

1 The Rolls

by Christopher Leach

Martin Butler is 13 years old and lives with his mother, his father having been killed in a traffic accident some years ago. At his school, there has been an open day for parents, where one of his classmates, George Swann, was criticised in a very rude manner by his teacher of English for his poor written work. George's mother and grandmother got very angry and told the teacher that in real life it is other values that are important. So, the next morning, as a demonstration, Mr Swann, a rich businessman, takes his son and Martin to school in his Rover 3500 and stops it next to the English teacher's old Volkswagen.

manner way
values værdier
break frikvarter
Dickie klassens
engelsklærer
pile of junk møgspand,
rustdyng
tin can blikdåse

"Did you see us?" he said at break. "Did you see Martin and me pull in next to old Dickie's pile of junk? That's what you call a car. A pity you haven't got a Rover. You're coming back with us later, aren't you, Martin?"

"No," I said.

"Why not?"

"I've got to go somewhere else."

"We'll take you there."

"I've had enough of Rovers," I said. "There's only one car to travel in."

"Old Dickie's German tin can, you mean?" said Burroughs.

"No," I said calmly, "a Rolls. If I go anywhere I go in a Rolls."

"You in a Rolls?" said Baxter. "You make me laugh."

"My uncle's got a Rolls," I said. "A Silver Cloud. Takes him to



the City every day. Got a chauffeur, too. He could pick me up any morning I like."

"Oh yes, we know, Butler," said Harrison. "We know."

"Where does this uncle live?" said Baxter.

"Bexley Heath," I said. "He could always arrange to call in. It's on his way."

"Ridden much in it, have you?" said Burroughs.

By this time, I had learned never to take a story too far. It had to be kept believable.

"No, I've never ridden in it," I said. "But he's always promised to give me a ride – whenever I want it."

"Better make it tomorrow, then," said George. "So we can all see."

"It'll show up your Rover," I said. "You sure you want that to happen?"

"I don't think he'll mind all that much," said Baxter, "will you, Swanny?"

"No," said George.

And they all waited: all the disbelieving faces that had nothing in their lives but things they could touch. Only Miller believed: the old hero-worship still shining.

"You show them, Martin," he said.

"So, what about the Rolls, Butler?" said Baxter.

"He may be abroad," I said. "He goes abroad a lot. Big businessman."

Burroughs nodded. "He'll be abroad then."

Miller shook his head. "He won't, will he, Martin?"

"No," I said. "He won't. Tomorrow morning, then."

"A Silver Cloud with a chauffeur," said Baxter. "We'll be waiting."

At the end of the day I walked home with Miller.

"Are you going away during the summer holidays?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said, still thinking of how I could get a Silver Cloud and a chauffeur by eight o'clock the next morning.

"Do you think he'll be abroad?" he said. "Your uncle?"

"No, I don't think so." I felt a sudden certainty. "I'll pick you up, if you like. Tomorrow."

He stopped on the pavement. "That would be wonderful."

"Be ready," I said. "The usual time."

When I got home I washed and changed, then sat down in front of the blank TV screen. The problem: a Silver Cloud and a chauffeur by eight a.m. How? I had fourteen hours; minus seven, for sleep. How? I checked up on how much money I had.

Bexley Heath *et*

yderkvarter i London

disbe'lieving *van tro*

hero-worship

heltetilbedelse

shining *'uforandret'*

blank empty, black



Thirty-two pence. Not a bad start for a Rolls. I got into my jacket and went out.

Martin goes to a car showroom to ask about Rolls-Royces, and is told that a certain Mr John Swinger, an estate agent, has got a Silver Cloud. He finds his address in a telephone directory.

Prospect Road, Greenwich. In twenty minutes I was there: standing outside the small iron gates. I reached for the black iron latch.

The Silver Cloud was parked outside the half-open door of the house. It looked well cared for and as much a status symbol as the Rover. I went up to the house. I had no great story to tell them, no fantastic lie that would astound them; I was just going to tell the truth. One should always take a chance.

Through the half-open door came the sound of voices, quarrelling: a man and a woman.

I realised that no matter how rich and beautiful the house is, people still shout and scream. I rang the bell. It had a soft, musical tone.

"Well, are we going or are we not?" the woman said. "Make up your mind: this is the last chance, John."

"I thought I heard the front door," he said.

"You don't get out of it so easily. There is no one there. John, I mean this now..."

I rang the bell again.

"There," he said, "answer it, will you?"

She came out of the room and into the hall. She was tall, wearing elegant clothes, and her hands were clenched.

"What do you want?"

I took a step back, then gathered myself together.

"Could I see Mr Swinger, please?"

"You cannot," she said. "He's very busy at the moment. What do you want?"

"I just want to see him."

"Who is it?" he called.

"A boy. He's going now."

"Could I see you, Mr Swinger?" I called back.

"Don't be so impertinent!" she said. "Go away!"

He came out from the room and stood behind her: taller than her, smart suit, eyes behind thick glasses. He was holding a glass

showroom

udstillingslokale

es'tate agent

ejendomsrådgiver

telephone di'rectory

telephone book

latch *klinke, håndtag*

as'tound *forbløffe*

there *(her) 'der kan du se'*

clench *knytte*

im'pertinent

uforskammet





lager *øl*
 col'lect *samle ind*
 calmness *ro*
 dentist *tandlæge*
 fireplace *pejs*

of what looked like lager. He grinned at me over her shoulder.

"Saved by the bell," he said.

"Go away!" she said. "He's collecting for something, I suppose."

"No," he said. "You want to see me? Come in."

"I will not have him in, John. I want to finish..." she forced herself to some kind of calmness. "What do you want, boy?"

"I want to see Mr Swinger about his Rolls-Royce."

"My Rolls?" He looked at it anxiously, then pushed her aside.

"You haven't done anything to it, have you?"

"No," I said.

Satisfied, he stepped back.

"Come in," he said.

The room was – well – great. They couldn't have had any kids: there wasn't a mark. Everything shone. It was like the inside of one of those houses you see in the magazines in dentists' waiting rooms. I was scared to sit down. He did, in a deep armchair. She stood near the fireplace, irritated and wishing me out of the house.

"Well?" he said.

"Have you got a chauffeur?" I said.



"You're too young to have passed the driving test," he said.
"No, I haven't got a chauffeur. What's it all about?"

"I told some... friends at school that I have an uncle who owns a Silver Cloud, and has a chauffeur. And I've told them they're calling for me at school tomorrow."

"Good for you," he said. "Good old uncle."

"But it's not true," I said.

"Face the music," he said, drinking some of his lager.

"Since when have you faced any kind of music?" she said. And she turned to me, slowly. "What are you... suggesting?" her mouth stayed open, and then she began to laugh. "You don't mean you... Oh no, you can't." She looked up at the man. "You know what he's suggesting?"

"Off you go, son," he said. "Own up and face the music."

She came forward and put her hand on his shoulder.

"This is exactly what I mean, John," she said. "You've gone old and boring. If this had happened when we were just starting, you would be all for it."

He put down his lager and looked at her.

"You mean: you want me to drive him to school tomorrow in the Rolls, pretending to be his uncle? Is that what you mean?"

"Why not?" she said. "You've become too much of a robot lately, John. This kid's arrived at the right moment. Take him to school in the Rolls. Get a chauffeur's cap from somewhere. Live a little out of that damned office. And come to Stockholm with me in the same spirit. Please."

He looked at me.

"You're both mad," he said.

"Of course we are!" she said. "Oh, let's have a little excitement again, John. Please."

The next morning, Martin is waiting for the Rolls Royce to arrive. Mr Swinger seems to be late.

Ten minutes later he hadn't arrived, and I knew I would have to go without him. I picked up my case and went out of the house. And there it was, coming smoothly up the street: the Rolls shining against the grey houses as the Rover had done. He stopped alongside me. He was wearing a peaked cap, more a yachtsman's than a chauffeur's, but it looked correct enough.

"Front or back?" he said.

"Back would be better, wouldn't it?" I said. "In style."

driving test køreprøve
face the music tage
konsekvenserne
sug'gest foreslå, være ude
på
own up indrømme, tilstå
pre'tend lade, som om
cap kasket
in the same spirit i
samme ånd, på samme
måde
case taske
peaked cap kasket
yachtsman
sejlsportsmand
in style med manér



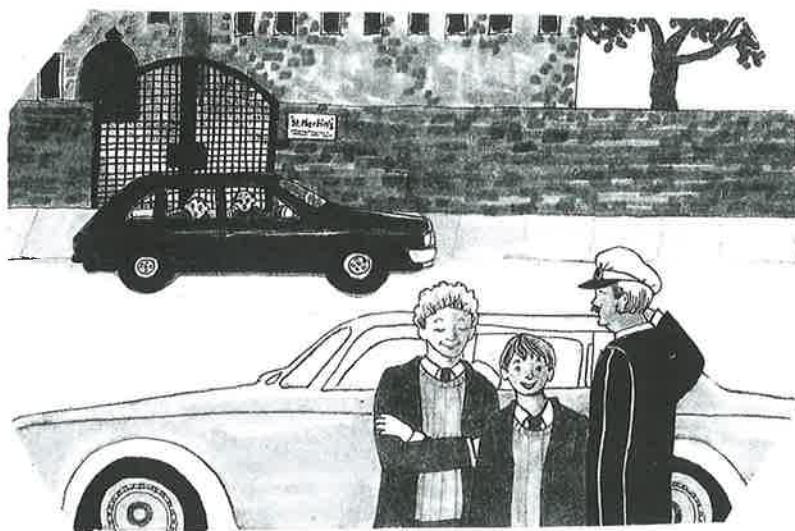
He smiled. "In style."
 "You're late."
 "Sorry, sir."
 I got in and closed the door.
 "Where does this boy live?"
 I told him, and he started the car.
 "Are you going to Stockholm?" I said.
 "You keep your ears open, don't you?" he said. "Yes, I suppose so. She's right. I've let the business take over too much. Stockholm; and then France, and then Spain."
 "Lucky you," I said.
 "First holiday in years," he said.
 "From chauffeur to first-class tourist."
 He laughed.

Mrs Miller came to the door, and stood there, unbelievably.

"Oh, he's gone," she said. "He told me, but..."
 "How long ago, madam?" said Swinger, playing his role perfectly.
 "Only five minutes or so," she said. "Oh, he will be disappointed."
 "Perhaps we can catch him up, Jenkins," I said from the open window.
 "Yes, sir," he said.
 She watched us go, shaking her head. Seconds later I saw him, running past the library.
 "There he is!" I said.
 The car pulled in slightly ahead of him. His head was down, and I had to call.
 "Miller!"
 His head came up as if pulled by wires, and a smile as wide as the Pacific lit up his face. He ran up, admiring the car.
 "Get in, please," said Swinger. "We are running rather late."
 "Hey, great," said Miller, plumping down in the seat. "Wait till they see this, eh?"
 "Could we go a little faster, Jenkins?" I said.
 "I'll try, sir," said Swinger. "But the traffic is rather heavy."
 When we turned into Treviot Street it was empty. Everyone was inside the school building.
 "Oh hell!" said Miller.
 "Turn in over there, please, Jenkins," I said.
 We swung on to the waste ground.

disap'pointed *skuffet*
 library *bibliotek*
 slightly a little
 ahead of in front of
 the Pa'cific *Stillehavet*
 run late *være forsinket*
 waste ground *ubebygget*
 grund





hymn salme
will these do? kan vi
bruge dem her (som
publikum)?
play it up giv den hele
armen
spring to at'tention
smække hælene sammen
sa'lute gøre honnør
prove bevise
purr spinde som en kat

"I'm terribly sorry, sir," said Swinger. And he really looked it. From inside the school building sounded voices singing a hymn.

No one would ever know – no one would believe.

Then Miller cried out:

"Look, Martin!"

And coming down the street was the Rover 3500 – later than we were. It stopped near the gate, opposite us, and two faces stared at us: George's and his father's.

"Will these do, sir?" said Swinger, quietly.

"Play it up," I said, equally softly.

By this time George was out and looking very unhappy over there on the pavement.

Swinger sprang to attention and saluted.

"Will that be all, sir?" he said.

"Yes, thank you, Jenkins," I said.

"Shall I call for you this afternoon?"

"No thank you. I was just proving something," I said, loud enough for George to hear me.

"Thank you, sir," said Swinger. "Any time, sir."

George and his father watched the Silver Cloud purr off. Then, as Miller and I went into the playground, George came out of his trance and ran after us.

"Wait for me, Martin!" he said. "Wait for me!"

1. Why does George want Martin to ride home with him in the Rover?
2. What makes Martin refuse?
3. Why does he make up the story about the Rolls Royce?
4. 'They all... had nothing in their lives but things they could touch.' Try



to explain what Martin means, and what this shows about himself.

5. What is Martin's relationship to Miller?
6. When does Martin finally decide to come to school in a Rolls Royce, and why?
7. How does the woman speak to Martin in the beginning, and why?
8. Why does she change her tone?
9. How does Mr Swinger play his role the next day?
10. How does Martin play his?
11. Describe Martin, both his positive and negative sides. Would you like a friend like him? Why/why not?
12. Would you like to be like Martin?
13. Telling the truth: we are told always to do so, but there are situations where we avoid it. Write a small paper on this, giving examples. Or, make up a story about persons who have been injected with a 'truth serum' so they cannot lie. What are the consequences?



JAGUAR

1. Why did the advertisers choose to place the boy and his bike in the foreground and not, for instance, a young couple?
2. Try to put the boy's dreams in writing. Start with the words: "Some day I..."
3. Make up a few advertisements for different sorts of cars, underlining different qualities (power, speed, safety, space, looks, comfort, equipment (:udstyr) etc.)

