

Mr. Grylls tapped his knee with his forefinger, rose with an air of ponderous finality, drained his glass and set it down with neat precision.

"A flood of light!" he remarked. "I didn't go far wrong in pressing you about that smack in the face, Mr. Polgleaze, though you were so huffy over it. You have been what I call a mine of information which ought to work up into a very pretty case. You haven't a notion, I suppose, of what the stuff was that they were handling under the rose?"

"Nary a guess. It might have been contraband of war that Pengarvan was smuggling out to one of those petty-smuggling states that are always scraping, or it may have been that he was just robbing the firm by taking out ordinary merchandise and raking in the freight himself."

"Well, that will have to be investigated later," said Mr. Grylls, putting on his cheese-cutter cap. "I'm obliged to you, sir, and I'll keep you posted if anything turns up. No, don't trouble to come down. I'll slip out without giving the gentlemen in the bar a chance to pump me. I'm such an infant at this sort of work that if I had another glass I might give some of this away."

But as the Superintendent made his way back to his office his unspoken reflections had nothing in common with the babbling of an infant.

"Master Wilson knows more than he has told," he said to himself. "He led me by the nose right up to Lance Pengarvan, and stopped short as soon as he had planted his seed of suspicion. Now that's a generous attitude for anyone to take up towards a man who has handled you as he has been handled. Generosity isn't Wilson's strong point. It's a bit of a conundrum."

If the astute police-officer could have seen his late host at that moment he would not have found the answer to that conundrum, but he would have confirmed his opinion that Wilson Polgleaze knew more than he had told. For up in his tawdry room at the third-rate hotel the new chief of "Polgleaze and Son" was cuddling the stiff dram he had poured for himself on his visitor's departure, and was chuckling words, meaningless to any chance hearer, but from which Mr. Grylls would have extracted a juicy kernel.

"I've fed that old fool up with the clue, and still got the trump card up my sleeve," he was muttering. "We will let the kettle simmer a while, Miss Hilda Carlyon, before we set it on to boil."

CHAPTER XI.

Left Behind.

ON the summit of the headland that sheltered St. Runan's Bay to the eastward there stood, at the very brink of the cliff, the crumbling remains of four stout stone walls, which year after year were being battered into little more than a shapeless heap. The ruin, the roof of which had long ago fallen in, had once been the hut whence the "huer" had watched for shoals of pilchard so as to signal their whereabouts to the boats at sea.

On the Sunday morning after the departure of "The Lodestar," a jack-daw, on its way to its nest in the cliff face, perched on one of the walls, but instantly with a hoarse croak of indignation rose into the air and resumed its flight, startled by the unwonted sight of a human being in the stone-littered, grass-grown enclosure.

His eyes glued to a chink in the masonry, a brown-faced boy of fourteen was directing his gaze alternately at the three cottages in the cove far below, and at the grim pile of St. Runan's Tower perched on the opposite headland. The youngster was travel-stained, not to say dirty, though there was nothing about him to suggest the homeless vagabond. His blue reefer jacket was fairly new, and his shoes, save for the caked mud upon them, were in good order. Yet the pinched and drawn expression on his face denoted hunger, and the fear in the hunted eyes that were made for merriment would have been apparent had anyone been there to see.

Now and again he consulted a cheap, nickel-cased watch, his vigilance in-

creasing as the hands approached the hour of ten. Almost to a second he was rewarded by the sight of a tall, gaunt figure in black emerging from one of the cottages in the cove and striking into the road that skirted the little settlement. It was Nathan Craze, starting on his four mile tramp to the Wesleyan chapel where he officiated as deacon. It was a sunny day, and the glint of the metal clasp of the huge bible he carried was plainly visible to the boy in his eyrie.

Thenceforward he gave his sole attention to the entrance gates of the Tower, and twenty minutes later he saw an object which at that distance resembled an elongated beetle crawl out of the drive and down the shoulder of the hill into the main road. The boy was well aware that the beetle was the equipage in which the long-suffering Jenny, gently urged by Timothy Pascoe, was conveying Miss Carlyon and Mrs. Pengarvan to church.

The boy had evidently been waiting for the passage of these worshippers from cot and mansion before breaking cover. No sooner had the chaise disappeared than he left the ruin and, after speeding like a hare across the wind-stunted grass of the headland, struck with practised feet into a steep path which brought him to the cove. Glancing fearfully to right and left, he slipped into the door of Nathan Craze's cottage.

"Marry" he cried in hushed tones. "Marry, are you there? It's Billy."

A SURPRISED exclamation sounded overhead, and Marigold came down the stairs, which were little better than a ladder, into the living-room.

"Why, whatever is the matter? Has your ship been wrecked?" she asked, scanning her brother's drawn face anxiously.

"Not that I know of; I was left behind," replied the boy, his lips twitching, as though he was on the verge of tears. "And speak low, Marry. The neighbours—no, nor father either—mustn't know. Give me something to eat. I'm starving."

She set food before him, watching while he ate ravenously. A faint colour mounted in his cheeks, but the hunted look was still in his eyes.

"Where have you been since 'The Lodestar' sailed?" the girl asked when he pushed his plate aside.

"Making my way here at night and laying up by day," was the reply. "I have been frightened, Sis, and I had to hide."

"You must have done something very wrong?"

"I haven't done any harm, but there are reasons why I mustn't be seen till Captain Pengarvan comes home again," the boy rejoined sullenly.

Marigold was at a loss what to make of him. He was such a merry little fellow as a rule, prone to mischief, perhaps, but fearless and open as the day. She could hardly believe that this was the same lad who had gone blithely off to join his ship ten days ago, promising to bring a parrot when he returned from the voyage which it seemed was to be no voyage at all. She had heard that morning from a neighbour of the murder of Jacob Polgleaze in Fal-mouth, but she did not connect the tragedy with her brother's unexpected appearance at the cottage.

"I don't quite see why you've come, Billy," she said, "if you mustn't be seen till Captain Pengarvan is home again. That will be four months, and might be six. How are you to live in this tiny cottage without father knowing, for instance? You say that even he mustn't be let into the secret of your having been left behind."

"He'd ropes-end it out of me, and another secret that's back of it," replied Billy. "I'd rather anyone should know but him. I watched him off to chapel before I dared come down."

"Then tell me just what you want me to do, little brother," said Marigold gently. "I'll do anything I can. What was in your mind when you came to me for help?"

"I thought if you'd bring me grub I'd camp in Smuggler's Hole—the cave in the cliff under the Tower. It's like

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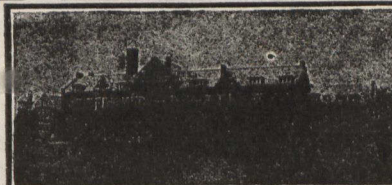
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