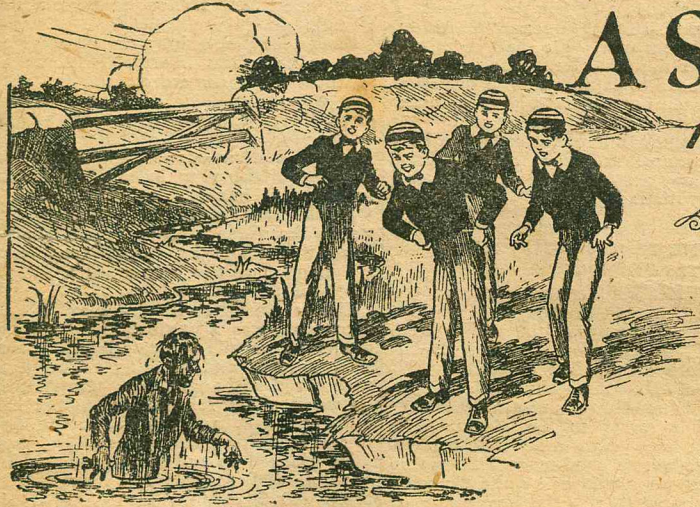


IN A SCRAPE OF HIS OWN MAKING!

Poor old Cuthbert Gower is well in the soup this week. There's ruination staring him in the face, and no one to help him out of the mess into which his "rorty" ways have led him. But help does come—and in an amazing and unexpected fashion!



A SPORTSMAN in TROUBLE! BY OWEN CONQUEST

A STIRRING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Return of the Ambassador

"SEEN that ass Lovell?"

Three Rookwood juniors were asking that question up and down the Fourth Form passage as bed-time drew near.

The three were Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome. They were the three who had the privilege—not always a happy one—of being the bosom pals of Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth.

They had asked the question a dozen times, and they were still asking it, without receiving a satisfactory answer. Sometimes they varied it a little; but always in a way that denoted an extremely disparaging opinion of Arthur Edward Lovell's intellect.

"Seen that chump Lovell?"

"Seen that frabjous fathead Lovell?"

"Anybody seen that burbling blitherer Lovell?"

Nobody had, apparently. Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth, seemed to have disappeared; he was gone from the gaze of his comrades like a beautiful dream.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were growing exasperated, and very uneasy.

There had been a difference of opinion in the end study, and Lovell had been displaying a dignified reserve; which was his more pleasing name for what other fellows called "sulks."

While the dignified reserve, alias sulks, lasted, his chums were not specially anxious for his society. But it was close on bed-time now, and they wondered what had become of Lovell.

"The silly ass has gone out!" Raby declared. "He's broken bounds without saying a word to us! Just like him to get nailed by a prefect when he comes in."

"Oh, just!" agreed Newcome.

Jimmy Silver sighed.

"Old Lovell can't help being a silly ass!" he remarked. "Asses are like poets—born, not made. But really this is the limit—getting out of bounds on his own; just because he's on his silly dignity! We'd better bump him when he comes in."

"Good egg!"

In ten minutes, or less, Bulkeley of the Sixth would be shepherding the Classical Fourth off to their dormitory, and if Lovell was still missing then, it

would mean serious trouble for the headstrong Arthur Edward. Arthur Edward was rather a complacent fellow, with unbounded confidence in himself. But that confidence his chums were far from sharing.

Their opinion was, that if any trouble happened to be lying around loose Lovell was precisely the fellow to butt right into the middle of it, and stick there.

So they were anxious as well as exasperated. Lovell tried their patience often, and tried it hard. But, after all, he was their chum.

"If the blinking chump has gone out of bounds, he'll have left the box-room window unfastened," said Jimmy at last. "Let's go and see."

And the three juniors went into the box-room, which was near the door of the end study in the Fourth.

It was very dark in the room, only the window showing itself as a glimmering square against the starlight.

Against the starlit window there was a dark shadow, and the juniors started as they saw it.

"Somebody's here!" murmured Raby. In the darkness a junior was standing by the box-room window, his face pressed against the glass, staring out.

Jimmy Silver & Co. could not see who it was; the figure was simply a black shadow on the glass. But as Raby murmured, it spun round, and they caught a gleam of startled eyes.

"Who—who's there?" came a gasping voice.

"Hallo! Is that Gower?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes!" gasped Gower. "What—what do you want? Has—has Lovell told you? Has he—?" Gower broke off.

Jimmy closed the box-room door, and came across to the window. In the dimness, Gower's face showed pale and scared.

"Has Lovell told me what?" asked Jimmy very quietly.

"Oh, nothing!"

"Are you waiting here for Lovell?"

"No! Yes! Oh, yes!" stammered Gower.

"Then he's out of bounds?"

"I—I think so."

Raby gave an angry grunt.

"Is Lovell palling on with Gower?" he asked in disgust. "He never said a word to us about clearing out. Where has he gone, Gower?"

"I—I—" Gower stammered.

"If Gower's waiting here to let him in, we needn't trouble," said Newcome drily. "If Lovell prefers a smoky, bettin' outsider for a pal, let him have Gower, and welcome. Let's get out of this!"

"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver. "I don't quite catch on. Only to-day Lovell was ragging Gower for slacking in the games practice. That's what our little tiff was about, in fact. I don't see how he's become so pally with Gower all of a sudden. I think—"

Jimmy broke off as a shadow moved outside the window.

The rather burly form of Arthur Edward Lovell loomed up there, standing on the flat leads outside.

"Here he is!"

"Oh, good!" gasped Gower.

Cuthbert Gower hurriedly pushed up the lower sash of the window. There was a startled exclamation from the junior outside on the leads.

"What—Who's that?"

"It's me—Gower!"

"You ass! You made me jump! I thought it was a prefect for a minute!" growled Lovell. "What the dickens were you waiting here for, Gower?"

"I—I was anxious about you."

Lovell climbed in. In the gloom of the box-room he did not see his three chums. Gower caught him by the arm as he got in.

"Lovell—quick! Is it all right?"

"No!"

"Oh!" gasped Gower.

"I did my best," said Lovell. "I met Joey Hook where you told me. He was cheeky, and I knocked him down."

"What?" yelled Gower.

"He was cheeky, and I knocked him down," repeated Lovell. "I kicked him, too. I think very likely it's done him good, Gower."

"You fool!"

"What?" exclaimed Lovell.

"You fool—fool—fool!" hissed Gower. "Is that your way of helping a fellow? I'm done for now!"

"You were done for, anyhow, if I hadn't interfered and helped you!" growled Lovell.

"How have you helped me, you silly idiot?"

"Well, I've knocked that scoundrel THE POPULAR.—No. 506.

down. He will have a prize nose, I think. That's something."

"Oh, you fool!"

Gower was trembling from head to foot with rage and terror. Arthur Edward Lovell glared at him.

"Is that your thanks?" he bawled. "Fool!"

"Do you want me to serve you the same as I served Joey Hook?"

"Fool!"

"My hat! I—I'll——"

"No, you won't," interposed Jimmy Silver, catching Arthur Edward Lovell by the arm. "Come away, fathead!"

"That you, Jimmy——"

"Yes, ass."

"Has Gower told you——"

"No—you have!" chuckled Jimmy. "Come away! Gower doesn't look as if he wants punching."

"I'm done for!" moaned Gower.

"Serve you jolly well right," said Lovell wrathfully. "My hat! I never expected any gratitude, but this is too thick. I've jolly well risked a flogging, going out of bounds to see that scoundrel for you. Now you call me names."

"Fool!" groaned Gower. "You've done for me! Hook might have let me off, or given me time—now he will be in a frightful rage, and he will take it out of me."

"Well, you've asked for it, haven't you?"

"What on earth's the trouble?" asked Raby, in wonder. "Mean to say you've been out of bounds, Lovell, to see that billiards sharper of the Bird-in-Hand, that rotter Joey Hook?"

"I say, that's the limit," murmured Newcome.

"I'll tell you!" exclaimed Lovell angrily. "That blackguard Gower has been betting with Hook, and borrowing money of him to play cards, and owes him seven pounds, and has given him a written promise to pay. He can't pay—and Hook threatens to send his paper to the Head."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gower got me to go and see the man, meeting him in Coombe Lane," pursued Lovell. "I was going to try to get time for the shady ass to pay, and all that. Gower thought it might do good. I was a fool to go——"

"You were!" agreed Raby.

"Well, I went, and the man was cheeky—in fact, insolent—and I knocked him down," said Lovell. "What else could a fellow do, with a blackguardly rotter like that?"

Newcome broke into an involuntary chuckle.

"Did you think that would make him go easier with Gower?" he inquired.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Newcome! I've no doubt it's done him good—he's wanted a lesson for a long time. I jolly well knocked him down, and I kicked him when he barked, too—and my opinion is that it will teach him a lesson. And all the thanks I get from Gower is—well, you've heard him," exclaimed Lovell, in great wrath.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Lovell.

"My hat! I shan't select you for an ambassador, Lovell, if ever I get into a scrape like Gower's!" chortled Raby.

"Fathead! I've done my best——"

"I'm ruined!" groaned Gower wretchedly. "He said he would send my paper to the Head by post to-night, unless I paid. He might have relented—now he won't—not now that that fool has laid hands on him. I'm done for at Rookwood."

THE POPULAR.—No. 506.

Gower limped out of the box-room trembling. Arthur Edward Lovell gave a snort of disgust.

"That's the thanks I get!" he exclaimed.

"And about all you've earned, I think," said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, ass—it's dorm now. We shall be missed in another minute. I suppose you don't want to have to explain to a prefect that you've been on an embassy to a loafer of the Bird-in-Hand. Come on."

And Jimmy Silver fastened the box-room window, and the Fistical Four hurried away after Gower—Lovell still fuming with indignation.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Sword of Damocles

"WHO wouldn't be a jolly sportsman?" murmured Valentine Mornington in the Fourth Form room the next morning, before Mr. Dalton came in.

Some of the Fourth chuckled.

By that time Gower's disaster was very little of a secret in the Form. His wretched face gave away his trouble, and there were a good many fellows who knew his ways who had quite expected it to come to this in the long run.

Precise details were not known, but it was generally known that Gower had come a "mucker" in his sporting pursuits and was expecting to be called up before the "Beak."

His own pals, Peele and Lattrey, may have sympathised; but, if so, they did not err on the side of being too demonstrative about it. They seemed to be leaving Gower rather severely alone.

Probably they were rather uneasy about their own little peccadilloes coming to light, and were very anxious not to risk being dragged down in Gower's fall.

Valentine Mornington had little sympathy to waste on Gower. A fellow who asked for trouble and lacked the courage to face it when it came evoked only contempt on Morny's part. The dandy of the Fourth, indeed, seemed to find something entertaining in Gower's long, dismal face.

"Who wouldn't be a merry old sportsman?" he repeated. "No end jolly and excitin', and all that! Isn't it, Gower?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it, Morny!" murmured Erroll. "The chap's down on his luck, you know!"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders. "He's makin' enough fuss about it!" he said. "Why, if this goes on it will be a standin' joke soon!"

Gower gave him a bitter look.

"It won't go on!" he said. "I'm gettin' the sack to-day—as you ought to have long ago, Morny!"

"Well, if it comes my way you won't hear me whinin'!" said Mornington contemptuously.

Mr. Dalton came into the Form-room, and the juniors took their places in silence. Gower gave the Fourth Form master an almost anguished look. By that time Dr. Chisholm must have opened his morning's letters, and Gower fully expected Mr. Dalton to tell him that the Head wanted him.

But the Form master did not address Gower or take any special notice of him.

Gower felt relieved, and yet he would have been glad to get it over, as it had to come. He wondered whether the Head was leaving the matter till after morning lessons. It was rotten to keep him in suspense like this, he thought. Or was it that Joey Hook had not posted the letter overnight at all? Was it barely possible that he had been

cowed by Lovell's drastic method of dealing with him?

Between fear and hope, Gower was not in a happy mood that morning. He was deeply thankful when classes were over and Mr. Dalton dismissed the Fourth.

Gower slipped quietly out of gates as soon as he was at liberty. He felt that he must know the worst, and the only way was to see Mr. Hook. Gower was prepared to eat "humble pie" to any extent to apologise submissively for Lovell's conduct—to say anything, to promise anything, to induce the sharper to hold his hand.

He hurried along Coombe Lane towards the village. At a short distance from the school he stopped suddenly. He had caught sight of Mr. Joseph Hook in the lane.

Gower stared at him. Joey Hook's occupation was a peculiar one. He was on his knees in the grass by the roadside, peering and blinking round him, with a red and angry face. Apparently he was looking for something that had been dropped, and his failure to find it was irritating his temper.

He glanced up and saw Gower looking at him, and rose to his feet, with a black scowl.

"Oh, you!" he snapped.

"Lost something, Joey?" asked Gower, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Let me help you find it."

"You mind your own business!" said Mr. Hook sourly. "I don't want any 'elp from you, young Gower!"

"What is it, Joey?" asked Gower. "I'll find it for you."

"Never you mind wot it is!" answered Mr. Hook. "You coming along to see me? You got the money?"

"No. I——"

"Then get out!" said Mr. Hook rudely. "Your pal last night punched me! P'raps you're going to try on the same game?" And the fat man came towards Gower, with a threatening scowl. He did not care to handle a sturdy fellow like Arthur Edward Lovell, but certainly Gower could not have punched Mr. Hook with impunity.

The Rookwood junior backed away. "No—no! I—I'm sorry!" he stammered. "I—I—Lovell was a fool—a silly fool—I never meant——"

"You was a fool, to send him to 'it a man," said Mr. Hook. "You'll be sorry for it, young Gower."

"I never meant——"

"Get out!"

"I—I say, Joey——"

"Don't say anything unless you've got the dibs," said Mr. Hook. "I ain't posted that letter yet, but it's coming along to-day, if you ain't squared up. Now you get out!"

He made a threatening motion with his stick, and the hapless Gower turned away. There was evidently nothing to be got out of Joseph Hook. It was a relief to know that the tell-tale piece of paper had not yet been posted; but the blow was only averted. Gower tramped dismally back to Rookwood.

Joey Hook watched him out of sight with a scowling face, and then dropped on his fat knees again, and resumed his search in the grass.

Hither and thither he went, peering and blinking, growling to himself as he searched. But his search was in vain. Whatever it was that Mr. Hook sought, the object eluded him, and he rose at last, and slouched away towards the village, muttering to himself.

Gower came in at the school in time for dinner. He met Arthur Edward Lovell as he went into the House.

Lovell gave him a sarcastic glance.

"Chopper has not come down yet?" he asked.

"Not yet!" muttered Gower.

"I told you so."

"Eh?"

"I've knocked the cheek out of that scoundrel, as I told you," said Lovell.

"That's all there is about it."

"Fool!"

"My hat! I'll—"

Gower hurried into the House. Mr. Dalton presided at the Fourth Form table, and Cuthbert Gower eyed him uneasily, and was relieved when he failed to catch the Form master's eye. Evidently Mr. Richard Dalton knew nothing so far. The Head had not received the letter from Mr. Hook. But—when it came—

Gower almost wished that it had come. This suspense was his hardest punishment. He felt like Damocles of old, with the sword suspended over his head by a single thread. After dinner the wretched fellow slunk away by himself, in almost a state of desperation.

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Mornny's Find.**

"COMIN' out, Gower?"

Valentine Mornington asked that question, with a derisive grin. Erroll, who was with the dandy of the Fourth, frowned a little. He quite failed to see anything funny in the hapless Gower's predicament, entertaining as it appeared to be to Mornny.

Gower stared at them. He was "mooching" dismally under the old beeches, his hands driven deep into his pockets. Classes were over for the day, and it was a pleasant sunny afternoon; but sun and storm were all the same to Gower that day.

"We're going out, old chap," went on Mornington. "Nothin' in your line, of course. There was a time when I looked on the wine when it was red, and the billiards-table when it was green, but Erroll has put a stop to all that—haven't you, Erroll?"

Erroll did not speak.

"Now, I'm like the johnny on the tub at the street corners," went on Mornington. "I used to be everythin' that was bad, and now I'm everythin' that's good. An hour or two in my improvin' society will do you good, Gower. Come along!"

"Oh, cheese it!" muttered Gower. He was in no mood for Mornny's airy badinage.

"After your plungin' and sportin', it will be a nerve rest," said Mornny. "We're not goin' to the Bird-in-Hand or to the races. We're goin' to take a quiet and sedate walk, and talk seriously about Shakespeare—ain't we, Erroll?"

"Fathead!" said Erroll.

"We've got sandwiches in our pockets," went on Mornny. "Sittin' under a peaceful hedge, we're goin' to have our tea, and reflect what really nice and well-behaved fellows we are! Come on. It's just the stunt for a repentant sinner. I'm sure you're repentant, now you've been found out."

Gower gritted his teeth, and turned his back on Mornington. Erroll caught his chum by the arm and dragged him away.

Mornny laughed as he went.

"Did you ever see such a sickenin' funk?" he asked. "By gad! He's makin' himself a figure of fun to the whole school, with that face of his. Dicky Dalton will notice it soon, and ask him what's the matter. Then Gower will begin weepin' and wailin'. Who wouldn't be a jolly sportsman?"

"The poor beggar's got it," said Erroll. "For goodness' sake let him alone!"

Mornny laughed again.

"He looks as if he's taken the knock," he remarked. "But he hasn't taken it yet. What will he look like when he really gets it?"

"Poor beggar!" said Erroll.

The two juniors walked out of gates. Valentine Mornington was in a mocking mood, as his observations to Gower showed. As a matter of fact, Mornny was still a good deal of his old self—the old Mornny, who had been the most reckless fellow in the Fourth, and not a little of a blackguard. Erroll's serious influence over him had brought about a change, and the change had gone deep; but Mornny was sometimes quite the old Mornny. Left to his own devices, he would have preferred to spend his leisure hours that afternoon in some risky escapade—probably of a shady kind. With Erroll that was impossible.

But the idea of going out for a quiet ramble, and sitting under a hedge to eat sandwiches for tea, made Mornny grin to himself. He wondered sometimes how he stood it, and why he did not throw Erroll over and chum up again with his former comrades—Peele and Gower and Smythe of the Shell, and fellows of that kind. But he never did.

"Hallo, there's jolly old Joey!" remarked Mornington, as the chums strolled down Coombe Lane.

Joey Hook appeared in a gap in the hedge, close by the spot where Gower had seen him that morning—the spot where Arthur Lovell had met him the previous night. Hook was apparently on his quest again, whatever that quest was; he was rooting about in the hedge, obviously in search of something he failed to find.

Mornny gave him a cheery nod. Joey Hook was an old acquaintance of his—an acquaintance he had long dropped, however.

"Lookin' for somethin', old bird?" he asked.

"Yes!" grunted Mr. Hook.

Mornington glanced whimsically at his chum.

"Let's help Mr. Hook," he said. "We're Scouts, you know, and it will be our good turn for the day—what?"

"Oh, come on," said Erroll.

"Don't you want to do a good deed, old chap?" mocked Mornington. "Good deeds are really more in your line than my own. Ain't you keen on playin' the Good Samaritan?"

Erroll dragged him on, and Mornny went, laughing. Mr. Hook was left rooting about, his face growing blacker and blacker, till at last he gave up the vain search and rolled away to the Bird-in-Hand for refreshment.

Mornington and Erroll continued their walk. In the pleasant autumn sunshine it was agreeable enough to ramble in the fields and woods, and Erroll was quietly enjoying it. Mornington was bored almost to tears, though he tried hard to conceal the fact. It cost him a good deal, sometimes, to play up to his

(Continued overleaf.)

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paper with my name on it. And the money he lent me he got off me again, at banker."

"Of course he did!" snapped Jimmy. "You knew jolly well the sort of man he was. Why couldn't you keep clear of him?"

"I—I wish I had! I will, if I get out of this! That fool Lovell knocked out my last chance by butting in. I could pay the man next week, only he doesn't believe me, and won't wait for the money. I—I say, 'Silver'—Gower eyed the captain of the Fourth timidly and eagerly—"if you'd help me to—"

"After I've just caught you stealing?"

"I—I tell you I was desperate. I—I'd pay you back!" moaned Gower. "I can manage it next week, I tell you. It's only seven pounds, and I'd get clear, and—I'd swear never to touch anything of the kind again if—"

There was a step in the passage, and Valentine Mornington looked into the end study.

"Gower here by any chance?" he asked. "I've looked in every dashed study along the passage— Oh, here you are, Gower! You look as if you've been enjoyin' your jolly old sportin' self."

Gower gave the dandy of the Fourth a look of hatred, but did not speak. Jimmy Silver kicked the chisel out of sight under the table. That last and deepest guilt of the wretched sportsman of the Fourth was not to be revealed, at least.

"Who wouldn't be a merry blade and a giddy plunger?" said Morny. "Gower's thrivin' on it. Looks like it, doesn't he, Silver?"

"No need to rub it in, Morny," said Jimmy Silver rather tartly. "He's got it in the neck, anyhow." Mornington laughed.

"Never sign your name to a paper, Gower, if you can help it," he said. "It's injudicious, when you don't mean to meet the little bill."

Cuthbert Gower stared at him.

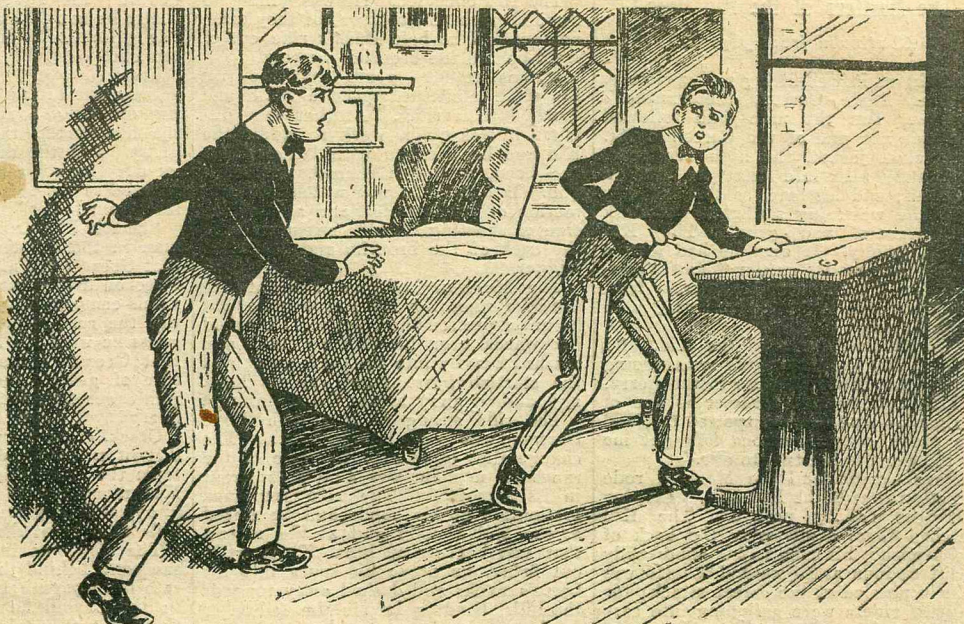
"What do you know about it?" he asked. "Has Lovell told you about meetin' the man for me, and knocking him down—the fool! The idiot! But for that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mornington. "That's Lovell's style! I thought Hookey's nose looked as if he'd run it against somethin' hard."

"You've seen him?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, rather! The dear man was rooting about in the hedges for somethin' he'd lost," grinned Mornington. "He never found it." He fixed his mocking eyes on Gower. "Dear old sport, suppose you got out of this scrape, would you undertake to become a reformed character, like my noble self, and never be naughty any more?"

Gower's face flushed with eager hope.



CAUGHT RED-HANDED! As Jimmy Silver entered the end study Gower of the Fourth spun round from Lovell's desk. Jimmy Silver stared at Gower, and when he saw the chisel in the Fourth Former's trembling hand he comprehended all of a sudden. "You awful rascal!" he gasped. "What's your game? Are you a thief?" (See Chapter 4.)

"Will you help me, Morny?" he gasped.

"Certainly, old bean!"

"It's only seven pounds!" gasped Gower.

"And I believe I've got nearly seven shillin's," said Mornington, with a nod. "I can see myself givin' you seven pounds, Gower, if I had it—I don't think. But I'm goin' to help you. You know it's my special line to play Good Samaritan, and help lame dogs over stiles—what? And you're about the lamest dog I ever saw—not to say a lame cur." Morny chuckled. "How would you like me to fix it up for you to pay Hookey when you like, and how you like, and on your own terms?"

"You—you can't."

"I can, old bean—an' will. Here you are!"

Valentine Mornington drew a crumpled paper from his pocket and tossed it across the study to Gower. Then he turned, with a laugh, and walked away.

Gower, in amazement, caught the fluttering paper. He stared at it blankly.

"Oh!" he stuttered. "My—my—my paper! My I O U! Then that was what Hook lost—what he was lookin' for! How the thump did Morny get hold of it? Oh gad!"

Gower leaped to his feet. The sight of that tall-tale scrap of paper seemed to have given him new life.

"Your I O U!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

Gower broke into a laugh. He could laugh now.

"I think I catch on!" he exclaimed. "Hook had this ready, of course, and then that fool Lovell pitched into him and punched him and kicked him, and Hook ran for it. Of course, he dropped the paper, and never thought of stopping for it, with that idiot Lovell goin' for him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy. "That's what he was rootin' about for—that's why he never sent it to the

Head!" Gower chuckled. "He jolly well won't send it now!"

Gower struck a match, and lighted the paper at the corner. He held it over the study fender till it was consumed.

"That's that!" he said. "Hookey won't have much choice about givin' me time to pay now. Of course, I shall pay him. But he'll have to wait till I'm ready to do it."

Jimmy Silver looked at him grimly. "And that's the last of your dealings with Joey Hook!" he said. "No more betting on geeees for you, Gower!"

"That's my business!" said Gower coolly.

"What?"

"When I want your advice, I'll ask you for it."

Jimmy Silver picked up the chisel from under the table.

"Very good!" he assented. "Now come along and see Mr. Dalton. We'll take the chisel with us."

Cuthbert Gower stared at him, and his new-found courage oozed away with startling suddenness.

"I—I—I—I mean, I swear—I promise—" he stuttered.

"Oh, cut it out!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver contemptuously. "If this lesson isn't enough to keep you straight, Gower, you're going to have another, and you'll get it from me. Keep that in mind! Now get out before I kick you."

And Gower got out.

THE END.



NEXT WEEK'S

Rollicking Long Story of
The Chums of Rookwood

**"THE ROOKWOOD
BARGAIN HUNTERS"**

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