

A. E. ANGUS

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August 25th,
1928.
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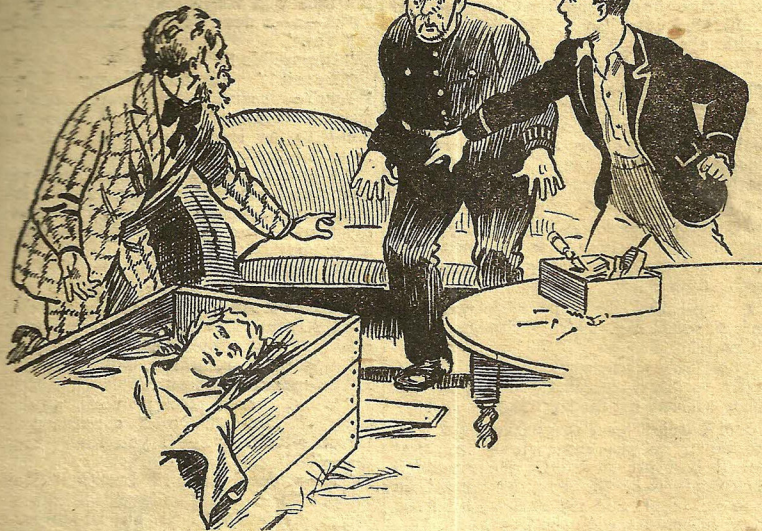


ROPED IN!

ROARING TALE OF THE WEST EVERY WEEK!

Arthur Edward Lovell is certain he has unearthed a deep mystery in a lonely moorland bungalow. And his chums are equally certain that he has made another mistake. Which of the two opinions turns out correct you will learn below!

Lovell Puts His Foot In It!



A ROLICKING LONG COMPLETE
TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO.
OF ROOKWOOD ON HOLIDAY.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

In the Mysterious Bungalow.

KNOCK! Knock! Knock!
"There he goes!" murmured Raby.

"The ass!" muttered Jimmy Silver, anxious and exasperated.

"The crass ass!" growled Newcome.

Knock! Knock!

The knocking of the hammer came echoing through the deep summer dusk. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome listened to it as they stood in the shadow of the trees by the roadside. And as they listened they grew more and more anxious and exasperated with their comrade, Arthur Edward Lovell.

Half a mile down the shadowy road behind the juniors lay the village of Sibley-by-the-Hill, where they had left their "jiggers" at the inn. Before them, at a short distance from the road, lay the Sibley Moor Bungalow—dark and deserted.

Faintly but clearly the sound of the knocking hammer came echoing from the bungalow.

Arthur Edward Lovell was there! And if Mr. Phidias Smith, the tenant of the furnished bungalow, should return and find him there—

"The ass!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "We were dufers to let him go in. It's half an hour since Mr. Smith passed us going down to the village. He may be back any minute."

"If he catches Lovell in his house he—"

"Oh dear!"

"The ass!"

"The chump!"

"The duffer!"

Steadily came the distant hammering, echoing through the silence of the summer night. Jimmy Silver could picture Lovell at work—as well as if he could see him. Lovell was bending over the mysterious box in the sitting-room of the bungalow—he was knocking a chisel under the nailed lid to prise it up, working by the glimmer of a tiny electric torch in the dark room, evidently deaf and blind to all considera-

tions but the investigation he was making.

Jimmy Silver turned his head and stared away anxiously through the shadows towards Sibley-by-the-Hill. Supper was due for the Rookwood ramblers at the Golden Cow in Sibley-by-the-Hill, and they were hungry. But they were not thinking of supper now. Arthur Edward Lovell had given them more pressing matters to think of.

More than one adventure had fallen to the Rookwood cyclists before they arrived among the hills and dales of Somersetshire. But this experience fairly put the lid on. But for Lovell they would have pushed on to Devonshire that morning. And they wished now that they had pushed on and taken Lovell with them, even if they had had to tie him on to the motor-scooter.

"The blithering dummy!" murmured Raby. "There's nothing in it, of course. He saw a man nailing up a box last night. As if a man has never nailed up a box before!"

"There might be anything in the box, from a grandfather's clock to a tailor's dummy!" groaned Newcome. "But Lovell's been reading in the papers about bungalow crimes."

"And if Smith comes back— See anything of him, Jimmy?"

"No, thank goodness!"

"He won't be long, most likely," said Raby. "We know he was expecting the carrier this afternoon, and the carrier never came. Ten to one he's gone to the village to see about it, and it can't keep him long. He'll come back and catch Lovell—"

"And take him for a burglar, finding him in his house!" groaned Newcome. "May charge him with it!"

"Oh dear!"

"We can butt in and explain that Lovell is only a born idiot. But Smith mayn't believe us."

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

The knocking of the hammer was still audible from the bungalow—it could have been heard by anyone passing on the road. The thin muslin curtains at the sitting-room window did not

hide the light; the glimmer of Lovell's little electric torch could be seen from the distance. Anyone passing the bungalow would have become suspicious at the sight of that moving, glimmering light in a house wrapped in darkness and the sound of the hammering. Fortunately it was a very lonely lane.

Jimmy wondered whether it was possible that there was anything in Lovell's suspicions.

The man in the bungalow had refused the juniors shelter the previous night in a heavy downpour of rain. That was rough and inhospitable, but it did not make the man a criminal.

Lovell, through the curtained window, had seen him nailing up the box—a long box that looked the size and shape of a coffin.

It was odd, perhaps; but Lovell's theory that a crime had been committed and that the bearded man of the bungalow was concealing the body had only made his comrades chuckle.

All the more because they chuckled Arthur Edward Lovell had been confirmed in his startling theory. That was Lovell's way. He was open to argument; but only open to be convinced by argument that he was in the right! Lovell decided that it was up to him to be the sleuth who should bring the crime home to the criminal.

Inquiry at Sibley village had revealed that the man of the bungalow seemed a rather queer character. He lived alone, had his meals taken to him from a cottage, and was supposed to be an artist of some kind. Certainly the juniors had noticed that he had a rather wild and unkempt look, which might or might not have been artistic.

His name was Phidias Smith—and one half of his name at least was rather unique, although the other half was quite well-known and reassuring.

Taking it altogether, Jimmy was of opinion that Mr. Phidias Smith was a rather queer sort of fellow, distinctly ill-tempered and undoubtedly inhospitable. And what the mysterious box contained was no business of anybody but Mr. Smith, in Jimmy's opinion. But Lovell was convinced that it was his business, too.

Knock! Knock! Knock!
"Look here, I'm fed-up with this!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver at last. "Lovell's got to chuck it before Smith comes back. Let's go in and hook him out while there's time."

"Good egg!" said Raby heartily. "Hallo! Somebody's coming up the road!" whispered Newcome.

The knocking at the bungalow ceased the same moment. Lovell, apparently, had finished with the hammer.

The juniors stared through the summer gloom towards the village, their hearts thumping. Was it Mr. Phidias Smith returning to his bungalow?

Footsteps rang on the road. They were coming nearer and nearer.

Whether the approaching man was Mr. Smith or not the juniors could not see. But there was no time to ascertain. For if it was Mr. Smith, he was drawing rapidly near and there was barely time to "hook" Lovell out of the bungalow.

"Come on!" breathed Jimmy. The three juniors ran across the intervening stretch of moor and reached the gate of the bungalow garden. They ran up the garden path to the porch.

Just as they reached the open door of the building there came a sudden cry from within—a cry so full of startled horror that it made the juniors halt with thrilling nerves.

"Lovell!" breathed Jimmy. "What is—"

That horrified cry rang and echoed through the silent bungalow. Only for an instant the juniors halted. Then, with thumping hearts, they rushed in.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Horrible!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL stood quite still.

The glimmer of the little electric torch lying on a chair was on the mysterious box—now open. One end of the carefully-nailed lid had been wrenched up, and the straw packing was spurring out. Lovell had leaped away from the box; and now he stood staring at it, his face white as chalk, horror thrilling him in every nerve. It seemed to him that he could still feel the icy touch of the cold, cold face over which his fingers had groped under the straw packing.

That face, hidden by the straw, had chilled his touch like a cold stone as he groped over it. He shuddered from head to foot as he stood staring at the box.

His suspicions had been strong. Yet he knew now, as he stood quaking with horror, that he had never really expected to find a dead body in the box. He had suspected it. All the little circumstances which to his chums seemed trifles light as air, seemed to Lovell to point to the guilt of the mysterious man in the bungalow. And yet the actual discovery came as a startling shock.

He stood as if frozen, rooted to the floor. And as he stood, like one in a terrible trance, his chums came bursting in at the door with alarmed and excited faces.

"Lovell—"
"What—"
"Old chap—"

Heavy footsteps rang on the weedy path from the gate to the bungalow porch.

Mr. Phidias Smith was coming back! The man whose footsteps the juniors had heard on the road was, after all, the man of the bungalow! That was clear now. And he was almost at the door!

Jimmy Silver made a jump for the electric torch, caught it up, and turned off the light.

The Rookwood juniors stood in darkness.

But they knew that the bearded man at the door had seen the light. His footsteps stopped in the doorway. They heard him muttering to himself.

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"I must have left the door unlocked! Yes, I know I did! Confound that carrier! Some thieving tramp has got in!"

There was a sound of fumbling in the little bamboo hall-stand. The juniors, breathless in the sitting-room a few feet away, heard umbrellas and sticks moving. They knew that the man was groping for a stick to use as a weapon, under the impression that tramps had penetrated into the unlocked bungalow in his absence.

The next moment he came groping across the room in the dark.

Jimmy Silver set his teeth. The right or wrong of the matter really became quite a secondary consideration just then. The pressing matter was to get out of the room and the house somehow.

Jimmy grasped the side of the gate-legged table, which was between him and the looming shadowy figure of the angry man.

He up-ended the table with a sudden jerk towards Mr. Phidias Smith.

Crash!
The table shot over at Mr. Smith, and a tool-box, an inkstand, and several other articles crashed on him.

The hapless man staggered back and sat down on the mysterious box that Lovell had investigated. He stumbled backwards over the box, as he sat on it so suddenly, and the back of his head came in contact with the floor.

A fiendish yell rang through the bungalow.

Now was the juniors' chance.

"Hook it!" panted Jimmy. The Fistical Four dashed for the door. They crowded out of it, and raced for the front door of the house. While Mr. Phidias Smith was sorting himself out and picking himself up the chums of the Rookwood Fourth dashed out of the bungalow and tore along the garden path.

They heard a roar of rage behind them, without heeding it. They ran on breathlessly into the road, and down the road towards the village.

Breathless, they stopped at last by the shadowy roadside, under the trees, and listened. There was no sound of pursuit. Mr. Smith was not following the supposed tramps out into the night. Across the dark moor came a glimmer of light, which they knew came from the front window of the bungalow.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "We're well out of that!"

"Oh dear!" murmured Newcome. "Oh, you ass, Lovell!"

"Might have been taken up as house-breakers!" said Raby. "Lovell, you born dummy!"

"Oh, what a game!" groaned Jimmy. "Thank goodness he never saw us. We'd better get back to the Golden Cow, and get the bikes and clear," said Raby. "It's a fine night, and we can get on the road all right. The sooner we're out of these parts the better—after this!"

"Yes, rather!"
"You don't know yet what I've found out," said Lovell, in an unusually subdued voice.
"Oh, some rot!" grunted Newcome. "Was it a grandfather's clock in the box, or some giddy relics of the Monmouth rebellion?" jeered Raby.

"No!"
"Well, what did you find there?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

Lovell's voice was low and husky as he answered:

"A dead body!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Dangerous Character!

WHAT!" Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome fairly howled out that ejaculation together.

They stared at Lovell in the shadows. Even in the dark they could see that his face was white and strained.

"A—a—a dead body!" babbled Raby.

"Yes."
"Impossible!"
"Lovell!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "You're dreaming, old man! It's impossible—really impossible! Do you mean to say that you saw a dead body in that box?"

"I didn't see it—it was covered with straw and canvas packing. I felt it!" said Lovell, with a shudder. "I passed my hand over its face—icy cold—cold as stone!"

"Lovell!"

Jimmy Silver struck a match, and looked at Lovell. It was only too clear that Arthur Edward was not jesting. His face was almost chalky white, and his lips were trembling.

The match went out.

"Well!" said Raby, with a deep breath. He, too, was convinced by Lovell's look. "If—if you really mean it—"

"A—a dead body!" breathed Newcome. "I—I can't believe it! It's not sense. That man is an ill-tempered brute, but he wasn't acting like a murderer. He was just acting like an ill-tempered man."

"You—you're sure it wasn't fancy—nerves, or something, Lovell?" asked Jimmy Silver hesitatingly.

"You can think so if you like," said Lovell. "I'm going to the police station, anyhow."

"There isn't a police station at Sibley," said Raby. "There's a village policeman at one of the cottages, though. But—but—"

"For goodness' sake hold on a bit," exclaimed Jimmy Silver anxiously.

"There's no time to waste. That villain will see that the box has been opened, and he will take the alarm. He knows by this time that he has been found out. It's our duty to see that he doesn't get away."

"Ye-e-s—but—"
"He's got the light on now," said Raby, staring across the dark moor towards the bungalow. "Listen!"

Knock! Knock! Knock!
It was the sound of the hammer echoing faintly from the lonely bungalow, in the silence of the summer night. Apparently the man was nailing up the box again.

"He's hiding it," said Lovell. "Nailing it up again to hide it. We're wasting time."

"I can't believe it all," said Jimmy Silver. "I simply can't! We've got to make jolly sure before we call in the police, Lovell. Let's go and see what he's doing."

"I've made sure."
"Oh, don't be an obstinate ass—a few minutes won't make much difference," said Jimmy Silver impatiently. "We've got to be quite sure before we risk making awful asses of ourselves."

"Look here—"
"Oh, come on!"

Lovell unwillingly assented, and the Rookwood juniors started back towards the bungalow. The steady sound of hammering showed that the mysterious man was bestowing no attention upon the intruders he had chased out of the bungalow. From the front window the brilliant light of the petrol lamp

streamed out into the night, like a searchlight streaming into the gloom. It added to the incredulousness of Lovell's chums. Unless the man was actually mad, could he be hiding the result of a crime, with that brilliant light streaming from the window, and only a thin muslin curtain between him and any possible watcher?

They approached the bungalow warily, and stopped opposite the lighted window.

The muslin curtain gave little obstruction to the view. The whole interior of the room was clear to their eyes.

Knock! Knock! Knock! Knock!

The bearded man was on his knees beside the long box, and he was nailing down the lid with great care, where it had been wrenched up by Lovell.

There was the mysterious box; but there was no chance of seeing the contents. The man's profile was towards the window, and the juniors could see that he looked disturbed and angry, but he did not look alarmed or ill at ease. He was frowning blackly; but obviously his looks were those of a bad-tempered man who had been annoyed, not of a criminal in dread of discovery.

He finished his hammering as the juniors stared at him from the darkness without, and rose to his feet, tossing the hammer angrily into a corner of the room with a crash.

Then he picked up a wide-brimmed Homburg hat and jammed it on his long hair and put a stick under his arm. Evidently he was preparing to leave the bungalow.

"He's going to run for it, now," muttered Lovell. "We've wasted time—he will escape now, unless we stop him."

"We'll follow him," whispered Jimmy. "We'll keep him in sight. Shut up, Lovell!"

Lovell grunted impatiently. It was too late now to collar Mr. Smith; he was striding out of the gate and across the moor to the road.

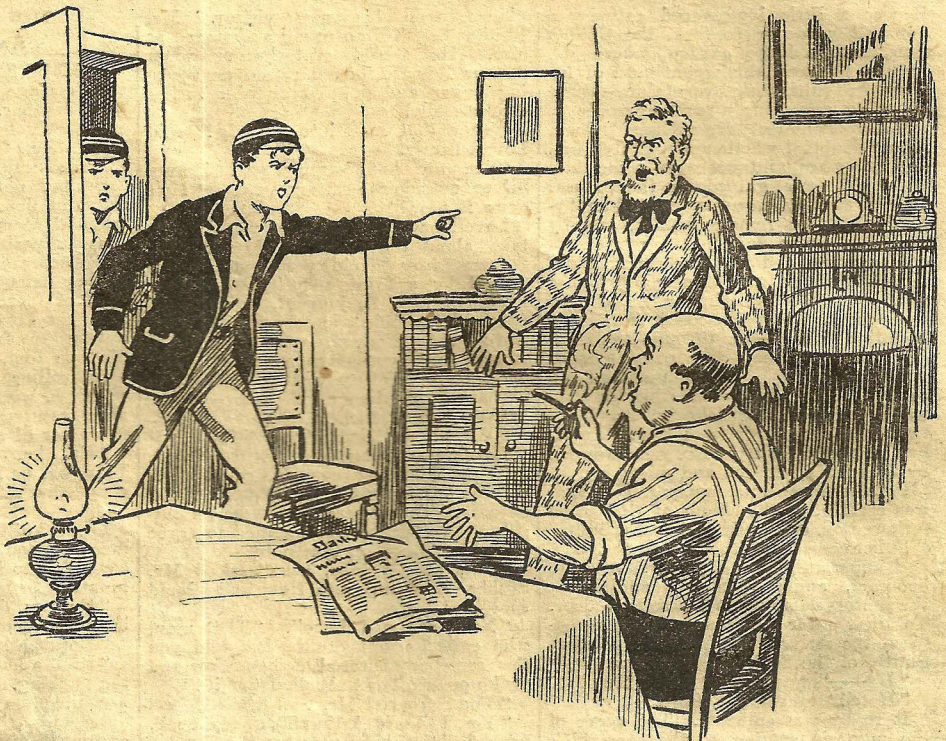
"Come on!" muttered Jimmy.

The juniors followed the bearded man to the road. Stars were twinkling in the summer sky, and it was easy enough to keep him in sight. To their surprise he turned in the direction of the village and strode on towards Sibley.

The Fistical Four trod cautiously on the track of the bearded man. Once or twice he paused and glanced back. To Lovell's mind that was a proof that he was a fugitive from justice, fearful of pursuit. But the other fellows wondered whether he had heard their footsteps, and naturally taken alarm, after his experience in the bungalow with unseen intruders.

At a bend in the road the man vanished behind a clump of trees. The Fistical Four hurried on, anxious not to lose sight of him.

As they came past the trees there was a sudden rush of footsteps. Before they knew what was happening the shadowed man was rushing among them, laying



LOVELL'S DRAMATIC STATEMENT! Mr. Stubbs, the village policeman, turned a slow and stolid glance upon Lovell as he came into the room. Mr. Smith spun round and stared at him. He stared still harder when Lovell raised an accusing finger, and pointed at him. "Take that man into custody, constable!" said Lovell firmly. (See Chapter 4.)

out right and left with his stick. Too late, they realised that he had become aware of their pursuit, and laid in wait for them.

"Oh, my hat! Yaroooh!" roared Lovell, as the big stick whacked across his shoulders with a terrific whack.

"Ow! Whoop!"

"Take that, you rascals!" roared Mr. Smith. "And that—and that—"

"Yooop! Ow! My hat!"

The juniors dodged frantically, yelling. The bearded man was among them, hitting right and left, and utterly reckless with his big stick. It was clear that he fancied he had been followed by a gang of tramps who had broken into his bungalow, and in the gloom he could not see that he had to do with school-boys. He was "out" for vengeance, and he evidently did not care how much damage he did.

"Hook it!" panted Newcome.

"Collar him!" roared Lovell.

"Collar him, what?" shouted the bearded gentleman. "By gad, you ruffianly gang—highway robbery, by Jove! I'll give you collar him! Take that—and that—and that!"

Whack! Whack! Crack! Whack!

They did not collar him. Jimmy Silver, and Raby, and Newcome dodged and fled, and Arthur Edward Lovell, finding the whacking big stick devoted to him solely, realised that it was not good enough, and followed his comrades with a breathless sprint.

"Scoundrels!" roared Mr. Phidias Smith. "Come on, you rascals! I'll give you in charge! Scoundrels!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

The "scoundrels" did not come on. Mr. Smith, in a raging temper, brandished his stick and shouted to them for several minutes before he resumed his way to the village. And the Fistical Four, breathless, bruised, and bewildered, groaned over their injuries at a safe distance.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Denounced!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL was the first to recover. He was hurt, but he did not forget that he had taken up the cause of justice, and that a dangerous criminal was still at large. Indeed, Lovell's bumps and bruises had banished whatever possible doubt he might have entertained of Mr. Smith's guilt. Lovell, as he rubbed his aches and pains, was prepared to believe that Phidias Smith had been guilty, not merely of murder, but of whole massacres.

"Come on!" said Lovell.

A chorus of groans answered him. Jimmy Silver & Co. were feeling hurt. They rubbed their injuries and groaned.

"Look here, he's getting away," insisted Lovell anxiously.

"Let him!" howled Raby. "The sooner he gets away, and the farther off he gets the better I shall like it. The beast has nearly cracked my collar-bone!"

"Blow your collar-bone—"

"I caught the stick on my nose!" moaned Newcome. "I don't believe I've got any nose left! Ow!"

"The beastly ruffian!" said Lovell.

"But we'll make him sit up for it. Let's get to the village policeman."

"Ow! I'm fed-up! Ow!"

"Well, I'm going."

Arthur Edward Lovell marched on towards Sibley, and the three groaning juniors followed him.

They entered the village, and passed the Golden Cow, which was their resting-place at Sibley. Mr. Purkiss, the ruddy-cheeked landlord, was standing in the doorway. Supper was waiting for Jimmy Silver & Co. at the Golden Cow, and they were hungry. But they resisted the temptation and passed on.

In their rambles about Sibley, the previous day, the Rookwood cyclists had seen the abode of the Sibley policeman.

It was a little ivy-covered cottage, a hundred yards or so from the Golden Cow, with a large garden, where Mr. Stubbs, the constable, spent most of his time in cultivating vegetables—crime being an exceedingly rare occurrence in the little Somersetshire village. Indeed, it was doubtful whether Mr. Stubbs had any closer acquaintance with crime than he might have gained by the perusal of his Sunday newspaper. Sibley-by-the-Hill was a remote hamlet, and by no means up to date in any respect.

A light burned in the cottage, glimmering through pots of geraniums that nearly blocked the window. The door was open as the Rookwood juniors came up through the path, through the well-kept garden, planted with rows of handsome cabbages. Lovell marched on ahead in determined mood; but his comrades followed more slowly, still hesitating to take a decisive step. Lovell had no doubts, but the Co. were worried by all sorts of doubts and misgivings.

But there was no stopping Lovell, that was certain, so the chums of Rookwood followed on, dubiously and hesitatingly.

Police-constable Stubbs was at home, and apparently had a visitor. A deep, booming, angry voice was audible as the juniors came up to the cottage door. To their utter amazement they recognised the strident tones of Mr. Phidias Smith, of the Sibley Moor Bungalow.

"He—" gasped Lovell. "Him!"
 "Here!" murmured Raby.
 It really was amazing. The nerve of the man, in coming to the constable's cottage, was startling to Lovell, at least. Mr. Smith's powerful voice could be heard outside the cottage as he talked to the village policeman.

"A gang of tramps—a set of scoundrels! My bungalow broken into—at least, entered! I left the door unlocked when I came to the village to see the carrier—"

Jimmy Silver & Co. blinked at one another.

In the glimmer of lamplight in the cottage they could see Mr. Stubbs. He was a plump, comfortable gentleman, with red whiskers, and he was in his shirt-sleeves, and had a pipe in his hand. With placid calmness he listened to the stormy plaint of Phidias Smith. It was not easy to disturb the equanimity of the steady, stolid Somersetshire man. Mr. Smith was gesticulating as he talked, doubtless in an excited access of the artistic temperament. But artistic temperaments were unknown at Sibley-on-the-Hill, and a slightly suspicious expression on Mr. Stubbs' placid face seemed to indicate a misgiving that his excited visitor had been drinking!

"Anything took, zur?" asked Mr. Stubbs, when his excited visitor paused for breath.

"Nothing, but—"

"Anything broke?"

"Only a vase, which—which I myself knocked over in the struggle—at least, while I was attacking the scoundrels. But my bungalow has been broken into—I mean entered—by a gang of ruffianly tramps. They followed me in the dark to the village and attacked me—at least, I attacked them. They are close at hand now. What are you going to do about it?"

"The audacious villain," murmured Lovell. "When there's a body in his box all the time!"

"Is there?" murmured Raby.

"You'll see!"

And Lovell strode up to the cottage door and stepped into the lamplight. The die was cast now!

Mr. Stubbs turned a slow and stolid

glance upon his new visitor. Mr. Phidias Smith spun round and stared at him. He stared still harder when Arthur Edward Lovell raised an accusing finger and pointed at him rather dramatically.

"Take that man into custody!" said Lovell firmly.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver, outside the cottage porch. "He's done it now!"

Lovell had done it, there was no mistake about that! Even Mr. Stubbs' Somersetshire placidity seemed a little ruffled by a faint surprise. As for Phidias Smith, he jumped, as if he had received an electric shock. Lovell's words were, indeed, quite enough to startle any gentleman who had been endowed by Nature with a full share—perhaps more than a full share—of the artistic temperament.

"What?" shrieked Mr. Smith.

Lovell's accusing finger still pointed.

"Take him into custody, constable!"

"The boy is mad!" said Phidias Smith dazedly. There were three fellows outside the cottage rather inclined to agree with Mr. Smith on that point.

"This here a joke, zur?" asked Mr. Stubbs, breaking into slow and placid speech at last.

"No!" snapped Lovell. "That man, who calls himself Smith, has told you that somebody entered his bungalow and broke open a box! Well, I did it!"

"You!" roared Mr. Smith.

"Yes, I!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, with disdainful defiance.

"It was a tramp! You do not look like a tramp! I thought—" Mr. Smith spluttered with wrath. "So it was not a set of thieves, but a prying, mischievous schoolboy. You young scoundrel—"

"You villain!" retorted Lovell, undaunted.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Now, young man," said Mr. Stubbs, with placid sternness, "you own up that you entered the gentleman's house?"

"Yes, I did," said Lovell; "and I found out what he had nailed up in a box there. It was a dead body!"

"What?"

Even Mr. Stubbs stared at that.

As for Mr. Phidias Smith, he stared across the room at Lovell like a man in a dream. He seemed unable to believe his ears.

"What—what—what did you say?" he stammered.

"I saw him last night, from the window, nailing up the body in the box," said Lovell. "I went there to investigate to-day. I opened the box and felt the dead body—"

"Come, come!" said Mr. Stubbs.

"A dead man, icy—stone—cold!" said Lovell. "Mr. Stubbs, I demand that that man shall be taken into custody, and that you shall come to the bungalow at once and see what I have discovered."

"Stone cold!" gasped Mr. Smith.

"Oh, heavens! Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell stared at him.

Was it hysteria? Had the desperate man's nerve broken down utterly now that he was discovered and denounced? It seemed so, to Lovell, for Mr. Phidias Smith had burst into a wild yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Stubbs blinked at him and blinked at Lovell. Mr. Smith fairly rolled in his chair, roaring with laughter. All his anger seemed to have gone—all his excitement and wrath. He was in the throes of a fit of helpless merriment, and he laughed and laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks; while Lovell stared at him blankly.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Awful—for Lovell!

JIMMY SILVER & CO., outside the cottage porch, looked at one another. From the bottom of their hearts they were glad now that they had not "collared" Mr. Phidias Smith on suspicion, and that they had not joined their headstrong chum in denouncing him. Doubts had haunted them all the time, in spite of Lovell's positive statement of what he had discovered in the nailed box. Now, as they listened to Mr. Smith's gurgling yells of merriment, it was a relief to feel that Lovell, who had insisted upon putting his foot in it, had put in only his own foot. For the bearded gentleman, rolling in the chair in an excess of mirth, weeping tears of laughter, was most assuredly not acting up to the character of a denounced assassin.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Smith. "Ha, ha, ha! Stone cold, hey? That's good—that's distinctly good! Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell knitted his brows. Mr. Smith's merry mood seemed absolutely unaccountable to him, unless the man was a lunatic.

"Do you deny what I found in the box?" he demanded.

"Not at all! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I felt a human face, stone cold, under the packing. Do you deny it?" shouted Lovell.

"Not in the least! I'm absolutely certain that it was stone cold! Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Mr. Smith.

He pulled out a handkerchief to wipe his eyes.

Astonishment was now penetrating the placidity of Mr. Stubbs. He laid down his pipe, and took a coat from a hook on the door.

"I'm bound to look into this, zur!" he said.

"Look into it, by all means!" gasped Mr. Phidias Smith. "Oh, heavens! By all means! I'll walk with you to the bungalow! Let this bright boy come along and point out the body. I don't deny anything; it's stone cold, and you will find it so! Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Stubbs put the coat on, slowly and methodically. Then he put on a helmet with equal leisure.

"You'll both come with me," he said. "I'm bound to look into this. I know it's all bunkum, but dooty is dooty, and I'm bound to look into it."

"I'm ready!" gasped Mr. Phidias Smith.

"And I!" said Lovell sternly.

The plump constable walked out of the cottage, with Lovell and the bearded gentleman. He blinked at Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, but without curiosity. Mr. Phidias Smith stared at them, and burst into a fresh roar of laughter.

"The rest of the gang!" he exploded. "Ha, ha, ha! And I took them for a gang of thieves, and they're only silly schoolboys who ought to be whipped by their schoolmaster!"

The Rookwood Co. turned pink. They said no word; in silence they followed on, with crimson faces.

Under the twinkling summer stars the party marched down the leafy lane to the road on the moor. Constable Stubbs trudged ahead, placid and unperturbed. Mr. Phidias Smith followed him, still grinning—like a demon in a pantomime, as Raby whispered to Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four walked together in silence. The bungalow was reached at last.

Lovell watched Mr. Smith sharply. At the last moment, perhaps, the

bearded gentleman's prudence might overpower his audacity, and he might bolt across the moor.

But the bearded gentleman showed no disposition whatever to bolt. He groped in his pocket for the key, and unlocked the front door of the bungalow.

"Better wait while I get a light, constable," he said.

"Right, zur!"

He entered the sitting-room, and the party heard him pumping up the petrol lamp. Then there was a bright light.

"Come in!" called out Phidias Smith.

With a steady stolid tramp, Constable Stubbs marched in. Jimmy Silver & Co. followed him.

"That's the box!" exclaimed Lovell.

Mr. Stubbs looked at it stolidly. Certainly in size and shape it was suggestive of a coffin. But it did not seem reminiscent of a coffin to Mr. Stubbs. He blinked at it slowly.

"That there's the box what came to

ing else, for the moment, was to be seen.

"Leave it to me now," said Mr. Phidias Smith. "I don't want to risk your damaging it with your clumsy hands."

Lovell stepped back.

Phidias Smith knelt beside the box, and began to unpack the straw and shavings. He did it slowly and carefully, and rolled aside wrappers with exasperating leisureliness.

There was a sudden cry from Lovell.

"There it is! Look!"

Jimmy Silver uttered a startled exclamation.

What Lovell's groping fingers had felt a couple of hours ago was revealed now in the brilliant lamplight.

A white set face—white, rigid, motionless—stone cold to the touch!

Mr. Stubbs gave a startled grunt.

For an instant there was a horrified tension. But only for an instant. Then Jimmy Silver gasped:

No wonder it had felt icy cold and rigid under his groping fingers! No wonder Mr. Smith had yelled with laughter when Lovell stated that the face he had touched was stone cold! It could scarcely have been anything else—as it was stone!

"Are you satisfied, Mr. Stubbs?" asked the sculptor, with grim irony. "If you prefer to take me into custody for having packed up this statue for transit on the railway, I am at your disposal."

Mr. Stubbs did not answer. His stolid face was relaxing. It took him some slow minutes to realise the humour of the situation. But he realised it at last. He grinned, and his grin grew slowly wider, and he laughed, and then he roared:

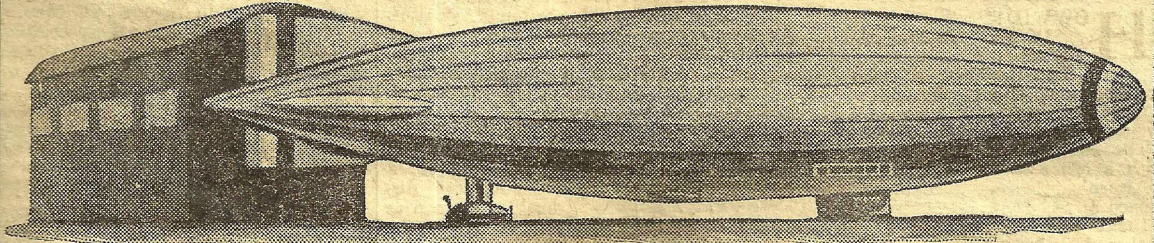
"Haw, haw, haw!"

The Rookwood juniors backed towards the door. Mr. Stubbs reduced himself to gravity at last.

"A stone stattoo!" he said. "Oh

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ere by carrier last week, ain't it?" he asked. "I think I members it."

"That is so," assented Mr. Smith, with a grin.

"I'm bound to see in that there box, zur, after what the young gentleman has told me, zur."

"Quite so. I have no objection." Mr. Phidias Smith looked round for his tools.

He handed a hammer and a cold chisel to Lovell.

"As you opened the box once on your own account, you prying young rascal, you can open it again for Mr. Stubbs," he said.

Lovell took the tools mechanically.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Once more the sound of hammering echoed through the lonely bungalow, and out on the moor.

The stout lid was loosened at last. With a wrench, it came up in Lovell's hands.

The careful packing of canvas and straw and shavings was revealed. Noth-

"Lovell! You ass!"

"What—what is—"

"It's a statue!" yelled Jimmy.

"Wha-a-at!"

Mr. Phidias Smith looked up, with a mocking grin. Never had he looked, to Lovell's eyes such a very sardonic and unpleasant gentleman.

"While you were prying into my affairs, it does not seem to have occurred to you to pry into my studio," he remarked. "Had you done so, you would probably have discovered that I am a sculptor."

"A—a—a sculptor!" babbled Lovell.

"A sculptor!" breathed Raby.

"For three months," said Mr. Smith, "I have been at work upon this marble statue. I came here to work in seclusion—not expecting to be visited by a mob of inquisitive schoolboys."

Jimmy Silver & Co. wished at that moment that the floor would open and swallow them up—especially Lovell. But the floor did not oblige.

Lovell gazed at the marble face.

lor! Mr. Smith, zur, if you want me to take these boys in charge for trespassing in your house—"

"Oh, my hat!"

Before Mr. Stubbs could finish, Jimmy Silver & Co. had done a "fade-through" more quickly than it ever was done on a film. There was a patter of footsteps, and they vanished.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not stay for supper at the Golden Cow, in Sibley-by-the-Hill. Hungry as they were, they forgot supper. They were only too anxious to shake the dust of Sibley-by-the-Hill from their feet. Three bikes and a motor-scooter were soon going strong, and under the summer stars the Fistical Four of Rookwood headed for Devonshire.

THE END.

("LOVELL'S LION HUNT!" is the title of next week's rousing long story of the holiday adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood.)

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