

The Orbury Way

by Phil Churchill

The Orbury Estate

Earl Orbury.....President

The Golf Committee

Jim Chives.....Club Secretary
Spencer Cartwright.....Club Captain
Ian (Minty) Fresh.....Vice Captain
Brian St.John-James (BSJ)Committee Secretary
Colin Stimpson.....Social Secretary
Charles Easter (Bunny).....Handicap Secretary
Bill Muir.....Competition Secretary
President.....Earl Orbury

Estate Staff

Brunswick.....Steward
Vic Peters.....Golf Professional
Cedric Abeline.....Head Chef
Clarence Llewellyn.....Master Housekeeper
Dave Marsden.....Head Greenkeeper
Bert Pamphlett.....Gamekeeper
Eric Styles.....Estates Manager
Barry Jones.....Tenant Farm Manager

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Prologue

The old man paused to rest halfway up the steep slope, leaning heavily on the four iron clutched in his hand as his chest billowed to suck air into his lungs. He could feel his heart thudding away inside his chest and his temples throb with the gushing sound of pumped blood.

They were no more than twenty yards ahead of him and yet he watched on enviously as his playing partners reached the crest of the hill and disappeared from view.

'Time was when I used to run up to this tee' he thought sadly, reflecting on the toll time had wrought upon his body.

Once his erratic breathing had managed to calm to a wheeze, he closed his eyes to summon the energy to force on to the summit. Pushing off, the wasted muscles in his legs quivered in pain, every sinew afire with the exertion. His shoulder socket burned, the tendons stretched to breaking point as he dragged his trolley behind him. Inch by inch, step by step he slowly made his way towards the crown. With relief he finally reached the top and collapsed against one of the tall slender pillars of the old temple that stood sentinel behind the elevated seventh tee.

Despite the pain and exertion, a thrill of delight percolated through him as he looked out and feasted upon the grand vista of his estate before him. From the raised teeing ground he looked out beyond the green below and back down the line of the first fairway. This snaking ribbon of closely mown grass climbed towards what had been the family seat for almost three centuries. The yellow southern face of the building never ceased to send a thrilling shiver through his body, its splendor glowing in the autumnal sunshine. From this distance he couldn't pick out the individual columns of the portico, instead it was a dark smudge, a missing tooth in a broad smile. But as ever, the pleasure of this wonderful sight

was followed by a sadness that had increasingly plagued him with the passing years.

Before gloom could get the better of him, he shook his head to clear the dark, melancholy thoughts of loss from his mind.

Turning away from the hall his eyes came to rest upon the tip of the slender column that was poking over the top of the trees adjacent to the tee. The Memorial to the Unknown Airmen. That brought a smile back to his face. Not so unknown to him. That however, was another little secret he would take to the grave.

“It’s your honour, Your Lordship,” said one of the other men, breaking his reverie. His playing partners stood aside as he strode onto the tee and looked down at the familiar green nestled at the base of the hill. He bent down stiffly and speared his wooden tee firmly into the immaculate turf. After balancing his ball on top he stood up a little too quickly and the distant pin shimmered into a haze. To regain his senses he scrunched up his eyes and waited for the fuzziness to pass. Then, for the first time, he became aware of the stiff breeze that was blowing over his shoulder.

“Damn, wrong bloody club,” he cursed as he glanced back at the abandoned trolley in the shadow of the temple. It was only thirty paces away but with his head swimming he shrugged and turned back to the green. Like it or not, a four iron it would have to be. As he took his stance, he slid his hands down the grip to take off some distance before he punching a shot with a three quarter swing.

“Oh wonderful strike your Lordship,” exclaimed one of the other men instantly.

“Get your wallet out your Lordship!” joked another as the ball tracked towards the heart of the green. The kidney shaped green below was made up of two symmetrical sides that were split by a central spine. The ball struck the putting surface right in its heart. For a moment the ball seemed to stick firm as if imbedded in its own pitch mark but then it started to move and trickle down to the right half of the green. The trickle became a creep,

then the creep became a crawl as the tiny speck gathered pace with every revolution. The pin was tucked hard right.

“Scotchus maximus!” cried the third man, dreaming of a free tippie as the ball rolled towards the hole. Even the ever present sound of birdsong fell silent as the slowing ball inched towards the hole. The four-ball held their collective breath as the ball seemed to come to a halt, teetering on the edge of the hole. They leant forward on their toes, craning their necks and willing the ball to drop.

Suddenly the group screamed as one. From their lofty perch they watched as the little white globe dropped into the cup. Their jubilant cries caused the huge black birds that had been skulking in surrounding trees to burst from cover and take to the skies, their haunting caw adding to the tumult.

But one scream cut short. As the winged carrion circled above, the world melted into a fusion of green, blue, ochre and pain as the old man crashed to the ground. His last breath burst from his lungs as he struck the turf, his club and triumphal arm the last to hit the manicured tee.

THE FRONT NINE

1 - The Orbury at War

Jim Chives stood at the central window of the Long Library and looked out onto the short par three tenth. Shifting weight from one foot to the other he caught a glimpse of his own reflection in the glass. Instinctively he straightened his back and brought his polished white heels together with a satisfying click. Immaculate in his russet club blazer, or fur, as the members called it, the Club Secretary kept an ever vigilant eye on proceedings from this perfect vantage point.

Just then a movement out the corner of his eye drew his focus to a lone golfer wandering on to the tee. Chives immediately clenched his jaw and thrust his double chin down on to his firmly knotted tie as he reached out his arm and pulled on a silk sash that would wake a small bell somewhere else in the hall.

Within a minute there was a rapid double tap upon the doorframe.

“You rang, Sir?” said a soft spoken voice at the entrance to the room.

“Ah Brunswick,” began the Club Secretary, his voice husky but clipped with the youthful training of public school. “Who is that man on the tee? I don’t recognize him?”

The Steward entered the room, his footsteps knocking against bare floorboards before he stepped silently onto the fraying rug that stretched the length of the room.

“That’s Mr. Lionel Woods,” he replied. “He’s applied to be a Kit, Sir. He’s up before the Captain later this week.”

“Fancies himself as one of the One Hundred does he? Well we’ll jolly well see about that Brunswick. He won’t get far at The Orbury dressed like that!”

The Steward raised one of his dark grey eyebrows before turning to take another look through the glass. The man on the tee was dressed smartly in a russet polo shirt, black tailored shorts that fell below the knee and knee length socks pulled up high to cover any rogue peeping skin. "I'm very sorry Sir, but my eyes are not what they were," he said cryptically.

"Socks!" bellowed Chives, his eyes bulging as his raised brows sent a ripple of deep furrows up his domed forehead.

"Yes I believe they are Sir, all the rage I understand."

"There's no need to be flippant Brunswick, you know full well what I mean."

"Sir?"

"Good God man, the colour, the colour. Those socks," he went on, pointing a stiff finger in the direction of the golfer, "are not regulation colour. In fact I'd go as far as to say that they are grey. *Light* grey. You know full well that club socks are white. Yet there he is, as brazen as the midday sun, on our course in light grey. His Lordship will be screaming from the rooftops if he see's him. Get him in here at once."

The Steward consented with a bow and left immediately.

"And after him, bring me Peters!" shouted the secretary at Brunswick's receding back. "The damn pro should know better as well!"

Moving back to the window he waited for the grey haired Steward to emerge from the ground floor door below the Library and make his way over to the golfer who had just teed off across the water. As if caught prying, Chives instinctively snapped his head from sight as Brunswick pointed up to his window mid conversation. Daring one more peek he inched his way around the drapes and saw that the two men were making their way back towards the hall. Abandoning stealth he ran towards a door at the far end of the Library to go into his office. At speed he leapt into the chair and pulled himself to his desk before rummaging through the scattered papers and organizing them into random piles. Once the desktop

was neat he checked that the knot of his tie was firmly in place, smoothed back his hair and ran a licked forefinger through his errant eyebrows. In the glow of the mid-morning light he looked down at his club fur and brushed away the highlighted flotsam and jetsam. Picking up his pen he pulled a blank piece of paper from his drawer and waited. As soon as he heard approaching footsteps he bent to the sheet and started scribbling away.

“Mr. Lionel Woods,” introduced Brunswick.

The secretary kept his head bowed and continued to write as he raised a finger for pause. Estimating the delay in his head for maximum effect he eventually laid down his pen and looked up.

“Ah Woods, may I call you Woods?” he began.

“Y-Yes of c-course er...”

“Mr. Secretary,” offered Chives.

“Thank you, yes, Mr. Secretary.”

“I understand that you have applied to join the Kits?”

“Indeed Mr. Secretary, I have been proposed and seconded and I’m just waiting for my formal interview with the Captain,” replied the new applicant.

“One hundred members are at this club Woods. No more, no less. The Orbury One Hundred is a rare band of gentlemen and his Lordship runs a pretty tight ship. He is very particular about who gets in, which means that we police the reserve list most keenly. To gain a place in the One Hundred it is very much a case of dead man’s shoes, do you understand?”

“Of course, as a Kit I can play twice a week in the afternoons and there is a ballot between those chaps in the Kits on the unfortunate occasion of a place becoming available,” replied Woods.

“Well you know your stuff, I’ll give you that. However I wouldn’t hold your breath. It is my job to maintain standards.”

“Standards Mr. Secretary? Have I done something wrong?”

“You are wearing grey socks, Woods. His Lordship doesn’t want to see grey socks. If he wanted to see grey socks he would have made grey the club colours. As it is he wants to see white. If we allow grey socks then tomorrow some roughneck will wear cream. From cream you get yellow. Allow yellow and you encourage green and if we are going to encourage green then you may as well allow red or pink! Ergo, anarchy. Grey is not what we do here Woods, grey is not the Orbury way, do you understand?”

“I’m sorry Mr. Secretary I had no idea. Had I realized then of course I wouldn’t have dreamt of breaking the dress code. He never mentioned it in the pro shop.”

“Oh don’t worry about that,” replied Chives, “he will be hearing about this as well. No, it is not a good start Woods. I will have to mention it to the Captain and he always follows my lead on such matters. Captains come and go each year you know, but the Club Secretary is here for life, to provide stability and continuity. That’s how his Lordship likes it and that’s what his Lordship ge...” the secretary stopped in full flow as Brunswick shuffled back into the room carrying a silver tray laden with a decanter of golden liquid.

“Good God Brunswick it’s not even midday!” The Steward ignored the comment and placed the tray on a table by the door before retreating from the room.

“Now where were we?” muttered Chives, trying to drag his attention back to the prospective member before him.

“Socks, Mr. Secretary.”

“But that’s the point Woods, it’s not just *socks*, it’s *grey socks*.”

“I can assure you that it will not happen again Mr. Secretary, I will dispose of them immediately after my round.”

“*After* the round?” spluttered Chives. “You can’t go out there looking like that again, the old man’s out there playing as we speak. One sight of grey and we will all be swinging from the rafters. Change them now or don’t play on, simple as that. The pro shop is well

stocked with white, chop chop!" Chives snapped his head back down to his piece of paper to bring an end to the meeting before feigning further scribbling.

Lionel Woods continued to stand in the centre of the room for a moment, unsure of what to do next. "I'll er, go and change them then. Thank you, Sir," he said finally.

"And once he's finished your purchase," replied Chives, "please ensure that Peters remembers to step this way so that I can put this mess to bed once and for all. I'll see you again at your entrance interview."

"Oh I thought that was just with the Captain."

"*Was* being the operative word, Woods. Have a good game and..." he stopped again in mid sentence. "What are you doing Brunswick?!" The Steward had returned to place a crystal tumbler next to the decanter. "Have you lost your marbles? Since when do I take whisky in the middle of the day?"

"You have been known to take a little soother at times of stress Mr. Secretary," replied Brunswick smoothly.

"I can assure you that it takes more than a pair of grey socks to get me stressed Brunswick."

The Steward politely shrugged his shoulders. "Well, you never know what's around the corner," he said as he tucked a crisply folded newspaper under the lip of the tray. "The local paper, Sir," he added before exiting in the wake of the grey socked gentleman.

Alone again Chives put down his pen, screwed the paper he was writing on into a ball and tossed it over his desk into the middle of the floor. Going to the umbrella stand he withdrew an old rusted lob wedge and studiously applied his grip. He paused to check the alignment of his thumb and forefinger before taking his stance over the scrunched ball. With a smooth swing he launched the paper high into the air. Dipping just short of the ceiling it seemed to hover in mid air for a moment before falling back to earth and rattling into the copper waste bin by his desk.

“You asked to see me, Mr. Secretary,” said the Golf Professional, his large belly distorting the diamonds on his sweater into ovals. Chives was back in the Library, awaiting the re-emergence of Lionel Woods onto the tenth green.

“Indeed Peters, one moment if you will,” replied the secretary, his finger raised in an umpire’s dismissal, demanding patience. The professional fiddled nervously with his habitual lop-sided bow-tie as Chives watched eagerly as the lone golfer emerged once more from the hall and made his way over the bridge to cross the lake. His legs were bedecked in a pair of crisp, knee length white socks worn to just below his shorts. Chives gave a nod of satisfaction before turning back to the other man in his presence.

“How are you settling in?” he asked, his back now to the window.

“I’m sorry?” frowned Peters, a nervous grin exposing two large incisors divorced by a large gap.

“It’s not easy being the new boy. Big building, surrounded by hundreds of years of tradition, dozens of names and faces to remember. No not easy, not easy at all Peters.”

“B-But I’ve been here nearly three years,” replied the professional.

“Three years? That barely registers on The Orbury timeline I’m afraid. The earldom of Orbury goes back almost three hundred years. His Lordship has been his Lordship for over ninety years. Yours truly has kept this place shipshape for almost fifty. ‘Meus dolosus amicus’”, he quoted in his best Shakespearean voice. “Do you know what that means Peters?”

“Of course, it’s the club motto; my cunning friend.”

“The club motto indeed,” said Chives proudly, his chest puffed out and his voice majestic. “The words of King George I himself in 1715,” he turned back to the window and fixed his eyes on some imaginary distant point in the sky. Peters’s shoulders dropped and his weight slumped back on to his heels, awaiting the inevitable.

“1715 Peters,” began Chives pompously. “The kingdom was in peril from a Jacobite rebellion to put Queen Anne’s half brother on the throne. On a bitter winter’s morning, his Majesty found himself separated from his companions not too far from this very building. His horse panicked in the thick fog and bolted, throwing the King from his saddle and knocking him unconscious. How long he lay there no one knows but with each passing minute the cold would have seeped into his body and inched him nearer to a death that would have thrown this country into even greater turmoil.” He paused for dramatic effect and turned back to Peters who managed to raise his eyebrows in feigned interest.

“But then something amazing happened, he became aware of an intense warmth upon his face. Regaining consciousness he opened his eyes to find himself face to face with a fox who was licking his cheek. Neither flinched. Instead their eyes locked until the distant sound of a voice drifted to them on the fog. The fox took a few steps back, never taking his eyes from those of the King before letting out a banshee cry. On and on it whined until the ethereal voices started to converge on the source of the call. The moment the first man crashed out of the undergrowth the fox fell silent and, with a last look at the King, bolted back into the dense wood. The beast’s burnt russet fur, black legs and white feet were seared into the memory of the stricken monarch. The man who found him carried him back to his humble dwelling and nursed him back to health. To give thanks to his miracle rescue the King bestowed the surrounding lands and the title of the Earl of Orbury on the man on the condition that ‘not a single hair of my cunning friend the fox be hurt upon these lands of Orbury.’”

Chives moved to stand immediately before the professional. “Russet, black & white,” he repeated slowly as he indicated the clothes he was wearing with a downward sweep of both hands. “A colour scheme steeped in history, steeped in majesty and worn with pride both on and off the course.”

The bow-tie received another tug under the close scrutiny.

“And yet apparently despite your self-proclaimed *three* years of vast experience, you believe you are in a position to think the colours inappropriate?”

“I-I’m not sure I follow Sir?” blinked Peters.

“It seems you think that His Majesty had been mistaken all those centuries ago and that in fact the fox had not had white feet but grey.”

“Ah,” said Peters at last, as the penny dropped, “the grey socks”.

“Yes Peters, the grey socks.”

“A simple oversight Mr. Secretary.”

“Simple indeed Mr. Peters, but regardless of your accurate self assessment, his Lordship is not shy in dealing harshly with those who do not come up to his exacting standards, do you understand me?”

“Yes, of course Sir, it won’t happen again I can assure you.”

“It may already be too late,” Chives continued. “If his Lordship has caught even the merest glance at them,” he paused to look at his watch, “then I would guess you have about two hours before you are packing your bags. Now if I were you I’d hope and pray that his Lordship’s four-ball never got within sight of the new man. I’ve got my eye on you Peters, now be on your way and make sure I have no cause for any further intimate chats.”

Offering his sincerest apologies for a final time Peters eventually slithered backwards out of the room and into the corridor, passing Brunswick who was going in the other direction. The Steward was carrying a tray of tea in one hand and a dustpan and brush in the other.

“Have you gone stark raving bonkers, Brunswick?” exclaimed Chives as he watched the Steward place the cleaning utensils on the floor next to the table. “I’m getting very worried about you this morning?”

“Never mind me, Sir,” Brunswick replied as he poured first milk from a small silver jug and then tea from the pot into a bone china cup and placed it on the reading table.

Chives strode over and picked up the beverage by the delicate saucer. With the china clamped between thumb and two fingers he teased the local paper from its resting place beneath the whiskey tray and with a practiced flick unfurled the folded edition to reveal its front page.

“Good God!!” he screamed, allowing the balanced cup and saucer to slip from his grasp. The china and tea crashed to the floor and shattered in a volley of ceramic shards and hot liquid.

“Brunswick!!!” he screamed, his eyes fixed on the headline as he felt the spilt beverage soak through his trousers, his normally immaculate white shoes splattered with a mosaic of Earl Grey.

By the time the Steward had rushed into the room, Chives had helped himself to a generous slug of the conveniently placed spirit. Kneeling on all fours Brunswick began to sweep up the mess with the strategically placed pan and brush as Chives helped himself to a further tot.

“Please tell me his Lordship hasn’t seen it,” he gasped as he gagged down a large fiery mouthful.

“His Lordship hasn’t seen it,” replied Brunswick dutifully.

For a moment Chives looked unsure. “Are you saying that because I told you to ‘tell me his Lordship hasn’t seen it’ or because he hasn’t seen it?”

“Because he hasn’t seen it, it was delivered after he teed off,” clarified the Steward.

“Thank heavens, that at least is one small mercy. It buys us a little time. What about the other copies?” he added suddenly, his mind racing.

“All taken care of Sir.”

“The one in the Lounge?” went on Chives.

“Taken care of.”

“The Smoking Room?”

“Likewise, Mr. Secretary.”

“What about the one in the Committee Roo-”

“All!” interrupted the Steward as he got up off his knees, the contents of the dustpan rattling as he stood and brandished the brush in front of him like a wand. “All, have been made to disappear, Sir.”

“Excellent, well done, good man, good man. Desperate times call for desperate measures Brunswick. I need to assemble a war cabinet. Who’s in?”

“The Handicap Secretary and the Social Secretary were in the Billiard Room last time I looked.” replied Brunswick raising firstly his thumb and then the forefinger of his left hand.

“Excellent, that’s a start. What about Spencer and Minty?”

“The Captain and Vice Captain are out playing with his Lordship. Semi-final of the pairs knockout.”

“Damn. BSJ?” enquired Chives.

“The Committee Secretary is in his usual seat in the Smoking Room,” replied Brunswick, raising his middle finger to join the other digits.

“Well, three plus me makes four,” said Chives. “It’s enough for a quorum. Now pour me another large one and then go muster the troops in the Committee Room.”

Chives sat at the head of the huge oak committee table, the measured calm of his face a mask for the maelstrom in his head. The old piece of furniture dominated the elegant room which was lit by ornate brass chandeliers that hung from the high ceiling on great chains. As well as electric light, daylight seeped in through the large arched windows that lined the western wall though the day was not yet old enough to garner direct rays from the sun. On the opposite wall was a carved marble fireplace, the creamy white stone sketched with grey veins. A range of alcoves flanked the fireplace, these inlets were filled with gods and goddesses of empires gone, their poses frozen in stone. Under the gaze of

the statues Chives sat stock still, his eyes looking beyond the table, fixed on the distant marble sculpture that dominated the centre of the north west tribune. The stunning Carrara marble rose from the floor in roughly hewn jagged cuts. As the statue rose, its ridges and crags slowly took shape, merging together until they took the form of a fox's throat, taut from the strain of the animal raising its muzzle to the heavens in a cry. The carved features of its face and fur were intricate and detailed and polished to a glossy sheen. Placed as it was the statue stood guard to the private family wing. Even from where he sat Chives could see the light dancing off the highly polished nose from incessant rubbing from his Lordship's ancestors as they sought good fortune.

The only sound in the room was the rhythmic measures of the carriage clock perched on the mantelpiece above the fire. Sitting above the ornate mechanism, in the large central alcove was a small silver goblet, its etched surface shimmering under the tungsten scrutiny of the chandeliers.

But then the sound changed. Still the regular marking of time but no longer just a clockwork cry. A deep resonant thud was added to the ticking that the secretary not only heard but felt through the soles of his feet. As they neared, the approaching footsteps slipped out of time with the clock and the heavy flat footed stride of its owner drowned out the timepiece. Chives didn't need to turn around to identify the encroaching man.

"Twouble at t'mill?" boomed a deep impersonating voice.

"You could say that BSJ," replied Chives. "Any sight of the others?"

"Colin and Bunny are hot on my heels," rumbled Brian St.John-James accurately as tandem footsteps came into earshot. Moments later the additional men strode into the Committee Room resplendent in their russet furs, their senses immediately heightened by the grave look upon the secretary's face.

“Gentlemen,” began Chives before they had even taken their seats, “apologies for the haste but I must call to order an Emergency General Meeting in line with the club rules, which state that a minimum of four members are required to be present.”

“Would you mind telling us what on earth is going on?” demanded Charles Easter, the Handicap Secretary.

Chives turned to look at the tall man. “Bunny, the impeccable name that this club has built up over one and a half centuries is at peril.” He paused dramatically, causing the other men to shift forward in their seats. After a few moments Chives slipped out the folded newspaper from a manila coloured file in front of him and, holding the offensive rag by two fingers, let the paper unfurl before them.

“Wuddy hell,” whispered BSJ, his thunderous voice resonating around the room.

“Wuddy hell indeed BSJ,” paraphrased Chives.

“THE ORBURY AT WAR,” read Colin Stimpson, squinting over the top of his black rimmed glasses, before reading the sub-title. “Civil War breaks out at private golf club,” he said in a dramatic voice.

“Yes alright Stimpson, that’s enough, you’re not Trevor bloody Macdonald!” castigated the Club Secretary.

“Sorry Jim,” replied the Social Secretary with a naughty grin.

“Dare I ask who’s involved?” asked Charles Easter in his usual serious manner. He was leaning forward and peering at the grainy photograph, unable to make out the faces of the two russet clad brawlers captured in full flow on the front page.

“Who do you think?” offered Chives.

“Not our very own Jailbird Johnnie?” suggested Stimpson.

“Correct Colin,” replied Chives gravely, “and this time he’s gone too far for even Viscount Waffham to save him from the boot.”

“But would the old man actually kick him out?” asked the Handicap Secretary sternly. “After all it’s bloody awkward, what with the chap being his grandson’s right hand man so to speak.”

“Oh I’m positive he would if push came to shove,” said Chives. “But then that’s why he’s got a Committee behind him; it’s our duty to do it for him. I warned his Lordship at the time Lamplighter was voted from the Kits to the One Hundred; once a wrong ‘un always a wrong ‘un, despite all that rubbish about turning over a new leaf. But enough is enough, today is one misdemeanor too far. Gentlemen, under our historic Club Constitution the Committee requires a quorum of four members to vote on the expulsion of a member. I therefore ask for a simple show of hands on the formal exclusion of John Lamplighter from The Orbury for bringing the club into disrepute.” Chives finished and abruptly thrust a ramrod arm into the air.

“Hang him!” boomed the bearded BSJ, as he shot up his arm in agreement.

“If you had your way BSJ, half the bloody country would be swinging from the main beam,” said Charles Easter before sharing an anxious glance across the oak table with Colin Stimpson.

“Bloody wight an all, they’d pwobably deserve it.”

“Jim,” started Easter, “I’m one of the first to step forward and admit that Lamplighter isn’t exactly my favourite person in the world, but I think we need a bit more information before we go gung-ho into kicking him out of the club.”

“After all,” supported Stimpson, “innocent until proven guilty and all that, eh?”

“You are forgetting that he’s already been found guilty by twelve good and just men of Her Majesty’s jury,” sniped back Chives.

“Pwecisely, hang him I say!” bristled the bushy beard.

“Guilty yes,” replied Easter, “but he served his time and that doesn’t mean he’s automatically guilty now.”

“Come on men, this is it! This is the chance we’ve been waiting for,” encouraged Chives. “We owe it to his Lordship to come down hard on him.” He picked up the newspaper and taunted them with it. “Look, we are the laughing stock of the county!”

“But what is it he is supposed to have done?” continued Easter.

“Plus,” added Stimpson, “unless my eyes deceive me, there are two members in that photograph.”

“Hang ‘em both,” resolved BSJ, raising both hands to the ceiling.

“Who is the other member?” pressed the Handicap Secretary.

“The innocent party, that’s who,” said Chives sheepishly.

“Doesn’t look too innocent to me,” said Stimpson. “It takes two to tango and all that, here, let me get a closer look at that photograph,” he went on as he reached across the table and grabbed the newspaper. “Oh flipping heck Jim, it’s Muxcombe!”

“As I said gentlemen, the innocent party in all this,” came back Chives.

“But surely we have no choice but to kick them both out Jim,” said Easter.

“Don’t be ridiculous Bunny. Lamplighter is an ex-con, clearly he’s to blame.”

“If we were going to expel all former guests of Her Majesty’s pleasure then what about Viscount Waffham himself?” put in Stimpson mischievously.

“Besides, your stance would have nothing to do with Muxcombe being your doubles partner, would it?” accused Charles Easter.

“Of course not Bunny,” snapped Chives.

“Or the fact that the two of you are through to the semi finals,” grinned Stimpson.

“That is an outrage! All I’ve ever strived to do is what is best for this club. I would never let my own interests cloud my judgement. Suffice to say that Alex has ended up on the wrong end of Lamplighter’s fist and I can assure you that it won’t have been of his own making. The man’s a bloody trouble maker and a liability and we need him out of The

Orbury today!” Chives scraped back his chair and stood up, slapping a defiant fist down on the antique wood.

An awkward silence broke out, disturbed only by the sound of Stimpson turning the front page of the paper as he followed the story to page two.

Charles Easter broke the silence. “Does it say what it was over?”

“It does indeed,” replied the Social Secretary, “it appears our friend Lamplighter has gone and got Muxcombe’s granddaughter in the family way.”

“Pwegnant! How old is she?” asked BSJ enthusiastically.

“It doesn’t say. Apparently Muxcombe got wind that something was up and followed her last Tuesday and found himself trailing her to an ante natal clinic.”

“Must have been straight after the swindle, he’s still in his golf clobber,” commented Easter.

“According to a witness he waited outside the premises until the two of them came out together and he confronted them. Sounds as if Lamplighter told him to mind his own business before Muxcombe threw a punch and the next minute they’re both rolling about on the floor in their club colours.”

“So it was Alex who threw the first punch?” noted Easter.

“Provocation!” shouted Chives in defense. “For goodness sake the man’s probably twice her age. Come on Bunny, you’ve got granddaughters, do you really want that man stalking around these parts preying on young girls?”

“He’s got a point,” conceded Stimpson to his doubting counterpart.

“Good man!” exclaimed Chives before turning all his attention on to the Handicap Secretary. “That’s three yes’s. It’s just down to you now Bunny, we need a unanimous decision. Surely you are not going to back this animal? Getting young girls pregnant? Come on Charles, don’t stand in the way of what is right.”

“We’ll make an enemy of Viscount Waffham,” replied Easter, “you mark my words. He will not take kindly to us kicking out his stable mate and pairs partner.”

“That’s a point, they’re still in the doubles as well, he’ll have to play on two against one,” put in Stimpson.

“Do we really want to go head to head with the heir to the pile?” pleaded Easter.

“Don’t you worry about the Viscount, I’ll make sure I sort him out with his grandfather. No doubt he’ll be able to soften the blow in the usual way,” assured Chives, rubbing the tips of his fingers together.

“Bail him out of his drinking and gambling debts again?” enquired Stimpson.

“Exactly,” said Chives. “So don’t you worry about him Bunny, it’s Lamplighter we need to focus on. It is imperative that we stop him right here, right now, before he drags this club into the gutter. This isn’t some back street brawling club or one of his seedy gambling joints, this is The Orbury. A show of hands please gentlemen and let us get this matter over with.”

“Hang him,” said BSJ again for good measure as three arms went up and all eyes fell once again on the Handicap Secretary.

“You promise to deal with Viscount Waffham?” said the lone abstentee.

“I promise,” replied Chives solemnly. “His Lordship won’t let us down on that front, I don’t think he’s ever really forgiven him over the death of his own son. What’s more, he would never allow the good name of The Orbury to be brought into question, family or not.”

Charles Easter continued to keep his arm down, scanning the other faces before finally letting out a long sigh and raising his hand with a shake of his head.

“Excellent. Ink pen at the ready BSJ?”

“Never dwy Mr. Secwetary,” said the Committee Secretary as he strained his large bulk out of his seat and made his way down towards the marble fox. Set into the four alcoves of the north western tribune, surrounding the howling statue, were four inset

bookcases. All were identical, with white alabaster scrolls edged in gold leaf adorning their tops and their sides trimmed with panels of carved gilt leaves. Each held four rows of large bound books, an array of crimson, claret, umber and olive hand stitched leather. But one bookcase held row upon row of identical tomes. The matching spines sat three inches thick, their copper covers glowing under the light thrown from the mighty crystal chandelier that hung from the centre of the tribune. A thumb's length from the top of each spine was a black title panel edge in gold banding. The black and gold stripe ran the width of the bookcase, flowing identically through each book. In the centre of this panel was a gold number that ran consecutively from volume to volume.

BSJ stopped in front of the bookcase and ran his finger across the numbers, stopping at number thirty-four. Teasing it out of its home with his fingertips he hefted the journal into his arms and carried it back to the table.

Out of breath from the exertion he let the book drop onto the table with a resonating thud before taking hold of the tongue of emerald silk that was poking out the bottom and turning to the correct page.

Each leaf was printed with feint horizontal lines. A single heavy vertical line split the page into two columns, the left hand margin just wide enough to write a number. BSJ reached into his pocket and withdrew a fountain pen, twisting off its cap before poising the implement in mid-air.

"Number?" enquired Chives when he saw that the other man was ready.

"Journal thirty-four. Entry three hundred and forty-five," replied the Committee Secretary as he wrote the digits neatly in the margin.

"Entry reads," stated Chives preparing to dictate, "at an Emergency General Meeting of the Committee Mr. John Lamplighter was expelled from the club by a unanimous vote by a quorum of four officers. The reason for expulsion is a consequence of his shocking

behavior resulting in bringing shame and humiliation to the club through violent and threatening behavior. Officers present; Jim Chives, Club Secretary; Charles Eas-

“Bloody hell Jim, do we have to put our names to it?” pleaded Colin Stimpson.

Chives ignored him and carried on without comment. “Charles Easter, Handicap Secretary; Brian St.John-James, Committee Secretary and Colin Stimpson, Social Secretary.” Stimpson groaned at mention of his name.

“Now if you’ll excuse me gentlemen, I have a phone call to make to conclude our business,” said the secretary rising from his chair. “What say we reconvene on the Portico Terrace in ten minutes to celebrate once the deed is done?” With that he turned and strode from the room, his gait the walk of a happy man.

“Hang him dwy!” called out BSJ to his receding back.

A quarter of an hour later the four men stood with drinks in hand under the canopy of the portico, looking out between the supporting columns at the first tee.

“How come from up here,” began Chives, still struggling to wipe the grin from his face, “it looks as though it is impossible to miss the fairway, it must be all of a hundred yards wide.”

“What’s more, there’s acres of space on the left and yet I always end up being blocked out behind that flipping oak tree on the right,” added Stimpson.

“I’m surprised no one’s got out their Black & Decker seven iron and hacked the wuddy thing down in the middle of the night,” bristled BSJ.

“That’s useful to know BSJ, now we know whose house to come knocking on if we find it splayed across the fairway one morning,” joked Stimpson.

Charles Easter didn’t crack his face. Under normal circumstances he was an extremely tall man who would tower over the others by a good six inches. However for the

moment his shoulders sagged under the weight of concern. “How did Lamplighter take it?” he asked tersely, cutting through the lingering bonhomie.

Chives paused to take a sip of his drink before answering. “Not well, to say the least.” For a moment the bravado had left his voice.

“Did he mention the Viscount?” continued Easter.

“He did. He said we hadn’t heard or seen the last of him and that we could expect a visit from the heir sooner rather than later.”

“I don’t like this at all Jim,” went on the Handicap Secretary nervously. “Are you absolutely positive we have done the right thing? Perhaps we should have waited for his Lordship to get in before we acted.”

“We mustn’t weaken now Charles. His Lordship will already be on the back nine and I’ll speak to him as soon as he gets in. As long as I get to speak to him before his grandson gets a chance then all will be fine.”

“And is there any risk that you might get there second?”

“None. An impossibility,” stated Chives.

“I take it then, that you know the Viscount isn’t around today?” enquired Stimpson.

“Correct, Brunswick said he had packed overnights so the coast is clear until tomorrow.”

As the secretary finished, the sound of raised voices escaped through the open doors behind them. All four men turned in puzzlement just as the peaceful backdrop of the estate was shattered by the haunting scream of a siren.

“What the hell?” shouted Stimpson, raising his voice to be heard.

“That’s the old air waid siwen on the woof!” exclaimed BSJ as the sound descended into its downward cry. Chives stiffened at the sound and stood with his mouth agape, struggling to draw breath.

“What bloody idiot has got their hands on that old thing?” complained Easter.

“It will be Brunswick,” whispered Chives, “in accordance with the protocol laid down in 1940 to alert the workers in the fields and across the estate of the news.” He spoke in a flat monotone, desperately trying to gather his thoughts.

“What news?” asked Stimpson.

The clamor of approaching voices reached a crescendo as both Captain and Vice Captain came flying out of the small opening onto the terrace.

“Jim! Jim!” they shouted together as they stumbled to a halt in front of the outstretched hand of the Club Secretary.

“I know,” he said softly.

“Know what?” exclaimed Charles Easter angrily as the siren wailed upwards.

“Spencer, Minty, what on earth is going?”

“I-It’s,” stammered Spencer Cartwright, the Club Captain, wiping sweat from his face and trying to catch his breath, “it’s the old m-man.”

“It’s his Lordship,” clarified the Vice.

“What about him?” asked Stimpson, Easter and BSJ in unison.

“He’s dead,” replied Chives knowingly.

“Wuddy hell.”