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"I do believe there's Miss Edith at the window!" (p. 25)

THE ISLAND HOUSE

A Tale for the Young Folks.

BY

F. M. HOLMES,

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"THE WHITE SLEDGE," ETC.

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A DOUBLE VICTORY
LEFT IN CHARGE
A SUNDAY TRIP
"IN A MINUTE!"
FARTHING DIPS
TIMFY SYKES

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"I do believe there's Miss Edith at the window!" *Frontispiece*

"Alfy and Mansy made quite an enjoyable meal."

"On floated the tub, leaving him alone in the tree!"

"I wonder if I could undo these knots with my teeth? I will try."

THE ISLAND HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

OLD MANSY HEARS SOMETHING.



think I'll get out here, young man."

"All right, missus."

The old carrier stopped his jolting cart—an easy thing to do, for the wearied horse was glad of the chance of halting—and the passenger leisurely descended. With her descended also a bulging umbrella and numerous packages.

"Good night, young man!" she exclaimed. She thought this a very polite way of addressing men whom she regarded as somewhat beneath her in social station.

But he did not answer. He was urging on his sleepy horse, and though it was an easy matter to stop that interesting quadruped, yet it was a very different thing to make him go on again.

So she started off down a road leading out of the turnpike thoroughfare on which the carrier was travelling.

She was a tall, somewhat angular woman, with determination written on her face. In one hand she carried a number of parcels mysteriously tied together, and in the other hand her very bulgy umbrella, which she used as a walking stick, and staffed her way with it solemnly along the dim country road.

It was a summer evening, and there had been a heavy storm during the day. "Dear! dear! how dirty it be, sure/y," she said, as she proceeded. "Bad enough to be dirty in winter, but in summer it's disgraceful! Ha! how sweet that woodbine do smell! Now, if I could get a piece for the children!"

She stopped and began to poke about in the hedge with her bulging umbrella. At last, after much reaching and pulling, she obtained a small piece of the sweet-smelling honeysuckle, stuck it in her large, old-fashioned bonnet, where it nodded like a plume, and pursued her way in triumph.

"Soon be home now," she said, to encourage herself. "Won't Master Alfy be pleased with the woodbine!"

Suddenly she paused again. What was that noise?

She was at the corner of a lane branching off from the road she had been pursuing. Dimly in her ears sounded a low, sullen roar—a roar something like the murmuring noise of a mighty city heard in a quiet and distant suburb.

But here was no mighty city. She was deep in the heart of the quiet country. What was that noise?

"I never heerd the like afore at this place," she muttered to herself. "Anyhow, I'll get on home. I shan't be long now!"

A few turns in the road brought her in sight of the house. But she stood suddenly

quite still, and stared in amazement and alarm. Was that indeed the house she had left quite safely in the smiling sunlight of yesterday morning?

Now, she saw a turbid sheet of water surrounding it; and here and there the tops of shrubs and trees and hedges, looking strange and melancholy as they rose out of the flood. The dull roar she had heard previously now sounded louder than before, but she did not think of that. The children were her anxiety. "Where are the children?" she cried.

The excitement and alarm wrought upon her feelings, and she screamed aloud—

"Children! children! Where are the children?"

Perhaps it was the best thing she could have done. Anyhow, it had a good effect. Lights quickly appeared at the windows, and she heard shrill, childish voices sounding over the water.

"Mansy! Mansy! is that you? Oh! we are glad you have come! Where does all the water come from?"

"Are you all safe?" she screamed.

"Yes, yes; but we have scarcely anything to eat."

"I have something in these parcels!" she shouted. "Oh, thank God the children are all safe!"

"How are you to get here, Mansy?"

That was the difficulty; and Mansy, as she looked at the dull, sullen water, felt she could not answer the question. First she thought of boldly plunging in and wading up to the house door. But, strong-nerved as she was, she shrank from this, and after carefully plumbing the depth a little way with the bulging umbrella, she shrank from it still more. It might be too dangerous.

In the dim twilight of that cloudy summer evening she stood on the water's brink and watched the flood go swaying past. She felt stupefied and bewildered. Whence came the flood, and how? A more unexpected thing had never happened to her. And now she knew that the children were safe, the unexpectedness of it, the amazement of the whole thing, seemed almost to benumb her senses.

But she soon roused herself, when across the water sounded a shrill boyish voice, which shouted—"I'll bring you over, Mansy. I'm coming for you. Look out!"

"Bless the boy! that's my Master Alfy. Whatever is he up to now?"

And the good woman strained her eyes in the direction of the house to see what her favourite boy was doing.

She heard numerous childish exclamations, shouts, and laughter, and noises as of something knocking against the walls of the house. Then a splash!

"Whatever is that boy doing?" cried Mansy. "Don't you get drowned!" she screamed. "Do take care, Master Alfy! I'd rather stay here all night than you should come to harm!"

"All right, Mansy dear," shouted the shrill voice of the boy. "I'm coming, safe and sound, Mansy."

"Now, what is he a-comin' in?" cried the good woman, gazing into the dusk. She saw the dim outline of something which soon she recognised.

"Why, bless the boy! he's in the big washing tub! My! and how clever he do manage it!"

Mansy was quite right. The plucky little lad had hit on this expedient of ferrying the old nurse and housekeeper over the flood to the house! He had obtained two large kitchen ladles, and with these he was propelling and guiding the unwieldy round tub, which bobbed about provokingly on the turbid water, and made but little progress. It would have been still less, perhaps, but for the fact that the water flowed from the direction of the house past the old nurse.

But the difficulty the boy had soon to encounter was to guide the tub to her, for it was in great danger of being carried past. The house stood in a small valley or depression of ground, which rose to the lane up which Mansy had been walking. She was now standing on the verge of the water, which appeared to surround the house entirely, and completely obliterated the lawn and garden, except for the trees and shrubs, and the boundary hedge which stood above the turbid flood.

"Now, Mansy, look out!" cried Alfy. And whirling through the air came a thin rope, which, before she was aware, struck her shoulder.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "what's that? What are you doing, Alfy?"

"Catch tight hold of it—quick, Mansy!"

Mansy's energy and common-sense were returning, and she was on the alert in a moment. She caught the rope, and held it firmly. "The new clothes line!" she exclaimed, "Bless the boy! what next?"

"Pull, Mansy dear, pull!" he shouted. She pulled hard, and the tub slowly floated towards her.

"That's right; jolly!" exclaimed Alfy, as the tub, with its bright, brave little burden, came close to Mansy and touched the ground before her.

"My dear boy," exclaimed the good old woman, "how did this water happen? And I am so glad to find you all well."

"Yes, all right, Mansy. Now get in the tub, quick! Is it not fun?"

"What! me get in the washing-tub?" she exclaimed. "Oh! I couldn't!"

"Why, yes, Mansy dear; that's what I came for. You'll be all right."

"Why, it wouldn't bear me! We should go to the bottom."

"Oh! nonsense, Mansy! Why, don't you remember at the seaside regatta, last year men had a race in tubs?"

"Ah! but I'm—I'm—heavier than them men," said Mansy thoughtfully, looking down on her ample proportions.

"The tub is big," exclaimed Alfy. "It is the biggest we have. We had a work to get it out of the window; and it made such a splash! Come on, dear Mansy!"

"I wouldn't do it for nobody but you, Master Alfy!"

"Well, do it for me then, Mansy. I'll take care of you; see if I don't."

"Anyhow, the parcels might go in. There's something there nice, Alfy,—a tongue—a nice Paysandoo; and some jam—blackberry and apple mixed, and some biscuits."

"Oh! jolly! treat! Come on, dear Mansy, let's be quick back."

"Has not the butcher come?" asked the old nurse.

"No; no tradesmen could cross over from the village, nor yet the postman, and we expected a letter from mother and father. We are all surrounded by water in the house, just like an island. 'The Island House' Madge called it!"

"And Miss Madge, and Miss Edie, and Jane are quite well?"

"Yes, quite, dear Mansy. Only do be quick, please."

The old nurse bent over and put the packages into the tub.

"There!" she said, as it dipped, "see how that weighs it down."

"Only a bob down when the parcels fell in," Alfy cried merrily. "See, it is all right now. You can't get across any other way," he added decidedly.

"Well, I'll try it," she said slowly; "but I very much doubt——"

She did not finish the sentence, but carefully planting the bulging umbrella in the water, she leaned on it, and then advanced one foot to place in the tub. "Oh, I can't!" she cried, just as the foot was over the side of the tub, and she hastily drew back.

"You *could*, Mansy dear," exclaimed Alfy. "You were just doing it beautifully!"

"But didn't you see how the tub was going down, Master Alfy?"

"Oh, no, it wasn't; try again, there's a dear!"

So Mansy, persuaded by Alfy, whom she loved like her own son, and spurred on also by the desire to reach the house, tried again. She leaned on the umbrella, and slowly advanced her right foot as before, but this time she plumped it down into the tub.

Down it bobbed, of course, under her weight. "Oh-h-h!" she cried. "I shall drown you, Alfy!" and hastily she drew back again. "Me in a tub!" she cried. "I can't!"

"It really is all right," said Alfy again. "It will take us both. Why, these flat-bottomed things float in ever such a little water. Try once more, Mansy dear, and then I can give you a kiss."

"I dessay you could, my bonnie baby, and I know you'd do anything to help your old nurse. You're a real good boy; but go in that rockety thing I couldn't!"

"Tisn't rickety, Mansy, when once you are inside. Look here," and he jumped in it, and shook it from side to side. Of course his light weight was nothing to speak of, and it sat like a cork on the water.

"You take over the parcels to your sisters, Alfy dear, and then they'll have something to eat."

"No, I'm not going without you, Mansy!" he exclaimed decidedly, pulling the tub in again by the rope quite close.

"Bless the boy! To think of my little Master Alfy taking his old nurse in a tub! What would your parients say, on the Continong?"

"Well, it must be, you see, Mansy dear, so please come on!"

"Well, if we do turn over, I'll save you, Master Alfy. So now I'll try again."

And once more leaning on the umbrella, she put one foot into the tub, and not caring for its plumping down into the water, this time she quickly brought the other foot after the first.

"Capital! capital!" cried Alfy. "There, you see, we have not gone over!"

No, they had not gone over; but he soon found they were not going at all! The tub was just aground, and would not move without being pushed off.

So Alfy endeavoured to edge off the clumsy craft with the ladles, and called on Mansy to help with the indispensable bulgy umbrella. The moon was now shining, and albeit it was with a wan and watery gleam, yet it enabled them to see their course a little more clearly.

After strenuous efforts, the large, round tub was gradually got off the ground, and actually floated. "Hurrah!" shouted the brave little Alfy. "Now for Island House!"

But try as he would he could not make the heavily laden craft float towards the house. His paddles were too small, or he had not power enough to make the best use of them, and slowly the current bore him away.

Then he called on Mansy to help, but, good woman, she no more knew how to paddle a tub properly than to fly to the moon! Their efforts perhaps slightly retarded the progress of the strange craft, but could not alter its course.

"I'll try the rope," cried Alfy in desperation. "Madge! Jane!" he shouted, "look out!"

He threw the rope, but, of course, it fell far short of the house. A moment's reflection would have shown him that it could not possibly reach the window where stood his sisters and the servant maid.

They saw the difficulty now, and screamed aloud, while Mansy endeavoured to shout back reassuring answers.

"It's no use," said Alfy, crouching down in the tub, "we are floating away. We cannot get to the house. What shall we do now?"

CHAPTER II.

TO THE LABURNUM TREE.

hat shall we do now?"

It was Mansy who echoed Alfy's cry. "Can't we stop it somehow, Master Alfy?" she



added. "Tie it with the rope to the top of some tree or something. Look there, could we not catch the line on there?" and she pointed to the shrubby top of a big bush or tree. Alfy could not exactly see what it was, but he saw something jutting up above the water.

The boy hastily took up his ladles, and endeavoured to steer the strange bark to the point indicated. It was a weary, troublesome task. Then Mansy threw the line, trying to catch it in the branches, and nearly overbalanced herself into the water.

"The rockety thing!" she exclaimed, half in alarm and half in contempt. "I feared it 'ud go over."

"It's all right, Mansy, if you sit still," said Alfy; "but try and paddle it with the umbrella to the tree."

So they both endeavoured to float it in the desired direction, and at length Alfy thought he might venture to throw the rope. He did so, and with some good effect, for it fell over a branch, and, though it did not wind tightly round and had no firm hold, he could just give the tub a bias in that direction.

After plying his paddles with fairly good result for a little time, he drew in the rope, and again launched it forth at the tree top. Again he was, to some extent, successful, and in a few minutes he was able to float the tub in among the branches.

"Here we are!" he cried, "quite like the baby in the nursery rhyme—'Hush-a-bye, baby, on the tree top,' you know, eh, Mansy dear? Now we will tie the tub firmly to the branches, so that there will be no fear of floating away!"

"You have managed well, Master Alfy," said Mansy, admiringly.

"Oh, but it was your idea; and look, we are not so very far from the house!"

"I wish we were there!" sighed Mansy.

"So do I," said Alfy, "but, Mansy dear, I really am very hungry, and you said you had something to eat in those packages!"

"And so I have," replied his old nurse. "Dear boy, you must be hungry. I suppose the girls have something left?"

"Oh yes, quite enough for another meal, I should think! I wish we could let them know we are safe, and not so very far away."

"Burn a light; I have some matches and a little spirit lamp. I bought it with some other things yesterday, thinking it might be handy in the summer, when the kitchen fire was out, to boil a little water."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Alfy. "We are just like wrecked sailors or something, near a desert island! We'll burn some of the papers round the parcels to make a great flare."

So the lamp was lit, and the papers burned, and Alfy waved the flimsy, flaming torch bravely for a minute or so, that the watchers in the island house might just catch a glimpse of them and of their position.

An answering light was soon flashed back by the girls, so they knew that their own had been seen.

"Now we will take some of this tongue," said Mansy, producing the tin in which it was preserved, "Lucky I got the young man in the shop to open it. But what about a knife to cut it?"

"Won't this do?" asked Alfy, producing his pocket-knife. "At all events, it is better than nothing."

"Why, bless the boy! so it is; but I am afraid it won't do very well. Howsomdever, we'll make the best of it!"

"Perhaps I can manage it better than you, Mansy," suggested Alfy. "I am more used to it, you know; and really it is a splendid knife when you know how to use it."

"Yes, I should think so, *when* you know how to use it, my dear, but I cannot do very much with it in cutting nice slices!"

"Oh, never mind the nice slices, if we can get some nice mouthfuls," laughed the boy. And he proceeded to cut some small slips off the top of the tongue with great facility, considering the unsuitability of the small pocket-knife for the purpose.

"Capital!" cried his nurse, as Alfie handed her a few of the small slices, and then she produced some biscuits, and Alfie and Mansy made quite an enjoyable meal.



"ALFIE AND MANSY MADE QUITE AN ENJOYABLE MEAL."

"I wish this water was fit to drink," she said, "for I feel thirsty. Now tell me where it comes from, if you can, and how the flood happened?"

"It was yesterday afternoon," replied Alfie. "About three o'clock we suddenly heard a loud noise, and then the water came rushing all round the house and into the lower rooms too! We were frightened and surprised at first, I can tell you!"

"I expect you were," replied Mansy sympathetically. "And all in the lower rooms. Oh, mercy on us, what a to-do! Is the mill-dam broke, do you think?"

"I don't know, Mansy. I'm not sure if it came that way. Have some more tongue, Mansy dear? It's jolly!"

"Thank you," exclaimed Mansy; "I don't mind if I do, Master Alfie. Well," she continued, as she took out some more biscuits, "if anybody'd told me this morning that I should have had my supper to-night in a washin' tub on the water I'd 'a said they was cracked!"

"And so should I," said Alfie. "Still, here we are, Mansy; and the next question is how long shall we be obliged to stay?"

"Yes, indeed," she sighed; "that is the question, and one we can't answer!"

"We must make the best of it," he said bravely. "I think I could swim to the house and drag the tub by the rope."

"I wouldn't hear of it for the world, Master Alfie," protested his nurse; "you'd catch your death!"

"Perhaps I could walk in the water," he replied. "I don't believe it is very deep. Try it, dear Mansy, with your umbrella, and see how deep it is."

"I wouldn't let you, Master Alfie; I wouldn't indeed. You'd catch your death, I tell you!"

"But we can't stay here all night, Mansy."

"I can't let you get into the water, Master Alfie. You don't know how deep it is, nor how strong it's a-runnin'; and you'll catch your death!"

"What dreadful disasters!" laughed Alfie. But he knew quite well that his nurse could make up her mind firmly, and that it would be useless to argue with her. Still

he thought he might have tried to get the boat nearer the house.

The moon was now shining brightly, and a beautiful silvery path of light lay on the water. Alfy sat on the side of the tub opposite his nurse and watched the scene. It was a strange picture—the unaccustomed flood, the dark mass of the house, and the tree tops standing out of the water, the bright moonlight, which seemed to make the scene almost more desolate, and the curious craft in which they were sitting. The scene deeply impressed itself on Alfy's mind.

"Well, it is of no use to sit here doing nothing," said Mansy presently. "If we cannot do anything else, I think we'll try and go to sleep. I am so tired. Perhaps we can see better in the morning what to do."

"How funny to sleep in a tub on the water!" exclaimed Alfy.

"Yes, and all through me," said Mansy; "I am sorry. If you had not come for me you might have been in your own nice warm bed!"

"Oh, never mind me, Mansy; I could not leave you there all night."

"I might have walked to the village."

"It's all right, dear Mansy, I'm happy enough. Let us snuggle down and get to sleep."

And so after they had said their prayers, and thanked God for His preserving care, they made themselves as comfortable as they could in their strange, cramped quarters, and actually began to doze a little.

But it was an uneasy slumber, and presently Alfy awoke and found the moon shining full on his face. The light was also bright on the hedgetop surrounding the garden of the house; and the idea darted into his mind that if he could but get the tub beside the hedge he could work it along toward the house by pushing the paddles against the hedgetops or pulling at them one after the other.

No sooner thought of than begun. He glanced at Mansy, but she, good woman, greatly wearied by the events of the day, was still slumbering, if her uneasy doze could be so described. So he commenced quietly to cast off the rope from the branch. "If I can but manage it, how nice it would be for Mansy to wake up and find herself at the house," he said.

So the plucky little fellow pushed the tub from the embrace of the branches once more into the flow of the flood; but this time, instead of attempting to stem the stream and struggle to the house, he sought to guide the drifting of his clumsy little bark towards a hedge leading up to the one surrounding the grounds of the house.

It was a difficult task, but not so difficult or so hopeless as endeavouring to reach the house by paddling direct up to it against the flood. Presently he was near enough to throw the rope to the hedge. Once! twice! thrice he threw it, before he was able to guide the tub at all by its aid. Then progress was slow at first, but at length the rope was twisted firmly round some branches, and he was able to pull the tub along hand over hand quite quickly.

Once beside the hedge, his task was comparatively easy. By pulling at some of the branches, one after the other, he was able to urge his strange craft along, and soon he had reached the point in the hedge nearest the building. Then he paused to consider. Clearly it was of no use to continue beside the hedge. That would only lead him round the house, but not to the house itself.

So he looked out for the nearest object to which he could throw the rope. Now, on the little lawn grew a rather tall laburnum tree. "If," thought Alfy, "I could fasten my rope round that, I could soon pull the tub up to it." After considering a few minutes he took the tin in which the tongue had been brought, and fastened it firmly to the end of the rope.

"This will make it easier to throw," he said, "and the tin will be more likely to become entangled in the branches or twist round them."

His plan was successful. After three or four ineffectual efforts the tin was caught firmly in the branches, and he commenced to haul the tub quite close to the tree.

Then another difficulty presented itself. How should the tin be disentangled? He soon found that it could not be done from his position in the tub, for he could not reach it in any way; so he whipped out his knife ready to cut the rope.

"Why, bless the boy! where are we?"

Mansy was wide awake now. In his efforts to reach the tin he had shaken the tub

a good deal and aroused her.

"Oh, Mansy, I hoped you would have slept till I got you up to the house!" he said.

"Me asleep in a washin' tub! think of that! Well, I was that dead tired I could have slept anywhere, I do believe. But however did you get here, Master Alfy?"

"Worked along by the hedge, Mansy."

"You are a brave, clever boy, Alfy! And I do believe there's Miss Edith at the window with a light."

"Are you there?" cried a bright, fresh, girlish voice.


"At the laburnum tree," answered Alfy.

"Oh! Do be quick," answered Edie. "We are so hungry. All the bread and butter and things that were left are spoiled by the water. And we have nothing to eat!"

"And we have not much," said Mansy; "the situation is really getting serious!"

CHAPTER III.

THE YOUNG NAVIGATOR.

he first thing is to get up to the house," said Alfy. "I shall have to jump into the water and wade, after all, Mansy."

"I couldn't permit it, Master Alfy, indeed I couldn't!" replied his nurse decidedly.

Alfy knew that when Mansy used that word "permit," her mind was very much made up indeed. It was one of her rare words, used only on great occasions and when much emphasis was intended.

"Well, how are we to get to the house?" he said. "Let us consider. Oh, I know!" he exclaimed in a few moments. "Good idea! a jolly dodge!"

"Can you get my bow and arrows, Edie?" he shouted, "and my kite string?"

"What for?"

"To shoot the string to us," he replied. "Unwind it, and tie one end to the arrow just above the feathers, and see if you can't shoot it to us."

"Don't hit us!" screamed Mansy.

Then the girls with the candle-light disappeared from the window, and the boy and the old nurse were left in the tub to await events.

"What a long time the girls are!" he exclaimed presently. "I expect they cannot find the things." The girls were not really so long as appeared to the wearied watchers in the moonlight; but at length Edie and her sister, with Jane, the servant-maid, showed themselves again at the window.

"Ah! they've got the bow and arrows," said Mansy.

"Look out," cried Madge, "I don't want to hurt you." And Alfy and Mansy covered their faces and screwed themselves down in the tub as well as they could, the irrepressible Alfy laughing meanwhile, and saying he did not think they need take such great precautions. Mansy, however, was rather fidgety about it.

"If the arrow did get into your eyes, you know, Master Alfy, I should never forgive myself!" she said.

"But I should like to peep and see how Madge does it, you know," argued Alfy.

"Now, I'm going to shoot," screamed Madge. She shot; and the arrow fell midway between the house and the boat.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the boy outright "To think of making all that fuss for nothing." Then he cried aloud, "Pull the arrow back quick, Madge, and raise the bow

higher when you shoot again; draw the bowstring back as far as you can."

"And tie some more string to the kite line if it is not long enough," cried Mansy.

So with much laughter from the girls they pulled the arrow back from the water by the string attached to it and tried again. They were not expert archers, and failed once more—failed indeed several times. But at last the arrow fell quite near the tub, and Alfy called out to his sisters not to draw it back as it floated closer, and then with the help of the handle of Mansy's bulgy umbrella he pulled it in and of course the kite string with it.

This string was of great length. Alfy was fond of kite flying, and by adding together long pieces of string he had acquired a tether of considerable extent. To lengthen it still more, however, the girls had managed to find some more string, and so it came about that communication was established between the inhabitants of the house and the watchers in the tub.

"That thin string will never pull us along," said Mansy doubtfully. "It'll break!"

"Not if we help, I hope," exclaimed Alfy cheerfully. "We must paddle our hardest, so the strain on the line won't be so great."

"Don't pull yet," he cried; "not till I tell you, Edie." Then he cut the tub free from the laburnum, and, pushing the umbrella hard against the trunk of the tree, gave the tub a vigorous push in the direction of the house; and while it was floating thither, he called out to the girls to pull the string lightly, and commenced to paddle at the same time. Mansy also endeavoured to help with her inseparable umbrella, and so now all of them were endeavouring to persuade the heavily laden and clumsy craft to float against the flood to the house.

It was a tiresome task. The young navigator was obliged to go very slowly, and to constantly ask his sisters not to pull hard, lest the string should break. The vigorous push-off had given them a good start, and they made a little progress.

Once the string broke, but Alfy was able to fish up the line, for it was near, and Mansy knotted the broken ends together again. He now began to be more expert with his improvised paddles, and the string just kept tight, but with scarcely any strain upon it, yet prevented the tub from "wobbling"—steered it in fact to the house, and helped to counteract the flow of the water.

So gradually they progressed to the house. The moon was now declining, and a dark hour before the early dawn was at hand.

"How I'm going to get inside that house I don't know!" ejaculated Mansy at last, after surveying the front for some little time. "I can't get through the door—that would let the water in,—and climb to the upper part of that winder, I couldn't!"

"Oh, we'll manage it, dear Mansy, somehow, never fear! We are getting through our difficulties splendidly!"

But when they did get the tub safe under the window—which was accomplished at last—and Alfy had expressed his joy with a loud hurrah, then the new difficulty presented itself in full force. They were afraid to open the lower sash of the window, as the level of the water was just above it.

"How am I to scramble over the upper sash?" she exclaimed; "and how am I to get down on the other side?"

"Yes! and the room is full of water," cried Edie from the window above.

"Not full, Edie!" expostulated Alfy.

"Well, there is a great deal all over the floor, and in all the lower rooms," explained his sister.

"Oh! dear me! what a mess to clear up," exclaimed Mansy.

"Let me get in and see," said Alfy sturdily.

"Do take care, and don't cut yourself with the glass!" Mansy cried, as she saw him clambering up over the top sash of the window. This he had first pulled down as far as he could, and he also helped himself by the sash lines. The breaking of the glass might of course prove very dangerous, but he found another difficulty when, having climbed over the sash, he stood a-tiptoe on the bottom of the window frame inside the room, and clung for support to the top sash. How was he to descend? Inside the room was dark, but he thought he saw the gleam of water. He hesitated to jump at hazard, not knowing where he might alight.

"Lower a candle, Edie," he cried, "and then I can see my way better!"

So presently down came a lighted candle, bobbing to and fro as the little sister lowered it. Alfy caught it with one hand and held it inside the room. "Oh! what a mess," he exclaimed, as he saw the water all over the apartment, with teapot cosy, music, papers, wool-mats, and all kinds of well-known pleasant household things floating despondingly on its muddy surface.

"What shall we do?" cried Mansy from the outside. "Oh! help me to get indoors, so that I can clear up a bit!"

"I don't see yet how I am to get down, Mansy. The table is too far off for me to jump to it, and the water seems high!"

"Oh! you mustn't get in the water, Master Alfy!" shrieked poor Mansy, "Oh, I am so tired of this rockety old washin' tub! Can't you get me out, Alfy dear?"

"I'll get you out, Mansy, somehow, never fear," assented Alfy cheerily. "Now, Edie dear, can you let down a chair and some hassocks for me to stand on?"

And the busy girls above tied string to the back of a chair and carefully lowered it, and some hassocks followed.

Alfy soon placed the chair in the room and piled the hassocks on it. Then lightly stepping on to them, he was able to make his way to the table, and also to the sideboard. Next, by means of chairs and hassocks he made his way to the staircase, and, having hastily mounted it, put his head out of the nearest upstairs window and shouted, "Hullo, Mansy!"

"Oh! bless the boy!" exclaimed Mansy with a start. "You have got up there, have you? I do wish I was safe up there, too, Alfy!"

"You soon will be, Mansy," he replied cheerily.

"Oh! we are glad you've come," cried his sisters, as he met them and kissed them. "But how are we to get Mansy up? She can never climb in through the window!"

"She'd fall in the water," remarked Jane, "and there would be a pretty to-do!"

"Do you think we could pull the tub up with Mansy in it to the window?" asked Alfy.

"It would be very heavy," suggested Jane.

"And Mansy might fall out," exclaimed the younger sister, with eager face and wide-open eyes.

"The distance is not very great," remarked Alfy, as he leaned out of the window and looked down. "And it is less still, of course, up to the top sash of the window, where I got in. Oh! I know," he added joyfully; "we will push the table in the downstairs room close to the window and put a chair on it, and then, if we can pull Mansy up to the same level, she can creep in over the sashes of the window, on to the chair."

"Oh! that will be delightful," said the girls. But, at first, Mansy would not hear of it. Poor Mansy! her ideas of dignity had been sadly disturbed this evening. "Me pulled up in a washin' tub?" she exclaimed. "The idea! the very idea of such a thing! And I know you'd let me fall!"

"If we did, it wouldn't hurt you," said Alfy, "because the tub would float, you know. Come on, Mansy, it's the only way I can see!"

She suffered herself to be persuaded by Alfy, and to yield to the logic of circumstances. So she fastened the piece of clothes-line that was left in the tub firmly through its two handles, and Alfy, with the girls, went downstairs, and, standing on chairs and hassocks, managed to push the table close up to the window, through which they expected Mansy to enter. Then a chair was placed upon it, so that she could creep in with comparative ease.

The next thing was more difficult. It was to haul up the tub a little way with Mansy in it. By tying a piece of thin kite string to the end of the rope, they were able easily to pull up the rope from Mansy, and then they turned it round the bed-post, and all four pulled hard together. Mansy herself helped very much by pushing the paddles against the window ledge; and presently they felt that the tub was slowly moving.

"Hurrah!" cried Alfy, "we shall do it!"

"Oh! it's off the water, and swinging about; do be careful!" cried Mansy.

"Steady it against the wall," cried Alf. "Pull away, Jane; pull, Edie; now, all together!"

And so with pulling and shouting, and with Mansy also doing her best to help, for she was thoroughly determined to enter the house this time, if possible, they raised the tub.

But just as she was preparing to creep in the window—either the children relaxed their efforts, or they were not aware of the necessity of holding the rope very tight when not pulling—suddenly, down went the tub, splash!

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried Mansy, "I shall be drowned."

The children rushed to the window terror-stricken. But they soon found, to their great relief, that Mansy was more frightened than hurt, and in fact was not hurt at all, though much splashed with water.

"Oh, I thought the rockety thing was going down," she cried; "it went down pretty far."

"But it's all right, Mansy," said Alf cheerfully; "and now, we'll try again, and keep tight hold this time!"

Mansy was very frightened, but eventually she did try, and all working away for the same object, she did at last manage to clamber in on the chair, and pick her way on chairs and hassocks over the water to the stairs.

Oh! what kissings and congratulations there were, when she found herself safe and sound, once more, with all the children!

Next morning the difficulty of providing food presented itself, as they knew it would. They had barely enough for one good meal. And as they scanned the watery scene around the house, there seemed no sign, and but little likelihood of any person coming to them from the village.

"I must go in the tub to the nearest land," said Alf, "and then run to the village. I shall not be long."

"What! go in that rockety thing again, Alf?"

"Why, yes, Mansy. You see it will be lighter with only one in it. And I will take the line and rope. Oh! I shall manage."

And so he pushed off. The flood was still flowing, and carried him quickly away from the house. He guided the tub to the laburnum tree, where a piece of the rope was still hanging. "I will get that rope," said he, and twisting a piece of the line in the tub round the tree, he climbed up. He found his task more difficult than he had supposed, but when he had succeeded and was about to descend, behold! to his amazement and chagrin the line had become loose, and the action of the water was just floating the tub away out of his reach.

He made a desperate endeavour to save it by trying to throw into it the tin which was still attached to the rope in the tree. But it missed; and on floated the tub, slowly, but provokingly, bobbing about in the morning sunshine, leaving him alone in the tree!



"ON FLOATED THE TUB, LEAVING HIM ALONE IN THE TREE!"

CHAPTER IV.

"WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD?"

What was to be done now?

"This is a greater bother than any of the others," said Alf. "I expect I shall have to wade or swim now, if I can. Then I must run to the village in my wet things. But how shall I get back to the house? Bother the tub, I say! However did it get loose?"

The reason was that he had not fastened it very firmly; but then he did not expect he would be so long in the tree, nor did he think the current of the water would have such influence.

But the tub had gone, and he must do the best he could without it. From his perch in the tree he could obtain a clear view of the flood. The muddy water glistened in the bright sunshine, as though trying to look pleasant.

The house was, as we have said, in a hollow, or depression of the ground, and the flood, Alf could see distinctly, came from some way behind the house, and flowed round and past it; but whence it came, or whither it went, he could not discover.

"It can't come from the river," he said thoughtfully, "for that is in a different direction. I cannot imagine what causes it."

Sundry things he noticed were floating on its surface.

Here was a quantity of hay, sailing slowly and solidly along in a fairly compact mass; farther on a little yellow straw flashed in the sunshine; not far off again pieces of wood floated; and then, curiously enough, a little tin hand-bowl bobbing about quite pertly, as it was borne along. That tin bowl gave him an idea.

"I know!" he cried; "I will ask Mansy and Edie to send off the old tin bath to me from the house."

Thereupon he shouted loudly to attract their attention.

At first they did not answer, and he could hear various sounds, indicating that

Mansy was endeavouring to repair some of the mischief done by the flood. "They are busy," he said, and again he cried, louder this time than before.

His shouts attracted Edie's attention, and she hastened to the window, where her exclamation of surprise soon brought the others. "Bless the boy!" exclaimed Mansy, "however did he get there? Where's the tub?"

"Can you send me the old bath?" he cried.

The girls disappeared hastily from the window, and Mansy cried again: "You are never going to get into that bath, Master Alfy, surely!"

"Oh! I can manage it," he replied briskly, "if you can send it down to the tree. Tell them to put a pole or something in it, dear Mansy, for me to paddle it with."

"You must be quick, Alfy, and get us some provisions," urged Mansy, "or I don't know what we shall do. We shall get starved!"

Alfy laughed in the gaiety of his heart. He was a merry, cheerful, plucky little lad, who could not talk religion, but strove to act it. Nelson's grand words, "England expects every man to do his duty," was his motto, unexpressed though it was.

"Never fear, Mansy," he cried, "I'll be back in good time. You shall have plenty to cook and eat to-day!"

Then Mansy disappeared from the window, and Alfy soon heard sounds, as though the bath were being brought along. It was a somewhat high-backed sitz bath, which had seen some service in the family.

Splash!

Over it went from the window, and of course it fell bottom-upwards!

"Ah-h-h!" he cried, "what a mull! Now I shall have to wait here a long time till it is righted. Take care, please; don't let it float away!" he shouted.

He soon saw that quick-witted Edie had hastened below to the table, which had remained as it was placed last evening, and stretching out of the window with a broom, which was the handiest and most efficient thing she could readily find, was holding the bath to the house.

In answer to Alfy's cries, Mansy went down to help Edie, and then the others following, they all endeavoured to turn the bath top upwards. This task they at length accomplished, with the help of one or two more brooms; and having fastened string round it to prevent its escape, it was launched with a vigorous push in Alfy's direction. It floated pretty buoyantly on the water, though its high back seemed to make it a little top-heavy.

Well was it that the strange craft had been tethered, or it might have floated provokingly just out of Alfy's reach; but, with a little pulling and guidance by means of the string, it was coaxed near enough to Alfy, so that he could throw in his tin with the cord attached, and persuade it to float right under the tree.

In a very short time he had cautiously descended and dropped into his novel boat. Yes, it floated still, though his weight caused it, of course, to sink deeper in the water. Perhaps, however, it was less liable to overturn, for its load ballasted it, and rendered it less top-heavy.

With a loud "Hurrah!" he pushed off smartly from the tree, and giving one wave of the hand to those watching him from the house, turned his attention to navigating his strange craft to the shore.

Now, for a paddle Edie had put in a long broom-handle, and grasping this in the middle, he plied it alternately one side and then the other.

Strange use for a broom-handle; but the occupants of the Island House never expected to be caught by a flood like this, so they had to do the best they could. "Hullo! I must look out for that mass of hay!" said Alfy. "That I shall call an iceberg; or, no, a whale I think. Out of the way, whale!" he cried, pushing it off briskly with his indispensable broom-handle.

Hard though he worked, he made but slow progress, his craft was so unwieldy and difficult to manage. "I wonder where the tub is!" he cried. "Why, actually there, stranded against the hedge! The tub was better than the bath. I've a good mind to go after that tub and bring both to land."

And this the plucky little fellow accomplished. He was becoming quite expert in the use of the paddles, and, of course, as soon as he came to the hedge-top, he was

able to propel the bath along more quickly. He fastened the tub and bath together, and then transferring himself to the former, set to work to bring both to the bank. He found it a difficult task, but he persevered, and in a short time was successful. At last he leaped on dry land. With a triumphant shout, he attracted the attention of Mansy and his sisters to his success, and then, after firmly mooring his fleet—as he called the tub and the bath—he set off quickly for the village.

Now, his way led him soon beside a tall hedge. And, as he was hastening along, he became aware of voices on the other side. At first he paid little attention, but then a word or two about the flood struck his ear. "If I could see them," he said, "I would ask how it was caused." But—what was one voice saying?

"If I told what I knew about your neglecting your duty, you would catch it hot, I can tell you."

"But you won't tell, I'm sure," replied the other.

"I don't know so much about that."

"I didn't mean to," whined the other.

"Didn't mean to! Of course you didn't. Still you did it. And this here ter'ble flood is the result. You was in drink, you know you was; and you was careless, and didn't do your dooty. You ought to have watched, and given the alarm, and the banks might have been mended, and the flood saved."

Alfy heard every word distinctly. There was an opening in the hedge a little farther on, and the voices seemed to be going towards it, even as he was himself.

"Who'd have thought," said the second man apologetically, "that that stout wall would have burst."

"You may be thankful it didn't burst the other side," answered the first man, "and the water flooded Tarn'ick. It's bad enough as it is, coming to the village; but it would have been very much worse then."

So this was the cause of the flood. The reservoir which supplied the populous town of Tarnwick had burst, and its contents had poured down towards the village. And had the village suffered at all? Alfy was anxious to know. And how had the man neglected his duty, and caused the flood?

The lad was now near the opening in the hedge, and he suddenly, but distinctly, saw the two men whom he had heard talking. He did not recognise either of them; but, at sight of him, they started in surprise, and stopped at once, and looked at him strangely, as though to ask what he had heard.

Alfy walked straight on, past the opening in the hedge, as though the men were not there, and on through the pleasant field. But the faces of those men were impressed on his mind, and he felt he should know them again.

Certainly their conversation had given him something to think of, but the chief thing now that he had to do was to purchase provisions, and have them conveyed to the house. Should he find much damage done at the village?

That question was soon answered, for, on arriving there, he found that the flood had passed it almost entirely by. Most of the houses were on fairly high ground, and the river being near, much of the water had flowed thither. Yet some of the cottages in the lower part had suffered, and Alfy heard much of them, and of a farmhouse and its buildings, which had also been flooded. He heard, too, of the difficulties which had been experienced in saving some of the animals.

He knew that farmhouse well. He and his sisters had played there with the children who lived under its pleasant roof. The flood had come so suddenly, and the house wherein Alfy lived was in such a retired spot, that no one seemed to have thought of it and its inmates. He therefore found himself listened to with eagerness and some surprise when he told of their condition.

"And how am I to send you these goods, then?" asked Mr. Daw, the tradesman of whom Alfy had been ordering a supply of grocery. "I could send them by cart, but I have not a boat."

"Do you know where I could borrow one?" asked Alfy anxiously.

Well, Mr. Daw was not sure. There were a few boats on the river, but how was one to be brought from thence to the flood near the house?

Nevertheless, he thought of a few persons to whom Alfy could apply, and the boy left him, after arranging that he would return later to point out the spot where the

goods were to be taken.

Alfy bought a few more goods, a joint of meat among them, at some other shops, directing them to be taken to Mr. Daw, who had promised to send all together. The boy had then a troublesome task; it was to find a boat or some means of conveying the provisions to the Island House. He had not time to talk much to any of the acquaintances and friends he met, though they were greatly interested in the condition of affairs at his home, and various were the directions he received as to the best means of getting a boat.

The river was a small one. It was stony in parts, so that there was not much boating. Still there were one or two kept at points along its course, and Alfy found himself, at length, asking a jolly-looking old gentleman, to whom he had been directed, but whom he did not know at all, if he would lend his boat, and telling him why it was wanted.

"Eh! what! house all surrounded by water? Quite an island, eh? That's what we used to learn at school—Island House, eh?"

"Yes, that is what we call it," laughed Alfy, somewhat reassured by the jolly old gentleman's cheerfulness and geniality.

"Of course I'll lend the boat," said the old gentleman. "That's what we've got to do, help one another—and mind you think of that, my boy; but the question is, how can you get it up to the house?"

"I heard that the flood was running into the river," replied Alfy, "so I thought I could row up that way."

"What! you row up against the flood!" exclaimed the jolly old gentleman; "you can't do it."

"I can try," said Alfy.

"Well, I might try and help you, but I am not much of a rower, and my son—it is he, really, who uses the boat—he is away from home. I question if I could pull my own weight. Most mysterious thing this flood. Where does it come from? How did it happen?"

So Alfy told what he had heard beside the hedge.

"Eh! what! eh! this is getting serious! One of the banks of Tarnwick reservoir burst! One man saying it is because of another's carelessness! This must be seen to. What sort of men were they? Should you know them again?"

And the jolly old gentleman who was now looking very serious, drew from Alfy all he knew about the men he had heard talking by the hedge.

"I must see to this quickly," said the old gentleman. "Send a policeman after them. Take the boat, my lad, and keep her as long as she is of any use to you. Good-bye, and good luck." And away he went.

Knowing that speed was very necessary, Alfy decided to try and row up the boat at once. At first, he thought he would seek help from some friends in the village. Then he determined not to do so. The village was some little distance from the jolly old gentleman's house, and some time, he thought, would be wasted in going to and fro. So he jumped in the boat, and cast off.

This was a case, however, of "more haste, less speed." If he had obtained assistance he would have made much better progress. The stream was against him, and he found it hard work pulling against it. But nothing seemed to daunt this boy's pluck.

"Put your back into it," he remembered an old boatman said, when last summer's holiday he and his sisters were rowing on a tidal river at a seaside resort, and now indeed he strove hard to put his back into his rowing.

He was certainly making progress. To escape the force of the current as far as possible he was creeping along by the shore. He was thinking whether he would row as near as he could to the village, and then jump out and tell Mr. Daw he had secured a boat, or whether he should row on to where he had left the tub and bath.


"I want to have as little distance to row the laden boat as I can," he said; "and I cannot take anyone to the house unless they will stay there, as we shall want the boat. What fun we will have to-morrow rowing about, and going for milk and things! I will point out the spot to Mr. Daw's man where they can be brought."

He was just considering which course he should pursue when suddenly his boat

was stopped, and he heard some words which almost sent his heart jumping to his mouth.

"I say, youngster, what was it you heard me and my mate say this morning?"

CHAPTER V. WITH TIED WRISTS.

lffy turned. Yes, one of the men he had heard talking beside the hedge, that morning, was leaning from the bank, and had stopped the boat.

He looked lowering and threatening.

"You don't budge an inch," growled he, "till you've told me what you have been to Squire Watkins's for."

"To borrow this boat."

"Something else as well," said the man. "What did you hear me and my mate saying this morning, and what have you told about it?"

"What right have you to ask me?" replied Alfy sturdily.

"I'll soon show you the right," exclaimed the man gruffly, at the same time raising his hand. "Now, then, out with it!"

"Out with what?" said Alfy doggedly.

Bang! Alfy felt a heavy blow on his head, which made the fire flash from his eyes, and nearly knocked him overboard; but, tingling with pain and indignation, he swept round the oar he held in his right hand, and struck the man sharply on the shoulder.

His assailant seized the oar, and a smart struggle ensued, in which the man's superior strength and position enabled him to be victorious. He wrested the oars from Alfy, and then, after cuffing him soundly, and calling him an "insolent young warmint," tied him tightly to the skiff with the boat-rope—which is commonly called the painter.

Alfy, smarting with the injustice of the attack, managed to administer a few wholesome kicks to his assailant during the struggle. Then a long, low whistle sounded, and the man hurried away, leaving the boy bound and aching in the boat.

The day was now fast wearing on, and the sun was beginning to sink in the heavens. As Alfy lay back in the boat his mind was racked with anxiety about the provisions, and his promises to take back food to the Island House. His sisters and Mansy might starve if he could not get the provisions to them. Then he shouted aloud to attract attention.

No answer came. His voice seemed borne back upon him as from an empty void. Again and again he called until he grew weary with shouting, and sickened with suspense and anxiety and disappointment. He seemed as far from his kind here as if he were alone in the deserts of Arabia.

Then he bethought him once more of self-help. "I wonder if I could free myself," he said. "I have got over several difficulties lately, perhaps I can get over this one also." He struggled upwards to a sitting position, and looked at his bonds. His wrists and ankles were tied pretty firmly, and one end of the rope was of course fastened to the boat.

"I suppose that rascal tied me up like this to give himself time to escape," said Alfy thoughtfully, as he looked down at the rope. "He thinks I know a lot about him, and will tell what I know, and he wants to get a good start. I wonder if I could undo these knots with my teeth? They crack nuts, why not untie knots? I will try."



"I WONDER IF I COULD UNDO THESE KNOTS WITH MY TEETH? I WILL TRY."

Happily his teeth were strong and sharp—teeth which many an older person would have envied. He was plucky and persevering also, and he set to work with a will to gnaw, or unfasten, or "worry" open the tough knots which bound him.

It was a stiff job, and a tiring one too. But he kept on pluckily, and would not give up. The sun sank lower in the heavens, and the beautiful summer afternoon wore on. "Oh! how they will wonder what has become of me at home!" he sighed. "I must be quick," and he redoubled his efforts.

But he found the task too difficult. The rope was hard and tough, and time was fast passing. His teeth and jaws quite ached with the unwonted use to which he was putting them. So after thinking over another plan he changed his tactics entirely.

Though his wrists were tied, his fingers were comparatively free; he could, for instance, grasp firmly with them anything that was not very large. He had noticed that the end of the rope tethering the boat had been tied to the bough of a young willow near the water's edge. He resolved to break that bough, and then slowly work the boat along by pulling at the grass, reeds, or anything on the bank. In a short time he carried out the first part of his programme.

Compared with gnawing at the hard rope, the twisting of the supple bough backwards and forwards, until he wrested it from the parent stem, was but a light task. It was more difficult to work the boat along against the stream. Yet by patience and pluck and perseverance—the three "p's" that all young folks should seek to acquire—he managed to succeed.

"Should that man come back to trouble me," he said, "he will find me gone; that will be something. Still I do not quite see how I am to get the things for the house, tied as I am to this boat."

Pluckily he pulled at the grass and reeds, and worked the boat along. When he had gone some distance from the point where the man had fastened the boat, he shouted again, and he continued to shout at intervals. But no cry answered his own. There was no sound but the lapping of the water against the boat or the murmur of the wind.

So some time passed. Alfy was getting very weary and hungry. There seemed no chance of help coming to him, and the situation was the more vexing, as he felt that his knife in his pocket, if he could but have got it, would soon have made short work of the knots. But in the circumstances the knife might have been left at the house, for all the good it was to him.

At length he came to the place where the flood poured into the river. "Hurrah!" he cried, "this does look like making progress. Now I will try and get as near as I can

to the house."

It was at times more difficult to make progress on the flood than on the stream, for there was no decided bank such as edged the river; but he took advantage where he could of anything on the brink of the water, such as a hurdle or a bush, a stile or a hedge, and pluckily kept at his work.

In the village, Mr. Daw was getting quite fidgety at Alf's absence.

"What can have happened to the lad?" said he. "The boy would surely not be so long in finding a boat, and if he could not find one he would have been here to say so. Jones, just you put all these things in the pony cart and get as near as you can to Fairglen." Fairglen was the right and proper name of the Island House.

"He has evidently been to other shops," continued Mr. Daw. "Here's a large sirloin of beef from Smithers, and quite a cargo of bread from Deane's, and vegetables and fruit from Wilson's. Why, good gracious me! one would think they were going to stand a siege up at Fairglen. I 'spect it is as the lad says, they've got nothing at all to eat. What can be keeping the boy I can't think."

"Prap's he's tumbled into the water, please, sir, and got drowned," drawled out Jones slowly.

"Get on quickly and put these things in the cart," said his master sharply. Jones' slow ways and stupid remarks generally annoyed Mr. Daw.

In quick time the goods for the Island House were packed in the grocer's little cart, and the slow Jones seated himself in front. "Drive as near to Fairglen as you can," said his master, "and shout aloud to attract attention. Now, mind you deliver the goods quickly."

"As quickly as I can," replied Jones, a grin slowly spreading over his expansive face.

Thus it came about in time that while Alf was slowly working his way along by the brink of the flood, the well-meaning but rather stupid Jones was staring in profound astonishment at the tub and the tin bath Alf had left in the morning.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Jones. "They be rum boats, they be!"

He had driven the cart up the lane as far as he could, and after tethering the horse, was now rambling beside the water.

"But how I'm to carry the meat and taters and sugars over to the house in them things I don't know!"

Then he remembered his master's injunction to shout, and he shouted accordingly. "I wish I knew where that young gent had got to!" continued Jones, and again he raised his hoarse voice, and shouted. "Why, what's that 'ere?" he exclaimed. "Is it an ecker, or is it the young gent?"

Again he shouted, as loud as he could this time, and then paused. Yes, faint and clear came an answering shout. There was no mistake this time! "Why, there he be!" exclaimed Jones in astonishment. "There he be! there he be!"

Then he began to move slowly in the direction of the shout, and called aloud again. The answer was louder and more distinct this time.

"I be getting nearer to him," chuckled Jones, "that I be!"

But when presently he came close enough to see the young boatman distinctly he stood still in complete amazement, with eyes and mouth wide open. The sapient Jones had had other things to astonish him considerably to-day, what with the flood and the tub and the bath, but this beat all. Here was Alf tied to the boat, and labouring with bound wrists to work the skiff along.

"Don't stand staring there!" cried Alf. "Can't you give me a hand?"

"Well I never!" exclaimed Jones. "Whatever did you tie yourself like that for?"

"Tie myself!" replied Alf impatiently; "I didn't tie myself. Come, cut the rope quickly, and help me along."

"I ain't got no knife!"

"Oh, get mine out of my pocket, and do be quick, please."

"Well, I never did see anything like this afore!" spluttered Jones, as he tumbled

into the boat. "My stars! however did you get tied up like this 'ere?"

Alfy did not vouchsafe any explanation, but gave him directions as to getting the knife quickly, and cutting the rope.

"Oh, how jolly!" he exclaimed, as he rose and stretched himself, when, after several clumsy efforts on Jones' part, he was at last made free.

"Now, can you row?" he continued briskly.

"How fur do 'ee want to go?"

"As far as a tub and a bath——"

"I see 'em!" interrupted Jones gleefully.

"Well, I want to get there, and then to hurry to Mr. Daw for some things," exclaimed Alfy.

"Things for Fairglen!" asked Jones, "'cos I got 'em, meat and taters and all!"

"Oh, that's right! Where are they?"

"In the cart, not far off."

"Well, can you row this boat, or shall we tow it along? Perhaps that will be best."

"Oh, I can pull with the rope," said Jones; "pull the boat and you too; you look tired enough."

So now, after his hard work, Alfy was able to lie back delightfully at his ease in the boat, and feel he was being drawn quickly along.

When they reached the two clumsy crafts Alfy had left in the morning he found them quite high and dry. "The flood is subsiding," he said. "Perhaps by to-morrow this time the water will all have gone!"

"P'raps it will," was Jones' reply, "and p'raps it won't. But I 'spects reservore's pretty nigh empty now."

"Oh, you've heard it's the reservoir?" exclaimed Alfy. "Do you know how the water came to flow out?"

"I heerd as how the wall looking this way suddenly bust," answered Jones, "and the water all rushed down here."

"But don't you know how the wall came to burst?" persisted Alfy.

"No-o; I can't say as how I do," replied Jones slowly, rubbing his head and knitting his brows as though deeply pondering the knotty point.

"Well, now, we must hasten on," said Alfy. "Where are those things for the house? Are they far?"

"They are in the cart in the lane."

"How can they be brought here?" asked Alfy. "Shall I help? Can't you bring the pony and cart through that gate? Let us be quick!"

"I think as how you and I must carry them here in lots," drawled slow-witted Jones. "I don't think pony and cart could come."

"Well, be sharp then!" urged Alfy, springing from the boat.

"Why, I do believe Mansy can see us from the house." And he shouted, and waved his handkerchief.

"Now, come on," cried he, "and show me where the things are."

The transferring of the goods from Mr. Daw's cart took some time, and made the youths very tired, for it was some little distance off. But Alfy was determined to start for the house as quickly as possible, and continued to urge on the slow-coach Jones; so that the task was accomplished more speedily than he had thought would be the case.

But then a new difficulty presented itself. Alfy wished to tie the tub and bath to the boat and take them back to the house, but he found that if he did so, wearied as he was, he could not row the laden boat against the flood. So he was finally obliged to take Jones with him. Even then the task was difficult, for Jones was not an expert

oarsman.

At length, however, the house was reached, and with joy and gladness, shoutings and hearty congratulations, the goods were borne in through the window, and on to the table as before. Mansy and Alfy's sisters were rejoiced to see him. He had been so long away they feared some accident had befallen him; but he did not tell what had happened until Jones had gone.


For Jones had to go back, and of course he went in the boat. This was against Alfy's plan, but he could not help it. Jones could not leave the pony all night, and he could not navigate Alfy's tub. So promising to send some one with the boat in the morning, he departed.

Yet, if Alfy had known what would happen with that boat in the night he would have gone with Jones, and tired as he was, would have brought it back. But he did not know; and after a hearty supper all the inmates of the Island House retired to bed.

They had hardly passed out of their beauty sleep—*i.e.*, the slumber before midnight—when, as the clocks were striking twelve, and an early chanticleer was crowing for the morn, Edie was awakened by some mysterious sounds—sounds as of something bumping against the walls of the house outside.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

he listened. Yes, it was so. Distinctly she heard something knock against the wall outside and underneath her window.

Her first thought was to arouse her brother. "But he must be so tired," she said; so she decided to awaken Mansy instead.

The good woman was sleeping in the room next to Edie's, so that it would not be very difficult for the little maiden to go to her.

Edie sprang from her bed, her heart beating fast, and was creeping along to Mansy's room, when, noticing the moon shining brightly, she thought she would look out and see if she could discover what had bumped against the wall. Just now everything was very quiet.

Cautiously, therefore, she peeped out of her window. No one was to be seen, and the water in the moonlight looked very peaceful and still. But just underneath was a boat—the very boat, as it seemed to her, that Alfy had used that evening.

"Oh, I expect that boy from Mr. Daw's brought it back," she said; "that is all. How foolish of me to be frightened. I expect he got another boat and rowed this one back, and has now returned. I hear no sound down below. He must have gone. It was very kind of him to bring the boat. I don't think I need wake Mansy now. Everything seems very quiet."

So the little maiden crept back to bed, and secure in the idea that she had solved what had seemed to her something of a mystery, she was soon sound asleep again.

But in the early morning, when the busy-minded Mansy, anxious to get forward with the work of the day, descended to the kitchen, what was her amazement and horror, to discover a man lying at full length, and fast asleep, on the table.

Her first impulse was to seize the handy broom, and either sweep him away in some mysterious manner into the water, or else challenge him to mortal combat; but wiser counsels prevailed. Mansy thought of a little plan; and her worthy face looked quite knowing as, chuckling to herself, she hastily removed all the food from the room, and then carefully locked the door from the outside.

"Now, there is my gentleman safe and sound," she said. "If he gets out of the window he falls into the water and is drowned; while o' course we must see that he doesn't break the door down while Master Alfy is fetching a policeman; so there he is. Horrid idjot! what did he want to come here for; and how did he come?"

A glance outside showed her the boat, and showed her also that the water was certainly subsiding.

"That's a mercy!" said Mansy; "but, oh! what a mess the garden and everything will be in!"

The interior of the house showed that Mansy had been busy, for it presented a much more comfortable and tidy appearance than when she returned. A quantity of the water had been bailed out through the windows; and the cracks of the doors had been tightly plugged to prevent water trickling in again.

To-day Mansy wished to continue her tidying arrangements, and she also wanted to cook a good dinner. "Bother the man!" she exclaimed. "What a nuisance he is in the kitchen, when I wanted to have everything ready there!" And she commenced to boil a little water for breakfast over her spirit lamp.

Just then the unwelcome visitor gave more evidence of being a nuisance. He had awakened, and finding the door locked, and no means of egress but into the water, he began knocking the panels of the portal to attract attention.

"Knock away, my gentleman, knock away!" said Mansy. "You won't get out except into a policeman's arms, I can tell you!"

The noise soon brought down the children, and Mansy speedily explained the position of affairs.

"Then it was somebody I heard in the night," exclaimed Edie. "I thought of waking you, Mansy." And she told her experience during the dark watches.

"As things have turned out, it does not matter," said Mansy; "and I am glad you did not wake me. Out he doesn't come 'cept into a policeman's arms. Do you hear that, you wagabone?"

"I'll break the door down," he shouted, "if you don't open it." And he continued to knock loudly.

"Why," said Alfy, "that is like the voice of the man who treated me so badly yesterday. I wonder if it is he! Yes, I do believe it is," he added, as he heard the man shout again. "Oh, we must keep the door fast. Let us put chairs and tables against it!"

"It will be of no use for you to break the door," cried Alfy aloud, "for we are going to put things against it! What did you come here for?"

"I didn't mean no harm," grumbled the man. "I haven't took nothing. I only come for a sleep." Then after a pause he commenced to knock the door more heavily than before.

"Be quick, Master Alfy; oh, do be quick, and get a policeman! We can pile up things against the door," and Mansy commenced at once to drag a table towards it. "I have put some breakfast ready for you in the dining-room. Take something to eat as you go along."

So in a very short time Alfy found himself sculling the boat along to the shore. He noticed that the flood had much subsided during the night. Indeed, but for the fact that the house lay in a hollow, the water might perhaps have gone down before.

He found the village policeman more easily than some of the blue-coated brethren are said to be found. He was at his house, rather tired after his perambulations during the night. Alfy quickly told his errand, and described the man.

"Why, I b'lieves it's the very cove as I'm in search of!" exclaimed the policeman. "Looked for him all night, I have; I 'spects he thought your house was empty in the flood, and he should be safe there for the night. But he's reg'lar caught hisself in a trap, ain't he?"

And policeman 451 Z. of the Blankshire constabulary chuckled. Then he took out a pair of handcuffs, looked at them, turned them round, clinked them together, and slipped them back into his pocket.

"If," said he, "it is as how my man don't go quiet they may come in handy."

"Hadn't we better hurry on?" asked Alfy. "He may break the door down and overturn the things."

"I don't think he will," said the policeman, shaking his head. "Howsomdever, we will go." And taking a long drink of cold tea, he put some bread and cheese in his pocket, and exclaimed, "Now I'm ready."

The two sallied forth, and before very long they had reached the house. As the policeman had anticipated, the man had not beaten the door down, and when it was opened he walked almost literally into the policeman's arms, as Mansy had said.

"I'll go quiet," said the man, who in fact looked tired and hungry. "You needn't put on them things," glancing at the shining steel handcuffs. "I s'pose, missus," he said, looking at Mansy, "you couldn't give a half-starved creetur a crust o' bread, could ye? I'm dead beat!"

"Well! did you ever!" exclaimed Mansy. "After breaking into one's house, then axin' for bread! The imperence!"

"Now then, come on!" said the policeman; "you'll have some food at the lock-up. Get into that boat, smart!"

Airy had looked closely at the man. Yes, it was the same who had tied him in the boat yesterday. Should he give him something to eat? The boy hesitated. The man looked very worn and weary. Then the lad thought of the words,—"If thine enemy hunger, feed him." He hesitated no longer. He slipped into the dining-room, took a large slice of bread, and pressed it into the man's hand just as the policeman hustled him off. Then he hurried away, scarcely hearing the man's thanks, though seeing his look of surprise.

That day was a busy one for the inhabitants of the Island House. Mansy was very anxious that as far as possible every sign of the damage done by the water should be repaired and cleared away. So she kept the young people well employed. But the Island House, however, was rapidly becoming an Island House no longer, for the flood continued to subside on every hand.

When the man was examined before the magistrates, of course Alfie had to be present to testify what he knew about the matter, and the causes of the flood were thoroughly investigated. To do him justice, the man himself did not attempt to conceal anything. His fault was chiefly that of gross carelessness and neglect of duty. The wall of the reservoir had showed signs of weakness which he had failed to report to his superior officers. In fact, he had seen but little of those signs, for, instead of keeping to his work, he had wasted his time in drinking; and on the afternoon when the wall burst he was loitering in a public-house some distance off. He hid in the Island House for the night, not knowing anyone was still there.

The heavy rains of an exceptionally wet July had increased the volume of water in the reservoir to a great extent, and placed a much greater strain on the weakened wall. Hence it came to pass that when the increased pressure came, the wall not being repaired and strengthened, gave way with a crash. As the man had entered the Island House, he was committed for trial at the next assizes, and Alfie was complimented on his bravery and cleverness.

Next morning, when the children came down, they were quite astonished to find that the water had all disappeared, and the garden and grounds looked very strange and muddy after their long and unusual bath.

"Why! where has the flood gone to?" exclaimed Edie. "It has quite vanished away in the night."

"It was subsiding quickly yesterday," said Alfie.

"Now that we have done up the damage in the house, we must see what we can do for the garden," urged Mansy. "Why here is the postman coming up the path, just as if nothing had happened!"

"A letter from Auntie Rose!" cried Edie, taking the packet from the postman. "Perhaps she asks us all to the seaside."

That was exactly what Auntie Rose did ask, as they found when they read the letter. She was staying with their cousins in Devonshire, and thought they might come at once, as she knew of suitable apartments for them. Their parents, too, who were on the Continent, might perhaps join them there soon.

"Oh, that will be jolly!" cried the children.

"And when we come back," said Alfie, "I expect all signs of the flood will have gone. It has not been a bad time, though, has it, Mansy?"

"Perhaps not so very bad, Master Alfie," said Mansy, laughing; "only I could not abear that rockety tub. Now let us tidy the garden."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ISLAND HOUSE: A TALE FOR
THE YOUNG FOLKS ***

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