of those shoes, and he didn't feel like being defeated by a woman's obstinacy.

"It wasn't Arthur who asked me to fetch them," he pursued. "It's an idea of my own. You will oblige me very much if you will fetch them."

"I don't know where they are, Mr. Maurice," she said.

"Please look for them," he urged, "to oblige me."

She glanced back at him in a frightened way as she turned to obey. After an absence of some three or four

minutes she returned, carrying a pair of very much soiled and worn shoes with red indiarubber soles.

"Here they are," she said. And as she passed them to him she caught at his hand, and held it tenderly, lovingly, and for a very much longer time than the occasion seemed to warrant.

"Thank you," he nodded; and, raising his hat, once more he crossed the pavement and dropped the shoes into the body of the car. This time he did not get up beside the chauffeur, but followed the shoes. When he was seated and the car was moving off, he bent down and turned one of the shoes over, exposing the rubber sole.

"H'm!" he muttered. "Seems to me I've made an important discovery. If those are not the same shoes that made the impressions among the geraniums, then I'm a Dutchman!"

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Iddles. "I'd no idea that he was Master Wrinklebury! Fancy his saying his name was Snooks!"

"I knew him at once—as soon as I saw him fielding," said Nubby Newgass. "He's left-handed, you see; and I remember seeing him playing tennis at the Hall that time when we had our school treat in the grounds. That's three years ago, to be sure, and he's altered a lot since then; and he hasn't been much about here in the interval, even in the holidays. Besides, you'd hardly expect a son of Lady Wrinklebury to be dressed in a seedy serge suit like he's wearing now."

"Fellows at public schools wear out their togs like any one else," observed Pinkney; "and he'd hardly come down here dressed in an Eton suit to play cricket with a gang like ours."

"He played a ripping fine game!" commented Bulstrode. "There was a style about his batting that you wouldn't find in any but a man trained at Eton or Harrow. He taught us a lot."

"He may have taught you a lot!" sneered Pinkney; "but I can't say I learnt much myself—not about cricket."

"His modesty was perfectly charming," remarked Newgass. "He behaved like one

of ourselves, instead of putting on side, like most aristocrats."

"You don't know much about aristocrats if you think they're in the habit of putting on side," said Pinkney, who was always ready to speak in defence of good breeding. "You might have seen by his hands, if nothing else, that he was well born." Pinkney looked admiringly at his own carefully kept hands. "Although, of course," he added, "you have to remember that Sir Charles Wrinklebury was only a knight and not a baronet, and that a knighthood isn't necessarily a sign of aristocracy. This Snooks will be plain Mr. Wrinklebury all his life, because the title isn't inherited, like the money and estates."

"Pinkney knows a lot about the aristocracy," Iddles remarked to Bulstrode. "I believe it's the grief of his life that he's no more than the son of an insignificant shipping agent, and that he hasn't been sent to a public school."

"I say! Here comes the Wrinklebury motor-car!" went on Iddles. "Why doesn't Snooks drive it himself, I wonder? I should."

Pinkney was hoping that the car would stop, and that Wrinklebury, who was now seated at the back, would pay him the flattering compliment of speaking to him within view of the people in the villa gardens. Wrinklebury did not order the chauffeur to pull up, however, but turned his attention to a very fine St. Bernard dog that was walking majestically on the other side of the road.

He knew that Arthur Pinkney was near; but, in spite of this knowledge, he left Pinkney's old shoes lying on the floor of the car, proving by this that his intention in securing them from Mrs. Pinkney was in no way connected with his professed desire to offer relief to Arthur, whose newer cricket boots were supposed to be hurting him.

As a matter of fact, Pinkney was not at this moment consciously uncomfortable about the feet, and nothing would have surprised him more than to hear of Wrinklebury's solicitude on his behalf.

"A tremendously swagger car that!" he remarked, as he glanced round to watch its easy progress up the road. "I'd give a lot to have a ride in it."

"Yes," said Newgass, "it must be tremendously nice to drive about in a machine like that. I daresay it cost well over a thousand pounds. It won't take him many minutes to get home to Wrinklebury Hall. There a footman will meet him at the door and take his hat from him, and he'll go up the wide stairs, that are carpeted with velvet, to his own room, where he'll dress for dinner with the help of a valet."

This contrast with his own position and surroundings was almost painful to Arthur Pinkney. His own home was particularly uninviting to him on this Saturday evening. As he pushed open the front door, and hung up his cap in the narrow, gloomy lobby, a voice came down to him:

"Is that you, Arthur?"

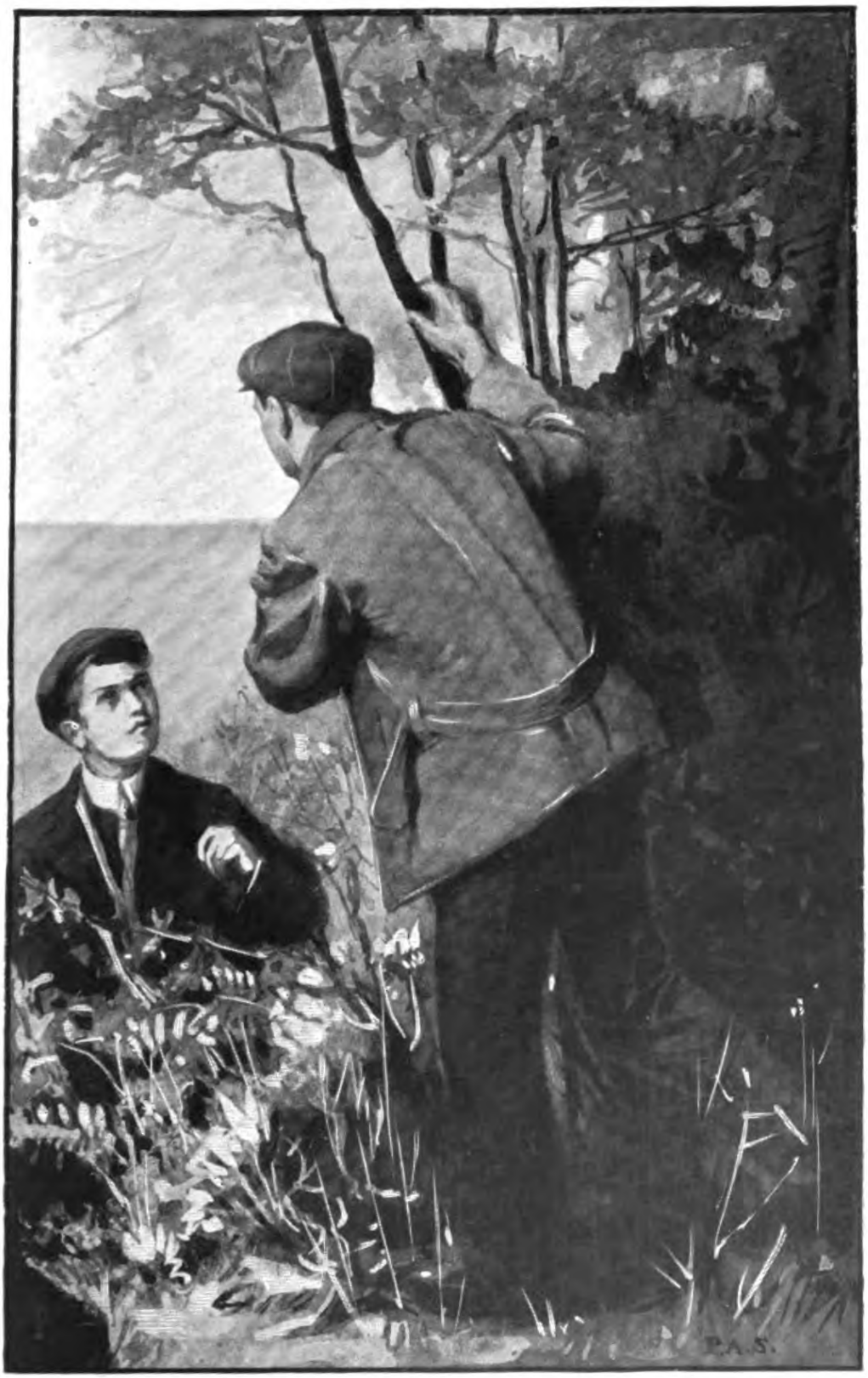
"Yes," he answered; "I want my tea."

"All right; get it ready yourself. You may have an egg if you're hungry."

When Pinkney had finished his tea, he went out again without seeing Mrs. Pinkney, and she had not, therefore, an opportunity to inform him of the recent visit of Maurice Wrinklebury.

He slipped out by the yard door, taking his bicycle with him. He crossed the street and mounted, pedalling slowly through the town and along the esplanade to the road bordering the long line of cliffs. Considering that he had spent the afternoon at cricket, it was remarkable that he should take further exercise. Apparently he was out entirely for pleasure, for he went in no definite direction, and even returned on his traces more than once. But as dusk fell he put on a new activity and rode with determination away from the vicinity of the town, first along the high-road, past the lodge gates of Wrinklebury Hall, and then eastward by unfrequented lanes. When dusk deepened into darkness he still held on, not pausing even to light his lamp, until he came out upon a wide stretch of wild moorland.

Here he drew up, and stood for a while looking around in all directions, as it seemed to assure himself that he was not seen, when he lifted his bicycle across an intervening bank and laid it upon its side within a few yards of a solitary fir-tree.



"THE MAN EMERGED FROM HIS HIDING-PLACE."

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There he left it, and strode quickly over the rough ground to a clump of furze and bracken, through which he forced his way. In its midst he halted, waited for a while, and then sounded a long, low whistle, as of a curlew's cry. He listened for an expected response, and presently there was a rustling movement among the bushes, and a man's voice called out:

"Right-oh! I'm here. Been waitin' for you this half-hour past."

The man emerged from his hiding-place. Even in the darkness Tony Mumford, had he been present, would have recognised him as the stranger whom he had seen some evenings earlier talking with Pinkney on the quay, and who had gone out with Pinkney in the boat, presumably for a night's fishing.

"Kept you waiting, I daresay," returned Pinkney. "But it was too light for me to come sooner than this. I was afraid of being seen."

"Glad to know you've got so much caution," the man nodded, sitting down among the bracken and taking a tobacco pouch and some cigarette papers from his

jacket pocket. "'Twouldn't do for either of us to be watched. What do you want to see me for?"

Pinkney seated himself beside him, and produced a cigarette case, which he opened.

"Have one of these, Jerry," he invited; and then, when they had both lighted up, he went on: "I'm getting fearfully nervous, Jerry. Young Wrinklebury has come down to the Hall, and has been spying round like a regular detective. He's got hold of that penknife that we opened the window with. He even showed it to me, and asked me if I happened to know who it belonged to. I was in no end of a funk, but fortunately I had presence of mind to tell him it was Tony Mumford's, which it was before I sneaked it."

Jerry looked at the glowing end of his cigarette.

"What in thunder made you let him speak to you?" he asked angrily. "Didn't I caution you? Didn't I tell you not to let a soul from the Hall come near you—much less have a word with you? Spyin' round like a detective, is he? I thought he

was safe at school. What else has he found out?"

Pinkney was silent for some moments. Presently he said:

"You know that gold cup with the coat of arms on it—the little one shaped like an eggcup?"

"What about it?" questioned Jerry. "Course I know it!"

"Well," said Pinkney, "I want you to let me have it. It's a challenge cup, won by young Wrinklebury in a foot race at Eton. He only holds it for a year, and it belongs to the College, unless he wins it again next time. He's fearfully upset about losing it, and I want to send it back to him—anonymously."

"You want——? Are you mad?" cried Jerry. "Have you gone clean off your head? How do you think you're going to send it back to him?"

"Oh, I shouldn't send it to Wrinklebury Hall," returned Pinkney. "I should send it to him at Eton—by registered post."

"Post?" repeated Jerry. "Well, I did think you was up to a thing or two. But now I see you're no more than a kiddy,

after all! Why, if you want to get fairly dropped on there isn't a surer way possible than the one you're suggesting. Lor', what a lovely mess you'd make of things if I wasn't your pal to keep you from giving yourself clean away! And is that what you wanted to see me for?"

"Not exactly," Pinkney answered. "What I want most of all is some money."

"Ah, now you're talking sense!" Jerry smiled. "Yes, you shall have all I can spare, for I haven't disposed of the swag yet. Those diamond things have got to be taken from their settings and put into the proper market. They can't be sold to any stray buyer. It's different with the plate. That has all been melted down, and I've got a trifle on account. I had a fancy you'd want a bit of money yourself to go on with. Five quid will do you for the present, eh?"

"Can't you make it ten?" urged Pinkney.

"Come," returned Jerry, in a coaxing tone, "I'm sure you don't want to break me." He thrust his hand into his hip

pocket, and brought forth some coins and counted them. "There's no more than nine here," he said. "I'll give you seven, leaving two for myself, and that's fair. Here you are, and take care you don't show yourself too flush of money by breaking out into extravagance. Better by far you should make out you're hard up. It isn't a bad plan to borrow a sixpence here and there among your pals to put them off the scent."

Pinkney pocketed the seven sovereigns, and was about to move away.

"Wait a bit." Jerry detained him. "There's that bit in the newspaper about the footprints. You were a born booby to come out that night in shoes with ribbed soles. Don't you see your error?"

Pinkney had not forgotten Maurice Wrinklebury's subtle remarks about cricket shoes. These remarks, indeed, had haunted him recurrently ever since the match. But he had comforted himself with the reflection that Wrinklebury had been successfully put off the scent.

"Yes," he replied, "I see my error now, but I never thought of it until I read the

newspaper reference to the footprints. Of course, I wore them because I could walk silently in them."

"Well," resumed Jerry, "there's no great harm done so long as the police can't track you by the marks. You've destroyed the shoes, haven't you?"

Pinkney dropped his cigarette, and crushed it with his foot.

"No," he answered hesitatingly, "I've not destroyed them. I've left them at home in the cupboard where all the boots and shoes are kept."

"Good glory!" cried Jerry excitedly. "You don't mean it? Go back at once—quick as you can. Don't lose a minute. Get hold of 'em at any cost and burn 'em; cut 'em in pieces, do anything—anything—but get them out of the way! Quick! don't you wait here another minute."

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT THE MOTOR SMASH REVEALED

EVEN before Arthur Pinkney, having finished his tea, had taken out his bicycle to ride forth on his journey to meet his accomplice, Maurice Wrinklebury had arrived home at the Hall. He did not alight, as Nubby Newgass conjectured he would do, in front of the great Gothic entrance door, but remained in the car, to be driven round to the stable-yard. This he did on the plea that he desired to see how his horses and dogs were getting on.

Before he visited the kennels or the stables, however, there was something else that he wanted to do, and that quite privately. He had bought an evening newspaper in the town to ascertain the scores of a cricket match at Lord's in which he was particularly interested, and,

having done with the newspaper, he had spread it out on the seat of the car, and used it as a wrapping for Pinkney's old pair of shoes.

Telling the chauffeur that he might want the car again later in the evening, he took the parcel under his arm, and strolled with it through the kitchen garden and by the shrubbery to the side of the house in which the library windows were situated. He paused on the pathway, looking down at the geraniums, now in full bloom of scarlet and pink and white, in front of the window. Among the geraniums there were three tin biscuit boxes, looking strangely incongruous in the midst of the flowers. He stepped to the nearest of these and carefully lifted it. On the soil which had been covered and protected by the tin box he saw the impression of a foot. It was not very distinct, for the soil was now dry ; but he could clearly discern the deep impression made by the heel and the outline of the sole, which was ribbed and cross-ribbed, with a groove around the outer margin. This impression had been made by the wearer's left foot, and the

boot or shoe that had made it was worn down at the side of the heel.

"I made sure I was not far wrong," Wrinklebury meditated; and he stepped back to the path, opened his parcel, and took from it Pinkney's left shoe, turning it sole uppermost. "Yes," he nodded. "There's the same herringbone pattern, the same line round the edge, the same worn-down heel."

Again he stepped upon the flower-bed, and now he held the shoe above the foot-mark, and very gently lowered it until it touched the ground. It fitted as exactly into the mark as a seal fits into the impression it has stamped in sealing-wax.

"This ought to be evidence enough to satisfy any jury," he decided. "It's rather a mean thing to do, but I believe it's my duty to inform the police. It's hard lines on Pinkney. He's a decent chap, in a way. I shouldn't have thought him capable of sinking so low as to commit a burglary, and yet it looks as if he had done. I hope to goodness he'll be able to explain the thing away, but it's long odds against him, and I don't see how he's going to account

for his presence here that night. Pshaw! I've a jolly good mind to drop the shoes into the horse pond and say nothing about them. But that, after all, would be like compounding a felony."

He replaced the biscuit-box, and wrapped up his now doubly-important parcel anew. There were other footprints, which he had previously examined in company with Tony Mumford and the superintendent of police; but they were too much overtrodden to be of any real value as evidence, and he did not pay any regard to them now.

He went back to the stable-yard. The chauffeur was still there, busy dusting down the motor-car. Wrinklebury put his parcel under one of the seats.

"See that nobody touches that parcel, George," he ordered. "I shall want you to drive me to the town again directly after dinner."

He went the round of the kennels and the stables, spending so considerable a time with each dog and horse that he was in danger of being late for dinner, and was obliged to dress very hastily.

The Vicar, who was a talkative old Etonian, and an equally garrulous retired naval officer, were among the guests at dinner, and the conversation drifted into political argument and school anecdote, and never approached the subject of the recent burglary. Maurice Wrinklebury had, therefore, no occasion to refer to his unofficial investigations in connection with the robbery. He did not really wish to speak of them, considering that his discoveries were as yet hardly ripe for general discussion. Besides, he shrank from introducing the name of Arthur Pinkney, who, after all, might possibly be in a position to vindicate himself and prove, in spite of suspicious appearances, that he was entirely innocent of any participation in the crime.

After dinner, Wrinklebury went alone into the library for one or two books that he wished to take back with him to Eton, and to write a note to his tailor, enclosing a cheque which Lady Wrinklebury had drawn for the payment of a long-standing account. By this time the motor-car was at the door, and he went out to it, wearing

a heavy overcoat above his evening clothes.

"I want to go to three places, George," he said to the chauffeur—"the yacht club, Mumford's, and the police-station. Better go to the police-station first. No; I won't drive in front; it's chilly, and I'm tired. I'll sit at the back, and have a snooze. Is my parcel all right? Oh, yes; I see it."

He got in and stretched his legs along the seat, covering them with the rug.

The car went slowly down the avenue and out by the lodge gates into the main road, that was dark with overhanging trees. The great front lamps of the car shot forth long, piercing shafts of light that brought weird, moving shadows to the roadsides, and made the stout trunks of the beeches stand out like marble pillars amid the green foliage. A mile or so beyond the Wrinklebury estate George turned sharply into a narrow by-road that led by a near way towards the town, and here he increased the speed.

A carriage approached from the opposite direction. It was the Vicar's brougham on its way to the Hall. George sounded

his horn and gave room. The lane was not too narrow for the two vehicles to pass, and he did not slacken pace. But just as the carriage was about to pass, a bicyclist emerged from its rear, riding at breakneck speed and without a light, apparently intent upon getting in advance of the brougham. At the risk of startling the Vicar's horse, George again sounded his horn. He steered to the side to avoid a collision with the reckless cyclist, but in his sudden alarm he must have miscalculated the pace at which the motor-car was travelling, and over-estimated the degree of steerage necessary to give space for the bicycle, for his car left the level of the road for the uneven grass, and plunged down the slope into the ditch, coming with fearful impact against the farther bank.

The coachman and the cyclist heard the crash, and both drew up. The coachman did so immediately, the cyclist after he had gone some thirty yards, when he alighted and walked back.

"Anybody hurt?" he questioned excitedly of the coachman, who had got

down from his box and taken hold of one of the side lamps of the brougham. "It's the Hall motor-car, isn't it?"

"Yes," the coachman responded, holding the lamp aloft. "It's your fault for not carrying a light. Who are you? Eh? Why, you're young Pinkney!"

Pinkney acknowledged his identity, and followed the coachman to the motor-car, which was now lying across the ditch, the machinery still working spasmodically. Then the panting of the petrol engine ceased, and he saw the chauffeur painfully crawling away from the front of the car.

"Are you hurt, George?" cried the Vicar's coachman.

"Only barked my shins a bit," ruefully replied the chauffeur as he leaned over to inspect the damage done to the gear. Mr. Maurice isn't hurt, is he? Look in the car. He was asleep."

Pinkney strode to the back of the motor. As he did so his foot kicked against a newspaper parcel, and by the coachman's light he saw that the wrapping had broken open and that it contained a pair of shoes. One quick, astonished glance was enough to show him that the shoes were his own—

the same pair that he was even now hastening home to destroy. Without questioning how they came to be here, he snatched them up from the ground and dropped them into the ditch, where he knew that he could presently find them again.

The coachman was now holding his lamp within the car. Its light shone upon the crimson upholstery, but there was no sign of Maurice Wrinklebury.

"He ain't here!" he called excitedly. "He's been thrown out!"

Pinkney saw something white gleaming at the far side of the ditch, and he leaped across.

"Fetch your lamp! Quick!" he cried. "Mr. Wrinklebury's here—he's hurt!"

The gleam of white that he had seen was Maurice Wrinklebury's shirt-front. Maurice Wrinklebury himself was lying on his back in a bed of nettles. Pinkney bent over him. The coachman and George were quickly at his side. By the lamplight they saw that the injured youth's head was resting against the root of a tree, and that his face and neck and collar were splashed with blood.

CHAPTER IX

AFTER THE ACCIDENT

THE chauffeur looked with nervous alarm upon the bloodstained face of his young master.

"Thank the Lord he isn't killed!" he said with a sigh of intense relief. "Here, you with the bicycle," he ordered Arthur Pinkney, "ride off for a doctor, will you? Bring him here. Dr. Crump is the nearest, if he's at home—or Dr. Welby. Either'll do."

Pinkney hesitated. He was thinking of the incriminating shoes that he had hidden in the ditch, only a few yards away from this spot. Dared he leave them there, perhaps to be found by one of these two men who were beside him? He had hidden them apart from the newspaper that had enwrapped them, and they could

"RIDE OFF FOR A DOCTOR, WILL YOU?"

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not easily be found unless some one deliberately searched for them. Yet for him so much depended upon their being destroyed or otherwise put for ever out of the way, so that there could no longer be the slightest danger of their being produced in evidence against him. How had they come to be here? He felt certain that they had been flung from the car at the moment of the accident; and if this were so, then Maurice Wrinklebury must surely have come into possession of them, and must therefore already have connected him, Pinkney, with the burglary!

As he saw Wrinklebury lying bleeding and apparently unconscious where he had fallen, Pinkney's pulses beat violently, with an evil satisfaction, and he was conscious of hoping that the accident would prove to be even more serious in its consequences to Maurice Wrinklebury than it seemed to be just now. He did not mean to hurry himself in his search for a doctor. Every moment's delay was obviously to his own advantage.

"What are you waiting for?" the coachman questioned him gruffly. "Go for the

doctor, can't you? And you'd best light up that bicycle lamp of yours."

"Don't you want my help to lift him on to the grass?" Pinkney demurred.

But already the coachman and George had caught hold of Wrinklebury, and were tenderly raising him from his cramped position in the ditch.

Pinkney saw that it was impossible now for him to search for the shoes and carry them off with him. He therefore went back to his bicycle, lighted his lamp, and rode off in the direction of the town.

He had hardly started when in the darkness he saw a woman coming along the road towards him. She wore a long dark cloak, and was walking quickly.

"There's been a motor smash along the road there," he called out to her as he passed her without slowing down. "They want help. Some one's hurt."

The woman stopped and looked after him as he rode on.

"That's Arthur, for sure!" she exclaimed in amazemeent. "What's he doing along here, I wonder? And what's that he said about a motor smash and somebody being hurt? Gracious me!"

She turned and went on. Among the trees in advance of her she presently saw the lights of the brougham and one of the brighter lights of the motor car, and between them a moving light, which seemed to be held by a man bending over something at the side of the road. She quickened her steps almost to a run as she caught sight of the white motor-car on the grassy slope of the ditch. She recognised it and hurried onward, agitated with a dreadful fear that some one—perhaps even Maurice Wrinklebury, with whom she had spoken only a few hours earlier—might be fatally injured. Mrs. Pinkney had a horror of motor-cars.

"What's happened? Who's hurt?" she cried, rushing up to the two men who were now bending over Maurice Wrinklebury. She pushed her way in between them, and stared aghast into the blood-stained face with its ominous smears of blood and its closed eyes. She gave a little scream, and went down on her knees.

"Heaven help him!" she cried. "It's Maurice—Maurice!"

"No use your exciting yourself that

ways, missis," said the Vicar's coachman. "He ain't killed."

"Where is he hurt?" she implored to know, drawing up her cuffs. She put her hands under Wrinklebury's neck. "I am a nurse," she said; "but you must send for a doctor as well. Ah! he's only fainted. See! he opens his eyes! Where was it that he fell, on the hard road here?"

"No, in the ditch—in the bed of stinging nettles there," explained the chauffeur, whose hands were badly stung. "'Twas a soft enough place, and I reckon no bones are broken; but he've got a ugly wound back of the head, where it struck the root of the tree. That's where all the blood be coming from."

"Turn him over, if you can," Mrs. Pinkney instructed, "or lift him a bit, so that I can see the extent of the injury."

They raised him to a sitting posture. The coachman held the light while the woman carefully examined the wound.

"Ah!" she nodded in extreme relief. "I see it is only a scalp wound. I don't think it could have been the tree he struck. That would surely have made a worse

injury than this, and he'd have been stunned, if not killed outright. He may have knocked against some part of the car before he actually fell."

While she spoke she was skilfully drawing the edges of the lacerated skin together, and now she took Wrinklebury's handkerchief from his sleeve and stanched the blood with it.

"Do you think we could get him into the carriage?" she questioned, turning to the coachman. "The sooner we get him home the better. I will go with him to look after him. I was on my way to the Hall to see Lady Wrinklebury's maid."

Wrinklebury was clearly conscious of what was going on about him.

"I think I can get in if you'll help me to my feet," he said. "I've had a nasty shaking, and my head's sore. George isn't badly hurt, is he?"

"No, sir," George himself promptly answered. "There ain't much harm done, sir, except that some of the gear has got bent and the car's in the ditch. It'll take some trouble to get her out."

"I don't care what has happened to the

car so long as no bones are broken," Wrinklebury said. He was standing now, and trying to discover how far he was hurt. They helped him into the brougham. "I'm jolly well bruised about the body," he added as he seated himself, "and I believe I've sprained my left wrist, which is hard lines, for it'll put a sure stopper on my bowling for the rest of the season. That's the worst of the whole accident. It makes me sorry I ever came down here."

Mrs. Pinkney got in beside him, and the coachman mounted and took the reins.

"It's awfully kind of you to help me this way, Mrs. Pinkney," Wrinklebury remarked when the horse had started at an even trot. "You see, I know you all right, so I can't be very badly hurt. I knew you as soon as I heard you speak."

"I am glad of that," she responded, holding the handkerchief at the back of his head, "very glad indeed. I shouldn't like you not to know me. But please don't thank me, Mr. Maurice. Believe me, there's nothing in the world that I'd rather do than be of service to you. You're a great deal more to me than you think."

He gripped his sprained wrist as if it pained him.

"Why do you say such a thing as that?" he asked after a long pause. "I don't understand. I've never done anything for you—never. And I dare say I gave you heaps of trouble when I was a squalling kiddie and you were my nurse. Why do you say you want to be of service to me?"

"Hush!" She laid a cautioning hand on his knee. "You mustn't talk. You must keep very quiet until the doctor has seen you. Lean back against my arm, and rest your head."

"It's only my wrist that's hurting me," he said. "My head's only scratched. Why should I be more to you than I think I am?"

"I cannot tell you—not now," Mrs. Pinkney returned in a mysterious whisper. "It's a secret—an ugly and shameful secret, and it would do you no good to know. The thing has gone too far now."

"I believe I can guess what it is," Wrinklebury went on, apparently not at all disposed to rest his head. He was thinking of Arthur Pinkney's connection

with the burglary, and conjecturing that Mrs. Pinkney's present kindly solicitude towards him was due to her desire that he should cease to try to discover and make public incriminating evidence against her son. "Your secret isn't so very profound," he resumed. "It's got to do with that pair of old cricket shoes that I got from you to-day. I got them under false pretences, Mrs. Pinkney. I didn't want them to take them to Arthur. He didn't need them. I suppose I was a rotter for deceiving you as I did. But I haven't told any one yet why I wanted them and what I did with them. I've kept it all to myself so far."

Mrs. Pinkney glanced aside at him curiously by the reflected light of the carriage lamps.

"Really, Mr. Maurice, I—I don't know what you are talking about," she interrupted. "I hope your brain isn't seriously affected by your accident. What do you mean?"

He moved uneasily, and looked across at the empty seat in front of him, and then down on the floor.

"Oh, my brain's all right," he assured her. "I've just remembered that I've left a parcel in the motor-car. I hope George will look after it. I don't want it to get into anybody else's hands." He paused. "Look here, Mrs. Pinkney," he said, "I hate doing anything underhand, and I think I ought to tell you that when we had the little mishap just now I was on my way to the police-station to give information against your son. Perhaps the accident was providential; because if it hadn't happened, it's a dead certainty that Arthur would have been arrested and sent into penal servitude. The law's awfully severe on burglars, you know."

Mrs. Pinkney had drawn back into the corner of the carriage, and was staring at him with wild, astonished eyes.

"What?" she cried. "What? Burglary? Do you mean to tell me that he—that Arthur had anything to do with the burglary at the Hall. Oh, it is impossible—impossible!" She buried her trembling fingers in her hair, and was breathing deeply, agitatedly.

"Well, you see," explained Wrinklebury,

"there isn't a bit of doubt that those shoes of his fit exactly into the footmarks he left on the ground outside the library window on the night of the crime."

She leaned forward again now, almost eagerly.

"That was on Tuesday night," she said. "Yes, I remember now. He was out very late. I don't know at what time he came home—not until long after midnight. And he refused to tell me where he had been when I questioned him in the morning. Burglary! Heaven help me! And at Wrinklebury Hall, of all places in the world! Oh, if he only knew!"

"He can't very well help knowing, I should think," Wrinklebury smiled. "It was a planned affair. He and his accomplice must have been planning it for weeks."

"And who is his accomplice?" Mrs. Pinkney questioned. To Wrinklebury's surprise she did not seem now to disbelieve in the probability of her boy's guilt.

"That I don't know," Wrinklebury answered. "Neither do the police. Of

course, Mrs. Pinkney, I haven't exactly proved that Arthur committed the crime, and nobody except myself suspects him. But, you see—— No, I can't tell you. I'm not going to give you pain by telling you why I suspect him or how far I have gone. I'll chuck the whole business. I'll say nothing about it to anybody. And when I get the shoes again—they're in the car—I'll do away with them, so that they'll never be found and brought up in evidence against him. It's only because there was a gold challenge cup of mine among the things that were stolen that I personally care. I haven't won it outright, and it belongs to the College, you see. As for the diamonds and things, they were insured against burglary, and they can be replaced. If I were to follow up the thing, it would be certain ruin for your son."

"My son?" Mrs. Pinkney repeated the words contemptuously. "Don't call him that. He is no son of mine. Listen! we are at the lodge gates now, and there is very little time. Listen!"

"No son of yours, Mrs. Pinkney?" interrupted Wrinklebury. "Isn't he? I

didn't know. That explains why you seem to be taking this business so coolly—as if you didn't greatly care whether he was put into prison or not."

"Nor do I," she declared. "You can do as you like against him for all I care, and in a convict prison he would be well out of my way."

"I suppose he's your nephew?" Wrinklebury inquired; "but even a nephew deserves some consideration."

She shook her head, and he felt her hand trembling nervously at the back of his neck.

"No," she answered, earnestly watching his face. "He is the son of Lady Wrinklebury."

"What?" The boy beside her started violently, as if he had been shot. "The son of Lady Wrinklebury—my brother? Are you mad to tell me such a preposterous lie?"

"Lie?" she echoed with a light laugh. "I am telling you no lie, but the very truth. And now—now that I have told you so much, I may as well tell you all. It's time that you should know it; you are

old enough to understand. No, he whom you know as Arthur Pinkney is not your brother; he is the son of Sir Charles and Lady Wrinklebury, which you who think yourself so are not. You and he are of the same age. I nursed you both when you were babies, and—Heaven forgive me—I secretly made an exchange, passing you off in his place. Every one has believed you to be the son of Lady Wrinklebury. She herself believes it, but your mother now sits beside you. I am she. You are my son."

Wrinklebury turned upon her with flashing, indignant eyes.

"You lie!" he cried vehemently. "It is an infamous lie!"

"Hush!" she cautioned him. "Hush—my son—the carriage is stopping. We are at the door of your home."

CHAPTER X

MRS. PINKNEY'S DECEPTION

HER son? This woman's son? The mere thought of such a thing filled Maurice Wrinklebury with hot resentment. Was it credible—could it be even possible?—that she had, indeed, been speaking the truth when she averred that she and not Lady Wrinklebury was his mother? No, no! it was ridiculous. Yet what evil purpose could she be seeking to achieve in saying such an unbelievable thing? He felt almost ready to strike her, to compel her to acknowledge that she was lying. But already the door of the Vicar's brougham had been opened, and servants were crowding about, alarmed at hearing of the motor accident, and he could not question Mrs. Pinkney now. His brain reeled as he crossed the threshold. He

staggered, and would have fallen but that Mrs. Pinkney caught him, and half led, half dragged him to the cushioned settee in an alcove of the oak-panelled hall.

"He is badly hurt," she explained, glancing round at the Vicar and Lady Wrinklebury, who hastened out from the billiard-room. "He must be got upstairs to bed. A doctor has been sent for, and will be here very soon." Rapidly, almost incoherently, she told what she knew of the accident. "It is a miracle he is not fatally injured," she concluded.

Lady Wrinklebury went up to the boy, alarmed and agitated, and was about to put her arms round him when he shrank back from her touch. If he was not her son, he dared not let her embrace him, dared not even meet the tender, sympathetic appeal in her beautiful eyes. She had been deceived, cruelly, terribly deceived during all these years of his life; she had lavished all a mother's affection upon him, and it would be wrong to accept that love and sympathy any longer. Wrinklebury's sense of honour utterly refused to yield to such falsity, even while he believed no

word of what he had just been told. To escape the embarrassing situation into which he had so suddenly been flung, he bent his head in his hands as if he were suffering great pain. He was suffering indeed, but the pain was mental rather than physical.

"It is good of you to have helped him home, Nurse Pinkney," Lady Wrinklebury declared. "How very fortunate it is that you were near!"

"I thought I might be of use until the doctor comes," Mrs. Pinkney responded. "He—Master Maurice—is not seriously injured. There is no danger, I believe. He may require nursing for a few days. Perhaps until a more experienced nurse can be engaged, your ladyship would allow me to attend to him?"

"Certainly," nodded Lady Wrinklebury in agreement of the seemingly unselfish proposal.

Late that night, when the doctor had been, Mrs. Pinkney sat at Maurice Wrinklebury's bedside. He had been asleep, but his sleep had been restless, and now he lay with eyes wide

open, staring perplexedly at the woman who with one blow had brought his hopes and happiness to irretrievable ruin.

"If what you said in the carriage is true," he murmured in a strained, hollow voice, "I have no right to be here. I must go away. I can never return to Eton or go up to Oxford. My whole life is a complete wreck." He drew a deep, painful breath. "I hate you!" he cried. "I hate you!"

She smiled at him almost maliciously.

"You don't appear to be grateful for all that I have done for you," she suggested, leaning towards him confidentially. "And when you talk of going away from here and refusing to return to Eton, you are talking sheer nonsense. Just think a bit what it means to you! Instead of wrecking your life I have actually made it. I have set you on your feet. If I had brought you up as my own son—as the son of a poor and ignorant shipping agent—you would have been no better than the Arthur Pinkney whom you suspect of being a low criminal and the associate of thieves. I should have brought you up as I have

brought him; not so well, perhaps, for with all his faults he has at least inherited a natural refinement and aristocratic instincts. But instead I made it possible for you to be nurtured in luxury and to be educated as a gentleman. Instead of hating me, as you say you do, you ought to be exceedingly grateful for what I have done for you."

Maurice shook his head.

"You make a tremendous mistake if you fancy I could be grateful to any one who had committed such a hideous crime," he retorted proudly. "But I will tell you straight, Mrs. Pinkney, I simply don't believe you. I cannot believe you, and I fail to understand what on earth you can hope to gain by making such a rotten, lying statement as you made to me in the brougham, or how any woman could demean herself as you have done by accusing yourself of such a frightful deception."

She tossed her head.

"Deception, yes," she responded; "but as Heaven is my witness I declare to you that it is no lie," she solemnly avowed. "I was tempted. The exchange was easily

done. I did it for your good. You and Arthur were babies together, and babies are often very much alike. You two were so much alike that it was hard to tell you apart. It was only a matter of making an exchange."

He drew back from her with a gasp.

"It was a wicked, wicked crime!" he declared accusingly.

"Oh, I can understand that the thing is a great surprise to you," she resumed. "I never really meant that you should be told. But I was beginning to feel a bit disappointed in not receiving any reward or recognition, and so I confessed to you. No one else knows or even suspects—neither my husband nor Arthur—and I don't see why they ever should. You and I can keep the secret together, and everything will go on as before. Only——"

"What?" he cried agitatedly. "You dare to suggest that I—*I* should be a party to your fraud—that I should allow Lady Wrinklebury still to believe that she is my mother?"

"I see that you perfectly well understand the situation," nodded Mrs. Pinkney. "Do you agree to stand by my side?"

CHAPTER XI

A DIFFICULT SITUATION

"Do you agree to stand by my side?" Mrs. Pinkney repeated. She regarded him steadily, waiting for his answer.

Maurice Wrinklebury slowly shook his head.

"Do you realise that you are asking me to commit a crime?" he asked sadly. "Do you know that you are asking me to go on living a most awful lie? Before to-night, when I never even dreamed that I was a usurper—that I was occupying a place that rightly belonged to another—I was content, I was happy. I had hopes that I was on the way to being a good and successful man, an honour to her whom I believed to be my mother. But now that you tell me that I have no claim to the position that I've been brought up

to, of course I must abandon it. There's no help for it. How could I do otherwise? It's ridiculous your asking me to stay on, acting falsely. So far as I can remember, I have never told a falsehood—not a real, serious one. I may have misrepresented things; but my mother—I mean Lady Wrinklebury—always taught me to be truthful. And at Eton we despise a fellow who tells lies or acts the sneak——"

He broke off, looking at her with contempt. She was silent.

"You must see for yourself," he went on presently, "how utterly impossible it would be for me to forgive what you have done, much less to stand by your side and be a party to your infamous fraud. I'd rather starve. I think I'd rather die. It would have been better for me, indeed, if I'd been killed outright in the motor accident. I can't bear to look at you. I hate you as I've never thought it possible one person could hate another!"

Mrs. Pinkney was clasping and unclasping her fingers nervously. Apparently she had not foreseen this obstinate opposition.

"You will alter your mind when you come to consider what the consequences will be if you betray my secret," she averred. "Your fine ideas of honour and all that sort of thing will fall to pieces when you realise your own advantage. What would you gain if you abandoned this beautiful home that I've put you into? And do you suppose that Lady Wrinklebury would agree at this time of day to take back the other one in your place? She loves you, and she has taught you to be a gentleman. But the other—the one that you have supplanted—well, you know what he is. He's a low, cunning sneak. He has been badly brought up; he has taken to evil ways. You yourself have said that you are ready to accuse him of burglary, and I haven't the slightest doubt that you could prove it against him."

"You've done Pinkney a greater wrong even than you've done me," Maurice interrupted. "If he has gone wrong, it's all due to your bad influence. He'd have been all right if you had let him alone to be brought up as a gentleman."

"That is possible," admitted Mrs. Pink-

ney. "But, you see, he hasn't been brought up as a gentleman, and it's too late to alter him. If you were to take it into your head to tell the ugly truth, do you suppose for a moment that he would be fit to occupy your place—as he would do? Better by far let him sink. You have proof that he committed the burglary. Clearly it is your duty to make that proof public. You must inform the police, and let him be charged and convicted, and sent to prison out of our way. He is our greatest danger, Maurice, and the danger from him is increasing with every day."

Maurice Wrinklebury looked up then, and met the woman's cunning glance.

"Do you mean that he is beginning to suspect who and what he is?" he questioned.

She shook her head.

"Oh, no!" she answered; "neither he nor any one else suspects that he is not —my son. No"—she leaned forward— "what I mean is that, as he grows older, he is growing day by day more like his father—like Sir Charles Wrinklebury; while you—I believe your eyes are very like mine."

"I hope they are not anything like so cunning and deceitful," retorted Wrinklebury.

"Your course is simple," resumed Mrs. Pinkney; "and there is no earthly reason why you should not still hope to be a good and successful man. You have every chance. You can return to Eton and go up to Oxford, just as has been planned; you can continue to enjoy this life of luxury in which you have been reared. And as for him that bears your name, I repeat, let him sink! Let him sink!"

Again Maurice Wrinklebury shook his head, this time with greater determination.

"No, no!" he declared resolutely. "I shall never do that. Let him sink, you say? Rob him still further of what is his lawful and natural right? I could not. I will not. And even if I were absolutely certain that he is guilty of the burglary, I should not now bear witness against him. It is yours and not his fault that he is the associate of thieves, and that his honour is weakened. But, in any case, he is yet young enough to be reclaimed, and I will reclaim him. I will do all that

I can for him. I shall spend the rest of my life in trying to pay him back for the injury that I have innocently and unconsciously done him."

"Hush!" Mrs. Pinkney whispered, laying her hand suddenly upon him. "You must rest; you must not talk. Some one is coming. I hear footsteps."

It was Lady Wrinklebury, who silently entered the room, wearing a beautiful blue silk dressing-gown. She approached him. At sight of her, Maurice covered his face with his two hands. He felt that he dared not look at her and keep silent concerning Mrs. Pinkney's awful revelation. And how could he tell her, and plunge her into an abyss of unspeakable horror and despair?

"How is he now, Pinkney?" Lady Wrinklebury asked, glancing at him tenderly.

Mrs. Pinkney had risen, and now drew her ladyship away from the bedside.

"He is very restless, my lady," she answered in a low voice; "and he has been a little delirious—talking at random and most incoherently. I am afraid his head

has been hurt more seriously than the doctor supposed."

"My poor boy!" murmured Lady Wrinklebury, glancing at him with motherly compassion. "Perhaps I had better telephone to Dr. Welby to come back. He is sending a trained nurse from the hospital. I expect her here within another hour."

"That was hardly necessary," observed Mrs. Pinkney. "I am sure, my lady, that no hospital nurse could possibly take greater care of him than I shall, and I think he would rather have me than a total stranger."

"Mother! Mother!" moaned Maurice.

Lady Wrinklebury was instantly at his side. She caught at his outstretched hand.

"Send Mrs. Pinkney away," he urged. "I don't like her. Do you know what she says? She says that I am not your son!"

Mrs. Pinkney staggered back at this threatened revelation of her long-kept secret. She glared at him indignantly, but she quickly composed herself to say, with subtle cunning:

"Listen, my lady. His mind is wan-

dering again. He is delirious. Yes, I think it would be well if you would telephone for the doctor."

And Lady Wrinklebury, believing what the woman said, went abruptly from the room.

CHAPTER XII

A PERPLEXING PROBLEM

"HELLO, Tony! So they released you, did they?" exclaimed Nubby Newgass, meeting Mumford on the way to school on the following Monday morning. "We all agreed that they couldn't have the face to keep you long in prison on a diet of bread and water."

Tony Mumford smiled.

"Released me? Prison?" he returned, very much amused. "I've never been in prison. I've never even had the privilege of looking inside a cell."

"But you were arrested," pursued Nubby, "for the Wrinklebury burglary. We thought it quite dramatic."

"Yes, I had that exciting experience," Tony admitted. "But Lady Wrinklebury and Mr. Superintendent Rabbidge made a

little mistake. They were put up to it by my friend Captain Quiller, who chose that way of getting me to help in elucidating the mystery, as the newspapers say. I've had a high old time since I saw you last."

"I made sure the police had found a mare's nest," nodded Newgass. "Where have you been? You've not been living at home, I know, for I called for you; so did Iddles, and we were told that you'd gone away."

"I've been living with Captain Quiller," Tony explained; "and you can have no idea what a ripping fine place that villa is up there on the hill. His garden is all planted out with tropical trees and flowers, the same as a South Sea island. You might fancy it was a coral island, only there's no lagoon. It's an idea he has, since it was in the Pacific that he made his fortune pearl fishing. He told me heaps about that part of the world. There's hardly a group of islands in the South Seas where he hasn't lived; and he's tatooed no end, I believe, but I've only seen the tail of the mermaid on his left arm, which he

uncovered by accident once when he was trying to capture a wasp that had crawled up his sleeve."

"Did he nab the wasp?" asked Nubby.

"Yes," nodded Tony, "before it got higher than the mermaid's tail, and he let it go without ever hurting a wing. I've wished ever since that the wasp had gone up as far as his elbow, because then I should have seen what the mermaid was doing. If he was poor, which he certainly isn't, he might earn lots of money by exhibiting his tatooing at a halfpenny a time."

"You seem to have altered your opinion of Captain Quiller," said Nubby. "You supposed that it was him that locked you up in the schooner's cabin. Pinkney even declared that if you were guilty of the burglary, then Quiller was your accomplice."

Tony did not respond for some moments.

"It doesn't seem very likely that he'd have anything to do with a thing of that sort, seeing that he's Lady Wrinklebury's own brother," he presently responded.

"Why, he's a born gentleman, and was educated at Eton. He taught me more Latin in half an hour than Mr. Grummel could teach in a month."

"Oh!" said Nubby, in surprise. "Lady Wrinklebury's brother, is he? I didn't know. Then I suppose you've been helping him to investigate the burglary business? Having seen the burglars' booty when it was aboard the *Nancy*, you were an important witness."

Tony nodded.

"Yes. We've found out a lot, but I'm not expected to tell any one. There's Pinkney! Just the man I wanted to have a jaw with."

Pinkney was crossing the road, with his school books under his arm. He was in advance of his two classmates, and did not see them until they were close at his side. He seemed to be counting something in his hands. Nubby Newgass crept behind him silently, and glanced over his shoulder. Instantly Pinkney closed his hand and thrust it into his pocket. He looked confused.

"It looks as if you were flush of pocket-

money," smiled Nubby. "If I didn't know that it's quite unlikely, I could almost swear I saw the yellow glisten of a sovereign."

Pinkney bit his lip, and then laughed.

"I only wish your eyesight hadn't deceived you," he said evasively. "Neither of you fellows could lend me a shilling, eh? I'd pay it you back on Saturday."

He was evidently profiting by the advice of his friend Jerry.

"I've got a penny towards it," said Tony. "I was going to buy a new drawing pencil, but that can wait. How did the match come off on Saturday? I hear the fellow I sent in my place didn't do badly."

"He did simply wonders!" put in Newgass. "And oh, I say, is that true about his meeting with an accident on Saturday night?"

He glanced from Pinkney to Mumford. Neither answered at once, but presently Mumford said:

"You were present at the time, Arthur. Won't you tell us how it all happened?"

Pinkney wondered how Mumford knew

of his connection with the motor accident.

"It was a very ordinary sort of mishap," he explained lightly. "The chauffeur was steering out of the way of the Vicar's carriage and he went bang into the ditch, cannoning against the bank. Snooks, as your friend called himself at the cricket match, was chucked out. I don't know if he was hurt much; I didn't stop to see. I biked off as quick as I could for a doctor. Snooks wasn't there when I got back, so I suppose he wasn't badly injured."

"A concussion of the brain and a few bruises," Tony Mumford explained. "That's bad enough. He can't go back to Eton this term, and there's a hospital nurse with him night and day."

Pinkney looked at Mumford sharply, anxiously.

"Concussion of the brain, you say? How do you know? Who told you?"

With a shrug of the shoulders, Tony answered:

"Lady Wrinklebury told me. I was there last night. He's delirious."

Arthur Pinkney permitted himself to

smile with satisfaction at the news. "A jolly good job for me!" he said to himself. Aloud, he added: "Poor chap! Then he'll miss his exams. and the Eton and Harrow match."

"Your mother was very kind to him," Tony remarked. "It was she who took him home in the Vicar's brougham. Didn't she tell you about it at all?"

Pinkney shook his head. He had had a very serious quarrel with Mrs. Pinkney on the previous morning, when she had asked for an explanation regarding a certain pair of worn-out cricket shoes which she had found him cutting up and burning piece by piece at the kitchen fire. She had roundly accused him of having had a hand in the burglary, and he had denied the accusation. The mere fact of her referring to the matter proved to him that she had had a conversation with Maurice Wrinklebury, and that Wrinklebury had stated his suspicions against him.

"Awfully lucky for me that the accident happened," Pinkney reflected for the hundredth time. "I should have been compelled to close Wrinklebury's lips in

some other way if Providence hadn't helped me."

"I hear it was near ten o'clock at night when the smash took place," observed Mumford. "That was a queer time of night, and it was a queer place for you to be bicycling, wasn't it, Arthur? And you'd had an afternoon's hard cricket, too. What on earth were you up to?"

He asked the question in perfect innocence, but Pinkney believed now that Tony was capable of being in league with Maurice Wrinklebury against him, and he resented the interference.

"It's got nothing to do with you where I'd been!" he snarled. "I'm rather fond of a ride at night, if you want to know."

"Oh, it doesn't matter to me one way or another," rejoined Tony. "I only thought it a bit queer, especially as you were riding without a light. It's fortunate for you that you weren't dropped on; and, from what I hear, your riding without a light was partly the cause of the accident."

Pinkney looked exceedingly uncomfortable.

"I'd no matches," he said lamely.

"That's rather rum," remarked Tony. "You were able to light up before you started for the doctor, and you certainly didn't borrow a match from George or the coachman."

Pinkney gave a forced laugh.

"Seems to me you're in training for a lawyer, Tony," he said evasively. "You'll have to shape better than you do at Latin if you're going in for the Bar. And French as well—you're a duffer at French, you know."

It was a curious fact that that morning in School Mumford gained higher marks for both Latin and French than Pinkney did. Crump, whom he had met on the Sunday afternoon, had told him what had been set for preparation, and he had come into his class well armed with most carefully finished exercises.

"I believe you'll be fit to go in for that entrance examination for Winchester yet, Mumford, if you persevere," Mr. Grummel had said to him in commendation.

After four o'clock that day, Mumford, Bulstrode, Newgass, and Iddles pulled out

to the *Nancy*, with the intention of having a swim. They were almost alongside when Nubby, who sat at the stern, announced that there was some one on board. Tony and Bulstrode, who were sculling, shipped their oars and looked round.

"I'm afraid it's all up with our swim," said Tony. "Why, they're at work painting her! And there's Captain Quiller himself giving directions! We shall have to do our diving from the boat, which isn't half so nice."

They pulled nearer.

"Here, Mumford, my lad," cried Captain Quiller, "come alongside; I want you. Come round to the starboard gangway. You can't use my schooner to bathe from any more, I'm afraid. We're fitting out, you see."

He gave a hand to Tony, who climbed up beside him.

"Your pals can lie off for a bit," he said. "Come below into the saloon."

Tony followed him. The saloon was dusty and untidy, but it still bore signs of having once been a most luxurious apartment.

"I went to the Hall this morning and saw Maurice," the Captain began, when he had invited Tony to be seated. "He is certainly badly hurt, but by no means seriously, and I'm going to take him for a cruise. He has found out something about the burglary, he won't tell me what; and he desires us to give up our search for the wearer of the cricket shoes. Do you understand? We've to try to get back the gold challenge cup; but the boy, whoever and whatever he is, must go free."

"That's queer!" ruminated Tony. "What can be his meaning? He was more anxious to find out the boy than the man. Aren't we to try to find the man either?"

"I don't think we ever shall find him," returned Captain Quiller. "But if you can do so without exposing his younger accomplice, well and good."

"That's a difficult problem," said Tony. "It would be easier the other way about. In fact, Captain Quiller, I think I ought to tell you that I believe I've found out the younger one already, and without doing any underhand sneaking; and I

think I am within an ace of getting proof."

"Proof?" repeated Quiller. "You must not look for proof. Leave the lad alone for Maurice himself to deal with, and search only for the man. There! those are your instructions. Obey them."

So already Maurice Wrinklebury was putting into action his purpose to do good to Arthur Pinkney, and to fulfil his spoken resolution: "I will do all that I can for him. I shall spend the rest of my life in paying him back for the injury I have done him." And, at the same time, while Wrinklebury was bent upon this kindly retribution, Arthur Pinkney was busy in mind inventing some means by which he should do Maurice Wrinklebury harm.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RAG THAT FAILED

"JANE told me in confidence that old Grum has had lobster and cucumber for his supper every night for a week, and that they always disagree with him," remarked Nubby Newgass. "That's why he's in such a fearfully crusty temper."

"There must certainly be some reason connected with his digestion to make him set us such beastly difficult lessons," reflected Iddles, glancing through the school porch at the pelting rain that flooded the deserted playground. "Those French irregular verbs that he gave us for last night's prep. fairly floored me. I frankly haven't learnt 'em, and I shall have to own that I couldn't."

"You're no worse off than I am," said Crump, munching a lunch biscuit as he

spoke. "I'd a jolly good try to get 'em into my head. Father agreed with me that they were too difficult, and he ought to know, as he's a French polisher."

"My experience is that parents, as a rule, are the last people in the world to go to for help," remarked Aubrey. "If they ever learnt, they've forgotten. They can help you with sums, but they can't help you to get French verbs into your memory."

"It's rather consoling to find that you fellows have all failed, the same as I have," said Mumford. "I'd an idea that it was my special stupidity that was at fault. I'm glad to know I'm not alone." He turned to Pinkney, who sat in a corner of the porch industriously printing his initials in blacklead on his new cricket ball. "I suppose the French verbs weren't too hard for you, were they, Arthur?" he questioned.

Pinkney returned the ball to his jacket pocket.

"Yes, they were," said he. "They were miles too hard. And I mean to let old Grum know it. I'll tell you what we ought

to do. When the French lesson comes on after playtime, we ought to go on strike to a man. If we all stand together he can't very well punish the whole class, and if no one knows the lesson he'll see that it was his own fault for putting on the screw, and he'll give it us easier in future."

"Not a bad scheme," agreed Bulstrode. "I managed to learn the blessed verbs by sitting up an extra half-hour, but I'm willing to stand in with you and sham ignorance."

"I believe I could have got through at a pinch," said Tony Mumford. "I knew every one of the verbs last night, but if Arthur's suggestion is to be followed, why, then I won't try to remember."

They all stood up as Mr. Grummel appeared at the porchway and closed his dripping umbrella and slipped off his goloshes.

"I hope none of you boys have been getting your feet wet," the master remarked as he passed through. "There's nothing worse than wet feet."

"Unless it's lobster and cucumber," added Nubby Newgass under his breath.

As the sixth class filed to their desks the word went round that French irregular verbs were to be barred. There was perfect agreement regarding Pinkney's scheme to defeat the severity of scholastic authority. When the examination began Mr. Grummel questioned some of the duller boys, and seemed not at all surprised that they could not answer. He tested Bulstrode's knowledge, but Bulstrode failed to give satisfaction. Iddles, Newgass, and Crump were equally ignorant, and then Mr. Grummel began to give apparent proof of the indigestible qualities of raw cucumber. He banged his cane on the flat of his desk, and his face went red with indignation.

"I am astonished!" he shouted. "A simple list of the easiest of irregular verbs, and none of you know them!"

He turned again to Bulstrode and then to Mumford, who both stood firm, although either could have answered correctly. He seemed to have forgotten Pinkney, or to be reserving him.

"You'll admit, sir, that the lesson is rather hard," said Bulstrode. "We've

never had it before, and there was a lot of preparation in other subjects."

"Hard? Rather hard?" repeated Mr. Grummel furiously. "It's your brains that are hard. I never encountered such a pack of numskulls!" He turned now to Pinkney, looking at him severely. "Have you also found the lesson too hard, Pinkney."

Pinkney stood up. In the expectation of the class he was the last straw that was going to break the camel's back. Pinkney was very calm. He glanced aside at Tony Mumford, and his glance, to Tony's discomfort, had unusual malice in it.

"Not at all, sir," Pinkney answered. And to the astonishment of his classfellows, he began at the beginning of the list and repeated the verbs in French and English with faultless correctness to the end.

"There!" roared Mr. Grummel, stretching forth his open hand in proud commendation of Pinkney. "Hard, you say? Pinkney didn't find it hard. Why should the rest of you?"

"S-sneak! S-sneak! S-sneak!" The word was hissed throughout the class, sounding like the letting off of steam, in the midst of the Headmaster's roaring denunciations.

With the exception of Arthur Pinkney, the whole of the class was kept in at dinner-time to learn the lesson, and none of the boys had an opportunity to tell Pinkney what the class thought of him. When school re-opened after the dinner interval, Pinkney went in half a minute late at the tail end. At a quarter to four he held up his hand and asked Mr. Grummel if he might leave early, as he had to go to the bank for his father before closing time. Mr. Grummel, remembering Pinkney's dexterity with French verbs, readily permitted him to go, and as he went he was followed by the suppressed hissing of the word "S-sneak!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE FIGHT ON THE PIER

"I CAN'T quite think what it is that has come over Arthur Pinkney lately," observed Bulstrode. "He seems to be altering in his character. He was always a bit of a sneak, but the thing he did this morning tops everything I've known him do before—at least, to his own chums. It wasn't only a sneakish thing to do, it was downright despicable."

"Despicable isn't at all a bad word to apply to him," nodded Tony Mumford. "I shall remember it next time I meet him. I could forgive a lot, but I can't forgive his getting the whole class kept in when it was himself that proposed the rag. He must have planned it all out from the first."

"Bulstrode's right when he says that

Pinkney's altering in character," Nubby Newgass observed. "He used to be fairly open and straightforward with his pals, but now he's mean and sly and secretive, and he isn't always particular about telling the truth. I could almost take my oath that it was a sovereign he had in his hand this morning, and he has shown by many signs that he's flush of money, and yet he's been borrowing right and left—a sixpence here, a penny there, as if he was stony broke and didn't know where to turn for help. I wonder where he got that sovereign from. He had other money in his hand, too—silver mostly. So far as I know, he hasn't been betting on horse-races or gambling in any other way. Then there was that lie he told about not having matches to light his bicycle lamp, while all the time he had some in his pocket."

"The funniest thing I know about him," added Iddles, "is his having that new set of cricketing flannels. His father and mother refused to buy them for him when he asked, and said he'd got to wear out his old ones first, and so he got them on his own hook at that swagger tailor's at

the corner of High Street; and, what's more, he paid for them out of his own pocket. And this morning he's got a new knife with three blades and a cork-screw. Of course he may have wanted a knife. All fellows do, and I know he hadn't one a week ago, or he wouldn't have borrowed Mumford's when he needed to sharpen his drawing-pencil."

Tony Mumford looked at Iddles with a curious sharp glance, and nodded. Then he began to whistle. What Iddles had said about the knife had put a strange thought into his head which he now wanted to dismiss as quickly as possible, only he could not dismiss it. The thought came back and back to him. Pinkney had borrowed his knife in school during the last drawing lesson, which was quite a week ago, and hadn't returned it. Yes, he remembered now. And the drawing lesson was on Friday, before the night of the Wrinklebury burglary! Here was proof enough of how that same knife came to be the one used to open the library window. Tony almost trembled with excitement at making this new discovery.

But he forced himself to think of something else, for had not Captain Quiller warned him that he must not seek for further proof?

As they talked, Tony and his companions were strolling along the pier.

"There's Pinkney himself!" Nubby Newgass suddenly exclaimed. "And he's got a new fishing rod! He isn't watching his float, and I believe he's got a bite. Who's the man he's talking with, I wonder?"

Nubby was looking towards the end of the pier, where Pinkney stood with his rod thrust out in front of him through the rail. The man beside him was also fishing, or pretending to be so, for he paid as little attention to the occupation as Pinkney was paying. He was dressed in a frock-coat and top hat. Tony could not see his face, but something about him—his way of holding himself, his manner of leaning towards Pinkney as he spoke—reminded him of the stranger whom he had seen with Pinkney on the previous Wednesday night. In spite of the man's better attire, indeed, he hardly doubted

that it was the same, until the stranger turned sideways, and then the fact that he wore whiskers and looked older, seemed to convince him to the contrary.

In his innocence, Tony did not realise that a man may come out in public so disguised that recognition is altogether improbable, and he was not aware that Pinkney's friend Jerry was a practised criminal accustomed to disguise himself.

Jerry had come into the town in answer to an urgent appeal from the young associate whom he was training in the arts of crime, and it was because he had expected him that Pinkney had left school a quarter of an hour earlier than the usual time that afternoon.

It was here at the end of the pier that they had met. Even Pinkney, who had made the appointment, did not at the first glance recognise Jerry in his unfamiliar get-up of an elderly gentleman spending a week at the seaside.

"I hardly knew you," he said in greeting. "I'm glad you've come. Get out your rod—here's bait—and pretend to be fishing while I tell you what's happened.

Have you brought that money you promised?"

Jerry nodded, and drew a bundle of bank-notes from his inner pocket, handing it to Pinkney.

"There's two hundred quid," he said. "You needn't count 'em. Shove 'em in your pocket. Is it about that motor accident you want to tell me? I've heard about it at the hotel where I'm staying. You managed that nicely, though I don't know why you did it. The young un couldn't have done us any harm."

Pinkney buttoned his jacket over the banknotes.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "Do you suppose I did it on purpose? It was a pure accident, excepting that I was riding without a light. But the young un, as you call him, could do us more harm than you think—in fact, he's done us no end of harm already. I was hurrying home, as you advised me, to destroy those shoes. But he'd got them already—in what way I can't for the life of me think, and I can't find out. He'd got hold of them; and, what's more, he'd compared them

with the footprints, and was on his way to give them up to the police when the accident happened."

Jerry gave a low whistle.

"Then we're as good as nabbed!" he said. "We must sling our hook from here in double quick time. He's on our track, for a dead cert."

"Of course he is," nodded Pinkney. "But I got the shoes, and have destroyed them, so they can't be shown in evidence. And the police know nothing as yet, because he—the young un—was taken home hurt."

"Yes, but he ain't dead," said Jerry. "He's got concussion of the brain, and that means he's off his nut for a bit. But he'll get better. They'll spend no end of money for London doctors. And then where will you be? It's easy enough for me. I'm off back to town to-morrow, but you've got to stop here, unless you'll come along of me. Will you? I've got another job in view—a better one than the last. Will you?"

Pinkney shook his head, and drew out his line to make a new cast.

"No," he answered resolutely; "I can't. It would look suspicious if I were to run away, and I'd be followed and caught. The young un will go back to Eton as soon as he's well."

Jerry smiled.

"And in the meantime he's only got to say a word and you'll be dropped on as sure as mud. No, it's too risky by far with him about. Pity he wasn't killed outright. Listen! Can't we manage to do for him?"

"Do for him?" echoed Pinkney. "How do you mean?"

Jerry leaned over to look for his float.

"Dead men tell no tales, you know," he muttered. "I hear it's your own ma that's nursing him. Couldn't you manage it through her?"

Pinkney drew back aghast. He understood now the awful thing that Jerry was suggesting.

"I may be bad," he returned, "but I've not sunk so low as that yet," he faltered. "And you may as well know at once that my mother isn't his nurse, and isn't likely to be."

"It isn't very easy to reach a chap that's

lying ill in bed," Jerry went on. "But I've known it done. Some white powder put into his food or into a medicine bottle, for instance, would do it. Now, supposing you could waylay the doctor's boy on his way to the house, get hold of one of the bottles of physic, and——"

He broke off. Pinkney had moved away from him on pretence of getting a new bait from his basket.

"Neither of them seems to have caught anything yet," remarked Nubby Newgass. "I believe I saw that man coming out of the 'Royal.' I suppose Pinkney's instructing him in the art of being patient. No fish in its senses would even look at a bait just there. Shall we go up to them?"

"No," said Tony.

"But I thought you wanted to tell him he's despicable?" pursued Nubby.

"So I do," returned Tony. "But as the remark may lead to something else, I'd rather it happened in a place less public."

Pinkney turned, and saw his four schoolfellows watching him.

"There's that beastly cad Mumford,"

he said to himself. "What's he spying round here for, I wonder? He's very nearly as dangerous as Wrinklebury himself, and I believe he has his suspicions."

Nubby Newgass left his companions, and slowly strolled towards him.

"Caught anything, Pinkney?" he inquired casually.

Pinkney shook his head, and turned to pay attention to his float.

"I'll see you again, Jerry," he whispered to his neighbour. "I shall have to recognise these fellows, but I'll get rid of them and come back to you."

"I say! What a swagger fishing-rod you've got!" exclaimed Nubby, in admiration. "You ought to catch heaps of fish with that. But not here. How much did you pay for it? I suppose it's your own?"

"Yes, of course it's my own," returned Pinkney. "It was a present. I believe it's a twelve-shilling one."

He began to wind the reel. Having done so, he laid the rod carefully on the deck of the pier, preparatory to disjointing it. Nubby made a sign to his chums to come nearer. Pinkney saw the signal with the

corner of his eye. He didn't want the fellows to come any nearer to Jerry, and, seeing no other way out of the difficulty, he left the rod where it lay and approached them.

"I wonder you have the cheek to come near us after what you did this morning," said Bulstrode, looking at him straight.

Tony Mumford went up to him very close.

"I was once silly enough to think a lot of you, Pinkney," he declared. "I made the huge mistake of taking you for a bit of a gentleman; but my opinion has changed, and I know you now to be a despicable sneak."

Pinkney drew back a step.

"Sneak!" cried Bulstrode.

"Sneak!" added Iddles.

"S-sneak!" hissed Nubby Newgass.

Pinkney gave a sneering, forced laugh.

"Really," he said, "your compliments make me blush. I can't, for the life of me, see how I deserve them."

"You need hardly ask yourself," retorted Tony angrily. "Your despicable trickery over the French lesson this morn-

ing can't help being fresh in your mind. But if you have forgotten the incident, we haven't."

"Pooh!" sneered Pinkney. "You were only kept in half an hour, and most of you would have been even if I hadn't been able to repeat the verbs. You can see for yourselves that I was cornered. The rag was a failure—that's all."

"It wouldn't have been a failure if you'd stood to the plan that you yourself proposed," said Bulstrode. "You meanly deserted us. I believe you meant to leave us all in the lurch from the beginning."

"Oh, no, I didn't," Pinkney denied. "It was the force of circumstances."

"You liar!" declared Mumford, with all the contempt that he could put into his voice.

"What?" cried Pinkney, darting a look of vicious anger at Tony. "Say that again!"

Tony stood up to him boldly.

"Of course I will say it again," he retorted. "It's the simple truth. You're a liar, a trickster, and a thief!"

"Take that, you cur!" cried Pinkney,

and, flinging out his hand, he gave Mumford a resounding slap across the cheek. Tony hit back, but with his closed fist instead of his open hand, striking Pinkney on the bridge of the nose. In an instant they were engaged. Neither waited to take off his jacket, but each struck out at his opponent with quick, determined blows. Pinkney was the more practised boxer, Mumford the more naturally alert. They clinched, but no harm was done. Bulstrode separated them, but again they closed. Pinkney jabbed with right and left, and Mumford's guard arm became sore with the repeated blows. He rushed in and landed his right with a dull thud on Pinkney's chest, just above the pocket where the banknotes were hidden. Pinkney shot out a head blow, but Tony guarded well, and got in with his left on his opponent's jaw. Pinkney's nose was bleeding, and there was a scarlet mark on Mumford's cheek when they next broke away.

"Give it him hot, Tony!" urged Nubby Newgass, who was enjoying this unexpected entertainment. And the two went at it again like a pair of terriers.

"PINKNEY THEN RUSHED IN, AND, EVEN WHILST TONY WAS BEING HELD IN THE MAN'S STRONG GRIP, HE LANDED A BLOW FULL IN TONY'S FACE."

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Pinkney's friend Jerry had by this time taken in his rod and leaned it against the rail. He now strode quickly to the rear of Bulstrode, pushed him aside, and caught Tony Mumford by the shoulders, dragging him back forcibly. Pinkney then rushed in, and, even whilst Tony was being held in the man's strong grip, he landed a blow full in Tony's face.

"Oh, you coward!" cried Bulstrode; and he leaped at Pinkney, and with all his fresh strength flung him upon his back.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE TRACK OF THE THIEF

"You coward!" repeated Bulstrode. He stood over Pinkney, whom he had so daringly thrown upon his back. "I should have expected you to fight fair, Pinkney," he said, in cool reprimand. "It wasn't at all fair to strike Mumford while he was being held and couldn't guard himself. It was rotten conduct altogether. I'm ashamed of you!"

"Let 'em fight it out," suggested Nubby Newgass, who was not at all satisfied. "A scrap like that's no good. They'll only be at it again another time. Let 'em fight it out, and show which is the better man."

He and Iddles then bent down and took hold of Pinkney, one at either side of him, and lifted him to a sitting posture.

"Here, take off your jacket," added Nubby; and he began to loosen Pinkney's jacket buttons.

"Stand aside there!" interposed the man Jerry, speaking now for the first time; and, pushing Nubby and Iddles away, he hoisted Pinkney to his feet. "You've had enough of it, both of you, and neither of you knows how to spar. Where's your wipe?" he inquired. He thrust his hand into Pinkney's breast pocket, drew out his handkerchief, and began industriously to mop his nose and mouth, which were bleeding freely. No one noticed the action, but while Jerry was taking out the handkerchief from the outside pocket with his right hand, his left had slipped into the inside of Pinkney's jacket and very dexterously extracted the bundle of banknotes, which he concealed up his own sleeve. His performance was all the more easy by reason of the circumstance that Bulstrode, Newgass, and Iddles had transferred their attentions to Tony Mumford.

"Come along home," urged Bulstrode, taking Tony's arm and leading him away. "It was ripping of you to stand up to him like you did. He's heavier than you and a better boxer, and you couldn't have hoped to beat him."

"Tony shaped awfully well, I thought," said Nubby. "He'd have knocked chips off him if it hadn't been for that chap holding him. I wonder who the fellow is, and if Pinkney knows him."

"I hope you're not badly mauled, Tony, old man," said Iddles, handing to Tony his handkerchief, which was large, even if it wasn't very clean. "Here, wipe the blood from your lip. There's some people coming towards us, and I think I saw a policeman's helmet at the back of them. There's sure to be a policeman knocking round now that it's all over."

"Where did that last blow strike you, Tony?" Newgass inquired. "I thought he struck you full in the face, but there's no swelling yet, and he hasn't drawn blood, except by that other one that he landed you on the lip."

"I believe he hurt himself more than me," Tony responded. "I ducked, and his fist caught me on the top of the forehead. I don't think I shall be disfigured, though I shouldn't have cared if I had been."

"You'd have been maimed in a good cause, anyhow," observed Nubby Newgass.

"One of us might have come in to help you. I'd have done so. I was ready; but I saw you were making a good account of yourself, and two to one wouldn't have been fair."

"I don't think he'll have the cheek to do any more of his sneaking after what he's got," remarked Iddles.

"You should say his 'despicable' sneaking," corrected Nubby. "Tony didn't forget to use that sladge-hammer word."

"It's quite the right word to use in the circumstances," said Bulstrode, who had been the first to employ it. "For it was nothing else than despicable that he should pretend not to have done his preparation and then come out with those irregular verbs as if he'd known them all his life. One thing I know is, that in future he shall not get the better of me, either in preparation or in class. If I sit up till one o'clock in the morning, I shall be even with him."

"There's one thing about Arthur Pinkney that I can't help admiring," added Tony—"he never cribs. He genuinely learns his lessons, and learns them easily.

If he wasn't so clever he wouldn't be quite so dangerous."

When they had gone off the pier, and had walked some distance along the esplanade, they separated. The evening was fine after the morning's rain, and there were a good many holiday people about. Tony Mumford tried to avoid their observation, for he was conscious that after his encounter he was looking conspicuously untidy, and he was not sure that his face was not smeared with blood. But presently he caught sight of Captain Quiller, and could not refrain from going up to him as he sat alone under one of the plane-trees.

"Hullo, Anthony!" exclaimed the Captain, looking at him with amused curiosity. "You look as if you had been in the wars. What's happened?"

"I've been having a bit of a scrap with one of the Grammar School boys," Tony admitted—"a fellow named Pinkney."

Captain Quiller knocked the ash from the very fragrant cigar that he was smoking.

"H'm!" he muttered. "Sit down here

and tell me about it. You gave him a sound licking, I hope? I'm rather interested in that young gentleman. What was the cause?"

"I called him a sneak and a thief," explained Tony. "He's both."

"Then he deserved his thrashing," commented the Captain. "What did he steal?"

"I don't think I ought to tell you," he responded. "It's got something to do with the affair that you warned me not to follow up."

"Ah!" nodded Captain Quiller. "I see that your suspicions are the same as mine. Perhaps you are right in saying that you ought not to tell me. Maurice Wrinklebury's injunctions are rather awkward for us both, aren't they?"

Tony glanced aside at him.

"Yes," he said; "and it's all very well for him to tell us not to follow up any clues. I've not been following up any. But what is one to do when the clues stare one in the face, showing themselves without any searching?"

Captain Quiller puffed vigorously at his cigar.

"I don't think that there would be any breach of confidence in your telling me," he said. "What Maurice intends is that the conclusions at which you or I may arrive are not to be made public—that we are not to take proceedings. What was it that this chap Pinkney stole?"

"My penknife," Tony answered, "the same one that was afterwards found at the Hall on the morning after the burglary."

"Indeed!" ruminated the Captain. "That is certainly a valuable clue—quite enough to direct suspicions towards Master Pinkney. But it is no proof of his guilt in the matter of the burglary, is it, now?"

"Of course not," Tony acknowledged. "But there are other things. I am almost certain that it was Arthur Pinkney who locked me up in the cabin of the *Nancy*. And if it was, then it was also he who took the things away out of the locker. He was out in a boat at the time, he and —and rather a villainous-looking man—a stranger."

"I see you are on a hot scent," observed Quiller. "The man was a stranger, you say. Should you recognise him again?"

Tony drew closer to his companion.

"I feel as if I were a bit of a traitor telling you this about a schoolfellow," he said.

"There is no treachery about it," Captain Quiller assured him. "It is the duty of every one to assist the law by bringing criminals to justice. Your suspicions against this Pinkney may be put in the background to satisfy Maurice Wrinklebury's eccentric wishes; but, as I told you before, the man is different. He was the prime mover in the crime. His accomplice, I firmly believe, was merely his instrument. Do you think you would recognise him if you were to see him again?"

"Captain Quiller," Tony said nervously, "I believe I have already recognised him. He's on the pier, now, at this minute, disguised. He is in company with Arthur Pinkney."

Captain Quiller sprang up from his seat.

"Come and point him out to me!" he urged. "Come, quick!"

They walked together to the end of the pier, but already Pinkney and Jerry had gone.

CHAPTER XVI

A BLOW FOR PINKNEY

"Look here," Jerry had said as soon as Mumford and his three companions had left, "you made a mistake to bring me out to a public place like this. We've been seen together. Why couldn't we have met outside of the town as before? We shall have the police on our track if you're not more careful. Let's cut away."

They took their fishing-rods to pieces and quitted the pier.

"Last time we met," said Jerry, "you said something about a gold cup that you wanted to send back to the young un. I've thought of a way of sending it if you still hanker after restoring it. The inscription on it is suspicious. A chap I showed it to saw the name of Eton College engraved on it. You can have it back."

"But I've changed my mind," returned

Pinkney. "I wouldn't do anything to oblige Wrinklebury now that I know he's got his knife into me. You can get the thing melted down and sold for its weight in gold. That reminds me," he went on, loosening the top button of his jacket, "I wish you had given me this money in gold instead of notes. How do you suppose a schoolboy is going to get bank-notes changed?"

He was thrusting his hand into his pocket; but Jerry, seeing his purpose and knowing that the notes were not there, stopped him.

"For goodness' sake don't bring those things out here!" he said insistently. "Think of the risk of their being seen! Don't look at 'em till you get home into your own room. How shall you change 'em? Why, any tradesman will cash 'em for you; only don't you flash more'n one at a time. You'd better leave me at the end of the pier. You know where to write or telegraph to if you want to see me. And don't be afraid of the young un for a day or two. He's safe while he's in bed, and as soon as he's about again

—before he does any harm—we must put him out of the way. But there must be no failure about it next time. He must be done for out and out. You're a bit too timid so far. You might easily have wiped out the butler the other night instead of only wounding him. How is he? Do you know?"

"Getting better," Pinkney answered. "And as soon as he's well there'll be another danger. I believe he saw me, and that he'd know me again."

"Like enough," nodded Jerry. "You're surrounded by dangers, it seems to me. Better by far come away with me to-morrow. It's a rare good thing I've been working up to for the next job. But I want your help."

"Is it another burglary?" Pinkney inquired.

"Hush!" cautioned Jerry. "Yes, at a nobleman's mansion near London, and we shall go equal shares, same as before. You'll be rich."

"I've half a mind to go with you"—Pinkney hesitated—"especially since I've quarrelled with the mater."

He gripped Jerry's wrist.

"Sling your hook!" he whispered agitatedly. "I've seen that fellow Quiller, and Mumford along with him. They're dogging us, I believe."

Jerry was accustomed to making quick disappearances, and he disappeared now so adroitly that even Pinkney failed to find him again a few minutes afterwards in the crowd of loiterers on the harbour front where he expected to meet him.

Pinkney did not go straight home. He intended to indulge himself in a comfortable meal at a very fine restaurant that had lately been opened for the accommodation of summer visitors. As he walked across to the place he made up his mind what he would order: a chop, with green peas and new potatoes, a half bottle of claret, to be followed by strawberries and cream. And here, where the people were new to the town and he was not known, he did not doubt that he would be able to get cash in exchange for one of his banknotes.

Having washed himself and brushed his hair, he chose a seat that was shielded

by a spreading tree-fern and a Japanese screen. While he waited for the chop, he read the cricket news in the evening paper, but all the time his fingers itched to take out the banknotes. He had a miserly desire to count the great sum. Never in his life had he possessed a banknote all his own. Two hundred pounds! It was a fortune for a schoolboy. What could he not do with it? And it was all his own, to spend as he liked. He had acquired it very easily, he reflected. There had been risks and anxieties, and he had made many very foolish mistakes in leaving traces of that night's works at Wrinklebury Hall. His wearing of betraying cricket shoes had been a most thoughtless blunder. They had certainly enabled him to move in silence, but he ought to have foreseen that they would leave tracks on the soft ground outside the window. And the knife, too—he realised now the risk he had run in losing it.

He thought of how nearly he had been detected in hiding the stolen plate and diamonds on board Quiller's schooner; but he had managed that business success-

fully, after all; and he chuckled to himself as he remembered how nicely he had entrapped Tony Mumford—Tony Mumford whom he now hated like poison.

Pinkney looked into the mirror that was near him. His nose was slightly swollen about the bridge, and he was not sure that one of his eyes was not turning black. Even if this were so, however, there was consolation in knowing that Mumford had got the worst in the short, sharp encounter at the end of the pier just now.

Two hundred pounds! He thought he might manage unseen to take out the notes and count them now, before the waiter should bring his chop and green peas. He thrust his hand into his pocket. Then he gave a sudden start.

His pocket was empty!

Hurriedly, excitedly he searched inside his jacket, in his other pockets, on the floor. Where were the notes? Two hundred pounds! They were lost! They were lost!

He snatched up his cap to run back to the lavatory downstairs. He had taken off his jacket to wash himself and hung it

up. Had the bundle of notes fallen from his pocket when he did so?

He bounded away from the little table, ducked under the spreading fronds of the tree-fern, and came full tilt against the waiter who was bringing his chop. The tray and its contents were flung high in the air, to come down with a crash. The waiter fell sprawling, the dishes were smashed, the chop fell into a lady's lap, and the green peas and potatoes bounced like small shot in all directions, while the bottle of claret hopped like a live thing down the stairs before it came to grief at the bottom.

All the apologies that Pinkney could muster were powerless to pacify the indignant waiter, or to assure him that the thing had not been done on purpose. And to make matters worse for the restaurant people, a large party of ladies and gentlemen, newly come ashore from a yacht, were entering at the moment, when, seeing the confusion, they turned away to bestow their custom upon an opposition establishment.

When at length Pinkney had mollified

the waiter with a handsome tip as well as with payment for the broken crockery and the uneaten dinner, he continued his interrupted way to the lavatory. The notes were not there. He did not remember whether any one else had been in the place while his jacket was hanging up, but he rather fancied that a young fellow in boating costume had taken his cap from a hook suspiciously near to the one he had himself chosen to use. If the banknotes had been by chance protruding from the pocket, they might very easily have been abstracted while he, Pinkney, had been bending over the wash-basin. But, of course, the stranger had fled!

Pinkney's appetite for chops and green peas, and even for strawberries and cream, had suddenly vanished. He had no appetite for anything now, and he hurried out into the street, hoping to run against the young fellow in boating flannels, and to demand the immediate restoration of the purloined banknotes.

Excitedly he reviewed in his mind every movement he had made since the moment when Jerry had handed him the bundle

of crisp papers. He was certain he had shoved them well down in his pocket—the inner pocket on the left side. And then he had buttoned his jacket, keeping it buttoned even while he was sparring up to Tony Mumford.

Ah! He remembered now. When Bulstrode had impertinently intervened and thrown him on his back, some one had opened his jacket. Iddles and Newgass had fumbled about his pockets while helping him to sit up. He had not been thinking of the notes at that moment, but he believed now that the two of them had drawn back from him very abruptly, and he made no doubt that they had purloined the money and handed it over to Mumford. Jerry, as well as Iddles and Newgass, had certainly touched him; but to suppose for an instant that Jerry would be so mean as to take the notes would be ridiculous. Had not Jerry just paid them over to him? No; it couldn't be Jerry who had taken them.

A rather perplexing difficulty now presented itself to Arthur Pinkney. If, as he more than half suspected, Newgass or

Iddles, either singly or both together, had taken the banknotes, how was he to get them back? The mere fact of admitting that he had lost so huge a sum would mean betrayal of himself and his guilt, for how could he explain his possession of so much money?

He resolved to go at once to the "Royal" and consult with Jerry, even before going home to his tea. Jerry had cautioned him against calling at the hotel, and had even refused to inform him under what assumed name he was staying there, but the occasion was pressing, and Pinkney had no doubt that he would be able to find his man without even inquiring for him by name.

The "Royal" was on the sea front, facing the esplanade. Pinkney strolled thither, puzzling his brain the while over his loss. As he crossed the narrow street at the corner of the hotel he noticed that there was a motor-car waiting at the side entrance, but he paid no special regard to it, although if he had paused to do so he might have recognised the man who hurriedly got into it. He boldly went

in at the front entrance, passed groups of gaily-dressed visitors who sat at the small tea-tables. But suddenly he halted and drew back guiltily.

In the vestibule, talking animatedly with the manager, stood Captain Quiller, and in company with him were Superintendent Rabbidge and Tony Mumford. Pinkney had no need to question what these three were doing here. They were on the track of Jerry; and the presence of Tony Mumford was a sure indication of how they had been put upon the line of Jerry's scent.

For an instant Pinkney wondered how he might convey a warning to his hunted accomplice. But how could he find him without knowing his name or the number of his room? He dared not go farther. Already he was in danger of being seen. He turned and went out into the street, meaning to re-enter the hotel by the side door.

He had got to the corner when the motor-car issued, panting and grunting, from the side street. A visitor was leaving the hotel, perhaps to catch a train. He

went up the steps of the side entrance, passing a hall porter, who was smilingly pocketing a handsome tip. When he reached the top step the door was flung open from within, and he confronted the very people whom he was endeavouring to avoid—Mumford, Captain Quiller, Rabbidge, and the hotel manager.

"Too late!" the manager exclaimed. "He's gone! He's escaped in his motor-car."

CHAPTER XVII

PINKNEY TRIES TO EXPLAIN

"ESCAPED?" cried Superintendent Rabbidge incredulously. He appeared to think that the hotel manager was personally responsible for Jerry's precipitate departure. "Why did you let him go? Has he paid his bill? Have you allowed him to take his luggage?"

"Come, Mr. Rabbidge," responded the manager. "Don't expend your annoyance upon me, if you please. How was I to know that he was a burglar? He came here just like any other summer visitor, and went away like one. He said, when he took the rooms, that he might not require them for more than one or two nights. This morning he gave me notice that he would leave a little after lunch-time, and his luggage was packed ready for putting on the motor-car as soon as

he should have paid his bill, which he did only a quarter of an hour ago. He rang for a waiter, and got change from a ten-pound note."

"I wonder if the note was a good one?" questioned the Superintendent.

The manager smiled.

"Perfectly good. I am satisfied of that," he assured the representative of the law.

"And the car," pursued Captain Quiller. "Is it his own?"

The manager did not know, but he believed so.

"Perhaps you can give me its number," said the Superintendent. "I must telephone to all the police and railway-stations, and have the rascal caught."

The manager and the Superintendent went together into the hotel bureau. Captain Quiller, in the meantime, had accosted Arthur Pinkney, who, fully aware now that Jerry had escaped, was making up his mind how to explain his own presence in the hotel.

"You have managed to get your friend off pretty smartly, young man," remarked the Captain.

Pinkney looked up at him blankly.

"My friend?" he repeated. "I don't know what you mean. If it's the man you've just been talking about, and that's gone away in the motor-car, he's no friend of mine."

"Indeed?" Captain Quiller perceived that the boy was telling a falsehood. "But you were with him, fishing from the end of the pier."

Pinkney's eyes turned menacingly upon Tony Mumford. He was sure now that Mumford had been spying upon him. Then he looked back at Quiller with well-assumed surprise.

"Oh, now I understand," he returned lightly. "Yes, I fell into conversation with him about fishing. Rather an amiable gent, I thought him. I'd no idea that he could be what you say he is—a burglar, wanted by the police."

"Hadn't you, indeed?" sneered Captain Quiller.

Tony Mumford was at Pinkney's elbow.

"That's another lie you've just told," he muttered. "You've known the fellow for weeks, and I've no doubt that you're

here even now to help him to get away. Why else should you have come into this hotel?"

"Come, you two, come!" interposed Captain Quiller. "Don't you two get quarrelling again."

He drew Tony away towards the bureau.

"You are going too far," he warned him. "If you are not more careful, he'll be taking fright and escaping. Leave him alone, and pretend that you know nothing against him."

When they entered the bureau, Superintendent Rabbidge was busy at the telephone, giving instructions to the police at the central police-station to telegraph in all directions to have the fugitive arrested. "The man's a notorious criminal, only lately released on ticket-of-leave from Dartmoor," Tony heard him say.

It was in an exceedingly distracted condition of mind that Arthur Pinkney went out of the hotel. Certainly he had a great deal to worry him. For one thing, Mumford's accusation that he, Pinkney, had been helping Jerry to escape was a sure

sign that Mumford's suspicions against him were not mere idle guesswork. It was evident beyond all question that he had been dogging and watching him for days past, and that he had something more than conjecture to go upon.

"It's that beast Wrinklebury that's been putting him up to it, I'd bet anything," Pinkney surmised. "Wrinklebury's at the bottom of it all, and I shall never be safe until he's well out of the way. Jerry said so, and Jerry was right. I've been an ass to think that because Wrinklebury's laid up he's therefore helpless. I wish to goodness I could get at him. If I can't, I shall have to cut my stick altogether. I wonder where Jerry's off to? He didn't take much time to clear his heels! I ought to have gone with him. It would have been the safest plan by far. But I can't even follow him now!" He again searched his pockets. "I could have lived in London for a twelvemonth with two hundred pounds," he regretted. "Who can have taken them? Neither Iddles nor Newgass knew that I had the notes in my pocket. But they may have picked them up. A

bundle like that might easily have worked its way out of my pocket when I wasn't thinking."

All sorts of wild and impossible explanations occurred to him; and it was rather singular that, knowing Jerry's character for dishonesty and crime, and the character of his two schoolfellows for honesty, it was yet Iddles and Newgass rather than Jerry whom he suspected of having robbed him. And this very largely from the idea that it was next to impossible that Jerry could be guilty of filching from him the money which he himself had given to him only a few moments earlier. The thing was absolutely impossible!

In any event, Pinkney believed that either Iddles or Newgass must be able to help him, and accordingly he determined to go and question them in turn. But first he would walk along to the end of the pier in the faint hope of finding the banknotes lying waiting for him.

He was crossing the road towards the pier-head when some one tapped him on the shoulder.

He started guiltily and glanced round, ready to take to his heels. But it was only Bulstrode, after all. He was greatly relieved to see that it was not a policeman.

"Oh, I say, Bulstrode," he stammered awkwardly. "I'm so glad to see you. I—I——"

"Want to apologise?" questioned Bulstrode. "I don't know that I should accept an apology if you offered one. You played us such a mean trick that you can have no possible excuse. However, you know by now what we all think of you, and I, for one, am not going to be hard on you."

Pinkney hung his head.

"It's awfully good of you," he said. "I know I was mean and cowardly. But I say, Bulstrode, I'm in a most awful fix."

He paused, wondering in what way he could most safely explain his predicament.

"A fix? What kind of a fix?" Bulstrode inquired.

"Why," Pinkney went on haltingly, "I—I had to go to the bank, you know, on the way home from school. That's why I left early. I had to change a cheque for my father, and the banknotes that they

gave me"—he thought it wise not to mention the amount—"I put them in my breast pocket, and—well, I've lost them."

Bulstrode whistled.

"I've either lost them or else they've been stolen from me," Pinkney continued. "I had them safe enough when I was fishing at the end of the pier—before I had that scrap with Mumford."

Bulstrode stood still and looked at him. He was not sure that he quite believed this tale about the lost notes.

"Serves you jolly well right for being so careless!" he said, turning away. "You ought to have gone straight home with them instead of fishing."

Pinkney pursued him, and caught him roughly by the arm.

"Look here, Bulstrode," he said accusingly, "I believe you know who's got them. I believe you saw Iddles and Newgass take them out of my pocket."

"What!" cried Bulstrode. "You dare to say that! Clear out of my way, you contemptible cur!" And for the second time that evening he flung Pinkney from him.

Bulstrode was on his way to the public library to change a book. He got the book he wanted, and was walking homeward with it again under his arm when, on pausing at a crossing to let the traffic pass, he found himself standing beside Mrs. Pinkney. He knew her only by sight. He raised his cap politely.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Pinkney," he began, "I'm one of Arthur's classmates at the Grammar School. I met him a bit ago, and he told me about losing those banknotes."

"Banknotes!" exclaimed Mrs. Pinkney, genuinely astonished. "What banknotes?"

Bulstrode innocently explained:

"That he got at the bank for your husband in exchange for a cheque. I wanted to tell you that I believe a man that he was talking with and fishing with at the end of the pier robbed him of them. At least, I'm almost sure it was he, for I saw him snatch something white out of Arthur's pocket."

Mrs. Pinkney still looked blankly amazed. She shook her head.

"You must be labouring under some strange mistake," she said, "or else Arthur has been telling you some silly romance. He never went to the bank for Mr. Pinkney or any one else, and I'm pretty sure he never had a banknote in his possession in all the course of his life."

"That's queer," returned Bulstrode. "But I'm making no mistake. He certainly told me only a few moments ago that he'd either lost the money or been robbed, and I'm quite sure I saw the man take something from him."

He escorted Mrs. Pinkney across the road, then raised his cap again and left her.

When she got home, Arthur was having his tea—a very poor substitute for the chop and green peas and strawberries and cream which he had so nearly enjoyed at the restaurant.

"What is this cock-and-bull tale about your having lost some banknotes?" she requested sternly to know.

He did not meet her inquiring glance. Slowly finishing the mouthful of bread and

butter that he was eating, he responded sheepishly, although with every nerve trembling in apprehension:

"I suppose it's Bulstrode who has been yarning to you. I never had any bank-notes. Where do you suppose I should get them from? You may well call it a cock-and-bull tale."

"I've noticed, nevertheless, that you have been spending a good deal more lately than can be accounted for with your pocket money," she remarked. "You've bought a new knife, new cricket shoes, and new flannels, as well as a new fishing rod. Where did you get the money from?"

He did not answer her. For once he failed to discover a plausible lie.

"I'm sure you never earned it," she pursued, "and no one gave it to you. I'm afraid you stole it." She sat down opposite him, and stared at him, noticing without remark that he had a black eye. He could not help looking across at her now.

"Stole it?" he repeated. "I must say you're not very complimentary."

"Yes," she reiterated, "stole it. And I happen to know when and where; and you needn't attempt to deny it when I tell you that I've found out that you were one of the thieves that broke into Wrinklebury Hall the other night. If I did what's right, I should inform the police. Indeed, I'm not so sure that I shouldn't have done so already only there are others who'll save me the trouble and the disgrace. If you take my advice, you'll go straight to Wrinklebury Hall and own up to your crime. That's the only way to keep yourself out of prison, where I'm sure you deserve to be. You'd better go and ask to see Mr. Maurice."

"I shall do no such thing," he protested vehemently. "If I were to come face to face with Maurice Wrinklebury, I should injure him."

"What!" Mrs. Pinkney leaped to her feet. "If you dare to touch him—if you harm even a single hair of Maurice Wrinklebury's head," she cried, "I will kill you!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WORK OF A SNEAK

"CAN it be true? I wonder if there can possibly be any truth in it!"

This was a perpetual perplexity to Maurice Wrinklebury. The fearful doubt haunted him night and day; he could not get rid of the ugly idea planted in his mind by Mrs. Pinkney, that he had been living all these years at Wrinklebury Hall under false pretences, believing himself to be the only son and heir of Sir Charles and Lady Wrinklebury, whilst all the time he had been enjoying all the comforts and privileges which belonged by right to Arthur Pinkney. His instinct, or perhaps rather his desire, assured him that Mrs. Pinkney's declaration was all a cruel lie. She had given him no proof. He had only her bare word to go upon. And yet

what could have been her object in inventing such a tale? What could she expect to gain? He tried to persuade himself that she had been temporarily insane, or that she had been drinking when she averred that she and not Lady Wrinklebury was his mother, and he tried to forget what she had said.

What disturbed him most was not the thought of giving up all the joys of his young life at Wrinklebury and at Eton; he felt that if need be he could make the sacrifice bravely; but there was something else not so easy to adjust, and that was the realisation that by being placed in this false position he had been innocently cheating Arthur Pinkney out of his birthright.

"Can it be true?" he asked himself again and again.

Lady Wrinklebury, at the least, had no doubt that he was her son, or she could not have been so tender with him. More than once he was on the point of questioning her, but he always shrank from the thought of causing her pain. And so the days went by without his speaking,

and by slow degrees he forced himself to believe that Mrs. Pinkney's story was a rank impossibility, got up, no doubt, with the intention of extorting blackmail.

Wrinklebury's accident was by no means so serious as it had at first appeared to be. The injury to his head was hardly more than a surface wound that could be cured under the protection of sticking-plaster and bandages; and his bruises and sprained wrist as quickly yielded to careful doctoring. Hardly a week had passed since the motor smash when he was talking of returning to Eton, and was taking country walks in order to steady his shaken nerves.

"Snooks, as he called himself—Master Wrinklebury, I mean—couldn't have been so badly hurt, after all," remarked Nubby Newgass to a group of his classmates one Monday morning in the Grammar School playground, when they were waiting to be let in. "I was taking a stroll along Wrinklebury Lane yesterday afternoon, and saw him looking as right as ninepence. He recognised me, too, and stopped and had a jaw with me about cricket and old

Grummel and Pinkney. He seems to take a rare interest in Pinkney."

Arthur Pinkney, who was standing near, but who was not included among Nubby's chosen audience, pricked his ears at mention of his name. He would have liked to question Nubby as to what Wrinklebury had said of him, but since the incident of the fight at the end of the pier he had not been upon the best of terms with his classfellows, and Nubby Newgass happened to be one of those who had agreed among themselves to treat him with the contempt which they considered he deserved. He gathered from what Nubby said later, however, that Maurice Wrinklebury was in the habit of taking a walk across the moor every afternoon, and he determined to seek him there on the first possible opportunity. Now that Wrinklebury was well enough to go out alone, Pinkney realised that his own position had become doubly dangerous. Neither Tony Mumford nor Captain Quiller could do him much harm, for however much they might suspect him, they had no proof against him; but Wrinklebury was different, and

he had already shown that he was in possession of sufficient evidence against him to have him arrested and committed to prison, thus bringing about the ruin of his whole future life. Jerry had been right when he had said that Wrinklebury must be got out of the way.

There was no cricket match on the Wednesday afternoon, but Arthur Pinkney was, nevertheless, in a great hurry to finish his dinner and get out. As he came downstairs with his cap on, Mrs. Pinkney noticed how his right hand went nervously to his jacket pocket, where something bulky and heavy was concealed. She wondered what it was. She was not sorry that he was going out so early, for she, too, meant to go out, and on a mission which she was anxious to keep secret.

"Where are you going?" she asked him.

"Birdnesting, if you want to know," he answered her rudely; "over by Bexton Woods."

Bexton Woods were in a directly opposite direction from Wrinklebury Moor. She guessed, for this reason, that his destination was Wrinklebury, as, indeed, it was.

He walked three or four miles, keeping to the unfrequented lanes, and avoiding the high-road. Consequently, Mrs. Pinkney, who kept to the shorter way, was on the moor long in advance of him. She, too, had heard that Maurice Wrinklebury was in the habit of taking an afternoon walk on the moor, and she wanted to meet him and speak with him, to implore him once more to keep her secret, and to warn him against Arthur Pinkney.

Pinkney himself entered upon the moorland so cautiously that he was comfortably certain that no eye could have seen him as he emerged from a dark plantation and threaded his way among the shielding furze-bushes to the path by which he expected Maurice Wrinklebury to come. He concealed himself in the same hollow in which he had had his interview with Jerry. At one side of it there was a rising mound, commanding a wide stretch of the moor, and here he lay in waiting.

For fully an hour he waited and watched. Was Wrinklebury not coming, after all? At length he caught sight of something white moving quickly along the

path. It was Maurice Wrinklebury's favourite fox-terrier. Pinkney had not counted upon the probability of a dog being the companion of his victim, and he was annoyed. He saw Wrinklebury himself now, conspicuous in a straw hat and a light tweed suit, walking slowly in his direction.

Pinkney crept back a few inches. His heart was beating furiously against his ribs. He could almost hear the regular, quick thumps. What a long time the fellow was in coming! Yet the white straw hat came nearer and nearer, steadily in the one direction. At last Wrinklebury and the dog were only a dozen yards away. What if the dog should discover him, Pinkney, lying there in wait? But suddenly the terrier darted off on the scent of a rabbit. Wrinklebury stood still. Then he sat down on the upper slope of the mound, hardly a couple of yards away from where Pinkney's eyes were watching him from behind.

Very quietly Pinkney raised himself on his elbow. Then with his right hand he drew something from his pocket and took

slow, deliberate aim at a point just an inch or so from the central seam in the back of Wrinklebury's light tweed jacket. His finger twitched on the trigger. There was no need to hurry. Fate had given him this opportunity. He had but to draw his finger now and Maurice Wrinklebury would be dead, shot through the heart, and no one in the world would ever know by whom the shot had been fired.

Ah ! The terrier was coming back. Now was the time, or it would be too late. In his excitement he did not hear the breaking of a twig behind him, did not notice the dark shadow of a woman's head and arm that fell across the expanse of grey tweed upon which his eyes were fixed.

He pulled the trigger. There was a flash and a sharp crack. But even in the same instant Pinkney felt the weight of a heavy foot upon his back ; his arm was knocked aside, and the smoking revolver dropped with a thud several inches beyond his reach.

CHAPTER XIX

NEARLY A TRAGEDY

UNCONSCIOUS of the peril which he had just escaped from the deadly bullet which had whistled past him within an inch of his shoulder, Maurice Wrinklebury was alarmed only at the unexpected discharge of a firearm so dangerously close to him. He swung himself round without rising.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "What's up? Are you making a target of me?"

What he saw was Mrs. Pinkney snatching from the ground the smoking revolver which she had a moment ago dashed from Pinkney's hand. Pinkney, whom she had flung violently aside, tried also to secure the weapon; but she was too quick for him. Gripping the revolver in a way which betrayed that this was not the first time she had handled one, she turned its

shining barrel point blank at Pinkney's face.

"Wretch!" she cried. "Murderer!"

Without an instant's hesitation, she pulled the trigger. But the hammer only fell with a click and no report followed; for the weapon had not been fully charged in all its six chambers. Pinkney, indeed, had depended upon the one solitary cartridge that he possessed, and now that this had been fired the revolver was temporarily useless. Whilst he was in the act of aiming, she had run up behind him and stamped her foot upon the small of his back, knocking aside his extended right arm. She had held him there with her weight upon him, but in reaching forward to seize the revolver she released him, and now he had scrambled to his feet and leaped at her with the fury of a wild beast robbed of its expected prey. He seized her by the throat.

"You've followed me here, have you?" he snarled, ferociously tightening his grip.

She screamed aloud. But already Maurice Wrinklebury had risen, and now he flung himself between them, forcing

them apart with his strong hands. He looked from one to the other of them.

"Perhaps you will explain this extraordinary behaviour," he said coolly.

Mrs. Pinkney was breathing heavily as she stood back from him adjusting her disturbed hatpins.

"There's not much to explain," she returned. "He meant to shoot you dead —to murder you. He was aiming to put a bullet into your heart, and would have succeeded if I had not come up behind him just in time. I followed him here, guessing that he intended to do you harm."

Wrinklebury stepped nearer to Arthur Pinkney, looking him straight in the eyes.

"So you meant to murder me, did you?" he questioned severely. "Why? Tell me why? What great harm have I done you?"

Pinkney's hands were clenched menacingly. Once again Wrinklebury had got the better of him. He did not answer.

"You've done him no harm," Mrs. Pinkney declared, "none whatever. It's only because he's an abject coward and afraid of you that he hates you. He's afraid of you because you can prove his

guilt of the crime of burglary. That is why he wants you out of his way. But now he has done more than burglary. He has attempted your life, and he shall pay the bitter penalty."

She turned upon Pinkney with withering condemnation, cursing him.

"I shall not shield you," she went on, concealing the revolver beneath her coat. "I will have no mercy on you now—none—though you were starving and fawning upon me like a dog for help. I would not save you, even from the gallows. Why should I spare you? You are no son of mine, and I do not want you. For all I care, you may spend the rest of your days in a convict's cell, as you deserve to do. I am done with you. Go and join your criminal companions. I'll give you an hour to clear your heels. If you're not gone by then, the police shall take you. Do you hear? Go from my sight! Never let me see your Judas face again."

Pinkney glared at her viciously over his shoulder as he slunk away.

"You are hard on him, Mrs. Pinkney," said Maurice Wrinklebury. "If I, whom

he has attempted to injure, do not condemn him, why should you?"

"Injure?" she repeated. "Why, if I had not crept up behind him and knocked aside his aim, you'd now be lying dead with a bullet in your heart! I saved you. I saved your life, which is a thousand times more precious than his. Let the law do its will with him, and may I never set eyes on him again!"

"But remember, Mrs. Pinkney, he is your son," pursued Wrinklebury.

She went closer to him, bringing her eyes on a level with his.

"He is not my son," she reiterated. "You—you who call yourself Maurice Wrinklebury—you are my son, not he."

He drew back from her. "Heaven forbid that I should be the son of a woman such as you!" he said beneath his breath.

"You do not believe me?" she questioned.

He shook his head.

"I cannot, and will not believe you," he answered her proudly. "You have given me no proof. You have no proof to give."

"Proof?" she echoed. "I can give

proof that will convince even you. But I do not want you to believe me. I want you only to go on living upright and honourable as you've been doing all along, believing yourself to be the son of Sir Charles and Lady Wrinklebury. I only want you to keep my secret, and be happy and successful. Oh, yes," she continued, as she saw the look of scorn in his face, "I know you hate me—despise me. I know that your sense of honour would have me even now make public my fraud. But it is too late now."

"It's never too late to do what's just and right," he retorted.

"What?" she cried, "and you would have that contemptible cur—a burglar and would-be murderer—put in your place? You'd abandon your privileges? You'd break Lady Wrinklebury's heart by undeceiving her? Ah, I see that I was doubly unwise ever to tell you! I didn't count on your being so scrupulous. But I was right when I guessed you would not believe me without proof. Well, I shall give you no proof. It's better for you and every one else that I should not."

She broke off abruptly and put forth her hand.

"Won't you shake hands with me, Maurice?" she implored. "I can't ask you to call me mother."

He shrank from her, thrusting his hand into his pocket.

"I'm afraid I cannot," he said.

"But I have just saved your life," she reminded him.

"I am not ungrateful," he assured her coldly, and calling to his terrier, he turned away and walked sadly homeward.

CHAPTER XX

TONY'S AMBITION

It was probably his absorption in things outside the school that caused Arthur Pinkney suddenly to lose interest in his lessons. Mr. Grummel had for a long time looked upon him as his most promising pupil, and had all along been nursing the hope that Pinkney would not only come out top in the preliminary examination and prove himself worthy to be sent up to Winchester College to try for a scholarship, but that his winning of a scholarship was a practical certainty. But as the time for the contest drew near in early July, he discovered Pinkney dropping hand over hand behind both Bulstrode and Mumford, and when at length the final choice of candidates had to be made, Pinkney failed utterly.

Mumford and Bulstrode were first and second, Newgass third, and it was decided that the two first were to go up.

Bulstrode, it may be stated, had entered with zeal and enthusiasm into the competition against Pinkney, while Mumford's association with Captain Quiller and Maurice Wrinklebury had given to him an unconquerable ambition to enjoy the benefits of that public school training which seemed to him to be more effective even than aristocratic birth in stamping a man with distinction and style. Captain Quiller, who, like his nephew Wrinklebury, was an Etonian, encouraged Tony's ambition, and even put himself out to coach him both in mathematics and classics, and he further promised that if Mumford should be lucky enough to capture a scholarship, he would himself add monetary help to carry him through his collegiate career.

Pinkney's jealousy of Mumford and Bulstrode rose to its highest pitch when he heard that they had actually gone off together in the train to Winchester. It was then that he most regretted his neglect

of his studies. He could so easily have beaten either of them if he had only tried!

"Don't you wish you'd been going up with them?" Nubby Newgass asked him tauntingly. "I should think you're sorry now that you didn't put a bit more shoulder into your work, and kept in front of them as you were a month or two ago. You've always set your mind on going to a public school."

"I could have beaten either of them hands down if I'd liked," Pinkney retorted. "But it's one thing to enter for a scholarship at a place like Winchester and another thing to gain one. The exam. is fearfully stiff. A fellow I know there told me so. Neither Mumford nor Bulstrode will pass—I bet you anything you like they won't. They'll only have their trouble for nothing."

"You even seem to wish that they shouldn't win," returned Nubby. "But even if they don't pass this time they can try again, and at least they'll have had their experience and know better how to go about it another time. But I don't see how either of them can fail."

"Don't you? I do," said Pinkney. "Why, there's heaps of fellows from all parts of the country trying—fellows who've been properly coached by good tutors, not by stick-in-the-mud Grammar School teachers like old Grummel."

Apart from Pinkney, every one in the Grammar School, including Mr. Grummel, was excitedly anxious that the two chosen candidates should pass. To them the occasion was as exciting as any cricket match upon whose results they had built their hopes.

On the morning when the news was expected Mr. Grummel was pale and distracted. He was counting upon the advertisement it would be for him personally if two of his pupils should succeed in gaining scholarships at a great public school like Winchester. He was regretting now that he had not arranged to have a telegraphic message of the result of the examination sent to him at the earliest possible moment, instead of waiting for the slower process of the penny post.

Arthur Pinkney, on the other hand, was jubilant. The reason of his joy was not

at first apparent; but as a matter of fact he had done what Mr. Grummel had not afforded to do. He had arranged to have the earliest news sent to him by telegram, and he had been in possession of the result even on the previous night, and had so long kept the knowledge to himself, secretly hoping to make something by laying bets against both Mumford and Bulstrode. He certainly found some half-dozen of his class fellows willing to take the offered odds, and Nubby Newgass was among them, he having staked two six-pences against Pinkney's ten that either Tony or Bulstrode would pass.

At the play interval Pinkney dis-appeared for a while. When he re-appeared, he produced a telegram, upon which he had carefully obliterated the previous day's date, and passed it round for inspection among those who had loyally staked their pocket-money on their two friends' success.

"You owe me a shilling, Newgass," he announced, handing the form to Nubby.

Nubby's jaw dropped as he read the brief message: "Bulstrode and Mumford both plucked."

"I don't believe it," Nubby declared, passing the paper to Iddles.

"No more do I," said Iddles. "The thing's a forgery."

Pinkney laughed.

"Oh, you needn't believe it unless you like," he said, "and I'm not asking you to pay up your betting debts on the strength of the telegram. It was sent to me by a chap I know at Winchester. I daresay Grummel will have a letter from one of them before dinner-time."

It was on the afternoon of this same day that Pinkney made his journey to Wrinklebury Moor with the revolver in his pocket, and while he was lying in wait for Maurice Wrinklebury, several of his schoolfellows were better employed in a swimming contest in which Captain Quiller was the referee and the donor of the prizes.

"I'm sorry neither Mumford nor Bulstrode is here," the Captain said to Nubby Newgass, whom he had asked on board the *Nancy* while waiting for the swimmers to get ready. Nubby was subject to cramp and was not competing.

"So am I," Nubby regretted. "But Bulstrode would have had to give every one else a start. Even Mumford can't swim as strongly, although I daresay you'd consider him better at the side stroke, and quicker on a short course."

"By the way," said Captain Quiller, "I have just received a letter from Mumford. Perhaps you'd like to read it." He handed an open sheet of notepaper to Nubby, who read as follows:

"DEAR CAPTAIN QUILLER,—I am very sorry that I failed at Winchester, but nobody seems to have thought that I ought to have succeeded. The examinations were held in a big hall, where every boy was provided with a big piece of blotting-paper, five nibs, and as much paper as he wanted. There were about eighty entries (this sounds like a dog show), and there were about fourteen scholarships, some exhibitions, and some Headmasters' nominations. There were lots of boys much older than myself there, and I think it is mostly they who have succeeded. Bulstrode did not succeed any better than I did, and I think

got on worse. On Thursday morning I was not on the list of those wanted on that day, as everybody was wanted on Tuesday and Wednesday, but if you were not going to get a scholarship you were kindly informed that your presence was not needed on Thursday. I hope you will not be greatly disappointed in my failure.

"I cannot thank you enough for inviting me to go on the cruise with Wrinklebury. But it is a bit embarrassing to me to be asked to nominate three other Grammar School boys. As you have left it to me, however, I should say Bulstrode for one and Newgass for another. These are the only two that Wrinklebury knows personally, excepting Pinkney, whom I don't suppose he would care to have in such close companionship.

"Yours very truly,

"ANTHONY MUMFORD."

Nubby Newgass folded up the letter.

"I'm awfully sorry Tony hasn't won the scholarship," he regretted.

"So am I," nodded Captain Quiller. "But he'll have better luck next time.

What is your opinion about the last part of his letter? You see he suggests that you should be one of our cruising party. Do you think it would be wise to have Pinkney also?"

Nubby slowly shook his head.

"Mumford and he had a stand-up fight only a few days ago," he said, "and they haven't made it up again yet. I'm afraid there'd be quarrelling if Pinkney were to join you."

"Well, in any case it is not very likely that Pinkney will accept the invitation," said Captain Quiller, "so we need not anticipate a mutiny."

This idea of taking four of the Grammar School boys with him on the cruise in the *Nancy* was wholly Maurice Wrinklebury's, and Wrinklebury had already decided to ask Arthur Pinkney to accompany him. He had even been thinking over the plan of how he should give a few days' pleasure to Pinkney at the moment when Pinkney was lying crouched behind him on the moor pointing a loaded revolver at him and making ready to pull the trigger.

Frustrated in his murderous intention, Pinkney slunk away, wondering what he should do now that he was found out. He could not go home again. He dared hardly go back into the town and face the probability of being arrested. Everything had gone wrong with him. Every one was against him. He had made a huge mess of all his efforts to gain advantage over other people, and he was thoroughly vexed with himself and the world.

What troubled him most at this moment was his want of money. He had very little left of the seven sovereigns which Jerry had handed to him when they had met here on the moor several nights ago. All but a few shillings had been spent. If only he had not lost those two hundred pounds! The mystery of the loss of the banknotes was still unsolved, and he had not ceased to blame himself for his own arrant carelessness in not looking after them more surely. If he only had those two hundred pounds now, he told himself, he would not need to hesitate. He would go right away, turning his back on Budmouth for good and all, never to return.

Pinkney had telegraphed a secret message to Jerry in London, asking him for money, and telling him that he was prepared to join him in the proposed burglary, and he was expecting Jerry to come down to Budmouth again, so that they might go away together. This plan suited him exactly now. Indeed, it represented his last resource. There was no use in trying any longer to be respectable. He had gone too far, and the life of a free and reckless criminal was beckoning him with its allurements and promises of easily acquired wealth.

When he had walked half a mile or so in the direction of the main road, Pinkney sat down to think out his plans as to what he should do if Jerry were to fail him, and the best idea that occurred to him was that he should hasten back to the town, get the bicycle and a few of his personal possessions and make for London. But in the meantime he would hang about here waiting for Jerry. And with this resolution fixed in his mind, he curled himself up in the long grass to have a sleep until dusk should come.

He had hardly closed his eyes when a terrier's cold nose was shoved under his chin. He sat up with a start. Maurice Wrinklebury stood in front of him.

"Well!" began Wrinklebury. "What are you thinking of doing? Your mother was rather hard on you just now, eh?"

Pinkney stood up, scowling at him.

"I suppose you fancy you've got the upper hand of me now?" he said impudently. "I suppose you fancy I'm going to let myself be hauled up by the police? You make a fine mistake if you do."

"I only fancy one thing, Pinkney," Wrinklebury responded, idly swishing the grass with the end of his stick. "And that is that you have jolly well made an ass of yourself. I can't imagine that you've gained very much by what you've done. So far as I can gather association with men of the criminal class such as your friend Jerry Scrutton isn't at all elevating, and burglary's a rotten sort of profession for a chap like you to engage in. As for firing pistols into people when their backs are turned, well, I don't call that at all sporting, do you? It's just

about as unsportsmanlike as to fire an air-gun at a sleeping cat. Now, if you want sport, I can give you plenty of rabbit-shooting, and you might come out after the partridges when the season opens——"

He broke off, Pinkney staring at him in perplexity.

"I don't know what you're driving at," he interposed.

Wrinklebury smiled at him kindly.

"I believe you're not half such a bad chap as you make yourself out to be," he remarked. "I think I know you better even than you know yourself. No, please don't be afraid of me, you're perfectly safe. Look here, I'm going home to dinner now. Will you come with me? I want to have a jaw with you, and we shall be alone together. There's a lot I want to talk about, and I want to arrange with you to come with me on a little coasting cruise that I'm arranging, in Captain Quiller's schooner. It'll be rare fun."

Pinkney was still staring at him in wonderment. Could Wrinklebury really mean what he was saying—that he was

not going to give him up to the police, that he was going to allow him to join in the partridge-shooting, to take him for a cruise in the *Nancy*, and that he was even now inviting him to have dinner with him at Wrinklebury Hall?

"Do you seriously mean it?" he questioned. "Do you mean that I, who intended to murder you, am to go home with you now and have dinner with you?"

CHAPTER XXI

MAURICE WRINKLEBURY'S GUEST

"MR. PINKNEY will take dinner with me, Jarvis," Maurice Wrinklebury said to the butler, who met him in the hall. "You may lay it in the library, as we are such a small party."

"Yes, sir." Jarvis took his young master's hat and Arthur Pinkney's cap and limped away with them. His leg, where it had been wounded on the night of the burglary, was well enough now to enable him to resume his duties on all but state occasions; but he had not forgotten his encounter with the two escaping burglars near the shrubbery, and he was reminded of it now as he glanced aside at his master's unexpected guest. He was almost on the point of giving expression to his suspicion in the servants' hall, only that

he reflected that Master Maurice was not likely to consort with any one who was not above reproach.

Maurice led his guest up the wide stairs to his own room.

"I daresay you'd like a wash before we feed," he said. "This is my den. It's bigger than the one I have at Eton, which is hardly larger than a wardrobe. But a school study has one good quality—it makes a chap content with anything ever afterwards. You'll find hot water in that tin jug in the washbasin, and soap and clean towels and everything you want."

Pinkney took off his jacket. He was glad that his cuffs happened to be clean. He folded them up carefully to his elbows. Wrinklebury heard him sigh.

"I'll leave you here for a bit," he said. "Dinner will be ready in half an hour. If you want anything, ring the bell and order it."

Pinkney was relieved to be left alone. Before washing, he made the tour of the room, looking at the pictures, the books, the silver hairbrushes and cut-glass bottles on the dressing-table, the blue silk and

lace bed-cover, and the magnificent furniture.

"H'm!" he reflected. "It would have been a beastly shame to deprive him of all this luxury! Lucky for him—and for me—that I didn't pull that trigger an instant sooner!"

The only things that he touched were a pair of boxing-gloves and a mended cricket bat. There was a pair of fencing-foils above the bed, but he did not dare to handle them without permission. He was pouring out the hot water when the door opened, and the butler entered with a small silver tray.

"Master thought you'd like a cup of tea, sir," said Jarvis. "Sugar and cream, sir?"

"Yes, please," Pinkney answered nervously. He had recognised the butler at the first moment of seeing him in the front hall, and now he observed that Jarvis was looking at him curiously as he dropped the sugar into the teacup. But Jarvis was too well trained a servant to say anything, or to remain in the room an instant longer than was necessary.

When Wrinklebury returned, Pinkney was ready, standing in front of the bookcase.

"Those are some of my old school prizes," their owner informed him; "and that's my stamp album on the top shelf. Do you collect?"

Pinkney was an ardent collector of foreign stamps, but he had never seen anything like so complete an array as this that Wrinklebury now showed him. "It must be worth thousands of pounds!" he estimated.

"'Tisn't worth anything to me now," said Wrinklebury. "It cost me a lot of trouble; but I've given up collecting now. If you'd care—if you'd accept the album and what's in it as a present, I should be awfully pleased. Suppose you take it downstairs and have a look at it afterwards. Dinner's ready now. Shall we go?"

It was, perhaps, rather unfortunate that Wrinklebury had ordered the meal to be served in the library; but when he did so, he did not reflect that that room, above all others in the house, was the one in which

his guest would feel least comfortable. In the presence of the butler and the footman, however, Pinkney was alert enough not to betray any uneasiness, even though he was painfully conscious all the while that the chair he occupied at the little round table was directly midway between the window which he had forced open with Tony Mumford's penknife and the iron safe from which he and Jerry Scrutton had burgled the family plate and Lady Wrinklebury's diamonds.

The dinner that they sat down to was a very ordinary one indeed for Wrinklebury Hall, but Pinkney thought it a magnificent banquet.

He was conscious of being awkward in his unfamiliarity with the table manners of the rich; but if he ate his fish with the wrong knife and fork, if he bit his bread instead of breaking it, or drank his claret while his mouth was full of food, his host was far too polite to seem to notice these vulgarities. Wrinklebury, indeed, even strove to put him at his ease by imitating him, and hastened further to lessen his obvious discomfort by dismiss-

ing the servants as often as possible. But it was not until the strawberries and cream had been served and the two men had finally retired that Pinkney was wholly free from embarrassment.

"It must be awfully fine to live always in a place like this, with all these comforts and luxuries around you," he ventured to say. "I almost wish you'd never asked me. It all makes me so frightfully envious. And I'm afraid I've been behaving like the rank outsider that I am before your servants. Why did you ask me? Do you know that instead of being here I ought to be in a prison cell?"

Wrinklebury drew a deep breath, and did not answer. He was thinking of what Mrs. Pinkney had told him, and wondering for the thousandth time if what she had told him was true. It would not have required a great effort for him at that moment to say: "Look here, Pinkney, I know you have done wrong, as I might have done in your place if I'd had the same temptations. But you mustn't think that you've no right to be here. You have more, far more, right than I. All this luxury and

comfort that you envy is not really mine, but yours. I am an interloper, a usurper, put here by fraud in the place that you were born to enjoy." But he was silent.

Pinkney leaned towards him across the table, speaking with nervous earnestness.

"What do you suppose your mother, Lady Wrinklebury, would think if she knew that you were entertaining a burglar and a would-be murderer?" he inquired. "You don't seem to realise that it was I who broke into this very room with Jerry Scrutton and carried off the contents of the iron safe there. And you seem to think nothing of the incident of the revolver."

"Hush!" Wrinklebury cautioned him. "Jarvis will be here with the coffee in a moment. I realise it all; but there's no use in talking about it. I'm sure you're sorry—sure you haven't gained enough to justify you in taking to crooked ways. I can't very well imagine how a fellow like you could allow himself to sink so low. There's one thing about you, however, that shows you're not altogether beyond recovery. You've admitted your guilt—

although, for that matter, I had found it out without any admission."

He broke off. Jarvis was coming in with the coffee.

Pinkney glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece with thought of his appointment with Jerry Scrutton.

"I ought to be going soon," he said. "It's tremendously kind of you to have had me here, and"—he turned to see that the butler closed the door behind him—"and believe me, Wrinklebury, I'm downright ashamed of myself having gone crooked, as you politely call it. But if I'd been well brought up by a good mother, as you have, and had everything I wanted, it would have been different."

"I daresay, I daresay," nodded Wrinklebury. "But don't let us refer again to what's past and done with. You've got to think now, not of what you've done, but of what you intend to do in the future. Where are you going to-night, for example?"

"I don't know," Pinkney answered dubiously. "There's no use my going home. I should find a policeman waiting

for me, or, if not a policeman, a loaded revolver. When my mother says she'll do a thing, she means it; and I believe it would suit her down to the ground to see me put into a convict prison or else lying dead. She has sworn to kill me. So you see I can't go home. If I didn't happen to be stone broke I should go up to London."

"About the worst place in the world you could think of going to," commented Wrinklebury; "so your being stone broke's an advantage. It's rather curious, though, that you should be without money. That seems to indicate that, after all the risks you ran, you didn't find the—the burglary a profitable bit of business. I'm not surprised. You were a rank idiot ever to engage yourself in it, and I'm jolly glad you didn't gain by it. Listen, Pinkney." He sat back in his chair, playing with his empty coffee-cup. "You needn't be afraid of the police, because you'll not be prosecuted. Do you understand? You're going to be let off, even if your accomplice is captured and punished, as I trust he will be very soon. So you'll have a chance of

redeeming yourself and making a new start."

Pinkney's face flushed in gratitude for this clemency.

"I—I feel awfully mean, being offered such help and kindness just after I was on the very point of putting a bullet into you," he murmured. "But I should be the meanest cur that ever lived if I refused to accept your help."

"You needn't trouble yourself to thank me," Wrinklebury interrupted. "You'll show your gratitude quite enough to satisfy me if you'll put yourself in my hands. Now, I'm not going to give you money to go to London. That's out of the reckoning altogether. But if you're not going home, I have another plan that will do to go on with, and that is that you go straight on board Captain Quiller's schooner, and lie low there until we set sail on our cruise. There's a crew on board, and you'll be well looked after. Does the idea appeal to you?"

Pinkney stood up. He had been watching the hands of the clock, and already it was the time at which he had told Jerry

Scrutton to meet him. Secretly he had not yet determined upon what he should do. He did not altogether dislike Wrinklebury's suggestion, but he wanted first to be sure that Jerry Scrutton had not a better plan to offer.

"All right," he nodded. And he glanced at the stamp album, which lay on a side table. He was wondering how much it might fetch if he had need to sell it.

"Yes, you can take that with you," said Wrinklebury. "Good night. And do try to turn over a new leaf, and live like a gentleman, and not like a low blackguard. Good night."

CHAPTER XXII

THE NINE-THIRTY EXPRESS

ARTHUR PINKNEY almost ran down the avenue, so anxious was he not to keep Jerry Scrutton waiting. It was after sunset, but the sky was still light, and he desired therefore to avoid the public highways, lest he should be seen and recognised. As on a former occasion, Jerry was at the meeting-place in advance of him. He was dressed now like a seaman in the Merchant Service, with a weather-beaten pea jacket over a blue guernsey, and a peaked cap. He wore a full black beard; and what could be seen of his face was skilfully coloured to a ruddy brown, which few people would fail to take for natural sunburn.

"It's easy for you to see how important I consider you, coming all these miles and travelling more than half the day for to

meet you here," he began. "How's things? Everything all right with you since we parted so unceremoniously near the pier? That was a near shave! I'd only bare time to get my traps out of the hotel and cut. I saw you in the side street as the car was moving off."

"I wanted to see you then, Jerry," Pinkney explained. "I'd just lost that bundle of banknotes you gave me, and I thought you might help me to find them."

"Ah! you told me about your loss when you wrote to me," Jerry said, with well-assumed sympathy. "Can't for the life of me think how you came to lose 'em. And now what about the next job? Everything is ready. We can bring it off before daylight if we catch the nine-thirty train."

Pinkney caught his breath.

"Do you mean to-night—now?" he questioned.

"Of course," Jerry nodded, taking out his pipe and preparing to light it. "There's no good to be got by delay. And besides, his lordship and her lady-

ship won't be at home to-night, and we shall never have a better chance. I've told you what a lovely haul we shall make if it all comes off as I've planned. Your own share alone will be worth a good three thousand pounds, and as safe as the Bank of England."

"What are the risks, though?" Pinkney wanted to know. Already he was beginning to yield to Jerry's plausible arguments.

"There's no more risk than there is in our sitting here," Jerry assured him. "We simply couldn't be dropped on if it's done to-night or before daybreak to-morrow morning, and we shall be on the spot long before daybreak if we go up by the nine-thirty express. What's that book you've got under your arm? You can't take that with you. We don't want any luggage of any sort."

"It's a stamp album that I got from young Wrinklebury," Pinkney explained. "I've just been dining with him." And he proceeded to inform Jerry Scrutton of the whole history of that afternoon and evening's experiences.

Jerry listened attentively to the end.

"There's only one mistake you made," was his criticism, "and that is that you didn't pull that trigger a moment sooner. All this hobnobbing with an aristocrat is all very fine and large. I daresay you feel flattered by it. I daresay you expect that he's going to make quite a companion of you. Don't you fall into any such error, though. You ain't born in the purple, and you'll never turn yourself into a gentleman, however you try. The whole thing's no more than a clever plant, and you ought to have seen it from the first. This here young Wrinklebury's a sight cleverer than you are, and he's got round you a treat. I never thought you could be gulled so easily. I thought you'd more sense."

"You're quite wrong, Jerry," Pinkney protested. "He wasn't getting round me at all. He was doing it all for my good."

"Yes, I don't think," sneered Jerry. "Very likely that a chap in his position would want to reward a fellow who'd just been trying to put a bullet into him, isn't it? Go along with you! You ain't half fly yet, with all my training of you! And

you'd walk straight into the trap with your eyes open, eh?"

"Trap?" repeated Pinkney. "There's no trap about it. Wrinklebury's a real gentleman. He shows it in everything he says and does, and I'd trust him through thick and thin."

"That's exactly where you make the mistake," Jerry insisted warmly. "Why don't you look at the thing straight? What's this same yachting cruise but a trap, I'd like to know? He only wants to entice you on board, and then—why, then you're his prisoner. He can do what he likes with you. Yes, and I don't doubt that he reckons upon getting hold of me as well as you, and we should both be clapped into Dartmoor convict prison before you could say Jack Robinson."

Jerry puffed vigorously at his pipe for some moments. Then he knocked out the ashes against the heel of his boot and stood up.

"Come along, matey. We must move. It's time to slip along to the railway-station and catch that train. We can walk towards the town together, but then we

must separate and meet on the platform just a minute before the train starts. I'll get the tickets."

As they went along the shady lanes, Jerry Scrutton described in minute detail exactly how the burglary was to take place —how, having gained access to the kitchen garden, Pinkney was to cross the stable-yard and get round to the west side of the great house, and climb by the ivy high up to a window which he would find open. He was to enter by this window, and make his way silently through the house to a room whose window was immediately above the front porch, where he would find Jerry waiting to be admitted. They were to take only the small and valuable things such as would go into Jerry's leather satchel. All the more precious things were together in one box, of which Jerry had a duplicate key. It was exceedingly simple and easy.

Pinkney listened to him nervously, taking his instructions very carefully, although at the same time he was not yet certain whether he was going with Jerry or not. All the time as he walked

Maurice Wrinklebury's parting words were ringing in his ears, "Try to live like a gentleman, and not like a low blackguard," and he felt very sure that he was now disobeying the gentlemanly instincts which Wrinklebury had awakened in him. But at the same time he reflected in excuse that the door of his own home was closed against him, and that, as Jerry had suggested, Wrinklebury might, after all, have been laying a trap for him, whereas he could trust Jerry Scrutton to look after him. The thought of the three thousand pounds which Jerry had promised as a share in the proceeds of this present enterprise also weighed heavily with Pinkney. What could he not do with so much wealth? It was more, far more, than he could hope to earn during years and years if he remained in Budmouth!

He had arrived at the railway-station, still intending to keep faith with Jerry, who was to wait for him at the door of a third-class compartment of the train. He saw Jerry cross the platform from the booking-office, and was about to follow him when he heard his name called.

"Hello, Pinkney!"

He turned, and almost immediately found himself in the midst of a small group of his schoolfellows.

"Awfully good of you to come and meet us," remarked Bulstrode. Tony Mumford and he had just arrived from Winchester, and Nubby Newgass, Iddles, and others had awaited their arrival.

Pinkney blushed red with confusion. He glanced in a frightened way towards the waiting train. Jerry was beckoning to him imperatively.

"I—I'm afraid I'm not here to welcome you, though," he stammered awkwardly. "I'm going——"

He broke off. He had not noticed that Maurice Wrinklebury was also present. Wrinklebury took him by the arm, as though to prove to the other fellows that Pinkney was to be regarded as an equal companion. Pinkney had now grown suddenly pale. He was trembling. Then he seemed to realise that some inevitable fate was shaping his destiny, holding him back from that departing train. He stood as if rooted to the spot. The guard's whistle

sounded shrilly, the train began to move. The compartment in which Jerry stood at the window slowly passed by. Pinkney turned away, and Tony Mumford alone saw and recognised the burglar's face and beckoning hand. But Tony said nothing, and the train glided with increasing speed out of the station.

On the following night Tony Mumford chanced to be reading an evening paper, when his eye caught an account of an attempted burglary at a nobleman's mansion in Berkshire. There was only one burglar, and he had entered the house by a window, to which he had climbed by the thick growth of ivy. He had rifled a room in which the family valuables were kept, and had filled his leather bag with jewellery estimated to be worth some five thousand pounds. But the police had been watching him, and as he descended with his booty they caught him red-handed. He was identified as the notorious Jerry Scrutton, who had already served three terms of penal servitude for similar crimes, and who was wanted in connection with a very recent burglary at Wrinklebury Hall.

CHAPTER XXIII

CROSSING THE BAR

"You ought to be interested in something here, sir," said Tony Mumford, handing the evening newspaper to Captain Quiller and indicating a particular column of print. "That chap Jerry Scrutton has been caught, and it seems he has given away his accomplice, which was rather mean of him, I consider, though you can't expect a professional burglar to be troubled much with a conscience. What's to be done, I wonder? The police will be after Arthur Pinkney now, and he is under your protection, you know."

They were on the deck of Quiller's schooner, which was being got ready to sail at high tide on the following morning. Bulstrode, Iddles, Nubby Newgass, and Pinkney were already on board, as well as Maurice Wrinklebury. They had all

had dinner together in the saloon, and had come up on deck for coffee and to watch the sun setting in a blaze of red and gold behind the town.

Captain Quiller took the paper and read the account of the Berkshire burglary and of Jerry Scrutton's arrest.

"Humph!" he ruminated. "The police were smart there for once. Yes, you're right; Pinkney is under my protection, and we don't want him to fall foul of the law now that he's so far on the way to reform."

Tony stood at his elbow.

"I think you ought to be told that Scrutton was in Budmouth again last night," he said. "He went away by the nine-thirty express. Pinkney was on the platform, and I'm almost sure he intended to accompany him. Scrutton was beckoning him to get into the train, and I believe Pinkney would have done so if we hadn't been there. It's lucky for him that he didn't go, otherwise he would have been in prison now, instead of enjoying himself here with the rest of us."

He glanced towards Pinkney, who lay at full length on the white deck, turning

over the leaves of Wrinklebury's album, while Bulstrode and Newgass were at his side, taking equal interest in the rarer examples in the collection.

"Why, there's a blue Mauritius!" exclaimed Nubby. "That's one of the rarest stamps in existence. There was one sold by auction the other day, and it fetched over a hundred pounds! It must be worth all the rest of the collection put together."

"And you say Snooks has given you the album for your very own?" questioned Bulstrode.

Pinkney nodded.

"Yes. It was no end kind of him, wasn't it? But don't call him Snooks. It's a rotten name for so nice a chap as Wrinklebury."

"You seem to have grown tremendously fond of him all at once," remarked Nubby. "You rather disliked him that day at the cricket match."

"I didn't know him then," remarked Pinkney. "I do now, and I consider him quite the most genuine gentleman and quite the nicest fellow I've ever known in my life. I'd do anything for him—anything."

"Do you think we ought to tell him what a narrow escape he has made?" Tony Mumford suggested.

Captain Quiller shook his head.

"No," he answered. "Don't remind him of what is past and done with. Maurice has persuaded him to turn over a new leaf, and he's doing it now. It'll be the best thing in the world for Pinkney that he is coming this cruise with us. He—— Hello, Maurice, I thought you were having a game at draughts with Iddles."

Wrinklebury had come silently behind him. Captain Quiller stood up and strode forward to speak to his sailing master. Tony strolled towards the group of his companions, who were still discussing the market value of foreign stamps. Wrinklebury took up the evening paper and sat on the end of the skylight, swinging his feet just above Pinkney's heels.

"There's been an awfully fine cricket match at Lord's," he said aloud to no one in particular. "I see C. B. Fry has made two centuries again. What a ripper he is!" His eye was caught by the report of the burglary. He read it eagerly. When

he had got to the end, he crushed the newspaper up into a very tight ball, which he bowled in the direction of the taffrail, aiming at one of the stanchions. The ball missed its mark and dropped overboard into the sea. He went aft, and watched it floating away on the tide.

"I hope to goodness there isn't another newspaper on board!" he muttered to himself. Then he went forward to where Captain Quiller stood talking with the mate.

"I say, Uncle Dave," he interrupted, "is there any important reason why we should not set sail at once, instead of waiting for the morning tide?"

"None in the least," returned Quiller. "The wind is in a favourable quarter, as it happens. We can start at once, if you like; in fact, I was just on the point of suggesting we should do so." He drew Maurice to the side. "You've been reading that newspaper," he said. "You suspect that the police will be boarding us?"

Wrinklebury nodded.

"Yes," he returned anxiously. "We

must not allow him to be arrested, as he will be if we delay. They have a warrant out against him. His—his mother has given information. She has been dogging him, and knows that he is here."

"Strange that a woman should give information against her own son!" observed Quiller. "You'd think she hated him, and wanted to see him convicted."

"That is exactly what Mrs. Pinkney does wish," Wrinklebury told him. "But we must cheat her of her satisfaction."

In less than an hour the schooner's anchor chain was rasping through the hawsehole, and the sails were swaying and flapping in the evening breeze. The water was beginning to ripple at her sharp bow, and she was moving smoothly, when Nubby Newgass, who was leaning over the quarter-rail, looking in the direction of the town, made an exclamation.

"I say, there's a boat hailing us, Captain Quiller!"

Captain Quiller, Wrinklebury, Mumford, and Pinkney stood near him.

"It's the police launch," Tony whispered to Wrinklebury.

"Oh, I say!" cried Nubby. "Pinkney must have forgotten some of his luggage, and his mother's bringing it out to him. That's her, sitting in the stern sheets. Don't you see? She's waving her hand to us frantically, wanting us to stop!"

"Pinkney," said Wrinklebury, "do you mind slipping down below and fetching my binoculars? You'll find them somewhere in the saloon."

Pinkney had turned suddenly white. He looked as if he were already seasick, and as if he were glad of an excuse to go down the stairs.

"Aren't we going to wait for her?" asked Nubby, noticing that the schooner's sails were filling and that she was putting on speed.

"No," answered Wrinklebury. "Pinkney will have to do without his clean linen, if he's forgotten it, or else borrow some of mine." To Captain Quiller he added: "Shove on more sail or something, for goodness' sake!"

"Who's that Johnnie sitting beside Mrs. Pinkney, I wonder?" Nubby went on, "Why, it's Superintendent Burridge, I declare! And he's yelling to us to stop!"

"Shut your mouth!" urged Tony, driving his elbow into Nubby's ribs. "Don't you understand that Captain Quiller doesn't want any of us to have seen the blessed boat? A sailing schooner isn't like a steamer, that can be stopped at a moment's notice."

The police launch was now steaming out to cross the schooner's bows, but the *Nancy* was built for speed, and there was a good breeze behind her. She plunged forward. For a minute or two it seemed as if the launch would overhaul her. Superintendent Burridge blew his whistle, but no one took any notice of this summons.

"Let her rip!" cried Wrinklebury. And she ripped.

The launch followed in pursuit out of the bay, but beyond the point where the breeze was stronger the *Nancy* cut through the water at racing speed; and very soon the launch was left far behind, a speck in the twilight.

It was not till then that Pinkney returned on deck.

"I'm sorry, but really I can't find your

binoculars anywhere in the saloon," he explained.

"Dear me, what a silly I am!" laughed Wrinklebury. "I ought to have remembered that I'd brought them up in my pocket!"

CHAPTER XXIV

PINKNEY'S SACRIFICE

"SOMEHOW or other, I've altered my opinion of Arthur Pinkney," said Bulstrode, "or else it is that he has altered his whole nature since we've been on board the *Nancy*. Don't you fellows notice a change in him? You know we called him the sneak of the school, and—well, there's no doubt he deserved the name; but his greatest enemy couldn't call him a despicable sneak now. Even Tony here"—he nudged Tony with his elbow—"seems to see a lot of good in him."

"I?" Tony dropped a handful of gooseberry skins overboard and watched the seagulls scramble for them. "Haven't I always seen good in him? Didn't I once say that I considered him quite the nicest and cleverest fellow in the school? He

has only been passing through a phase of sneakishness, as one passes through measles or mumps. You may say that he's convalescent now."

"Well, of course he's been on his best behaviour ever since we left home," said Iddles. "And, when you come to think of it, a chap would be an out-and-out rotter who should show his worst side in such happy circumstances."

"I should say that living on board a yacht with a fellow is the best way in the world for finding out his true character," observed Nubby Newgass.

"But there's been a special influence at work upon Pinkney," rejoined Tony Mumford. "Wrinklebury has been putting himself out a lot to be kind and attentive to him, and to show him that it isn't so hard, after all, to be unselfish. It's only a pity that the process of regeneration didn't start a bit sooner. Pinkney had got to be fearfully slack just at about the time of our cricket match against Newton's. It was then that he began to go wrong. If he'd only kept straight—I mean, if he hadn't temporarily lost his ambi-

tion—he'd have been certain to gain that Winchester scholarship, and then he'd have gone on like a house on fire."

"'Tisn't too late for him even yet to indulge in such a conflagration," put in Nubby Newgass. "I believe Pinkney 'll be quite a different man after this trip, and that he'll go up to the University before he's done."

"Wrinklebury's going to help him," added Tony. "I heard him say so. He's going to push him forward, and coach him in Greek and mathematics, as well as in cricket and football."

"I wonder why?" questioned Bulstrode. "Those two don't seem to me in the least cut out for pals, and yet they're pulling up to one another as if they'd known each other all their lives."

"So they have," said Tony—"at least, off and on. They were nursed together, you know. Mrs. Pinkney nursed them both. My sister, who is lady's-maid at Wrinklebury Hall, told me so."

"Like Romulus and Remus, they were brought up together by a she-wolf," suggested Nubby. "There's a good deal of

the wolf about Mrs. Pinkney if all I've heard of her is true. Are there any more gooseberries in that bag, Bulstrode?"

"No." Bulstrode passed the empty bag to him. "Wrinklebury and Pinkney are going to bring another supply with them. They're coming off now, see."

The schooner was anchored off the quaint little village of Clovelly, and Wrinklebury and Pinkney had gone in the dinghy for fresh provisions. The boys watched them pulling out.

When they got on board the anchor was taken up, and a course was made round Lundy Island. This was to be the farthest point of the cruise, after which the *Nancy* was to return to Budmouth. They were to put in at Penzance on the way, where Wrinklebury was going to land, and travel by train to Eton for his examinations before the holidays.

So far they had had bright summer weather, but after leaving Clovelly the wind changed, bringing rain and frequent squalls and rough seas. All pleasure was at an end. Off the Lizard, indeed, sailing was even dangerous as well as uncomfort-

able, and Captain Quiller gave orders that the younger boys—Newgass and Iddles—were not to come on deck. The order was agreeable to both of them, as both of them were wretchedly seasick, and glad of an excuse for remaining in their bunks. Wrinklebury, Bulstrode, Pinkney, and Mumford were more accustomed to sailing, and they could even lend a hand to the crew sometimes in hauling in or letting go a sheet or trying a reef.

"Have a care there, you boys!" Captain Quiller warned them more than once when they were tempted to take too much upon themselves or expose themselves to danger.

Wrinklebury, who was an experienced yachtsman, never considered that such a warning was necessary for himself, and, barring accidents, this was the case; but accidents cannot always be avoided on shipboard, and it was an accident that brought about the tragedy which has now to be told.

It was evening, and the schooner was making for Penzance with the land on her lee when a sudden rain squall struck her. Pinkney and Wrinklebury were

amidships taking charge of the foresail sheet. At the tail end of the squall she was being brought round on a new track.

"Let go foresail!" came the cry from the mate, who was at the tiller.

Pinkney obeyed, and the vessel heeled over as she wore round; but by some mischance Wrinklebury failed to haul in the sheet at the right moment, and the foot of the liberated sail, flapping noisily about his head and shoulders, knocked him violently against the bulwarks on the lee side. He caught at a fold of the canvas, and it lifted him bodily off his feet. Pinkney saw him flung outward into the sea.

"Man overboard!" he cried at the top of his voice, and ran aft. He caught at a lifebuoy, unhooked it, and threw it out upon the waves as near as he could to where he saw Wrinklebury's cap floating astern.

"Man overboard!" he repeated. Then, without an instant's hesitation, he vaulted the taffrail, and struck out with his strong breast stroke. He saw the white circle of the lifebuoy rise on the top of a wave. He swam to it and seized it, slinging it

over his left arm. Then as a wave lifted him he looked around. He caught sight of Wrinklebury's wet head and struggling hands above the surface. In calm water Wrinklebury was a good swimmer, but in a rough sea such as this he could do hardly more than keep himself afloat.

"Man overboard!" The thrilling cry ran through the schooner, but she was already well in the wind, and had left the two swimmers far in the wake before she could again be turned. Captain Quiller sang out to his men to launch the quarter boat, and they hurried to obey. Bulstrode and Mumford dropped into her, and were followed by the mate and two seamen. The two men took the oars. They shoved off, and began to pull vigorously.

"It was Wrinklebury who fell overboard," Bulstrode informed the mate. "Pinkney jumped in after him. Pinkney's the best swimmer in the school."

Tony Mumford, who was at the bow, stood up, searching the darkening water.

"I can't see either of them yet," he reported.

"'BACK WATER, BILL! IT'S WRINKLEBURY.'"

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Rain was falling heavily, adding its mist to the twilight. The rowers pulled steadily. The schooner was coming down towards them now, and Captain Quiller had climbed the main shrouds, the better to see between the waves from that height.

"We must have passed them," said Bulstrode.

"There they are!" cried Tony. "Pull, stroke! Pull hard!"

He had seen the lifebelt with a pair of hands clinging to it. Then a wave came between, and for a time he saw no more. But presently, right in advance of the boat, the struggling swimmer reappeared.

"Steady!" cried Tony. "Ship your oar, Johnson! Back water, Bill! It's Wrinklebury!"

He leaned far over the side, holding on with his knees and feet while he stretched forth his hands. He caught at the floating lifebuoy, towing it to the stern and dragging Wrinklebury with it. Wrinklebury was exhausted, but Tony and the mate seized his wrists, and drew him nearer until they got their hands under his arms, and, helped by Bulstrode, lifted him on

board, and at once began to apply what means they could to restore him.

It was not many moments before he spoke.

"Pinkney—where's Pinkney?" he asked.

"All right, we're looking for him," Bulstrode answered. "He's a good swimmer. I daresay we shall find him in a minute or two."

The schooner bore down upon them, and they pulled alongside, but Wrinklebury would not allow them to put him upon her deck.

"No, no," he objected. "I'm all right. We must find Pinkney first. Where is he? He let go of the lifebuoy. He said it wouldn't support us both. Oh, find him! find him!"

They called aloud, and listened for Pinkney's cries. They pulled to and fro and backward and forward, searching, searching all the time. Darkness came on. They lighted lanterns, and still searched and searched without success. Wrinklebury was shivering in the cold wind and rain. At length they put him aboard the schooner in the care of his uncle, and still they

searched, far into the night. But Pinkney was nowhere to be found. At midnight Captain Quiller decided that there was no longer any possibility of rescuing him.

"Oh, Heaven help him!" Wrinklebury cried. "I wish it had been I instead! He did it all for me. He gave up his life for me, trying to save me. He did save me. He forced me to take the life-buoy, saying he could do without it."

For three days the *Nancy* lay at anchor in the place where the accident had happened. For three days the boats went out in search, and on the third day the body of Arthur Pinkney was found.

As the months and years went by Pinkney's last act of heroism was alone remembered, and those who had known him as something less than a brave, self-sacrificing hero were silent concerning his faults. Maurice Wrinklebury caused a brass tablet to be erected to his memory in the Grammar School, where also he perpetuated the name of Pinkney by the foundation of a valuable scholarship, and the gift of a challenge cup for swimming. The scholarship was gained in the first

year by Bulstrode and Mumford, and in the second by Newgass and Iddles. Mumford and Bulstrode are now at Oxford, in the same College at which Wrinklebury took his degree. Mumford thinks of reading for the Bar, Bulstrode has a fancy for being a doctor, but Nubby Newgass is less decided in his ambitions. He thinks he might do fairly well as a schoolmaster, with the prospect of being successor to Mr. Theophilus Grummel.

THE END.

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