

Marsh—that's a likely place: lots of food in the swamp: their instinct would tell them that."

They went to that blissful region where the pearl-bordered fairies lit so gracefully in the long summer afternoons, and the spikes of bog-asphodel stand up like lighted candles with their golden bloom, and the purple orchis mingles a profusion of color in harmonious contrast.

Harry and Jimmy crunched the lush wealth of greenery under foot, stopping continually to notice some fresh attraction. Specially the dragon-flies that haunted the brook-side, with flopping wings, peacock-blue and black. I never saw them except in Fritillary Marsh.

The boys forgot the object of their quest, in their zeal for nature's charms, until at last Harry looked at his watch.

"Ha—on!" he said, "why it's ten to four! Now the time has flown! We must hurry back! What a nuisance! Well, it can't be helped, we must have another try to-morrow."

And so they did—or at least Harry did, for Jimmy, as usual, was "detained" by less agreeable occupations. Harry did not ask anyone else to go; he thought he should get over the ground quicker alone, because he always stopped to look for something when he had a companion.

He went through the village and inquired at the postoffice. They had not heard of any gulls. He went to John Galpin, the butcher, and the boy Samuel came out, and said he didn't know nothing about no body-oids. Then Harry worked his way by Hawthorn Glen to Mosterton Marsh, asking at every cottage without success. Then he reluctantly took the homeward turn up Nightingale Lane, which brought him presently to that bit of ragged garden behind Punchey Brown's cottage.

It was as sorry a bit of ground as ever had the impertinence to call itself a garden. Its owner seemed to hold it in no esteem. The cottage stood on a small triangle of land, formed by the forked end of a lane where it joined the main road. Just at the angle of the fork was the garden, enclosed by a few scraggy bushes, the gaps between them being closed by rough stakes and hoop-iron from old casks, in a sort of patchwork apology for a fence.

Harry pulled up with a sudden jerk. "Could it be? Was it possible? Yes! beyond a doubt, there were the two gulls! He made the chuckling noise which would remind them of feeding-time, and they turned their heads slightly in his direction. That was all their spirits were hampered by the thrabdom of anagke (that terrible word, inscribed by some despairing hand on the wall of the Bastille, which inspired one of Victor Hugo's hametral works).

But, joy! Harry had found them! He ran round to the cottage and bounced in, for there were three jars of lollipops in the window, and a bag of Brazil nuts, and two bottles of ginger-beer, so it was a shop, and anyone might enter without knocking.

"I say, Mother Scrubland, how ever did you get the sea-gulls? I'm so glad you found them! Lend me a basket—I'll take them back."

The old woman's head at him up and down for some moments in stolid surprise. Then she said:

"Well, to be sure! Who ever heard the likes of that? If it wasn't for the cap which shows you come from the school, I'd have taken you for an escapee from the asylum. Sea-gulls? That's good! Are you sure they ain't ostridges? Sea-gulls, indeed!"

"What do you mean?" said Harry. "You've got the doctor's sea-gulls in the garden. I must take them back!"

"Oh, you must, must you?" When I was a girl they wouldn't allow me to say 'must.' But young gents at school is different, no doubt, though it seems they don't trouble much about manners! But you be joking, Master Pippish, sure—ly!"

Harry got rather excited, and probably made some rude remarks—the was rather vague in his report of the interview—and Mother Scrubland was made decidedly angry.

"How dare you come here, Master Popnjay, accusing an honest woman, old enough to be your grandmother, of stealing? If Punchey were here, he'd wallop you for your impudence! I've a mind to do it myself! 'Stealing sea-gulls.' You ought to know better! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! But as you ain't just be off about your own business, and leave honest folks alone! I'll tell Mr. Porchester, that I will! No, I won't—I'll take a shorter cut, and get a summons against you from the policeman, and you'll have to go before the Magistrate, and he'll teach you! He'll send you to jail for libellous accusation, that he will, and serve you right! Them birds is pigeons, wounded by the farmers at their shooting. I caught them in the wood, as anyone else might have done. And lawful findings is lawful keepings—as is a fow of the land, and I'm going to make them into a pigeon-pie. So now you know all about it, and you'd best pack yourself off to school, and learn your lessons instead of bothering your head about sea-gulls. And you can expect the policeman about tea-time. There's the door!"

Harry was cowed by the vehemence of this tirade. His horror of a policeman had never abated since that day at Eastbourne, when the driver of the bathing-machine threatened him with a similar visitation. He slunk out of the cottage in abject fear, and the woman banged the door behind him. He took a few tottery steps and then stopped.

At all costs he must try and pacify her. So he went back to the cottage and opened the door.

"Please, Mrs. Brown, I'm very sorry. I didn't mean to accuse you of stealing. I only thought you had made a mistake."

"Oh, you didn't, didn't you? And you did, did you? But you won't get off by whimpering. You wilfully brought a