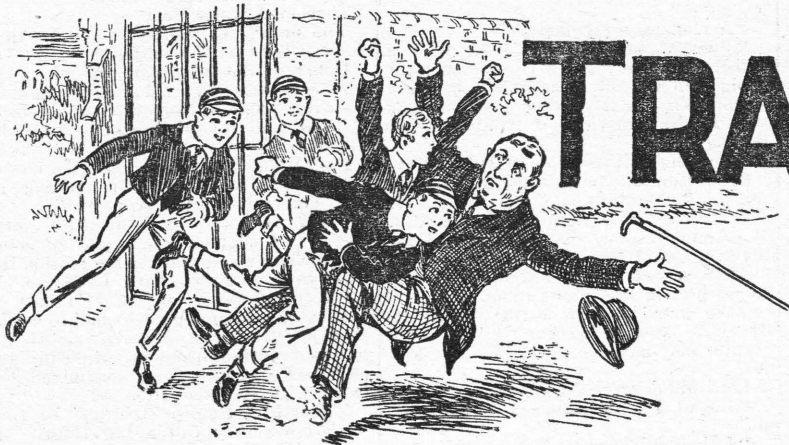


THE LAST MEMBER OF THE FISTICAL FOUR OF ROOKWOOD FALLS A VICTIM OF THE MYSTERIOUS KIDNAPPER. JIMMY SILVER FOLLOWS IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HIS CHUMS.



TRAPPED!

A Splendid Long Complete Story, dealing with the Adventures of JIMMY SILVER & Co. at Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST

(Stories of Rookwood appear every Monday in the "Boys' Friend.")

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Rough Reception.

"W HAT on earth's the game?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Shush!"
"But what—?"

"He'll hear you!" whispered Mornington. "Shush!"

Jimmy Silver looked astonished. The captain of the Fourth had been sauntering in the quad, his brows knitted in thought, when he caught sight of the little crowd in the gateway.

Jimmy was thinking of his missing chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome; he was seldom thinking of anything else.

But the sight of Mornington and his companions evidently in ambush in the gateway, drew his attention.

Mornington, Oswald, Van Ryn, and Conroy, all of the Classical Fourth, were there, and Conroy was peering out into the road.

Apparently the four juniors were waiting for somebody, and keeping in cover while he approached.

"Shush!" whispered Mornington. "We're waiting for Brown!"

"Brown!" repeated Jimmy Silver, in surprise. "Do you mean Mr. Brown, the detective?"

"Exactly! We're going to give him a surprise."

Conroy drew back his head quickly. "He's coming!" he murmured.

"Ready, you fellows!"

"But what are you going to do with Mr. Brown?" asked the astonished Jimmy. "You'd better not jape him, Morny. He's bound to complain to the Head if you do. Most likely he's coming to see the Head, or Captain Lagden."

Mornington gave a shrug.

"We're going to bash him by accident," he explained. "No law against rushing out of gates suddenly if we want to. If Brown happens to be in the way, he may get knocked over. So much the worse for Brown."

"But—"

"It's like the fellow's cheek to hang round here," said Morny. "I don't care whether he's a detective from Scotland Yard or not; it's like his cheek! He's after a chap who was at Rookwood fifteen years ago. Isn't it like his thumping cheek to suppose that that fellow Baumann has any connection with Rookwood now? Yet he's hanging about the school?"

"I suppose he knows his own business best," suggested Jimmy Silver.

"Rats! He thinks that Baumann is keeping up some connection with the school, and he thinks he will get a clue to him here," said Mornington. "Like his cheek! He don't know Rookwood!"

"I should jolly well say so!" said Oswald warmly. "We've heard all about that fellow Baumann; he's a regular waster, and a

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criminal! A Hun, by the name, too! He's been in prison for counterfeiting banknotes, from what I hear. And that howling ass, Brown, is hanging about Rookwood looking for him, just because the rotter was here when he was a boy!"

"Cheeky ass!" said Conroy.

"Shush!" came from Mornington.

There was a sound of footsteps in the road now.

The juniors were silent.

Jimmy Silver said no more. He was not in much of a humour for japing, himself; the unknown fate of his chums weighed too heavily upon his mind.

Mr. Brown, the gentleman from Scotland Yard, had been some time in the neighbourhood, and it was well known that he was in search of Baumann, once a Rookwood fellow.

Why he should be looking for him in the neighbourhood of the school was a mystery, unless he supposed that Baumann had kept up some connection with Rookwood. That thought naturally annoyed the Rookwooders.

Baumann had been a thorough rascal in his school days, and had been expelled from Rookwood many years before Jimmy Silver knew the school.

Since then he had gone utterly to the bad, and had seen the inside of a prison on more than one occasion.

To suppose that anybody at Rookwood had any connection with such a character was an insult to the school.

It was bad enough to know that such a thorough rascal had ever been at Rookwood; and few fellows, in fact, had heard of him until Mr. Brown arrived in the neighbourhood, and his mission became known.

Mr. Brown's pertinacity in keeping about the school looked as if he expected to pick up some clue to Baumann there; and the idea of that exasperated the Rookwooders.

Morny & Co. were going to impress upon Mr. Brown's mind that he was not wanted there.

It had to be by "accident"; they did not want to be called over the coals by the Head for ragging the podgy gentleman from Scotland Yard.

The footsteps came closer.

Jimmy Silver grinned a little as Mornington and his companions prepared for a rush.

"Ready!" whispered Morny.

The footsteps were quite close now. A podgy figure appeared in view as Mr. Brown turned towards the gateway.

Like an arrow from a bow, Mornington shot out into the road, his comrades at his heels.

They crashed into the unfortunate Mr. Brown just as the detective was turning into the gateway.

Morny's head, lowered, smote the podgy detective full on his ample chest, and Mr. Brown went staggering.

As he staggered, the other fellows crashed into him.

Bump!

Mr. Brown, with a breathless yell, sat down on the cold, unsympathetic road.

In a second the four juniors were sprawling over him. The podgy gentleman disappeared under them.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver.

Little could be seen of Mr. Brown as he sprawled on his back, the juniors rolling over him and almost squashing him.

"Oh!" gasped Mornington. "We've run into somebody!"

"This is where we travel!" murmured Conroy; and the juniors picked themselves up and scuttled down the road before Mr. Brown could get a good look at them.

Jimmy Silver, suppressing his mirth, came out of the gateway, and gave Mr. Brown a hand up.

The fat gentleman staggered to his feet with Jimmy's assistance.

"Thank you, my boy!" he said gaspingly. "Oh dear! I am quite out of breath! Who were those young rascals who ran into me?"

"Ahem!" murmured Jimmy. "Not hurt, sir?"

"Yes, I am hurt!" snapped Mr. Brown.

"Sorry!" grinned Jimmy.

He kindly picked up Mr. Brown's hat and stick, and handed them to him.

The podgy gentleman gripped the stick and glared along the road, as if inclined to pursue Morny & Co. and take summary vengeance; but the merry Rookwooders had vanished through a hedge by that time.

With a grunt Mr. Brown walked in at the gateway, leaving Jimmy Silver smiling.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Mr. Brown Meets the Captain.

DR. CHISHOLM, the Head of Rookwood School, frowned slightly as Mr. Brown, of Scotland Yard, was shown into his study.

Mr. Brown was not persona grata there. Every reminder of Baumann, who had brought disgrace on his old school, was intensely annoying to Dr. Chisholm, who had the honour and good name of Rookwood very much at heart.

The Head had to admit that Mr. Brown was doing his duty, but that did not make his presence any the more welcome.

Mr. Brown saluted the Head civilly, apparently unaware of the contraction of the old gentleman's brows.

"You must excuse me for troubling you once more, Dr. Chisholm," said the podgy gentleman, as he took the seat the Head indicated by a gesture.

"Not at all, if your duty calls you here!" said the Head tartly. "Pray, what is it now? You have already informed me of your object here. I am quite assured that you have found no trace whatever of Baumann in connection with this school. It is preposterous to imagine that anyone here could have the least knowledge of such a person!"

NEXT TUESDAY!

"BROUGHT TO BOOK!"

A GRAND TALE OF ROOKWOOD SCHOOL. BY OWEN CONQUEST.

"Quite so—quite so!" said Mr. Brown soothingly. "But the fact remains that Baumann's activities have been traced in this neighbourhood. This vicinity is the centre of his operations. Forged currency notes, recognised as his work, have been traced at half a dozen towns within a ten-miles radius of Rookwood—that is, until a few days since."

"Ah! Then none of them have been traced lately?"

"Not since I came here, sir."

The Head looked relieved.

"Evidently the man has become aware that he is sought in this vicinity, and has fled!" he exclaimed.

"Or else he is lying low for the present," assented Mr. Brown.

"Really, Mr. Brown, it is more probable that he has taken himself off, surely?"

"That depends, sir. It is not so easy to dodge and turn as it was before the war," said Mr. Brown. "If Baumann has found a secure hiding-place in this quarter, he is not likely to leave it if he can help it; it would be jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire!"

"But really—"

"He is more likely to lie low and suspend his operations till the coast is clear," said Mr. Brown. "Doubtless he is active in the meantime in producing more counterfeit notes, to be passed later, when he is safer."

The Head made an impatient gesture.

"I suppose it is possible," he said, evidently weary of the subject. "But what is your business with me now, sir?"

"I have had some talk, at different times, with some of the boys of this school while staying in the neighbourhood," said Mr. Brown. "I have also talked with the local police-inspector. It appears that three boys have disappeared from Rookwood."

"I must remark, Mr. Brown, that that matter does not come within your province." Mr. Brown did not appear to be affected by that very plain snub.

"Quite so!" he said. "It is, however, a very remarkable occurrence."

"A very annoying occurrence!" said the Head. "The three juniors have run away from the school, and have been so unfeeling as to fail to notify even their parents of their whereabouts."

"That is known for certain?" asked Mr. Brown.

"It is the only possible explanation of their departure, sir, and therefore it may be taken as certain."

"You do not suspect foul play?"

"Certainly not!"

Mr. Brown pursed his plump lips.

"Really, sir!" exclaimed the Head, in deep annoyance. "I trust you do not assume any connection between the disappearance of these juniors and the presence in the vicinity of the man you are in search of?"

"It is at least singular that their disappearance should have taken place at this precise time. Dr. Chisholm?"

"Doubtless they will be heard of soon."

"But if not—"

"I am assured of it!" said the Head in a tone of finality.

There was a pause.

"If you have any business with me, Mr. Brown—"

"Certainly, sir! To come to the point, I desire to call upon Captain Lagden, who, I understand, is engaged as football coach at this school."

"You are naturally at liberty to do so, at any time you please. There is no necessity whatever for consulting me on the matter."

"Unfortunately, Captain Lagden has declined to see me, on the plea of ill-health."

"I am aware that the captain is troubled with his old wounds," said the Head. "He has asked to be excused from his duties for some days. If he is too unwell to see you, Mr. Brown, I cannot help you."

"It is very important for me to see him, however."

"Indeed!"

"It appears," explained Mr. Brown, "that Captain Lagden, when at Rookwood, was the study-mate of Baumann, who on one occasion shut him up in the old abbey vaults. I should like to consult with him."

"It is utterly impossible that he can know anything of Baumann."

"Nevertheless, I should like to speak with him; and perhaps a word from you, sir, would induce him to grant me a few minutes," said the detective.

Dr. Chisholm controlled his impatience.

"I will send him a message, asking him whether he feels well enough to-day to receive you," he said.

"Thank you; that is what I should like!"

Dr. Chisholm touched the bell, wrote a short note, and handed it to Tupper, the page, when he came in.

There was a grim silence in the Head's study while Tupper was gone with the note. The page came back at last.

"Captain Lagden will be glad to see Mr. Brown in his room, if the gentleman will step there," was the message brought by Tupper.

Mr. Brown rose.

"Kindly show this gentleman to Captain Lagden's room, Tupper."

The detective bowed to the Head, and followed Tupper.

Dr. Chisholm was left in a mood of annoyed thoughtfulness.

The detective's presence near the school troubled him and annoyed him, and he was a little surprised at Basil Lagden's refusal to see the man.

The captain was supposed to be troubled with his old wound, but he was well enough to lunch and dine with the Head, and to walk in the garden, so there hardly seemed sufficient reason to refuse to see Mr. Brown on the score of ill-health.

The Head could not help suspecting that Lagden's motive had rather been a desire to avoid a disagreeable interview, which he felt that he could avoid no longer when the message came from the Head personally.

Mr. Brown followed Tupper to the captain's quarters, and was shown into the Oak Room, a handsome oak panelled room in the oldest part of Rookwood, which was Lagden's sitting-room.

His bed-room adjoined.

Captain Lagden was seated at a table reading.

He rose politely as the detective entered.

Mr. Brown's light, shifty eyes scanned his face, deeply scarred by wounds, which gave the captain a rather forbidding expression.

"Please sit down, Mr. Brown!" said the captain. "I am sorry I have not been able to see you before; but, to be quite candid, I do not quite see why you wished to call upon me."

"You have doubtless heard from Dr. Chisholm of my mission here, Captain Lagden?"

"The Head has mentioned the matter to me."

"I am in search of Baumann, the forger and coiner, a former Rookwood boy," said Mr. Brown. "I have arrested him twice in the course of his criminal career, and hope to do so a third time."

"I certainly wish you every success. The man appears to be a thorough rascal, and has brought disgrace on his old school," said the captain.

"You knew him very well when you were a boy here, I believe?"

"Very well indeed; he was my study-mate."

"And friend?"

"Not at all. I disliked the fellow—most Rookwooders did, I believe. He was a rascal even in those days!"

"After leaving Rookwood, doubtless you met him once or twice?"

"Never, sir."

"You were in the Loamshire Regiment, I believe, Captain Lagden?"

"Precisely!"

"Baumann was taken under the Military Service Act, and served in the Loamshires. He was shot, I understand, in leaving the lines in the direction of the German trenches, very probably with the intention of deserting. You did not hear of this while you were at the Front?"

"I do not remember to have done so. I may have heard of it, but Baumann is not an uncommon name."

"It is an uncommon name in the British Army, I should think!" remarked the detective.

"Yes, possibly."

"Then you did not come in contact with the man in Flanders?"

"Not to my recollection."

"Or in England since?"

"No."

"If he communicated with you—"

"I should place his communication in the hands of the police instantly. I imagine that that would be my duty."

"Quite so; but friendship for an old school-mate might—"

"It would not stand between a British officer and his duty, sir!" said the captain stiffly. "Moreover, Baumann was no friend

of mine at school, as I have already told you."

"Then you can give me no information whatever respecting the man?"

"I am sorry, no. I should be glad to do so if it were in my power."

"Then I can only apologise for having troubled you," said Mr. Brown, rising with a disappointed look.

"Not at all."

Mr. Brown took his leave, with a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow.

Captain Lagden, left alone, breathed hard, a strange and harassed expression on his scarred face.

He rose, and crossed to a cabinet, from which he took a bottle and a glass, and half-filled the glass with brandy, which he drank almost at a draught.

Apparently the captain felt the need of a powerful pick-me-up after his interview with the gentleman from Scotland Yard.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver Makes Up His Mind.

"HALLO! The captain's about again!" remarked Mornington.

Jimmy Silver glanced round.

Jimmy was in the quad with Erroll and Mornington after lessons, when Captain Lagden was seen coming down from the house towards the gates.

He gave the juniors a kindly nod as he passed, and they capped him.

The captain disappeared out of the gates. Mornington looked rather grim.

"What do you think of that chap, Jimmy?" he asked sullenly.

"Blest if I quite know," said Jimmy Silver. "I didn't like him at first, and Lovell was down on him. Afterwards he was so kind in helping me search for Lovell; but then he—"

"He acted like a cad and a brute the other day, when he pitched into Morny," said Kit Erroll quietly. "What did it matter if Morny came into the ruins while you were there with the captain?"

"Nothing, that I can see," said Jimmy Silver. "Lagden has a rotten temper, that's certain. But he's told Morny since that he's sorry he lost his temper that time."

"That doesn't alter what he did!" grunted Mornington. "I may as well say out plain that I don't like him, and don't trust him."

Jimmy Silver was silent.

A distrust of the captain was growing up in his own breast, he hardly knew why.

There were many little circumstances that tended to shake his faith in Basil Lagden.

The brutality he had shown towards Mornington in the abbey ruins was the chief one.

Only a ruffian could have handled a boy as Lagden had handled Morny, and so far as Jimmy could see, Morny had done little or nothing to provoke the captain.

It was as if the man's real nature had peeped out from behind the cover of smiling courtesy he adopted as a mask.

The discovery had given Jimmy Silver a shock.

And there were other things—trifles perhaps; but they had caused a vague and haunting suspicion to grow up in Jimmy's mind—a strange suspicion that he hardly acknowledged to himself.

Lovell had disliked the captain, and he had disappeared at night, when he had gone down to the captain's room with a can of ink, to play a trick on the man he disliked.

Lovell's chums had traced him to the door of the Oak Room, but beyond that point there was no trace.

Raby had been the second to disappear, and he had last been heard of near the Oak Room.

Then had come Newcome's disappearance, and the last person who had spoken to him was Captain Lagden.

More and more it was borne in upon Jimmy's mind that it was at the Oak Room, or near it, that his chums had mysteriously vanished, one by one, and within a few days of the captain's coming to Rookwood.

The suspicion, half formed in his mind, seemed absurd, ridiculous; but since he had formed a more correct opinion of the captain's true character, it was growing.

Yet what possible motive could Captain Lagden have for hurting any junior schoolboy of Rookwood?

That was an unanswerable question; but, then, the whole affair was utterly mysterious and inexplicable.

Mornington looked at Jimmy's sombre face

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with a slight smile; the captain of the Fourth was plunged in a deep reverie, and had forgotten his companions.
 "Penny for them!" said Morny suddenly.
 Jimmy Silver started.
 "What? Eh?" he ejaculated.
 Mornington grinned.
 "Working out somethin' in maths in your head?" he asked.
 "N-no! I was thinking—"
 "About Lovell?"
 "Yes."
 "I was going to make a suggestion," said Mornington. "What about that man Brown, Jimmy?"
 "Brown?" repeated Jimmy Silver.
 "Yes; he's a detective, and he's playing the fool round here at present, looking for a man who's probably a hundred miles away. But suppose you ask him about what's happened to Lovell and the rest. He might be interested in it, as a detective, and take the matter up."

for getting rid of the chaps I should think he had a hand in it."
 "It—it came into my head; but, of course, it's absurd," said Jimmy. "There were some things—"
 "What things?"
 "I—I undertook not to mention them," said Jimmy, colouring. "The captain thought it best. But I'm going my own way to work; and then if you fellows care to hear, I'll tell you all I know, from beginning to end."
 "I think that's a good idea," said Erroll.
 "Captain Lagden seems too jolly fond of keeping secrets about nothing!"
 Jimmy Silver walked away, his brows knitted in thought.
 "Impossible as it seemed that Lagden could be in any way responsible for the disappearance of his chums, in the total absence of any motive, Jimmy could not drive the haunting uneasiness from his head.
 He had determined, at least, to tell the captain that he had decided to go his own

"Yes; Dr. Chisholm is speaking."
 "Oh! It is you, sir?"
 "Yes. What is wanted?"
 "Don't you know my voice, sir?"
 "I do not recognise it," said the Head.
 The voice on the wires was very faint, and it was scarcely possible to recognise the tones even if the Head had known them well.
 "I've caught a bit of a cold, sir," went on the faint voice. "I'm Lovell of the Fourth, sir."
 "What!"
 The Head nearly dropped the receiver in his astonishment.
 "Raby and Newcome are here with me, sir."
 "Bless my soul!"
 "I hope you will excuse us, sir, for having left Rookwood without permission."
 "Where are you speaking from, Lovell?"
 "I—I'd rather not tell you, sir, if you'll excuse me."
 "Lovell, you are to return to Rookwood at once! Do you hear me?" snapped the Head.
 "We cannot, sir!" came back the faint voice. "I've rung you up, sir, so that you can tell our people that we are well. I'm afraid they have been anxious about us."
 "They have been very anxious, Lovell, and your conduct has been utterly unfeeling and reprehensible!"
 "Oh, sir!"
 "It has been utterly heartless, Lovell! You have been absent for days, and have not written a line. You are to return to school immediately? Do you hear?"
 "No reply, but a whirl on the telephone."
 "Lovell!"
 Silence!
 "Lovell! Answer me!"



JIMMY SILVER'S PERIL! As Jimmy Silver closed with the captain, a shudder of horror ran through him as a second arm was thrown about him. He found himself grasped with two arms by a man he had believed one-armed. (See Chapter 6.)

"I—I thought of that."
 "Well, why not speak to him? Easy enough to see him. And you didn't have a hand in bumping him over to-day, you know," added Morny, with a grin.
 "Well, I've agreed not to speak to Mr. Brown about it," confessed Jimmy, at last.
 "Captain Lagden thought it inadvisable. But I think you're right, Morny; and I'm going to tell Lagden that I've changed my mind."
 "I don't see why Lagden should care one way or the other," said Erroll, in surprise.
 "He thought it would make the Head waxy."
 "Pure kindness on his part?" said Mornington.
 "I suppose so."
 "And we know how kind-hearted a man he is, from the way he pitched into me the other day," said Morny. "Look here, Jimmy, I don't trust Captain Lagden. If it were possible to suspect him of having any reason

way to work, and to take Morny and Erroll into his confidence, and then to seek the advice of Mr. Brown.
 He felt that he was bound to tell the captain so first, and to end the arrangement they had made.
 After that, he would be free to do as he thought best.
 The decision he had come to relieved Jimmy's mind a little, and he went down to Little Side to join in the football practice with a much more cheerful face than he had shown of late days.

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
 Startling News!**

B UZZZZZZ!
 Dr. Chisholm turned from his desk, and took up the telephone-receiver, as the bell buzzed in his study.
 "Hallo!"
 "Hallo?" A voice he did not know came over the wires. "Is that Rookwood School?"

It was only too clear that the speaker at the other end had rung off, and the Head jammed the receiver on the hooks with an angry frown.
 He was glad that he had received the communication.
 It bore out what he had always believed was the explanation of the juniors' disappearance, and it relieved his mind.
 But he was more angry with the missing juniors than before.
 After a few minutes' reflection, he took up the receiver again, and called up the exchange.
 From the operator he learned that the call he had just received came from Lantham. His next step was to call up the police-station at Lantham.
 The inspector in charge listened to his explanation, and promised to do as he requested, which was to find three schoolboys who were wandering about in the district.
 Having taken that step, the Head had little doubt that he would see the three culprits brought back to Rookwood that evening; and he proceeded to despatch wires to their homes, assuring their parents of their safety.
 Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, was then summoned to the study, and informed of what had passed.
 "Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles. "It is as we supposed, then, sir."
 "There is no doubt about it," said the Head. "Kindly see that the school is informed, Mr. Bootles, so that all surmises upon the subject may be set at rest."
 "Immediately, sir!"
 Ten minutes later all Rookwood knew that Lovell & Co. had been heard from.
 Tubby Muffin brought the news to the end study, where Jimmy Silver was sitting down to tea with Mornington and Erroll, who were a good deal in his study since his chums had gone.
 Tubby's fat face was ablaze with excitement as he burst in.
 "Jimmy!" he gasped.
 "Hallo! How did you know there was a cake here?" asked Mornington.
 Tubby Muffin disdained to reply to that question.
 "Jimmy, they're found!" he spluttered.
 "What!"
 "Lovell—Raby—Newcome—found!" trilled Tubby Muffin, greatly pleased at the sensation he was making in the end study.
 Jimmy Silver bounded to his feet.
 To Tubby's surprise and indignation, Jimmy seized him by one fat shoulder, and shook him forcibly.
 "Now, what do you mean, you fat duffer?" he exclaimed.
 "Yaroooh!"

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"Tell me what you mean, you fat chump!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Grough! Stop sh-sh-shaking me!" gasped Tubby. "How can I speak when you're shoo-shoo-shaking me? Yooop!"

"Only one of Tubby's yarns!" growled Mornington.

"Tain't!" yelled Tubby breathlessly. "They're at Lantham—and Lovell's telephoned to the Head to tell his people—and they're going to be brought back to-night! Mr. Bootles says so—he's announced it! There!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Mornington.

Jimmy stood dumbfounded. His vague suspicions crumbled away at that startling information.

"I—I can't believe it!" he stammered. "It's official!" grinned Tubby. "Didn't I say so all along? I told you so, Jimmy. You can't deny that I told you so!"

"That's what makes it rather incredible!" grinned Mornington.

"Rats!" snorted Tubby, and he rolled away to impart his sensational news to all other fellows who had not yet heard it.

Jimmy Silver was left almost dumbfounded. If this was true—And could it be otherwise? He waited that evening in feverish anxiety.

That evening he had determined to see the captain and inform him of his intentions. But he was not thinking of the captain now.

After prep Jimmy Silver hurried downstairs to learn whether there was anything new. But if Lovell & Co. were coming, they had not yet come.

And Jimmy, in his anxiety, made his way to the Head's study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Black Suspicions.

MR. BOOTLES was leaving the Head's study as Jimmy Silver arrived there.

The Form master looked troubled and puzzled. He stopped, and glanced inquiringly at the captain of the Fourth.

"What do you want here, Silver?" he asked.

"Is there any news, sir?"

"Only what has already been stated," said Mr. Bootles.

"But is it certain that my friends are at Lantham, sir?" asked Jimmy anxiously.

"Undoubtedly, since Lovell telephoned to Dr. Chisholm from that town, Silver."

"But, sir, by this time—"

"You have no cause for anxiety, Silver," said the master of the Fourth kindly. "It is certainly very singular that the boys have not been found. Inquiries have been made at Lantham by the police, at the Head's request, but they have just telephoned that no trace has yet been found of Lovell, Raby, or Newcome."

Jimmy breathed hard.

"Doubtless after telephoning to the Head, Lovell realised that he had given a clue to his whereabouts, and they left Lantham immediately, before they could be looked for there. You may set your mind at rest, Silver; there is no cause whatever for anxiety."

And Mr. Bootles, with a kind nod, rustled away down the corridor.

Jimmy remained where he was.

He had only half believed the startling news, and now, it appeared, Lovell & Co. had not been found at Lantham after all.

His half belief was dissolved on the spot.

He summoned all his courage to beard the lion in his den, as it were, and knocked at the Head's door.

"Come in!"

Dr. Chisholm raised his eyebrows as the Fourth-Former entered.

Jimmy faltered a little as he approached his headmaster's writing-table. The doctor's look was not encouraging.

"Well, Silver?" said the Head coldly.

"I—I came here, sir, to—ask you—"

"Kindly come to the point at once."

"About Lovell, sir," stammered Jimmy.

"They—they say that he telephoned from Lantham—"

"That is correct."

"That is correct."

"That is correct."

"That is correct."

"That is correct."

"That is correct."

"That is correct."

"But he hasn't been found there, after all, sir."

The Head compressed his lips, and his eyes had a steely look. Jimmy could see how bitterly angry he was.

"The boys seem to have quitted Lantham," said Dr. Chisholm. "That is all, Silver; there is no ground for anxiety. You may go."

"But, sir—but— Is it certain, sir, that it was Lovell who telephoned to you?"

"What?"

Jimmy backed away a pace. But he stuck to his guns.

"Anybody could telephone, sir," he stammered. "Is it certain that it was Lovell who spoke to you?"

The Head's frown became almost terrifying.

Jimmy, in his worry and anxiety, was rather over-stepping the line; it was not for a junior to catechise his headmaster.

"I have already said that it was Lovell, Silver."

"But did you recognise his voice, sir?" persisted Jimmy, astonished at his own temerity, but keeping to the point.

"I did not recognise Lovell's voice, Silver, owing to the distance, but it was undoubtedly Lovell who was speaking to me. He gave his name."

"But, sir, if Lovell has been kidnapped—"

"What utter nonsense are you talking, Silver?"

"If he has been kidnapped, sir—"

"Silver, you appear to be taking leave of your senses! I forbid you to make such a childish and ridiculous suggestion! Leave my study!"

"But, sir—"

"Go!" thundered the Head.

There was nothing more for Jimmy Silver to say after that, and he retreated from the Head's study.

But there was a glint in his eyes, and his lips were set.

He had learned what he wished to learn. Lovell's voice had not been recognised on the telephone, and there was no proof that it was Arthur Edward Lovell who had been speaking.

Mornington and Erroll were waiting for him at the corner of the passage, and Jimmy stopped as he came up.

"No news?" asked Erroll.

Jimmy gritted his teeth.

"I've found out that the Head did not recognise Lovell's voice on the telephone," he answered. "He took it for granted that it was Lovell who was speaking."

"You don't think it was?"

"I know it was not!" said Jimmy, between his teeth. "I know that they never left Rookwood of their own accord without telling me a word. They wouldn't! I know it—I'm certain! They would have let me know, at least; they'd know how anxious I've been. It wasn't Lovell who telephoned. Lovell's not at liberty to telephone."

Mornington whistled softly.

"You think—" he began.

"Suppose some villain has kidnapped them?" muttered Jimmy. "It's the only explanation. Well, then, it would pay him to make people believe they'd run away from school."

"Captain Lagden seems to have been the first to suggest that!" said Valentine Mornington, in a significant tone.

"I know!"

"And now this telephone message, supposed to come from Lovell, confirms it," said Mornington.

Jimmy gave him a startled look.

"And," continued Mornington quietly, in a low voice, "the telephone-call comes when Captain Lagden is out of gates."

"Morny!"

"The first time he's been out of gates since that detective fellow was hanging round the school."

"Mornington!"

"And the Head didn't recognise the voice on the phone! I'd like to ask him whether it sounded anything like Lagden's," said Mornington deliberately.

Jimmy Silver caught his breath.

"Morny!" he muttered. "There's no motive—no possible motive—"

"I know; that's what beats me! But if there were a motive—"

"But there isn't—there isn't!"

"Not so far as we can see," said Mornington coolly. "But there's no motive for anybody to have made away with the fellows,

so far as we can see, and yet you believe they've been made away with."

Jimmy Silver was quite pale.

"It can't be!" he muttered. "I—I—"

He clenched his hands. "But I'm going to find out! I'm going to speak to the detective to-morrow, and ask his advice—tell him all, and ask him what he thinks. I'm going to Captain Lagden now to tell him what I'm going to do."

Jimmy Silver strode away.

His mind was made up.

Mornington glanced at his chums as the captain of the Fourth disappeared up the staircase.

"You remember our little scheme, Kit—"

"What do you mean, Morny?"

"Don't you remember we arranged to keep a watch on Jimmy Silver in case anything happened to him like his chums?"

Erroll smiled.

"Morny, old man, he's gone to see Captain Lagden in the Oak Room. Nothing can happen to him there."

"I'm going to wait for him on the staircase," said Mornington calmly. "I've said that I'm going to keep him under my eye, and I'm going to do it, my infant. You please yourself."

"I'll come with you, of-course, Morny."

"Waste of time, if you like; but there's nothin' like bein' thorough, you know," said Mornington, with a grin.

The two chums went up the big staircase, and stopped at a landing window whence they could see the door of the Oak Room.

They were just in time to see Jimmy Silver enter at that door and close it after him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Face to Face.

CAPTAIN LAGDEN was smoking a cigar in the Oak Room, and he had a book on his knee, which he tossed aside as Jimmy Silver knocked and entered.

His scarred face had a genial smile as he nodded to the junior.

"I am glad to see you, Silver," he said. "Close the door, my boy, and come to the fire."

Jimmy came in, his face clearing unconsciously.

Strange, vague, and dark suspicions had found lodgment in his mind, but they faded at the captain's genial manner and kind smile. But his purpose remained unchanged.

The captain's help in his search for his missing chums had been useless, and Jimmy Silver was inflexibly resolved to go his own way; and it only remained to tell Captain Lagden so.

"Sit down, Silver!"

Jimmy Silver sat down.

Captain Lagden rose, and paced the room before him, his cigar in the fingers of his left hand.

The empty sleeve of his coat, on the other side, hung loose.

Jimmy could never see that empty sleeve without a feeling of kindness for the man who had lost his arm in the Great War; and he was for the moment ashamed of the dark doubts that had forced themselves into his mind.

Indeed, in the actual presence of the captain, those doubts seemed almost fantastically absurd.

Even the savage temper the captain had displayed on some occasions, when he was off his guard, could be explained by the trouble his old wounds gave him, preying on his nervous system.

His manner now was all kindness.

"Well, my boy, it appears that there is news of your friends at last!" he remarked, glancing at Jimmy Silver's face.

"You have heard of it, sir?"

"Mr. Bootles told me all about it." The captain smiled. "You remember, Silver, I hinted that my belief was something like that—that the young scamps had run away. You did not agree with me."

"No," said Jimmy.

"But you are convinced now?" said the captain, with a laugh.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"What? Not yet?" exclaimed the captain. "I think you are probably the only person in Rookwood who doubts it now, Silver."

"Perhaps. But—"

"Well, then, surely that places the matter beyond the shadow of a doubt?" said Captain Lagden, pausing in his walk, and

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fixing his eyes very curiously on the junior's face.

"I do not believe that it was Lovell who telephoned, sir," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

Captain Lagden started. "Is it possible?" he exclaimed. "But the Head—"

"I know the Head thinks so."

"But surely he should know?"

"He did not recognise Lovell's voice on the telephone."

"And how do you know that, Silver?"

"I asked him."

"By gad! You have a good deal of nerve for a junior in the Fourth Form!" said the captain, smiling. "When I was a junior here I should scarcely have ventured to question my headmaster."

Jimmy Silver coloured. "I was too anxious to think of that, sir," he answered.

"But if it was not Lovell who telephoned, why should anyone else do so and use his name, Silver?"

Jimmy drew a deep breath. "I believe they've been kidnapped, sir—Lovell and Raby and Newcome. I've told you so. Well, then, in that case, it was the kidnapper who telephoned, to lead us all on a false scent."

"By gad!"

"It's possible, at least," said Jimmy. "We must talk this over, Silver," said the captain genially. "You know that I am heart and soul with you in probing this curious affair to the bottom. By the by, call your friends in."

"My friends?" repeated Jimmy.

"They are waiting for you in the passage, are they not?"

"Oh, no!"

"The last time you called to see me your friends waited for you in the passage," said the captain, with a smile. "I should not like to keep them waiting while we talk. However, if they are not there, never mind. Your idea of the kidnapper—granting there is one—having telephoned in Lovell's name is certainly ingenious. It is quite possible—in fact, on reflection, Silver, I agree with you."

The captain smiled as he spoke, but the smile was so strange that Jimmy felt a return of the strange uneasiness that had seized upon him.

Half unconsciously he wished that his friends had come up the stairs with him, as on the previous occasion.

As a matter of fact, they were waiting for him at the end of the corridor, by the dark window; but Jimmy was not aware of the fact.

The captain, who was standing, was between Jimmy Silver and the door, as the junior sat by the fire.

He went on speaking, with the same strange smile on his scarred face.

"You are a very keen lad, Silver—as keen as I supposed you to be at first acquaintance. For instance, the way you traced Lovell's movements on the night he disappeared was

sharp indeed. You traced him to the very door of this room."

"Yes," said Jimmy.

"And then your suggestion that the legend of a secret passage might be well founded, and that it might exist behind the old panels of this room—that quite startled me."

"Did it, sir?"

"Oh, quite! I am sure that if you had spoken as freely, say, to Mr. Brown, the plump gentleman from Scotland Yard, he would have been very interested."

"I am thinking of doing so, Captain Lagden," said Jimmy, getting it out at last.

The Fourth-Former was feeling a growing desire for the interview to end; the Oak Room seemed to be stifling him.

"But our agreement?" said the captain, with a smile. "Did we not arrange to keep our suspicions dark, and to work ourselves at searching for your friends?"

"It has led to nothing, sir."

"That is true," said the captain, with a nod.

"Don't think me ungrateful, sir," said Jimmy, a little remorsefully. "You have been very kind. But I think it would be wise of me to ask Mr. Brown's advice. He is an experienced detective, and he may be able to advise me."

Captain Lagden moved carelessly towards the door, and beat over the handle. There was a sharp click.

Jimmy Silver gave a jump.

Captain Lagden had locked the door. Jimmy Silver started forward, his heart beating almost to suffocation.

The captain turned back, a smile hovering on his lips.

"I will show you my discovery, my lad," he said. "I have locked the door in case anyone should enter."

"Your—your discovery?" stammered Jimmy Silver.

"You remember your suggestion that the secret passage might exist in this very room, behind one of these old panels?"

"Yes."

"I have found it," said the captain, with a smile. "You may see it before you go, Silver, and you are at liberty to add that to the other circumstances you will confide to Mr. Brown."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy breathlessly.

Again he was ashamed of his suspicion, and of the vague fear that had thrilled him when he heard the key turn in the lock.

Captain Lagden stepped to the dark oak panels of the wall, and felt over them with his hand, the junior watching him intently.

Click!

It was a faint, almost inaudible sound, as the captain's finger touched a hidden spring, and one of the great panels flew back into the wall.

A dark orifice was disclosed, at the bottom of which the light from the room glimmered upon a narrow stone stair.

"Look!" said the captain.

Jimmy Silver breathlessly approached the opening.

"Let us explore it together, my boy," said the captain, with a note in his voice that

struck Jimmy Silver strangely, almost eerily.

The junior spun round from the opening.

His suspicions had been banished, so far as his mind went; but instinct is stronger than reason.

Not for worlds would Jimmy Silver at that moment have ventured into those dark, tomb-like depths with Basil Lagden alone.

The captain's eyes met his, gleaming.

For a moment they looked at one another, black suspicion and fear growing in the junior's face, mocking malice in the other's.

It was as if a mask had dropped from the face of Basil Lagden, so terrible and threatening was his look.

Jimmy did not speak. He could not, but his heart was sick within him, for at that moment he knew all.

He knew—he read in that terrible face as plainly as if words had been spoken—he knew, he felt, that it was by this hidden door that his entrapped chums had vanished from human sight—that the hand that had dragged them from the light of day was the hand of the man before him.

The silence was terrible while it lasted.

That moment seemed an age long to Jimmy Silver, while he fought with the fear that was gathering in his heart, and nerved himself to meet his danger—for he knew his danger now.

He moved—it was to make a spring for the door.

But even as he sprang the captain's hand closed on his shoulder, and swung him back.

"Not so fast!" Basil Lagden's voice was low, hissing through his lips, and his eyes burned at the junior. "Not so fast, my boy!"

"Let me go!" panted Jimmy.

The captain laughed—a low, soft laugh—as his grasp closed more savagely on the junior's shoulder.

Hardly knowing what he did, Jimmy Silver struck at him, and strove to wrench himself free.

It was man against boy, but the man was one-armed, and Jimmy Silver was strong and courageous.

He fought for his liberty, panting.

But as he closed with the captain, a shudder of horror ran through him as a second arm was thrown about him, enclosing him in a deadly grasp.

The surprise, the horror of it, of feeling himself grasped by two arms by a man he had believed one-armed, almost overcame the junior.

The empty sleeve was still hanging, but from under the coat had come that sound arm, strong and sinewy, and the almost fainting junior understood that the empty sleeve was a cheat, a lie, and that he was in a powerful grasp from which there was no escape.

His lips opened for a cry; but a strong hand was clapped over his mouth, choking it back ere it could be uttered.

He was as an infant in the muscular grasp of the ruffian; helpless, though he still struggled to resist.

Still struggling, he was dragged from the floor and borne through the secret opening in the panelled wall.

Click!

The oaken panel closed; the wall presented the same appearance as before.

But it had closed on Jimmy Silver of the Fourth Form, borne away helpless into the tomb-like depths that hid his kidnapped chums—in the merciless grasp of the kidnapper.

Half-past nine!

Mornington and Erroll were still waiting by the landing window.

"Bed-time, Mornny," said Erroll at last. "We've got to get to the dorm."

"Jimmy's not come."

"He'll come to the dorm."

Mornington reluctantly nodded assent, and the two juniors hurried to the dormitory of the Classical Fourth. There they expected Jimmy Silver to follow.

But Jimmy Silver did not come.

And that night the whisper ran through Rookwood that another junior had disappeared—that Jimmy Silver was not to be found.

THE END.

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