

THE MYSTERY OF THE NEW SKIPPER!

The strange behaviour of Valentine Mornington, the new captain of the Fourth-Form, causes a great sensation in the school. The general opinion is that Morny is treading the downward path in a reckless manner—but, has the junior some dark secret? You simply must not miss the yarn below!

TROUBLE FOR MORNINGTON!

But that's a frame of mind you ought to fight against. It's not good for you."

The Missing Captain!

A Fine Long, Complete Story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Morny's Way.

"MORN Y!"
Mornington of the Fourth was sitting in the window-seat in Study No. 4, looking out into the quadrangle.

The sun was setting, and the old beeches were casting long shadows in the quad. Morny's handsome face was dark and thoughtful as he gazed from the window, and he did not turn as his chum spoke.

There had been silence in the study for some time.

Kit Erroll was working at the table, but at intervals he raised his head, to glance towards his chum. Several times a shade of anxiety had crossed Erroll's face as he looked at Morny's thoughtful profile. At last he spoke.

Mornington continued to stare into the quadrangle as if deeply absorbed in watching the lengthening shadows of the beech-trees.

"Morny, old chap!"
Morny heard then, and he looked round, with a slightly irritable expression.

"Hallo!"
"Hadh't you better begin your prep, Morny?"

"Oh, bother prep!"
"Better get on with it," said Erroll mildly. "You don't want any trouble with Mr. Bootles to-morrow."

"Blow Bootles!"
"It's the Bagshot match to-morrow, Morny, you know. If you should get detained—"

Morny yawned, and rose from the window-seat.

"I suppose I'd better begin grindin'," he said discontentedly. "Bootles is a worry; he's always findin' fault. Just like him to detain me for the afternoon when there's a match on!"

"You've been a bit of a worry to Bootles, you know."

"Bless Bootles! Still, I suppose I'd better toe the line, or there will be trouble. But if anythin' happened, Jimmy Silver could captain the side against Bagshot all right."

"You're captain now, Morny!"
"I'm blessed if I know what I was so keen about it for!" yawned Mornington. "It takes up a lot of a fellow's time, and there's always somethin' to worry about."

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a listless and dissatisfied air.

In a few minutes, however, he threw his books aside, and rose to his feet restlessly. "Blessed if I can put my mind into that stuff!" he grunted. "I'm fed up, Erroll!"

"What with?"
"Everythin'!" said Mornington comprehensively.

"You needn't worry about the match, if that's what you're thinking of. We're in great form for to-morrow, and I think we shall beat Bagshot. Jimmy Silver is at the top of his form; his bowling to-day was simply ripping.

"And what was my battin' like?" grinned Mornington.

"Not so good as usual; but you'll be all right to-morrow."

"Perhaps!"
"Look here, Morny—" said Erroll abruptly.

"Well?"
"What have you got on your mind?"

Mornington did not answer immediately. He had turned to the window again, and stood staring out into the deepening dusk in the quad. When he spoke, it was over his shoulder, without looking at his chum.

"What makes you think I've got somethin' on my mind?" he asked.

"Your ways for some time past," answered Erroll quietly. "You seem to have lost interest in things. You're not so keen on cricket, for instance—"

"Cricket's a bore, like everythin' else!"

"You were no end pleased at becoming junior captain of Rookwood, and now you don't seem to care anything about it."

"True. I don't!"

"Well you must admit that you've changed in the last week or so. Now, tell me what you've got on your mind."

Mornington laughed.

"What should I have on my mind?" he answered. "It's my character that's at fault, old scout. I get fed up. I was as keen as a razor to get in as junior captain, and I was pleased when I bagged Jimmy Silver's job. But I'm not much like Silver. I'm tired of the stunt already. Everything I take up is only a stunt, and I get sick of it when the novelty's worn off. When I used to go the pace with Lattrey and his set, I got fed up with that, and turned away from it. Now I've got sick of sweating, and toein' the line, and playin' cricket, and—and everythin'!"

"I was afraid it was something like

Erroll's brow clouded, but he did not answer. It was evident that his chum's mood troubled him, and that he did not quite know what to make of it.

Valentine Mornington dropped into his chair at the table, and drew his books towards him.

He began to work with

that. Morny," said Erroll sadly. "But that's a frame of mind you ought to fight against. It's not good for you."

Morny shrugged his shoulders.

"You see, we're different," he said. "You're a steady old codger and whatever your hand findeth to do you do it with all your might. I'm like Reuben—'unstable as water, thou shalt not excel,' you know. That's me all over."

"But—"

"I'm made like that!" said Mornington restlessly. "Besides—besides—" He hesitated.

"Go on!" said Erroll quietly.

"I'm poor!" said Mornington, with a flush. "I was rich once—the richest fellow at Rookwood. Then my cousin turned up—you remember it all—and I was left. Well, I haven't made a howl about it, but I've felt it, all the same. I've missed it all. I want to be the best-dressed fellow in the Fourth, I want expensive motor-cars, and bank-notes in my pocket; I want money to burn, and I haven't got it. See?"

"That's not very serious, Morny."

"Not to a chap like you, but awfully serious to a chap like me. You don't care what clothes you wear as long as you're decent; I care no end. I hate wearin' a collar twice, and a necktie three times. I hate havin' my boots soled and heeled. I hate lookin' at a quid twice before I spend it. In fact," said Mornington, with a bitter grin—"in fact, I've got all the tastes of a gentleman's gentleman, and that's what I ought to be, I suppose. I belong to the vulgar rich, and I can't get out of it. And you don't understand it a little bit."

"I could understand it in a cad like Lattrey, or Peele," said Erroll; "but it's rather hard to understand in a fellow like you."

"You see, I'm a good deal of a cad myself," explained Mornington, with cynical candour. "That's where the trouble is."

"What rot!"

"It's so, old scout. And—and like a fool I've landed myself in a position I'm not fit for. Why couldn't I leave the captaincy alone?" Mornington gave a restless shrug to the shoulders. "I can't resign it now—the fellows would think I found the job too big for me; and I'm too conceited and swankin' to let them think so. But—but—I'm stickin' to the job, but I'm not fit for it. A captain has duties—and there never was a less dutiful fellow in existence than I, I suppose. It's made me ill to hear the chaps talking about the Bagshot match to-morrow. I suppose it would shock you to hear that I don't care two pins about the match."

"But why?"

"Because I haven't got any bets laid on it."

"Morny!"

"I knew I should shock you!" grinned Mornington. "You'll be droppin' my friendship some day, old top, like a hot potato, when you understand at last what I'm really like."

Are Mornington's Days as Junior Captain Numbered? See Next Week!

"That will never happen, anyhow."
 "I'm not goin' to be poor," said Mornington, in a dogged tone. "Why should I, when a chance comes my way? And—and like a fool, I land myself into a job where I know I ought to keep as straight as a die, and set an example to the other chaps. But—"

Erroll stared blankly at his friend.
 "You're talking in riddles, Morny. You speak as if you had a chance of getting rich."

"Suppose I have?"
 "Not much use supposing that as it's impossible," Erroll rose to his feet. "Look here, Morny, you alarm me. What is it you have got in your head now?"

Morny did not answer for a moment. But he smiled as he met Erroll's anxious and alarmed gaze.

"It's all right," he said carelessly. "Only blowin' off steam, you know. I'm a discontented ass—that's what's the matter. I've got all I want; and I'm mooning over the things I don't really want. Only gas-sin', old chap; don't take any notice of my nonsense."
 "But—"

"I think I'll take a turn in the quad," said Morny abruptly. "A little fresh air will do me good—after the way I've been swottin'!" He laughed. "You stick to merry old Virgil—I'm goin' for a walk."

Mornington left the study before his chum could reply.

The door closed sharply on him; and Erroll sat down at the table again, with a distressed cloud upon his face. The strange mood of his chum troubled him deeply. Morny's nature was not superficial by any means—but it was volatile, and his change-fulsness had often troubled his chum. That there was something wrong with Morny now, Erroll knew well, though he could not guess what it was.

He did not resume his work. He sat in deep and painful thought for some time, and then rose and crossed to the window. Outside, the dusk was deepening into darkness. Under the old beeches Erroll caught sight of a moving shadow—and he knew that it was Mornington, pacing to and fro in the gloom a prey to restless discontent. And Erroll, with a heavy heart, watched him till the deepening darkness hid him from sight.

**THE SECOND CHAPTER.
 A Very Mysterious Document.**

JIMMY!" Jimmy Silver & Co. were at prep. in the end study when Tubby Muffin rolled in.

Jimmy Silver had just finished; but Lovell, Raby, and Newcome were still hard at work, and Lovell waved an impatient hand at the fat Classical.

"Shut up!" he said politely.
 "I say, you know—"
 "Dry up!"

"Tea's over and done with, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver, with a laugh. "You're too late!"

"Oh, I knew you had only sardines for tea, and not much of them," answered Tubby. "Blow your tea, Jimmy Silver! 'Tain't that."

"Well, if it's supper, there isn't going to be any?"

"'Tain't supper!" roared Tubby Muffin.
 "What the thump is it then?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "If you're going to offer your services for the Bagshot match to-morrow, Morny's the man to go to. He will jump at the offer—I don't think!"

"I'll bet I could play cricket as well as Morny was playing it to-day, and chance it!" said Muffin disdainfully. "Never saw a chap in such rotten form. But it isn't that. I've found something."

"Is that fat idiot going to shut up, or am I to take the poker to him?" inquired Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Look here, Lovell—"

"If you've found something, take it to Mr. Bootles, if it's any value, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver.

"It isn't!"
 "Then chuck it away!"
 "But it's jolly queer, Jimmy."

Tubby Muffin had a sheet of paper in his fat hand, and he held it up. Evidently there was something interesting on that sheet of paper, from Tubby Muffin's point of view.

"Well, what is it?" asked Jimmy.

"It's jolly queer!" repeated Tubby Muffin. "I've never seen anything like it. I picked it up on the landing. Some chap must have dropped it, mustn't he? I was coming upstairs, when that beast Mornington came down in a hurry and ran into me. Knocked me over, you know," said Tubby Muffin indignantly. "Luckily, I caught hold of his collar and pulled him over, too. And he actually bumped me on the landing."

"Mustn't pull junior captains over by their collars," grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Well, he's a beast!" said Tubby. "I wish you were captain again, Jimmy—you were never quite such a beast as Morny. But I say, I found this paper on the landing, and it's jolly queer. I can't make it out."

"Some deep arithmetical problem, such as twice one are two?" asked Lovell. "That would be a bit above your brain powers, I suppose?"

"It's a lot of numbers," said Tubby, "and some letters, and it don't seem to mean anything. It's really extraordinary, so I brought it here to show you fellows."

"Well, let's see it!" yawned Jimmy Silver. Tubby had succeeded in interesting the Fistical Four at last; and all of them looked at the paper as the fat Classical laid it on the table.

They looked at it, and stared. It certainly was an extraordinary paper, and the Fistical Four, though considerably brighter, intellectually, than Tubby, could make no more of it than he did. It ran:

R.	N.
7	29
30	28
	4
	17
	20
23	
5	10
27	
7	
19	
	24
1	
30	

That was all; but it was enough to make the Fistical Four of the Fourth rub their eyes. There was nothing in mathematics that they knew of that bore any resemblance to this. What the letters meant, and what the numbers meant, was a deep mystery to the end study.

Tubby Muffin blinked at them, evidently pleased at the impression he had produced. There was no doubt that the Fistical Four were puzzled and perplexed.

"Well, what does that mean, Jimmy Silver?" asked Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy shook his head.
 "Ask me another," he said. "I can't make head or tail of it. It doesn't seem to mean anything, so far as I can see."

"Some joke, I suppose," said Raby. "Did you make this up, to puzzle us, Tubby?"

"No!" howled Tubby. "I tell you I found it on the landing, after Morny had knocked me over."

"Some chap in the Fourth must have dropped it there, then," said Newcome. "You'd better inquire up and down the passage, if you want to find the owner."

"I don't specially want to find the owner, that I know of. I want to know what it means," said the inquisitive Tubby. "It must mean something, you know."

"Well, I suppose a chap wouldn't take the trouble to write it down for nothing," said Jimmy Silver, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "But I can't make it out. Might be some sort of cryptogram. The fat looks a bit like Morny's: he always makes small, neat figures in this style. Take it along to No. 4, and see if it's his."

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed Tubby. "He dropped it when I pulled him over, I expect. I'll ask Morny what it means."

And Tubby Muffin rolled out of the study, with the mysterious document in his fat fist. Lovell and Raby and Newcome resumed their work; but Jimmy Silver sat with a somewhat thoughtful expression on his face. He was thinking of the mysterious paper.

"Done!" yawned Lovell, rising from the

table at last. "Hallo! What are you looking like a boiled owl about, Jimmy?"

"I was thinking—"
 "Penny for 'em, if they're worth it."

"It's jolly queer about that paper," said Jimmy. "It puzzled me at first; but, now I think of it, I've seen something like it before."

"Where?"
 "In a book," said Jimmy. "Last vac. I was looking over a book at home about holidays on the Riviera, and there was a description of Monte Carlo."

"Monte Carlo!" repeated Lovell, with a stare. "That's the gambling place, isn't it?"

"Yes."
 "What's that got to do with Tubby's paper?"

"Nothing, of course. But I remember, in the description of the place, they mentioned a spicing game that's played there; red and black numbers on a wheel. There was a specimen list of numbers, and it ran like that list Tubby showed us. If that paper means anything at all, it's a list of numbers kept by some person who's been playing roulette."

"Roulette!" ejaculated Lovell.
 "That's the name of the game—some sort of spoof for taking in strangers, I suppose," said Jimmy. "But—but it's illegal in England. It's not possible—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell, in great merriment. "Do you think that some chap in the Fourth has been tripping across to Monte Carlo on a Saturday afternoon?"

Raby and Newcome chortled.
 "Fathhead!" said Jimmy. "I say the game's illegal in England. But I've read in the newspapers that it's played at some places illegally. Silly fools go there to be swindled, and the police come down on them every now and then. But—"

"My dear man, you're dreaming!" grinned Lovell. "There isn't anything of that kind anywhere near Rookwood; and if there was, no Rookwood chap would know anything about it. My hat! I can imagine how the Head would look if he heard anything about it."

Jimmy shook his head.
 "I suppose there's nothing in it, of course," he assented. "But it struck me—Never mind. Let's get down, if you're finished. We've got some boxing on with Tommy Dodd and Co. in the gym."

"Come on then!"
 The Fistical Four left the end study; but Jimmy Silver was still in rather a thoughtful mood. He was pretty certain that the mysterious paper belonged to Valentine Mornington. And, though Morny was as straight as a die, and Jimmy had no doubt about it, he could not help remembering that in Morny's early days at Rookwood he had been the wildest fellow in the school, and had come very near to being expelled. And the bare possibility that Morny—now junior captain of the school—was returning to his old wild ways, was very discomfiting to Jimmy Silver.

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.
 Morny Loses His Temper.**

MORNY here?" Kit Erroll was in the window-seat, plunged in thought, when Tubby Muffin came into No. 4.

His unfinished work was on the table. For once, Erroll was slacking.

He looked up, with less than his usual kind patience, as the fat Classical rolled in.

"Morny's gone out."
 "When will he come back, then?" asked Tubby. "I've got something here that belongs to him."

"Put it on the table, then."
 "But I want to know what it means."
 "What?"

"Look at it, old top!" said Tubby.
 Erroll glanced at the paper as Tubby held it up. A startled look came over his face.

He rose quickly to his feet, and caught the paper from Tubby's fat hand.
 "Where did you get this?" he asked sharply.

"Picked it up on the landing," said Tubby. "I think Morny dropped it after bumping over me. I say, give it to me, you know."

Erroll did not answer. His eyes were glued on the paper, and he plainly did not intend to hand it back to the fat junior.

"You know what it means?" asked Tubby,
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inquisitively. "It must mean something, you know. Jimmy thinks it's Morny's fist. I say, is it something about backing horses?"

"What?"

"Morny used to back horses a lot, you know," said Tubby. "That was when he was thick with Lattrey and Peele and Gower, and that lot. I believe he's given it up since he lost his money. I remember he had some scheme of a system for backing horses, and it cost him a lot of money. He used to make bets through Joey Hook, at Coombe, you know."

"You fat duffer!"

"Oh, I say, Erroll, he did, you know! Everybody in the Fourth knows it, and knows about his breaking bounds at night."

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Erroll.

Kit Erroll knew more than Tubby did about his chum's former habits, but he did not like to hear the subject spoken of.

"Well, you know what it means," said Tubby. "I can see that in your face. Why can't you tell a chap?"

"You can cut along," said Erroll. "I'll give this to Morny when he comes in."

"But perhaps it isn't Morny's; and I want to know what it means."

"It's not your business, Muffin."

"Well, it isn't yours either, if it comes to that," retorted the fat junior. "You give me that paper, Erroll."

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Look here—"

There was a step in the passage, and Valentine Mornington came into the study. His face was a little pale, and as moody and dissatisfied as when he had left. He glanced at Erroll and Tubby Muffin.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" he asked.

"I want to know what it means!" howled Tubby.

Inquisitiveness was almost a disease with Reginald Muffin, and his appetite for information was fairly whetted now.

"What what means, you fat idiot?"

"That paper with the numbers on it."

Mornington started, and his hand flew to his pocket. It did not need more than that action to reveal the ownership of the mysterious paper.

"You dropped it on the landing," grinned Tubby. "Now Erroll's got it, and he won't give it to me. I say, Morny—Yaroooooop!"

Tubby Muffin, much to his astonishment and indignation, found himself suddenly seized by his fat shoulders.

With a spin, Morny sent him whirling into the passage.

Tubby Muffin spun round like a very fat top, and was across the corridor before he knew what was happening to him.

He bumped on the opposite wall, and collapsed, with a roar.

"Bump!"

"Oh! Ah! Yah! Yooooop!" roared Tubby breathlessly.

Mornington's eyes glittered after him from the study doorway.

"Cut off, you fat fool!" he snapped.

"Yaroooh! Help! Yooooop!"

"Do you want me to kick you along the passage?" said Mornington, between his teeth.

Erroll's hand fell on his chum's arm from within the study. Morny gave him a fierce look for a moment, but he allowed himself to be drawn back into the room, and Erroll closed the door.

Tubby Muffin scrambled up, and rolled away down the passage, simply palpitating with indignant wrath. What was the cause of Morny's sudden outbreak of temper the fat Classical could not even guess.

In Study No. 4, Mornington and his chum looked at one another rather grimly. Then Mornington held out his hand for the paper.

"It's mine," he said.

"I know it's yours, Morny." Erroll passed the mysterious paper to the junior captain of Rookwood. "Will you tell me what it means?"

"Oh, it's nothin'!" said Mornington carelessly.

"Is that all?"

"What the thump does it matter?" exclaimed Mornington irritably. "You're jolly curious all of a sudden, Kit Erroll!"

"I'm not curious, Morny. You've never found me curious about your affairs, I think," said Erroll quietly. "But I should like to know what that means."

"I tell you it's nothin'!"

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Erroll drew a deep breath.

"You've nothing more to tell me than that, Morny?"

"Nothin'!"

"Very well!"

Erroll did not say another word. He sat down at the table and resumed the work so long interrupted. Mornington looked at him with a clouded brow, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently and quitted the study. There was no prep for Valentine Mornington that evening.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mornington Missing.

JIMMY SILVER wore a pleasant smile as he came out of the School House after dinner the following day. There was bright sunshine in the quadrangle and the old red roofs of Rookwood glimmered in the sun. The cricket-field looked like emerald—a pleasant sight to the eyes of a cricketer. Jimmy Silver was feeling fit and cheerful, and quite well satisfied with himself and the universe generally.

Bagshot was coming over that afternoon, and Jimmy was looking forward to the match. True, he was no longer junior captain. He had captained Rookwood in the last match with Bagshot, but this time Valentine Mornington was in command. But Jimmy did not mind much. He was the champion bowler of the Lower School—indeed, there were Sixth Form wickets that were not quite safe from Jimmy Silver, and his services could not be dispensed with in any important match. Not that Morny showed any desire to dispense with them. The new captain and the former captain pulled together remarkably well, and Jimmy's name had gone down in the list as a matter of course.

Jimmy Silver was going to enjoy himself that afternoon in his own way, which was by taking Bagshot wickets. He only hoped that Morny would prove the good batsman he had always been, in spite of the fact that the new skipper had been rather off-colour lately.

He caught sight of Mornington heading for the gates at a rather rapid walk, and called to him.

"Going out, Morny?"

Mornington glanced round.

"Yes!" he answered shortly.

"Bagshot get here at two-thirty, you know," said Jimmy Silver, rather surprised that the skipper should be going out so soon before the match. "Not going far, I suppose?"

"Oh, bother Bagshot!"

"Wha-at?"

Mornington coloured under Jimmy's astonished look. Then he smiled. To Jimmy Silver, the Bagshot match loomed large that afternoon, and Jimmy would have been more surprised still if he had known how little Morny was thinking of it just then.

"I—I mean, it's all right," said Mornington hastily. "I shall be back in plenty of time for Bagshot, Jimmy. I'm only going a little way—not so far as Coombe, in fact!"

"Right you are!" said Jimmy.

Valentine Mornington went out at the gates, not seeming to see Kit Erroll, who was coming towards him across the quad. Erroll hastened his steps and then slackened again. It was pretty clear that his chum did not want his company just then.

Jimmy Silver glanced after Morny's disappearing form, and then at Erroll. It occurred to him that there was some rift in the lute in Study No. 4. That was not his business, however, and he sauntered away without a remark. Lovell and Raby and Newcome joined him in the quad.

"Morny gone out?" asked Newcome.

"Yes."

"Silly ass! He ought to be here. Blessed if I know what the fellows elected Morny skipper for," said Newcome. "You used to leave me out of the matches sometimes, Jimmy. Morny does it all the time!"

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"Cricket comes before friendship, unless you're chucking away matches," he remarked.

Arthur Newcome grunted. He was a cheery and contented youth, as a rule, but his three chums were in the Rookwood junior team, and he was feeling rather "left" that afternoon.

"Let's hope one of the Modern players will fall downstairs and break a leg or two,"

suggested Raby. "Then you'll go in, Newcome!"

Newcome laughed.

"I don't think I'll depend on that," he said. "I'll take a stroll this afternoon, I think, on the botany stunt. I'll be back before tea, and then you can tell me how Bagshot walked over you!"

"They won't walk over us in your lifetime, fathead!" said Lovell. "I think we're going to mop 'em up. I must say that Morny has looked a bit off colour lately, but everybody else is in great form. Conroy was batting yesterday like a Jessop, and Tommy Dodd is in remarkable form—for a Modern. We shall be all right!"

"Best of luck, old top!" said Newcome. And Newcome strolled away as his chums headed for the cricket-ground.

After two, the Rookwood juniors began to gather on the ground. There was a good team to represent Rookwood: Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, Conroy, Erroll, Van Ryn, Grace, Mornington—Classicals; and Dodd, Cook, and Doyle—Moderns. Ten of the eleven gathered on the ground, in spotless white; but Valentine Mornington was not there.

Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, gave them a look-in on his way to Big Side for practice. The big Sixth-Former glanced over the junior cricketers with an approving eye. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked very fit and businesslike.

"Ready for business, what?" asked Bulkeley, with a smile.

"Quite!" said Jimmy. "We're expecting Bagshot every minute now!"

"Where's your skipper?"

"Oh, Morny's coming along!"

"He's gone out," said Smythe of the Shell, who was hanging about the pavilion.

"Met him on the Coombe road, walkin', a quarter of an hour ago!"

Bulkeley looked surprised.

"He will be back for the match," said Jimmy Silver hastily.

"I should hope so," remarked the captain of Rookwood in rather a dry tone.

There was a squeak from Tubby Muffin.

"Here come Bagshot!"

The visiting team had arrived.

Jimmy Silver and the other cricketers exchanged glances. Pankley & Co. of Bagshot had arrived, but the Rookwood captain was not on the ground to greet them.

Morny had not come in.

"This is rather curious of Mornington, isn't it?" said Bulkeley.

"I—I suppose he's delayed, somehow," said Jimmy Silver. "He will turn up all right!"

Bulkeley shook his head and walked on towards the senior ground. It was his duty, as captain of the school, to keep an eye on junior cricket, and he was by no means satisfied with Mornington's peculiar conduct on this occasion.

Jimmy Silver greeted the Bagshot fellows, and Lovell cut off to the gates to see if there was any sign of Mornington returning. But he looked for Morny in vain.

He came back and found Jimmy chatting with Pankley and Poole of Bagshot. He shook his head in response to Jimmy's inquiring glance.

Jimmy called to Erroll.

"Know where Morny's gone, Erroll?"

"No!"

"Or when he'll be back?"

"Sorry, no!"

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, in dismay.

"Anything up?" asked Cecil Pankley. The Bagshot skipper could see that there was something amiss.

"Well, our skipper hasn't come in," said Jimmy Silver. "Morny's skipper now, you know. Mind waiting a bit?"

"Not at all!" said Pankley politely.

But the Bagshot fellows were smiling. They did not quite know what to make of a cricket captain who was absent, without explanation, when the match was due to begin.

Erroll ran down to the gates and looked out on the road. But there was no sign of Mornington there, and he returned to the cricket-ground with a knitted brow.

Mornington's inexplicable absence was generally known now, and it was the subject of animated discussion among the juniors gathering round the field.

Tommy Dodd was heard to inquire what fellows could expect when they elected a doddering Classical as captain. Tubby

Muffin suggested that Morny had dropped into the Bird-in-Hand for a game of billiards, and forgotten all about the match—a suggestion which very nearly earned him a lunge from Erroll's bat.

How to account for Morny's peculiar proceedings was a mystery, and it was a mystery the Rookwood fellows had no time to solve. The minutes were passing, and, polite as the Bagshot Bounders were, they were showing signs of impatience. The Rookwood cricketers held a hurried consultation.

"We can't keep Bagshot hanging about much longer," said Jimmy Silver. "They're grinning at us already."

"We shall have to play without Morny!" grunted Lovell. "What the thump does he want to take himself off just before a match for?"

"Goodness knows!"

"He—he may have had some—some accident!" said Erroll hesitatingly.

"Walked under a market cart, perhaps!" suggested Arthur Edward Lovell, with deep sarcasm.

"Well, as he hasn't come back—"

"More likely some of his cheek!" growled Lovell. "He's just gone out and let it slide."

"He wouldn't do that."

"Well, he's done it. The question is, are we going to play Bagshot, or ain't we?"

"You're vice, Jimmy!" remarked Raby.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"As Morny isn't here, we're bound to play the match," he said. "If you fellows agree, we'll get on. I suppose I'd better take Morny's place."

"And if the fellows had any sense, they'd make you keep it!" growled Lovell.

"Never mind that. We shall want another man," said Jimmy Silver briskly. "Where's Newcome?"

"The silly ass has gone out botanising!"

"That's rotten! We can't wait any longer. Pons will fill the bill. Know where Pons is, Conroy?"

"Here he is, old top!" said the voice of the Canadian junior, behind Jimmy. "Ready if you want me."

"Get into your things, then, sharp!"

"You bet!"

Pons was ready very quickly. Jimmy Silver, taking his old place as junior captain for the nonce, tossed with Pankley for choice of innings. It fell to Rookwood to bat first, and Jimmy sent in Lovell and Erroll to open the innings.

"There's still a chance for Morny," he said. "You're last man in, Pons, and if Morny turns up, you understand—"

"I savvy!" said Pons cheerfully.

Probably Pons was not very anxious to see Mornington turn up before the end of the innings. As it turned out, Morny did not do so, and when last man was called, the Canadian junior went in. The Rookwood first innings closed for 60 runs, and when it was over Mornington had not appeared; and every fellow on Little Side was asking himself the question, "Where was Morny?" without being able to find an answer to it.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Newcome.

"FOOL!"

Arthur Newcome jumped. Newcome was rambling through Coombe Wood, and, in his botanical zeal, he had gone a good distance from the beaten paths. It was a very pleasant ramble among the big trees, interlaced by creepers and thick ferns, with the sun glinting through thick, green foliage overhead.

Newcome was in a quite contented mood. He would rather have been playing cricket at Rookwood, but he was enjoying himself in his own way.

The junior had supposed himself to be alone in the depths of the thick wood, seldom trodden by anyone. The sudden sound of a voice close at hand startled him.

It was not only the voice suddenly breaking the deep stillness of the wood that had a startling effect. It was the fact that the voice was that of Valentine Mornington.

Newcome had supposed that Morny was on the cricket-ground at Rookwood, deep in the Bagshot match. He stared round him in amazement.

Mornington was not to be seen, but the underwood was so thick that Newcome could not see more than a yard or two. As he looked round him he heard Morny's voice again.

"Fool! Fool!"

Newcome grinned.

"Morny's being jolly polite to somebody!" he murmured. Then he called out, "Hallo, Morny!"

There was a rustle in the underwood. Newcome pushed his way through, and came on Valentine Mornington.

The dandy of the Fourth was leaning against the trunk of an old oak, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a black and moody expression on his face.

He gave Newcome a far from pleasant look.

"You!" he ejaculated. "What the dickens are you doin' here, Newcome?"

"Botanising!" answered Newcome cheerfully.

Morny gave a scoffing laugh.

"What rot?"

"Thanks!" said Newcome, unperturbed.

"You seem to be alone here," said Newcome, glancing round. "Whom were you calling a fool? I heard you!"

"Whom do you think?" sneered Mornington. "I was speakin' to myself, if you want to know!"

"Oh, I see! Well, if that's the case, you hit the right nail on the head, and got the right word."

"Oh, shut up!"

Arthur Newcome's eyes gleamed, and he took a step nearer to Valentine Mornington. He was a peaceable fellow, but Mornington's manner was very hard to bear peaceably.

Morny regarded him with a sneering look.

"Huntin' for trouble?" he asked. "If you are, I can give you all you want, Newcome. I'm just in a mood to smash somebody!"

"You can try your hand on me if you



SAVING THE MATCH! There was a groan from the Rookwooders as the leather flew hot from the bat. They had expected to see that ball save the game for them, but the wicket was still standing. Then there was a roar. "Erroll! Erroll! Well caught!" (See Chapter 6.)

"But what the dickens are you doing here, if you come to that? I thought you were playing cricket."

"Cricket?"

"You haven't forgotten the match, I suppose?"

Morny's lip curled.

"Cricket! The match! What rot! I'm not thinkin' of cricket."

"It's a cricket captain's bizney to think of cricket, isn't it?" asked Newcome drily.

"Oh, rot!"

"Have you left the fellows in the lurch, then?" exclaimed Newcome warmly.

"Oh, they'll get on all right without me! I don't care a rap whether they do or not. Hang them! Don't talk rot!"

"You seem in a jolly nice temper this afternoon, Morny!" said Newcome, with increasing astonishment. "If that's the way you treat cricket fixtures, you won't be captain long!"

"Do you think I care?" snapped Mornington. "I've somethin' else to think about."

"The fellows will want to know the—"

"Confound the fellows!"

like," said Newcome. "I'm feeling quite inclined to damage your nose, you cheeky cad!"

Mornington clenched his hands hard, with a glitter in his eyes. But he unclenched them again, and shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the good?" he muttered. "I've played the fool! Cricket! I suppose I'd have done better to play cricket. But it was a chance—a glorious chance—and—"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh, nothin'! You'd better clear off, Newcome; let me alone. Hold on, though!"

Morny came nearer to Newcome, with a gleam in his eyes. "Can you lend me any money?"

"Money!" repeated Newcome, in amazement. The sudden change in topic astonished him.

"Yes, money. I—I'm hard up. I—I want some tin!" said Mornington eagerly. "I'm not a chap to borrow, as a rule; you know that. But—but I'm in trouble for want of some money, and that's the fact."

Newcome's face softened. He knew all

about Morny's fall from fortune, and he would not have been surprised to hear that the once wealthy and extravagant dandy of the Fourth had plunged into some expense he found it difficult to meet.

"Oh, if that's it—" he said.
"That's it! Can you lend me a few quids?"

"My hat! I'm not a giddy millionaire!" said Newcome, smiling. "I can lend you a quid if you like."

"That all?" asked Morny, his face falling.
"It's all I've got, you see."
"Shell out, then."

Newcome took a currency note from his pocket, and handed it to Mornington, whose fingers closed on it greedily. He hardly stayed to mutter a word of thanks, but darted off through the wood.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Newcome. The sound of brushing foliage and hurried footsteps died away, and Arthur Newcome was alone. Morny was gone, but he had not gone in the direction of Rookwood. Newcome stood for several minutes, staring blankly in the direction Morny had taken, before he turned away from the spot. He shook his head seriously as he turned away. There was something wrong with Valentine Mornington—something very wrong indeed; and Newcome wondered what it was.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER Mornington's Return.

"Go it, Jimmy!"
Shadows were lengthening at Rookwood, and the cricket-match was very near its close. Morny had not put in an appearance, and in the keen interest of the game the Rookwooders had almost forgotten him.

The match had been well contested. Rookwood had taken 60 in their first innings and 50 in the second. Bagshot had 65 for the first innings, and they were 40 in the second for eight wickets. Five were wanted to tie, and 6 to win, and two wickets to fall. Jimmy Silver's bowling was to be the deciding factor.

Pankley of Bagshot had the bowling, with Putter at the other end. Pankley had done very well for his side, and he was very confident. The over was beginning, and Jimmy Silver was going on to bowl, and all eyes were upon him.

"Go it, Jimmy Silver!"
"Good old Jimmy!"
Jimmy Silver sent down the ball, and Pankley smiled as he played it. The leather went whizzing, and it looked like two to Pankley, and he ran, and Putter ran. But the ball came quickly in with a smart return from Kit Erroll, and it proved only a single.

Putter had to face the bowling, and it was Jimmy Silver's turn to smile. He knew that he could handle Putter.

Clack!
The sound of the falling wicket followed the ball, and there was a roar from the Rookwood crowd.

"Well bowled, Jimmy!"
"Bravo!"
"Good old Jimmy!"
"Last man in!"

The last Bagshot man came to the wickets, and he was very wary. He knocked the ball away for a single run, and gave the bowling to Cecil Pankley again. Three to tie, and four to win, and Pankley was in great form.

And the hopes of Rookwood fell almost to zero when Pankley scored two from the next ball.

"All over bar shoutin'!" yawned Adolphus Smythe of the Shell.
"One to tie, and two to win!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell. "Oh, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver was not in a hurry to deliver the next ball. The result of the Bagshot match probably depended on it, and Jimmy Silver put all he knew into it. The ball came down, and Pankley played.

There was something like a groan from Lovell as the leather flew hot from the bat.

And the Rookwooders gasped. They had hoped, and more than half-expected, to see the wicket go down; and the wicket was still standing, and the batsmen were running.

And then there was a roar.
"Erroll, Erroll! Well caught!"
"Oh, well caught, sir!"

Kit Erroll, with a flush in his face, held up the ball. And all Rookwood roared.

THE POPULAR.—No. 236.

"How's that?"

"Hurrah!"

"Well caught, Erroll!"

Jimmy Silver rushed up to the fieldsman, and gave him a tremendous clap on the shoulder.

"Good man!" he gasped. "Oh, good man!"

"Our win!" chortled Lovell. "Rookwood wins! Hurrah!"

Pankley grinned at Jimmy Silver as he came off.

"Jolly near thing!" he remarked. "That was a good catch—or was it a giddy fluke!"

"No fear!" said Jimmy laughing. "It was a fluke your getting so near to a win, old top."

"Bow-wow!" was the Bagshot skipper's reply to that.

There was keen satisfaction among the Rookwooders. The end had been very close, but the win was all the more satisfactory on that account. Only Kit Erroll's face was clouded as the cricketers came off the field. He was thinking of his absent chum.

Newcome came in as Jimmy Silver & Co. were heading for the School House.

"How did it go?" he inquired.

"Won by a run."

"Good!"

"My hat! Morny never turned up, after all!" exclaimed Lovell, remembering the existence of Valentine Mornington. "What do you think of that for a skipper?"

Newcome nodded.

"I knew," he said. "I met him in the wood this afternoon."

"Then he's had no accident?" exclaimed Raby.

"He didn't look like it. He seemed a bit worried, that was all."

"He'll get some plain English when he comes back to Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

After the Bagshot fellows were gone, Jimmy Silver repaired to Study No. 4. He knew that Kit Erroll was anxious about his chum. He found Erroll moving restlessly about the study. Erroll looked up quickly as Jimmy appeared in the doorway.

"Has he come in?" he asked eagerly.

"Not yet."

"I—I think there must have been some accident," faltered Erroll. "It's unaccountable, otherwise."

"That's what I came to tell you," said Jimmy Silver. "There's not been any accident."

"How do you know?"

"Because Newcome met Morny in the wood, when he was out on his botany stunt. Morny simply let the match slide."

"He—he couldn't!" muttered Erroll.

"Well, he did."

"But—but why should he?"

Jimmy's face set grimly.

"That's what he will have to explain when he comes in. The cricket club can't be treated in this way."

"I think he must have a good reason, Jimmy. Give him a chance, you know."

"If he had a good reason, he can tell us what it was," said Jimmy Silver; and he left the study.

Erroll, with a troubled brow, went downstairs. He could not account for Morny's conduct, but there were dark forebodings in his mind. He had not forgotten the list of numbers discovered by Tubby Muffin, of which he knew the meaning far better than Jimmy Silver did. And there was a deep fear in his heart that evil had befallen his chum.

A good many fellows gathered in the big doorway to wait for Mornington to come in. It was close on locking-up now, and his return could not be long delayed. Tubby Muffin's fat squeak was heard at last from the dusky quad.

"Here he comes!"

A figure loomed up in the dusk.

Valentine Mornington came striding towards the School House, and he came up the steps with a set face and a black brow. His look was not pleasant; and one or two fellows who had intended to "jaw" him decided not to do so. But Morny's black look had no terrors for Jimmy Silver, and he spoke at once as Mornington entered the House.

"You've missed the match, Mornington."

"Eh? Oh, yes!"

"You're supposed to be junior captain!"

exclaimed Lovell. "What the thump do you mean by it?"

"Find out!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Morny!" muttered Erroll, in distress. Mornington did not even glance at his chum.

"Don't you even want to know how it went, Morny?" exclaimed Raby, in angry disgust.

"Not in the least!"

Mornington strode on towards the staircase, leaving the juniors gazing.

"Mornington!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Go and eat coke!"

And Mornington tramped up the stairs without another word.

Jimmy Silver made a step after Mornington, but he stopped. There was nothing more to be said just then. But it was pretty clear to all that Mornington's days as junior captain of Rookwood were numbered.

THE END.

(Tell your pals that next week's story of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood is full of thrills.)

SMITHY'S
ROUGH LUCK!

(Continued from page 21.)

face. The struggle to do the right was difficult; the shadow of the past lay too darkly upon his path. By force of circumstances, it seemed that by persisting in the straight path, he would bring ruin upon himself; and that he could only save himself by going back to the old bad ways. It was a grim temptation to one whose conceptions of right and wrong were by no means firmly fixed.

Wharton understood his feelings, and he laid his hand on the Bounder's shoulder.

"Don't think of that, Smithy," he said quietly. "Play the game. We'll find some way yet of setting that scoundrel. But don't go back on your word, and on yourself. Play the game!"

"And get the sack!" said the Bounder sardonically.

"It's a rotten position, I know. But there must be some way out."

"Blessed if I see it, then! The fellow may get tipsy, and come here. That's the greatest danger. He must have been tipsy, and blabbed something out before Loder some time. That's what put Loder on the track last night. He doesn't care what he says or does when he's been drinking. He thinks I've given him the go-by, and he's ratty about it. It's natural in a way. If he comes here—"

The Bounder set his teeth.

"I'm not going to be sacked from the school for the sake of playing the game as you call it! If there's no other way, I shall pal on to him again, and stave it off that way."

"Smithy!"

"I'm not going to be ruined!" said the Bounder savagely. "Haven't I done my best? There isn't a fellow in the school has been straighter than I've been this term. I've had Loder and Carne down on me because of it—and you know how much a prefect can make a junior squirm. I've clucked it all up—betting, smoking, breaking bounds—everything—and if you want to know, I've found it precious dull at times, too. But I've stuck to it. I've even gone out of my way to help others do the same. Haven't I looked after that fool Hazeldene like a Dutch uncle, and kept it dark that he took my money to gamble with? I've done more than most fellows would do. Now I've got to be shown up and ruined, because I'm trying to do the decent thing. Well, I'm fed up with it!"

"I know. But it all comes of your breaking your promise to the Head," said Harry quietly. "That's the cause of it, and you've got to pay for it, Smithy. You ought to stick to your guns, and play the game—whatever comes of it!"

"That's easy enough for you to say; you're not in the soup. I tell you a chap's whole career is ruined by being sacked from a school like this—and for such reasons! I can't be expected to stand it! I've got to save myself, and I'll save myself any way I can!"

THE END.

(You must not miss next week's stirring story of Greyfriars, entitled: "OUTWITTING A RASCAL.")