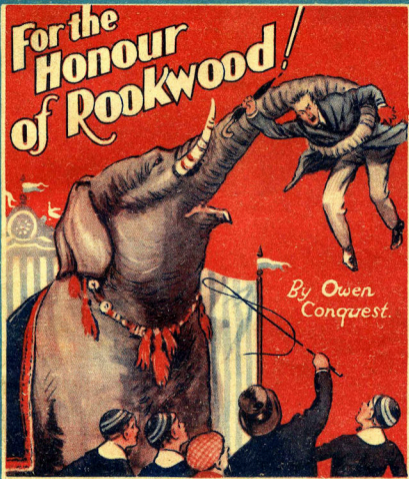


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of Rookwood!



By Owen
Conquest.

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CHAPTER 1.

A Queer Beginning!

REMEMBER me to your Cousin Clarence."

"Yes, uncle!"

"And look after yourself, my boy. Don't go getting into any trouble on the way."

"No, uncle!"

James Montgomery Babbington, a mild-looking youth with large spectacles, leaned out of the carriage window at the London railway terminus. In his pocket was a first-class ticket to Coombe. On the platform stood a stout gentleman who closely resembled him—his uncle, Mr. Montgomery Babbington.

"Well, good-bye, my boy," said Mr. Babbington.

"Good-bye, uncle!"

"Don't forget to go and see the headmaster as soon as you arrive."

"Yes, uncle."

"Mind you don't lose your luggage."

"No, uncle!"

"Bless the boy!" cried the old gentleman testily. "Can't you say anything except 'Yes, uncle' and 'No, uncle'?"

"Yes, uncle—I mean, no, uncle."

Mr. Babbington frowned, while James Montgomery looked almost ready to cry.

Just then the guard blew his whistle, and the train began to move off.

"Well, good-bye, my boy!"

"Good-bye, uncle!"

And James Montgomery was on his way to school.

Master Babbington had spent the whole of his life up to this time in India, and was now being sent to an English Public school, after a short stay in the care of his uncle. Master Babbington knew nothing about the customs of an English Public school, and was looking forward with no little

trepidation to his first introduction to school life in England.

His one hope was his cousin, Clarence Cuffy, who was already at Rookwood—for Master Babbington was bound for Rookwood.

Babbington felt that his Cousin Clarence would be able to put him up to all the dodges and the customs of a Public school, and in every way make his life more bearable until he settled down.

Babbington had never seen his Cousin Clarence. If he had, perhaps he would not have been quite so hopeful as to the help he would receive from that worthy.

He settled down, rather anxious in mind, to while away the journey by reading, and as the miles flew by he became more tranquil.

At last the train slowed down, and James Montgomery Babbington heard the porters shouting:

"Latham Junction! Change here for Coombe!"

Gathering his things together, Babbington jumped from the carriage and sought out the local train which was to take him to Coombe.

A comparatively short journey landed him at the little town, and as the train drew up to the platform he looked out of the window in the hope of seeing his Cousin Clarence on the platform.

Three boys, obviously schoolboys, were on the platform, but none of them was Clarence.

"Oh dear!"

Somewhat dismayed, James Montgomery gathered up his bags, and the umbrella with which his uncle had thoughtfully provided him, owing to the fact that he was wearing a top-hat for the first time, and stepped out on to the platform.

The three youths, who were wearing green caps, espied him at once, and one of them came forward politely.

"Master Babbington, I think?" he said.

"Yes," said Babbington.

"James Montgomery Babbington?" continued the green-capped youth.

"That's my name."

"Good! Then come with us."

"Did you come to meet me?" inquired Babbington timidly. "It is very kind of you, I am sure."

"Very kind of us," said the green-capped youth solemnly.

He had a cheerful face, rather freckled, and a permanent twinkle in his eye, but his manners were beautiful.

"Allow me to present myself and my friends. My name is Pankley. This is Putter, Mr. Babbington. This is Poole, Mr. Babbington."

"Pip-pip-pleased to meet you!" said Babbington, with a blush.

And Messrs. Putter and Poole grinned. Giving up his ticket, Babbington passed through the barrier with his new friends. Outside was the station cab, an ancient vehicle as the weary-looking quadruped between the shafts.

"I—had better have a cab for my luggage, I suppose?" Babbington remarked.

"Send your luggage by the cab and we will walk," said Pankley.

The flustered Babbington hurriedly spoke to the cabman, and a half-crown changed hands.

The four juniors then walked rapidly through the old High Street of Coombe Village, Babbington trotting along by the side of his companions with his head rather in a whirl. The three youths seemed to have quite taken possession of him, and were hurrying along as though they had not a moment to spare.

"Is there any hurry?" stammered Babbington, finding himself falling behind somewhat.

"Yes, come on! We must get a move on," replied Pankley, without turning his head. "They might be after us at any moment."

"What!" exclaimed Babbington, staring.

"I mean," said Pankley hastily, "we must—hem—get in before call-over. Come along!"

Babbington duly came along, somewhat puzzled by an ill-suppressed guffaw which came from Pankley's two friends.

For half a mile or more the four juniors kept up a smart pace. Then Pankley slowed down a bit. A large red-brick building surrounded by a high wall came into view about a quarter of a mile away. It was, as a matter of fact, Bagshot School, and Pankley & Co., who were the shining lights in the Fourth Form of this well-known scholastic institution, were feeling pretty safe now. But they had slowed down too early.

From a field by the side of the lane came a sudden yell.

"There they are!"

"After them!"

"Catch the bounders!"

"Give 'em socks!"

Pankley & Co. gave a start.

"By Jove, they are after us!" cried Pankley hastily.

He grasped the startled Babbington by one arm, while Putter took the other.

"Come on, kid!" exclaimed Pankley, breaking into a sharp trot.

Through a gap in the hedge on the side of the lane appeared half a dozen excited-looking youths in Etons, and there was an angry chorus of shouts, and what to the astonished Babbington sounded uncommonly like threats.

"They've got him!"

"After the bounders!"

"What—what does this mean?" stammered Babbington.

"Come on!" cried Pankley excitedly.

"But—but—"

"Never mind butting! Put it on!" gasped Putter. "If they catch us they will scalp us!"

"Oh dear!"

Babbington ran desperately, the perspiration streaming down his face, his spectacles awry on his nose.

The demeanour of his companions left no doubt in his mind that it was urgently necessary to escape the pursuing mob.

Babbington had no wish to be scalped,

whatever that process might involve. He fairly bounded over the ground.

The leaders of the pursuit, however, were getting nearer, and as Babbington raced towards the iron gate set in the high brick wall surrounding Bagshot School, he realised that it was going to be a near thing. Almost as he reached the gate he felt a clutching hand behind him, and a grasp was made upon the tail of his coat.

"Goodness gracious!" he gasped. "They have got us!"

"Come on!" roared Pankley, wrenching him along, while the clutching hand tightened its grasp.

Through the gate they swept, Pankley and Putter still grasping the unfortunate Babbington, while the clutching hand retained his coat-tails, until with a rending sound they parted suddenly.

Through the gate sprinted Babbington and his captors, and to the former's relief the pursuit ceased. Evidently the fellows behind did not care to venture into the courtyard, where a number of boys were walking or punting a footer about in a desultory way.

"Done 'em!" chuckled Pankley. "Good egg!"

"But—but—" stammered Babbington, mopping his brow and putting his spectacles straight. "What! Where? Why?"

"That's all right, kid!" said Pankley. "We've done 'em!"

"Yes, but—but my tail——" gasped Babbington.

"Never mind! Those rotters won't come in here. There are too many chaps about." And, turning round, Pankley waved his hand cheerily to the crowd of hot, dusty, and, apparently, indignant youths clustered on the outside of the gate.

"You rotter, Pankley!" came in a howl from the gate. "Just you wait!"

Pankley chuckled.

"Keep your hair on, Jimmy!" he howled. "We have only borrowed him. You can have him back soon, if you come and ask nicely."

Babbington turned amazed and helpless glances from Pankley and his chums to the group at the gate, but before he could frame the questions that arose to his lips, he was seized again and marched on, while a howl of rage rose from the gates.

Into the porch of the big, red-brick building Babbington was marched, with many curious and amazed glances turned upon him as he went.

"What have you got there, Pankley?" shouted a tall boy in a tone of authority.

"It's all right, Mason," said Pankley hurriedly. "Just a little joke," and hastened on down a narrow passage leading off from the main corridor.

Putter and Poole exchanged quick glances with their chief.

"Where?" said Putter.

"In here," replied Pankley quickly, opening a door at the end of the narrow passage. "In you go, Babbington.

"But—but what—"

"It's all right. You must go in here for a bit."

"But I can't! Why? What's this for?" panted Babbington, as he gazed into what appeared to be a coal-cupboard. "I don't see—I don't understand!"

"You don't have to," said Pankley, giving the astenished Babbington a gentle push which sent him forward into the darkness of the coal-cupboard.

The next minute the door was slammed and there was the sound of the key being turned in the lock. In the dim light of the coal-cupboard, Babbington gazed around him in a state of mind which was almost idiotic. Here he was after a hectic chase on a warm day, minus one of his coat-tails, and locked in a coal-cupboard—a striking beginning to the school career to which he had been looking forward with so many misgivings!

"Good gracious!" murmured the dazed youth. "What can be the meaning of this?"

He removed his spectacles, wiped them with his handkerchief, and re-

placed them on his nose. He looked round him again. Yes, undoubtedly he was in a coal-cupboard! He shook his head. It was more than he could fathom.

"So this," he murmured to himself, "is Rookwood!"

CHAPTER 2.

Too Late!

"O H, my hat!"

Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, the three leading lights of the Modern House at Rookwood, were strolling along the Coombe Road, with a fine afternoon before them and at peace with all the world, when Tommy Dodd made that exclamation.

The three Tommies, as the trio were called, were intending to do a little shopping preparatory to putting in some footer practice on their return. They were three famous fighting men, but on this bright afternoon nothing was further from their thoughts than fighting of any description.

The sight, however, of an object which suddenly burst upon their view as they were half-way down the road to Coombe, altered all this. The object in question was the figure of a youth in Etons, hopping along painfully on one leg, and with a large paper dunce's cap on his head.

The three Tommies stopped dead and stared at the oncoming figure.

"What the dickens!" said Tommy Dodd.

"What on earth!" exclaimed Cook.

"Sure, and the spalpeen must be dotty entirely!" cried Tommy Doyle, who hailed from the Emerald Isle.

The figure hopped painfully down the road towards them as the three Tommies stared with all their eyes.

"My hat, I believe it's that priceless ass, Cuffy!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

"That duffer!"

"That gosssoon!"

"He's been in trouble again!" groaned Tommy Dodd.

Clarence Cuffy of the Fourth Form at Rookwood constituted one of the principal trials of life for Tommy Dodd. Cuffy was every sort of an ass and was always getting into hopeless trouble.

He was as green as grass and his leg could be pulled with impunity by an infant in arms. Although he had been some time in Rookwood and Tommy Dodd had done his best to cure him of his simplicity by the liberal application of a cricket stump, Clarence Cuffy was still a greenhorn.

Owing to Tommy Dodd being a distant relation of the duffer of Rookwood, Tommy was supposed to keep a fatherly eye upon Clarence's career at Rookwood. Tommy had heroically endeavoured to do so, but had practically abandoned the task in despair.

Now, when he saw the forlorn figure of Clarence Cuffy hopping towards him with a ridiculous dunce's cap perched upon his perspiring brow, Tommy Dodd gave a deep groan.

"The dummy!" he gasped. "The freak! The hopeless jabberwock! He's been and got himself into a fix as usual. It's really the limit!" He walked up to the unfortunate Clarence and gave him a deadly glare. "Cuffy, what's happened, you freak?"

"My dear Thomas!"

"You burbling lunatic!"

"My dear Thomas, I assure you," gasped Clarence, "I have had a terrible time."

"Faith, and so it seems!" grinned Tommy Doyle.

"What happened?" growled Tommy Dodd.

"Perhaps you would please release me, my dear Thomas," gasped Clarence. "My leg is tied and my hands are tied."

"I can see that," growled Tommy Dodd, producing a knife and cutting the cords which bound Clarence's hands and leg. "Precious ass you are to get

yourself into a fix like this! There you are!"

"Ow! Yow! You have cut me, my dear Thomas!"

"Good thing, too!" growled Tommy Dodd. "Now, what do you mean by it, Cuffy?"

"My dear Thomas, it was not my fault at all," said Cuffy pathetically. "I was merely proceeding to the station to meet my cousin, Babbington."

"Your what?" exclaimed Dodd, staring.

"My cousin, Thomas—my cousin—James Montgomery Babbington."

"What!" shrieked Tommy Dodd. "Do you mean to say you have got a cousin coming to Rookwood?"

"Yes, my dear Thomas."

"Great pip, another of 'em!" exclaimed Tommy Cook.

"The saints preserve us!" groaned Tommy Doyle.

"My cousin, Babbington, was coming to Rookwood to-day," continued Clarence Cuffy, with a reproachful look. "He is from India, and has never been to school before. I thought it would be only polite to go and meet him, when those horrid Bagshot fellows—"

"Horrid fellows. Did you ever hear anything like it?" exclaimed Tommy Dodd disgustedly. "Do you mean Pankley & Co., you—you blithering idiot?"

"Yes, my dear Thomas, it was Pankley and his friends Putter and Poole. They tied me up like this."

"And you let them!" growled Tommy Dodd.

"Really, my dear Thomas, I could not prevent it, otherwise I should certainly have endeavoured to do so."

Tommy Dodd gave a snort.

"You did not tell them about your cousin coming, I suppose?"

"Certainly, my dear Thomas!"

"What! You—you hopeless ass! They will be getting hold of him next!"

"Good gracious, I never thought of that! Dō you really think so, Thomas?"

Tommy Dodd snorted again, more emphatically than before.

"Of course I do, you idiot! Which way did they go?"

"They went off towards Coombe after I had told them I was going to meet my cousin!"

"How long ago was that?" demanded Tommy Cook.

"About twenty minutes ago, my dear fellow!"

"Of course they have gone to meet him, and they will rag him bald-headed!" hooted Tommy Dodd. "Just like you, you ass! Always letting Rookwood down!"

"My dear Thomas!"

"Oh seat!" said Tommy Dodd contemptuously. "You are enough to drive a fellow dotty. Come on, you chaps, if we run for it we may be in time to catch Pankley & Co. yet."

Leaving Cuffy to make the best of his way back to Rookwood, the three Tommies dashed off at top speed.

There was a shout from behind as they did so.

"Hi, Tommy, whither away so fast?"

Tommy Dodd looked round to see four juniors wearing Rookwood caps approaching from the direction of the school. They were no other than Jimmy Silver, junior captain of Rookwood, and his three inseparable chums, Raby, Lovell, and Newcome.

"Come on, Jimmy!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Pankley & Co. are up to their tricks again. This way!"

"What-ho!" yelled back Jimmy, and the four newcomers broke into a run.

"We shall be too late!" gasped Tommy Dodd, who had rapidly explained the situation to Jimmy Silver as they raced along. The train was in some time ago. I expect Pankley & Co. have got that Babbington merchant already."

"I'll dash in and inquire!" said Jimmy, as they arrived at the station.

In twenty seconds he was back.

"That's right! They met him all serene and have gone off towards Bag-

shot. If we hurry up we may just catch them."

Fortunately, Jimmy Silver & Co. and Tommy Dodd & Co. were among the keenest sportsmen at Rookwood and always kept themselves fit and in good training. They raced on through the old High Street of Coombe as if on the cinder path, and a little way up the road through the village took to the fields to make a short cut.

"There they are!" shouted Tommy Dodd. "Put it on, chaps!"

The seven juniors put on a spurt, although Raby and Tommy Doyle were beginning to show signs of flagging, not being quite such expert runners as their chums.

But the Bagshot fellows, against whom Rookwood waged a deadly, if good-natured warfare, had espied the enemy, and with the top-hatted figure of Babbington in their midst were now making a dash for the gates of Bagshot.

The chase ended at the very gates with one of James Montgomery's coat-tails in the grasp of Jimmy Silver.

Panting and furious the seven juniors drew up at the tall gates, baffled.

"Faith, and let's make a dash in after them!" growled Tommy Doyle.

But Jimmy Silver, the sagacious "Uncle James" of Rookwood, shook his head.

"No use," he said tersely. "Look at all the fellows in the playground! Pankley would whistle them up in a moment and they would snatch us bald-headed. We don't want to hop back to Rookwood like that ass, Cuffy."

"Well, what are we to do?" growled Tommy Dodd.

"No use hanging round here," said Jimmy Silver. "Let's sit down under the hedge opposite and have a council of war."

The panting and overheated juniors acted upon the excellent advice of the junior captain of Rookwood, and the council of war was soon in full swing.

CHAPTER 3.

Rough on Rookwood!

THE Rookwood juniors remained in earnest consultation for more than ten minutes, during which time alternative methods of attack were discussed without any decision being arrived at.

Then there was a shout from just within the Bagshot gates, and looking up the Rookwooders beheld Pankley & Co. grinning, as Tommy Dodd put it bitterly, all over their dials.

"Hallo, you Rookwood bounders, what are you doing there?" called out Pankley. "Plotting mischief?"

"Come out of your old casual ward and we'll soon show you!" answered Tommy Dodd.

"You come in and see what you will get," cried Pankley.

"Rats! What have you done with our new chap?" said Jimmy Silver severely. "We want him and mean to have him."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pankley & Co., feeling thoroughly pleased with themselves. "What will you give us for him?"

"Nothing," said Tommy Dodd. "We don't want him really, but he is a Rookwood chap, or intended to be one, and he is jolly well coming to Rookwood."

"We were thinking of keeping him as a mascot," chuckled Pankley. "He's a beauty!"

"Probably a fearful ass," growled Tommy Dodd, "but you will have to give him up. Do you think you could keep a Rookwood chap in a mouldy old casual ward all night?"

"We could if we liked, but we are not going to," said Pankley. "I'll tell you what though: We'll let one of you come in to fetch him away—but only one."

The Rookwooders looked at each other for a moment in silence.

"Looks like a trap!" said Jimmy Silver slowly.

"Is that honest Injun, Pankley?" called out Tommy Dodd.

"Honest Injun! If one of you comes in alone you can have your new freak. The rest of you can wait for him at the gate."

"Well, I'll go!" said Tommy Dodd. "After all, this new freak is Clarence Cuffy's cousin."

"And you are supposed to be his keeper!" grinned Lovell.

"Oh, rats!" said Tommy Dodd crossly. "Well, anyway, I suppose I'll have to go."

"Are you coming, Tommy?" grinned Pankley.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pankley & Co.

"What's the joke, you cackling idiots?" said Tommy Dodd suspiciously.

"Nothing."

"No ragging."

"No, you won't be hurt this time. We'll look after you," chuckled Pankley. "You other chaps can wait here for Dodd. You will see him again together with your precious new freak in a minute or two."

Tommy Dodd crossed the road and entered the gates of Bagshot and then walked off with Pankley & Co. across the playground towards the big red-brick school.

"Pankley's up to some game or other," said Jimmy Silver anxiously, "but he is straight enough. He won't rag Tommy under a flag of truce."

"Faith, and I hope not," said Tommy Doyle. "If he does, we'll give the spalpeen fits."

"Oh, Tommy Dodd will be all right," said Jimmy Silver. "We must just wait."

Five minutes passed, during which the six juniors clustered round the Bagshot gates like so many Peris outside the gates of Paradise.

At the end of that time a commotion of some sort was observable on the far side of the playground.

"Hallo, there's something on!" cried Jimmy Silver, shading his eyes with his hand. "Over there by the big doorway."

There was certainly something on. Shouts of laughter came from a hilarious group of Bagshot fellows, and from all sides fellows came running to see what was up.

The juniors at the gates fixed their eyes on the scene of the disturbance as the crowd moved slowly down in their direction.

"It is Tommy Dodd," gasped Jimmy Silver at last. "He is wheeling something!"

"Wheeling something?" said Lovell. "Oh rot!"

"He is, I tell you," said Jimmy Silver, straining his eyes. "It's a wheelbarrow, with something in it."

"There's a fellow in it," said Tommy Cook suddenly; "a duffer in a top hat."

"It's the new chap!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "Of course."

"That's it, and they are making Tommy wheel him down in a wheelbarrow."

"The bounders! The blighters! The villains!"

The unfortunate Tommy Dodd was now seen approaching, pushing a wheelbarrow on which was seated the forlorn figure of James Montgomery Babbington. The new boy's top hat was considerably the worse for wear, and his umbrella, looking very shabby, was still under his left arm. His face was grimed with coal dust and perspiration, and one tail was missing from his overcoat.

James Montgomery Babbington, at that moment, looked far more like a scarecrow than like a boy on his first day at a Public school.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What price Rookwood now?"

A yelling crowd of hilarious Bagshot juniors surrounded the little procession.

Tommy Dodd, with a pink and furious face, pushed the barrow along painfully. Babbington was heavy, but the Bagshot fellows would not let him get down.

This was Pankley's idea—the only terms on which he would let Tommy Dodd recover the kidnapped junior.

The chortles of Bagshot were loud and long. While Tommy Dodd scowled like a demon in a pantomime, the Bagshot fellows chortled; and the more Tommy scowled the more they chortled.

Thus the little procession came to the gates.

Here Tommy Dodd was at length permitted to put down his load, and the unfortunate Babbington was delivered at last into the arms of his rightful schoolfellows.

"The awful rotters!"

"What a nerve!"

Wrathful and shamefaced, the little band of Rookwood juniors could do nothing but shake their fists at the hilarious Bagshot bounders; and their feelings as they almost crawled back to Rookwood with the rescued Babbington in their midst, were too deep for words.

"This has done it!" groaned Jimmy Silver at last. "What will the fellows at Rookwood say when they hear about it? Those Bagshot bounders will never let us hear the last of it."

"Something has got to be done," hissed Tommy Dodd between his clenched teeth. "We have got to get our own back on them or bust a boiler!"

"We'll do it!" said Uncle James, a determined look coming into his blue eyes. "We'll do it! The honour of Rookwood is at stake! I don't know how yet, but we must think something out. It's up to us to give the Bagshot bounders the kybosh at any cost. What do you chaps say?"

"What-ho!" said the chaps. "Rely on us, Jimmy! Pankley & Co. can look out for squalls!"

CHAPTER 4.

Two of a Kind!

WHEN the little party of Rookwooders, with James Montgomery Babbington in their midst, got back to school, the news of their defeat at the hands of Bagshot quickly spread.

Fellows swarmed round them as they

tramped across the quad, and remarks sarcastic and facetious flew freely.

"Been havin' a pretty rough time, what?" said Adolphus Smythe, the elegant nut of the Shell, gazing at the dusty little party through his eyeglass with considerable disdain. "Let that chap Pankley put it across you again, I suppose? Blessed if I know what Rookwood's coming to, by gad! Ow-w-w!"

Adolphus Smythe had not meant to add this last exclamation. What made him do so was the fact that Lovell and Raby, as if moved by the same spring, grasped him and set him down on the hard quad with a considerable bump.

"Ow! Yow!" gasped Adolphus. "Hands off, you ruffians!"

"If you want us to wipe our boots on you, you've only got to make a few more funny remarks!" hissed Lovell.

"Good gad! Ow! Yow!"

The party passed on, leaving Adolphus gasping, but despite his fate, remarks continued to be frequent and painful, and free.

"You ought to have taken me with you, Jimmy," drawled Valentine Mornington. "That chap Pankley's 'ot stuff, you know. A bit above your weight, evidently."

"Chuck it!" growled Jimmy Silver. "We couldn't help it. We——"

"Some leader—I don't think!" said Peele, of the Modern House, dodging out of the way just in time to escape a lunge from Tommy Dodd's fist.

"By the way, who is your new friend?" remarked Mornington, gazing at Babbington through his eyeglass.

"Oh, he's the new chump!" grunted Tommy Dodd.

"What's his name?" inquired Mornington, eyeing Babbington with languid interest.

"Blowed if I know," growled Tommy Dodd, "or care! He's a freak!"

"Oh!"

"And a fathead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And a silly chump!"

"Quite a character!" grinned Mornington. "I suppose he is going into the Modern House?"

"I s'pose so, worse luck!" snorted Tommy Dodd. "He's that chump Cuffy's cousin."

"Cuffy's cousin?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Two of 'em!"

"What a lark!"

There was a shout of laughter at once. Clarence Cuffy was the joke of Rookwood, and the thought that the new boy was his cousin struck the whole crowd of juniors as comic in the extreme.

During all this extremely personal conversation, Babbington had not spoken a word. He gazed round upon the grinning company in mild surprise.

"Really, my dear fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just like that ass, Cuffy!"

"Really, I fail to see——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Babbington gave it up. Apparently the Rookwooders were determined to see something comic in him, so he wisely subsided. Blinking round through his spectacles, he suddenly espied his Cousin Clarence approaching.

"Here's Cuffy!" sang out Peele, with a grin. "Take him away, Cuffy! I suppose you can find him a spare strait-waistcoat somewhere?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, my dear Peele," said Clarence Cuffy reproachfully. "What will my Cousin Babbington think? He is not used to your rude manners, you know."

Peele turned pink.

"You silly ass!"

"Pray don't take any notice of Peele, my dear fellow!" said Cuffy, holding out his hand to Babbington, who grasped it. "Welcome to Rookwood, my dear fellow! Judging from your appearance you seem to have been having a somewhat rough experience."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Babbington blinked at his cousin, who blinked back. Standing together, the

two cousins looked almost exactly alike, and there was a fresh laugh from the juniors as they noted it.

"Yes, indeed! I really am somewhat confused," said Babbington. "It appears that I was conducted to the wrong scholastic establishment in error. But, however, it is all right now."

Amid a loud cackle of laughter from the hilarious juniors, the two cousins walked off together in the direction of the Modern House.

James Montgomery Babbington had arrived at last, and was safely under the wing of his Rookwood cousin. And, judging by their merriment, the Rookwooders had made up their minds in advance that James Montgomery would add appreciably to the gaiety of the old school.

Cuffy had already been informed that Babbington was to share his study, so it was to that little apartment in the Modern House that he took his cousin. They had been there but a few moments when the door opened and the head of Leggett, of the Modern Fourth, was projected into the study.

Leggett was a somewhat unpleasant and rather unpopular youth, who was always ready to lend money to impecunious juniors at an exorbitant rate of interest. Such fellows, though they undoubtedly have their uses, are usually not popular in Public schools.

Leggett's face wore a grin as he looked into the study.

"Better cut along to see Bulkeley, Cuffy," he remarked, "and quick, too!" Cuffy opened his eyes.

"Bulkeley, my dear Leggett! Why should you say that I should go in search of the estimable captain of the school?"

Leggett's grin became wider.

"Well, he was asking for you, that's all! I should buck up or you will catch it hot, young Cuffy! I am just telling you for your good, you know."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Clarence, quite distressed. "This is the first I have heard of it! I should be most re-

luctant to keep Bulkeley waiting. I will go at once, my dear Leggett. Thank you for telling me."

Leggett nodded, and disappeared.

"I must hasten off, James," said Clarence. "Doubtless Bulkeley will not detain me long, though I have no idea why he wishes to see me."

Clarence bustled off, and almost immediately Leggett's head reappeared round the door.

"Aren't you going down to have your tea?" he said, twisting his features into what he hoped was a pleasant expression. "You're the new fellow, aren't you?"

"Yes. My name is Babbington. I was thinking of waiting for my Cousin Cuffy."

"Oh, I shouldn't do that. He may be a long time. Go down now. I will show you your sitting-room."

Babbington's eyes opened wide.

"My sitting-room! But I thought I was sharing this study with Cuffy."

"Oh, yes!" said Leggett hastily. "But you will have a private sitting-room at first as well. All new boys do."

"Dear me! I was not aware of that!" said Babbington.

"Ah, you have not been to school before," said Leggett, grinning. "Your tea will be in your room now. I will show you the way if you like."

"Thank you so much. I shall be glad of some tea," said Babbington eagerly.

"Follow me, then."

Leggett, trying to look serious, led the new boy down the passage and down the stairs.

Through a baize door they went, and then Leggett boldly led the way into a cosy room furnished as a study. It was empty, but on the polished table was set a tray containing a dainty tea reinforced by a dish of steaming poached eggs.

"Ah, here's your tea! They have put it ready," said Leggett airily; "so you'd better wire in right away!"

Babbington stood on the threshold of

the cosy room and looked round appreciatively.

"Is this really my sitting-room?"

"Well, for the present," said Leggett hastily.

"And my tea?"

"Certainly."

"You will join me, then," said Babbington, advancing rather gingerly into the apartment.

"No, I'm afraid I can't," said Leggett quickly. "I've got some work to do. See you later, perhaps."

"Very well, then. Many thanks for showing me here!"

"Not at all! I hope you will have a good tea," said Leggett, keeping his gravity by a great effort. "Cheerio!" And he tripped out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Once outside, his face broke into a somewhat ill-natured grin, and he executed a sort of war-dance on the mat. Then he took the way he had come, and in five minutes had confided to half the juniors in the Modern House that Babbington, the new fellow, was in Mr. Manders' study, wolfing his Housemaster's tea!

Leggett had, naturally, found out something about Mr. Manders' movements before attempting to carry out this little joke. He was, as a matter of fact, going to the Housemaster's study with some lines, when he heard the telephone-bell ring in the study. Immediately after, Mr. Manders had appeared and hurried out, evidently on his way to see the Head, or one of the other masters.

As Leggett had turned away he had observed the housemaid take Mr. Manders' tea into the study.

He knew, therefore, that the study was occupied only by the tea, so to speak, and this had led him to plan his scheme for pulling the new boy's leg.

He had had to lure Cuffy away by a false message at the beginning, but Leggett's conscience was very elastic in the matter of an untruth or two, and it gave him no qualms to think that he

had sent the innocent Clarence on a wild-goose chase.

The Moderns roared at the idea of James Montgomery Babbington coolly demolishing Mr. Manders' tea. At the same time, some of the more thoughtful fellows wondered rather anxiously how the new junior would get out of the scrape he was in, for Mr. Manders was by no means a pleasant gentleman, and was cordially disliked by most of his House—and, indeed, by Rookwood in general.

His temper was uncertain and crusty at the best of times. When he suffered from indigestion, as he often did—he was, as Tommy Dodd put it, more like a Hun than a Public schoolmaster. What Mr. Manders would say on this occasion when he returned to his study was a question.

CHAPTER 5.

Tea with Mr. Manders

THE experience he had been through on this, his first day at Rookwood, had made James Montgomery Babbington hungry.

He was, therefore, able to do full justice to the excellent tea so thoughtfully provided in Mr. Manders' study. He polished off the poached eggs in no time, and then started on the bread-and-butter and cake, and finished them, too. He was just toying with his third cup of tea and feeling more at peace with the world than he had leisure to feel for some time, when there was a hasty step in the passage outside, and an elderly, angular gentleman, with not too good-tempered a face, came unceremoniously into the study.

Mr. Manders—although James Montgomery Babbington did not know it was Mr. Manders—had returned!

At the sight of Babbington lying comfortably back in his own armchair, with the remnants of the tea on the table before him, Mr. Manders stopped and stared, transfixed. Over his somewhat harsh face came an expression which

the fabled gorgon might have envied. For a moment Mr. Manders seemed bereft of speech.

There was a terrific silence.

Babbington stared back at the elderly gentleman somewhat uneasily. He had a feeling that something was wrong somewhere. Mr. Manders' expression was enough to tell him that. But what exactly was wrong James had no idea. All he knew was that this gentleman with the extraordinary expression had walked straight into his—Babbington's—sitting-room, and, in Babbington's opinion, it was up to him to welcome him politely.

He, therefore, rose from the chair with an ingratiating smile.

"Please come in, sir!" he remarked, in a mild voice. "Won't you sit down?"

Mr. Manders, standing as if glued to the mat, struggling for breath, found his voice at last.

"Boy!" he gasped. "Boy! How dare you! Who—what—who are you?"

Babbington's eyes opened widely. He could see that the gentleman was apparently suffering from a state of suppressed excitement, and, though he had no idea of the cause of it, he sensed that it behoved him to walk warily. At that moment Mr. Manders looked decidedly dangerous.

"P-p-p-please, sir, my name is Babbington," he stuttered—"James Montgomery Babbington!"

"Babbington!" roared Mr. Manders, in a voice which made Babbington jump almost clear of the floor. "Babbington! Then you are the new boy?"

"Yes, sir, please! May I ask who you are?" said Babbington, with a timid smile.

Mr. Manders struggled for breath, and appeared to be on the verge of an apoplectic fit.

"Boy!" he roared. "I am Mr. Manders, your Housemaster! What are you doing here in my study?"

"Your study!" gasped Babbington.

"But—but—but——"

"My study, sir!" raved Mr. Man-

ders. "And my tea, sir! You have eaten it! Don't dare to deny it!"

"But—but—but——"

"Wretched boy, how dare you!"

"I—I—I——"

"Outrageous young ruffian!"

"But—but—but——"

Mr. Manders made a tiger-like spring at the now thoroughly alarmed Babbington, who skipped nimbly back so as to put the chair between him and the angry master.

"You shall pay dearly for this outrage?" gasped Mr. Manders. "Come here, boys?"

James Montgomery Babbington was not too bright, but he was bright enough to see that this was an invitation that it might be unwise to accept. He did not "come here." On the contrary, he edged a little farther away from the infuriated Mr. Manders.

"I—I—I assure you, sir," he managed to gasp, "I had no idea that this was your room!"

"What!" hooted Mr. Manders.

"I—I—I understood that it was my sitting-room."

"Your sitting-room!" raved Mr. Manders. "Ridiculous! Outrageous! I do not believe a word of it!"

He made another step towards Babbington, who dodged away again with amazing speed.

"But—but really, sir, I was told so," stammered James Babbington. "I—I thought it was my tea, too."

"Your tea!" shrieked Mr. Manders. "You thought that your tea would be placed in my study!"

"I did not know it was your study!" wailed Babbington. "I thought—I was told—that is to say, I understood——"

"Stop!" cried Mr. Manders. "I will get to the bottom of this outrage."

"Oh!"

"Before expelling you——"

"Ow!"

"I shall expect you to tell me exactly what happened."

Mr. Manders was more master of him-

self now, but his frowning brow and grim mouth boded little good to the unfortunate Babbington.

Fortunately, Mr. Manders did not hear a slight shuffling of feet and whispering outside his door. Had he thrown the door open suddenly he would have seen quite a crowd of Modern House juniors who were listening outside with bated breath in an endeavour to glean something of what was going on inside the room.

"Boy!" said Mr. Manders, in a grinding voice, addressing Babbington again. "In your first hour at Rookwood you have entered your House-master's study in his absence and consumed his tea, the act of an impertinent, unprincipled young reprobate!"

"B-but, sir——"

"You will find, sir," thundered Mr. Manders, "that I am not the man to put up with such outrageous insolence! You will find, sir, that you have made a great mistake if you have come to Rookwood with the idea that you can play fast and loose with your House-master."

"But—but, sir, it was all a mistake!" exclaimed Babbington, in great distress and now thoroughly frightened. "I would not do that for the world. I did not know——"

"Then how came you here at all?" hooted Mr. Manders.

"I—I—I—I was told—that is, somebody——" Babbington trailed off lamely.

Mr. Manders' eyes gleamed with the light of comprehension.

"Ah! Is it possible that someone—some boy—had the unparalleled impertinence to suggest to you this outrageous course of action, Babbington?"

"Ye-ees, sir," stammered Babbington.

"Indeed!" barked Mr. Manders. "Kindly give me that boy's name at once."

"If you pip-please, sir, I don't know it," said Babbington.

"Then describe him. What was he like?"

Babbington hesitated.

Had he known it, a dozen fellows on the outside of the door were holding their breath and hanging on his words.

Now was the test for Babbington, and he did not fail under it. Babbington was quite bright enough to have been able to give a fairly accurate description of Leggett of the Fourth, and his first instinct was to do so and thus save his skin, if he could, by transferring the blame to Leggett's shoulders, where, in truth, it properly belonged. But although Babbington had never before been to a Public school, or to any English school, he knew how to play the game.

He made up his mind in a moment that to give Leggett's description would not be the sporting to do.

"I—I—I—really don't know exactly what he looked like, sir," he stammered.

"Perhaps not exactly, but tell me approximately," said Mr. Manders impatiently. "Come on, boy! Out with it, if you want to save your skin!"

"I really could not say," said Babbington. "I—I think he had red hair."

"Think!" stormed Mr. Mander. "Did he have red hair or not?"

"I—I—I—I think so—or else it was black," said Babbington.

Mr. Manders gave a furious snort. Turning to a corner, he selected a stout and extremely unpleasant-looking cane.

"Now, Babbington," he said harshly, "I have decided that I will not report your outrageous conduct to Dr. Christholm, the Head of Rookwood, in view of this being your first day here. It is impossible, however, to overlook such unparalleled insolence. Either you are a knave——"

"Oh, sir!"

"Or a dolt!"

"Oh!"

"Or an imbecile!"

"Really, sir!"

"But, in any case," boomed Mr.

Manders viciously, swishing the cane in the air, "I intend to give you a lesson you will remember. Bend over that chair."

It was quite evident that Mr. Manders, having failed to extract from Babbington the name of the boy who had led him into such a plight, was determined to take it out of the victim at hand. Babbington felt, with a sigh, that the unpleasant experiences of his first day at Rookwood were by no means over. In fact, positively the most unpleasant experience of all was about to be added to the others!

Reluctantly, however, he bent over the chair as directed.

Swish, swish, swish!

Mr. Manders laid it on with vim, and Babbington's howls awoke the echoes.

Swish, swish, swish!

To the juniors outside it sounded as if Mr. Manders was beating a carpet. There was no doubt Babbington was going through it. But as the juniors trod gently away from Mr. Manders' door they agreed among themselves that Babbington, though a duffer and a mug and several sorts of an idiot, was, at any rate, true blue. He could have given Leggett away if he had wanted, but he had not done so.

Mr. Manders gave Babbington ten hefty lashes, by which time the House-master felt quite tired, but not as tired as Babbington. That youth limped out of Mr. Manders' study a few minutes later, a sadder and wiser Babbington.

He had bagged Mr. Manders' tea, but he had also bagged a record licking, and on the whole he decided that it would be a long time before he again attempted to take tea with Mr. Manders!

CHAPTER 6.

Something Like a Scheme!

"GENTLEMEN—"

"Hear, hear!"

"On the ball, Jimmy!"

"Gentlemen," continued Jimmy

Silver, raising his voice, "this meeting has been called—"

"Hear, hear!"

"To consider ways and means of getting our own back on the Bagshot bouncers."

"Hurrah!"

The captain of the Fourth Form at Rookwood was standing on a chair and addressing a full house in the famous End Study in the Fourth Form passage at Rookwood.

Besides his own study-mates, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, there were Tom Rawson and Valentine Mornington, and Conroy the Cornstalk, Tommy Dodd, and his chums, Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle from the Modern House, and several others, including even Tubby Muffin, the fattest Fourth-Former at Rookwood.

It made a tight squeeze, but the End Study was used to crowds.

"We all know," went on "Uncle James," "that Bagshot gave us socks in the matter of that new ass, Babbington, the other day."

"Shame!"

"Sure, and they did that entirely!"

"Well," continued Jimmy, "something must be done. We're all agreed on that. That's why I called this meeting. We've got to give the Bagshot-bouncers the kybosh somehow. The question is how."

Jimmy Silver paused dramatically.

"That's it—how are we going to do it?" said Valentine Mornington. "Easy enough to talk, you chaps, but what I say is, how are we going to do it?"

"Better leave it to the Moderns," suggested Tommy Dodd easily.

"That's what I think," said Tommy Cook promptly.

There was a howl at once.

"Rats!"

"Chuck him out!"

But Jimmy Silver held up his hand with a soothing gesture.

"No rags, you chaps! Never mind that Modern ass! He can't help it!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, scat!"

"Let Jimmy get on with the washing," said Lovell. "He's leader."

"Well, that's right enough," drawled Valentine Mornington. "Jimmy Silver's leader. Has he got any suggestion to make, then?"

"That's it. If he's leader, let him lead," said Tommy Cook. "What's it to be, Jimmy? Out with it!"

"Well, I have got a notion," said Jimmy Silver emphatically. "If you chaps will listen to me a minute I'll explain. I have found out that the Bagshot bounders—that is the junior eleven at Bagshot, which includes that blighter Pankley and his pals, have got a footer match on to-morrow afternoon against Lantham Grammar School at Lantham."

"Well, what if they have?"

"Sure and I don't see—" began Tommy Doyle.

Jimmy Silver held up his hand again for silence.

"Never mind what you don't see, Tommy Doyle! Just listen to me a minute. To-morrow's Thursday. It's not a half-holiday at Bagshot or here. Pankley & Co. are leaving Bagshot in a small motor-bus for Lantham about a quarter past two. I suppose there will be eleven or twelve of them in the bus. I thought if we could lie in wait for the bus along the Bagshot Lane and hold them up somehow, we could give them a ragging—just make guys of them and let them go on to Lantham all tied up and whitewashed."

Mornington chuckled.

"It would create a regular sensation at Lantham if we could," he agreed, "but—"

"Yes, but," said Tommy Dodd doubtfully. "It sounds all right, but how are we going to stop the motor-bus?"

"And how—" began Tommy Cook.

"Oh, stop your buts and hows!" broke in Jimmy Silver. "Look here, I've thought it all out, you chaps. The great thing is, of course, how we can be certain of stopping their bus. When we were talking it over before you came

Lovell had an idea about that. Tell 'em, Lovell."

"Hear, hear!"

"On the ball, Lovell!"

"Go it!"

Jimmy Silver descended from his perch on the chair, and Arthur Edward Lovell took his place.

"I think the best way would be to lay a regular trap for them, and to have a sort of decoy to lead them into it," he said. "For instance, if two of our chaps were walking up the middle of the lane carrying pails of whitewash and the Bagshot bus met them, it is ten to one Pankley & Co. would stop the bus and rag them baldheaded."

"Faith, and there's no doubt about it, they would!" said Tommy Doyle, with conviction.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a good idea," grinned Tommy Dodd, "but the question is, who will be the decoys? It's pretty certain they would have a rough passage, whatever happens!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell was coming out strong, and there was no doubt he was enjoying the limelight. Arthur Edward Lovell always knew better, in his own opinion, than anybody else, and his chums in the End Study well knew how obstinate he could be. It was not often that he was allowed to spread himself in open meeting as at the present juncture, but Arthur Edward rose to the occasion.

"I've thought it out," he said. "The two chaps who carry the whitewash will probably have a bit of a rough house before we can rescue them, but it won't matter."

"It will matter to them," grinned Mornington. "Who are the giddy victims to be?"

"Why, Cuffy and his blessed cousin, Babbington!" said Lovell promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell's little scheme certainly appealed to the assembled company as being really rich. It was owing to James Montgomery Babbington, the

fatuous cousin of the fatuous Clarence Cuffy, that Rookwood had met with their defeat of the previous week.

"Isn't it possible that young Cuffy and Babbington may have some slight objection?" said Tom Rawson, grinning.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leave that to me," said Tommy Dodd promptly. "I'll see that Cuffy and his blessed cousin do the trick all right. I'm fed-up with them," he added warmly. "If they get slaughtered by the Bagshot bounders it'll do them good. If they don't do it they'll get it hot. I shall slaughter them myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's understood, then, Tommy, that we will leave the victims to you," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "I'll arrange to have a crowd of our fellows behind the hedge on either side of the road, a quarter of a mile from Bagshot, at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon. You had better bring some of your Modern chaps as well, Tommy."

"Right-ho! How many shall we want?"

"Well," said Jimmy thoughtfully, "there will be eleven or twelve of the Bagshot bounders, not more. As it's not a half-holiday, the other fellows won't be going to the match. If we take fifteen or sixteen fellows in all, it would be ample to deal with the rotters. If you bring half a dozen Moderns, I will bring ten or a dozen Classics."

"Right-ho!" said Tommy Dodd. "That's a deal."

"Mind, everyone must be in position and well out of sight by two o'clock," said Jimmy Silver. "Cuffy and Babbington must be walking innocently up the middle of the road towards Bagshot, carrying three pails of whitewash. Pankley & Co. simply won't be able to resist the temptation of stopping to jam their heads in the buckets, and then we'll have 'em."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good!"

And the Rookwood council or war broke up amidst laughter and cheers.

Briefly outlining the scheme, Dodd had communicated to the astonished Clarence and his hopeful cousin precisely the roles which had been allotted to them.

"All you've got to do," explained Tommy Dodd, patiently but firmly, "is to stroll up the road carrying three big pails of whitewash with some brushes in them—see?"

"But, my dear Thomas——"

"Scat! There you go again! All jaw, like a blessed sheep's head. Now just listen to your Uncle Tommy," interrupted the leader of the Modern juniors. "You and Babbington stroll up the road like a pair of innocent idiots, and on comes the bus with Pankley & Co. in it. They spot you, of course. You've got to stay in the middle of the road, so they can't miss you. 'There's that ditherer, Cuffy!' Pankley will say. 'And there is his freak of a cousin!'"

"My dear Thomas, I was thinking——"

"You don't have to think at all—see?" said Tommy Dodd. "Do just what you are told. Our chaps will be behind the hedge, and we'll rescue you before you are absolutely slaughtered, so you needn't worry. Is that clear?"

"But, my dear Thomas——"

"If you call me 'my dear Thomas' again I'll slay you!" hooted Tommy Dodd. "Say yes or no!"

"I—I——"

"Give me that cricket stump, Cook. I can see young Cuffy is going to be obstinate," said Tommy Dodd in a businesslike tone. "As for Babbington, we'll give him a few as well."

"Wait! Pray don't be so hasty, my dear—that is to say, Dodd," said the unfortunate Cuffy hastily. "I think I understand the somewhat perilous role allotted to my Cousin Babbington and myself."

"Good!" said Tommy Dodd grimly. "I thought you would get to understand, somehow. Do you understand, Babbington?"

"Yes—yes; but—but——"

"Never mind butting," said Tommy Dodd. "You fully understand what you have got to do? That's the only thing that matters. I've got the whitewash all ready at old Mack's lodge, so directly after dinner you two scoot off and get it and get on with the job. Savvy?"

"Ye-e-es, my dear Thomas."

"Good! Don't forget, it's for the honour of Rookwood," said Tommy Dodd, a little less grimly. "That blessed ass, Babbington, got us ragged last time. It's up to you and him to help turn the tables on the Bagshot bounders. Now clear off!"

And Clarence Cuffy and James Montgomery Babbington obediently cleared off, but with their heads in a whirl.

CHAPTER 7.

The Tables Turned!

TO say that Cuffy and Babbington were in love with their job would be an exaggeration; but Clarence Cuffy knew Tommy Dodd, if Babbington didn't.

Clarence could not help feeling extremely doubtful whether he and his cousin would escape from capturing a ragging over this amazing scheme; but he also felt that there was no doubt whatever that he would capture a record ragging from Tommy Dodd should he fail in any way over his allotted task.

Clarence Cuffy, therefore, being a patient sort of ass, resigned himself to the inevitable; and so did James Montgomery Babbington.

Punctually at the appointed time, therefore, Cuffy and Babbington, arrayed in their oldest Etons, were to be seen standing forlornly in the middle of Bagshot Lane about a quarter of a mile from Bagshot School. With them were

three huge pails of whitewash, each with several brushes in it.

Behind the hedges on either side of the road lay the Rookwood juniors in ambush. There were sixteen of them, and Tommy Dodd was in command on one side of the road and Jimmy Silver on the other. All was in readiness to give the unsuspecting Bagshot junior eleven a very warm five minutes.

The warning hoot of a motor-horn from the direction of Bagshot, came to the waiting juniors' cars.

"They're coming!" hissed Tommy Dodd from the hedge. "Get a move on, you duffers!"

Cuffy and Babbington, looking thoroughly scared, seized their pails of whitewash. Each had a pail, while they bore the third between them.

Forlornly they started to trudge up the middle of the road.

"Don't look like a couple of scared rabbits!" came in a ferocious whisper from the inexorable Dodd.

Whereupon the unfortunate decoys made a desperate effort to compose their frightened countenances into expressions of pleased expectation.

Toot, toot!

A small private motor-bus swung round the corner and bore straight down upon the hapless twain. There was a sudden grinding of brakes, and a shout in the well-known tones of Pankley, the redoubtable leader of the Bagshot juniors.

"Hold on a minute, driver! Here's a lark, you chaps! Two Rookwood duffers taking some whitewash for a walk! We've got time to speak to 'em!"

There was a cheer and a roar of laughter.

"What-ho!"

"Hurrah!"

In a second a swarm of fellows in shorts and football boots sprang from the motor-bus and surrounded the palpitating Cuffy and his no less palpitating cousin. Rude hands were laid upon them. But suddenly a shout of triumph rang out from each side of the road.

"Rookwood to the rescue!"

"Hurrah!"

"Rookwood for ever!"

In a trice the Rookwood forces had closed in upon the enemy. The Bagshot fellows, utterly unprepared for this development, for the most part were overpowered with hardly a struggle.

Pankley and his staunch chums, Poole and Putter, put up a stout fight, but they were overborne by the weight of numbers, and in almost less time than it takes to tell, the whole of the Bagshot eleven were prisoners.

The eyes of the motor-bus driver grew round with amazement at this extraordinary proceeding.

"Well, my eye!" ejaculated. "This 'ere is a rum go, blowed if it ain't!"

"It's all right, driver!" sang out Jimmy Silver cheerily. "You can have your passengers back in a minute—when we've used up all the whitewash."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley, securely held by two grinning Rookwooders, wriggled apprehensively.

"Look here, Silver!" he said fiercely. "We've got to play a match at Lantham this afternoon. None of your larks, you know!"

"What about the larks you had the other day with poor old Cuffy and his cousin?" grinned Jimmy Silver. "But we won't hurt you, Pankley. Just a dose of whitewash—like that!"

And Jimmy dabbed the raging Bagshot leader under the chin with the dripping whitewash brush.

"You—Gog! Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the Rookwooders.

"Who's top dog now?" sang out Lovell jubilantly.

"You are, for the moment," spluttered Pankley; "but—but—"

"But what?"

"Give him another, Jimmy!"

Splash!

"Gug, gug! Mumm-mm!"

The whitewash brush splashed in Pankley's face again, and he gave a choking gurgle. But there was a gleam in his eye, which might have warned the Rookwood juniors of what was to come had they had leisure to notice.

"We'll tie 'em up and give 'em each

a good dose of whitewash," said Jimmy Silver. "They're only in footer things, anyway."

"What-ho!"

"The Lantham chaps will be a bit surprised to see 'em," grinned Mornington, "but that doesn't matter a bit."

"Not at all!" chuckled Jimmy. "We will put a notice in the bus with them. Here it is. I've got it all ready."

And Jimmy displayed a large card on which was written:

"SPECIAL EXHIBIT OF BAGSHOT BOUNDERS!"

Rookwood For Ever!"

He held it up for all to see, and there was a cheer from his victorious followers.

But the next moment that cheer died away in their throats as round the corner, with a swirl and a hoot, came a large charabanc crammed to the utmost capacity with juniors wearing the green cap of Bagshot School.

There was a gasp of dismay from the Rookwooders.

Jimmy Silver's jaw dropped.

"G-g-great Scott!" he groaned. "Here's the whole blessed lot of 'em!"

There was a roar from Pankley & Co.

"Rescue, Bagshot!"

"Help!"

"Rookwood Bounders!"

The charabanc drew up with a screeching of brakes, and the road was instantly a-swarm with sturdy youths, who rushed upon the Rookwood fellows. As the Assyrians came down like wolves on the fold, so did the flood of excited Bagshot fellows engulf and overwhelm the heroes of Rookwood.

Outnumbered by four or five to one, the Rookwood party had no chance, and in a couple of minutes they stood in a woe-begone line, prisoners in place of Pankley and his team. The tables were turned with a vengeance!

Under the eyes of the grinning drivers the face of each Rookwooder was liberally splashed with a workmanlike coat of whitewash. Fortunately, the pails were large, and Tommy Dodd had been generous with the whitewash!

A coil of strong cord was discovered in the possession of Arthur Edward Lovell.

Obviously it had been intended to secure the Bagshot eleven. Now it was pressed into service to rope the eighteen Rookwood juniors, after each had been well white-washed, in a long line.

Jimmy Silver was at the head of it, seeing, as Pankley facetiously observed, that he was the leader; Clarence Cuffy, looking more woebegone than ever with his large spectacles gleaming on his ghastly, white-washed countenance, brought up the rear.

Having made suitable alterations to the large notice which Jimmy Silver had so thoughtfully provided, Pankley & Co. secured it with string to the side of the long line of tightly-rope'd juniors.

It now read:

"SPECIAL EXHIBIT OF ROOKWOOD BOUNDERS:

Bagshot For Ever!"

With shouts of laughter, cheers, and cat-calls, the Bagshot team and their supporters piled into their vehicles.

"Hard luck, Jimmy old bean!" sang out Pankley. "You didn't know that our Head had given special permission to the whole junior school to come over and see the match, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the jubilant Bagshot fellows.

"You have to get up very early in the morning to catch Bagshot out!" cried Pankley. "Better luck next time, old bean!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

And in the thunder of triumphant cheers the Bagshot party rolled away in the direction of Lantham.

"Dished, diddled, and done!" groaned Jimmy Silver. "Oh, my hat! I never knew—I never thought—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, dear!"

Seventeen whitewashed glares were fixed upon the unfortunate leader of the Rookwood juniors. For some moments the rope'd-up line wrenched and wriggled at their bonds. But each fellow's hands were tied behind his back, and the Bagshot bounders had done their work too well. The bonds could not be loosened.

Slowly and with much groaning the weird

procession started to crawl dismally off down the road to Rookwood.

How they ever reached the school they could hardly tell, but they finally shuffled in at the gates, and Mack, the porter, as he confided afterwards to his wife, thought he was "seeing things."

The unfortunate juniors managed, however, to persuade old Mack to cut them free, whereupon there was a general rush for the bath-rooms. And naturally the news of the disaster spread through Rookwood like wildfire, and Jimmy Silver & Co., with Tommy Dodd & Co. were glad to seek the sanctuary of their studies, there to hide their diminished heads.

Not yet was the honour of Rookwood avenged!

CHAPTER 8.

Great Snakes!

"MY dear Clarence!"

It was after dinner on a fine afternoon at Rookwood School.

Most of the fellows were out on the playing fields, but Clarence Cuffy and his cousin, James Montgomery Babbington, had retired to the little study they shared on the Modern Side, with the intention of passing a quiet and peaceful afternoon.

James Montgomery Babbington had only been at Rookwood a few days, and during that time his life had been far from a quiet one.

He was a mild and inoffensive youth, who had been brought up in India, where his parents still were. Rookwood was his first experience of a public school, and he was finding it exciting—rather too exciting, in fact. However, for once there appeared to be a reasonable prospect of a quiet hour for Babbington. He was busy unpacking a large box which was standing in a corner of the room when he looked up and addressed his remark to his cousin.

"My dear Clarence, do you by any chance object to snakes?"

Clarence Cuffy gave a jump.

"Snakes!" he repeated. "My dear James, did you really say snakes?"

"Certainly, my dear Clarence! I have here a large basket," said Babbington seriously, lifting out a big, round, rush basket, curiously constructed, and evidently of

Indian manufacture. "It contains a number of snakes."

This time Clarence Cuffy jumped off the floor.

"Goodness gracious!"

"Are you fond of snakes, my dear Clarence?" continued Babbington seriously, blinking at his startled cousin.

"Certainly not!" said Cuffy promptly.

"I—I—my dear James, I know nothing about snakes. Surely—in a study, you know—really, my dear James!"

"There is nothing to be afraid of," said Babbington calmly, lifting the lid of the basket. "Look here!"

He plunged his hand in and brought out a wriggling reptile, which he placed on the table. Fully five feet long and beautifully marked, the snake curled and hissed along the table, while Clarence Cuffy gazed at it through his big spectacles with eyes that positively bulged with alarm.

"Goodness gracious!" he gasped. "How dreadful!"

Babbington laughed.

"Not at all!" he said. "That's Rajah. I've had him for years. Look here!"

Babbington picked up the big snake and coiled it round his neck. The reptile hung motionless, and seemed perfectly docile when handled by his master.

"My dear James!" gasped Clarence in horror. "Surely that is very dangerous!"

"Not a bit! I have some more here."

James plunged his hand into the basket again, and took out several more snakes almost as large as the first.

"I learned how to charm snakes in India. An old fakir showed me. Just you watch."

He uncoiled the snake which was round his neck, and replaced it on the table with the others. Then from an inner pocket he took a short reed pipe only a few inches in length. Putting it to his lips he began to play. A low wailing sound came from the pipe.

Clarence Cuffy watched, transfixed. At the first notes of the pipe the reptiles on the table raised their heads and swayed backwards and forwards to the music of the pipe, almost as though they were dancing to its tune. The low wailing notes sounded through the study, and the snakes writhed and swayed in rhythm. The peculiarity of the sight simply fascinated Clarence. Here

was his cousin Babbington in a new light. Clarence did not know what to make of it. He could only gasp.

Suddenly Babbington stopped and replaced the pipe in his pocket.

"There!" he beamed. "They simply love music. I can do what I like with them."

Catching his pets dexterously behind the head, he swung them back into the basket and replaced the lid, much to Clarence's relief.

"You don't mind my keeping Rajah and the others here in the study, do you, Clarence?"

Clarence looked dubious.

"Really, my dear James, suppose they should escape?"

"They won't escape," said Babbington. "I shall keep the basket in my big box."

"Suppose Mr. Manders knew?"

"The less said about them the better," said Babbington. "I did not tell the headmaster, in case he should object."

Babbington broke off and looked at his cousin inquiringly as the heavy tramp of feet sounded in the passage outside.

Most of the fellows on the Modern Side were out of doors, but as the trampling feet came nearer to the study Babbington's hopes of a quiet afternoon began to fade.

Crash!

The door was flung open suddenly, and the burly form of Higgs of the Classical Fourth burst into the study, followed by two other Classical juniors whom Cuffy recognised as Peele and Gower.

"Hallo!" roared Higgs in a powerful voice. "So here you are! Good!"

Clarence Cuffy and James Montgomery Babbington blinked at him mildly through their spectacles.

"D-did-did you want anything, Higgs?" stammered Cuffy, somewhat apprehensively.

Cuffy knew Alfred Higgs, and was no stranger to his high-handed methods. Higgs was, in short, a bit of a bully, and on that account had often come up against Jimmy Silver & Co. But the Co. were out on the footer field, in the middle of a practice match with Tommy Dodd & Co., and Higgs felt pretty safe from any interruption from them.

"We want young Babbington," said Higgs. "We've come to put you two

Modern freaks through it, haven't we, chaps?"

There was a snigger from Peele and Gower.

"We have," said Peele. "Just to teach them to respect their betters on the Classical Side."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's it!" chuckled Higgs. "Shut the door, Gower. We don't want any interruption for a bit. Hallo! What's that?" he broke off, looking at the big rush basket on the table.

"Oh, never mind that!" said Peele. "Let's get on with the job."

"Now, listen!" said Higgs threateningly, as Babbington and Cuffy retreated round the table and eyed him apprehensively. "First of all, you two freaks have got to go down on your bended knees and apologise!"

"What for?" quavered Cuffy.

Babbington said nothing.

"What for?" roared Higgs. "For being at Rookwood!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peele and Gower.

"But surely that requires no apology? We were sent here," said Babbington mildly.

"I say it does!" bellowed Higgs. "I've told all the chaps that I'd make you apologise, and I'm going to do it—see?"

And Higgs shook a large fist closely resembling a leg of mutton almost under the nose of Babbington.

James Montgomery recoiled from the fist as if he had been stung. At the same time, he reached for the rush basket on the table and pulled it out of Higgs' way. With a quick movement Higgs reached over the table and caught Babbington's arm.

"Hold on, young Babbington!" he cried.

"What's in that basket?"

"Er—n-n-nothing much," said Babbington.

"Oh, isn't it? Grub, I suppose? Let's have a look."

Babbington's reply was to push the basket still farther out of Higgs' reach. Alfred Higgs grew red with rage.

"You cheeky young rotter!" he roared.

"Hand over that basket at once!"

"But—but—" quavered Babbington.

"Hand it over!" bellowed Higgs.

He made a clutch at the basket and dragged at it. Babbington's arm closed

round it, and for a moment there was a tug-of-war between the two.

"Here, Peele—Gower—catch hold!" yelled Higgs.

Peele and Gower went to their leader's aid, and the combined grasp of the three was too much for Babbington. He let go of the basket suddenly, and Higgs and his two keepers flew back with the basket in their grasp so suddenly that all three of them sat on the floor with a bump. The basket shot into the air, and a shower of wriggling snakes flew from the rush receptacle and descended full upon their heads.

CHAPTER 9.

The Biter Bit!

TO say that Higgs & Co. were surprised by this sudden clammy shower would be to put it mildly. Their howls of utter astonishment and terror might almost have been heard on the playing fields where Tommy Dodd & Co. and Jimmy Silver & Co. were engaged in deadly rivalry.

Gower, indeed, who was not the stuff from which heroes are made, almost fainted with terror. He lay perfectly still on his back, frozen with horror while a large snake crawled across his waistcoat. Peele, frantically dashing one of the snakes from him, rushed for the door and fled howling down the passage.

Alfred Higgs was as white as a sheet. One of the snakes had dropped right on his face and was now coiling itself round his neck. He fairly panted with terror, and fixed James Montgomery Babbington with glassy eyes as he ran round the table.

Clarence Cuffy, from the corner of the room, could only wring his hands and ejaculate: "Goodness gracious! This is terrible!"

Babbington, however, was quite calm.

"Keep still, Higgs!" he said sharply.

"Stooping, he picked the snake from the trembling Gower's chest and held it, writhing, in his hand.

"You had better clear," he said curtly. And Gower, shaking so much that he could scarcely crawl, scrambled to the door and disappeared.

Higgs sat immovable. All the bluster had departed from the bully of the Fourth, and he now looked in his terror a pitiful object indeed.

"Keep quite still!" said Babbington again sharply.

He moved his hand gently along Higgs' shoulders until he touched almost caressingly the silky folds of the snake that was coiled about the bully's neck, while Higgs' eyes almost started from his head.

Babbington, softly crooning to himself, gently unwound the reptile and placed it on the floor.

"Out of the way—quick!" he jerked out.

Babbington was by this time between Higgs and the door. Higgs jumped at the other's words, darted across the room and took refuge in the opposite corner.

At once the big snake which Babbington had called Rajah, writhed rapidly across the floor with a soft hissing sound straight in the direction of Alfred Higgs. The latter cowered in terror in the corner.

"Look out!" he screamed. "That big one! He's after me!"

"All right!" said Babbington, swiftly whipping the snake he had in his hand back into the rush-basket. "There's one back—and another—and another!"

"Help!" screamed Higgs. "He's coming after me!"

"Well," said Babbington mildly, clapping down the lid on the other snakes which he had now got safely housed in their basket. "I told you not to meddle with my basket, Higgs!"

The big snake, Rajah, had now got to within a couple of feet of Higgs in the corner, and was swaying its head backwards and forwards, hissing at the bully for all the world like a terrier which had cornered a cat.

"I know you did!" moaned Higgs. "I'm sorry—I'm sorry, Babbington! Take it away!"

"I think this should be a lesson to you, my dear Higgs," observed Clarence, coming out of his corner now that the redoubtable Higgs was reduced to complete helplessness. "It is rude in the extreme to burst into other fellows' studies, is it not, my dear James?"

Higgs scowled at Clarence's gently chiding words, but he kept his eyes on the swaying reptile.

"Take it away, Babbington—take it away, for goodness' sake!" he groaned. "I'm sorry! I apologise! I'll do anything if you'll let me out!"

Babbington blinked mildly at Higgs, but he did not make any movement to recapture Rajah.

"I understand, Higgs," he said gently, "that you're from the Classical Side?"

"Yes—yes!" panted Higgs.

"It appears," continued Babbington, "that you came over here for the express purpose of making my cousin, Clarence, and me apologise. Is that not so?"

"Yes," mumbled Higgs, with a hunted look.

"That was very wrong, Higgs," broke in Clarence once again—"very wrong and very inconsiderate, my dear Higgs."

"Quite so," said Babbington. "You are quite right, my dear Clarence. I was about to observe, however, that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

"Quite true, my dear James; but I do not quite see—"

"What I mean," pursued Babbington, "is this. The object of Higgs' visit was apparently to make us apologise for being at Rookwood. Do you not think, my dear Clarence, that it would be only just if Higgs were made to apologise to us?"

A gleam came into Higgs' eye, and his rugged countenance was suffused with colour.

"You—you—you little rotter!" he hissed. "I'll—I'll—"

He broke off with a yelp as Rajah swayed towards him, and a glimmer of a smile showed in Babbington's face for a moment.

"Rajah has got you cornered, you see, Higgs," said the new junior pleasantly. "I could call him off in a moment if I liked."

"Then call him off!" shrieked Higgs. "I can't stand this much longer!"

"What about apologising, then?" said Babbington almost sweetly.

Higgs gave Babbington and his cousin a deadly glare, and he appeared to be swallowing something with difficulty, but there was no help for it. The bully of the Fourth knew he was in a corner, and there was no way of escape.

"Will you call it off?" he hissed.

"I will when you have apologised," said Babbington gently. "We did not ask you here, you know, Higgs."

"I—I'll apologise!" gasped Higgs thickly. "Don't let that brute come any nearer."

"All right; but hurry up!" said Babbington warningly, as the snake swayed backwards and forwards with a more rapid rhythm and its hiss became louder.

Higgs slipped to his knees without taking his eyes off the hooded head of the snake for a moment.

There was a rush of feet in the passage, and Peele's voice was heard excitedly:

"In there! Snakes! Lots of 'em! You look, you fellows!"

The door was opened cautiously, and then more widely, and in a moment it was crowded with heads.

Peele, dashing from the study in terror, had gasped out his story right and left, and even the junior practice match had been suspended while investigations were made.

Half the junior school was clustered round the open door of Cuffy's study, and there was a gasp of amazement at the astounding scene that was revealed.

Alfred Higgs, the most powerful fellow in the Fourth, was down on his knees in a corner, while in front of him, poised apparently ready to strike, was a big snake. Behind it stood Babbington, calm and self-possessed, fingering his reed pipe. Clarence Cuffy looked on with a benevolent blink.

"Great Scott!"

"My hat!"

"Well, did you ever?"

"Higgs!"

"Look at him!"

"And the giddy snake!"

Babbington did not turn his head or take his eyes from the snake, while Higgs' eyes seemed glued to the swaying Rajah. In fact, Alfred Higgs hardly heeded the interruption from the open door. Higgs' one idea was to escape.

To do that he had to apologise, but such was the state to which he had been reduced by his hair-raising experience of the last ten minutes that he was now prepared to do anything to escape from the supposed deadly fangs of the fearful reptile.

"Do you apologise, Higgs?" asked Babbington in a low voice.

"Yes, I apologise," babbled Higgs.

"What for?" asked Babbington sweetly.

"I apologise for being at Rookwood," said Higgs.

There was a gasp of amazement from the doorway.

Higgs apologising—and to those Modern freaks!

"I apologise," went on Higgs, gasping the words out with frantic haste. "I'm sorry, Babbington. I'm sorry I came to your study. I apologise for being at Rookwood. I apologise for being a Classical. I apologise for everything!" screamed Higgs desperately.

From the doorway came an uncontrollable roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's the giddy limit!" said Tommy Dodd, weeping on the shoulder of Tommy Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Babbington raised the reed pipe, pressed his lips to it, and a few low, clear notes sounded in the study. At once the big snake turned from the cowering Higgs and glided towards its master. Babbington, still playing the pipe, backed across the study towards the basket, followed by the big snake.

Still playing, he bent down and with one hand fondled the reptile. Then he caught it gently behind the head, and it coiled and writhed about his arm.

"Got you!" said Babbington quietly.

"Good old Rajah!"

He opened the lid of the basket and popped the big snake in.

"You see, Higgs—" he remarked, turning round.

But Higgs was gone. With a bellow like an enraged bull he had rushed across the study and charged out of the door, scattering the shrieking crowd right and left as he went.

Back to his own study fled Alfred Higgs, sadder and wiser, and bitterly regretting that he had chosen James Montgomery Babbington to rag that fine afternoon. Behind him he left a crowd that almost filled the passage outside Cuffy's study.

They laughed and cheered and laughed again, and on all sides was exhibited a plentiful lack of sympathy for Alfred Higgs and his plight.

He had come to make Cuffy and Babbington apologise, and he had made them an abject apology! The biter had been bitten with a vengeance.

Tommy Dodd & Co. almost embraced the smiling Babbington.

"Jolly good, Babby!" chuckled Tommy Dodd, slapping him on the back. "Blessed

if I thought a freak like you had it in him! You'd better look after those snakes, though. Are they dangerous?"

"Not a bit," said Babbington. "They are quite harmless. Their fangs have been removed. They're my pets, you know."

"Good for you!" said Tommy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Higgs!"

"What a come down for the Classics, too!"

"You've put the Moderns one up, Babbington, my lad! Good for you!"

"Thru, and it's a broth of a boy you are!" said Tommy Doyle. "I can see Higgs' face now as he apologised!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tommy Cook. "It was worth a guinea a box!"

Gradually the crowd drifted away, still laughing and talking excitedly, but not before they had given three rousing cheers for James Montgomery Babbington.

CHAPTER 10.

The Ban!

"I SAY, you fellows, have you heard?"

It was Tubby Muffin who burst into the junior Common-room just as that apartment was at its fullest in the hour between tea and preparation.

The fat Fourth-Former was evidently full of news which he was bursting to impart to the world at large.

"Have you heard, you fellows?" he repeated excitedly. "I'm just back from Coombe—been down for old Bulkeley, you know, and I saw the notices being put up about it!"

"About what, ass?" inquired Lovell pleasantly.

"About the circus, you know."

"Circus?"

"What's that?"

"What circus?"

There was a general movement of interest and the juniors crowded round Tubby Muffin. That youth's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. He had attracted some attention at last with his news!

"Yes; the—the circus!" he gasped. "Burgess' World-Famous Circus, you know! There's a chap sticking bills up everywhere in the village. It will be camped just outside Coombe to-morrow, and there is a show in the afternoon."

"Good!"

"Three cheers!"

"Topping!"

The news seemed to afford the juniors in the room great satisfaction. Circuses were rare in that rural part of Hampshire, and the Rookwooders looked forward to visiting Burgess' World-Famous Circus with a great deal of interest.

"Have they got wild animals there, I wonder?" said Raby.

"Heaps!" said Tubby.

"Any elephants?" asked Lovell, with interest.

"Dozens!" said Tubby, drawing recklessly upon his imagination. "I say, you chaps, are you going to the circus?"

"We is—we are!" said Jimmy Silver amiably.

"I expect most of the school will turn up to-morrow afternoon!" said Tommy Dodd.

"What about me?" demanded Tubby.

"Well, what about you?" asked Jimmy tolerantly.

"Well, I'm going, ain't I?" demanded Tubby again. "I told you about it, you know! Who's going to lend me a bob?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I s'pose you don't think I'm going to be left behind?" snorted Tubby indignantly.

"We don't think about it at all," said Lovell cheerily. "It is of no importance to us, you see."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you I am going!" shrieked Tubby. "One of you beasts must lend me a bob!"

"Now then, don't all speak at once!" said Mornington humorously. "Which of you beasts is ready to oblige?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver produced a shilling from his pocket and flicked it good-naturedly to the fat junior. It landed on Tubby's little fat nose and Tubby gave a squeak.

"Ow! You ass! Look out!"

"Sorry, Tubby! Chuck it back, then, if you don't want it!"

"No fear!" said Tubby promptly, grabbing at the shilling and thrusting it into his trouser pocket. "Thanks, Jimmy, old bean! See you at the circus to-morrow!"

And Tubby Muffin scuttled off with his booty.

The news about the coming of Burgess' World-Famous Circus to the neighbourhood was soon all over Rookwood, and it was

discussed just as eagerly on the Modern Side as on the Classical Side.

Tommy Dodd & Co., the leaders of the juniors in the Modern House, were specially interested.

"Jolly fine!" said Tommy Dodd enthusiastically. "Haven't been to a circus for goodness knows how long! I believe Burgess' is a jolly good show, too!"

"Faith, and we'll be there!" said Tommy Doyle.

"What-ho!" chipped in Tommy Cook, the third member of the famous trio.

Just then the door of the three Tommies' study opened and the rather unpleasant features of Carthew of the Sixth were projected into the room.

"I shall want you to get my tea in the study to-morrow afternoon, Dodd," said Carthew, with a sneering smile. "My fag's gone sick. See that you are there at three sharp, do you hear?"

"Nothing doing, Carthew," said Tommy Dodd promptly. "There's a circus at Coombe to-morrow afternoon and we are going to it. Sorry and all that, but you must get someone else to fag for you, I'm afraid."

Carthew's sneering smile grew a little broader.

"You can wash out the circus, you cheeky young rotter," he said. "I have just heard from Mr. Manders that no Modern juniors will be allowed to go."

"What!" roared Tommy Dodd. "Not allowed to go to the circus!"

"'Tis mad the man is entirely!" said Tommy Doyle.

"I suppose you can understand plain English!" said Carthew unpleasantly.

"Mr. Manders has put the circus out of bounds for Modern juniors. He says there's been too much rowdiness in the House lately, so you are all gated for the afternoon. There's no circus for you, so mind you come along to my study at three sharp."

"Rats!" said Tommy Dodd defiantly.

Carthew gave him a black scowl.

"If you don't come there will be trouble—and lots of it, Dodd!" he snapped. "Anyone who tries to break bounds to go to the circus will be flogged, and so I warn you."

And Carthew slammed the door, and departed, scowling.

"We're going to the circus," said Tommy Dodd, between his set teeth. "Manders

isn't going to keep me in with his silly rulings and unjust gatings. We'll all go just the same."

"Hear, hear!" said Tommy Doyle.

Great was the indignation when the news of the Housemaster's ban on the circus circulated.

Even Clarence Cuffy, who shared a study with his recently arrived cousin, James Montgomery Babbington, was more than a little disappointed.

"Dear me, James," he said, "it is really very vexing. I was quite looking forward to visiting the circus in Coombe to-morrow afternoon."

"So was I, dear Clarence," said Babbington. "I suppose we—"

"You suppose what?" asked Clarence, looking at his cousin curiously.

"I suppose we could not go?" said Babbington.

Clarence Cuffy's mild eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"But, my dear James," he expostulated, "have you not heard that Mr. Manders, our respected Housemaster, has forbidden any of the juniors in his House to attend the circus?"

"Yes, I know," said Babbington, "but—"

"Surely, my dear James," said Clarence reprovingly—"surely you are not contemplating rapping counter to our respected Housemaster's wishes! That would be a very reprehensible course, my dear James, and I feel bound to point it out to you."

James Montgomery Babbington gave a grunt.

It might have meant that he appreciated the kindness of his Cousin Clarence in pointing that out to him—or it might not!

CHAPTER 11.

French Leave!

THE next afternoon, which was Saturday, saw a throng of Rookwooders, senior and junior, trudging along the road to Coombe and into the circus.

Great was the sympathy shown by the rest of the school for the unfortunates of Mr. Manders' House, who were banned from the circus. The general opinion was that it was "just like Manders'!"

Mr. Manders was bad-tempered and a good deal of a tyrant.

Heartily did the chums of the Classical Fourth congratulate themselves, as they strolled circusward on that fine afternoon, that they were not under the authority of Mr. Manders.

"It's pretty hard luck on Tommy Dodd & Co.," said Jimmy Silver, as they turned into the field where the circus band was already rendering the air with an amazing volume of sound.

"Jolly hard luck!" agreed Lovell.

"Why—what—"

"Great Scott! Tommy!" gasped Newcome.

Three cheerful faces grinned at them from the crowd. They belonged to none other than Tommy Dodd, Tommy Doyle, and Tommy Cook!

"My hat! So you've bolted, have you, Tommy?" said Jimmy Silver. "Manders will scrag you for this!"

"Let him!" said Tommy Dodd recklessly. "We're not missing the circus for all the Manders that ever meandered!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Any more of you Modern kids made a dash for it?" said Lovell.

"I don't think so," said Tommy Dodd, with a grin. "Manders and Carthew are keeping a pretty sharp look-out for truants.

"We got away out of the boot-room window."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess we're the only ones who have done the trick," said Tommy Cook, as the chums joined forces with their Classical allies, and pushed through the crowd.

But therein Tommy Cook was wrong.

"Hallo, seems to be a shindy of some sort going on here!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

A voice, raised in loud and angry exhortation, drew the chums away from the circus tent to where a canvas stall was placed near a couple of caravans.

A tall, fat man, with a very red face and a top hat stuck on the back of his head, was giving somebody a piece of his mind.

It was Joe Burgess, the circus proprietor himself, and just behind him, standing in a flimsy canvas stall, with a chain round one of his legs, stood Raneé, the big circus elephant.

"You are a lazy skunk, Ali!" shouted Mr. Burgess. "Always skulking and mumbling. That there elephant ought to have been fed an hour ago!"

A matter of words in a foreign tongue

came to the juniors' ears, and they saw that the object of Joe Burgess' wrath was a little, wizened Hindu, evidently the elephant's attendant.

"None of your backchat now!" roared the angry Mr. Burgess. "A-muttering and a-mumbling at me in your heathen tongue! Get along now, and get the old girl's gear ready for her turn in the big tent! Jump to it!"

Still muttering, the little Hindu took himself off, and Joe Burgess mopped his crimson brow with a large silk handkerchief.

"Bust me if it ain't enough to make a man wild, running a circus in these 'ere days!" he remarked loudly.

"Now then, you boys, no teasing of that there elephant while Ali is gone!"

"We are not going to tease him, Mr. Burgess!" said Jimmy Silver indignantly.

"Don't call that elephant a him, it's a her," said Mr. Burgess. "What's that you've got in them bags?"

"Buns," said Jimmy Silver tersely.

"Buns! You will make old Raneé your friend for life if you give her buns. She fair loves 'em!"

And the circus proprietor strolled off, and entered one of the neighbouring caravans.

"Let's have some of those buns, Jimmy," said Tommy Dodd eagerly. "What a topping bulliphant she is!"

Under the generous treatment of the Rookwooders, Raneé was docility itself, but she had a queer temper, as Joe Burgess well knew.

CHAPTER 12.

A Shock for Mr. Manders!

MOST of the crowd in the circus field had by now packed themselves into the big tent, for the performance was just about to begin.

"Better be just getting a move on, hadn't we?" said Jimmy Silver at last. "Are you coming, Tommy?"

But Tommy Dodd could not tear himself away from Raneé.

"You chaps buzz off," he said. "I'm staying with the elephant a big longer. There's still some buns left. We'll see you later!"

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy Silver. And the chums of the end study strolled over to

the tent, while Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle remained with their leader.

As Jimmy Silver & Co. were paying their entrance money into the big tent, a lean figure, wrapped in an overcoat, hurried into the field and stood looking round him with sharp, questioning eyes. In a moment he had spotted the figures of the three Tommies standing by the big elephant's stall.

Mr. Manders—for it was he—had keen eyes, and he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. He had discovered the absence of Tommy Dodd & Co., and had, in fact, come to the circus specially to search for them. There must have been more than a hundred Rookwood boys in the circus at the time, and it was satisfactory to Mr. Manders that he was able to spot the culprits immediately he set foot in the field.

He hurried across to the elephant's stall, and the first intimation the hapless Tommy Dodd & Co. had of his presence was the sound of his harsh, grating voice behind them:

"Boys! What are you doing here?"

A simultaneous gasp came from the three Tommies, and they spun round on their heels. The dismay on their faces was almost idiotic. They stared at Mr. Manders' severe countenance with drooping jaws.

"Bowled out!" murmured Tommy Dodd, under his breath.

"Boy, what did you say?" grated Mr. Manders. "What have you to say for yourself?"

Tommy Dodd was silent.

"You have come here deliberately in face of my strict orders to the contrary!" went on Mr. Manders, with glinting eyes. "You, Dodd, and you, Cook, and you, Doyle, shall all be soundly flogged for this!"

Tommy Dodd, who had a bun in his hand, half turned to Rance and allowed the big elephant to whip the bun from his fingers with her trunk. Mr. Manders' harsh words did not have the effect of making Tommy Dodd feel ashamed of himself. On the contrary, they made him feel more rebellious than ever.

"We haven't been to the circus yet, sir," he ventured.

"Boy, don't be impertinent!" shouted Mr. Manders, stepping forward and grab-

bing Tommy Dodd by the shoulder. "Come back with me at once!"

Tommy Dodd shook off the angry Housemaster's grasp, and in a trice had popped under the bar and was standing in the elephant's stall.

Rance's trunk slid systematically into his hand.

Mr. Manders fixed Tommy with a furious glare.

"Come out of there at once! Get out this instant!" he raved. "Come out, or I will give you a thrashing here and now!"

Tommy Dodd eyed Mr. Manders and his brandished umbrella coolly.

"Not good enough!" he said.

And Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle with difficulty suppressed a snigger.

Mr. Manders could hardly believe his ears.

"Boy!" he shrieked. "Impertinent young wretch! You shall not defy me in this manner!"

Almost beside himself, Mr. Manders stretched over the bar and made a grab at Tommy with his left hand, while he grasped his rolled umbrella with his right. There was a businesslike look in Mr. Manders' eye, and Tommy Dodd noticed it. He skipped nimbly back, with the result that Mr. Manders sprawled on his hands and knees into the elephant's stall.

The next moment Mr. Manders of Rookwood School received the shock of his life.

With a little squeal that seemed to indicate annoyance, Rance, the elephant, coiled her trunk round the Housemaster's waist, and in a second the horrified Mr. Manders found himself borne aloft by the elephant's trunk some twelve feet from the ground!

"My hat, that's done it!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Faith, and he'll be kilt entoirely!" groaned Tommy Doyle.

Tommy Cook said nothing. He only gazed at Mr. Manders as if mesmerised.

Mr. Manders himself seemed to be paralysed with fear. His face was white and his eyes were staring, while he appeared to be struggling for breath.

Mr. Joseph Burgess, hustling from his caravan at the sounds of alarm, nearly fell down the steps as he saw his elephant brandishing a perfectly respectable schoolmaster high in the air.

"Lor' love us! There's old Rancee up to her tricks!" he gasped. "Where's Ali?"

He rushed up to the elephant and addressed it in wheedling tones:

"Put him down, Rancee, there's a good old girl! Come on now, Rancee, put him down, do!"

But Rancee was obdurate. She appeared, if fact, to be enjoying herself, and the wheedling tones of her proprietor were quite wasted on her.

"Drat her, she's a bad-tempered anny-mile, she is!" gasped Mr. Burgess. "Where's that blessed nigger? Ali, Ali, Ali!" he roared, in a voice that might almost have been heard at Rookwood.

"Shall I see if I can find him, sir?" said Tommy Doyle anxiously.

"Yes, run along, my lad! He may be round the back of the tent. Tell him to come here quick! No one else can do anything with that there Rancee!" said Mr. Burgess excitedly.

"Help, help!" came faintly from Mr. Manders.

"She won't hurt you, sir!" cried Mr. Burgess. "It's only her fun—at least, I hope it is," he added, under his breath. "But she's a queer-tempered creature."

"Help, help! I shall be killed! Make it put me down!" raved Mr. Manders, apparently recovering the use of his voice somewhat.

The showman shook his head and mopped his perspiring brow.

"I can't help you!" he muttered. "Nor no one can't, except only that black beast, Ali! Where is he, I wonder? Hallo! Who's this?"

The newcomer was a mild-looking youth with large spectacles and wearing, in his simplicity, the cap which proclaimed him to be a junior of the Modern Side of Rookwood.

It was James Montgomery Babbington, and Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook stared at him hard for a moment.

"Dear me, is that you, my dear Dodd?" he remarked. "I just wondered what was happening over here, so—"

"That's Mr. Manders up there. The elephant's got him!" gasped Tommy Cook. "It's awful!"

"Good gracious! My dear Cook! How really terrible!"

"It's frightful!" said Tommy Dodd shakily. "I don't believe Rancee will hurt

him—you never know! Tommy Doyle's looking for the Hindu attendant now."

"Ah, but that is indeed interesting!" remarked James Montgomery Babbington mildly, eyeing the squirming figure of Mr. Manders with a good deal of interest. "Will the elephant not put him down?"

"Help! Save me!" shrieked Mr. Manders. "Help, help!"

Joe Burgess mopped his brow and groaned.

"Where's that blessed Ali got to?" he mumbled. "Blessed if I know what to do!"

"Perhaps I could help?" ventured Babbington.

Mr. Burgess stopped mopping.

"You! What do you know about elephants?"

"Not much, but I have lived in India," said Babbington mildly.

"Oh, you have, have you, young shaver? Well, speak to the brute."

"Certainly, my dear sir!"

Under the eyes of the amazed Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook, Babbington ducked under the bar and walked into the stall.

He reached up and pulled the big elephant by one ear. In a low voice Babbington broke into a curious speech which sounded like the rapid drawing of corks.

Rancee's ears twitched as if the big elephant could hardly believe what she heard.

James Montgomery Babbington, apparently quite fearless, pulled the big ear again and uttered another burst of Hindustani. To the red-faced showman's blank amazement, Rancee lowered her trunk slowly; and the next moment the gasping Mr. Manders, to his enormous relief, found his feet once more upon the ground.

Babbington slipped his hand down the elephant's trunk, which remained coiled round the Housemaster.

"Quick—quick!" gasped Mr. Manders. "Make it release me! Quick, Babbington!"

"But, my dear Mr. Manders—"

"Quick, boy!"

"My dear sir, I cannot refrain from mentioning that I came to the circus—"

"What—what?" cried Mr. Manders. "What are you talking about, Babbington? Make it release me at once."

"As I was saying, my dear sir, I came to the circus without your permission."

"What? You dolt! You imbecile! Make it release me at once—quick!"

"May I take it, my dear Mr. Manders, that I shall not be punished for coming to the circus without your permission?" said Babbington mildly.

Mr. Manders simply squirmed in the embrace of the elephant's trunk. Not for one moment did Ranees relax the continued pressure round the Housemaster. Babbington still held his hand caressingly on the big trunk.

"Fool, will you make it release me?" hissed the Housemaster.

"If you will pardon me," recommenced Babbington gently.

"Of course—of course! That is nothing!" raved Mr. Manders. "Now, release me at once!"

"And Dodd here?"

"Ah, Dodd!"

Mr. Manders' eyes gleamed.

"Ah, Dodd—that wretched boy!"

"But you will pardon Dodd also, my dear Mr. Manders, I am sure?"

"Certainly not!" snapped Mr. Manders. "Now, please release me at once! Oh, help!"

For Babbington withdrew his hand from the elephant's trunk, and Mr. Manders was slowly raised in the air again.

He gave a shriek.

"Help, help! Make it release me—make it set me down, Babbington!"

Babbington muttered in quick Hindustani, and the trunk was slowly lowered until Mr. Manders' feet were once again on the ground.

"Then you will pardon Dodd?" began Babbington.

"Yes, yes!" shrieked Mr. Manders.

"And Cook?" said Babbington gently.

"Yes, boy, yes! Now release me!"

"And Doyle?" breathed Babbington.

Mr. Manders could have danced in his anguish, but the trunk held him too firmly.

"Yes, yes, yes!" he raved. "Dodd and Cook and Doyle and you and everybody else! For Heaven's sake, release me!"

Babbington muttered two words, and the great trunk uncoiled, perhaps as though reluctantly, from round the Housemaster's waist.

Mr. Manders was free!

In a trice he had scrambled out of the

elephant's reach, and the next moment he had collapsed on the ground.

Mr. Manders, stern Housemaster of Rocky wood, at whose frown every junior trembled, was reduced to a pitiable condition. He was almost sobbing with relief and with the fright he had undergone as Joe Burgess picked him up and endeavoured to smooth him down.

Joe Burgess was very apologetic.

"The animal meant no harm, sir," he said. "I am sure I am very sorry it should have happened!"

The three Modern juniors looked on in silence, waiting for the storm to burst. But all the fight was gone out of Mr. Manders.

"Let me go—let me go!" he murmured. And, gathering up his hat and umbrella, he almost staggered out of the circus field.

Tommy Cook gazed after him raptly.

"By Jove, old Manders is fairly done for once!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "My hat! What a lark! What a treat to see him wriggling up there in Ranees' trunk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd.

The two Tommies had recovered their spirits very quickly. They had been alarmed before at Mr. Manders' peril, but now that the Housemaster had escaped with nothing worse than a shock and a severe fright they were jubilant.

"It was priceless!" chuckled Tommy Dodd, giving full rein to his mirth and patting Ranees appreciatively on the flank. "Priceless! Good old Ranees!"

"All very well for you boys!" grunted Joe Burgess. "But it was no laughing matter for the gentleman, I'll lay!"

"He is not a gentleman; he's a Housemaster!" said Tommy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

James Montgomery Babbington was smiling his gentle smile.

The fat circus proprietor made a stride towards him and held out a huge red hand.

"If you ask me, this is the young gentleman we have got to thank," he said. "Shake hands, sir! It is thanks to you no damage was done—that's my belief!"

James Montgomery Babbington blushed like a schoolgirl and shook hands with the beaming showman shyly.

"I am sure I was very pleased to render a little assistance," he said modestly.

"Wonderful, it was!" said Mr. Burgess enthusiastically. "You have got a way

with anymiles, sir, that's evident. Old Rancee would do anything for you."

"I believe she would," said Babbington. "You see, I am used to elephants." And he rubbed the big elephant's trunk affectionately.

"By Jove, you're a nut, Babbington!" cried Tommy Dodd enthusiastically, clapping James Montgomery on the shoulder. "You're a sport, too! You've got us out of a thundering good row when no other chap at Rookwood could have done it! Hallo! Here's Tommy Dodd with Ali—too late, of course."

"What about going into the big tent now?" asked Tommy Cook.

"What ho, we will!" said Tommy Dodd. "All the lot of us—and you, too, Babbington! Come on! We'll pay your entrance, too!"

"Hear, hear!" said Tommy Cook. And the three Tommies, with Babbington in their midst, entered the tent and pushed their way as near as they could to the front row. If Tommy Dodd told Babbington he was a nut once that afternoon, he told him a dozen times.

And all Rookwood, when the story became known, emphatically endorsed that verdict.

That evening James Montgomery Babbington was the hero of the school!

CHAPTER 13.

Babbington's Brain-Wave!

"IT'S up to us, chaps!"

Tommy Dodd, the leader of the Modern House juniors at Rookwood, made that momentous announcement in portentous tones.

Tommy Cook, who was scribbling an imposition at the study table, continued to scribble.

Tommy Doyle, who was making toast by the study fire, continued to make toast.

"It's up to us," repeated Tommy Todd.

Still his two chums went on with their occupations. Tommy Todd glared round at them.

"Will you stop scribbling, Cook?" he exclaimed exasperatedly.

"What for?" mumbled Tommy Cook, writing away industriously. "I've got to finish these lines for Manders, you know."

"Oh, rats! Stop making toast, Doyle, you duffer!"

"Faith, and it's getting on for tay-time!" said Tommy Doyle.

"Will you drop it?" roared Tommy Dodd. "I tell you it's up to us to do something!"

Tommy Cook threw down his pen resignedly, while Tommy Doyle hung up the toasting-fork. They could see that Tommy Dodd had something on his chest, as it were, and would give them no peace until he had got it off.

"What's up to us, old bean?" asked Tommy Cook. "Out with it!"

"Well, look here," said Tommy Dodd, "here's Bagshot been beating us all along the line lately! You chaps know that, as well as I do."

"Sure, we do!" said Tommy Doyle.

"Well, it ain't good enough. Our last wheeze for ragging 'em bald-headed was a ghastly failure, and we got ragged instead," said Tommy Dodd. "That was Jimmy Silver's wheeze. Jimmy's and Lovell's together, wasn't it?"

"It was. It were."

"Well, it was a rotten one. The truth is, those Classicals are no good at wheezes. Now, what I say is, it is up to us to think out a really good wheeze. What about it?"

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle both scratched their heads and looked rather blank.

"Faith, and it isn't aisy," said Tommy Doyle. "That spalpeen, Pankley, is hot stuff, and no mistake!"

"He is," said Tommy Dodd, "and that's why it will take a Modern wheeze to down him. Can't you think of anything, Cook?"

"Well, I—I—"

Tommy Cook broke off and scratched his head again.

It was pretty evident that he had nothing valuable to suggest at that moment.

Tommy Dodd gave a snort.

"Blessed if you aren't as big a duffer as those Classicals!"

Tommy Dodd coughed.

"Ahem! I was just thinking I—Hallo! Who's that?"

A round, mild face, adorned with a pair of large spectacles, was poked into the study.

"It is I, dear Thomas!"

"Cuffy! Oh, lor'!" groaned Tommy Dodd. "Buzz off, Clarence!"

"Really, my dear Thomas!" said Clarence Cuffy, the greenest junior at Rookwood, with reproach in his voice. "That hardly strikes me as a hospitable remark, my dear Thomas. I have come——"

"Faith, and ye can go!" said Tommy Doyle

"Really, my dear Thomas! I have brought my cousin, Baddington, along."

"Oh, Baddington?" said Tommy Dodd. "Well, bring him in, for goodness' sake!"

Clarence Cuffy sidled into the room, followed by his cousin, James Montgomery Baddington. Both looked as solemn as owls. "Come in, Baddington!" said Tommy Dodd more genially. "Cuffy is a freak, of course——"

"Really, my dear Thomas!"

"But you are not such a fool as you look."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sit down, Baddington!"

The three chums looked at James Montgomery Baddington rather curiously. Rookwood was still talking of this strange new boy's amazing exploit at Burgess' Circus, where he had shown himself capable of controlling an excited elephant, thereby saving his Housemaster from possible serious damage. In addition, the three Tommies remembered gratefully that he had saved them from severe punishment.

The fact was that Tommy Dodd & Co. were beginning slightly to modify their opinion of James Montgomery Baddington.

His mild manner and his greenness—for he had never been to a Public school before—added to his personal resemblance to the ineffable Clarence Cuffy—had caused Rookwood as a whole, and Tommy Dodd in particular, to write him down as a good deal of a simpleton.

It did not escape notice, however, how Baddington had more than held his own with Alfred Higgs, who was a good deal of a bully, when the latter had visited him in his study with the intention of ragging him. On that occasion Baddington's pet snakes had provided a diversion of which James Montgomery had not been slow to take advantage.

Tommy Dodd & Co. had therefore considerably modified their first impressions of Baddington during the last few days, and

their feelings towards him were quite friendly.

They were curious to know exactly why Cuffy had brought his cousin to see them. Clarence Cuffy enlightened them in his long-winded way.

"You are doubtless curious, my dear Thomas, as to the exact reason for this visit to your study," he began ponderously.

"Well, we are a bit," grinned Tommy Dodd.

"It was really my Cousin Baddington's suggestion," said Clarence. "My Cousin Baddington has a little plan that he would like to confide to you."

"Indeed!" said Tommy Dodd, trying to appear interested. "Well, confide away, Baddington. What's it all about?"

Thus adjured, James Montgomery Baddington gave a little cough.

"Well, really, Dodd, perhaps there's nothing in it, but it occurred to me that you might perhaps be glad to hear of a scheme which would bring about the discomfiture of the rival school."

"What school?" asked Tommy Dodd, roused to interest at once.

"Why, Bagshot School!" said Baddington.

"Bagshot!" shouted Tommy Dodd. "Have you a stunt for putting it across Bagshot?"

Baddington nodded.

"Yes, I think I have," he said.

"Good man!" cried Tommy Dodd excitedly. "Out with it, then, Baddington! We were just trying—ahem!—that is, we were discussing that very matter when you came in."

"Faith, and 'tis a broth of a bhoys ye are!" said Tommy Doyle enthusiastically.

"Shurrup, Doyle! Get on with it, Baddington!" said Tommy Cook impatiently.

"Well," said Baddington modestly. "I owe Bagshot one, as you know."

Tommy Dodd grinned and nodded.

"I thought that if Pankley received a letter from the captain of a football team asking for a match on the Bagshot ground on a day which the Bagshot fellows have vacant, a rather amusing game of football might be fixed up."

"Eh?" said Tommy Dodd, staring. "I don't quite understand."

"Well," said Baddington, "if Pankley got

a letter from say, the captain of Lingfield House School Team, asking him to fix up a match, he would probably do so."

"Well, what about it? Where's Lingfield House School?" said Tommy Cook.

Babbington smiled.

"Wait a minute. Suppose such a match was fixed up, and the team arrived at Bagshot just in time for the match. All the fellows would be standing round, wouldn't they?"

"Of course, they would! What's the idea?"

"Some of the Rookwood chaps would come over to see them, too, I suppose?" pursued Babbington.

"Yes; we sometimes go and watch their matches," said Tommy Cook; "but what—"

"Well, suppose the team turned out to be girls?" said Babbington.

The three Tommies stared.

"Dotty!" said Tommy Dodd with conviction.

"Balmy!" said Tommy Cook.

"Faith, but the bhoys dippy!" said Tommy Doyle.

"If the team turned out to be a girls' team, and Bagshot could be persuaded to play them, it would be a jolt for Pankley & Co! if they were beaten hollow in front of the whole school, wouldn't it?" pursued Babbington.

"If!" said Tommy Dodd scornfully. "But Pankley would not play a girls' team."

"He might, if he were shammed into it," murmured Babbington.

"Yes; but—but—"

"Pankley would lick 'em for certain, in any case."

"Faith, and it's rot ye are talking, Babbington."

"Absolute rot!" said Tommy Dodd, with conviction.

Clarence Cuffy gazed at the three Tommies reproachfully.

"Really, my dear fellows, you have not given my Cousin Babbington a chance to explain properly, but if you will let him do so—"

"Well, let him get on with it," said Tommy Dodd crossly. "Blest if I can see much sense in his wheeze so far!"

"You see," said Babbington gently, "the girls' football team will be really Rookwood fellows."

"What?"

The word was shouted by the three Tommies simultaneously.

For a moment they stared incredulously at Babbington. A great light broke in upon them. Then Tommy Dodd, with a yell, rushed at the new junior and clasped him round the neck.

In a moment the amazed Babbington was being waltzed round the study, grasped tightly in the embrace of the exuberant Tommy Dodd.

"Splendid! Magnificent! A 1! Gilt-edged!" carolled Tommy Dodd. "You're a nut, Babbington. 'I told you so before!'"

"Splendid! Magnificent! A 1! Gilt-thusiasmatically."

"Faith, and you're a januis!" roared Tommy Doyle. "It's the giddy kybosh for Bagshot at last!"

CHAPTER 14.

The Challenge!

"HERE you are, chaps! Listen to this!"

The great Pankley, leader of the Bagshot juniors and the inveterate, if friendly, enemy of the Rookwood chums, pulled out a letter he had just opened and proceeded to read it:

"To Master Pankley,

"Junior Captain,

"Bagshot School.

"Dear Master Pankley,—Our school team, of which I am captain, has no match for Saturday next, and we were wondering if you could give us a game on your ground at Bagshot. The average age of our team is about fifteen, and we are considered quite good at football. If you think you could take us on we should be very pleased to give you a game.—Yours sincerely,

"J. GOLD.

"Lingfield House,

"Near Latcham."

"Check!" said Poole.

"Nerve, I call it!" said Putter.

Pankley frowned thoughtfully as he looked at the letter.

"This duffer Gold seems to fancy himself at football, anyway," he said slowly. "We're considered quite good."



The combined strength of Peele, Gower, and Higgs pulling at the basket was too much for Babbington. He suddenly let go, and the three bullies sat down with a bump. The basket flew open and a shower of wriggling snakes descended full upon Higgs & Co.!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then, 'if you care to take us on,' I don't altogether like that," pursued Pankley. "Looks as though the beggar thinks we may be frightened of him. What about it, chaps?"

Putter snorted.

"I think it's a bit of cheek on Master Gold's part! Tell him to go and boil his head!"

"Hear, hear!" said Poole.

"Well, I don't know," said Pankley slowly. "We haven't got a game for Saturday, as you know. If this chap Gold's team is really hot stuff, we might have a jolly good match."

"Where's Lingfield House School, anyway?" said Potter. "Never heard of it myself. Is it near Latcham?"

"Can't be very far away," said Pankley. "I s'pose it's just a private school."

"Some of those private schools have jolly good teams," said Putter thoughtfully. "It might be rather fun to take 'em on and lick 'em!"

"Can't do any harm, anyway," said Pankley. "I think I might write back, upon the whole, and tell the beggar to bring his merry crush over on Saturday, and we'll play their heads off. What do you chaps say?"

"I still think it's cheek," said Putter; "but if you think it's all right, Pank, old son—"

"Well, I can't see what harm it can do," said Pankley. "I'll write and tell him to come along. If they are sportsmen we might have a bit of fun with them."

"Right-ho!"

And so the matter was settled.

Had Pankley only known it, there was very little doubt about it that there would be some fun on the following Saturday!

Meanwhile, at Rookwood, the juniors who were in the great secret were awaiting a letter from Pankley with bated breath.

When James Montgomery Babbington saw a letter in the rack addressed to himself in the well-known handwriting of his Aunt Jane, he crabbled it and legged it up to his study at top speed.

There he shut the door and feverishly tore open the missive. Inside were a few

words from his maiden aunt, written in a neat hand upon letter-paper headed "Lingfield House, near Latcham." Accompanying this note was an unopened letter addressed to "Master J. Gold, Lingfield House, near Latcham," and it was upon this letter that Babbington pounced, his eyes gleaming with excitement behind his big spectacles.

"So he's fallen for it!" he breathed. "Good old Pankley."

Ten minutes later the contents of Master J. Gold's letter were being read in Jimmy Silver's study on the Classical Side, amidst loud chortles from a crowd of juniors who were present.

"So you've wangled it, Babbington!" said Jimmy Silver enthusiastically. "Good man! Good man, indeed!"

Besides Jimmy Silver and his three chums—Lovell, Raby, and Newcome—the three Tommies and Babbington were in the study, with the addition of Val Mornington, Putter Grace, Conroy, and Oswald—all of the Classical Fourth. These were the chosen ones whose participation in the great jape had been agreed upon between Tommy Dodd and Jimmy Silver.

A roar of laughter greeted the conclusion of the letter accepting the challenge, while Babbington grinned delightedly.

"You got your aunt to send this on to you? Splendid!" said Jimmy Silver, addressing Babbington. "You have worked the wheeze finely so far!"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd warmly. "It takes a Modern—"

"Oh, shut up, for goodness' sake!" said Lovell. "We're sick of hearing that!"

"Well, this is a Modern wheeze, ain't it?" demanded Tommy Cook heatedly.

"Peace, my infants!" murmured Jimmy Silver chidingly. "For goodness' sake, don't let's start ragging amongst ourselves. It will wreck the whole business. This is Babbington's wheeze, we all know, and if we pull it off it will vindicate the honour of Rookwood once and for all. Now, what about our costumes, Dodd?"

"I've been over to Judson's at Rookham," said Tommy Dodd, calming down, "and I've fixed up for eleven sets of girls' gym clothes. Short skirts, you know!"

"And stout-ribbed stockings; and all that!"

"Good!" said Jimmy, with a grin. "I

suppose old Judson will let us change at his place?"

"Oh, yes, he's quite a sport. He'll let us have the barn at the back of the house," said Tommy Dodd. "I've arranged a motor—a sort of private bus—to take us from Judson's to Bagshot. They'll think we've come from Latcham, of course."

"We shall have to push along to Judson's as hard as we can go on our bikes directly after dinner on Saturday," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "We've not got too much time. Kick-off two-forty-five, sharp, you know!"

CHAPTER 15.

The Lingfield House Footballers!

THE great wheeze was kept dark, even from Tubby Muffin, the tattler of the Fourth Form, until the Saturday morning; but on that day mysterious whispers went round that anyone who wanted to see a bit of fun should stroll over to the Bagshot footer ground that afternoon. No one seemed to know exactly what was going to happen, but the general impression was that Bagshot was going to get the kybosh at last.

After dinner there was a rush of eleven juniors to the bike shed, and off they all streamed post-haste to Rookham, where they were welcomed at the little shop in High Street by the good-natured Mr. Judson.

Mr. Judson was hairdresser, wig-maker, costumier, and many other things. He supplied costumes for the Rookham Theatre Royal, and also for the Amateur Theatrical Society at Rookwood School. The juniors were good customers of his, and Mr. Judson had willingly done what he could for them.

In the barn behind his house were laid out eleven "young ladies' sports costumes," as Mr. Judson called them, and in a very short time eleven remarkably sturdy "young ladies" were inside the gym. costumes. The arrangement of the hair was a matter which offered a difficulty, but Mr. Judson's hairdressing skill overcame this admirably, and very soon after eleven "young ladies" were fitted with bewitching shingled or bobbed coiffures.

The juniors, looking at one another, went off into peal upon peal of laughter.

"Faith, and yer big face will give us all away, Lovell, darlint!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle. "Sure, no one would take ye for a girl at all in thim big boots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Edward Lovell, who was tugging on a pair of football boots which were certainly not very dainty-looking, looked up with a red face.

"You—you Irish ass!" he roared. "What about you, with your blessed Irish accent you could cut with a knife?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure, an' I'm Miss Bridget—of Malone, Kilkenny—for one afternoon only!" grinned Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurry up, you chaps! There's no time to waste!" urged Jimmy Silver. "And don't forget, for goodness' sake, that I'm Jenny Gold, and captain of this blessed team of female footer experts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And for the love of Mike, don't call me Jimmy, or you'll give the whole show away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's right, though," said Tommy Dodd seriously. "You must all remember your names and each other's—one slip would bring the Bagshot bounders down on us like a ton of bricks. Young Babington will be on the touch-line with a crowd of the fellows, but there'll be enough of the Bagshot chaps around to scrap the lot of us if they smell a rat!"

"Rather!" said Jimmy Silver. "Better run through the names, to make sure."

"Right-ho!"

"Line up here, then, and answer your names, girls!" called Tommy Dodd, in a high-pitched voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The grinning juniors lined up, and a fine, athletic-looking lot of "young ladies" they looked, with their "fetching" coiffures and smiling, pink faces.

"Now, don't grin all the time, for goodness' sake!" said Jimmy Silver, as he surveyed his team, though he could not help grinning a little himself as he spoke. "Pankley's hot stuff, and if he tumbles to our little game, he'll jolly soon knock the grins off our faces!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now answer your names! Gortie!"

"Here!" called Oswald promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Edna!"

"Here!" said Lovell.

"Ada!"

"Here!" from Newcome.

"Bridget!"

"Faith, an' here I am, Jenny, darlint!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop cackling, you asses!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Gladys!"

"Here!" yelled Raby.

"Muriel! Tilly!"

"Here! Here!" came from Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook respectively.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Valerie!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

"Here!" drawled Mornington.

"Flossie!"

"Here!" said Putty Grace. "Is my hair on straight, Jenny darling?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kate!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Here!" called Conroy.

"That's the lot! Now, come on, chaps—I mean, girls!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here's the blessed bus! Pile in, and off we go for Bagshot!"

With a farewell wave of the hand from the grinning Mr. Judson and his assistant, the stalwart team of young lady footballers piled into the bus and rattled off down the old High Street of Rookham.

A brisk run of about ten minutes brought them to the village of Coombe, and a minute or two later the well-known gates of Bagshot School came in sight.

"Now for it!" murmured Jimmy Silver, noticing that several Bagshot fellows were waiting about near the gates, evidently on the look-out for the team from Lingfield House. "Carry on, driver, right up to the football ground!"

"Very well, miss."

"Don't stop by the gates, whatever you do!"

"Right, miss."

The driver grinned as he turned the bus in at the gates. He had a strong suspicion that the cargo of young ladies in his bus were not exactly as they appeared to be. But Tommy Dodd had taken the precaution to tip him half-a-crown in advance, with the injunction to "keep his mouth shut"; and, having taken the tip, the driver was

prepared to obey the orders which accompanied it.

Several of the Bagshot fellows jumped back in a hurry as the bus swerved in at the gates without slowing down perceptibly. Then, as they saw that the passengers in the bus were girls, their jaws dropped, and they gazed after the vehicle like fellows in a dream.

A bus-load of girls—and turning in at Bagshot School! What on earth could it mean?

The young ladies seemed to find considerable entertainment in the surprised expressions on the faces of the Bagshot fellows, and there was a chorus of chuckles inside the bus.

"They seem a bit surprised, what?" chuckled Valerie, alias Mornington. "Anybody would think they had never seen a bus-load of pretty girls before!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The bus ground on along the gravel drive until it reached the nearest point to the football pitch. Here quite a crowd was collected, including Pankley and his merry men in football togs, and a number of Rookwood Fourth-Formers, mingled with the Bagshot fellows.

It was not unusual for the juniors of either school to stroll on to the football ground of their friendly rivals on special occasions, or on days when there was no home match.

The bus stopped with a jerk.

"Here we are, then!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Just on two-forty-five, too! Now, girls, follow me!"

And then, smiling, fresh-complexioned girls, in neat gym. costumes, skipped out of the bus and clustered round their captain. And if some of them showed a heightened colour and appeared as though uneasy, surely it was only natural in the circumstances, and under the stares of fifty pairs of curious eyes!

A sort of gasp went up from the Bagshot crowd, followed by complete and tense silence.

Then Jenny Gold, alias Jimmy Silver, stepped forward, with a confident smile on "her" cheery, good-looking face.

"Is Master Pankley here?" she said, in a high, clear voice, looking round inquiringly.

Pankley, who had been watching the girls

with an air of dazed surprise, pulled himself together with a start.

"Yes, here you are, miss!" he gasped. "I—I'm Pankley."

"Ah, how do you do?" trilled Jimmy Silver coolly, holding out his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Master Pankley!"

Pankley took the outstretched hand almost mechanically, and then dropped it as if it were red-hot. His face turned a fiery red.

"B-but," he babbled—"bub-but, who are you?"

"We're the Lingfield House team, and we've come along for that game of football you promised us!"

CHAPTER 16.

Awful!

"THE match! You've come to play the match?"

Pankley, of Bagshot, fairly goggled at the cheery group of athletic-looking girls. His brain was almost turning round!

Here they were—eleven stalwart young ladies actually on the Bagshot ground, and wanting to play a match against him, Pankley, and his team!

It was incredible! Incredible, but true!

Pankley gasped, and the listening group of Bagshot fellows gasped, too.

"I—I—I—" babbled Pankley, and then he stopped.

Miss Gold smiled pleasantly.

"Is anything the matter, Master Pankley?" she inquired. "We're ready right away, you know."

"I—I—I—"

"Are you feeling quite well, Master Pankley?"

"I? Oh, yes—that is, I—I—" Pankley broke off again.

For once in his life the great Pankley was stumped for words.

The situation was preposterous—incredible—impossible!

The idea of playing a team of girls made Pankley feel faint! Never in all his experience had he heard of such a thing! Whatever the result of the match, it was certain he would never hear the end of it!

The Bagshot junior team to play a team of girls!

It was unthinkable!

Putter gave Pankley a nudge.

"Say something, Pankley!" he hissed. "Tell 'em we can't play. Tell 'em it's a mistake. Tell 'em anything!"

"Really, Master Pankley!" broke in Miss Gold, a trifle impatiently. "Don't you think we might start?"

Pankley gritted his teeth. The situation was desperate, but upon one thing Pankley was resolved. He would never play a team of girls!

"I—I—I'm sorry," he managed to gasp out. "There's some mistake. I didn't know."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Gold briskly. "There's no mistake. Lingfield House, that's us! I've got your letter."

There was a breathless hush as the crowd of fellows standing round hung upon the words of the rival captains.

What would Pankley do?

That was the question.

"Yes," said Pankley desperately, "I'm awfully sorry. You will think me rude I know, Miss Gold, but—"

"But what?" demanded Miss Gold.

"But I—I—I really can't play your team," stammered Pankley. "You—you see, I didn't know."

"You didn't know we were girls, I suppose?" said Miss Gold crisply. "Well, never mind that, Master Pankley. We'll give you a good game, all the same."

"That's right, Jenny! Stand up to him!" cried a high-pitched voice from the ranks of lady footballers.

There was a cackle from the crowd, and Pankley, crimson and desperate, looked round in a hunted way. There was a stir as a tall, good-looking senior pushed his way through the throng. At the sight of the girls and Pankley & Co. facing each other he stared and rubbed his eyes. It was evident that Mason, captain of Bagshot School, could hardly believe his eyes. He turned swiftly to Pankley.

"What's all this, Pankley? Who are these—these young ladies?"

"They—they're a football team, Mason," stammered Pankley.

"Football team? What football team?" demanded Mason.

"Lingfield House, Mason. I—I fixed up a match with them."

"You fixed up a match with a team of—ahem!—girls!" cried Mason. "Excuse me, miss!" he said, turning to Miss Gold apologetically. "I beg your pardon! But I—I was rather surprised."

"Oh, don't mind us!" said Miss Gold, with a smile. "Master Pankley fixed up a match with us, and now he wants to back out of it."

"Shame!" came a murmur from the crowd.

The fellows, Bagshot and Rookwooders alike, were grinning now. They were beginning to enjoy the scene and the disfigurement of the lordly Pankley.

Mason bent a stern look on the unfortunate Pankley.

"What's this, Pankley? Did you fix up a match with this team?"

"I—I— Yes, I suppose so, Mason," stammered Pankley desperately; "but—but—"

"But what?" said Mason sharply. "You must know whether you did or not!"

"Yes, I did, Mason; but I didn't know it was a girls' team."

It was out at last, and there was a shout of laughter from the crowd, in which the girls joined merrily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!"

Pankley, crimson with confusion and mortification, almost tore his hair.

"I didn't know!" he gasped. "Lingfield House—I didn't know!"

Even Mason was smiling.

"Well, you should have made sure," he said. "But now that these young ladies have arrived you must play them, of course."

"What!" gasped Pankley, while Putter reeled against Poole and groaned deeply.

"Play 'em, I said," repeated Mason sharply, "and get on with it quickly. You've wasted quite enough time already. I am very sorry, miss," he continued, turning to Miss Jenny Gold, who was grinning widely. "I must apologise for the bad manners of Pankley, but we'll get right on with the game now, and I'll referee for you myself."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Mason! That is so good of you!" cooed Jenny.

"Not at all!" said Mason, blushing and leading the way on to the field. "Get a move on, Pankley!"

And to the accompaniment of loud chuckles from the touchline, Pankley led a very shamefaced-looking team on to the field.

The girls lined up without a moment's delay, and very businesslike they looked in their neat gym. costumes and rather large football-boots. Jenny Gold won the toss.

"Ready?" smiled Mason.

Miss Gold nodded.

"Go ahead!" she said tersely.

Phoop!"

Mason blew his whistle, and the amazing match started.

CHAPTER 17.

"Played, the girls!"

FROM the moment the whistle went in that astounding match, Lingfield House began to press. Pankley and his team were flustered and ill at ease, and the shouts from the touchline naturally made them worse. Almost all Bagshot had been attracted by this time, to say nothing of a considerable number of Rookwood juniors, and the touchline resounded with shouts of encouragement for the girls' team.

The spectators seemed to find something very entertaining in the spectacle of Pankley & Co. fumbling with the ball in a state of hopeless "nerves," while their girlish opponents, cool and methodical, made rings round them.

"Go it, the girls!"

"Play up, Lingfield House!"

"Play up, the flappers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the young ladies did play up! Getting the ball on his toes from Pankley, Jimmy Silver, alias Jenny Gold, neatly tricked the Bagshot centre-half and passed out to Lovell on his left.

Lovell, alias Edna, on being tackled in a half-hearted way by the flustered right-back, passed the ball to his centre, and that stalwart young lady whipped round the other back like a flash of lightning, and before the Bagshot goalie realised the danger, a real pile-driver whizzed past him into the net.

There was a roar from the touchline.

"Goal!"

"Well played, the girls!"

"Goal for Lingfield House!"

"Hip, hip, hip, hooray!"

It was first blood to the girls, and the match was only a minute old. If anything could have added to the discomfiture of Pankley & Co., it was this unexpected blow. From that time they played, as one of the Bagshot fellows disgustedly remarked, like a set of moulting fowls.

The Lingfield House young ladies simply ran through them, and the busiest man on the Bagshot side was the unfortunate goalie.

Shots rained upon him from all sides until he was in a state of complete bewilderment. And they were shots, too; not gentle, delicate kicks, or half-hearted punts, but really hefty shots with plenty of beef behind them!

To Pankley and his team there was something positively unladylike in the way that Lingfield House kicked the long-suffering football about!

The Bagshot Junior Eleven were by no means composed of duds. Pankley himself was as a rule a tower of strength, and he had collected a team round him which in an ordinary way could, and did, give a good account of themselves against Jimmy Silver's team at Rookwood.

But the circumstances of this amazing match were such that Pankley & Co. never for one single instant were able to do themselves justice.

They played like a team of hopeless duffers, and the more the crowd on the touchline yelled at them the worse they played. The Lingfield House team, on the other hand, did not seem to have a trace of nerves.

Not only was their ball control infinitely superior, but they did not hesitate to charge the unfortunate Pankley & Co. off the ball time after time. Each time this happened a perfect shriek of delight went up from the touchline; for, as everyone there knew well, none of Pankley's men dare charge their feminine opponents.

The young ladies of Lingfield House, however, had no such scruples, and the staggering Bagshot fellows were charged about

the field, and, not seldom, were bowled clean off their feet.

Even Mason at times laughed so much that he almost swallowed the whistle.

Naturally, he did not think of pulling up any of the young ladies, however robust their charges; though, to give them their due, Lingfield House team, played a perfectly clean, if hefty, game.

When Edna added a second goal from a wonderful corner kick there was another sensation; but when Valerie, otherwise Mornington, dribbled right through on his own, to score a third, the touchline crowd were almost dumb with astonishment.

The Rookwooders on the touchline were in ecstasies.

"Did you ever see anything like it?" almost sobbed Pons, who was watching with his chum, Van Ryn. "They're simply wiping the floor with poor old Pankley."

"Pankley's simply flummoxed," chuckled Van Ryn, "and no wonder! Poor old Pankley! Ha, ha, ha!"

Yelling with mirth, the Rookwooders cheered on the girls enthusiastically. Bagshot fellows on the touchline, although still laughing, were beginning to get a little restive.

Three goals in ten minutes was rather too much of a good thing for a girls' team against their junior footballers.

But more surprises were in store for them.

A pretty piece of work between Conroy and Newcome, otherwise Kate and Ada, tricked the backs completely, leaving the Bagshot goalie no alternative but to run out. This he did, but in vain. Dodging nimbly aside, with the ball at his feet, Conroy tricked it into goal in the neatest way in the world, bringing another shout of laughter to add to the depression of spirit of Pankley's unfortunate footballers.

Four—nil for Lingfield House!

After this disaster Pankley gritted his teeth and strove to pull himself together. At the same time he made a desperate attempt to infuse some spirit into his humiliated team.

"For goodness' sake buck up!" he hissed to Putter. "Your play's all gone to pot! Pull yourself together, man!"

Putter glared at his chief.

"You ass!" he hooted. "That blessed centre-forward there just knocked me flying! By Jove, I'd like to—"

"Oh, scat!" growled Pankley. "Keep your temper! No rough house, you know!"

"Rough house!" howled Putter. "What do you call that, then?"

"That" was the spectacle of Poole, the third member of the famous Bagshot trio, being bowled over incontinently by a muscular young lady who was speeding down the wing with the ball at her toe.

On she went, to put in a beautiful centre just at the right moment, a centre which dropped practically at the feet of Miss Jenny Gold, who promptly kicked the ball into goal.

There was a yell.

"Well played, Jenny!"

"Well centred, Flossie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Before half-time came to give a brief respite to the agonies of the jaded Pankley & Co., another goal had been added to the total by the amazing Lingfield House girls.

Six—nil!

That was the score that faced Pankley & Co. as they almost tottered off the field!

"Six—nil!" muttered Mason to himself. "By gad, I never saw anything like it! This beats Banagher!"

And the stalwart Six-Former gazed in some admiration at the group of girls who were chatting together unconcernedly as if the beating of a boys' football team were a matter of very little moment to them.

CHAPTER 18.

A Shock for Pankley & Co.!

JENNY GOLD, sucking a lemon, strolled over to the Bagshot group.

"Jolly good game, what?" she remarked brightly.

"Told you we could give you a good game, didn't I, Master Pankley?"

Pankley, red and furious, gave the cheerful young lady a basilisk glare, which he endeavoured at a moment's notice, catching a look from Mason in his direction, to change into a beaming smile. The result

was an expression so extraordinary that Miss Jenny's eyes opened wide.

"Are you ill, Master Pankley?" she said, with concern in her voice.

"N-n-no, not at all!" gasped Pankley. "It—it's a ripping game, of course. We—we—"

"You're not quite in your best form, what?" said Miss Jenny brightly. "Never mind, Master Pankley. You may get a goal in the second half, you know."

Pankley, forgetting himself, glared again, and with a merry laugh Miss Jenny turned away to rejoin her team.

"I—I could brain that wretched girl!" said Pankley, in concentrated tones. "She's charged me about fearfully, too!" Potter snorted.

"She thinks we may get one goal in the second half," he said, "and they have got six already—Crrumph!"

"By the by, did you notice how streaky her face looked?" said Poole. "Sort of streaks all down the sides. She's evidently rather made up—that's what I think!"

Pankley looked up thoughtfully.

"Yes; it's funny I noticed that," he said. "I s'pose that's what it is—their complexions come off when they get hot. Hallo! There goes the whistle!"

Mason blew his whistle, and the teams lined up for the second half. Pankley & Co. had got a little more used to the situation now, and were determined to make a desperate effort to retrieve the fortunes of the game.

But the Amazons of Lingfield House, unfortunately for Pankley & Co., were no less determined to carry on their policy of aggression.

In less than two minutes Miss Jenny had netted another goal for Lingfield House, and Pankley & Co. gazed at each other hopelessly.

"This is awful!" groaned Pankley.

"She's hot stuff!" said Pool grudgingly. "She's a blessed Dixie Dean!"

"Going to rain, I believe," said Putter, gazing up at the sky which had become very black.

"Good thing, too!" said Pankley gloomily. "I hope it comes down in torrents and washes the match out!"

As a matter of fact, Pankley's wish was

granted. Five minutes later there was a sudden deluge of rain which almost blotted out the landscape. But in those five minutes the Lingfield House team had had time to score two more goals.

In a terrific downpour the field cleared like magic. There was a rush to the house for shelter on the part of the crowd on the touchline, while Pankley & Co. led away at the double to the pavilion.

Although this was normally reserved for the players only, it was noticeable that half a dozen of the Rookwood Fourth-Formers, who had been among the spectators, made a dash for the pavilion, too.

Amongst these was James Montgomery Babbington, of the New House at Rookwood.

"Bad luck this rain," said Miss Jenny, when the shelter of the pavilion had been reached. "Looks as though we shall not be able to finish this delightful match."

There was more than a suspicion of a giggle from the other young ladies at this remark, and Pankley looked up sharply.

"I suppose you are satisfied, Master Pankley?" continued Miss Jenny blandly.

Pankley looked hard at this formidable young lady.

"I—I suppose so," he stammered. There was a laugh from Mason. He, like others, had run for the pavilion.

"You ought to be satisfied, Pankley!" he grinned. "Bagshot never had such a licking, that I know of. It's your win all along the line, Miss Gold."

"It's very kind of you to say that, Mr. Mason!" cooed Jenny Gold. "Do you hear that, girls?" she called over her shoulder. "Mr. Mason says that it's our win all along the line!"

Pankley gazed hard at the cheery Miss Gold and her merry team, and there was suspicion in his glance. Strange and disturbing thoughts were working in Pankley's mighty brain.

He opened his mouth to speak, and then closed it again. Mason, the school captain, turned up the collar of his blazer.

"Well, I'm going to run for it," he remarked. "As soon as this rain lets up a bit, Pankley, bring the girls along to the house to tea. I'll tell the matron."

And, with a cheery wave of the hand, the Bagshot captain ran out of the pavilion and scudded off through the rain.

Pankley did not turn his head at Mason's departure, but kept his eyes fixed on the animated countenance of Miss Jenny Gold.

That young lady, if she noticed it, did not allow it to disturb her in any way.

"Well, girls," she remarked almost casually—and now there was a subtle change in her voice, as Pankley noticed, with a start—"Mason's gone! What about it?"

There was a sort of involuntary movement of the girls towards their captain.

"Yes, what about it, Jimmy—er—Jenny, I mean!" came the drawing tones of the tall girl who answered to the name of Valerie.

That did it!

In an instant the truth—the dreadful truth—dawned upon Pankley.

"Jimmy!" yelled Pankley, making a dash at "Miss Gold." "Jimmy Silver! I know you now, you bounder!"

The incensed skipper of the Bagshot team made a wild clutch at the provoking young lady's beautifully shingled hair. Miss Gold ducked swiftly, but Pankley's clutching fingers caught in the hair, and the whole coiffure came off in his hand. The transformation was amazing—and instantaneous. Jimmy Silver stood revealed to all beholders, in his own proper person.

There was a roar of mingled wrath and astonishment from the Bagshot fellows. Putter and Poole almost fell down with amazement.

The next moment there was a shout of defiance from the Rookwooders, as they charged the demoralised and gasping Bagshot fellows in a compact body; and inside ten seconds a wild and whirling combat was in progress.

"Sock it to 'em, Rookwood!" sang out Jimmy Silver.

"Give 'em beans!"

"Down with the Bagshot bounders!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The conflict was short and sharp; there could be but one ending to it. To the Bagshot fellows, almost stunned by the shock of the paralyzing discovery, it

seemed like a horrible nightmare. For the most part they were too dazed to put up much of a fight against overwhelming odds. The Rookwooders who had been amongst the crowd on the touchline, and who had taken refuge from the rain in the pavilion, joined in the combat with zest.

Pankley and Putter and Poole, wild with rage at the way they had been tricked, put up a terrific fight. But Rookwood outnumbered Bagshot by almost two to one, and in five minutes the fight was over. Every Bagshot fellow was prostrate on the floor, with one or more Rookwooder sitting on his chest!

The Rookwood fellows, however, had not got off without damage. Most of the "girls" wigs had been shed in the struggle, and a number of discoloured eyes and swollen noses testified to the stout fight put up by Pankley & Co.

Arthur Edward Lovell, from his perch on the chest of the redoubtable Pankley, nursed a cut lip as he grinned down at his fallen foe.

"Done you this time, Pankley, old son!" he chortled. "What a wind up to your footer season! Beaten nine-nil by a team of girls!"

Pankley glared in breathless rage.

"You lemme gerrup, and I—I'll give you socks, Lovell!" he gasped.

"Not good enough!" grinned Lovell. "And call me Edna, please, Master Pankley!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Rookwooders.

Pankley almost foamed.

"You—you boulder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you rotter! I—I'll give you Edna if you lemme gerrup!"

"Nothing doing, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is the jape of the giddy season!" gasped Jimmy Silver, wiping the tears of mirth from his eyes. "There's never been anything to equal it! Pankley'll never get over it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'll have to clear off to Australia or somewhere, to hide his diminished head!" chuckled Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A real, gilt-edged, copper-bottomed stunt, an' it worked a treat!" put in Val Mornington.

"And don't forget it was a Modern wheeze!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Faith, an' ye're right, Tommy!" said Doyle. "It's a broth av a bhoy ye are, Babbington!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Three cheers for Babbington!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

There was a cheer which might easily have been heard in the Bagshot School House, but for the roar of the rain on the roof of the pavilion. Some such thought evidently occurred to Jimmy Silver, for he gazed out at the weather somewhat anxiously.

"It's letting up a bit, I believe!" he exclaimed. "We must buck up and clear out of here, you men, or we shall have a crowd of Bagshot bouncers on our track."

"What shall we do with these beauties, Jimmy?" sang out Raby.

"Tie 'em up!" said Jimmy promptly. "Their clothes will be in the changing-room. Use their ties and braces and mufflers—anything—and rope 'em up!"

"What-ho!"

"You—you rotters!" choked Pankley.

"Cheer up, Pank, old man! Someone'll soon come across from the house to see what we're doing; but we shall be gone by then!" grinned Lovell.

The unfortunate Bagshot fellows were securely trussed up, one after another, with their handkerchiefs or anything that came to hand. Each man's hands were bound behind his back, and his legs tied together at knee and ankle.

Then the whole team were sat up on the floor, with their backs against the wall.

"Pretty lot, ain't they?" grinned Jimmy Silver, stepping back to admire the effect, with his head on one side, while eleven pairs of eyes from eleven flushed, furious faces, glared at him with a deadly, concentrated glare.

Jimmy Silver wagged an admonitory forefinger at them playfully.

"Naughty, naughty! You mustn't lose your little tempers with young ladies, just because they have beaten you at footer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Rookwooders. And Pankley fairly writhed.

"Jenny Gold—Jimmy Silver! Silver—Gold! Oh, if I'd only known!" he groaned. "If I'd only guessed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You would have done if you hadn't been such a chump, old man," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Give Mason our love—he was awfully nice and polite to us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, and all that, but we must be going now—the rain looks like stopping. Just a moment, though!"

Jimmy Silver produced a piece of charcoal crayon from some recess of his gym costume, and, jumping on a form, proceeded to scrawl on the wall above the heads of the disconsolate row of bound Bagshot fellows:

"ROOKWOOD FOR EVER!"

"How's that?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hip, pip, hurrah!"

There was a wild cheer from the hilarious Rookwooders.

"Come on, now, girls—I mean, chaps! Gather up your wigs and things, and we'll make a bolt for the 'bus!" said Jimmy briskly. "We shall get wet, but that's better than being caught here by the Bagshot bounders!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-bye, Pankley! Thanks for the ripping game!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-bye, Bluebell! Three cheers for us!"

And with another cheer, the whole party of Rookwooders—footballers and spectators—streamed out of the pavilion and bolted across to where the motor-bus was standing, leaving behind them eleven of the gloomiest youths in Christendom.

Breathlessly, the Rookwood juniors clambered aboard the bus, while the driver started up the engine.

"Get a move on, driver!" said Jimmy Silver. "It's time we went—high time!"

"We've decided not to stay to tea!" grinned Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's us for Rookham!" said Jimmy. "Mr. Judson'll be wanting his things back, and we want a change badly. We're wet, but we've certainly had a wonderful day!"

There was a roar of assent. The bus started with a jerk, and rolled rapidly down the drive towards the gates of Bagshot School.

It was just in time.

Already a stream of fellows could be seen flowing from the door of the School House, as the rain now almost stopped; one or two of them stopped and stared as they saw the bus moving off.

"We've timed it beautifully," said Jimmy Silver. "If the gates are open we're all right."

Fortunately the gates were open.

Some of the Bagshot fellows were running after the bus now, evidently puzzled as to why the girls' team should be leaving so hurriedly. A noise of shouts came to the ears of the Rookwooders. Had the gates been shut against the bus, the delay might well have had serious consequences for Jimmy Silver and his merry men; but they were not shut.

The bus passed out of the precincts of Bagshot School without let or hindrance, and turned on to the high road, speeding towards Coombe Village.

"Safe!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows—"

"Hear, hear!"

"We have been successful in pulling off the jaws of the century! It's the kybosh for Pankley & Co."

"Hurrah!"

"And the honour of Rookwood is safe!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

CHAPTER 19.

The Eavesdropper!

"WELL make it a feed, then," said Jimmy Silver.

The topic of conversation in the end study in the Fourth Form passage at Rookwood was naturally the famous victory which the Rookwood juniors had just gained over their old enemies, Pankley & Co. of Bagshot School.

Jimmy Silver and his chums, Lovell.

Raby, and Newcome, were unanimously agreed that such a famous victory should be celebrated in some way or other.

The discussion had not been in progress more than a minute or two when Arthur Edward Lovell, in his decisive way, gave his opinion as to the form the celebration should take.

"Let's have a feed," was his suggestion; and Jimmy Silver agreed.

"Better have it in the dormitory, I suppose," said the captain of the Fourth thoughtfully. "We can get the Modern chaps over—smuggle them in somehow."

"Hope Manders won't be on the war-path," said Newcome. "He's a nosy old beggar, and he keeps a pretty sharp eye on the Moderns, you know."

"That's their look out!" grinned Lovell. "If they don't like to risk old Manders they can stay away."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Jimmy, laughing. "The man who thought of the whole stunt really was young Babbington, and he's a Modern. We must have him at the feed, and Tommy Dodd & Co., of course, will have to come."

"Babbington ought to be the guest of honour," said Newcome. "That Modern's got a headpiece on him, and no mistake."

"He has," agreed Jimmy. "He's a mighty sharp chap is Babbington, and the funny part is he looks exactly like his cousin, Clarence Cuffy, the biggest ass at Rookwood!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sh-shush!"

Lovell tiptoed across the study, and, grasping the handle of the door, suddenly flung it open. There was a gasp from a fat figure which staggered and almost fell into the room.

"Tubby Muffin!" roared the Fistical Four, with one voice.

Tubby Muffin, the fattest junior at Rookwood, was noted for his tale-bearing, eaves-dropping proclivities. Evidently his ear had been at the keyhole of the end study. But for how long? That was the question.

"You fat clam!" roared Lovell, springing at Tubby like a tiger.

The fat junior, with a gasp of terror, turned to flee, but it was too late. Lovell's grasp was upon him, and with a horrified

yell he was dragged backwards into the study.

"Shut the door," said Jimmy Silver. "Now, Muffin, how dare you listen outside our door, you young rotter!"

"Ow! I didn't—I wasn't!" Leggo, Lovell!" shouted Tubby wildly.

"You awful little sneak!" hissed Lovell, shaking Tubby violently by the collar, much as a terrier might shake a very fat rat.

Shake, shake, shake!

"Ow! Yoop! I'm ch-choking!"

"Good thing, too, you spying worm!" snorted Lovell.

Shake, shake, shake!

"Ow! Help! Yaroooh!"

"Go easy, Lovell!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "We don't want a dead porpoise lying about the study."

Lovell desisted at last, and released Tubby, who gasped and gasped as if for a wager.

"Now, how much did you overhear—that's the question, Tubby?" said Jimmy Silver sternly.

"And tell the truth, Tubby," said Raby, flourishing a cricket stump, "or we'll lay this round you!"

"Beast! I didn't hear anything—I wasn't listening!" gasped Tubby.

"Oh, tell that to the marines!" said Newcome.

"Fact! My—my shoelace came undone, and—"

"Oh, stow all that, Tubby!" snapped Jimmy Silver impatiently. "We know you were listening!"

"I heard nothing, I tell you!" wailed Tubby. "I never heard anything about the feed. Anyway, I s'pose I shall be there—that is to say, I think it's a jolly good idea!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You would think that," said Jimmy Silver, grinning in spite of himself. "So you know all about it, and you will cackle it all over the place, of course!"

"I won't—I swear I won't!" said Tubby earnestly.

"If you do," said Raby, flourishing the cricket stump, "look out, that's all!"

"Now, listen to me, you fat ass," said Jimmy Silver earnestly. "If a word about this suggested feed gets out, Carthew or

old Manders, or some of the beaks will get on to it and stop the whole thing. Then there'll be no feed. See?"

"I—I won't say a word—I swear it, Jimmy!" said Tubby hurriedly. "No feed! My hat! I won't breathe a word!"

"If you do, you will get a licking from the whole Form," said Lovell darkly. "Now, roll away, porpoise. I'm fed up with the sight of you!"

And Lovell threw open the door and made a lunge at Tubby with a large size in feet.

"Ow! You beast, Lovell! Shurrup kicking me! Help! Yaroo!"

Tubby Muffin stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once.

"That chap Muffin makes me sick with his spying habits," said Lovell disgustedly, slamming the door again. "He's a worm!"

"Yes; but I don't think he'll let on in this case," said Jimmy Silver. "When there's a feed in the air he'll be jolly careful. We'll talk it over in the dorm. to-night and have a whip round, and then get in the grub to-morrow. To-morrow night we'll have the feed in our dorm.—a victory celebration—what?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Tommy Dodd & Co. will chip in all right," said Lovell. "We'll go and see them about it now. They'll have to stand their whack, of course."

"All except Babbington," said Jimmy Silver. "That chap Babbington must be the guest of honour."

"Hear, hear!" agreed the Co. heartily.

And they swung out of the study en route for the Modern House to consult with Tommy Dodd as to ways and means for the great victory feed.

CHAPTER 20.

Catching a Tartar!

THE Fourth Form, Classics and Moderns alike, enthusiastically approved of the Fistical Four's suggestion of a dormitory feed, and the necessary preparations were quickly made.

A small buying committee was formed, consisting of Jimmy Silver and Tommy

Dodd, and during the whole of the following day the two members of the buying committee were constantly haunted by the fat figure of Tubby Muffin, who hovered hopefully in the vicinity.

"Clear off, Muffin, will you!" said Tommy Dodd for the umpteenth time, as he was walking through the cloisters during morning break. "What are you following me about for, you fat freak?"

"N-nothing, Dodd!"

"Then what are you dodging from one pillar to another like a blessed detective for? I'll teach you to follow me!"

And Tommy Dodd made a wrathful lunge in Tubby's direction.

Tubby skipped out of the way and fled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Lovell, who had observed the incident. "Tubby won't let you out of his sight, in case you are going to start buying for the feed."

"Shush, you ass! Don't blab it out all over the place, Lovell," said Tommy Dodd.

"It's all right," said Lovell, looking round hurriedly. "No one about."

"So that's what he's haunting me for, the fat freak!" growled Tommy Dodd. "If he comes after me again I—I'll burst him!"

"He's gone off to track Jimmy Silver, I expect," grinned Lovell. "He won't lose sight of the buying committee to-day, I'll bet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After footer practice that afternoon it was arranged that the tuck for the great feed, which had already been ordered, should be conveyed from Sergeant Kettle's little tuckshop across the quad, in a number of parcels and baskets, by different juniors to avoid suspicion.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were particularly anxious that the eye of authority should not notice that large consignments of provisions were being smuggled into the house at one time.

At first the idea succeeded according to plan. Tommy Doyle of the Modern House was the first junior to emerge from the tuckshop with a large brown-paper parcel under his arm. Looking as unconcerned as possible, he strolled across the quad and scooted into the School House. There the parcel was deposited in Jimmy

Silver's study. Lovell and Raby were in to receive it.

Newcome came next with a basket, and attracted no particular attention, save from Tubby Muffin.

That junior was watching the proceedings from outside the tuckshop, his numerous attempts to enter having been firmly repulsed by the buying committee, in a state of great excitement.

As each consignment of tuck appeared Tubby followed it at a distance, his round eyes never removed from the parcel until it disappeared in at the door of the School House.

Flynn of the Fourth was the next to appear with a parcel. Tubby Muffin eyed it hungrily.

"Kape off, ye fat thafe of the world!" muttered Flynn, as he passed Tubby.

"Oh, really, Flynn," said Tubby, in an injured tone, "I was only just looking!"

"If you look any more, I'll take my boot to ye!" growled Flynn, passing on hurriedly.

"Hi, there, Muffin, come over here!"

A sharp voice rang across the quad, and Tubby Muffin gave a start and looked around.

From a window of the Modern House overlooking the quad the head and shoulders of Carthew, the unpopular prefect, appeared. He was beckoning to Tubby.

"Come here, Muffin!" came the sharp voice again.

Tubby Muffin, looking very anxious, rolled towards the window.

"What's going on here, Muffin?" said Carthew sharply. "I've seen two or three kids cutting across the quad with parcels. What's it all mean, hey?"

Tubby Muffin fairly spluttered with alarm.

If Carthew once got on the track Tubby knew there would be no feed that night. Carthew was the most unpopular prefect at Rookwood, and particularly down on the Fourth Form.

"I—I—nothing!" stammered Tubby. "Nothing at all, Cardew! It's quite all right!"

"All right, is it?" said Carthew, his suspicions thoroughly roused by Tubby's

manner. "I think I'll come down and see about it myself."

"Y-yes, Carthew!" spluttered Tubby.

Here was an unfortunate turn of events. Somebody must be warned, and at once. Tubby gazed round hurriedly. Just emerging from the door of the Modern House was the figure of James Montgomery Babbington, the new boy at Rookwood, who had already gained quite a reputation for being a fellow of ideas.

Tubby rushed across to him in a moment.

"I say, Babbington!" he babbled. "Quick, Carthew!"

Babbington blinked at him in surprise. "Carthew!"

"Yes, Carthew! He's got on to it!" "What?"

"On to the feed, I mean. He's seen the chaps carrying the parcels. He's coming down."

"Oh, is he?" said Babbington, his eyes gleaming. "Hold on a minute, will you?"

He turned and dashed back into the Modern House. He flew up the stairs like lightning, and along the passages to the study which he shared with his cousin, Clarence Cuffy.

It was the work of a moment to pick up a basket which was concealed under a rug in a corner and tuck it under his arm. Then Babbington turned and dashed downstairs again. In an incredibly short space of time he was standing by Tubby once more.

"Has he come down?" he gasped breathlessly.

"No; but he said he was coming, and—"

"Wait here and look out for him," said Babbington; and he dashed off at top speed for the tuckshop.

Carthew had, as a matter of fact, been delayed a moment or two owing to the fact that he had mislaid his ashplant. Carthew found more use for that implement than any other prefect at Rookwood, and he thought it might help him in the investigation he was going to make.

What was going on Carthew had no idea, and it was hardly his business to find out. But if Carthew could catch the Fourth-Formers, and especially Jimmv Silver &

Co., out in any way, he felt that it would amply repay him for any trouble it might cause him.

He found his ashplant at length, and hurried downstairs.

Meantime, Babbington had reached the door of the tuckshop with his basket. He was just in time to meet Tommy Cook emerging with a large hamper under his arm.

"Quick! Drop that!" exclaimed Babbington, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "Take this and carry on!"

"What—what—"
"Quick! Carthew!" gasped Babbington.

He snatched the hamper from the astounded Tommy Cook, and thrust the big basket he had been carrying himself into that worthy's hands.

Then, picking up Tommy Cook's hamper, Babbington made a jump for the tuckshop door.

Almost mechanically, Tommy Cook walked on, carrying Babbington's big basket. At the same time Carthew came out of the Modern House at a run, with his ashplant tucked under his arm. Tommy Cook looked across at him, but kept on walking towards the School House.

"Hi, Cook!" shouted Carthew peremptorily. "Stop!"

"What is it?" asked Tommy Cook, walking on steadily.

"Stop!" yelled Carthew, waving his hand. "Stop at once, Cook! I order you!"

Tommy Cook, by this time half-way across the quad, stopped reluctantly. A swarm of fellows came out of the tuckshop and stood looking on as Carthew came panting up.

"Now, what's all this?" said Carthew enigmatically. "You young sweeps are up to some game or other."

"Are we, Carthew?" said Cook innocently.

"Yes, you are, and I'm going to find out what it is," said Carthew. "Hand over that basket, Cook."

"What for, Carthew?" said Tommy Cook coolly. "It isn't yours, is it?"

Carthew grinned evilly.

"No, it's yours at present, Cook," he said. "But I'm going to confiscate it. My duty as a prefect, you know."

"Shame!" came a murmur from the indignant crowd.

"I'm not letting this basket go!" said Tommy Cook defiantly.

"We'll soon see about that!" said Carthew grimly, letting his ashplant slip into his hand. "Now, Cook, I order you, as a prefect, to hand over that basket to me!"

"Shame!" came the murmur again, only louder this time.

"Don't do it, Cook!"

"Stick it out!"

"Silence!" yelled Carthew savagely. "There's grub in that basket, I jolly well know!"

"Well, why not?" said Tommy Cook.

"You're the third or fourth young sweep I've seen carting loads of tuck across to the School House," said Carthew. "There's some game going on. Besides, what are you Moderns doing carting grub into the School House?"

"Has that anything to do with you, Carthew?" said Tommy Cook blandly.

"Yes, you young sweep, it has!" roared Carthew. "And I'll jolly soon show you! Hand over that basket or take a licking!"

Tommy Cook hesitated.

"Are you going to confiscate it, Carthew?"

"Yes; it's got grub in, I know that," said Carthew, "and you youngsters are not allowed to have grub by the basketful. Hand it over!"

Tommy Cook reluctantly handed it over, and Carthew, with a victorious grin, grasped it.

"Shame!" came in an angry roar from the onlookers, who by now included half the Fourth Form.

"Highway robber!"

"It's burglary!"

"Shame, Carthew!"

But Carthew only laughed. He was feeling quite pleased with himself. He had dished the juniors' little game, whatever that game might be, and, in addition, had confiscated what looked like a very promising basket of grub.

The basket was furnished with a heavy lid, which was kept in place by a wooden peg. As he held the basket by one arm, Carthew could not resist the temptation to have a look at the contents of his prize. Amidst a breathless hush he pulled out the peg, and, opening the lid, peered in. Then a wild yell rent the air.

For, as Carthew looked into the basket, the hooded head of a big snake rose with

an angry hiss, writhing almost into the prefect's face.

For a moment Carthew was transfixed with horror. His bulging eyes gazed at the fearsome head, fixed with terror.

The next instant, with a shriek of sheer fright, Carthew flung the basket from him.

There was a roar from the crowd of juniors.

"A snake!"

"Look out, Carthew!"

"Run, man, run!"

Carthew turned on his heel as six feet of angry reptile writhed out of the basket with incredible speed and made in his direction.

For the first time since the beginning of this little comedy the face of Montgomery Babbington wore an anxious look.

Would Carthew stand his ground and slash at the snake with his ashplant? If so, Babbington would have to intervene, and quickly, to save the life of his pet. But he need have no fear. Carthew did not even think of attacking the fearsome-looking reptile whose appearance had caused him such a shock. Turning on his heels, he fairly fled back towards the Modern House, followed by such a roar of laughter as had seldom been heard at Rookwood.

It was certain that the great victory celebration had nothing more to fear from the interference of Carthew!

CHAPTER 21.

The Feast!

"GENTLEMEN!"

"Hear, hear!"

The applause that greeted Jimmy Silver as he rose, holding aloft a tumbler full of foaming ginger-pop, was none the less hearty because it was subdued.

The great victory celebration in the Fourth Form dormitory on the Classical side was in full swing.

The three Tommies, together with a number of other stalwarts from the Modern Fourth, and including, of course, Babbington and his cousin, Clarence Cuffy, had been smuggled in through the window.

Evening-dress, as Putty Grace remarked,

was compulsory, but on this occasion this consisted of jacket over a suit of pyjamas.

The feed was by way of being a record one in the annals of the Fourth Form. The whip-round had been generously responded to, and Mornington had contributed a whole fiver.

Ham and tongue, tinned fruits, potted meats, jam, and cakes galore, tarts enough to satisfy Tubby Muffin—all these good things and many more were there. Only Tubby Muffin, whose jaws had never stopped during the whole of the evening, was still going strong when Jimmy Silver rose to make a speech.

So long as a crumb of the Gargantuan feed remained to be eaten it was likely that Tubby Muffin would continue to go strong.

"Gentlemen," said Jimmy Silver, "I have only a few remarks to make."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Jimmy!"

"This feed, as you all know, is to celebrate our recent great victory over the Bagshot bounders!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Jimmy!"

"Hurrah!"

"In times past," continued Jimmy Silver modestly, "we have perhaps not always come out top in our rags with Pankley & Co.—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But this last time we japed them as they have never been japed before! It was the kybosh for Pankley & Co., and everybody knows it—even Pankley knows it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now, chaps," went on Jimmy Silver gracefully, "the fellow who originated the great jape is our guest of honour this evening. I refer to Babbington; and if it was not for the noise you would kick up, I would ask you to drink his health three times three!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Babbington!"

"Faith, and here's to ye, Babbington!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle enthusiastically.

"Ye're a broth of a boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The toast was drunk with the greatest enthusiasm, and James Montgomery Babbington rose with a modest blush to reply.

With his round face and large spectacles Babbington did not look particularly like a hero, but the fellows of the Rookwood Fourth had already learned that beneath Babbington's guileless exterior lay an unusual personality.

"Gentlemen of the Fourth," said Babbington, "I thank you very much for drinking my health!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Babbington!"

"I am glad our little stunt against Bagshot was so successful, though I had very little to do towards carrying it. Now, gentlemen," continued Babbington, blinking round on the cheery throng, "I received a letter by this evening's post, which I should like to read to you. It is from Pankley, of Bagshot, who must have heard of me somehow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And this is what he says:

"Master Babbington, Rookwood School.

"My dear Freak,—The last time your Rookwood chumps came over here, dressed as a lot of blessed girls, they left something behind them. It was a wig—a girl's wig—and if you would like it back you can come and get it. At present it is nailed to the flagstaff in our playground, and we challenge you to fetch it—if you can! We can promise any Rookwood duffers who have the nerve to enter these gates a high old time!—Yours truly,

"CECIL PANKLEY.

"P.S.—If we had spotted who the Lingfield House team were a bit earlier we'd have given them several sorts of fits!"

"That, gentlemen, is Pankley's letter. What are we going to do about it?"

And James Montgomery Babbington sat down again with a beaming smile on his round face.

Then a low babel of voices broke out.

"Well, of all the blessed cheek!"

"Just like Pankley!"

"The cheeky rotter!"

"It's a trap!"

"Let's go and get the wig!"

Jimmy Silver held up his hand.

"Shush!" he commanded. "You're making too much row, chaps! We'll have the beaks down on us in a minute!"

"Here, we don't want that!" said Tommy Dodd, looking alarmed. "Old Manders will warn us if he finds we're out of the dormitory!"

"Faith, and he will that!"

"Well, chuck it!" said Jimmy Silver. "Now, about this letter?"

"What I say is," broke in Arthur Edward Lovell, "it's all rot!"

"Hear, hear! Good for you, Lovell!"

Jimmy Silver submitted to the interruption patiently. He was used to being interrupted by Lovell.

"It's all a plant," said Lovell excitedly, "that's what I say! Pankley's been dished, and now he's trying to make us run our heads into the lion's mouth!"

"But——" said Jimmy Silver.

"Don't start 'butting,' Jimmy! It's quite clear!" snorted Lovell. "We won't have anything to do with it! It will simply be playing Pankley's game!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's so!"

There was a chorus of assent, and it was pretty evident that Arthur Edward Lovell's view of the matter was shared by the majority of those present.

"Lovell may be right, and all that," cut in Mornington. "He hardly ever is, but still——"

"Look here, Mornington——" bellowed Lovell wrathfully.

Mornington raised his hand.

"Don't get excited, Lovell! I should like to have a cut at this. As to getting that wig back, it would be rather sport."

Lovell snorted.

"Rats! Rot! I tell you it's a plant!"

"What did you say, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"Well, the letter was addressed to Babbington," he said slowly. "If Babbington has an idea——"

"Piffle," said Lovell. "It's addressed to Babbington, but it's a challenge to the whole Form. I think he ought to write back and tell Pankley to go and eat coke."

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, we'll see what the meeting says. Hands up for Lovell's suggestion!"

Three-quarters of the fellows held up their hands. Lovell, in his enthusiasm, held up both.

"There you are!" cried Lovell triumphantly. "Carried!"

"Good enough!" said Jimmy Silver.

He himself had not voted, and neither had Newcome, Mornington, Putty Grace, or Babbington himself.

"You see what the meeting thinks, Babbington."

"Yes, I see that, Silver," said Babbington mildly.

"Well, that's settled," said Lovell loudly. Arthur Edward Lovell always knew better than anyone else, in his own opinion, and he did not care to hear any more objections. "You Modern chaps should be getting along. It's jolly near eleven o'clock."

"My hat!" said Tommy Dodd, jumping to his feet. "So it is! We must scoot or old Manders will be on the warpath. Come on, you chaps! Come on, Babbington! Bring that ass, Cuffy, along. Nighty-night, everybody!"

"Cheerio, Tommy!"

In a few minutes the party had broken up. Candles were extinguished and all signs of the feast were rapidly obliterated, while many helpers assisted the visiting Moderns out of the window.

In a very short time all the beds in the Classical Fourth dormitory were occupied and most of the juniors were asleep.

Arthur Edward Lovell placed his head on his pillow with great satisfaction. The celebration had been a record one, and had gone off swimmingly, and the great question of the evening, i.e., Pankley's letter, had been settled in the only possible way—which was Arthur Edward's way.

There was one person at least, however, who did not regard the matter as settled, and that person was James Montgomery Babbington of the Modern House.

CHAPTER 22.

Babbington Replies to the Challenge:

"THANK goodness, that's done!" Tommy Dodd, of the Modern House, shut his Latin grammar with a resounding bang by way of signalling the fact that he had finished his prep.

It was the evening following the great literary feast.

"Done!" he repeated with satisfaction. "What about routing round after some supper, you chaps? Is there anything in the cupboard?"

"Shush!" said Tommy Cook, without looking up from his book.

"What do you say, Doyle?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"Faith, an' ye're interrupting me, Tommy!" said Doyle, scribbling away for dear life.

"Oh, rats! I want some supper! Come on, you fellows! I've done my prep."

"We know that, but can't you see we haven't?" roared Tommy Cook, bending a glare on his cheerful leader. "For goodness' sake keep quiet until we've finished!"

Tommy Dodd grinned.

"Buck up, then!" he said.

And for another five minutes silence reigned in the study.

During this time Tommy Dodd sat in deep thought, and the subject of his thoughts was the letter that Pankley had sent to Babbington.

The minutes passed slowly in the study, and then Tommy Cook sat up in his chair with a yawn, and snapped his book shut.

"Finished!" he announced. "Cheers!"

"Faith, and so have I!" cried Tommy Doyle. "My construe to-morrow will bate the band!"

"If it doesn't, Dicky Dalton will bate you!" grinned Tommy Cook.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

At this moment there came a tap on the study door.

"Come in, fathead!" shouted Tommy Dodd.

And the spectacled face of James Montgomery Babbington looked into the study.

"Hallo, Babbington!"

"Come right in!"

"Faith, and ye're welcome entoirely!"

Babbington stepped into the study and closed the door quietly. Until a few weeks ago, the famous Co. of the Modern Fourth would probably have greeted his appearance with missiles of various sorts, but in the last few weeks Tommy Dodd & Co. had learned to respect the mental powers of James Montgomery Babbington. Combined with his mild nature and his large spectacles, which gave him a particularly innocent appearance, Babbington's mental agility made him a dangerous customer to

tackle. It looked the easiest thing in the world to pull Babbington's leg, but in this case, as so often happens, appearances were quite deceptive.

Babbington ambled into the study with a gentle smile.

"I—I wanted to see you, Dodd, about Pankley's letter," he began. Tommy Dodd started.

Here was almost the echo of his own thoughts.

"Well, go ahead!" he said tersely.

Seating himself on the edge of the table, Babbington blinked at the three Tommies.

"Er—Lovell said last night that the letter was a trap, and the chaps seemed to agree with him," he said.

"Lovell's an ass!" snorted Tommy Dodd.

"And a chump!" put in Tommy Cook.

"And a Classical fathead!" added Tommy Doyle.

Babbington grinned.

"That's so! I think that letter ought to be answered, don't you?"

"Well," admitted Tommy Dodd, "I was thinking about it myself. I don't like to leave it unanswered, but I'm blessed if I see what we can do."

"I don't see that we can do anything," said Cook.

"Faith, and we can't," agreed Tommy Doyle. "If any gossoon put his head into Bagshot just now Pankley & Co. would scrag him baldheaded."

Babbington said nothing, but continued to smile blandly.

Tommy Dodd looked at him curiously.

"Have you got a wheeze, Babbington?" he asked.

"Well, I might have," admitted Babbington. "In fact, I may say that I have."

"Well, out with it!" said Tommy Dodd. "I know you are a nut at wheezes, but I'm blessed if I can see how you can get that wig back from under the noses of all Bagshot!"

Babbington produced a slip of paper from his pocket.

"I thought of sending this to Pankley," he said, in a mild voice. "If you chaps are agreed, that is."

"Read it out, then, ye gossoon!" said Doyle.

Babbington cleared his throat.

"Dear Pankley,—I shall come on Saturday next between two and three in the afternoon, and fetch away the wig we left at Bagshot, and which you are retaining as a trophy.—Yours,

"JAMES MONTGOMERY BABBINGTON."

There was a moment's silence while the three Tommies stared at the bland and almost expressionless features of the cheerful Babbington.

"Well, of all the nerve!" gasped Tommy Dodd admiringly. "You take the bun, Babbington!"

"Do you think that will do?" asked Babbington innocently.

"Do?" ejaculated Tommy Dodd. "There's no doubt it would do all right, but for one thing!"

"Well?"

"How are you going to get the blessed wig, you duffer?"

"Faith, and that's the question, me bhoys!"

Babbington's smile grew broader.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said.

And he leaned forward and spoke in a low voice.

For the next five minutes explosive chuckles from the three Tommies punctuated Babbington's remarks as he unfolded his plan.

There was no doubt about its reception. As Babbington finished, Tommy Dodd slapped him enthusiastically on the back.

"You're a marvel, Babbington!" he chuckled. "It's a real rip-snorter of an idea!"

"An A 1, eight-cylinder, copper-bottomed stunt!" grinned Cook.

"It's a broth of a bhoys ye are, Babbington!" was Doyle's delighted contribution.

"Good! Then I'll send the letter," said Babbington.

And Babbington drifted out of the study with a happy smile on his innocent countenance.

When, two days later, he showed the three Tommies Pankley's reply, these worthies chuckled loud and long in gleeful anticipation, for the reply ran as follows:

"My dear Ass,—Your cheeky letter received. We will look out for you between two and three on Saturday, and can promise you a warm reception. If you or any

cheeky Rookwood bouncer gets away alive with our trophy I'll eat my hat.—Yours,
"CECIL PANKLEY."

"Poor old Pankley!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "He'll get a surprise on Saturday, won't he, Babb?"

"He hasn't had much luck lately," said Tommy Cook.

"Not since Babbington came," added Dodd. "I always said it takes a Modern to put the kybosh on the Bagshot bouncers."

"Faith, and ye're right, Tommy!"

And the three Tommies, hugging themselves gleefully, settled down to wait for Saturday afternoon with the most happy anticipation.

"Well, I'll do it! For you I'll do it, Master Babbington! You helped me out of a nasty 'ole with that there helephant, a little time back, so, blōw me, if I don't do it!"

The rich, fruity tones of Mr. Burgess, of Burgess' World-renowned Circus, boomed out over the field where that establishment was encamped, in the neighbourhood of Rookham.

A week or two before, the circus had been at Coombe, where James Montgomery Babbington, displaying an uncanny power of control over the big circus elephant, Raneec, had saved what threatened to be a nasty contretemps, and Mr. Burgess felt that he owed a great debt of gratitude to the mild-looking Rookwood junior.

Thus it was that he came to agree to the somewhat remarkable proposition which Babbington had just put to him.

The time was just after two o'clock on the Saturday afternoon. Babbington had arrived at Rookham on a bicycle, and sought out Mr. Burgess.

When he left the circus field, however, ten minutes later, he was no longer riding his bicycle. He was riding Raneec, the big elephant!

Down the road which led towards the village of Coombe—and which, incidentally, passed the gates of Bagshot school—Raneec tramped with stately tread.

The passers-by looked up in astonishment at the spectacled youth in Etons, sitting calmly on the big elephant's head.

Babbington's mild face wore a calm and cheerful expression as he swayed with the motion of the animal and rubbed one of the big ears affectionately.

Babbington did not hurry the elephant.

It took him half an hour to arrive at the gates of Bagshot School.

Babbington grinned as he reached the corner near the gates and saw a couple of Bagshot juniors standing just outside, with their backs to him, looking down the road towards Rookwood.

They were evidently on the look out for an invasion; but they were looking in the wrong direction!

CHAPTER 23.

No Joy Ride!

THE huge elephant was almost on top of the two Bagshot juniors before they looked round. They gave a shout of surprise at the sight of Raneec. Then their gaze travelled to the junior sitting astride the huge back, and their yell had a note of alarm in it.

"A Rookwood kid!" came the cry. "And on an elephant! Look out!"

The two Bagshot fellows bolted at the gates.

With a word in Hindustani and a pat, Babbington calmly guided the elephant through the gates after them!

Slowly he was borne up the trim drive of Bagshot School on the back of his strange mount, and there were shouts from all sides as fellows came running up from every quarter.

Looking ahead to where the flagstaff stood in the middle of Bagshot courtyard, Babbington could see a solid phalanx of the Bagshot Fourth guarding their citadel. Evidently they were expecting a mass attack, and were prepared to deal with it!

The question now for Pankley was how to deal with Babbington.

"That," murmured Babbington to himself, "is a conundrum to which Pankley will not find the answer very easily."

Regardless of everything, and taking not the slightest notice of the shouts of the Bagshot fellows, the big elephant trod on. Right into the courtyard went Raneec,

and the excited crowd parted in front of her.

"Mind out, you kids!" shouted Babbington from his perch. "If she treads on your corns you'll know it!"

A roar of anger greeted this calm announcement.

"Rookwood cad!"

"Come down, you bounder!"

"We'll scrag you!"

"Rush the blighter!"

"Yah! Pull him down!"

Ranee strode serenely on.

Every now and then, where the crowd was thickest, she would stop instinctively, but with guttural clicking sounds Babbington urged her on until the great beast stood at the foot of the Bagshot flagstaff.

"Come down, Babbington, you young beast!" howled the infuriated Pankley, who was standing with his bodyguard at the foot of the flagstaff. "'Tain't fair, bringing a blessed elephant in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come down, you Rookwood cad, and we'll scrag you!" cried Pankley, shaking his fist furiously at the grinning Babbington.

"Not good enough!" chuckled Babbington. "Now, watch out, Pankley!"

He stood up on the great elephant's head, watching breathlessly by a group of Bagshot fellows. He uttered a few words in Hindustani, and the big trunk came curling up towards him.

Babbington calmly stepped into the folds of it and uttered another command. Slowly he was hoisted up on high until he was on a level with the shingled wig which decorated the Bagshot flagstaff, some twenty feet from the ground.

With one wrench, Babbington secured the coveted trophy. Holding on to Ranee's trunk with one hand, he waved the wig exultantly in the air.

"Cheerio, Pankley!" he yelled.

And a roar of rage rose from the gurgling crowd of Bagshot juniors.

But the wrath of the enemy only tended to broaden the grin on Babbington's face, and he waved the wig triumphantly.

Again a muttered word, and the great trunk lowered him, and he scrambled back on to the elephant's back. Then at a low command the great beast turned round.

"Well, cheerio, you fellows!" yelled Babbington above the din. "Thanks for the wig. I'll be getting back to Rookwood now."

And, stuffing the wig into his pocket, James Montgomery waved his hand cheerily to the infuriated Pankley.

"You bounder!" yelled the leader of the Bagshot bounders. "You haven't got away yet! Cut down to the gates!" he shouted, turning swiftly to Putter and Poole, his trusty lieutenants. "Lock 'em and bolt 'em, and we'll prevent the bounder from getting out."

Putter and Poole tore off, while the great mass of Bagshot fellows moved slowly in an excited throng behind the elephant as it made its way leisurely towards the gates.

Pankley's new move had not escaped the watchful eyes of Babbington, however. His eyes gleamed with a determined light behind his big spectacles as he urged Ranee on towards the gates.

Naturally, however, Putter and Poole, running rapidly, reached the gates before Babbington. When the great beast, followed by half Bagshot, arrived there, the big iron gates were securely locked and bolted.

"Now, what are you going to do?" shouted Pankley, with a grin of triumph in his eyes. "You're here, and here you'll have to stop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the Bagshot fellows.

Really, the tables seemed turned now on the daring Rookwooder.

"Come down!" howled Pankley again. "Come down and be slain, Babbington! We'll keep the blessed elephant as a mascot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Babbington was not beaten yet. He cast a quick look to right and left.

A high wall surrounded the Bagshot playground and the school building. There was no way out except by the big gates or by sundry side gates, which were obviously too small to admit of the passage of Ranee.

It would not be difficult, Babbington reflected, to push the wall down. Ranee was undoubtedly capable of doing so, and of stepping over the ruins and out into the road. But Babbington realised that trouble

would be sure to follow such a proceeding as certainly as night follows day.

He therefore cast about in his fertile mine for a solution to the problem that confronted him.

"We'll have that trophy back, after all!" jeered Pankley. "Get a ladder, some of you chaps, and we'll climb up after it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good idea, Pankley!"

In a twinkling a ladder was rushed up. It happened to be lying on the ground near the gates, and Pankley & Co. calmly propped it up against the elephant. Things began to look rather warm for James Montgomery Babbington.

"Have him off!" came in a roar.

Pankley made a jump at the ladder and swarmed up it in a twinkling, followed by half a dozen of his chums.

Without moving his position, Babbington issued a sharp command in Hindustani, and Rancee promptly sidled away from the ladder, letting it down to the ground with a terrific crash.

There was a roar from Pankley & Co. The storming party crashed to the ground in a heap.

"Ow!"

"Help!"

"Yow!"

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

Pankley & Co., dusty and furious and not a little hurt, sorted themselves out, with many groans.

"Ow!"

"My napper!"

"My backbone's busted!"

Babbington saw that the moment was favourable for what he had decided to do. The mishap of Pankley & Co. had caused a diversion, and with a rapid word or two he urged Rancee right up to the iron gates of Bagshot.

Then came a succession of sharp commands, and the big trunk curled round the bars of the gate. Another word, and a gentle pressure from Babbington's heel, and the great beast put forth her strength and with a steady pull lifted one side of the double gates clean off its hinges!

There was a gasp from the Bagshot crowd.

"Look out! It's pulling the gates down!"

"Stop him!"

But to stop an elephant is easier said than done.

Rancee moved the grip of her trunk to the other side of the gate, and, with a heave and pull, removed it also from its hinges.

The whole gate then fell backward, its two parts bolted together, and rested for a moment against the great elephant's head.

Rancee, again at Babbington's command, shifted the grip of her trunk and lowered the gates gently to the ground. The gates were not damaged in the slightest, thanks to the careful handling of the situation by the sagacious animal. But the way to freedom was open!

Stepping carefully over the fallen gates, Rancee moved her great bulk majestically from the precincts of Bagshot.

"How's that, umpire?" yelled Babbington, with a note of jubilation in his voice, which was perhaps pardonable in the circumstances. "Bye-bye, Pankley! You're done again, old man!"

The furious Bagshot juniors rushed out into the road in a body, but they could, of course, do nothing. Pankley himself, the great leader of Bagshot, literally danced in his impotent rage.

"Can't we stop him somehow?" he raved. "You blighter, Babbington! I'll—I'll—"

And Pankley rushed after Babbington, waving his fist and shouting, and making such a picture of frustrated wrath that even the Bagshot crowd could not help but burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Babbington looked down at the perspiring form of his chief adversary.

"Going to run alongside all the way to Rookwood, Pankley?" he chuckled.

"You—you blighter! You spoofing bounder!" spluttered Pankley, glaring up at Babbington with a red and furious face.

A sudden gleam came into Babbington's eyes, and he clicked out another word of command.

The next moment a gasp of dismay rose from the Bagshot crowd as they saw Rancee's trunk curl round the body of Pankley and lift him struggling off his feet.

"Oh, my hat! He's got him!"

"He's got Pankley!"

"Help! Lemme go!" shrieked Pankley, struggling violently. "Leggo, you brute!"

Babbington laughed heartily.

"You came for a ride, Pankley. Don't struggle. Rancee won't hurt you."

"You beast! Let me down!" raved Pankley.

"Not to-day, old chap!" chuckled Babbington. "You're coming to Rookwood.

And, disregarding alike the yells of the flustered Bagshot fellows and the indignant gasps and splutterings of Pankley, Rancee, the big elephant, trod majestically down the road that led to Rookwood.

CHAPTER 24.

A Narrow Escape!

TO say that Babbington had a great reception as he turned into the gates of Rookwood would be to put it mildly.

Tommy Dodd & Co. were on the look-out for him, and half the Fourth Form were with them.

When the huge bulk of the elephant was seen marching down the lane there was a rush to meet it. But when it was seen that the figure borne by the upturned trunk of the big elephant was none other than the great Pankley himself, the excitement knew no bounds.

"Pankley!"

"Faith, an' it's Pankley himself!" roared Tommy Doyle. "Good for ye, Babbington!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Rookwood for ever!"

"Well done, Babbington!" roared the crowd.

Babbington waved the wig he had rescued from Bagshot jubilantly around his head.

"My hat, he's got the trophy as well!" said Jimmy Silver, fairly staring. "Blest if I ever knew anything like that chap Babbington! He's a real knock-out!"

Then, escorted by a dense throng of cheering juniors, Babbington was followed through the gates of Rookwood with his trophy and his captive.

Right across the quad. and up to the gates of the School House went the triumphal procession. Here Babbington halted the big elephant.

"Speech!" yelled the crowd.

And there was a hush.

Babbington waved his hand to the crowd.

"Gentlemen," he said, his mild face aglow and his eyes gleaming with triumph behind his big spectacles, "when I got Pankley's letter I wanted to take up his challenge, so I thought of this way of doing it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Babbington!" came in a roar.

"I have got the trophy, as you see," and he waved it again above his head, "and I've got Pankley, too—that's all!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Rookwood!"

"And three more for Babbington!"

The cheers were given with a will, while all this time the unhappy Pankley was held a fast prisoner in the grip of the big trunk of the elephant.

"Come down, Pankley," called Jimmy Silver. "We want you badly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley waved his hand cheerily.

"You blighters! You've done me this time—but a fellow can't argue with an elephant!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put him down, Babbington!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

Babbington spoke a word, and the big elephant lowered its trunk, and as Pankley's feet touched the ground he was seized by a dozen hands.

"Bring him over to our study," grinned Tommy Dodd. "He's our prisoner, you know."

"Right-ho!"

Pankley was being hustled away, when there was a sudden stir and a breathless hush as the lean, angular figure of Mr. Manders, the master of the Modern House, suddenly appeared at the door of the Classical House.

"Cave! Manders!"

The words went round in a stage whisper.

"Now, look out for squalls!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Manders stopped at the top of the Classical House steps, petrified at the astounding scene that met his gaze. Within a few feet of him was an enormous elephant, surrounded by a crowd of juniors, and, most astounding of all to Mr. Manders, sitting coolly astride of the elephant's huge neck was a Rookwood junior, a bland smile on his spectacled face.

Mr. Manders gasped.

"Boys, what—what is the meaning of this?" he managed to stutter. "This—this is disgraceful! This is unprecedented! I— Good gracious!"

Mr. Manders slipped back as if stung as Ranee swung her trunk towards him. The idea at the back of the big elephant's mind in doing so was probably intimately connected with buns. But, to Mr. Manders, whose last experience with an elephant was still fresh in his memory, there was something sinister, if not threatening, in the movement.

"Take it away!" shrieked Mr. Manders, darting back into the door of the Classical House. "Take that—that dangerous animal away at once! Do you hear me, Babbington?"

"Very well, sir," said Babbington meekly. "Come on, Ranee, old girl!"

At a word in Hindustani the big elephant swung away and headed towards the gates. Mr. Manders, still looking apprehensive, popped his head out of the door again to watch it go.

"Really!" he gasped. "That animal—and within the precincts of Rookwood! It—is disgraceful! How did it get in, Silver? Do you know?"

"It— it walked in, sir," said Jimmy Silver cautiously.

He realised that it would go hard with the enterprising Babbington if Mr. Manders got to know too much about his latest escapade.

"So I supposed, Silver!" snapped Mr. Manders, with heavy sarcasm. "I did not anticipate that it would have arrived in an aeroplane!"

"No, sir!" said Jimmy demurely.

"But Babbington—"

"Fortunately, Babbington is able to control the beast, sir," said Jimmy, interrupting hopefully. "It's quite quiet with him, and he's taking it back to Burgess' Circus, sir."

"Very good, Silver! I trust they will not allow the animal to stray from the circus in the future!" snapped Mr. Manders. "It is most careless and most dangerous. I shall certainly complain to the police if it occurs again."

"The circus is leaving the district this

week, I believe, sir," said Jimmy Silver pacifically.

"And a very good thing, too!" snorted Mr. Manders. "If I had my way, such entertainments would not be allowed at all! Disgraceful!"

And the indignant Housemaster resumed his interrupted journey across to the Modern House, while Jimmy Silver, satisfied at having successfully put Mr. Manders off the scent, winked into space.

"Now for Pankley!" he remarked. "Better bring him into the junior Common-room, you fellows. Manders is on the war-path, and will probably butt in if there's a crowd in Tommy Dodd's study."

"That's so," said Tommy Dodd. "Bring him into the Common-room, then."

And Cecil Pankley, who had been carefully concealed from Mr. Manders' observation by a knot of juniors, was marched into the School House and along the passage to the junior Common-room in the grip of a dozen pairs of hands—a hapless prisoner in the stronghold of his deadly foes!

CHAPTER 25.

The Trial!

"BRING him along!"

"This was for the prisoner!"

"Shove him in the dock!"

Cecil Pankley, in the midst of a jostling crowd of hilarious Rookwood juniors, was hustled into the junior Common-room—a prisoner.

He was to stand his trial in the midst of his enemies, and the hapless Pankley looked forward to the ordeal with many apprehensions.

"Now, I'll be the judge," said Jimmy Silver, coming to business at once. "Who will prosecute the prisoner?"

"I will!" said Lovell promptly.

"Rats to you, Lovell! I'm prosecutor," said Tommy Dodd.

Lovell glared.

"Look here—"

"Oh, scat!" said Tommy Dodd warmly. "If Silver's to be judge, we don't want another fat-headed Classical as prosecutor!"

"If you are looking for a licking, Dodd—" began Lovell excitedly.

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver soothingly. "Tommy Dodd's right, Lovell. After all, it was a Modern wheeze that got the prisoner here, so let Tommy prosecute."

Lovell grunted and subsided.

"Tell you what, Lovell," said Jimmy, "we must have a prisoner's friend, like they do on courts-martial, you know."

"A whatter?" said Lovell.

"A prisoner's friend—sort of defending counsel, you know. You can take on that, if you like. The rest of the chaps can be the jury."

"Hear, hear!"

"Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle had better look after the prisoner," said Tommy Dodd.

"Right-ho! They can be the gaolers!"

"Put that fender against the wall. It will do for a dock," suggested Newcome.

The big fender from the fire was jammed up against the wall, and Pankley was hustled into it. It hemmed him in as completely as if he were in a real dock. On either side of the fender stood Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, the gaolers.

A high stool was brought from the master's deck at the end of the room and placed in position, and on this sat Jimmy Silver, facing the prisoner. The rest of the crowd sat on the surrounding desks or stood round in a circle. The "jury" must have been at least fifty strong.

"Put a couple of chairs out here for Tommy Dodd and Lovell," said Jimmy Silver. "Now, prisoner at the bar, Mr. Dodd will lead for the prosecution, while Mr. Lovell will be your counsel!"

"I object!" said Pankley promptly.

"What! You object?"

"Yes. I object to Lovell defending me!" said Pankley, with a grin. "I claim the right to select my own defending counsel!"

"Rats!" snorted Lovell. "I'm jolly well going to defend you, Pankley, so shut up! I'll give you beans, you bounder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley grinned.

"Well, I claim the services of somebody a bit different—"

"What!" roared Lovell.

"Someone with bigger brains and smaller feet!" said Pankley blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a shout of laughter, and Arthur Edward Lovell turned pink.

He sprang up and made a rush at the prisoner in the dock, brandishing his fists wildly.

But restraining hands were laid upon him, and he was dragged back gently but firmly.

"Leggo!" roared Lovell, struggling violently. "Lemme get at the beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Calm down, old man!" said the judge, trying to keep a straight face. "After all, he's entitled to pick his own man to defend him, I suppose."

"Rats! I'll smash him!" roared Lovell.

"Nothing doing, old man!"

"I tell you—"

"Shush!"

"Dry up!"

"Chuck it!"

The indignant Lovell was pushed aside by many hands, and had to content himself with glaring ferociously at the prisoner, who lounged easily in the dock, with an unmoved countenance.

Cecil Pankley, the hero of the Bagshot Fourth, was in a tight corner, and he knew it; but Pankley was made of stout stuff, and he had no intention of showing the white feather.

"Prisoner at the bar, whom do you choose to be your counsel?" inquired Jimmy Silver sternly.

Pankley gazed round upon the serried ranks of Rookwood juniors with a somewhat disparaging eye. His glance lighted upon the chubby face of Teddy Grace of the Fourth, commonly known as Putty, because, as he was always ready to explain, he was so soft.

Putty Grace was a cheery youth, with a permanent twinkle in his eye and a propensity for practical joking.

Pankley thought that he would defend him as well as anybody, and possibly better than most.

"I choose Teddy Grace, if he will take the job on!" he announced.

"Will you act, Putty?" asked Jimmy.

"What-ho!" said Teddy Grace promptly.

"Right!" said Jimmy Silver. "Then that's settled! Prisoner at the bar," he continued, eyeing Pankley severely, "we're going to try you for your life!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We've caught you fairly, and we'll give you a fair trial before we scrag you!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cecil Pankley grinned.

"Candid, at any rate!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"These gentlemen are the jury," continued Jimmy Silver, with a wave of his hand. "After Tommy Dodd has had his go, your counsel can address them, and if he can persuade 'em to let you off, all well and good!"

"What hopes!" murmured Pankley.

"If not," continued the learned judge, "it will be my painful duty to pass sentence upon you! Now, Dodd, on the ball!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Tommy!"

Thus adjured, Tommy Dodd stood up and cast a baleful eye at the prisoner in the dock.

"Gentlemen of the jury," began Tommy eloquently, "you see before you one of our deadliest enemies in the person of Cecil Pankley, the leader of the Bagshot bounders! This fellow—I may say, this scoundrel——" continued Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Has often proved to be a thorn in the side of Rookwood——"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in the prisoner heartily.

"Silence!" exclaimed the judge sternly. "Prod him with the poker, Tommy, if he opens his mouth again!"

"What-ho!" said Tommy Cook promptly, grasping the poker with a business-like grip.

"This scoundrel," continued Tommy Dodd, "has many times laid violent hands upon gentlemen of Rookwood, and for so doing I claim that he merits a really fearful punishment!"

"Something with boiling oil in it?" suggested the judge humanely.

"That's the ticket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's it!" said Tommy Dodd. "Something that Bagshot will remember for a long time! But first of all the prisoner must confess that Bagshot is hopelessly diddled, dished, and done, once and for all!"

There was a loud cheer from the jury.

"Hooray!"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Gentlemen of the jury," concluded Tommy Dodd impressively, "it is unnecessary for me to say any more about this double-dyed villain Pankley! You know all about him, and I ask you, one and all, to find him guilty."

"Hear, hear!"

"We do!"

"Guilty!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" chimed in the judge enthusiastically.

Teddy Grace jumped up.

"Here, hi, Mister Judge! The jury can't find him guilty before I've had a go," he exclaimed. "What about my speech for the defence?"

"Oh, that's right, Putty," exclaimed the judge hastily. "I forgot for a moment. Gentlemen of the jury, you must listen to Putty's speech for the defence, though, of course, you need not take any notice of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now fire away, Putty!"

"Gentleman, chaps and fellows," began Teddy Grace, "I rise to defend the prisoner at the bar. As you all know, he's a fearful outsider——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And a cheeky bounder——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the leader of those Bagshot blighters. He has had the nerve to butt up against the juniors of this famous school, and in my opinion he entirely deserves his fate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that what you call defending me?" howled the prisoner.

"Poker!" commanded the judge sharply.

"Yarooooop!"

There was a yell from Pankley as he received the business end of the poker in a powerful lunge from Tommy Cook.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order, order!"

"Gentlemen of the jury," continued Teddy Grace, "I took on the defence of the prisoner, as you know, at short notice and I'm blest if I can think of anything to say in his favour. The only thing is that he is a Bagshot bounder because his people sent him to Bagshot, I s'pose, and that's more his misfortune than his fault."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You must admit, gentlemen," said Putty, "that as a Bagshot bounder he has kept his end up pretty well on the whole against us, so that I think we can say he has proved himself a fellow worthy of our steel."

"Bravo, Putty!"

The prisoner at the bar bowed elaborately to his counsel at this somewhat belated tribute.

"There seems to be nothing else to say in the prisoner's favour," continued the learned counsel candidly. "I therefore leave his fate in the hands of the jury, and I hope they'll give him jip!"

And counsel for the defence sat down amidst a salvo of cheers.

"Gentlemen of the jury," began the learned judge, "it's my turn now, so stop jawing and listen to me!"

"On the ball now, Jimmy!"

"Go it, judge!"

"You have heard the eloquent speeches of Mr. Dodd for the prosecution and Mr. Grace for the defence," continued the learned judge. "Mr. Dodd calls upon you to find the prisoner at the bar guilty, and Teddy Grace said what he could for him— which was not much!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Teddy Grace, of course, had to say that because he's defending counsel; but, if I were you, I should not take any notice of him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, I say!" protested the prisoner.

"Poker!" commanded the judge sternly.

And there was another lunge from Tommy Cook and another growl from the hapless prisoner.

"Gentlemen," continued the judge, "I ask for your verdict—guilty or not guilty?"

There was a roar from the jury:

"Guilty, yer honour!"

"Scrag him!"

"Rag the bounder!"

Jimmy Silver held up his hand.

"Gentlemen of the jury, I congratulate you upon coming to the right decision—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will now ask the prisoner if he has anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon him forthwith."

"Faith, and that's a good word, Jimmy darling!" said Tommy Doyle admiringly.

"Speak up, prisoner, if you have anything to say!" commanded Jimmy Silver.

"All I've got to say," said Pankley, "is that we've given you a high old time in the past, and if it hadn't been for that new fellow, Babbington, I should not be in your hands now! Rats to the lot of you—that's what I say!"

There was a roar at this defiance from the prisoner in the dock.

"Have him out!"

"Give him the frog's-march!"

"Rag him baldheaded!"

"Hold on!" yelled Jimmy Silver, jumping to his feet. "We asked this cheeky bounder what he'd got to say, and now we know! Hold on while I pass sentence!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Order, order!"

"Silence for the judge!"

CHAPTER 26.

Ructions in Court.

"I HAVEN'T got a black cap," remarked Jimmy Silver. "Let me have your handkerchief, Tubby; it's generally black enough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"On second thoughts, however, I'll do without," continued the judge. "Prisoner at the bar, it only remains for me to say — Ow! Wow! Groogh!"

The learned judge had not intended to finish his sentence quite like that.

What caused him to utter these ejaculations was the fact that a broomstick was suddenly thrust through the window behind him, and, catching him between the shoulders, shot him forward off the high stool. He landed right on top of Tommy Dodd.

There was a loud roar from Tommy Dodd as the judge's chin met the top of his head with a resounding crack.

"Wow! My head!" he howled.

"Groogh! My chin!" roared the judge.

"Yow! Ow!"

"Wow! Groogh!"

The judge and the prosecuting counsel rolled on the floor in each other's grasp, yowing and yowling as if for a wager.

In a moment the court was in an uproar.

"Bagshot bounders!" yelled Putty Grace, pointing to the open window, where he had caught a fleeting glimpse of a couple of heads bobbing up and down.

"After 'em! Quick! Bagshot bounders!" roared fifty voices.

There was a wild rush for the door of the junior Common-room, which was wrenched open, and twenty or thirty juniors stampeded down the passage in quest of the daring intruders.

Cecil Pankley, in the dock, roared with laughter.

Pankley was, in fact, the only person in the Common-room who had not been electrified by the sudden interruption.

While the learned judge was about to pass sentence, every eye in the court had been fixed upon the prisoner at the bar; but the prisoner's eyes had been fixed upon the window at the back of Jimmy Silver, at which the countenances of the faithful Putter and Poole, Pankley's chums at Bagshot, had caught his attention.

Pankley had indeed hard work to repress a grin as he discerned a broomstick poised for the thrust which had cut short the eloquence of the learned judge.

Seeking to take advantage of the sudden confusion, Pankley grasped the fender and was about to hurl it aside when Tommy

Doyle's heavy hand was laid upon his collar.

"No, you don't, you spalpeen!" said Tommy Doyle. "Here, Cook, where's the poker?"

Unfortunately for Pankley, his gaolers had not been distracted from their duty in the general excitement. Cecil Pankley was still a prisoner!

He grinned cheerily at the dusty figures of Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd, who were now sitting up on the floor grasping their nose and head respectively and groaning.

"Oh, my head!" groaned Dodd. "You silly ass, Silver! What d'you mean by jumping on me like that?"

"Groogh! By dose!" exclaimed the learned judge. "Do you think I did it on purpose, you frabjous dummy?"

"You silly cuckoo!"

"You potty lunatic!"

"Faith, and Jimmy Silver got a broomstick between the shoulders!" grinned Tommy Doyle. "That's why he jumped on ye, Tommy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Pankley.

The damaged officials staggered to their feet and favoured the hilarious Pankley with two separate and distinct glares.

"We'll take it out of you, Pankley, for this!" said Tommy Dodd threateningly. "You'll be grinning on the other side of your face soon!"

"Yes, you're for it, Pankley!" said Jimmy Silver darkly, holding his nose. "Who was it at the window, anyway?"

"Why, Putter and Poole!" chuckled Pankley. "They biffed you through the window with a broomstick, hoping, I s'pose, that I should be able to get away in the confusion!"

"Well, you didn't!" said Jimmy Silver grimly.

"Laugh away!" growled Tommy Dodd. "When the chaps come back with your precious pals, we'll stick all three of you in the dock together!"

"They won't catch 'em!" grinned Pankley. "As soon as they biffed Jimmy they dropped out of sight and bolted for the gates, I bet. They'll get away safe enough."

"We'll see," said Jimmy Silver darkly. It was quite possible that Putter and Poole, the faithful chums of the great

Pankley, would have got away safely after their daring exploit but for one circumstance—and that was they met Babbington, who was returning to Rookwood after having taken the big elephant back to the circus to hand over to Ali, the animal's attendant.

Ali, having nothing particular to do, had walked along the road to meet his charge, wheeling with him the bicycle on which Babbington had ridden to the circus that afternoon.

Ali, grinning, had taken charge of Rane, and after certain coins of the realm had been dropped into the native's dusky palm, Babbington, with great satisfaction, mounted his bicycle and returned to Rookwood.

As he turned into the gates, he was just in time to observe two flying figures dashing towards him from the direction of the Classical House, while from out of the big doorway charged in pursuit a howling mob of Rookwood juniors.

In the course of this story, James Montgomery Babbington has more than once been shown to be a youth of unusual resource.

In spite of his mild manners and innocent appearance, his brain worked remarkably quickly.

Never had Babbington shown himself more resourceful than in the present emergency. He dismounted from his bicycle in a flash, and as the two figures dashed straight at him, he pushed the machine with a hefty shove right under the feet of one of the figures, while he threw himself at the other without a moment's hesitation in a true Rugby tackle.

With Babbington clinging like a leech to his ankles, the unfortunate Putter of Bagshot crashed helplessly to earth! While, at the same moment, the hapless Poole, with a loud howl, tripped over the bicycle and was similarly grassed!

Before either of the Bagshot fellows could so much as struggle to their feet, the pursuing Rookwooders were down upon them like wolves on the fold.

"Got you!" gasped Lovell, who was the foremost of the pack, laying a heavy grasp upon the collar of the almost-winded Putter.

"Good man, Babbington!"

"Neatest thing I ever saw!" gasped

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Mornington, seizing hold of Poole, who was gasping as if he would never stop.

"Bring the bounders back!" exclaimed Teddy Grace. "We'll jam 'em in the dock along with their precious leader."

"Hear, hear!" roared the Rookwooders. "Up you get, Babbington!"

And with Babbington and the two hapless prisoners in their midst, the triumphant crowd of Rookwooders streamed back to the junior Common-room.

CHAPTER 27.

Carried Unanimously!

CECIL PANKLEY'S face fell as he saw the figures of his faithful chums hustled into the junior Common-room.

"So they were caught!" he muttered.

"Good!" said Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd, with satisfaction.

"We've got 'em!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell triumphantly. "They jolly nearly get away, though, but Babbington

"Babbington!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"They were nearly at the gates when they met Babbington coming in on his bike, and he stopped them both."

"Chucked his bike at the foot of one and tackled the other like a good 'un!" chuckled Teddy Grace.

"He's a nut, Babbington is!" said Tommy Dodd, with admiration. "Turns up just where he's wanted every time."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hip, hip, hooray!"

"Good old Babbington!"

There was a roar of cheering as the figure of James Montgomery Babbington, looking very flustered and dishevelled, was propelled into the room in the midst of the tumultuous crowd.

"Babbington again!" exclaimed Pankley in disgust. "Blest if that chap doesn't pop up everywhere!"

"And dishes you every time!" chuckled Teddy Grace.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shove 'em in the dock with Pankley," said Jimmy Silver, taking charge of the situation again in his best "Uncle James" manner. "Shove 'em behind the fender with their blessed leader."

"Hear, hear!"

Putter and Poole much the worse for wear, were jerked over the rail of the fender, and there was a shout of laughter as the three prisoners gazed out of the dock upon their enemies.

Jimmy Silver picked up the high stool and sat on it again.

"Order in court!" he shouted. "We won't go over the whole trial again, but we'll find all three of the prisoners guilty and sentence 'em straight away."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The question is, gentlemen," continued Jimmy Silver, "what possible punishment can we give these bounders that will meet the case, now we've got 'em? We ought to give 'em something to remember us by."

"We can make 'em run the gauntlet, of course," said Tommy Dodd reflectively.

"A bit hard on 'em, perhaps, though they are Bagshot bounders," said Jimmy Silver.

"What about the frog's-march?" sang out Mornington.

"Hear, hear!"

"Give 'em the frog's-march!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then we might tie 'em up and black their faces," chimed in Teddy Grace.

"Hear, hear!"

"And gum their hair!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And paint 'em green!"

"That's it!"

"Rag 'em baldheaded!" yelled Lovell.

Jimmy Silver held up his hand.

"Order!" he roared. "Gentlemen, the general opinion seems to be that what our friends, Pankley & Co., want is the frog's-march. They have asked for it, gentlemen—in fact, they have begged and prayed for it—and I think we cannot do better than give it to 'em."

"Hear, hear!"

"Give 'em the frog's-march!"

"One moment, if you please!"

Amidst the noise and shouting of the excited juniors, the mild voice of Babbington made itself heard, and there was an instant hush.

"If you please, Silver, may I say a word?"

"Go ahead, Babb!"

James Montgomery Babbington blinked round on the assembled company with a somewhat heightened colour in his mild countenance.

"Gentleman of the Remove," he said, "excuse me butting in—"

"Go ahead, Babbington!" said Jimmy Silver cordially.

"We've done these Bagshot chaps fairly and completely," continued Babbington.

"You have, you mean!" said Tommy Dodd enthusiastically. "All your doing, Babbington!"

"Hear, hear!"

Babbington blushed modestly.

"I may have had something to do with it," he said. "But you will remember that when I first came to Rookwood I made an unfortunate blunder."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I let the Bagshot chaps get hold of me and went to Bagshot instead of to Rookwood," continued Babbington, smiling gently. "It was silly of me, and I was told that I had let Rookwood down."

There was a hush of interest as Babbington continued:

"After that the Bagshot chaps scored off us again, and it became a question of getting our own back for the honour of Rookwood."

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen," went on Babbington, blinking rapidly, "we dished Pankley & Co. with the girls' school footer match."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we've dished them again over the wig business!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And now we've got Pankley & Co. prisoners in our midst!"

"Good old Babbington!"

"Gentlemen, I think that you will agree that the honour of Rookwood is satisfied."

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"I should like to suggest, then," con-

tinued Babbington, almost shouting to make himself heard, "that, instead of ragging Pankley & Co., who, after all, are jolly stout fellows, we should heap coals of fire on 'em, you know—and ask them to tea!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the stunt!"

"Good idea, Babbington!"

There was a roar of laughter and cheers at Babbington's unexpected ending, but it was easy to see that it appealed to the crowd considerably.

"You're right, Babbington," said Jimmy Silver at once. "You're responsible for the victory, and, by Jove, you've taught us all a lesson! Shake hands!"

And the captain of the Fourth shook James Montgomery Babbington warmly by the hand.

"You're a nut, Babbington!" said Tommy Dodd, making that valuable remark for the hundredth time. "I always said so, and I shall say it again! You're a nut!"

The excited juniors were crowding round Babbington and patting him on the back and shaking his hand until it almost looked as if Babbington was undergoing the ragging which had been intended for Pankley & Co.

Jimmy Silver jumped on the high stool and raised his voice above the din.

"Chaps," he yelled, "I move that Babbington's suggestion be adopted. Instead of ragging the prisoners, let's give 'em a jolly good tea!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The honour of Rookwood is satisfied, and we can afford to be generous to Pankley & Co. Three cheers for a real good sportsman—James Montgomery Babbington!"

And never had the walls of Rookwood echoed to a heartier round of cheering since the foundation of that ancient seat of learning.



BIG BANGS!

The Glorious Fifth!

November is the month for fireworks. Every "Fifth" sees effigies of the rascally Guido Fawkes being burnt, rockets, jumping crackers and the thousand and one kinds of fireworks let off with great glee. But the banging of squibs and Roman-candles is very small beer to that of fireworks of a very different nature that have shocked and astounded the world. Modern high-explosive has put these pyrotechnic displays somewhat in the shade when it comes to noise.

Imagine a shell weighing nearly a ton being thrown a distance of over thirty miles, and after that journey being able to pierce face-hardened armour fourteen inches thick! The tremendous power of modern explosive makes such a feat possible. One wonders what Nelson would think could he return and see our navy at practice. The ship named after him, H.M.S. Nelson, and her sister-ship the Rodney, have nine 16-inch guns mounted on three triple turrets. These guns are nearly 67 feet long, and can fire one round a minute. One salvo from three of these guns cost no less than £700!

But it is not only in guns that the biggest explosions the world has ever known have occurred. Chemical factories, munition works and many other kindred places have been the scene of terrible disasters.

When Silvertown Reeled!

Perhaps the best known of these was the Silvertown explosion. Explosives were somehow ignited in a great chemical works in Silvertown, whether by accident or design (it occurred during the war) will never be known. But the explosion wrecked hundreds of houses, killed at least fifty people and injured hundreds.

An eye-witness of the scene declared that a great flare shot up from the south side of the Thames, lighting everything for miles around, and then proceeded to say that three streets of workmen's dwellings seemed to have dis-

appeared altogether! A gate was the only thing left standing of one factory!

The concussion was felt for miles around, and nearly every window within a radius of twelve miles was smashed!

But, great and terrible as this was, it was not the greatest explosion England ever had. In March, 1913, four magazines of Nobel's dynamite works at Ardeer in Ayrshire exploded and for a radius of twenty miles every window was broken. Even in far-off Lanarkshire the shock was felt. People poured out of their homes terrified, thinking that some disaster had occurred in the mines. Near the factory hundreds of dead birds were picked up, and a beacon some miles away was extinguished!

Happily the works were situated on a large sandy tract, fronting the Firth of Clyde, and not many dwellings were near the danger zone.

The End of a Perfect Barge!

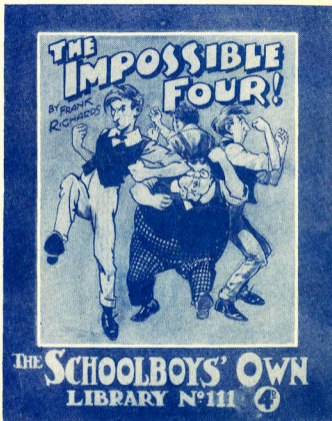
The tranquil life of the Zoo was rudely disturbed one day in October, 1874. A barge, laden with five tons of gunpowder, became somehow ignited and exploded in Regent's Canal. The banks of the canal were blown in, neighbouring trees torn to ribbons, and the barge practically disappeared. Later, fragments of the ill-fated vessel were picked up near the Elephant House in the Zoo, while the roof of the Aviary was broken and many valuable birds escaped!

But gigantic upheavals have had other causes than chemical explosives. When, for instance, compressed water finds an outlet, things start moving.

In 1906, a 42-inch water main carrying the Liverpool water supply from Lake Vrnwy burst under the bed of a river known as the Elfer. A column of water shot up, carrying masses of rock and masonry. There was a thunderous roar, and shingle and earth, loosened from the hillside, rolled down and filled the whole of the river bed!

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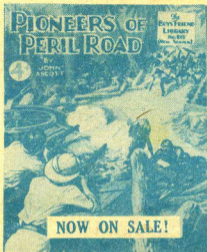


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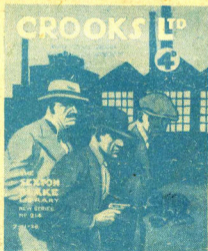


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