

LOST IN THE TRAIN

The Missing Title-Deeds
of Medland School

Told by T. C. Bridges,
the C.N. Storyteller

CHAPTER 57

Calvert Gets the Upper Hand

LEAVING Dicky in Gilkes's grasp, Calvert began to ransack Dicky's play-box.

Almost at once he had the bag, and was holding it up before the others.

"What did I tell you?" he exclaimed, in ugly triumph. "What about it, Doran? Wasn't I right?"

"You jolly well were," declared Doran. "That's Miss Morland's bag all right. There are her initials on it. R. M."

With a violent effort Dicky flung him off. It was no use. Calvert had him before he could get away, and, flinging him down again, threw all his weight on top of him.

"No you don't!" he snapped. "You'll just lie where you are, and wait there till we've settled your case. What have you done with those deeds, eh?"

For the moment Dicky had been quite unable to speak, for Calvert's heavy weight had knocked all the breath out of his body. But now he had got it back a little, and he managed to answer.

"You talk like that!" he said bitterly. "Why, you've been hunting them yourself, for days past. You can say what you like, but Burland and I both heard every word you said to Janion the other day up at the Marl Pits."

For the moment Calvert was quite taken back.

Tom chimed in.

"Yes, we heard. We know you were trying to bribe Janion to give you the bag. I suppose you wanted it to plant on Dent."

"And what were you doing in the Swallet Hole last night?" added Dicky quickly.

Calvert saw the ears of Gilkes and Doran pricked with interest. He pulled himself together.

"I haven't the faintest notion what you're talking about," he said coolly. "I suppose you're trying to invent something to throw the blame off yourselves."

"Do you mean to deny you were talking to Janion?" cried Dicky in sudden passion.

"Not a bit," was the quick answer. "As a matter of fact, I've been busy ever since the beginning of term trying to get to the bottom of things, and Doran and Gilkes can back me up in that. I tackled Janion to find out if he could tell me anything, for I knew he'd been there at the time of the accident. He helped to put me on the right scent, and if it hadn't been for your pal Last butting in I'd have got the rights of it days ago."

For the moment Dicky was so staggered by this bold tissue of lies that he could find nothing to say. It was Tom who answered.

"You're a liar, Calvert," he said bluntly.

Calvert's lips twisted in fury. But he managed to control himself.

"No, I won't lick you," he said. "You and Dent are going to have a worse punishment than that. When the whole school knows what you've done you'll have a sweet time of it. Oh, you're going to enjoy yourselves, I can tell you!" He laughed, a nasty, grating laugh.

CHAPTER 58

Sent to Coventry

"WHAT do you think he's going to do?" asked Dicky.

It was just before tea, and he and Tom were walking together round the quadrangle in the chilly darkness of the evening.

"Calvert, you mean?"

"Yes, of course," said Dicky.

"Why, it's clear as mud! He means to start the yarn that you bagged Miss Morland's property, and that you've hidden the deeds somewhere and that you and I have been saving up the money until now, so as to avoid suspicion."

Dicky nodded. "Yes, that's about the size of it, I suppose. The question is, will the other chaps believe him?"

"A lot of them will," answered Tom gravely. "You see, Calvert can make up a pretty good story."

"And he's got the bag to show," added Dicky.

"Then that's what he's been wanting it for all along, I suppose," said Tom. "That's why he tried to buy it from Janion?"

Dicky shook his head.

"No. He wanted to plant it on Joe Last. He hates Joe even more than he does us. It was only because Joe is out of the way and because Calvert found out that I had the bag that he changed his mind."

"How did he know you had the bag?"

"Why, from Janion, of course. And the chances are that he looked in my dormitory locker last night and spotted it there."

"Then why didn't he collar it at once?" asked Tom.

"Because he wanted witnesses. I expect he watched me put it in my play-box this morning, and then got Gilkes and Doran, and the whole three waited until we came into the box-room."

"He's an awful brute," stated Tom plainly.

Dicky smiled wryly.

"Of course he is. But it won't do any good abusing him. We've got to try to find some way out of this horrible business."

Before Tom could find anything to say, the tea-bell rang, and they had to hurry to the dining hall. As they took their seats they were both conscious that everyone was looking at them, and that the glances were not friendly.

Dicky's heart sank, for he realised that Calvert had been as good as his word, and that he had already spread the story about the school.

But he took his seat quietly. He and Tom helped themselves out of their pot of jam. Then he passed the pot across to the boy opposite, a boy called Hamilton who was in the same form as Tom and himself, and with whom they generally shared good things.

"Have some jam, Hamilton?" he said.

Hamilton did not answer, and Dicky repeated his question in a louder voice. Still no reply, and Dicky became aware that Hamilton was not even looking at him.

In a flash the truth burst upon him. He and Tom had already been sent to Coventry. The order had gone out that they were to be ignored—treated simply as if they did not exist. He felt himself going hot all over.

Tom, however, was equal to the occasion.

"Poor dear!" he said sarcastically. "Hamilton has gone deaf and dumb. Never mind, Dicky. There'll be all the more for us."

Hamilton looked foolish, some boys grinned, others scowled, but not a soul said one word to either Dicky or Tom during the rest of the meal.

The two went out together.

"So now we know," said Tom grimly. "This is going to be pretty beastly, old man."

"Do they all believe I'm a thief?" asked Dicky bitterly.

"Not all," replied Tom, "but

those who don't are afraid to say so. They think they might find themselves in the same box with us."

"I wish I could think what was the best thing to do," said Dicky. "Professor Perrin told me to come to him if there was trouble. He's a jolly good sort."

Tom agreed. "All the same you'd better not tackle him, I think."

"Why not?"

"Because he'd go to the Doctor or else to Inspector Croome. Then you can't tell what would happen."

Dicky nodded.

"Then you think we'd better wait a bit and see what happens?"

"That's the idea. Sit tight and hope for better times."

Tom's advice no doubt was good, but it was none too easy to follow, for the boycott held and the two boys found themselves absolutely cut off from their kind.

Their loneliness was appalling. Neither in class-room, hall, nor outside did anyone address a single word to them. They were treated as if they did not exist. Games were out of the question for no one would play with them. If they had not had one another to speak to they would have died of sheer loneliness.

CHAPTER 59

The Worst Week

A WEEK passed—the worst week Dicky had ever known. The boycott hit him even worse than it did Tom, for Dicky was a chummy, companionable sort, while Tom's nature was more silent and self-reliant.

At night Dicky would lie awake either shaking with anger against Calvert and all his friends, or else desperately but vainly planning for some way out of this horrible business. But in the day he went about with his head high, and to all appearance caring nothing for the way in which he was being treated.

Several boys were so struck by this that they were badly puzzled, and would like to have asked Dicky for an explanation. But, after all, there was the evidence of three boys that Miss Morland's bag had been found in Dicky's box, and neither Dicky nor Tom had offered to explain it.

It must be remembered, too, that there were a lot of boys who, like Dicky and Tom, were cut off from their sisters at Warley, and who were very sick and savage about the state of things. Everyone at Medland was silent and surly, and Dr. Fair himself was quite evidently depressed and unhappy. No wonder, for Miss Morland now refused even to

speak to him, and she had, actually threatened to take the playing-fields away altogether.

Out of school Dicky and Tom spent as much time as was possible taking long walks, and more than once they secretly visited the Hollow in the vague hope of getting hold of Janion.

Janion, they found, was still living in the ruined cottage. He was evidently desperately hard up, for day by day he grew more shabby. His cheeks were beginning to fall in, and he looked savage and desperate. As far as Dicky and Tom could find out, he and Calvert had not met again.

It was on the second Wednesday—that is, just ten days after the Sunday of the storm—that Dicky and Tom, on their way down into the village, saw a tall boy walking in front of them.

"It's Philip Aylmer," whispered Dicky to Tom. "And looking like a lost dog. I wonder what he's after."

"Someone to stand him a feed, I expect," replied Tom, rather scornfully. "He's always cadging for a loan of sixpence or a lump of cake. I can't imagine how Joe ever had such a brother."

"He's only a half-brother," replied Dicky quickly.

"He's no good, anyhow," said Tom.

Dicky caught his chum by the arm. "There's Calvert," he said in a whisper, as the bully came out of Sugg's shop.

Philip Aylmer saw Calvert, and went quickly up to him, but what he said the chums could not hear. But they could hear Calvert's reply.

"Get out!" he said coarsely. "I'm sick of you and your begging. If you want cash you'd better go to that pretty brother of yours."

Pushing Philip roughly out of his way, he went on down the street and, turning the corner, disappeared.

Philip, who seemed to have no sense of shame, stood gazing greedily into Sugg's window at the buns and jam tarts which were spread temptingly on trays.

Dicky, who had come down to buy shoe-laces, took some money from his pocket, and was counting it as he went toward the shop door. Suddenly he felt a touch on his arm.

"Lend me a bob," came Philip's eager voice.

Dicky simply stared at him. It was the first time that any boy except Tom had spoken to him for more than a week.

"Lend me a shilling," repeated Philip. "I'll pay you next Saturday when I get my allowance."

"Will you talk to me in the meantime?" asked Dicky, and his voice rang with a scorn which he could not hide.

Philip stood looking covetously at the money in Dicky's hand.

"I—I—" he stammered.

"No, of course you won't," returned Dicky bitterly. "Here, take your shilling. I won't lend it you. I'll give it you."

He was in the act of putting the coin in Philip's eager hand when he was suddenly swung aside with a force that nearly knocked him off his feet. The shilling went clinking along the pavement, and he looked up, to see Joe Last striding down upon Philip.

Joe looked taller and leaner than ever, but his blue eyes were full of that same blazing anger that Dicky had seen more than once before. He caught Philip by the collar, and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat, then flung him aside.

"You miserable dog!" he cried. "I knew you were no good, but I'd never have believed this if I hadn't seen it." He stopped, and stood breathing hard. "I'm done with you," he said bitterly. "Done with you; do you hear? You may be my brother, but I'm finished with you."

TO BE CONTINUED

Who Was He?

A Great Statesman

AN Eton boy who had gone up to Oxford about a year after Peter the Great died failed to take a degree, and after travelling on the Continent for a time entered the army.

Then he went into Parliament, and, by his ability and hostility to the Government, drew upon himself the anger of Sir Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister, who exclaimed: "We must at all events muzzle that terrible cornet of horse."

But the young officer was not to be muzzled, and so, to punish him for his daring, the Minister had his commission taken away. What he lost by this, however, was more than made up to him by the high public esteem in which he came to be held.

The Duchess of Marlborough left him £10,000, "on account," as she said, "of his merit in the noble defence he has made for the support of the laws of England and to prevent the ruin of his country." And another admirer left him a fine estate.

The King disliked him greatly, but at the age of 48 he became practically Prime Minister, although he was nominally only a Secretary of State. Differences with the King led to his resignation in less than a year, but the people loudly demanded his return to office.

He was undoubtedly the wisest British statesman of his day, and he began a vigorous policy that made England great and gave her victories in all parts of the world. He knew his own ability and the weakness of his opponents, and declared to a duke, "My lord, I am sure I can save this country and nobody else can." This may sound like boasting, but it was a fact.

Again he had to resign, but after a few years was recalled to office. He formed a ministry, but ill-health had now sapped his vigour, and he could no longer take an active part in government.

Had he received the confidence and support of the King and regained his health, the story of the world for the last 150 years would have been very different from what it has been. The United States would probably have been British today.

Yet when, after trying to coerce the colonists, the Government turned round and wanted to make peace on any terms, this aged and sick statesman went down to the House of Lords and spoke against such a policy.

Exhausted by his effort he fell back while trying to speak, was carried home, and died a few weeks later.

He was buried in Westminster Abbey, his debts were paid by the country, and a pension of £4,000 a year conferred on his descendants. Here is his portrait. Who was he?



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