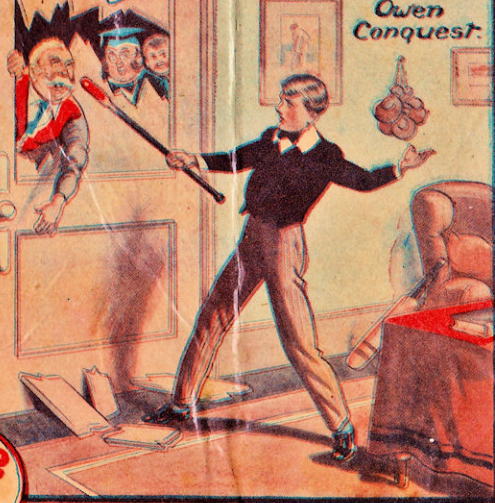


Expelled!

By
Owen
Conquest.



4^{p.}

THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN
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Expelled!

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A Stirring Story of
JIMMY SILVER
& Co., at Rookwood.

CHAPTER 1.

No Room for Mornington.

"FLYNN in goal!" said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome nodded.

They were helping the junior captain of Rookwood with the footer list—at all events, they were listening to his remarks and nodding assent.

The first big match of the season was due on the following day, and Jimmy Silver was going over the list for the last time.

After tea it was to be posted on the board for all Rookwood to read—for the Lower Forms to read, at least. Great and important as the matter was, it was not likely to interest the Fifth and the Sixth very much. But of the juniors, there was hardly a fellow who was not looking forward keenly to the posting of the footer list. Fellows who had no chance whatever of getting into the team to play St. Jim's hoped against hope that they might, after all, find their names in the list.

For Jimmy Silver was a first-rate footer captain, and was certain to look for talent wherever he could find it—either on the Classical or the Modern side. So every fellow who felt an inward conviction that he was a budding International hoped that

Jimmy Silver's well-known good judgment would lead him to the same opinion.

"Backs—Raby and Jones minor," said Jimmy.

"Hear, hear!" said Raby. "One's jolly good, anyway!"

"Halves—Rawson, self, and Doyle," said Jimmy. "Centre-half is about my mark, I think."

"Doyle's a Modern boulder!" grunted Lovell.

"He's a good half," said Jimmy; "and the Moderns have got to have a show in the team, anyway."

"Yes. It's rotten, but I suppose so. Where do I come in?" asked Lovell.

"Forwards—Oswald, Lovell, Tommy Dodd, Towle, and Cook," pursued Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, and where do I come in?" demanded Newcome warmly.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"You don't come in at all, old chap."

"Well, my hat!"

"Football comes before friendship," explained Jimmy Silver. "I've left you out to put Towle in."

"Left me out for a measly Modern!"

"Yes. You'll have to wire in, you know. But I couldn't pass over Towle, could I?"

"This study ought to be always in the eleven," said Lovell, with a shake of the head.

"Quite so," agreed Jimmy Silver. "But this study will have to be the best of the bunch in that case. And at present Towle is rather ahead of Newcome."

"I don't quite see that," remarked Newcome.

"But it is so, old fellow."

"Br-r-r!"

"I think that's about the best team we could get together," said Jimmy. "Smythe & Co. will be snorting about the Shell being left out. But the Shell will have to buck up if they want to play for Rookwood. Mornington and his pals will be raging, too. Can't be helped."

"Mornington's been shaping jolly well at the footer," remarked Lovell. "Some of the fellows expect him to play."

"Blessed are those that don't expect, then," said Jimmy calmly. "Mornington don't play in my team."

"He makes out that you only play your own pals."

"Well, I'm playing four Moderns," said Jimmy; "and I've left out one of my own pals—Newcome. Morny can say what he likes. I'm sorry, Newcome, old chap, but it can't be helped, you know. Don't you begin to jaw me, as the others will."

Newcome grinned.

"Oh, all serone! I think you're an ass, that's all."

"So will twenty other chaps when they see the list," grinned Jimmy Silver. "Can't expect more than eleven chaps to be satisfied with a footer team really. Not even eleven, very likely. I suppose Jones minor will tell me he's best at centre-forward, and Doyle will suggest changing with me at centre-half. Never mind; it's all in the day's work. Hallo! Come in!" added Jimmy, as there came a tap at the door.

Mornington of the Fourth came into the study.

"List not posted up yet?" he remarked.

The dandy of the Fourth spoke quite agreeably, apparently oblivious of the fact that he was on the worst of terms with Jimmy Silver. When it suited him, Mornington could drop the superciliousness of his usual manner.

"Just going to take it down," said Jimmy.

"My name in it?"

"No."

Mornington's eyes glittered. "You're leaving me out, then?" he asked.

"I don't know about that. I'm certainly not putting you in."

"May I look at the list?"

"Certainly!"

Mornington ran his eye over the names.

"You've seen me at practice," he said very quietly. "I ask you candidly, Jimmy Silver, do you think Towle is a better forward than I am?"

"No."

"But you've put him in and left me out?"

"Exactly."

"Is that what you call playing the game?"

"Quite," said Jimmy Silver, undisturbed. "I've put Towle in because he's a good footballer and plays the game. He won't keep the ball to himself whenever he has a chance, and muck up the game for the rest. He won't try to bring off risky shots from the touchline to cover himself with glory, instead of centring when he ought to centre. He won't go all out for limelight, and let the game go hang. You would."

Lovell & Co. chuckled. Jimmy's plain speaking tickled them.

"You'd be a better man than Towle if you played the game," continued Jimmy Silver. "But you don't—I think you can't, in fact. You played me too many dirty tricks in the cricket for me to trust you in the footer. Once bit, twice shy, you know."

"You mean that I'm not going to have a chance in the footer because we're on bad terms personally?" sneered Mornington. Jimmy yawned.

"You can think so if you like," he remarked. "You know it isn't true; but you can think so. I don't mind."

"I've heard how you used to gird at Smythe when he was skipper, before I came, for makin' up a team of his own pals," said Mornington. "You're doin' the same."

"Not quite. But I don't mind your thinking so," said Jimmy blandly. "It's a free country, and you can think what you like."

Mornington clenched his hands hard. It was not easy to "draw" the imperturbable Jimmy.

"Does that mean that I'm not going to have a chance all through the winter?" he asked.

"You won't play for Rookwood so long as I'm skipper unless we have a mighty big change in your manners and customs."

said Jimmy. "We play footer matches to win, you know; not to give a swanking ass chances to show off to the gallery."

"It's no good my telling you I'll play up my best for Rookwood?"

"No good at all. If anything happened to upset your majestic serenity, you'd be quite capable of giving the game away out of sheer malice. You have done it before at cricket."

"So I'm left out!"

"Exactly!"

Mornington gritted his teeth.

"Well, I'm going to play," he said.

Jimmy whistled.

"I'm goin' to play in the St. Jim's match," said Mornington deliberately. "So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Jimmy Silver!"

"And how are you going to manage it?" grinned Lovell.

"That's my bizney! But you can't pass over me like this. I'm not standin' it."

"Bow-wow!" grunted Raby. "What do you care for footer, anyway? Smoking cigarettes and playing nap is more in your line. Go back to your smokes, and shut up!"

"Hang the footer!" said Mornington coolly. "But I'm not goin' to be passed over—that's my point. I'm goin' to play in the St. Jim's match."

And the dandy of the Fourth turned on his heel and strode out of the study. He left the Fistical Four chuckling. Mornington was a determined fellow, and he was known to be unscrupulous and to stick at little to gain his ends. But it was really a little difficult to see how he was going to play in the St. Jim's match without the consent of the skipper.

CHAPTER 2.

Morny's Little Game.

"ROTEN!"

"Beastly shame, you know!"

"Just like Jimmy Silver!"

It was Wednesday, and morning lessons were over at Rookwood.

Immediately after dinner, the Rookwood footballers were to start for St. Jim's. It was a good journey, and there was no time to cut to waste.

Mornington's pals, the elegant nuts of

Rookwood, were sauntering in the quad, with the dandy of the Fourth, waiting for the dinner-bell. They were full of sympathy. Townsend and Topham, Peele and Gower, did not understand or share Morny's desire to shine as a footballer, certainly. They regarded football as a beastly fag, and "dodged" the practice whenever they could. But as Mornington wanted to play in the junior eleven, they agreed that it was a rotten shame that he was excluded, and that it was like Jimmy Silver's cheek to exclude a member of their noble society.

But while they sympathised with Mornington, they "rubbed it in" a little. Even his own dear pals and faithful followers were disappointed to see that the lofty Morny could not have everything his own way.

And so they smiled as they made their sympathetic remarks.

Mornington was looking grim.

"I'm playin' all the same," he said.

Townsend winked at Topham, with the eye that was fustiest from Mornington.

"Playin' all the same, Morny?"

"Yes."

"Without Silver's permission?"

"Yes."

"By gad! How are you goin' to do it?"

"You fellows are goin' to help."

"Any old thing," said Peele. "But I don't see—"

"The team's goin' over by train," said Mornington quietly. "It's a rather expensive journey, you know, and nobody else is goin'. Only Newcome. They generally have a crowd to watch them when they go to Bagshot, or any place near. But a railway journey to St. Jim's is rather a big order, for the pleasure of standin' about with cold feet."

The nuts chuckled.

"But we're goin'," added Mornington.

"We are?"

"Exactly."

"My dear chap," protested Townsend, "we're not, you know. I'm not goin' to take a journey like that. No fear. Too faggin'. And I don't want to watch 'em play. I don't care a merry copper whether they beat St. Jim's or not."

"Same here," said Gower. "What's the good of wastin' money on railway tickets to watch those duffers faggin' after a muddy ball?"

"I shall stand the tickets, of course," said Mornington, "and anythin' else that turns up."

"Well, that's all right; but it's wastin' an afternoon," urged Townsend. "We're goin' to get up a game of bridge in Smythe's study, too."

"Bridge can wait," said Mornington coolly. "We're not goin' over to watch them play, of course. It's a wheeze."

"Blessed if I see it."

"Only Newcome's goin' over with the team. If anythin' happened to any of the players, that means only one reserve for Jimmy Silver to call in."

"But nothin' will happen to them," said Townsend, in astonishment.

"They won't fall out an' break their necks to please you, Mornny. They won't, you know," argued Topham.

"At least two of them won't turn up at St. Jim's," said Mornington calmly. "Two, at least, will get left behind somewhere. Jimmy Silver can call in Newcome, but he'll still be a man short. He will have to play me."

"Oh!" ejaculated Townsend.

He understood now the cunning scheme that was working in Mornington's brain.

Certainly Jimmy Silver was not likely to be on his guard against tricks of that kind.

"Oh, my hat!" said Peele, with a whistle.

"They have to change trains twice, at least," said Mornington. "There's a good wait at each place. I've looked out the trains. Easy as winkin' for a chap to get left at the last minute—with somebody to help him."

"Oh, by gad!"

"And a later train wouldn't be any good. A chap left behind would come on too late for the match. I don't mean you're to collar 'em by the neck and drag 'em out of the train," grinned Mornington. "It's all goin' to be done under the rose, of course. First change at Rookham, with ten minutes to wait. Well, when they're catchin' the second train, one of you gets into a fight with one of them, and that one loses the train! What?"

"Oh!"

"Same thing happens at Laxham, and Jimmy Silver finds himself two men short at St. Jim's. Plays Newcome and me," smiled Mornington. "One man short wouldn't do. He'd play Newcome, not me. But two does the trick."

"Well, you are a deep bounder, and no mistake," said Townsend admiringly. "I don't see why it shouldn't work."

"It will work, of course. I mean it to work," said Mornington arrogantly; "and at St. Jim's, even if Jimmy Silver didn't want to play me, the fellows would make him. The match will be touch-and-go, anyway, and playin' a man short simply means askin' for a lickin'."

"No doubt about that," chuckled Peele.

"And Jimmy Silver will be dished this time," said Mornington.

"Ha, ha!"

"But—but he'll smell a rat," said Gower. "He'll tumble to it that you've worked it, Mornny."

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Let him!"

"Hallo, there's the dinner-bell!"

The nuts of the Fourth went in to dinner.

They were grinning with great delight over Mornington's precious plan. It really looked as if Jimmy Silver would be "dished" this time.

After dinner, the footballers prepared to start.

Newcome was going with them; and, so far, Jimmy Silver did not know that anybody else was accompanying the team.

But when the dozen juniors started from Rookwood to walk down to the station at Coombe, five more fellows joined them.

Jimmy regarded the nuts with surprise.

"Comin' to see us off?" he asked.

"Comin' to see the match," said Townsend.

"What?"

"I suppose you'd like some Rookwood chaps there, to cheer your goals? What?" grinned Topham.

"You're going to make that journey to watch the game?" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, the Rookwood centre-forward.

"Yaas."

"Blessed if I know why you don't take up footer, then, if you're so jolly interested in the matches," said the Modern junior, puzzled.

"I suppose we can come? What?" said Mornington.

"Certainly," said Jimmy Silver. "No harm in your coming. You're not asking the club to pay your fares, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha!"

The footballers were considerably puzzled. As a rule, the nuts of the Fourth did not even turn up to see the home matches. It was astounding that they should make a long railway journey to see an away match.

Still, Jimmy was willing to regard it as a sign of grace; and he had no objection to Morny & Co. accompanying the team.

The party arrived at Coombe, and swarmed into the train for Rookham, the junction where the first change was made.

Morny & Co. travelled in a first-class carriage by themselves. Jimmy Silver and his team, who saw no object in wasting money, travelled third.

But they met again when the train stopped at Rookham, where there was ten minutes for the party to wait.

CHAPTER 3.

Left Behind.

"PUT that out, you ass!"

The Rookwood juniors were waiting on the platform at Rookham, when Townsend selected a cigarette from his case, and lighted it.

Jimmy Silver snapped at once.

He had no mind for the Rookwood party to be made ridiculous in the public eye by the nutty manners and customs of the giddy goats of Rookwood.

"Oh, rot," said Townsend airily. "Why shouldn't a fellow smoke?"

"Well, one reason is that it makes you look a silly ass, and us, too, as we're with you!" growled Lovell. "Put it out!"

"Oh, rats!"

Lovell's eyes gleamed.

"Did you say rats to me, Tommy?"

Townsend nodded coolly.

"Yes, Rats, dear boy, and many of 'em!"

"Why, you cheeky rotter," roared Lovell, greatly incensed by this unexpected bravado from Townsend, the slacker and dandy, "do you want me to mop up the platform with you?"

"You couldn't do it, dear boy."

"Wha-a-at!"

"You couldn't, you know. Rather above your weight, I think," said Townsend, blowing a puff of smoke fairly into Lovell's face.

Lovell was crimson.

"By jingo, I'll show you whether I could or not!" he exclaimed, clenching his fists.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Raby. "The train's coming in."

"Blow the train! It won't take me ten seconds to mop up that slacking duffer!"

"Hold on, Lovell!" said Jimmy. "Never mind mopping him up now. He can wait."

Lovell grunted.

But he dropped his hands. It was not a judicious moment for a scrap. The train puffed into the station and stopped.

Townsend burst into a laugh.

"Well, of all the funks!" he ejaculated.

Lovell had opened the carriage-door. But he spun round as Townsend spoke, his face crimson with wrath.

"You called me a funk!" he stuttered.

"Yes, rather! When is that mopping comin' off!" jeered Townsend.

"Get into the train, Lovell!"

"Look here—"

"Get in, you ass!"

Lovell swallowed his fury, with difficulty, and turned again to follow his comrades into the train.

Townsend made a clutch at his collar, and whirled him back. Mornington & Co. got into the next carriage, and they were watching Townsend from the window with grinning faces.

"Go it, Towny!" yelled Topham.

Jimmy Silver put his head out.

"Lovell, you ass, jump in! The guard's waving his flag."

"I'm coming!" panted Lovell.

He shook Townsend off fiercely, and made a rush for the train. But Townsend was not done with yet.

He rushed after Lovell, and grasped him again, and whirled him away from the carriage.

They stumbled over a trolley and rolled on the platform together.

"Right away!"

"Lovell!" roared Jimmy Silver.

He jumped out of the train, in great anxiety.

"Lovell!" yelled Raby. "Buck up! The train's going!"

"Lovell, you duffer!"

Lovell was struggling on the platform a dozen yards away. Townsend was holding grimly on to him.

Jimmy Silver ran towards them, but the guard was waving his flag, and he was holding the carriage-door to shut it.

"Jimmy!" shouted Newcome.

Jimmy bounded back to the carriage.

There was not half a second to lose. Lovell had to take his chance. It looked as if the captain of the football eleven would be left behind, too.

"Stand back——"

"Hold on a second!"

"Too late!" snapped the guard. "Stand back!"

But Jimmy fairly dragged the door open and hurled himself in. The train was moving. The guard slammed the door angrily.

On the platform Lovell sat up breathlessly, and blinked after the moving train. He had shaken Townsend off at last.

Towny was panting, on his back. Lovell leaped up and raced after the train. A porter dragged him back; but there was no chance.

The junior stood in utter dismay as the train swept out of the station.

He was left behind!

Lovell clenched his hands hard. That unlucky "row" with Townsend had settled his chance of playing in the match at St. Jim's.

There was only one consolation left—to hammer Townsend till he howled. As the train disappeared out of the station, Lovell turned back to where he had left the slacker of Rookwood, with clenched fists and blazing eyes.

But Townsend was gone.

He had known what to expect, and he had not waited for it. Lovell glared round in search of him, but in vain.

And the train rushed on towards Laxham bearing the Rookwood junior team—minus its inside-right.

CHAPTER 4.

Tommy Dodd Has Bad Luck.

"SILLY ass!"

"Fathead!"

"Of all the duffers——"

The remarks of the Rookwood footballers made on the subject of Arthur Edward Lovell were not complimentary.

Jimmy Silver was frowning.

He had a time-table in his pocket, and he took it out and consulted it anxiously. But he shook his head.

"No train?" asked Raby.

"Not for two hours. Lovell can't come on."

"Oh, rotten!"

"The silly ass, to get left behind!" growled Tommy Dodd. "Just like a Classical, I must say! You can't say I didn't

warn you to put one or two Moderns in the team, Jimmy Silver!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Sure, it wasn't really Lovell's fault!" said Flynn, the goalkeeper. "That thafe of the worrould fairly fastened on him, you know. Faith, it's the first toime I've iver seen Towny spoilin' for a fight!"

"Well, it can't be helped," said Jimmy Silver. "Keep smiling! Lucky Newcome's with us."

Newcome chuckled.

"You'll want me now, Jimmy?"

"Yes, fathead!"

"Quite sure I'll do?" asked Newcome, rather sarcastically. "You've got the nuts to choose from, you know. There are four of them in the next carriage."

"Fathead!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"It's hard cheese on Lovell!" remarked Raby. "Still, Newcome will play up all right. It won't make much difference in the match."

"Pity a few Moderns didn't come along," said Tommy Dodd. "Too many Classical duffers in the team, anyway, if you ask me!"

"Well, I don't ask you," said Jimmy Silver politely.

"Mind some more of your Classical asses do not get left behind!" remarked Tommy Cook. "We've got another change at Laxham, you know."

"If anybody gets left behind, I'll scrag him!" growled Jimmy Silver. "We can't play St. Jim's a man short. It wasn't really Lovell's fault; it looks to me as if that cad Townsend was making him lose the train on purpose. I've never seen him on the war-path like that before."

The train rushed on, the juniors chatting over the prospects of the match at St. Jim's. Lovell would be missed from the front line, but Newcome was able to fill his place pretty well—he was a quick and reliable forward. It was distinctly fortunate, Jimmy reflected, that Newcome had decided to come along and see the match. If he had taken his exclusion from the team as some fellows did, he would not have been available.

Matters might have been worse, and Jimmy Silver lived up to his own maxim, and "kept smiling."

"Laxham!" said Tommy Dodd, at last.

The train stopped, and the Rookwooders

poured out of it. Mornington & Co. alighted from the next carriage.

Mornington glanced over the footballers as they gathered on the platform.

"Hallo, lost one of your men?" he asked.

"Lovell lost the train at Rookham!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"Oh! Like me in his place?"

"No, thanks!" said Jimmy curtly.

"I'm willin' to play," said Mornington.

"I don't bear any malice. Say the word, and I'm your man!"

"Newcome's playing."

"Not much good against St. Jim's," said Mornington, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Why, you cheeky rotter!" exclaimed Newcome indignantly. "I shan't kick the ball through my own goal if I get into a wax! You would!"

Mornington gave another shrug and strolled away with his friends. The footballers followed them to the other platform, where they waited for the train for Wayland.

Topham and Peele and Gower were looking a little uneasy. It was nearly time for the second trick to be played, and the nuts did not feel keen to be selected for it. Mornington regarded them with an ironical smile.

"You're the man, Topy!" he remarked.

"Oh, gad!" said Topham.

"I suppose you want Jimmy Silver to be dished, don't you?"

"Ye-es. But—"

"Collar Tommy Dodd!" said Mornington.

"I rather fancy his place in the team—centre-forward suits me."

"Lots of limelight!" grinned Peele.

"I—I say, that Dodd beast is rather a tough beast," said Topham uneasily. "He's a beastly hard hitter, you know."

"Yaas, that's so. Gower had better lend you a hand!"

"Oh!" said Gower.

"I suppose you can handle him between you?" sniffed Mornington.

"Oh, yes! But—"

"It'll save you the trouble of comin' on to St. Jim's. I suppose you're not specially keen to see the match?"

"No jolly fear!"

"Well, you two keep an eye on Tommy Dodd, and collar him when the train's going. Mind they don't smell a rat, of course!"

"I—I say, how are we goin' to get up a row?" said Gower uneasily. "He won't row with us for smokin', as Lovell did!"

"Well, chip him about bein' a Modern cad, and mop him up," said Mornington coolly. "It won't look suspicious, Classicals rowin' with a Modern cad!"

"Yes, that's a good idea; but—"

"They're goin' into the buffet," said Mornington. "Come along! You may be able to keep Dodd back when the others leave to catch the train!"

"Oh, all right!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had gone into the station buffet, which opened from the up platform, to while away the quarter of an hour they had to wait. Mornington and his friends joined them there.

The juniors discussed ginger-pop and the coming match and the weather, and the minutes passed.

Towle looked out on to the platform.

"Train's signalled," he remarked.

"Get out, then," said Jimmy Silver. "Don't get losing the train, any of you!"

Jimmy settled for the ginger-beer, and turned to the door. Mornington made a sign to Gower and Topham, and sauntered out with Peele.

Topham took hold of a siphon of soda-water. Tommy Dodd finished his ginger-beer, and turned away from the table. As he did so, a sudden stream of soda-water caught him behind the ear.

"Yaroooh!" yelled Tommy Dodd, spinning round.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You clumsy ass!" exclaimed Cook wrathfully.

"Do you want some?" grinned Topham.

"Why, you— Yow—ow—grooogh!"

Tommy Cook jumped back as the stream was turned on him. Jimmy Silver's voice was heard from the platform:

"Come on, you dufers! The train's in!"

"Coming!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Come on, you chaps! No time to sorag those cheeky cads now!"

The three Moderns rushed for the platform.

Whizz-sizzzzz!

A fresh stream of soda-water caught Tommy Dodd in the back of the neck.

"Give it to the Modern cad!" howled Gower. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd turned back with blazing eyes.

"Come on!" called out Doyle.

"I'm coming!"

Sizzzz!

It was more than flesh and blood could stand. Topham was deliberately sizzling the soda-water over the Modern junior, drenching him. Tommy Dodd rushed at him with blazing eyes, and struck out angrily.

"Yow-ow!" roared Topham; and he rolled on the floor, and the soda siphon went down with a smash.

Tommy Dodd did not wait for more. He turned to rush out, and rushed over a foot Gower put out just in time. The Modern junior stumbled and rolled over.

Topham staggered up.

"Collar the cad!" he panted.

"Come on, Tommy!" yelled Cook from the platform. "They're shutting the doors!"

Tommy Dodd scrambled up, only to find himself in the grasp of Topham and Gower, and to go down sprawling with them.

"Let me go!" yelled the junior, struggling fiercely. "You rotters, you want me to lose the train!"

"Sit on him!" panted Gower.

"Leggo!"

"Ha, ha! Sit on the Modern cad!"

Tommy Dodd struggled fiercely, and though the nuts were two to one, he hurled them off at last, and picked himself up.

He rushed breathlessly out of the buffet to the platform.

The train was vanishing down the line. Tommy Dodd had lost it by a good minute.

The Modern junior stood rooted to the platform.

He had lost the train. The match at St. Jim's was to be played without him as well as without Lovell.

"M-m-my hat!" stuttered Tommy Dodd.

Two dishevelled youths looked out of the buffet. They grinned as they saw Tommy Dodd standing in dismay on the platform, staring blankly in the direction the express had gone.

"Done!" grinned Topham.

"Done to a turn!" chuckled Peele.

But they left off grinning and chuckling as the Modern junior of Rookwood came towards them.

"You've lost me the train!" said Tommy Dodd, between his teeth. "You've done me out of the match, and goodness knows how it will go now! You did it on purpose!"

He pushed back his cuffs.

"I think I can see the game. Towny at Rookham, and you cads here—a sneaking game to muck up the team for the St. Jim's match! Well, you've done me, and now I'm going to do you. Come on!"

"I—I say—" stammered Topham, backing away.

"Keep off, you Modern cad!" panted Gower. "There's two of us, and—"

"I don't mind the two of you!" said Tommy Dodd disdainfully. "I shouldn't mind half a dozen of your sort! Come on; you're going to have it!"

And as the slackers of Rookwood did not come on, Tommy Dodd came on—like a whirlwind.

Topham and Gower put up the best fight they could, and they were two to one. But the indignant Modern junior made short work of the two weedy slackers of the Fourth.

Right and left, left and right, he piled in, till Topham and Gower lay sprawling on the platform, and refused to rise for any more. They were likely to show serious damages when they returned to Rookwood.

Tommy Dodd turned away with a black brow.

He had made the nuts suffer for their sins, and that was a solace. But he was out of the St. Jim's match now, and the Rookwood skipper was another man short. And Tommy Dodd anathematised his luck as he waited wearily for a train.

CHAPTER 5.

Mornington's Chance.

JIMMY SILVER'S face was a study. The loss of Lovell had been serious enough, but there was Newcome to take his place, more or less effectively.

But the loss of Tommy Dodd was a knock-down blow.

Jimmy sat silent, in utter dismay, as the train buzzed out of Laxham Junction. It was hard under the circumstances to "keep smiling."

The eleven had lost its centre-forward, and there was no one to fill the place.

Tommy Dodd was one of the very best

men in the team, and there was not even a reserve to fill the gap.

Jimmy could hardly blame himself. He could not have foreseen that two players in succession would lose the connection.

"The silly ass," said Jimmy at last, "to get into a row with those fellows just at that minute—just as Lovell did!"

"Sure, it wasn't Tommy's fault!" said Tommy Doyle loyally. "I tell ye Topham was squirting soda-water all over him, be-dad! He was lookin' for a row!"

"Looks to me like a rotten trick!" said Rawson, the right-half of the team. "Towny at Rookham, and Topy at Laxham—it's a game to muck up the team!"

"A rotten Classical trick!" snorted Towle.

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"That's why they came!" growled Raby. "They meant to play that game all along! It's as plain as the nose on your face, Jimmy!"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Jimmy Silver slowly.

"And now we're a man short!" said Rawson. "What are you going to do now, Jimmy?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"I saw Morny and Peele get in further down the train," said Towle. "You'll have to play one of them!"

Jimmy compressed his lips.

"Peele's not a bad forward, if he chooses to buck up," he said thoughtfully. "I might play Peele!"

"Better Peele than anybody."

"Well, yes!"

"My hat! Was that the game, then?" exclaimed Tommy Cook. "Did they play those rotten tricks to give Peele or Morny a chance?"

"I shouldn't wonder." Jimmy set his teeth. "Still, those cads are always up against us. I don't see any evidence that Mornington or Peele had a hand in it. Anyway, we must have another player, as the matter stands, and Peele will have to play!"

It was evidently the only thing to be decided on—unless Mornington was to be chosen.

Mornington was far and away a better player than Peele—indeed, he was very nearly as good as Tommy Dodd himself, when he chose. But Jimmy knew the un-

reliable temper of the cad of Rookwood too well. Not until he had no other possible resource would he have dreamed of playing Mornington.

Jimmy's face was not so cheerful, as the train rushed on, now.

Peele could play forward after a fashion, but he was out of condition, and at the best would not have been a patch on Tommy Dodd. It meant a weak spot in the team that required to be at its very best for the match. Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's were foemen worthy of the steel of the best footballers that Rookwood could send out.

But it could not be helped, and Jimmy took it as cheerfully as he could.

The train stopped in Wayland at last.

The footballers alighted, and Mornington and Peele stepped out of a carriage further along.

They did not join the footballers, however. Mornington was sure of his point now, and he would not appear eager. It suited him to be approached by Jimmy Silver now that he regarded himself as indispensable.

Jimmy hurried towards the two nuts as they were leaving the platform. Mornington regarded him with an insolent smile.

"Hallo! Lost another man?" he remarked.

"Yes. I shall want you, Peele."

Peele started, and a steely look came into Mornington's eyes. He was not, after all, indispensable. It had never even occurred to him that Jimmy Silver might choose Peele instead.

"I—I'm wanted," repeated Peele, equally surprised.

"Yes. Tommy Dodd's left behind at Laxham, and he can't get here in time for the match. I shall put Oswald in the centre, and you can play on the wing. I suppose you're willing to play?"

Jimmy added that as an after-thought. Most Rookwood juniors would have jumped at the chance of playing for the School, but Peele was a well-known slacker.

"I—I've got no things here, you know," stammered Peele, quite taken by surprise.

"I've got Lovell's things in my bag—that's all right."

"Lovell's things wouldn't fit me."

"Oh, don't be an ass! A football field isn't a monkey-parade in Bond Street!"

snapped Jimmy Silver. "They'll fit you near enough!"

Peele hesitated.

As a matter of fact, slacker as he was, he would have liked to bag the distinction of having played for Rookwood in a big match.

He looked doubtfully at Mornington:

The dandy of the Fourth met his eyes, his own gleaming with menace. If Peele trumped Mornington's trick in this manner, he knew the deadly enmity and malevolence he had to expect afterwards. He was not prepared to quarrel with the leader of the Rookwood nuts, and to make an enemy of the richest fellow at Rookwood.

He shook his head.

Jimmy stared at him. He could hardly comprehend for a moment, that the slacker of the Fourth was refusing a place in the eleven.

"Sorry!" said Peele at last. "I can't do it!"

"You can't do it!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Sorry! No; I'm not in form for footer."

"I know that!" growled Jimmy. "You don't think I'd play a weedy-looking slacking worm like you if a fag from the Second Form at Rookwood was here, do you? I'm going to play you because there's nobody else."

"Thanks!" said Peele. "You're tremendously complimentary, and you make me feel like obligin' you—I don't think! Sorry, I can't play!"

"That's thrue for ye!" said Flynn. "You can't play for toffee! But you can walk on at yer best."

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"Do you mean to say that you won't play for Rookwood, Peele?" he exclaimed.

"I can't."

"It's for me to settle whether you can or not. I'd rather play you than play a man short. Will you play—yes or no?"

"No!" said Peele, driven to a plain answer at last.

"Why, you unspeakable cad!" broke out Dick Oswald savagely. "Do you want to leave your own school in the lurch?"

"Ye thafe of the worruld—"

"There's Morny," said Peele, a little alarmed by the looks the footballers bent upon him. "Morny's a better man than I am, and he's willin' to play."

"Quite willin'," said Mornington, smiling.

Jimmy Silver paused. Peele's refusal left him no resource but to play Mornington, or to play a man short against St. Jim's. That, of course, was asking for a tremendous licking in the first match of the season. And Mornington, if he chose, could play a good game. Would he choose? Certainly, he seemed keen and willing enough now.

"If one rotten worm won't play, better play the other rotten worm, Jimmy," said Oswald.

"Nothing else doing," said Rawson.

Jimmy Silver made up his mind.

"I'll play you, Mornington," he said abruptly.

"I'm your man."

"I suppose you won't mind if Lovell's clobber don't fit you to a hair?" added Jimmy bitterly.

"Not at all," said Mornington, laughing.

"Then you're in the team. As for you, Peele, you cad, you won't come on to St. Jim's. And before I leave you, you'll put up your hands."

"I—I say—"

Peele did not have time to say anything. The angry and indignant football skipper was already hitting out, and the nut of Rookwood had to put up his hands. His hands did not help him much, however. Jimmy left him gasping on the platform, to be picked up by a porter, and the footballers streamed out of the station.

Mornington went with them, smiling. The unfortunate Peele had the pleasure of nursing his nose at the station till a train came in to take him home. By that time he had repented very sincerely of his share in Mornington's plot. But the plot had succeeded, and the dandy of Rookwood was a member of the Rookwood team.

CHAPTER 6.

Checkmate.

"BAI Jove, heah you are, deah boys!"
The dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's greeted the Rookwood footballers as they came out of the station.

A brake was waiting for the team outside, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy were seated in it. The Rookwooders clambered in.

"Had a good journey?" said Tom Merry cheerily.

"Oh, ripping!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Topping!"

"First-rate!" said Mornington, laughing.

Jimmy Silver shot the cad of Rookwood a suspicious glance as he sat down in the brake.

There was no direct evidence to connect Mornington with the disaster that had befallen the Rookwood team, but Jimmy could not help being suspicious.

It was true that Townsend & Co. were "up against" the Fistical Four and all their works, yet it was surprising that they should have taken so much trouble to "dish" the footballers, unless there was some strong motive behind it.

Was Mornington at the bottom of it?

Peele's refusal to play was the last straw. Peele could have had only one motive for refusing—to leave the place open for Mornington.

Did that mean that Mornington had plotted the whole business, and that all that had happened on the journey was due to the machinations of the cad of Rookwood?

Jimmy remembered Mornington's declaration in the end study the previous day—that he would play in the St. Jim's match in spite of Jimmy Silver. Had he planned all that had happened in order to carry out his boast?

It looked like it. But there was no proof, and without proof Jimmy Silver could not act. If it was so, he was playing into his enemy's hands. He was rewarding him for his treachery with a place in the team. The thought of that made him set his teeth hard. But there was no proof.

Jimmy was almost silent as the brake rolled away to St. Jim's. Mornington was in great spirits, however, and he chatted cheerily all the time. The brake arrived at the old school, and the Rookwooders followed Tom Merry and D'Arcy to Little Side. Tom Merry's team was on the ground already, punting a ball about.

The visitors went into their dressing-room to change. Mornington, fastidious as he usually was, made no objection to donning Lovell's football shorts and jersey, though they were considerably too large for him. Tommy Dodd's clobber was available for Newcome.

"You'll go in the centre, Oswald," Jimmy Silver remarked, as the juniors changed; "Newcome, inside-right; Mornington, outside."

Mornington looked up quickly from lacing his boots.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, his brow darkening.

"You heard what I said."

"I understood that I was going to take Tommy Dodd's place. I'm best at centre-forward."

"Isn't that for me to judge?" said Jimmy quietly.

"You'd better play me in the centre. I like the place better," said Mornington. "Oswald won't be much good there, in my opinion. He's a pretty fair winger."

"Your opinion doesn't happen to matter," said Jimmy Silver icily. "My opinion is that Oswald is worth about three of you at centre-forward, and my opinion happens to be the one that counts."

"Shut up, Morny, for goodness' sake!" said Oswald.

Mornington scowled.

"Look here, am I goin' to play centre-forward?" he demanded.

"No, you're not," said Jimmy Silver crisply.

"Then I've a jolly good mind not to play at all."

"Suit yourself," said Jimmy coolly. "I've a jolly good mind, as it happens, to kick you out and play a man short!"

"And give the match away?" sneered Mornington.

"Chuck it, Jimmy," whispered Raby anxiously. "We're not looking for a licking, you know. Let the cad jaw!"

Jimmy Silver choked down his wrath. Now that Mornington was in the team, he was beginning in his usual way. He made no appearance at all of respect for his captain's authority; and he was getting into one of his sulky tempers, in which he was as likely as not to let his side down. Jimmy half repented letting him into the team at all, dire as the necessity was.

Mornington's face was dark as he left the dressing-room with the rest. St. Jim's were waiting in the field.

"You won't give me the place I want?" Mornington asked, joining Jimmy Silver as he went into the field.

"No, I won't!" snapped Jimmy. "Shut up!"

Mornington's eyes gleamed.

"You've got into the team, and that's more than enough for you," said Jimmy. "Don't let me have any more of your chin-wag; I'm fed-up with it!"

Mornington laughed mockingly.

"I told you I should be in the team," he sneered. "You are not quite the great panjandrum you fancy, Jimmy Silver. I told you I should play in the St. Jim's match, and I'm goin' to play. That's good enough for me, after all."

Jimmy stopped dead.

"Does that mean that you fixed this up for me, Mornington?" he asked, in a quiet voice. "You planned fixing me like this?"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders. He was utterly reckless. He was convinced that Jimmy Silver could not do without him now, at any price; and he was keen to enjoy his triumph.

"What did I tell you?" he sneered. "If there isn't one way, there's another, and I told you I should play against St. Jim's. So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Jimmy Silver!"

"Come on, Jimmy," said Raby anxiously.

"The fellows are waiting for us."

Jimmy did not move.

"Mornington's owned up that he planted this on us," he said. "He put Townsend and the rest up to their game. I suspected it; but the cad has owned up now!"

"You can lick him at Rookwood," said Raby. "Come on now!"

"Mornington isn't going to play," said Jimmy quietly.

There was a buzz among the Rookwood footballers.

"Not going to play!" ejaculated Rawson.

"No!" Jimmy Silver's eyes were gleaming. "Whether we win, or whether we lose, Mornington doesn't play for Rookwood. He's dodged Lovell and Tommy Dodd out of the team, to steal their places; and I'm not backing up a plotting thief! Mornington won't play!"

"I—I say, Jimmy—"

"It's settled," said Jimmy Silver, frowning.

"But we shall be a man short!"

"Better that than play a rotten, scheming rascal. Get off the field, Mornington!"

Mornington's face was white with rage and chagrin. He had never dreamed of this. He had deemed it safe to triumph over the football skipper he had so cunningly outwitted. But he did not know Jimmy Silver.

"You—you—" he panted. "I tell you I'm goin' to play!"

"You're not!" said Jimmy Silver tersely. "Get out! If you don't want the St. Jim's fellows to see you kicked off the field, you'd better clear—at once!"

Mornington stood rooted to the ground for a moment. It looked as if there would be a scone; Jimmy's hands were already clenching. But the humiliation of being kicked off under the staring eyes of the St. Jim's crowd would have been too bitter. The dandy of Rookwood, deadly white with passion, turned on his heel and strode away.

In silence the footballers went into the field. The die was cast now. And the Rookwooders, now that they knew the truth, did not blame Jimmy Silver. Better to take any chances than to play a traitor in the ranks. But their hopes of a win in the first big match of the season had sunk to zero.

CHAPTER 7.

A Fight to a Finish.

TOM MERRY looked rather curiously at the Rookwooders as they came on.

"Man short?" he asked.

Jimmy Silver nodded shortly.

"Yes; one of my men can't play."

"Bai Jove! That's too bad," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sympathetically. "We shall give you a feahful lickin', you know."

Jimmy smiled.

"Not till we've wriggled a bit," he suggested.

"But that won't do, you know," said Tom Merry. "Pity you haven't another man with you. Can't we lend you a man?"

"Yaas, wathah! That's a good ideah."

"Better pick up a chap here," said Jack Blake. "It won't be much of a match, otherwise."

Jimmy Silver paused.

Naturally, he wanted to play that match

with a wholly Rookwood team. But the suggestion was good; and the looks of his followers showed him that they thought so. He nodded at last.

"Thanks!" he said, "If you can lend me a man——"

"A dozen, if you like," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "Of course, we've got the best in the team, but there are others jolly good."

"Bai Jove! I will play for Wookwood, you know," said D'Arcy generously. "We mustn't give a visitah a second-wate playah. Is it a forward you want, Silvah, deah boy?"

"Yes; outside-right."

"Then I'm your man."

"Take D'Arcy, if you like," said Tom Merry. "I'll put in young Julian; he's quite as good."

"Wcally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Well, if D'Arcy's agreecable——" said Jimmy Silver.

"I am quite at your service, deah boy."

"Then it's a go. Thanks!"

"If you have any clobber for me, I will change——"

"That's all right. Come with me."

Mornington came out of the dressing-room, in his Etons, with a bitter look on his face. He gave Jimmy Silver a dark look, and went into the crowd round the ropes. He had one consolation left—that of watching the Rookwood team thoroughly licked by St. Jim's—as he fully anticipated. D'Arcy entered the dressing-room, and Jimmy picked up the "clobber" Mornington had thrown savagely on the floor.

"I won't keep you three seconds, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

As a matter of fact, D'Arcy kept him full five minutes; changing clothes was not a rapid process with the swell of St. Jim's.

But he was changed at last, and he returned to the football-field with the Rookwood skipper.

Julian of St. Jim's was already in football garb, and in the ranks of the Saints.

Tom Merry's team was ready.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took his place on the right wing as the Rookwood team lined up.

The kick-off fell to Tom Merry, and the ball rolled as Lefevre, of the Fifth, blew his whistle.

The great match began.

The Rookwood footballers realised at once that they were "up against" a very tough proposition in Tom Merry and his team. And although they found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy a first-rate winger, and decidedly useful in the front line, they had the disadvantage of having a stranger in the ranks—a player with whom they had never practised, and whose play they knew nothing of.

Jimmy had trained his team to work together like clockwork; and there was a loose screw, as it were, in the machine. But D'Arcy was doing his very best for his adopted side; and his very best was very good indeed.

The first goal came to Talbot of St. Jim's, after a struggle that had lasted for twenty minutes without a score on either side.

But close on half-time the Rookwood forwards made a hot attack on the home goal, and D'Arcy centred to Oswald in the nick of time, and the Rookwood junior put the ball into the net, in spite of the efforts of Fatty Wynn in goal.

The score was level when the whistle went for half-time.

Mornington, looking on, ground his teeth.

It was anybody's match so far, and it was quite on the cards that he would be deprived of the consolation of seeing his side defeated.

His plot, which had promised so well, had not worked out eminently successfully, after all. His boast remained unfulfilled; he was not playing for Rookwood in spite of Jimmy Silver. He had his trouble for his pains, with a long journey thrown in, and his heart swelled with malice and all uncharitableness. But the Rookwood players did not waste a thought upon the disappointed cad of the Fourth.

Rookwood kicked off for the second half, Mornington's sulky eyes watching them from the crowd.

The wind was behind the Rookwooders now, and they took full advantage of it. They came down on the home goal with a rush.

Twice Fatty Wynn in goal narrowly saved before the struggle went away to mid-field.

Then again came a hot Rookwood attack, and a shot from the wing very nearly beat

Fatty Wynn in goal. Arthur Augustus had come very near scoring for Rookwood. But it did not quite come off, and the score remained one to one, while the minutes wore away.

The game was hard and fast all through, and both goals were in danger incessantly; but Flynn for Rookwood and Fatty Wynn for St. Jim's proved equal to the test.

The referee looked up at the old clock-tower above the trees.

Five minutes to go, and the score level.

It had been a gruelling game, and some of the players on both sides had bellows to mend, fit as they were. It looked like a draw, but both teams were determined that it should not be a draw.

Tom Merry's men came on gallantly, and there was a fierce struggle before the Rookwood goal, and the ball went in, only to meet a quick Irish list and come out again like a pip from an orange. This time Raby cleared, and Jimmy Silver saw his opportunity, and sent the ball out to D'Arcy on the forward wing.

The Rookwood forwards were away again. The ball came in to Newcome, who centred to Oswald as he was tackled, but Oswald rushed it on.

The St. Jim's backs accounted for Oswald, but not before he had passed to Towle, who rushed on and kicked. Fatty Wynn made a leap too late, and the leather rebounded in the net.

"Goal!"

Towle panted and blinked. He had had good luck.

"Goal, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Sowwy we've beaten you, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

"Goal!" gasped Jimmy Silver, as he thumped Towle on the back. "Good for you, you Modern bounder! Rookwood wins!"

"Hurray!"

Rookwood had won, for the whistle went, and the game was over. Mornington, with a scowling face, tramped away, after seeing the Rookwood team victors in the hard-fought match.

But nobody missed Mornington.

Tom Merry & Co. took their defeat cheerfully enough, and they entertained the Rookwood footballers in great style till it was time to start for the station.

Jimmy Silver & Co. departed in great spirits. The first match of the season had been won, after all, and without Mornington. The cad of Rookwood had plotted in vain, and Jimmy Silver could afford now to dismiss him contemptuously from his thoughts.

"Morny! How did it go, dear boy?"

Mornington arrived at Rookwood before the footballers. He had caught an earlier train. Lovell and Tommy Dodd were there, eager to know how the match had gone. Townsend & Co. greeted Mornington as he came in.

But Mornington scowled.

"You played, of course?" said Topham.

"No."

"My hat! Why?"

"Hang them!" was Mornington's reply.

"Then they lost?"

"No; they won!"

"By gad!"

"Rookwood's won?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, good! What are you scowling about, you image, if Rookwood's won?"

"Go and eat coke!" was Mornington's reply.

He went sullenly to his study with the nuts. A little later the merry voices of the returning footballers were heard. Jimmy Silver & Co. had scored a victory to open the season, and they let all Rookwood hear their delight.

Mornington gritted his teeth.

"No good grousin', old chap," remarked Townsend. "Can't be helped. But Jimmy Silver has all the luck."

"His luck is goin' to turn!" said Mornington, his eyes gleaming. "I'm fed up with Jimmy Silver. There isn't room at Rookwood for Jimmy Silver an' me!"

Townsend stared.

"What the dickens— He won't leave to please you, Morny."

"He may be made to!" said Mornington, in a low, tense voice. "I tell you there's no room at Rookwood for the two of us; and Jimmy Silver is getting near the end of his tether!"

"What the dickens are you drivin' at, Morny?" muttered Townsend uneasily.

But the dandy of Rookwood did not reply. Only the savage gleaming of his eyes told

of the dark thoughts that were working in his brain.

In the end study the Fistical Four were rejoicing. Little did Jimmy Silver dream of the black thoughts in the mind of his enemy, and little would he have cared if he had known. But he was not done with Mornington yet.

CHAPTER 8.
Chucked Out!

"YOW! Leggo!"

Jimmy Silver heard that yell as he came upstairs. It came from the other end of the passage from the end study.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Leggo, you rotter!"

It was Newcome's voice. Jimmy Silver's brow darkened. He hurried up the passage towards the end study. Newcome was his chum, and if Newcome was in trouble, it was time for Jimmy to appear on the scene.

Mornington and Townsend and Peele of the Fourth were in the passage, and they were grinning. Mornington & Co. apparently found something entertaining in the wild yells that were proceeding from the study. They grinned more than ever at the sight of Jimmy Silver.

"Better chip in, Silver," chuckled Mornington. "Newcome's gettin' it in the neck. Beaumont's got him."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Townsend and Peele.

"Shut up, you rotters!" growled Jimmy Silver.

The nuts of the Fourth were in his way, and Jimmy Silver shoved savagely through them; and hurried on. He sent Townsend reeling against a wall, and Mornington through a study doorway, and Peele sat down on the floor with a bump. Without even a glance at the scattered nuts, Jimmy Silver ran on to his study.

The door was closed, and Jimmy flung it open and rushed in.

Newcome of the Fourth was wriggling in the grasp of Beaumont, the bully of the Sixth Form.

Beaumont's face was dark with anger.

He had gripped the junior's collar with his left hand, and with his right he was wielding his ashplant.

The blows were simply raining on the wriggling, struggling, kicking Fourth-Former. Beaumont, as a prefect of the Sixth, had the right of wielding the ashplant, but certainly not in the way he was doing it now.

Jimmy did not stop to ask questions.

He ran at Beaumont, hitting out. Prefect or no, prefect, Jimmy did not intend to see his chum used in that way.

His fist caught Beaumont on the side of the chin, and it caught him like a hammer. The senior uttered a howl and staggered, releasing Newcome.

Newcome promptly jumped away.

Beaumont reeled against the mantelpiece, and swung round on the captain of the Fourth.

For a moment he scarcely seemed able to realise that it was a junior of the Fourth who had struck him.

Jimmy Silver was not in the least dismayed at what he had done. He faced the Sixth-Former, with his fists clenched and his eyes glittering.

"You bullying cad!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Newcome. "I didn't put the jam in the beast's slippers. I wish I had, but I didn't."

Beaumont panted.

"Silver! You—you dare! You have struck me, a prefect!" he gasped.

"I'll do it again fast enough if you don't clear!" said Jimmy Silver savagely. "Back me up, old chap. We can handle the cad between us!"

"What-ho!" said Newcome promptly.

Beaumont made a furious stride at the two juniors. There was a rush of feet in the passage, and Lovell and Raby came hurrying in. They had heard of the "row."

The bully of the Sixth paused.

The Fistical Four always stood together, and they were evidently prepared to "mop up" the study with Beaumont, prefect as he was.

"Come on, you rotter!" said Lovell.

"We're ready!"

"File in!" said Raby.

Beaumont gritted his teeth.

"Silver, you've struck a prefect! Come

with me to the Head! I'll have you flogged for it!"

"Oh, I'll come fast enough!" said Jimmy disdainfully. "You come, too, Newcome, and let Dr. Chisholm see how the bullying cad was licking you. I don't think Beaumont will be a prefect much longer."

Again the senior paused.

He knew that Newcome's back and shoulders must be deeply marked by the brutal blows he had rained on him, and he dared not let the Head see those marks.

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver invitingly. "We're waiting to go to the Head, you rotten bully!"

"I—I won't take you to the Head now!" muttered Beaumont. "But look out, Jimmy Silver—look out, you cheeky young scoundrel!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Jimmy unceremoniously. "You dare not take Newcome before the Head, and you know it, you cad! I've a jolly good mind to march him in and tell the Head, anyway!"

"The—the young rotter put jam in my slippers," stammered Beaumont.

"I didn't!" said Newcome. "But I will, I promise you that!"

"I was told you did——"

"And you came here and acted like a rotten Hun, because of what some sneak told you!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Collar the cad!"

Beaumont started back.

"Don't you dare!" he panted.

"You can take us to the Head if you like," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "Suit yourself about that. You're going to be chucked out of this study on your neck!"

"You—you— Hands off!" roared Beaumont, flourishing the ashplant.

The prefect was in an awkward position. He simply dared not let his brutality come to the Head's knowledge, and so his authority was gone. And the Fistical Four of the Fourth meant business.

"Put down that stick!" commanded Jimmy Silver.

"I—I'll brain you, if you——"

"Well, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," said Jimmy. "If there's any braining to be done, I'll do my bit!"

He caught up the poker from the fender and advanced on Beaumont.

"You use that stick, and I'll use this poker!" said Jimmy determinedly. "Now, collar him, you chaps!"

Beaumont backed away, the Fistical Four following him up.

He aimed a fierce blow at Jimmy Silver, and Jimmy neatly parried it with the poker. Then the poker clattered on Beaumont's arm, and the senior uttered a howl of anguish and dropped the ashplant.

"I warned you," said Jimmy coolly. "Collar him!"

Beaumont was in the grasp of the juniors the next moment.

His arm was numbed, and he could not put up much of a fight, big Sixth-Former as he was, in the grasp of the four.

He was swept off his feet in the grip of four pairs of hands, and whirled to the doorway.

Outside in the passage a crowd of the Fourth had gathered.

There was a buzz of amazement and consternation at the sight of a prefect of the Sixth struggling in the grasp of Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Stand clear!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

The juniors, gasping, crowded back.

Beaumont came hurtling from the study doorway, hurled fairly into the passage by the chums of the Fourth.

Bump!

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Rawson. "Oh, Jimmy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Beaumont rolled along the passage, and sat up, quite dazed. He gave the four juniors a glare that a Hun might have envied. The Fourth-Formers looked on blankly. They had never seen a Sixth-Form prefect handled like that before, and it really seemed time for the skies to fall. They expected to see Beaumont charge back at the juniors like a mad bull. But he didn't. He picked himself up, gasping for breath, and, with a deadly glance at the Fistical Four, he limped painfully away down the passage.

"Oh, my hat!" said Oswald of the Fourth. "You take the cake, Jimmy Silver! You might be sacked for it, you know!"

"I don't think Beaumont will take it any further," said Jimmy. "If he does, we're ready. Now I'm going to burn his ashplant."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And in a few minutes the symbol of authority was crackling away merrily in grate in the end study.

CHAPTER 9.

Morny's Programme.

PENNY for 'em, Morny!"
Mornington of the Fourth was wearing a thoughtful look. Peele and Gower, his study-mates, regarded him curiously. Tea was just finished in Study No. 4, and Mornington had lighted a cigarette—his usual custom.

He looked at Peele, as he spoke, through a cloud of cigarette-smoke. There was a strange gleam in Mornington's dark, deep-set eyes.

"I've been thinking," he remarked.

"You've been lookin' like a boiled owl for an hour or more," said Peele. "What's the row? Somethin' gone wrong with the geegees?"

"I'm not thinking about gee gees," said Mornington. "I'm thinkin' about Jimmy Silver."

"Cheeky cad!" said Gower. "Fancy his handlin' Beaumont like that this afternoon! And Beaumont's lettin' this matter drop, it seems."

"Well, he hasn't much choice," said Peele, with a grin. "The Head would come down on him like a hundred of bricks, if he knew what a rotten bully he was. I wonder Newcome doesn't tell about him. I would."

"And it wasn't Newcome put the jam in his slippers," grinned Gower. "I wonder—who did it?"

"Somebody told Beaumont it was Newcome."

"I told him," said Mornington.

"By gad! You did?"

Mornington nodded calmly.

"I—I say, that was rather thick, Morny," said Peele uneasily. "The fellows would be awfully down on you for sneakin', if they knew."

"You can tell them if you like," said Mornington, with a sneer.

"I shan't do that, of course. But it was rather thick."

"Beaumont's always been down on that study," said Mornington. "They're too cheeky for him. But I wanted to make

him bitter—and, by gad, it's turned out better than I expected! He can't forgive them for bootin' him out of the study, with half the Fourth Form lookin' on. The fags are cacklin' over it no end, and Beaumont hardly dare show his face in public."

"But"—Peele looked very uncomfortable—"sneakin' is a bit thick. An' that chap Newcome isn't such a bad sort, in his way. What are you down on him for?"

"I'm down on anybody who backs up Jimmy Silver. But I don't care twopence about Newcome. It was to get Beaumont more down than ever on Jimmy Silver that I did it. I knew that cheeky cad would chip in!"

"But I don't see—"

"I've told you before that there isn't room at Rookwood for Jimmy Silver and me," said Mornington, between his set teeth. "One of us has got to go."

"Yes, you've said so, but it's all rot. Jimmy Silver won't go to please you, I suppose."

"I'm goin' to make him!"

"Make him leave Rookwood!" said Gower, with a stare.

"Yes."

"You can't do it. He wouldn't leave Rookwood unless he had to; and he won't have to unless he's sacked."

"He's goin' to be sacked."

"Jimmy Silver—sacked!"

"Yes."

"You're talkin' out of your hat," said Peele. "Why should he be sacked? Come to that, you're more likely to be sacked than he is. If the Head knew you smoked, an' gambled, an' betted with bookmakers, an' broke bounds—"

"The Head doesn't know, an' he won't know," said Mornington. "I know Jimmy Silver won't do anythin' to be sacked for. But it can be worked, an' I'm goin' to work it."

"Morny!"

"Shocked, I suppose?" sneered Mornington. "I suppose you'd be as glad as I to see the cad go? He's down on our set. We can't have a quiet game in the study—we can't get up a Form sweepstake—we can't do anythin' we want, so long as that prig is captain of the Fourth. A lot of fellows who would join our set are kept back by Jimmy Silver. He's down on smokin', an' card-playin', and havin' a good time generally. He keeps me out of the footer. An' he's captain of the Fourth

—an' I'm goin' to be captain of the Fourth. I can't while he's here."

"But you can't do it," said Peele, who was rather pale now. "What rotten scheme have you got in your head now, Morny?"

"Beaumont's goin' to help."

"Oh! That's why you've been suckin' up to Beaumont all this time."

"He's been suckin' up to me, you mean!" said Mornington scornfully. "He bets on gee-gees, an' he's got into scrapes, an' I've helped him out. He owes me more than ten quid."

"Beaumont does!" ejaculated Peele.

"You mean to say that a Sixth-Form prefect borrows of you—a Fourth-Former!"

Mornington laughed mockingly.

"Beaumont would have borrowed of the Gentleman in Black himself, to get out of his scrape," he said. "I knew from Joey Hook the fix he was in, an' I offered to lend him the money. He jumped at it. He's under my thumb now. If it came out that a prefect borrowed money in the Fourth, it would be bad for Beaumont."

"I fancy he would deny it," said Peele, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"He couldn't deny his signature on the I O U he gave me," said Mornington coolly. "I didn't part with the money without his acknowledgment, of course. I can do what I like with Beaumont."

"But—but," Peele stammered, "Beaumont wouldn't join you in—in anythin' rotten against Silver!"

"Not after what's happened this afternoon?" sneered Mornington. "I fancy he'll jump at it. But he's got to, anyway."

"Oh, Morny!"

"I'm not goin' to tell you anythin' about it," said Mornington, with a sneer. "You needn't be afraid; you don't stand to risk anythin'. But it's come to a finish between Jimmy Silver and me. One of us has got to go under—and it won't be me!"

The dandy of the Fourth threw his cigaretté into the grate, and lounged out of the study.

Peele and Gower looked at one another with almost scared faces.

"He means it!" muttered Gower.

Peele drew a deep breath.

"I'd be glad to see Silver sacked!" he said. "We've never had a show since the interferin' cad came to Rookwood! But—but I'm not goin' to have a hand in anythin' of the kind, I know that."

"Same here," said Gower. "I Morny luck; but he can leave me. I'm not goin' to know anything about it."

Morny's pals were quite determined at that point. And, glad as they would have been to see their pal in Jimmy Silver's place as captain of the Rookwood Fourth, they could not help feeling anxious and uneasy. Well they knew Mornington's reckless and unscrupulous character, they knew Jimmy Silver, too, and they could not help feeling that it was probable that Jimmy would not, after all, get the worst of the contest.

CHAPTER 10.

A Precious Pair.

BEAUMONT of the Sixth looked up with a scowl as his door opened without a knock, and Mornington of the Fourth came in.

Beaumont was in a bad temper.

It was no light thing for a prefect of the Sixth to be "chucked" out of a junior study, and to let the matter drop. Beaumont dared not take it further, lest worse should befall him, but he felt the humiliation keenly. All the juniors had heard of it, and were grinning over it. Bulkeley, the head-prefect, had spoken to him about it in rather plain language. And Beaumont had several troublesome aches and pains as souvenirs of his encounter with the Fistical Four.

Altogether, he was in a Hunnish mood, and he scowled savagely at Mornington.

"You cheeky fag, can't you knock at a door?" he snapped.

Mornington shrugged his shoulders, and closed the door.

He did not stand on ceremony with Beaumont.

Though one was in the Sixth, and the other in the Fourth, there was a great deal in common between the two. Both had manners and customs that they did their best to keep strictly secret, and for which they would have been expelled if the Head of Rookwood had known them better. Beaumont was a "sportsman," as he called it, and an arrant blackguard, though probably not quite such a black sheep as the dandy of the Fourth.

There was this difference, that Mornington had more money than he ever wanted

and could afford to lose it; while Beaumont was sometimes in difficulties owing to unlucky speculations. And the prefect had more than once put his pride in his pocket, and accepted loans from the wealthy junior.

The obligation was an irksome one to him, and it did not make him feel grateful or affectionate towards Mornington.

But he was careful to keep civil, as a rule. It was in the powers of the Sixth-Form prefect to help the rascally junior in many ways—in giving him passes out of gates after locking-up, and other ways. Beaumont did that, and other things, with as good a grace as he could. He disliked Mornington, and feared him a little, junior as he was.

But the prefect was in so savage a temper at the present moment that he forgot the necessity of being civil to his creditor.

"You cheeky rat!" he exclaimed, starting up. "Have you come here for a licking? You've come to the right place."

He caught up a cane from his table.

Mornington looked at him with cool insolence.

"You can keep that for Jimmy Silver," he said. "Don't play the giddy goat, Beaumont. It won't pay with me!"

"You insolent young cad—"

"Better language, please!" said Mornington, with a glitter in his eyes.

"By gad! I'll—"

"You'll put that cane down!" said Mornington. "I've come here on business. Perhaps it would be convenient to settle up, Beaumont?"

Beaumont flung the cane on the table.

"It wouldn't!" he growled. "Are you holding that over my head, you black-mailing little scoundrel?"

Mornington laughed.

"The Sixth would have somethin' to say if they knew you raised loans among the fags," he remarked.

"You pressed your filthy money on me, and I was in a hole!" muttered Beaumont. "I was a fool to touch it. I know that now."

"You hadn't any choice. Joey Hook wouldn't have waited any longer for what you owed him."

"He might. I—"

"He wouldn't. And he won't wait much longer for what you owe him still," said Mornington coolly—"not unless I ask him

to. He won't do anythin' I don't want."

"I suppose he makes a good bit out of you?" sneered Beaumont, seating himself again. He realised that it would not do to allow himself the pleasure of licking the cad of the Fourth.

"I dare say he does. I never count my money," said Mornington, with a touch of his usual purse-proud arrogance. "I can afford to pay up when I lose. You'd be in a hole again if Hook started worryin' you for the money."

"I know that."

"I've asked him to go easy."

Beaumont bit his lip. He knew that he owed a respite to Mornington's good offices; but the humiliation made him writhe. There was anything but gratitude in the glance he gave the junior.

"Thank you!" he muttered. "About your money, I hope to be able to raise it in a week or two."

"You needn't trouble. I don't believe you could, anyway."

"Did you lend me the money thinking that I couldn't repay it?" sneered Beaumont.

Mornington nodded.

"Certainly! I knew that you couldn't pay it. It suited me to be friendly."

Beaumont gritted his teeth. Friendliness from a junior in the Fourth was a bitter pill for the Sixth-Former to swallow.

"It paid you to have a prefect to help you in your rotten scrapes, you mean," he growled. "Well, I've done that. If you haven't come for your money, get out!"

"Never mind the money," said Mornington. "A tenner doesn't make any difference to me—or half a dozen tenners, for that matter. I could lend you the money to square right up with Joey Hook if I liked, without missin' it."

"I know you're rollin' in it!" sneered Beaumont. "All Rookwood knows that. You let them hear enough about your money."

"Some of them are glad to get their fingers on it, anyway," said Mornington composedly. "You among the rest."

"Look here—"

"But I haven't come here about that. It's about Jimmy Silver."

Beaumont's eyes blazed.

"Hang Jimmy Silver! Don't talk to me about the young hound!" he broke out furiously. "I'll make him suffer yet for his check!"

"That's what I mean."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"Makin' Jimmy Silver suffer," said Mornington, with a gleam in his eyes.

"If you've come here sneaking, you can go somewhere else. You told lies about Newcome."

"You're up against Jimmy Silver," said Mornington, "so am I. I like him no more than you do."

"I'm not up against a kid in the Fourth!" said Beaumont, with an attempt at dignity. "Don't talk checky rot!"

"You hate him," said Mornington calmly. "Don't mount the high horse with me, Beaumont. It's no use, you know. Well, I'm up against him. He's been against me ever since I've been here—"

"Yes, I've heard about it. He's down on your rotten tricks!" snarled Beaumont. "You gave away a cricket match, I've heard, from rotten temper. I wonder he didn't hammer you black and blue."

"How would you like Jimmy Silver to be kicked out of Rookwood?" asked Mornington, unheeding.

"I'd give a term's pocket-money to see it. No chance of that, though."

"That's what's goin' to happen."

Beaumont bent forward, his eyes glistening.

"Do you mean to say that you know something about Silver that he could be sacked for?" he muttered breathlessly. "By gad! Do you?"

"He's never done anything to be sacked for. He can't be made to. I've thought of that, and it's N.G. But somethin' could be put on him."

"What rot!"

"And you're goin' to do it."

"What!"

"As a prefect, you're the man," said Mornington coolly. "Jimmy Silver kicked you out of his study—"

"Hold you're tongue, confound you!"

"And you can get level by havin' him kicked out of Rookwood," smiled Mornington. "One good turn deserves another."

"I'd do it if I could, I suppose. But it's not possible. What silly rot have you got in your head?"

"I've thought it out. Suppose you had a five-pound note stolen from your study—"

"I haven't a five-pound note, you fool,

and if I had, do you think Jimmy Silver would steal it, you idiot? You might."

"I could find the fiver easily enough."

"Are you dotty?" said Beaumont savagely. "You know well enough that Silver wouldn't touch it if I shoved it under his nose! He's a checky cub, but he's not a thief."

"I know that. But if the fiver were found hidden in the linin' of his jacket, after you'd raised Cain about it bein' stolen, all Rookwood would believe that he was a thief."

Beaumont started violently.

"You confounded young scoundrel!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "You dare to come and propose such a thing to me—a prefect, too!"

"Keep your wool on!" said Mornington, unmoved. "I'm proposin' it to a gamblin' outsider, who'd be hooted out of Rookwood himself if the Head knew what I could tell him. Don't put on virtuous airs with me. They won't go down. Keep your temper, unless you want your I O U to be pinned upon the wall of the Common-room for all Rookwood to see."

"You blackmailing young hound!" muttered Beaumont.

Mornington laughed.

"Did you enjoy bein' kicked out of Silver's study?" he asked.

"Will you hold your tongue?" hissed Beaumont.

"I'm only remindin' you what you owe Jimmy Silver. You can pay your debt to him, or your debt to me. Which do you prefer?"

"You know I can't pay you!"

"Exactly. But you can pay Jimmy Silver. Dash it all, you want to see the last of the meddlin' cad! You'll never hear the end of bein' kicked out of his study. The fags are cacklin' over it now. Tommy Dodd is makin' up a song about it, an' they're goin' to chant it under your window."

The prefect ground his teeth.

"You're not popular, you know," said Mornington calmly. "Twistin' fags' ears an' pinchin' their arms doesn't make you popular. They know you daren't take this matter before the Head, because he'd see how you used Newcome, and they're goin' to make the most of it— My hat! There they are!"

Beaumont turned hastily to the window. In the quadrangle outside a crowd of juniors had gathered, and a buzz of voices floated into the study.

CHAPTER 11.

Nice for Beaumont.

BEAUMONT stared savagely from the study window.

A dozen or more juniors had gathered there—both Moderns and Classics—of the Fourth and the Third. Prominent among them was Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth, with his chums, Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle. The three Tommies were grinning over a paper Dodd held in his hand.

"Now, altogether when I give the signal!" said Tommy Dodd, raising his hand.

"Beaumont's at home!" chuckled Doyle.

"There he is at the window!"

The juniors gave a yell.

"Yah! Bully!"

Beaumont glared at the crowd. At any other time he would have sallied forth with a cane. But the hapless bully was only anxious now for the affair to drop and be forgotten. He almost trembled at the thought of the Head's wrath if Dr. Chisholm should see the marks he had left on Newcome's back. The juniors had the upper hand for once, and they meant to let the bully of the Sixth understand it. Beaumont understood it only too well.

"Clear off, you fags!" he called from the window.

"Yah!"

"Bully!"

"Rotter!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Mornington, keeping out of sight in the study, grinned. Tommy Dodd's little demonstration could not have happened better for his purpose.

"Order!" rapped out Tommy Dodd. "We've come here to give Beaumont a serenade, not to yell. Now, then!"

"Will you clear off?" howled Beaumont.

"No fear!"

"Yah!"

"Don't you like serenades, Beaumont?" chuckled Oswald. "Go it!"

"Go it!" yelled Flynn. "Pile in!"

And the fags began to chant:

"Who's the rottenest bully at Rookwood?"

"Beaumont!"

"Who was kicked out of Jimmy Silver's study?"

"Beaumont!"

"Who ought to be sacked from the school?"

"Beaumont!"

"Who's a sneak and a funk?"

"Beaumont!"

"Who smokes cigarettes in his study?"

"Beaumont!"

"Who's afraid to report us to the Head?"

"Beaumont!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Beaumont's face was white with rage. The merry fags were warming to their work, and their united voices rang across the quadrangle. Beaumont was in a momentary dread of a master coming on the scene.

Fortunately for him, Bulkeley of the Sixth was in his study, and he threw up the window and looked out, frowning.

"Silence, there!" he called out.

"Oh, really, Bulkeley, we're only serenading Beaumont!" said Tommy Dodd, in an injured tone.

"Cut off at once!" said the captain of Rookwood, frowning. "Do you hear? I'll be out with a cane in two jiffies!"

"I say, Bulkeley—"

"Cut off!" roared Bulkeley.

The juniors, greatly disappointed, cleared off. There was no gainsaying the captain of Rookwood.

Bulkeley, with a dark frown, slammed down his window. Beaumont's humiliation was shared, to some extent, by all the Sixth, and the Rookwood captain felt it keenly.

Beaumont turned from his window, almost choking with rage. Mornington regarded him with a cynical grin.

"You've got a lot of that to expect till it blows over, or till Newcome's back gets well," he remarked. "Jimmy Silver's at the bottom of it, of course. You know they'd never dare to back up like this without him."

Beaumont clenched his hands convulsively.

"I'll make the young hound suffer for it!" he muttered thickly.

"I'm showin' you the way!"

"Hang you!"

"It's as easy as rollin' off a form," said Mornington. "You'll have to wait a few days till this blows over, that's all, and be a bit civil to Jimmy Silver for a day or two, so there'll be no suspicion. Then you can be down on him, before he gets up to some new trick against you."

"I can't do it. It—it's too risky!" muttered Beaumont.

"No risk for you."

"But—but about the banknote; if it's to be put somewhere—"

Beaumont's scruples had evidently vanished, and he was thinking only of the possibilities and the risk.

"You won't have to do that," said Mornington, sinking his voice. "You'll simply miss the banknote—after takin' the number. There'll be a search, an' it will be found hidden about Jimmy Silver somewhere. You won't know how it got there."

"You mean, you will—"

"Never mind that. I guarantee that the fiver turns up where it's wanted and when it's wanted. That's enough for you."

"I shouldn't really know whether he'd stolen it or not, if it's like that," the Sixth-Former muttered.

"Of course you wouldn't!" said Mornington. "In fact, you'd know he had stolen it, unless he could explain. If he can explain, he's welcome to. He'll have a fair inquiry and strict justice."

"I—I—I'll think about it!" muttered the prefect, passing his hand over his damp forehead.

"Do!" said Mornington, rising. "Better think at the same time where you're goin' to get ten pounds from to settle with me, if you don't do as I suggest. And think, at the same time, how you're goin' to deal with Joey Hook when he puts the screw on, as he will at a tip from me."

"Get out of my study, you—you criminal!" said Beaumont hoarsely.

Mornington laughed, and lounged out of the study.

CHAPTER 12.

Missing Money!

"BLESSED if I can' catch on!" said Jimmy Silver.

The captain of the Rookwood Fourth was puzzled.

It was three or four days after the affair in the end study, and Beaumont of the

Sixth had been reminded of that affair again and again, till he was weary of the subject—quite weary.

The Fistical Four had expected the prefect to be "down" on them with a more terrific "down" than ever.

To their amazement, Beaumont had pulled in his horns, so to speak, in the most remarkable way.

He had shown no sign of animosity against the juniors who had ejected him from their quarters in so unceremonious a fashion.

In many ways the prefect could have made his resentment felt; but he had not done so.

More surprising than all, he had told Newcome he was sorry he had licked him so severely.

That put the lid on it, as it were.

It could not be that Beaumont was afraid the chums would sneak on the subject; he knew they would not do that. He might have been hoping to hear the end of the affair by placating the Co.; but as a matter of fact, Jimmy Silver was not joining in the set made against the bully. The Fistical Four considered that they were even with him, and so long as he let them alone, they were willing to leave him alone.

Beaumont's civility was amazing.

It really looked as if he had received good from the lesson the Co. had given him, and had resolved to turn over a new leaf.

That was a possible explanation; but Jimmy Silver admitted that it was unlikely. Beaumont was too confirmed a bully to change his habits all of a sudden. Yet he had changed them—at least, so far as the Fistical Four were concerned.

And Jimmy Silver confessed that he did not catch on.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were puzzled, too.

"Well, if the cad's turning over a new leaf, it will give our study a rest," remarked Lovell. "Let's get down to the footer."

"Beaumont asked me to fag at goal-practice with him," said Jimmy.

"Oh, my hat!"

"If he holds out the giddy olive-branch I don't see why we need be rusty," said Newcome. "Better do as he asks."

"It's jolly good practice, kicking goal

against a Sixth Form player," said Jimmy. "Beaumont is a good goalie, too. He knows I'd like it. But it beats me—the giddy lion has turned into a lamb, and no mistake."

The juniors walked down to the football-ground. While Lovell & Co. went to Little Side, for practice with the juniors, Jimmy Silver crossed over to Big Side.

Beaumont was there, and he greeted him with a nod.

"I'm ready, Beaumont, if you are," said Jimmy civilly.

Jimmy was not at all the sort of fellow to bear malice, and he was quite willing to forget old troubles.

"Thanks!" said Beaumont. "You're a very smart kick at goal, Silver, and I think you'll be useful. Still, you're not my fag, and if you don't want—"

"I don't mind a bit. In fact, I'd like it," said Jimmy.

"Then run up to my study for my ball," said Beaumont.

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy cut off to the house, and Beaumont threw off his coat and went into goal. Beaumont hoped to keep goal for the first eleven that season, and he was somewhat keen on practice.

Jimmy Silver played centre-half in the junior eleven, but he could play forward with distinction, and he was a deadly kick at goal. Even for a senior player it was good enough practice, stopping Jimmy's shots. Still, it was an honour from a Sixth-Former and a member of the First Eleven, and it was very surprising from Jimmy's old enemy.

Jimmy returned with Beaumont's footer in a few minutes, and the practice began. Beaumont found that it was not easy to keep the leather out of goal, though he had only one player to defend against. Jimmy had a trick of changing his foot suddenly in the most unexpected way, which puzzled the goalkeeper. Bulkeley and Neville and Knowles paused to look on, and they grinned when the leather passed between the posts in spite of Beaumont's efforts.

Beaumont gave Jimmy a dark look.

Jimmy was doing his best; in his innocence he supposed that Beaumont would be glad of some really hard work in goal. But Beaumont was not at all pleased for the captain of Rookwood to see that

he could not keep his citadel intact against a junior.

"That'll do!" said Beaumont curtly. "Take the ball back to my study, Silver!"

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy cheerily.

"You can't play Beaumont in goal, Bulkeley." Knowles was remarking as Jimmy Silver walked away with the ball. "Frampton's your man. I suppose you're not bent on putting in a Classical?" added Knowles, with a slight sneer.

"I shall put in the best goalkeeper, you can depend on that," answered Bulkeley, in his cheery way, apparently not noticing the Modern prefect's sneer. "Beaumont, old man, you'll have to buck up a bit if you're going to keep goal for the First. I should hardly have thought you'd let a fag beat you in goal."

Beaumont gritted his teeth. "It was really an accident, of course," he said.

"Oh, rot!" said Bulkeley. "Silver is a tricky little beggar; but he beat you fair and square, and you oughtn't to have let him. You'll have to grind a bit at practice."

Beaumont walked away without replying, his brow very dark.

He returned to his study.

His football lay there, where Jimmy Silver had replaced it. Beaumont closed the door, and paced to and fro in the study.

"He's been here, and nobody else with him," he muttered. "He can't deny that. And—and the banknote—when I say it's missing—" He wiped his brow with his handkerchief. "Hang him! Hang him! He's done me out of my chance for the First Eleven very likely! Hang him!"

Neville of the Sixth came into the study a little later, and found Beaumont at work at his table.

"Busy?" asked Neville. "I was going to remind you that you haven't paid your sub."

"I told you this morning I hadn't any change," said Beaumont, without looking up. "Unless you can change a fiver for me, I can't pay up."

"Just what I can do," said Neville. "I've brought you the tin."

"Oh!" said Beaumont. "So trot out your fiver, and I'll give you a receipt," said Neville.

Neville was grinning a little. All the Sixth knew that Beaumont had been hard

up of late, and Neville half suspected that the story of the fiver was an excuse for gaining time. Beaumont was a good deal late with his subscription for the senior club, and Neville was a businesslike secretary. He had dunned Beaumont for it several times, and he was not to be put off with a story of an imaginary fiver.

"Oh, all right!" said Beaumont. "If you've got change—"

"I've got it. I've brought the club funds along to change your giddy fiver!" grinned Neville. "Shell out, dear boy!"

"Right you are!"

Beaumont rose, and opened the table drawer. He fumbled in it, and then, with a startled look, made a careful examination in the drawer.

"That's queer!" he said at last.

"What's queer?" asked Neville grimly.

"The— the fiver doesn't seem to be here."

"I thought that perhaps it mightn't be," said Neville dryly. "Look here, Beaumont, if you can't pay up, I suppose I shall have to give you time; but don't spin me any fairy-tales, you know!"

Beaumont flushed.

"I don't know what you mean," he said hotly. "I had a fiver from my uncle, and it was in this drawer. I put it under a book for safety."

"Better have locked it up, I should think."

"I don't see why I should lock my money up. I suppose there isn't a thief at Rookwood, is there?"

"I hope not," smiled Neville. "Well, have another look, and let's see the merry fiver. I'm rather curious to see it."

Beaumont drew the drawer bodily out of the table, and turned it upside down. Then he went over the contents methodically, examining each article separately. Neville watched him with growing impatience. The club secretary's opinion was that Beaumont was stony, and was going through a little comedy for his benefit.

"Well, can you find it?" he asked.

"It's not here!"

"Well, let me have your sub as soon as you can," said Neville, turning to the door. "It isn't easy to keep accounts with fellows keeping their subs back half through the football season."

"Hold on!" said Beaumont. "Look

here, Neville, this is rather a serious matter. I left that banknote in the drawer. It was there when I went down to the footer this afternoon."

Neville turned back, and looked at him sharply.

"Look here, Beaumont, did you really have a fiver, or is it some more of your blessed swank?" he asked bluntly.

"I tell you I had it from my uncle!" said Beaumont savagely. "I've got the number here in my pocket-book if you want to see it."

Neville appeared convinced.

"Well, if you had it, it must be here somewhere," he said briskly. "Better have a good look for it."

"It isn't here."

"Look in your pockets."

"I left it in the drawer," said Beaumont. "I looked at it before I went out to the footer. I was thinking of putting it in my pocket, but I decided not to. It was there then."

Neville's face became very grave.

"Do you mean to say that it's been taken, Beaumont?"

"Isn't it plain enough!" said Beaumont tartly. "It was here, and it isn't here now."

"That's jolly serious. You'd better have a pretty thorough search before you tell anybody you've missed money. I'll help you."

The two seniors made a search of the study. Beaumont turned out all his pockets very carefully. But the banknote was not found.

"You say you had the number?" said Neville at last.

"Here it is, in my pocket-book—0002468," said Beaumont.

"Better come with me and see Bulkeley about it. It's a rotten affair!"

Beaumont nodded, and with a flushed face, followed Neville down the passage to the Rookwood captain's study.

CHAPTER 13.

Under Suspicion.

BULKELEY heard the story with a grim brow.

"You ought to have put your banknote in a safe place!" he growled, when Beaumont had finished.

"The place was safe enough!" said Beaumont sullenly. "Nobody goes to that drawer but myself; and it was put under a book, too. Somebody must have heard me speaking to Neville about it, and must have taken it while I was on the footer-ground."

"Do you know whether anybody went to your study. Your fag—"

"My fag hasn't been there that I know of. He doesn't go there till tea-time."

"Anybody else?"

"I sent Silver of the Fourth there, to fetch my ball. He went there again to take it back after I'd finished."

Bulkeley started.

"Jimmy Silver?"

"Yes."

"He couldn't have touched it. I couldn't believe that for a moment—I know the kid too well."

Beaumont shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not suggestin' anythin' of the sort. You asked me whether anybody had been to the study."

"Nobody else that you know of?"

"Nobody."

Bulkeley paced to and fro for some moments, his brow deeply contracted. The affair was bitterly annoying to the captain of Rookwood. The honour of the school was very dear to him, and the discovery that there was a thief at Rookwood came to him as a great shock.

"And you're certain it was there?" he asked at last.

"I saw it just before I went down to the footer."

"To be quite plain, Beaumont, did you have a fiver at all? I don't want to offend you, but you're a bit given to swanking, and if you say you've lost a five-pound note, you'll be called upon to prove that you ever had one."

Beaumont bit his lip hard.

"I've got the number here," he said. "I always take the numbers of notes in case of accident. And the note can be found. It isn't much more than an hour ago since it was taken, and the thief can hardly have got rid of it yet. If Silver took it he must still have it about him, I should think, unless he's gone out."

Neville pointed to the window.

The Fistical Four were passing, going down towards the gates. Football practice was over, and the chums of the Fourth were going out.

Bulkeley hastily raised the window and called:

"Silver!"

"Hallo?" said Jimmy, turning round.

"Come here."

"Yes, Bulkeley?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. came up to the study window. Bulkeley's face searched the honest, frank face of the captain of the Fourth. It was not easy to fancy that that frank, cheery schoolboy could be guilty of theft.

"You were going out?" asked Bulkeley.

"Yes; down to Coombe. Anything I can do for you there?"

"Have you been out since you were fagging for Beaumont on Big Side?"

"No; I've been at practice with the Fourth."

"What were you going out for?" asked Bulkeley.

"Going down to Mrs. Wicks', in Coombe," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going to have rather a spread in the study at tea this time."

"Oh!" said Bulkeley. "You're going to have a spread, are you?"

"Yes; I'm in funds."

Bulkeley started, and Beaumont and Neville exchanged a quick glance.

"In funds?" repeated Bulkeley.

"Yes, rather; rolling in merry oof!" said Jimmy cheerily.

"Where did you get it?"

Jimmy stared.

"I say, Bulkeley, you're getting jolly inquisitive in your old age!" he exclaimed.

"I haven't been burgling the Head's safe."

"Never mind that," said Bulkeley.

"Tell me where you got the money from. I order you, as a prefect!"

"Little boys shouldn't ask questions, you know!" said Jimmy, secure in the fact that he was outside and Bulkeley inside. "Still, I don't mind telling you, as you're a good boy. I've had a postal-order from my pater."

"How much?"

"My hat! Ten bob, if you must know!" said Jimmy Silver, more and more surprised.

"You've got the postal-order about you?"

"Yes; I'm going to cash it at the post-office."

"Show it to me."

"What the merry thunder do you want to see Jimmy's postal-order for?" ejaculated

Lovell. "You're getting as inquisitive as Tubby Muffin, by gad!"

"Show me the postal-order, Silver," said Bulkeley, taking no notice of Lovell.

"Certainly!" said Jimmy, in great wonder.

He extracted a ten-shilling postal-order from his pocket, and held it up for inspection.

"All serene!" said Bulkeley, greatly relieved. "You haven't any money beside this?"

"Yes, rather! One-and-a-tanner!" said Jimmy. "If you're on the rocks, Bulkeley, the tanner's at your service."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co.

The idea of the high-and-mighty captain of Rookwood borrowing sixpence from a Fourth-Former tickled them.

"Don't be a cheeky young ass!" said Bulkeley, with a smile. "There's something rather serious happened, Silver; that's why I'm asking you questions. Don't run away with the idea that I suspect you—I don't!"

"Suspect me!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"What on earth's happened?" asked Newcome. "Has Beaumont found some more jam in his slippers? Not guilty, my lord!"

"More serious than that," said Bulkeley quietly. "You went to Beaumont's study to fetch his ball, Silver?"

"Yes; he asked me."

"What did you do while you were there?"

"Nothing but take the ball."

"You did not take anything else?"

"What the merry dickens else could I take?" exclaimed the astounded Jimmy. "Has somebody run away with his parlour clock?"

"Answer my question!"

"No, I didn't!"

"I don't think you did," said Bulkeley. "I don't think so for a moment. But Beaumont has missed money from his study."

"Wha-a-at!"

"And as you went there, I'm bound to question you. That's all."

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"That's all right, Bulkeley! Fire away with your questions!" he said. "I know you wouldn't be rotten enough to think I'd touched Beaumont's money."

Bulkeley coughed.

"Did you go to Beaumont's table drawer?"

"Of course I didn't!"

"Did you know he had a five-pound note there?"

"No."

"Did you know he had a five-pound note at all?"

"I dare say I did, if I'd thought of it," said Jimmy. "I heard Beaumont speaking to Neville about it this morning in the passage. I couldn't help it, as he spoke right under my nose."

"Did you know Beaumont keeps money in that drawer?"

"Not at all. Never knew anything about his money, and never cared twopence for it, or for Beaumont either!"

Beaumont gritted his teeth at that remark.

Bulkeley paused. Jimmy Silver had answered his questions freely and frankly, and it seemed absolutely impossible to suspect him.

"Well, you'd better not go out, Silver," said Bulkeley at last. "You see, it wouldn't do till this is cleared up. Go to your study and wait till I come. I must speak to Mr. Bootles about what's to be done."

"All serene!" said Jimmy. "I suppose I can go to the school shop and get something for tea? Sergeant Kettle will change my postal-order if I ask him."

"Better go to your study at once. You don't seem to realise that this is a very serious matter, Silver."

"It's nothing to do with me," said Jimmy. "I haven't seen anything of Beaumont's silly money. I don't believe he's had any taken, either!"

"What!"

Beaumont's face was scowling from the window, but Jimmy Silver met his angry eyes fearlessly.

"I don't believe it!" he repeated. "There isn't a thief in the school. More likely it's swank, and Beaumont never had a fiver at all!"

"The cheeky young hound!" roared Beaumont.

"Well, that's my opinion," said Jimmy coolly. "It's easy enough for a swanking ass to say he had no end of fivers and somebody took them!"

"You must not speak to a prefect like that, Silver!" rapped out Bulkeley.

"Beaumont has the number of the note. Go to your study!"

"Hold on!" broke in Beaumont. "I don't say Silver had the note—I don't even suggest it. But if he has it he's got it about him, and was going out to change it, I should say. Let somebody go with him to his study, and see that he doesn't get rid of it."

"You can all come, if you like!" said Jimmy Silver disdainfully. "I'll eat all the banknotes you find about me."

"It's just as well," said Bulkeley. "Don't think you're suspected, Silver; you're not. But you can see for yourself that we've got to go into the matter."

"Oh, yes; that's all right, Bulkeley! I don't want to get out of your sight. One of you can escort me home!" grinned Jimmy. "Will you jump out of the window, or shall I jump in? Any old thing!"

Bulkeley laughed.

"You jump in," he said.

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy Silver clambered in lightly at the study window.

"Take him to his study, Neville, will you, and stay with him a bit till Mr. Bootles comes?" said Bulkeley.

"Come on, Silver," said Neville.

"I'm your man!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

And he followed Neville from the study.

Bulkeley gave Beaumont a troubled look.

"It's impossible that that kid can have taken it," he said.

"I think so myself," said Beaumont, rather unexpectedly. "Silver's about the last kid I should suspect. He's a cheeky little rascal, but I firmly believe he's as honest as the day. I will say that."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say so," said Bulkeley, in some surprise. "You seemed rather down on him."

"Not at all. As he was in my study, and nobody else seems to have been, he ought to be searched for his own sake. The whole school will know this soon, and for his own sake it ought to be proved that the stolen note isn't in his possession."

"That's right enough. Come with me to Mr. Bootles, then. The sooner this matter's settled the better."

And the two prefects proceeded to seek the master of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 14.

Guilty!

JIMMY SILVER'S chums joined him in the end study.

Neville of the Sixth sat down on the table, very quiet and grave. But the chums of the Fourth were not very grave. They did not take the matter seriously at all.

Indeed, the only trouble they had just then was that they were hungry after footer practice, and that this affair meant putting off tea indefinitely.

There were footsteps in the passage, and Mr. Bootles entered the study, followed by Bulkeley and Beaumont.

"Ahem! Silver," he said, "this is a most unpleasant occurrence—most unpleasant! What—what! It appears that a banknote has been taken from a drawer in Beaumont's study, and nobody but yourself is known to have entered the room during his absence. I cannot suspect for a single moment that you are guilty of theft, Silver."

"Thank you, sir!" said Jimmy.

"I trust I know your character too well, Silver. I trust that I am too good a judge of character to be so deceived," said Mr. Bootles. "Neither does Beaumont suspect you for one moment, Silver. Indeed, he has spoken of you most highly, and is most anxious not to be understood to be making any accusation."

"Indeed, sir!" said Jimmy.

"Yes, yes! But Beaumont thinks—and I think—that as you were in the study alone about the time the note disappeared, it would be judicious to deal with you first of all. Bear in mind, Silver, that it is for your own sake. A prompt proof that the note is not in your possession will clear you of any possibility of odious suspicions among your schoolfellows."

"I understand that, sir."

"You have no objection, then, to being searched, Silver?" asked Mr. Bootles, blinking at him.

Jimmy flushed a little.

"Not at all, sir, if you think it best," he said.

"For your own sake, Silver, it should be established as quickly as possible that the banknote is not in your possession. This can only be done by a search."

"Very well, sir."

"Beaumont, will you——"

"Excuse me, sir," said Beaumont quietly; "as it is my property that was taken, it would surely be better for me not to act in the matter. I should prefer not to touch Silver."

"Perhaps you are right," assented Mr. Bootles. "Bulkeley, may I request you to make a search of Silver's person? A most unpleasant duty, Bulkeley—most unpleasant ahem—but we are all called upon to perform unpleasant duties at times."

"I will do as you ask, sir," said Bulkeley reluctantly.

It was, as the Form-master remarked, an unpleasant task, but it had to be done, and Bulkeley stepped forward. He ran his hands through Jimmy Silver's pockets.

Jimmy slipped off his Eton jacket to make the search easier. Bulkeley examined it carefully enough.

"The lining is split in your pocket, Silver," he said.

"Is it?" said Jimmy. "These things will happen, you know, Bulkeley. I dare say you had gammy pockets sometimes when you were in the Fourth."

"Ahem! Ahem!" said Mr. Bootles.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Bulkeley suddenly.

A crisp rustling had caught his ear, faint but unmistakable, as he felt methodically over the jacket to make sure that nothing was concealed under the lining.

He groped carefully, and his fingers closed upon rustling paper. His face was quite pale with the shock.

Jimmy Silver started. The expression on Bulkeley's face startled him and scared him a little.

"What's the matter?" he exclaimed. "You haven't found anything in my jacket I know that!"

"Bulkeley," panted Lovell, "what are you looking like that for? What's the matter?"

Raby and Newcome stood as if frozen. There was only one possible significance in Bulkeley's strange look.

The Rookwood captain's hand came into view from the lining of the jacket. In his fingers was a rustling banknote.

Jimmy Silver gazed at it, speechless. His cheeks gazed at it, scarcely believing their eyes.

Bulkeley held it up.

"Is—is—is that a five-pound note, Bulkeley?" stuttered Mr. Bootles.

"Yes, sir."

"Silver, you did not tell me that you had a banknote of your own—"

"I—I hadn't!" stammered Jimmy. "I—I never have five-pound notes. That—that note isn't mine!"

"Oh, Jimmy!" groaned Lovell.

"The number will settle it, sir," said Beaumont. "This is a shock to me. I have the number of my note here."

"Read it out, Beaumont," said Mr. Bootles, in a shaken voice.

The prefect read out in a voice that was not steady:

"0002468."

"And the number on that note, Bulkeley?"

Bulkeley looked at it.

"0002468," he said.

"Then it is Beaumont's note," said Mr. Bootles. "You may give it to him, Bulkeley."

The captain of Rookwood silently passed the note to Beaumont.

There was a dreadful silence in the study.

All eyes were fixed upon Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy stood white as death, his eyes almost wild. He had caught at the edge of the table to steady himself.

He thought for a moment that he must be dreaming. Beaumont's note—hidden under the lining of his jacket. How had it got there? Beaumont, certainly, could never have put it there; that was unthinkable. Even if he wanted to, he could never have had any opportunity. How had it got there? Had he gone mad? Had he, in some fit of insanity, taken Beaumont's banknote without his own knowledge?

His brain was reeling. He staggered against the table, panting, as he read the grim condemnation in the faces round him. He came to himself, out of a mist, as it were, to hear Mr. Bootles' deep voice:

"Silver, I am inexpressibly shocked! I have been deceived in you—grossly deceived! Wretched, wretched boy! What possessed you to do this? And to maintain an appearance of innocence—of unconcern? Good heavens, is it possible that such baseness and duplicity can exist in one so young? Wretched boy, you have ruined yourself and disgraced your school! Remain here till you are sent for by the

Head to receive your sentence of expulsion from Rookwood!"

Jimmy's voice came, broken and unnatural, through his dry lips.

"Mr. Bootles, I—I never did—I don't know—I—"

With a contemptuous gesture the Form-master swept from the study. Beaumont followed him quietly.

"Bulkeley!" Jimmy Silver's voice was almost a shriek. "Bulkeley, you don't believe—"

Bulkeley left the study with Neville. He did not answer.

Jimmy Silver groaned. Bulkeley, who had always been kind to him, believed him guilty. What else could he believe?

But his chums—his own chums? Jimmy Silver turned his eyes on them in vague terror. Would they believe him?

"Lovell—" he said huskily.

"Oh, Jimmy!"

Lovell could say no more. Raby groaned, and Newcome fairly broke down.

Jimmy Silver looked at them, and was dumb. For at that moment the iron entered into his very soul. His chums—his own loyal chums—believed him guilty; and in that terrible moment the very sun of heaven was blotted out to Jimmy Silver.

CHAPTER 15.

Under the Shadow.

"**T**HIEF!" Jimmy Silver started violently. The hideous word was howled in at the keyhole of the end study.

A rapid patter of footsteps in the passage followed. Whoever had yelled that taunt at Jimmy Silver had beaten a prompt retreat.

But Jimmy did not rise. He was seated in the study armchair, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hands, in an attitude of utter dejection.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome, his chums, were in the study. They were silent. Their faces were pale and troubled.

For some time there had not been a word uttered in the study.

The taunt howled in at the door broke a grim, oppressive silence. Only Lovell made a movement towards the door, but he paused.

Jimmy Silver looked up at his chums at last. His face was deadly white.

"You believe it?" he asked, in a strange, dry, husky voice.

Lovell groaned.

"Oh, Jimmy!"

There was a tap at the door, and it opened. Rawson of the Fourth looked in hesitatingly.

Jimmy Silver smiled bitterly. He had always been friendly with the scholarship junior, and had stood by Rawson against the snobs of Rookwood—Morrington, Townsend, Topham, and the rest. Had Rawson come to taunt him now?

"Jimmy!" said Rawson.

"Go it!" said Jimmy Silver, with a curling lip. "I didn't expect it from you, Rawson; but go it!"

Lovell clenched his hands.

"Better not!" he muttered.

"You don't seem to catch on," said Rawson quietly. "I haven't come here to go for you, Jimmy. I just caught Gower in the passage; he had been yelling into your study. I heard what he said."

"What all Rookwood will be saying soon!" muttered Jimmy Silver.

"I banged his head against the wall," said Rawson. "Gower's nursing his head now. Surely you don't think I believe it, Jimmy?"

The captain of the Fourth looked at him curiously.

"You don't?" he asked.

"No."

"You haven't heard the evidence, then?"

"Hang the evidence!" said Rawson stoutly. "I don't believe a word of it!"

"The five-pound note was found in my jacket," said Jimmy. "It had slipped through the lining from the pocket—there's a hole in the lining."

"How did it come in your pocket?"

"I don't know."

"You didn't put it there, of course?"

"No."

Lovell and Raby and Newcome exchanged haggard looks. Their faith in their study-leader was founded as upon a rock. But Jimmy's statement was staggering. How had Beaumont's bank-note come into his pocket, if he had not put it there?

"Don't give in, Jimmy," said Rawson. "I believe you, anyway. So do these chaps!"

"Do they?" muttered Jimmy.
 "Yes," said Lovell. "I—I do! But—
 but how did the banknote come there,
 Jimmy? Tell me that. It was found
 there."

"Somebody put it there, as I didn't."
 "But who?"

"Beaumont, I suppose. It was his."
 "Beaumont—a prefect of the Sixth! Oh,
 Jimmy!"

"Hold on," said Rawson. "Look here,
 Beaumont is a prefect; but we all know
 the kind of fellow he is. He's a rotter all
 through, and he has always been down on
 Jimmy for not standing his bullying. If
 Beaumont searched Jimmy, he might have
 slipped the note into his pocket, and pre-
 tended to find it there."

"He didn't search Jimmy. He refused
 to."

"Who did, then?"

"Bulkeley."
 "Oh, Bulkeley!" said Rawson, dis-
 couraged again. "Bulkeley's all right."

"The note was in my pocket before I
 was searched," said Jimmy Silver.
 "That's clear enough. Somebody put it
 there. It was Beaumont's note, and he
 dislikes me—he always has. I suppose he
 managed it somehow."

"But he couldn't!" muttered Lovell.
 "Even if he's a rotter enough, how could
 he get at your jacket, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver did not answer. He could
 not answer.

"You have the jacket on all day," said
 Raby. "He couldn't get at it while you're
 wearing it."

"I know he couldn't."

"Then it must have been put in in the
 dorm," said Rawson.

Lovell shook his head hopelessly.

"Beaumont don't know his way about
 our dorm well enough to find Jimmy's
 jacket in the dark and put a banknote into
 it," he said. "Somebody would have woke
 up. He wouldn't have risked it—he
 couldn't."

"I know it sounds steep," said Jimmy
 Silver miserably. "I don't say that's the
 explanation. I only say I never saw the
 note in my life till Bulkeley pulled it out
 of my jacket half an hour ago."

The door opened, and Bulkeley of the
 Sixth looked in. His face was very grave.

"You're wanted, Silver!" he said.
 Jimmy rose.

"Follow me to the Head's study!" said
 Bulkeley, and he strode away.

His usually kind voice was as hard as
 iron. It was easy to see what Bulkeley
 believed. Jimmy Silver, without a word,
 followed him from the study.

Lovell made a restless gesture.
 "It can't be true!" he muttered.

"Jimmy must have been mad if he did it."

"He didn't do it," said Rawson.

"But how did the note get there? You
 know as well as we do that Beaumont
 couldn't have come to our dorm last night
 and found Jimmy's jacket in the dark—"

"It doesn't seem possible," admitted
 Rawson.

"Then how—"

"I don't know. But I know Jimmy
 Silver's innocent, and I'm standing by him,"
 said Rawson quietly, "and I think you, as
 his pals, will stand by him, too!"

"We shall stand by him," said Raby.

"But—but—"

Topham of the Fourth looked in,
 grinning.

"I hear there's goin' to be a sackin',"
 he remarked. "Quite a ceremony, by gad,
 for gettin' rid of a thief—Yaroooh!"

As if moved by the same spring, Lovell
 and Raby and Newcome jumped at Top-
 ham. The nut of the Fourth went reeling
 along the passage under a shower of fierce
 blows, and he fled yelling along the passage.

There was no doubt that the Co. would
 stand by Jimmy Silver. But it was with
 heavy hearts.

CHAPTER 16.

Expelled from Rookwood.

JIMMY SILVER followed the captain of
 Rookwood with a firm step.

The discovery of the stolen note, and
 the condemnation that followed, had
 almost stunned Jimmy Silver; but he was
 recovering himself now.

He was innocent, though the toils were
 about him. He knew that he was innocent,
 and that therefore he was the victim of
 a cunning plot, which he could not yet
 fathom.

He had been found guilty, and he was
 to be expelled from the school; he knew
 that. But the consciousness of innocence
 upheld him even in that extremity.

He did not look like a culprit as he fol-
 lowed Bulkeley to the Head's study.

In the lower passage, Mornington & Co. were gathered, apparently in high feather. The news was all over the school now, and Jimmy Silver's guilt was being discussed by all Rookwood.

His old enemies were rejoicing in it.

Mornington burst into a sneering laugh as he came by, and Townsend and Peele and Gower and Smythe of the Shell smiled with lofty scorn.

"Here comes the thief!" said Townsend.

"Mind your pockets!" chortled Smythe.

Jimmy Silver clenched his hands hard.

"Enough of that!" exclaimed Bulkeley angrily. "Hold your tongues!"

"Well, the rotter's a thief, isn't he?" sneered Mornington.

"Hold your tongue, I tell you!"

Bulkeley strode on with Jimmy Silver, and they entered the Head's study.

"That's the finish of Jimmy Silver here," remarked Mornington. "I fancy we shall see the last of him this evenin'."

"No doubt about that," said Townsend. "We don't want a thief at Rookwood. The Head can't do anythin' but sack him."

"Good riddance!" remarked Adolphus Smythe. "The young cad was always too cheeky. I'm not surprised at his turnin' out like this, really."

"You never know a fellow till you find him out," said Howard of the Shell sapiently.

"Yaas, by gad!"

"I suppose he's guilty," said Peele.

"Of course he is," said Mornington, with a stare. "Wasn't Beaumont's banknote found hidden in his jacket?"

"Queer about Beaumont havin' a banknote."

"I don't see that."

"Well, we know Beaumont's hard up," remarked Peele, with a curious look at Mornington. "We know he's been borrowin' money of you—a kid in the Fourth, Morny. All Rookwood don't know it; but we do!"

"And the less you say about it the better," said Mornington tartly.

Peele laughed.

"Oh, I'm not sayin' anythin'," he said.

"But it's queer. If Beaumont had a fiver, it's queer he should be borrowin' quids in the Fourth."

"Well, he had the fiver, or it couldn't have been found on Jimmy Silver, could it?"

"Might have borrowed that, too,"

grinned Peele. "You were sayin' the other day, Morny, that you knew a way of gettin' rid of Jimmy Silver—"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Mornington.

Smythe of the Shell turned his eyeglass curiously on the dandy of Rookwood.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Nothin'," said Mornington hastily. "Only Peele's rot!"

"You haven't had a hand—"

"Of course I haven't! Don't be an ass!"

Mornington walked away with Peele; and the nuts of Rookwood regarded one another with curious glances.

"By gad!" said Smythe. "It can't be a plant, surely! That would be a bit too rotten, even for Morny."

"No bizney of ours, anyway," said Townsend, shrugging his shoulders.

"No, by gad! It's time that cheeky young cad was sacked, anyway," agreed Smythe. "Some of his betters may have a chance in the footer when he's gone."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Howard.

But Peele's words had left the nuts of Rookwood with an uneasy feeling. Well they knew that Mornington of the Fourth would not have stopped at much to rid himself of Jimmy Silver. But if the miserable affair was a "plant," with Mornington of the Fourth at the bottom of it, they were not disposed to air their suspicions. It was no business of theirs to help Jimmy Silver out of his scrape, so far as they could see. Let him take his chance!

Meanwhile, Jimmy Silver had entered the Head's study at the heels of the Rookwood captain. Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, and Beaumont, the prefect, were there with Dr. Chisholm.

The Head's face was grim and set. One glance at that hard, severe face was enough to tell Jimmy Silver that he had no mercy to expect.

"Silver!" said the Head, as the junior entered. "Come here!"

Jimmy advanced with a firm step.

"You have been guilty of theft. You have disgraced yourself and the school you belong to. You are expelled from Rookwood!"

"I—"

"You need not speak. Mr. Bootles will take you to the station, and you will take the next train home. I shall send with

you a letter of explanation to your father. That is all. Take him away, Bulkeley!"

Jimmy Silver's eyes flashed.

"You won't listen to me, sir?" he exclaimed.

Dr. Chisholm regarded him coldly.

"You can have nothing to say," he replied. "I presume you have no intention of denying your guilt in the face of the clearest proof?"

"I do deny it!"

"You will serve no purpose, Silver, by adding falsehood to theft."

"I shall tell you the truth, sir!"

"You had better go. Follow Bulkeley."

"Come, Silver," said the Rookwood captain gently enough.

Jimmy Silver did not move. In the presence of the Head, and with grim condemnation in every face round him, many fellows would have submitted hopelessly to Fate. But Jimmy Silver was made of sterner stuff. All his courage was needed now, and it did not fail him.

"I demand to be heard, sir!" he said calmly.

The Head made an impatient gesture.

"If you intend to utter a series of absurd falsehoods, Silver——"

"I do not."

"Then what can you have to say? You know that I desire to do strict justice. If you have anything to say, I will hear it. But be brief."

"It's worth a few minutes, sir," said Jimmy bitterly, "when a chap's in danger of being disgraced for life!"

"That is true, Silver," said the Head, more gently. "If there were a possible shadow of doubt, I should not spare my time or my trouble. I did not think that you would venture to deny what is clear as the sun at noonday. But if you choose to give me your version of the matter I will hear you patiently."

"Thank you, sir."

"Well, what have you to say?"

"Bulkeley found Beaumont's banknote in my pocket. I don't know how it got there!"

"Come, come!"

"I never saw it till Bulkeley pulled it out, sir," said Jimmy steadily. "I never touched it. I never knew it was missing till Beaumont said so."

"Silver!"

"It was in my pocket; I can't deny that. But I did not know it was there."

"Do you expect me, boy, to place the slightest reliance on such an absurd statement?" exclaimed the Head sharply.

"It's true, sir."

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you, sir, it is true. Somebody put that banknote into my pocket to make me out a thief!"

"Utter nonsense!" said the Head. "Whom do you accuse?"

"I don't know whom to accuse. It's possible, I suppose, that somebody took the banknote from Beaumont's study, and planted it on me. I don't know."

"Who? Who? Answer that question."

"I can't! I don't even know anybody did so. It's quite as likely that Beaumont did it himself."

Beaumont of the Sixth started.

"Silver!" The Head's voice was hard and grinding. "You have the impudence, the effrontery, to bring such a wicked accusation against a prefect of the Sixth Form?"

"I only say it's very likely, sir. All I know for certain is that I don't know how the note came to be in my jacket. Beaumont has always been down on me."

"Nonsense!"

"I suppose I need not deny such nonsense, sir?" said Beaumont.

"You need not, Beaumont. The wretched boy's wicked slander only adds to the contempt with which I regard him. He does not seem to be aware that what he suggests was impossible, as well as unimaginable. Silver, if you have nothing more to say——"

"I am innocent, sir!"

"That will do!" said the Head curtly.

"You may go! Remain in your study till Mr. Bootles is ready to take you to the station. You are expelled from Rookwood! Go!"

Jimmy's eyes blazed.

"I am expelled from Rookwood, and I've done nothing!" he exclaimed.

"Silence! Take him away, Bulkeley," said the Head, frowning.

"I—I tell you——"

Bulkeley's hand fell heavily on the junior's shoulder.

"Come!" he said.

Jimmy shook himself loose, and faced the Head, his eyes blazing, his whole form trembling with anger and excitement.

"Well, I won't go!" he shouted. "I



"I've got a cord round your axe, old chap," said Jimmy Silver, "and I'm holding it. Pull as hard as you like." "Master Silver!" exclaimed the old sergeant, "let go that axe!" (See page 40.)

won't be expelled, when I've done nothing! I won't!"

"Take him away, Bulkeley!" thundered the Head.

The captain of Rookwood grasped Jimmy Silver again by the shoulder, and drew him forcibly from the study.

CHAPTER 17.

Jimmy Silver's Resolve.

SACKED!
Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth Form, was sacked from the school!

The news spread over Rookwood, and was discussed far and wide, in every tone of amazement and consternation.

Jimmy Silver sacked—for theft!

It was incredible,

But it was true!

Tommy Dodd & Co., on the Modern side, heard it with amazement and dismay. They were Jimmy Silver's old rivals, but they were cast down by the news. They could scarcely believe it at first.

But the whole story was soon told—the finding of Beaumont's banknote hidden in the lining of Jimmy's jacket, and the sentence of the Head—expulsion from the school!

"How on earth did he come to do it?" said Tommy Dodd, in wonder. "He must have been mad!"

And Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook agreed that that was the only possible explanation.

Jimmy Silver a thief—Jimmy Silver condemned for theft! Unless Jimmy had taken leave of his senses, there was no explanation of it.

That Jimmy was innocent could scarcely be believed. The evidence was too strong for that. And it could not be believed that the Head of Rookwood had condemned him on insufficient proof.

But what he had done was totally at variance with his character as the Rookwood fellows knew him, and they charitably opined that he must have been out of his senses when he did the wretched thing.

It came as a surprise to the fellows who had heard the evidence that Jimmy Silver was maintaining his innocence.

To most minds, in the face of the proofs,

Jimmy's denial seemed, as it seemed to the Head, mere effrontery.

But the fellows who knew him best did not think so.

Rawson of the Fourth did not waver for a moment. Even the Head's sentence made no difference.

And Rawson's loyal faith braced Lovell & Co. Their own horrid doubts were driven manfully from their minds. They determined to believe Jimmy Silver, in spite of everything.

And they were not alone.

Jimmy Silver returned to the end study after the interview with the Head, and Oswald and Flynn and Van Ryn of the Fourth joined him there.

They came to tell him that they believed in him still.

Tommy Dodd came over from the Modern side, and found the end study quite crowded with Jimmy's sympathisers.

There was a general clenching of fists at the sight of the Modern. The impression was that the Moderns had come to "crow" over the expelled Classical. But that was doing injustice to Tommy.

"I say, Silver, old man," began Tommy Dodd, "is it true that you are denying having had Beaumont's banknote?"

"Yes," said Jimmy quietly.

"Well, if you give your word on the subject, I take your word," said Tommy Dodd manfully. "It looks like a clear case, but I take your word, Jimmy."

"Thanks!" said Jimmy Silver, much moved by the testimony from his old rival. "You're a good sort, Tommy."

"But how did the banknote get there, Jimmy?"

"I don't know."

"I—I say, that sounds awfully steep," said Tommy Dodd uneasily. "I believe you, all the same. But—but you can't expect the Head to."

"He doesn't, anyway," said Jimmy Silver grimly.

"And—and you're sacked?"

"Yes."

"It's rotten!" said Tommy Dodd, in great distress. "When are you going?"

Jimmy Silver's face set hard.

"I'm not going!" he said.

Tommy Dodd stared, as well he might.

"Not going!" he echoed.

"No!"

"But—but you're sacked!"

"I'm sacked for nothing, and I'm not going. I'm not going to be turned out of Rookwood as a thief."

"But—but you can't stay if the Head says you're to go!"

"I shall stay!"

"But they'll shift you out if you don't go!" said Tommy Dodd, blinking at him in blank astonishment.

"They've got to get hold of me first," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "I'm not going to take this lying down. I am going to stay at Rookwood."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'd better not tell you chaps any more, though. I don't want to drag you into trouble," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm glad you believe in me, Tommy. And you can tell the chaps on your side that it's all a rotten lie, and I never had anything to do with Beaumont's rotten banknote."

"I will," said Tommy Dodd. "And—and I wish you luck, Silver! If there's anything I can do, old scout—"

"There isn't, thanks, excepting to believe that I'm not a rotten thief!"

"You can rely on that," said Tommy.

And he took his leave, leaving Jimmy Silver alone with the Classical juniors. They were staring at Jimmy, not knowing in the least what to make of his startling announcement.

"How the dickens are you going to stay, if the Head won't let you, Silver?" asked Van Ryn.

"I'm going to stay. But I don't want you fellows dragged into it. Thank you for standing by me. But you'd better clear off. I've got to get ready before Bootles comes to take me to the station."

"Then you are not going?" asked Oswald.

"No; I'm not going!"

"I'm going to stand by you, Jimmy, whatever you do," said Oswald. "You stood by me once when I was in a bad scrape."

Jimmy shook his head.

"You can't help me, old chap, and I'm not going to get you sacked, too. You'd better all clear off."

"But can't we help ye intirely?" asked Flynn.

"No; there's nothing you can do."

"Sure, I can punch the head of any spalpeen who calls ye a thief," said Flynn.

"I'll go an' see Morny now. I'll stop his grinning, anyway."

Flynn and Oswald and Van Ryn left the study. But the Co. remained. Jimmy Silver looked at them.

"Better go," he said.

"I'm not going," said Lovell stubbornly. "What are you thinking of doing, Jimmy?"

"I'm going to lock myself in this study, and refuse to clear," said Jimmy quietly.

"I'm not going to leave Rookwood unless I'm dragged out. And they won't drag me out without some trouble."

Lovell whistled.

"A barring-out?" he said.

"Something of the sort."

"We'll stay and help you, Jimmy," said Raby.

"No; better not. You can help me get ready, if you like," said Jimmy Silver.

"But I'm doing this alone. You would be sacked for resisting the Head's order, and you've got your people to think of."

"But—," began Newcome.

"I've settled on that," said Jimmy.

"I'm going to resist, because I am accused unjustly, but you fellows have no part in it. The truth may come out about that banknote—lies generally are found out in the long run. Anyway, I'm going to stick it as long as I can."

"Good for you!" said Rawson. "I dare say we can help you better outside the study than inside it. We've got to find the rotter who planted that note on you."

Jimmy brightened a little.

"You might," he said. "If you could do that—"

"We'll try," said Lovell, not very hopefully.

"There's one thing," said Jimmy. "I believe Mornington had a hand in it. Keep an eye on him."

"Mornington?"

"Yes. You know how thick he's been with Beaumont, and it's jolly odd for a Fourth-Former to be thick with a Sixth Form prefect. They're both down on me—they've always been. And they're both rotters through and through. Mornington knows something about it, I'm certain of that."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Lovell, between his teeth. "He's cad enough. Beaumont couldn't have planted that note on you, but Mornington could, as he's in our dormitory."

"Mornington's our game," said Rawson, with a nod. "And we shan't be idle,

Jimmy. The truth has a way of getting out; lies can't be kept up for ever."

"But—but about sticking here, Jimmy?" said Raby hesitatingly.

"That's settled."

"They'll force the door."

"Not so jolly easy, I think."

"But—but you'll be starved out, anyway."

"Not if I get a supply of grub in," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "That's where you fellows can help. You can get in some grub from the tuckshop for me, if you don't mind lending me your money."

"Good egg!"

The four juniors left the study at once on that errand.

Jimmy Silver's plan seemed wild and reckless to them; but they were prepared to back him up to the full extent of their power.

What would happen when the Head of Rookwood learned that the expelled junior refused to leave the school they could hardly imagine.

But one thing was certain—that Jimmy was in deadly earnest, and that only force would move him from the school.

Jimmy, left alone, began to make his preparations.

His heart was beating faster than usual, and he was labouring under suppressed excitement. But his head was cool.

He had mapped out the course he intended to take, and nothing would have induced him to swerve from it.

If he had been guilty, he would have been glad to flee from Rookwood, and hide his shame from the eyes of all who knew him. But he was innocent, and that made all the difference.

To go home, to tell his father that he had been expelled as a thief, unresistingly—he refused to think of that for a moment.

The news would be a terrible shock to his father, in any case. But surely he would not be displeased to know that his son was making a fight for his honour.

Lovell & Co. returned laden with parcels. There was little time to lose. Then Lovell cut off to the dormitory with Raby, and they came back with a couple of blankets and a pillow. There were tears in the eyes of Jimmy Silver's faithful chums as they helped him make his final preparations.

Oswald looked into the study hurriedly.

"Bootles is coming, Jimmy," he breathed.

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"Right! Clear off, you chaps; I've got to lock the door!"

"Oh, Jimmy!" groaned Lovell.

With miserable, dejected faces Jimmy Silver's chums left the study. Jimmy closed the door after them, and the key turned in the lock.

CHAPTER 18.

Jimmy Declines to Go.

MR. BOOTLES' kind face was deeply distressed as he made his way to the end study.

The disgrace of Jimmy Silver had come as a heavy blow to the master of the Fourth, and he felt it keenly.

He had always liked the cheery, frank junior, as most Rookwooders—masters and boys—did.

That Jimmy should have turned out so badly, as he regarded it, was a blow to Mr. Bootles. Had there been room for a doubt on the subject the Form-master would have doubted. But there seemed no room for doubt.

He tapped at the study door and turned the handle. To his surprise the door did not open.

He knocked again, more loudly.

"Silver!"

"Yes, sir!" came Jimmy's voice from within.

"Open the door, please! It is time to go to the station. You have packed your box, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Dear me! You should have done so. However, it is too late now; your box shall be sent after you. Open the door!"

"I can't, sir."

"What? What? Why can't you open the door, Silver?"

"I am not going to leave Rookwood, sir."

Mr. Bootles jumped.

"What—what?" he ejaculated.

Jimmy Silver's voice came steadily and clearly through the locked door.

"I am innocent, sir! I refuse to be expelled for something I have not done! I am staying here."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles.

Some of the Fourth were gathering in the passage, and they listened in amazement. Mornington's face was very dark.

"By gad, the cad's stickin' it out!" he remarked to Townsend. "But he'll have to go all the same. We don't want a thief here."

Biff!

Mornington gave a howl as Patrick O'Donovan Flynn's clenched fist was planted full in his face, and he went flying backwards.

Crash!

"Yooop!" gasped Mornington.

Flynn stood over him with clenched fists and blazing eyes.

"Now say that again, you hound, if you want some more, bedad!" he roared.

Mr. Bootles looked round angrily.

"Flynn! How dare you fight in my presence!"

"Sure, he called Jimmy Silver a thafe, sorr!"

"What? What?"

Mornington sat up dazedly.

"So he is a thief!" he yelled.

"Faith, you want some more—eh?"

"Flynn!" shouted Mr. Bootles.

The Irish junior did not heed. He grasped Mornington by the collar, and proceeded to bang his head on the floor.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Go it!" yelled Lovell, in great delight.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help!" screamed Mornington.

Townsend and Topham made a move towards him, and Lovell shoved them back savagely.

"Do you want some?" he asked. "I'm ready!"

Townsend and Topham did not want any. They backed away in a hurry. Mornington's wild yells rang through the passage.

Mr. Bootles hurried to the spot and grasped Flynn by the shoulder, and dragged him away from the unfortunate dandy of the Fourth.

"Flynn! How dare you!"

"He called Jimmy Silver a thafe, sorr!"

"Bless my soul!" It was news to Mr. Bootles that anybody at Rookwood believed that Jimmy Silver was innocent. "Flynn, control yourself, sir. Mornington, you will kindly refrain from making unpleasant references to Silver in the presence of his friends. It is, at the least, very bad taste."

"Yow-ow-ow!" groaned Mornington.

"Let there be no more of this!" said Mr. Bootles sternly. "Silver has been punished for his action, and if his friends still have

some faith in him, it is not for you to attempt to shake it, Mornington. It is mean and cowardly to triumph over a person who is unfortunate, even when his misfortune is his own fault."

Mornington only groaned. He was not feeling equal to any more triumphing just then, at all events.

Mr. Bootles returned to the door of the end study, and rapped sharply.

"Silver!"

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly open the door at once!"

"Sorry, sir!"

"Will you open this door, Silver?"

"Will the Head let me remain at Rookwood, sir?"

"Certainly not! You know that is impossible!"

"Then it is impossible for me to open the door, sir!"

There was a pause. In these extraordinary circumstances Mr. Bootles did not know what to do. Certainly he could not pass through a locked door.

The juniors in the passage waited in breathless expectation; excepting Mornington, who had gone away to bathe his nose.

Mr. Bootles was at a loss.

"Silver," he said at last, "what do you intend by this—this extraordinary conduct?"

"I intend to remain at Rookwood, sir."

"You are expelled—"

"Unjustly, sir."

"Silver!"

Another pause. Mr. Bootles coughed and blew his nose.

"Silver, unless you open the door at once, I shall have no alternative but to call in the Head."

"Very well, sir."

"This disrespectful conduct will not benefit you in any way, Silver," said Mr. Bootles, his temper rising a little.

"I don't mean to be disrespectful, sir. But I can't leave Rookwood in disgrace when I've done nothing to deserve it."

"That matter is settled, Silver. There is no purpose to be served by making a disgraceful disturbance. You must be aware that if you do not go quietly, you will be removed from the school by force!"

"I shall resist, sir!"

"Bless my soul! Very well, Silver, as you are determined, apparently, to cause as much unpleasantness as possible, I shall call Dr. Chisholm."

Mr. Bootles rustled away, very much disturbed. There was a buzz in the passage. As the Form-master went, a cheer rang out—a cheer for Jimmy Silver—a cheer for the junior who was under sentence of expulsion—and it rang very strangely in the Form-master's ears.

CHAPTER 19.

No Surrender.

DR. CHISHOLM looked disturbed and irritated as Mr. Bootles entered his study. The whole affair was very disturbing to the Head, who had the honour of the old school very much at heart. The discovery of a thief in Rookwood was a bitter blow to him. He was only anxious to get the matter finished with as quickly as possible, and forgotten as soon as might be.

"Silver, sir—" began Mr. Bootles, hardly knowing how to acquaint the Head with the latest extraordinary development.

"I understood that you had already taken him to the station, Mr. Bootles!" said the Head, with asperity.

"He refuses to go with me, sir!"

"What?"

"He will not come to the station!"

"Really, Mr. Bootles, I am surprised at you! Surely you can deal with a junior boy in your own Form. If he has the astounding audacity to refuse to go, take him by force! If you need assistance, call upon one of the prefects to assist you."

"He has locked himself in his study, sir, and refuses to admit me!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Head.

"It is a very distressing matter, sir," said Mr. Bootles. "He maintains that he is innocent—"

"Absurd!"

"It is very odd, too, that a number of boys in his Form appear to believe in his innocence, in spite of the evidence to the contrary."

The Head made an irritable gesture.

"Their foolishness makes no difference, Mr. Bootles. Silver must go—and at once. We will see whether he refuses to open his door at my command!" rumbled the Head, and he stalked majestically from the study.

Mr. Bootles followed him. He did not doubt that a command from the Head himself would bring the recalcitrant junior to reason.

The Fourth-Formers in the passage made way respectfully for the Head as he came striding upon the scene. The frown on Dr. Chisholm's severe face was thunderous.

"Now look out for fireworks!" murmured Oswald.

Dr. Chisholm reached the end study, and struck sharply on the door.

"Silver!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir," came from within.

"Open this door immediately!"

"Am I to remain at Rookwood, sir?"

"What? Certainly not. You are to proceed to Coombe with Mr. Bootles at once, to take the train for your home."

"My home is at Rookwood till the end of the term, sir."

"You are expelled from Rookwood, Silver!" thundered the Head.

"Unjustly, sir!"

"What? What?"

"I can't go home and tell my people I'm expelled, sir! I am not a thief, and if I gave in it would look as if I were one!"

"How dare you bandy words with me, Silver! I command you to open this door this instant!"

No reply.

"You hear me, Silver?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you open this door?"

"No, sir!"

"If you do not obey me immediately, Silver, I shall have the door forced."

"I shall resist, sir."

"Enough!" thundered the Head. "I am sorry to see, Silver, that you are lost to all sense of shame as well as to all sense of honesty! The door will be forced, and you will be removed!"

And the Head, greatly perturbed and extremely angry, strode away.

There was a low, steady sound continuously from the end study, and the juniors in the passage knew what it was. Jimmy Silver was screwing up the door!

As soon as the Head was gone Lovell ran up the passage and tapped.

"Jimmy!"

"Hallo!"

"You're sticking it out?"

"Yes, rather!"

"There'll be an awful row, Jimmy!"

"I know that, old chap."

"I—I wish you'd let me in, Jimmy. I'll stand by you."

"No fear! You clear off, old chap. I'm all right. I've screwed up the door with a dozen big screws already. I've got no end of nails and screws in my tool-chest!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Bulkeley of the Sixth came along the passage, with a grave face.

"Clear off, you fags," he called out.

And the passage cleared. The captain of Rookwood knocked at the door.

"You'd better chuck this, Silver!" he said.

"Sorry, Bulkeley, I can't."

"What's the good of making a fuss, Silver? It's only disgracing the school. You know you've got to go," said Bulkeley.

"I'm not going, if I can help it."

"You young ass, do you think you can stay here after what you've done?" exclaimed Bulkeley angrily.

"I've done nothing."

"If you're going to keep up that yarn

"I'm going to keep up the truth, Bulkeley. And it won't finish here, either. My father won't take this quietly," flashed out Jimmy Silver. "There's still some law left in England, and my father will see that the truth is brought out."

"Your father will know that you are guilty, Silver!"

"He won't believe anything of the kind. You wouldn't either, Bulkeley, if you weren't an ass!"

"What?"

"You ought to know me better. You know Beaumont's a liar and a cad! He planted his rotten banknote on me somehow!"

"Rot!" said Bulkeley.

"It's the truth!"

"Look here, Silver, the Head's sent for Sergeant Kettle to force the door. You will be taken away by force. Won't you go quietly?"

"Never!"

"It will be all the worse for you."

"I'll chance that."

Bulkeley shrugged his shoulders and retired.

The Rookwood captain was feeling uneasy in his mind, too. Was it possible that a guilty fellow could have had the hardihood and offrontery to make a resistance like this against a just sentence? Was it possible that there was some fearful mistake—that the hapless junior was, after all,

the victim of a treacherous plot? It was hard to believe—and yet—

Bulkeley went to Beaumont's study. Beaumont was not looking happy. He had been successful; but the new development of the situation troubled him greatly. He had never expected this. Beaumont's desire was for Jimmy Silver to go—and go quickly. The more fuss there was made about the matter, the more chance there was of something happening to bring the truth to light.

"Has the young cad gone?" asked the prefect, as Bulkeley came in:

"No. He's locked himself in his study, and refuses to come out. Look here, Beaumont"—the Rookwood captain looked hard at the pale and troubled prefect—"Silver says that banknote was planted on him—"

Beaumont sneered.

"Have you come to ask me whether that's true?" he said sarcastically. "Do you think I should plant a banknote on a kid in the Fourth, and call him a thief?"

"I know you always disliked Silver. I've heard all about your being kicked out of his study when you went there to lully one of them," said Bulkeley abruptly. "The juniors made no end of a song about it."

Beaumont shrugged his shoulders. But a chill of fear crept into his heart as he saw the doubt that was creeping into Bulkeley's mind.

"Suppose I were rotter enough to do such a thing, do you think I could?" he sneered.

"Well, no, it doesn't seem possible."

"If it seemed possible, you'd rather believe Jimmy Silver than me," said Beaumont, with a bitter sneer.

"Yes, I would," said Bulkeley at once.

"Silver was always as straight as a die. I can't understand how he came to do this thing—unless he's deceived everybody all along the line!"

"Well, he has."

"If he's guilty, it's jolly queer that he's got the nerve to kick up a shindy like this, and no mistake!"

"Oh, he's got plenty of nerve—a hardened young scoundrel!"

"If he's guilty, he's a hardened young scoundrel right enough," agreed Bulkeley. "But he never gave any sign before of being a hardened young scoundrel, or anything like it. I'm not generally a fool, and

I always had a high opinion of the kid. I—I wonder if it's possible that some other kid sneaked that note, and shoved it on him? Do you know any kid in the Fourth who's got a bitter grudge against him?"

"I don't know much about the Fourth and their precious feuds!" said Beaumont. "I don't care twopence, either!"

"It's barely possible that it happened that way, though."

"You're making out that there's a kid in the Fourth who's ten times worse than Silver's supposed to be!"

"Well, ye-e-es; I suppose that's hardly fair, either. But it's a puzzling business. Silver's acting as if he's innocent, not as if he's guilty!"

"He wants to give that impression, of course, and he's taken you in to begin with!" said Beaumont scornfully.

"I—I suppose that's possible. It's a jolly queer bizney, anyway!"

Bulkeley quitted the prefect's study with knitted brows. In spite of himself, in spite of the clearest proof, a doubt was in his mind, and would not be dismissed.

When he was gone, Beaumont paced the study with uneasy steps, his heart throbbing, and beads of perspiration on his brow. There was at least one fellow at Rookwood that day who was more downhearted than Jimmy Silver of the Fourth, and that was Beaumont the prefect.

CHAPTER 20.

Jimmy "Holds the Fort."

CRASH!

Crash!

The heavy blows rang and echoed through the Fourth-Form passage.

At the end of the passage a crowd of juniors looked on with breathless interest.

Sergeant Kettle was wielding a heavy axe, and the blows crashed and crashed on the door of the end study.

Mr. Bootles stood looking on. The Head had retired to his study, like Achilles to his tent, with great dignity.

Crash, crash!

The door was of stout oak, but it yielded at last under the terrific blows rained upon it by the sergeant.

The head of the axe went through at last. It disappeared through the wood, and the sergeant *dropped* on in vain.

"By gum, the beastly thing's jammed!" he muttered.

"Go it, sergeant!" called out Jimmy Silver.

"Hang you!"

"I've got a cord round your axe, old chap, and I'm holding it! Pull as hard as you like!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles.

The sergeant, crimson with exertion, tugged at the handle of the axe; but it was held by the cord lopped over the head within the split door.

"I—I can't get it out!" gasped the sergeant.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Bootles.

"Master Silver, let go that axe!"

"Bow-wow!"

"You young raskil—"

"Go and eat coke, old scout!"

The sergeant growled under his breath some expressive words he had learned in the Army.

"Pray proceed, sergeant," said Mr. Bootles mildly.

Sergeant Kettle snorted.

"I'll have to use the 'ammer!" he said.

He took up a heavy coke-hammer, and proceeded to hammer on the door. The lock was already smashed, but the stout screws held the door fast. Under the crashing blows, the already split panels flew in splinters. A huge gash appeared down the middle of the door, and the sergeant could see into the study. His eyes met Jimmy Silver's, and the besieged junior nodded to him.

"Oh, lor'!" gasped the sergeant.

"Go it!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"You young rip!" panted the sergeant.

"Silver, let me make one more appeal to you!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "This disgraceful scene should go no further!"

"I can't give in, sir!"

"In a few minutes more, Silver, the door will be forced!"

"Some hours' work yet, I think, sir, and I'm not going to let the sergeant do it if I can help it. I've got a poker in the fire!"

"What?"

"And I think the sergeant will get fed-up on it, sir, before he gets through!"

"Oh, my heye!" said the sergeant.

"Pray proceed, sergeant!" said Mr. Bootles, frowning.

"Which I'm jolly near worn out, sir!" growled Sergeant Kettle sulkily. "This

"ere ain't work for a school sergeant, that I knows on!"

"Ahem! Some recompense will be made for your trouble, sergeant," said Mr. Bootles. "Pray proceed as quickly as possible. Otherwise, the last train will be gone, and it will be impossible to remove that wretched boy from the school to-night!"

"I rather think that train will go, sir," said Jimmy Silver; "and I rather think I shan't be in it!"

"Silence, Silver!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Crash, crash, crash!

The heavy hammer splintered the upper panels of the door. The opening in the jagged wood grew larger. The sergeant panted over his job. He was still a hale old fellow, but the hard labour told on him.

As soon as the opening was large enough for his head and shoulders to pass through, the sergeant threw down the hammer.

He put his head through the opening, and his shoulders and arms followed. Lovell, at the end of the passage, gave him chums a hopeless look.

"Poor old Jimmy!" he said. "The game's up now!"

But the game was not up yet. Jimmy Silver had said that he would resist to the finish, and he meant it.

As the burly sergeant strove to drag himself through the opening in the smashed door, Jimmy Silver jerked the poker from the fire.

The end was glowing red.

Sergeant Kettle blinked at him as Jimmy advanced, poker in hand.

"Master Silver! Don't you dare——"

"Get out!" said Jimmy.

"I'm coming in, hang you!" bellowed the sergeant.

"I give you two seconds," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "I don't want to hurt you, sergeant, but you are not coming into my study!"

"It's 'Ead's orders, Master Silver!"

"I can't help that. I'm holding the fort, same as you did when you were shut up in Ladysmith," said Jimmy. "Only following your own example, sergeant. You can't grumble at that!"

The sergeant grinned for a moment.

"Look 'ere, Master Silver, I've got to come in! Don't you touch me with that there poker!"

"Are you going?"

"No, I ain't!" roared the sergeant angrily.

"Then here goes!"

The glowing end of the poker came forward, straight at the sergeant's plump nose.

Human flesh and blood could not stand that. Sergeant Kettle jerked back his head, and gave a wild howl as the back of it knocked on the door. He wriggled out of the opening in a terrific hurry.

"Sergeant—sergeant!" Mr. Bootles was very annoyed. "Why do you not enter the room, sergeant? Pray enter the room at once!"

Sergeant Kettle rubbed the back of his head, and gave Mr. Bootles a glare like a Hun.

"Which I ain't ramming my nose on to no red-ot pokers—not if I knows it!" he roared. "P'raps you'd like to ram your own nose on to a red-ot poker, sir? You're welcome!"

"Bless my soul! Silver, put down that poker at once!"

"Sorry, sir. Can't be done!"

"You—you wretched boy! I will enter myself!" shouted Mr. Bootles. "I presume, Silver, that you will not touch your Form-master with that poker?"

"If I'm expelled from Rookwood, sir, you're not my Form-master any longer," said Jimmy Silver. "You can't come in, sir!"

"I shall come in immediately!"

Mr. Bootles put head and shoulders through the gap in the door, his eyes gleaming with anger over his spectacles.

Jimmy made a pass with the poker, and the glowing tip glowed within an inch of the Form-master's nose.

Mr. Bootles felt the glow of heat on his nose. He did not wait to feel the poker itself. He squirmed back in breathless haste.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "Silver! You utter young ruffian!"

"Sorry, sir!"

"Sergeant, on second thoughts, perhaps you had better proceed to demolish the door entirely!" gasped Mr. Bootles.

The sergeant grunted.

"You don't like red-ot pokers at close quarters, sir—wot?" he remarked, with heavy sarcasm.

"Ahem! Pray proceed, sergeant, and do not pass remarks," said Mr. Bootles hastily.

Sergeant Kettle took up the big hammer again; and the crashing of his blows resounded along the passage.

But at the third or fourth crash there was a sudden fearful yell from the sergeant. The hammer dropped to the floor with a crash, and the sergeant hopped and skipped wildly, roaring.

"Yow-ow-ow! Wow-wow-wow!"

"Bless my soul—"

"Yarocoh! I'm burnt! Yoop! Oh, oh! Ah, yah!"

"Sergeant! What is the matter?"

"Grooh! Yocop! I'm burnt!" howled the sergeant.

"Pooh! Only a tap on the wrist!" said Jimmy Silver. "Suppose I'd tapped you on the nose, sergeant? I'd have done it, only I don't want to spoil your beauty!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

The sergeant rubbed his wrists wildly. It was not a bad burn, but it was a sample of what was to come. Now that there was a big gap in the door, Jimmy Silver could reach him with the poker with perfect ease, and it was clear that he meant to defend his stronghold against further attack.

Mr. Bootles seemed at his wits' end. At the end of the passage the juniors were clucking. Even fellows who had thought the worst of Jimmy Silver were coming round in their opinion now. The fellow who was putting up so extraordinary a fight against expulsion couldn't be guilty—at least, that was how it seemed to the Fourth Form. And excepting Mornington & Co. there was not a junior in the Fourth who did not wish Jimmy Silver luck.

The sergeant licked his scorched wrist, and sucked it, and growled, and made military remarks, fortunately under his breath.

"Pray proceed," said Mr. Bootles at last. "I am sorry you have been hurt, sergeant—extremely sorry; but it is, after all, necessary to overcome that obstinate boy. Pray force the door as quickly as possible."

"I've been burnt, ain't I?" roared the old soldier.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Bootles soothingly. "But pray go on. Really, if there is much more delay, the train will be lost."

The sergeant sulkily picked up the hammer again. Jimmy Silver put the poker back into the grate.

Crash! Crash!

As the blows resounded on the creaking door again, Jimmy took the poker from the grate and returned to the defence.

The glowing end of the poker, jammed through the gap, shoved right at the sergeant as he hammered. The junior incant business.

But it did not touch Mr. Kettle. The old sergeant jumped back before it could reach him. The crashing ceased.

"Sergeant!" urged Mr. Bootles.

"Look at that there red-'ot poker!" bel-lowed the sergeant furiously. "I ain't going to be burnt hall hover—not if I knows it!" He hurled the hammer to the floor with a final terrific crash. "I'm done! I can't get at that there door while that there young demon 'as got that there red-'ot poker! I'm hoff!"

"Sergeant!" gasped Mr. Bootles.

But the sergeant strode away down the passage, growling and grunting. He was fed up, which was not surprising under the circumstances. Breaking into a study to collar a rebellious junior was not really a part of his duties; and it was only too clear that every crash on the door would be followed by a thrust of the red-hot poker. It was not good enough.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, in dismay.

The Fourth Form master ambled away to the Head's study again. He could think of nothing but to bring the Head upon the scene once more.

There was a sound of knocking in the study. Jimmy Silver was nailing the table to the door, to block up the openings Sergeant Kettle had made with his axe.

The knocking was still proceeding merrily when the Head came striding up the passage with a black brow.

He glared through the split door at the junior in the study.

"Silver!" he rasped.

"Yes, sir?" said Jimmy, quite respectfully.

"You young rascal, will you cease this disgraceful scene?" shouted the Head. "Will you give yourself up at once?"

"No, sir."

The Head appeared to choke for a moment. Never had Jimmy Silver seen him so furious. But the junior did not falter. He had everything to lose and nothing to gain by surrender. And he did not even think of surrender. Surrender

was not a word in Jimmy Silver's vocabulary.

"Silver, if you persist in this, I shall send for your father!" gasped the Head at last. "This—this utter ruffianism—"

"I am sorry, sir! But I am not a thief, and I cannot be expelled from Rookwood for what I have not done."

"Enough! Since you persist in this ruffianly resistance, I shall request your father to come here and remove you! Enough!"

The Head strode away.

Jimmy Silver let the poker fall into the fender. It was not needed now. The siege of the end study was over, and Jimmy Silver had won.

Jimmy Silver slept in his blankets in the end study that night. But it was long before anyone slept at Rookwood. The old school buzzed with excitement, and all were wondering how the amazing state of affairs would end.

CHAPTER 21.

Loyal Chums.

CLANG! Clang! Clang!

Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Fourth Form, sat up in bed as the first clang of the rising-bell rang out over Rookwood School.

Lovell was the first out of bed. Chums, Raby and Newcome, followed quickly, while Rawson was out a moment or so later.

The chums dressed quickly, while the rest of the Fourth were still yawning.

Then the four juniors hurried downstairs to the Fourth-Form passage.

The passage was deserted, and they hastened along it to the end study. The door of that study was closed and fastened—screwed securely from inside. There was a gap in the door, but inside there was a barricade of the study furniture, screwed with an abundance of screws. Jimmy Silver, expelled from Rookwood by order of the Head, had screwed himself in his study, and was holding the fort against all comers. It was an unprecedented state of affairs, and it caused tremendous excitement in the old school. And Jimmy's pluck and determination carried the belief in his innocence to spread, especially among the juniors.

The Head, perplexed and puzzled by the line taken up by the expelled junior, had sent for his father, and Mr. Silver was expected that morning to take his son away. It was the only way Dr. Chisholm could think of for dealing with the recalcitrant junior. And Jimmy Silver, secure in his fortress, had passed the night there, rolled in blankets on the sofa.

Lovell tapped cautiously at the door.

Communication with the expelled junior was forbidden, but at that early hour there was no prefect on the scene.

"Jimmy!"

There was a yawn inside the study. Jimmy Silver rolled off the sofa, and tossed the blankets aside.

He grinned at his chums through the gap, smashed in the door by Sergeant Kettle's attack the previous day.

"Hallo, kids!"

"Feel all right this morning, Jimmy?"

"Right as rain!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

"Got plenty of grub for brekker?" asked Rawson.

"Lots!"

"I say, Jimmy," said Raby, "the Head's sent for your pater."

Jimmy nodded.

"I know."

"He'll be here to-day—this morning most likely. What are you going to do?"

"What's the matter, pater?"

"I was expelled by the Head for something I haven't done. I never touched Beaumont's banknote. I never saw it till Bulkeley took it out of my pocket when he searched me. It was planted on me by some cad, and I believe Mornington had something to do with it. My father won't believe me guilty. I don't know what he'll decide. But unless he orders me to leave Rookwood, I shan't go."

"Good for you!" said Rawson. "And remember, Jimmy, we're looking into it. I've been thinking it over a lot, and I'm going to see your father, if I can, and tell him about it. Better let him hear your side of the matter before he sees the Head."

"You'll be at lessons," said Jimmy.

Rawson shook his head.

"I'm going to cut lessons, and meet your pater at the station."

"Phew!"

"So are we," said Lovell. "That's what we've come to tell you, Jimmy."

"But Mr. Bootles won't give you leave of absence—"

"We're going to take French leave."

"I—I say, you'll get into a row," said Jimmy uneasily. "I don't want you to get into a row on my account."

"Rats!" said Newcome. "Ain't we your pals, fathead?"

"You see, the Head's written to your father that you've stolen a banknote from Beaumont of the Sixth, and that you're sacked," said Lovell. "Your pater will be cut up about it. It will buck him up no end if we meet him first, and explain that it's all lies."

"And it will show him that some of Rookwood, at least, believes in you and sticks to you, Jimmy," said Raby.

"It's awfully good of you," said Jimmy Silver gratefully. "The poor old pater will be cut up, there's no doubt about that."

"We'll cheer him up," said Rawson; "and we know how to put him on the track, too. We've been jawing it over, and we've thought of a way of getting some light on the subject."

"You have, you mean," grinned Lovell. "I never thought of it."

"Rawson's hit on something, Jimmy," said Newcome. "Rawson's got a long head, and no mistake! He—"

"Clear off, you fellows!" Beaumont called. "You dare you come here?"

The juniors looked grimly at Beaumont. He was a prefect of the Sixth, but they were not much inclined to treat him with respect. It was Beaumont's banknote that had been found on Jimmy Silver, and not one of Jimmy's chums believed that he had stolen it. They believed that the bully of the Sixth had been concerned in "planting" it on him. It was the only thing they could believe, so long as their faith in Jimmy Silver remained unshaken.

"Do you hear me?" rapped out Beaumont. "It's against the Head's orders for you to come here, and you know it!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Lovell savagely. "We're going to speak to our pal if we choose!"

"Your pal—an expelled thief!" sneered the prefect.

"Liar!" said Jimmy, through the door.

"Perhaps it isn't Jimmy—who'll be ex-

pelled when the truth comes out," said Lovell, his eyes gleaming. "Perhaps it's a bullying cad in the Sixth, and a mean rotter in the Fourth, who helped him to plant a banknote in Jimmy's pocket!"

Beaumont started violently.

"You—you dare to suggest—" he panted.

"Oh, that touches you on the raw, does it?" said Lovell.

"You young hound!" shouted Beaumont.

He made a rush at Lovell. The four juniors stood up to him grimly, quite prepared to "handle him," prefect as he was.

But Bulkeley of the Sixth came hurrying up.

"Stop that!" he said curtly.

"Those young cads are talking to Silver," said Beaumont, with a scowl. "The Head's forbidden it."

"I know that as well as you do, Beaumont. Clear off, kids," said the captain of Rookwood. "You're not allowed here."

And Bulkeley shepherded the juniors down the passage, followed by the scowling Beaumont. Jimmy Silver was left alone—much cheered by the visit of his chums.

CHAPTER 22.

French Leave.

HERE was intense excitement, in Rookwood that morning.

At breakfast it was impossible to still the buzz of excited whispers.

Over on the Modern side the excitement was almost as great as among the Classics. Fellows who knew Jimmy Silver well still had faith in him, in spite of the overwhelming evidence against him.

The fact that the Head had given up the attempt to remove the expelled junior by force, and had sent for his father, added to the excitement. So far, Jimmy Silver had won. The honours were with him.

After breakfast a prefect was posted in the Fourth-Form passage to see that none of the juniors visited the rebel in the end study. He remained on guard until the bell rang for morning lessons.

But when the Classical Fourth turned up in their Form-room there were four absentees.

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth,

was looking very distressed that morning. He was quite pale and troubled when he came into the Form-room. The disgrace that had fallen upon his Form was a heavy blow to him.

He glanced at the Fourth over his spectacles, and noted the absence of four juniors at once.

"Lovell! Raby! Newcome! Rawson!"

There was no answer.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles. "Does anyone here know where those four boys are?"

"They went out after breakfast, sir," said Peele.

"Dear me! Is it possible that they are playing truant?" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, aghast at the idea.

"Gone to see Jimmy Silver, perhaps, sir," said Mornington.

"Shut up, you spalpeen," whispered Flynn fiercely.

Mr. Bootles left the Form-room, evidently to investigate. But he returned in a few minutes. The absentees were not in the house.

Mr. Bootles had no resource but to mark them down absent, and morning lessons began.

Meanwhile, the four juniors were on their way to the station at Coombe.

They had slipped out of gates quietly, reckless of the result of cutting morning lessons. There would be punishment to follow, but that had to be risked. Helping their chum when he was down on his luck was more important than construing Latin—at least, Lovell & Co. so considered.

They arrived early at the little station in Coombe, and saw the first train from London come in. Then they waited for the next.

"I suppose Jimmy's pater couldn't get here much before midday," remarked Lovell. "He won't have received the Head's letter till this morning, most likely. We may have to wait all the morning."

"We'll wait all day if necessary," said Raby.

"Yes, rather!"

But the devoted chums did not have to wait so long as that. When the eleven o'clock train came in, a gentleman stepped from it they knew well. It was Mr. Silver.

Mr. Silver was looking troubled, and a little pale, but his brows were knitted. The

Head's letter had evidently given him a severe shock; but, to judge by his expression, it was not in a chastened mood that he was going to Rookwood. He was going there to see that his son had justice.

The juniors hurried towards him, raising their caps.

"Mr. Silver!" exclaimed Raby.

Mr. Silver stopped, looking at them in surprise.

"We came to meet you, sir," said Lovell.

"Indeed!" said Jimmy's father, looking puzzled. "I suppose you are aware of the state of affairs at the school—that my son has been expelled?"

"Yes, sir."

"And we know he's innocent, sir," said Rawson.

"You know it."

"Well, we believe so, anyway."

"Jolly sure of it, sir," said Newcome. "We're Jimmy's pals, and we're sticking to him."

Mr. Silver's clouded brow cleared a little. "Then I take it that the evidence is not complete?" he said.

"Well——" Lovell hesitated. "It's pretty strong, sir. The Head has decided that Jimmy is guilty."

"Yet you believe in him?"

"You see, we know old Jimmy," explained Lovell. "I don't care twopence for the evidence!"

Mr. Silver smiled.

"I am glad to see that there is someone at Rookwood who has faith in my son," he said. "I came to see Dr. Chisholm. It appears that my son has refused to leave the school, although ordered to do so."

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Lovell. "He's holding the study against everybody. Just like old Jimmy. He won't give in and be sacked when he's innocent all the time. You ain't waxy with him for that, sir?"

"I do not blame him if he is innocent," said Mr. Silver; "and, naturally, I am inclined to put faith in my son. Yet it is extraordinary, if he is innocent, that the evidence against him should be strong enough to cause Dr. Chisholm to sentence him to expulsion from the school. I had better see the Head——"

"But we've got something to tell you that the Head doesn't know, sir," exclaimed Lovell. "Old Rawson thought of it. He's jolly deep."

"Then I shall certainly listen to you," said Mr. Silver. "Come into the waiting-room."

Mr. Silver was a quiet and self-contained gentleman. But the juniors could see that he had been "bucked," as they called it, by learning that his son's friends still believed in his innocence, and stood by him.

"Now, tell me exactly what happened at Rookwood yesterday," said Mr. Silver, as he sat down in the waiting-room.

"Go it, Rawson. You're going to do the talking," said Lovell.

Rawson nodded.

"Beaumont of the Sixth missed a five-pound note from his study, sir," said Rawson. "It was taken from the table-drawer. Jimmy Silver had been sent to his study to fetch his footer, and it seems that nobody else went into the study.

"Beaumont didn't accuse Jimmy, but he suggested searching him. Bulkeley—he's the captain of Rookwood—searched Jimmy in the presence of Beaumont and Mr. Bootles and two prefects. The banknote was found on him."

Mr. Silver drew a deep breath.

"It was found in his jacket," went on Rawson. "The lining was torn, and the banknote had gone through the pocket. They took it for granted that Jimmy had stolen it, then."

"I admit I was rather knocked over," said Lovell, colouring. "It did seem a clincher. But—"

"Did my son make any explanation?"

"Yes," said Rawson. "He said he'd never seen the note before, and that somebody must have put it in his jacket. Only—only it wouldn't be easy for a Sixth-Former to come nosing in our dorm, looking for a chap's jacket in the dark—and it must have been put there at night. So—so—and besides, Beaumont's a prefect of the Sixth, and—and the Head wouldn't be likely to believe such a thing of him. He doesn't know how Beaumont hated poor old Jimmy."

"My son was on bad terms with this Beaumont?"

"Yes, rather," said Lovell. "Beaumont's the rottenest bully at Rookwood, and, of course, we don't stand that."

"Jimmy kicked him out of our study the other day," said Newcome. "He came there to lick me, and we kicked the rotter out!"

"Surely juniors are not allowed to eject

a prefect of the Sixth Form from a study. Did not Beaumont complain to the Head?"

"That shows what a rotter he is!" said Lovell. "He had licked Newcome so much that he dared not let the Head know about it. But he was awfully down on Jimmy for taking the lead in kicking him out! All the fags were laughing at him for it. Some of them serenaded him under his window."

"Then Beaumont had a motive for wishing to injure my son," said Mr. Silver. "But it is a long step from that to attempting to fasten a charge of theft upon him!"

"Yes; but as Jimmy's innocent, that's the only explanation, sir."

Mr. Silver smiled. The eager, unthinking faith of Jimmy's chums touched him deeply.

"But my son's innocence has to be proved yet," he said. "Did it transpire whether my son knew that there was a banknote in Beaumont's study?"

"Yes; and that told against him," said Lovell. "But Rawson has worked out that it tells in his favour!"

"Indeed!" Mr. Silver looked very curiously at the scholarship junior. "Please go on, Master Rawson!"

Rawson coloured a little.

"I thought of it in talking it over with these chaps," he said. "You see, Jimmy knew there was a banknote in Beaumont's study, because he had heard Beaumont mention it to another Six-Former in the passage."

"Well, chaps in the Fourth don't generally hear Sixth-Formers talking about their business; it was jolly odd that Jimmy happened to hear that. I thought it over, and it seems jolly clear to me that Beaumont deliberately spoke about it in Jimmy's hearing, so that it would come out afterwards that Jimmy knew the banknote was there!"

"You ought to be a lawyer, young man," said Mr. Silver. "The point is very well taken indeed. But, as the matter stands, it appears that the evidence against my son is overwhelming, and his only plea is an accusation against a Sixth-Form prefect which cannot be proved in any way!"

"That's where old Rawson comes in!" said Lovell triumphantly. "Rawson's jolly well going to prove it!"

"Go on, my dear boy," said Mr. Silver. "And the chums of the Fourth chorused: 'Go it, Rawson!'"

CHAPTER 23.

Good Old Rawson.

RAWSON coloured and grinned. He had shown considerable acumen in thinking the mysterious tangle out, and the juniors admired him for it. The scholarship boy had had a harder life than most of the Rookwood fellows, and his hard experiences had given him an old head on young shoulders; and Rawson's long head was destined to stand Jimmy Silver in good stead.

Rawson "went it," as his chums requested.

"You see, this chap Beaumont is rather a rotter," he said. "We don't sneak about a chap, of course, even when he's a beastly bully; and I don't know that anything could be proved against him, anyway—he's jolly deep!

"But we in the Fourth know jolly well that he's a rotter all through! He's been seen talking to a shady bookmaker who hangs about Coombe, and his fag has found cards and cigarettes in his study, and sporting papers, and all that. Everybody knows jolly well that he goes the pace, though he doesn't know they know!"

"That is important," said Mr. Silver quietly. "The personal character of an accuser is a very important matter. Pray continue!"

"Well, for the last few days everybody knew that Beaumont was hard up," said Rawson. "The fellows joked about his having bad luck on the geegees—not to let Beaumont hear them, of course. He's borrowed money of a kid in the Fourth!"

"Mornington," said Lovell, "the rottenest cad in the Lower School. He's been very thick with Beaumont, and he hates Jimmy Silver as a Hun hates the truth!"

"Mornington never told us so, of course," said Rawson. "But his pals knew—Towny and Topham and Peele—and, of course, they jawed sometimes; so most of the fellows knew.

"Besides, it ain't usual for a Sixth-Form prefect to be thick with a Fourth-Form junior. It's jolly unusual, and everybody knew it was because of Morny's money. Morny rolls in money; he simply reeks with it. Beaumont wouldn't have stood him for ten seconds if he hadn't been hard up and wanting to borrow."

"But what does this lead to?" asked Mr. Silver.

"Rawson's coming to it," chuckled Lovell. "You give old Rawson his head. Go it, Rawson!"

"Well, sir, Beaumont being hard up, as we all knew, to such an extent as to be borrowing money of a junior, where did he get five pounds from all of a sudden?" said Rawson.

"That's it!" said Lovell.

"Five pounds is a good bit of money even for a Sixth-Form chap," said Rawson; "and we know Beaumont hadn't a quid, let alone five quids. Where did he get that fiver from?"

Mr. Silver looked perplexed.

"But it is established that Beaumont had the five-pound note," he said. "It was actually found in the search!"

"Exactly. But I don't believe it was Beaumont's fiver at all!"

"But whose, then, do you suppose it was, and what has that to do with the matter?" asked the perplexed old gentleman.

"Morny's!" chorused Lovell and Raby and Newcome.

"You mean that Mornington has lent the five-pound note to Beaumont?"

"Yes, sir, to fix it on Jimmy Silver."

"Oh!"

"You see, sir, Beaumont was so well known to be hard up that when he missed the note first fellows said he hadn't one, and was only gassing about having had one and lost it.

"After we thought of this, I spoke to Neville," said Rawson. "Neville's the secretary of the senior football club, and he used to dun Beaumont for his sub. We all knew it. Some of the fags used to call out to Beaumont. 'Here comes Neville for his sub!' and it made Beaumont awfully wild!"

Mr. Silver laughed.

"I have no doubt it did."

"Well, Beaumont was looking for the fiver to pay Neville when he missed it," said Rawson; "and my belief is that he fixed that so as to have Neville present when it was missed.

"Neville didn't half believe at first that he had a banknote at all, and Beaumont had to explain how it was, as Neville knew he was stony. He explained that he'd received it from his uncle."

"Is not that probable?"

"I suppose it's possible," said Rawson. "But I'm jolly certain that if Beaumont got a fiver, he'd have paid some of his debts with it, not use it to fix a charge on old Jimmy. But that isn't all. When he couldn't pay Neville his football sub., he couldn't have had the fiver, could he?"

"I suppose not."

"Well, he had the fiver afterwards that day—and he had it from his uncle, so he says. But he never had a letter that day!" said Rawson triumphantly. "We've been inquiring about that, and Beaumont never had a letter yesterday at all. The postman comes only twice a day to Rookwood, and Lovell met him each time. Lovell's expecting some tin from home!"

"And Beaumont met him each time, too," chuckled Lovell; "and each time the old boy said no, there wasn't a letter for Master Beaumont. I never thought about it till Rawson started working it out!"

Mr. Silver's face was very grave.

"So you see how we work it out, sir," said Rawson modestly. "Beaumont says he had the fiver from his uncle—he told Neville so—and we know he hadn't a letter yesterday at all. Mornington is simply reeking with fivers, and we know he'd give 'em all to get even with Jimmy Silver."

"Beaumont couldn't have sneaked into our dorm. to shove that banknote into Jimmy's jacket. But Morny sleeps in our dorm., and it would be quite easy for him to sneak out of bed and do it when all the chaps were asleep. He'd know exactly where Jimmy's jacket was, of course. That five-pound note never was in Beaumont's table drawer at all!"

"Never in its life!" chortled Lovell.

"It was Morny's fiver all the time, and Morny shoved it into Jimmy's pocket, and only gave Beaumont the number, so that he could claim it!"

Mr. Silver drew a deep breath.

"My dear boy," he said, "I think your theory has been largely dictated by your belief in my son; but it is certainly possible, and quite certainly this aspect of the matter shall be inquired into!"

"That's what we want," said Lovell. "We know you'll see that Jimmy has justice, sir. The Head wouldn't listen to kids like us, but—"

"He will listen to me," said Mr. Silver

grimly. "I should certainly require proof as to the last iota before I allowed my son to be branded as a thief!"

"That's it, sir," said Rawson. "Now, all banknotes are numbered, and that note had a certain number. Notes can be traced by their numbers. If Beaumont had it from his uncle, it can be proved!"

"Undoubtedly."

"And if he had it from Morny, that can be proved, too. Morny will deny knowing anything about it—he's a regular Prussian for lying—but it can be proved all the same. The note must have come from a bank, and the banker will know!"

"And if the note's proved to be Morny's, that settles the whole bizney," said Raby. "Morny put it into Jimmy Silver's pocket, and Beaumont claimed it afterwards—and very likely he'd never even seen it."

"And there's another point," said Rawson. "Where's that note now? It's Morny's—we're convinced of that, and it's served its turn in getting Jimmy Silver expelled. I don't believe Morny would let Beaumont keep it. He swanks a lot with his blessed money, but he don't give any away. I don't believe for a minute that he would let Beaumont keep that note, if it's his."

"And if he's got it back he's got it now," said Lovell. "You see, they believe the matter is finished and done with—they don't guess old Rawson has been working it out like a merry old Sexton Blake."

"My dear lads," said Mr. Silver gratefully, "you have lightened my heart very much. I cannot thank you enough for meeting me here and telling me this. I shall now know what line to take at Rookwood. You can safely leave the matter in my hands from this point."

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Lovell.

Mr. Silver rose. The four juniors walked to Rookwood with him in high spirits, and they arrived as the Rookwood fellows were coming out of the Form-room after morning lessons.

CHAPTER 24.

Mr. Silver Means Business!

DR. CHISHOLM rose as Mr. Silver was shown into his study.

The Head's face was grave and concerned. Angry as he was with Jimmy Silver, he could feel for the blow

that had fallen upon the boy's father. He shook hands very cordially with his visitor.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Silver. Please sit down. I need not say how extremely sorry I am to send for you on such an errand."

"I can quite understand that," said Mr. Silver.

"Your son must leave Rookwood," said the Head. "The discovery of his action must, of course, be a very painful shock to you. But you will see that I had no resource but to expel a boy guilty of theft."

"If my son is guilty of theft, sir, he deserves to be expelled from school, and to go to prison. I should have no pity for him whatever if that were the case," said Mr. Silver quietly. "But if he is innocent—"

The Head made a gesture.

"I stated the whole of the circumstances in my letter to you, Mr. Silver."

"So far as you knew them, sir."

"Really, Mr. Silver, you must do me the credit of believing that I inquired into the matter in the most thorough manner," said the Head, with a touch of asperity. "It is not a light matter to expel a boy upon so serious a charge."

"Quite so. But as the boy's father you must allow for my natural faith in him," said Mr. Silver. "I am quite aware that you intend to administer strict justice, of course. Still, there is the possibility that a mistake has been made."

The Head stiffened visibly.

"There was no room for a mistake," he said. "The stolen property was actually found in your son's possession."

"I understand that he claims that it was placed in his pocket without his knowledge."

"Indeed! Certainly he made that absurd statement, which I refused to listen to for a moment. I did not mention that in my letter to you."

"I have seen some of my son's friends here."

"It is news to me that any boy at Rookwood doubts his guilt," said the Head coldly.

"On the contrary, his friends have not lost faith in him, and neither have I," said Mr. Silver composedly.

The Head drummed on the table with his fingers.

"Mr. Silver, the matter has been ad-

judged. I have asked you to come here to remove your son, who defies all authority, and has even resorted to violence to remain at Rookwood against my will."

"If he is innocent, doctor, his conduct can be pardoned, I imagine?"

"If he were innocent, Mr. Silver, I should not only pardon his action, but I should express my personal regret to him for what has happened. But he is not innocent," said the Head tartly. "He is guilty, and his guilt has been proved."

"I do not regard the proof as conclusive."

"I am sorry for that. I must say that my decision remains unchanged."

"You have no objection, however, to my inquiring into the circumstances myself while I am here."

"I have no right to raise any objection, but I do not see the use."

"That may transpire later," said Mr. Silver. "Doctor, my son's good name, and my own as his father, are at stake. You can make allowance for a parent's feelings, I am sure."

The Head melted at once.

"My dear sir, you shall be satisfied in every possible way!" he exclaimed. "I am sorry that I see no possible chance of lifting this stain from your son's name. His Form-master tells me that he had a very high opinion of him until now. He was, in fact, a credit to the Fourth Form—somewhat high-spirited, but an excellent lad in every way. That makes his fall more shocking and painful."

"And improbable," said Mr. Silver.

"Well, you shall satisfy yourself," said the Head. "Heaven forbid that I should deny you the fullest satisfaction in the matter. What do you wish to do?"

"I should like to question Master Beaumont."

"Very well."

Dr. Chisholm touched the bell, and sent the page to call Master Beaumont to the study.

"You must not suppose that Beaumont accused your son," he explained. "Mr. Bootles tells me that he expressed serious doubt as to whether Silver had taken the note. He required him to be searched partly for his own sake, as suspicion naturally fell upon him."

Mr. Silver nodded without replying.

Beaumont of the Sixth entered the study.

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The prefect was looking pale, and his brows were clouded. It was not pleasant to him to meet Jimmy Silver's father. But he nerved himself for the ordeal.

"This is Master Beaumont," said the Head.

Mr. Silver scanned the prefect's face.

"Thank you for coming here, Master Beaumont," he said. "I am Silver's father. I have come to take my son—if he is guilty."

Beaumont's lips quivered uneasily.

"I am afraid there is no doubt about that, sir," he said. "The matter has been proved, I am sorry to say."

"We shall see. It was your banknote, I understand, that was purloined?"

"Yes, sir."

"A five-pound note?"

"Yes."

"You had the number of it?"

Beaumont identified the note by the number," interjected the Head.

"Exactly. May I ask, Master Beaumont, whether you are accustomed to possessing banknotes of such value?"

"I have fivers sometimes, sir," said Beaumont.

"May I ask you where you obtained this one?"

"Really, sir—" began the Head.

"Let Master Beaumont answer my question. Unless," said Mr. Silver, with bitter emphasis—"unless Master Beaumont objects to answering it."

Beaumont made an uneasy movement.

"I have no objection to answering it, of course," he said. "I had the note from my uncle."

"You stated as much, I understand, to Neville, of your Form?"

"Yes; I told Neville," said Beaumont, astonished at Mr. Silver's knowledge.

"Please tell me your uncle's name."

Beaumont hesitated.

"I am waiting," said Mr. Silver.

"I don't see—"

"I must say that I do not see the drift of all this," said the Head, with very visible signs of impatience.

"I have an object, sir. Unless Master Beaumont answers my questions, I shall conclude that he has spoken falsely in saying that he had the banknote from his uncle."

"Mr. Silver!"

"Let him answer," said Mr. Silver.

"My uncle is Sir Charles Beaumont," said the prefect sullenly.

"Very good. Sir Charles Beaumont, doubtless, takes the numbers of his notes," said Mr. Silver. "You have the number of the stolen note, Dr. Chisholm?"

"Yes; but—"

"I have finished with Master Beaumont."

The Head made the prefect a sign to leave the study. Beaumont, very pale and perturbed, quitted the room.

"Now, sir—" began the Head.

"I observe that you have a telephone here, sir," said Mr. Silver. "Doubtless Sir Charles Beaumont's name is in the telephone directory—"

"That is the case. I have received a call from him before," said the Head. "But what—"

"Will you kindly telephone to him, and inquire whether he sent his nephew a banknote for five pounds yesterday, or this week at all?"

"Really—"

"My belief is that he did nothing of the kind," said Mr. Silver grimly.

"Really, sir—"

"A few words with Sir Charles Beaumont will settle the matter one way or the other," said Mr. Silver.

The Head made an impatient gesture.

"I will do as you wish, Mr. Silver, but—"

"Thank you!"

Dr. Chisholm crossed to the telephone and picked up the receiver. He called for his number, and in a few minutes he was through.

"Fortunately, Sir Charles Beaumont is at home," said the Head irritably. "You will see in a few minutes, Mr. Silver, that your very remarkable suspicion is quite unfounded."

"Perhaps so."

"Ah, he is here! Is that Sir Charles Beaumont?"

"Yes," came back the voice on the wire. "That is Dr. Chisholm?"

"Yes. Pray excuse me for disturbing you, Sir Charles. I desire to ask you one question, concerning a banknote you sent to your nephew here this week."

"What? What?"

"You sent a five-pound note to your nephew, Master Beaumont of the Sixth Form at Rookwood—"

"Nothing of the sort!"

"Wha-at?"

"I have not sent my nephew a bank-note!"

The Head fairly gasped over the receiver.

"You—you—you have not?" he stut-tered.

"Certainly not. I have no five-pound notes to spare to send to schoolboys!" said Sir Charles crossly. "So far as I remember, I have sent him nothing since his birthday two months ago."

"You are absolutely certain?"

"Of course I am certain! What the dickens—"

"Pray excuse my troubling you!" gasped the Head. And he rang off without further speech, probably leaving the baronet very much puzzled.

Dr. Chisholm sank limply into his chair.

"Well?" said Mr. Silver grimly.

"You were right!" gasped the Head.

"Sir Charles Beaumont has not sent his nephew a banknote, and Beaumont has spoken falsely. But—but what does that prove?"

CHAPTER 25.

Lovell on the Warpath!

JIMMY SILVER was sitting in his study, contentedly munching bread and cheese.

"Hallo, pickpocket!" yelled Townsend, peering through the gap in the door.

Jimmy Silver looked up.

"Thief!" said Tonham.

"Lucky for you there's a door between us, Tonny," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

"Your pater's come," sneered Mornington. "You'll soon be out of that, my pip-pin!"

"And a good riddance!" said Peele.

"My pater will stand by me," said Jimmy, "and the rotter who put that bank-note in my jacket had better look out."

Mornington laughed mockingly.

"Like son, like father, perhaps," he remarked. "Birds of a feather."

Whiz!

A chunk of cheese came through the gap in the door, and Mornington gave a yell as it caught him in the eye.

"Yow-wow!"

He shook his fist savagely at Jimmy Silver

as, he gouged at his eye with the other hand.

"You rotten thief! You're going to be kicked out, and your confounded father with you!" he hissed.

There was a rush of feet in the passage. Lovell & Co., and Rawson and Flynn, came dashing up.

"Go for the cads!" shouted Lovell. "I thought we'd find you here, you rotters!"

"Hang you! Keep off! Yah!"

Lovell rushed at Mornington, hitting out right and left. Townsend and Topham and Peele rolled on the floor under the vigorous assault of the Co.

"Kick 'em along the passage," said Lovell. "Leave this cad to me!"

"Yow-ow! Help!"

"Yoop! Leggo!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

The unfortunate nuts roared and howled as they were dribbled along the passage. They went rolling down the stairs in a dishevelled state.

Mornington, meanwhile, was fighting with Lovell, hammer and tongs.

The dandy of the Fourth had pluck enough, of a wildcat sort. He fought his hardest, but he was no match for Jimmy Silver's indignant chum.

Lovell knocked him right and left. Mornington went down at last under a terrific right-hander.

"Well hit!" shouted Jimmy Silver from the end study. Jimmy was looking on, through the door, with great enjoyment.

"Get up, you cad!" panted Lovell. "Get up, you slandering rotter! You've got to take your medicine for shoving that bank-note in Jimmy's pocket!"

Mornington panted.

"It's a lie! You—you—"

"Get up, or I'll jolly well jump on you!" roared Lovell.

Mornington scrambled to his feet, and came on again. Lovell met him more than half-way.

The dandy of Rookwood was scratching and kicking as well as fighting, and Lovell showed very plain signs of conflict. But he stuck grimly to his enemy, and punched, and punched again, till Mornington went down once more, and lay gasping.

"Good old Lovell!" chortled Jimmy Silver.

"Cave!" called out Raby along the passage.

Mr. Bootles came whisking on the scene, with rustling gown.

"Lovell, what are you doing here? Do you wish to be caned again, sir? Go away at once! Do you hear me? Mornington, you are wanted!"

The Form-master drew Mornington to his feet, and the junior reeled, breathless.

"The—Head wants me?" said Mornington.

"Yes, at once!"

Mr. Bootles walked away with the gasping Mornington, and a few minutes later, when he was brushed down, took him to the Head's study. Lovell & Co. exchanged glances on the landing.

"Beaumont's been to the Head," said Flynn. "Now Mornington. Jimmy's pater's there. What does it mean intirely?"

Lovell drew a deep breath.

"I believe it means that the truth is coming out," he said. "I'm going to speak to Jimmy again, and chance it!"

He scudded along the passage.

"Jimmy, old son!"

Jimmy Silver looked out with a smile. The scrap in the passage had cheered him up very considerably, though he had only been a spectator.

"Has my pater come, Lovell?"

"Yes, rather! He's with the Head. And Beaumont and Morny are being called over the coals, Jimmy, old man, I believe it's going to be all right!" gasped Lovell.

Jimmy's eyes danced.

"Oh, old scout, I wish it would! But how—"

"It was old Rawson— But I'll tell you later. Here's Bulkeley!"

And Lovell scuttled away as the captain of Rookwood appeared in the passage.

He left Jimmy Silver with a brightened face and renewed hope in his heart. Was it possible, after all, that the clouds were to roll by?

CHAPTER 26.

In the Toils!

MORNINGTON was still breathing hard as he entered the Head's study with Mr. Bootles.

Dr. Chisholm glanced at him and frowned. He could see that the junior

had been fighting. But he made no remark upon it. There were more important matters on hand at present.

"You sent for me, sir," said Mornington, a little breathlessly.

"Mr. Silver wishes to question you, Mornington," said the Head.

Mornington looked at the visitor as insolently as he dared.

"I don't see what business Mr. Silver can have with me, sir," he replied.

"You will kindly answer his questions, Mornington."

"Very well, sir!"

"I understand that you are on bad terms with my son, Master Mornington," said Mr. Silver.

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't like him," he said. "He keeps me out of the footer, chiefly because he's jealous of my form. I don't take the trouble to dislike him. He's not worth it."

Mr. Bootles coughed, and the Head frowned. Mr. Silver's eyes gleaned for a moment.

Mornington's insolence made a bad impression on all three.

"You are on very friendly terms with Master Beaumont of the Sixth Form, I understand."

"Not at all. Fourth-Formers are not usually friendly with prefects. But, perhaps, you don't know much about public schools, sir."

"Mornington, you will kindly answer Mr. Silver respectfully!" said the Head warningly.

"I am quite aware such a friendship is unusual," said Mr. Silver. "But in this case, I understand, it exists. You are on friendly terms with a prefect of the Sixth, and both of you are on bad terms with my son."

"Not at all."

"Are you prepared for members of your Form to be questioned as to your friendship with Master Beaumont?"

Mornington shifted uneasily. His amazing "palliness" with a Sixth Form prefect had been the talk of the Fourth, and it was not much use denying a fact that could be established at once by investigation.

"Perhaps Beaumont has been rather kind to me," he said, after a pause. "He rather likes me. I like him."

"That does not agree with your previous

statement, Mornington," said the Head, frowning. "I warn you to be careful."

"I don't see that my private affairs are this gentleman's business at all, sir," said Mornington coolly. "I regard this questioning as sheer impertinence!"

"Mornington!"

"You will soon see the object of my questions," said Mr. Silver grimly. "Did you, or did you not, enter into a scheme with Master Beaumont to fasten a false charge of theft upon my son?"

"Good heavens!" murmured Mr. Bootles, aghast, and the Head gasped.

Mornington drew a deep, deep breath.

"Certainly not!" he replied.

"You did not?"

"No. I regard the question as an insult!"

"Did you, taking advantage of the fact that you occupy the same dormitory as my son, leave your bed in the night to place a banknote in his jacket, having arranged with Beaumont to pretend the next day that it was stolen?"

"No!" muttered Mornington.

"Was the five-pound note yours or was it Beaumont's—the banknote that was found in my son's jacket lining?"

"Beaumont's, of course. He told the Head so."

"Do you know where Master Beaumont obtained it?"

"I think he obtained it from his uncle. I don't know much about Beaumont's affairs, of course."

"Beaumont informed us that it was from his uncle," remarked Mr. Bootles.

Mr. Silver smiled, and the Head gave a peculiar cough.

Mornington cast a sharp look from one to the other. He could see that something, at any rate, was known, and that knowledge filled him with a vague fear.

Had he left some point in the cunning scheme unguarded, after all? That was the deadly fear that was gnawing now at the young rascal's breast.

"You did not put the note in my son's jacket, Mornington?"

"I have said so," muttered the junior huskily.

"It was not your note?"

"No."

"Very good!" Mr. Silver turned to the Head: "Dr. Chisholm, my point is that the banknote was Mornington's, and was never

in Master Beaumont's possession at all. Therefore, it could not have been taken from his study by my son."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head. "You—you amaze me!" stammered Mr. Bootles. "What possible reason is there for supposing that the note was Mornington's?"

"It was not mine!" shouted Mornington furiously. "This is a rotten trick to get Jimmy Silver off!"

"Silence, Mornington!" said the Head.

"Am I to keep silence while this man is arguing my good name away?" demanded Mornington fiercely. "I give you my word, sir, that I never heard of it till it was found on Jimmy Silver, who had stolen it from Beaumont!"

"You need not fear that anything but the truth will be established, Mornington. Mr. Silver, I must ask you for your reasons for the astounding suggestions you make."

"Proofs are better than reasons," said Mr. Silver quietly. "You have the number of the note in question."

"I have the number here."

"Very good. You have already learned that Beaumont lied in declaring that the note came from his uncle."

Mornington panted. He began to feel the toils closing about him.

"By the number of the note," continued Mr. Silver, "you can ascertain whether it was Mornington's."

"True!" said the Head.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles.

"Mornington, I understand that you have a very considerable allowance," said the Head. "You sometimes have banknotes?"

"I've plenty of money," muttered Mornington, with a touch of his old purse-proud manner.

"Did you have a five-pound note yesterday?"

A denial trembled on Mornington's lips. But a denial was not much use when he had a wad of fivers in his pocket-book at that very moment.

"Yes, sir; several."

"He had five-pound notes and Beaumont had none," said Mr. Silver significantly.

"His banknotes must have come originally from a bank, and either through his guardian or the banker the numbers can be ascertained. If one of the numbers is the same with the number of the stolen note

"That would certainly prove your case, sir," said the Head slowly. "I will communicate with Mornington's guardian on the subject at once."

Mornington reeled. His face was deadly white. Every eye in the room was on him, and his terror could not escape observation.

"Mornington"—the Head's voice was slow and ominous—"do you admit now that the banknote was yours?"

"No," said Mornington thickly. "I—I deny it!"

"I have yet another point to make," said Mr. Silver, his voice like iron. "The stolen note was, I presume, returned to the supposed owner when it was taken from my son?"

"Undoubtedly!" said Mr. Bootles. "It was given back to Beaumont in my presence."

"I believe that the note was Mornington's, and used only for the purpose of fastening a false charge on my son. After it had served its purpose the real owner would doubtless claim it. He would have, so far as I could see, no motive for allowing his accomplice to keep it. That being the case, it is very probably in Mornington's possession at this very moment, and I demand that he be searched—"

Mr. Silver broke off suddenly as Mornington made a wild and desperate rush to the door.

CHAPTER 27.

"Hurrah!"

"STOP!"

"Mornington!"

Mornington did not stop.

He fairly sprang at the door, and tore it open. But though the Head and Mr. Bootles were taken entirely by surprise, Mr. Silver was on the alert. With a spring, he was at the door, and his grasp closed like iron on Mornington's shoulder.

"Not so fast!" said Mr. Silver grimly.

"Let me go!" yelled Mornington.

He kicked and struggled savagely in Mr. Silver's grasp.

With a twist of his arm, Jimmy's father sent the wretched schemer spinning back into the study, and closed the door.

Mornington stood panting.

"Dr. Chisholm"—and Mr. Silver's voice

was calm and even—"after this boy's action you can have no further doubt that the banknote is upon his person."

"Good heavens!" said the Head.

"It certainly appears clear," said Mr. Bootles. "Mornington must be searched."

"Kindly search him, Mr. Bootles!" said the Head. "There is little doubt now, I fear. Silver has been cruelly wronged."

Mornington started back as the Form-master approached him.

"Hands off!" he muttered thickly.

"Hands off, or—"

"Mornington!" The Head's voice was deep and stern. "Submit to a search at once, or I shall call in a prefect to hold you!"

"I—I haven't the note!" panted Mornington.

"A search will prove that, one way or the other."

The wretched junior groaned. There was only one explanation of his action, and there was nothing to be said.

He made no further resistance. Mr. Bootles drew a fat pocket-book from the junior's pocket and opened it. There was a dozen banknotes in it, and Mr. Bootles examined each one methodically. He paused at last, and drew one note out from the others.

"That is the note," he said.

The Head took it, scanned the number, and compared it with a number on a slip of paper.

"The number is the same," he said.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Bootles.

"This note," said the Head, "is the note found upon Silver of the Fourth when he was searched yesterday. I need not ask you how it came into your possession, Mornington. It was your property, and you reclaimed it from your accomplice when it was taken from Silver. Do you still wish an investigation to be made through your guardian, to prove that the note was your property in the first place?"

Mornington pulled himself together.

"You needn't trouble," he said. "I own up! Not much good lyin' about it now. I thought the matter was ended, or I'd have left the note with Beaumont, only the silly fool would have blued it on geegees, and I should never have seen it again. The game's up, and I'm ready to take my ground!"

The Head's brow was black as thunder. "It is clear that you placed that bank-note in Silver's pocket, and somehow induced Beaumont to make a false claim to it," he said. "Now that your guilt is proved beyond a doubt you admit it!"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders with his old coolness.

"I know the game's up!" he said, with a sneer. "I swore that either Jimmy Silver or I should clear out of Rookwood. I meant it to be Jimmy Silver. My luck's out, but I'm not going to whine. I'm ready to be sacked!"

"You will certainly be expelled immediately from the school, you unmitigated young scoundrel!" exclaimed the Head. "Mr. Bootles, kindly call Beaumont here!"

In a few minutes Beaumont entered, looking pale and harassed. His scared eyes dwelt on every face in turn.

"The game's up, Beaumont!" said Mornington flippantly, before the Head could speak. "They've found the note on me!"

Beaumont gave a gasping cry.

"The truth is known, Beaumont," said the Head quietly. "How came it, wretched boy, that you, a prefect of the Sixth Form, entered into this dastardly plot with a junior to disgrace an innocent lad?"

Beaumont staggered against the door.

"I—I never wanted to," he said huskily.

"You—you don't know that young fiend! He drove me into it! I owed him money—he had me under his thumb! I—I never wanted to do it—"

He broke off with a groan.

Mr. Silver rose. He was not wanted longer.

"May I see my son?" he asked.

"Mr. Bootles, kindly conduct Mr. Silver to his son's study. Please tell Silver that now his innocence is proved he is pardoned for his insubordination, and he will, of course, remain at Rookwood."

Mr. Silver left the study with the Form-master. Beaumont and Mornington remained—to be dealt with by the Head.

"What news, sir?"

Lovell & Co. surrounded Mr. Silver.

The old gentleman smiled jovially.

"The best, my lad!" he said. "Master Rawson, you have saved my son.

Jimmy's innocence is proved. Come with me to tell him so, my lads!"

The news spread like wildfire, and an army of Rookwood juniors marched, with Mr. Silver to the end study.

"My boy!" said Mr. Silver.

"Dad!"

"All is cleared up, Jimmy," said Mr. Silver, in a moved voice. "You owe it to your schoolfellow Rawson, who suggested to me the line of inquiry I followed. The Head pardons you—"

"Dr. Chisholm overlooks your—ahem!—insubordination, Silver," said Mr. Bootles.

"You will—ahem!—kindly come out of your study, and—ahem!—the damage will be repaired. I congratulate you, my boy!"

"Hurray!" roared Lovell & Co.

"Bravo, Jimmy!"

The screwed door of the end study was forced open—Jimmy Silver's siege was over now. Jimmy came out, his face glowing. His father shook hands with him, Mr. Bootles shook hands with him; Lovell & Co. fairly hugged him. And when Jimmy learned all he gave Rawson a thump on the back that made the scholarship junior stagger.

"You did it, you boulder!" said Jimmy. "Give us your fist, old son!"

"Hip, hip, hurray!" roared the Rookwood juniors, Classical and Modern alike.

The roar of cheering reached the Head's study, and the Head smiled as he heard it; and it reached the two wretched culprits receiving the sentence of expulsion from Rookwood—Beaumont pale and shame-stricken, and Mornington insolent and mocking to the last.

Jimmy Silver's star was in the ascendant again, and he was not likely to forget the debt he owed to Rawson, whose loyal faith and cool, clear head, had saved him when all looked black.

CHAPTER 28.

The Fourth Form Mean Business.

"B LESS my soul!" said Mr. Bootles, in astonishment.

The master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood had called out "Come in!" in response to a respectful tap at his study door.

The door had opened, disclosing to Mr.

Bootles' astonished eyes about half the Fourth Form crammed in the passage.

The Fistical Four of the Fourth—Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby and Newcome—were in the lead. After them came Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side. Then there were Oswald and Flynn and Rawson, and Van Ryn and Towle and Tubby Muffin, and a dozen more fellows, Classicals and Moderns.

And they were all looking excited.

They marched into Mr. Bootles' study—eight or nine of them, the rest crowding the doorway and the passage outside.

Mr. Bootles blinked at them over his glasses.

"Bless my soul!" he repeated.

The Form-master's study had never held so many of his Form before at once. It was a regular invasion.

"What does this mean?" asked Mr. Bootles, still blinking. "What do all you juniors want here?"

"If you please, sir, we're a deputation," said Jimmy Silver, speaking up as captain of the Fourth.

"Representing both sides of Rookwood, sir—Modern and Classical," said Tommy Dodd.

"Classical and Modern you mean," remarked Lovell.

"I mean Modern and Classical!" said Tommy Dodd warmly.

"Look here, Tommy Dodd——"

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Ahem!" said Mr. Bootles.

Tommy Dodd and Lovell, with a mutual glare, ceased to debate the question of precedence. Mr. Bootles' study, they realised, was not the right place for such a debate, important as the question was.

"Shut up, you two!" said Raby. "Mr. Bootles is waiting."

"Well, we hear that Beaumont and Mornington have been expelled for their dirty trick," went on Lovell.

Mr. Bootles nodded.

"Both have been expelled from Rookwood," he said. "Beaumont has already left the school. Mornington will follow."

"That's the point, sir," said Lovell.

"We saw Beaumont go—and a good riddance to him! But Mornington hasn't gone."

"And we want to see the last of him!" said Rawson.

"Hear, hear!"

"They were sacked yesterday for their dirty trick," resumed Lovell. "Beaumont

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left yesterday afternoon. Mornington didn't. Well, we expected to find that he had gone this morning. But this morning he hadn't gone. His box is still in the dormitory and his things are still in his study. We haven't seen him about, but we know he's still in the school."

"Shame!" came a howl from the passage.

"Under the circumstances, sir, we've come to you as a deputation," said Lovell. "We want Mornington to go. The Fourth of Rookwood, sir, can't stand him."

"Never!"

"We don't think it's possible that the Head would think of allowing him to stay, after what he's done. But he hasn't gone, and it's twenty-four hours since he was found out. Why hasn't he gone, sir?"

"That's the question, sir," said Tommy Dodd. "The Fourth Form feel that they have a right to know, sir."

"Sure, if he stays here, we'll slaughter him intirely," said Flynn.

"We'll scalp him!" roared the deputation from the passage.

Mr. Bootles waved his hand.

"Silence, please!"

"Shut up!" said Jimmy Silver. "Silence for Mr. Bootles!"

The Fourth Form master coughed.

"Mornington is under sentence of expulsion. His accomplice left Rookwood yesterday, never to return. Mornington has not yet gone, but he will be removed from the school as soon as possible."

"Why not at once, sir?" asked Lovell.

"Because he is ill."

"Wha-a-at?"

"The wretched boy appears to have suffered from the shock of the discovery, and the punishment that followed," said Mr. Bootles. "He fell in a faint in the Head's study, and was removed to the sanatorium. The school doctor is now in attendance upon him. Mornington appears to be suffering from a nervous breakdown. In such a state he cannot leave the school."

"Oh!"

"As soon as he is sufficiently recovered for removal he will be taken away from Rookwood," said Mr. Bootles. "You may rest assured of that. Such an unmitigated young rascal could never be allowed to remain here."

The juniors looked at one another.

They knew Mornington—they know the cunning, unscrupulous, and audacious nature of the cad of the Fourth.

There was only one thought in the minds of Jimmy Silver & Co. The dandy of the Fourth, in spite of the discovery of his rascality, in spite of the sentence of expulsion, hoped yet to escape the degradation of being kicked out of Rookwood. His illness was one more of his many tricks.

There was a murmur from the deputation, a murmur of disgust and indignation.

Mr. Bootles waved his hand to the door. The deputation, with grim looks, filed out of the room at last.

CHAPTER 29.

"Fire!"

"WHAT the merry dickens—" murmured Jimmy Silver.

The captain of the Fourth sat up in bed in the Fourth-Form dormitory.

It was past midnight.

Jimmy Silver was usually a sound sleeper, and he wondered what had awakened him as he sat up and blinked about him.

Then he realised in an instant what it was.

The dormitory windows were illuminated by a bright glare—a ruddy light which became brighter every second. Rookwood was on fire!

Jimmy Silver was out of bed with a jump.

"What's the row?"

"What's that?"

"Fire!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, crumbs!"

The word was enough. A group of fellows in the dormitory were out of bed in a twinkling, and most of them rushing to the window.

The door opened.

"Are you awake, my boys?" It was Mr. Bootles' voice. "Yes, I see you are! Do not be alarmed! Part of the school appears to be on fire."

"We're not alarmed, sir," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

"Dress yourselves quickly, and come downstairs," said Mr. Bootles. "There is probably no danger, but we must take reasonable precautions."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Bootles moved away, and the juniors proceeded to dress themselves, some of the clothes getting mixed in the hurry.

"Who's got my jacket?" demanded Higgs in a sulphurous voice. "What silly idiot has got my jacket?"

"The same silly idiot who's got my socks, very likely!" said Townsend savagely.

"Where's my blessed waistcoat?"

"What thumpin' ass has collared my trucks?"

"What the dickens does it matter?" said Jimmy Silver. "We're not going to be presented at Court, are we? Buck up, and don't jaw!"

Sharp and shrill a whistle rang out, the signal of the school fire-brigade. Jimmy Silver, half-dressed, rushed to the door, and tore downstairs, with a crowd after him. Below, there was already a crowd—juniors and seniors and masters mingled.

The words ran from mouth to mouth:

"It's the Head's house!"

"It's on fire!"

There was a rush out of doors.

In the burning building were Dr. Chisholm and his wife and their nine-year-old daughter, Dolly. Little Miss Dolly—she was there! Jimmy Silver's heart turned sick at the thought.

A crowd rushed towards the House, tramping through the gardens. Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, was rapping out orders to the school firemen. Mr. Bootles tried in vain to keep the juniors indoors.

Lovell caught Jimmy Silver by the arm in the quad.

"What about Morny?" he muttered.

"Hang Morny!"

"He's in the sanny, you know. It may catch—"

Jimmy halted.

"Quiet, please!" It was Mr. Manders' voice. "Everyone is safe; all are out of doors. Quiet, please."

Jimmy drew a sobbing breath.

"Thank Heaven! Miss Dolly's safe, then! I'll get Morny out, Lovell; the cad may not be able to get out, if he's not spoofing."

Jimmy Silver dashed away to the sanatorium. But when he reached the ward, he found the beds there empty. Mornington was already out. Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders as he saw the turned-back bed, and noted that the invalid's clothes were gone. The alarm had been sufficient to cause the invalid to recover all of a sudden, and Mornington was probably one of the first up.

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Jimmy left the sanatorium again. Against the sky there was a brighter glare; the flames were bursting from the windows of the Head's house.

CHAPTER 30.

The Hero!

"MISS Dolly!"
 "Where's Miss Dolly?"
 It was a cry of alarm in the crowd of Rookwood fellows. Mrs. Chisholm had been seen—the Head had been seen. Dr. Chisholm had carried his wife, fainting, across to Mr. Manders' house on the Modern side, out of all danger. But where was Miss Dolly?

Lovell rushed up to Mr. Manders, and caught him by the sleeve, hardly aware of what he was doing in his excitement.

"You said they were all out, sir! Where's Miss Dolly?"

Mr. Manders was very white.

"I thought so—I certainly thought so. But—but—"

"Is she in there?"

"I fear so."

Lovell groaned.

The Head's house was a raging furnace. The school fire-brigade were at work, pumping sheets of water upon the flames. But the water sizzled into the fiery furnace with little effect. It was evident that the building would be gutted.

Jimmy Silver came up breathlessly.

"Morry's not there," he said. "He had got out—What's the matter, Lovell?" He stared at his chum's ghastly face.

Lovell pointed to the burning house.

"Miss Dolly!" he muttered.

Jimmy turned white.

"Manders said—"

"He was mistaken. The Head brought Mrs. Chisholm out; Miss Dolly's still there."

"Good heavens!"

Jimmy gazed in horror at the flaming house. Miss Dolly was there—there, in that fierce furnace—overcome by the smoke, perhaps, for not a cry had been heard. It seemed to Jimmy Silver that a hand of ice gripped his heart. He pulled himself together, and rushed towards the house. Bulkeley caught him by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Out of the way, you young fool!"

"She's there!"

"What—who—"

"Miss Dolly!"

"My daughter!" It was the Head's voice. "Let me pass, Mr. Bootles! Let me pass, I say! My child is there!"

"Let go, Bulkeley!" yelled Jimmy Silver furiously. "I'm going in, I tell you! Let me go, hang you!"

The Sixth-Former held him fast.

"You're not going in! Stand back! This is a job for me!"

"Bulkeley," shouted Mr. Bootles, "stay where you are! There is no hope! It is certain death!"

"I must try, sir!" panted Bulkeley.

"Dr. Chisholm—"

The Head groaned.

"Stay, Bulkeley! You shall not sacrifice your life! I order you to stay! There is no hope. Heaven have mercy!"

"I will try, sir!"

"Stop! I command you!"

Bulkeley hesitated. He still held Jimmy Silver. The junior would have rushed in, hardly conscious of danger. It was true that there was no hope. The stairs had been heard to fall, with a fearful crash and a myriad of rising sparks. It was death to enter, and there was no chance of reaching the girl's room. Neville and Knowles had rushed away for a ladder. Dr. Chisholm covered his face with his hands.

"You're sure she's there, sir?" muttered Bulkeley.

"I called her; she followed me," said the Head in a trembling voice. "My wife had fainted; I was carrying her. I thought Dolly was close behind me. The smoke must have overcome her. Heaven be merciful!"

"The ladder!" yelled Lovell. "Buck up with the ladder!"

Jimmy Silver ground his teeth.

"You fool, Bulkeley! Let me go! I tell you I'm going in!"

Bulkeley shook his head, and held him. It was death, and the sacrifice would have been useless.

"Look!" yelled Oswald suddenly.

He pointed to a window.

The glass, cracked by the heat, had fallen out. Behind the blackened framework of the window a smoke-grimed face appeared. Blackened as it was, the juniors knew it.

"Morrington!"

"Morrington!" cried the Head. "What is he doing there?"

"He was in the sanatorium!" gasped Mr. Bootles. "In Heaven's name, how did he come in the Head's house?"

All eyes were upon the window, fascinated. It was almost the only spot in the façade where the flames were not rolling and biting. Mornington's blackened face looked down on the sea of faces, and his blackened lips curved in the sneering, ironical smile the Rookwood juniors knew so well. What was he doing there? The Rookwood fellows soon knew.

Neville and Knowles rushed the ladder towards the window. Whatever Mornington was doing in the Head's house, he had to be saved.

"Climb out on the sill!" shouted Bulkeley.

Mornington did not climb out on the sill. He was smashing out the sashes with desperate hands, as if to make a larger passage. Then he disappeared for a moment from view.

The hearts below hardly beat.

There was a buzz, deepening to a roar, as Mornington appeared by the window. He had something in his arms—a bundle rolled in a blanket. He pushed it through the window, and held it while the ladder was planted below. From the rolled blanket a tress of golden hair escaped. Then they knew!

"Miss Dolly!"

Jimmy Silver breathed the words. Dr. Chisholm gazed at the blackened face of the expelled junior, and at the bundle he held by main strength on the sill, out of the rolling smoke and licking flame.

"My daughter!"

The ladder crashed on the wall. Bulkeley rushed up it, his feet seeming scarcely to touch the rungs.

Mornington grinned down at him through the smoke. In that fearful moment he was the same Mornington as of old—cool, mocking, reckless.

"Take her, Bulkeley. She's not hurt—only fainted!"

Bulkeley, without a word, took the inensible girl in his strong arms. He descended the ladder with her carefully.

Miss Dolly was passed into her father's arms, and his tears fell upon the calm, unconscious face, smoke-grimed but unhurt. Not a hair of her head had been harmed. And it was Mornington, the cad of Rookwood, the blackguard, the expelled rascal, who had saved her!

Could he save himself?

As Bulkeley ascended the ladder again, there came a gust of smoke and flame from the window where Mornington stood, and for an instant he was hidden from sight. A groan went up. All Mornington's faults, all his rascality, all his treachery, were forgotten then. At that hour he was the hero who had saved a child from a fearful death in the fiery flames, and risked, perhaps lost, his own life in doing it. There was a gasp of relief as he was seen again. He was on the sill, clinging blindly, his clothes charred and singed by the flames, blind with pain, with smoke, at the end of his strength.

But Bulkeley was rushing to his aid. The Rookwood captain's strong grasp closed upon him even as his hold was relaxing. In Bulkeley's strong arms he was brought down the ladder. And as Bulkeley landed on firm earth there was a shout of warning: "Stand clear!"

The crowd surged back. The wall was falling inwards, the ladder with it. The escape had been terribly narrow.

Bulkeley laid the junior on the ground. His eyes had closed, but they opened again, and Mornington looked round him wildly. His face was burned, his hands burnt, his hair was almost gone, his eyelashes were gone. He was hurt—terribly hurt—and he knew it.

"Morny!" panted Jimmy Silver, with tears in his eyes. Jimmy had more than forgiven his old enemy now.

Mornington grinned—a twisted, blackened grin.

"Hallo! You knew I was spoofin' in the sanatorium. I shan't be spoofin' this time, by gad—what? I wonder if this is the last lap? Well, I shall be game to the finish, you can bet on that! Is she safe?"

"My dear, dear lad!" The Head bent over the blackened dandy of the Fourth—not much of a dandy now. "My brave, noble lad! She is safe, and you have saved her from a fearful death! Heaven bless you, Mornington!"

"All serene, sir," said Mornington coolly. And then Mornington, hard as he was, fainted.

Rookwood was in a buzz of excitement the next day.

The Head's house was a blackened ruin. But few heeded that. No lives had been lost. The grim tragedy that might have

cast its gloom over the school had been averted.

And Mornington?

Miss Dolly had been saved. She was not hurt, apart from the shock. Mornington had found her overcome by smoke, and, with strange coolness in the hour of fearful peril, he had wrapped her carefully in blankets before he moved her, and then he had fought his way through flame and smoke to the window.

He had entered the burning house even before the Head had emerged from it. No one had noticed him then. Perhaps some thought had been in his mind of rendering prompt assistance, and thus improving his chances of eluding the sentence of expulsion. He had found her and saved her, but the flames he had so carefully protected her from had taken their vengeance upon him. Mornington of the Fourth lay in the sanatorium, a "spoofer" no longer, but terribly ill, tora with pain, and enduring his pain with grim, cool stoicism.

There was no mention of expulsion for Mornington. Jimmy Silver, whom he had so cruelly wronged, was the first to ask the Head if Mornington might be allowed to remain. And the Head's answer that Mornington was pardoned, more than pardoned, gave satisfaction to all the school.

When Mornington recovered, he was able

to take his old place in the Fourth Form at Rookwood, and the Fourth were content to know it. Jimmy Silver was ready to give him the hand of fellowship. It was long before the dandy of the Fourth was destined to rise from the bed of illness. But as soon as he was able to see visitors, the Fourth-Formers were eager to pay him visits, and Jimmy Silver was the first.

A scarred face grinned at Jimmy from the white bed.

"Don't I look a picture?" said Mornington. "But the doctor says it will go in time. By gad, I shouldn't like to keep a chivvy like this! And I'm not going to be sacked, after all!"

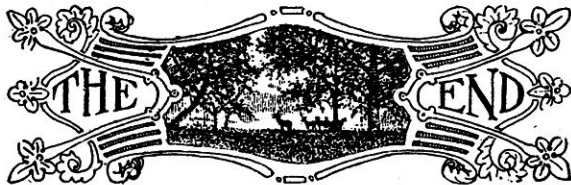
"And I'm jolly glad of it!" said Jimmy.

"I'm goin' to be a thorn in your side still!" chuckled Mornington. "When I'm back in the Form I'm goin' to give you a tussle, Jimmy Silver. I'm goin' to be captain of the Fourth yet!"

"More power to your elbow!" said Jimmy, laughing.

"But there's only one thing I'll say," said Mornington, after a pause. "I've been doin' a lot of thinkin' while I've been lyin' here. I'm sorry I played that dirty trick on you—real sorry—and there's my fist on it, if you like to take it!"

And Jimmy Silver took it, with all his heart.



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