Эдит Несбит

The Story of the Treasure Seekers

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E. Nesbit
The Story of the Treasure Seekers. Being the Adventures of the Bastable Children in Search of a Fortune

CHAPTER 1. THE COUNCIL OF WAYS AND MEANS

This is the story of the different ways we looked for treasure, and I think when you have read it you will see that we were not lazy about the looking.

There are some things I must tell before I begin to tell about the treasure-seeking, because I have read books myself, and I know how beastly it is when a story begins, "'Alas!" said Hildegarde with a deep sigh, "we must look our last on this ancestral home"'—and then some one else says something—and you don't know for pages and pages where the home is, or who Hildegarde is, or anything about it. Our ancestral home is in the Lewisham Road. It is semi-detached and has a garden, not a large one. We are the Bastables. There are six of us besides Father. Our Mother is dead, and if you think we don't care because I don't tell you much about her you only show that you do not understand people at all. Dora is the eldest. Then Oswald—and then Dicky. Oswald won the Latin prize at his preparatory school—and Dicky is good at sums. Alice and Noel are twins: they are ten, and Horace Octavius is my youngest brother. It is one of us that tells this story—but I shall not tell you which: only at the very end perhaps I will. While the story is going on you may be trying to guess, only I bet you don't. It was Oswald who first thought of looking for treasure. Oswald often thinks of very interesting things. And directly he thought of it he did not keep it to himself, as some boys would have done, but he told the others, and said—

'I'll tell you what, we must go and seek for treasure: it is always what you do to restore the fallen fortunes of your House.'

Dora said it was all very well. She often says that. She was trying to mend a large hole in one of Noel's stockings. He tore it on a nail when we were playing shipwrecked mariners on top of the chicken-house the day H. O. fell off and cut his chin: he has the scar still. Dora is the only one of us who ever tries to mend anything. Alice tries to make things sometimes. Once she knitted a red scarf for Noel because his chest is delicate, but it was much wider at one end than the other, and he wouldn't wear it. So we used it as a pennon, and it did very well, because most of our things are black or grey since Mother died; and scarlet was a nice change. Father does not like you to ask for new things. That was one way we had of knowing that the fortunes of the ancient House of Bastable were really fallen. Another way was that there was no more pocket-money—except a penny now and then to the little ones, and people did not come to dinner any more, like they used to, with pretty dresses, driving up in cabs—and the carpets got holes in them—and when the legs came off things they were not sent to be mended, and we gave *up* having the gardener except for the front garden, and not that very often. And the silver in the big oak plate-chest that is lined with green baize all went away to the shop to have the dents and scratches taken out of it, and it never came back. We think Father hadn't enough money to pay the silver man for taking out the dents and scratches. The new spoons and forks were yellowy-white, and not so heavy as the old ones, and they never shone after the first day or two.

Father was very ill after Mother died; and while he was ill his business-partner went to Spain—and there was never much money afterwards. I don't know why. Then the servants left and there was only one, a General. A great deal of your comfort and happiness depends on having a good General. The last but one was nice: she used to make jolly good currant puddings for us, and let us have the

dish on the floor and pretend it was a wild boar we were killing with our forks. But the General we have now nearly always makes sago puddings, and they are the watery kind, and you cannot pretend anything with them, not even islands, like you do with porridge.

Then we left off going to school, and Father said we should go to a good school as soon as he could manage it. He said a holiday would do us all good. We thought he was right, but we wished he had told us he couldn't afford it. For of course we knew.

Then a great many people used to come to the door with envelopes with no stamps on them, and sometimes they got very angry, and said they were calling for the last time before putting it in other hands. I asked Eliza what that meant, and she kindly explained to me, and I was so sorry for Father.

And once a long, blue paper came; a policeman brought it, and we were so frightened. But Father said it was all right, only when he went up to kiss the girls after they were in bed they said he had been crying, though I'm sure that's not true. Because only cowards and snivellers cry, and my Father is the bravest man in the world.

So you see it was time we looked for treasure and Oswald said so, and Dora said it was all very well. But the others agreed with Oswald. So we held a council. Dora was in the chair—the big dining-room chair, that we let the fireworks off from, the Fifth of November when we had the measles and couldn't do it in the garden. The hole has never been mended, so now we have that chair in the nursery, and I think it was cheap at the blowing-up we boys got when the hole was burnt.

'We must do something,' said Alice, 'because the exchequer is empty.' She rattled the money-box as she spoke, and it really did rattle because we always keep the bad sixpence in it for luck.

'Yes—but what shall we do?' said Dicky. 'It's so jolly easy to say let's do *something*.' Dicky always wants everything settled exactly. Father calls him the Definite Article.

'Let's read all the books again. We shall get lots of ideas out of them.' It was Noel who suggested this, but we made him shut up, because we knew well enough he only wanted to get back to his old books. Noel is a poet. He sold some of his poetry once—and it was printed, but that does not come in this part of the story.

Then Dicky said, 'Look here. We'll be quite quiet for ten minutes by the clock—and each think of some way to find treasure. And when we've thought we'll try all the ways one after the other, beginning with the eldest.'

'I shan't be able to think in ten minutes, make it half an hour,' said H. O. His real name is Horace Octavius, but we call him H. O. because of the advertisement, and it's not so very long ago he was afraid to pass the hoarding where it says 'Eat H. O.' in big letters. He says it was when he was a little boy, but I remember last Christmas but one, he woke in the middle of the night crying and howling, and they said it was the pudding. But he told me afterwards he had been dreaming that they really *had* come to eat H. O., and it couldn't have been the pudding, when you come to think of it, because it was so very plain.

Well, we made it half an hour—and we all sat quiet, and thought and thought. And I made up my mind before two minutes were over, and I saw the others had, all but Dora, who is always an awful time over everything. I got pins and needles in my leg from sitting still so long, and when it was seven minutes H. O. cried out—'Oh, it must be more than half an hour!'

H. O. is eight years old, but he cannot tell the clock yet. Oswald could tell the clock when he was six.

We all stretched ourselves and began to speak at once, but Dora put up her hands to her ears and said—

'One at a time, please. We aren't playing Babel.' (It is a very good game. Did you ever play it?)

So Dora made us all sit in a row on the floor, in ages, and then she pointed at us with the finger that had the brass thimble on. Her silver one got lost when the last General but two went away. We think she must have forgotten it was Dora's and put it in her box by mistake. She was a very forgetful girl. She used to forget what she had spent money on, so that the change was never quite right.

Oswald spoke first. 'I think we might stop people on Blackheath—with crape masks and horse-pistols—and say "Your money or your life! Resistance is useless, we are armed to the teeth"—like Dick Turpin and Claude Duval. It wouldn't matter about not having horses, because coaches have gone out too.'

Dora screwed up her nose the way she always does when she is going to talk like the good elder sister in books, and said, 'That would be very wrong: it's like pickpocketing or taking pennies out of Father's great-coat when it's hanging in the hall.'

I must say I don't think she need have said that, especially before the little ones—for it was when I was only four.

But Oswald was not going to let her see he cared, so he said—

'Oh, very well. I can think of lots of other ways. We could rescue an old gentleman from deadly Highwaymen.'

'There aren't any,' said Dora.

'Oh, well, it's all the same—from deadly peril, then. There's plenty of that. Then he would turn out to be the Prince of Wales, and he would say, "My noble, my cherished preserver! Here is a million pounds a year. Rise up, Sir Oswald Bastable."'

But the others did not seem to think so, and it was Alice's turn to say.

She said, 'I think we might try the divining-rod. I'm sure I could do it. I've often read about it. You hold a stick in your hands, and when you come to where there is gold underneath the stick kicks about. So you know. And you dig.'

'Oh,' said Dora suddenly, 'I have an idea. But I'll say last. I hope the divining-rod isn't wrong. I believe it's wrong in the Bible.'

'So is eating pork and ducks,' said Dicky. 'You can't go by that.'

'Anyhow, we'll try the other ways first,' said Dora. 'Now, H. O.'

'Let's be Bandits,' said H. O. 'I dare say it's wrong but it would be fun pretending.'

'I'm sure it's wrong,' said Dora.

And Dicky said she thought everything wrong. She said she didn't, and Dicky was very disagreeable. So Oswald had to make peace, and he said—

'Dora needn't play if she doesn't want to. Nobody asked her. And, Dicky, don't be an idiot: do dry up and let's hear what Noel's idea is.'

Dora and Dicky did not look pleased, but I kicked Noel under the table to make him hurry up, and then he said he didn't think he wanted to play any more. That's the worst of it. The others are so jolly ready to quarrel. I told Noel to be a man and not a snivelling pig, and at last he said he had not made up his mind whether he would print his poetry in a book and sell it, or find a princess and marry her.

'Whichever it is,' he added, 'none of you shall want for anything, though Oswald did kick me, and say I was a snivelling pig.'

'I didn't,' said Oswald, 'I told you not to be.' And Alice explained to him that that was quite the opposite of what he thought. So he agreed to drop it.

Then Dicky spoke.

'You must all of you have noticed the advertisements in the papers, telling you that ladies and gentlemen can easily earn two pounds a week in their spare time, and to send two shillings for sample and instructions, carefully packed free from observation. Now that we don't go to school all our time is spare time. So I should think we could easily earn twenty pounds a week each. That would do us very well. We'll try some of the other things first, and directly we have any money we'll send for the sample and instructions. And I have another idea, but I must think about it before I say.'

We all said, 'Out with it—what's the other idea?'

But Dicky said, 'No.' That is Dicky all over. He never will show you anything he's making till it's quite finished, and the same with his inmost thoughts. But he is pleased if you seem to want to know, so Oswald said—

'Keep your silly old secret, then. Now, Dora, drive ahead. We've all said except you.'

Then Dora jumped up and dropped the stocking and the thimble (it rolled away, and we did not find it for days), and said—

'Let's try my way *now*. Besides, I'm the eldest, so it's only fair. Let's dig for treasure. Not any tiresome divining-rod—but just plain digging. People who dig for treasure always find it. And then we shall be rich and we needn't try your ways at all. Some of them are rather difficult: and I'm certain some of them are wrong—and we must always remember that wrong things—'

But we told her to shut up and come on, and she did.

I couldn't help wondering as we went down to the garden, why Father had never thought of digging there for treasure instead of going to his beastly office every day.

CHAPTER 2. DIGGING FOR TREASURE

I am afraid the last chapter was rather dull. It is always dull in books when people talk and talk, and don't do anything, but I was obliged to put it in, or else you wouldn't have understood all the rest. The best part of books is when things are happening. That is the best part of real things too. This is why I shall not tell you in this story about all the days when nothing happened. You will not catch me saying, 'thus the sad days passed slowly by'—or 'the years rolled on their weary course'—or 'time went on'—because it is silly; of course time goes on—whether you say so or not. So I shall just tell you the nice, interesting parts—and in between you will understand that we had our meals and got up and went to bed, and dull things like that. It would be sickening to write all that down, though of course it happens. I said so to Albert-next-door's uncle, who writes books, and he said, 'Quite right, that's what we call selection, a necessity of true art.' And he is very clever indeed. So you see.

I have often thought that if the people who write books for children knew a little more it would be better. I shall not tell you anything about us except what I should like to know about if I was reading the story and you were writing it. Albert's uncle says I ought to have put this in the preface, but I never read prefaces, and it is not much good writing things just for people to skip. I wonder other authors have never thought of this.

Well, when we had agreed to dig for treasure we all went down into the cellar and lighted the gas. Oswald would have liked to dig there, but it is stone flags. We looked among the old boxes and broken chairs and fenders and empty bottles and things, and at last we found the spades we had to dig in the sand with when we went to the seaside three years ago. They are not silly, babyish, wooden spades, that split if you look at them, but good iron, with a blue mark across the top of the iron part, and yellow wooden handles. We wasted a little time getting them dusted, because the girls wouldn't dig with spades that had cobwebs on them. Girls would never do for African explorers or anything like that, they are too beastly particular.

It was no use doing the thing by halves. We marked out a sort of square in the mouldy part of the garden, about three yards across, and began to dig. But we found nothing except worms and stones—and the ground was very hard.

So we thought we'd try another part of the garden, and we found a place in the big round flower bed, where the ground was much softer. We thought we'd make a smaller hole to begin with, and it was much better. We dug and dug and dug, and it was jolly hard work! We got very hot digging, but we found nothing.

Presently Albert-next-door looked over the wall. We do not like him very much, but we let him play with us sometimes, because his father is dead, and you must not be unkind to orphans, even if their mothers are alive. Albert is always very tidy. He wears frilly collars and velvet knickerbockers. I can't think how he can bear to.

So we said, 'Hallo!'

And he said, 'What are you up to?'

'We're digging for treasure,' said Alice; 'an ancient parchment revealed to us the place of concealment. Come over and help us. When we have dug deep enough we shall find a great pot of red clay, full of gold and precious jewels.'

Albert-next-door only sniggered and said, 'What silly nonsense!' He cannot play properly at all. It is very strange, because he has a very nice uncle. You see, Albert-next-door doesn't care for reading, and he has not read nearly so many books as we have, so he is very foolish and ignorant, but it cannot be helped, and you just have to put up with it when you want him to do anything. Besides, it is wrong to be angry with people for not being so clever as you are yourself. It is not always their faults.

So Oswald said, 'Come and dig! Then you shall share the treasure when we've found it.'

But he said, 'I shan't—I don't like digging—and I'm just going in to my tea.'

'Come along and dig, there's a good boy,' Alice said. 'You can use my spade. It's much the best—'

So he came along and dug, and when once he was over the wall we kept him at it, and we worked as well, of course, and the hole got deep. Pincher worked too—he is our dog and he is very good at digging. He digs for rats in the dustbin sometimes, and gets very dirty. But we love our dog, even when his face wants washing.

'I expect we shall have to make a tunnel,' Oswald said, 'to reach the rich treasure.' So he jumped into the hole and began to dig at one side. After that we took it in turns to dig at the tunnel, and Pincher was most useful in scraping the earth out of the tunnel—he does it with his back feet when you say 'Rats!' and he digs with his front ones, and burrows with his nose as well.

At last the tunnel was nearly a yard long, and big enough to creep along to find the treasure, if only it had been a bit longer. Now it was Albert's turn to go in and dig, but he funked it.

'Take your turn like a man,' said Oswald—nobody can say that Oswald doesn't take his turn like a man. But Albert wouldn't. So we had to make him, because it was only fair.

'It's quite easy,' Alice said. 'You just crawl in and dig with your hands. Then when you come out we can scrape out what you've done, with the spades. Come—be a man. You won't notice it being dark in the tunnel if you shut your eyes tight. We've all been in except Dora—and she doesn't like worms.'

'I don't like worms neither.' Albert-next-door said this; but we remembered how he had picked a fat red and black worm up in his fingers and thrown it at Dora only the day before. So we put him in.

But he would not go in head first, the proper way, and dig with his hands as we had done, and though Oswald was angry at the time, for he hates snivellers, yet afterwards he owned that perhaps it was just as well. You should never be afraid to own that perhaps you were mistaken—but it is cowardly to do it unless you are quite sure you are in the wrong.

'Let me go in feet first,' said Albert-next-door. 'I'll dig with my boots—I will truly, honour bright.'

So we let him get in feet first—and he did it very slowly and at last he was in, and only his head sticking out into the hole; and all the rest of him in the tunnel.

'Now dig with your boots,' said Oswald; 'and, Alice, do catch hold of Pincher, he'll be digging again in another minute, and perhaps it would be uncomfortable for Albert if Pincher threw the mould into his eyes.'

You should always try to think of these little things. Thinking of other people's comfort makes them like you. Alice held Pincher, and we all shouted, 'Kick! dig with your feet, for all you're worth!'

So Albert-next-door began to dig with his feet, and we stood on the ground over him, waiting—and all in a minute the ground gave way, and we tumbled together in a heap: and when we got up there was a little shallow hollow where we had been standing, and Albert-next-door was underneath, stuck quite fast, because the roof of the tunnel had tumbled in on him. He is a horribly unlucky boy to have anything to do with.

It was dreadful the way he cried and screamed, though he had to own it didn't hurt, only it was rather heavy and he couldn't move his legs. We would have dug him out all right enough, in time, but he screamed so we were afraid the police would come, so Dicky climbed over the wall, to tell the cook there to tell Albert-next-door's uncle he had been buried by mistake, and to come and help dig him out.

Dicky was a long time gone. We wondered what had become of him, and all the while the screaming went on and on, for we had taken the loose earth off Albert's face so that he could scream quite easily and comfortably.

Presently Dicky came back and Albert-next-door's uncle came with him. He has very long legs, and his hair is light and his face is brown. He has been to sea, but now he writes books. I like him.

He told his nephew to stow it, so Albert did, and then he asked him if he was hurt—and Albert had to say he wasn't, for though he is a coward, and very unlucky, he is not a liar like some boys are.

'This promises to be a protracted if agreeable task,' said Albert-next-door's uncle, rubbing his hands and looking at the hole with Albert's head in it. 'I will get another spade,' so he fetched the big spade out of the next-door garden tool-shed, and began to dig his nephew out.

'Mind you keep very still,' he said, 'or I might chunk a bit out of you with the spade.' Then after a while he said—

'I confess that I am not absolutely insensible to the dramatic interest of the situation. My curiosity is excited. I own that I should like to know how my nephew happened to be buried. But don't tell me if you'd rather not. I suppose no force was used?'

'Only moral force,' said Alice. They used to talk a lot about moral force at the High School where she went, and in case you don't know what it means I'll tell you that it is making people do what they don't want to, just by slanging them, or laughing at them, or promising them things if they're good.

'Only moral force, eh?' said Albert-next-door's uncle. 'Well?'

'Well,' Dora said, 'I'm very sorry it happened to Albert—I'd rather it had been one of us. It would have been my turn to go into the tunnel, only I don't like worms, so they let me off. You see we were digging for treasure.'

'Yes,' said Alice, 'and I think we were just coming to the underground passage that leads to the secret hoard, when the tunnel fell in on Albert. He *is* so unlucky,' and she sighed.

Then Albert-next-door began to scream again, and his uncle wiped his face—his own face, not Albert's—with his silk handkerchief, and then he put it in his trousers pocket. It seems a strange place to put a handkerchief, but he had his coat and waistcoat off and I suppose he wanted the handkerchief handy. Digging is warm work.

He told Albert-next-door to drop it, or he wouldn't proceed further in the matter, so Albert stopped screaming, and presently his uncle finished digging him out. Albert did look so funny, with his hair all dusty and his velvet suit covered with mould and his face muddy with earth and crying.

We all said how sorry we were, but he wouldn't say a word back to us. He was most awfully sick to think he'd been the one buried, when it might just as well have been one of us. I felt myself that it was hard lines.

'So you were digging for treasure,' said Albert-next-door's uncle, wiping his face again with his handkerchief. 'Well, I fear that your chances of success are small. I have made a careful study of the whole subject. What I don't know about buried treasure is not worth knowing. And I never knew more than one coin buried in any one garden—and that is generally—Hullo—what's that?'

He pointed to something shining in the hole he had just dragged Albert out of. Oswald picked it up. It was a half-crown. We looked at each other, speechless with surprise and delight, like in books.

'Well, that's lucky, at all events,' said Albert-next-door's uncle.

'Let's see, that's fivepence each for you.'

'It's fourpence—something; I can't do fractions,' said Dicky; 'there are seven of us, you see.'

'Oh, you count Albert as one of yourselves on this occasion, eh?'

'Of course,' said Alice; 'and I say, he was buried after all. Why shouldn't we let him have the odd somethings, and we'll have fourpence each.'

We all agreed to do this, and told Albert-next-door we would bring his share as soon as we could get the half-crown changed. He cheered up a little at that, and his uncle wiped his face again —he did look hot—and began to put on his coat and waistcoat.

When he had done it he stooped and picked up something. He held it up, and you will hardly believe it, but it is quite true—it was another half-crown!

'To think that there should be two!' he said; 'in all my experience of buried treasure I never heard of such a thing!'

I wish Albert-next-door's uncle would come treasure-seeking with us regularly; he must have very sharp eyes: for Dora says she was looking just the minute before at the very place where the second half-crown was picked up from, and *she* never saw it.

CHAPTER 3. BEING DETECTIVES

The next thing that happened to us was very interesting. It was as real as the half-crowns—not just pretending. I shall try to write it as like a real book as I can. Of course we have read Mr Sherlock Holmes, as well as the yellow-covered books with pictures outside that are so badly printed; and you get them for fourpence-halfpenny at the bookstall when the corners of them are beginning to curl up and get dirty, with people looking to see how the story ends when they are waiting for trains. I think this is most unfair to the boy at the bookstall. The books are written by a gentleman named Gaboriau, and Albert's uncle says they are the worst translations in the world—and written in vile English. Of course they're not like Kipling, but they're jolly good stories. And we had just been reading a book by Dick Diddlington—that's not his right name, but I know all about libel actions, so I shall not say what his name is really, because his books are rot. Only they put it into our heads to do what I am going to narrate.

It was in September, and we were not to go to the seaside because it is so expensive, even if you go to Sheerness, where it is all tin cans and old boots and no sand at all. But every one else went, even the people next door—not Albert's side, but the other. Their servant told Eliza they were all going to Scarborough, and next day sure enough all the blinds were down and the shutters up, and the milk was not left any more. There is a big horse-chestnut tree between their garden and ours, very useful for getting conkers out of and for making stuff to rub on your chilblains. This prevented our seeing whether the blinds were down at the back as well, but Dicky climbed to the top of the tree and looked, and they were.

It was jolly hot weather, and very stuffy indoors—we used to play a good deal in the garden. We made a tent out of the kitchen clothes-horse and some blankets off our beds, and though it was quite as hot in the tent as in the house it was a very different sort of hotness. Albert's uncle called it the Turkish Bath. It is not nice to be kept from the seaside, but we know that we have much to be thankful for. We might be poor little children living in a crowded alley where even at summer noon hardly a ray of sunlight penetrates; clothed in rags and with bare feet—though I do not mind holes in my clothes myself, and bare feet would not be at all bad in this sort of weather. Indeed we do, sometimes, when we are playing at things which require it. It was shipwrecked mariners that day, I remember, and we were all in the blanket tent. We had just finished eating the things we had saved, at the peril of our lives, from the st-sinking vessel. They were rather nice things. Two-pennyworth of coconut candy—it was got in Greenwich, where it is four ounces a penny—three apples, some macaroni—the straight sort that is so useful to suck things through—some raw rice, and a large piece of cold suet pudding that Alice nicked from the larder when she went to get the rice and macaroni. And when we had finished some one said—

'I should like to be a detective.'

I wish to be quite fair, but I cannot remember exactly who said it. Oswald thinks he said it, and Dora says it was Dicky, but Oswald is too much of a man to quarrel about a little thing like that.

'I should like to be a detective,' said—perhaps it was Dicky, but I think not—'and find out strange and hidden crimes.'

'You have to be much cleverer than you are,' said H. O.

'Not so very,' Alice said, 'because when you've read the books you know what the things mean: the red hair on the handle of the knife, or the grains of white powder on the velvet collar of the villain's overcoat. I believe we could do it.'

'I shouldn't like to have anything to do with murders,' said Dora; 'somehow it doesn't seem safe—'

'And it always ends in the poor murderer being hanged,' said Alice.

We explained to her why murderers have to be hanged, but she only said, 'I don't care. I'm sure no one would ever do murdering *twice*. Think of the blood and things, and what you would see when you woke up in the night! I shouldn't mind being a detective to lie in wait for a gang of coiners, now, and spring upon them unawares, and secure them—single-handed, you know, or with only my faithful bloodhound.'

She stroked Pincher's ears, but he had gone to sleep because he knew well enough that all the suet pudding was finished. He is a very sensible dog. 'You always get hold of the wrong end of the stick,' Oswald said. 'You can't choose what crimes you'll be a detective about. You just have to get a suspicious circumstance, and then you look for a clue and follow it up. Whether it turns out a murder or a missing will is just a fluke.'

'That's one way,' Dicky said. 'Another is to get a paper and find two advertisements or bits of news that fit. Like this: "Young Lady Missing," and then it tells about all the clothes she had on, and the gold locket she wore, and the colour of her hair, and all that; and then in another piece of the paper you see, "Gold locket found," and then it all comes out.'

We sent H. O. for the paper at once, but we could not make any of the things fit in. The two best were about how some burglars broke into a place in Holloway where they made preserved tongues and invalid delicacies, and carried off a lot of them. And on another page there was, 'Mysterious deaths in Holloway.'

Oswald thought there was something in it, and so did Albert's uncle when we asked him, but the others thought not, so Oswald agreed to drop it. Besides, Holloway is a long way off. All the time we were talking about the paper Alice seemed to be thinking about something else, and when we had done she said—

'I believe we might be detectives ourselves, but I should not like to get anybody into trouble.'

'Not murderers or robbers?' Dicky asked.

'It wouldn't be murderers,' she said; 'but I *have* noticed something strange. Only I feel a little frightened. Let's ask Albert's uncle first.'

Alice is a jolly sight too fond of asking grown-up people things. And we all said it was tommyrot, and she was to tell us.

'Well, promise you won't do anything without me,' Alice said, and we promised. Then she said —

'This is a dark secret, and any one who thinks it is better not to be involved in a career of crime-discovery had better go away ere yet it be too late.'

So Dora said she had had enough of tents, and she was going to look at the shops. H. O. went with her because he had twopence to spend. They thought it was only a game of Alice's but Oswald knew by the way she spoke. He can nearly always tell. And when people are not telling the truth Oswald generally knows by the way they look with their eyes. Oswald is not proud of being able to do this. He knows it is through no merit of his own that he is much cleverer than some people.

When they had gone, the rest of us got closer together and said—

'Now then.'

'Well,' Alice said, 'you know the house next door? The people have gone to Scarborough. And the house is shut up. But last night *I saw a light in the windows*.'

We asked her how and when, because her room is in the front, and she couldn't possibly have seen. And then she said—

'I'll tell you if you boys will promise not ever to go fishing again without me.'

So we had to promise.

Then she said—

'It was last night. I had forgotten to feed my rabbits and I woke up and remembered it. And I was afraid I should find them dead in the morning, like Oswald did.'

'It wasn't my fault,' Oswald said; 'there was something the matter with the beasts. I fed them right enough.'

Alice said she didn't mean that, and she went on—

'I came down into the garden, and I saw a light in the house, and dark figures moving about. I thought perhaps it was burglars, but Father hadn't come home, and Eliza had gone to bed, so I couldn't do anything. Only I thought perhaps I would tell the rest of you.'

'Why didn't you tell us this morning?' Noel asked. And Alice explained that she did not want to get any one into trouble, even burglars. 'But we might watch to-night,' she said, 'and see if we see the light again.'

'They might have been burglars,' Noel said. He was sucking the last bit of his macaroni. 'You know the people next door are very grand. They won't know us—and they go out in a real private carriage sometimes. And they have an "At Home" day, and people come in cabs. I daresay they have piles of plate and jewellery and rich brocades, and furs of price and things like that. Let us keep watch to-night.'

'It's no use watching to-night,' Dicky said; 'if it's only burglars they won't come again. But there are other things besides burglars that are discovered in empty houses where lights are seen moving.'

'You mean coiners,' said Oswald at once. 'I wonder what the reward is for setting the police on their track?'

Dicky thought it ought to be something fat, because coiners are always a desperate gang; and the machinery they make the coins with is so heavy and handy for knocking down detectives.

Then it was tea-time, and we went in; and Dora and H. O. had clubbed their money together and bought a melon; quite a big one, and only a little bit squashy at one end. It was very good, and then we washed the seeds and made things with them and with pins and cotton. And nobody said any more about watching the house next door.

Only when we went to bed Dicky took off his coat and waistcoat, but he stopped at his braces, and said—

'What about the coiners?'

Oswald had taken off his collar and tie, and he was just going to say the same, so he said, 'Of course I meant to watch, only my collar's rather tight, so I thought I'd take it off first.'

Dicky said he did not think the girls ought to be in it, because there might be danger, but Oswald reminded him that they had promised Alice, and that a promise is a sacred thing, even when you'd much rather not. So Oswald got Alice alone under pretence of showing her a caterpillar—Dora does not like them, and she screamed and ran away when Oswald offered to show it her. Then Oswald explained, and Alice agreed to come and watch if she could. This made us later than we ought to have been, because Alice had to wait till Dora was quiet and then creep out very slowly, for fear of the boards creaking. The girls sleep with their room-door open for fear of burglars. Alice had kept on her clothes under her nightgown when Dora wasn't looking, and presently we got down, creeping past Father's study, and out at the glass door that leads on to the veranda and the iron steps into the garden. And we went down very quietly, and got into the chestnut-tree; and then I felt that we had only been playing what Albert's uncle calls our favourite instrument—I mean the Fool. For the house next door was as dark as dark. Then suddenly we heard a sound—it came from the gate at the end of the garden. All the gardens have gates; they lead into a kind of lane that runs behind them. It is a sort of back way, very convenient when you don't want to say exactly where you are going. We heard the gate at the end of the next garden click, and Dicky nudged Alice so that she would have fallen out of the tree if it had not been for Oswald's extraordinary presence of mind. Oswald squeezed Alice's arm tight, and we all looked; and the others were rather frightened because really we had not exactly expected anything to happen except perhaps a light. But now a muffled figure, shrouded in a dark cloak, came swiftly up the path of the next-door garden. And we could see that under its cloak the figure carried a mysterious burden. The figure was dressed to look like a woman in a sailor hat.

We held our breath as it passed under the tree where we were, and then it tapped very gently on the back door and was let in, and then a light appeared in the window of the downstairs back breakfast-room. But the shutters were up.

Dicky said, 'My eye!' and wouldn't the others be sick to think they hadn't been in this! But Alice didn't half like it—and as she is a girl I do not blame her. Indeed, I thought myself at first that perhaps it would be better to retire for the present, and return later with a strongly armed force.

'It's not burglars,' Alice whispered; 'the mysterious stranger was bringing things in, not taking them out. They must be coiners—and oh, Oswald!—don't let's! The things they coin with must hurt very much. Do let's go to bed!'

But Dicky said he was going to see; if there was a reward for finding out things like this he would like to have the reward.

'They locked the back door,' he whispered, 'I heard it go. And I could look in quite well through the holes in the shutters and be back over the wall long before they'd got the door open, even if they started to do it at once.'

There were holes at the top of the shutters the shape of hearts, and the yellow light came out through them as well as through the chinks of the shutters.

Oswald said if Dicky went he should, because he was the eldest; and Alice said, 'If any one goes it ought to be me, because I thought of it.'

So Oswald said, 'Well, go then'; and she said, 'Not for anything!' And she begged us not to, and we talked about it in the tree till we were all quite hoarse with whispering.

At last we decided on a plan of action.

Alice was to stay in the tree, and scream 'Murder!' if anything happened. Dicky and I were to get down into the next garden and take it in turns to peep.

So we got down as quietly as we could, but the tree made much more noise than it does in the day, and several times we paused, fearing that all was discovered. But nothing happened.

There was a pile of red flower-pots under the window and one very large one was on the window-ledge. It seemed as if it was the hand of Destiny had placed it there, and the geranium in it was dead, and there was nothing to stop your standing on it—so Oswald did. He went first because he is the eldest, and though Dicky tried to stop him because he thought of it first it could not be, on account of not being able to say anything.

So Oswald stood on the flower-pot and tried to look through one of the holes. He did not really expect to see the coiners at their fell work, though he had pretended to when we were talking in the tree. But if he had seen them pouring the base molten metal into tin moulds the shape of half-crowns he would not have been half so astonished as he was at the spectacle now revealed.

At first he could see little, because the hole had unfortunately been made a little too high, so that the eye of the detective could only see the Prodigal Son in a shiny frame on the opposite wall. But Oswald held on to the window-frame and stood on tiptoe and then he *saw*.

There was no furnace, and no base metal, no bearded men in leathern aprons with tongs and things, but just a table with a table-cloth on it for supper, and a tin of salmon and a lettuce and some bottled beer. And there on a chair was the cloak and the hat of the mysterious stranger, and the two people sitting at the table were the two youngest grown-up daughters of the lady next door, and one of them was saying—

'So I got the salmon three-halfpence cheaper, and the lettuces are only six a penny in the Broadway, just fancy! We must save as much as ever we can on our housekeeping money if we want to go away decent next year.'

And the other said, 'I wish we could *all* go *every* year, or else—Really, I almost wish—'

And all the time Oswald was looking Dicky was pulling at his jacket to make him get down and let Dicky have a squint. And just as she said 'I almost,' Dicky pulled too hard and Oswald felt himself

toppling on the giddy verge of the big flower-pots. Putting forth all his strength our hero strove to recover his equi-what's-its-name, but it was now lost beyond recall.

'You've done it this time!' he said, then he fell heavily among the flower-pots piled below. He heard them crash and rattle and crack, and then his head struck against an iron pillar used for holding up the next-door veranda. His eyes closed and he knew no more.

Now you will perhaps expect that at this moment Alice would have cried 'Murder!' If you think so you little know what girls are. Directly she was left alone in that tree she made a bolt to tell Albert's uncle all about it and bring him to our rescue in case the coiner's gang was a very desperate one. And just when I fell, Albert's uncle was getting over the wall. Alice never screamed at all when Oswald fell, but Dicky thinks he heard Albert's uncle say, 'Confound those kids!' which would not have been kind or polite, so I hope he did not say it.

The people next door did not come out to see what the row was. Albert's uncle did not wait for them to come out. He picked up Oswald and carried the insensible body of the gallant young detective to the wall, laid it on the top, and then climbed over and bore his lifeless burden into our house and put it on the sofa in Father's study. Father was out, so we needn't have *crept* so when we were getting into the garden. Then Oswald was restored to consciousness, and his head tied up, and sent to bed, and next day there was a lump on his young brow as big as a turkey's egg, and very uncomfortable.

Albert's uncle came in next day and talked to each of us separately. To Oswald he said many unpleasant things about ungentlemanly to spy on ladies, and about minding your own business; and when I began to tell him what I had heard he told me to shut up, and altogether he made me more uncomfortable than the bump did.

Oswald did not say anything to any one, but next day, as the shadows of eve were falling, he crept away, and wrote on a piece of paper, 'I want to speak to you,' and shoved it through the hole like a heart in the top of the next-door shutters. And the youngest young lady put an eye to the heart-shaped hole, and then opened the shutter and said 'Well?' very crossly. Then Oswald said—

'I am very sorry, and I beg your pardon. We wanted to be detectives, and we thought a gang of coiners infested your house, so we looked through your window last night. I saw the lettuce, and I heard what you said about the salmon being three-halfpence cheaper, and I know it is very dishonourable to pry into other people's secrets, especially ladies', and I never will again if you will forgive me this once.'

Then the lady frowned and then she laughed, and then she said—

'So it was you tumbling into the flower-pots last night? We thought it was burglars. It frightened us horribly. Why, what a bump on your poor head!'

And then she talked to me a bit, and presently she said she and her sister had not wished people to know they were at home, because—And then she stopped short and grew very red, and I said, 'I thought you were all at Scarborough; your servant told Eliza so. Why didn't you want people to know you were at home?'

The lady got redder still, and then she laughed and said—

'Never mind the reason why. I hope your head doesn't hurt much. Thank you for your nice, manly little speech. *You've* nothing to be ashamed of, at any rate.' Then she kissed me, and I did not mind. And then she said, 'Run away now, dear. I'm going to—I'm going to pull up the blinds and open the shutters, and I want to do it at *once*, before it gets dark, so that every one can see we're at home, and not at Scarborough.'

CHAPTER 4. GOOD HUNTING

When we had got that four shillings by digging for treasure we ought, by rights, to have tried Dicky's idea of answering the advertisement about ladies and gentlemen and spare time and two pounds a week, but there were several things we rather wanted.

Dora wanted a new pair of scissors, and she said she was going to get them with her eight-pence. But Alice said—

'You ought to get her those, Oswald, because you know you broke the points off hers getting the marble out of the brass thimble.'

It was quite true, though I had almost forgotten it, but then it was H. O. who jammed the marble into the thimble first of all. So I said—

'It's H. O.'s fault as much as mine, anyhow. Why shouldn't he pay?'

Oswald didn't so much mind paying for the beastly scissors, but he hates injustice of every kind.

'He's such a little kid,' said Dicky, and of course H. O. said he wasn't a little kid, and it very nearly came to being a row between them. But Oswald knows when to be generous; so he said—

'Look here! I'll pay sixpence of the scissors, and H. O. shall pay the rest, to teach him to be careful.'

H. O. agreed: he is not at all a mean kid, but I found out afterwards that Alice paid his share out of her own money.

Then we wanted some new paints, and Noel wanted a pencil and a halfpenny account-book to write poetry with, and it does seem hard never to have any apples. So, somehow or other nearly all the money got spent, and we agreed that we must let the advertisement run loose a little longer.

'I only hope,' Alice said, 'that they won't have got all the ladies and gentlemen they want before we have got the money to write for the sample and instructions.'

And I was a little afraid myself, because it seemed such a splendid chance; but we looked in the paper every day, and the advertisement was always there, so we thought it was all right.

Then we had the detective try-on—and it proved no go; and then, when all the money was gone, except a halfpenny of mine and twopence of Noel's and three-pence of Dicky's and a few pennies that the girls had left, we held another council.

Dora was sewing the buttons on H. O.'s Sunday things. He got himself a knife with his money, and he cut every single one of his best buttons off. You've no idea how many buttons there are on a suit. Dora counted them. There are twenty-four, counting the little ones on the sleeves that don't undo.

Alice was trying to teach Pincher to beg; but he has too much sense when he knows you've got nothing in your hands, and the rest of us were roasting potatoes under the fire. We had made a fire on purpose, though it was rather warm. They are very good if you cut away the burnt parts—but you ought to wash them first, or you are a dirty boy.

'Well, what can we do?' said Dicky. 'You are so fond of saying "Let's do something!" and never saying what.'

'We can't try the advertisement yet. Shall we try rescuing some one?' said Oswald. It was his own idea, but he didn't insist on doing it, though he is next to the eldest, for he knows it is bad manners to make people do what you want, when they would rather not.

'What was Noel's plan?' Alice asked.

'A Princess or a poetry book,' said Noel sleepily. He was lying on his back on the sofa, kicking his legs. 'Only I shall look for the Princess all by myself. But I'll let you see her when we're married.'

'Have you got enough poetry to make a book?' Dicky asked that, and it was rather sensible of him, because when Noel came to look there were only seven of his poems that any of us could understand. There was the 'Wreck of the Malabar', and the poem he wrote when Eliza took us to

hear the Reviving Preacher, and everybody cried, and Father said it must have been the Preacher's Eloquence. So Noel wrote:

O Eloquence and what art thou?
Ay what art thou? because we cried
And everybody cried inside
When they came out their eyes were red—
And it was your doing Father said.

But Noel told Alice he got the first line and a half from a book a boy at school was going to write when he had time. Besides this there were the 'Lines on a Dead Black Beetle that was poisoned'—

O Beetle how I weep to see
Thee lying on thy poor back!
It is so very sad indeed.
You were so shiny and black.
I wish you were alive again
But Eliza says wishing it is nonsense and a shame.

It was very good beetle poison, and there were hundreds of them lying dead—but Noel only wrote a piece of poetry for one of them. He said he hadn't time to do them all, and the worst of it was he didn't know which one he'd written it to—so Alice couldn't bury the beetle and put the lines on its grave, though she wanted to very much.

Well, it was quite plain that there wasn't enough poetry for a book.

'We might wait a year or two,' said Noel. 'I shall be sure to make some more some time. I thought of a piece about a fly this morning that knew condensed milk was sticky.'

'But we want the money *now*,' said Dicky, 'and you can go on writing just the same. It will come in some time or other.'

'There's poetry in newspapers,' said Alice. 'Down, Pincher! you'll never be a clever dog, so it's no good trying.'

'Do they pay for it?' Dicky thought of that; he often thinks of things that are really important, even if they are a little dull.

'I don't know. But I shouldn't think any one would let them print their poetry without. I wouldn't I know.' That was Dora; but Noel said he wouldn't mind if he didn't get paid, so long as he saw his poetry printed and his name at the end.

'We might try, anyway,' said Oswald. He is always willing to give other people's ideas a fair trial.

So we copied out 'The Wreck of the Malabar' and the other six poems on drawing-paper—Dora did it, she writes best—and Oswald drew a picture of the Malabar going down with all hands. It was a full-rigged schooner, and all the ropes and sails were correct; because my cousin is in the Navy, and he showed me.

We thought a long time whether we'd write a letter and send it by post with the poetry—and Dora thought it would be best. But Noel said he couldn't bear not to know at once if the paper would print the poetry, So we decided to take it.

I went with Noel, because I am the eldest, and he is not old enough to go to London by himself. Dicky said poetry was rot—and he was glad he hadn't got to make a fool of himself. That was because there was not enough money for him to go with us. H. O. couldn't come either, but he came to the station to see us off, and waved his cap and called out 'Good hunting!' as the train started.

There was a lady in spectacles in the corner. She was writing with a pencil on the edges of long strips of paper that had print all down them. When the train started she asked—

'What was that he said?'

So Oswald answered—

'It was "Good hunting"—it's out of the Jungle Book!' 'That's very pleasant to hear,' the lady said; 'I am very pleased to meet people who know their Jungle Book. And where are you off to—the Zoological Gardens to look for Bagheera?'

We were pleased, too, to meet some one who knew the Jungle Book.

So Oswald said—

'We are going to restore the fallen fortunes of the House of Bastable—and we have all thought of different ways—and we're going to try them all. Noel's way is poetry. I suppose great poets get paid?'

The lady laughed—she was awfully jolly—and said she was a sort of poet, too, and the long strips of paper were the proofs of her new book of stories. Because before a book is made into a real book with pages and a cover, they sometimes print it all on strips of paper, and the writer make marks on it with a pencil to show the printers what idiots they are not to understand what a writer means to have printed.

We told her all about digging for treasure, and what we meant to do. Then she asked to see Noel's poetry—and he said he didn't like—so she said, 'Look here—if you'll show me yours I'll show you some of mine.' So he agreed.

The jolly lady read Noel's poetry, and she said she liked it very much. And she thought a great deal of the picture of the Malabar. And then she said, 'I write serious poetry like yours myself; too, but I have a piece here that I think you will like because it's about a boy.' She gave it to us—and so I can copy it down, and I will, for it shows that some grown-up ladies are not so silly as others. I like it better than Noel's poetry, though I told him I did not, because he looked as if he was going to cry. This was very wrong, for you should always speak the truth, however unhappy it makes people. And I generally do. But I did not want him crying in the railway carriage. The lady's piece of poetry:

Oh when I wake up in my bed
And see the sun all fat and red,
I'm glad to have another day
For all my different kinds of play.

There are so many things to do—
The things that make a man of you,
If grown-ups did not get so vexed
And wonder what you will do next.

I often wonder whether they
Ever made up our kinds of play—
If they were always good as gold
And only did what they were told.

They like you best to play with tops
And toys in boxes, bought in shops;
They do not even know the names
Of really interesting games.

They will not let you play with fire
Or trip your sister up with wire,
They grudge the tea-tray for a drum,

Or booby-traps when callers come.

They don't like fishing, and it's true
You sometimes soak a suit or two:
They look on fireworks, though they're dry,
With quite a disapproving eye.

They do not understand the way
To get the most out of your day:
They do not know how hunger feels
Nor what you need between your meals.

And when you're sent to bed at night,
They're happy, but they're not polite.
For through the door you hear them say:
'*He's* done *his* mischief for the day!'

She told us a lot of other pieces but I cannot remember them, and she talked to us all the way up, and when we got nearly to Cannon Street she said—

'I've got two new shillings here! Do you think they would help to smooth the path to Fame?'

Noel said, 'Thank you,' and was going to take the shilling. But Oswald, who always remembers what he is told, said—

'Thank you very much, but Father told us we ought never to take anything from strangers.'

'That's a nasty one,' said the lady—she didn't talk a bit like a real lady, but more like a jolly sort of grown-up boy in a dress and hat—'a very nasty one! But don't you think as Noel and I are both poets I might be considered a sort of relation? You've heard of brother poets, haven't you? Don't you think Noel and I are aunt and nephew poets, or some relationship of that kind?'

I didn't know what to say, and she went on—

'It's awfully straight of you to stick to what your Father tells you, but look here, you take the shillings, and here's my card. When you get home tell your Father all about it, and if he says No, you can just bring the shillings back to me.'

So we took the shillings, and she shook hands with us and said, 'Good-bye, and good hunting!'

We did tell Father about it, and he said it was all right, and when he looked at the card he told us we were highly honoured, for the lady wrote better poetry than any other lady alive now. We had never heard of her, and she seemed much too jolly for a poet. Good old Kipling! We owe him those two shillings, as well as the Jungle books!

CHAPTER 5. THE POET AND THE EDITOR

It was not bad sport—being in London entirely on our own hook. We asked the way to Fleet Street, where Father says all the newspaper offices are. They said straight on down Ludgate Hill—but it turned out to be quite another way. At least *we* didn't go straight on.

We got to St Paul's. Noel *would* go in, and we saw where Gordon was buried—at least the monument. It is very flat, considering what a man he was.

When we came out we walked a long way, and when we asked a policeman he said we'd better go back through Smithfield. So we did. They don't burn people any more there now, so it was rather dull, besides being a long way, and Noel got very tired. He's a peaky little chap; it comes of being a poet, I think. We had a bun or two at different shops—out of the shillings—and it was quite late in the afternoon when we got to Fleet Street. The gas was lighted and the electric lights. There is a jolly Bovril sign that comes off and on in different coloured lamps. We went to the Daily Recorder office, and asked to see the Editor. It is a big office, very bright, with brass and mahogany and electric lights.

They told us the Editor wasn't there, but at another office. So we went down a dirty street, to a very dull-looking place. There was a man there inside, in a glass case, as if he was a museum, and he told us to write down our names and our business. So Oswald wrote—

OSWALD BASTABLE

NOEL BASTABLE

BUSINESS VERY PRIVATE INDEED

Then we waited on the stone stairs; it was very draughty. And the man in the glass case looked at us as if we were the museum instead of him. We waited a long time, and then a boy came down and said—

'The Editor can't see you. Will you please write your business?' And he laughed. I wanted to punch his head.

But Noel said, 'Yes, I'll write it if you'll give me a pen and ink, and a sheet of paper and an envelope.'

The boy said he'd better write by post. But Noel is a bit pig-headed; it's his worst fault. So he said—'No, I'll write it *now*.' So I backed him up by saying—

'Look at the price penny stamps are since the coal strike!'

So the boy grinned, and the man in the glass case gave us pen and paper, and Noel wrote. Oswald writes better than he does; but Noel would do it; and it took a very long time, and then it was inky.

> DEAR MR EDITOR, I want you to print my poetry and pay for it, and I am a friend of Mrs Leslie's; she is a poet too.
> *Your affectionate friend,*
> *NOEL BASTABLE.*

He licked the envelope a good deal, so that that boy shouldn't read it going upstairs; and he wrote 'Very private' outside, and gave the letter to the boy. I thought it wasn't any good; but in a

minute the grinning boy came back, and he was quite respectful, and said—'The Editor says, please will you step up?'

We stepped up. There were a lot of stairs and passages, and a queer sort of humming, hammering sound and a very funny smell. The boy was now very polite, and said it was the ink we smelt, and the noise was the printing machines.

After going through a lot of cold passages we came to a door; the boy opened it, and let us go in. There was a large room, with a big, soft, blue-and-red carpet, and a roaring fire, though it was only October; and a large table with drawers, and littered with papers, just like the one in Father's study. A gentleman was sitting at one side of the table; he had a light moustache and light eyes, and he looked very young to be an editor—not nearly so old as Father. He looked very tired and sleepy, as if he had got up very early in the morning; but he was kind, and we liked him. Oswald thought he looked clever. Oswald is considered a judge of faces.

'Well,' said he, 'so you are Mrs Leslie's friends?'

'I think so,' said Noel; 'at least she gave us each a shilling, and she wished us "good hunting!"'

'Good hunting, eh? Well, what about this poetry of yours? Which is the poet?'

I can't think how he could have asked! Oswald is said to be a very manly-looking boy for his age. However, I thought it would look duffing to be offended, so I said—

'This is my brother Noel. He is the poet.' Noel had turned quite pale. He is disgustingly like a girl in some ways. The Editor told us to sit down, and he took the poems from Noel, and began to read them. Noel got paler and paler; I really thought he was going to faint, like he did when I held his hand under the cold-water tap, after I had accidentally cut him with my chisel. When the Editor had read the first poem—it was the one about the beetle—he got up and stood with his back to us. It was not manners; but Noel thinks he did it 'to conceal his emotion,' as they do in books. He read all the poems, and then he said—

'I like your poetry very much, young man. I'll give you—let me see; how much shall I give you for it?'

'As much as ever you can,' said Noel. 'You see I want a good deal of money to restore the fallen fortunes of the house of Bastable.'

The gentleman put on some eye-glasses and looked hard at us. Then he sat down.

'That's a good idea,' said he. 'Tell me how you came to think of it. And, I say, have you had any tea? They've just sent out for mine.'

He rang a tingly bell, and the boy brought in a tray with a teapot and a thick cup and saucer and things, and he had to fetch another tray for us, when he was told to; and we had tea with the Editor of the Daily Recorder. I suppose it was a very proud moment for Noel, though I did not think of that till afterwards. The Editor asked us a lot of questions, and we told him a good deal, though of course I did not tell a stranger all our reasons for thinking that the family fortunes wanted restoring. We stayed about half an hour, and when we were going away he said again—

'I shall print all your poems, my poet; and now what do you think they're worth?'

'I don't know,' Noel said. 'You see I didn't write them to sell.'

'Why did you write them then?' he asked.

Noel said he didn't know; he supposed because he wanted to.

'Art for Art's sake, eh?' said the Editor, and he seemed quite delighted, as though Noel had said something clever.

'Well, would a guinea meet your views?' he asked.

I have read of people being at a loss for words, and dumb with emotion, and I've read of people being turned to stone with astonishment, or joy, or something, but I never knew how silly it looked till I saw Noel standing staring at the Editor with his mouth open. He went red and he went white, and then he got crimson, as if you were rubbing more and more crimson lake on a palette. But he didn't say a word, so Oswald had to say—

'I should jolly well think so.'

So the Editor gave Noel a sovereign and a shilling, and he shook hands with us both, but he thumped Noel on the back and said—

'Buck up, old man! It's your first guinea, but it won't be your last. Now go along home, and in about ten years you can bring me some more poetry. Not before—see? I'm just taking this poetry of yours because I like it very much; but we don't put poetry in this paper at all. I shall have to put it in another paper I know of.'

'What *do* you put in your paper?' I asked, for Father always takes the Daily Chronicle, and I didn't know what the Recorder was like. We chose it because it has such a glorious office, and a clock outside lighted up.

'Oh, news,' said he, 'and dull articles, and things about Celebrities. If you know any Celebrities, now?'

Noel asked him what Celebrities were.

'Oh, the Queen and the Princes, and people with titles, and people who write, or sing, or act—or do something clever or wicked.'

'I don't know anybody wicked,' said Oswald, wishing he had known Dick Turpin, or Claude Duval, so as to be able to tell the Editor things about them. 'But I know some one with a title—Lord Tottenham.'

'The mad old Protectionist, eh? How did you come to know him?'

'We don't know him to speak to. But he goes over the Heath every day at three, and he strides along like a giant—with a black cloak like Lord Tennyson's flying behind him, and he talks to himself like one o'clock.'

'What does he say?' The Editor had sat down again, and he was fiddling with a blue pencil.

'We only heard him once, close enough to understand, and then he said, "The curse of the country, sir—ruin and desolation!" And then he went striding along again, hitting at the furze-bushes as if they were the heads of his enemies.'

'Excellent descriptive touch,' said the Editor. 'Well, go on.'

'That's all I know about him, except that he stops in the middle of the Heath every day, and he looks all round to see if there's any one about, and if there isn't, he takes his collar off.'

The Editor interrupted—which is considered rude—and said—

'You're not romancing?'

'I beg your pardon?' said Oswald. 'Drawing the long bow, I mean,' said the Editor.

Oswald drew himself up, and said he wasn't a liar.

The Editor only laughed, and said romancing and lying were not at all the same; only it was important to know what you were playing at. So Oswald accepted his apology, and went on.

'We were hiding among the furze-bushes one day, and we saw him do it. He took off his collar, and he put on a clean one, and he threw the other among the furze-bushes. We picked it up afterwards, and it was a beastly paper one!'

'Thank you,' said the Editor, and he got up and put his hand in his pocket. 'That's well worth five shillings, and there they are. Would you like to see round the printing offices before you go home?'

I pocketed my five bob, and thanked him, and I said we should like it very much. He called another gentleman and said something we couldn't hear. Then he said good-bye again; and all this time Noel hadn't said a word. But now he said, 'I've made a poem about you. It is called "Lines to a Noble Editor." Shall I write it down?'

The Editor gave him the blue pencil, and he sat down at the Editor's table and wrote. It was this, he told me afterwards as well as he could remember—

May Life's choicest blessings be your lot
I think you ought to be very blest

For you are going to print my poems—
And you may have this one as well as the rest.

'Thank you,' said the Editor. 'I don't think I ever had a poem addressed to me before. I shall treasure it, I assure you.'

Then the other gentleman said something about Maecenas, and we went off to see the printing office with at least one pound seven in our pockets.

It *was* good hunting, and no mistake!

But he never put Noel's poetry in the Daily Recorder. It was quite a long time afterwards we saw a sort of story thing in a magazine, on the station bookstall, and that kind, sleepy-looking Editor had written it, I suppose. It was not at all amusing. It said a lot about Noel and me, describing us all wrong, and saying how we had tea with the Editor; and all Noel's poems were in the story thing. I think myself the Editor seemed to make game of them, but Noel was quite pleased to see them printed—so that's all right. It wasn't my poetry anyhow, I am glad to say.

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