

CHAPTER VIII

There are two main dates in the summer half at Eton. Jones was tanned a week after the Fourth of June ; or it was just before Lord's that Smith made his century. Denis had drawn lines across his calendar, where the Fourth of June and the Eton and Harrow match occurred, and the first line was coming near.

The days before the Fourth passed quickly with a temporary end in view. Maths seemed to have lost some of their dullness. Daddy Long Legs was revealed for the first time as a human being with some sort of a grievance against life in general. Monsieur Perrier was really rather a wit.

Fielding point in club cricket matches, Denis stood closer to the batsman and tried hard not to funk the stinging catches slashed in his direction. He batted carefully and made twenty-seven. He felt very cheerful and pencilled off each day on the school calendar. The major saints' days were shown in red and were celebrated as whole holidays, sometimes as *non dies*, when even early school was excused. The saints were very popular at Eton.

Denis had arranged for the newer of his two suits to go down to the tailors to be pressed, ready for the Fourth of June. The richer boys sent their suits alternate weeks, for which their parents eventually paid the sum of seven and six a time. But Denis plied a clothes-brush in his room at night and put his trousers under the bed on Saturday. He had an allowance of £100 a year, out of which he had to dress, pay railway fares, and find the necessary pocket money. Most boys had orders, provided by their people at one of the school sockshops : but Denis had to pay cash, and the summer half, with its ices and sundaes and messes. was one long temptation.

But the Fourth was an exception. Recklessness was in the air and dressing up was a duty. Mr. and Mrs. Bailey and probably Joan were coming down and Denis must do them justice. Joan would look at his clothes and compare them to those of other boys, and the result of the comparison would seriously affect her own prestige with other boys' sisters. In the same way it was terribly important that his people should be well dressed. A boy with shabby people felt the eyes of all Eton were upon him. And, in fact, they were. No parent could escape the criticism of the school. It was all-seeing, summary and amazingly just. An overdressed mother let down her son just as badly as a shabby father. Boys prayed before the Fourth that their parents would be inspired to hit off the right mean in their clothes. Smart, but not too smart. An Etonian, however, could not be overdressed and the tailors knew it.

Denman and Goddard's shop was crowded. Rolls of light grey or sponge bag material lay piled on the counter. A boy in jackets stretched himself on the weighing machine and lowered the height ruler till it brushed his topmost hairs. "Another half inch, sir, I'm afraid," said the tailor. In the corner someone was telephoning to his people in London. "Wait a moment; I can't hear a word with this din going on." He slammed the door and went back to the telephone. Two pops strolled into the tailors. They swung themselves on to the counter and made jabs at the piles of cloth with their rolled umbrellas. After a short gossip with Mr. Philbert, they moved off to Tap next door and orders continued for coloured waistcoats and daring trouser patterns and all the things which Pop wore normally every day of the half.

"This pearl grey cashmere is just the thing for you, Mr. Manley," said the manager, Mr. Philbert. He knew every customer, his parents' fortune and his style. "It will make a very smart single-breasted waistcoat, and not too . . . too much, sir."

"What do you think, Denis?"

"Very nice."

"Do you really like it?"

"Yes, I think it's all right."

"Let's see what you've chosen." Mr. Philbert brought forward some fawn pink material. "Mr. Bailey is having a double-breasted waistcoat this year."

"Good Lord, you're not going to wear that, are you?" said Robin.

"Why not?"

"Only it's a bit out of your line, isn't it, Denis?"

"I rather wanted to have a double-breasted waistcoat for a change."

"Oh well, so long as Joan likes it. Yes, I'll have that grey, Mr. Philbert. You won't want my measurements again?"

"Joan's coming down on the Fourth," said Denis. "She said particularly she was looking forward to seeing you."

"I'm having lunch at the White Hart with Tony's people, but I'll look out for her on Upper Club. See you later." He went out into the street.

"Doesn't our Manley approve of double-breasted waistcoats," said Ockley.

"Damned smart," said Harbord. "I've just been measured for a pair of sponge bag trousers."

"I suppose he's jealous because you've gone one better than him," said Ockley. "Let's go to Tap and I'll sock you a bridge roll before lunch." A bridge roll was a formidable piece of bakery, split into two and anointed sparingly with some paste. It rarely failed to blunt the sharpest appetite before boys' dinner.

Denis did not sleep much the night before the Fourth. Each time he woke the school clock was striking a later hour. At four he gave up trying not to think of the day that was dawning. He closed his eyes and formed thoughtful pictures of the events before him. On the ottoman lay the smartly pressed suit and the fawn d.b. waistcoat. His umbrella, specially rolled for the occasion, hung from the top of the burry. He could see it clearly now in the paling shadow. After breakfast he would go down town and buy a carnation

from an old woman on Barnspool Bridge. He saw himself in his d.b. waistcoat and pink carnation and with rolled umbrella ; on the station, meeting his people ; the brilliant scene on Upper Club ; lunch in Wren's private dining-room ; strolling round with Joan, then tea in his own room, and the fireworks and procession of boats at night. And, most of all, he thought of all the things he wanted to say ; all the experiences he wanted to unload ; things he seemed to have done lately at Eton with the sole object of relating them to someone else. Little things like ragging Perrier, when Perrier had jumped up and exclaimed, " You will take two hundred tickets and one yellow line," and Perrier could not understand why the whole division was dissolved in laughter. He decided to tell his people about his tanning. He had kept his beatings secret or alluded to them in a casual way. But now he felt he could tell everything. He so wanted his father and mother to share his Eton life with him. It would be easier to-day. Past efforts had dried up in arid half truths. Eton and Wren's had refused to be told. His mother still groped after the life he really led, while his father frowned at the bald results. But the Fourth of June would put it right. The sun had risen now and it was going to be hot on Upper Club. " I got six up father, as hard as Freeman could lam in. I got six up," Denis repeated and fell asleep.

By half-past ten, Windsor station was crowded. Gay waistcoats and buttonholes were everywhere on the platforms ; newly rolled umbrellas were swung about, while their owners gave their hats a last shine on the sleeve on their coats. As they passed the station refreshment room, boys glanced in the mirror and went away smiling. Only the stationmaster seemed unmoved. Kings and Queens were always getting out at Windsor and occasions such as the Fourth were part of his routine. The beginning and end of the half caused a certain flutter among the station staff, as the Etonian scale of tipping was notoriously high. Higher possibly than that of the Kings and Queens, who got out at Windsor. Porters grumbled at a mere sixpence, and the

cabbies on Windsor Hill asked half a crown each for a four passenger drive to Eton, half a mile distant.

Denis elbowed his way through the crowd and hurried up to the narrow slant of the platform's end. From there he could see across the roofs of lower Windsor and over the snake-like Thames to the high tops of Brocas Clump. He saw the distance signal set for the London train and he watched the curving line of arches lost to view among the trees of Eton. He watched the arches, and a green tank engine popped out of the trees and three coaches followed. So self-conscious and childlike they seemed, as they bustled over the iron railway bridge and dived behind another clump of trees. In a few seconds the engine reappeared, swollen to a panting monster, swung across the points and rushed at the platform end. Denis ran back, searching through the windows for a sight of his family. He stood on one side of the barrier and as the crowd melted away he saw them. Mother and Joan were far up on the platform and his father was struggling with something in the carriage. He strode towards them.

"Hullo, mum." He kissed her. "I say, Joan, you are smart." He forgot to kiss her, too.

"Drat the thing," said Mr. Bailey.

"Can I help, father?"

"The infernal thing has got stuck under the seat. Jump in and pull from the other side. That's right. No, not like that. Confound it. Come out, Denis. I'll do it. Ah, that's got it." Mr. Bailey landed a large hamper on the platform.

"We've brought some things for you," said his mother. Mr. Bailey dusted his suit. "Here, give me a hand. Denis, we'll manage it between us. Come along, Mary." The procession moved off down the platform.

"You've grown," said his sister.

"Surely you've got a new suit on?" said his mother.

"I see the school are doing well against the Ramblers," said his father.

"Yes," said Denis. He glanced at his people. His mother was nicely dressed in black with bits of green on it; she had

a green parasol. Mr. Bailey always wore his suits with an expression of regret that he must wear anything at all. But he put on the right things and they suited him without his knowledge. He wore a blue serge suit, white spats, and a black and white knitted tie. His bowler hat dated him pleasantly. Denis was slower in taking in his sister's changed appearance. It was a year since he had last seen her. She was in a brightly-flowered frock, cut, he supposed, in what Spencer-Mace called the new fashion, and she wore a large and floppy hat. But there was something else he noticed. There was something controlled and possessive about her figure. In the old days it had seemed to belong to anyone but Joan ; but to-day it was very much part of her, and Joan seemed to know it.

Denis felt awfully proud of his family, and he felt proportionately sorry for a boy in front of him, whose father was striding along in a vulgar grey check and a light velour. A bookmaker probably. How awful to have a bookmaker for a father. And then the weight on his arm reminded him of the infernal thing he was carrying. His gaiety clouded over at the prospect of carting the hamper down Eton High Street. He dared not suggest a cab and he felt a guilty shame of being seen with the hamper. Somebody would be sure to rag him about it the next day. They would not actually accuse his people of meanness, or worse still of poverty ; that would be caddish. But they would not fail to tell him that he had been spotted. Mr. Bailey was not the slightest mean. He merely did not mind carrying hampers.

The journey down the High Street took ten minutes. The party left some of their things in Denis's room, heard him answer " Here, sir," at absence, and strolled out through the playing fields. On Upper Club the second eleven were playing the second eleven of the Ramblers, an Old Etonian cricket club. On Agar's Plough the two first elevens were engaged. But the trees on Agar's Plough were sparse and small and the greater part of the crowd preferred to wander or sit in the shade of Upper Club.

There was a garden party atmosphere about the second

eleven match. Against a background of elms and flowering chestnuts all society nodded and bowed and smiled thin little smiles from the corner of the mouth. Everybody who was anybody was there, and quite a few, who were nobody in particular. But all society united in indifference to the game in progress. Red and green buses roared along the dusty Slough road and the passengers on top waved and shouted at the players. Errand boys rode their bicycles on to the pavement and leared their elbows on the low wooden fence. The crowd on the deck of a river steamer, floating down the Thames, stared for a minute at the strange pageant between the trees. Till the steamer turned away under the railway bridge with a heavy list to port. Out on the pitch a veteran in a straw hat patted a ball past cover point and called for a run. An Etonian chased it, threw in a smart return, and the wicket-keeper whipped off the bails. The umpire's hand went up. The cheering died away as the veteran ran up the steps into the pavilion and the voice of the crowd rose higher.

"Why, I believe Lord Harrison is out," said a lady with a lorgnette some ten minutes later. But her friend had turned her chair away from the hot pitch and was examining the people, who flowed past endlessly.

Two years ago Joan had come to the Fourth of June and had asked Denis, "What are those colours that boy is wearing? Who's the fast bowler this end? How many did Eton make in the first innings? Was that a boundary?" Now she defensively eyed the frocks of other girls and shyly appraised the looks of the older Etonians.

"Who's that who went by, Denis? I seem to know his face." Denis looked round. "It's Robin Manley, of course; didn't you recognise him?"

"He's changed so. Shall we go over and talk to him?"

"He's with Taunton's people at the moment. But we might follow him if you like." They stalked the group, leaving their family to admire the cricket. As they caught them up, Robin turned and saw Joan. His mouth opened. "I didn't recognise you for a moment, Robin," said Joan,

holding out her hand. "I am glad to see you again." Robin looked quickly to see if the Tauntons were waiting for him. Colonel Taunton had hooked an old man in a top-hat, who was obviously good for several minutes. He took in Joan with slow, marvelling eyes. "I was hoping I'd see you," he said. "I hear you've been to Switzerland."

"Completing my education."

"I may be leaving at the end of the half myself and going abroad."

"Are you?" said Denis. "You never told me."

"Nothing's settled yet. You do look smart, Joan."

"Do you think so? You must come and stay with us again, don't forget. Fix it up with Denis."

"Thanks; I'd love to if . . . if I can."

"Why doesn't Robin come for the yacht club dance? Mother said I could ask anyone I liked, Denis?"

"Yes," said Denis. "Why don't you?"

"I'll let you know later, if I may. It would be great fun. I must fly now. They're waiting for me. See you later, Joan."

"He's become so good looking," said Joan, after Robin had gone.

"Has he?"

"And he's got such nice manners. It would be fun if you had him to stay in the hols. Can he dance?"

"Fun for you. Oh yes, I expect he can."

"I've always liked Robin. He seems so sensible and sure of himself for his age. Who's that bowling for the school, Denis?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Denis.

As the stroke of one drifted out to the cricket field, people began to move towards lunch. Denis took his mother's arm and piloted her towards the house.

"I believe you're fatter," said his mother. "You look very well."

"How do you like my new waistcoat, mum?"

"What, another coloured waistcoat. What extravagance. But it's very smart. What a funny way the buttons are arranged. Is that the latest thing at Eton?"

“D.B. Double breasted.”

“I think it’s very nice, though I don’t know how you can afford it. Here’s a little present I’d better give you while I can.” Denis’s fingers fastened on a thin envelope. They walked on without glancing down. Denis thrust the envelope in his trouser pocket. “I say, mum, it’s awfully decent of you, and I know you can’t afford it. I wish you’d spend something on yourself instead. You’re always giving me things.” He pressed her arm, and looked away at the stream of parents. They had left the shade of the cloisters for the dazzling heat of school yard. The statue of the Founder smiled gently. The red bricks of Lupton’s Tower quivered in the sun. It was a glorious Fourth.

“You haven’t noticed my new hat,” said Mrs. Bailey. “I bought it in Barford for the occasion. I hope you approve.” Denis felt a pig. But he had noticed a general niceness about his mother’s dress on the station platform. “You look jolly well in it,” he said. “I say, mother, Joan looks ripping, doesn’t she? She’s quite different somehow.”

“She’s nearly eighteen, you know.”

“Can I ask some chaps to stay in the holidays, mum?”

“Of course; is P.obin coming?”

“Joan wants him. I was thinking of asking Ockley or Harbord if you don’t mind.”

“We’ll do our little best for them. I used to know Lord Ockley’s mother, when I was a girl. She was penniless, poor thing, before she married Lord Periton.” They caught up Mr. Bailey and Joan, who were waiting by the house. “Now mind you tell your father everything you’ve been doing this half,” said his mother. “You know he likes to hear it all from the beginning.”

“All right, I’ll try, mum. I’ve got lots to tell you all. Come on, Joan and father. In here. You can leave your things in the hall. Here’s m’tutor.”

“Ah, Mrs. Bailey, and Mr. Bailey, very glad to see you. And this is Joan. Last time I saw you, you were in pigtails.” Joan smiled and made a face at Denis. Wren led the way down the long table of the private dining-room. Opposite

them sat Lord and Lady Periton and Ockley, already busy with some salmon mayonnaise.

"Lady Periton," said Wren, "Mr. and Mrs. Bailey and Joan; Lord Periton." Wren beamed round on his guests. The sleeve of his tail coat was smeared with cream. He hustled off with a worried smile on his face.

"A fine match, sir," said Mr. Bailey across the table.

"I believe we met as children at Norah Fleming's, didn't we?" said Mrs. Bailey.

"Yes, a fine match," said Lord Periton.

Denis listened uneasily to both conversations, while Joan looked up and down the table. Ockley had taken some chicken in aspic and a dozen new potatoes. The dame, as usual, had risen to the occasion, and if only his parents would stick to their seats, there was no end to the possibilities of the menu.

"Very likely," said Lady Periton. "Do you ever see the Flemings nowadays?"

"I haven't seen Norah for nearly fifteen years."

"Really?" said Lady Periton. Denis helped himself to dressed crab. He had a nasty feeling that his mother was going to be caught out. She had never told him before of Lady Periton or the Flemings. Joan was staring at Ockley's trencher work. "I say, Ockley, this is my sister; Joan, Lord Ockley."

"How do you do?" said Ockley. "Have some ham *mousse*. It's a very odd colour."

"Thanks. I'd love to."

"My father is having a great success with yours, Miss Bailey. He knows less about cricket than I do, having been blind as a bat when he was here."

"Father's never played in his life," said Joan, and they laughed.

"But if the school can stay in till four o'clock," said Mr. Bailey.

"Exactly," said Lord Periton.

"And it's so nice for Peter having such a charming dame as Miss Fuller to look after him," Lady Periton was saying.

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Bailey. "Miss Fuller always says such delightful things about Denis."

"Of course, it must be difficult for her to give every boy the same amount of attention, don't you agree?"

"Yes, I'm afraid my Denis gets more than his share, don't you, Denis?" Both ladies looked at him.

"She's not a bad old hag, I mean dame," he muttered.

"But, of course, a shower of rain would upset the whole game," said Mr. Bailey.

"No, we don't want rain, you're right," agreed Lord Periton rather wearily.

In the afternoon they went back to Upper Club. It was hotter now than in the morning and many of the spectators had moved their chairs back under the chestnut trees, where they could see and be seen, if necessary, by the passers-by.

The crowd moved ceaselessly, but it was possible to walk for the whole of the Fourth without meeting a particular friend. Everybody walked in the same direction and the same faces reappeared every ten minutes. There was a bent little man in a grey topper and an Old Etonian tie, and a hatchet-faced woman in big, blue spotted chiffon, and as the afternoon wore on, Denis developed a strong grievance against both of them. There was no escaping them. His father and mother were always finding old friends and stopping to express the same surprise, that they had not met since goodness knows when. As soon as they stopped, the grey topper and the blue spots swept by, as if wound up with an inexhaustible spring. Then the Bailey family walked on again, and in a minute the bent old man and the hatchet-faced woman hurried towards them out of the crowd.

It was funny about these old friends of the family, thought Denis. His people kept meeting them and saying such warm and affectionate things; yet, though they had not met since goodness knows when, they made no attempt to see each other again. Only sometimes, Mrs. Bailey said, "Do suggest yourself if you are ever in our part of the world." And the old friend said, "Thanks, I will," and hurried off.

"I bet he doesn't," said Denis to Joan.

“ Thank heaven, no. He knew mother didn't mean it.”

A little before five they left the cricket. Wickets had been falling rapidly in the last half-hour, but hardly anyone knew the score. They crossed the Slough road and went along through the flower-filled grass by the side of school field, or Sixpenny as it was called in the summer. The heat in the fives courts was terrific. The sun beat back from the walls of the newer courts in a dazzling white glare. The asphalt burnt beneath the feet.

The school stores were almost empty. One of the assistants was reading the racing news in the evening paper. Tom himself leaned on the counter. A fat faced mother came in with her small son. She asked him what he wanted for tea. “ Have what you like, Charles.” Tom looked at her first with patience, then with pity, as she gave her son her reasons for ordering something quite different. The fat mother went away with bags of things under her arm, which her son did not want. Like a small dog, he trotted beside her. Tom smiled at Denis. “ Hopeless,” his smile said. Denis bought a basket of strawberries and they went back to tea.

Denis's room was cool and quiet after the restless heat of Upper Club. It was pleasant to be able to look closely at the pictures on the walls instead of staring in an unfocused way at the sea of moving faces, among which grey topper and hatchet face were bound to appear. Mrs. Bailey took off her gloves and hat and Joan followed her example. Mr. Bailey picked up some school books and turned over the leaves. Inside them various names were scrawled in pencil, one over the other, or stamped in violet ink. But seldom Denis's name.

There was no fagging on the Fourth. Denis went along to the gas rings and filled his teapot. He put it in front of his mother. He took some eggs out of a steaming basin and dropped them in the egg cups. “ Cucumber sandwiches, mum ? ” Mr. Bailey made a neat pile of the books and sat down at the table. “ Now tell u. everything you've been doing,” he said suddenly.

Denis knew that the moment had come. He passed a cup

of tea to Joan and handed the sugar. He poured some hot water into the teapot. "I was tanned, I mean beaten, last week by Freeman. Jolly hard."

"Rotten luck," said Joan.

"What had you been doing, that you shouldn't?" said his mother.

"It was after Maureen had come to tea. Harbord and I were mobbing Spencer-Mace and Freeman caught us."

"I don't quite understand," said Mr. Bailey. "I thought you told me that members of the debating society could not be beaten, Denis?"

"No, they can't really; but the others weren't in the debate and Freeman said it was unfair to them. Have another sandwich, father?"

"I see."

"Did it hurt?" said Joan. "Poor old Denis."

"And what else have you been doing?" said his father. "You've told us nothing about your work or cricket this half. What's your highest score?"

"Twenty-seven," said Denis, and wished he had doubled it.

"And where are you in your division? Mr. Hunter, to begin with."

"We haven't had an order card this week."

"Well, the last week you had one."

"I was eighteenth; but I missed two papers."

"And Mr. Raven?"

"Third."

"Good," said his mother.

"Mathematics?"

"Sixteenth last week."

"Out of how many?"

"Sixteen." Joan bent over her tea-cup to hide a smile.

"Why aren't you messing with Robin this half?" said his father.

"Well, you see father, Robin's in the library this half; and is messing with Tarrton."

"I've never seen anyone eat like Lord Ockley," said Joan.

"Isn't it rather a mistake to mess with boys younger than yourself, Denis?"

"I don't know, father. Besides, they aren't much younger than I am."

"Lady Periton remembered meeting me at the Flemings's, Hubert," said Mrs. Bailey. "She was saying how very different the midlands are nowadays. The hunting has been quite spoilt by people from London."

"Yes, but I wish you wouldn't interrupt me, Mary. I'm trying to find out exactly what Denis has been doing. So far, I've learnt that he has been wrongfully caned for doing something I do not understand."

"Tanned," muttered Denis, catching Joan's eye.

"Is Mr. Wren satisfied with you?" said his father.

"Yes, I think so. At least, we went sketching together last week. Would you like to see it, mother?"

"Yes, show me; and show your father the sketch you won the Holiday Prize with. We were very glad to hear you'd won it, weren't we, Hubert?"

"You make it very difficult for me to ask Denis anything, Mary. If you will . . . but let's see the drawing. I'm glad you got a prize for something."

Denis was a long time by the burry. He opened and shut the same drawer several times. Then he brought out his sketches. "I say, you're not eating anything, father. Nor are you, Joan. Shall we have the strawberries now?"

"I simply couldn't. Oh, I suppose I can," said Joan, whose stomach had ceased to protest.

"Thanks, Denis, thanks. That's enough." Mr. Bailey put on his glasses and surveyed the sketches. Joan chattered lightly of the day. Mr. Bailey ate his strawberries reluctantly, dipping them in the cream and afterwards in a neat pile of sugar. He seemed almost angry that he must put them in his mouth.

"Do have some more, father; you've had none."

"No, thanks, I've done very well, thank you." Mr. Bailey wiped his mouth and sat back in his chair. Denis pressed strawberries on his mother and Joan. He raked in his mind

for something to say. But all that he had thought of in the early hours that morning, had fled from his mind. The things he had done this half all boiled down to some rather bad order cards and a tanning from Freeman. Then he remembered.

"Ockley has asked me to stay with him in London for Lord's, mum."

"That's very nice of him."

"Does that mean we shan't see anything of you for long leave?" said his father.

"I could come down on the Saturday after the match."

"No, it isn't worth it," said Mrs. Bailey. "We had been thinking of coming up for the day, but, in any case, we shouldn't stay the night. It would be nice for Denis to stay with the Peritons, don't you think so, Hubert?"

"I think you should have asked your mother before accepting," said Mr. Bailey.

"But I haven't accepted yet, father."

"You go, Denis," said his mother. "And tell Lord Ockley that we should be very pleased to see him in the holidays. You can take him out in the *Cormorant*. And there's the yacht club dance I've promised to take tickets for."

"I've asked Robin Manley to come to the dance," said Joan.

"Lord Ockley can come another time, then."

The tea party ended on a lighter note and Mr. Bailey had to leave unsaid many of the things he had meant to say. It aggravated him to have no mental picture of his son's life at Eton. He wanted to have everyone's life snapped like a passport photo, labelled and pigeon-holed. People, who led unsnappable lives, made him angry. The ladies powdered their noses in the narrow mirror by the washstand. They put on their hats and followed Denis down the stairs and out across the street into school yard, where absence was about to be called.

The headmaster stood on the steps of chapel. He wore a robe of scarlet, and a mortar-board on his head. The captain of the school in rowing dress waited by his side. Behind

a square of wooden barriers the vast crowd pushed and squeezed to get a view of absence. In a window of Upper School a camera man was turning a handle. The clock struck and the headmaster took up his list. A boy in white ducks stepped forward, raised his straw hat a few inches and called "Here, sir." A boy with a heated face raised a pale blue cap and pulled it back on to the side of his head. Members of the eleven, in pale blue blazers or striped black and blue, answered their names and strolled away, careless of the crowd. Only the members of the boats were a little conscious of their glory. They wore gay striped shirts, starched at the front and white ducks, and straw hats with the ribbon of their boat. They grinned rather sheepishly as they joined their people before going down to the river for the first procession of boats. Gathering pace as he read, the headmaster exploded the endless names, scarcely pausing to note an absentee before he drew in breath for the next. The circle of boys grew thinner round the chapel steps, till a mere dozen were left. A last figure in tails and top-hat was summoned to the steps. The headmaster said something and smiled. The boy blushed, put on his topper at a jaunty angle and mingled with the crowd. The tide of onlookers flowed back over the cobble stones, lapping the entrance walls to school yard, overflowing again over the streets and meadows of Eton.

The Baileys had dinner in Windsor and Denis led the way down to the river bank in time to get a good place for the procession of boats and fireworks to follow. The evening held warm and a marvellous stillness fell on the darkening Thames. A long line of coloured lanterns shone in the dusk and flickered in the moving water. The Etonian crowd came flowing softly over the grass and sat down on the bank and talked in whispers. The shore opposite was packed with townfolk and the low murmur of a thousand tongues enhanced the strangeness of the scene. When a military band thumped out a muffled rhythm in the background, Denis felt very close to the huge gathering. He looked up at the distant battlements of Windsor Castle and saw grey smudges

on the night. Closer, the white line of Romney weir cut the darkness of the river. Softly, thumped the band, an occasional trombone blaring louder into the night air. Giant poplars shot up high above their heads. Denis wrapped his coat round Joan. Dew was on the ground. Mr. Bailey's pipe glowed regularly and died again. Mrs. Bailey's fingers found Denis's hand.

The murmur of voices increased, as the first boat appeared. One after the other the nine slim shells glided past, turned, and the great venture began. In the lower boats the eight oarsmen and cox had to raise themselves upright, holding their oars before them, while the boat drifted on the stream. The crew of the three upper boats had only to stand upright. To make it more difficult they were all given a banquet down river, when vast quantities of some stimulating cup were supposed to be drunk.

The procession of boats started. Just opposite the crowded shore the coxswain's order rang out. Stroke ceased rowing and stood up briskly. More or less nervously the rest of the crew straightened in a series of jerks. The boat glided on through the cheers of both banks, while eight more figures crept cautiously to their feet a few yards behind them. Five boats passed safely, and the crew of the sixth was almost up, when bow, unused to strong liquor, sat down abruptly. Two swayed to starboard, recovered for an instant, then flopped in the water. The boat heeled gracefully over, oars tracing a slow arc through the night, before they splashed among the swimmers. The bank shouted and cheered like mad, while the crew scrambled ashore, damp but smiling. A few straw hats floated on the stream.

After this gallant plunge the faultless performances of the following boats seemed tame. But suddenly a deep boom shook the air. A plaintive scream and a hollow crack high above their heads. A rain of silver stars sank languidly. The fireworks had begun. ooooOOOOO went the rockets. BANG. Then OOOOooooo the note died away and was lost. The crowd took it up. ooooOOOOO. A thousand boys drew in their breath, OOOOooooo, and exhaled in a melancholy

sigh. Roman candles spluttered on the further bank and whizz-bangs leaped in fiery pain across the river. Catherine wheels raced round. Rockets banged louder and higher and fresh constellations floated down from heaven. A fire balloon with a label addressed to Eton College, drifted away in the direction of northern Germany. The crowd applauded wildly at each new turn. The band thumped braver and more stirring melodies. A few couples strolled closely away among the trees. Then an enormous set piece sprang into fire and traced the words "FLOREAT ETONA" in dazzling letters, while the trombones blared out the school song. When all was dark and still a last crackle broke out across the river. On a trellis framework the portraits of their reigning majesties were picked out in silver and gold. The band smashed the last note of the National Anthem, and the Fourth of June was over.

The Baileys hurried with the van of the crowd to catch the last train to Paddington. Denis said good-bye at the door of Wren's. Hodge was waiting to lock up for the night. "A fine Fourth, sir," he remarked. "Yes," said Denis. He climbed the stairs and went to his room. He threw himself on his bed, exhausted. Yes, it had been a fine Fourth. The best he had had. And he was gloriously tired and there was no early school the next morning. He got up and began to undress. His father didn't understand. He was doing all right. He was a success this half and he would explain everything to his father in the holidays. He put his collar stud on the mantelpiece and saw a letter. It was addressed to Denis Bailey, Esq. Inside, "To Denis, from his affectionate father, H. E. B." and a one pound note. Then he hadn't been angry after all.