

that the world was warned, the better. Or, at least I would tell my father, and he would get together a few determined men, who would not be afraid to act according to their consciences and the necessities of the case.

As for fear, it had clean gone from me. A kind of singing came into my head instead, but not in my ears which seemed to act with extraordinary acuteness. After all it was splendid to know what no one else on earth knew. Besides, I would show them all, especially Elsie, what I could do, acting alone. They despised me, laughed at me, yet here was I. I had been away all day, without food, without a soul thinking about me or caring for me. Nevertheless I, Joe Yarrow, whom everybody thought an idler, a mere waster of precious time, would spring this news upon the world!

And so I might, but for one thing.

To get away I had to pass the wall of the old orchard and the flagstone on which Mr. Ablethorpe and I had seen Mad Jeremy stamping down with such force. Now, if I had not been such a conceited young man (my father's words), or so taken up with getting the better of Elsie (that young person's own opinion), I would have known that any of the crew who knew the secret of the iron door and the bricked passage would also be sure to know that of the flagstone and the way out by the orchard.

But at any rate it did not occur to me at the time. I thought solely about getting home, arming a band and coming to watch for the scratcher of the lily bed, the swimmer of the Backwater, the creature which had opened and shut the iron door—no easy task, as we knew, Mr. Ablethorpe and I.

So I skirted the water edge of the old orchard hastily