

TELLING OF THE EXTRAORDINARY AND DRAMATIC CAPTURE OF A RASCAL, AND OF THE DEPARTURE FROM ROOKWOOD OF "CAPTAIN LAGDEN"!



BROUGHT TO BOOK!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story of the Amazing Mystery at Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST

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

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Missing!

"IMPOSSIBLE!"

Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood, rapped out the word angrily. Mr. Bootles coughed.

"I regret to say, sir—" The Head rose from his chair, his brows knitted. Mr. Bootles coughed again apologetically. He could not help being the bearer of unpleasant tidings.

Dr. Chisholm fixed his eyes upon the master of the Fourth.

"You say that Silver, of your Form, cannot be found, Mr. Bootles?"

"Quite so, sir!"

"He is not in the dormitory with his Form?"

"No."

"Has he been searched for?"

"Everywhere!"

"It is extraordinary!" exclaimed the Head, biting his lips. "He has, of course, left the school without permission, as his three friends have already done. It is unpardonable!"

Another cough from Mr. Bootles.

"Two boys of the Fourth, sir, have made a statement to me," he began. "They are Mornington and Erroll."

"Have they any knowledge of this affair?" snapped the Head.

"So they say, sir."

"Admit them at once, then!"

Mr. Bootles turned to the door, and made a sign to the two juniors, who were waiting in the corridor.

Mornington and Erroll entered the Head's study.

Dr. Chisholm glanced at them sharply.

"What do you know of Silver's actions?" he asked. "Were you aware that he intended to run away from school?"

"We know that he has not run away from school, sir," said Mornington quietly.

"What?"

"Something has happened to him, sir," said Erroll.

"An accident, do you mean—within the walls of Rookwood?" exclaimed the Head, in astonishment. "If so, where is he?"

"We last saw him enter the Oak Room—Captain Lagden's sitting-room, sir."

"Indeed! When was that?"

"About half an hour before bedtime."

"And after that?"

"Nothing after that, sir," said Mornington. "He never came out of the Oak Room!"

"Do you mean to say that all this disturbance is about nothing, and that Silver has visited Captain Lagden, and simply forgotten bedtime?"

"No, sir."

"Silver is not there now," interposed Mr. Bootles. "After Mornington told me this, I called on the captain at once, and found him alone."

"Then what does Mornington mean?" exclaimed the Head testily.

"Explain to Dr. Chisholm, Mornington."

"Certainly, sir. Since Silver's chums disappeared, sir—Lovell and Raby and Newcome, one after another—we've been keeping an eye on Jimmy," said Mornington. "I had a suspicion that something might happen to Jimmy Silver, too, and we hardly ever let him out of our sight."

"Indeed!" said the Head, in surprise.

"When we went to call on Captain Lagden in the Oak Room this evening, we went as far as the landing window and waited for him," said Mornington. "He couldn't have left the Oak Room without our seeing him. He never left it. We cut off to the dorm at half-past nine, expecting Jimmy to turn up there before lights out. But he never came."

"Undoubtedly he left the Oak Room after you left your post," said the Head.

"Then what became of him, sir?"

"He has left Rookwood, I suppose. His friends had already run away, and he has gone to join them!" exclaimed the Head angrily.

"He hasn't run away in this weather, without his cap or his coat, sir," said Valentine Mornington.

The Head started.

"What do you mean to imply, Mornington? That Silver is still in Captain Lagden's quarters, although Mr. Bootles says he is not there? Are you out of your senses?"

"I think Captain Lagden might be able to explain, sir."

"Nonsense! However, I will see Captain Lagden," said the Head testily. "I believe he was on friendly terms with this boy, and he may have some suspicion of his intentions."

The Head, evidently in a very irritated mood, left his study hastily.

Mr. Bootles coughed.

"You may go to your dormitory, my boys," he said mildly.

"Yes, sir."

Mornington and Erroll left the study, but they did not go to the dormitory of the Classical Fourth.

They followed Dr. Chisholm to the Oak Room.

Quite unconscious of the fact that the two juniors were at his heels, Dr. Chisholm tapped at the door of the Oak Room, and entered.

Captain Lagden was in his dressing-gown, the right sleeve of which hung empty at his side.

Apparently the captain had been going to bed when he was disturbed by Dr. Chisholm's visit.

"Pray excuse this intrusion, Lagden, my dear fellow!" said the Head.

"Not at all, sir! You are disturbed about Silver's peculiar conduct, I suppose?"

"Exactly. Two boys state that he was in this room up to bedtime."

Captain Lagden nodded.

There was a thoughtful expression upon his scarred face, and he looked very concerned.

"Silver certainly called on me this evening, sir," he answered. "I had made friends with the boy. That, I suppose, was his reason for confiding certain circumstances to me, which, in view of what has happened, I feel bound to tell you of. He confessed to me that his friends, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, have run away from Rookwood."

"I suspected as much," said the Head. "And Silver actually confessed this?"

"Yes, and admitted that it was arranged that he should join them. I earnestly dissuaded him," continued the captain. "I thought I had succeeded. When he left me he promised not to carry out his intention, but to write to his friends, and to urge them to return to school. But for that I should have felt it my duty to come to you at once."

"Quite so, but—"

"I am afraid that Silver has broken his word," said the captain slowly. "Having confided the matter to me, and found that I disapproved strongly, no doubt he guessed that I should warn you of his intentions, and, fearing to be stopped, he has left Rookwood without a moment's delay. But certainly he gave me the impression that he had abandoned his intention."

Dr. Chisholm compressed his lips.

"I understand perfectly," he said. "I do not blame you for relying on the boy's assurance."

Mornington and Erroll were outside the half-open door, and they exchanged a quick glance.

The captain's manner was perfectly natural.

It seemed impossible to suspect the scarred, one-armed man, bearing the signs of honourable wounds received in the war, of treachery and duplicity; but Mornington, at least, was certain in his own mind that Jimmy Silver had never left the Oak Room.

Yet what could have happened?

Why should Captain Lagden, a retired officer of the Loamshire Regiment, engaged as football coach at Rookwood School, harm Jimmy Silver of the Fourth?

The question was unanswerable; but Mornington's conviction remained unshaken. His glance roved over the oak panels that formed the walls of the Oak Room, one of the oldest parts of Rookwood School, and he was wondering what dark secret those old panels might hide.

Captain Lagden made a sudden movement as he perceived the two juniors at the doorway.

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The Head, following his glance, turned his eyes upon them, and frowned angrily.

"Mornington! Erroll! What are you doing here? Go to your dormitory at once!"

"But, sir—" began Mornington.

"Go!" thundered the Head.

Mornington set his lips, but Erroll drew him by the arm, and the two juniors departed.

They returned to the dormitory, where the Classical Fourth were in a buzz of excitement.

"Any news of Jimmy?" called out Tubby Muffin.

"No!"

Bulkeley looked in.

"Turn in!" said the captain of Rookwood tersely. "You're a good bit past bed-time now. Enough talk. Turn in!"

The juniors turned in, and Bulkeley put out the light and retired.

But it was a long time before the excited discussion ceased in the Fourth Form dormitory, and sleep visited the eyes of the juniors.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

In the Hands of the Kidnapper!

"JIMMY!"

"Lovell!"

"You here, too!"

Jimmy Silver, panting for breath, looked round him in the dimness. He was still exhausted by the struggle with the kidnapper.

It seemed like an evil dream to Jimmy Silver.

In the powerful grip of the kidnapper he had been carried down the spiral stone stair, hidden behind the panelled walls of the Oak Room.

His strength was spent, and he was helpless in the iron grip of the ruffian.

He was flung into the vaulted cell below Rookwood School, and the iron grating had closed on him, the key turned in the padlock.

The dim glimmer of an oil lamp showed through the grating, faintly lighting up the cell.

There was a clink of chains in the shadows.

There, in the obscurity, three forms lay on a heap of sacking, half asleep; but they started up as the grating clanged shut on the new prisoner.

Jimmy Silver recognised his missing chums Lovell and Raby and Newcome—pale and gaunt from their long confinement in the vault.

One by one the Fistical Four of Rookwood had fallen into the hands of the secret kidnapper. Jimmy Silver was the last.

Jimmy sat on the stone flags, panting.

"You, too!" repeated Raby, with a groan.

"Then it's all up!"

"You, too!" muttered Newcome.

Lovell clenched his hands.

The three juniors had never lost the hope that their chum would somehow, sooner or later, help them.

But that faint hope of rescue was dashed to the ground now.

Jimmy Silver had fallen a victim like the rest of the Co.

Jimmy looked at his pale and haggard chums.

They were secured by heavy chains that were fastened to iron girdles round their waists, rusty old fetters left in the cell for many long years unused.

Jimmy was not so secured, however; the kidnapper had departed hastily after flinging him in, and closing the grating on him.

Evidently the rascal was anxious to get back to his room above as quickly as possible, to keep up appearances there if any inquiry was made for the captain of the Fourth Form.

"So you're here, you fellows?" said Jimmy at last.

"It seems like years!" muttered Lovell. "We—we hoped that you would get us out of this somehow, Jimmy. And now—"

He broke off with a groan.

"Now I'm landed as well!" said Jimmy Silver grimly.

"And it's all up!" said Raby.

"Keep smiling!" said Jimmy, though without much conviction. "While there's life there's hope."

Something like despair was creeping into his own courageous heart, but he tried to keep up a cheerful tone.

"We're done!" muttered Lovell. "Oh, THE POPULAR.—No. 137.

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“RAISING THE WIND!”

Jimmy, I thought you might somehow get to suspect that villain and keep clear of this.

"I did half suspect him," said Jimmy. "I—I was caught, though. But—but who could suspect an Army captain of being a kidnapper? And even now I can't make out what his object is."

"I don't believe he's an Army captain at all," said Lovell. "There's more in it than we understand. When he collared me, I found out that he was not one-armed, as he pretended. If Captain Lagden of the Loamshire Regiment lost his arm in the war that man can't be Captain Lagden."

"Some swindling impostor," said Raby. "I'm sure of that."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

It seemed the only conclusion. When the captain had seized him in the Oak Room, Jimmy had made the startling discovery that the empty sleeve was a lie and a cheat, and that the supposed cripple was in possession of all his limbs.

The discovery had almost dazed him.

If the man was not Captain Lagden, who and what was he, and what amazing deception was he playing at Rookwood School?

"You found him out first, Lovell," said Jimmy. "Tell me what happened that night when you went down from the dorm to play a trick on him in his rooms."

Lovell shivered.

"We traced you afterwards as far as the door of the Oak Room," said Jimmy. "But there we were beaten. We couldn't suspect—"

"I suppose you couldn't," said Lovell. "You didn't know what I knew. When I got down to his rooms I found them dark, and I supposed that he was in bed, and I went into the sitting-room. I thought he was in the next room—the bed-room, of course—and I was going in quietly to pitch the can of ink over him. Then all of a sudden—"

He broke off, and shivered again.

"Then?" asked Jimmy.

"All of a sudden there was a click, and I heard somebody in the dark. The next instant the light was turned on—an electric lamp he had in his hand—and I saw a big panel in the wall wide open, and Captain Lagden coming out. He saw me at the same moment. I—I was so stunned that I stood quite still, half thinking I was dreaming. I—I had thought he was asleep in bed, and there he was, coming out of the secret door in the wall. He was as startled as I was; but in a second he jumped on me like a tiger."

Lovell's voice shook.

"Even then," he went on, "I thought I had a chance, as he was one-armed; but I had found out fast enough that he had two arms, and he was as strong as a tiger, though he pretended to be wounded. He handled me like a baby. I hadn't a chance even to call for help—not that anyone could have heard me. He dragged me down here, and chained me up like this. I've lived on bread and water since—alone here, till Raby came."

"And you, Raby?" asked Jimmy.

"You remember you left me outside the door of the Oak Room," said Raby. "Captain Lagden opened the door suddenly, and asked me what I wanted. I told him we had been thinking he was ill, and he said he was feeling faint, and asked me to step in and help him into his bed-room. I stepped in, and he collared me. That's all."

"When Raby came," said Lovell, "I knew that the villain meant to collar the lot of us. He's playing some game at Rookwood, some deep game, and he was afraid we should spot him. Of course, if he'd let me go, after I'd seen the secret panel open, it would have been all up with his game, whatever it was. And after kidnapping me he was bound to finish with you fellows, for he knew, of course, that you'd never rest till you found me."

"I knew that—too late!" said Raby.

"And I!" said Newcome ruefully. "I walked into his room without suspecting anything at all, and as soon as he knew I was alone he seized me, and I was brought down here. I—I was afraid that you might follow me to his room, Jimmy, and follow me here, but you never came."

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"I've had some narrow escapes of this already," he said. "I can see it now. I understand now. The ratter kept it up to the finish that he was trying to help me. I went into the abbey vaults with him to

explore them, and he pitched into Mornington because he followed us—I know why now. If I'd gone into the vaults I should never have come out. I know now why he wanted to keep it all dark from Brown, the detective, too. What a fool I've been!"

"You couldn't know," said Lovell.

"He must be an impostor of some kind," said Newcome. "He keeps up appearances well enough, but he's no Army captain."

"But—but he must be an old Rookwooder, as he makes out, or he couldn't know anything about the secret panel in the Oak Room."

"That's true!"

"It beats me!" said Newcome. "Hark!" "There was a step in the darkness.

"He's coming back!" muttered Jimmy. The eyes of the four juniors were fixed on the grating.

Into the dim radius of light from the lamp stepped a figure they knew well—that of the kidnapper, who was known to all Rookwood as Captain Basil Lagden.

His scarred face looked in through the bars with a grim smile.

He unlocked the grating, and stepped into the cell.

Jimmy Silver clenched his hands hard. But his fettered chums could not help him, and the hopelessness of a renewed struggle with the powerful ruffian was only too clear.

"You villain!" muttered Jimmy. Lagden did not speak.

He laid a strong grasp on the junior's shoulder—a grasp that was like iron, and showed at once the futility of resistance.

Jimmy was dragged to the nearest stone pillar, to which was attached one of the rusty chains and iron girdles.

The captain of the Fourth struggled, though without hope, as he was dragged to the fetters; but he resisted in vain.

The iron girdle was locked round his waist, and he was a prisoner like his chums.

"Oh, you villain!" he muttered. Captain Lagden burst into a laugh.

"All here now!" he said. "You were a little too sharp, Master Silver. But not quite sharp enough, as it turned out. You should not have come and warned me that you intended to speak to the man from Scotland Yard."

"I did not know you were a rascally kidnapper then!" said Jimmy Silver disdainfully.

"You know it now!" said the captain, unmoved.

He left the cell, locking the grating after him, and picked up the lamp, and disappeared in the vaults beyond.

From beyond the stone pillars that hid him from view came the glimmer of light, and low sounds which the juniors could not understand, but which showed that the man was engaged upon work of some kind.

"What is he doing here?" muttered Jimmy. "I don't know," said Lovell. "Nearly every night he comes down into the vaults, and we hear him at work. It's some kind of hand-machine he's using. Goodness knows what it means. But whatever it is he's doing there is the reason why he came to Rookwood."

"It's something against the law," said Raby. "And he knew this was a safe place, being an old Rookwooder, and knowing the secret of the vaults. We should never have known anything about it but for Lovell happening to find him coming out of the secret door that night."

"And no one but us will ever know!" muttered Newcome.

"We can't be kept here for ever!" said Jimmy.

"What's to prevent him from keeping us here as long as he likes?"

Jimmy was silent.

But he broke the silence at last, speaking in a low whisper.

"There's a chance for us, you fellows! Listen to me—I must whisper! Morny and Erroll may guess—"

"Why should they?"

"Morny had an idea that what had happened to you fellows, might happen to me," whispered Jimmy. "He set out to keep an eye on me, and hardly ever left me. He may know— He knew I was coming to the Oak Room this evening to see the captain, and he may know."

"Oh!" muttered Lovell.

"I don't know whether he was keeping it up, and whether he may have followed me there," said Jimmy. "But he may have

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Anyway, he knew I was there, and he may guess."

"You knew I went there, but you never guessed," said Lovell.

Jimmy was silent again.

The thread of hope was a slight one, but he would not part with it; it was the only glimmer of light in the darkness.

The juniors threw themselves upon the sacking wearily.

It was an hour later that the kidnapper came back, and placed the lamp by the grating, and disappeared.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were sleeping uneasily in the vaulted cell.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Mornington's Decision!

MORNING dawned upon Rookwood School. There was only one topic that morning among the Rookwood fellows, and that was the disappearance of Jimmy Silver.

Every fellow at Rookwood, on the Classical and the Modern side, was talking of it.

Not that there was any mystery about it. Captain Lagden's statement to the Head was known to the school, and there was no doubt on the subject.

It was already generally believed that Lovell and Raby and Newcome had run away from school; and some of the fellows had suspected that Jimmy Silver was in the scheme, and intended to join his chums as soon as the coast was clear.

Now he had done so, and that was all there was about it.

But there were two fellows in the Classical Fourth who did not share the general opinion, though they said nothing about it.

Mornington and Erroll were not satisfied.

They went into class with the rest of the Fourth that morning, but they were certainly not thinking much about the valuable instructions imparted by Mr. Bootles in the Form-room.

The two chums were glad when lessons were over, and they were free to think out the problem that weighed on them.

Mornington drew Erroll away, as the Fourth-Formers streamed out after morning lessons.

They retired to a quiet corner of Little Quad, while most of the other fellows went down to the footer ground.

Mornington and Erroll sat down on a bench under the leafless trees in Little Quad, and Morny's face was very serious.

"This is up to us, Erroll," he said.

Kit Erroll nodded.

"I think it is, Morny."

"You see, I was right about Jimmy disappearing after his pals," went on Mornington. "We oughtn't to have let him out of our sight."

"We couldn't follow him into Captain Lagden's room."

"No. But that was where he disappeared, Erroll."

"It looks like it," he said. "But—but it's impossible, Morny! How could he disappear there? Why should Captain Lagden harm him?"

"I don't know! But he has!"

"Morny!"

"Think of it, Kit! Lovell's friends have disappeared, one by one, and each of them was somewhere about the Oak Room when he vanished."

"I know what it looks like, Morny! But what possible object—"

"That beats me!" confessed Mornington. "Unless the man's mad, I can't guess what it means."

"It's no good suggesting it to the Head, Morny."

"I know that; he's jawed me enough already," said Mornington, with a grin. "And we can't do anything alone. But we're going to take professional advice."

Erroll started.

"Brown!" said Mornington tersely. "Brown, the detective, is still at Coombe, and he's hanging about the school every day. He's looking for that man Baumann, the counterfeiter, who used to be at Rookwood when he was a boy. Like his cheek to be hunting for him here. But never mind that now. He's a Scotland Yard detective, and he must have some sense. My idea is to go to him, make him listen to the whole story, and tell him what we suspect. He can't refuse to hear us."

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"RAISING THE WIND!"

"I'm afraid the Head will be ratty if he hears of it."

"I know he will; but I'm willing to risk that, for the sake of the fellows who've been kidnapped—if they've been kidnapped. If it turns out that they have really run away from school, we shall look a pair of asses for our pains, I know that. But—"

"I think you're right, Morny. Let's go to Brown. It can't do much harm, even if it doesn't do any good."

"Good!" said Morny, rising. "Come on, then, and let's lose no time."

That decision having been reached, Mornington and his chum started for the gates at once.

Captain Lagden was sauntering in the quadrangle, and he came towards the two juniors as he sighted them, with a pleasant nod.

Morny gave Erroll one quick look.

The thought was instantly in his mind that the captain wanted to ascertain whether they harboured any suspicion.

But Morny's face expressed nothing of that thought to the captain, and Erroll was only looking quiet and grave.

"No news of your friend yet?" asked the captain, with a smile.

"Jimmy Silver, do you mean, sir?" asked Morny.

"Yes. He appears to have gone away to join the others, after all. I did my best to dissuade him," said the captain, shaking his head. "I certainly thought he had given up the idea when he left me last night."

"I haven't heard from him," said Mornington. "Fancy Jimmy Silver playing the goat like that! If he's at Lantham, though, he'll be brought back fast enough. I hear that the Head has telephoned to the police there."

"The sooner the better for the foolish boy," said the captain.

"Well, I should think he would come back in time for the Bagshot footer match," said Mornington gravely.

"I hope so," said the captain, with a smile.

He nodded, and walked on, and the two juniors went out of gates.

Kit Erroll glanced inquiringly at his chum as they went down the lane together towards Coombe.

"Morny, old man," he said, "I can't believe it—I can't suspect it! He spoke like—like what we've always supposed him to be—fair and above-board."

"He spoke as I expected him to," answered Mornington quietly. "He wanted to know whether we were suspicious, and I've made him believe that we are not. I feel more certain than ever, Kit."

The two juniors walked on in silence till they reached Coombe, and there, in the veranda of the Coombe Arms, one of the first persons they saw was Mr. Brown, of Scotland Yard, reading a newspaper.

"There's our man!" said Mornington.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

An Astounding Discovery!

MR. BROWN looked rather grimly at Mornington as the two juniors joined him on the veranda of the village inn.

He thought he recognized Morny as one of the juniors who had "accidentally" rushed him over in the lane a short time before.

Mornington, like most of the Rookwooders, had been exasperated by the discovery that Mr. Brown was in the neighbourhood looking for an old Rookwooder who had fallen foul of the law.

Baumann, once a Rookwood fellow, had been expelled from the school in boyhood, and that was disgrace enough for his school, without Mr. Brown assuming that the fellow had any further connection with Rookwood.

"Excuse us, sir," said Mornington. "Can you spare us a few minutes? We've something to tell you."



A DRAMATIC DISCOVERY! Click! Dr. Chisholm spun round. A panel had opened and the Head was just in time to see Captain Lagden disappearing through the wall. The detective sprang forward with a cry. "Have you any doubts now, sir?" he asked. (See Chapter 5.)

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Mr. Brown's podgy face cleared at once. "Certainly!" he said. "If you have any knowledge of Baumann—"

"Oh, bother Baumann!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, it's not about Baumann," said Mornington hastily. "Quite a different matter. We believe there has been kidnapping—"

"Come into my room," said the detective briefly.

Mr. Brown's room opened on the veranda. The juniors followed him in, and the detective motioned them to be seated.

"Now," he said, "I have heard some talk from Rookwood boys, and I am aware that three juniors have left the school under somewhat peculiar circumstances. I have offered the Head my services in the matter, but he appears to believe that the boys have run away."

"All the school believes that—or nearly all."

"But you do not?" asked the detective sharply.

"No."

"You believe the three boys—"

"Four!" said Mornington. "Jimmy Silver disappeared last night!"

The detective gave a start.

"Is it possible? And you believe—"

"I believe they've been kidnapped," said Mornington.

"And why?"

"I can't guess," said Morny frankly. "You, being a detective, may be able to see light when it's all dark to me."

Mr. Brown smiled.

That tribute was not displeasing to the podgy gentleman from Scotland Yard.

"Possibly," he assented. "I may say that the affair has interested me. You suspect, then, that your friends may have made some discovery which endangered a certain person, and that he has secured their silence by kidnapping them?"

"I suppose it would be something like that."

"Baumann!" exclaimed Erroll suddenly. "Morny, what if that man is really in this neighbourhood, as Mr. Brown supposes—Jimmy Silver may have fallen foul of him!"

"Tosh, old chap!" said Mornington. "Jimmy Silver & Co. disappeared at Rookwood, and Baumann isn't at the school, wherever he may be."

The detective's eyes glistened for a moment.

"Whom do you suspect?" he asked.

It was evident that Mr. Brown took a very deep interest in what Mornington had to tell him.

"Captain Lagden!" answered Mornington at once.

"What?"

"You've seen the man," said Morny. "You called on him—"

"I did, with some difficulty," said Mr. Brown. "Owing to ill-health he was unable to see visitors; but I called on him at last."

"He don't look much like a chap in ill-health," said Morny. "I shouldn't wonder if he was not specially keen to meet a detective."

Mr. Brown smiled.

Perhaps that thought had already been somewhere in the back of his mind.

"But Captain Lagden is a man with a very honourable record," he said. "I understand that he was formerly at Rookwood, that he had a distinguished career in the Loamshire Regiment, and he lost his right arm in the fighting on the Somme, when his face received the scars he bears now. Surely such a man is above suspicion."

"I know," said Morny. "I know. But—"

"Tell me what you think, my boy."

"Well, Captain Lagden has two rooms at Rookwood. One of them, his sitting-room, is called the Oak Room, because the walls are panelled in old oak."

"That is where I saw him," assented Mr. Brown.

"That room had been disused for years, but it was specially prepared for Captain Lagden," went on Mornington. "He must have asked the Head specially to let him have it, for all that trouble to be taken."

"Why should he wish for that room especially?"

"Well—" Morny hesitated. "There's an old story at Rookwood of a secret passage from the School House to the abbey vaults."

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When that fellow Baumann was at the school he used to get in and out without anybody knowing how he came and went, and some of the fellows think he knew of the secret passage, since there's been a lot of talk about him, you know. Well, Lagden was Baumann's study-mate when they were both at Rookwood, a dozen or fifteen years ago. If Baumann knew of the secret passage he may have told his study-mate."

Mr. Brown looked very curiously at Mornington.

"Then you think Captain Lagden knows of a secret passage, of which the opening is in the Oak Room?"

"I—I know it sounds thick," said Morny falteringly. "But—Lovell first, and then Raby, then Newcome, now Jimmy Silver vanished—in the Oak Room or near it!"

"Is that so?"

"Lovell had gone there one night to play a trick on the captain," said Morny. "He never came back. Raby was last seen outside the door of that room. The last that was known of Newcome was that he had gone into the room."

"Oh!"

"Since then we've been looking after Jimmy, and last night we waited for him outside the room when he called on the captain. He never came out!"

"By gad!"

Mornington went on to explain fully, and Mr. Brown listened with the keenest interest, putting in a question here and there, till he knew all that Morny knew, and perhaps a little more.

He was silent when the junior had finished.

"I know it sounds thick," said Mornington, encouraged by the detective's evident interest. "It looks, from what I've said, as if Lagden came to Rookwood and specially got hold of the Oak Room because he knew of the secret passage there, for the purpose of kidnapping the Fistical Four one after another. Unless he's mad it can't be so, I know. But he may be mad, for all I know."

"Or suppose," said Mr. Brown—"suppose he were carrying on some nefarious scheme of some kind, and Lovell happened to make a discovery by coming into his quarters unexpectedly at night?"

Morny brightened.

"Yes, that's so," he said. "But—but what could he be doing that Lovell mightn't see?"

Mr. Brown did not answer that question.

"In that case the secret passage was ready to his hand," he remarked. "And he may have chosen that room because his secret occupation—granted he had one—required to be carried on in a secret place. Lovell's disappearance would then be followed up by that of his friends, because they were anxiously hunting for him, and making endless surmises as to what had become of him, and might have hit upon something like the truth in time."

Morny gave Erroll a triumphant glance.

"Just what I thought!" he exclaimed.

"You are a very keen lad, Master Mornington," said Mr. Brown, with a smile. "I am glad you came to me this morning. You have rendered me assistance beyond what you can possibly have thought of."

"I don't quite see that, sir," said Morny, puzzled. "I wanted you to help us find Jimmy Silver. I don't see how I've assisted you."

"You will see shortly, no doubt. Captain Lagden!" The detective spoke the name slowly and thoughtfully. "Right arm missing, face badly scarred. Old Rookwooder. H'm! Fool!" Mr. Brown was apparently addressing that uncomplimentary epithet to himself. "Fool! You knew that Baumann had his headquarters somewhere near the school; you even suspected that he was utilising some knowledge gained in boyhood of a secret den among the ruins; you even ascertained that Captain Lagden had had a key made to fit the door of the abbey vaults. Yet you never suspected—"

The juniors stared blankly at Mr. Brown. He was talking to himself, not to them, and his words astounded them.

"I will come back to Rookwood with you," said Mr. Brown, recovering himself. "I have only to call at the police-station for two or three constables. Cheer up, my boys! In a very short time now, I think, you will see your missing friends."

Mornington and Erroll, in a dazed frame of mind, followed the podgy gentleman from the room.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Brought to Book.

"REALLY, sir—" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm warmly.

Mr. Brown, plump and podgy and smiling, opened the door of the Oak Room without a knock and stepped in.

The Head was in the captain's sitting-room, chatting with Lagden. He had called on Basil Lagden to accompany him down to lunch.

He rose from his chair with an indignant frown as Mr. Brown came in unasked and unannounced.

Captain Lagden also rose, his sharp eyes on the detective.

"Really, sir—"

"Please excuse me, Dr. Chisholm," said Mr. Brown calmly. "I have called on rather important business with your guest."

"That is no excuse for this intrusion!" exclaimed the Head.

"I am afraid the business could not be deferred," said Mr. Brown, with a smile. "I am sure you will admit it when I explain. You are aware, sir, that I have been for some time in this neighbourhood, under the belief that Baumann, the forger and counterfeiter, was somewhere in the vicinity of Rookwood."

"What of that now?"

Captain Lagden's brows came together in a knitted line.

He moved, as it were carelessly, from his chair, along the panelled wall, and stood with his back leaning against a tall panel.

Mr. Brown did not appear to note it.

"I have already asked Captain Lagden if he could give me any information regarding Baumann, who was his study-mate at this school many years ago," Mr. Brown continued.

"I have replied that I was sorry I could not, Mr. Brown," remarked the captain.

"That is very curious," said Mr. Brown, with a cheerful smile. "I have reason to believe that Baumann's career is not quite unknown to you."

"Really, sir—"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Head emphatically.

"Baumann, after leaving prison, was taken into the Army under the Conscription Acts," said Mr. Brown. "He was shot down while leaving the trenches with the obvious intention of deserting to the Germans—being of German descent himself. His injuries were chiefly in the face, and it appears now that they have rendered him so unrecognisable that I have talked with him face to face without knowing him."

The captain's left hand had disappeared behind him, as if feeling over the panel behind his back.

Still Mr. Brown, usually so sharp, seemed to be blind to his movements.

"Baumann, once at Rookwood, seemed to have made some discoveries while he was a boy here," resumed Mr. Brown, still addressing the amazed Head. "Is it not a fact that he was expelled from this school, sir, for certain actions, such as breaking bounds at night, gambling in low resorts—"

"That is true. But I do not see—"

"And it was a matter of conjecture how he contrived to enter and leave the school on so many occasions and for so long a period without being detected?"

"Quite so. But—"

"It never occurred to you that he had by chance discovered the secret passage which was supposed to exist between the School House and the abbey ruins?"

"Certainly I never thought of any such nonsense!"

"Yet it was true, sir."

"Wha-t!"

"For which reason," pursued Mr. Brown calmly, "he came back to Rookwood, as a safe refuge, under an assumed name, to carry on his work of counterfeiting banknotes in the recesses of the hidden vaults, to which only he knew the mode of ingress."

"Are you joking, sir?"

"Not at all. He assumed for that purpose the name of a brave man who had once been his study-mate at Rookwood—in whose name he came here unsuspected. This disguise-ment of his face made the deception easy. And it was easy, too, to affect the loss of an arm by wearing an empty sleeve."

"Are you mad?" exclaimed the Head huskily.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
At Last!

Click!

Dr. Chisholm spun round. The panel had opened, and the Head was just in time to see Captain Lagden disappear through the wall.

The detective sprang forward, and his foot was in the opening in a moment. But the captain had vanished down the spiral staircase hidden in the thickness of the ancient wall.

"Good heavens!" stuttered the Head. "Have you any further doubts, sir?" smiled Mr. Brown.

Dr. Chisholm passed his hand over his brow.

"I cannot have," he said. "What does this mean? This—this man is—is Baumann, calling himself Captain Lagden?"

"Exactly!"

"And you have allowed him to escape you?" gasped the Head. "Not quite!" smiled Mr. Brown. "The abbey vaults, of which he knows the secret, are guarded. The moment he emerges he will be seized. I saw to that precaution, sir, before I came here. Now he has kindly revealed the secret entrance to the vaults from this side, we shall have no difficulty in finding the juniors whom he has kidnapped."

"What!" stuttered the Head, amazed by that statement as much as by Mr. Brown's astuteness.

"That, however, can wait—first I must see to my prisoner."

Mr. Brown called in a constable from the corridor, and posted him on guard at the secret panel in case the desperate rascal should double back. The podgy gentleman from Scotland Yard was leaving nothing to chance.

Then he hurried out of the Oak Room and down the stairs, the amazed Head following him like a man in a dream.

Outside in the quadrangle there was a buzz of astounded voices—or, rather a roar.

Half Rookwood was gathered round a starting group—two constables, who held by the arms a handcuffed prisoner, whom they were bringing to the House.

It was the man who had been known at Rookwood as Basil Lagden.

His scarred face was white and tense, his eyes gleaming with rage and hatred.

Mr. Brown smiled as his eyes fell upon the exposed cheat.

"You've got him!" he said, with satisfaction.

"Yes, sir," said one of the officers. "He came out of the door in the abbey vaults and ran fairly into our arms. He unlocked the door from the inside."

"Quite so!" Mr. Brown rubbed his fat hands, making no attempt to conceal his satisfaction.

"But what does this mean?" exclaimed Bulkeley of the Sixth hotly. "What is Captain Lagden treated like this for?"

Mr. Brown did not heed. His shifty eyes were fixed upon the sullen, desperate face of the prisoner.

"Baumann, I arrest you in the name of the law!" he said. "I warn you that whatever you say will be taken down, and may be used in evidence against you."

Baumann glared at the detective.

"The game's up!" he said. "But how did you find it out, hang you? I thought I was safe here—safe and sound in this quiet corner! Hang you!"

"Take him away!" said Mr. Brown.

"Is that man Baumann?" stammered Bulkeley.

"Just so!" smiled Mr. Brown. "Baumann, once of Rookwood, afterwards of several of his Majesty's prisons, deserter from the Army, spy of the Germans, and, in fact, a pretty thorough scoundrel—kidnapper among the rest. He is not Captain Lagden. And now, if some of you care to come with me, I will show you where to find Silver and the other boys who have been missing."

"What-at!"

A crowd of fellows, in utter amazement, followed the detective back to the Oak Room. But Mornington and Erroll had been before them.

"HARK!"

Jimmy Silver uttered the word. In the dim vault the captain of the Fourth hurried to the grating, his chains clanking as he moved.

There was a sound of hurried footsteps somewhere in the darkness beyond the iron grating.

And from the darkness came the sound of a voice—a voice that sent a thrill to the hearts of the kidnapped juniors.

For it was not the voice of the kidnapper—the only voice they had expected to hear in those gloomy depths.

It was the voice of Valentine Mornington of the Fourth Form.

"This way, Erroll! There's a light!"

"Morny!" roared Lovell.

"Morny!" shouted the four together, in joyous amazement.

Mornington's voice came ringing back from the shadows.

"Jimmy Silver! Where are you, Jimmy?"

"Here!"

"This way!"

Into the radius of the lamplight came Mornington and Erroll, breathless and excited.

The Fistical Four stared at them through the iron grating, scarcely able to believe their eyes.

The sight of their friends seemed too good to be true to the kidnapped juniors of Rookwood.

"Morny!" panted Jimmy Silver.

Mornington grinned through the grating. "Here we are, old bird! How goes it?"

"Look out for that rascal!" panted Jimmy.

"Captain Lagden—he will attack you if he—"

"All serene, Jimmy!" said Erroll, smiling. "Captain Lagden is a bit too busy to think of us just now! He's trying to get away."

"And you're all here?" exclaimed Mornington.

"All of us!" said Newcome. "Oh, by gum, it does us good to see you fellows here!"

"It's like a dream," said Raby. "I'd given up hope! But what's happened? How did you find us?"

Mornington was shaking the iron grating, but he could not open it.

"We shall have to wait till we get the key," he said. "That villain will have it about him, and he's bagged—bagged as safe as houses!"

And Morny explained to the amazed prisoners what had happened.

"He's not Captain Lagden at all; he's that Hun beast, Baumann!" he said. "The rotter borrowed Lagden's name to come here—his face being disfigured made it all safe. Even Brown talked with him without guessing who he was, though he has arrested him twice. The Head never had the slightest suspicion. Nobody might ever have had, if Lovell hadn't blundered into his hands and been kidnapped, and if the rotter hadn't thought to make all safe by bagging Lovell's pals after him."

"My hat!" said Lovell. "And now he's—"

"Now he's scudded off by the secret panel," grinned Mornington. "There's a way out in the abbey vaults, of course, and there's two bobbies waiting there for him—in fact, they've got him before this!"

"Hurrah!"

"We came up to the Oak Room after Browney. There's a bobby in charge there, and he didn't want us to get through the secret door; but we insisted," grinned Mornington. "We were rather in a hurry to see you chaps, so we pushed him out of the way, and came. Ha, ha!"

"I don't think I've ever been so jolly glad to see anybody!" said Jimmy Silver, with a deep breath. "Good old Morny! If you hadn't gone to the detective—"

"But I did!" chuckled Mornington.

Clank, clank! Clank, clank!

The chains rattled and rang as the Fistical Four executed a war-dance in their cell in the exuberance of their delight.

A light gleamed, and there were voices and footsteps.

The podgy gentleman from Scotland Yard came up to the grating, with Bulkeley and Neville and a crowd of other fellows at his heels.

There were exclamations on all sides as the Fistical Four were seen behind the grating.

"Good-morning, Mr. Brown!" sang out Lovell.

Mr. Brown grinned.

"We'll soon have you out of that!" he said.

He produced a bunch of rusty keys which he had taken from the handcuffed rascal above.

The grating was unlocked, and the Rookwood fellows swarmed into the vaulted cell, surrounding the kidnapped juniors with loud congratulations.

Mr. Brown unlocked the fetters one by one.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were free again at last.

It seemed almost like a happy dream to Jimmy—and more especially so to Lovell & Co., who had been so much longer in the hands of the ruthless kidnapper.

Mr. Brown left the cell, evidently to make investigations in the hidden vaults, of which the existence had not been previously known at Rookwood, save to Baumann in his school-days—the result, probably, of an accidental discovery.

The former Rookwooder had remembered that discovery in later years, and undoubtedly it had been the cause of his coming to Rookwood, under an assumed name. The real Captain Lagden, as he happened to know, was at present abroad.

In the next vault was found the handiwork of the counterfeiter—the dies and stamps and other appliances with which he had produced the forged notes.

In addition, bundles of notes, ready to be passed as soon as opportunity came—opportunity that would never come now.

That was the work upon which Lovell & Co. had so often heard the kidnapper engaged, and which had so puzzled them.

But while Mr. Brown, in a state of simmering satisfaction, was taking possession of the counterfeiter's outfit, and making his notes, Jimmy Silver & Co. were conducted to the upper air by the crowd of delighted Rookwooders.

Dr. Chisholm met them when they emerged into the Oak Room.

The Head shook them by the hand, and welcomed them in a voice that trembled with emotion.

The juniors had never seen the good old Head so deeply moved.

And, after that, the Fistical Four were given a tremendous ovation when they reappeared among their schoolfellows.

The mystery of Rookwood was a mystery no longer.

The Fistical Four were restored to their friends, and that evening there was a tremendous celebration in the end study, which overflowed into the passage, Moderns as well as Classics coming in crowds.

Meanwhile, "Captain Lagden," alias Baumann, was in the hands of the law, and not likely to escape them again for a good ten years to come.

Mr. Brown had departed in a mood of supreme satisfaction.

He had bagged his man, and he admitted that he owed his success in part to Jimmy Silver & Co., and especially Mornington.

The Fistical Four felt the effects of their imprisonment for some days; but they soon pulled round, and they were quite fit again by the time the Bagshot match came round.

By that time the kidnapping and the imprisonment in the secret vault seemed like an evil dream of the past to the chums of the Fourth. But they were never likely to forget that it was mainly due to Mornington that they had recovered their freedom, and that the kidnapper had been brought to book.

THE END.

NEXT TUESDAY.

"RAISING THE WIND!"

Another grand long complete story of the Chums of Rookwood.

By OWEN CONQUEST.