

CHAPTER XVII

Mr. Bailey shut the front door. The house seemed very quiet and forbidding now that Peter's car had driven away. A little like Wren's study, thought Denis, when his tutor was about to begin a pijaw. He walked softly into the inner hall and sat down. He stared through the window into the drive. He wanted to sit perfectly still by himself and think. For a moment the holidays were suspended and he must give them time to reform.

Mr. Bailey came through from the hall. "Well, Denis," he said. "Going out before lunch?"

"I don't know, father. It's going to rain, I think."

"Rain? Nonsense. A drop of rain won't hurt you. How about helping me in the garden? There's a whole row of potatoes that want digging." His father drew on his gardening gloves and waited.

"Do you mind if I don't, father? I think I'll stay in this morning."

"Well, get a book then. I hate to see you doing nothing. There's this month's *Cornhill* on the table."

"Thanks," said Denis. He picked up the *Cornhill* and pretended to read. "Damn," he exclaimed, when his father had gone. "Damn and blast. I'm bored stiff. Curse everything."

"Denis?" his mother called from the drawing-room. "Is that you there? I thought you had gone out."

"It's going to rain, mother."

"Come and talk to me for a moment if you are doing nothing."

"All right." He got up reluctantly and slouched across the drawing-room carpet. Why couldn't people leave him alone this morning?

"Are you sorry Peter has gone?" said his mother.

"I suppose so."

"I hope he enjoyed his visit. I think he did. Did he say anything to you about it?" Mrs. Bailey was resting in a corner of the sofa. She looked tired.

"Of course, he enjoyed it," said Denis, allowing his mother to take his hand.

"I'm afraid we couldn't quite rise to the Periton scale of entertaining; but he seemed happy."

Denis traced patterns with his shoes on the carpet.

"It will be quite a pleasant relief to be alone for a little now," said his mother. "I have hardly had a moment to talk to you yet, and you haven't told me anything about yourself."

"Haven't I, mum? What do you want to know?" Now he was in for confidences, thought Denis.

"Tell me about the end of the half," said his mother.

"Well, it ended," said Denis with a grim smile.

"Your father was disappointed you didn't get a place in the house eleven."

"I wasn't good enough; or I should have been tried."

"The captain of the games, Taunton, is it? doesn't like you, you said, I think."

"Oh yes, he does. I tell you, I wasn't good enough."

"And how did you enjoy camp? Joan thinks you had a pretty good time, in spite of the letters you wrote."

"It wasn't so bad," said Denis. "We had a damned good evening in Tidworth, mum. Peter, Oliver, Featherstone, and me."

"I wish you wouldn't swear, Denis. But tell me more about it. What did you do?"

"We had dinner in the Skittles Hotel," said Denis, trying to sum up the evening in terms his mother could understand.

"And how much did that cost you?"

"Oh, not much, mum. Besides, Featherstone paid for most of it. He's got pots of cash."

"I hope he didn't think you couldn't afford to pay your share?"

"Good heavens, no. It was a damned good rag. Don't tell father, mum, but I had two glasses of port. You're right; it's not such bad stuff." Better not add that he had a whisky and soda and another port after dinner.

"I'm sure that was forbidden, wasn't it? And you told your father you had never tasted strong drink."

"You won't tell, will you, mum?"

"It depends."

"And then we mobbed some Magnafieldians on the way back, and old Featherstone was laid out. I socked one fellow in the face and would have laid him out, if a motor lorry hadn't come along."

"Good heavens," said Mrs. Bailey. "And what happened then?"

"We had to get poor old Feathers back to camp; and . . ."

"And what?"

"We got him back in the end. It was some evening."

Mrs. Bailey took up her knitting and worked for a few minutes.

"I am sorry we couldn't manage your visit to the Peritons in Scotland. It was very nice of them to ask you and you know I should have liked you to have gone, if we had the money. But there it is."

"That's all right, mum."

"Your father and I put our heads together; but we couldn't see how it could be done. But there is plenty of time. Perhaps they will ask you again next year."

"I don't mind, mum, a bit."

"And we don't see much of you, as it is, do we?"

"Six weeks, mum."

"And most of that you will be out in the *Cormorant* or running round the place on your bicycle. So we must make the most of you while we can." Mrs. Bailey gave a little laugh. Denis squeezed her hand. "I don't want to go up to Scotland, mum. I'm just as happy here."

"Lunch," said Mr. Bailey, rubbing his hands in the doorway. "Denis, are you ready?"

"Yes, father; at least, I haven't washed my hands yet."

"Hurry up then. Don't keep your mother waiting."

For the first time in the holidays the family sat down alone. Mr. Bailey ate rather more than usual and munched with a spiteful energy. Joan exchanged a few sly jokes with Denis across the table and Mrs. Bailey listened to her husband's conversation.

"I'm afraid you must be content with water to-day, Denis," said his father.

"Right, father."

"We can't always have ginger-beer, when we are alone, can we?"

"I don't want it, thanks." Mr. Bailey poured himself out a glass of water and returned to village politics.

"I told you, my dear, that if they insisted on putting a man on the committee, whose only experience had been with niggers, they could scarcely be surprised if the shop people complained."

"Which reminds me, Hubert, that Roffal the butcher is being tiresome about his joints again. He refuses to kill more than once a week."

"Yes, dear, but I wish you wouldn't interrupt me. Colonel Custard, as I said at the meeting last month, is a good business man; but he imagines himself a sort of local sahib here. The fellow's got no tact and no manners."

"Joan," said Mrs. Bailey. "I've never returned Mrs. Custard's call. We must go to-morrow."

"So I dropped a strong hint, that if they co-opted Custard, I should resign."

Denis caught Joan's eye through the flowers on the table and straightened his face. "How pretty the roses are this year, Joan," he said.

"Charming, my dear. Are they Madame de Maintenon or Julius Caesar? I always forget."

"I'm not quite sure, either." Denis got up and helped himself to vegetables.

"But that would be a pity, Hubert, surely."

"I don't care," said Mr. Bailey. "It's time these Anglo-Indians were shown what we think of them. Stinkthrew hinted he would do the same."

"Yes, but you know that Major Stinkthrew is far too weak to resign. The vicar will let you go, Hubert, and then get Miss Pennywell on to the committee."

"By the way, were you at Lord's this year, Mr. Bailey?" said Joan.

"Of course, Miss Bailey. Were you?" said Denis.

"No, I was in the country, you know."

"Hard cheese. I mean how very sad for you, my dear."

"In that case there will be a real dog fight," said Mr. Bailey. "Custard has got no more use for the bob and scrape brigade than I have. He told me yesterday he would rather see his daughter marry a Hindoo than one of these chicken-livered Anglo-Catholics. I'll give Custard that."

"Now change the plates, children," said Mrs. Bailey, who had been listening to both conversations.

"The truth is, we want a new vicar," said Mr. Bailey; "and there won't be any peace in this place till we get one."

For the next few weeks Denis sailed, played cricket, went to tennis parties, and sketched. The first part of the holidays always went faster than the end. With the help of Joan, he made several half-hearted efforts to rouse his father's interest in $2\frac{1}{2}$ h.p. second-hand motor bicycles; but apparently without much success. One evening at supper he tried a new approach to the problem. He decided, as nearly as were possible, to ask his father if he had been a lad in his youth, and if his father admitted as much, to suggest that motor bikes corresponded nowadays to the playthings of Mr. Bailey's boyhood.

"I suppose things were pret'y gay, when you were a boy, father?" he led off at a signal from Joan.

"How do you mean, gay?" said his father.

"Well, I mean, there were more sportsmen, you know."

"Denis means you were terrific dogs, weren't you?" said Joan.

"I'm not so sure," said Mr. Bailey. "You boys have a much better time than we had in our day."

"What did you do in the holidays, father?"

"Of course there was shooting and fishing. But I never had a bicycle or a sailing boat of my own. What do you say, Mary?"

"I think Denis does pretty well on the whole."

"And remember we worked a good deal harder in those days," continued Mr. Bailey. "No half holidays as you have at Eton every other day. Cold baths in the morning and a swishing from the head if you didn't know your lesson."

"Were you ever swished, father?"

"I can't remember. I expect so. We all were."

Then why, Denis wondered, should his father have been so furious, when he heard of his own swiping, when he was actually boasting of the corporal punishment he had suffered in his own youth.

"Did it hurt?" said Denis, determined to reduce his father to a common level of suffering.

"Good heavens, I don't remember. Why do you ask?"

"I only wondered if it hurt more in those days than now." His father frowned and the subject dropped. Peter was all wrong about his father having been a lad. Denis doubted whether his father had ever been swiped at all by the headmaster of his school.

In the first week in September, Robin Manley and Joan's friend, Karl Swensen, came to stay. Mrs. Bailey laid in large supplies of food and Mr. Bailey placed a selection from his cellar on the dining-room sideboard.

Karl Swensen was tall and fair and had a way of looking at people with one eye, when he had made an apparently trivial remark. Joan thought him intelligent and Mr. Bailey frankly did not know what to think. His polished manners pleased Mrs. Bailey, while Denis took a strong dislike to

him. "Conceited," "bumptious," and "the sort of fellow girls like," were amongst his epithets, and he was strengthened in his last opinion by a visit to Karl's bedroom. On his dressing-table were several kinds of hair oil and face cream and two yellow paper novels with "*amour*" in both their titles.

Robin arrived the next day and was soon involved in an earnest argument with Karl on the merits of the English public school, to which Joan listened attentively. Karl talked incessantly at every meal on books, music, and young women. Mrs. Bailey laughed at his extravagant stories and Mr. Bailey reserved his opinion.

On the third day of their visit, Denis left Karl and Robin after breakfast and bicycled down to the quay. He was hoisting the *Cormorant's* lug, when Maureen came along the causeway.

"Going for a sail, Denis?"

"Coming? Right you are. I'll pick you up at the steps. Denis luffed the boat skilfully into the wind and ran forward to grip the side of the steps. "Jump in, Maureen. Shove her off." He held up the jib sheet; then hauled in the lug, as the wind flattened the jib and the *Cormorant's* bow swung away in the tide. Maureen settled herself on the middle thwart. "What's up, Denis?" she said.

"I don't know, I'm fed up. It's Joan's fault for asking them."

"The Swedish boy and Robin? I thought Robin was your friend."

"Was. He used to be all right till he got into the library. He's been spoiled."

"Cheer up, anyhow. Karl-what's-his-name probably isn't so bad when you get to know him. Does he like Joan?"

"I suppose so," said Denis. He put the *Cormorant* about and steered for an opening in the spear.

"Wherever are we going?"

"Thought we'd explore Buller's Creek. I haven't been up it since last summer."

"Don't get stuck. I've got to get back for lunch. I say,

Denis, what's the matter with you this hols. ? You seem so bored with everything. Even Phyllis noticed it."

"Damn Phyllis," said Denis. Now Maureen was getting confidential.

"Can't you tell me ? We never used to have secrets from each other."

"There's nothing to tell. I swear there isn't."

"Have you been having a row with your family ?"

"Not more than usual."

"Well, what is it ?"

"I tell you, nothing, except . . ."

"Except what ?"

"That I'm fed up with this place. Fed up with Speenmouth and Joan and Robin and everyone." Denis suddenly put the helm down and the *Cormorant's* bow sheared through the mud of the windward side of the channel and came to rest against the stalks of the spear. "She's all right here ; the tide's rising."

"I see," said Maureen. "Am I included in everyone ?"

"Did I mention you ?" said Denis.

"All right ; go on."

"That's all. I should think it's enough, isn't it ?"

"I don't know. Everyone gets bored occasionally. I hate Speenmouth at times and wished we lived somewhere else. I hate Phyllis Stetterley and most of the other girls here. They're such little cats ; and they hate me, too. They think I'm superior and put on airs, because I've read more books. Do I ?" Maureen looked away at Fanny Castle, a fat grey slug in the distance. She came across and sat down in the stern, next to Denis. She put a hand on his arm. "Has it got anything to do with Eton or Peter ?" she said.

"No, why ever should it ?" He glanced at her. She seemed curiously and uncomfortably close to him. He heard her breathing come quick and short and it reminded him of a fragile looking girl in a pink frock. He drew away his arm and picked up the sheet.

"Why don't you like Peter, Maureen ?"

"Who said I didn't ?"

"Joan."

"She had no right to. I never said so. I think you've changed a lot since you made friends with him ; but I never said I didn't like him."

"Comes to much the same thing." Denis took out an oar and made a dig at the mud. He pulled the jib to windward and put down the helm and the *Cormorant* drifted gently backwards. Letting go the jib, he hauled in the sheet and the boat gathered way, her centreboard, half raised, grating on the bottom. A trail of mud floated away under the rudder. The tall spear in their summer green passed in stately procession as the *Cormorant* slid round the angles of the channel. In a few minutes they rejoined the main stream and began the slow beat back to the quay. Maureen sat on the middle thwart and ducked her head, when the boom swung over.

"Are you enjoying Eton?" she said.

"Compared to this place."

"And you like Oliver?"

"Of course. He's a good sort."

"He's coming the day after to-morrow. We'll all meet at the dance on Saturday, so cheer up."

"Good," said Denis. "Here we are at the steps. You'd better get out here."

When he got home, Denis was mildly reprovèd for leaving his guests alone.

"But they're not my guests, mother," he said.

"Robin and I have been looking at your father's books. What a lot Robin has read for his age. I had no idea."

"Has he?"

"The whole of Scott, Dickens, and most of Shakespeare, Stevenson, Hardy, and others. You ought to read more, Denis. Your father was saying only the other day that he never saw you with a book in your hands."

"I don't pretend to be as good as Robin, mum."

"Don't be so silly. You know you've got more brains than Robin, when you like. But you ought to read more. Your father is right."

"Yes, mum."

"You don't get on with Robin as much as you used to?" Oh, Lord, thought Denis, another examination.

"No," he said, "I don't." Mrs. Bailey busied herself with some papers. "I can see you are in an evil mood today. You must make an effort."

Thank God there were only three weeks more holidays, thought Denis.

"You must try. To please me. Ah, here come the others. Here's Denis returned at last," she said.

Robin entered the room as an old and privileged guest. He went over to the mantelpiece and rested his elbow.

"We want you to decide something for us, Mrs. Bailey."

"No, you don't persuade her, Mr. Manley," said Karl.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Bailey. Joan was laughing in the background.

"I will tell you," said Karl. "Girls, do they fall in love with boys, or the boys with the girls most often?"

"Really, children, what a question. How should I know?"

"Karl thought you might," said Joan.

"I should say that the majority of young people fall in love with each other; at least, I should hope so."

"And you think what, Denis?" said Karl.

"Girls with boys," said Denis. He made a face at his sister and went out to wash.

The yacht club dance was on a Saturday. The ballroom was on the first floor of the clubhouse and overlooked the tidal waters of the Barford River. The setting for the dance was as romantic as a full moon shining on the face of the flooded estuary could make it. The masts of the yachts, moored by the ship-building yard, were projected in spiral zig-zags in the pearl grey water. In the distance Fanny Lighthouse flashed long uneven rays. Dinghies and prams—a local cockleshell with single lug—drifted on slack painters by the causeway and seemed to ogle for joyrides like the *Skylarks* on Brighton beach.

But the air was salt and by the time the Baileys arrived

the dancing floor had become a vast flypaper. Mrs. Flightwood and her two daughters, who had organised the dance, scattered a tin of French chalk on the parquet and ran backwards and forwards with floor mats and rugs. Thanks to their efforts, the surface resembled first a skating rink, then the sawdust floor of a public bar, and finally returned to its flypaper condition.

Denis introduced Karl to Maureen. "Have you heard what happened to Dick Lett?" she said.

"What?"

"It's frightfully funny, though Dick doesn't think so. You know those harbours along the shore?"

"Basins," said Denis.

"Dick was coming along, chatting to May Eversley, when he suddenly disappeared. May asked some question and there was no answer."

"I looked all round," said May Eversley, "and at last a feeble voice came from below and called 'May, help me out'; and there was Dick struggling in the mud up to his tummy."

"A couple of fishermen pulled him out," said Maureen, "and one of his shoes was left behind. Poor old Dick, and I had number three booked for him."

"Look out you don't follow his example, Karl," said Denis, "when you go for a walk between dances."

"I never leave the ballroom," said Karl. "I sit on a chair and make talk to my partner."

Mrs. Bailey had secured a ringside seat by the wall. She had been a keen dancer in her day and liked to follow her children's feet in and out of the crowd. If Denis or Joan danced more than once with the same partner, she made a mental note for the future. With Lady Hindley on her left and Mrs. Roxburgh on her right she felt comfortably at home, till she remembered that Lady Hindley did not *know* Mrs. Roxburgh. It had been, so she believed, a mere confusion as to the right to call in the first place. Both ladies had settled in the neighbourhood some fifteen years ago; but unfortunately within the same week, and neither had

been able to decide whose duty it was to make the first advance. As a result, they still sat stiffly in their chairs and looked before them. They were rather like lower boys, who find themselves next to the captain of their Eton house at a lunch party in the holidays.

Shall I introduce them? thought Mrs. Bailey, as many people had thought before in a similar situation. But there was always the possibility of Lady Hindley not wanting to know Mrs. Roxburgh, or Mrs. Roxburgh replying with perfect calm, "Lady Hindley and I are already acquainted." So no one introduced them and the two old ladies sat on, their faces set in thin smiles.

The dance was going nicely. Mr. Studlee, the Barford bootmaker, chased after the plonk plonks of the banjo with a quavering wail from his saxophone. It was a tin-plated instrument, twisted like some foul subaqueous growth, and clinging to his neck by a bootlace. Major Carter, the banjoist, organised, enthused and led the band in a hurrying tempo of his own, which gathered pace as the evening wore on. Shorter and faster shuffled the dancers' steps, as Major Carter bent lovingly over his banjo. The bleatings of the saxophone trailed like Eastern music over and under and round about the melody. Mr. Haines, who had taught himself the piano in the intervals of running a garage, thumped with relentless vigour and spurred Major Carter to go one better on his banjo.

Robin Manley danced twice with Joan, and Mrs. Bailey made her note. Mrs. Roxburgh beside her had observed the disappearance after the third dance of Maureen and Oliver. When Major Carter, with a gracious smile, turned over number five on the piano, she decided to take a stroll round the groundfloor rooms of the yacht club at the first opportunity.

The buffet was crowded. "You try this stuff," said Oliver to Karl Swensen.

"It's all right; don't be afraid," said Maureen. Karl held the jug to the light and sniffed. He poured out a glass. "Tastes like vegetables."

"There's cucumber in it," said Denis. "I've just had three glasses."

"Is there any whisky?" said Karl, smacking his lips. "I like Scotch."

"I don't think so," said Denis.

"Who wants whisky?" said a voice. "You're too young."

"Hullo, Major Carter," said Denis. "I didn't see you. Is there an interval?"

"Just come down for a breather." He wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"This is my friend, Karl Swensen, who is staying with us," said Denis. "He wants to know if there is any whisky."

"Officially there isn't. But come along with me boys and we'll see what we can do." He led the way through a door marked "Secretary" into a small room, thick with tobacco smoke. "You don't drink whisky, Denis? You're not old enough." He slopped a generous measure into a glass and handed it to Karl. "Help yourself to soda."

"We had some at camp this summer, Oliver here and I," said Denis.

"Well, don't tell anyone I gave it to you. Here you are, boys." He mixed a weak whisky and soda. "You'll have to share it between you."

"Thanks, awfully, sir," said Oliver. Karl gulped, made a face and lit a cigarette. "That's the stuff. Scotch," he said.

"What have you three been doing?" said Maureen when they got back.

"Ha, ha," said Denis. He felt warm and happy. Karl was a little red.

"Shall we go back and dance?" said Oliver.

"I've got an idea," said Denis. "Let's bag a couple of boats and go for a row. What do you say, Karl?"

"Sure. I come with you."

"Maureen, will you come with me?" said Oliver.

Denis undid the painter of a dinghy and got out the oars. "Come on, Karl, or are you going with the others?"

"I come with you, Denis, old boy." He jumped clumsily into the boat and his feet shot away under him. "Damn. It's all water," he said.

"There are no floorboards in her," said Denis. "Don't worry." In the other dinghy Oliver was splashing into mid-stream.

"I say, my trousers are damn wet." Karl stood up and felt with his hands.

"Take an oar, then, and you'll soon dry. For heaven's sake, man, don't stand up in the boat, or we'll capsize." Karl took an oar.

"Don't pull so hard," shouted Denis. "We're going in a circle."

"I say, Denis, old boy, I feel awfully fine. Damn good evening."

"Enjoying the dance?"

"I like rowing; and Scotch."

"Have you danced with Joan yet?"

"No. Damn. I have the next dance with Joan. I must get back."

"Cut it," said Denis. "She'll dance with Robin. She's gone on him. I mean she won't mind."

Karl stopped rowing.

"I say, you're not gone on Joan, are you?" said Denis. He rested his blade on the water and drew up his knees.

"What, you mean in love? Not at all. We had some flirt in Geneva. I like your sister Joan; but, you forgive me, you should see the other girls. Oh dear," he gave a long-drawn sigh.

"She thinks the hell of you," said Denis.

"Oh, she does. Well, I like Joan. She's a nice girl, but I'd rather have a boy for my friend. Girls are too . . ."

"Too much like girls," said Denis.

"Yes. They don't think for themselves. They want nothing

really. They have too much here, you know." Karl slapped himself on the left chest.

"I'm fed up with girls," said Denis. He started to paddle gently "They are always imagining things."

"That's so," said Karl. "But you don't like me, do you, Denis, old man? Why don't you like Karl Swensen?"

"I like you more than I did."

"That's good news. Well, you know, I like you. We'd be great friends if you lived in Sweden. Oh yes, we would."

Should we? Denis wondered. He might be clever, this Swedish boy, but he was a good deal too bumptious. Karl wanted a lot of side knocking out of him first. He would be a decent fellow if he had been to Eton. Denis raised his oar and let it fall on the water. A spray of phosphorus gleamed, then vanished in the river."

"It's a pity you are not at Eton, Karl, you know."

"Oh, damn it. You and Robin are just the same. I know you don't approve of Karl. You think all that's important is doing the right thing. You are afraid, isn't that so?"

"Don't talk rot," said Denis.

"Oh yes, but it is. You don't think. In Sweden they would say you have seen a ghost in your cradle. I think you are better than Robin, really, though he thinks more now. Robin is what you call a . . ."

"A prig," said Denis, thinking much the same of Karl.

"A prig; that's it."

"Robin's not so bad. I say, let's go back now. They'll be wondering where we are." Denis pulled a couple of strokes.

"You are a funny fellow," said Karl. "You are afraid of yourself, I bet. Damn, my feet are all wet. I say, what's up?" Denis looked between his knees. "By God, she's leaking. Oliver, Maureen." But the others were out of sight. A steady bubble of water rose from the bilge hole, from which Karl had unconsciously kicked the peg. Denis groped for a moment in the water, but the peg had floated into some corner. There was no sign of a bailer.

"Karl, we must row like hell. Put your feet against the back of my seat."

They braced their dancing shoes against the thwarts and pulled as hard as they could. Less than a hundred yards lay between them and the causeway, but the gunwhales sank lower at every stroke. A rising sea slopped against the inside of the dinghy like waves in a well-filled bath. The water swayed to and fro and splashed up in sharp columns.

"I'm soaked already," said Denis. He looked over his shoulder. "But we're nearly there. We'll have to beach her. Come on, Karl, one more effort." They dug their oars into the water, nearly level with the thwarts, and pulled against the dead weight of the dinghy, and the boat sank steadily. "Gently, now," said Denis. "Don't swamp her." A few more strokes and the bow grated on a patch of gravel. The boys jumped out into six inches of water and splashed ashore. Denis fastened the painter. "She'll drain when the tide goes out," he said casually.

"Yes, and fill again, when the tide makes," said a fisherman, who had been watching.

"What for do you want to go taking other people's boats, young mister?"

"It was only a joke," said Denis.

"A fine joke if the boat had sunk and you two young gentlemen in it," said the fisherman.

"Is it your boat?" asked Karl.

"No it ain't, but I knows whom it belongs to."

"Then go away and look after your business, if it's not your boat," said Karl angrily.

"I don't know who you are," said the fisherman; "but you be careful."

"Silly old man. Come on, Denis." Karl took his arm.

"No, you can't leave the boat to fill again," said Denis. "Besides, he may tell Major Carter. Do you think you could find the peg and see to it, when the tide falls?" he said to the man.

"You leave it to me, mister. I'll see to it."

Denis fumbled in his pocket. "Here's a bob ; and you needn't say what happened."

"Ay, ay, sir. That'll be all right." He pocketed the shilling. "Good night to you, gentlemen," and he stumbled off in the darkness.

"Of course he might have told someone," said Denis. "And he was a decent old bird really."

"Drunk," said Karl.

"I don't believe it. He was just a bit surly," said Denis.

Number nine was on the piano when they reached the yacht club.

"Whatever have you two been doing?" said Mrs. Bailey. She saw their muddy trousers and the pool of water forming on the floor.

"We went in a boat, mum ; and it leaked," said Denis. Mrs. Bailey sniffed. It was not only mud she smelt.

"And you left poor Joan and Robin for four dances. Joan has been looking for you everywhere, Karl."

"I ask your pardon, Mrs. Bailey. Our boat was no good."

Mrs. Bailey smiled. "But whatever are you going to do now?"

"That's all right," said Denis. "We'll soon dry. Have some coffee, mum ; I'm sure you've had nothing to drink."

"As a matter of fact I haven't. Lady Hindley has been talking to me about Ralph. He's doing so well at Marlborough. He'll be in the sixth, whatever they call it, next term."

"Ralph was always a bit of a sap," said Denis.

"I only hope you do as well in your last year." Mrs. Bailey sipped her coffee and took a sandwich.

"I haven't an earthly chance of getting into sixth form, if that's what you mean, mum. Only saps get into sixth form."

"Well, well, I'm sure you'll do your best for your father's sake, anyhow." She put down her cup and went upstairs. Two numbers later Denis and Karl were dancing again. If their shoes moved in jerks across the floor, other couples were faring little better. But Mrs. Flightwood had ceased to

worry about the state of the parquet. The dance was being a success. Lady Hindley had told her so. Major Carter played faster and faster and was smiling rather oddly, thought Mrs. Flightwood.

The night before Robin left, he and Denis had a long gossip in his bedroom.

“I wish you were in the library,” said Robin. “It would make such a difference.”

“Yes,” said Denis.

“There will be three vacancies,” said Robin. “Beckett is in already, as he is captain of the games.”

“Yes, of course.”

“Beckett will propose Warburton and Featherstone, and Swinley will probably put up Holmes-Norton and Ockley.”

“Yes, I see.” Denis wished Robin would stop before the case of Denis Bailey came up for consideration.

“You know I put you up at the election at the end of last half. But Freeman blackballed you. He was pretty sick of you and Ockley after the Devil’s Island business.”

“How did he know about that?” said Denis sharply.

“Oh, Wren asked him to find out, you see.”

“And who told Freeman?”

“He pretty well knew already; about Ockley, anyhow. It wasn’t very hard to guess as you are always about with him and Harbord.”

“I see,” said Denis.

“Besides, m’tutor had told Freeman that it wasn’t a case of being sacked. A swiping at the most.”

“Quite.”

“Anyhow, that’s all over now. You were pretty good fools, don’t you think?”

“Absolutely bloody,” said Denis.

“Don’t be an ass and take it to heart. Forget about it. I’m damned well going to put you up again at the next election, and for heaven’s sake, pull yourself together if you get in.”

“Thanks, Robin.”

“Good. I must go to bed now. It’s been a delightful visit.”

“ I’m glad you enjoyed yourself. Good night.”

So Robin had told Wren, or Freeman, anyhow. Robin or Taunton, and he hadn’t mentioned Taunton. It must be Robin himself. But Robin was going to put him up for the library next half. Damned decent of him. Provided he pulled himself together. Denis laughed. What fools they all were.