

Maurice Gee. *The Fire-Raiser*
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SETTING AND NARRATIVE VIEWPOINT

Place: ‘Jessop’ – a fictionalised version of Nelson, New Zealand.

Time: around a fortnight in March, 1915, shortly before the deployment of New Zealand troops at Gallipoli.

Viewpoint: roving third person, focused mainly on the four children Phil, Irene, Kitty and Noel, and the two adults Thomas Hedges and Edgar Marwick.

CHARACTERS

[Notes:

Characters are listed alphabetically by the given name, family name, or nickname by which they are most frequently known to the author or other characters. The exceptions are generic family terms such as ‘Mum’ or ‘Grandpa’, which, along with alternative names and nicknames, are given in brackets. The titles ‘Mr’, ‘Mrs’ and ‘Miss’ are given when the narrative viewpoint belongs to children who would employ such terms for adults. Where only one name is given for a character, it is because others have not been provided in the text. Unnamed minor characters are listed by their major identifying feature, usually occupation.]

Bob Taylor. A rather obnoxious pupil in Standard 6 at Jessop Main School.

Bolton (‘Bolters’) Mrs. Authoritarian teacher at Jessop Main School. Christian, jingoistic, snobbish, genteel and Anglophile, she is the polar opposite of her colleague Thomas Hedges, with whom she conducts (and secretly enjoys) a running feud. Organises the school’s patriotic pageant that sparks off an anti-German riot. Appears again as Mrs Beattie in *Prowlers*.

Chalmers, Mrs Ann. Middle-aged mother of Irene, and wife of Francis. Snobbish and over-bearing, she imitates the genteel life style of the English upper crust in small-town colonial New Zealand.

Chalmers, Mr Francis. Husband of Ann and father of Irene. Small, plump, middle aged. Although a prosperous seed merchant and mayor of Jessop, he is domestically dominated by his stronger-willed wife and daughter, and is ineffectual in moments of civic crisis.

Charlie Miller. Minor; off-stage. Alcoholic widower. Now a sawmill worker, formerly a rag-and-bone man, he is the absent father of Phil. Appears again as Les Dockery in *Prowlers*.

Dargie. Minor; off-stage. Has a street named for him, and owns the livery stables that are burned down in the first chapter.

Hankin. Minor. A boy in Thomas Hedges's class.

Hedges, Mr Thomas (Tom; 'Clippy'). Central. Middle-aged Headmaster of Jessop Main School, whose grotesquely ugly physical appearance belies his admirable personal and pedagogical qualities. He is an all-round 'Renaissance man', who encourages his pupils to develop a similar range of interests. He is knowledgeable in all aspects of science from anatomy to astronomy, but has an equal relish for flights of fantasy, and a semi-mystical feeling for nature. He encourages the physical activities of his pupils, and is himself an accomplished amateur boxer. A liberal humanist, he opposes the social orthodoxies embodied in Mrs Bolton and Ann Chalmers, from snobbery to Anglophile jingoism, and is prepared to stand up against public opinion at the risk of personal or professional injury. His most important relationships are with the German music teacher Frau Stauffel, whom he wants to marry, and with Phil Miller, whom he hopes to redeem from social alienation by encouraging his intellectual interests. He appears again under the name 'Tup' Ogier in *Prowlers*.

Irene ('Charmy-Barmy') Chalmers. Central. Twelve-year-old, black haired daughter of Ann and Francis, and classmate of Kitty, Noel and Phil. An extremely gifted piano player, she has a deceptively pretty doll-like face, behind which lurks an imperious will and slyly rebellious personality. She is Mrs Bolton's teacher's pet, and is initially alienated from her peers, particularly the working class Phil, because of her parents' social standing and her own air of aloof distinction, but she becomes socially integrated through her friendship with Kitty. Plays Belgium in the school pageant. A full-length account of her personality and life appear under the name Irene Lomax in *Prowlers*.

Jobling, Mr. MP who attends the Jessop Main School patriotic pageant. He is a lecher with a falsely hearty manner, plummy voice, stupid face and smelly feet who whips the pageant audience into a destructive patriotic fervour. Appears again as Jacklin in *Prowlers*.

June Truelove. Rather obnoxious friend of Melva Dyer, class-mate of Irene and Kitty. Appears again under same name in *Prowlers*.

Kitty Wix. Central. Eleven-year-old sister of Noel and friend of Irene. Big for her age and rather clumsy. Popular and good-natured, her quick intellect and retentive memory have enabled her to jump a class and join the other central characters in Standard Six. Plays Britannia in the school pageant, and has an important encounter with Mrs Marwick. Is developed more fully under the name Kitty Hughes (née Papps) in *Prowlers*.

Lucy Marwick. Dead. Pretty and spoiled, she was drowned in the river 35 years ago at the age of eight. Her photographs and old piano are kept in a dusty parlour

dedicated to her memory by Mrs Marwick, who still blames her son Edgar for not looking after his little sister on the day she was drowned. She is mentioned again as Lucy Le Grice in *Prowlers*.

Marwick, Mr Edgar. Central. A 45-year-old farmer and part-time arsonist with a fetishist attachment to a red balaclava. He is green eyed, and would be good-looking were it not for a lumpiness around the nose and jaw, and a permanently surly appearance. A complex character, appearing in three distinct but overlapping guises, depending on the situation, his relationship with others, and the narrative viewpoint. In one, archetypal aspect he is portrayed as a nightmarish bogeyman - a mixture of a psychotic maniac and a fairy-tale ogre. At a second level, that of social realism, he appears as a normal if unpleasantly belligerent member of the adult community, in which guise he is seen either as a land-owner conducting a feud against the local establishment over access to a swimming hole, or as a leader of an anti-German mob. On the psychological plane that underpins and drives the other two, he is revealed as an emotionally damaged ten-year-old, who never outgrew his resentment at being punished for his partial responsibility for the death of his younger sister, and who has a complicated love-hate relationship, partly rebellious, partly servile, with his elderly mother. He appears again under the name Edgar Le Grice in *Prowlers*.

Marwick, Mrs Julia. Elderly mother of Edgar and Lucy. Like her son, she appears in at least three guises. On occasions she is perceived as a nightmarish archetypal figure - a witch, a spider or an ancient lizard. In terms of social realism, she is an imperious, upper crust land-owner, living in the dilapidated splendour of a once-stately home, but still retaining her former disdain for town 'riff raff'. At the psychological level, she has been irredeemably wounded by the drowning of her pretty, pampered daughter Lucy, whose memory she evokes through playing the girl's piano or endlessly listening to the same gramophone record. She drifts between the real world of the present and a dream-like state in which Lucy is still alive. She wants to keep the stretch of river where the girl drowned sacred to her memory by preventing town children from playing in it. She reappears as Mrs Le Grice in *Prowlers*.

McCaa, Sergeant. A brusque and overbearing police officer, imbued with adult scepticism about the credibility of children, but shrewd enough to investigate and eventually believe their suspicions of Edgar Marwick.

Melva Dyer. Obnoxious Standard Six friend of June Truelove. Appears again under the same name in *Prowlers*.

Nancy Dormer. Minor. Former pupil of Clippy Hedges, now Ann Chalmers's maid.

Noel Wix. Central. Twelve- or thirteen-year old elder brother of Kitty, and friend of Phil and Irene. Is dark, rather Italianate in appearance, with a mobile, rubbery face. Comes across as rather smug and a bit of a smart aleck, but has a basically kind nature and is fiercely protective of his sister. Plays the Kaiser with great relish in the school pageant. As Sir Noel Papps, he becomes the central narrator of *Prowlers*.

Phil ('Fleabites') Miller. Central. Twelve- or thirteen-year-old classmate of Noel, Kitty and Irene. He is tall and good-looking, but dirty, uncouth and unkempt, with a reputation for harbouring fleas. His mother is dead and his father has abandoned him.

A tough and aggressive working class kid with a marked Kiwi accent, he lives by himself on the fringe of society, attending school only intermittently. He is a social outsider, stigmatised by Mrs Bolton and other members of respectable Jessop society. He compensates for this by adopting a habitually scornful attitude towards all around him, which aggravates his naturally bullying temperament. The police sergeant McCaa and the school Principal Thomas Hedges are aware he could be heading for a life of crime, but he is redeemed from this, and is integrated into the mainstream community, through his own raw talent and intellectual curiosity, through the cultivation of these qualities by Thomas Hedges, and by his growing if uneasy friendship with the other three children. Thanks to Noel's generosity, he is given the central role of 'New Zealand' in the school pageant. He is developed into a full-length character under the name Phil Dockery in *Prowlers*.

Ray Stack. Minor. Standard Six pupil. He appears in *Prowlers* under the same name.

Secretary to Francis Chalmers. Minor; unnamed.

Stack, Mr. Minor. Ray's father, who takes part in the mob attack on Frau Stauffel's house.

Stauffel, Frau Lotte. German music teacher. A plump, good-natured, middle-aged widow, with apple cheeks, pixie chin, blue eyes and pink-icing mouth. She is the heir to a long European line of musical tuition going back to Liszt, impressing her student Irene with her combination of science and magic on the piano. Has become the local scapegoat for the anti-Hun hysteria that sweeps the country during the Great War. At the end of the novel, she agrees to marry Thomas Hedges, who has been keeping a protective eye on her throughout the book. She appears again in a much less amiable light under the name Lotte Reinbold in *Prowlers*.

Taylor, Mr. Minor. Bob's father, involved in the anti-German riot.

Trumbull, Mr. Minor; off-stage. Plays the piano to accompany the silent movies.

Wilmott, Reverend. Minor; off-stage. Local clergyman who helps write the patriotic pageant.

Wipaki. Minor. Maori pupil in Standard Six, who is not allowed to play New Zealand in the pageant because of his race.

Wix, Mr George. Middle-aged, lower middle class father of Noel and Kitty. A plump, brisk, jovial, talkative baker, with a vast repertoire of songs and literary snippets ranging from *Alice in Wonderland* to *Troilus and Cressida*. Is prepared to believe and support the children about Edgar Marwick when other adults are sceptical. Makes a minor appearance as George Papps in *Prowlers*.

Wix, Mrs. Wife of George, mother of Noel and Kitty, who tends to be sterner with her children than is her more relaxed husband. Spends most of her time knitting for the war effort, but would rather be doing outdoors farm work. Like her husband George, she is conscious of the class difference between her own children and Irene. Makes a minor appearance as Dora Papps in *Prowlers*.

Animals

Birds. Thrushes are heard singing cheerfully outside the houses of the Chalmers and Frau Stauffel.

Bull. A rather intimidating jersey bull puts in a brief appearance at the Marwicks'.

Cat. A startled cat alerts the children to Marwick's presence in the school near the end of the book.

Horses. Horses are being phased out as a means of transport, but there are still a few in the livery stables the arsonist attacks in the opening chapter with the deliberate intention of burning them alive.

SUMMARY

Chapter One: The Red Balaclava

After a gap of almost three months, the Jessop arsonist strikes again. Wearing a long black coat and a red balaclava, a large man slips into Jessop by secret ways and sets fire to Dargie's livery stables where a number of horses are housed. He has chosen this particular target because his growing appetite for fire now requires the taking of life. In an exultant frenzy, he whoops, capers and whinnies as the horses scream, and the flames spread both through the stables and his own bloodstream. The pleasure he derives from arson is two-fold. On the one hand, he glories in the fire in and for itself, fire-lighting being variously evoked as a hunger to be satisfied, a baptismal rite of rebirth, and a form of magic. On the other hand, he revels in the power it gives him over others, and in the outrage it arouses: he likes to see large crowds at his fires and to taste their fear. Arson is thus both a pathological addiction and a way of striking at the town. His orgiastic work complete, the nightmare figure, part psychopath, part Gothic monster, salutes the fire with a raised arm and hooked fingers, and slips off into the night.

Most of the novel's other main characters now arrive at the scene of the fire. At the bottom of the town's social hierarchy there is the barefooted outsider Phil Miller, who has been hanging around town as is his wont. At the other social extreme, the mayor Francis Chalmers is driving his snobbish wife Ann and slyly manipulative daughter Irene back from the silent movies. Phil and Irene know each other slightly from school, and are mutually contemptuous – a contempt which Phil also directs against another school mate, Kitty Wix. It is Kitty who first actually discovers the fire when walking home from the Wix bake house where she and her brother Noel have been helping their ebullient father. She even encounters the arsonist himself, who knocks her over in passing as he runs from the fire with a crookedly upraised arm and loping, wolfish strides. He appears to Kitty as a gigantic monster with a round, red, inhuman head like a vulture's skull.

Mr Wix and his son Noel also arrive on the scene, the former sending Noel off to sound the alarm bell, and himself going to help Phil rescue the terrified horses. He is joined by the primary school headmaster Thomas Hedges, who has spotted the fire through a telescope from the observatory. Francis Chalmers hovers around the scene, feebly flapping his arms at the gathering crowd and ignored by everyone. Kitty is also ignored when she tries to tell people she has actually seen the arsonist. Her brother Noel feels similarly put out that he has been sidelined, and not been acclaimed as a hero for raising the alarm.

The fire-raiser himself stands at the front of the crowd of on-lookers, having discarded his coat and balaclava and assumed the guise of an ordinary citizen of the town. Inside, however, he secretly whoops with exaltation. Even though he has not succeeded in immolating the horses as he hoped, he savours the fear of his fellow-citizens as a personal tribute. This is his biggest fire yet – the kind of blaze he has dreamed of since he was a child. As the fire is damped down and people drift off

home, he returns to his farm with a sense of repletion to digest his fiery meal. His hunger has been satisfied, and he will not need another fire now for some time.

Chapter Two: Miss Perez

Next morning before school, while Phil is scavenging through the burnt-out ruins he is collared by Sergeant McCaa, who regards the boy as a jailbird in the making and is in the habit of dealing out summary rough justice to him. The policeman scrutinizes a long black coat which Phil has earlier discovered hidden under a footbridge, and realises it corresponds to the one Kitty claims to have seen on the man who knocked her down as he ran from the scene of the fire. Although he has learned not to trust children's stories, McCaa takes the coat to the Wixes' place, where Kitty confirms it is the one she saw, and to the accompaniment of smart aleck comments from her brother repeats her description of his bizarre appearance. Mrs Wix, who is busy knitting, realises the odd red thing he was wearing on his head must have been a balaclava. Pleased with themselves at being praised by the sergeant, the children go off to school, hoping their part in the previous evening's drama will be mentioned by their master Clippy Hedges.

In class, however, Hedges is preoccupied and angry. He dropped in to see the German music teacher Frau Stauffel on the way to school, and found her distressed at receiving a letter from Irene's mother to say her daughter no longer required piano lessons. What upsets Frau Stauffel is that Mrs Chalmers regards music as just a social asset to enable frilly girls to catch husbands, whereas to Frau Stauffel, Irene is no ordinary ivory tickler but a 'wunderkind' – a child genius. Furthermore, Frau Stauffel is aware that Ann Chalmers does not want a 'Hun' teaching her child. Hedges says he will have a word with the woman, but suggests that in the current anti-German climate Frau Stauffel should avoid using terms like 'wunderkind'.

After this flashback, there is a brief description of Hedges's grotesquely ugly appearance, and of his determination to foster an optimistic and happy outlook in his pupils, despite the meanness and pain waiting around the corner. The children join in group singing accompanied on the piano by Irene, after which Hedges allows himself to be sidetracked from arithmetic to talk, first, about the military situation in the Dardanelles and Neuve Chapelle, then about brain anatomy.

His educational philosophy is to build on children's own interests as the occasion presents. To this end, he sends Phil and Noel, who belong to different gangs and are not friends, up to the belfry to fetch 'Miss Perez' – an articulated skeleton on a frame, whose limbs can be moved by pulling a lever, and of whom the children, even the tough Phil, are rather in awe. Hedges intends using her to instil in his pupils an awareness of the beautiful engineering of the human frame, but digresses to spin them a yarn about Miss Perez having been a famous operatic singer, who out of unrequited love for a tenor threw herself from an Amazon steamer and was eaten by piranhas. When challenged by his sceptical pupils, he cheerfully admits this is a lie, but says that when we do not know the facts, we are entitled to invent. He operates Miss Perez's lever to show how the various bones move, then returns to his original subject, the human brain, explaining its basic anatomy, with a digression into the pseudo-science of phrenology.

The children sidetrack him into theology by asking if Eve had one more rib than Adam. While he is warning them against literally believing everything in the Bible, he is indignantly interrupted by Mrs Bolton, the self-appointed Christian guardian of right belief, and saviour of Jessop children from the cloven-hoofed Thomas Hedges. The latter gets the skeleton, whom he has now jauntily renamed Captain Nemo, to raise its arm and welcome Mrs Bolton on board, then leaves her to make an important announcement.

Mrs Bolton takes over the class, and tells the children that a patriotic school pageant '*Britannia Awakes*' will take place in three weeks, and begins allocating roles. She singles out her favourite Irene to play Little Belgium, brave and beautiful, not knowing how much the girl loathes her and hates being singled out for her 'niceness'. Noel is chosen to play New Zealand, while Phil is given the villain's role as Kaiser. Even though Noel dislikes Phil, he sees how upset the latter is, realises playing the Kaiser will add to his social isolation, and feels that Mrs Bolton is deliberately torturing him. He therefore volunteers to play the Kaiser himself, demonstrating his suitability for the role with melodramatic grimaces and gestures. Mrs Bolton reluctantly gives the part of New Zealand to Phil, who is actually much taller and better-looking than Noel, but continues to publicly humiliate him with comments on his dirty appearance. Phil goes off to wash, sending Noel a murderous look as he goes.

Chapter Three: Buck's Hole

During playtime at school, Irene is taunted by her classmates Melva and June about her alleged romantic link with the flea-infested Phil. Kitty has to choose sides, and not wanting to be complicit in her other friends' cruelty, she elects to walk away with Irene, whose musical talent she admires and envies. As they sit together and discuss techniques of manipulating adults, a new friendship begins to develop between these two very different girls.

At the same time, Hedges breaks up a fight between Noel and Phil, caused by the latter's resentment of Noel sticking up for him against Mrs Bolton. Instead of strapping the boys, Hedges shows them a chart of the human brain, contrasting the cerebellum, which makes us human and with which we are supposed to think, with the lower, reptile brain left over from when we lived in the swamp. Hedges does not care much for the smug Noel, but is anxious to encourage Phil to go to secondary school, in order to escape from the downward spiral caused by the poverty, neglect and social ostracism that have turned him aggressive. He sees that the boy needs care, and that time is running out for him. However, Phil is uncomfortable with the idea of continuing his education, preferring to leave school, get a job and make money. Above all, he is anxious to prevent the teacher coming around to talk to his father, and thereby discovering that Phil is actually living on his own.

In the afternoon, the children go swimming, the girls with the prim Mrs Bolton to Girlie's Hole, the boys with Hedges to Buck's Hole. Taking the path beside the Marwick farm, they find the Marwicks have put up a notice saying 'Private Property Keep Out'. Hedges tells the boys to pull the notice out, as the swimming hole is legally public property. Edgar Marwick watches them, then strides off to the house, presumably to get further orders from his mother Julia. The house looks like a fairy

castle, but there is nothing fairy-like about its inhabitants. Edgar's burning eyes and air of barely repressed rage makes Hedges nervous, as does his mother, who reminds him of a witch or spider, drawing power and secret knowledge from her position at the centre of things.

Hedges's breath is taken away, as always, by the sensuous loveliness of the pool and its surroundings, which help him to forget the Marwicks. Breaking the spell, however, he measures the temperature of the water with the thermometer he always carries, then while the other boys swim or practise their strokes on shore, he gives Phil and Noel a diving test. Phil, who is an excellent swimmer, revels in his underwater prowess, but his attention is drawn to an unidentified green and yellow object with writing on it which he glimpses at the bottom of the stream. Noel subsequently sees the same object, and they agree to come back later and investigate, Phil enjoying his awareness that Noel is rather scared.

The boys then discover that someone has taken their clothes. Since the obvious culprit must be Edgar Marwick, Hedges leads them up to the Marwick house to confront him. Hedges thinks he is a good-looking man, but sullen and surly, with the appearance of someone damaged beyond repair. Mrs Marwick, a tall lady of ravaged stateliness, emerges from the house like an ancient lizard and takes command of the situation. She and Hedges argue over whether or not the pool is private property: she demands the boys be kept away from it, while Hedges points out that the court has granted legal access along the riverside path to members of the public. She is unmoved, until Hedges gets the boys, some of whom are totally naked, to perform a noisy red Indian war dance. Edgar moves to attack them, but is tripped by Phil and pinned down by swarming boys. Mrs Marwick surrenders, shows them where their clothes are and retreats back into the dark of the house, again like a sinister lizard. Hedges feels a stab of fear at this image, but his spirits revive as he leads his triumphant tribe away, singing 'Men of Harlech'. Phil and Noel, who are becoming rather uneasy allies, slip away by themselves to investigate the object they saw in the river.

Chapter Four: Clippy Pays a Call

Phil and Noel retrieve the green and yellow object from the river and find it is an empty five gallon benzene can, of the kind used to burn down the stables. They return to town and go to Chalmers' warehouse, which Phil has a new job cleaning out. They decide against telling the police or Hedges about their find, but are sure it is connected with the arsonist, and probably with the Marwicks. Noel suggests keeping watch on the pool overnight, but is relieved when Phil rejects the scheme as impracticable.

While the boys are at the pool, Kitty and Irene return to town from their swim. Irene wishes they could swim 'nuddy' like the boys, and the pair entertain seditious thoughts about what Mrs Bolton would look like in the nude. Irene accompanies Kitty to the latter's music lesson with Frau Stauffel, though Kitty, knowing her musical incompetence, warns her friend not to listen. Irene is awed by Frau Stauffel's piano virtuosity, part science, part magic, and is determined to emulate her.

They find the pretty, kindly widow in tears over the letter she has received from Mrs Chalmers, stopping Irene's lessons. She knows, although Mrs Chalmers does not say so explicitly, it is because of the anti-German sentiment whipped up by the war. For

the same reason, she has had stones thrown on her roof and filthy things put through her letterbox. Irene is transformed by the cancellation of her music lessons into an enraged, foot stamping gnome like Rumpelstiltskin, shouting that her mother takes everything away from her, and determining to get her father to intervene – a project Frau Stauffel knows will fail, as he is a weak vessel, unable to stand up to his wife.

Meanwhile, Hedges is confronting Mrs Chalmers about Irene's piano lessons, pointing out that the girl is the most musically gifted pupil he has ever had. She deserves the best tuition, which in this case is Lotte Stauffel, who has herself been taught by a student of Liszt. Mrs Chalmers replies that Irene approaches music with excessive enthusiasm. She must learn moderation, and besides will not need music to earn her living. She adds that in the name of patriotism she has sold Irene's German piano. Throughout his visit, Hedges, who realises Mrs Chalmers regards him as the class equivalent of a tradesman, dislikes the woman's snobbery and English affectations 'in this rough little country at the end of the world, where Christmas comes at summer and nobody has a master'. On his way out, he hears a thrush singing, and feels that although the bird is from England, it has settled down in New Zealand in a way the woman has not: with her aping of the English gentry, she is actually more foreign than Frau Stauffel.

He wonders about having a talk with Mr Chalmers concerning Irene's lessons, but sees Irene herself going to the council chambers with a fierce look on her face, and thinks she is a tough little thing who will be able to twist her father round. He feels rather sorry for the man, caught between a self-important wife and strong-minded daughter. He instead heads off to see Charlie Miller about Phil's education.

Irene, accompanied by Kitty, arrives in the mayoral office to confront Mr Chalmers. Despite his business and political authority, he feels helpless in face of his twelve-year-old daughter, whose normally quiet demeanour is now replaced by a shrewish face with snapping eyes and mouth. He puts all the blame for the cancellation of the lessons and sale of the piano, which Irene only now learns about, on his wife, and offers to buy the girl a kitten or a pony instead. The enraged Irene says she would drown a kitten and hates horses. Kitty is daunted by how coldly adult her friend has become. Her spell over her father is broken, however, when Edgar Marwick pushes his way into the office. Summoning the courage to order the belligerent intruder to wait outside puffs Mr Chalmers up sufficiently to resist his daughter. No longer adult, she and Kitty are patronisingly sent off to buy themselves bottles of fizz drink. Irene gives Marwick a dirty look as she goes out for spoiling things just when her father was curling up.

Hedges is now at Charlie Miller's slum house down at the wharves, a place more fit for rats than humans. The place is occupied, and efforts have been made to keep it tidy, but there is no sign of Charlie and only one mattress on the floor. He spots an article about British troops capturing Neuve Chapelle in a newspaper spread on the table, a battle Phil mentioned in class this morning, and he also notices with an unexplained mixture of annoyance and amusement that Phil has a picture of Halley's Comet. Phil then comes bursting in and confronts his teacher with surliness unusual in a pupil. This is explained when he is forced to admit his father is now working over the hill at a sawmill. He asserts he can cope perfectly well on his own, but Hedges remains concerned about the effect this is having on his schooling. Noel stands

smirking in the background, to be brusquely told by Hedges that Phil is just as brainy (if not as clean) as he is - in fact almost as brainy as Kitty. Hedges tries to find out where Phil and Noel got to after the diving test, but they keep quiet about the benzene can they discovered. Hedges sends them off with money to buy themselves some fizz.

Back in the mayoral office, Marwick and Chalmers confront each other over the issue of legal public access to the swimming pool. Marwick's anger is intensified by the remembered shame and insult of being tripped and pinned down by Hedges's pupils. When the mayor says the police will be called in if the 'no trespassing' notice is put back up, Marwick's scarcely contained rage comes to a head, and he storms out of the office threatening dire if unspecified vengeance. Bursting out into the street, he sends Kitty and her fizzy drink flying. As she watches him departing with his broken gait, half gallop, half wolfish padding, one arm raised like a club, she realises she is looking at the same man who had knocked her down as he ran from the fire the previous night.

Chapter Five: The Letter

Irene and Kitty, who in less than a day have become loyal friends, agree there is no point telling sceptical adults about Kitty's conviction that Marwick is the fire-raiser. The next day at school, Mrs Bolton scolds them for being late for the first pageant rehearsal, behaviour she would not have expected from Irene, her pet pupil. The latter unabashedly lies that they are late because they have been learning their lines.

Phil has been summoned from the playground by Hedges, who is trying to rouse his interest in astronomy by showing him a star chart, and telling him about the system for naming astronomical bodies. It transpires that Phil had ripped out the picture of Halley's Comet, which Hedges saw in his house, from one of the latter's magazines. Phil was interested because he had seen the comet himself when he was six. Hedges also saw the comet through his telescope at the observatory, and he feels that he is getting somewhere with the boy when Phil asks if he can look through that telescope. They are interrupted by Mrs Bolton impatiently demanding Phil's attendance at the rehearsal. Hedges is angered by her obvious social and physical distaste for the boy.

At the rehearsal, Noel throws himself with melodramatic gusto into the role of the evil Kaiser, for which he has brought along a spiked Prussian helmet. The other pupils declaim their jingoistic lines, with Kitty playing the central part of Britannia, while Irene is poor little invaded Belgium. Mrs Bolton is contemptuous of Phil's flat, working class New Zealand vowels, despite Noel's protest that Mr Hedges says New Zealanders should speak like New Zealanders, not mock Englishmen. She forces the humiliated Irene to enunciate 'white cliffs' in the correct, English way.

After school, the two pairs of children meet by accident on a foot bridge. Phil and Noel sneer at Irene's posh voice, 'a cow with bloat', and to compensate she blurts out that she and Kitty know who the fire-raiser is. Phil trumps her by saying he and Noel have the benzene can to prove it is Marwick. Neither side is convinced by the other's evidence. Phil and Irene snipe at each other, the latter telling Phil he stinks and has fleas.

The girls run off to the Wixes' house to pick up Kitty's things for an overnight stay at Irene's place. Irene shows off on the Wix piano by racing through Handel's 'Harmonious Blacksmith', but is then ashamed of herself, since music is not for 'skiting' with, and makes amends to herself by a poignant rendering of a Chopin nocturne. Kitty and Mrs Wix are both impressed, but Irene ungraciously responds by saying their piano is not very good and needs tuning. Kitty is sent off by her mother with the admonition to mind her manners at the Chalmers's house.

Noel takes Phil to see Mr Wix. The latter gets the boys to help him with the baking, after Phil is obliged to have a thorough wash. Phil takes to the job because he enjoys eating the product, although he is slightly bemused by Mr Wix's ad lib quotations. The boys confide their discovery and suspicions of Marwick to Mr Wix. Despite his preliminary caution, he thinks Sergeant McCaa should know about it, and promises to take the boys to see him tomorrow. Noel does not mention Kitty's suspicion of Marwick, thinking this would detract from his own importance.

At the Chalmers', Kitty does not enjoy the frugal dinner, mainly because she is uncomfortable about being waited upon by Nancy, and about Mrs Chalmers's patronising manner towards the maid. After dinner, the girls concoct an anonymous letter denouncing Marwick to the police, signing it Britannia and Gallant Little Belgium. As they do so, both uneasily imagine the silent presence of mad Edgar Marwick, with his green eyes, loping run and upraised arm. Mrs Chalmers demands to see the letter, but is distracted by loud knocking and voices at the door. The girls take the opportunity to slip out and put the letter to Sergeant McCaa in a letter box, hearing the bell of a fire engine as they go. On their return, they are told that the Chalmers warehouse is on fire.

Chapter Six: At Chalmers' Warehouse

Edgar Marwick has been brooding on his wrongs and preparing his arson material, although he has not consciously chosen a target. He briefly listens with a mixture of love and pity to his mother repeatedly playing the same gramophone record - a tenor and soprano howling in grief. He then heads off through secret ways into the hostile town, where he dons the red balaclava, which is not so much a disguise as a sign that lights a fire in his head. He arrives at Chalmers' beckoning warehouse, his head like a ball of fire, and mutters: "Now Chalmers, you're going to get it. You'll see what I can do."

Phil and Noel are walking away from the bakery, eating pasties and discussing their futures. Phil would like to be a baker, dismissing the notion of going to college despite Hedges's conviction of his natural intelligence, because he needs to earn money. Noel for his part wants to be a scientist. They hear glass breaking in the Chalmers' warehouse and go to investigate the dark yard. A match scratches, fire blazes, and they see a figure that screeches like an owl, looking more like a devil than a man. The figure bursts out into the yard, where it turns into an ordinary human being, who knocks the boys aside as they try to tackle him. They turn a hose on the fire without much success, then Phil runs off and rings the town fire bell. Wix, Hedges, Chalmers, McCaa and other men take over from the boys, but the latter are given credit for discovering the fire.

Emboldened by this, they tell Sergeant McCaa their suspicions of Marwick, but he is sceptical, as they have only seen the arsonist's eyes, not his face. However, when Mr Chalmers describes the threats Marwick made against him yesterday, the policeman decides to pay a call on the Marwicks, taking the boys and Mr Wix along with him. Hedges adds himself to the party, despite McCaa's coldness towards him, saying he is acting in loco parentis for Phil.

Out at the Marwicks', the town group led by Sergeant McCaa is confronted by a united and unperturbed Marwick front, the mother as imperious as a beak-nosed queen, her son standing beside her like a butler. Told about the fire, the pair deny all knowledge of a black coat, crowbar, tin of benzene and red balaclava, although Hedges notices Mrs Marwick's eyes suddenly widen at the mention of the latter. Hedges also sees that the backs of Edgar's hands are singed, but this is explained as the result of his burning some rubbish. The Marwicks haughtily dismiss McCaa's questions, and turn the tables by accusing the two boys of having set fire to the warehouse themselves, Mrs Marwick asserting that her son was with her the whole evening. The confrontation ends with the town party being ordered out of the house. The Marwicks have had the upper hand throughout, with even the dogged sergeant adopting a tone of deference to the old land owner, in marked contrast with his belligerence towards the schoolteacher.

Once the intruders are gone, Edgar Marwick is suddenly transformed from a hulking bully into a disgraced, frightened but defiant boy, unable to look at his mother directly. She has known throughout the confrontation with the policeman that the allegations against Edgar were true. In the course of their following exchange, it emerges that Edgar's fire fetish began when in punishment for not properly looking after somebody called Lucy, he had been locked in a dark cupboard. Terrified of the darkness, which was like being buried alive, he had kept it at bay by lighting fires in his head. He was subsequently whipped for starting a real one in the farm outhouse, but in his imagination he had burned down buildings all round the town. Now he is grown up, he has begun turning fantasy into reality. His mother contemptuously tells him that he has never grown up: although 45, he is still really just a little boy. She demands the balaclava from him, but he refuses to hand it over, saying that it is his, and he has put it away. She does not insist, but instructs her naughty little boy: "No more fires."

Chapter Seven: The Ram

The next day, Kitty and Irene listen to the genteel Mrs Chalmers and her rather more plebeian husband sparring. Neither parent believes the boys' accusation against Marwick, Mrs Chalmers's reason being that the Marwicks are 'a very good family'. Mr Marwick, however, is grateful to them for saving his warehouse the previous night. Irene wants to go off to the Wixes' place with Kitty, but her mother is reluctant until Kitty says that Irene will help her pronunciation of her pageant lines. Mrs Chalmers regards Kitty as rather 'common', but her husband says she is doing their daughter good, and putting some colour in her cheeks.

Phil has been watching a freighter coming into harbour and thinking about the John Masefield poem 'Cargoes' that Hedges had read them. He then goes into town and sees the damaged warehouse being cleaned up after the fire, in which his own role

now seems rather small. He and Noel join up and go down to the foot bridge to mull over the Edgar Marwick situation. Knowing Sergeant McCaa does not believe their story, they wonder how to obtain more hard evidence. They are joined by the girls, who tell them about the anonymous letter they sent McCaa, and all four head off for the Marwick farm on the hunt for evidence. Phil remains contemptuous of Irene, and is reluctant to have incompetent girls coming along while he is doing something 'real'. Compared with them and Noel, he feels himself a grown-up.

The four follow the river up to the Marwick farm, where Edgar is working out in the yard. They discover a machine in the river with a feed line taking water up to the house. The know-all Noel says it is a hydraulic ram and explains how it works. Phil suggests jamming the ram to lure Marwick down to the river, thus giving them a chance to search. Irene is delegated to do the sabotage job with a hairpin she proudly produces, but is secretly terrified, and rather hurt when her friend Kitty elects to go off with the boys.

As the party splits up, the viewpoint alternates between Irene and the others. The latter secretly watch Marwick sharpening a scythe on a grindstone. Irene thrusts her hairpin into a valve and jams the pump. Marwick notices the water supply into the tank has been cut off, and strides off to the river to check the pump. Irene watches in horror as he comes towards her with giant strides, like a monster in a nightmare – one adult she will never be able to control. He discovers and removes the pin in the valve, hunts briefly for the hidden Irene, then returns to the house without starting the pump up again.

Meanwhile, the boys have slipped into the barn, while Kitty, who is supposed to be keeping watch, rummages through a shed. The boys, who think they are safe because they cannot hear the pump, ransack the hay barn and find a small cupboard containing tins of benzene and a pile of cotton waste and rags. They decide to bring McCaa out to the farm again to see their find, but Edgar comes bursting like an ogre into the barn. In a murderous rage, he begins stabbing into the hay where Noel, who realises the game is now being played in deadly earnest, has hidden. Phil tries to distract Marwick by pelting him with nails and other objects, but they are only saved by a call to Edgar from Mrs Marwick.

Outside, Kitty has moved from the shed to the veranda. She has heard the noises of the chase in the barn, then seen Mrs Marwick emerge onto the veranda calling to Edgar to find out what is going on. Edgar appears and explains he has got the two town boys bailed up, and Mrs Marwick tells him not to hurt them - too much. Phil and Noel make a getaway, having escaped from the barn through a loose board. Marwick chases after them, egged on by his mother. Kitty cannot help them, as she is herself now trapped on the veranda. To avoid being seen by Mrs Marwick, her only recourse is to slip inside the house.

Chapter Eight: Kitty Plays the Piano

Inside the Marwick house, Kitty finds herself in a dark, dusty hall with chandeliers so high it seems to be a house built for giants. Hearing Mrs Marwick come in, she retreats into a gloomy parlour smelling of mould and rot. She sees a number of framed photographs all of the same little girl at different ages, dressed in frilly clothes and a

bonnet, with a pretty face and a happy, fat mouth. Kitty presses a key on an old, dusty piano and finds that some kind of sponginess inside prevents it sounding. She investigates and discovers a red balaclava stuffed down amongst the wires, which she hides inside her blouse.

Mrs Marwick comes into the room, undergoing some kind of psychic change as she does so. She calls Kitty by the name of Lucy, obviously the little girl in the photos, and makes her play the decrepit old piano. Mrs Marwick, who is alternating with a puzzled air between the former time of Lucy and the present, then makes 'Lucy' sit beside her and tell her about school. She then talks to her supposed daughter about two children who died on the ship during the voyage out to New Zealand: "Grief is a terrible thing". She then abruptly returns to normality and with a wail of grief demands to know who Kitty really is. She reveals that Lucy drowned in the river 35 years ago when she was eight, because her elder brother Edgar had not been watching her as instructed. This explains Mrs Marwick's possessive attitude to the pool: she won't have town children playing where Lucy drowned.

Enraged that one of those town children has invaded her house, she drags Kitty down the hall to a cupboard, slapping her face hard on the way. The elongated, towering figure of the old woman bundles her into the cupboard and locks her in the darkness reserved for naughty children, from which "they never come out".

During Kitty's encounter with Mrs Marwick, Irene has rejoined Phil and Noel after their escape from Edgar. They worry about where Kitty has disappeared to, and realising that Marwick doesn't play by the normal rules – he seems like something that has sprung out of nightmare into real life – they decide to appeal again to McCaa. He sourly calls them a bunch of Hottentots, but drives them back out to the farm, where they are joined by Hedges who has been collecting specimens in the river. Edgar is back sharpening his scythe, and Noel demands to know what he has done with Kitty. Marwick launches a pre-emptive counter-attack, accusing the children of trespass and theft. McCaa inspects the barn, and finds the little room empty of the benzene and rags the boys had discovered. Marwick further discredits the children by showing McCaa the pin with which Irene had jammed the pump.

Noel keeps demanding to know where his sister is. He is answered by Mrs Marwick, who leads them to the cupboard where she has locked the girl. As Noel puts an arm around his white-faced sister, Mrs Marwick accuses her of stealing from her parlour. Kitty responds that she stole nothing except this – holding out the red balaclava.

Chapter Nine: The Moon, and Other Things

There is a tense silence as everyone looks at the balaclava. Both Edgar and Mrs Marwick deny all knowledge of it, accusing the children of planting it to make trouble. Kitty sticks resolutely to her story, and for the first time the Marwicks are on the defensive as Sergeant McCaa thoughtfully pockets the balaclava – an act which Edgar watches with a grieving air – and says he will make further enquiries. The Marwicks decline to press the trespassing allegations they have made against the children and Hedges, and the town group again leaves the farm.

Walking back to town with the children, Hedges agrees that Marwick is undoubtedly the fire-raiser, but warns that he is dangerous, and they should leave him to McCaa, who is no fool: there will be no more fires. Kitty's senses are heightened now she has been released from the darkness of the cupboard. When Hedges asks how she was able to bear her ordeal, she says she remembered him telling them about a prisoner who recited poetry to himself, so she kept her own mind occupied by going over her lines for the pageant. Hedges laughs and shouts "Three cheers for Mrs Bolton!"

Noel, Kitty and Irene go to the Wixes' house, where Mrs Wix is knitting ferociously for the Belgium relief fund and wishing she was out milking cows or shoeing horses. She displaces her anger onto the children, threatening Kitty and Noel with a whipping, but is sidetracked by Kitty's mention of Lucy. At first, Mrs Wix does not recognise the name, but she then recalls stories of the pretty little spoilt girl who died in Girlie's hole after Edgar had left her to go fishing. The Marwick parents used to live like landed gentry, holding garden parties and entertaining English aristocrats, but after Lucy's death Mr Marwick gave up all his business and political involvements, and died shortly after, while his widow became a total recluse. Irene is packed off home, and Kitty retires to her room to ponder the difference between the Mrs Marwick of the old, garden party days, and the stricken figure in the dusty parlour today. She is deeply moved by 'the danger and dreadfulness of life, and the mystery of time passing by and making things old, and things that happened long ago staying alive and turning people into different shapes.'

Meanwhile, Mr Hedges takes Phil up to the observatory. There is something about the place with its skull-like dome which makes Phil prickle. Hedges draws his attention to the large telescope, which he likens to the human optic nerve, and reveals that his secret ambition is to discover a new comet or planet. He opens a slit in the dome and allows Phil to look through the telescope at the daytime moon, whose apparent nearness startles Phil, and whose weight threatens to crush him. Hedges explains that the craters on the moon have been made by the impact of meteorites, and in reply to a question by Phil says there is no animate life there, as it lacks the atmosphere to sustain it. He promises that some night he will show him the planets as well. These are named after Roman gods, but Hedges prefers the Greek ones: his own planet will be named after the legendary musician Orpheus, because of the harmony he senses when looking up at the night sky.

Phil finds a small, hand-held telescope and trains it up the valley, where he spots Edgar Marwick on the veranda bringing his mother an elegantly covered tea tray, complete with silver sugar tongs. Phil thinks he is waiting on her like a servant, but Hedges responds he is perhaps just being a good son.

As they walk down town afterwards, Phil is still under the spell of the observatory, and confides he would like to be an astronomer. Hedges replies that there are all sorts of universes, and suggests that Irene is exploring her own musical one, a comparison which rather deflates Phil. The pair walk to Frau Stauffel's house where Hedges is to have lunch. Phil feels his teacher should not be consorting with the enemy. Reaching her place, Phil obviously feels awkward about being introduced to the German woman, and quickly excuses himself. Frau Stauffel then shows Hedges the words 'Dirty Hun' that were crudely painted on her door the previous night. Hedges reassures her this is just the yahoo behaviour of young fellows – she is safe enough so

long as adult men do not start on her. He asks her to play the piano for him – the best answer to that kind of thing.

Chapter Ten: Britannia Meets the Kaiser

The date of the pageant is brought forward, and the children now have only a week to prepare. The school gears up to get everything ready, from learning lines to building props. On the day itself, Hedges and Standard Six have their usual rambling dialogue, exploring the workings and structure of the voice box, dismissing phrenology as mumbo jumbo, following the progress of the war, speculating about whether New Zealand troops will next fight the Germans or the Turks, and doing sums. Hedges warns the children not to regard war as some kind of game, since men are really dying, all because people haven't got control of what goes on in their heads – something he perceives his pupils do not understand. Concerned by the racist spirit infecting some of them, he muses that Beethoven, Bismarck and the Kaiser were all alike German, as Shakespeare and Butcher Cumberland were both English. He wonders if any of the children will be able to make sense of this one day, since he himself cannot.

In the evening, people pour into St Andrew's Hall for the patriotic pageant, while the frazzled Mrs Bolton presides over last minute preparations. The three backdrops depict the fields of Belgium, the white cliffs of Dover, and the sinister, stormy forests of Germany, of which Noel, as Kaiser, is particularly proud. Phil turns up late wearing dirty shoes. Irene and Kitty peer at the growing audience and see the MP Jobling, a fat man with a face like huhu grubs, arriving with the Chalmers. Irene reports that he has smelly feet and touched their maid Nancy's bottom. Hedges is not there yet, as he is with Frau Stauffel, reassuring her that despite the jingoistic 'huff and puff' she will be safe enough. He also hints that there is a way to secure her future safety, but Frau Stauffel replies that she does not want to bring her worries to him as a dowry.

Hedges goes down to the hall, worried by the sight of young fellows – previously his own more disruptive pupils – hanging around outside. He takes his seat beside the red-faced and rather stupid Jobling, exchanging pleasantries that barely mask their mutual antipathy. Behind the curtain, the children take their places for the opening tableau, Mrs Bolton strikes up 'God Save the King' on the piano, and the pageant has begun. Kitty as Britannia finds it rather odd to remain seated while everyone else stands for the national anthem. She looks out over the audience to cigarettes glowing in the dark outside the hall, and wonders if Edgar Marwick is out there.

Marwick has not meant to come into town tonight, and in fact has not been off the farm since McCaa confiscated the balaclava, without which he does not feel fully alive. He tries to chop down a tree and send it crashing into Buck's Hole, thereby putting an end to the swimming, but is thwarted by his axe breaking: everything is against him. Going into the house, he is further enraged to hear his mother playing the piano in the dark, dusty room which has become a shrine to Lucy: the music scratches like possum claws on an iron roof. He storms in, telling his mother that Lucy has been dead for thirty-five years and is not coming back. She replies that the girl has indeed been back, and has played the piano for her. Edgar shouts that she is loony. He has come to hate and resent the piano, which he would like to chop up for firewood. His mother orders him out of Lucy's room, telling him never to come in there again.

Without knowing where he is going, he heads into town, still grieving for his lost balaclava. Over dinner at a restaurant, he has mixed emotions about his mother. Despite his resentment of her Lucy cult and his knowledge that she is crazy, it distresses him to know she is old and will soon die. He would like things always to remain as they are now, with him waiting on and caring for her. He makes his way to the hall, stands to attention outside for the national anthem, then joins the audience and begins to enjoy the pageant.

Kitty, seated on Britannia's throne, feels the hall go cold as she sees Marwick come in and stare at her. She is comforted, however, to hear Phil whispering Marwick's name to her, and also by the reassuring presence of familiar adults in the audience, so focuses her attention on the speech she is about to deliver. Noel hooks his wicked German fingers at Irene: "I will tear this poppy Belgium from her stem." She flies to Britannia for assistance, who answers her call by summoning the nations of the Empire to join the glorious cause. Phil's moment has come: "Furthest flung of your empire we may be, but our character and customs are your own. We are the Britain of the south." He turns to the audience: "Who would not fight for England?" Jobling shouts "bravo!" and leaps to his feet and leads the audience in a jingoistic song: "Old England's sons are English yet. Old English hearts are strong."

Frau Stauffel hears the singing, and knows it is the kind of music that makes people swell up, blind and silly, as do beer and speeches. It pains her to think of her wunderkind Irene singing such stuff, and she plays a gentle Brahms lullaby for Irene as an act of faith in the goodness of music. She knows that the silence following the singing in the hall means more speeches, more huff and puff, and she sits in the dark waiting till it is over. Out on the farm, Mrs Marwick is asleep in her chair, smiling and sighing as she dreams of Lucy.

On stage, the pageant comes to a flag-waving, boastful end as all the Empire pledge themselves to right the monstrous wrong: the British bulldog is aroused. Noel claws, howls and dies as Kitty stabs him with Britannia's trident. Jobling bounds onto the stage and does his own piece of rabble-rousing, rhetorically demanding who wouldn't go out and shoot a Hun for the glorious Empire, and reminding the crowd of patriotic attacks that have been made on a German car and a German pork butcher in Wellington and Gisborne. Voices call out that Jessop has its own Huns, and demand that the music teacher be driven out of town, to the sudden, ineffectual alarm of Jobling and Mayor Chalmers. Edgar Marwick emerges as the leader of the pack, adult men as well as young fellows, shouting for the others to join him as he storms out of the hall.

Hedges, Wix, Irene and Kitty rush off to protect Frau Stauffel. She is hustled out the back of her house as the baying, stone-throwing mob descend on it like an ominous wave. Hedges stands out the front and tries to stop them, but is stoned, knocked down and trampled. The anger of the demented mob is directed by Marwick towards the Hun piano, which is rolled out of the house and attacked. Marwick leaps onto it with a bottle of flammable liquid and sets it ablaze. Phil and Noel, who have come to Hedges's aid, see Marwick running his hands over his skull as though feeling for something. Flames leap in his eyes, and it seems as though the inside of his head is on fire.

Chapter Eleven: Girlie's Hole

The morning after the pageant, Wix, Hedges and McCaa are at Frau Stauffel's cottage. Wix hears a thrush shouting with happiness, and thinks that if he were a bird, he would also sing on such a lovely morning, despite the human nastiness of the previous night. McCaa has had a word with members of the mob, but will not lay charges as this may rebound against Frau Stauffel herself. The two men agree that Marwick, whom Wix considers certifiable, was the ringleader, and McCaa says he is keeping a close eye on him for other reasons as well: there will be no more fires.

Hedges and Wix stroll off to the latter's house. Frau Stauffel has temporarily taken refuge there, and Irene is also coming to stay - a mixing of class boundaries which prompts Wix to quote from *Troilus and Cressida*: "Oh when degree is shaken." Hedges mentions there is an unspecified matter with which he would be grateful for Wix's help.

Frau Stauffel and the children are having breakfast. She says that out in the streets it is Walpurgisnacht [witches' Sabbath], but Irene and Kitty are two angels - a view of Kitty Noel does not share, considering how she had stabbed him with her pitchfork during the pageant. Mrs Wix agrees with Frau Stauffel when the latter says perhaps she should avoid German references when she talks. Mr Wix arrives and tells Frau Stauffel that Tom Hedges is waiting to see her in the sitting room.

Kitty eavesdrops on their conversation, hearing them talking about the damage the vandals have done to her cottage: "They are the Hun. They are Visigoths." Then she hears Frau Stauffel agreeing to marry Hedges, since neither of them is afraid any more. She is sent off with a whack to her bottom by Mrs Wix, but not before she sees Frau Stauffel giving Thomas a kiss. When she later confides this to Irene, the girls cannot imagine kissing someone as ugly as their teacher, but Irene hopes once Frau Stauffel changes her name to Hedges, she might be able to resume the piano lessons. Kitty says it is more likely that everyone will call Clippy 'Herr Hedges'.

At school, Hedges tells Phil that the latter's father is keen for his son to go to college. Phil is to stay with the Wixes for a few weeks, after which, Hedges adds slyly, he has another idea. Phil realises with a groan this means living with the Hedges once they are married. Mrs Bolton arrives in class to thank the children (except Phil) who are still buzzing with excitement, and to announce the evening had been a very great success. Hedges retorts it would have been if not for a stupid speech by their MP, and the behaviour of a gang of bully boys towards a woman who had never done them any harm. Mrs Bolton says that you cannot blame patriotic feeling. Hedges thinks there will be more trouble with her, and perhaps with the school board: he may even lose his job for marrying Frau Stauffel. However, although he is angry, he is satisfied with himself.

In the afternoon, the children go up to the swimming holes. Phil and Noel are both slightly apprehensive about their new living arrangements. Phil looks forward to the food at the Wixes, but Noel hopes he will take more baths. Edgar Marwick, emboldened by the leading role he played last night, watches the boys arrive at

Buck's hole and prepares for action. He goes in to tell his mother, who has been sitting in the parlour talking to a photograph of Lucy all morning, that the town children are back in the river. She echoes the words "the river", drops Lucy's photo, and with a cry sees the girl's face tremble and sink under water. Edgar grabs a cross-cut saw, and heads for the trees by the river.

Hedges hears the sound of sawing while he is conducting swimming lessons, orders the boys out of the pool, and just manages to drag the last one to safety before a giant tree comes crashing into the water. Too angry for good sense to prevail, Hedges marches up to the Marwicks for a showdown with Edgar. The latter waits for him, laconically but menacingly smoking a cigarette. He responds first with disbelief, then with greed, as Hedges strips down and challenges him to a bout of fisticuffs. Hedges is aware he must look a little comic as he strikes up a pugilistic pose, but needs to punish Marwick, both for endangering the boys' lives and for the attack on Frau Stauffel. Phil and Noel watch, ready to help their teacher if, as seems certain, he is knocked down. However, Hedges quickly despatches Marwick with a professionally delivered straight left and right hook, leaving his opponent whimpering with rage on the ground.

Recovering himself, Hedges says he hopes they can now behave like adults, and apologises to his opponent. However, he admits to the boys that he has probably only made matters worse. They are most impressed with his boxing prowess, which he casually explains was the result of his time sparring with a boxer called Young Griffo. He is not pleased with his own conduct, though: "I feel like a crocodile". The boys are told they will have to stop using the pool until the police do something about Marwick, whom Hedges has decided is definitely certifiable.

They are interrupted by Melva Dyer, who runs up to tell Hedges that Mrs Marwick has fallen in the river. Kitty was defying Mrs Bolton's instructions by swimming in the deep pool near the rapids, when she saw Mrs Marwick emerging from the bushes with a look of terrible fear. The old lady called out Lucy's name and plunged into the rapids, trying to reach Kitty whom she mistook for her daughter. Irene and Kitty managed to pull her out of the water, and girls were sent for an ambulance. Now Hedges arrives on the scene, and begins administering artificial respiration.

Phil and Noel summon Edgar, who rushes down to the ambulance, and ignoring everyone else stumbles into it to be with his mother. Hedges offers him the old lady's false teeth, which he has hooked out of her mouth. Marwick snarls: "You did this. You and those kids". He then turns away, as if a flame had been blown out, to stroke his mother's face: "Ma? Please. Look at me, Ma".

Chapter Twelve: The White Lady

The evening of the same day, the four children are at the Wixes' house. Phil is sure that the drama of the day is not yet over: he seems to hear a great wheel still grinding on. They agree that Marwick will want his revenge on Clippy, perhaps even murder him or Frau Stauffel. Phil listens to the others arguing about what they should do to prevent him, and feels they are being childish. They all agree the best thing to do is keep watch on Marwick tonight, but that it is too risky to actually go up to the farm.

Phil conceives a plan that will enable them to undertake such surveillance, but without the danger of being caught at it by Marwick.

After explaining his scheme to the others, Phil pays one last visit to the slum house by the docks, then returns into town, passing army recruits boarding a train for Trentham training camp. As he looks at Jessop in the fading light from up by the cathedral, it seems full of secret places he does not know. He makes his way through the shadows to the observatory with its skull-like dome. Finding the small telescope, he trains it up the valley, as he had done once before with Hedges, and watches through the one lighted window at the Marwick house. This begins a vigil that lasts for several hours. At one point, Noel visits him with a pie, a candle and a blanket, telling him that he and the girls will be staying awake, ready to join him if anything happens. The frightened Phil cannot connect the two girls, waiting excitedly for an adventure, with the dangerous reality of Marwick. He watches and dozes till after midnight as his quarry sits unmoving at a table.

Marwick is in a strange, trance-like state, where the only true substance is the flame dancing in his head. All the objects in the quiet room seem unreal. Worse, they – particularly the cold ashes in the stove – seem to insult him by denying the reality of the fires in his head. Hearing one o'clock strike, he suddenly moves, smashing a plate and a vase with a poker, then rummaging through his mother's clothes until he finds a red scarf, which he wraps around his head like a turban. He goes into a lean-to and retrieves the arson gear hidden there.

Phil sees him come out of the shed with something red on his head, then vanish into the night. He runs down to fetch the others, who have been taking turns keeping awake. They hide under the footbridge, knowing this is Marwick's only way into town, and follow him through the darkness which covers everything like black water, from which the red scarf emerges from time to time, glowing like an ember. They think he is heading for Hedges's house, but a cat leaping out of the school yard alerts them to his real destination.

They get into the school through an open window, that swallows them into its darkness like a mouth. Marwick is about to set light to Hedges's classroom. The girls are sent up to the belfry to sound the alarm by ringing the bell, while the boys tackle Marwick. They are able to prevent him lighting the kerosene, but he turns on them, wielding the leg of a table like a club. For a while they are in serious danger from Marwick's murderous onslaught, but when he slips, they are able to bolt out the door and join the girls in the belfry.

Marwick follows them up, and smashes at the bolted belfry door. Noel remembers Miss Perez. He fetches her sinister, grinning, luminous form out of her coffin and they stand her up facing the door. As Marwick bursts in, trips, and falls onto his knees, Miss Perez unfolds her hands, raises her arms and reaches out for him. Terrified, he squats against a wall and stares back at the sinister figure over his shoulder.

The girls run down to meet McCaa and Hedges, the first of the rescuers, and explain what has happened. The two men find the horrified Marwick still crouching, with tears running down his face like a child. A crowd gathers, as he is led away with unseeing eyes. The four children are taken back home. As he leaves, Noel realises that

for some reason he has picked up the red scarf. Not wanting it, he lets it drop at the foot of the steps, where it lies behind them like a pile of embers in the dark.