

THE GREAT ESCAPE



One morning, at the beginning of the summer holidays, four children sat in an express train, feeling tremendously excited.

Now were really off! said Mike. My word - think of it - two months in a little house by the sea! Bathing, paddling, fishing, boating - what fun we shall have!

All the same, I wish Mummy and Daddy were coming with us, said Nora, Mikes twin sister. I shall miss them - especially after being away at school all term, and only seeing them once.

Well, they couldnt take the whole lot of us with them on their lecture tour! said Peggy sensibly. They will join us at Spiggy Holes as soon as they can.

Spiggy Holes! Doesnt that sound an exciting name for a holiday place? said Jack. Spiggy Holes - I wonder why its called that. I suppose there are holes or caves or something.

The four children had come home from school the day before. Nora and Peggy had arrived back from their girls school, and Mike and Jack from their boys school. They had spent the night at home with their father and mother, and now they were off, all alone, to Spiggy Holes.

Jack was the most excited of the four, for he had never been to the sea before! He was not really the brother of Mike, Nora, and Peggy, and had no father and mother of his own.

But the childrens parents had taken him for their own child, because he had helped Mike, Peggy, and Nora so much when they had run away from an unkind aunt and uncle. Captain Arnold, the childrens father, had left them at a farm with his sister, whilst he and his wife had tried to fly to Australia in an aeroplane.

Captain and Mrs. Arnold had been lost for months on a desert island, and when it seemed as if they would never come back, the childrens aunt treated them unkindly. They had made friends with Jack, who had helped them to run away to a secret island in a lake, and there the children had lived together until they had heard that their parents had been found and had come back to England to look for them.

As Jack had no people of his own, and was very fond of Mike, Nora and Peggy, Captain and Mrs Arnold had said that he should live with them just as if he were another of their children - and Jack had been very happy.

He had gone to boarding school with Mike, and now here they all were together again for the summer holidays. At first they had been sad to hear that Captain and Mrs. Arnold were to go to Ireland to lecture there all about their flying adventures - but now that they were on their way to Cornwall together, to live in a house on the cliffs, and do just what they liked, the children couldnt help feeling excited and happy.

Whos going to look after us at Spiggy Holes? asked Jack.

Somebody called Miss Dimity, said Nora. I dont know anything about her except that Mummy says

she is nice.

Miss Dimity! said Peggy. She sounds sort of timid and mouse-like. I shall call her Dimmy.

The others laughed. You wait till you see what shes like! said Mike. She might be tall and strict and have a loud voice.

The train roared on and on. Jack looked at a map on the wall. I say! he said. It looks as if Spiggy Hole isnt so very far from our secret island! I wonder if we could go over and see it. Dear little secret island - I expect its looking grand now.

Its a good distance, said Mike, looking at the map. About forty miles, I should think. Well, well see. just love to see our secret island again.

Lets have our dinner now. said Peggy, undoing the luncheon basket. Look what Mummies given us!

There were chicken sandwiches, tomato sandwiches, biscuits of all kinds, lemonade to drink, and apples and bananas.

Jolly good, said Mike, taking his share of the lunch. Mummies a brick. She always knows what we like!

How long is it before we get to Spiggy Holes? asked Nora, eating her chicken sandwiches hungrily.

We get to the nearest station at half-past four this afternoon, said Mike. But thats six miles from Spiggy Holes. Theres to be a car or something to meet us.

The time passed rather slowly. They had their books to read, and they played games of counting the signal-boxes and tunnels - but long before half-past four came they all felt tired, dirty, and hot.

Im going to sleep, said Nora, and she put her feet up on the seat.

Sleep! said Mike scornfully. I couldnt possibly go to sleep now.

All the same, he was fast asleep in a few minutes! So were they all, whilst the train thundered along through the sunny countryside, rushing under bridges, past stations and through tunnels at a tremendous speed.

The children only awoke as the train was slowing down in a station. Mike leapt up and looked out of the window.

I say! Our station is the next one! he yelled to the others. Wake up, you sleepyheads, wake up! Get your things down from the rack, and make yourselves a bit tidy. You look dreadful.

So they all cleaned themselves up, and got down their things. They were just ready when the train slowed up again and it was time to get out.

They jumped out, one after the other. Mike called to a porter, Weve two trunks in the van. Will you get them out, please?

The porter ran to do so. Jack wandered out into the yard to see if any car had come to meet them. But there was none. Only a sleepy brown horse stood there, with a farm wagon behind him. A farm-lad stood at his head.

Are you Master Arnold, sir? he said to Jack. Im meeting a party of four children to take them to Spiggy Holes.

Good, said Jack. He called to the others. Hie, Mike! Nora! Peggy! Theres a wagonette here to take us all. Hurry!

The porter wheeled out the two trunks. The children piled themselves and their belongings into the wagonette and grinned at the farm-lad, who looked a jolly sort of fellow. He got up into the driving-seat, cracked his whip and off they went trundling over the six miles to Spiggy Holes.

It was wonderful country that they passed through. The sea lay on one side, far down the cliff, as blue as the sky above. The cliffs were magnificent, and the coast was very rocky. Here and there the sea splashed around enormous rocks, and washed them with white spray.

On the other side were fields and hills. Poppies blazed by the roadside, and blue chicory flowers shone as brightly as the sky. The children were thrilled with everything.

Hope the weather keeps on being sunny and warm like this, said Mike. I shall live in a bathing-costume!

So shall I, said the others at once.

The horse cantered on. The children could hear the sound of the waves breaking on the shore far below. They were driving along a high, winding cliff road, and the sea-wind blew hard in their faces. There was a very pleasant breeze, for the sun was hot, and still high in the sky.

Whats our house called? Mike asked the farm-lad, who was driving.

Its called Peep-Hole, said the lad.

Peep-Hole! said Jack, surprised. What an odd name!

Youll be seeing it in a minute, said the lad. There it be!

He pointed with his whip - and the four children saw the queer little house that was to be their home and the centre of their strange adventures for the next few weeks.

It was a funny crooked house, with a queer little tower built on one side of it. It was set in a hollow in the cliffs, and was turned towards the sea.

Its called Peep-Hole because it really is a kind of peep-hole out to sea, set in the middle of those two cliffs, said the farm-lad. And from the tower you can see the tower of the old house set back on the cliff behind those tall trees there. They do say that in smugglers days someone in the Peep-Hole used to flash signals to someone watching in the tower of the Old House.

I say! This sounds exciting, said Jack. Smugglers - and towers - and flashing lights - and I suppose there are caves too.

Scores of them, said the lad, grinning. You mind you dont get lost in some of them, or get caught by the tide. This is a rare dangerous coast for children.

Heres the Peep-Hole, cried Nora, as they drew up outside the funny house with its one tall tower. And look - that must be Miss Dimity at the door! And shes just as mouse-like as you said, Peggy!

All the children looked at Miss Dimity. She was a small, oldish woman, with neat grey hair, a little smiling face, and big grey eyes that looked timid and kind.

Welcome to the Peep-Hole, children! she cried in a little bird-like voice.

Thank you, Miss Dimity! said the children, and they each shook hands politely.

I hope youll have a good-time here, said Miss Dimity, leading the way indoors. Your rooms are in the tower. I thought you would like that.

In the tower! cried Nora. with a squeal that made Miss Dimity jump. Oh, how lovely, lovely, lovely!

Miss Dimity led the way to a funny little spiral staircase that went up and up and round and round to the top of the tower. In the tower were two rooms, one above the other. They were not very large and were perfectly round.

Now you can wash and brush your hair and then come down to tea, said Miss Dimity, in her firm, gentle voice. And she added again, I do hope you will have a good time here.

She didnt guess what a strange time the children would have - poor Miss Dimity!

The children washed and tidied themselves. They chattered loudly all the time. The boys had the top room, and as it had four windows, one on each side of the round tower, they had four different views.

This window looks over the sea for a long way, said Jack, peering out. And the next one looks on the cliffs - and this one looks overland and has a jolly good view of that old house up there - and this one just looks over the roofs of Peep-Hole.

That old house looks rather interesting and mysterious, said Mike. Its very big. I wonder who lives there.

Come along, children! called Miss Dimity. Tea is ready.

They all ran downstairs, laughing at the queer little winding staircase. They felt so happy. It was such fun to be all together again, after three months at school - it was nice to think of the lovely long week stretching before them, full of sunshine and fun.

There was a splendid tea, with three kinds of homemade cakes, and some delicious honey made by Miss Dimitys own bees. There was no tea to drink - just big mugs of cold creamy milk.

Miss Dimity sat at the head of the table, and asked them about their journey down. The children liked her. She laughed at their jokes, and didnt seem to mind how many cakes they ate.

I made them all, she said. So its nice to see them being eaten. I know you like them then.

We certainly do, Dimmy, said Nora. The others giggled and looked at Miss Dimity. Was she going to be cross at being called Dimmy?

Dear me, she said, thats what I was called at school. It is nice to hear that old name again!

So after that they all called her Dimmy, and the name suited her beautifully.

When they had eaten their tea Dimmy got up to clear away. She did all the cooking and housework herself.

Would you like us to help you? asked Peggy politely.

Oh no, thank you, said Dimmy, stacking up the cups and saucers. Youve come here to have a holiday not to help me. But there are one or two rules I want you to keep, all of you.

What are they? asked Mike, rather alarmed. This sounded a bit like school to him.

Oh, nothing very much, said Dimmy, smiling. You must make your own beds each morning. You must be in good time for meals - though if you want to picnic out of doors you can tell me and Ill put you up lunch or tea any time you like. And the third thing is something your mother asked me - that is, you must be in bed by half-past eight.

All right, Dimmy. said Mike. Well keep the rules. Weve all got watches, so we know the time. Now can we go and explore a bit?

Yes - go out for an hour, then come back in time for bed, said Dimmy. Ill unpack for you, if you like.

Oh goody! said Peggy, pleased. Thanks very much. Come on, you others!

They all trooped out of the house and ran to the path that led down to the beach. It was a steep path, made of steps that were cut into the rock itself.

It winds down like our tower staircase! said Mike. Isnt it a steep cliff - and I say, just look at the colour of the sea! Ive never seen such a blue.

The sun was sinking in the west. To the east the sea was deep blue and calm. To the west it was full of a dancing golden light. The children laughed for joy and jumped down the last steps to the golden sand. It was studded with shells of all sorts.

Ill be able to make a fine collection of shells, said Mike, who loved to make collections of all kinds of things.

I say! Look at those caves! suddenly said Jack, and he pointed to the cliff behind them. The others looked. They saw big and small holes in the cliffs.

Lets go and see them, said Nora. She ran up to the cliff and peered inside one cave.

Oooh! she said. Its cold and dark in there. She was right. It was. The sunshine could not get inside the deep caves, and they felt damp and mysterious.

I wonder how far they go back, said Mike. It would be fun to bring a torch and see.

Well do that one day, said Peggy. Now what about a paddle? Come on!

They took off their sandals and splashed into the water. It was warm. They danced about in glee, and played catch in the water. Nora fell over and wetted her frock.

Peggy squeezed it out, and then looked at her watch.

Goodness, its time we went back! she said. We must hurry. Come on!

They ran back to the cliff and climbed up the steep, narrow path in the rock, panting and puffing, for they were not yet used to it. Then down the garden they ran to the side-door of Peep-Hole. Miss Dimity was setting a simple supper for them of green lettuce and brown bread and butter, and barley water.

Good old Dimmy! cried Mike. Oh, this is a lovely place, Dimmy. There are dozens of caves down there on the beach.

I know, said Dimmy. They are called the Spiggy Holes after a famous smuggler called Spiggy, who lived a hundred and fifty years ago. He used to live in that old house higher up the cliff. It is said that

he used this house as a spy-place so that he might know when his smuggling boats were coming in.

Oooh! How exciting! said Mike. Good old Spiggy!

He wasn't good, said Miss Dimity sternly. He was very bad.

I wish there were smugglers nowadays, said Peggy. Then perhaps we could spy on them and discover them. It would be most exciting.

Well, there are no smugglers in Spiggy Holes, said Dimmy. Have you finished your supper? It is quite time you went up to bed. I suppose you can be trusted to wash and clean your teeth and all that without me seeing that you do?

Dimmy dear, do you suppose our teachers at school come and see that we do all that? said Jack. It may surprise you to know that we are all of us over five years old.

It doesn't surprise me at all, you cheeky boy, said Dimmy, smacking him with a spoon, as he ran by her. Go along with you!

They all went upstairs giggling. Dimmy is a good sort, said Nora, as she undressed in her little round tower room with Peggy. She likes a bit of fun. Oh, I do like this funny bedroom, with its four windows, don't you, Peggy?

Yes, said Peggy. But the boys have got the best room - so high up like that. Let's go and say good-night to them.

They slipped on their dressing-gowns and climbed the winding stairs to the boys room. Both the boys were in bed. We've come to say good-night, said Peggy. Isn't this a lovely place to stay in, Mike?

Lovely, said Mike, with a huge yawn. I like a room where the sun shines in from dawn to dusk, and has four windows to peep through!

Peggy went to the window that looked up the cliff, away from the sea.

That old house looks queer, she said. I don't think I like it. Do you see its big tower, Mike? It is just like this little one, but taller and bigger. It seems as if that big tower is frowning down at ours.

You do have silly ideas, Peggy, said Mike sleepily. We'll go and explore the grounds of the Old House sometime - and wouldn't it be fun if the house was empty and we could go inside and see what the tower there was like!

I wonder what Spiggy the Smuggler was like, said Nora.

You'll have Dimmy after you with a hair-brush to spank you with if you don't go to bed, said Jack, burying his head in his pillow. I can't think why you are so wide awake. Do go to bed.

All right, said Peggy. Good-night. See you tomorrow, sleepy heads!

She and Nora slipped down the winding stairs into their own room. They got into bed. They were tiny

little beds, but very comfortable.

Now Im going to think about all weve done to-day, began Nora. But before she had thought more than twelve words her mind floated off into sleep, and she didnt move until the morning. The sun came in from the opposite window then, and Peggy and Nora were awakened by somebody tickling them.

Oooh, dont! squealed Nora. Mike, stop! What do you want?

Come and bathe before breakfast, said Mike. Get up, lazybones. Its seven oclock. Breakfast isnt till eight, so weve lots of time.

Nora and Peggy sat up, quite wide awake. They looked round their sunny room with its four quaint windows. They could see four bits of bright blue sky, and they could hear the sound of the waves breaking at the cliff-foot. They felt so full of happiness that they had to sing.

Here we are at Spiggy Holes,

Here we are at Spiggy -

Here we are at Spiggy Holes,

Pop goes the weasel!

yelled Nora to the tune of Pop Goes the Weasel.

The others took up the silly song and they all went downstairs in their bathing-costumes, roaring the tune. Miss Dimity put her head out of the kitchen.

Dear me, its you! she said. I thought it was the canary singing.

The children squealed with laughter and rushed down the steep path to the beach. They flung themselves into the water.

Now our holidays really have begun! said Mike, as he splashed Peggy. What fun were going to have!

The first few days of the summer holiday slipped away happily. The children explored the beach, which was a most exciting one, but rather dangerous. The tide came right up to the cliffs when it was in, and filled most of the caves.

We shall have to be careful not to get caught in any of these caves when the tide is coming in, said Jack. It would be very difficult to get out.

Miss Dimity warned them too, and told them many stories of people who had explored the caves, forgetting about the tide, and who had had to be rescued by boats when they found that they could not get out of the caves.

The bathing was lovely at low tide. The children had to promise not to bathe at high tide, for then the waves were very big, and Dimmy was afraid the children might be dashed against the rocks. But it was lovely to bathe at low tide. The rock pools were deep and warm. The sand was smooth and golden, and felt pleasant to their bare feet.

You need not wear your sand-shoes here, Dimmy told them. No trippers ever come to Spiggy Holes, leaving their litter and broken glass behind them!

So they went barefoot, and loved to feel the sand between their toes. The farm-lad, who came to do Dimmy's garden for her, lent them his boat, and the four children had a wonderful time at low tide, boating around the rocks and all about the craggy coast.

One day there was a very high tide indeed. The waves splashed against the cliffs and all the caves were full of water. There was nothing to do down on the beach, because, for one thing, there was no beach, and for another Dimmy said it was dangerous to go down the cliff-path when the tides were high because the spray made the path slippery, and they might easily slip down and fall into the high water.

Well, what shall we do then? said Jack, wandering out into the garden, and picking some pea-pods. He split the pods and emptied the peas into his mouth. Dimmy had a lovely garden - full of peas and beans and lettuces and gooseberries and late cherries and early plums. None of the children could help picking something as they went through it every day.

I know what we'll do! said Mike. We'll go and explore the garden of the Old House. Come on!

They passed the farm-lad, George, who was busy digging up some potatoes. Nora called to him.

Hallo! We're going to explore the garden of the Old House. Nobody lives there, do they, George?

That house has been empty this twenty years. said George. Maybe more. The garden is like a forest!

It will be fun to explore it then, said Peggy. They ran up the slope of the cliff towards the Old House. They were all in sun-suits and shady hats, but even so they were very hot. Soon they came to a high wall that ran all round the big garden of the Old House.

We cant climb over this, said Jack, looking up at the wall, which was three times as tall as he was. What are we going to do?

What about going in through the gates? said Mike, with a grin. Or do you feel it would be more exciting to break your leg trying to climb that wall, Jack?

Everybody laughed. Well, it would be more exciting to climb the wall, said Jack, giving Mike a friendly punch. But well go and find the gates.

The gates were locked, but the children easily climbed over them. They jumped to the ground on the other side.

There was a long, dark drive in front of them, winding its way below tall, overhanging trees to the front door. The drive was completely overgrown with nettles and thistles, and the children stopped in dismay.

I say! said Jack. We want to be dressed in macintoshes and gum-boots to make our way through these stinging, prickly things! If we push through them we shall get terribly stung!

Well, look, said Nora, pointing to the left. Theres a better way off to the left there - only just tall grass and no nettles. Lets go that way.

So they went to the left, making their way through shrubberies and overgrown beds. It was a very large garden, and very exciting, for there were all kinds of fruit trees that had not been pruned for years, but whose fruit was sweet and delicious.

The children picked some ripe plums and enjoyed the sweet juice. Nobody lives here, so it cant matter having a few plums, said Nora. The wasps would have them if we didnt. Isnt it hot in this garden!

Lets go and see what the house is like. said Jack. So they pushed their way through the long sprays of overgrown rose-bushes and went up to the house. It was built of white stone, and was very solid and strong. It had rather small windows, very dirty indeed, and the rooms looked dark and dreary when the children looked through the glass.

They came to the round tower built on to one side of the house, just as the tower of Peep-Hole was built on to Miss Dimitys house.

This is an enormous tower, said Mike, in surprise. Its three times as big as ours! My word, Id like to go up it! The view over the sea must be marvellous!

Lets see if we can get into the house, said Peggy. She tried some of the windows, but they were fast shut. Mike tried a door set deep into the wall of the tower but that was locked and bolted inside.

Then Jack gave a shout. He had found an old broken ladder lying on the ground and had set it up beside the wall of the round tower. It just reached to a small window.

I believe that window could be opened, said Jack. Come and hold the ladder, Mike. The rungs dont look too good to me.

Mike held the ladder and Jack went carefully up it.

One of the rungs broke as he trod on it and he nearly fell. The ladder wobbled dangerously, but Mike was holding it tightly, so Jack was quite all right.

He climbed up to the window-sill and tried to pull the window open. The catch is broken! he said. I believe I can get the window open if I try long enough. Its stuck hard.

Ill hold the ladder tight, Mike shouted back. Shake the window and bang the bottom part, Jack. Nora, help me to hold the ladder. Jacks shaking the window so hard that the ladder is swinging about! I dont want him sitting on my head suddenly!

There was a shout from above and the ladder wobbled again. Ive got it open! cried Jack. It came up with a rush!

Well climb up the ladder then, said Nora, in excitement.

No, said Jack, leaning out of the window. He had climbed in through it. That ladders too dangerous for you girls to use. Ill pop down and unlock the door in the tower, just near you.

Right. said Mike, and he took the ladder away and threw it down on the ground again. Jack disappeared. They could hear him running down the stairs of the tower. Then they heard him undoing bolts, and turning a rusty key. He pulled at the door and Mike pushed. It opened so suddenly that Jack sat down in the dust, and Mike flew in through the door as if he were running a race!

The girls followed, laughing at the two boys. Jack got up and dusted himself. Lets go up the tower first, he said. Look at the walls! They seem about four feet thick! My word, they knew how to build in the old days!

The tower was very solid indeed. It had a small winding staircase that ran round and round as it went upwards. There were four rooms in the tower, one on top of the other.

They are all quite round, said Jack. Just as ours are in the Peep-Hole tower. I say! What a magnificent view you get over the sea from this top room!

The children stood in silence and looked out of the window over the sea. It shimmered there for miles in the sun, purple blue, with tiny white flecks where the water washed over hidden rocks.

You can see the tower of Peep-Hole very well from here, said Mike. The two towers must have been built in these special positions so that the smugglers could signal to each other. If one of us were in our tower to-day we could easily wave a hanky to the others here, and it would be seen perfectly.

Mike! Jack! I can hear something! said Nora suddenly. She had very sharp ears.

The others looked startled. Whatever do you mean, Nora? said Jack. I can hear things too - the birds singing, and the far-away sound of the sea!

I dont mean those, said Nora. I am sure I heard voices.

Voices! In an old empty house that hasnt been lived in for years! said Jack, laughing.

I tell you I did, said Nora. She suddenly pointed out through one of the tower windows. Just look down there! she said. You can see the front gate from here - look at it!

The others looked, and their eyes opened wide in surprise.

The front gate is open! said Mike. And it was fast locked when we climbed over it! Nora is right. She must have heard somebody.

Perhaps it is somebody come to look over the house to buy it, said Nora. Oh dear - we oughtnt to be here, Im sure. And I wish we hadnt eaten those plums now. Lets go quickly.

The others could hear the voices very clearly now too. Jack looked alarmed. I believe theyre in the tower already, he said. They must have come into the house by the front door and gone round to the tower.

They are coming up the stairway! whispered Peggy, her hand half over her mouth. Sh! Dont talk any more. Maybe they wont come right up to the top.

The voices came clearly up the stairway. One was a mans and one was a womans.

This tower is the very place. said the mans deep voice, which did not sound quite English.

Nobody would ever guess, said the womans voice, and she laughed. It was not a kind laugh. The strangers went into the room below the top one and the woman exclaimed at the view.

Isnt it marvellous! And so lonely too. Not a house within miles except that little one down there - its called the Peep-Hole, isnt it? And the old farmhouse four miles off. Its just right for us, Felipe.

Yes, said the man. Come along - weve seen all we need.

The children breathed a sigh of relief. So the people werent coming up to their room after all.

Well, Id very much like to see the view from the topmost room of all, said the woman. Also, thats the room wed use, isnt it?

Very well. Come along, then, said the man. But hurry, please, because we havent long.

The footsteps came up and up. The children didnt know what to do, so they simply stood together and waited for the small but strong door to be opened. It swung inwards, and they saw a golden-haired woman looking at them, and a man with a very dark skin behind her.

Well! said the woman in astonishment and anger. What are you doing here?

We just came to have a look at the garden and the tower of the Old House, said Jack. We are staying in the Peep-Hole.

The man came into the room and scowled at them. Youve no right to get into empty houses. We are

going to buy this house - and if we catch any of you in the house or garden again well give you a good whipping. Do you understand - because we mean it! Now clear out!

The children were frightened. They tore down the winding staircase and out into the sunlight without word. They had seldom been spoken to like that before.

Lets go and tell Dimmy, said Nora. Do hurry!

Can They Be Smugglers?

The four children rushed out of the front gate and didnt stop till they got to the Peep-Hole. How nice and friendly it seemed, and how kind Dimmy looked as she stood picking peas for supper in the garden!

Dimmy! cried Nora, rushing up to her. Some people are going to buy the Old House.

Dimmy looked astonished. Whatever for? she asked. Its no use except for a school or for a hotel or something like that - its so lonely for an ordinary family.

Dimmy, they are queer people, said Jack, and he told what had happened. Do you suppose they really would punish us if we go there again?

Quite likely, said Dimmy, going indoors with the peas. If they are buying the house it will be theirs. So keep away from it. Surely youve got plenty to do without going wandering over that old place!

Well, you see, its a mysterious sort of place, somehow, said Jack. It looks as if anything might happen there. I keep looking at it and wondering about it.

So do I, said Nora. I dont like the old house - but I cant help thinking about it.

Rubbish! said Miss Dimity. No doubt these people will move in and make it a holiday place, and it will be just as ordinary as Peep-Hole.

Lets go and bathe, said Mike suddenly. Dont lets think about it any more. They were horrid people, and well forget them.

They fetched their towels in silence. They had all had a shock, for never had they thought that anyone could speak to them so fiercely, or threaten them so unkindly. However, when they were splashing in the warm water they forgot the strange old house and the queer couple that were going to buy it, and shouted gaily to one another.

But they had another shock when they went in to their tea that afternoon. They saw a car outside the door, and inside it was sitting the same yellow-haired woman they had seen in the old house! She looked at them without smiling.

The children went indoors, puzzled - and they walked straight into the dark-skinned man! He was standing just inside the sitting-room door, listening to Dimmy.

Oh! Sorry! said Jack. I didnt know you had a visitor, Dimmy.

Hes just going, said Dimmy, who looked quite worried. Go and tidy yourselves for tea.

As the children turned to go they heard the man speak again.

But why will you not sell me this little house? I am offering far more money to you for it than you will ever get when you want to sell it!

It has been in my family for two hundred years. said Dimmy firmly. It is true that I only live here in the summer-time, but I love it and I will not part from it.

Well, will you rent it to me for twelve months? asked the man.

No, said Miss Dimity. I have never let it, and I dont want to.

Very well, said the man angrily. Do as you please. But I think you are very foolish.

Im afraid I dont really mind what you think about me, said Dimmy with a laugh. Now, please go. The children want their tea.

Oh, the children - yes, that reminds me, said the man sternly. Keep them out of the Old House from now on, or they will get into serious trouble. Im not going to have badly-behaved children running all over my house and grounds.

They are not badly behaved, said Dimmy, and they didnt know you were going to buy it till to-day. Good-day.

She showed the man out of the door. He went to the car frowning, started it with a great noise and roared off down the country lane.

Sort of fellow who likes a car to sound like a hundred aeroplanes, said Mike in disgust, looking out of his tower window. You know, Jack, theres something funny about that man. Why does he want to buy the Old House - and the Peep-Hole, too? Do you suppose hes going to do something that he wants no one to know of? This would be a marvellous place to do a bit of smuggling, for instance.

People use aeroplanes for that sort of thing nowadays, said Jack. No - I just cant imagine what hes going to do here - but Id dearly like to find out. And if Mr. Felipe, or whatever his name is, is up to something funny, I vote we find out what it is!

Yes, lets, said Nora excitedly. She and Peggy had come up to the boys room to brush their hair. I feel as if something is going to happen. Dont you?

I do rather, said Jack. Though it may all turn out to be quite ordinary.

Children! Are you never coming down to tea? called Miss Dimity. I suppose you dont want any jam-

scones to-day?

Yes we do, yes we do! yelled the children, rushing down the winding stairs. Is there cream with them?

There was. Dimmy poured out their milk and handed the new scones thickly spread with raspberry jam.

Dimmy, who was that man? asked Jack.

He said his name was Mr. Felipe Diaz, said Dimmy, eating a scone. Fancy him thinking Id let him have the Peep-Hole! I certainly wouldnt sell my old home to a person like Mr. Diaz!

We think hes up to no good, said Jack, taking a second scone. And if he is, Dimmy, we are going to find out whats wrong!

Now dont you do anything of the sort, said Dimmy at once. Hes a man of his word, and if he says hell punish you if you trespass on his grounds you may be sure youll get into trouble if you disobey. Keep away from the Old House. Dont even peep over the wall.

The children said nothing. They didnt want to make any promises, because they never broke a promise, and it would spoil things if they had to promise Dimmy never to go near the Old House.

They ate a huge tea, and not a single scone or cake was left. You made too few scones, Dimmy dear, said Jack, getting up.

Oh no, I didnt, said Dimmy. You ate too many! I am just wondering whether I shall bother to think about supper for you - I am sure you couldnt possibly eat any more to-day.

The children laughed. They knew Dimmy was only teasing them. Were going out in Georges boat, said Jack. Why dont you come with us, Dimmy? Wed love to have you.

Dimmy shook her head. Ive plenty to do, she said. Go off and enjoy yourselves and see if you can possibly get an appetite for supper!

The children shot off to get Georges boat. He kept it tied to a rough little wooden pier in a cove nearby. He used it for fishing and it was a good, strong little boat.

George, did you see anything of the people who are going to buy the Old House? asked Jack eagerly.

Yes, said George, who was mending his fishing lines. They came and asked me to tidy up the garden a bit and to get a couple of women from the nearest village to scrub down the house. And they wanted to know a tidy lot about the coast around here!

Did they? What for? asked Mike.

Thats what Id like to know! said George, with a laugh. That mans up to no good, I reckon! He wanted me to sell him my boat too, when I told him it was the only one hereabouts.

Oh, George! You didnt sell it to him, did you? cried Jack in dismay.

Of course not, said George. I wouldnt part with my boat, not for a hundred pounds! I dont think they wanted the boat to use themselves though - I just think they didnt want me rowing round about this coast for a bit.

George! Do you think they are smugglers then? cried Mike. I thought smugglers used aeroplanes, not boats nowadays.

Theyve got some little game on, said George, packing up his nets neatly into the bottom of the boat. But Im not going to help them by selling my boat. Im going to keep my eyes open.

So are we, George, so are we! cried the four children excitedly. They told him all about their adventure in the Old House that day. George listened. He got into his boat, which was floating by the side of the little pier, and beckoned to the children to get in.

You come along with me and Ill show you something, he said. They all tumbled in, and Jack and Mike took an oar each. George had two. They rowed out on the calm sea, bumping a little on the waves that ran round the rocks here and there.

Weve got to row a good way, said George. I reckon we can just do it before supper. Right round the cliff there, look - and beyond it - and then round the next crag too. Its a goodish way.

It was lovely on the sea in the evening. The children took turns at rowing. The sun sank lower. The boat rounded the big cliff, went across the next bay, and rounded a great craggy head of rock that stood well out into the sea. Beyond that the cliff fell almost down to sea-level before it rose again.

George took the boat well out to sea then - and suddenly he pulled in his oars, shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked over the land to the north-west.

Now you look over there, he said, and tell me what you can see.

The children looked. Jack gave a shout. Why, we can see the topmost window of the Old House from here - and we can see the topmost window of our own tower too! The cliffs seem to fall away in a more or less straight line from here, and the towers can just be seen.

Yes, said George. And in smuggling days a ship could come and anchor out here. right out of sight of Spiggy Holes, and could come in at night when a light shone in those towers! Old man Spiggy used to light the lamp when it was safe, and it used to wink out at the smuggling ships here, and in theyd ride on the tide, unseen by anyone!

It does sound exciting, said Jack. Do you suppose Mr. Felipe Diaz is going to use the tower for the same thing, George?

Oh no! said George. But well keep our eyes open, shall we?

Yes, rather! cried all the children, and rowed back to supper as fast as they could.

The next few days the children kept a sharp eye on the Old House. They saw smoke rising from two of the chimneys and guessed that women were at work cleaning the big place. George also went up and tried to clear the weeds from the drive, and he told the children that the new people were coming in the very next week.

They seem in a mighty hurry to come in, he said. Why, that place wants painting from top to bottom and they're not going to have anything done except that the big boiler is to be put right!

The children bathed and paddled, fished and boated as much as ever, but the day that the new people moved into the Old House all four of them went to hide themselves in an enormous oak tree that grew not far from the gates.

They climbed up into the tree, settled themselves down on two broad branches, leaned comfortably against the trunk of the tree, and sat there, whispering and waiting.

Presently a large removal van came along the road, and then another - but that was all.

Funny! said Jack, in surprise. Only two vans of furniture for that enormous house! They must just be furnishing a small part of it.

The vans moved in through the gates, stopped in front of the house, and the men began to unload. Then the big car belonging to Mr. Felipe Diaz came tearing along, and, just under the tree where the children hid, it had to stop, to allow a tradesman's van to pass out of the gates.

In the car was Mr. Diaz, the yellow-haired woman, a chauffeur as dark as Mr. Diaz, and a sleepy-eyed young man who lolled back in the car, talking to the woman.

Well, said Mr. Diaz, hopping out of the car, and beckoning to the young man to come with him. Here we are! You go on to the house, Anna. Luiz and I are just going to walk round the walls of the place to see that they are all right.

The car moved in through the gates. The two men stood underneath the tree, talking in low tones. The children could hear every word.

This is as safe a place as anywhere in the kingdom, said Mr. Diaz. See that tower? Well, the boat can hang about right out of sight till we light a signal in the tower. Then it can come slipping in, and nobody will ever know. We shall be copying the old smugglers, Luiz - but our goods are not quite the same! Ha, ha!

Luiz laughed too. Come on, he said. I want to see the place. When are the dogs coming?

Mr. Diaz murmured something that the children couldn't hear, and the two went off round the walls of the Old House's garden. The children, who had hardly dared to breathe whilst the men had stood beneath the tree, looked at one another in the greatest excitement.

Did you hear? whispered Mike. Theyre going to use a boat - and put a signal into the tower! Its just like the old days!

But are they smugglers then? asked Nora, puzzled. And what are the goods they spoke of?

I dont know, said Mike. But Im jolly well going to find out. This is about the most exciting thing that has happened to us since we ran away long ago to our secret island!

I love adventures, said Jack. But look here - weve got to be jolly careful of these people. If they think we even guess that theyre up to something, therell be a whole heap of trouble for us!

Well be careful, said Nora, and she began to climb down the tree. Come on! Im tired of being up here

Nora! Dont be an idiot! whispered Jack, as loudly as he dared. Come back - we havent looked to see if its safe to get down!

But Nora slipped at that moment, slid down the last bit of tree-trunk, and landed on her hands and knees on the ground below the tree. And at that very moment Mr. Diaz and Luiz came back from their walk round the high walls of the grounds!

They saw Nora, and Mr. Diaz frowned. Come here! he shouted. Nora was too afraid to go to him, and too afraid to run away! She just stood there and stared. The others up the tree stayed as still as mice, wondering what Nora was going to do.

Mr. Diaz came up to poor Nora and shouted at her. What are you doing here? Didnt I say that you children were not to come round the Old House? He took hold of Noras shoulder and shook her.

Where are the others? Are they anywhere about?

Nora knew that Mr. Diaz hadnt seen her fall from the tree, and she was glad. If only he didnt look up and see the others!

Please let me go, she said, half crying. I just came for a walk up here. I havent been inside the gates.

You just try coming inside the grounds! said Mr. Diaz fiercely. He gave her another shake. Now, go home. And tell the others that if they come for walks up here they will soon feel very sorry for themselves. I keep a cane for tiresome children!

Ill go and tell the others, said Nora, and she sped away down the slope of the cliff as if she were going to find Peggy, Jack, and Mike straightaway.

Thats given her a good fright, said Luiz, with a sleepy grin. We dont want any sharp-eyed kids about, Felipe! Well, when the two dogs come theyll keep everyone away. Theyll bite anyone at sight!

The two men went through the gate laughing together. When they were safely out of sight. Jack spoke

A nice pleasant pair, arent they? he whispered to the others. Nora was pretty sharp the way she shot off like that - it looked exactly as if she was going to find us - and yet there we were above dear Mr. Diazs head all the time! Hed only got to look up and see my big feet!

I want to get down as soon as I can, said Peggy, who felt that if anyone did happen to see them up the tree they would be well trapped. Is it safe to slip down now, Jack?

Jack parted the leaves and peered all round. Yes, he said. Come on, down we go!

One by one they slipped down, and then shot off down the slope, keeping behind the big gorse bushes as much as they could in case any of the people of the Old House caught sight of them. They guessed that Nora would be waiting for them at the Peep-Hole.

She was - but she was crying bitterly.

Dont cry, Nora, said Jack, putting his arm round her. Were you very frightened?

Im n-n-n-ot crying b-b-because I was frightened, sobbed Nora, Im c-c-c-rying because I was such a idiot - slipping down out of the tree like that, and nearly spoiling everything.

Well, that was really very silly of you, said Mike. But you didnt give us away, thank goodness - you were quite sharp, Nora. So cheer up - but youd better be careful next time.

Jack shall be captain, said Peggy. He always was on the secret island - and he shall be now. He shall take charge of this adventure, and well do what he says.

All right, said Nora, cheering up and putting away her hanky. Ill always do what the captain says.

Do you think we ought to tell Dimmy about this adventure? said Mike.

No, I dont, said Jack at once. She is awfully nice - but she might be frightened. She might even forbid us to try and find out anything. Well keep this secret all to ourselves - though perhaps we might get George to help us later on.

Did you hear what they said about the boat coming in? said Mike. Well watch for that, anyway! We can take it in turns to sit up each night in the top bedroom of our own tower and watch for a light in the tower of the big house. When we see it, well slip down to the beach, hide in a cave, and watch the boat coming in - and maybe well see what the mysterious goods are that dear Mr. Diaz is smuggling in!

Its getting very exciting, said Peggy, not quite sure whether she liked it or not. We shall have to be awfully careful that were not seen or caught.

George told the children that the furniture had been put into only eight of the twenty rooms of the Old House.

The tower rooms have been furnished, he said. I found that out from one of the women who is cleaning the place. So they are going to use the tower.

Yes - they are going to use the tower! said Mike, looking at the others. But they did not tell George what they knew. He was very nice - but he was almost grownup and he might think, perhaps, they should tell Miss Dimity - and they did so want to follow the adventure themselves and find out everything before any grownups came into it.

That night the children undressed in great excitement. Jack was to take the first watch, from ten o'clock to twelve o'clock. Then Mike was to watch from twelve to two and Nora from two to four. By that time it would be daylight and there would be no need to watch.

The next night Peggy was to begin the watch. We must sit by this window, and keep our eyes on the tower of the Old House, said Jack. If any of us sees a light flashing or burning there, he must wake the others at once - and then we'll all creep down to the beach, hide in a cave and see if we can spot the boat coming in.

Peggy and Nora went down to their bedroom. They found it difficult to go to sleep. Mike got into bed and talked to Jack, but they both fell asleep very soon. Jack had set the alarm clock to wake him at ten.

R-r-r-r-r-ring! It went off shrilly at ten o'clock. Jack sat up and switched it off. Good thing Dimmy gave us our rooms right away in this tower, he thought to himself. She would be waked too, if we slept anywhere near her. Mike, are you awake? Well, go to sleep again. I'm going to watch now, and I'll wake you at twelve.

Jack put on a dressing-gown, and sat down by the window that looked towards the tower of the Old House. It was a dark, cloudy night. Jack could not make out the tower, stare as he might.

Well, I should see it if it had a light in it, he thought.

An owl hooted in a distant wood. A moth fluttered in a corner near Jack's head and made him jump. He yawned. After the first five minutes, it was rather boring to sit and look at dark nothingness.

He was glad when it was time to wake Mike. Mike stumbled sleepily out of bed, dragged on his dressing-gown, and went to sit by the window. Jack tumbled into bed thankfully and was asleep in a second.

Mike sat and stared sleepily at the tower of the Old House. He could just see it now, for the sky had cleared. The tower was dark. Mike felt his eyes closing and he jerked his head up. He got up to walk about, afraid that he might fall asleep in the chair.

When his two hours were almost up, he heard a sound in the bedroom. and a hand touched his shoulder. Mike almost jumped out of his skin. He hit out and struck something soft.

Oh! said Nora's voice. You hurt me, Mike! I've just come up to tell you it's my turn to watch.

Well, what do you want to come creeping in like that for, and make me jump! said Mike crossly. I thought you were a smuggler or something!

Nora giggled and took her seat by the window. Get into bed, she said. It's my turn now. Oooh, I do feel important!

That night nothing happened - neither did anything happen the next night or the next - but on the fourth night there was great excitement. A light flashed in the tower at midnight! There it was, as plain as could be!

It was Peggy who first saw the light flashing in the tower of the Old House. Mike had had the first watch that night, and Peggy had come up from her room about one minute before midnight to take her turn at watching.

She whispered a few words to Mike, and took her seat by the window.

There hasn't been a sign of anything, Mike said in a low voice, and he threw off his dressing-gown to get into bed. This is the fourth night we've watched - it's a bit boring, I think. Do you suppose that...

But just at that moment Peggy gave such a loud squeal that Mike jumped. Mike! Oooh, look! Mike! There's a light in the tower. It's just come, this very moment!

Mike ran to the window, almost falling over a chair on the way. Jack awoke at the noise.

Yes! said Mike. It's a light! Jack! Jack! Come and look!

Jack jumped out of bed and ran to the window. Sure enough, there was a light in the distant tower - a light that dipped and flashed and dipped and flashed.

They are signalling, said Jack, in excitement. The boat must be standing out to sea watching for the signal right beyond that rocky crag we sailed round.

Shall we get on our things and slip down to the beach? said Mike. So excited that he could hardly stand still.

Yes, said Jack. Peggy, wake Nora. There's no hurry, because if that light has only just shone out of the tower, it will take some time for the boat to get round to Spiggy Holes. We've plenty of time to dress properly.

Peggy flew down the winding staircase to tell Nora, who was still sleeping soundly. Peggy shook her, and Nora woke up in a hurry.

Nora! The lights in the tower! Hurry and get dressed, because we're all going to creep down to the beach and hide in a cave to watch, cried Peggy. Nora almost fell out of bed in her excitement. They put on their clothes in the dark, for Jack had forbidden lights of any sort in their tower, in case they should be seen from the Old House.

If we can see their light, they could see ours, said Jack.

True, Captain! said Mike and dressed himself at top speed. He put on both his stockings inside out, and buttoned his coat up wrong - but who minded?

They were all ready in five minutes. Jack took his torch and gave one to Peggy for the girls. They all crept down the staircase, out of the little tower door, and down the garden path, where the smell of honeysuckle came to them.

Noras got on her bedroom slippers, said Peggy, with a giggle. She couldnt find her others.

Sh! said Jack sharply. Other people may be about, remember. We mustnt be seen or heard.

They went as quietly as they could down the rocky path to the beach. The tide was half in and half out. The moon swam out from behind a cloud and lighted up the shore for the children. Jack stopped and looked out over the sea.

No sign of any boat yet. he whispered. Lets get into one of the nearest caves and get settled before anyone arrives. I expect the people from the Old House will come down to the beach soon.

The children went into a small cave not far from the steep cliff path. They thought that if they hid there they could easily see who came or went up the cliff. They sat on the dry sand on the floor of the cave and waited, speaking in whispers. Nora was shaking with excitement. She said her knees wouldnt keep still.

Suddenly the children heard voices, and they stiffened in surprise. The voices were to the right of them. Jack cautiously peeped out of the cave when the moon went behind a cloud.

I believe its the man called Felipe Diaz and that sleepy-looking chap called Luiz, whispered Jack.

But, Jack, how in the world did they get on to the beach? whispered back Mike. We didnt see them come down the cliff-path - and thats the only way down on to the beach for a couple of miles! The cliffs are much too steep anywhere else to get down to the shore.

Thats funny, said Jack. They couldnt have been here already, surely, or wed have seen them. Perhaps they were waiting in a cave. Good gracious, I hope they didnt spot us!

Nora went hot and cold when she heard Jack say that. Mike shook his head.

If theyd seen us theyd have rushed us off the beach at once, he said. They wouldnt want us to see what was happening tonight. Listen! Whats that!

The children listened - and over the black and silver water they heard the sound of a low humming.

Its a motor-boat! said Jack, in an excited whisper. Its been waiting out yonder, round the crag, for the signal. Now its coming in! Watch out, everyone. See all you can.

The children stood up and craned their necks round the rocky edges of the cave. The moon came out for a moment, and coming nearer and nearer to the shore a large motor-boat could be seen, glinting in the moonlight. Its hum was loud in the stillness of the night.

It shut off its engine and ran gently into the little cove where George kept his boat. The children could no longer see it.

It must be by Georges small wooden jetty, whispered Jack. Well, we shall see what kind of goods the smugglers are bringing in, when they pass us on their way to the cliff-path.

They all waited impatiently. The sound of hushed voices came to them, and the thud of the boat

against the wooden pier. The children waited and waited. Then there came the sound of humming once again, and the motor-boat slid out of the cove and made its way swiftly out to sea and round the rocky headlands.

Theyll be coming by in a second, said Jack. Now be quiet as mice, everyone - dont sneeze or cough for goodness sake!

Nora at once felt as if she was going to sneeze. She took out her hanky and buried her face in it. How dreadful if she gave their hiding-place away just at this most important moment!

But the sneeze didnt come - and nobody came. Not a shadow passed in front of the childrens cave. Not even a voice could be heard now.

After half an hour, the children became impatient.

Jack, whats happened, do you suppose? whispered Nora.

Cant imagine, said Jack. Then a thought struck him. I say! I wonder if the boat came to fetch anyone! We shouldnt see them come by if theyd gone in the boat!

Well, then, we might as well go out and look round a bit, said Mike. Can we, Jack?

All right, said Jack. But for goodness sake be quiet!

They made their way softly to the little cove where the wooden pier stood. Georges boat was beside it. Jack shone his torch on the ground and pointed out the footsteps in the sand.

Lets follow them backwards and see where they come from, said Mike. I simply cant understand how those men came down to the beach tonight without us seeing them pass.

So, with the help of the torches the children followed two pairs of footsteps from the cove, round the beach - and into a big cave!

So they must have been hiding here all the time! said Jack.

Look, said Mike, in a puzzled voice, swinging his torch all over the sandy beach. There are no more footsteps beyond this cave - they didnt come to the cave by the cliff-path, thats certain. Then how did they come?

Jack! Mike! There must be a secret passage from the Old House to the beach! suddenly said Nora, in such a loud whisper that the others jumped.

Sh! said Jack. Then he too began to whisper loudly. I believe Noras right! Of course! Theres a secret passage from the shore to the Old House! Why didnt I think of it before! My goodness, Nora, that was smart of you to think of that.

The passage must begin in this cave, where the mens footsteps go, said Nora, pleased and excited to think that Jack thought she was smart. Lets go in and explore.

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