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No. 412.

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Back to the Fourth Form!

A Splendid, Long Complete Tale of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, and Val Mornington the Outcast School-boy.

BY
OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Message for Mornny!

"MORNY, too?" said Lovell. Jimmy Silver nodded. "First catch your hare!" grinned Raby. "All Rookwood's been looking for Mornny for weeks past without finding him." "He's bound to turn up before the school breaks up for the Christmas holidays," remarked Newcombe. "Wherever he's hidden, he wouldn't hang on after all the fellows are gone."

The Fistical Four of the Fourth were seated round the tea-table in the end study. They had been discussing the Christmas holidays, now close at hand, and their talk had drifted to Valentine Mornington.

Mornington's, in fact, was the name most often mentioned at Rookwood now. From the august Head himself down to the smallest fag, Mornington was a topic of the keenest interest.

For the expelled junior, who had returned to Rookwood School in defiance of the headmaster, was still at Rookwood, though his whereabouts were unknown.

Where he was hidden was the deepest of mysteries, but that he was somewhere in the old school was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt.

It was a mystery that thrilled Rookwood, and it was the daily topic. Where was Valentine Mornington? was a question incessantly asked, and never answered.

"We had our little trouble with him before he was sacked," said Jimmy Silver slowly. "But that's all over. I'd jolly well like him to come home with us for the Christmas holidays."

"Same here," agreed Lovell. "But I don't quite see how you're going to ask him. You can't put up the invitation as a notice on the board."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's another way," said Jimmy. "The new boot boy, Smacke, is helping Mornny in this stunt, so he certainly knows where the chap is hidden, and can speak to him when he likes. I'm

going to ask Smacke to pass the invitation on to him."

"Oh, good! Never thought of that," admitted Lovell.

"Lots of things you don't think of, old fellow," said Jimmy Silver affably. "Thousands! Millions, in fact. I'll put it to Smacke and tell him to put it to Mornny, wherever he is, if you fellows are all agreed that you'd like Mornny along with us for Christmas."

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

And thus assured of his chums' views on the subject, Jimmy Silver quitted the end study and made his way downstairs. He passed Peele of the Fourth in the passage, and Cyril Peele favoured him with a scowl. Peele was on the worst of terms with Jimmy Silver in these days, since Uncle James of Rookwood had stopped his mean persecution of the new boot-boy, Smacke.

Uncle James, however, did not heed Peele or his scowl. He walked on regardless, quite unmoved by the looks of so insignificant a person as Peele of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver glanced round him rather cautiously as he descended the lower staircase that led to the boot-room. Rookwood fellows were not supposed to penetrate into those regions, but as Jimmy wanted to see Smacke, there was no choice about the matter.

A dusky passage led to the boot-room. The door was half-open at the end, and Timothy Smacke was humming a tune over his work. Jimmy Silver heard it as he came along, and he could not help wondering. It was an operatic air that Smacke was humming, odd enough to hear proceeding from a boot-room.

But Smacke was a rather remarkable boot-boy in many respects, as the captain of the Fourth had already discovered.

Jimmy Silver tapped at the door and pushed it open, and Timothy Smacke suspended the polishing of a large boot belonging to Mr. Greeley, the master of the Fifth, and glanced at his visitor.

In the light from the boot-room window, Smacke's shock of red hair

and sandy complexion showed up to advantage. Jimmy Silver smiled a little.

There were red-headed boys at Rookwood, but Timothy Smacke's red head was unusually striking.

"Arternoon, Master Silver," said Smacke.

"Good-afternoon, kid," said Jimmy. "Got a few minutes to spare for a pow-wow?"

"I can talk while I'm a-polishing of this 'ere boot, sir," said Timothy. "Mr. Greeley's a very particular gent about his boots."

"Go it," said Jimmy cheerily. "It's about Mornington."

"Yes, sir?"

"You know where the chap's hidden," said Jimmy. "I'm not asking you for information, but there's the fact. Why you're helping him in this stunt I don't know, and I can't say I quite approve of it. But I want to speak to Mornington."

"Better look for him, sir, if you think he's in the school."

"I know he's in the school," said Jimmy quietly. "No good beating about the bush, Smacke. I'd like to speak to him, but if you can take a message it will do almost as well. Will you?"

Smacke was silent.

"My dear man, I know that you know where he is," said Jimmy. "It's you that supplies him with food, and all that—What are you grinning at?"

"W-w-was I grinning, sir?"

"Yes, you young ass! I don't see anything to grin at. I don't quite understand you, Master Timothy."

"No, sir," said Timothy cheerfully.

"You're a bit out of the common run of boot-boys," said Jimmy. "I've heard from Tupper about your little ways, besides what I've seen. The way you take care of your hands, and study Latin in your room—"

"No reason why a bloke shouldn't try to improve 'isself, sir."

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"None at all," agreed Jimmy. "But it's queer. I fancy you haven't always been a boot-boy, Smacke. I don't believe you're taking money from Mornny for helping him, but you've got a motive. You're new here. Did you get the job just to help Mornny in this stunt?"

Smacke started a little. "I've hit the right nail on the head, what?" asked Jimmy, with a laugh. "I've suspected that before. You're some friend of Mornny's. I shouldn't be surprised if you were a relation."

"A—a—a relation?" stammered Smacke.

Jimmy nodded coolly. "Just that," he said. "More than once, when you've spoken to me, you've had a tone in your voice exactly like Mornny's own. It made me jump once or twice, just as if it had been Mornny speaking."

"Oh!" gasped Smacke. "And that upper-cut you gave Peele the other day," continued Jimmy. "It was Mornny's upper-cut to the life, and I fancy he taught it you. What are you grinning at again, you image?"

"Sorry!" gasped Smacke. "Wha-at's the message you want me to give to—the young gentleman, sir?"

"I want him to come home with me for Christmas, when we break up," said Jimmy Silver. "Will you tell him so?"

Timothy Smacke looked very curiously at the captain of the Fourth.

"I've 'eard 'as 'ow it was for a low-down trick on you, sir, that Master Mornnington was turned out of the school," he said.

"You've heard it right," said Jimmy. "But the fathead was sorry afterwards, and we met in the next vac, and made friends again. So that's over. And you needn't trouble to drop your h's in speaking to me, Smacke. It doesn't come natural, and you can keep it for people who haven't spotted you."

"Oh!" stuttered Timothy. "Will you give my message to Mornnington?"

"Yes, sir." "Good enough, and thanks," said Jimmy Silver.

And with a nod to the new boot-boy the captain of the Fourth departed, satisfied that his message would reach Valentine Mornnington, in whatsoever mysterious nook or cranny that invisible youth was hidden.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Peele on the Warpath!

BETTER let him alone!" muttered Gower.

Cyril Peele set his teeth. "Not till I've got him the sack!" he answered.

"It's all rot!" said Gower. "Utter rot! Blessed if I'd take such a lot of trouble about a dashed boot-boy! He's beneath our notice. I know he's cheeky, but there's such a thing as one's own dignity, you know. Chap ought to draw the line at quarrelling with servants."

Peele gave his comrade a bitter look. "It's not only cheek," he said. "He's punched me!"

"Well, you were ragging him," said Gower. "You could get him pushed out for punching a Rookwood chap, only you can't let the Head know you were ragging a servant's room. Chuck it up, and let the kid alone!"

"He knows where Mornnington is hidden," said Peele, unheeding. "I know that for a fact, but there's no proof."

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"Not much good spinning such a yarn without proof."

"I know that. I'm going to get proof. I'm going to make him pay dear for that upper-cut!"

Gower yawned.

He did not like Timothy Smacke, and he resented what he called the cheek of the boot-boy. But he did not share Peele's bitterness, and he was bored with the whole subject. And it was quite plain that Gower did not intend to run any risks in the matter.

"It's plain sailing enough," said Peele. "He's helping Mornny to keep hidden in the school. That means that he takes him food."

"Looks like it!" assented Gower.

"He wouldn't dare do it in the daytime," said Peele. "He must get the stuff in his room, and take it to Mornny at night, when the whole House is asleep, and he's safe."

"Most likely—if he's doing it."

"I know he's doing it!" snarled Peele.

"Oh, all serene!" Gower yawned again. "I'll take your word for it."

"It's only a question of watching for a few nights, perhaps for only one night," urged Peele. "We're bound to catch him in the act. You can guess how the Head would deal with him if he found him out in helping Mornny here!"

Gower chuckled.

"It would be Smacke for the long jump like a shot!" he remarked.

"That's what we want."

"I dare say; but not enough to make me break dormitory bounds, an' sit up at night watchin' like a giddy sentinel. Not good enough!"

"If you won't help me, I shall do it alone."

"Go it, an' welcome," said Gower.

"I wish you luck. Tell me all about it in the mornin', won't you?"

And Gower strolled away whistling, leaving Cyril Peele with a dark scowl on his face.

Peele was quite determined; but he would have been glad of a companion to share his vigil. But aided or unaided, he was quite resolved; Gower's defection made no difference to his plans.

Gower glanced at his chum with a grin when the Classical Fourth went to their dormitory that night. Peele did not meet his glance; and he was silent. It was very necessary to keep his intentions secret from the Fistical Four. Had Jimmy Silver & Co. suspected that Peele intended to leave the dormitory to spy on Timothy Smacke, certainly Peele's intentions would never have been carried out.

But the Co. did not suspect. Bulkeley of the Sixth saw lights out for the Classical Fourth, and the juniors turned in, the buzz of talk from bed o bed running chiefly on the approaching Christmas vacation, and the mystery of Valentine Mornnington.

Peele did not join in the talk. He was thinking augry, bitter thoughts as he lay wide awake; and he was still wakeful when the rest dropped off to sleep.

Long after the rest of the Fourth were sound asleep Peele lay wakeful, listening to the chimes that echoed through the winter night. Ten o'clock—half-past ten—eleven!

When eleven had struck Peele slipped quietly from his bed.

At that hour all the Rookwood fellows were asleep, and the servants had gone to bed.

It was probable that Smacke, to make all safe, would leave his task till midnight, or even later; but Peele did not

mean to take chances. At eleven he intended to be on the watch.

He dressed hurriedly, and crept silently to the dormitory door. Softly and silently he opened the door, slipped into the passage, and closed it behind him.

There was no sound from the dormitory, save the steady breathing of the juniors and the snore of Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were safe in the arms of Morpheus, never dreaming of Peele or his spying expedition.

The corridor was quite dark, and Peele groped his way along, his rubber-soled shoes making hardly a sound.

By one passage after another, groping his way, he crept on to the little staircase to the boot-boy's garret.

There he paused to listen.

All around him was still and silent as the grave. Peele felt a tremor run through his limbs as a mouse scuttled behind the wall. At that moment he wished himself safe back in the Fourth Form dormitory.

But he quickly regained his nerve. The darkness and silence were oppressive, but there was no danger. What danger could there be within the locked and bolted doors of the Rookwood School House?

With stealthy steps, he crept up the narrow staircase.

At the top was a little landing outside Smacke's bed-room door, and there Peele intended to take up his watch. If the boot-boy quitted his room that night he could not escape discovery. And if Peele's theory was correct, the boot-boy must visit Mornnington in his hiding-place almost every night, if not every night.

Suddenly the junior gave a start, and his heart throbbed. From somewhere below in the darkness there came a sound.

It was a faint sound. Peele hardly knew what it was, unless it was the creak of a window. But to his startled, throbbing eardrums it seemed almost like thunder in the deep silence.

He stood still for several minutes and listened.

But the sound was not repeated.

"Only a rat!" breathed Peele.

He reached the little landing, and leaned against the wall there. But his heart was beating fast and painfully. It was a comfort to him, in the deadly silence and solitude, to feel that Smacke was on the other side of the door, much as he hated Smacke.

He waited.

Half an hour passed. It seemed like long, weary ages to the spy. Still there was no sound or motion from the garret.

Surely, if Smacke was coming out of his room that night he would come soon? And it flashed into Peele's troubled mind that perhaps Smacke had gone already—before his arrival; that perhaps the strange sound he had heard had been made by Smacke himself on his way in the dark to Mornnington's mysterious hiding-place.

Peele gritted his teeth at the thought.

If he had had his vigil for nothing

he—

His nerves were growing into a twitter now. He determined to satisfy himself at last, and softly turned the handle of the garret door and opened it. Within all was dark.

Was Smacke there?

In the darkness he could see nothing. He listened intently, but he could hear no sound of breathing. But his heart was throbbing so loudly that it was difficult to listen with clearness.

He groped in his pocket for his electric torch. At any risk he must know whether Smacke was still there,

or whether it was useless to watch longer. His vigil was getting on his nerves more than he had imagined possible when he had laid his scheme in the daylight.

A sudden gleam of light came from the little torch; and it fell on Timothy Smacke's bed.

It fell on a startled face and two staring eyes. The boot-boy was there, and he had awakened.

"What!" came a gasping voice. Peele shut off the light instantly.

Smacke was there, evidently awakened out of sleep by that nocturnal visit. Yet it was close on twelve! What became of Peele's carefully-worked-out theory?

He heard the sound of the startled boot-boy scrambling out of bed.

"Who's that?" panted Smacke. Peele did not answer. He backed out of the bed-room hurriedly and drew the door shut.

In the room he could hear Smacke moving—a sound as of a fellow hurriedly grabbing his clothes and bundling them on.

The door reopened as Peele crept away across the little landing to the staircase.

"Is that you, Peele, you cad?"

So the boot-boy had guessed—probably suspecting that it was another "rag" of the cad of the Fourth.

Peele almost stumbled down the staircase.

Whether his theory was sound or unsound, evidently there was nothing more to be done that night. The boot-boy was on his guard now. Peele stumbled hurriedly down the stairs and stumbled away, his heart throbbing. If the boot-boy raised an alarm—if he was caught out of his dormitory—

He blundered on in the darkness, hardly knowing whither he was going in his hurry. And a scream of terror rose to his lips as he was suddenly grasped in the gloom—a scream that died unuttered as a rough hand was pressed over his mouth.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

An Astounding Discovery!

PEELE tottered in the grasp that had fastened on him, his senses swimming with fear.

Who had seized him?

It was not Smacke. He was still above. Was it Mornington, who had emerged from his hiding-place? Or Jimmy Silver, who had followed the spy from the dormitory?

Peele knew that it was not.

He knew that it was a man's grasp that had fastened on him, and he remembered the sound he had heard

half an hour before—the sound as of a window creaking.

So terrible was his fear that he almost fainted as he realised that he was in the hands of burglars.

The rough hand pressed hard on his mouth, choking his cry if he had tried to utter it again. But Peele did not think of crying out again. He was too terrified for that. He could only sink helplessly in the muscular grasp, quaking with terror.

"What is it, Ikey?" came a hoarse, whispering voice.

"A kid, I think?"

"Wot's he doin' 'ere, then?"

"Dunno, but I've got him safe!"

A light glimmered out—the light of a dark lantern, that glimmered on Peele's white, fear-stricken face.

Dimly he made out two faces that were masked with strips of black cloth, the eyes showing above, the hard mouths below. Dazed with terror as he was, Cyril Peele lost no detail of what he saw; he even observed the bag slung over the shoulder of the man who had seized him—a bag that gave a slight metallic clink as the man moved.

He knew now what had happened—that he had blundered, in the dark, fairly into the path of the two cracksmen, who were stealing away after committing a robbery back to the box-room window by which they had entered.

"Don't make a sound, young 'un!" breathed Ikey. "If you want your 'ead caved in, you make a sound!"

Peele was not likely to make a sound.

"We can't hang on, Ikey," muttered the other man hurriedly, "and we can't let him yell as soon as we're gone!"

"I know that."

"Well, then—"

"You've got the jemmy 'andy?"

Peele shuddered with horror. But he could make no effort in the savage muscular grasp that imprisoned him. There was a catch of the breath from Ikey's companion.

"You—you don't mean—"

"Course I don't!" said Ikey savagely. "I mean, give him a tap on the napper what will keep him quiet for 'arf an hour!"

"Old him, then?"

"Ain't I 'oldin' him? Sharp's the word!"

Peele almost fainted with horror as he lay helpless in the muscular grasp. There was a sound in the darkness of the passage behind him.

"Shut off the light!" hissed Ikey, as his quick ears caught it.

But before the light could be shut off a half-dressed figure came racing up. There was a glimmer of red hair in the

light, and Peele knew that it was Timothy Smacke, the boot-boy—the boy he had sought to injure—who had come to his rescue.

Crash!

There was an Indian club in Smacke's hand, and it struck the man who held the lantern in one hand and the jemmy in the other.

The attack was so sudden that the ruffian had no time to elude it. The club crashed on his head unresisted.

The dark lantern went with a clatter to the floor, and there was a heavy thud the next moment as the cracksman rolled over half-stunned.

Ikey turned on the red-haired boot-boy. The lantern on the floor was still burning. Peele, with a scream, tore himself away from the ruffian's relaxing grasp.

He rushed down the passage, shrieking at the top of his voice.

Ikey, gritted his teeth, paused as he was hurling himself at Smacke, and turned to run, leaving his comrade on the floor.

With a spring, Smacke threw himself on the fleeing ruffian.

"No, you don't!" panted Smacke.

The ruffian turned on him with a furious cry.

He closed with Smacke, and the Indian club dropped to the floor, struck out of the boot-boy's hand.

"Help!" shouted Smacke.

"Help! Help! Help!" Peele was screaming.

There were sounds of opening doors and calling voices on all sides now. And Smacke, with relentless determination, clung to the cracksman, shouting breathlessly.

Lights flashed along the passage.

A sudden brilliant illumination blazed up—the electric light had been turned on. The passage was flooded with light.

"Help!"

"We're coming!" It was the voice of Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth.

"Hold him, my boy!"

Crash!

Something heavy, grabbed by Ikey's hand from his pocket, came down on Timothy Smacke's head. There was a faint groan from the boot-boy, and he dropped senseless to the floor.

The cracksman fled on, but the delay had sealed his fate. Mr. Dalton was coming along the passage with the fleetness of a deer. He sprang on the ruffian from behind, and bore him to the floor with the force of his rush. Cracksman and Form master went to the floor together, the cracksman underneath.

"You scoundrel!" panted the young master.

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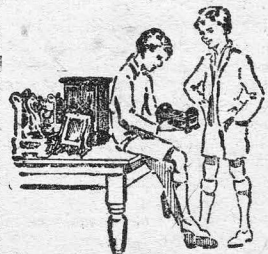


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AN ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY! Smacke's eyes were closed. The thin stream of crimson still oozed from under the red hair. Dr. Chisholm looked for the injury, and a strange, startled exclamation broke from his lips. His hand rose from the boot-boy's head—with the red hair in it! "A-a-a wig!" panted Jimmy Silver. (See Chapter 3.)

The ruffian struggled furiously, but he was no match for the athletic master. A heavy knee was planted on his chest. Three or four half-dressed Sixth-Formers were on the scene now. Bulkeley of the Sixth came to Mr. Dalton's aid, and Ikey, struggling furiously, was secured. And Neville and Lonsdale laid hands on his half-stunned confederate, and secured him easily enough.

There was a buzz of voices in the broad corridor. Fellows of all Forms were crowding on the scene, half-dressed or in pyjamas. Jimmy Silver & Co. were among the first of the juniors, but they came too late for service; the cracksmen had already been overpowered.

Peele, finding himself in the midst of a crowd, and safe, ceased to shriek, and leaned on the wall panting for breath. But no one heeded him.

All eyes were turned in horror upon the still form of the boot-boy stretched on the floor, with a trickle of red oozing from under the shock of red hair.

He was quite insensible. "Good heavens!" panted Jimmy Silver. "It's Smacke! He—he's stunned!"

"He collared the burglar!" breathed Lovell.

"Hold those two rascals safely," said Mr. Dalton, and he rose, panting, to his feet. The cracksmen were safe enough; seven or eight of the Sixth had hold of them now, and they could stir hardly a limb.

Mr. Dalton hurried to the insensible boot-boy.

"In Heaven's name, what has happened?"

opened, Mr. Dalton?" Dr. Chisholm, in sweeping dressing-gown, arrived on the scene, his face pale and agitated. "What—what—what is it?"

"A burglary, sir," said Mr. Dalton. He made a gesture towards the cracksmen's bag, which had burst open in falling to the floor. Half a dozen pieces of the school silver had rolled out.

"Bless my soul! But this boy—"

"He seized upon the burglar, sir, and prevented his escape," panted Mr. Dalton. "It is Smacke, the boot-boy. He has shown amazing courage. But for him the ruffians certainly would have escaped with their plunder. This villain struck him down!"

"The brave lad. Give me room!" Dr. Chisholm dropped on his knees beside the insensible boot-boy, and the Rookwood fellows crowded back.

The Head's face was deeply moved. Smacke's eyes were closed, his face like marble. The thin stream of crimson still oozed from under the red hair.

Dr. Chisholm looked for the injury, and a strange, startled exclamation broke from his lips.

His hand rose from the boot-boy's head—with the red hair in it! There was a gasp of stupefaction from the crowd.

"A—a—a wig!" panted Jimmy Silver.

Under the red wig a crop of soft, dark hair had been hidden, cropped close. The change in the boot-boy's look was startling.

In spite of the sandy-red complexion, the bushy eyebrows, now that the shock of red hair was gone, Timothy Smacke looked quite another person—

From every fellow who could see him there came a shout, a shout of utter amazement.

"Mornington!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Luck at Last!

"MORNINGTON!"

"Valentine Mornington!"

"Morny!"

Dr. Chisholm, on his knees beside the insensible junior, held the red wig in his hand, motionless, like one dazed.

The juniors crowded forward, craning over one another's shoulders to look at the still face—the face that was unmistakably Valentine Mornington's, in spite of the "make-up" that disguised it.

"Morny!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Old Morny! And we never guessed. I never guessed."

"Morny!" muttered Cyril Peele, and there was a pang of remorse at his heart. "Morny! And I—I—"

"Stand back!" It was Mr. Dalton's voice. "Give him room. He is coming to his senses."

The eyes of the boot-boy opened. He stared round him wildly.

"What—what—" he muttered faintly.

"My poor boy!" whispered the Head. Mornington's eyes rested on him, and on the red wig which the doctor still held in his hand. A spasm of pain crossed his face. But he smiled—the old ironical smile of Valentine Mornington of the Fourth.

"You've spotted me." His voice was a faint whisper, dying away in sheer weakness. "The game's up!"

"Mornington!" breathed the Head. All anger was gone now, all resentment of the wayward junior's wild escapade. Only compassion and anxiety remained.

"You saved the school from a great robbery, Mornington," said the Head softly. "Your courage and devotion will not go unrewarded. But do not speak any more, my boy."

Mornington made a motion with his hand, to put it to his aching head. But his strength failed him, and the hand fell helplessly back. In spite of himself, a groan escaped the hapless junior.

His eyes closed again.

"Mr. Dalton—Bulkeley—help me with this poor boy," said Dr. Chisholm, rising to his feet. "He must be put to bed at once. Neville, please telephone for the doctor—urge him to come without a moment's delay—and then telephone for the police."

"Yes, sir."

The cracksmen had been secured with cords by this time, for Bulkeley had been busy. With their hands bound, the two ruffians were led away to a room to be locked in, to await the arrival of the police.

Valentine Mornington, unconscious again, now, was carried away by Mr. Dalton and Bulkeley.

Then the juniors were shepherded back to their dormitories by the prefects.

But there was little more sleep for Rookwood School that night.

In every dormitory there was a buzz of excited talk, and especially in the dormitory of the Classical Fourth, the Form to which Mornington had belonged when he was a Rookwood fellow.

"Morny—making out he was a giddy boot-boy!" said Arthur Edward Lovell for the tenth time. "It beats me! And we never guessed!"

"It's a giddy wonder!" said Conroy.

"What do you think now, Peele?" hooted Lovell. "Are you still down on Smacke, you rotter?"

Peele's reply was unexpected. "I didn't know it was Mornny," he said in a subdued voice. "But—but I shouldn't be down on him now if he was really a boot-boy. He rushed in when those villains were going to knock me on the head—" Peele shuddered at the recollection.

"And why were you out of the dorm at all?" demanded Raby.

"Never mind that; the Head doesn't know I was out, as he found me in a crowd when he came up. Never mind why—only I'm sorry; and I'm going to tell Mornny so when he's well enough to hear."

Peele said no more; but his thoughts were busy as he lay wakeful. For once, at least, the hard heart of the cad of the Fourth was touched, and his repentance was sincere enough.

It was a very late hour when the Classical Fourth slept at last, and there were a good many heavy eyes in the Classical Fourth when the juniors turned out at the clang of the rising-bell in the winter morning.

Jimmy Silver & Co. and Erroll were the first down. They were keenly anxious for news of Mornny. The Co. found Mr. Dalton in the quad, and Jimmy ventured to question him. The Fourth Form master's face was very grave.

"Mornnington is at present in the sanatorium," he said. "He is ill—very ill. But the doctor is assured that he will recover, and will be himself again in the course of a week or two."

"Thank goodness for that!" said Jimmy. "None of you boys had any knowledge of his imposture?" asked Mr. Dalton, eyeing the chums of the Fourth.

"Not the least idea, sir!" "It is amazing," said Mr. Dalton. "Mornnington's face was made up with great skill; and he has admitted to the Head that he borrowed the name of a lad named Timothy Smacke, who was to come here recommended by an agency, as the new boot-boy. He induced Smacke to let him borrow his name and take his place—doubtless for a monetary consideration. His surprising appearances in the school are now explained—when he appeared as Mornnington, he had removed his disguise; and he replaced it again behind a locked door in his garret, to reappear as Timothy Smacke. It was a most amazing imposture."

"But now, sir—" said Jimmy Silver. "Is he—is he to be sent home now, sir?" asked Erroll. Mr. Dalton shook his head.

"Mornnington has received a severe injury in saving the school from a robbery," he said. "But for his intervention, there is no doubt whatever that those two rascals would have escaped with the school silver, and with five hundred pounds in bonds from the Head's safe. Mornnington lies ill and suffering as the result of his courage and devotion. I am sure that, in these circumstances, the Head will take a merciful view."

"Oh, good, sir!" murmured Jimmy. "Mornnington's defiance of all authority is inexcusable," said Mr. Dalton. "That remains unaltered; but his devoted courage has atoned for it. I have every hope that Mornnington will be allowed to resume his old place here."

"Hurrah!" Mr. Dalton smiled as he walked away; and the cheer that Jimmy Silver & Co. gave woke every echo of the old quadrangle of Rookwood.

Richard Dalton proved to be a prophet. It was soon known throughout the school that Valentine Mornnington had been pardoned, both for his old offence and for the wild escapade by which he had become an inmate of Rookwood. In the circumstances, the Head could scarcely have acted otherwise; but never had a decision of the Head's been more popular in every Form.

And as soon as the injured junior was able to receive visitors, Jimmy Silver and Erroll were the first he saw. A pale face smiled at them as they stood beside Mornny's bed. "No end of a stunt—what?" grinned Mornnington. "It was a shame to pull your legs as I did, but I had no choice. And I was bound to come back to Rookwood—and here I am—to stay! Toppin', what?"

"Yes, rather, old fellow!" said Erroll softly. "Tip-top!" said Jimmy Silver. "And you can give yourself the message now, old chap—about Christmas, I mean! You're coming?"

And Mornnington grinned again, and nodded his head. And when Rookwood broke up for Christmas, Mornnington was one of the merry crowd that departed under the wing of Uncle James.

THE END.
(Don't miss next week's topping Christmas tale of Jimmy Silver & Co., entitled: "The Phantom Prior!")

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