

LUCKY for LOVELL!

By
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He tottered and almost fell over

CHAPTER I LIKE LOVELL!

“THAT funk Carthew—!”

Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, got no further than that.

He had more to say. Lovell rather liked the sound of his own voice. Also, he had a high opinion of his own opinions, which, as he believed if no one else did, were worth hearing.

Probably Lovell would have said quite a great deal more, on the subject of Carthew of the Sixth, the most unpopular prefect at Rookwood School, had he not been interrupted.

He did not like Carthew. Few fellows, if any, did. Carthew was much given to a too liberal use of the official ashplant. Now, as it happened, scorn was added to dislike: for had not Pipkin of the Third actually seen Carthew, Sixth-Form man and prefect as he was, running away from a tramp in Coombe Lane? Pipkin had related that incident to other fellows, who

had in turn related it to still other fellows, till all Rookwood knew about it, which was rather awful for Carthew. So there was Lovell, in the quad, telling Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome what he thought of Carthew: and no doubt he would have gone on telling them, had he not been interrupted.

But he was—suddenly.

Smack!

The chums of the Fourth had not seen Carthew coming. He came round a corner of the building, just in time to hear his name, with the unpleasant epithet “funk” attached to it. And the smack he handed out to the speaker rang like a pistol-shot.

Lovell caught it with his ear. It was a mighty smack. He tottered, and almost went over.

“Oh!” spluttered Lovell. “Oh! Ow! Who—!”

With a hand to a burning ear, he spun round at his assailant. He glared at Carthew. The Sixth-Form man gave him an angry stare, and walked on. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome exchanged looks. It was so like Lovell to be expressing his opinion of Carthew, in his usual loud tones, just as the person concerned was coming into hearing.

Lovell rubbed his burning ear, spluttering with fury.

“Why, the cheeky rat—does he think he can smack a fellow’s head?” gasped Lovell.

Carthew, apparently, did think so: for he had done it. Lovell’s somewhat thick head was singing from that sounding smack. Really, they did not smack heads at Rookwood. A prefect could, for just cause, order a fellow to bend over: but he really couldn’t smack his head. However, whether he could or not, Carthew undoubtedly had done it!

“That funk, who bolted from a tramp, smacking a fellow’s head!” gasped Lovell. “By gum, I’ll show him whether he can smack a fellow’s head or not!”

And Arthur Edward Lovell clenched his fists and started at a rush after Carthew, who had walked on as if he considered the incident closed, as doubtless he did. Arthur Edward forgot, at that moment, or did not choose to remember, that Sixth-Form prefects could not be punched by juniors, and that the punching of a prefect could only mean an interview with the Head, with dire results. Lovell was not only going to punch Carthew, but he was going to punch him as hard as he jolly well could, prefect as he was.

But again he was interrupted.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, all three, jumped at him, as he started after Carthew, as if moved by the same spring. They grasped him on all sides, and whirled him back.

Lovell struggled in their grasp.

"Let go, you fatheads!" he roared.

"Easy does it, old boy!" said Jimmy Silver, soothingly.

"Chuck it, fathead!" said Raby.

"Want to go up to the Head to be sacked?" inquired Newcome.

Lovell wrenched at detaining hands.

"You saw him smack my head—" he howled.

"And we heard you ask for it!" said Raby.

"You can't call pre's fancy names," said Jimmy.

"Not when they can hear you, at any rate!" said Newcome.

"I'm going to hit him in the eye!" yelled Lovell. "Think I'm going to let him smack my head? Let go!"

He wrenched and again wrenched. But his loyal chums did not let go. If Lovell, for the moment, had a fancy for going up to Dr. Chisholm to be sacked for hitting a prefect in the eye, it was up to his faithful friends to restrain him. And they did!

"Jolly near time for class," said Jimmy Silver. "Let's get along to the form-room."

"I'm going to hit Carthew in the eye—"

"Carthew's a pre—"

"I don't care!"

"You will, when the Head tells you to look out a train for home!" said Newcome. "Forget it, old man."

"The rotter—the rat—the swob—"

"All that, and more," agreed Jimmy. "But—"

"Will you let go?"

"Not so's you'd notice it! Come along to the form-room."

"I won't!" roared Lovell. "Not till I've given that funk Carthew a oner in the eye."

And again he wrenched.

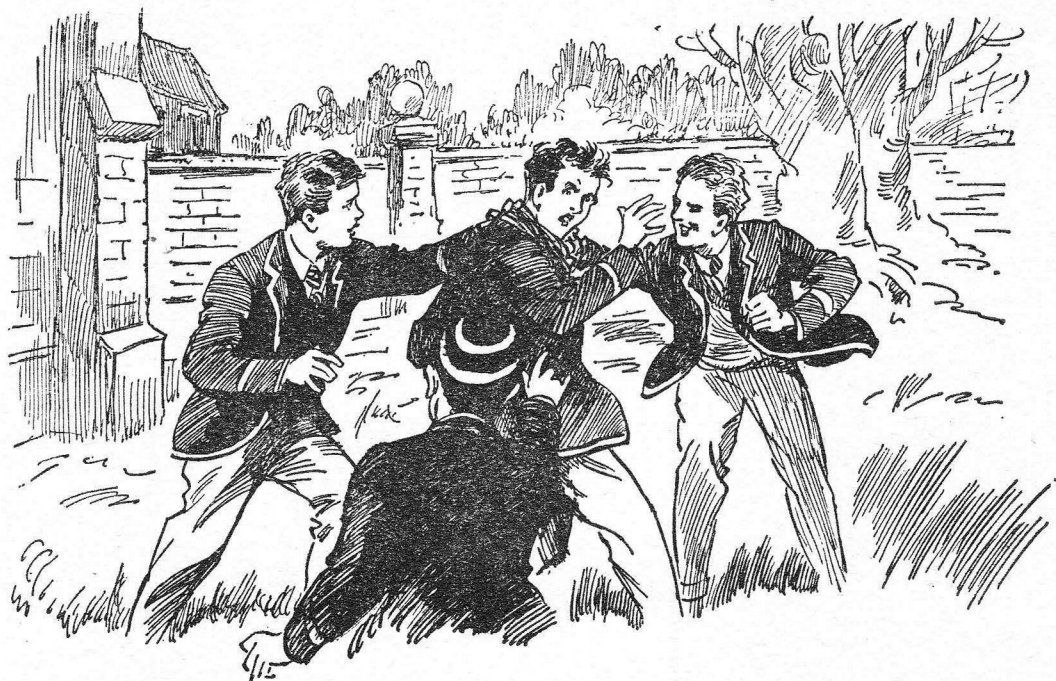
Arthur Edward Lovell was quite a hefty fellow. But he was not hefty enough to deal with his three faithful friends in a bunch. They held on to him: and he wrenched in vain. They rocked and almost rolled: but they held on.

"Come on, old chap!" said Jimmy.

"I'm going—"

"Not at all—you're coming!"

And Lovell came! With three fellows grasping him, and walking him off, he had no choice. Carthew, quite unconscious of his narrow escape from a punch in the eye, walked on his way: what time Arthur Edward Lovell, vociferous but safely held, walked to the form-room.



And Lovell came! With three fellows grasping him and walking him off

CHAPTER II

LOVELL MEANS BUSINESS!

"I COULD lick him!"

"Eh! Who?" said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell frowned darkly.

It was prep in the Classical Fourth. The "Fistical Four" were in the end study: three of them seated round the table with their books, one of them leaning on the mantelpiece with his hands in his pockets and a frown on his brow . . . which deepened as Jimmy replied to his remark.

Lovell rather liked leaning on that mantelpiece. He was the tallest of the four: the other three were hardly long enough for such leaning. They were all sturdy youths: but it was an undoubted fact that none of them was so long as Lovell: and Arthur Edward did not dislike making that fact manifest. Now, as he leaned, he looked down from superior height on three bent heads at the table. He was not, for the moment, bothering about prep. It was not, indeed, uncommon for Lovell not to bother about prep, and land into a spot of trouble with Mr. Dalton in the form-room in consequence.

But it was not just his accustomed carelessness that now banished prep from Lovell's mind. He was thinking of the episode of that day in the quad: and the more he thought of it, the more it rankled. Smacking a fellow's head was the limit: far beyond the limit.

It was true that Arthur Edward himself, now and then, had cuffed some cheeky fag in the Second or Third. So it would be hard to say that he objected to the smacking of heads wholly on principle. But the case now was, of course, very different. In this case, it was Arthur Edward's own head that had been smacked: and there is no doubt that head-smacking is one of those things which it is more blessed to give than to receive. Lovell was not a fag in the Second or Third—Lovell was a man in the Fourth: and in his own esteem at least, quite an important man in the Fourth. Actually, if Lovell's head was smacked, it was practically time for the skies to fall. He brooded on it. To let such an indignity pass, and nothing done, was unthinkable. The fact that Mark Carthew was a Sixth-Form prefect, and by all the rules and laws of Rookwood School unpunchable, did not make it thinkable.

Jimmy Silver and Co. on the other hand, had almost forgotten the incident. It did not loom so largely in their minds as in Lovell's. And in preparation, too, a fellow had to think of prep. The Classical Fourth had to prepare a section of the Aeneid for the morrow: and really and truly, there was enough in Virgil for a fellow to think about, if he did not want to perpetrate "howlers" in form—as Lovell very frequently did!

Lovell frowned, and his lip curled.

"Who?" he repeated. Jimmy Silver had actually asked "Who?"—when Lovell declared that he could "lick him." Evidently, the matter that was seething in Lovell's mind was not seething in Jimmy's. His thoughts were in prep: and he did not know to whom Lovell was alluding! "Did you say 'Who'?"

"Eh! Yes!" said Jimmy. "But never mind who, old chap—hadn't you better pile into prep?"

"Don't be an ass!"

"Well, prep's prep!" remarked Raby.

"Blow prep."

"Are you going to blow Dalton in the form-room to-morrow, too?" inquired Newcome.

"I'm not bothering about Dalton, and I'm not bothering about prep," hooted Lovell. "I said I could lick him, and I jolly well could."

"Lick Dalton?" ejaculated Raby, staring up from Virgil.

"You silly ass—"

"Well, you said—"

"I said I could lick him!" roared Lovell, "and you jolly well know whom



"I could jolly well stand up to him, and lick him," declared Lovell

I mean, if you haven't forgotten Carthew smacking my head. Perhaps you have!" added Lovell, with bitter sarcasm.

"Eh! Oh! No! Yes," said Jimmy, rather vaguely. "Never mind that now, old boy—just sit down and tackle jolly old Virgil—"

"I could lick him! He's a Sixth-Form man, I know, a senior and all that—but he's a weedy specimen: he never turns up for games if he can crawl out of it, and he's a funk. I'm as big as he is, or jolly near. I could jolly well stand up to him, with or without gloves, and lick him!" declared Lovell.

"My dear chap—"

"I've got more pluck, at least! Think I'd run away from that tramp, as young Pipkin saw Carthew doing?" demanded Lovell.

"Um!" said Jimmy. "From what I've heard, that tramp was a husky fellow, and Carthew wouldn't have had much chance. And from what Carthew says, he thought the man was a footpad, going to rob him—"

Scornful snort from Lovell.

"He would say anything, after what he did!" he jeered. "He'd like fellows to believe that the man was a dangerous character—"

"Perhaps he was!" suggested Newcome.

"Rot!" said Lovell.

"Well, Pipkin described him as a big, brawny brute of a fellow, with a bull neck in a spotted muffler, and—"

"Pipkin's a young ass."

Arthur Edward, clearly, was not prepared to hear or heed anything in favour of Carthew of the Sixth. So Jimmy, Raby and Newcome reverted to Virgil.

Virgil, however, was interrupted by Lovell.

"Carthew's a funk, as I was saying this afternoon when he came up and smacked my head!" resumed Lovell. "Even if that tramp was a footpad, which he most likely wasn't, and even if he was a brawny brute, which I don't suppose for a minute he was, Carthew was a funk to run. Rookwood men don't take to their heels because they're frightened of a tramp. Think old Bulkeley would have run, or even Knowles of the Modern Side? I said that Carthew was a funk, and he smacked my head for it—and I could lick him, all the time. Don't you fellows think I could?" demanded Lovell, aggressively. "What do you think, Jimmy?"

"I think you'd better get on with prep—"

"You silly ass! What do you think, Raby?"

"Same as Jimmy."

"Will you talk sense?" bawled Lovell, in a voice heard far beyond the confines of the end study. "What do you think, Newcome?"

"I think you'll have a beak up here if you bellow like an elephant."

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard.

"Oh, all right!" he said, in a tone clearly implying that, so far from being all right, it was all wrong. "All right. If you don't care about a senior man smacking Fourth-form men's heads, all right! Get on with your prep! I know what I'm going to do, all the same."

Three juniors looked up at that.

That afternoon, they had barely restrained Arthur Edward Lovell from asking for the "sack". It sounded as if more restraint might be required. Lovell was a determined fellow. He rather prided himself upon being as firm as a rock: and his friends acknowledged that he was, at least, as obstinate as a mule!

"Well, and what are you going to do?" asked Jimmy.

"I'm going to lick Carthew."

"Oh, my hat!" said Raby.

"You're going to lick a Sixth Form pre, when any man would be sacked for laying a finger on him?" said Jimmy.



"But he's got it coming!" added Lovell

"He smacked my head—"

"We've had that!" remarked Newcome.

Lovell glared at him.

"You fellows can walk round Rookwood having your heads smacked right and left, if you like it," he said. "I don't! I'm not taking it lying down, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it! I tell you I could lick Carthew—and I'm jolly well going to do it, for smacking my head. Only—" Lovell paused.

Apparently even Lovell realised that there was an "only".

"Only," he went on, more slowly, "only I don't want to go up to the Head to be bunked. If it wasn't for that, I'd walk into Carthew's study this very minute and knock him right and left. But—"

Another pause! Clearly, there was a "but" as well as an "only".

"But he's got it coming!" added Lovell, finally. "I shall have to think it out a bit—I certainly don't want to go up to the Head! But you fellows can bank on this—I'm going to lick that cad Carthew. I've made up my mind about that, and it's as settled and fixed as the laws of the What-do-you-call-'ems and the Thingummies. I mean business—and that's that!"

And that being that, Lovell, at last, dropped the subject, and condescended to give a little attention to prep.

CHAPTER III

LOOKING AFTER LOVELL!

“CRICKET!” said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell shook his head.

It was the following afternoon.

That day, Jimmy and Raby and Newcome had had rather an anxious eye on Arthur Edward Lovell. The “Fistical Four” of Rookwood were generally inseparable: but never had they been quite so inseparable. There was really no telling what Lovell, in his present mood, might do: and the three agreed that he needed an eye kept on him.

In morning break, he had eyed Carthew, in the quad, rather like a truculent mastiff. His three chums had been prepared to collar him, as one man, if he made a single step towards the object of his deep wrath.

But Lovell restrained that wrath. Even Lovell realised that it wouldn't do to punch a Sixth Form prefect in open quad, under the eyes of all Rookwood. He was quite determined that he was going to “lick” Carthew. But between that determination, and his strong objection to being “sacked” for such an exploit, Arthur Edward was in rather a dilemma. He had said that he would have to think it out: and undoubtedly it was a difficulty that required considerable thought!

The afternoon was a half-holiday, and Jimmy Silver hoped that cricket would keep Lovell too busy to bother about reprisals on Carthew. Lovell was a keen cricketer, and not as a rule willing to miss a game. But it appeared that even cricket was taking second place now. Lovell's negative shake of the head indicated as much when Jimmy mentioned the subject in the quad after dinner.

“Not this afternoon,” said Lovell.

“You can't cut cricket,” urged Jimmy.

“There's no match on—”

“We've got to keep up to the mark for the Felgate match next week.”

“Never mind next week!” said Lovell.

Jimmy breathed rather hard. If Lovell turned down cricket, there was only one explanation—his feud with Carthew of the Sixth.

“Look here, you ass, what have you got in your head now?” demanded Jimmy. “If it's Carthew—”

“Just that!” assented Lovell.

“Then you can forget it!” snapped Newcome.

"I'll forget it after I've licked Carthew."

"But you can't!" hooted Raby.

"I fancy I could! I'm going to try, anyway."

"You're not!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"I jolly well am! I've thought it out," said Lovell. "I know how! You needn't tell me that I can't walk up to him in the quad here and wallop him. I know that. But outside the school, with nobody to butt in—what about that? Suppose I catch him, say, in Coombe Wood—a quiet spot all to ourselves. Carthew's been pretty well grinned at over running away from that tramp. Think he'd like to tell all Rookwood that he's been thrashed by a Fourth Form man? What? Why, he wouldn't be able to look a fellow in the face afterwards. He wouldn't dare show his nose in the Prefects' Room. Bet you he wouldn't say a word. Think so?"

Lovell's chums gazed at him. Evidently, Lovell had been doing some thinking! And his chums had to admit that there was, perhaps, something in what he said. A Sixth Form man, thrashed in a stand-up scrap by a junior of the Fourth, might quite possibly hesitate to tell the world about it. If he did, Lovell undoubtedly would be sacked: but Carthew would never hear the end of it. There was a chance—just a slim chance—that Lovell might get by with this!

Slim as that chance seemed to Jimmy Silver and Co., Lovell did not seem to regard it as slim. It seemed that he banked on it.

"Think he wants them turning up their noses at him in the Prefects' Room, and fags cackling over it, and everybody pointing him out as the man who was licked by a junior?" said Lovell, derisively. "Not on your life! If it's quite private, with nobody to see, I'll bet that Carthew will say nothing about it. What?"

"It's just possible—!" said Jimmy, slowly. "But—"

"It's a cert!" said Lovell, confidently.

"Fathead!" said Raby.

"Look here, Raby—"

"Well, thank goodness Carthew won't give you a chance of catching him in a lonely spot in Coombe Wood," said Newcome.

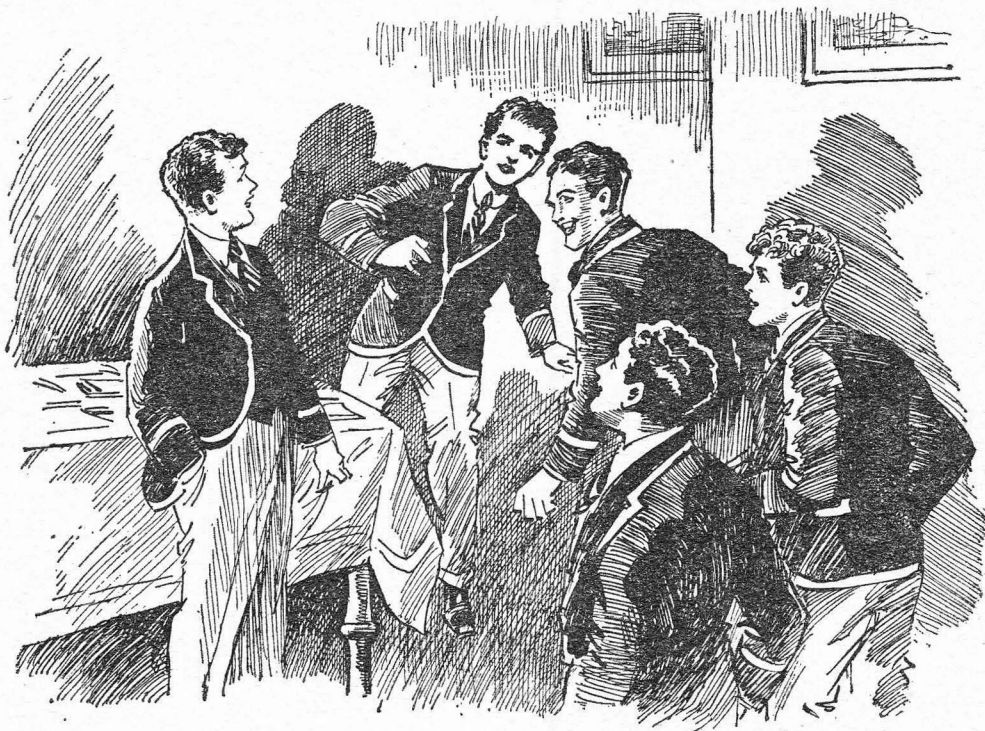
Lovell laughed.

"That's exactly what he's going to do this afternoon," he answered. "Carthew's walking over to Latcham this afternoon to go to the Regal."

"How do you know!"

"Because I heard him asking Neville to go with him. But Neville's playing cricket, and Carthew's going alone."

"Oh!" murmured Jimmy Silver.



"Well, I shall be behind that oak when Carthew comes along"

"So I've got it all cut and dried," went on Lovell. "I go out before Carthew starts, and wait for him on the footpath in Coombe Wood. You know that place where the big oak spreads over the footpath? Well, I shall be behind that oak when Carthew comes along."

"Look here, Lovell—"

"I shan't give him a chance to cut, like he did from that tramp," added Lovell. "I shan't let him see me till I've got him! See? Then he can use his fists, instead of smacking a fellow's head from behind. I shall lick him—"

"Suppose he licks you!" suggested Newcome.

"I'll chance that!"

"Suppose he comes straight back and goes to the Head—"

"I'll chance that too."

"You can't do it, old man."

"Can't I? You'll see."

Lovell's mind, evidently, was made up. He was going ahead, regardless—banking on that slim chance that Carthew would never own up to all Rook-

wood that he had been thrashed by a Fourth Form junior. That chance seemed good enough to Arthur Edward Lovell. It did not seem good enough to his chums.

"You fellows cut cricket, and come along and watch the show!" suggested Lovell.

"Ass!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Fathead!" said Raby.

"Goat!" said Newcome.

Raby and Newcome seemed to give the case up as hopeless. Argument rolled off Arthur Edward Lovell like water off a duck. But "Uncle James of Rookwood" had a card yet to play. Desperate diseases, as the poet has remarked require desperate remedies: and "Uncle James" was prepared to go great lengths to keep his hot-headed chum from asking for the "order of the boot".

"Come up to the study, Lovell," he said.

"What for?" asked Lovell.

"Something I want to show you."

"Oh, all right."



"Suppose he licks you?" suggested Newcome



Deposited in a breathless, gasping, infuriated heap on the study carpet

They went into the House, and up to the junior studies, Newcome and Raby following. Lovell had a cheery grin on his face, evidently in happy anticipation of what was going to happen in Coombe Wood later. Raby and Newcome were puzzled: they guessed, if Lovell did not, that Uncle James had something up his sleeve, though they could not guess what it was.

"Well?" said Lovell, having marched into the end study, "What is it that you want to show me, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver, standing with his back to the door, put his hand behind him and extracted the key from the lock.

"I want to show you that you can't carry on with playing the giddy goat," he explained. "Now, old fellow, will you chuck it up, and come along with us and play cricket?"

"No!" hooted Lovell, "I won't!"

"Do, old chap!" urged Raby.

"Rats!"

"Well, if you can't look after yourself, your pals will have to look after you," said Jimmy Silver, resignedly, and he jammed the key into the outside of the lock. "Come on, you chaps—Lovell's staying here."

Raby and Newcome chuckled.

"Good egg!" said Raby. "Come on!"

"Why, you—you—you—!" spluttered Arthur Edward Lovell. "You fancy you can lock me in the study—you—you—!" Lovell made a rush.

Three pairs of hands met him. There was quite a mix-up for a minute or two. But if Arthur Edward could handle Carthew, as he fancied, or not, he couldn't handle his three loyal pals; on the other hand, they handled him, and Arthur Edward was deposited in a breathless, gasping, infuriated heap on the study carpet.

Leaving him to gurgle for breath there, Jimmy Silver slammed the door, turned the key outside, and put it in his pocket. Three juniors walked away, satisfied that Arthur Edward was safe for the afternoon.

But was he?

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome joined a crowd of the Fourth on Little Side, and cricket was the order of the day. They even forgot Lovell. But had they remembered him, they would never have guessed that Arthur Edward in broad daylight, at the risk of being spotted by masters and prefects, had climbed down a rain-pipe from the window of the end study.

But he had! And while his faithful friends, nothing doubting, were urging the flying ball, Arthur Edward Lovell, as obstinately determined as ever, was on his way to Coombe Wood: there to lurk in ambush for Carthew of the Sixth, and administer the scheduled licking to that unpopular prefect.

CHAPTER IV

CHANGE IN THE PROGRAMME!

"**B**LOW!" muttered Lovell.
He muttered that expressive word under his breath.

It was very annoying.

For half an hour Arthur Edward Lovell had lurked behind the big spreading oak, on the footpath through Coombe Wood. He had started well ahead of the Sixth Form man who was going to Latcham: and he had to wait: but he was quite content to wait till Carthew came along. It was a solitary footpath, shaded by the thick foliage of trees on either side: and Lovell had certainly selected a favourable spot for an ambush. Underwoods grew thickly and he was in good cover, behind the oak, as he peered occasionally along the path, in the direction of Rookwood, to see whether Carthew was coming.

And then came footsteps on the grassy path: not from the direction of Rookwood, but from Latcham in the opposite direction. Lovell, no doubt, would have preferred to have Coombe Wood all to himself—and Carthew—that afternoon: but even Lovell did not expect the general public to give up

the use of that footpath to suit his personal plans. Somebody was coming along from Latcham, and Lovell, behind his tree, waited for that somebody to pass and disappear into space.

That somebody did not pass.

Lovell heard a sound of someone, unseen through the massive trunk of the oak, throwing himself down in the grass. Further sounds apprised him that that someone was sitting there, leaning on the tree: apparently taking a rest in the shade on a warm summer's afternoon. That spot, favourable for an ambush, was equally favourable for a rest in the shade. It was natural enough: but very annoying to Lovell. He did not want an audience on the spot when he "licked" Carthew. However, he waited as patiently as he could for that pedestrian, having rested, to resume his way. Instead of which, a scent of tobacco floated in the air. That pedestrian was not going on his way. He had lighted a pipe: to judge by the scent, a fairly foul one.

Lovell, at last, peered round the massive trunk, to see who or what it was. He caught his breath as he saw.

Sitting there, in the grass, his back to the oak, a pipe in his mouth, was a roughly-clad, muscular-looking man, with a rag of a cap on the back of his head, and a spotted muffler round a bull-neck. Obviously, the man was a tramp, if not something more truculent: and it dawned on Arthur Edward Lovell that that spot, which he had selected for its loneliness, was rather too lonely for a fellow to want to run into a tough-looking tramp.

He muttered "Blow!" but he was careful not to let that mutter be audible. He did not want to attract the attention of the bull-necked gentleman in the spotted muffler.

That spotted muffler rang a bell, as it were. He remembered Pipkin's description of the tramp from whom Carthew of the Sixth had fled: a big, brawny brute in a spotted muffler. It occurred to Lovell that this, in all probability, was the very tramp, or footpad, from whom Carthew had run.

Lovell drew back behind the oak trunk.

He was feeling rather serious now.

The spot was lonely—very lonely. If that tramp was Carthew's tramp—and he could hardly doubt it—the man had attacked Carthew, who had run for it. Carthew had declared, at Rookwood, that the ruffian had wanted to rob him—and Lovell had to admit that this man looked none too good for it. He wondered a little whether he had done Carthew injustice: for the Rookwood senior certainly was no match for that hefty tramp, and after all, no fellow wanted to be robbed. And suppose the brute spotted him there, and decided that a Rookwood junior was worth plundering as well as a Rookwood senior?

Lovell breathed rather hard—but very quietly.



Obviously, the man was a tramp

He longed to hear the man in the spotted muffer get up and go on his way. But the man did not stir.

His presence knocked out Lovell's carefully-laid plans. Any minute now Carthew might come along that footpath. At the first glimpse of that truculent-looking tramp, Lovell knew what Carthew would do—he would take to his heels, as he had done before. If it was the same man, one glimpse would be enough!

It was really very annoying!

Suddenly a sound came through the silence of the dusky wood. It was the sound of someone coming along the footpath from the direction of Rookwood.

Lovell set his lips.

Carthew was coming. Ten to one, it was Carthew: and the minute he saw that tramp, he would bolt. That was going to be the ultimate outcome of all Arthur Edward's careful planning.

Then a sound closer at hand caught his ear.

The tramp was stirring.

Lovell heard him scramble up. A rustling sound told that he had pushed into the bushes on the other side of the footpath.

Was he gone? Lovell listened intently. But the rustle died away immediately: the bushes were still and quiet. The tramp was not gone. He had only taken cover in the bushes across the path.

Lovell wondered why.

He was soon to know.

Footsteps on the footpath came closer. Peering from behind the trunk, Lovell saw the newcomer at last. It was Mark Carthew, of the Rookwood Sixth: swinging carelessly along, with his hands in his pockets—walking right into Lovell's ambush, and evidently happily unaware of tramps. The man was still close at hand, but nothing was to be seen of him.

The tramp, for some reason of his own, had dodged out of sight. There was no glimpse of him to alarm Carthew. The Sixth Form man came swinging on under the branches of the oak.

Now was the time for Arthur Edward Lovell to go into action, as planned. But he hesitated. A truculent tramp only three or four yards away made a difference. Suppose he butted in—!

As Lovell, behind the oak, hesitated, there was a sudden stir in the bushes on the other side of the footpath. An unwashed face, a ragged cap, a spotted muffler, came suddenly into sight—and then, as the man leaped on Carthew, it dawned on Lovell why he had taken cover! He was, after all, a footpad: and he had dodged out of sight till the wayfarer was within his reach! Lovell, really, might have guessed that one!

Carthew uttered a yell of alarm.

But he had no chance to run. The ruffian's grasp was on him, and he struggled in that grasp.

"Gotcher!" grinned the man in the spotted muffler.

"Let go!" panted Carthew.

"I don't think! You agin, is it—I know you! You bolted the other day—you ain't bolting now! I gotcher! Now, then, 'and it over—all you've got about you—and sharp! And if—Oh!"

Carthew was struggling. It did not seem that he was, after all, such a funk as Arthur Edward Lovell had declared. No doubt he would have taken to his heels, given a chance: but he had no chance of that. But he was not going to be robbed if he could help it. He struggled, and hit out: and his knuckles crashed on an unwashed face.

"Oh!" panted the man in the spotted muffler. "Oh! Oooh!" His nose spurted red from that jolt. "Cor! Why, I'll smash yer."

Lovell stared on—only for a moment or two!

The enraged ruffian was hammering Carthew right and left. The Rookwood senior was putting up a fight: but he was simply nowhere in those



"Gotcher!" grinned the man in the spotted muffler

muscular hands! Lovell had come there, and lurked in ambush, with the fixed determination of "licking" Carthew. Carthew was now getting such a "licking" as even the exasperated Arthur Edward would never have dreamed of handing out. Really, that should have suited Lovell's book. Somehow, it didn't!

He rushed out from behind the oak.

Lovell wasn't thinking now of "licking" Carthew. So far as he was thinking at all, he was only thinking of helping a Rookwood man attacked by a footpad. And the unfortunate Carthew was in need of help—there was no doubt about that. Punches were landing on him like hail, as Arthur Edward Lovell rushed into the fray.

His rush took the man in the spotted muffler quite by surprise. Both Lovell's fists, with plenty of beef behind them, crashed into the unwashed face, and the ruffian, with a bellow of rage, released Carthew, and turned on Arthur Edward. Carthew tottered against a tree, panting for breath. And for the next minute or two, until Carthew recovered sufficient wind to come to his aid, Arthur Edward Lovell had the time of his life.

CHAPTER V

UNEXPECTED!

JIMMY SILVER stared.

"Where—?" he ejaculated.

"How—!" exclaimed Raby.

"Mizzled!" said Newcome.

"Oh, the ass!"

"The fathead!"

Three Classical juniors stared into the end study. They had been rather surprised, as they came up the passage, after the cricket, to hear no sounds from that study: they had quite expected Arthur Edward Lovell to be audible. A fellow locked in a study for a couple of hours was not likely to keep quietly patient: least of all a fellow named Arthur Edward Lovell. Surprisingly, there was no sound: but the silence was explained when Jimmy Silver unlocked the door: the end study was vacant.

"The goat!" said Newcome. "The blithering ass! He must have mizzled by the window!"

"Down that rain-pipe!" said Raby, with a nod.

"The ass!" said Jimmy. "The goat! Oh, my hat! In broad daylight—with beaks and pre's about—clambering down from a study window! If he was spotted, it means six of the best from Dalton."

"Do him good, perhaps," said Newcome.

"Well, yes, but—" Jimmy wrinkled his brows. "He's gone, anyway. Whether he had six or not, he's gone. And we jolly well know where he's gone."

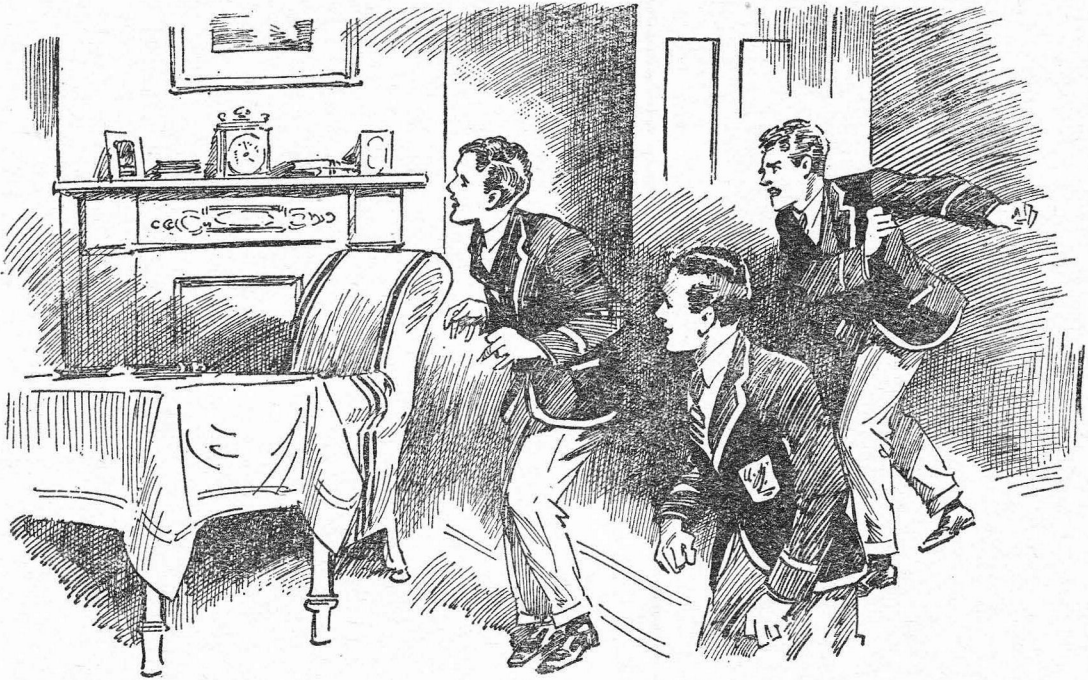
The three exchanged dismayed glances. Lovell was gone: and it was easy to guess where and why. He was carrying on with the plan which his loyal chums had hoped to nip in the bud by locking him in the study. There could be no doubt about that. And it was too late—much too late—to intervene. Whatever had happened in Coombe Wood, it must be long over by now.

"Poor old Lovell!" said Raby. "It's the long jump for him, if he pitched into Carthew in the wood."

"There's just a chance!" said Jimmy. "If he licked Carthew, Carthew mightn't want to let it out, as Lovell thought——"

Newcome shrugged his shoulders.

"But could he lick Carthew?" he said. "He thinks he could, but—Carthew's a bit of a weed, but he's a Sixth Form man—if there was a scrap, I'll bet it was Lovell got the licking, not Carthew."



Lovell was gone! The three Classical juniors stared into the end study

"Oh, suffering cats!" said Jimmy. He realised that Newcome was probably right. And if that was so, Carthew would have no reason for keeping the affair dark. The outcome of Arthur Edward's proceedings would be, first a thrashing from Carthew, and then the "sack" from the Head!

"I wonder if he's come in yet," said Raby. "Better go down and see."

In quite low spirits, the Co. went down to see. They soon learned that Lovell had not come in, and they stationed themselves at the gates to wait for him to do so. They waited anxiously, watching the road for Lovell like three Sister Annes.

Three faces were glum and worried.

Had Lovell, as he confidently believed that he could, licked Carthew? And if he had, was there a chance that the prefect would keep it dark, rather than own up that he had been licked by a junior? That was Lovell's only chance. Or—had Arthur Edward over-estimated his powers, and had Carthew handled him as any other Sixth Form man would have done? If that was how it was, Lovell was coming back to the school to be reported to the Head for punching a prefect, and sacked accordingly.

"There's Lovell!" exclaimed Newcome, suddenly.

Lovell was coming at last.

They watched him anxiously. He was not coming with his usual free-and-easy stride. He seemed to be almost crawling. And as he came nearer, they could see, with dismay, that there had, undoubtedly, been a scrap. Neither did Lovell look as if he had had the best of it.

"He's got a black eye!" murmured Raby.

"And look at his nose!" said Newcome.

"Poor old Lovell!" said Jimmy, sadly.

They went down the road to meet him. Lovell gave them a faint grin.

"Oh! You fellows!" he said, "did you fancy you could keep me locked in the study? Rats!"

They gazed at him. He had one black eye, and the other was an art shade in green. His nose looked red and swollen, and had evidently shed much claret. He had a bruise on either cheek, and another on his forehead. Only too clearly there had been some hard hitting.

"Did you meet Carthew?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh! Yes."

"Licked him?"

"Oh! No."

"If only you'd stayed in the study—!" sighed Jimmy.

Snort from Lovell.

"Catch me staying in the study, you cheeky asses! I'd jolly well smack your cheeky heads all round for locking me in, only I feel too done up. Rats!"

Lovell tottered on to the school gates, his friends keeping him company in sad silence. They felt that it was all up now.

Many glances were cast at Lovell as he came in at the gates. It was uncommon—very uncommon—for a Rookwood fellow to come in, on a half-holiday, with a black eye, a swollen nose, and a general aspect of having been under a lorry. In the quad, fifty fellows at least stared at Lovell.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Raby, "there's the Head!"

Dr. Chisholm was walking in the quadrangle. He ceased to walk and stood staring at Arthur Edward Lovell, blankly. Then, with a frown on his majestic brow that rivalled the frightful, fearful, frantic frown of the Lord High Executioner, he bore down on the Fistical Four.

Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome stood in silent dismay. Strange to relate, and much to their surprise, Lovell did not seem dismayed. He blinked at his headmaster, with discoloured eyes that persisted in winking, but displayed no sign of uneasiness.

"Lovell!" said the Head, in a very deep voice.

"Yes, sir."

"You have been fighting!"



"You are in a disgraceful state, Lovell!"

"Yes, sir."

"You are in a disgraceful state, Lovell. You are in a state in which no Rookwood boy should ever be seen."

"I—I couldn't help it, sir! I—I got some jolly hard knocks—"

"I can see that, Lovell! With whom—" The Head's voice was deeper. "With whom have you been fighting, Lovell!"

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome hardly breathed! It had to come out now! But as Lovell answered his headmaster's question, they wondered whether they were dreaming.

"A tramp, sir!"

"A tramp!" repeated the Head. "You return to the school in this state, Lovell, because you have been fighting with a tramp!"

"I couldn't help it, sir, really," said Lovell. "He was a footpad really, sir, and I couldn't let him knock Carthew about without going to help him—"

"Carthew?" repeated the Head.

"The brute set on Carthew in the wood, sir, and was knocking him about, and was going to rob him—"

"Bless my soul!"

"I had to help him, sir," said Lovell. "We handled the man between us, and he was glad to get away at the finish, but he gave us some jolly hard knocks—"

The Head gazed at Lovell. Jimmy Silver and Co., almost doubting their ears, gazed at him too. The Head spoke at last.

"You had better go in at once, Lovell, and bathe your face!" he said.

"Yes, sir!" said Lovell.

His friends, still wondering a little whether they were dreaming this, marched him into the House.

JIMMY SILVER and Co., really, could hardly believe it at first. But they had to. For it was so! Lovell hadn't licked Carthew—he hadn't even tried to. Instead of that, he had gone to Carthew's rescue, and collected untold damages in so doing. And he admitted that Carthew was not such a funk after all, for he had taken a full share in that scrap with the man in the spotted muffler. Had he not done so, Lovell's damages, already severe, would have been much severer. For which reason, it appeared that Lovell was prepared to forget and forgive that smack on the head! It was long before Arthur Edward's eye and nose ceased to be the most decorative in the Classical Fourth. But there was no doubt that the way it had turned out was Lucky for Lovell.

THE END