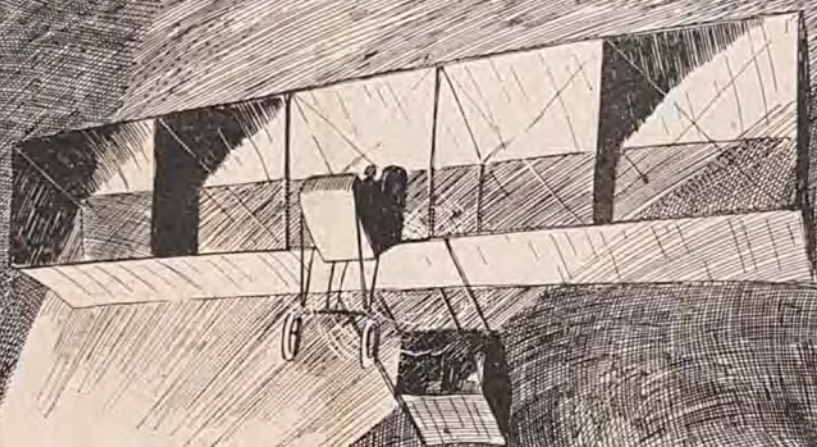


THE GREAT SATURDAY SPORTS PAPER.

Boys' Realm



**Vultures
of the Air!**

A THRILLING
FLYING STORY

he would mind entering into every moment of his life.

When he entered the butcher's shop, he was told by the assistant that Mr. Tubb was not.

"He'll be back by your arrival, nor," said the man.

Shell captain grunted impatiently.

"Oh, I can't wait," he snarled. "I want my prize at once. Here, you'll better open this, and look sharp about it."

It wasn't quite the best way to tackle the matter as Clifford was to discover to his cost.

The assistant flinched as he took the letter. When he had opened and read it, however, a slow smile spread across his face.

"All right, sir," he said slowly, with a meaning glance at the prize-winner. "Oh can do this job for you."

"I thought it wouldn't be beyond your intelligence," the crustal Shell captain remarked.

Again the butcher's assistant glared, but he kept his temper.

"Oh suppose you are going to take it away from me?"

"Great Scott, what a question! Of course I am. Just fork it out, and don't waste my time."

"Bright! Come this way, sir."

Clifford followed the man through the back of the shop and out into the yard.

"It must be a bicycle, or something," the Pelhamite thought, as the butcher went up to a low shed and began to unlock the padlock.

There was a faint glow of rage from within the shed, and presently the assistant reappeared, bearing the end of a stout rope in his hand.

"Here you are, sir," he cried, slipping the end into Clifford's limp palm. "Take it as you see fit."

"What do you—?" Clifford began.

There was a rustle of straw and another loud snort, then there shot out of the door of the shed a young, frisky-looking calf.

"That be the first prize, sir," the assistant cried, with a bow of laughter; "and you'd better take 'un away at once."

"But, here, dash it, I—!"

"Good bye, master," said the man, darting across the yard, and vanishing into his shop.

"You can't say as how Oh can't be sharp about it!"

For a long, awful moment, Clifford stood stock still, gazing into the wide, beautiful eyes of his prize.

The horror of his position was slowly dawning on him.

The calf was certainly his property, and, no doubt, was worth the sum mentioned, but he would have cheerfully swapped it for a less valuable but more portable prize.

"What the dickens am I to do with the lovely thing?" he thought.

It was the calf that answered him. It suddenly saw that the gates of the butcher's yard were open, and, turning like an eel, it bolted straight for the road.

By some unfortunate means, Clifford had managed to get the calf twisted around his head. The first plunge of the skittish animal nearly dragged the boy's arm out of its socket, and he went up a quick yelp of pain.

"Oh help!"

The next instant the peaceful dwellers in High Street, Pelham, were treated to a new and thrilling spectacle.

Down the centre of the road, moving with quick jumps and leaps, came a lively, two-legged calf, and behind it, clutching firmly to the rope, puffing like a grampus, capless and dishevelled, came the stumbling form of Clifford.

Unfortunately for the spectators, this entertainment was a very short one. The calf was meeting at a pace which would have chased a Derby winner, and in less time than it takes to tell Clifford found himself clear of the town, streaking along between the hedges as fast as he could go.

"Stop! Whoa! Shoo!"

"How on earth does one stop a beastly calf?" he breathed, the sweat pouring down his face.

The rope around his wrist was drawn so tightly that he had no hope of releasing himself.

Wherever that fool calf intended to go, Clifford would have to follow.

Suddenly a shout from the roadway ahead made Clifford look round. A travelling team, a whirling of lettings and goings, and pans seemed to suddenly break close around Clifford's head. His sense came into violent contact with the outstretched shafts, and he was thrown forward on to his face.

"(Angry) Bust yer!" came a thick voice from the hedgerow, where the tinker had wisely sought sanctuary. "I'll 'ave yer locked up for this!"

The bully was now playing the part of a sheep, leaping and gliding over the smooth roadway behind the flashing hoofs of his prize, and two pillars of dust arose from each side of him.

The tinker came out of the hedge, cast one despairing glance at his stricken vehicle, then began to tear off over the utmost stream road-way in the wake of the Pelhamite.

"You won't escape me!" he yelled. "You'll 'ave to stop afore I get you!"

By a wonderful trick of strength, Clifford managed to get on his feet again. He cast one glance behind him, and saw the race-follower of the man. It was to be expected, for the calf, he felt that it would be a jolly sight gone dangerous to stop.

Two strides brought him up to the flanks of the little animal, and, resting one hand on the leading leg, he began to urge it forward.

"Go on, O old son!" Clifford panted.

"If you at stop now it's all up with me!"

His action made the sturdy beast put on a spurt, and a cap of twenty yards leaped between them and their end-follower.

"Stop that stop that!" bawled the tinker, clenching his fists, and fairly busting along the road.

For the better part of half a mile the furious chase continued. Then gradually Clifford and the calf began to wear down the older runner behind. The tinker dropped further and further to the rear, until, on topping a slight rise, the Shell captain found that there was now a couple of hundred yards between them.

The calf, however, was beginning to give signs that its superlative energy had evaporated, and that it was now quite content to amble along like a calf, and not a racehorse.

"Go on, O old son, you can't stop!" Clifford yelled, slapping the panting flanks.

But the beast had enough of it, and its pace became slower and slower.

"That beggar will get us, after all," the Shell captain breathed, tugging at the rope around his wrist.

The flesh had swollen under the strain, and he found it quite hopeless to attempt to loosen it.

"I—I wish I had never seen you, but it's I!" he continued, glancing at his prize. "That beggar will half kill me if he catches me!"

Suddenly he caught sight of an open gate in the hedgerow. Beyond it stood a small shed without a moment's hesitation he swung the calf round and dashed through the opening.

Roaring like a shot, he found, to his delight, that the door was open, and in another second he had pushed the calf inside, and had followed it into the gloom of the interior.

As he swung the door to again, he heard the steady pad, pad of feet on the roadway, and a second or so later the ragged figure of the tinker, his face a perfect mask of fury now, waded like a bull through the open gate and came on down the road.

A cold shiver ran down Clifford's spine at the nearness of his escape.

"He—he looks absolutely murderous," he murmured. "It's just like my rotten luck! Why didn't I let Hayne go and get his beastly prize? He'd be in here now, not me!"

This penitent speech, very characteristic of Clifford, over, the bully set to work to free himself from the thing that was a difficult task, but he managed to do so at last.

His wrist was black and swollen, and the pain of it made him wince. He shook his fist across the darkness towards the bulky calf.

"I'll be even with you, you leech!" he cried.

"Just wait till that fellow gets out of the way. I'll sell you to the first butcher I can find, you see if I don't!"

Clifford had to stand in the damp shed for the next half hour before he heard the tinker returning from his fruitless chase. The man stopped at the gateway, sending the Shell captain's heart into his mouth; but he did not enter the field, and presently his shuffling footsteps were heard as he departed.

Clifford tiptoed to the door of the shed. As he did so the calf moved forward.

"Oh, no, you don't!" said the Pelhamite, stopping, and turning round. "You've got to stay where you are made to!"

He stooped and unfastened the catch of the door. It was one of those doors one meets in the country, made in two halves. Clifford had just pulled the bolt back, and was straightening up, when the calf took a hand in the business.

It lunged forward, got its thick, sturdy head between Clifford's lanky legs, and heaved.

Ouch!

The Shell captain made a wild grab at the door, but he was too late. His fingers slipped, and he was clean over the top of the closed half, turning a somersault as he went.

The shock with which his flying body struck the turf outside almost knocked the wind out of his body, and as he sat up, wondering what had happened, a cold shower of rain behind him, and through the splintered doorway the little animal waded, like a swimmer coming ashore through a bank of reeds.

"Now!" it said.

"You can't stop a lot of mischief in that sound, and Clifford staggered to his feet. It was evident that the calf had no intentions of submitting to being locked up in that or any other shed.

"Oh, all right!" said Clifford, waving his hand. "If you don't want to stay in there, you can go off by yourself."

It was almost dusk now, but he could see the big, brown eyes fixed on his face. He stepped aside, and pointed to the gate.

"Go on, you pig-headed brute," he said, "bust off! I wouldn't have you as a gift now!"

The calf never as much as flickered an eyelash.

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