

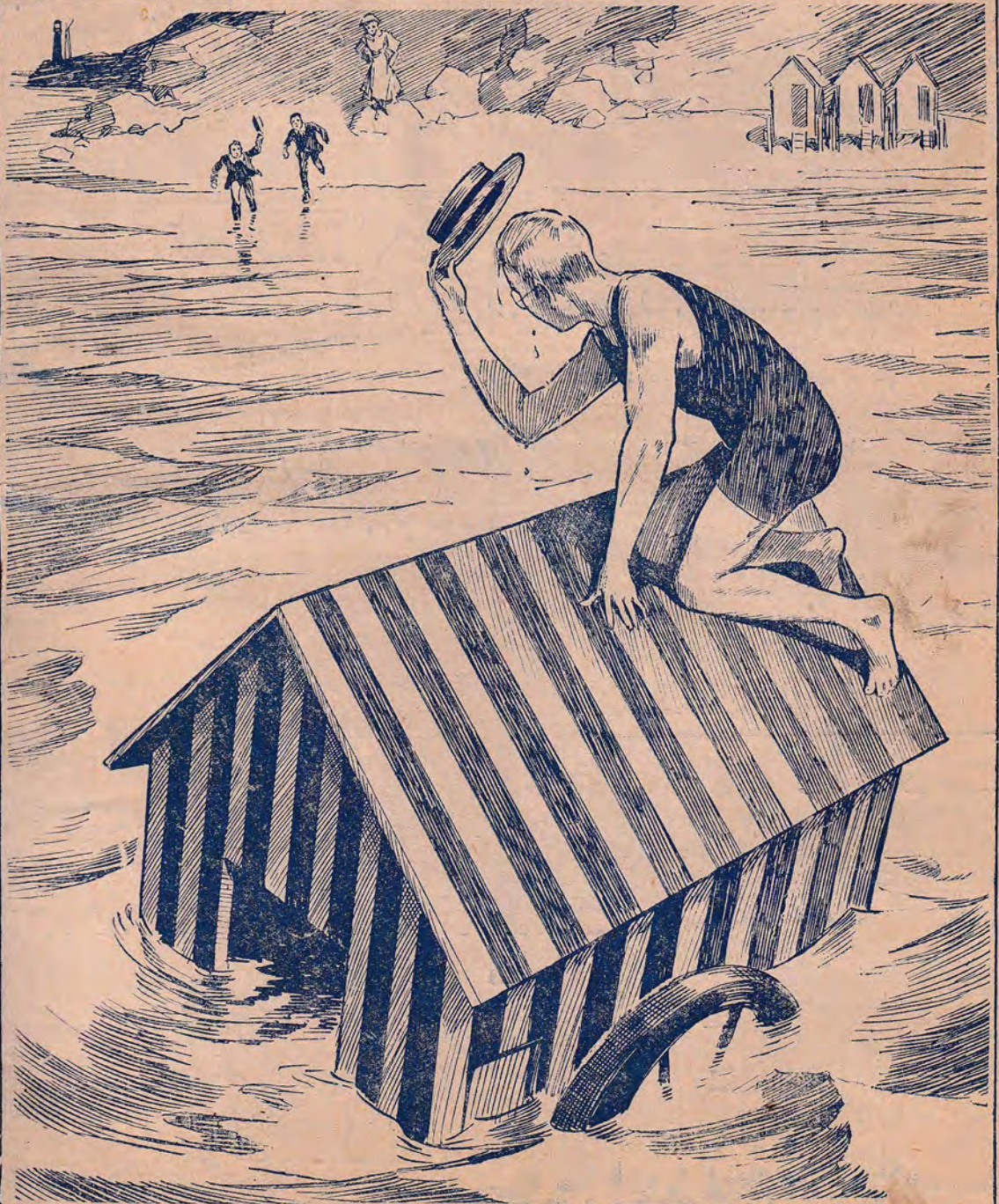
The Ventriloquist's Holiday!

PLUCK

1^d

A GRAND STORY OF SPECS.
By H. Clarke Hook.

A THRILLING TALE OF THE SEA.
By Clabon Glover.



SPECS RIDES ASTRIDE A BATHING-MACHINE.

NO. 197. NEW SERIES.

New School Tale.

A SPLENDID SCHOOL TALE

By MARTIN CLIFFORD, Author of
THE TALES OF TOM MERRY
appearing in "The Gem" Library

The Secret of St Winifred's



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 Scaman, 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. There is a Form election, and Clive is elected Captain of the Fourth. The Form celebrate the occasion and capture Kendal and Keene. In playful revenge Clive decides to let his followers toss their captives in the blanket. Kendal loses his temper and challenges Clive. The fight takes place, and Kendal is beaten. One day Trelawny finds Baker in his study. Baker tells him that, having been warned by Clive Lawrence, he found Herr Stossel in the study rummaging in the drawers. (Now go on with the story.)

The Only Way.

"I do not quite understand why he should," said Trelawny.

"The facts speak for themselves. Where is the parchment with the plans of that old hidden treasure of yours?" replied Baker.

"I have it with me. It is safe. In future I shall take good care that it is never off my person." Trelawny looked very uneasy. "Is Franz Stossel a rival for the gold of the Spanish galleon? The more thought seems absurd."

"What else did he want here?"

"True!"

"Lawrence may be able to tell you something. He certainly knew what the German was here for, or he couldn't have given me the tip."

Trelawny nodded.

"I will speak to Lawrence," he said. "I do not see how he can know anything about the matter; but, as you say, it looks as if he does. I have just given him a pass out of bounds, so I can't see him now. Come down to the nets."

There was a deep shade of thought on Oswald Trelawny's face as he went out with Baker. The action of the German master puzzled him strangely.

"I say, Kendal!"

"Well?"

The captain of the Fifth Form at St. Winifred's rapped out the monosyllable.

"This has been rather a come-down for the Fifth."

"What has?"

"You know what I'm alluding to," said Keene. "I mean your being licked by young Lawrence."

Kendal scowled.

"Can't you leave that alone?"

"Yes, I can; but the fact remains."

"I've had it dinned into my ears long enough!" snapped Kendal angrily. "I'm going to resign the captaincy of the Form!"

Keene looked alarmed.

"I say, don't do that, old fellow. Nobody wants you to do that."

"Perhaps the chaps who have been chipping me the last day or two can do better than I have done," said Kendal.

"I'd like to see any of them tackle young Lawrence, for instance—I really would!"

"We all know he's a tough customer. I don't blame you for being licked."

"There you go again! I tell you I've had enough of it. If you say the word licked again I shall dot you on the nose, Keeney, so look out!"

"Oh, very well, I won't say it, as you're so touchy! But, of course, the facts remain the same, don't they?"

"What I said is, it was a come-down for the Fifth."

"I'm willing to resign, as I said before."

"That wouldn't mend matters. It would only make them worse."

"Well, then," said Kendal, somewhat mollified by his chum's last remark, "what's the good of ragging me about it?"

"I wasn't ragging you."

"Yes, you were!"

"Well, I didn't mean to," said Keene, choosing his words carefully, as he saw that his leader was in so extremely cantankerous a humour. "I wouldn't rag you about it for anything, Kendy. You couldn't help being—"

Kendal clenched his fist, and Keene paused just in time, before the obnoxious word had escaped him.

"You couldn't help what's happened," amended Keene. "But, as I said, it's a come-down for the Fifth Form at St. Winifred's—"

"You've said that before."

"I say it again!" said Keene, with some spirit—"it's a come-down for the Fifth. I don't blame you; but something's got to be done."

"Perhaps you'd like to tackle Lawrence yourself?" suggested Kendal.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Kendy! What's the good of being so touchy about it? I dare say you'd lick him next time if you tried again. It's nothing. Only the Fifth have got to get their end up again. That's all I want to make out."

"If you can suggest any scheme for putting those cheeky youngsters in their place, you can depend on me," said Kendal more amiably.

"I can't. I thought you might be able to."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I've been thinking out a wheeze," said Kendal—"I was thinking it out when you started jabbering."

"What is it?" asked Keene, discreetly taking no notice of Kendal's polite way of referring to his conversation.

"Well," said Kendal, growing more amiable as he proceeded, "I don't know whether you know that young Lawrence and those rotters, Fisher and Locke, take a great interest in the old smugglers' caves in Penwyn cliffs?"

"I can't say that I've noticed it."

"Well, I have. If I didn't keep my eyes open, I wonder—"

"Oh, go on!"

"Lawrence wants to explore the caves. I know for a fact that the three of them are going up there on Saturday afternoon."

Keene nodded thoughtfully.

"You're sure of that, Kendy?"

"Quite sure. Now, the three are going, and no one else. They'll be three; but if half a dozen of us go, we shall be six."

"That's so. But what—"

"Well, my idea is to make it warm for them. Mind, I don't bear Lawrence any malice for a fair fight. It's only

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when silly cuckoos start talking about it that I get my rag out."

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"All the same, the Fifth have got to keep up their proper place at St. Winifred's, and the youngsters have got to be taught to look upon us with respect."

"Yes, rather!"

"Therefore it's our duty—a plain matter of duty—to make examples of Clive Lawrence and Fisher and Locke."

"You're quite right."

"If we catch them in the caves we can put them through in first-class style. I haven't thought it all out yet, but to catch them on the hop there is the most important point."

"I suppose so."

"Of course, you must keep it dark. Better tell Stott and Benyon and a couple of other fellows, that's all."

"Good! If we can make Lawrence sing small, that's the chief thing. The Fourth Form are crowing no end. Lawrence doesn't crow, but he's the cause of it all. The youngsters will never forget that he licked you—"

Biff!

Kendal's fist came across the study table, and lighted upon Keene's nose with a force that made the latter crash backwards. His chair went flying, and he went flying, too, and sat down on the floor.

"Wh-wh-what?"

"I told you I would!" said Kendal grimly.

"You utter ass!"

"I'm going to dot on the nose every fellow who says that word to me," said Kendal. "You'll get out of the habit of it in time."

Keene rose to his feet. He rubbed his nose ruefully. The blow had not been a gentle one, and his nose was swelling.

"You shrieking idiot!" he grunted. "It's not my fault if young Lawrence licked—"

Kendal rushed at him, and Keene dodged out of the study and slammed the door. The captain of the Fifth burst into a laugh.

The door of the study opened, and Stott of the Fifth looked in.

"Hallo," he exclaimed, "what's the row? What's Keene gone flying for as if he had a prefect after him with a cane?"

"Better ask him."

"I say, Kendal, some of the fellows have been saying that since young Lawrence licked you— Ow!"

Stott sat down in the doorway and rubbed his nose dazedly. Kendal strode past him, and went down the passage. Stott looked after him.

"Mad!" he murmured—"mad and dangerous! That's the only explanation."

"Hallo, Kendy!" said Benyon, meeting the captain of the Fifth in the passage. "I wanted to speak to you. It's time something was done."

"Is it?" asked Kendal grimly.

"Yes, rather. The fellows are saying that it's a come-down for the Fifth, and we've got to do something to keep our end up. Since young Lawrence licked— Geroch!"

Kendal walked on, leaving Benyon staggering against the wall, rubbing his nose, and staring in blank amazement.

A Surprise for Trelawny!

Fisher and Locke were waiting for Clive Lawrence when he came back from the village. They met him in the gateway of St. Winifred's. Clive had his new bat under his arm, and his chums looked at it with admiration.

"Good egg!" said Fisher. "That looks all right. By the way, I saw Trelawny a while ago, and he said he wanted to speak to you."

"Good! Where is he?"

"In his study, I believe."

"I'll go up at once, then. Put my bat in our study, will you, Fishy?"

"Right you are!"

Fisher took the new bat, and Clive Lawrence went along the Sixth-Form passage towards the captain's study. There was a heavy step, and a scowling face passed him. It belonged to Herr Stossel.

The look he gave Clive Lawrence startled the boy. But he walked quietly on, and tapped at Trelawny's door. The captain's voice bade him enter.

Trelawny was at work, but he put his books aside as Lawrence came in. There was a very serious shade upon his handsome face.

"Ah, it is you, Lawrence!" he said.

"Yes; Fisher told me you wanted to speak to me."

"That's right. Close the door, and sit down."

Clive obeyed. He guessed that the captain of St. Winifred's was about to speak of the incident in the study, and he was not mistaken.

"You came to my study while I was out, Lawrence," said Trelawny.

"Yes, Trelawny. I wanted a pass out."

"You found Herr Stossel here?"

"Yes. He said he was waiting for you, and he wouldn't let me wait too."

"So you told Baker?"

"Yes."

"Why?" asked Trelawny.

"Because I thought Herr Stossel was rummaging through your things, and that he might find something you didn't care for him to find," said Clive Lawrence quietly. "I wasn't going to let him do that."

"I understand, Lawrence, and I thank you, too; but there is something very curious about this. Why should you suspect Herr Stossel of wanting to rummage through my things? You would not suspect any other master at St. Winifred's?"

"Of course not."

"Then why did you suspect Herr Stossel?"

"For one thing, because a drawer and a box were open, and then he was furious at my entering the study, and wouldn't allow me to wait here for you."

"But you had another reason, too," said Trelawny keenly.

"Yes." Clive hesitated. "I've thought several times that I ought to tell you about it, Trelawny, but—but—"

"Go on!"

"Well, it seemed like taking an interest in your private affairs, and I was afraid you might think it cheek; and then, it's a strange story, too."

"I'd rather you told me, anyway."

"It's curious. It happened the night I came here; the first night of the term, you know. I—I can't tell you exactly where I heard them talking—" Clive stopped and coloured. He realised that he could not give all the particulars of the talk he had accidentally overheard at the Jolly Seaman without betraying Courtney.

"I don't understand you, Lawrence," said Trelawny, looking puzzled. "Whom did you hear talking, and about what?"

"Herr Stossel and Mr. Napper—and about you."

Trelawny looked amazed.

"Napper! I have heard of that man. He is a disreputable character who hangs about the inn on the coast road—the Jolly Seaman. How could you possibly be with him?"

"It was by an accident I heard him talking. I can't tell you all, Trelawny, without giving somebody away," said Clive frankly. "I don't want to be a sneak."

"Tell me as much as you choose," said Trelawny quietly.

"Well, I was asleep, and I woke up and heard them talking—quite by chance. I hope you'll believe that I didn't intentionally play the eavesdropper," said Clive, flushing again.

"I believe it. Go on."

"They were talking about a wrecked Spanish galleon—"

The captain of St. Winifred's gave a violent start.

"Herr Stossel and Mr. Napper—a wrecked Spanish galleon!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. They are both in search of the gold belonging to the wreck, which was hidden away in Penwyn caves by an ancestor of yours in Queen Elizabeth's time."

Trelawny compressed his lips.

"You are certain of this, Lawrence?"

"I heard them say so. They know that you have a clue—" Trelawny started again.

"They know that! That explains— But go on."

"Herr Stossel has a clue as well. I don't know what it is, but he has one. I gathered that it wasn't of any use without the one you have."

"Heavens!"

The captain of St. Winifred's paced to and fro in the room in great excitement. His eyes were blazing. Clive looked at him in astonishment.

Trelawny caught his look and stopped. His manner was still full of suppressed excitement. It was evident that Clive's words had greatly startled him.

"Go on, Lawrence—go on, my boy!"

"That is about all, Trelawny. They agreed that the clue must be stolen from you, and to divide the treasure when it was discovered."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I was afraid you might think I was romancing," said Clive, colouring. "It's a queer story, and you didn't know much about me then."

"True." Trelawny looked at him searchingly. "You—you are quite sure of this, Lawrence—quite sure you didn't dream it?"

Clive Lawrence laughed.

"No, I do not doubt you; but it is amazing. Yet Herr Stossel's conduct bears it out. What else did he want here? I suppose you had this in mind, and so you suspected that he was searching my study for the clue spoken of?"

"That is it."

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"I understand. Well, he did not find it, and he is not likely to do so. Lawrence, this is a very strange affair, and the less spoken of it outside this study the better. You understand me?"

"Quite. I am not a chatterbox."

"Then you have told nobody?"

"Only Fisher and Locke. They are mum as oysters on the subject."

Oswald Trelawny nodded.

"Good! Don't let it go any further. It would be very unpleasant if it became the talk of the school. I am very glad you have told me this. It will enable me to be more upon my guard."

The captain of St. Winifred's was silent for some moments. "There's one more thing," said Clive. "We've been up to the Penwyn caves—"

"Looking for the treasure?" said Trelawny, with a smile. "Well, we should like to find the treasure of the wrecked galleon," said Clive. "Of course, if we found anything we should tell you at once. It belongs to you. We haven't seen anything of the galleon's gold, but we saw Herr Stossel."

"In the Penwyn caves?"

"Yes. Hunting for something. You know what! He had a parchment in his hand, too, and was referring to it. I thought you ought to know it all."

Trelawny nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes; there is no doubt now upon that point. It is very curious, though. But keep your own counsel, Lawrence."

"Yes, rather." And Clive Lawrence quitted the study, leaving Oswald Trelawny in a puzzled and mystified mood.

The Explorers.

"Got the lantern?"

"Yes."

"And the matches?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good! Then come along!"

Clive Lawrence, Fisher, and Locke quitted the study, and descended the stairs. It was Saturday afternoon, and a fine, bracing day. From the Fifth Form passage two pairs of eyes watched them go, and two faint chuckles might have been heard.

"They're gone, Kendy!"

"Right-ho, Keene!"

"Locke had a lantern in his hand."

"There's no doubt where they're gone to," grinned Kendal. "I know they were going to explore the Penwyn caves."

"Let's get the fellows together, and follow on."

"Right you are!"

Quite in ignorance of the Fifth Form plot, the chums of the Fourth crossed the Close, and walked down to the gates. Locke had wrapped the lantern up now, so as not

to give the secret of the expedition away. Several voices hailed the juniors en route.

"I say, Lawrence," called out Pye, "aren't you coming down to the nets?"

"Not just now, Pye."

"Look here, you want practice."

"I dare say I do. I'll get some another time."

"That's all very well; but I want you to bowl for me, as a matter of fact."

"My dear chap, there wouldn't be any fun in bowling to you—I might as well bowl at the side of a house."

"Look here, as captain of the Form—"

"Oh, cheese it, Pye!"

The three chums walked on laughing. They left the school gates, and took the road towards the sea. At a bend in the road they came in sight of the Jolly Seaman. Clive Lawrence gave a sudden start.

"Look there!"

A well-known figure was just passing through the orchard gate at the side of the inn. The figure disappeared among the trees within the fence the next moment, but the chums of the Fourth had recognised it.

"Herr Stossel!"

"Going to see Napper again, I suppose," said Locke. "My word, there would be a row if Dr. Esmond knew that a master of St. Winifred's was in the habit of visiting a man

like Napper in a place like that!"

"There would be a row if the Head knew several other things about Franz Stossel," Clive remarked.

"You're right! He ought to be shown up!"

"He ought. But we can't do it. I hope he won't spot us passing."

"Let's take a cut through the wood."

"Good wheeze."

If the German master had seen the juniors on their way to the beach there was little doubt that he would have stopped them on some pretext. But a cut through the wood took the chums out of sight of the windows of the Jolly Seaman, and a little later they emerged in sight of the ocean.

The wide sea rolled and shone in the afternoon sun. The juniors ran gleefully upon the long pebble ridge.

"Here we are again!" grinned Fisher. "Now for the giddy treasure!"

"I say," observed Locke, "it's as likely as not that Stossel will be searching the caves again this afternoon. I never thought of that."

"I did," said Clive quietly. "We have as much right there as he has. Let's get up the path from the cliff."

"Come on, then!"

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