

SPECS, VENTRILOQUIST!

PLUCK

THE BOY VENTRILOQUIST.

1^d

A NEW ADVENTURE STORY.



"LET ME OUT!" MOANED A VOICE FROM THE INTERIOR OF THE TRUNK.

NO. 187. NEW SERIES.

NEW SCHOOL TALE.



READ THIS FIRST.

Clive Lawrence, a new boy at St. Winifred's, is put into the Fourth Form, which is at daggers drawn with the Fifth. The leaders of the Fourth are Fisher and Locke, Clive's study-mates, and those of the Fifth are Kendal and Keene. Courtney, a bully, takes Clive for "fag," and sends him on an errand to the Jolly Seaman, a public-house in the village. Clive arrives at his destination, and is shown into a back room to wait for a Mr. Napper. He overhears a plot between Napper and a German, whom he afterwards recognises as Herr Stossel, the German master at St. Winifred's. Clive returns to the school, and the next day quarrels with Fisher. The two agree to meet in a glove fight, and Clive knocks Fisher out. Soon after the fight Courtney tells Clive to go down to the "Jolly Seaman" with a letter. Lawrence, however, stoutly refuses.

(Now go on with the story.)

One Against Two.

Clive had already made one bitter foe at St. Winifred's. The German master hated him, and would not allow his hatred to sleep. With a prefect against him, too, the life of the junior was likely to be a harassed one. But Clive Lawrence had never wanted for courage.

"Lawrence!" broke out Courtney, at last. "Lawrence! Do you know what you are saying?"

Clive's eyes met the prefect's calmly.

"Yes, Courtney."

"You refuse to obey my orders?"

"In this case I must!"

"Very well, Lawrence. You have deliberately set yourself against me!"

"I am not against you. I will do everything you have a right to ask of me. You have no right to send me to the Jolly Seaman, and to make me risk getting expelled from the school," said Clive firmly.

Courtney sneered savagely.

"I will teach you in the long run that it does not pay to set up as a judge of your prefect's actions," he said. "I could have been a good friend to you, but if you choose to make me an enemy, you will repent it."

Clive Lawrence was silent.

The door of the study opened, and Carne, of the Sixth, looked in. He glanced curiously at Clive, and at the white, furious face of the prefect.

"Hallo, Courtney! Haven't you sent him?"

"He won't go!"

Carne gave a whistle.

"He won't go? Do you mean that he refuses to obey you?"

"Yes."

"There's a cricket-stump in the corner," said Carne, "and I'll hold the young rotter across the table if you like."

Clive Lawrence clenched his hands hard.

"You won't!" he said.

Carne looked at him in amazement.

"Hallo, are you answering me back?" he exclaimed. "I won't, won't I? And why won't I, if I choose, you young scoundrel?"

"Because," said Clive, between his teeth—"because if either of you lays a finger on me, I will go straight to Trelawney and tell him why."

Courtney changed colour.

"You young villain!" broke out Carne. "You'd tell tales of us, would you? You'd go to Trelawney! My hat! I'll give you something else to tell him!"

And he sprang savagely towards the unflinching junior.

Courtney stepped in the way.

"Not now, Carne," he said, in a low voice.

Carne uttered an angry exclamation.

"Are you going to let a brat out of the Fourth Form defy you in your own study, Courtney? You must be mad!"

"There is plenty of time to bring him to his senses," said Courtney, in a significant tone. "There is no hurry, Carne."

Carne gave a short laugh.

"Perhaps you are right."

Courtney turned to Clive Lawrence. There was a bitter look upon his face that boded no good to the junior, though he now had his temper well in hand.

"You may go, Lawrence."

Without a word, Clive Lawrence turned and left the study.

The Fourth Form is Curious.

"Coming to the meeting?"

"What's it about?"

"Blessed if I know," said Pye. "Fishy's called a meeting of the whole Form, but what the little game is, is more than I can discover."

"Must be something in it if Fishy calls the meeting," said Sugden.

"Perhaps he's going to publicly drop his absurd pretensions to the leadership of the Fourth Form," said Pye. "Of course, I am really head of the Form—"

"Rats!"

"If you say 'rats' to me, Sugden, I'll—"

"Well, I do say 'rats' to you!"

"Then I'll—"

"What will you do?"

"I'll overlook it, as it's too warm to quarrel."

"Are you going to the meeting, Locke?" asked Sugden, as Fisher's chum came by with his cricket-bat under his arm, on his way to the nets. It was the first half-holiday of the term, and most of the boys of St. Winifred's were out in the playing-fields or on the river.

"Eh?" said Locke. "I'm going to the cricket."

"But you know about the meeting Fisher is calling for this afternoon?"

"Oh, yes, I know all about it!"

"Well, are you going?"

"Of course I am!"

"Do you know what it's about?"

"Yes, I know."

"Well, tell a fellow, then," said Sugden, Pye, and several others.

"Ask Fisher," said Locke. "It's his business, not mine."

"Why can't you tell us?"

"You'll know when the meeting comes off."

"But, I say—"

But Locke was gone. The juniors looked after him wrathfully. Their curiosity was excited to a high pitch.

"What the dickens is it all about?" exclaimed Carker. "I don't see why they want to be so jolly mysterious about it."

"Neither do I. Perhaps it's a lot of rot. I shan't go, for one."

"Then you'll miss it if there's anything on."

"Well, they ought to tell us."

"There's Fisher!" exclaimed Pye. "Let's ask him."

"Right-ho!"

Half a dozen curious juniors rushed up to Fisher, who was going down to the fields. They surrounded him and plied him with questions immediately.

"What's the meeting about, Fishy?"

"What's on?"

"What's the wheeze?"

"Eh?" said Fisher. "Don't bother me now. I've got to get some batting practice in before five o'clock."

"Yes; but what's the meeting about?"

"A most important affair connected with the Form. It concerns every member of the Fourth, so you'd better all turn up."

"But what is the important matter?"

"You'll know if you come to the meeting."

"Why can't you tell us now?"

"Because it's bad for little boys to indulge their curiosity," said Fisher loftily. "Better run away and play."

"Hark at the rotter!"

"We won't come to the meeting."

"Do you hear, you waster? We won't come to the meeting! You can hold it all on your lonesome! We won't come!"

"Don't, then," said Fisher placidly.

"I say, Fishy, don't be a cad, you know; tell us what it's all about!"

"Rats!" said Fisher. And he pushed his way through the group, and went down to the wickets.

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"The rotter!" exclaimed Pye wrathfully. "I say, you chaps, are you all with me to boycott the beastly meeting, and not go?"

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed Sugden.

"Hallo, Lawrence! I say, have you heard that there's a Fourth Form meeting called for five o'clock behind the chapel, the whole Form to go?" exclaimed Pye.

Clive Lawrence nodded genially as he joined the excited group.

"Yes," he replied. "I've heard all about it, chappies."

"Do you know what it's called for?"

"Yes."

"What is it?" shouted a dozen voices at once.

"Ask Fisher."

"We've asked him, and the beast won't tell us."

"Then I'm not going to, either. Fishy is captain of the Form, and I'm not going to set myself up against a Form captain."

"Well, you licked him, you know," said Carker.

"I'll lick you, too, Carker, if you put it like that."

"Oh, no offence!" said Carker, drawing back hastily.

"Shut up, then," said Clive. "If you fellows are thirsting for information, why don't you come to the meeting? It's fixed for five o'clock, and you've only got a couple of hours to wait."

"But we don't want to wait, you see," explained Pye.

"That's rather rough," said Clive sympathetically, "be-

cause, you see, you've no choice in the matter. You've got to wait."

"Why, you're as rotten a rotter as Fisher himself!"

Clive Lawrence laughed.

"Anything more to say?"

"Yes. You're a beast!"

"Anything else?"

"And a rotten brute!"

"More?"

"Yes. And a howling cad!"

"Thanks. If you've finished, I'll get on."

"Look here—"

But Clive Lawrence was gone.

He walked down to the wickets, and joined Fisher and Locke, leaving the juniors furious and extremely anxious to know what was going to happen at the Form meeting.

"On second thoughts," said Pye reflectively,

"I think I'll go."

"So will I," said Sugden.

"But we won't cheer anything they say," said Carker.

"I'll hiss Fisher all the time, and I'll—"

"Let me catch you hissing old Fishy, that's all!" said Pye.

"Well, I don't see—"

"Of course you don't! Shut up! You fellows coming down to the cricket?"

And the juniors followed the leaders of the Form down to the practice-ground, and the subject was dismissed for the time.

The Parchment.

Oswald Trelawney, captain of St. Winifred's, was sitting in his study, with a fragment of parchment in his hand, and an extremely thoughtful expression upon his face. While the shouts of the cricketers were ringing in the close, Trelawney was deaf to the cheerful din, blind to the bright summer sunshine. A matter to him more important than cricket held his attention chained.

His eyes were on the fragment of parchment in his hand, and he was studying the words faintly scrawled there, as he had studied them a hundred, or perhaps a thousand times before.

He gave a faint sigh, and shook his head, and the hand that held the parchment dropped upon the table.

"No use," he muttered. "No use. I might as well give it up. Yet—"

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in."

Baker entered the study. Baker, of the Sixth, was Trelawney's chum, a fine, athletic lad. He glanced at Trelawney, and then at the parchment, and smiled.

"At it still, Oswald?"

Trelawney smiled, too, but rather a sad smile.

"Yes, Baker."

"Anything fresh?"

"Nothing."

"Rather hopeless, isn't it?" said Baker, sitting on the corner of the table, and swinging the cricket-bat he held in his hand. "I looked in to see if you were coming down to the cricket."

"I might as well, I suppose, for all the good it does to pore over this confounded thing," said Trelawney, throwing the parchment on the table. "It is supposed to contain the clue to the whereabouts of the gold lifted from the Spanish galleon by my ancestor three hundred years ago, but—"

"And probably it does."

(To be continued.)

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PLUCK

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