

THE WRECK OF THE GUN-RUNNER. A THRILLING SEA STORY.
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PLUCK

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BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD,

Author of the tales of Tom Merry,
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Who was it?

Lawrence, Locke, and Fisher lay in silence at the narrow entrance to the cave.
"Somebody's coming!" exclaimed Lawrence.
"My hat! If it's the German—"
"Then we're caught! Quiet!"
The juniors listened in painful silence. A footstep was grinding the sand of the outer cave. A light flashed from the darkness.
"Who is there?"

Waylaid in the Woods.

Kendal and Keene came running across the Close at St. Winifred's, with three or four of the Fifth at their heels. The two leaders had waited only to gather a few trusty followers before leaving the House; but the chums of the Fourth were already out of sight. Kendal glanced out of the gates, but the road was clear.

"They're gone!"
"They've lost no time, either," granted Keene. "Lucky we know where they're going. I don't know if they've gone by the road or through the wood."

"We'll take a cut through the wood—it's quicker."
"Right-ho!"

The Fifth-Formers hurried down the lane, and left it at the first stile, before coming within sight of the Jolly Seaman. There was a beaten track through the wood at this point, but the party soon left it, plunging into the thick wood to take a shorter cut. Kendal and Keene knew the way well, and the others followed their lead. Suddenly Kendal halted.

"Hold on!"
"What's the matter?" asked Stott, stopping. "There's no time to lose, you know."

"Quiet! I heard somebody!"
"We're close on them, then," muttered Keene.
"Looks like it. Quiet!"

The Fifth-Form party stopped, and listened intently. Round them the wood was thick, undergrowth and great ferns growing amid the trees. They could not see three paces in any direction, except here and there through small openings. From the deep wood came the sound of rustling twigs, as they were pushed aside. There was someone in the wood, and close at hand. It was natural for the Fifth-Formers to jump to the conclusion that it was the Fourth-Form party.

"Quiet!" whispered Kendal again.
The footsteps stopped. A voice came to the ears of the Fifth-Formers through the thick foliage.

"There's nothing else for it, Napper."
Kendal gave a jump.

"My hat! You know that voice!" he whispered excitedly.
"Herr Stossel!"

"Yes, and he's with that blackguard Napper, from the Jolly Seaman. Keep close; he would be awfully wild if he knew we had spotted him."

"Yes, rather!"
The boys remained silent—almost breathless. This was a discovery for them. They had never liked the hard, cold-hearted German, but they had never suspected him of keeping company with rank outsiders like Mr. Napper, of the Jolly Seaman.

The footsteps had ceased. The two men had halted in the wood, within six paces of the Fifth-Formers, crouching there in the ferns.

"Why do you stop, Stossel?" asked the wheezy voice of Mr. Napper impatiently.

"Because we can watch the path from here."
"What path?"

"The track from St. Winifred's to the beach, used by the boys when they want to go down to the shore secretly."

"But—but who—"
"Trelawny usually comes this way."
"How do you know?"
"Because I have watched him, once, Herr."
There was a pause. The Fifth-Formers, who had been looking at one another in blank amazement, now looked at Stossel. What did it all mean?
"Look here, Stossel—"
"Let me speak. He may be here any minute, and the cold, hard voice of the German master of the school was getting to a climax, now."
"I don't see why there should be any danger."
"That is because you don't know what has happened."
"Well, what has happened?" asked Mr. Napper, in a sulky tone.
"I have attempted to discover Trelawny's clue to the galleon's gold, as we agreed. I have seen it—the parchment upon which the secret is written—which, joined to the fragment I possess, gives the whole clue to the treasure."
"You have not succeeded—"
"No, I have tried, with the result that I might have expected. I have discovered that Trelawny never leaves his room at night and day; and he has discovered, for his part, that I am in search of it."
"That means that you have been careless."
"It was necessary to take some risks; but I am not yet punished," said the German, with a grin, in which the boy who troubled us at the Jolly Seaman was doubly on his guard. There is only one way of getting to the secret."
"And that is?"
"To take the parchment from Trelawny."
"By violence?"
"Is there any other way?"
"I suppose not."
There was a short silence. The listening Fifth-Formers were looking at one another with scared expressions. One or two faces had gone quite white.
"There is nothing else to be done," returned the German. "That is why I called for you at the Jolly Seaman—to have brought you here. Trelawny will pass here on his way to the shore."
"And you propose—"
Mr. Napper faltered and did not finish.
Franz Stossel laughed contemptuously.
"Are you afraid of a boy, then?"
"I am not afraid of a boy, but I am afraid of the law, and the law. What you are proposing is robbery and violence."
"And you have never dabbled in anything of the sort before?"
"That's neither here nor there," said Napper, disregarding the bitter sneer in the German's voice. "I don't mean to run more risks than I can help."
"There is no question of risk. Trelawny will pass here; he will be seized, dragged down, stunned in a second. I have a handkerchief here to tie over my face, and you can do the same with yours. If he has time to see us, he will not recognise us."
"Well, there is something in that," said Mr. Napper, in a relieved tone. "But look here, are you certain about the parchment?"
"Quite. I will tell you this much—I have the right end of the Trelawny parchment, and when the two halves are fitted together, the secret is revealed. Does that satisfy you?"
"Yes, I suppose so."
"Then silence, and be ready."
Silence followed. The Fifth-Formers stared at one another in horror. It seemed like a dream to them—a dream of horror from a nightmare. But it was only too terrible. They were to be the spectators of a savage attack upon Trelawny, the captain of St. Winifred's, and the most every fellow in the Fifth.
"The—the scoundrels!" muttered Kendal. "We'd better to chip in here."
Keene nodded.
"Can't we warn Trelawny?"
They were speaking in the faintest of whispers.
"I—I don't see how. If we leave here to find him, he will pass, and they—they— No, we must stay here and wait till he comes. Not a sound."

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