

**ARTHUR
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A photograph of a weathered wooden shipwreck on a beach at night. The ship's hull is made of dark, aged wood with visible rivets. The background is a dark, starry night sky with a faint orange glow on the horizon. The ship is positioned in the lower half of the frame, angled towards the right.

**THE SHIP
OF STARS**

Arthur Quiller-Couch

The Ship of Stars

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CHAPTER I.

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THE BOY IN THE GATE-HOUSE.

Until his ninth year the boy about whom this story is written lived in a house which looked upon the square of a county town. The house had once formed part of a large religious building, and the boy's bedroom had a high groined roof, and on the capstone an angel carved, with outspread wings. Every night the boy wound up his prayers with this verse which his grandmother had taught him:

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.
Four corners to my bed,
Four angels round my head;
One to watch, one to pray,
Two to bear my soul away."

Then he would look up to the angel and say: "Only Luke is with me." His head was full of queer texts and beliefs. He supposed the three other angels to be always waiting in the next room, ready to bear away the soul of his grandmother (who was bed-ridden), and that he had Luke for an angel because he was called Theophilus, after the friend for whom St. Luke had written his Gospel and the Acts of the Holy

Apostles. His name in full was Theophilus John Raymond, but people called him Taffy.

Of his parents' circumstances he knew very little, except that they were poor, and that his father was a clergyman attached to the parish church. As a matter of fact, the Reverend Samuel Raymond was senior curate there, with a stipend of ninety-five pounds a year. Born at Tewkesbury, the son of a miller, he had won his way to a servitorship at Christ Church, Oxford; and somehow, in the course of one Long Vacation, had found money for travelling expenses to join a reading party under the Junior Censor. The party spent six summer weeks at a farmhouse near Honiton, in Devon. The farm belonged to an invalid widow named Venning, who let it be managed by her daughter Humility and two paid labourers, while she herself sat by the window in her kitchen parlour, busied incessantly with lace-work of that beautiful kind for which Honiton is famous. He was an unassuming youth; and although in those days servitors were no longer called upon to black the boots of richer undergraduates, the widow and her daughter soon divined that he was lowlier than the others, and his position an awkward one, and were kind to him in small ways, and grew to like him. Next year, at their invitation, he travelled down to Honiton alone, with a box of books; and, at twenty-two, having taken his degree, he paid them a third visit, and asked Humility to be his wife. At twenty-four, soon after his admission to deacon's orders, they were married. The widow sold the small farm, with its stock, and followed to live with them in the friary gate-house; this having been part of Humility's bargain with her

lover, if the word can be used of a pact between two hearts so fond.

About ten years had gone since these things happened, and their child

Taffy was now past his eighth birthday.

It seemed to him that, so far back as he could remember, his mother and grandmother had been making lace continually. At night, when his mother took the candle away with her and left him alone in the dark, he was not afraid; for, by closing his eyes, he could always see the two women quite plainly; and always he saw them at work, each with a pillow on her lap, and the lace upon it growing, growing, until the pins and bobbins wove a pattern that was a dream, and he slept. He could not tell what became of all the lace, though he had a collar of it which he wore to church on Sundays, and his mother had once shown him a parcel of it, wrapped in tissue-paper, and told him it was his christening robe.

His father was always reading, except on Sundays, when he preached sermons. In his thoughts nine times out of ten Taffy associated his father with a great pile of books; but the tenth time with something totally different. One summer—it was in his sixth year—they had all gone on a holiday to Tewkesbury, his father's old home; and he recalled quite clearly the close of a warm afternoon which he and his mother had spent there in a green meadow beyond the abbey church. She had brought out a basket and cushion, and sat sewing, while Taffy played about and watched the haymakers at their work. Behind them, within the great church, the organ was sounding; but by-and-by it stopped,

and a door opened in the abbey wall, and his father came across the meadow toward them with his surplice on his arm. And then Humility unpacked the basket and produced a kettle, a spirit-lamp, and a host of things good to eat. The boy thought the whole adventure splendid. When tea was done, he sprang up with one of those absurd notions which come into children's heads:

"Now let's feed the poultry," he cried, and flung his last scrap of bun three feet in air toward the gilt weather-cock on the abbey tower. While they laughed, "Father, how tall is the tower?" he demanded.

"A hundred and thirty-two feet, my boy, from ground to battlements."

"What are battlements?"

He was told.

"But people don't fight here," he objected.

Then his father told of a battle fought in the very meadow in which they were sitting; of soldiers at bay with their backs to the abbey wall; of crowds that ran screaming into the church; of others chased down Mill Street and drowned; of others killed by the Town Cross; and how—people said in the upper room of a house still standing in the High Street—a boy prince had been stabbed.

Humility laid a hand on his arm.

"He'll be dreaming of all this. Tell him it was a long time ago, and that these things don't happen now."

But her husband was looking up at the tower.

"See it now with the light upon it!" he went on. "And it has seen it all. Eight hundred years of heaven's storms and man's madness, and still foursquare and as beautiful now as

when the old masons took down their scaffolding. When I was a boy—"

He broke off suddenly. "Lord, make men as towers," he added quietly after a while, and nobody spoke for many minutes.

To Taffy this had seemed a very queer saying; about as queer as that other one about "men as trees walking." Somehow—he could not say why—he had never asked any questions about it. But many times he had perched himself on a flat tombstone under the church tower at home, and tilted his head back and stared up at the courses and pinnacles, wondering what his father could have meant, and how a man could possibly be like a tower. It ended in this—that whenever he dreamed about his father, these two towers, or a tower which was more or less a combination of both, would get mixed up with the dream as well.

The gate-house contained a sitting-room and three bedrooms (one hardly bigger than a box-cupboard); but a building adjoined it which had been the old Franciscans' refectory, though now it was divided by common planking into two floors, the lower serving for a feoffee office, while the upper was supposed to be a muniment-room, in charge of the feoffees' clerk. The clerk used it for drying his garden-seeds and onions, and spread his hoarding apples to ripen on the floor. So when Taffy grew to need a room of his own, and his father's books to cumber the very stairs of the gate-house, the money which Humility and her mother made by their lace-work, and which arrived always by post, came

very handy for the rent which the clerk asked for his upper chamber.

Carpenters appeared and partitioned it off into two rooms, communicating with the gate-house by a narrow doorway pierced in the wall. All this, whilst it was doing, interested Taffy mightily; and he announced his intention of being a carpenter one of these days.

"I hope," said Humility, "you will look higher, and be a preacher of God's Word, like your father."

His father frowned at this and said: "Jesus Christ was both."

Taffy compromised: "Perhaps I'll make pulpits."

This was how he came to have a bedroom with a vaulted roof and a window that reached down below the floor.

CHAPTER II.

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MUSIC IN THE TOWN SQUARE.

This window looked upon the Town Square, and across it to the Mayoralty. The square had once been the Franciscans' burial-ground, and was really no square at all, but a semicircle. The townspeople called it Mount Folly. The chord of the arc was formed by a large Assize Hall, with a broad flight of granite steps, and a cannon planted on either side of the steps. The children used to climb about these

cannons, and Taffy had picked out his first letters from the words *Sevastopol* and *Russian Trophy*, painted in white on their lead-coloured carriages.

Below the Assize Hall an open gravelled space sloped gently down to a line of iron railings and another flight of granite steps leading into the main street. The street curved uphill around the base of this open ground, and came level with it just in front of the Mayoralty, a tall stuccoed building where the public balls were given, and the judges had their lodgings in assize time, and the Colonel his quarters during the militia training.

Fine shows passed under Taffy's window. Twice a year came the judges, with the sheriff in uniform and his chaplain, and his coach, and his coachman and lackeys in powder and plush and silk stockings, white or flesh-coloured; and the barristers with their wigs, and the javelin men and silver trumpets. Every spring, too, the Royal Rangers Militia came up for training. Suddenly one morning, in the height of the bird-nesting season, the street would swarm with countrymen tramping up to the barracks on the hill, and back, with bundles of clothes and unblackened boots dangling. For the next six weeks the town would be full of bugle calls, and brazen music, and companies marching and parading in suits of invisible green, and clanking officers in black, with little round forage caps, and silver badges on their side-belts; and, towards evening, with men lounging and smoking, or washing themselves in public before the doors of their billets.

Usually too, Whitsun Fair fell at the height of the militia training; and then for two days booths and caravans, sweet-

standings and shooting-galleries lined the main street, and Taffy went out with a shilling in his pocket to enjoy himself. But the bigger shows—the menagerie, the marionettes, and the travelling Theatre Royal—were pitched on Mount Folly, just under his window. Sometimes the theatre would stay a week or two after the fair was over, until even the boy grew tired of the naphtha-lamps and the voices of the tragedians, and the cornet wheezing under canvas, and began to long for the time when they would leave the square open for the boys to come and play at prisoners' bars in the dusk.

One evening, a fortnight before Whitsun Fair, he had taken his book to the open window, and sat there with it. Every night he had to learn a text which he repeated next morning to his mother. Already, across the square, the Mayoralty house was brightly lit, and the bandsmen had begun to arrange their stands and music before it; for the Colonel was receiving company. Every now and then a carriage arrived, and set down its guests.

After a while Taffy looked up and saw two persons crossing the square—an old man and a little girl. He recognised them, having seen them together in church the day before, when his father had preached the sermon. The old man wore a rusty silk hat, cocked a little to one side, a high stock collar, black cutaway coat, breeches and gaiters of grey cord. He stooped as he walked, with his hands behind him and his walking-stick dangling like a tail—a very positive old fellow, to look at. The girl's face Taffy could not see; it was hidden by the brim of her Leghorn hat.

The pair passed close under the window. Taffy heard a knock at the door below, and ran to the head of the stairs.

Down in the passage his mother was talking to the old man, who turned to the girl and told her to wait outside.

"But let her come in and sit down," urged Humility.

"No, ma'am; I know my mind. I want one hour with your husband."

Taffy heard the door shut, and went back to his window-seat.

The little girl had climbed the cannon opposite, and sat there dangling her feet and eyeing the house.

"Boy," said she, "what a funny window-seat you've got! I can see your legs under it."

"That's because the window reaches down to the floor, and the bench is fixed across by the transom here."

"What's your name?"

"Theophilus; but they call me Taffy."

"Why?"

"Father says it's an imperfect example of Grimm's Law."

"Oh! Then, I suppose you're quite the gentleman? My name's Honoria."

"Is that your father downstairs?"

"Bless the boy! What age do you take me for? He's my grandfather. He's asking your father about his soul. He wants to be saved, and says if he's not saved before next Lady-day, he'll know the reason why. What are you doing up there?"

"Reading."

"Reading what?"

"The Bible."

"But, I say, can you really?"

"You listen." Taffy rested the big Bible on the window-frame; it just had room to lie open between the two mullions—"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia they assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not. And they, passing by Mysia, came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. . . ."

"I don't wonder at it. Did you ever have the whooping-cough?"

"Not yet."

"I've had it all the winter. That's why I'm not allowed in to play with you. Listen!"

She coughed twice, and wound up with a terrific whoop.

"Now, if you'd only put on your nightshirt and preach, I'd be the congregation and interrupt you with coughing."

"Very well," said Taffy, "let's do it."

"No; you didn't suggest it. I hate boys who have to be told."

Taffy was huffed, and pretended to return to his book. By-and-by she called up to him:

"Tell me, what's written on this gun of yours?"

"Sevastopol—that's a Russian town. The English took it by storm."

"What! the soldiers over there?"

"No, they're only bandsmen; and they're too young. But I expect the

Colonel was there. He's upstairs in the Mayoralty, dining.

He's quite an old man, but I've heard father say he was as

brave as a lion when the fighting happened."

The girl climbed off the gun.

"I'm going to have a look at him," she said; and turning her back on Taffy, she sauntered off across the square, just as the band struck up the first note of the overture from *Semiramide*. A waltz of Strauss followed, and then came a cornet solo by the bandmaster, and a medley of old English tunes. To all of these Taffy listened. It had fallen too dark to read, and the boy was always sensitive to music. Often when he played alone broken phrases and scraps of remembered tunes came into his head and repeated themselves over and over. Then he would drop his game and wander about restlessly, trying to fix and complete the melody; and somehow in the process the melody always became a story, or so like a story that he never knew the difference. Sometimes his uneasiness lasted for days together. But when the story came complete at last—and this always sprang on him quite suddenly—he wanted to caper and fling his arms about and sing aloud; and did so, if nobody happened to be looking.

The bandmaster, too, had music, and a reputation for imparting it. Famous regimental bands contained pupils of his; and his old pupils, when they met, usually told each other stories of his atrocious temper. But he kept his temper to-night, for his youngsters were playing well, and the small crowd standing quiet.

The English melodies had scarcely closed with "Come, lasses and lads," when across in Mayoralty a blind was drawn, and a window thrown open, and Taffy saw the warm

room within, and the officers and ladies standing with glasses in their hands. The Colonel was giving the one toast of the evening:

"Ladies and gentlemen—The Queen!"

The adjutant leaned out and lifted his hand for signal, and the band crashed out with the National Anthem. Then there was silence for a minute. The window remained open. Taffy still caught glimpses of jewels and uniforms, and white necks bending, and men leaning back in their chairs, with their mess-jackets open, and the candle-light flashing on their shirt-fronts. Below, in the dark street, the bandmaster trimmed the lamp by his music-stand. In the rays of it he drew out a handkerchief and polished the keys of his cornet; then passed the cornet over to his left hand, took up his baton, and nodded.

What music was that, stealing, rippling, across the square? The bandmaster knew nothing of the tale of Tannhauser, but was wishing that he had violins at his beck, instead of stupid flutes and reeds. And Taffy had never heard so much as the name of Tannhauser. Of the meaning of the music he knew nothing—nothing beyond its wonder and terror. But afterward he made a tale of it to himself.

In the tale it seemed that a vine shot up and climbed on the shadows of the warm night; and the shadows climbed with it and made a trellis for it right across the sky. The vine thrust through the trellis faster and faster, dividing, throwing out little curls and tendrils; then leaves and millions of leaves, each leaf unfolding about a drop of dew, which trickled and fell and tinkled like a bird's song.

The beauty and scent of the vine distressed him. He wanted to cry out, for it was hiding the sky. Then he heard the tramp of feet in the distance, and knew that they threatened the vine, and with that he wanted to save it. But the feet came nearer and nearer, tramping terribly.

He could not bear it. He ran to the stairs, stole down them, opened the front door cautiously, and slipped outside. He was half-way across the square before it occurred to him that the band had ceased to play. Then he wondered why he had come, but he did not go back. He found Honoria standing a little apart from the crowd, with her hands clasped behind her, gazing up at the window of the banqueting-room.

She did not see him at once.

"Stand on the steps, here," he whispered, "then you can see him. That's the Colonel—the man at the end of the table, with the big, grey moustache."

He touched her arm. She sprang away and stamped her foot.

"Keep off with you! Who *told* you?—Oh! you bad boy!"

"Nobody. I thought you hated boys who wait to be told."

"And now you'll get the whooping-cough, and goodness knows what will happen to you, and you needn't think I'll be sorry!"

"Who wants you to be sorry! As for you," Taffy went on sturdily, "I think your grandfather might have more sense than to keep you waiting out here in the cold, and giving your cough to the whole town!"

"Ha! you do, do you?"

It was not the girl who said this. Taffy swung round, and saw an old man staring down on him. There was just light enough to reveal that he had very formidable grey eyes. But Taffy's blood was up.

"Yes, I do," he said, and wondered at himself.

"Ha! Does your father whip you sometimes?"

"No, sir."

"I should if you were my boy. I believe in it. Come, Honoria!"

The child threw a glance at Taffy as she was led away. He could not be sure whether she took his side or her grandfather's.

That night he had a very queer dream.

His grandmother had lost her lace-pillow, and after searching for some time, he found it lying out in the square. But the pins and bobbins were darting to and fro on their own account, at an incredible rate, and the lace as they made it turned into a singing beanstalk, and rose and threw out branches all over the sky. Very soon he found himself climbing among those branches, up and up until he came to a Palace, which was really the Assize Hall, with a flight of steps before it and a cannon on either side of the steps. Within sat a giant, asleep, with his head on the table and his face hidden; but his neck bulged at the back just like the bandmaster's during a cornet solo. A harp stood on the table. Taffy caught this up, and was stealing downstairs with it, but at the third stair the harp—which had Honoria's head and face—began to cough, and wound up with a *whoop!* This woke the giant—he turned out to be Honoria's grandfather—who came roaring after him. Glancing down

below as he ran, Taffy saw his mother and the bandmaster far below with axes, hacking at the foot of the beanstalk. He tried to call out and prevent them, but they kept smiting. And the worst of it was, that down below, too, his father was climbing into a pulpit, quite as if nothing was happening. The pulpit grew and became a tower, and his father kept calling, "Be a tower! Be a tower, like me!"

But Taffy couldn't for the life of him see how to manage it. The beanstalk began to totter; he felt himself falling, and leapt for the tower. . . . And awoke in his bed shuddering, and, for the first time in his life, afraid of the dark. He would have called for his mother, but just then down by the turret clock in Fore Street the buglers began to sound the "Last Post," and he hugged himself and felt that the world he knew was still about him, companionable and kind.

Twice the buglers repeated their call, in more distant streets, each time more faintly; and the last flying notes carried him into sleep again.

CHAPTER III.

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PASSENGERS BY JOBY'S VAN.

At breakfast next morning he saw by his parents' faces that something unusual had happened. Nothing was said to him about it, whatever it might be. But once or twice after this, coming into the parlour suddenly, he found his father

and mother talking low and earnestly together; and now and then they would go up to his grandmother's room and talk.

In some way he divined that there was a question of leaving home. But the summer passed and these private talks became fewer. Toward August, however, they began again; and by-and-by his mother told him. They were going to a parish on the North Coast, right away across the Duchy, where his father had been presented to a living. The place had an odd name—Nannizabuloe.

"And it is lonely," said Humility, "the most of it sea-sand, so far as I can hear."

It was by the sea, then. How would they get there?

"Oh, Joby's van will take us most of the way."

Of all the vans which came and went in the Fore Street, none could compare for romance with Joby's. People called it the Wreck Ashore; but its real name, "Vital Spark, J. Job, Proprietor," was painted on its orange-coloured sides in letters of vivid blue, a blue not often seen except on ship's boats. It disappeared every Tuesday and Saturday over the hill and into a mysterious country, from which it emerged on Mondays and Fridays with a fine flavour of the sea renewed upon it and upon Joby. No other driver wore a blue guernsey, or rings in his ears, as Joby did. No other van had the same mode of progressing down the street in a series of short tacks, or brought such a crust of brine on its panes, or such a mixture of mud and fine sand on its wheels, or mingled scraps of dry sea-weed with the straw on its floor.

"Will there be ships?" Taffy asked.

"I dare say we shall see a few, out in the distance. It's a poor, outlandish place. It hasn't even a proper church."

"If there's no church, father can get into a boat and preach; just like the Sea of Galilee, you know."

"Your father is too good a man to mimic the Scriptures in any such way. There is a church, I believe, though it's a tumble-down one. Nobody has preached in it for years. But Squire Moyle may do something now. He's a rich man."

"Is that the old gentleman who came to ask father about his soul?"

"Yes; he says no preaching ever did him so much good as your father's. That's why he came and offered the living."

"But he can't go to heaven if he's rich."

"I don't know, Taffy, wherever you pick up such wicked thoughts."

"Why, it's in the Bible!"

Humility would not argue about it; but she told her husband that night what the child had said. "My dear," he answered, "the boy must think of these things."

"But he ought not to be talking disrespectfully," contended she.

One Tuesday, towards the end of September, Taffy saw his father off by Joby's van; and the Friday after, walked down with his mother to meet him on his return. Almost at once the household began to pack. The packing went on for a week, in the midst of which his father departed again, a waggon-load of books and furniture having been sent forward on the road that same morning. Then followed a day or two during which Taffy and his mother took their meals at the window-seat, sitting on corded boxes; and an evening when he went out to the cannon in the square, and around

the little back garden, saying good-bye to the fixtures and the few odds and ends which were to be left behind—the tool-shed (Crusoe's hut, Cave of Adullam, and Treasury of the Forty Thieves), the stunted sycamore-tree which he had climbed at different times as Zacchaeus, Ali Baba, and Man Friday with the bear behind him; the clothes' prop, which, on the strength of its forked tail, had so often played Dragon to his St. George. When he returned to the empty house, he found his mother in the passage. She had been for a walk alone. The candle was lit, and he saw she had been crying. This told him where she had been; for, although he remembered nothing about it, he knew he had once possessed a small sister, who lived with him less than two months. He had, as a rule, very definite notions of death and the grave; but he never thought of her as dead and buried, partly because his mother would never allow him to go with her to the cemetery, and partly because of a picture in a certain book of his, called *Child's Play*. It represented a little girl wading across a pool among water-lilies. She wore a white nightdress, kilted above her knees, and a dark cloak, which dragged behind in the water. She let it trail, while she held up a hand to cover one of her eyes. Above her were trees and an owl, and a star shining under the topmost branch; and on the opposite page this verse:

"I have a little sister,
They call her Peep-peep,
She wades through the waters,
Deep, deep, deep;
She climbs up the mountains,
High, high, high;

This poor little creature
She has but one eye."

For years Taffy believed that this was his little sister, one-eyed, and always wandering; and that his mother went out in the dusk to persuade her to return; but she never would.

When he woke next morning his mother was in the room; and while he washed and dressed she folded his bed-clothes and carried them down to a waggon which stood by the door, with horses already harnessed. It drove away soon after. He found breakfast laid on the window-seat. A neighbour had lent the crockery, and Taffy was greatly taken with the pattern on the cups and saucers. He wanted to run round again and repeat his good-byes to the house, but there was no time. By-and-by the door opened, and two men, neighbours of theirs, entered with an invalid's litter; and, Humility directing, brought down old Mrs. Venning. She wore the corner of a Paisley shawl over her white cap, and carried a nosegay of flowers in place of her lace-pillow; but otherwise looked much as usual.

"Quite the traveller, you see!" she cried gaily to Taffy.

Then the woman who had lent the breakfast-ware came running to say that Joby was getting impatient. Humility handed the door-key to her, and so the little procession passed out and down across Mount Folly.

Joby had drawn his van up close to the granite steps. They were the only passengers, it seemed. The invalid was hoisted in and laid with her couch across the seats, so that her shoulders rested against one side of the van and her feet against the other. Humility climbed in after her; but Taffy, to his joy, was given a seat outside the box.

"C'k!"—they were off.

As they crawled up the street a few townspeople paused on the pavement and waved farewells. At the top of the town they overtook three sailor-boys, with bundles, who climbed up and perched themselves a-top of the van, on the luggage.

On they went again. There were two horses—a roan and a grey. Taffy had never before looked down on the back of a horse, and Joby's horses astonished him; they were so broad behind, and so narrow at the shoulders. He wanted to ask if the shape were at all common, but felt shy. He stole a glance at the silver ring in Joby's left ear, and blushed when Joby turned and caught him.

"Here, catch hold!" said Joby handing him the whip. "Only you mustn't use it too fierce."

"Thank you."

"I suppose you'll be a scholar, like your father? Can ee spell?"

"Yes."

"Cipher?"

"Yes."

"That's more than I can. I counts upon my fingers. When they be used up, I begins upon my buttons. I ha'n't got no buttons—visible that is—'pon my week-a-day clothes; so I keeps the long sums for Sundays, and adds 'em up and down my weskit during sermon. Don't tell any person."

"I won't."

"That's right. I don't want it known. Ever see a gipsy?"

"Oh, yes—often."

"Next time you see one you'll know why he wears so many buttons.

You've a lot to learn."

The van zigzagged down one hill and up another, and halted at a turnpike. An old woman in a pink sun-bonnet bustled out and handed Joby a pink ticket. A little way beyond they passed the angle of a mining district, with four or five engine-houses high up like castles on the hillside, and rows of stamps clattering and working up and down like ogres' teeth. Next they came to a church town, with a green and a heap of linen spread to dry (for it was Tuesday), and a flock of geese that ran and hissed after the van, until Joby took the whip and, leaning out, looped the gander by the neck and pulled him along in the dust. The sailor-boys shouted with laughter and struck up a song about a fox and a goose, which lasted all the way up a long hill and brought them to a second turnpike, on the edge of the moors. Here lived an old woman in a blue sun-bonnet; and she handed Joby a yellow-ticket.

"But why does she wear a blue bonnet and give yellow tickets?" Taffy asked, as they drove on.

Joby considered for a minute. "Ah, you're one to take notice, I see.

That's right, keep your eyes skinned when you travel."

Taffy had to think this out. The country was changing now. They had left stubble fields and hedges behind, and before them the granite road stretched like a white ribbon, with moors on either hand, dotted with peat-ricks and reedy pools and cropping ponies, and rimmed in the distance with clay-works glistening in the sunny weather.

"What sort of place is Nannizabuloe?"

"I don't go on there. I drop you at Indian Queens."

"But what sort of place is it?"

"Well, I'll tell you what folks say of it:"

'All sea and san's,

Out of the world and into St. Ann's.'

"That's what they say, and if I'm wrong you may call me a liar."

"And Squire Moyle?" Taffy persevered. "What kind of man is he?"

Joby turned and eyed him severely. "Look here, sonny. I got my living to get."

This silenced Taffy for a long while, but he picked up his courage again by degrees. There was a small window at his back, and he twisted himself round, and nodded to his mother and grandmother inside the van. He could not hear what they answered, for the sailor-boys were singing at the top of their voices:

"I will sing you One, O!

What is your One, O?

Number One sits all alone, and ever more shall be-e so."

"They're home 'pon leave," said Joby. The song went on and reached

Number Seven:

"I will sing you Seven, O!

What is your Seven, O?

Seven be seven stars in the ship a-sailing round in Heaven, O!"

One of the boys leaned from the roof and twitched Taffy by the hair. "Hullo, nipper! Did you ever see a ship of stars?"

He grinned and pulled open his sailor's jumper and singlet; and there, on his naked breast, Taffy saw a ship tattooed, with three masts, and a half-circle of stars above it, and below it the initials W. P.

"D'ee think my mother'll know me again?" asked the boy, and the other two began to laugh.

"Yes, I think so," said Taffy gravely; which made them laugh more than ever.

"But why is he painted like that?" he asked Joby, as they took up their song again.

"Ah, you'll larn over to St. Ann's, being one to notice things." The nearer he came to it, the more mysterious this new home of Taffy's seemed to grow. By-and-by Humility let down the window and handed out a pasty. Joby searched under his seat and found a pasty, twice the size of Taffy's, in a nose-bag. They ate as they went, holding up their pasties from time to time and comparing progress. Late in the afternoon they came to hedges again, and at length to an inn; and in front of it Taffy spied his father waiting with a farm-cart. While Joby baited his horses, the sailor-boys helped to lift out the invalid and trans-ship the luggage; after which they climbed on the roof again, and were jogged away northward in the dusk, waving their caps and singing.

The most remarkable thing about the inn was its signboard. This bore on either side the picture of an Indian queen and two blackamoor children, all with striped parasols, walking together across a desert. The queen on one side wore a scarlet turban and a blue robe; but the queen on the other side wore a blue turban and a scarlet robe. Taffy dodged from side to side, comparing them, and