

NO GOOD AS CAPTAIN!

By
OWEN CONQUEST



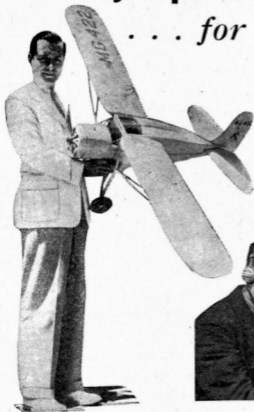
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NO GOOD AS CAPTAIN!

By OWEN CONQUEST



VALENTINE MORNINGTON is very pleased to bag the junior captaincy of Rookwood from JIMMY SILVER.—but once in the coveted position, it soon becomes obvious that he's not fit for the job!

CHAPTER 1.

A Very Pressing Invitation!

"STEP in, Morny!"

"Trot in, old scout!"

"We want to speak to you, Morny!"

Lattrey, Peele, and Gower, of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, spoke together.

Mornington was going towards the stairs with Jimmy Silver, when the trio called to him from the doorway of the first study.

Mornington, the new junior captain,

and Jimmy Silver, who had formerly held that position, seemed to be on the best of terms with one another—a circumstance that was not at all a pleasing one to Lattrey & Co.

Morny paused a moment.

"Can't stop!" he said. "I'm goin' down to the footer."

"Shan't keep you a few minutes," said Lattrey.

"Well, what is it?"

"Step into the study!"

"Oh, rot! You can speak to me

here, I suppose?" answered Mornington impatiently.

"You coming, Jimmy?" bawled Arthur Edward Lovell from the stairs. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were waiting below.

"I'm coming!" answered Jimmy.

And he went on. Mornington made a move to follow him, but Lattrey caught him by the sleeve.

"Look here, Morny—" he began.

"Oh, let me go—I've no time to waste!" said Mornington. "If you've got anything to say, say it, and have done!"

"Can't yell it out in the passage," said Lattrey sulkily. "Why can't you step into the study for a minute?"

Valentine Mornington made an impatient gesture.

"Oh, all right!"

He came into the study, and Lattrey closed the door. Mornington stood looking at the trio with impatient inquiry. There had been a time when Morny had been on good terms with the three black sheep of the Fourth, but that time was quite past. And since he had become junior captain, Morny had hardly spoken to the trio.

"Well, go ahead!" he said. "What is it? You three slackers thinkin' of takin' up footer?"

"Ahem! No!"

"Well, I knew that!" grunted Morny. "Too much like work—what?"

"You haven't always been so jolly keen on footer yourself!" said Peele tartly.

"Not unless there was a bet on the game," added Gower.

Morny flushed.

He did not like being reminded of the time when he had been one of the blackest of the black sheep. That time was past, and Morny would have been glad for it to be forgotten.

"Is that what you brought me in here to listen to?" he snapped.

Lattrey gave his comrades a warning glance.

"Not at all," he said. "Nothing of the kind. Won't you sit down, Morny?"

"No time!"

"This isn't chummy, you know—"

"Well, I'm not chummy with this study," said Mornington coolly. "What's the good of beatin' about the bush?"

"We used to be pally!" said Peele.

"We will be again, if you like—if you give up playin' the goat, an' take to playin' the game," said Mornington with a laugh.

"Oh, draw it mild! You can't spoof us!" growled Gower.

"Spoof you?" repeated Mornington. "What do you mean, Gower?"

"Shut up, Gower!" said Lattrey hastily.

Cuthbert Gower gave a grunt.

"Well, look here, Moray," said Lattrey, in a conciliatory tone. "You're junior captain now. You've got Jimmy Silver's job, and you're head of the Lower School."

"That's no news!"

"I mean, you're in a different position from what you used to be in. You've got power in your hands now," said Lattrey. "Junior captain has a lot of influence, and can do pretty well as he likes, so long as he has a backing among the fellows, and doesn't kick over the rules too much. You've been on the Good Little Georgie stunt for a long time now, haven't you?"

Morny's eyes gleamed a little.

"You must be getting fed up with it," pursued Lattrey. "Now, why not chuck it?"

"Chuck it?" repeated Morny.

"Yes; and have a good time like you used to. You can do it now, without fear of anybody, now you're junior captain. Jimmy Silver & Co. don't count now—they can be as goody-goody as they like by themselves in the end study. Let 'em rip! They can't interfere with you, and you can have a jolly good time! See?"

"I see!"

"You haven't realised what a difference it makes, being junior captain," continued Lattrey, encouraged by Morny's placid tone. "You're really monarch of all you survey in the Fourth, you know. Jimmy Silver couldn't keep his end up against you now, if he chipped in. Why, with you as leader, we could have no end of a good time. And you must be feeling the want of a little excitement by this time!"

Morny nodded.

"Such as breakin' bounds at night, and goin' to the little parties at the Bird in Hand?" he suggested.

"That's it!"

"Backin' gee-gees, and handin' over my pocket-money to a boozy bookie?"

"Ahem!"

"Spoillin' my wind by smokin' cigarettes——"

"Oh, rot!"

"And occasionally makin' myself sick with a cigar?"

"Look here, Morny——"

"It's a delightful prospect," said Mornington. "Especially the cigar. I remember seein' Gower tackle a big cheroot once. It doubled him up, an' he was groanin' with anguish for hours afterwards. Weren't you, Gower?"

"Oh, rats!" muttered Gower.

"It must have been a happy experience," said Mornington, "and the time a bookie was chasin' you, Peele, for money you owed him, an' threatenin' to call on the Head! That's a merry recollection, isn't it?"

"Oh, rot!"

"Thanks for the offer!" said Morny. "Declined with thanks! Anythin' more to say?"

Lattrey & Co. looked at one another.

"Oh, don't talk out of your neck, Morny, old man," said Lattrey uneasily. "I'll tell you what; we've got a little smokin'-party on after tea."

"Ass!"

"Towny an' Toppo are comin', and Smythe and Tracy of the Shell," said Lattrey. "We invite you, Morny!"

"Do come, old scout!" murmured Peele.

"Banker afterwards, if you like," said Lattrey. "But, anyhow, come to the smokin'-party, Morny. It will buck you up no end!"

Mornington looked curiously at the black sheep of the Fourth. There was no doubt about the eagerness of the Giddy Goats of Rookwood to welcome him back into the fold. With the junior captain of the school at the head of their select fraternity, the Rookwood Goats felt that they would be able to "spread" themselves with much more freedom. While Jimmy Silver was junior captain they had been under a cloud and had been subject to raggings.

As Mornington seemed to hesitate, the looks of the black sheep became brighter and more confident.

Not one of them believed for a moment in the genuineness of Valentine Mornington's reform. Their view of it was that it was pure humbug, and now that Morny was captain of the Lower School, they did not see any further usefulness in the humbug. It had been useful, no doubt, in helping Morny into the coveted position. Now it was time to "chuck it," and they felt that Morny as a sensible fellow, ought to see that.

"Some jolly good smokes, Morny," said Peele temptingly. "Really good Turkish cigarettes—your favourite old brand, you remember."

"And plenty of them," added Gower. "We're doin' it in good style, Morny."

Morny grinned.

"Regardless of expense?" he asked.

"That's it!"

"You'll enjoy yourself, old chap," murmured Lattrey.

Mornington reflected, and the shady three watched him eagerly.

"Could I bring a friend or two?" asked Morny, at last.

"Certainly, old top!"

"I don't suppose Erroll would care to come," remarked Peele, with a grin.

"Oh, he'll come if I ask him!"

The trio looked doubtful. Kit Erroll, of the Fourth, certainly was not a fellow in their line at all.

"Oh, bring him, if he cares for it!" said Lattrey.

"And Jimmy Silver?" asked Morny.

Lattrey started.

"Silver wouldn't——"

"Well, can I ask him? I'll tell him it's a smokin' party, of course, an' he can suit himself."

"That's a go!" said Lattrey. "If Silver likes to come to a smokin' party, he's welcome."

"Done, then!" said Mornington. "What time?"

"Six!"

"I'll be here!"

And Mornington, with a genial nod, left the study, and sauntered away down the passage to the stairs, whistling cheerily.

CHAPTER 2.

Nice for the Nuts!

"OUR win!" chuckled Mark Lattrey, in great satisfaction, when the junior captain was gone.

"Good!"

"Rippin'!"

Lattrey laughed.

"Of course, I knew he was only spoofin', with his blessed reform, an' all that!" he remarked. "It puzzled me a bit at first, but I soon spotted the little game. He was aiming at the captaincy all along. There's too many goody-goody fellows at Rookwood for a Giddy Goat to set up for the captaincy; he couldn't have got elected. So Morny lay low—till he bagged the place away from Silver. That was the game."

"Plain enough," assented Gower.

"He's kept the spoof up longer than was necessary," said Lattrey. "But I

was pretty sure he was tirin' of it. Well, we've got Morny back."

"Bravo!"

"This means that Jimmy Silver & Co. take a back seat for good. As for Silver comin' here to a smokin' party—that's all rot! He won't!"

"Morny's goin' to ask him."

"And he'll refuse—and that may mean trouble between them, which is all the better. That solemn old fogey, Erroll, won't come, either. And if he gives Morny lectures, Morny may get fed up with him, too. I'm surprised that they've been pally so long."

"Morny's rather a swankin' cad," remarked Peele. "But he will be jolly useful to us—that's a cert! And if he loses money in this study——"

"And he will!" said Lattrey.

"He ain't so rich as he used to be, but he can always borrow money from that scrubby cousin of his in the Second Form. But it will be a big thing for us to have the junior captain one of our set."

"Yes, rather! Let's go and tell the chaps!"

Lattrey & Co. left the study, and walked along cheerily to Study No. 5. Townsend and Topham, the dandies of the Fourth, were there at tea, with Tom Rawson, the scholarship junior. Towny and Topy were chatting to one another—without addressing any remarks to Rawson. Rawson was not sufficiently "class" for Towny and Topy to have anything to say to him. Besides, Rawson had put a very firm foot down on smoking in the study. And he was so "hefty" a youth, that Towny and Topy, after having had their heads knocked together once or twice, loftily and disdainfully let him have his way.

Townsend was telling his chum about what his aunt, the countess, had said to his elder brother, the baronet; it was quite a high-class conversation, and intended to impress Rawson with a proper sense of his study-mates' superiority. Unfortunately, it failed of

its effect, as Rawson was "sapping" Virgil over his tea, and was too deep in Latin verses to heed what his lofty study-mates were saying.

"Trot in, old scouts!" said Townsend, as Lattrey & Co. appeared in the doorway.

The black sheep came in, Lattrey lighted a cigarette.

"Have a fag?" he asked.

"Ahem! No, thanks!" said Townsend hastily.

"Not just now!" murmured Topham.

Lattrey blew out a cloud of smoke. Tom Rawson coughed and looked up from P. Virgilius Maro.

"Chuck that!" he said tersely.

Lattrey appeared to be deaf. Although by no means so aristocratic as Towny and Topsy, Lattrey made it a point to be "down" on Rawson, and to ignore his existence.

"You fellows—" he began.

"Did you hear me?" asked Rawson.

"You fellows will trot along at six?" said Lattrey, still unheeding. "Morny's comin'."

"Oh, good!"

"If you've got fags about, you might bring them along—it's goin' to be a regular orgy, old tops," said Peele.

"Rely on us!" smiled Townsend.

Rawson rose to his feet.

"I can't stand smoke in the study," he said. "You've no right to smoke here, Lattrey!"

"Did you address me?" asked Lattrey disdainfully, becoming conscious of Rawson's existence at last.

"Yes; put that smoke out, or take it out of the study!"

Lattrey's reply was to blow out a cloud of smoke, which made Rawson cough again.

There was a chuckle from the nuts in the study.

"That's enough!" growled Rawson.

He came towards Lattrey, with his hands up.

"Get out!" he said.

"Look here! You leave Lattrey alone!" said Townsend. "Shut up, an'

behave yourself, Rawson. You're not in your pater's workshop now!"

"Mop up the cad!" suggested Peele.

"Yaas, so we will, if he don't behave!" said Towny, feeling strong in numbers. "Sit down, Rawson!"

"Are you going, Lattrey?"

"No fear!"

"Will you put that smoke out?"

"No!"

"Then, here goes!" said Rawson.

He collared Lattrey promptly, and spun him towards the open doorway.

"Back up!" shouted Lattrey.

Peele and Gower seized Rawson at once, and Towny and Topsy jumped up to help.

Rawson went spinning back across the room.

"Now come on again, you cad!" panted Gower.

Rawson did not answer; he picked up a big cushion, and came on again with a rush. The cushion swiped right and left, and Gower went spinning in one direction, Peele in another. Then Lattrey caught it with his face, and went bumping into the passage.

The cushion swept round, and Townsend and Topham captured it together and tottered back.

There were five of the nuts; but the burly Rawson seemed to have it all his own way with the cushion to help.

Lattrey was gasping in the passage, showing no inclination whatever to come in again. He was also in difficulties with his cigarette, which had slipped into his mouth, and felt warm there.

Peele and Gower, dodging the swiping cushion, scrambled into the passage after him.

Rawson devoted his attention to his study-mates then. Towny and Topsy dodged and twisted round the study, yelling, as Rawson chased them with the whirling cushion.

"Stoppit!" yelled Townsend. "You horrid ruffian—stoppit!"

"Get out, then!"

"Do you think we're goin' to get

out of our own study to please you?" shrieked Topham.

"Yes, unless you want some more," said Rawson coolly.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

Townsend sprawled on the carpet, and Topham jumped over him, and dodged into the passage, with the cushion behind.

Four furious faces glared in at Rawson—but they stayed in the passage.

Rawson turned round to Townsend.

That breathless youth was staggering to his feet, when the cushion caught him again, and he sprawled doorwards.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Yow-ow! Stoppit! I'm goin', ain't I?" wailed Towny.

And he went.

Slam!

Tom Rawson returned to his tea and P. Virgilius Maro, keeping the cushion handy in case it was wanted again.

But it was not wanted.

Outside the study five breathless and furious nuts uttered blood-curdling threats, but there seemed a general disinclination to put them into effect.

"Let's rush the rotter, an' smash him up!" gasped Peele.

"Let's rag him black and blue!" hissed Gower.

"After all, we don't want to be in the study with that cad!" said Cecil Townsend loftily. "I'm really ashamed of havin' laid hands on the low rotter. Let's go an' see Smythe."

"Yaas, let's!" gasped Topham.

"Oh, come on!" growled Lattrey.

"He, he, he! He, he, he!"

That offensive cachinnation came from Tubby Muffin, who was watching the dusty and breathless nuts from the door of Study No. 2.

Lattrey gave the fat Classical a savage look.

He feared Rawson; but he did not fear Tubby Muffin—which was rather unfortunate for the fat Tubby.

"Collar that fat owl!" snarled Lattrey.

"Yaas, give the fat cad a lesson!" said Towny.

"He, he, he! Oh, my hat! I say — Yaroooooh!" roared Tubby Muffin, as the nuts rushed on him and collared him, sending him spinning into his study.

Crash!

There was a sound of a table that went whirling over, and a crash of crockery.

"Yoooooop! Yow-ow-woop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lattrey.

"Let's go in and give him another!" exclaimed Gower.

Gower made a step towards the doorway; but he suddenly halted as Putty of the Fourth, Jones minor, and Higgs looked out. Tubby's study-mates were at home.

"What are you up to?" roared Higgs. "You've upset our tea! Come on, you chaps, and wipe up the passage with them!"

Lattrey & Co. fled.

Higgs and his comrades chased them to the head of the stairs, down which they ran; Gower, unfortunately last, being rolled down after the rest.

It was rather a breathless party that arrived at Adolphus Smythe's study, in the Shell quarters.

CHAPTER 3.

The Call of Duty!

NOT finished, Morny?" Jimmy Silver & Co. were improving the shining hour with football practice.

The match with Bagshot School was coming along; and the Rookwood footballers were very keen on beating Bagshot, their old rivals. Morny was giving a great deal of attention to his team, getting them into shape, in which he had the hearty support of Jimmy Silver.

Whether Jimmy Silver was exactly pleased by his fall from the junior

captaincy was a question; but certainly he owed no grudge to the new skipper. Morny's career as captain, so far, had not been an unqualified success; but he was doing his best, and Jimmy Silver was backing him up. For which Morny was duly grateful, for he was well aware that his position would have been extremely uncomfortable if Jimmy had gone into opposition.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome, though they "grouched" at the change of skipper, followed Jimmy's lead; and in addition to Morny's own chum, Erroll, the Fistical Four were the new captain's chief supporters.

Morny had come off the field, when Jimmy called to him. He nodded in reply.

"Yes, I've got an engagement for six," he answered.

"Oh, bother your engagements!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Stick to footer!"

"But it's rather important," said Mornington. "And I want you four to come, and Erroll, too."

"Well, I was going to put in some more practice," said Jimmy Silver.

"You can practise some other time, old scout."

"Well, what's on, anyway?" asked Raby.

"A little party in Lattrey's study." Lovell glared.

"Blow Lattrey! Bother Lattrey! Bless Lattrey! I wouldn't be found dead in Lattrey's study!" he snorted.

"I don't want you to be found dead there, old top. I want you to come to the party."

"I don't quite catch on," said Jimmy Silver. "You're not pally with Lattrey and his set, Morny."

"Lattrey's extended the olive-branch," explained Mornington. "His idea is that now I've bagged the captaincy, I can give up playing the ox, and take to my merry old manners and customs. I'm offered the distinguished

rank of great chief an' leader of the Giddy Goats of Rookwood."

"Morny!" exclaimed Erroll.

"Lattrey's laid in supplies of expensive smokes, and I'm asked to the party," said Mornington, while his companions stared at him blankly. "I've got leave to bring my friends, so it's all right."

"You're asking us to a smoking-party!" ejaculated Newcome.

"Yaas!"

"You cheeky ass——"

"My dear man, it's a great occasion. I tell you Lattrey's got no end of expensive smokes, and there's to be banker afterwards, if we care for it."

"Look here, Morny——" began Jimmy Silver.

"A very distinguished company, too," went on Mornington. "Smythe of the Shell—the nobby Adolphus; the glass of fashion an' the mould of Form, you know—arbiter of elegance to the Lower School. Tracy, too—very entertainin' chap, Tracy; knows all about the races——"

"Are you pulling our leg?" demanded Jimmy Silver restively.

"Not at all. There'll be Towny and Topy, too—to give the party a tone. Towny will tell us about his aunt, the countess."

"We know all about Town's giddy aunt," said Jimmy Silver. "And I'm not coming."

"Same here!" said Lovell emphatically.

"Oh, do come!" urged Mornington. "I want you to bring cricket-stumps, too."

"Cricket-stumps!" yelled Raby.

"Certainly! They may be needed."

"What on earth for?"

"In case the merry smokers cut up rusty at what I'm goin' to do."

"Oh!" said Erroll. "You mean——"

Mornington laughed.

"I mean that I think it's high time the junior captain took a hand in this smokin' and card-playing and so on,"

he said. "That kind of merry-makin' was under the weather when Silver was captain. Now it seems to be flourishin' again no end. I think it's time it was sat upon. Are you fellows comin' to help?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Lovell. "I didn't catch on——"

"You seldom do, old top."

"Look here, you ass——"

"Come on!" said Mornington. "It's nearly six, and it's bad manners won't keep a party waitin'. Adolphus won't be able to keep away from the smokes, and there won't be any left for us."

Jimmy Silver chuckled as he followed Mornington from the footer field. Six juniors headed for the School House. Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, was heading for Big Side, and he stopped to speak to Mornington.

"Mornington!"

"Hallo, Bulkeley!"

"I've got a bone to pick with you," said Bulkeley quietly. "It seems that you're junior captain now. It's not my business to interfere in the arrangements of the juniors, but it may have occurred to you, possibly, that the junior captain has some duties to perform, as well as the senior captain."

"What's up, then?" asked Morny.

"I'm afraid that there's several things up, that will have to be put down," answered Bulkeley grimly. "There's been fag-ends of cigarettes picked up in the Fourth Form passage. A playing-card was swept up by one of the maids, and Mr. Bootles has spoken to me about it."

"Oh gad!" murmured Mornington.

The other juniors stood silent.

They were well aware that since Jimmy Silver had ceased to be captain the Giddy Goats of Rookwood had become more reckless and impudent. The restraining hand was gone. It looked now as if they had been a little too reckless.

"So far as possible," went on Bulkeley, in the same quiet tone, "I think it's a good idea to let the junior captain keep order. Silver always seemed to manage fairly well. If I have to chip in officially, it will lead to some trouble—serious trouble. You don't seem to have realised, Mornington, what it's up to you to do. That's all, for the present."

And Bulkeley of the Sixth walked on, leaving Morny with a rather dismayed look on his face.

"Bulkeley's got on to it," said Lovell. "It's about time you made up your mind to take a hand, Morny."

Mornington nodded.

"High time, it seems," he remarked. "Well, let's go ahead with our giddy duty. After we've done there will be a scarcity of cigarette-ends in the Fourth Form passage, I really think."

Morny & Co. entered the School House, and proceeded upstairs to the Fourth Form passage. They met Tom Rawson at the top of the stairs, and Morny called to him.

"Join up, Rawson," he said.

"What's up?" asked Rawson.

"Smokin'-party in Lattrey's study."

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Rawson. "No time for such rot, or inclination, either."

"There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding about," said Mornington, laughing. "We're going in as executioners, dear boy, and we may want help."

"Oh, I see! I'll come, if that's the case."

"Follow your leader."

There were seven sturdy juniors now heading for Lattrey's study. There were an equal number of the noble fraternity known as the Giddy Goats in that select apartment, waiting for Morny. Mornington had said that he would bring his friends. But it was certain that Lattrey & Co. would be surprised, and anything but pleased, when Morny arrived with his friends.

CHAPTER 4.

Doggish!

"SO Morny's comin'!" Adolphus Smythe leaned back in the armchair in Lattrey's study, and blew out a little cloud of smoke.

The smoking-party had gathered.

Smythe and Tracy of the Shell were there, and Towny and Topy, as well as the three owners of the study.

Lattrey, Peele and Gower, as a matter of fact, were a good deal keener on banker and nap than on the smokes. They had an eye to business. The three young rascals were black sheep of a rather deeper dye than their guests. But, for the present, cigarettes were the order of the day. It was not quite six, but the smokes were "going."

"Yes, he's coming," said Lattrey. "Promised to come."

"I fancied he would come round in time," remarked Adolphus sagely. "In fact, I told Tracy as much, didn't I, Tracy?"

"You did, old sport," answered Tracy.

"Hallo! I hear footsteps!" smiled Lattrey. "Here comes our dear reformed Morny."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Footsteps approached the door of the study, and there was a tap and it opened. But it was the fat face of Tubby Muffin that looked in.

The Giddy Goats stared at him.

"Get out!" snapped Peele.

"Travel, you fat rotter!" growled Lattrey.

Tubby Muffin blinked in at the smoking-party.

"I thought it was a feed," he said, in a tone of deep disappointment.

"Well, it isn't. Get out!"

"Shut the door after you, fatty!"

"Oh, I don't mind joining you!" said Tubby Muffin genially. "I'm a bit rorty myself, you know—quite a rorty old dog, in fact. I'll come in, with pleasure."

"By gad!" said Smythe of the Shell. "Really, Lattrey, if you inflict that fat bounder on us—"

Mark Lattrey started to his feet.

"I'll clear him off fast enough, if he doesn't go!" he exclaimed. "Hand me over that cricket-stump, Gower!"

"Here you are, old top."

Tubby Muffin backed into the passage.

"I say, Lattrey—" he began reproachfully.

Slam!

"Lattrey returned to his seat. The next minute the study door reopened, and the fat face of Reginald Muffin appeared once more.

"Get out!" roared Lattrey.

"You don't want me to join you?" asked Tubby.

"No, you fat porpoise."

"Oh, very well! I suppose you fellows know that you are breaking the rules," said Tubby Muffin loftily. "I'm sorry, but I feel bound to mention it to Bulkeley—"

"Wha-a-at!" ejaculated Adolphus Smythe.

"You fat sneak!" shouted Lattrey furiously.

"I'm not a sneak," said Tubby Muffin warmly. "I've got a sense of duty, that's all. Some fellows have. I'm shocked at you, Lattrey—surprised and shocked! Smoking in the study, like a gang of toppers in a tap-room! This isn't good enough for Rookwood, I can tell you!"

And Tubby Muffin shook a fat forefinger accusingly at the merry blades of Rookwood, who gave him savage looks.

"I heard Mr. Bootles speaking to Bulkeley this morning," continued Tubby. "Old Bootles suspects that smoking goes on in the Fourth Form studies. He told Bulkeley so. Now, I really think it's my duty, having caught you in the act, to mention it to Bulkeley. What do you think?"

"You fat rotter!"

"If you treated me as a pal," said Tubby, "I should be bound to keep "

dark, out of friendship. But you're not treating me as a pal. Now I put it to you, Lattrey—are you treating me as a pal?"

Lattrey grasped a stump.

Tubby Muffin eyed him very warily.

"Hold on, Lattrey," said Gower hastily. "We don't want Bulkeley of the Sixth brought here."

"By gad, no!" concurred Smythe of the Shell. "If that fat little beast is goin' to sneak——"

"Some fellows have a sense of duty," said Tubby Muffin loftily. "I'm ashamed of you chaps! I can't let this go on."

Lattrey laid down the stump with a savage look. The fat Classical had the upper hand. Lattrey & Co. dared not let a Sixth Form prefect be brought to the study, already reeking with smoke.

"Let the fat brute come in!" muttered Peele.

"You can come in, Muffin," said Lattrey, between his teeth.

Tubby Muffin shook his head loftily. Having gained an advantage, he meant to make the most of it.

"I'm afraid I couldn't accept an invitation put like that, Lattrey," he said. "Besides, I feel bound to mention to Bulkeley——"

"Do come in, Tubby!" said Lattrey, gritting his teeth. "We—we'll be pleased to have you!"

Tubby Muffin smiled beamingly.

"Sure you'd like me to join you, old tops?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Then I'll come in," said Tubby cheerily. And he came in and closed the door after him. "Of course, with matters on a friendly footing—— What did you say, Smythe?"

"Nothin'!" muttered Adolphus.

"I thought you called me something."

"N-n-not at all."

"Oh, all right! Any smokes going?" asked Tubby Muffin, with quite a doggish air. "Any whisky about?"

"Oh, my aunt!" murmured Tracy.

There was no whisky, even in Lattrey's study. But the fat Tubby, having started as a Giddy Goat, evidently felt that it was up to him to go the whole hog, so to speak.

"Nunno!" stuttered Lattrey. "Here, help yourself to a fag!"

He pushed the cheapest box of cigarettes towards Tubby, with a far from hospitable expression upon his thin, hard face.

Tubby selected a smoke with a very doggish air. He lighted it at Smythe's cigarette, and Adolphus contrived to let his lighted end touch Tubby's fat little nose.

There was a fiendish yell from Tubby as he jumped back, and a roar of laughter from the Rookwood Goats.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-wooop! You rotter!" howled Tubby. "You did that on purpose!"

"Quite an accident, I assure you, dear boy!" smiled Adolphus.

"Wow-wow-wow!"

Tubby Muffin rubbed his nose ruefully.

"Let me give you a light, Muffin," grinned Lattrey.

"Ow! Yow! I'll have a match."

Tubby, having finished with his nose, struck a match to light his cigarette. He blew out a cloud of smoke with an air of great enjoyment. Tubby rather fancied himself as a "dog," and he was determined to be as doggish as any other fellow in the study.

But before he was half-way through the cigarette he was smoking very slowly. He coughed several times and grunted expressively. Doggishness of the smoky variety did not quite agree with the ample supplies Tubby had taken in at tea-time.

"Time Morny was here," remarked Peele, with a glance at the clock.

"Here comes somebody."

There were footsteps in the passage

again—a good many footsteps. Then there came a rap at the door.

"Trot in, old sport!" called out Lattrey.

The door open, and Mornington's smiling face was seen. The nuts of Rookwood gave him a cheery grin of welcome, and Tubby Muffin bestowed a genial nod upon him.

But the grin died away a little as Erroll and Jimmy Silver were seen behind Morny.

The junior captain entered the study. Jimmy Silver and Kit Erroll followed him in. And Lattrey & Co. looked quite grave as Lovell and Raby and Newcome and Rawson followed.

Rawson was the last, and he closed the door.

The study was pretty well crowded now.

"Well, here we are!" smiled Mornington.

"Ya-a-as, here you are!" stammered Adolphus Smythe.

"You said I might bring my friends, Lattrey."

"Ye-e-es."

"Well, I've brought them."

"Squat down somewhere, old tops," said Tubby Muffin. "Join us in a smoke—no end ripping, I assure you! Pass 'em the cigarettes, Smythe. Try these, Morny—you'll like 'em!"

"So Tubby's joined the Goats, has he?" ejaculated Arthur Edward Lovell, in astonishment.

Reginald Muffin gave a fat chuckle.

"What do you think?" he answered jauntily. "I'm a bit of a rorty dog, you know! A short life and a merry one! He, he, he!"

"Well, your life as a Giddy Goat is going to be a short one, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver. "I don't think it will be a very merry one, though."

"Not very," grinned Raby.

"May as well lock the door," said Mornington. "We don't want to be interrupted; and we don't want any of our rorty friends to bolt."

"Turn the key, Rawson."

Rawson turned the key, and put it in his pocket. The Giddy Goats viewed that proceeding with growing alarm. Mark Lattrey's face was dark and apprehensive.

"If you fellows have come here to kick up a row—" he began.

Mornington nodded.

"Exactly!" he answered. "We've come to kick up quite a shindy! But don't mind us—get on with the smoking! We'll watch you."

"Look here——"

"Keep on with the smoking! So long as you're smoking, we won't touch you."

"Morny——" began Lovell.

"Leave it to me, Lovell, please. We'd better open the window and sit round it—I'm not used to tap-rooms. Don't mind us, my nutty friends—go on smoking."

The Giddy Goats blinked at Mornington in astonishment, and went on mechanically puffing at their cigarettes. Mornington opened the study window, and he and his companions sat round it, keeping as close to the fresh air as possible. Then, with smiling faces, they watched the smoking Goats of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 5.

A Peculiar Punishment!

MARK LATTREY'S teeth closed hard on his cigarette.

The cad of the Fourth understood well enough now that Mornington had not come there to join the smoking-party.

It was evident that Morny had been pulling the Giddy Goat's leg when he accepted the invitation.

Whether Valentine Mornington's reform was genuine or not, he was still "keeping it up."

The fact that Erroll and Jimmy Silver were with him was a pretty plain proof that Morny had not come there to be "rorty."

All the nuts realised that, and they were puzzled and alarmed. Even

Tubby Muffin realised that there was something wrong, and he blinked at Morny & Co. uneasily.

Exactly what Mornington intended was rather a puzzle.

In the days when Jimmy Silver was junior captain the Fistical Four would have thought nothing of raiding and ragging a study where a "smoking-party" was going on.

But Morny was leader now, and the Fistical Four were following his lead, as well as Erroll and Rawson.

And it seemed clear that Mornington was not intending a ragging.

He sat by the open window, with a smile on his face, watching the Giddy Goats; but the smile was a rather wicked one, and did not reassure the Goats.

The atmosphere of the study was rather thick by this time, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were glad to be by the open window. If the door had been unlocked there would probably have been a rush of the Giddy Goats to get away; but the door was locked, and the key was in Rawson's pocket. There was a long silence, while the Rookwood Goats smoked, and the unwelcome visitors watched them smoking.

Lattrey broke the silence at last.

"Look here, Morny! What's this game?" he asked, in a low voice of concentrated anger.

"Game?" repeated Mornington.

"Yes. You haven't come here to join us?"

"Not exactly."

"What do you want, then?"

"To watch you."

"You silly fool!" broke out Lattrey savagely. "What do you want to watch us for, you idiot?"

"I find you rather amusin'."

"Look here——" began Adolphus Smythe.

"I'm lookin', dear old Smythey."

"I—I think we'd better be goin'," murmured Tracey. "I'd be obliged if you'd unlock the door, Rawson."

"Oh, yaas!" murmured Townsend.

Tom Rawson looked at Mornington for orders.

"Keep the key in your pocket," said Morny.

"Right you are!"

"Look here, Rawson!" broke out Topham. "You just unlock that door! We don't care for your company, and we're goin'!"

"I don't care for yours," said Rawson cheerfully. "But you're not going till Morny gives the word."

"Morny's skipper, you know," remarked Jimmy Silver. "There's such a thing as discipline, Toppo."

"What have you planted yourselves in this study for, you rotters?" muttered Lattrey, his eyes burning.

"I—I say, have a smoke, Morny, an' let's be pally," said Peele, extending a box of cigarettes to the junior captain.

Valentine Mornington shook his head.

"Thanks, I've given up smokin' long ago!" he answered.

"Oh, put on a smoke!" urged Gower uneasily.

"My dear man, you'll want all those smokes before you're through."

"Not a bit of it! We shan't be smokin' half this lot!"

"You will!" answered Mornington coolly.

"Eh?"

"Tubby, your smoke's gone out," said Mornington, with a stern look at the fat Classical.

"That's all right, old chap!" said Tubby. "I don't believe in overdoing it, you know. Fact is, I've been smoking an awful lot to-day."

"You're going to smoke an awful lot more, too. Light another cigarette!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Do you hear me?"

"Ye-es, but——"

"Do as you're told!"

"I—I don't want to, Morny," said Tubby, in alarm. "I—I—I'm feeling a bit queer inside now, I am really."

"You'll feel a bit queerer before this smokin'-party is over," answered Mornington. "Put on another fag at once."

"Wha-a-at for?"

"Because you're told. Rawson, you're nearest the fat boulder. Give him a dig with your stump, will you?"

"Certainly!" said Rawson.

"I—I say— Yaroooh! Stoppit!" yelled Tubby Muffin, as he duly received the dig—rather an energetic one. "Yow-ow! Chuck it! I—I—I'll smoke another fag if you like, Morny! I—I want to."

"Whether you want to or not, you're goin' to!" said Mornington. "Now, then, sharp's the word!"

Slowly and unwillingly, Reginald Muffin lighted another cigarette. He smoked it slowly—very slowly indeed. But he smoked it. Rawson was ready with his stump, and the cigarette seemed the lesser evil—at present. The time was soon to come when a thousand stumps would seem a lesser evil than a cigarette to the hapless Tubby.

Lattrey & Co. looked at one another. They understood now.

Mornington's little game was not a ragging. It was something more severe than a ragging. The Giddy Goats of Rockwood had gathered there to smoke—and Mornington was going to make them smoke—till all the smokes were gone. It was the junior captain's idea of making the punishment fit the crime—quite in keeping with Morny's whimsical character. Jimmy Silver & Co. chortled as they watched the expressions of the nuts.

"You have stopped smokin', Smythey," remarked Morny, a few minutes later.

"I've finished," said Adolphus.

"Not quite! Light up!"

"I—I'm not goin' to."

"Will you give Smythe a dig with your stump, Lovell?"

"Won't I?" grinned Arthur Edward. And he did.

There was a howl from Adolphus.

"Have another smoke, Smythey?"

"I—I—don't mind if I do!" gasped Smythe.

"Go it!"

And Adolphus Smythe went it, with a face that was a picture of fury and horror—and that was gradually assuming a complexion of various colours, in which a sickly green predominated.

"Muffin!" rapped out Mornington.

"Groooh!"

"You're not smokin'!"

"Ow! I—I can't! I—I'm not one of this lot, really, Morny," pleaded Tubby. "I—I just looked in to—to speak to them about—about footer, you know—and—and—"

"Give him your stump, Rawson."

"Ow! I—I'm just going to begin!" howled Tubby.

"Buck up, then!"

Two cigarettes had had a most alarming effect upon the inward regions of Reginald Muffin. But he started on a third.

"You're not smokin', Gower."

"I—I'm just goin' to—"

With a face like a demon, Cuthbert Gower lighted up again. In a dismal crowd, the unhappy Giddy Goats of Rockwood smoked and smoked—and the ready stumps kept them at it. There came an interruption at last, from Tubby Muffin. That plump youth rolled suddenly from his chair, and collapsed on the hearthrug, with his head in the fender. And the sounds that followed from the hapless Tubby resembled the weird sounds heard on a Channel steamer on a stormy day.

CHAPTER 6.

Awful!

"LATTREY!"

"Hang you!"

"You're not smokin'."

"I won't!" hissed Lattrey between clenched teeth. "Hang you! I won't!"

"Oh, what a falling-off was there!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "You giddy blades gathered here to smoke. That was your special object. Now you say you won't, just as if you didn't like it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him your stump, Erroll."

Erroll laughed, and gave Lattrey the business end of his stump. Lattrey uttered a peculiar gurgle as he tried to dodge. Then he sat very still.

"Leave off, you rotter!" he panted. "I—I—I'll smoke."

"Go it!" said Mornington encouragingly.

Lattrey, with a fiendish face, lighted another cigarette. He was more hardened to smoking than his comrades, and he was standing it better; but he was feeling threats of upheaval within.

Tracy of the Shell had joined Tubby Muffin with his head in the fender. The rest kept their places, smoking—slowly.

But they had to smoke.

There had been many a smoking-party held in Mark Lattrey's study, but certainly there had never been such a dismal one as the present party. The Giddy Goats of Rookwood were going through it, and never had they so sincerely repented of their giddy goatishness. A licking or a ragging would have been a joke to this.

Mornington watched them implacably.

It was high time the smart set of Rookwood had a lesson, and they were getting a lesson now, and a severe one.

Adolphus Smythe dropped a half-smoked cigarette to the floor, and leaned his head upon his hands, groaning deeply.

"You're not smokin', Smythey!" said Mornington.

Groan!

"You hear me, Adolphus?"

Groan!

Adolphus couldn't answer; he could only groan, and the groans were both loud and deep.

"Fancy Smythey getting fed up with smoking!" grinned Lovell. "Who'd have thought it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you enjoying yourself down there, Tubby?"

"Grooogh!"

"Having a good time, Tracy?"

"Gug-gug-gug!"

Groan from Adolphus Smythe.

Townsend and Topham had their heads on the table now, groaning in chorus with Adolphus. Lattrey, Peele, and Gower were still smoking feebly; they were the toughest of the Giddy Goats of Rookwood. But it was not long now before Cyril Peele collapsed. He rested his hands on his knees, groaned, and rocked himself in anguish.

Lattrey staggered to his feet. His face was white from rage, and the influence of the cigarettes.

"You rotters!" he muttered huskily. "You rotters! Ow! I—I won't touch another! I—I won't!"

"Prod him, Erroll!"

"Don't you think he's had enough, Morny?" murmured Erroll.

"Not till he collapses."

"Let him keep it up," chuckled Lovell. "It may be quite a long time before Lattrey gives another smoking-party in his study."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mornington started operations with his stump. Lattrey dodged and twisted—and the quick motion completed the work of many cigarettes. He collapsed into a chair, overcome.

Gower was the last. There was still a cigarette between his pallid lips, but he had ceased to smoke. He sat quite still, his glassy gaze fixed before him stonily.

"Go it, Gower!" said Morny.

Gower did not answer, or look at him. He seemed to have been turned to stone, as if by the glance of the fabled Gorgon.

Mornington looked round at the unhappy crew. The cigarettes were not finished yet—there were plenty more. But it was pretty evident that they would never be smoked by Lattrey's smoking-party.

"Have they had enough, you fellows?" queried Mornington.

"Grooogh!"

"Ow! Ow! Grooogh!"

"Gug-gug-gug-gug!"

"Well, they sound as if they've had enough," said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

"We'll give them a larger dose next time they have a smoking-party."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's a good idea. We'll clear off now—it's a bit thick in here. I hope you fellows have been enjoying yourselves," said Mornington, looking at the hapless Goats. "You've had a really good time—a really rorty time. You ought to have enjoyed yourselves no end. Come on, you chaps!"

Tom Rawson unlocked the door, and Mornington & Co. walked out of the study. They were followed by a dismay chorus.

"Grooogh!"

"Ooooooch!"

"Oooo-er!"

"Gug-gug!"

And the door closed upon the sufferings of the Giddy Goats.

That night there were pallid faces among the Giddy Goats of Rookwood when they went to bed. In the dormitory of the Classical Fourth, Lattrey and Peele and Gower, Townsend and Topham, looked as if they were not finding life quite worth living. In the Shell quarters, Smythe and Tracy gloomed upon the dormitory, from the deepest depths of pessimism.

And the sufferers received no sympathy. Their pallid looks only excited the irrepressible merriment of the other Rookwood fellows. Lattrey did not answer when several juniors inquired when he was giving another smoking-party. It was very probable that while Mornington remained captain, the smoking-parties of the Giddy Goats of Rookwood would be few and far between.

CHAPTER 7.

Morny's Way!

MORNINGTON of the Fourth was sitting in the window-seat in Study No. 4, looking out into the quadrangle.

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

There had been silence in the study for some time.

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

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

"Morny, old chap!"

Morny heard then, and he looked round, with a slightly irritable expression.

"Hallo!"

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

"Oh, bother prep!"

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

"Blow Bootles!"

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

Morny yawned and rose from the window-seat.

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

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

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

"You're captain now, Morny."

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

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

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

He began to work with a listless and dissatisfied air.

In a few minutes, however, he threw his books aside, and rose to his feet restlessly.

"Blessed if I can put my mind into that stuff!" he grunted. "I'm fed-up, Erroll!"

"What with?"

"Everythin'!" said Mornington comprehensively.

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

"And what was my play like?" grinned Mornington.

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

"Perhaps!"

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

"What have you got on your mind?"

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

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

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

"Footer's a bore, like everythin' else."

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

"True. I don't!"

"You've taken to slacking at work. Mr. Bootles and Mr. Cardwell have both been down on you a dozen times, and you can't say it was without reason."

"Bootles is a fussy old donkey."

"Well, he's a good sort in his way; and, after all, Morny, we come here to work, you know. School life isn't all loafing about the passages and strolling in the quad."

"You come here to work, old chap," said Mornington, looking round at last. "I don't! I work when the spirit moves me. At bottom, I'm a rotten slacker, and you know it as well as I do. I started here as a slacker, and I should never have tried anything different, but for you. You turned me into a worker. But it won't answer. I'm not your sort, Erroll, and if you had any sense you'd give me up as a bad job."

"Something's come over you," Morny, said Erroll anxiously. "You've taken to mooching out of the school by yourself, too. Solitude isn't a good thing for a chap like you."

"Solitude!" repeated Mornington, with a very curious look at Erroll.

"Yes. It's not good for anybody, and bad for a chap of your sort, Morny. I suppose your health is all right, isn't it?"

"Never better."

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

Mornington laughed.

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

turned away from it. Now I've got sick of swotting, and toein' the line, and playin' footer and—and everythin'!"

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

Morny shrugged his shoulders.

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

"But——"

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

"Go on!" said Erroll quietly.

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

"That's not very serious, Morny."

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

"I could understand it in a cad like Lattrev. or Peele," said Erroll; "but

it's rather hard to understand in a fellow like you."

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

"What rot!"

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

"By why?"

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

"Morny!"

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

"That will never happen, anyhow."

"I'm not goin' to be poor," said Mornington, in a dogged tone. "Why should I, when a chance comes my way? And—and like a fool, I land myself into a job where I know I ought to keep as straight as a die, and set an example to the other chaps. But——"

Erroll stared blankly at his friend.

"You're talking in riddles, Morny. You speak as if you had a chance of getting rich."

"Suppose I have?"

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

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

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

"But—"

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

Mornington left the study before his chum could reply.

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

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

CHAPTER 8.

A Very Mysterious Document!

"JIMMY!"

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

Jimmy Silver had just finished;

but Lovell, Raby and Newcome were still hard at work, and Lovell waved an impatient hand at the fat Classical.

"Shut up!" he said politely.

"I say, you know—"

"Dry up!"

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

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

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

"'Tain't supper!" roared Tubby Muffin.

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

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

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

"Look here, Lovell—"

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

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

"Well, what is it?" asked Jimmy.

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

him over, too. And he actually bumped me on the landing."

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

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

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

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

"Well, let's see it!" yawned Jimmy Silver.

Tubby had succeeded in interesting the Pistical Four at last; and all of them looked at the paper as the fat Classical laid it on the table.

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

R.	N.
7	
	29
30	
	28
	4
	17
	20
23	
5	
	10
27	
7	
19	
	24
1	
36	

That was all; but it was enough to make the Pistical Four of the Fourth

rub their eyes. There was nothing in mathematics that they knew of that bore any resemblance to this. What the letters meant, and what the numbers meant, was a deep mystery to the end study.

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

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

Jimmy shook his head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And Tubby Muffin rolled out of the study, with the mysterious document in his fat fist. Lovell and Raby and Newcome resumed their work; but Jimmy Silver sat with a somewhat

thoughtful expression on his face. He was thinking of the mysterious paper.

"Done!" yawned Lovell, rising from the table at last. "Hallo! What are you looking like a boiled owl about, Jimmy?"

"I was thinking——"

"Penny for 'em, if they're worth it."

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

"Where?"

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

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

"Yes."

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

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

"Roulette!" ejaculated Lovell.

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

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

Raby and Newcome chortled.

"Fathead!" said Jimmy. "I say the game's illegal in England. But I've read in the newspapers that it's played at some places illegally. Silly fools go there to be swindled, and the police

come down on them every now and then. But——"

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

Jimmy shook his head.

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

"Come on, then."

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

CHAPTER 9.

Morny Loses His Temper!

"MORNLY here?"

Kit Erroll was in the window-seat, plunged in thought, when Tubby Muffin came into No. 4. His unfinished work was on the table. For once, Erroll was slack-ing.

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

"Morny's gone out."

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

"Put it on the table, then."

"But I want to know what it means."

"What?"

"Look at it, old top!" said Tubby.

Erroll glanced at the paper as Tubby held it up. A startled look came over his face.

He rose quickly to his feet, and caught the paper from Tubby's fat hand.

"Where did you get this?" he asked sharply.

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

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

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

"What?"

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

"You fat duffer!"

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

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Erroll.

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

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

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

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

"It's not your business, Muffin."

"Well, it isn't yours, either, if it

comes to that," retorted the fat junior.

"You give me that paper, Erroll."

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Look here——"

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

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

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

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

"What what means, you fat idiot?"

"That paper with the numbers on it."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bump!

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

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

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

"Yaroooo! Help! Yooooop!"

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

Erroll's hand fell on his chum's arm from within the study. Morny gave

him a fierce look for a moment, but he allowed himself to be drawn back into the room, and Erroll closed the door.

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

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

"It's mine," he said.

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

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

"Is that all?"

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

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

"I tell you it's nothin'!"

Erroll drew a deep breath.

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

"Nothin'!"

"Very well!"

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

CHAPTER 19.

Mornington Missing!

JIMMY SILVER wore a pleasant smile as he came out of the School House after dinner the following day. There was bright sunshine in

the quadrangle and the old red roofs of Rookwood glimmered in the sun. The footer field looked like emerald—a pleasant sight to the eyes of a footballer. Jimmy Silver was feeling fit and cheerful, and quite well satisfied with himself and the universe generally.

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

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

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

"Going out, Morny?"

Mornington glanced round.

"Yes!" he answered shortly.

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

"Oh, bother Bagshot!"

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

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

"Right you are!" said Jimmy.

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

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

"Morny gone out?" asked Newcome.

"Yes."

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

Jimmy Silver smiled.

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

"True, O king!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Morny isn't doing so badly."

"You mean he hasn't left you out!" remarked Newcome.

"Ahem! Well, I suppose that's it!" said Lovell, laughing. "Never mind; you shall watch me and Jimmy kicking the goals."

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

"Let's hope one of the Modern players will fall downstairs and break a leg or two," suggested Raby. "Then you'll go in, Newcome."

Newcome laughed.

"I don't think I'll depend on that,"

he said. "I'll take a stroll this afternoon, I think, on the botany stunt. I'll be back before tea, and then you can tell me how Bagshot walked over you."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where's your skipper?"

"Oh, Morny's coming along!"

"He's gone out," said Smythe of the Shell, who was hanging about the pavilion. "Met him on the Coombe road walkin' a quarter of an hour ago."

Bulkeley looked surprised.

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

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

There was a squeak from Tubby Muffin.

"Here comes Bagshot!"

The visiting team had arrived.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jimmy called to Erroll.

"Know where Morny's gone, Erroll?"

"No."

"Or when he'll be back?"

"Sorry, no!"

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

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

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

"Not at all!" said Pankley politely.

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

Erroll ran down to the gates and looked out on the road. But there was no sign of Mornington there, and

he returned to the ground with a knitted brow.

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

Tommy Dodd was heard to inquire what fellows could expect when they elected a doddering Classical as captain. Tubby Muffin suggested that Morny had dropped into the Bird-in-Hand for a game of billiards, and forgotten all about the match—a suggestion which very nearly earned him a lunge from Erroll's boot.

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

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

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

"Goodness knows!"

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

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

"Well, he hasn't come back——"

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

"He wouldn't do that."

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

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

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"As Morny isn't here we're bound to play the match," he said. "If you

fellows agree we'll get on. I suppose I'd better take Mornny's place."

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

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

"The silly ass has gone out botanising!"

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

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

"Get into your things, then, sharp!"

"You bet!"

Pons was ready very quickly. Jimmy Silver, taking his old place as junior captain for the nonce, tossed with Pankey for choice of ends.

The game began, and every fellow on Little Side was asking himself the question: "Where was Mornny?" without being able to find an answer to it.

CHAPTER 11.

A Surprise for Newcome!

FOOO!"

Arthur Newcome jumped.

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

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

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

It was not only the voice suddenly breaking the deep stillness of the wood

that had a startling effect. It was the fact that the voice was that of Valentine Mornnington.

Newcome had supposed that Mornny was on the football field at Rookwood, deep in the Bagshot match. He stared round him in amazement.

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

"Fool, fool!"

Newcome grinned.

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

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

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

He gave Newcome a far from pleasant look.

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

"Botanising," answered Newcome cheerfully.

Mornny gave a scoffing laugh.

"What rot!"

"Thanks!" said Newcome, unperturbed. "But what the dickens are you doing here, if you come to that? I thought you were playing footer?"

"Football?"

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

Mornny's lip curled.

"Football! The match! What rot! I'm not thinkin' of football!"

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

"Oh, rot!"

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

"Oh, they'll get on all right with-

out me! I don't care a rap whether they do or not. Hang them! Don't talk rot!"

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

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

"The fellows will want to know the—"

"Confound the fellows!"

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

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

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

"Oh, shut up!"

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

Morny regarded him with a sneering look.

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

"You can try your hand on me if you like," said Newcome. "I'm feeling quite inclined to damage your nose for you, you cheeky cad!"

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

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

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh, nothin'! You'd better clear

off, Newcome; let me alone. Hold on, though!" Morny came nearer to Newcome, with a gleam in his eyes. "Can you lend me any money?"

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

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

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

"Oh, if that's it——" he said.

"That's it! Can you lend me a few quids?"

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

"That all?" asked Morny, his face falling.

"It's all I've got, you see."

"Shell out, then."

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

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Newcome.

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

CHAPTER 12.

Mornington's Return!

AT Rookwood the football match was nearing its end. At half-time the score had been 2-1 in Rookwood's favour. Then Bagshot equalised, and the match became a ding-dong struggle.

Morny had not put in an appearance, and in the keen interest of the game the Rookwooders had almost forgotten him.

Almost in the last minute of the game Jimmy Silver led a desperate attack on the Bagshot goal. The Rookwood forwards swept down the field, the ball at Jimmy Silver's feet. At the crucial moment Jimmy passed to Kit Erroll, who shot hard and true, giving the Bagshot goalie no chance.

"Goal!"

"Good man, Erroll!"

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

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

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

Pankley grinned at Jimmy Silver as he came off.

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

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

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

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

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

"How did it go?" he inquired.

"Won by a last-minute goal!"

"Good!"

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

Newcome nodded.

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

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

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

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

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

"Has he come in?" he asked eagerly.

"Not yet."

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

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

"How do you know?"

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

"He—he couldn't!" muttered Erroll.

"Well, he did."

"But—but why should he?"

Jimmy's face set grimly.

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

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

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

Erroll, with a troubled brow, went downstairs. He could not account for Morny's conduct, but there were dark

forebodings in his mind. He had not forgotten the list of numbers discovered by Tubby Muffin, of which he knew the meaning far better than Jimmy Silver did. And there was a deep fear in his heart that evil had befallen his chum.

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

"Here he comes!"

A figure loomed up in the dusk.

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

"You've missed the match, Mornington."

"Eh? Oh, yes!"

"You're supposed to be junior captain!" exclaimed Lovell. "What the thump do you mean by it?"

"Find out!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Morny!" muttered Erroll, in distress.

Mornington did not even glance at his chum.

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

"Not in the least!"

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

"Mornington!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Go and eat coke!"

And Mornington tramped up the stairs without another word.

Jimmy Silver made a step after Mornington, but he stopped. There

was nothing more to be said just then. But it was pretty clear to all that Mornington's days as junior captain of Rookwood were numbered.

CHAPTER 13.

The Vials of Wrath!

"H'E'S got to resign!"
Arthur Edward Lovell spoke hotly.

Jimmy Silver was silent, with a rather troubled wrinkle on his brow; but Raby and Newcome nodded a hearty assent.

The Fistical Four were discussing Mornington of the Fourth, the new junior captain of Rookwood; or, rather, three of them were discussing him, and Jimmy Silver was listening patiently.

"If he don't resign," went on Lovell angrily, "he's got to get the order of the sack!"

"Hear, hear!" said Newcome.

"And the sooner the better!" remarked Raby. "We don't want him to play the fool with any more of our matches."

"What do you think, Jimmy?" demanded Lovell.

Jimmy Silver's wrinkle deepened, but he did not answer.

"He left us in the lurch over the Bagshot match yesterday," continued Arthur Edward Lovell, with deep indignation. "Walked off without a word of explanation, and simply cut the match! Is that the right thing for a football captain to do?"

"Hardly!" said Raby.

"When he came in, and we tackled him, he told us to go and eat coke!" said Lovell, breathing hard. "That's all the explanation he's given! The Bagshot fellows were kept waiting, and finally we had to play without Morny, putting in another man at the last minute. And he's captain! I tell you Rookwood won't stand that sort of thing!"

"No fear!"

"Morny was elected skipper in your place, Jimmy, and now you've only got to raise your finger to get the captaincy back again," said Lovell. "After all, it really belongs to this study. It's up to you, Jimmy. You've got to put up again, and Morny's got to go!"

No answer.

"Why don't you speak?" exclaimed the exasperated Lovell. "Don't you agree with what I'm saying, you dumb image?"

Jimmy Silver smiled faintly.

"To some extent," he admitted.

"Only to some extent!" snorted Lovell.

"Yes. I'm not putting up against Morny. The fellows made the change of their own accord——"

"If you're going to sulk——"

"I'm not sulking, ass! But you can't put in a skipper one day, and drop him the next. Morny's a bit uncertain, but all the fellows knew that before they elected him. They took him with their eyes open. I'm as waxy as you can be about the match yesterday; it was simply rotten to cut it as he did. But I'm not starting a campaign against Mornington. I told him I'd back him up, and I'm going to do it. If he's booted out of the captaincy I decline to have a hand in it!"

"Rot!"

"Rot or not, that's how I look at it, and that's what I'm sticking to," said Jimmy Silver. "If I put up against him it would look as if I'd been on the watch to catch him tripping——"

"What does it matter how it looks if it isn't so?"

"Well, it doesn't matter. If the fellows aren't satisfied with Morny as captain they can drop him and find somebody else; but I'm not the man. Leave me out!"

"Look here——" roared Lovell.

"Jimmy——" began Raby.

"Fathead!" said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver strolled out of the

end study, as the easiest way of putting an end to the discussion.

Lovell & Co. looked at one another in great wrath.

"Obstinate ass!" growled Lovell. "He means that, you know. Blessed if I haven't a jolly good mind to put up for skipper myself!"

"Well, you wouldn't be much good as skipper, old chap," remarked Raby, with friendly candour.

"Better than Morny, ass, anyhow!"

"Well, Morny isn't much good, the way he's turning out; but he's a jolly good skipper when the spirit moves him. Of course, we can't stand what he did yesterday. That's the limit!"

"There's something queer about it," said Newcome thoughtfully. "Erroll thought Morny must have some awfully good reason for cutting the match as he did."

Lovell snorted.

"Erroll backs Morny up through thick and thin, because he's his chum!" he growled.

"Well, he was mistaken, anyway, for I met Morny loafing about in Coombe Wood while the match was on," said Newcome. "He seemed upset about something; but he was only loafing around. It's a bit too thick for a football captain to go loafing round and forgetting matches!"

"Never heard of such a thing! But, unless Jimmy backs up against him, I don't know that the fellows will turn him out. I suppose they'll get fed-up in the long run. Jimmy ought to take the lead and down him."

"He ought. But——"

"But he won't!" said Raby.

"Obstinate ass!"

"Morny's got to explain to the committee," said Newcome. "But he will pull through if Jimmy Silver doesn't take a hand against him. It's all very well to be loyal, but Jimmy pushes that too far."

"Much too far, the ass!"

"Anyhow, I'll jolly well tell Morny

what I think of him!" growled Lovell. "Let's go and see him."

"Right-ho!"

Lovell & Co. left the end study, and proceeded along the Fourth Form passage to Study No. 4.

Arthur Edward Lovell opened the door of Study No. 4 by the simple process of jamming his boot against it with a crash.

He was in rather a warlike mood.

The door flew open, and Lovell marched into the study. But Valentine Mornington was not there. His study-mate, Erroll, looked up from a book in surprise.

"Hallo! Are you understudying an air-raid?" he asked.

Lovell glared round the study.

"Where's Morny?"

"Downstairs, I think," answered Erroll. "He had a paper he was going to put on the board."

"Oh!"

Lovell & Co. went downstairs, and they found Valentine Mornington standing before the notice-board in the hall. The three juniors glanced at the paper Morny had pinned up. It ran:

"BICYCLE FOR SALE.

"Cost fifteen guineas. Ten pounds cash.—Apply Study No. 4, Fourth Form."

"My hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "Selling your bike, Mornington?"

Mornington nodded.

"Yaas, if I can find a purchaser," he answered. "Like to take it on?"

"I've got a bike. And I haven't got ten pounds," answered Lovell. "Bother your bike, anyway! I was looking for you, Mornington!"

"Well, here I am!" said the junior captain of Rookwood coolly.

"About your playing the goat yesterday!" snorted Lovell. "You deserted us over the match!"

"Yaas?"

"Is that what you call playing the game?" demanded Lovell.

"Not at all."

"Oh, you admit that!" ejaculated Lovell, rather taken aback.

"Certainly!"

"Are you going to resign?"

"Oh, no!"

"You're sticking to the captaincy, after what you've done?"

"Yaas."

"Well, you'll be turned out!" bawled Lovell.

"My dear man, I'm not deaf!" said Mornington, with polite impertinence. "No need to shout. All the county doesn't want to know."

"Why, you—you——"

"You can raise the matter in committee, if you like," said Mornington. "Let it rest at that, old top. Ta-ta!"

And Valentine Mornington strolled away, leaving Lovell in a state of almost speechless wrath.

CHAPTER 14.

The Chance of a Lifetime!

"IT'S risky!" said Adolphus Smythe.

Smythe of the Shell was reclining gracefully in a luxurious armchair in his study, and he made that remark through a cloud of cigarette-smoke.

Howard and Tracy, his chums and study-mates, were smoking cigarettes, too. The Giddy Goats of Rookwood were feeling no end doggish. The door had been carefully locked, however, before the cigarettes were lighted. Doggish as the nuts of Rookwood were, there was a certain amount of fear and trembling associated with their doggishness.

"I don't deny that it's risky," continued Adolphus. "But it's no end sportin'."

"But what's the game?" asked Tracy.

"Roulette!"

"Phew!"

"That swindling game they play at casinos on the Continent?" asked Howard.

"That's it!"

"My hat! It's risky enough. Why, it's against the law in England!"

"This old country is rather slow," yawned Adolphus Smythe. "I had a vac in Switzerland once with my people when I was a fag. I remember seein' the punters goin' in a casino there—a game of the same kind. I'd have tried my luck, but I couldn't do it under the pater's eye. This is really the chance of a life-time."

Howard and Tracy looked a little uneasy, and Adolphus smiled a superior smile as he noted it.

Adolphus Smythe was a great sportsman—in any sport that was not of a manly character. He had no love for cricket or football, or for rowing or swimming; but a considerable amount of his pocket-money went in backing "gee-gees"—strictly under the rose, of course.

"I got the tip from Joey Hook," he went on. "I was seein' him about a horse. He told me about this man Tickey Tapp."

"Ye gods! What a name!"

"I'd heard of him before," said Adolphus. "A chap at St. Jim's told me about him. He started his precious game near that school once, and got a lot of the fellows there. Made lots of money out of them, I've no doubt. Chap named Merry—you've heard of Tom Merry—took some friends there and smashed up his game."

"Like his cheek!" said Tracy.

"Oh, yes, rather! But he did it. But I dare say Tickey Tapp made more than he lost. Well, the long and short of it is that Tickey Tapp has pitched his giddy tent near Rookwood, and he's open to receive custom. He's got one of those bungalows on the moor—not a mile from Coombe, just off the edge of Coombe Wood, you know. Quite a solitary spot—and the bobbies won't tumble to his game in a month of Sundays."

"The police?"

"You see, it's against the law, and the police mop up such places when

they get to hear of them. But Tickey Tapp is wide—very wide! He won't get moved in a hurry."

"You've been there?" asked Tracy.

"Not yet; but I'm goin'. I'm takin' you two fellows, if you'll come. Of course, it's risky, and it's got to be kept awfully dark. No good tellin' Peele, or Lattrey, or Gower. Can't trust such a secret with those Fourth Form kids. It's strictly among ourselves."

"But, I say——"

"Of course, the risk isn't really so great as long as we're careful," said Smythe. "And it's the chance of a life-time. Just the same as goin' to Monte Carlo, you know."

"People don't generally bring any money away from Monte Carlo, I believe," remarked Howard.

"People don't generally have any sense or nerve," answered Adolphus sapiently. "I believe there's lots of money to be made at the game if a fellow keeps his wits about him. As good as backin' horses, anyhow. You watch the run of the numbers, you know, and lay your money accordingly. I'm awfully keen to give it a trial."

"It's frightfully risky. It would mean bein' expelled from Rookwood if the Head got to know."

"He won't get to know."

"Suppose the police raided the place while we were there?"

"They won't! But Hook tells me that there's a way out if they did, and we should walk off safely enough."

There was silence in Smythe's study.

The thought of the roulette-wheel and the fortune that might be made upon it, perhaps, was a strong attraction to the three young rascals. But they could not help thinking of the risk.

"And other Rookwood fellows go there?" asked Howard at last.

"I asked Hook, and he said there were one or two," said Smythe. "He wouldn't give me their names, though.

I've got a suspicion that some of the Sixth drop in there in the evenin'—fellows like Carthew and Frampton, I fancy. We're not to go in the evenin'. Tickey Tapp runs his game twice a day, afternoon and evenin'. We're booked for the afternoon."

"In case we see too much, I suppose?"

"Very likely."

There was another pause. Adolphus Smythe finished his cigarette.

"Of course, we shall have to be careful," he said. "We've got to be wary of the beaks. And Morny seems to have taken a leaf out of Jimmy Silver's book, now he's captain, and he's liable to interfere if he knew. We won't go there in Etons. We can change our clobber, and nobody there will guess that we belong to Rookwood. It will be quite an adventure, by gad, you know."

"I—I suppose we might win something," murmured Tracy, with a greedy gleam in his eyes.

"I hope so."

"What time do we start?"

Adolphus Smythe looked at his big gold watch.

"Any time now," he said. "In fact, the sooner the better, now we've had tea. We shan't stay there long."

"I—I say, it might attract attention if we went out in other clobber."

Adolphus smiled his superior smile again.

"We don't," he said.

"But you were sayin'—"

"What's the matter with takin' our lounge clothes in a bag and puttin' them on in the wood? We have to go through the wood to get to the bungalow."

"Oh, that's a good stunt!"

"You rely on me for stunts," said Smythe loftily. "I'm rather wide, I think. Now, are you fellows comin'?"

Howard and Tracy exchanged glances, and rose from their seats. There was no doubt that they were coming. The appeal of the green table

was too strong to be resisted by Howard and Tracy.

Ten minutes later the nuts of the Shell strolled out of the School House, Smythe carrying a valise in his hand.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were chatting on the steps, and they noted the valise.

"Hallo! Goin' off for the weekend?" asked Lovell.

Smythe smiled.

"Merely a little run to Monte Carlo," he answered.

"Eh?"

Smythe & Co. walked on, grinning, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell considerably mystified.

Valentine Mornington was heading for the gates, and he turned out into the road at the same time as the nuts of the Shell.

He glanced at them, but walked on, without speaking, towards Coombe.

"Walk a bit slowly," murmured Adolphus. "Let that cad get ahead. We don't want him to spot where we're goin'."

"What-ho!"

The Giddy Goats slacked down, and Mornington disappeared round a turning of the lane ahead.

He was out of sight when the nuts of the Shell came round the turning, much to their satisfaction.

Smythe & Co. turned into the footpath through the wood, and at a certain point left the path and followed a scarcely marked track that led through the wood towards the open heath.

The sight of a Rookwood cap ahead of them on the track startled them suddenly. They could only see the back of a head beneath the cap, but they knew that it was Mornington's.

"That cad again!" muttered Smythe. "He's goin' to the heath, I suppose. Bother him!"

"Slow down!" said Tracy.

The Shell fellows slowed down once more, and Mornington's head disappeared among the underwood. They changed clothes in a thicket, and went

en. It was some time before they came out in the open heath, where it was bordered by Coombe Wood.

At a short distance lay the wooden bungalow, one of several that had been erected on the heath for summer visitors. There was no other building in sight of this one, however. Mr. Tapp had judiciously chosen a very solitary spot for carrying on his precious game. Smythe & Co. were heading for the bungalow, when they spotted a Rookwood junior on the heath. It was Mornington again.

Morny was pacing to and fro, with his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed on the ground. There was a deep wrinkle in his brow. He glanced up as Smythe & Co. stared at him and gave a start. Then he strode quickly towards the nuts of the Shell.

"What are you doing here?"

CHAPTER 15.

Nipped in the Bud!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON rapped out the words sharply, with a glitter in his eyes.

Smythe & Co. stood silent, taken aback.

Morny's eyes scanned them.

The valise was still in Smythe's hand, but it was packed now with the Etons the juniors had worn when they quitted Rookwood. They were clad now in grey lounge clothes, and looked very different. And Morny was far too keen a fellow not to be aware that the change of clothes signified a good deal. Unless the Shell fellows were bound upon some extremely surreptitious expedition, they would certainly not have gone to the trouble of changing their clothes in the wood.

"What are you doing here?"

Mornington's tone was almost fierce.

Smythe pulled himself together. Ticky Tapp's bungalow was in sight, and he wondered uneasily whether the junior skipper guessed his destination.

But he told himself that Morny could not possibly know anything about Ticky Tapp and his little game.

"Eh, what are you so jolly curious about, Morny?" yawned Smythe, affecting an ease he was far from feeling.

"Yes, what do you mean, you cheeky aes?" exclaimed Tracy. "I suppose we can take a stroll after lessons if we like?"

"I should think so!" chimed in Howard.

Morny's eyes gleamed at them.

"You've changed your clothes since I saw you leaving Rookwood," he said.

"Can't we change our clobber if we like?"

"What have you done it for?"

"No bizney of yours!" said Smythe.

"Still, I don't mind tellin' you that we've put on some old clothes because we're goin' for a ramble on the heath, lookin' at the old quarries."

"Don't tell lies!"

"Wha-at?"

"Do you think you can take me in with a silly yarn like that?" snapped Mornington contemptuously.

Smythe flushed.

"Well, don't ask questions!" he said savagely. "Then you'll get no lies told you, you cheeky, interferin' cad!"

Morny raised his hand.

"You'll go back to Rookwood!" he said.

"We jolly well shan't!" exclaimed Smythe hotly. "Who the merry dickens are you to give us orders?"

"I'm junior captain of Rookwood," said Mornington quietly. "I've dropped on you fellows before for playing the goat. Do you think I don't know why you're here?"

"No, you don't!"

"You're goin' to Heath Bungalow!"

Smythe jumped.

"Wha-a-at do you know about Heath Bungalow, hang you?" he ejaculated.

"Well, I know somethin'," said Mornington grimly. "I know that your

bookmaker friend, Joey Hook, goes, for one thing!"

"I don't know anythin' about it if he does!"

"You're goin' there to gamble!"

"I—I——"

"Oh, don't spin me any more yarns!" snapped Mornington. "I know as much about it as you could tell me!"

"And how do you know, hang you?" said Smythe between his teeth.

"Never mind that. Perhaps I've been keepin' my eyes open to prevent silly fools from playin' the goat and gettin' themselves sacked from the school. That's my bizney, as junior captain, you know. You're goin' back to Rookwood at once, all three of you!"

The nuts of Rookwood looked at Mornington as if they could eat him.

This was rather a "facer" at the beginning of their sportive expedition.

"You interferin' cad——" began Tracy.

"That's enough! Are you goin' back?"

"No!" howled Smythe.

"Then you'll be reported to the captain of the school!" said Mornington.

"It's my duty to stop you, an' I'm goin' to do it. If you don't go back at once you'll be called upon to explain to Bulkeley—after I've told him all I know about that bungalow!"

Smythe & Co. stood rooted to the ground.

They exchanged glances, and then turned back towards the wood.

There was no help for it.

Mornington, if he knew the character of the place they were intending to visit, was certainly doing his duty as junior captain in keeping them away from it. He was acting as Jimmy Silver would have acted in his place had he still been junior captain, and there was no possibility of resistance. The bare thought of being brought before Bulkeley of the Sixth for inquiry made the nuts feel cold all over.

With bitter looks and deep bitterness

in their hearts, they turned back to the wood and entered the trees. If they had any hope of dodging Mornington and revisiting the spot it was soon knocked on the head, for Morny followed them to see them through the wood.

Smythe & Co. looked savagely back at him.

"The cad's watching us!" muttered Tracy.

"Another time!" murmured Smythe.

"Oh, I'll make that meddlin' cad pay for this somehow!"

"You can change your clobber here," said Mornington.

Without a word, but with black looks, Smythe & Co. changed into their Elons.

Then they resumed their way.

Valentine Mornington followed them until they crossed the stile into Coombe Lane. Then he turned and went back into the wood and disappeared.

With feelings almost too deep for words, Smythe & Co. tramped back to Rookwood School.

"How did the cad know?" muttered Smythe again and again. "How did he know anythin' about Tickey Tapp and his game? He never sees Joey Hook now, that I know of. Hook can't have told him."

"Well, he does know, an' he knows Rookwood fellows go there!" growled Tracy. "He's on the watch there for them, that's plain enough!"

"Hang him!"

"We'll go another time, when that cad isn't spyin' round!" said Howard.

And the disconsolate nuts tramped into Rookwood. Lovell caught sight of them as they crossed the quadrangle.

"Hallo! You're soon back from Monte Carlo!" called out Arthur Edward.

"Oh, rats!" grunted Smythe.

Kit Erroll met them as they entered the schoolhouse. He stopped to speak.

"Been out of gates?" he asked.

"Yes," growled Smythe.

"Seen anything of Morny? He seems to have gone out."

"Hang Morny!"

With that polite reply, Smythe & Co. went on, leaving Erroll surprised.

Morny's chum walked down to the gates and looked into the road, and then strolled in the quadrangle with a thoughtful brow. It was not the first time, of late, that Valentine Mornington had gone out without a word to his best chum; and without a word of explanation when he returned. And Erroll's uneasiness for his chum was deep and increasing.

CHAPTER 16.

Trouble for Morny!

JIMMY SILVER had much food for thought during the next few days.

He gave a good deal of thought to Mornington; though he did not often speak to him.

The affair of the Bagshot match had blown over. The resentment of the Rookwood juniors had been deep; not only because he had treated the whole matter without a word of explanation, but because he had treated the whole matter with flippant disdain when taxed with his conduct. If Jimmy Silver had chosen to make the least effort, he could, without question, have recaptured the position he had lost. His chums urged him to do so; Arthur Edward Lovell being especially emphatic on the subject. And a good many fellows were of Lovell's opinion.

But Jimmy had marked out the course he intended to follow, and followed it.

The Lower School had chosen their captain, and Jimmy Silver had promised to support him. And Jimmy held to that.

Unless Mornington resigned, Jimmy had no intention of accepting the captaincy, even if it were offered to him. He made it very plain that if there was another election he would not stand as candidate.

The Modern fellows were in favour of another election, in the hope that their

leader, Tommy Dodd, would get in. For that very reason the Classicals were opposed to it, unless Jimmy would stand; Jimmy Silver being the only Classical candidate who could hope to beat Morny's supporters at the same time.

As Jimmy Silver distinctly refused to move in the matter, the subject dropped after a day or two.

Jimmy felt that he was acting rightly; that he was bound to give Mornington every chance of "making good."

But he was rather exercised in his mind on the subject.

There could be no doubt that the new junior skipper was losing his keenness. He did not turn up regularly for practice as of old; he did not take his former interest in the affairs of the Fourth Form, or of the Lower School generally. He had begun a campaign against the manners and customs of the Giddy Goats; but that had dropped, and Peele & Co., of the Fourth, went their own shady way without any interference from Morny.

The junior captain was, in fact, slacking down all round. Bulkeley of the Sixth, who had a fatherly eye to keep on the juniors and their affairs, more than once gave Mornington a very expressive look when he came across him loafing in the quad or about the passages. But as yet Bulkeley had not seen fit to interfere.

More football matches were coming off soon, and if Rookwood Juniors were to come through the season with credit, it was very necessary for the junior skipper to put some life into the business. But Valentine Mornington showed no sign of doing so. And Jimmy wondered whether he had been rather too punctilious on a point of honour, and whether he ought not to have pushed Mornington aside, for the sake of the school.

It was pretty clear, in fact, to all the juniors interested in the matter, that Mornington had some interest at

heart that he did not communicate to the other fellows; that his thoughts were set on matters not connected with football or the school at all.

His frequent absences from the school after lessons and on half-holidays, and the secrecy that attended them, were a pretty plain proof of that.

And Jimmy could not help wondering whether the dandy of the Fourth was falling into his old ways again.

Morny, in his wealthy days, had been a blade of the blades, and the most reckless fellow that ever entered the gates of Rookwood School. Now, since his fall from fortune, he certainly could not afford to "play the giddy goat" as of old, even if he had the desire. But it was very possible that he might do it without being able to afford it.

If Morny's shady past was being revived, it was a bad look-out in many ways, and he certainly was not fitted to hold the junior captaincy. And that he was hard up was proved by the sale of his bicycle. For several days Morny's notice had remained on the board, and finally he had parted with his machine to Leggett of the Modern Fourth.

It leaked out that Leggett had given him only seven pounds for it—less than half its value; a proof that Morny was very pushed for money. Why was he so pushed? His allowance from his uncle was not exactly ample, but it was as large as Jimmy Silver's—and Jimmy certainly was never under any necessity to sell his bike.

He had expensive tastes, but he did not seem to have been gratifying them lately. He was not seen spending money; indeed, of late he had several times taken his tea in Hall—another sign of shortness of cash. Erroll would willingly have "stood" tea in the study for both; but Morny's touchy pride would not permit that. And he did not seem so chummy or confidential with Erroll as of old.

Jimmy Silver was not exactly friendly with Mornington; but he had a regard for him, since Morny's reform; and he

was very seriously sorry to think of him going on the shady path again, which could only lead him to trouble, and probably to disgrace and disaster. But Morny was not the kind of fellow who could be advised or remonstrated with.

Moreover, if his own chum failed to influence him, it was not likely that Jimmy Silver would succeed in doing so.

So Jimmy held his peace; but he was troubled. With Morny in this peculiar mood, Jimmy was worried about football prospects, and he could not help seeing that Morny was not giving much thought to football, if any. On Saturday there was a House match between Moderns and Classicals, and Jimmy wondered whether Morny would even take the trouble to be present at it. He felt that this state of affairs could not last.

On Saturday morning, Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, was very sharp with Mornington in class. Morny had omitted his prep the evening before—as he had done a good many times lately.

Mr. Bootles had no idea whatever of Morny's preoccupations; his view was that junior schoolboys were at Rookwood to learn—rather a natural view for a Form-master to take. And that especial morning he gave Mornington a very severe lecture on slackness and carelessness.

Mornington listened, with the eyes of all the class upon him, some of the Fourth Formers grinning. His cheeks were a little flushed, and there was a sullen expression on his handsome face.

"The report your uncle will receive at the end of the term," Mr. Bootles wound up, "will be very unfavourable indeed, Mornington, if you do not mend your ways."

"I don't care!"

"What!"

Mr. Bootles almost jumped as he heard that disrespectful reply. He came closer to the desk, his eyes gleaming over his spectacles.

The kind little gentleman was not often angry, but he was very angry now. Erroll gave his chum an anxious look; Morny's eyes were fixed sullenly on his desk.

"Mornington!" said Mr. Bootles, with ponderous indignation. "You inform me that you do not care what report your conduct is given to Sir Rupert Stacpoole at the end of the term."

"Well, I don't!"

"Is that dutiful, Mornington?"

Grunt!

"Well, Mornington, if you do not care, I am afraid you must be made to care," said Mr. Bootles sternly. "I have attempted to appeal to your better feelings. I have failed. Mornington, you will be detained this afternoon, and you will do the work you have neglected under my supervision."

Mornington gave a start. His manner changed at once.

"Oh, sir! I—I—"

"Enough!" said Mr. Bootles majestic-ally.

Valentine Mornington sat in dismay. The juniors supposed that he was thinking of the afternoon's football match; but Jimmy Silver had his doubts.

When the Fourth Form were dismissed that morning, the junior captain paused on his way out, and after a moment or two of hesitation, he approached Mr. Bootles' desk. His manner was very submissive now.

"Well, Mornington?" said Mr. Bootles severely.

"I—I am sorry, sir, that I answered you as I did this morning."

"I am glad of that."

"If you would kindly let me off detention this afternoon, sir—"

"I am glad, Mornington, that you have repented of your impertinence," said Mr. Bootles. "That, however, does not alter the fact that you have neglected your work, and that it must be done. I am afraid, Mornington, that I cannot excuse you."

"But, sir—"

"That will do!" said Mr. Bootles, in a tone of finality.

And Valentine Mornington, with a black brow, followed the rest of the juniors from the Form-room.

CHAPTER 17.

Given a Chance!

"AND that's our skipper!"

Arthur Edward Lovell made that remark in contemptuous and rather loud tones in the corridor as Morny came out.

Mornington gave him a dark look. Lovell went on, unheeding:

"Detained now! And we're playing the Moderns this afternoon! Detained because he hasn't done his prep. Why hasn't he done his prep like any other fellow?"

"He was out till calling-over last evening!" said Tubby Muffin. "I say, Morny, where did you go?"

"There was plenty of time after call-over!" said Lovell. "Other fellows find time to do their prep. Why can't Morny?"

"Mind your own business, Lovell!" snapped Mornington savagely.

Lovell gave him a glare.

"This is my business, and every other fellow's!" he retorted. "If you're skipper you ought to be in the match this afternoon. If you're not in the match you oughtn't to be skipper. And if Jimmy Silver had the sense of a born idiot, he would boot you out of the job you're not fit for."

"Oh, cheese it, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You know you could do it!" roared Lovell. "Why don't you do it, then?"

"Bow-wow!"

"Not that it makes much difference whether Morny's detained or not," continued Lovell hotly. "He might go out for a walk and forget the match, if he wasn't detained. That's his style as captain!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Mornington.

"Perhaps you'd like to shut me up?"

suggested Arthur Edward Lovell aggressively.

Mornington clenched his hands.

Lovell followed his example, and there would certainly have been trouble if Jimmy Silver had not intervened and dragged Lovell away almost by main force. Erroll slipped his arm through Morny's and led him into the quad.

"What are you chippin' in for?" growled Mornington, though he allowed his chum to lead him away. "It would do that cheeky fool good to have his mouth shut up for him."

"No good fighting with Lovell, Morny."

"Well, I suppose not; but I feel jolly well inclined to fight him, all the same. Confound his cheek!"

Erroll did not reply, and Mornington jerked his arm away and gave him a sullen look.

"You agree with him, I dare say?" he sneered.

"Well, you ought to have been careful, Morny, not to get detained when there's a match on."

"How could I help old Bootles getting his rag out?"

"By doing your prep yesterday," answered Erroll quietly.

"I had other things to think of."

"You can't expect Mr. Bootles to look at it like that."

"Oh, hang Bootles!" said Mornington irritably.

"And what other things, after all, had you to think of?" exclaimed Erroll, speaking warmly for once. "You didn't come into the study at all last evening. I don't see how you could be so very busy, mooching about the passages."

"I was thinkin'."

"Of what?"

"Lots of things," answered Mornington sourly. "How to raise the wind was one thing. I'm hard up."

"But you've just sold your bike."

"That thief Leggett gave me only seven quid for it, and it's gone!"

Erroll compressed his lips.

"Better not let the remows hear you say that you've spent seven pounds in one week, Morny!" he said in a low voice.

"And why not?" snapped Morny.

"They may begin to make surmises about what you've spent it on."

"That's my business!"

"It's not mine, I suppose," said Erroll, with a sigh. "I'm sorry to see you like this, Morny. But about this afternoon? I dare say Mr. Bootles will let you off, if it's put to him that there's a match on. He doesn't know about that, and he's a kind-hearted man."

"I shall cut detention, anyhow!"

"You can't, and play football in sight of Mr. Bootles' window. You would be fetched in by a prefect. But I think Mr. Bootles will let you off if it's put to him. I'll speak to Jimmy Silver, if you like, and we'll try."

Mornington opened his lips to speak, but closed them again. There was rather a peculiar glimmer in his eyes as he looked at Erroll.

"Then I'll speak to Jimmy," said Erroll.

And he proceeded to look for Jimmy Silver, leaving Mornington "mooching" under the beeches by himself in a sulky mood.

Erroll found the Fistical Four in the quad, three of them talking wrathfully on the subject of Morny, Jimmy Silver silent and thoughtful. Kit Erroll explained his idea, and Jimmy nodded assent.

"I dare say Bootles will see reason," he assented. "We'll tackle him after dinner, and we may get Morny off. We certainly want him in the match with Tommy Dodd's crowd."

And after dinner Jimmy and Erroll proceeded together to Mr. Bootles' study.

They found the Fourth Form master in a good temper, under the ameliorating influence of a good dinner. He gave them a gracious glance.

"If you please, sir——" began Jimmy.

"You may proceed, Silver."

"It's about Morny, sir—I mean Mornington."

Mr. Bootles frowned.

"We're playing a football match this afternoon, sir," said Erroll hastily. "Morny is captaining our side against the Moderns."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Bootles dryly.

"If you'd be kind enough to let him off detention, sir——"

"H'm!"

"Otherwise it may mean the loss of the match to us, sir," said Erroll meekly. "It means a lot to us, sir."

Mr. Bootles coughed.

"Mornington has been very remiss lately," he said. "He seems, indeed, to be returning to his old ways, when he was the most troublesome boy in my Form. However, I do not wish his punishment to fall upon others. You may tell him that I will give him another chance."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Erroll gratefully.

"You may tell him, Erroll, that he is excused from detention this afternoon, only on condition that he displays more industry next week," said Mr. Bootles.

"Yes, sir," faltered Erroll.

The two juniors left Mr. Bootles' study, and Erroll went at once in search of his chum. He found Mornington under the beeches, with a sulky brow.

"It's all right, Morny!" said Erroll cheerfully.

"I'm let off detention?"

"Yes."

"Oh, good! Many thanks."

"It's on condition that you buck up next week, and stick to your work a bit better, old chap."

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"Next week can take care of itself," he said carelessly. "I'm off for this afternoon, so that's all right!"

"Kick-off at half-past two," said Erroll, rather abruptly. "We may as well get along to the ground."

"No hurry! I'll see you later."

And Mornington lounged away to the schoolhouse, and Erroll, with a rather grim look, was left alone.

CHAPTER 18.

The Downward Path!

"SILVER!"

"Hallo, Morny!"

Jimmy Silver had come out of the schoolhouse in his football rig. He was looking very cheerful, as he was feeling. Mr. Bootles had let Mornington off, so that matter was settled satisfactorily, and Jimmy hoped that he would put a little heart into the House match.

Jimmy greeted Morny quite cordially.

"Ready for the match, what?" said Mornington.

"Quite ready!"

"I'm goin' to ask you a favour. I want you to captain the side."

Jimmy started.

"What on earth for? You're playing!"

"As it happens, I'm not!"

Jimmy Silver's lips set.

"Look here, Mornington, this won't do," he said quietly. "Erroll and I went to Mr. Bootles and begged you off—to play footer. Bootles let you off on the understanding that you were playing."

"I can't help that. I've got an engagement——"

"You had the engagement, I suppose, before I went to Mr. Bootles?"

"Well, yes."

"Then you ought to have told me before I went to him!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily. "You've put me into the position of spoofing him. He only let you off detention to play football!"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"I wasn't askin' you for a sermon," he said. "The question is, will you take my place and captain the side? You can easily find another man."

"I can do it easily enough, of course. I captained the side against Bagshot, as you were not here. But if I'm to captain the eleven, I don't see why you were so keen to shove yourself in as junior skipper."

"There are lots of things you don't see," answered Mornington coolly.

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"Look here, Morny, this is beginning to look a bit too fishy," he said. "I'm beginning to think that you're at your old games again!"

"You're at liberty to think anythin' you please. It's a free country!"

"If you are playing the goat again, and dropping into the Bird-in-Hand to play billiards with the sharpers there, when you ought to be playing footer —"

"I'm not!"

"Well, I take your word, of course; but it looks fishy, and the sooner you stop it the better!"

"Thanks! Now, to come back to the point, are you goin' to captain the side, or shall I ask Conroy?"

Jimmy Silver paused.

"Will you tell me what your engagement is?" he asked.

"No."

"It's one that won't bear the light. I'm afraid, Morny."

"So kind of you to take an interest in my doin's," said Mornington, with a yawn. "Does it concern you in any way?"

"It does! If you're really playing the giddy goat, like Smythe and Peele and that crowd, you're not fit to be junior captain of Rookwood, and you know it! And if I believed it, I'd take measures to put you out of the job fast enough!"

"You think you could do it?" sneered Mornington.

"I know I could."

"Well, we're wanderin' from the point. Are you goin' to captain the side against the Moderns?"

"No; not unless you explain candidly why you can't play this afternoon!"

"Then I'll ask Conroy."

Jimmy Silver joined his chums, on their way to Little Side, with a frowning brow.

"Wherefore the giddy scowl?" asked Raby. "Not been rowing with Morny?"

"No; but he's not playing this afternoon. Conroy's going to captain us!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave a loud snort.

"This is getting rich!" he said. "Is he ever going to play football again? Why can't he resign, and have done with it?"

Conroy came on the ground with his chums—Pons and Van Ryn. All three of the Classics were playing in the Classical team. Conroy had cheerfully taken on the captaincy for the occasion, but there was a buzz of surprise amongst the Classical footballers when they knew. Kit Erroll looked dismayed.

"Isn't Morny playing, then?" he exclaimed.

"No—some important engagement, he told me," answered the Australian junior carelessly. "I'm putting in Rawson. We shall lick the Moderns all right."

"Not in your lifetime!" grinned Tommy Dodd, as he came along with his merry men.

"Hallo, where are you off to, Erroll?" called out Conroy.

Erroll glanced back.

"I'm going to speak to Morny—I'll be back in a jiffy!"

"Well, buck up, then; we're going to start."

Kit Erroll hurried off the football field. He met Smythe of the Shell in the quad, talking to his chums. Smythe & Co. were discussing the idea of a visit to Mr. Tickey Tapp's bungalow that afternoon, and debating the pros and cons, when Erroll interrupted them.

"Seen Morny?"

"Isn't he playin' football?" asked Smythe.

"No; going out, I think. Haven't you seen him?"

"No; and don't want to!" grunted Adolphus.

Erroll hurried on to the School House.

"So he's cuttin' footer, an' goin' out!" growled Adolphus Smythe. "I wonder whether he's spyin' round the bungalow again, to catch us trippin'?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said Tracy.

"Better cut it for the afternoon. I'm not goin' to run any risks!"

"Same here!" said Howard. "Let's go and our watch the footer."

Adolphus gave a sniff.

"Bless the footer! Let's go and get some banker in Peele's study if we can't go to Tapp's!"

"Right-ho!"

And once more giving up their projected visit to Mr. Tickey Tapp, Smythe & Co. made their way to Peele's study, where they were soon deep in banker with Peele and Lattrey. Meanwhile, Kit Erroll was looking for Mornington. He hurried down to the gates, and spotted the dandy of the Fourth just starting towards Coombe.

"Morny!" called out Erroll.

Valentine Mornington looked round.

His brow darkened at the sight of Erroll; and he quickened his pace. But the next moment he stopped, as his chum came running after him.

"Well, what is it?" asked Mornington curtly. "You ought to be on the footer field!"

"I know that; I'm afraid I'm keeping the fellows waiting——"

"Well, don't keep them waiting any longer."

"Where are you going, Morny?"

"What does it matter?"

"Won't you come back with me?" asked Erroll, in a low, earnest voice. "Morny, old man, I'm not a fool—I've seen things, though I haven't told you so. I know what you're going to do; that list of numbers I saw in the study was enough for me."

"I didn't know you were so well up in roulette—a stodgy old fogy like you, Erroll!"

"I've had some experiences you haven't had, Morny," answered Erroll quietly. "My past isn't quite the same as yours; and I've seen things I should have been the better for not seeing. Morny, old chap, you're playing the fool, and you know it. You're the football captain, and your place is in the field with us. Come back!"

"Too late; I've asked Conroy——"

"I'll stand out and give you my place, then——"

Mornington burst into a laugh.

"Many thanks; but I've got an engagement. Hallo! There's Jimmy Silver looking for you."

"Erroll!" shouted Jimmy Silver from the gates. "Conroy wants to know whether you're playing or not."

"Yes, yes——"

"Then come along, you ass!"

"Cut along, old chap!" said Mornington. "I'll see you later. My dear chap, I've raised five quids, and it's burnin' a hole in my pocket. You shouldn't have chummed with me, old scout. I warned you, you know. Go and play footer, while I——" He broke off abruptly. "Good-bye!"

"Morny!" said Erroll miserably.

Mornington strode on.

Erroll stood looking after him for a moment or two, in doubt; then, as Jimmy Silver called to him again, he turned back. Without a word, he hurried to the football field with Jimmy Silver. His face was full of trouble—and Jimmy Silver's of anger.

Mornington strode on, with a knitted brow.

His chum's voice was still ringing in his ears—and in his heart. As he reached the footpath in the wood, then he paused.

For several minutes he stood there, undecided, a struggle in his breast. Once he made a step in the direction of Rookwood; but he stopped again. Then, with a sudden movement, as if flinging all thought to the winds, he plunged into the wood.

CHAPTER 19.

Trouble Ahead!

"HAS Morny come in?"

Jimmy Silver looked in at the door of Study No. 4, as he asked the question. There was rather a grim expression upon Jimmy's face.

Kit Erroll was alone in the study,

looking out of the window into the dusky quadrangle. He glanced round and shook his head.

"I think not," he answered. "He's not here, anyway!"

"He's missed calling-over," said Jimmy.

"I know."

"You don't know when he'll be back?"

"No!"

"I'll wait for him, if you don't mind."

Erroll looked worried, but he nodded assent.

"Sit down, then!" he said.

Jimmy Silver took a seat on the corner of the table. Erroll resumed staring out of the window, evidently in a glum mood. There was silence in Study No. 4.

A fat face looked in at the doorway a few minutes later, and the silence was broken by Tubby Muffin's fat chortle.

"I say, Morny's come in!" chuckled Tubby. "Bootles is jawing him no end for missing call-over! He, he, he!"

"That's nothing to cackle at, you fat duffer!" snapped Erroll.

Tubby Muffin seemed to think that it was, however. He chuckled again.

"We could hear Bootles in the passage," he said, "and Morny was cheeking him! Morny's come back in a jolly bad temper. I say, Erroll, why did Morny miss the footer match this afternoon?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I believe he's got the cane!" said Tubby. "Serve him right, you know. I heard a swishing in Mr. Bootles' study. He, he, he! Yaroooooh!" roared Tubby, all of a sudden, his fat chortle changing into a roar of anguish.

A grip of iron was laid on Reginald Muffin's neck from behind, and he was spun away from the door of Study No. 4.

Bump!

Tubby Muffin sat down in the passage with a loud concussion, and a

louder roar. Valentine Mornington, who had pitched him out of the way so unceremoniously, strode into No. 4.

Mornington's handsome face was dark and sombre, his eyes glistening under his knitted brows. He gave Jimmy Silver a far from cordial look. Tubby Muffin blinked into the study.

"Yah! Rotter!" he howled.

Then, as Mornington swung angrily round, Tubby took to his heels and vanished.

"Had your tea, Morny?" asked Erroll mildly.

"No—I don't want any. Do you want anything here, Silver?" asked Mornington abruptly. "I'm not in much humour for company."

"I suppose you've been licked for cutting call-over," said Jimmy.

"That's my affair."

"Well, if you've been licked, I'll speak to you another time," said Jimmy, slipping from the table, taking no notice of Morny's unpleasant manner. "I'll look in again, Morny."

"You needn't!" said Mornington. "If you've got anything to say get it off your chest, and have done with it. I warn you that I don't intend to be lectured, though, if that's what you've got in your mind. I'm not inclined to be trifled with just now!"

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders.

Valentine Mornington was plainly in the worst of tempers; but his black looks had no terrors for Jimmy Silver. In fact, Jimmy's own temper was rising a little at Morny's mode of address.

"If you'd rather have it now, Morny!" he began quietly.

"Oh, get it over!"

"I will, then," said Jimmy Silver. "You cut the match with the Moderns this afternoon, Morny. It's the second match you've cut since you were elected junior captain."

"Is that your business?"

"Yes, rather! I've stood aside to give you a chance to make good as skipper," said Jimmy Silver, "but there's a limit! There was a time,

Morny, when you were about the blackest sheep at Rookwood——"

"What?"

"We all thought that was over and done with. Now it looks as if you're dropping into your old ways again!"

"It's kind of you to take such an interest in me," sneered Mornington, "but I think I mentioned that I don't want any sermons!"

"I'm not going to give you a sermon; but to talk plain sense. If you choose to play the goat, it's your own affair, and you can go to the dogs your own way, I suppose!"

"Thanks!"

"But it's not good enough for the junior captain of Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "I needn't go into details, Morny; but it's plain enough that you're playing the goat again, and under the circumstances, you ought to resign the captaincy. A gambling plunger isn't good enough for the job, and you know it!"

"You mean that you want the job again?"

Jimmy flushed.

"I meant to stand aside, and I've stood aside," he answered. "I've backed you up, and you know it! But when you're throwing your duties aside in the most flagrant way, for the sake of playing the goat, it's time somebody put his foot down. Do you think I don't know that you went out to gamble this afternoon?"

"I don't care what you know!"

"Very well. I want to ask you one question—are you going to be junior captain, or are you going to be a giddy goat? You can't be both!"

"I'm goin' to please myself!"

"That isn't an answer!"

"It's all the answer you'll get from me," said Mornington, throwing himself into the armchair. "Go and eat coke!"

Jimmy Silver compressed his lips.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Morny," he said. "I'd be only too glad to see you playing up, and I'd back

you up no end. But I can't stand aside and see everything going to pot while you play the goat. If you won't do the decent thing, it's up to me to see that you don't do any more harm. You know your duty as skipper, and you don't do it. You don't even turn up to football practice now, and you're getting into rotten form, so that you wouldn't be much good even if you took the trouble to play in the matches; and you've stopped doing even that. It can't go on!"

"Is that all?" yawned Mornington. "If it is, will you give me a rest?"

"Morny!" murmured Erroll.

Jimmy Silver looked at the new junior captain, and his look was very expressive.

"You mean to keep on like this, then?" he asked.

"I don't mean to give an account of myself to anybody—least of all to you!" answered Mornington.

"Very well! Then I'm up against you!" said Jimmy Silver. "That's a plain warning, Mornington!"

"Rats!"

Jimmy Silver clenched his hands. Morny's manner was very hard to bear with patience.

"And now," continued Mornington, rising to his feet, "I've heard enough; and you can get out, Jimmy Silver!"

"You cheeky cad!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I've a jolly good mind to punch your head before I go;"

"Go ahead, if you prefer to leave this study on your neck!" answered Mornington, with a sneer.

"By Jove!"

Jimmy Silver made a stride towards the dandy of the Fourth, and Morny's hands went up promptly enough to meet him. Kit Erroll rushed between before a blow could be struck on either side.

"Stop it!" exclaimed Erroll sharply. "Clear off, Jimmy—and you, Morny, don't play the fool!"

"Look here, Erroll——"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Erroll.

Jimmy Silver left the study quietly enough. He did not want a fight with Mornington; he had come there to warn him, and he had warned him. The dandy of the Fourth threw himself into the armchair again, his eyes fixed loweringly on Kit Erroll.

"So you're takin' Silver's side, are you?" he said.

"Oh, talk sense!" said Erroll. "Silver's right in every word he's uttered, and you know it. You're not doing your duty."

"By gad!"

Mornington burst into a laugh. It was unusually plain speaking from his chum, and it rather amused him.

"If you don't want to do a captain's duty, you can resign," said Erroll. "Why don't you do it?"

"No fear! I'm sticking to the job. Swank, you know," said Mornington coolly. "It's my weakness. Besides, I'm not goin' to be bullied. And I'm not goin' to be preached at. That's a tip for you, Erroll."

"I'm not thinking of preaching at you, Morny; I know it wouldn't be any good," said Erroll sadly. "I wish you'd be more sensible. What's the good of playing the goat as you're doing now? I'm quite sure that you've lost your money this afternoon."

"Right on the wicket."

"Well, that must be an end. Now you've sold your bike, you won't be able to raise any more funds."

"The wish is father to the thought!" grinned Mornington.

"Well, yes; I'd rather see you stony than playing the goat like this."

"Well, I'm stony—no mistake about that," said Mornington, with a shrug. "Luck has been against me. But I can raise the wind right enough. You forget that I've got a cousin in the Second Form here, and young 'Erbert would lend me the boots off his feet if I asked him."

Erroll started.

"You're not going to borrow money from 'Erbert, Morny?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"You couldn't repay it, for one thing, if you lose it."

"'Erbert won't dun me for it, if I don't."

Erroll drew a deep breath. The shocked expression on his face drew a mocking laugh from Mornington.

"Shocked—what?" he asked.

"Yes," said Erroll quietly. "I never thought you'd have fallen as low as this, Morny."

"Well, you've found me out, then," sneered Morny; "and now you've found me out, the best thing you can do is to drop my acquaintance."

"I shan't do that."

"You will if you can't keep off sermons," said Mornington. "I'm fed up—with you as much as with Jimmy Silver! Hang you both!"

"Morny!"

"Oh, rats!"

Mornington strode out of the study, and closed the door with a slam.

CHAPTER 20.

The Lowest Depths!

"OH, Master Morny! 'Course I will—anything you like!"

Jimmy Silver started.

It was the following morning—Sunday—and the Fistical Four were sauntering in Little Quad after service. Lovell, Raby, and Newcome were talking—at the same time—and Jimmy Silver was listening. The opinion of the Co. was that it was high time that Mornington was "shifted" out of the junior captaincy, and they were glad to see that Jimmy Silver showed signs of coming round to their opinion.

From under the trees by the archway came the voice of 'Erbert of the Second Form—otherwise Mornington II. The chums of the Fourth could not help hearing it as they strolled by.

"Can you manage ten quids, 'Erbert?"

"Cert'nly, Master Morny."

"Don't call me Master Mornny, you young ass. Don't you know that you're the rich relation now, and I'm a dashed poor relation?"

"Oh, Master Mornny! I never wanted the money," said 'Erbert. "I'd 'and it all over to you with pleasure, if I was allowed. And I've got a lot saved up, sir, and it's all yours if you want it, and I'm only too glad."

"You're a good kid, 'Erbert," said Valentine Mornington, with a touch of remorse in his tone. "I'm a beast to take your money."

"It's yours, sir."

"But I'm goin' to settle up, 'Erbert—Hallo!"

The Fistical Four came in sight through the trees, and Mornington stopped abruptly.

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked on. The expressions on their faces showed plainly enough what they were thinking—indeed, the contempt in Arthur Edward Lovell's speaking countenance would have pierced the shell of a tortoise.

Mornny turned crimson.

His recklessness had brought him low—so low that he despised himself; but the contempt of the others was still more bitter.

"Oh! Eavesdroppin'—what?" he exclaimed.

Lovell turned sharply.

"I heard!" he answered. "You know I couldn't help hearing, as I was passing close to you. Now you're borrowing that kid's money to lose in gambling. You're a hopeless cad, Mornington. You ought to be kicked out of Rookwood!"

"Hear, hear!" said Raby.

"You let Master Mornny alone!" exclaimed 'Erbert of the Second, firing up at once. "'Tain't your business, anyhow."

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver quietly.

The Fistical Four went their way, and disappeared through the arch into Big Quad.

Mornington looked on at the fag with a gloomy brow.

"Don't you mind them, Master Mornny," said 'Erbert.

"I don't!" muttered Mornny. "But—but— Oh, dash it all!"

"I know it's all rot," continued 'Erbert. "You ain't going to gamble, are you, sir?"

There was an anxious note in little 'Erbert's voice, however.

"Suppose I am?" snapped Mornington.

"Oh, sir!"

"You'd better keep your money, kid."

"No fear, sir! Arter all, why shouldn't you 'ave a flutter if you want?" said 'Erbert loyally. "A gentleman like you, sir, ain't like the other blokes."

Mornington winced.

"Lovell was right!" he said moodily.

"I ought to be kicked out of Rookwood. I should be if the Head knew. But—but I shall settle this up, kid—luck can't go against me all the time. It can't! I shall screw out of Tickey Tapp all I've lost, and more."

"I'll fetch the tin now, sir."

"After dinner will do."

"Orl right."

Valentine Mornington nodded to the fag, and walked away, his hands driven deep into his pockets.

His face was moody.

There were excuses for the reckless fellow, in some ways. Mornny had been the richest fellow at Rookwood before his fall came—before his lost cousin had turned up, and the great Mornington property had passed to him as the rightful heir. And a chance had come—what Mornny believed to be a chance at last—of restoring his fallen fortunes. At the secret gaming-den, run by Tickey Tapp in the bungalow on Coombe Heath, the infatuated junior hoped to "break the bank"—the delusive hope that has led many a reckless plunger to ruin. It was wrong—wickedly wrong—but the old reckless instincts had revived in Mornington

at the thought of it, and all other considerations were thrown to the winds.

And instead of winning he had lost incessantly at Tickey Tapp's roulette table—as he might have expected, if he'd known more of the shady side of the world. Mr. Tapp was not in the business for his "health," and it was not likely that he could live upon losses. Swindling is the inseparable associate of gambling, and, although Morny was not aware of it, Mr. Tapp's roulette-table was arranged to bring up the numbers at Mr. Tapp's own sweet will. Roulette was supposed to be a game of chance; but it may safely be said that roulette never is, and never was, played as a game of chance. It is played to win money from foolish punters, and it answers that purpose admirably. Morny's eyes would have been considerably opened if he could have examined the construction of Tickey Tapp's roulette-table.

But he was not thinking of that. He was thinking how cruelly luck had been against him—how his most careful calculations had come to nothing.

Mornington's brow was moody when he came in to dinner.

Erroll looked at him rather anxiously across the table, but Morny did not catch his chum's eye.

After dinner Erroll joined him in the passage.

"Coming out?" he asked.

"No."

With that abrupt answer Valentine Mornington turned away, and went to join Erbert. A few minutes later, with the bag's savings in his pocket, Mornington started for the gate.

Jimmy Silver & Co. saw him go.

"On Sunday, too!" said Lovell.

"Perhaps—" began Jimmy Silver.

Lovell interrupted him.

"Perhaps be blowed! You know what he's going out for. And that cad's junior captain of Rookwood—that's the fellow! He's got to be sacked out of that, anyhow!"

And Jimmy Silver was silent.

CHAPTER 21.

Tracy Makes a Discovery!

"DASH it all, not on Sunday!" Adolphus Smythe of the Shell made that observation. And Howard nodded assent.

Tracy of the Shell looked obstinate.

"What does it matter?" he asked.

"My dear man," said Adolphus, "there's a limit. I know it's hard cheese. Twice we've been goin' to sample the roulette at Tickey Tapp's bungalow, and twice we've been sheered off by that cad Mornington."

"The coast's clear to-day," said Tracy.

"Very likely; but, dash it all, there's a limit! I'm not goin' there on Sunday."

"Oh rot!" said Tracy sulkily.

"There's such a thing," said Adolphus loftily, "as good form, Tracy. I like a flutter as well as the next man. But gamblin' on a Sunday is dashed bad form, and I'm not goin' in for it."

"I must say I agree with Smythey," remarked Howard. "It will keep, Tracy."

Tracy grunted.

"Since that cad Morny's been captain, he's meddlin' with everythin' of the kind," he said. "He actually stopped us near Tickey Tapp's place the other day, an' sent us back, threatenin' to report us to Bulkeley. Now we've got a chance—"

"Chuck it!" said Adolphus.

"And I've got a suspicion," went on Tracy. "There's been a lot of talk about Morny lately. While he's down on the Giddy Goats, it looks a great deal as if he's playin' the Giddy Goat himself. I half suspect that when we found him near the bungalow the other day, he wasn't lookin' for us, but was going there himself!"

Smythe whistled.

"That's rather thick!" he said.

"Well, I suspect it. It's just in Morny's line, as he used to be. Now, I'm goin' to risk a visit to-day," said Tracy. "If I find Morny hangin'

about, I'll tell him what I think—and sharp, too! Will you fellows come?"

"Not on Sunday."

"Oh, rats!"

Allan Tracy turned on his heel, and went out of the gates by himself.

Even Smythe of the Shell had his limits; but Tracy did not agree. He was keen to try his luck at Tickey Tapp's table, and he was determined that it should not be put off any longer.

He walked away down Coombe Lane, and turned into the footpath through the wood.

As he entered the path in Coombe Wood he gave a start.

Ahead of him, under the trees, was a well-known figure—the elegant figure of Valentine Mornington. Morny was standing, with an expression of impatience on his handsome face, in talk with Kit Erroll. And Tracy stepped from the path into the trees at once. He did not want to be observed.

There was a bitter expression on the Shell fellow's face.

He more than half-suspected that Mornington was a visitor at the bungalow himself, while exercising his authority as junior captain to turn back the Giddy Goats from such pursuits. And that thought made Allan Tracy feel very bitter indeed.

Keeping away from the path, Tracy of the Shell moved on quietly through the trees, and drew near the spot where Mornington and Erroll were standing. He was curious to hear what was being said, for the attitude of the two juniors was a plain indication that Erroll was seeking to restrain his chum, and that Morny's impatient temper was rising. As he came behind the bushes close by the path, Tracy caught Morny's voice, raised a little in anger.

"You don't know anythin' about it, Erroll! You're talkin' out of your hat. Give us a rest, for goodness' sake!"

"Listen to me a minute or two, Morny," came Erroll's quiet tones. "I know more about it than you fancy."

"I don't see how you can," sneered

Mornington. "You're too good to have played roulette, I suppose?"

"I never played it, certainly. But I've seen it played."

"You have?" ejaculated Mornington, in astonishment.

A pained look came over Erroll's face. Through the interstices in the bushes Tracy was watching them curiously as he listened.

"You know I had some rather strange experiences before I came to Rookwood, Morny," said Erroll. "I don't like speaking of that time, or thinking of it. But now——" He paused. "You know, old chap, that for a time I was with a rascal called Gentleman Jim, who had taken me away from my father. The man was a rascal in every way—a thief and a gambler. At one time he ran a roulette bank, on Monte Carlo lines—secretly, of course, as it is illegal in England."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mornington.

"Foolish fellows used to come to him to play," continued Erroll. "I have seen them, sometimes. I've seen them calculating the run of colours and numbers, and so forth, the fools! For I knew the secret, Morny. I've seen the roulette-table when it wasn't in use. And I tell you, old chap, that the croupier can bring up any numbers he pleases."

"It's impossible!"

"Not impossible, Morny—easy! I've seen Gentleman Jim practising with the wheels when the punters weren't there. He used to make me call out numbers for him to turn up on the wheel, as an exercise of his skill."

"Oh, gad!" muttered Mornington.

"But even swindling to that extent was not enough for him," said Erroll, "and he had a contrivance fixed under the table, worked by the foot, to stop the wheel any moment he chose. As a rule, he depended on his skill in turning the wheel. But in exceptional cases—when there was a heap of money on the board—he used that contrivance to

make sure of a win. He was afraid to use it too often, lest it should be detected; but it was always there if he needed it."

"And you've seen it?"

"I've seen it. I tell you, Morny, if a player could dodge the cheating of the croupier, by placing his stakes after the wheel has started, he can always be beaten by secret trickery. Dash it all, old man, do you think that professional gamblers can afford to play fair? A run of luck on the side of the player might break the bank at any time, if they played a square game. They couldn't afford to, if they wanted to."

"I've heard of the bank bein' broken at Continental casinos."

"You mean you've read cunning advertisements, for that is all such reports are."

Mornington was silent.

"Apart from its being wrong and rotten, Morny, you're throwing your money away," said Erroll.

"Oh, hang it all!" exclaimed Mornington irritably. "The man you speak of may have been a swindlin' hound, but they're not all the same. Tickey Tapp's bank isn't the same."

"But——"

"I'm going to try my luck, anyhow. I don't believe half you say, Erroll; you're prejudiced. Look here, come with me. It isn't far. It's the first bungalow past the wood—Heath Bungalow. I can get you in. Come with me, and try your luck, too."

"I wish you'd come with me, Morny—back to Rookwood. This sort of dingy fooling isn't good enough for you."

"Oh, rats!"

Mornington turned and strode away up the footpath, to end the discussion.

Erroll looked after him with a troubled brow, and walked slowly in the same direction.

In a few minutes Mornington was out of sight.

Behind the bushes, Tracy of the

Shell grinned, and resumed his way through the wood. He was sure now of what he had only suspected before.

Mornington was a regular visitor at Tickey Tapp's gaming table, and that was why he had turned the Giddy Goats back from the bungalow—because he did not wish them to discover him there.

He would not turn Tracy back this time.

The cad of the Shell hurried on, and came out into the footpath again when he was well ahead of Erroll, and hurried along the footpath towards the heath.

As he emerged from the wood, at last, upon the open heath, in sight of the bungalow, he saw Mornington.

The footsteps caught Morny's ear, and he turned, a dark look coming over his face at the sight of Allan Tracy. He strode up to the Shell fellow.

"So you're here again!" he said. "Clear off!"

Tracy smiled evilly.

"I'm goin' in," he answered. "Let's go in together, old top! I know what you are here for. I'm on the same game. Coming?"

"What!"

"Coming?" grinned Tracy.

Valentine Mornington did not answer.

He seemed taken aback, and his eyes gleamed at the Shell fellow with menace in them.

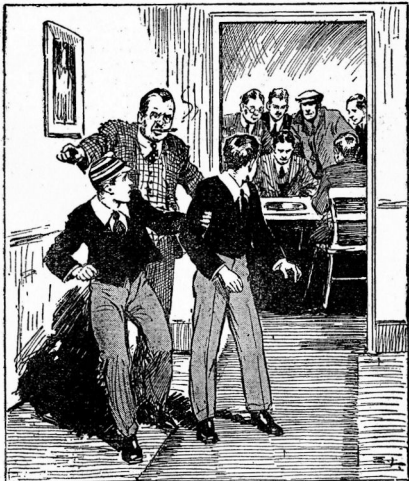
"You're goin'—where?" he exclaimed at last.

"Into the bungalow."

"You're not!" said Mornington quietly.

Tracy laughed.

"I think I am," he answered. "Don't come the captain with me now, Morny; it won't work. That chicken won't fight, old top. You've been there yourself—many a time. You were goin' there when I met you here the other day. I suspected it afterwards, an' I know it now. Report me to Bulkeley



"I've come to warn you, Morny!" said Erroll, pulling at his chum's arm. "Come—come—the police! There's not a moment to lose!" "By gad!" muttered Morningson. "So we've been given away, have we?" growled Tickey Tapp, savagely.

if you like—or to Mr. Bootles—or the Head. I'll report you at the same time. See?"

And Tracy laughed again, quite enjoying the situation.

Mornington did not speak.

His eyes were glittering, but the Shell fellow did not heed his threatening look. He felt that he had the whip hand.

"You've been playin' us for fools," he said; "playing captain and keepin' us in order—by gad! And all the time you've been gamblin' in Tickey Tapp's den yourself. My word!"

"Not all the time," said Mornington quietly. "Only the last few days, Tracy."

"I don't care! I'm goin' to do the same, and I defy you to interfere with me again."

Morny's hands clenched.

"Will you let me pass?" asked Tracy.

"No."

"You're goin' to try to stop me?"

"Yes."

Tracy set his lips.

"I know your game, and you've admitted it," he said. "Yet you think you're coming the captain over me, all the same."

Mornington nodded.

"Why, you—you cheeky hound!" shouted Tracy, in rage and indignation. "Get out of the way."

"You're going back, Tracy."

"No fear."

"As junior captain, I'm bound to keep you out of such a den as Tickey Tapp's," said Mornington coolly. "I may let duty slide in some ways, but not in every way. See? You're goin' back."

"I won't! And if you interfere with me, Mornington," said Tracy venomously, "I'll go straight to Bulkeley of the Sixth, and explain to him."

"What proof will you give?"

"Proof?" repeated Tracy.

"Yes; Bulkeley will want some proof

before he takes any notice of a yarn like that."

"Why, you—you——" stammered Tracy.

"You're known to be a liar," said Mornington. "Bulkeley himself has punished you for lying. Your word isn't worth much, old scout."

Tracy trembled with rage. He realised that if Mornington chose to deny his accusation, he had no proof of it to offer. He did not hold the whip-hand so effectively as he had supposed.

"Mind your own business, then," he muttered. "You're goin'. Why shouldn't I go?"

"Because I won't let you," answered Mornington. "Never mind whether I'm goin'—I shan't take the trouble to argue with you. But you're going back to Rookwood, you measly cad—and sharp!"

Tracy clenched his hands and strode on. He was in too great a rage to feel, at the moment, his usual fear of Mornington.

Morny caught him promptly by the shoulder.

Whether it was a lingering sense of duty, or simply his repugnance to have Tracy's eyes upon him while he was standing at Tickey Tapp's green table, the junior captain was quite resolved that Tracy should not enter the bungalow.

"Let go!" panted Tracy thickly.

"Get back!"

Tracy's furious fist crashed into Mornington's face, and the junior captain staggered back with a cry.

The next moment he straightened up and was springing forward.

The mark of Tracy's blow showed red on his cheek, and his eyes were glittering with passion.

Mornington's temper, never perfect, had been sorely tried during the past few days, and now it was at its worst. And Tracy's blow had stirred up all the bitterness in his heart.

He attacked savagely

Tracy, almost equally enraged, gave blow for blow, and for a couple of minutes he held his ground.

But there was no resisting Mornington's furious attack.

The Shell fellow was driven back and back, till he was under the trees of the wood again, and all the time Mornington was raining fierce blows upon him.

A powerful drive sent Tracy spinning at last, and he rolled gasping at the foot of a tree. Mornington's eyes gleamed down at him.

"Get up, you cad!"

Tracy groaned.

"Do you want any more?" asked Mornington between his teeth.

"Hang you! No!" gasped Tracy. "I'll make you suffer for this!"

"Get up and go, or I'll begin on you with my boots," answered Mornington contemptuously.

Tracy dragged himself to his feet. With a look of bitter malice at the junior captain he limped away up the footpath.

Mornington watched him till the thicket hid him from sight; then, with a contemptuous smile, turned on his heel and strode swiftly towards the bungalow.

"Oh, gad! Ow!" mumbled Tracy, as he dragged himself along the footpath. "Oh! By gad I'll make him repent this—and I know a way. Ow!"

"Hallo! What—"

Tracy halted as he met Kit Erroll face to face on the path. Erroll stared at his bruised face.

"Your pal did this," muttered Tracy. "Morny, by gad! But I'll make him sorry for it. Oh! Ow!"

"Where is Morny?" asked Erroll un-
easily.

"Gone into Tickey Tapp's bungalow to gamble," hissed Tracy. "He's beaten me off, the cheeky cad! But I'll make him sit up for it! Let him wait a little."

"You're not going to sneak at Rookwood!" exclaimed Erroll.

Tracy gave a bitter laugh.

"No; Morny's pointed out that that cock won't fight. I've thought of something better than that. I'm going to the police-station."

"What!"

"Do you think the police wouldn't like to know what's going on at that place?" sneered Tracy. "Morny's there with a gang of gambling outsiders, breaking the law. Let him wait a bit, I'll make him sorry he's laid his hands on me, the cad!"

"Tracy, stop—"

With a sneering laugh Tracy turned off the footpath and plunged through the wood, taking the shortest cut towards Coombe.

Kit Erroll stood rooted to the ground.

There was no mistaking the malicious determination of the cad of the Shell. What a more decent fellow might have done from a sense of duty, Tracy intended to do from malice; but it came to the same thing. It meant a police raid on Tickey Tapp's headquarters—and Mornington was there!

Erroll felt his brain whirl as he thought of it.

Mornington—taken by the police in the midst of a gang of shady, disreputable gamblers at an illegal roulette den! The thought almost stunned him.

It meant disgrace, ruin, certain expulsion from Rookwood, with every circumstance of shame and ignominy! It meant that, without the shadow of a doubt, to any Rookwood fellow found at Tickey Tapp's den.

Mornington had gone his way with wilful obstinacy, flouting his chum, scorning his good counsel, reckless of the consequences. But he was still Erroll's chum, and it was of his good qualities, not of his reckless folly, that Kit Erroll thought then.

His mind was quickly made up. Of the danger to himself he hardly thought; his only thought was to save Mornington, if he was yet in time.

And as Tracy of the Shell tramped away through the wood, Kit Erroll broke into a run along the footpath, and he was heading for Tickey Tapp's bungalow on the heath.

CHAPTER 22.

The Green Table!

"MAKE your game, gentlemen!" A fat, coarse-featured man droned out the words as he sat before the roulette-wheel.

Mornington of Rookwood pushed aside the hangings in the doorway, and entered the roulette-room as Tickey Tapp was speaking.

Tickey Tapp glanced at him as he came in, and gave him a friendly nod. He recognised one of the best customers of his peculiar business.

There were a dozen punters in the room already, gathered round the green cloth, and the game was going strong when Morny entered.

The dandy of Rookwood came up to the table.

"Make your game, gents!"

Coins and currency notes fluttered on the board. With a twist of his hand, Tickey Tapp sent the wheel spinning, and spun the little ivory ball in the opposite direction. Most eyes were fixed on the spinning wheel, growing more eager as it slowed down, and the ball spun past the little numbered pockets.

On the green cloth of the table were yellow numbers, corresponding to the numbers on the wheel. The number of the pocket in which the ball finally rested was the winning number, and the unthinking punters fondly imagined that it rested there by chance. On one number—17—a wealthy punter placed a five-pound note, and, if 17 came up, Tickey Tapp was bound to pay him £175 by the rules of the game—thirty-five times the amount of the stake. And, as a few such coups would have cleared Mr. Tapp out of all his resources, it was

pretty certain that such a win would not happen often, if it happened at all.

Mornington, mindful of what Erroll had said, in spite of himself, watched the turn instead of playing.

The wheel slowed and slowed, and the ball dropped into a pocket. It dropped in at 5—a good distance from 17 on the wheel. Tickey Tapp had not run the remotest risk of 17 turning up a winning number.

Morny's brow clouded.

The incident bore out Erroll's statement that the croupier was able to turn up whatever numbers he chose, from skill and long practice at spinning the wheel. Sometimes, doubtless, he blundered, but, as a rule, he could rely upon his skill. He did not need to exert it always. When most of the numbers were covered, it was enough to let the ball run by chance, for it was certain then that, whoever won, the bank would win more. There could only be one winning number, and there might be thirty-five losing ones, as well as zero. But when a large and reckless stake portended danger to the bank, the croupier called upon his skill.

Mornington's hand was in his pocket on the banknotes little 'Erbert had lent him, or, rather, given him. But he did not draw out the money.

In spite of the fever of gambling that burned in his veins, Erroll's warning weighed upon him. To play and lose was one thing, but to throw his money into the grasp of a swindler was quite another; that was not even gambling—it was sheer imbecility.

And Morny resolved to watch the game a little before he played. It was the dawn of returning good sense.

"Make your game, gents!"

Tickey Tapp had taken in his winnings—a considerable sum, including the five-pound note of the wealthy punter. He had the ball in hand, ready for a new spin.

Mornington stood motionless, watching.

The room was hot and stuffy, the windows covered with dark curtains to prevent possible observation from without. There was a cloud of cigarette-smoke in the air. Somehow it was borne in upon Morny's fastidious mind, as never before, in what dingy surroundings he was finding himself. Next to him stood a fat man, evidently a bookmaker, who was warm with whisky and perspiration. Morny moved a little away from him. The scales seemed to be failing from his eyes. Somehow the roulette-table was losing its fascination already.

Money showered on the green cloth again.

Tickey Tapp's patrons evidently had "money to burn." Without it, it was not much use visiting Mr. Tapp. At the roulette-table only ready cash was admitted.

The wheel was spinning again, and the ball revolving. Among smaller stakes, there were three fivers on the table—on numbers 17, 18, and 36. And it was zero that came up.

Mornington's frown deepened.

In the next round the fat bookmaker placed a five-pound note on zero. And zero came up again, and Tickey Tapp passed a bunch of banknotes to the winner. There was a murmur round the table, and Morny started.

But at the same time—his eyes opened now, as it were—he caught the furtive smile that passed between Tickey Tapp and the bookmaker.

And he understood.

The two were confederates in the game, and the pretended punter was allowed to win to encourage the others. Tickey Tapp's banknotes had been paid over to an apparent winner, but they were still "in the business."

Mornington had been determined not to listen to Erroll's counsel; he had been determined to fling consideration to the winds. But he could not help himself.

The warning had taken effect, and he could not help it; his natural strong

sense would not allow him to be deceived now that his eyes were opened.

He felt a sickening at the heart.

The glamour of the game of chance was gone now—now that he knew it was not a game of chance at all, but a deliberate swindle which was worked as an absolute certainty—for the bank.

He felt disgust and contempt for the obtuseness of the punters, who could not see what was so plain to him, forgetting that a very short time before he had been as blind as the rest.

He still watched, without playing.

Some of the punters, he noted, seemed to have lingering doubts, in spite of themselves, for they were careful to place their stakes after the wheel had started, and the croupier had taken his hand from it. There was only one reason why they should do so—a lingering doubt that the croupier could control the wheel. After he had taken his hands from it they felt safe to stake.

Morny found himself watching one of those cautious punters. He was a young man with a vacant face, a fair moustache, and an eyeglass, evidently wealthy. He had lost again and again, and now he was playing for larger stakes, and carefully refraining from placing them till the wheel had started.

But he continued to lose.

Once or twice, when he threw on a pound note, he won. But when he played with fivers and tenners he had no luck. The explanation was simple enough. Tickey Tapp could afford to leave pound stakes to chance, but he could not afford to pay out hundreds of pounds.

Some secret contrivance, invisible to the players, existed, which enabled Tickey Tapp to control the wheel surreptitiously up to the very moment that it stopped.

Mornington's lip curled.

His money remained in his pocket. He had come there to gamble, not to throw his banknotes away; and now he

knew that by placing them on the green cloth he was throwing them away as surely as if he had dropped them into one of the old quarries on the heath.

The knowledge that the game was "rigged" did what appeals to his better nature had failed to do. Mornny was "fed up."

But with that feeling there came shame for what he was doing—shame at his vile surroundings and the wretched greed that had brought him there.

And this was Sunday!

A hot flush came into Mornnington's cheeks. He made a step towards the doorway. And as he did so there sounded through the room a loud knocking.

Knock, knock, knock!

CHAPTER 23.

Saved by His Chum!

TICKEY TAPP started to his feet.

Knock, knock!

The wheel was revolving, but no one regarded it now. For at the sound of the loud and insistent knocking one alarming thought was in all minds.

"The police!"

The hangings at the door were pulled hastily aside, and a startled face looked in, the face of the doorkeeper of the bungalow.

"What is it?" muttered Tickey Tapp.

"The police!" muttered Mornnington, and his heart was like lead within him.

Tickey Tapp hurriedly followed the man from the room. Mornnington caught the doorkeeper's hurried whisper.

"There's a young gent, sir. He says the police——"

Tickey Tapp looked back from the doorway.

"Calm yourselves, gentlemen! There's a way out in case of need. No one need be alarmed."

Then he disappeared.

Mornnington followed him down the passage.

In the little hall of the bungalow a junior in Etons was standing, and Mornnington uttered an exclamation as he saw him.

It was Kit Erroll.

"What the——" Tickey Tapp was beginning.

Mornnington ran forward.

"Erroll, you here? Are you mad!"

"I came to warn you, Mornny——"

"But, the police—— For goodness' sake, clear——"

"I've come for you——"

"Look 'ere! Wot does this 'ere mean?" interrupted Tickey Tapp.

"You've been hammering on the door till you was let in, young feller. Now, wot do you want? You've come to give us the office——"

Erroll gave the sharper a stare of contempt.

"You!" he said scornfully. "I'd be glad to see you in the hands of the police, more than glad! I've come to warn my friend. Mornny, come with me at once. Tracy's gone to the police-station, and they may be here any minute now!"

"By gad!" muttered Mornnington.

"So we've been given away, have we?" muttered Tickey Tapp, savagely.

"You have, and serve you right!" answered Erroll coldly. "I hope the police will be here before you can escape. Mornny; come—come; there's not a moment to lose!"

He turned to the door.

The doorkeeper had put on the chain after admitting Erroll, and the Rookwood junior removed it.

"Come!" he said.

"Better keep in cover if the cops are about!" said Tickey Tapp. "There's another way out."

"Keep it for your rascally associates!" said Erroll. "There's still time. Mornny, come—come!"

He threw open the door.

Mornnington followed him from the bungalow without a word. The door

was slammed after them, and the chain rattled into its place.

Erroll's eyes swept over the open heath that glimmered far and wide in the afternoon sunshine. From the direction of the village two or three police helmets could be seen bobbing amidst the gorse. The police were coming already!

"You fool, Kit!" muttered Mornington. "You fool! Do you know what you've risked by comin' here?"

"I know! Come, Morny!"

Erroll took his chum's arm in his grasp, and started towards the wood. Morny ran with him, without protest.

Every minute was precious now, for if the police arrived it was certain that they would stop anyone seen leaving the bungalow.

But there was still time.

The two juniors plunged into the wood, and the trees swallowed them up and concealed them. Then Valentine Mornington stopped.

"Come on, Morny!" urged Erroll. "Rookwood's the safest place now. Some of the cads there may talk if the police——"

"They won't be nabbed now," said Mornington coolly. "There's a secret way out, and they've had warnin'."

Erroll bit his lip hard.

"It was for your sake I came, Morny," he said. "For the rest, I'd be glad to see them taken!"

"They're no worse than I was."

"I don't agree with you, Morny. But come on—come on——"

"Let's wait and see what happens. We're safe here, old top."

Mornington clambered upon a branch, and looked out over the heath. In the distance, towards the village, appeared a policeman's helmet. Mornington drew a deep breath.

The police had lost little time in acting upon the information given them. A little later, and all would have been lost—for Mornington! Erroll's warning had come in time to save him!

He dropped from the tree.

"Come on!" he said abruptly.

The chums hurried along the foot-path. What was happening at the bungalow they did not know, and they cared nothing. Whether Tickey Tapp and his honourable company had escaped in time, or whether they were rounded up in the gambling den, was a matter of small moment. The two juniors were thinking of their own narrow escape.

They hurried on in silence.

Not a word was spoken till they reached Rookwood. Jimmy Silver was standing in the gateway, chatting with 'Erbert of the Second Form. 'Erbert looked up quickly at Valentine Mornington.

Morny came up, unheeding the dark frown that gathered on Jimmy Silver's brow.

"I—I've been waitin' here for you to come in, Master Morny," muttered 'Erbert. "I—I——"

Mornington smiled.

"I've got something here for you, kid," he said. "I find I shan't want your banknotes after all. Thanks all the same!"

"Oh, Master Morny! But——"

Mornington thrust the notes into the fag's reluctant hand.

"It's all serene, kid. I shan't want them," he said. "Go and lock them up at once!"

"Orl right, Master Morny!"

Valentine Mornington walked on with Erroll, leaving Jimmy Silver staring after him blankly.

There was a curious expression on Erroll's face. Morny's action had surprised him, as well as Jimmy Silver.

"Time for tea, I think, old top!" yawned Mornington.

"Yes, old chap."

The chums did not speak again till they were in Study No. 4. Erroll lighted sticks in the grate, and shoved the kettle on them, Mornington watching him with an old smile.

"Well?" he said, as Erroll looked up.

"Well?" said Erroll.

"Do you know that you're a thump-in' fool?"

"I hope not."

"You are, an' no mistake about that. Suppose the cops had been a little quicker, and you'd been nabbed at Tickey Tapp's show along with me? We should both have been expelled from Rookwood!"

"I know," said Erroll, in a low voice.

"And yet you risked it?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're a thumping ass! And a jolly good pal!" said Mornington, his tone changing. "Erroll, old chap, I've been a beast—a regular beast! There's a bad strain in me somewhere, and it works out at times. I suppose I can't help it."

"Try!" suggested Erroll, with a smile.

"Everythin' you told me about that rotten game is true, and even if it wasn't, what was I doin' there, anyhow?" muttered Mornington. "If it's any satisfaction to you, Kit, I'm ashamed of myself."

"If that's all over, Morny—"

"It's all over, Kit. Honour bright!"

"Then there's no reason why you shouldn't make a jolly good success as junior captain," said Erroll brightly. Mornington shook his head.

"I've been thinkin' about that," he said. "I know what I ought to do, and I'm goin' to do it. But never mind that now. Let's have tea."

And Mornington and his chum sat down to tea in a more cheerful mood than either had known for some time past. The clouds had rolled by in Study No. 4 at last.

CHAPTER 24.

Morny's Last Chance!

"THE best match of the season!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell impressively.

"We want to win!" remarked Raby.

"And we don't want St. Jim's to beat

us on our own ground," added Newcome.

Jimmy Silver was silent.

The Fistical Four, of the Rookwood Fourth, were at tea in the end study. Jimmy Silver attended to tea almost in silence. But Lovell, Raby, and Newcome put in enough conversation for four.

And all their remarks were on the same subject—Valentine Mornington, the junior captain.

"It's time," said Lovell, with increasing impressiveness, "to put our foot down. Mornington doesn't care a two-penny rap for footer; he's shown that plain enough. He's hanging on to the captaincy out of sheer obstinacy. He don't want it, but he won't part with it. Dog in the manger, you know. And Morny won't beat St. Jim's."

"Not likely!" agreed Raby.

"With a skipper like that, the team is simply going to the blessed bow-wows!" said Lovell. "You know that, Jimmy."

"Um!" said Jimmy Silver.

"It's all very well to say 'um,' but you know it as well as we do," said Lovell warmly. "You've got to raise the matter in committee, Jimmy. When we meet St. Jim's on Wednesday, we've got to have our old skipper, and that's you! Morny's got to stand down! We can't lose matches because he's taken to playing the goat."

"Um!"

"Otherwise," hooted Lovell, "I shall resign from the team."

"Um!"

"You ought never to have stood aside for Morny. You were an ass—in fact, a silly chump!" said Lovell. "All the chaps want you back. You know you ought to push Morny out, and let us win the most important match of the season. Don't you, you silly ass?"

"Um!"

"If you say 'um' again, I'll shy the teapot at you!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell, in great exasperation.

The door was pushed open at that

point, and the fat face of Reginald Muffin looked in.

"Morny here?" he asked.

"No, blow Morny!"

"Where the thump is he, then?" demanded Tubby Muffin, in an aggrieved tone. "Bulkeley's sent me for him, and I can't find him anywhere. He's not in his study, and he's not in the quad, and he's not anywhere. And Bulkeley's waiting for him."

Lovell gave a snort.

"Inquire at some blessed pub where they play billiards!" he answered. "That's most likely where you'll find Morny."

"Draw it mild, old chap," murmured Jimmy Silver.

Another snort from Arthur Edward.

"Isn't it so?" he demanded. "Doesn't he clear off every day after lessons? Does anyone know where he goes? He doesn't even tell his own chum, Erroll. Morny's at his old games again, and you jolly well know it, Jimmy Silver."

"I suppose I ain't to tell Bulkeley that?" grinned Tubby Muffin.

"Looks to me as if Bulkeley suspects it," grunted Lovell. "I know he's had his eye on Morny lately. What's he sent for him for?"

"Blessed if I know; but I can't find him," said Tubby. "I'd better tell Bulkeley he's gone out. I suppose he has gone out."

And the fat Classical rolled away.

"At it again!" said Lovell savagely. "He cut footer practice to-day, and now he's out of gates, nobody knows where. And you're sitting there like an Egyptian mummy, Jimmy Silver, and letting school matches go to pot, because you won't do what you know you ought to do."

"I've been thinking it out," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "I've made up my mind, Lovell. I'm going to take a hand."

"High time you did!" grunted Lovell.

"Morny's simply thrown football over lately, and he can't expect us to

sit down while he loses matches for us," said Jimmy Silver slowly. "If he don't want to do a captain's duty, he should throw up the captaincy. We've got to beat St. Jim's, if we can. We're not going to suffer defeat to please Mornington."

"Hear, hear!" said the Co., with great satisfaction.

Jimmy Silver had come round to his comrades' way of thinking at last; and, as Lovell said, it was high time.

"Jimmy!"

It was Kit Erroll's quiet voice in the doorway. Morny's chum had a troubled wrinkle in his brow.

"Hallo, Erroll! Trot in!"

"I suppose you don't know where Morny is?"

"Not likely to, if you don't," answered Jimmy.

"I think he went out after lessons," said Erroll. "But—but I can see what you fellows think; but you're mistaken. Morny isn't playing the goat."

"You'd stand up for him whatever he did!" growled Lovell.

"Well, perhaps I should. But it's the truth. Morny has been a bit reckless lately, as I suppose most of the fellows know," said Erroll, colouring. "But he's chucked that up."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I do know. I don't know what he's gone out for now, but I know it's nothing of that kind."

"Bow-wow!" said Lovell.

"He's very keen about the St. Jim's match," said Erroll.

"It doesn't look much like it," said Jimmy Silver dryly. "He's cut practice again, and he's off colour at footer. Now he's cleared off again, as usual. Bulkeley wants him, and he can't be found. It's close on locking-up, but he's still out of gates."

"But—"

"I'm bound to take the matter up," said Jimmy Silver. "Somebody's got to. We can't let St. Jim's beat us because Morny's tired of football. The

fact is, Erroll, everybody is fed up with his rot!"

"I'm sure that Morny could explain, if he liked, when he comes in——"

Erroll paused, and glanced along the passage from the doorway of the end study.

"Here he is!" he said. "Come along here, Morny!"

Valentine Mornington came along the passage.

His handsome face wore a very cheery expression. He glanced into the end study, and nodded to the Fistical Four.

"Anythin' up?" he asked.

"Yes!" growled Lovell.

"I'd better tell you," said Jimmy Silver. "I told you the other day, Morny, that I'd made up my mind that your way of handling things wouldn't do."

"I remember."

"I've stood aside to give you a chance as captain," continued Jimmy Silver. "You can't say you haven't had a chance."

"I can't," agreed Morny.

"And you can't say that I haven't backed you up, Morny."

"Right on the wicket. And now you're fed-up?" asked Mornington coolly.

"That's it," assented Jimmy, rather surprised at Morny's way of taking it.

"That's how it stands, Morny."

"You want me to resign?"

"Yes."

"I'm not goin' to."

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to be made to," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm sorry, but there's a limit, and you've reached it. But I'd rather give you every chance, if you'd only play the game. So would all the fellows."

"Rot!" came from Lovell.

"Shut up, Lovell, old chap! Look here, Morny, it's pretty well known that you've been kicking over the traces and playing the goat in your old style."

"I suppose so."

"Oh, you admit it?" ejaculated Raby.

Mornington nodded.

"Why not?" he answered coolly. "It's true! I had an idea in my head—the fat-headed idea that ever came into anybody's head. I went on a flutter. Result—stony! It serves me right. I've got what I deserve. Erroll has been talking to me in his celebrated seventhly manner——"

"You ass!" exclaimed Erroll.

"And I've been brought round," continued Mornington, unheeding. "Now, like the johnny who chin-wags on a tub at the street-corners, I can say that I used to be everything that was bad; and now I'm as good as gold, and call on other fellows to follow my shinin' example. See?"

"If that's the fact——"

"Are you understudyin' doubtin' Thomas?"

"Well, you see——"

"Where have you been now?" asked Lovell abruptly.

"That's my bizney, old top."

"Ours, too, if you're going to captain us against St. Jim's. If you haven't been playing the goat, say where you've been. No reason why you shouldn't, if it will bear the light."

Mornington flushed.

"I see your point," he admitted. "You're right, in a way. But I can't tell you, as it happens."

"Why not speak out, Morny, old fellow?" muttered Erroll. "You've only been down to the village."

"That's so."

"Well, then——"

"I'm sorry. I can't go into particulars," said Mornington. "I admit I've played the ox, and given you fellows a right to question me. But, as it happens, I can't tell you anythin'."

"Why not?" asked Newcome.

"Because I can't!"

Tubby Muffin came rolling along the passage.

"Conroy says Morny has come in—— Oh, here you are! Bulkeley wants you in his study, Morny."

"All serene!"

Mornington walked away, and Erroll followed him slowly, leaving the Fistical Four looking very grim. Jimmy Silver's face was set. Every junior footballer at Rookwood was thoroughly fed-up with Morny and his ways, and it needed only a word from the former skipper to bring about the new captain's fall. Hitherto, Jimmy had refused to utter that word. But he had made up his mind about it now.

CHAPTER 25.

Mysterious!

"COME in!"

Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood School, spoke very quietly and gravely as Valentine Mornington appeared in his doorway.

Mornington was looking a little grave, too, as he entered the study.

Bulkeley's expression was a warning.

"You wanted to speak to me, Bulkeley?" said Morny.

"Yes.

"Well, here I am."

"You can sit down, Mornington. I've got to speak to you seriously," said the captain of the school.

"Go ahead."

"Some time ago," continued Bulkeley, "the juniors elected you skipper, in Silver's place. I did not quite approve of this, Mornington; but I did not interfere. But you're probably aware that it's my duty, as Head of the Games, to keep an eye on junior football. I've been taking some notice of you lately, Mornington, and I'm not satisfied."

"I'm sorry for that, Bulkeley," said Morny, with unusual meekness.

"You seem to have neglected your duties very considerably, even to the extent of failing to attend matches, and leaving it to others to act in your place. You generally get out of gates as soon as lessons are over, and stay out as long as you can. You've been

late in for call-over on several occasions. You've given your Form-master a good deal of trouble in class—neglecting your work, and cheeking Mr. Bootles, instead of expressing regret. I've not forgotten, Mornington, that you had a very bad reputation when you first came here, and were very near getting expelled from Rookwood. It looks to me as if you've begun again in your old style."

"Oh!" said Morny.

"This won't do," went on Bulkeley quietly. "Apart from your position in the Lower School, you can't go on like this. As Head of the Games, I have to see that you don't play the fool with junior football. As head prefect, I'm bound to see that you keep the rules of the school. I require to know now, Mornington, where it is you go after lessons, that keeps you out of gates so constantly."

Mornington drew a deep breath.

His chief feeling, at that moment, was one of relief—deep relief—that he had listened to the wise counsels of his chum, and had of his own accord abandoned the folly into which he had been drawn.

"To-day, as usual, you have cleared off, and nobody seems to know where you have been," said Bulkeley. "I won't go into the past. But you are to tell me where you have been to-day."

"I've been down to Coombe."

"There are places in Coombe, Mornington, where you are not allowed to go, any more than any other Rookwood fellow. Have you been to one of those places?"

"No."

"Very good. Then you can tell me where you have been."

Mornington was silent.

"I'm waiting for your answer," said Bulkeley.

"I've done no harm."

"I hope not. But where have you been?"

No answer.

The Rookwood captain's face hardened.

"You had your allowance on Saturday, I think, Mornington?"

"Yes."

"Have you the money now?"

"N-no."

"Where is it?"

Silence.

"How much money did you receive from your uncle?"

"Only a quid."

"If you have spent it, what have you spent it on?"

No reply.

"You can refuse to answer me, if you choose," said Bulkeley. "But you cannot refuse to answer the Head, if the matter goes before him, Mornington."

"The—the Head!" stammered Mornington.

"It's my duty to place the matter in his hands unless you satisfy me. To be plain, Mornington, you are generally suspected of having fallen into your old ways, for which you came within an ace of being expelled from the school at one time. If you are innocent, you have only to explain. I'm ready to hear your explanation."

Morny's face was red, but he did not speak.

Bulkeley waited a few moments, and then rose from his chair, his face very stern.

"I've given you a chance," he said. "I shall have to consider what step to take next, Mornington. For the present, you can go."

Without a word Mornington turned to the study door and opened it. The next moment there was a gasp in the passage, as Tubby Muffin jumped back from the door.

Mornington gave him a furious look.

"You eavesdroppin' cad!" he shouted.

"I—I—I wasn't listening!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin indignantly. "I—I was just coming to speak to Bulkeley! Yarocoh!"

Tubby Muffin roared, as the angry junior smote him, and he sat down with a bump in the passage.

Mornington strode on with knitted brows.

Tubby staggered to his feet.

"Yah! Rotter!" he gasped.

Mornington strode on to the staircase without heeding. Some of the Fourth watched him rather curiously as he went upstairs.

"What did Bulkeley want, Morny?" called out Flynn.

Morny did not seem to hear.

"I know what he wanted!" howled Tubby Muffin, coming up breathlessly. "He's going to report Morny to the Head for playing the goat! I heard him."

In about five minutes nearly all the Fourth knew what Tubby Muffin had heard at Bulkeley's door.

Meanwhile, Valentine Mornington had gone to his study. He found the room empty, and flung himself savagely into a chair. A few minutes later Erroll came in.

"Oh, you're here, Morny! Do you know what the fellows are saying?"

"Hang the fellows!" growled Mornington.

"Tubby is spinning a yarn——"

"Hang Tubby!"

"That's all very well!" exclaimed Erroll, with a touch of impatience. "But you refused to tell Bulkeley where you had been——"

"That's so!"

"Why?"

"I had my reasons."

"You know what he must think, Morny?"

"Let him think it!"

"And the fellows, too——"

"Blow them!"

"Then you won't explain?"

"No, I won't!"

"I'm afraid it's all up with you about the captaincy, then, Morny. It's only necessary for Jimmy Silver to say a word——"

"Bless Jimmy Silver!"

Erroll compressed his lips and was silent. Valentine Mornington gave him a dark and bitter look.

"You think the same as the others, then?" he snapped.

"No!" said Erroll, after a pause. "You told me you'd given up playing the fool, and I believed you—I believe you now! But you can't expect other fellows to have the same faith in you. Why can't you explain?"

"Because — because——" Mornington flushed. "It's not as they think, but I can't explain! Dash it all, I can't! There's a reason! For goodness' sake, give a chap a rest!"

"Very well!" said Erroll quietly. And the subject dropped.

CHAPTER 26.

Coming to a Crisis:

"**A** GAIN!" Arthur Edward Lovell made —or, rather, snorted—that remark.

The Fistical Four were strolling in the quadrangle after lessons the next day, when Mornington came in sight.

Morny was heading for the gates.

He saw the chums of the Fourth, but he did not look at them. But the deepening colour in his cheeks showed that he knew their eyes were upon him. He swung out of the gateway and vanished.

"He, he, he!" came from Tubby Muffin. "What a nerve, you know! After what Bulkeley's said to him!"

"Er-r-r-r!" growled Jimmy Silver.

Tubby Muffin rolled away to the gates after Mornington. Tubby was intensely curious; it was his besetting sin. Morny's mysterious excursions excited Tubby's inquisitiveness to a point that was almost painful. And the Paul Pry of Rookwood meant to find out.

"That prying rotter is going after Morny!" growled Raby.

"Oh, bother him!" said Jimmy

Silver. "Let's get along and get some footer practice while there's some light."

"What are you going to do about Morny?" snapped Lovell.

"He's got to go, I suppose," said Jimmy uneasily. "I hate taking a hand against him, but it's past the limit now. But—but it's rotten to turn a fellow out of the captaincy, and—and I shan't take it on again myself. If I move against him, I can't do that! I'll back up Conroy for the job."

"Rot!" roared Lovell. "You're going to be skipper again, Jimmy Silver! None of your silly piffle!"

"Let's get down to the footer!" was Jimmy Silver's reply.

And they went.

All the members of the Rookwood junior eleven were at practice, with the exception of Valentine Mornington—and his absence was very freely commented upon. Bulkeley of the Sixth came by while the footballers were going strong, and he called out to Jimmy Silver:

"Isn't Mornington at practice?"

"N-no!"

"Where is he?"

"Gone out, I think," answered Jimmy Silver reluctantly.

Bulkeley compressed his lips, and walked on without any further remark. The practice went on, and it was dusk when the juniors came back to the School House. Erroll, somewhat to his surprise, found Mornington in Study No. 4 when he came in.

Morny nodded to him with a smile.

"Had some good practice?" he asked.

"Yes. I wish you'd been there, Morny?"

"It wasn't possible. I had an appointment."

Erroll made no reply to that. The two chums sat down to tea, both of them silent and thoughtful.

"I borrowed two quids of you before I went out," said Mornington, breaking the silence at last.

"That's all right."

"Don't you want to know what I did with the money?"

"No."

"You don't think I've been squandering it in riotous livin'?" asked Mornington, with a rather sneering smile.

"I don't know what you've been doing, Morny. I think you're making a lot of mystery over nothing."

There was a tap at the door, as the chums finished tea, and it opened to disclose Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Conroy, Van Rynn, and Dodd, all members of the Lower School football committee. They came into the study with rather grave faces.

Mornington looked at them with a mocking expression.

"Trot in!" he said. "Don't mind me!"

"We've come to say something rather unpleasant, I'm afraid, Morny," said Jimmy Silver.

"Fire away!"

"Well, the long and the short of the matter is, that we want you to resign."

"I thought that was comin'," said Mornington, with a nod. "You don't want me to captain you in the St. Jim's match to-morrow?"

"No!"

"That's rather complimentary."

"Oh, cut the cackle!" said Arthur Edward Lovell gruffly. "It's the order of the boot for you, Mornington, and you know you've asked for it."

"I'm not resignin'!"

"It will come to the same thing," said Jimmy Silver. "But everything is going to be fair and square. A meeting of the whole club will be held, and the matter put to the vote."

"I shan't call a meetin'!"

"It will manage to meet without your calling it," remarked Tommy Dodd, with a sniff. "We're fed-up with you, Morny."

"You want to be present, I suppose?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Not particularly!"

"Well, the meeting's at seven, in the

Common-room, if you want to come; but please yourself!"

"Shut the door after you!" was Morny's unmoved reply.

The visitors left the study with rather angry faces. Mornington's manner of treating their serious decision did not gratify them. The dandy of the Fourth shrugged his shoulders as the door closed behind Jimmy Silver & Co.

"How do you think the vote will go, Erroll?" he asked.

"You will get one vote, Morny."

"Yours?" said Morny, laughing.

"Yes."

"I could bag Muffin's, too, by standing him some tarts!" said Mornington, with a grin. "Not worth the tarts, though, as the matter stands. I wonder what those asses would say if they knew the facts?"

"Why not tell them the facts, Morny?"

"Can't!"

"You'll come to the meeting, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; may as well see the thing through!" yawned Mornington. "It's rather a pity—I was going to play a really great game to-morrow against St. Jim's. Now I suppose I shan't even be in the team. By gad, it's rather a temptation to give Tickey Tapp another look-in!"

"You won't do that!"

"Oh, no; I'm done with that rot! I'll come and watch, and give you a cheer when you kick the winning goal against St. Jim's, old scout!"

Mornington's manner was light and careless; but Erroll could see well enough that it did not indicate his real feelings. Morny felt the blow to his pride keenly enough.

"It's rotten!" he said, after a pause.

"After—after the way I've played the fool lately, Erroll, I was beginnin' to understand that I'm not the man for the job I've taken on. But—but the order of the boot—and it's odd, too, that, as it happens, I don't deserve it on

this occasion. Can't be helped, though."

And Valentine Mornington shrugged his shoulders again, and dismissed the subject.

His face was smiling when he left the study to go down to the Common-room with Erroll. It was rather past seven then; it was just like Morny to be late for the meeting that was to decide so much for him.

"All the merry family there!" he remarked, as there was a buzz of voices from the Common-room.

The room was crowded with juniors, Classics and Moderns. To the surprise of the two chums as they approached, the voice of Tubby Muffin was heard.

"Fairly knocked me into a cocked hat, you know, it did, really! He never went to the Bird-in-Hand. He wasn't meeting any old bookies! I can tell you where he went."

Mornington gave a violent start.

"By gad!"

"Well, where did he go, you blessed Peeping Tom?" grunted Lovell.

Tubby Muffin chuckled.

"It'll surprise you! He——"

Tubby broke off suddenly as Mornington strode into the crowded room and grasped him by the shoulder.

"You fat rascal!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Shut up!"

CHAPTER 27.

What Tubby Know!

"YAROOOH!"

"Hold your tongue!"

"Leggo!" roared Tubby

Muffin. "I say, make him leggo, Jimmy Silver! Yow-ow! You're chook-chook-choking me! Ooooooh!"

"Morny!" exclaimed Erroll, following his chum quickly into the room.

The juniors crowded round, in great curiosity and excitement. The Peeping Tom of Rookwood had watched Mornington that afternoon, and he

was about to relate his discoveries, when the dandy of the Fourth interrupted him. And Mornington's action made the very worst impression upon the Rookwooders.

Arthur Edward Lovell caught Morny by the arm.

"Let go!" he said curtly.

"Mind your own business, Lovell!" snapped Mornington savagely.

"Let go!"

Lovell gripped hard, and Mornington was swung away from Tubby Muffin.

He turned on Lovell fiercely, but two or three fellows interposed.

"Easy does it, Mornington!" said Jimmy Silver.

Mornington panted.

"That fat cad has been watchin' me!" he exclaimed.

"Ow, ow!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "Wharrer you making such a fuss about, you silly ass? Ow, ow! Ooooooh!"

"If you've been spying on me, hold your tongue about it, you fat rascal!"

"I haven't been spying!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin indignantly. "I happened to walk down to Coombe. I suppose I can walk down to Coombe if I like? Ow!"

"Well, what did you find out?" inquired Peele of the Fourth.

"Yes; tell us that!" chimed in Tracy of the Shell. "It ought to be interestin'."

"Very!" retorted Tommy Dodd.

"We don't want to hear Tubby's silly yarns!" said Jimmy Silver. "Shut up, Tubby, and roll away! Let's get to business!"

"Let Tubby speak out!" exclaimed Lovell. "We know pretty well what Morny's been up to; but if Muffin knows for certain, let him speak out. Never mind how he found out. Go it, Tubby!"

"I—I was just going to!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "I don't know what Morny's so waxy about. How, keep him off!"

Two or three fellows grasped Valentine Mornington as he made another angry movement towards the fat Classical.

"You keep quiet, old top!" said Conroy. "Let Tubby go ahead!"

"Let go, hang you!"

"Rats!"

Mornington breathed hard with anger; but there was no help for it. Tubby's yarn was to be spun, and Morny could not stop him. The fat Classical grinned at Mornington as three or four juniors held him back.

"You needn't mind, Morny!" he grinned.

"You fat rascal!"

"Oh, go ahead if we've got to listen to it!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver impatiently. "Get it over, for goodness' sake!"

"I say, I followed Morny—I mean, I didn't follow him, of course——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, I happened to walk in the same direction, you know, and spotted him in the High Street at Coombe. I didn't know what to make of it," said Tubby ingenuously. "He passed the Bird-in-Hand without even looking at it."

"You fat idiot!" growled Mornington.

"Well, is that all?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"No fear! Where do you think he went?" said Tubby.

"I don't know, and don't care two-pence! If you've got anything to get off your chest, get it off and give us a rest!" said Jimmy gruffly.

"I've a jolly good mind not to tell you at all!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin indignantly.

"Don't then! Roll away!"

"Well, I don't mind telling you, old chap," said Tubby, who was evidently not to be deprived of the pleasure of making a sensational announcement. "It was no end surprising, you know. You could have knocked me down with a feather!"

"I'll knock you down with my knuckles if you don't come to the point!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Oh, I say, Lovell——"

"Get to the point!" roared Lovell.

"Well, I'm getting to it as fast as I can, only you keep on interrupting me," said Tubby in an injured tone. "Morny turned out of the High Street into Water Lane——"

"No pubs there," remarked Tracy, and there was a laugh.

"He didn't go into a pub," said Tubby. "He went into a house, and he——"

"I've had enough of this!" said Mornington savagely. "Let me go! I won't touch the fat cad! I'm goin'."

"Let him go if he likes," said Jimmy Silver.

Mornington swung savagely out of the Common-room. Kit Erroll, however, remained. Erroll was the only fellow present who believed that Tubby's tale would disclose nothing to Mornington's discredit.

"Get on with the washing, Muffin, if you must wag your chin," grunted Jimmy Silver. "Cut it short!"

"He went into a house," said Tubby.

"What house?" asked Tracy.

"Mrs. Wickers' house."

"Mrs. Wickers!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, in amazement.

Tubby Muffin chuckled.

"I was just as surprised as you are, you bet," he said. "I thought he was gone out on the razzle. I'd have sworn to it. I was awfully disappointed—I—I mean I was jolly pleased——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth did he want in Mrs. Wickers' house?" exclaimed Lovell blankly.

Most of them knew Mrs. Wickers, a soldier's widow, of Coombe. Since her husband had fallen on the North-West Frontier in a skirmish with the wild tribesmen of the district, the poor little woman had eked out her pension with needlework, and Mrs. Chisholm, the

Head's wife, had shown her great kindness. The juniors had sometimes seen little Mrs. Wickers coming to the Head's house, and they had always "capped" her with deep respect. What Mornington should have visited Mrs. Wickers for was a deep mystery.

Tubby's yarn was listened to now with much more interest. Evidently it was not to be a tale of wild "razzle."

"Mrs. Wickers hasn't started poker parties, I suppose?" remarked Tracy of the Shell.

"Shut up, Tracy!"

"Go on, Tubby!"

"Mrs. Wickers let him in," continued Tubby, evidently elated at the impression he was creating. "He only went into the hall, and the door was open, so I sneaked up—I—I mean, I thought I'd like to have a closer look at the marigolds near the door, so I went to look at them, and while I was looking at the marigolds I saw Morny give her two pound-notes—"

"Wha-a at?"

"Great Scott!"

"And I heard him say that would make up what she needed, with the one yesterday—"

"Oh!"

"And Mrs. Wickers said he was a good young gentleman—"

"Ah!"

"And she wouldn't take it; only if the man turned her out there was nowhere for her children to go."

"Phew!"

"She said it was noble of a rich young gentleman to think of the poor," grinned Tubby. "She don't know Morny isn't rich now. Blessed if I know where he got the money from. Borrowed it of Erroll, I dare say. Anyhow, he had it, and he gave it to her, and never let on a word that it was all he had. Then I cut off in case the beast should see me—I mean, I'd finished looking at the marigolds."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Queer, ain't it?" said Tubby

Muffin. "Fancy Morny handing out his cash for a widow to pay the rent, when we all thought—"

"Well, my only hat!" said Tommy Dodd blankly.

Jimmy Silver coloured.

"We've been rather hard on Morny, I think," he said. "I—I think there's a lot that wants explaining about his doings lately; but he's certainly been misjudged this time. That fat rotter ought to be kicked for watching him—but I'm glad it's come out."

"I knew he was all right," said Erroll, whose face was very bright now. "It was just his pride that wouldn't allow him to explain.

"Oh, blow his pride!" growled Lovell. "He could have explained."

"Well, I don't know," remarked Jimmy Silver. "If Morny had told the yarn it would have sounded a good deal like blowing his own trumpet. Still, I'm jolly glad we've got the facts—in time."

"In time?" repeated Lovell.

"Well, now we know, I suppose there's no further idea of turning him out," said Jimmy.

"Oh!"

Jimmy Silver took Tubby Muffin by one fat ear.

"You prying worm!" he said.

"Ow!"

"You ought to be kicked for watching and listening. Go to Bulkeley of the Sixth and tell him what you've told us. Otherwise, you'll get the kicking you've asked for!"

"Ow! All right! Leggo!"

Kit Erroll started for his study, and several of the juniors followed him there. Valentine Mornington gave them a very unpleasant look as they came in.

"It's all right, Morny!" said Jimmy Silver. "The meeting's called off."

"Blow the meeting!"

"We seem to have misjudged you and—"

"Oh, rot—"

"But it was all your own fault; you

fairly asked for it," said Jimmy. "But as the matter stands, it's cleared up, and you're captaining us to-morrow against St. Jim's."

"I don't know that I want to!" grunted Mornington. "Like your thumpin' cheek to take an interest in my private affairs!"

"Look here——" began Lovell hotly.

"Oh, go an' eat coke!"

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You're going to have another chance, Morny. For goodness' sake make the best of it, and nobody here will say another word about electing a new captain. Come on, you chaps."

And Jimmy Silver & Co. left the study. Kit Erroll looked at his chum with a smile.

"I'm glad it's out," he said.

"I'm not!" growled Mornington. "I'll jolly well kick that prying fat rascal!"

"It's done you good!"

"Oh, rot!"

Erroll smiled again, but said no more. And Mornington, upon reflection, was probably not sorry that the junior meeting had been interrupted by Tubby Muffin with his surprising yarn. On the morrow, when the Rookwood junior team went into the field against St. Jim's, Valentine Mornington went with them as their captain.

The match was one which will live long in the memories of all who saw it, and most of Rookwood, seniors as well as juniors, was on the touchline to cheer Morny's men on against their deadly rivals of St. Jim's. Tom Merry's team was in great form, and, being a rather heavier side, looked at first as if they might overwhelm the Rookwooders. But Valentine Mornington soon showed that he was in irresistible form, and under his inspired leadership his team worked like Trojans. After ten minutes' ding-dong play Tom Merry put the ball into the Rookwood net, and there were long faces on the touchline. But two minutes later Mornington

equalised with a shot that gave Fatty Wynn, the plump Welsh junior who was keeping goal for St. Jim's, simply no chance. A beautiful pass from D'Arcy on the right wing enabled Monty Lowther to score again for St. Jim's; but Jimmy Silver replied with a regular pile-driver into the St. Jim's net which put Rookwood level again.

Two all at half-time!

The second half was even more exciting than the first. Tom Merry and his men started off with a rush, with the evident determination to settle the issue beyond doubt. Two quick goals rewarded their efforts, scored by Jack Blake and Bernard Glyn. Rookwood fought back gallantly, and Jimmy Silver headed the ball past Wynn into the net from a corner kick. With only six minutes to go Mornington, tired but undefeated, led a desperate raid on the St. Jim's goal which gave Tommy Dodd a chance to equalise—and he took it! As the teams lined up again Bulkeley, who was refereeing, was looking at his watch.

"It's now or never, you men!" breathed Mornington.

Tom Merry secured the ball from the kick-off and whipped up the field with it; he passed out to D'Arcy, but Tommy Cook was a shade too quick for that elegant youth. With a long kick Tommy punted the ball down the field, and the Rookwood forwards raced for it, Val Mornington in the lead.

There was a roar from the touchline.

"Go it, Morny!"

"On the ball!"

Down the field raced Mornington, to reach the ball a split second before Herries, the burly St. Jim's back. Amid shrieks of encouragement Morny sped straight for goal, the ball at his feet. Conroy, the other St. Jim's back, was racing to cut him off, but Mornington seemed fairly to fly. Ten yards from the goal he steadied himself for a moment, and then the ball flew straight and true into the corner of the net just as Morny crumpled up under a

heavy charge from Conroy. It was one of the finest individual goals ever seen at Rookwood, and there was a roar of applause round the ground.

"Hurrah!"

"Rookwood wins!"

"Well played, Morny! Well played indeed!"

The referee's whistle blew for time. Rookwood had won on the stroke of time!

Mornington was borne off the field in triumph by his elated team amidst the cheers of the spectators and of the St. Jim's side as well—the hero of the hour!

CHAPTER 28.

Morny Steps Down!

"WHAT the thump——" said Lovell.

"What's on now?"

"It's Morny's fist!"

Jimmy Silver & Co., and a crowd of other fellows, were gathered round the notice-board. It was dark in the quadrangle now. Tom Merry & Co. had long since departed. On the board there was a notice in Valentine Mornington's well-known "fist," and it ordained a meeting of the Rookwood Junior Football Club for that evening in the Common-room, on a matter connected with the captaincy, and "urgent."

"Blessed if I can see anything to meet about!" said Lovell. "I suppose we'd better give Morny his head after the ripping game he put up to-day."

"Yes, we'll give him his head, certainly," said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

"Must be something on," remarked Tommy Dodd. "Blessed if I know what it's all about, though. You know, Erroll?"

Erroll was coming along, and he glanced at the notice as the Modern junior called to him.

"I've an idea," he answered.

"Well, what's it about, then?"

"I think I'd better leave it to Morny to tell you that!" said Erroll, and he went on towards the Common-room.

"Jolly mysterious!" yawned Lovell. "Still, we'll go!"

"Oh, we'll go, rather!"

There was a considerable amount of speculation as to what Mornington had called the meeting for; and there were very few fellows, Classical or Modern, who did not decide to go. The Common-room was crowded before the time appointed for the meeting, and there was a buzz of discussion. And there was a general movement of interest as Valentine Mornington entered the crowded room.

Mornington was cool and smiling, apparently unconscious of the curiosity about him. A dozen voices greeted him.

"What's the game, Morny?"

"What's it all about?"

Mornington glanced round.

"I'm just going to enlighten you, dear boys," he answered.

"Go ahead!"

Valentine Mornington mounted upon a chair, and looked over the crowded meeting. There was a rather peculiar smile upon his handsome face. Erroll stood by his side, looking a little grave.

"Gentlemen——" began Morny.

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, you have been called together to hear an important communication."

"Go it!"

"On the ball!"

"Some time ago," continued Mornington, "you did me the honour to elect me junior captain of Rookwood in the place of Jimmy Silver, whom I am happy to see present."

"No need to yarn about that now, that I can see," remarked Jimmy Silver, rather uncomfortably.

"I was very honoured by the selection," went on Mornington. "It was really a big compliment to me, to make out that I was a better skipper than

Jimmy Silver. At the same time, I can't help thinking that you made a mistake."

"Oh!"

"My hat!"

The Rookwood juniors stared at Mornington. They had not known what he was going to say; but certainly they had not expected him to say that. And they wondered what was coming next.

"In fact," said Mornington, "with all respect to the honourable gentlemen present, I think not only that you made a mistake, but you acted in a way that can only be justly described as asinine."

"Eh?"

"Oh!"

"You had a first-class skipper, and you got tired of it," said Mornington, with all eyes fixed on him. "You turned him out in favour of one not nearly so good—not a patch on him, in fact."

"Great Scott!"

"I—I—I'm dreaming this!" stuttered Arthur Edward Lovell.

Jimmy Silver fairly blinked at Mornington.

"You—you ass, Morny!" he ejaculated. "What the merry thunder are you driving at?"

"I'm coming to the point. It's lately been borne in upon my mind that I'm not the junior skipper that Rookwood wants—or needs! I'm not cut out for the job. Having made up my mind to be candid, I'm goin' the whole hog. The fellows who voted for me played the silly ox!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I'm much obliged to them, personally; but I cannot help regarding them as a set of silly asses!"

"Phew!"

"Well, of all the cheeky duffers he's—"

"He's right, all the same!" grinned Tommy Dodd.

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Lovell. "Go it, Morny! This is better than your football, old top!"

"Silence for the chair!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As soon as there was an interval of silence Valentine Mornington resumed, in the same nonchalant tone:

"Candidly, that's what I think. I'm not a bad captain, but rather like the egg in the story—good in parts. I do not keep up the consistent level of high quality displayed by our honourable friend Jimmy Silver—Uncle James of Rookwood!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it, you ass!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"I'd like to say that I've done my best," resumed Mornington, "but with proper regard for the facts, I can't say it. I haven't done my best—only sometimes, when the spirit moved me. At other times I've followed false prophets, to put it poetically. To come down to business, I feel that I'm not the man for the job, and have consequently decided to resign."

"Great pip!"

"I'm very much obliged to the fellows who put me into Jimmy Silver's place, without having any great admiration for them intellectually. Finding that the job doesn't fit, I'm steppin' out of it. My last act as junior captain of Rookwood will be to advise you to vote for Jimmy Silver. I'm not standing again as a candidate. You've got a chance now of gettin' back the captain you really want—as a common or garden member of the club, I'm goin' to vote for him! That's all!"

There was a buzz of voices in the Common-room, mingled with a good deal of laughter. Morny was always Morny; it could always safely be predicted that he would never do anything quite like any other fellow. And certainly he had chosen a rather unique way of handing in his resignation.

"Look here," began Jimmy Silver. "I'm not——"
"You are!" grinned Lovell. "Shut up, Jimmy!"

And Jimmy Silver gave in. Mornington's was the first vote for him, and when the meeting broke up Jimmy Silver was once more junior captain of Rookwood School. Which, as Morny declared, and as most of the other fellows agreed, was exactly as it should be.

CHAPTER 29.

The Widow of Coombe!

TOMMY DODD, of the Modern Fourth at Rookwood, wore a worried look.

He was leaning against one of the old beeches in Big Quad, with his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a deep wrinkle in his brow.

So immersed was he in reflection that he did not even observe Jimmy Silver & Co. as they came sauntering along from the School House.

Jimmy Silver glanced at him and smiled.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome smiled, too. They found something rather comic in Tommy Dodd's attitude, as he stood with his eyes fixed on the ground, unconscious of their proximity. It was a very unusual thing for Tommy Dodd to be so deeply buried in meditation.

"Halt!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

The four Classical juniors halted.

"Something's up with Tommy," grinned the captain of the Fourth. "He must be thinking of his sins, to judge by his look. Let's wake him up."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Lovell.

And the Fistical Four trod softly towards the Modern junior, with the playful intention of waking him up by collaring him suddenly and sitting him down in the quad.

Fortunately for Tommy Dodd, he observed them as they came closer, and Arthur Edward Lovell's outstretched hand was almost upon him when

Tommy gave a jump and started back in alarm.

That, however, was not fortunate for him. He had forgotten the beech-trunk just behind him.

Crack!

"Yow!" howled Tommy Dodd.

The back of Tommy's head had smitten the beech with a sudden and painful smite. Jimmy Silver & Co. burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow!" Tommy Dodd rubbed the back of his head and glared at the Classical juniors. "You silly chumps! You startled me! Ow, wow, yow!"

"We were only going to wake you up, old top!" said Jimmy Silver. "What do you mean by going to sleep in the quad, standing up like a horse?"

"I wasn't asleep, you Classical chump! Ow! I was thinking!"

"Gammon!"

"Fathead!" growled Tommy.

"Anything up?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Has Mr. Manders been going for you?"

"No. Ow!"

"Dear old Knowles on the warpath again?"

"No, ass! Ow! I've hurt my napper——"

"Lucky there's nothing in it!" remarked Lovell. "You might have damaged it if there had been!"

"Ass!" Tommy Dodd rubbed his head again. "Well, I suppose it's no good thinking! I can't do anything. It seems a shame, though!"

The Fistical Four looked at him. Tommy Dodd's remarks seemed rather cryptic to them.

"Of course you can't do anything," agreed Jimmy Silver. "You Modern chaps never can. But what's the matter? What's a shame? Tell your Uncle James!"

"About Mrs. Wickers!" said Tommy.

"Well?"

"You remember her—the little widow at Coombe, who does sewing and things for Mrs. Chisholm?" said Tommy.

"You've seen her coming here to the Head's house, I dare say."

"Lots of times," said Jimmy Silver. "Anything wrong there?"

"Yes," grunted Tommy Dodd. "I was trying to think whether I could do anything to help. But where's a chap to raise pounds and pounds? Can't be done!"

"Well, it wouldn't be easy!" said Lovell. "If it was bobs and bobs, or tanners and tanners——"

"Oh, don't be funny!" growled Tommy Dodd. "This is a serious matter. I say it's a shame. Her husband was killed on the North-West Frontier of India, and it doesn't seem fair to me, somehow, that she should have to suffer for it. It was bad enough in itself, without losing her home, too. But a chap can't do anything. I was thinking, perhaps, I could call on her landlord and give him a pink eye. But I suppose that wouldn't do any real good!"

"Not to him, anyway," said Raby. "It is a shame, really. How do you know about it?"

"I was down in Coombe before dinner," explained Tommy Dodd. "I met one of the nippers there, and asked the kid how they were getting on. And little Franky told me. It's a shame. Of course, people have to pay rent for their houses; that's all right. But it's a rotten case, because old Grubb, the landlord, is a rich man. He's got lots of cof. He could afford to let it go!"

"And he won't?"

"No, he won't! He ought to. Poor old Wickers lost his life, and I don't see why old Grubb can't lose his money. That would make it fair all round. But——but——"

"Well, what's going to happen?"

"Bailliffs!" grunted Tommy.

"Oh!"

The Fistical Four looked very serious now.

They had a very dim and far-away idea of the mysterious processes of the law, but they knew there was some pro-

cess by which a tenant's goods and chattels could be seized if the rent was not paid, and that the bailiff and the bailiff's man were the instruments thereof.

"Poor woman!" said Newcome softly.

"I—I say, how much is it?" asked Raby. "If a chap could help——"

"I don't know how much, but it's pounds and pounds," said Tommy Dodd. "I was trying to think it out, but—but I've only got twopence——"

"If we had time——" began Jimmy Silver.

Tommy shook his head.

"It's got to be paid by two-thirty this afternoon—that's the last chance," he said.

"My hat! It's two now!"

"And if it isn't paid, the bailiff takes possession of the place," said Tommy. "Puts a man in, you know. Old Shingle is the bailiff—crusty old beast! I remember his slanging me last winter because I knocked his hat off with a snowball—awfully crusty old beggar! I jolly well wish now it had knocked his head off. Fancy poor little Mrs. Wickers with a man in possession—a boozy bounder mooching around the house. And the poor little woman with two nippers—and her husband buried in India. Oh, it's too bad! It makes me feel ill!"

And Tommy Dodd gave a loud snort, expressive of a variety of feelings.

"If there was time——" said Lovell.

"But there isn't!"

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"This is too jolly rotten!" he exclaimed. "It's got to be stopped!"

"Got any tin?" asked Tommy.

"About five bob——"

"Then you can't do anything, any more than I can!"

"My dear chap, consider the difference in intellect!" said Jimmy Silver reprovingly.

"Fathead!"

"It's up to us, somehow," said Jimmy Silver. "We haven't any money to speak of, certainly, but—"

"It's money that's wanted, ass!"

"But something's going to be done!" said Jimmy Silver firmly.

"Poor Mrs. Wickers is going to be done, and you're a silly ass, Jimmy Silver!" grunted Tommy Dodd, and he walked away, evidently in a very depressed frame of mind.

CHAPTER 30.

Up to Uncle James!

JIMMY SILVER wrinkled his brows.

His chums looked at him silently.

The Classical quartette were all deeply interested in poor Mrs. Wickers' misfortune, and they would gladly have done anything they could to help. But certainly they were not in a position to help in a financial way.

Given time, they could possibly have raised the required money somewhere, somehow, and they would have spared no effort to do so. But there was no time.

The heavy hand was about to fall upon Mrs. Wickers' little home.

But Lovell and Raby and Newcome watched Jimmy Silver's thoughtful face with a faint hope. They had great faith in "Uncle James," of Rookwood. Often and often Jimmy Silver had risen to a difficult occasion when nobody else could see a way out.

But this time it really looked as if Uncle James was powerless.

"It's rotten!" said Lovell, breaking the silence at last. "It was Mrs. Wickers that Mornington took some quids to last week, you know, when the fellows thought he was blowin' his cash at the Bird-in-Hand. It came out through Tubby Muffin watchin' him. I suppose he just helped her to tide over for a time. But the chopper's coming down now, and no mistake. We can't do anything, Jimmy."

Jimmy made a gesture.

"I'm thinking," he said.

"Well, what about?"

The junior captain of Rookwood drew a deep breath.

"It's up to us!" he said.

"But what—"

"You chaps know anything about the law?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

"Blessed if I do, or want to!" he answered. "I only know it's something the lawyers live on, to save the trouble of working. What—"

"Well, I don't know much about it," admitted Jimmy Silver; "but I've heard about cases like this before—read 'em in the papers. Now, if Mrs. Wickers had time to pay, we could rally round, and see her through—somehow. The question is, to gain time."

"But that's the point. There isn't any time," said Lovell. "The man will be in possession in half an hour!"

"He won't!" said Jimmy.

"What'll stop him, then?"

"Us!"

"Us!" echoed Jimmy Silver's chums.

"Little us!" agreed Jimmy.

"Well, if giving the bailiff a thick ear will do any good, I'm your man!" said Arthur Edward Lovell at once. "I could knock out old Shingle. I've seen him often enough, and I know I could. But would that stop him?"

"No, ass! And you'd be landed in chokey for assault and battery! Don't you know the law has to be respected in this country?" demanded Jimmy severely.

"Oh, blow the law!"

"Why, you're a blessed Bolshevik!" exclaimed Jimmy indignantly. "The law's all right. There's always two sides to a question, and the law takes notice of both sides. Now, I tell you I've read about these things. It's the law for Shingle to put his man into Mrs. Wickers' house till the rent is paid or the goods and chattels sold. But it's also the law that Mrs. Wickers can keep him out if she likes!"

"My hat! Is it really?"

"Certainly!"

"Then what the thump's the good of the law if it can be walked round like that?"

"Well, lawyers must live!" said Jimmy tolerantly. "Anyhow, what we've got to deal with is the matter as it stands. If Mrs. Wickers don't let the bailiff in he can't get in, can he?"

"Couldn't he bust the door?"

"No; that's against the law!"

"Well, my word!" said Lovell, in amazement. "He can walk in if the door's not locked, but if it is locked he mustn't bust it!"

"Exactly!"

"Well, the chap who said the law was an ass knew what he was talking about!"

"Never mind that; that's the law! To shove a way into the house they have to get an order or an injunction, or something, from some old johnny in a wig, and that takes time. Everything connected with the law takes time; that's the beauty of it. There's no hustle about the law. Now do you see?" asked Jimmy Silver. "If the bailiffs are kept out, that gains the time we want, and, somehow or another, the old hunks can be paid."

"But—but little Mrs. Wickers couldn't stand a siege in her house!" ejaculated Raby. "The bailiff would be mooching round all the time, looking for a chance to dodge in if the door was opened."

"Then it must not be opened."

"But Mrs. Wickers couldn't. The poor little soul hasn't the nerve——"

"Probably not; but we have. The end study is famous for its nerves!" said Jimmy Silver calmly.

"We—we—— But we——" stuttered Newcome.

"We're going to be the garrison," said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Dash it all, old Wickers stood up for us on the Frontier!" said Jimmy Silver warmly. "It's up to us to stand up for his little home and his widow!"

"That's all right; but can we——"

"We can, and we're going to! Come and get the bikes!"

"But—but——"

"No time for 'buts,' old chap. You can understudy a billy goat another time, when it's not so pressing. Get a move on!"

And, without waiting for further discussion, Jimmy Silver started for the bike-shed at a run.

His chums blinked at one another.

"Well, of all the stunts!" ejaculated Lovell.

"I fancy we're going to look for about the biggest scrape we ever landed into!" observed Raby.

Lovell grinned.

"Well, let's go and look for it!" he said. "Anyhow, Jimmy's going, so we've got to go, too. Come on!"

And the Co. ran after their leader.

In a very short time the Fistical Four were wheeling their bicycles out of the gates.

Tubby Muffin of the Classical Fourth met them in the gateway, and planted his fat person in the way.

"You fellows going out for a spin this afternoon?" Tubby inquired.

"Yes. Jump away!"

"Hold on, Jimmy! I've nothing special to do this afternoon."

"We have. Clear!"

"I'll spend the half-holiday with you chaps, if you like," said Tubby Muffin generously. "You can take me up on your bike behind, Jimmy."

"My bike doesn't carry cargo by the ton!"

"I know a place where we can get some tarts," said Tubby. "I'll show you where. I'm rather short of money to-day, but you chaps——"

"Will you get out of the way?" roared Lovell.

"But I was just saying—— Yaroooop!"

Two or three front wheels collided with Tubby Muffin's fat legs at once.

Tubby gave a roar, and sat down.

"Yaroooh! Why, you rotters! Ooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you wheel your beastly bikes over my trousers, you rotters! Why, you awful cads! Oh, crikey!"

Tubby Muffin sat, looking rather dusty, after the Fistical Four had passed, and shook a fat fist after them. Unheeding the fat Classical, Jimmy Silver & Co. mounted their machines, and started for Coombe, and the pedals fairly flew.

CHAPTER 31.

Rookwooders to the Rescue!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. put on a speed in Coombe Lane that was almost reckless, but their excuse was that they were, so to speak, riding to the rescue.

In a very brief space of time they were in the old-fashioned High Street of Coombe, and there they had to slacken a little. They turned from the High Street into Water Lane, a straggling street that led down towards the river.

Water Lane was not a wealthy quarter. Little detached cottages stood in little, trim gardens, poor, but neat and clean and homely. Half-way down the street a crowd was gathered outside poor Mrs. Wickers' cottage. The news that the "broker's man" was coming had spread, and neighbours had gathered round, to express sympathy and indignation, or to look on and talk. Lovell uttered an exclamation, as he made a gesture towards a fat man, who was marching along towards the cottage on the pavement.

"That's old Shingle!" he said.

The rescuers were only just in time.

Mr. Shingle, the balliff, was a stout and rather important gentleman, with a red face and thick side-whiskers. He walked with his fat chin well up, perhaps from a consciousness of his own importance, or perhaps to give room for his double chin to expand over his collar.

Behind him, a shabby man, with a hungry face, was shambling humbly.

This, evidently, was Mr. Shingle's factotum, the "man" whom he put in possession when hapless tenants did not pay their rent.

Mr. Shingle did not deign to walk with his "man." He kept ahead, and affected to be ignorant of the "man's" existence.

Jimmy Silver & Co. passed the pair on the way and shot ahead, reaching Mrs. Wickers' cottage a good distance ahead of them.

The crowd cleared back a little as the four bikes came buzzing on, and the juniors jumped down at the garden gate.

There was a Rookwood fellow coming down the street—Rawson of the Fourth—and Jimmy Silver called to him.

"Hallo! What's the row here?" asked Rawson, crossing over.

"Take our bikes, old chap, will you?" said Jimmy Silver hurriedly. "We may be staying here. I'll explain later. Do us a good turn!"

"Certainly!" said Rawson, very much surprised, but willing to oblige.

He took the four bikes in charge, and the Fistical Four entered the garden.

"You stand at the gate a bit, Lovell," murmured Jimmy. "If those cads come up before we're ready, keep 'em back somehow!"

"What-ho!" said Arthur Edward, clenching his fists.

"You're not to hit them, you ass! That's against the law!"

"Look here, I'm not a dashed lawyer!" growled Arthur Edward. "How am I to know what's against the law and what isn't? What's the matter with hitting Shingle in the eye?"

"Ass! You come in with me, then!" said Jimmy, catching Lovell by the arm. "Raby, you stay at the gate, and keep them in talk somehow. Give us time to get ready for the cads!"

"Leave it to me!" said Raby.

George Raby stationed himself at the gate, and the other three ran up to the house. Master Franky's chubby face

was glued to a front-window pane, and he ran to open the door.

Mrs. Wickers came down the little hall—or, rather, passage—as the juniors entered.

The poor widow's face was pale, and wet with tears.

"Oh, Master Silver!" she exclaimed.

"We know all about it, ma'am," said Jimmy Silver, taking off his cap. "We've come to help."

"Oh, but—but——"

"Mr. Shingle is just down the street. I'm expecting him every minute," faltered the widow. "It is terrible! My poor little home and the children——" Mrs. Wickers' tears flowed afresh. "What can I do? I could pay my way, with the pension and the garden and the sewing, only it's what I owe for so long! It was because little Alice was ill, and the money went then. But, of course, you young gentlemen wouldn't understand about that."

"We jolly well do understand," said Jimmy Silver, "and we're going to see you through, Mrs. Wickers!"

The widow shook her head.

"But I mean it!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"We're going to raise the tin somehow—you take my word for that!"

"But I—I couldn't—I couldn't let you!"

"Yes, you could, and you're going to," answered Jimmy. "That's all right! But we've got to get the time to do it. See, Mrs. Wickers? You're not going to let those men in. See?"

Mrs. Wickers started.

"But they'll come in!" she said.

"They can't, if you keep them out. They have to start another process or something. It's the law," explained Jimmy.

"If—if you're sure it's the law, Master Silver——"

"Quite sure."

"Well, I suppose you know, up at the big school," said poor Mrs. Wickers.

Jimmy Silver suppressed a smile. Valuable as a knowledge of the law undoubtedly was, that was not a subject

included in the curriculum at Rookwood. But Jimmy was willing to let it go at that. He was sure of his ground, and it was necessary to reassure the widow.

"Will you leave it to us, ma'am?" he asked. "We will see you through. We know just what those bounders can do, and what they can't do. You can rely on us!"

"I'm sure I trust your judgment, Master Silver, and it's very kind of you! But what can we do?"

"Fasten all the doors and windows, and tell them to go and eat coke!" answered Jimmy promptly.

Mrs. Wickers smiled through her tears.

She was not likely to tell Mr. Shingle and his man to go and eat coke, but she was ready to carry out the rest of Jimmy's instructions.

"We'll help!" said Newcome. "You'll allow us, ma'am?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Anything you think best!"

"Good!"

The little cottage contained only four rooms and a passage, and it was not a lengthy task to secure the doors and windows. There were only two doors, one back and one front. Newcome ran to the back door, and locked and bolted it. Lovell fastened the windows of the sitting-room and kitchen. Jimmy Silver remained at the front door, ready.

"Right!" called out Newcome.

"All serene!"—from Lovell.

Jimmy shouted to Raby at the gate:

"This way, Raby!"

From the gate there was a sound of voices in dispute. Mr. Shingle and his factotum were there.

CHAPTER 32.

No Admittance!

GEORGE RABY had his foot against the gate. There was no lock on it, only a latch, and it could not be fastened.

Mr. Shingle laid a fat and heavy hand on the gate to open it. As Raby's boot was in the way, naturally it did not open.

Mr. Shingle frowned at the Rookwood junior.

"Are you holding the gate, boy?" he exclaimed.

"Not at all, old top!"

"You have your foot against it!" exclaimed Mr. Shingle.

"Well, that isn't holding it, is it?" asked Raby, with a sweet smile at the bailiff.

"Open t' gate at once!"

"My dear man, I'm not a gate-opener!"

"Let me pass in!" shouted Mr. Shingle angrily.

Raby cast a glance behind at the house. He was there to keep the bailiff and his man back until Jimmy Silver had made the preparations for a siege.

"The question is, who are you, and what do you want?" he said. "I'm doing the lodge-keeper stunt at present for Mrs. Wickers, and I can't let in suspicious characters!"

There was a giggle from the crowd in the road, and Mr. Shingle's fat face became purple.

"Mrs. Wickers knows perfectly well who I am, and what I have come for!" he snorted. "I am here to put a man in possession for the rent!"

"Got any credentials to show?" inquired Raby.

"I shall not show them to you, boy!"

"I am afraid I can't let you pass until I'm sure about you!" said Raby, still with his foot planted against the gate, keeping it shut. "You may be a burglar, for all I know!"

"Boy!" roared Mr. Shingle.

"Man!" replied Raby.

"Will you release that gate at once?" thundered Mr. Shingle.

"Otherwise I shall box your ears!"

"Look out for your waistcoat if you

do!" retorted Raby undauntedly. "I shall biff you on the watch-chain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the road.

Mr. Shingle glared at Raby, but certainly he could not box the Rookwood junior's ears without exposing his ample waistcoat to attack. So he refrained. He grasped the gate with both hands and shoved. Raby kept his foot jammed to it, close to the ground, and the gate did not move.

"Smunk!" roared Mr. Shingle.

His man came up.

"Yes, sir!"

"Push this gate open, Smunk, you fool! What do I pay you for?"

Smunk grasped the gate in his turn, and the bailiff and his man shoved together. It was at that moment that Jimmy Silver's call came from the house.

"This way, Raby!"

It was only just in time, for the pressure without was too strong for the junior. Raby made a sudden jump back and ran for the house.

Mr. Shingle and his man were pressing with full force on the gate when Raby jumped away from it. It flew wide open with startling suddenness, and the two men sprawled headlong upon the gravel path inside.

Crash!

Bump!

"Yooooooooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the delighted crowd in the roadway.

While Mr. Shingle and his man were sprawling, Raby reached the house, and ran inside. Jimmy Silver slammed the door, locked and bolted it, and put the chain on.

"Done 'em!" gasped Raby.

"Good man!" chuckled Jimmy Silver.

He looked through the keyhole.

Mr. Shingle and Smunk had staggered to their feet, very red and breathless and gravelly. The bailiff was relieving his feelings by "slanging" the hapless Smunk. He talked to Smunk with great emphasis for

several minutes, while the crowd outside chortled. At length, however, Mr. Shingle came back to the business in hand, and walked up the garden path to the house, Smunk following at his heels like a bullied dog.

Rap, rap, rap!

Mr. Shingle gave three terrific knocks at the door, which could have been heard as far as the High Street.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Mrs. Wickers.

She made a movement as if to open the door, overawed by the truculent Shingle, and the unknown and mysterious powers of the law that he was supposed to wield.

But Jimmy Silver interposed.

"Leave him to us, ma'am!"

"If—if you're sure, Master Silver—" faltered Mrs. Wickers.

"Quite sure, ma'am!"

"Very well, Master Silver," said the widow resignedly.

Rap, rap, rap!

"Will you let me in, Mrs. Wickers?" thundered the bailiff, in a voice that rang through the little cottage from end to end.

There were startled gasps from Alice and Franky, and Alice began to cry. Mrs. Wickers trembled, but Jimmy Silver did not falter. It required more than a loud and bullying voice to disturb the serenity of "Uncle James" of Rookwood.

"Hallo! Who's that?" he inquired through the keyhole.

"Open the door!"

"Is that Shingle?"

"Yes!" roared the bailiff.

"Then you can go and eat coke!"

"What?"

"Coke!"

"Why, you—you—what—who——" spluttered Mr. Shingle. "I demand admittance to this house at once!"

"Rats!"

"Smunk!" howled Mr. Shingle.

"Sir!"

"Don't stand there staring like a fool! Go round and get in at the back door, and open this door for me."

"Yessir!"

Smunk went round the cottage. There was a chuckle from the Fistical Four inside, as they heard Smunk, trying over the back door. He came back to his master in a few minutes.

"It won't open, sir!"

"What?"

"It's locked inside, I think, sir!"

"Fool! Find an open window, then!"

The hapless Smunk went round the house again. But he came back after a fruitless quest.

"All the winders seem to be fastened inside, sir!"

Mr. Shingle gave a snort. He was growing intensely exasperated. He was a busy man, and this was wasting his time. He had other homes to break up, and he felt indignant at being delayed in carrying out that happy task.

He rapped fiercely on the door again.

"Mrs. Wickers, if you do not admit me at once you will take the consequences!" he thundered.

"Oh, dear!" gasped the widow.

"All right, ma'am; he's only blowing off gas!" said Jimmy Silver reassuringly. "There aren't any consequences."

"Will you let me in immediately—immediately?" raved Mr. Shingle.

"Not this week, old top!" answered Jimmy Silver through the keyhole.

"I give you one minute!" thundered Mr. Shingle. "If the door is not opened in one minute I will have it broken in. Smunk, get an axe!"

"Yessir!"

There was a wail from little Alice and a sob from Mrs. Wickers.

"Oh, Master Silver, if they're going to break in——"

"Only spoof, ma'am!" answered Jimmy Silver. "He dare not do it. Even bailiffs have to obey the law." And Jimmy called through the keyhole: "Mr. Shingle, if you do any damage to this door you will be held

responsible. You'll be prosecuted, you rotter! Understand?"

There was a furious snort from Mr. Shingle. He was quite aware that he dared not carry out his threat—at least, if there was anybody in the place who was acquainted with the law on the subject. With poor people, ignorant of the law, Mr. Shingle sometimes took chances, but he was aware that it would not pay him to take chances now.

The minute elapsed, but there was no attack on the door; neither had Mr. Smunk fetched an axe.

Outside, in the little wooden porch, Mr. Shingle fumed and snorted. He was quite at a loss.

"Smunk!" he rapped out at last.

"Yessir!"

"Stay here. Enter the house as soon as the door is opened, and do not leave it again!"

"Yessir!"

And Mr. Shingle whirled round and strode away, still snorting with fury; and his fat form disappeared up the street, followed by a loud and prolonged hiss from the crowd of on-lookers. The faithful Smunk remained on guard, sucking at a tobaccoless pipe in the porch.

CHAPTER 33.

Besieged!

"VICTORY!" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Hurrah!"

"He—he is gone!" exclaimed Mrs. Wickers breathlessly.

"He's gone, mum!" howled Master Franky, from the front window. "I see him go. He's mizzled, mum!"

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" said the widow.

"Of course he's gone!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Nothing for him to do here. He's left his man, but it won't hurt you if the man stands in the porch for a bit, will it?"

"Not at all!" smiled Mrs. Wickers.

"We'll stay on, if you don't mind," said Jimmy. "They may come back and try some dodges. It's a half-holiday at Rookwood to-day. Mind, after we're gone you're not to open door or window. They can't do anything so long as you keep them shut out. They've got to get some authority from some old donkey in a court somewhere. I don't know how many days it takes, but it's a good many. Before the time's up we'll manage to square the rent with Mr. Grubb."

"Oh, sir!"

"You won't be able to go out and do any shopping," said Jimmy. "But that's all right. We'll do some shopping for you."

"But—but I—"

"This is our treat, Mrs. Wickers!" said Jimmy Silver firmly. "You're to give me a list of things you want, and we'll get them—grub and so on. Shell out, you chaps!"

"Oh, rather!"

Jimmy Silver held out his cap, and the chums of Rookwood "whacked" in contributions as far as their limited financial resources allowed. Fifteen shillings reposed in the cap. It was all they had.

"But—but I can't allow——" gasped Mrs. Wickers.

"Stuff!" said Jimmy. "Ain't we in charge of this fort, holding it against the enemy? You're only a member of the garrison, Mrs. Wickers. You place the matter in my hands just as if I were your father, you know."

Mrs. Wickers laughed. She could not help it.

However, Jimmy Silver had his way, and Mrs. Wickers, having made up the list required, it was handed to Lovell, who was to do the shopping.

"Now, we mustn't let Smunk get in while you're getting out, old top!" said Jimmy. "You get out of the back door, and Raby's to bolt it immediately you're outside. I'll talk to the Smunk-bird through the keyhole here, and keep him busy."

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy Silver looked through the key-hole of the front door.

Mr. Smunk was shifting from one leg to the other, apparently growing tired already.

"Hallo, old man!" said Jimmy. "Do you want to come in?"

"Yes!" growled Smunk.

"Getting tired of waiting?"

"'Ang you!"

"My hat! You're more likely to be hanged than I am," said Jimmy Silver. "Why can't you show your face like an honest man, instead of coming here with a mask on?"

"Eh? Wotcher mean? I ain't got a mask on!"

"What? Isn't that a Guy Fawkes mask you're wearing?" asked Jimmy Silver, in surprise.

"You—you—you young rip!" roared Mr. Smunk, greatly enraged at having his features mistaken for a Guy Fawkes mask.

"My mistake!" said Jimmy Silver. "Natural mistake, under the circs, Mr. Smunk—don't you think so?"

"I wish I 'ad 'old of your hear!" was Mr. Smunk's reply.

"Hard lines on you, waiting here like this, Smunky! What will they do without you at the pub?"

"My eye! I'll—I'll——" Words failed Mr. Smunk, and he began to kick furiously at the door by way of expressing his feelings.

"Go it, old bird!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly.

Mr. Smunk went it.

He was thus engaged when Arthur Edward Lovell came round the cottage from the back, grinned at him, and passed on to the gate. Mr. Smunk stopped kicking the door, and stared after him. He realised that the back door must have been opened, and he rushed round the house.

But the back door was closed and bolted; and at the kitchen window Raby kissed his hand to the enraged bailiff's man.

Mr. Smunk shook his fist in response, and retired to the front porch again, in a very surly temper. The bailiff's man was not enjoying his afternoon.

Mrs. Wickers made tea, and Jimmy Silver & Co. started a game with Alice and Franky to keep up their spirits. Newcome displayed a keen and well-sustained interest in Alice's doll, and did not seem to tire of seeing it open and shut its eyes—indeed, he displayed wonder and delight every time Alice made the doll move its optics—and Alice was quite happy.

Franky rode about on Jimmy Silver's shoulders in a state of great delight, oblivious of bailiffs and men in possession. There was quite a happy family in the cottage when Lovell returned with a bag crammed with provender of various kinds.

Mr. Smunk blinked at Lovell with beery eyes as the junior came up the garden path.

He understood that the Rookwooder had brought provisions for the siege, and he grinned at him evilly.

"So you're a-going in agin, are you?" he said. "Well, when you goes in, in I goes, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, young feller-me-lad!"

"Thanks, I don't smoke," said Lovell politely.

"You jest look out!" said Mr. Smunk.

"I'm here, Jimmy!" called out Lovell.

"I know you are, old top!" called back Jimmy. "I could hear your fairy footsteps a mile off!"

"Fathead!"

"Got the provender?"

"Yes, here it is; but this bat-eyed blighter says he's coming in when I do!"

"You jest watch!" sneered Mr. Smunk.

Jimmy Silver had expected this emergency, and he was ready for it.

"Bring it round to the kitchen window, Lovell," he called out.

"Right you are!"

Mr. Smunk followed Lovell round to the kitchen window with a very vengeful expression on his face. Jimmy Silver's face appeared at the little window. Behind him was Raby, with a garden-broom in his hands. Mr. Smunk had a rather dubious expression as he looked through the glass and saw that broom.

Jimmy opened the lower sash of the little window as Lovell put the crammed bag on the sill. He caught the bag and drew it in, and at the same moment Mr. Smunk pushed Lovell roughly aside, and shoved his head and shoulders in at the window after the bag.

"Now, then!" he said triumphantly.

The little window was just about large enough for Mr. Smunk to crawl in through—if he was not stopped.

But he was stopped!

Jimmy Silver dragged down the sash again, and Mr. Smunk's triumphant remark was cut short, and turned into a howl of anguish, as the sash caught him on the back of the neck.

"Yoooooop!"

The expression on Mr. Smunk's face was extraordinary as he stood pinned, with his head inside, his body outside, and the sash jammed on the back of his neck.

"Leggo!" he howled.

"Not a bit of it!" answered Jimmy Silver cheerily. "I'm holding this sash for the present."

"You're a-breaking of my neck!" wailed Mr. Smunk.

"Yes? Is it of any value?"

"Why, you—you—you——"

"I dare say we could screw the window like this," remarked Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "Would you mind, Smunk?"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Let me give him a omer on the napper with this broom!" said Raby.

"He's nicely placed. He won't want more than one!"

"Yoop! You keep that broom away!" shrieked Mr. Smunk. "I'll 'ave you up for 'sault and battery! Yooooop!"

"Better fasten him in as he is!" said Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell, outside. "Shall I spank him?"

"Yow-ow-ow! You keep off!" yelled Mr. Smunk, kicking out wildly behind.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'll tell you what!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'll push up the sash again, and you knock his head out with that broom, Raby. Catch him fairly on the boko with it, and he'll go, I think!"

"Leave it to me!"

"Yow-ow-ow—'elp!"

"Ready?"

"Go it!" answered Raby.

Jimmy Silver pushed up the sash again. Raby was brandishing the broom, and Mr. Smunk did not wait for his head to be knocked out—as Jimmy fully expected he wouldn't! He withdrew it quickly.

Slam! went the window again, and Jimmy fastened it, grinning through the panes at the infuriated Mr. Smunk.

Mr. Smunk shook an enraged fist at him. He came very near smashing the glass in his wrath, but he did not venture to go that length.

"Well, am I coming in?" called out Lovell, as Mr. Smunk stood rubbing his neck and muttering.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"No need, old chap. You get home, and ask Rawson for the bikes, and bring them as far as the corner, and wait for us there. We're coming out at dusk, you know. These rotters aren't allowed to act after dark—that's the giddy law!"

"Well, that's rather a sensible law!" remarked Lovell. "I'm off, then!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell walked away whistling.

Mr. Smunk eyed the juniors grin-

ning at the window, with feelings too deep for words. As Lovell was not going in again, after all, Mr. Smunk's chance of getting in along with him had vanished. Jimmy Silver kissed his hand to the enraged bailiff's man and smiled sweetly. Mr. Smunk scowled and tramped round to the front of the house again to resume his vigil in the porch.

CHAPTER 24.

The Victor!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were very cheery that afternoon—it was a rather unusual and rather exciting way of passing a half-holiday, and they had the pleasant consciousness that they were doing good. Little Alice and Franky forgot all their troubles in the merry company of the Rookwood juniors, and even poor Mrs. Wickers brightened up and smiled. Jimmy Silver's method of dealing with the difficult situation had astounded the poor woman; but his success was very encouraging, and the widow had the firmest faith in "Uncle James," of Rookwood.

During the afternoon Mr. Shingle reappeared, and made some excited remarks when he found his man still outside the house—like a very shabby and beery Peri at the gate of Paradise.

"Haven't you got in yet, you fool?" inquired Mr. Shingle.

"I ain't 'ad a chance, guv'nor!"

"What do I pay you for?" roared Mr. Shingle.

Smunk did not answer that question. He asked another.

"Ow am I to get any grub, sir? I'm 'ungry."

"You have to get into the house. The tenant has to keep the bailiff's man while in possession. You've been in enough houses to know that, you idiot!"

"But I can't get in, can I?" wailed the hapless Mr. Smunk.

"That's your business. You should get in."

"Am I to stay 'ere without nothing to heat?" demanded Mr. Smunk, showing signs of rebellion. Even the worm will turn; and undoubtedly Mr. Smunk was a worm.

Mr. Shingle snorted.

"You ought to have got in, somehow. I don't pay you to loaf around in front gardens admiring the landscape. Get in, and they have to feed you."

"But I can't get in!" howled Mr. Smunk. "There's a gang of young rips in the 'ouse, a-keeping of me hout!"

"That's your look-out! Get in, somehow!"

And Mr. Shingle stalked away in great dudgeon.

Mr. Smunk groaned.

He had to keep up his vigil till dark; and he was hungry, and more thirsty than he was hungry. He thought of the tap-room at the Black Boy, and groaned again. Then he shook a dirty fist at a grinning face that looked from a window, and settled down to his vigil.

After dark, he would have to retire—as the bailiff's delightful occupation cannot be carried on after sunset—but it was not dark yet. But Mr. Smunk was aware that the schoolboys would have to get away before dark, and he still hoped to dodge in when they dodged out. Once inside, he was a fixture. The poor widow would have to provide for his wants, and Mr. Smunk meant to be very exacting as a compensation for the troubles of the afternoon.

But he was not inside yet.

Jimmy Silver was thinking over the question of retreat, as the dusk began to fall over Coombe.

At the end of the street Lovell was waiting with the bicycles for the garrison of the cottage to return to Rookwood. The Co. had to join him without letting Mr. Smunk into the house.

"You'll remember, Mrs. Wickers, to keep doors and windows fastened all day to-morrow," said Jimmy Silver. "After dark they can't do anything, so you'll be all right when we're gone. To-morrow we're going to raise the wind somehow to see you clear, but until we've done that, you've got to keep those rosters outside. You catch on?"

The widow smiled faintly.

"Yes, Master Silver, I'm leaving it to you. I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't trouble," answered Jimmy. "We'll chance it about call-over for once, and not leave till it's quite dark. And we'll manage all right about that beery old bird outside. You're to bolt the door after us, you know!"

"Yes, yes!"

"And if they give you any trouble after dark, you'll only have to go to the police station, but they won't dare do that; they know too much about the law!"

Jimmy looked from the window.

It was growing dark now, but Mr. Smunk's weary form could still be seen shifting from one tired leg to the other and back again.

Mr. Smunk ceased to be a blot upon the landscape, however, as the darkness deepened.

But he was still there!

"Now, we've got to be jolly careful, you chaps," said Jimmy, in a low voice. "Strictly speaking, the man can't enter when we open the door, as it's after sunset, but, as a matter of fact, he would rush in and make out afterwards that it wasn't quite dark if he was tackled over it. We've got to see that he doesn't."

"You bet!" assented Raby.

"He's waiting there—ready to rush," said Jimmy. "If we get the back door open, he may nip round in time before it's closed again. We'll go out by the front door."

"But then——"

"And we'll do the rushing," said

Jimmy coolly. "If we rush into Smunk and bowl him over, that's his look out; he shouldn't be in the way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If he falls down, and we fall on him, we needn't be in a hurry to get up; there's no law about that. And Mrs. Wickers will have time to bolt the door after us."

"Good egg!"

And so it was arranged.

Jimmy Silver withdrew the bolt on the front door, and he heard a heavy breathing outside, which showed that Mr. Smunk had heard the sound, and was close at hand and on the alert.

Then he rattled the chain off.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Wickers!" he murmured. "We're going. You'll remember to fasten the door at once."

"Yes, yes, Master Silver."

"And don't let anybody in on any account."

"No, no."

"I'll run down on my bike to-morrow, and see how you're getting on, and to see if you want anything. Keep your pecker up, you know."

"I will remember, my dear—dear boy," said the widow.

"Good-night, then! Now, ready, you chaps?"

Jimmy Silver turned back the key, and threw open the door; and in an instant, the three juniors rushed out in a bunch.

Mr. Smunk had his foot on the doorstep, his hand outstretched.

Crash!

The collision was terrific.

But three bodies are heavier than one. Mr. Smunk went staggering blindly back from the shock.

He landed on his back in the porch, and the three juniors of Rookwood sprawled over him.

The door closed.

From the hapless Mr. Smunk, sprawling breathlessly under three Rookwood juniors, there proceeded a series of remarkable sounds. The three juniors seemed, to him, to have

at least half a dozen knees and elbows apiece, and all that formidable number of knees and elbows seemed to be jabbing into Mr. Smunk at once.

It was no wonder he roared.

"Hallo! We've run into something," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "I've fallen over something——"

"So have I!" chuckled Raby.

"There's something wriggling under my elbow," said Newcome.

"Get your elbow out of my eye, you 'orrid young willian!" shrieked the suffering Mr. Smunk.

"Why, it's Smunk!"

"Dear me!" said Jimmy Silver. "Is that you, Smunk?"

"Which you know it is!" raved Mr. Smunk. "I'll 'ave the lor on yer! 'Sault and battery, that's wot it is! Yarocogh!"

"My dear man, how could you expect us to see you in the dark?" remonstrated Jimmy Silver. "You must have been in the way. Are you hurt?"

"Yurrggghh!"

The key had turned in the lock, and the bolt was shot. Jimmy Silver picked himself up.

"Come on, you chaps," he said.

He walked down to the gate, followed by his chuckling chums.

But Mr. Smunk did not rise so soon. There was no breath left in his beery carcase, and he remained sprawling on the ground for several minutes. When he picked himself up, he bestowed a final kick on the door, by way of a parting benediction, and limped away. The siege of the cottage had ended for that day.

Jimmy Silver & Co. sauntered along Water Lane, to the corner of the High Street, where they found Lovell with the bicycles.

"Oh, here you are!" yawned Arthur Edward. "You've kept me waiting a jolly long time."

"All serene! He also serves who only stands and waits, you know."

"Bow-wow! We shall be jolly late for calling over!"

"Never mind; keep smiling."

And the Fistical Four rode home cheerily to Rookwood. Roll-call had long been over; and the four had to present themselves in Mr. Bootles' study to explain. Needless to say, they did not mention that they had been doing garrison duty in a besieged cottage. They expressed meek regret for being late; and Mr. Bootles gave them a hundred lines each and dismissed them.

Prep in the end study was rather neglected that evening. Jimmy Silver & Co. had something more important than prep to think of—how to "raise the wind" and see the widow of Coombe through her troubles. And "Uncle James" of Rookwood set his active wits very seriously to work on that subject.

CHAPTER 35.

A Very Important Meeting!

"YOU let me in!"

Tubby Muffin's voice was loud and indignant.

The fat Classical was standing at the door of the box-room, and thumping on it with a fat fist.

The box-room was at the end of the Fourth Form passage, which was deserted, save for Reginald Muffin. The buzz of voices in the room showed that a good many of the Classical Fourth were assembled there.

And the door was locked.

Naturally, Tubby Muffin was wrathful and indignant. He was locked out of the box-room, and the only conclusion he could possibly come to was that a spread was going on, from which he was to be excluded. And the bare thought of being excluded from a spread threw Reginald Muffin into a state of the deepest indignation.

Thump, thump!

"Jimmy Silver! Lovell! I say, old chaps! You rotters! Let me in!"

Thump! Bang!

"Cut off, you bothering barrel!"

came the wrathful voice of Arthur Edward Lovell from within the box-room. "Buzz!"

"Shan't!" retorted Tubby Muffin, emboldened by the fact that there was a solid oaken door between himself and Arthur Edward.

"I'll come out to you!" roared Lovell.

"You let me in! Jimmy Silver—I say, Jimmy——"

"Clear off, Tubby!"

"You let me in!"

"It's not a feed, you fat chump!" called out Jimmy Silver. "It's a discussion."

"You can't pull my leg, Jimmy!"

"Why, you—you——"

"You let me in, anyhow," said Tubby. "I've a right in the box-room, I suppose. In—in fact, I want to look for some—some banknotes I left in my box by mistake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a howl of merriment from the box-room. Tubby Muffin's statement did not find any believers there.

"Thump! Kick!"

"Look here, I'm coming in!" shouted Tubby.

"Better let the fat duffer in," murmured Raby. "If this row goes on we shall have some of the Moderns nosing round."

"Bless him!" growled Jimmy Silver.

The key turned in the lock, and the door opened. Tubby Muffin grinned with satisfaction. He was admitted to the secret conclave at last. But his grin vanished the next moment, and he roared. The mode of his admittance was not to his taste, for Arthur Edward Lovell reached out, grasped him by the hair, and jerked him headlong inside. Then Jimmy Silver closed and locked the door again.

"Yooop!" roared Tubby. "Yah! Leggo my hair! Oh, my hat! Yoooop!"

"Well, you wanted to come in," re-

marked Lovell. He released Tubby's hair, and sniffed at his hand. "I forgot the fat beast uses hair-oil. Grooogh! You fat porpoise——"

"Look here, do you call it pally to leave a chap out of a feed?" demanded Muffin reproachfully. "I'm surprised at you, Jimmy Silver!"

"Fathead! There isn't any feed."

Tubby Muffin blinked round the box-room.

There were more than a dozen juniors present, seated on boxes or trunks, all of them belonging to the Classical Fourth. But there was certainly no sign of a feed. The fat Classical's face fell.

"What the thump are you doing here, if there isn't any feed going on?" demanded Tubby, with an injured expression.

"It's a discussion of ways and means, fathead!" answered Jimmy Silver, "and it's got to be kept dark, or the Moderns will be chipping in. See? That's why you were left out, because you're such a chatty chatterbox. See?"

"If you think I can't keep a secret, Jimmy——"

"Well, if you don't keep this one you'll be scalped!" growled Lovell. "Shut up, now, and let's get on with the washing."

"But, I say——"

"Kick him whenever he opens his mouth," said Mornington.

"Good egg!"

"Yah!" growled Tubby Muffin.

The fat Classical dodged Lovell's boot, and sat down on a trunk. He was disappointed and indignant. There was no feed, evidently, and to Tubby there were only two pleasures in life—enjoying a feed, or anticipating one to come. But now he was in the box-room curiosity kept him there. He wanted to know all about it. He always did.

"Now," said Jimmy Silver, resuming the remarks which had been interrupted by the fat Muffin. "it's

settled that we, the Classics, take up this stunt and see it through."

"Hear, hear!"

"No good letting the Moderns into it. Tommy Dodd & Co. wouldn't be any use."

"Hardly!"

"Besides, they can come in as audience, when the concert comes off," said Jimmy Silver. "They'll have to pay for admission, of course."

"What-ho!"

"Now, some of you fellows know how the matter stands," said Jimmy, "some of you don't. I'll explain in a few words—"

"The fewer the better," remarked Putty of the Fourth, with a nod of full agreement.

"Dry up, Grace! You all know Mrs. Wickers, who does sewing for the Head's wife—a nice little body," said Jimmy Silver. "She's a widow, you know, and does not live on the fat of the land on her magnificent pension. One of the nippers was ill, and Mrs. Wickers let the rent run—I suppose she couldn't help it. Landlord comes down, demands payment, which isn't forthcoming, and shoves in a bailiff—"

"Shame!"

"Rotten!"

"Yes, it's a rotten shame!" said Jimmy Silver. "Old Grubb is a hard nut to crack. But that's where Rookwood comes in. We went along, and chipped in, kept the bailiffs out, and we've left Mrs. Wickers full instructions for keeping the enemy at bay."

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Mornington.

"As the matter stands, Mrs. Wickers will be besieged in her cottage every day by the bailiff Shingle and his man Smunk," said Jimmy Silver. "That's only to gain time, of course. The rent's got to be paid. I've got the particulars, and it comes to six pounds up to date. I've persuaded Mrs. Wickers to leave the matter to us. The poor soul doesn't know which way to turn, and it's up to us to see her through. The

question is, where is six pounds coming from?"

"Echo answers, where?" remarked Putty.

"It doesn't. I've got a stunt for raising the wind. We're going to give a concert in the Form-room, charging for admission. We've got lots of talent. We charge a bob a time, two bob for reserved seats, five bob for special seats for masters and prefects—"

"Great pip!"

"Fellows will come, and pay, for the good of the cause, you know."

"I suppose they wouldn't have any other reason," assented Putty.

"And to see the show, of course," said Jimmy Silver, frowning. "Don't you be funny, Putty. Funny merchants are liable to get sat upon. Now, we want the concert to be a success—"

"Hear, hear!"

"We can get plenty of talent in the Classical Fourth—"

"Yes, rather!"

"And we don't want any assistance from the Moderns—"

"No fear!"

"It's important to keep this from Tommy Dodd's crowd. You see, it was Tommy Dodd who found out that Mrs. Wickers was in such a scrape after Morny here had helped her once. Tommy couldn't think of anything, of course," said Jimmy Silver. "All the thinking that's done in the Fourth Form at Rookwood is done on the Classical side. We took the matter up, and the enemy's being kept out of Mrs. Wickers' house—all us! So the Modern bounders ain't entitled to take a hand. They can come in as audience on the day of the concert, if they like; but that's all. We'll post up an announcement at the last minute. This is entirely a Classical stunt. If the Moderns knew, they'd come chipping in—they might even try to get up a rival show. Of course, it would be a failure—"

"Hear, hear!"

"The thing's in our hands, however, and it's got to stay there. Now, if all

you fellows are agreed, we'll set to work making up a programme."

"Passed unanimously," said Lovell. "I'll do a tenor solo myself."

"I say, the audience pay at the door, I suppose?" asked Putty.

"Oh, yes!"

"Good! It will be necessary to make sure of the money in advance, if Lovell is going to sing a tenor solo."

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got an idea, Jimmy!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin. "I don't mind doing a turn for you."

"But we mind!" grinned Newcome.

"But I've got a jolly good wheeze," said Tubby Muffin eagerly. "I'll give a recitation as Hamlet——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Better make it Falstaff."

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Recitations are off," said Jimmy Silver, laughing, "and you'd better be off, too, Tubby. You're dead in this act, you know."

Tubby Muffin rose from the trunk with a sniff.

"You're a lot of asses!" he said.

"You're leaving out your best man—just as you do in the footer. I'm afraid your concert is going to be a failure, Jimmy. No, you needn't ask me now," said Muffin, with great dignity, holding up a fat hand as Jimmy Silver opened his lips. "I'm not going to give you a turn now. You've refused. You can ask me on your bended knees, and I shall decline to appear on your silly stage at all."

"Look here, Tubby——"

"No good, I tell you," interrupted Tubby. "I simply decline to appear."

"You silly ass!" howled Jimmy Silver. "I——"

"That's enough!" said Tubby loftily.

"You can muck up the concert your own way, and I shall simply laugh at you. Yah!"

And with that crushing observation. Tubby Muffin rolled out of the box-room. He paused in the doorway to

blink back and discharge a Parthian shot.

"I wash my hands of the whole matter!" he said, with an air of finality.

"Well, it's about time you washed them!" remarked Putty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" snorted Tubby Muffin. It was the most crushing retort he could think of. And he rolled out and slammed the door.

And Jimmy & Co. proceeded to put their heads together over the programme of the Classical concert, quite undismayed by the fact that Reginald Muffin had washed his hands of the whole matter.

CHAPTER 26.

Keeping the Secret!

TOMMY DODD looked suspicious.

It was the following morning, and Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth, had come upon Jimmy Silver & Co. in the quadrangle.

The Fistical Four were standing in a group, in very deep and earnest discussion, as the Modern junior came along. But at sight of Tommy Dodd they ceased speaking very suddenly.

Tommy Dodd looked at them.

"Well, what's up?" he demanded.

"Up?" repeated Jimmy Silver vaguely.

"Yes. You Classical duffers were confabbing about something, and you shut up mighty sharp when I came along," said Tommy Dodd suspiciously. "Dumb all of a sudden?"

"Well, old chap, your merry features are liable to produce that effect on anybody," argued Jimmy Silver. "Be reasonable, you know."

"Br-r-r!" grunted Tommy Dodd.

And he walked on, still looking suspicious.

"All serene," said Jimmy Silver. "The Modern bounder doesn't guess. I don't see how he could, without being a merry magician. Hallo, Tubby! Pining for your dinner?"

Tubby Muffin rolled up to the Fistical

Four, with a very serious expression on his fat face. Muffin looked as if he had been doing some thinking. He blinked solemnly at the Classical quartette.

"I say, Jimmy, I was just thinking that I'd like a snack before dinner," said Reginald Muffin seriously.

"And dinner's in twenty minutes!" snorted Lovell. "You'll burst your crop one of these days!"

"Well, I'm hungry! I say, Sergeant Kettle has some lovely little cakes at sevenpence each——"

"Well, roll away, and blow your sevenpence!"

"But I haven't got sevenpence," explained Tubby Muffin.

"Well, roll away, anyhow!"

Tubby Muffin did not move. It looked as if he had business with the Fistical Four, though they could not guess what it was.

"Sevenpence isn't much!" he remarked. "I suppose you could lend me sevenpence, Jimmy?"

"I'll lend you a thick ear, if you like," answered the captain of the Fourth.

"I said sevenpence." An aggressive note crept into Tubby Muffin's voice, which made the Classical four stare at him. "I said sevenpence, and I mean sevenpence."

"Money's tight," explained Jimmy Silver. "We had to spend some yesterday on Mrs. Wickers' account. There isn't more than a bob left in the whole firm. So roll away, and be quiet."

"A bob would do, of course."

"What he really wants is a good, hard kick," said Lovell. "We want to keep in form for footer. Let's begin on Tubby. I'll take the first kick, and see how far I can land him."

"Go it!" said Lovell's chums.

Tubby Muffin jumped back. He had no desire whatever to figure as a footer.

"Yaroooh! You keep off!" he roared.

"Where will you have it?" demanded Lovell.

"The sevenpence?"

"No, you ass—the kick!"

"Oh, all right," said Tubby Muffin, backing away again. "I dare say Tommy Dodd will lend me sevenpence if I ask him. I dare say he'll be interested in something I can tell him. Yah!"

And Tubby Muffin rolled away.

The Fistical Four stood transfixed for a moment or two, staring after Reginald Muffin. They understood now the note of truculence in the fat Classical's manner.

"Why, the—the—the fat traitor!" howled Lovell.

He made a rush after Tubby, and grasped him by the collar and spun him round. There was a terrific roar from Tubby.

"Yooop! Leggo!"

"You fat rotter——"

"Yow-ow! I was only j-j-joking!" gasped Tubby. "Of course, I wasn't going to tell Tommy Dodd anything about this concert——"

"Shurrup!" muttered Jimmy Silver, as Cook and Doyle, of the Modern Fourth, came along the path under the beeches.

Cook and Doyle glanced at the Classics.

"Phwat's that about a concert, bedad?" exclaimed Tommy Doyle.

Jimmy Silver did not reply.

The Fistical Four grasped Reginald Muffin together, and marched him away, wriggling and gasping through the archway into Little Quad, and there they jammed him up against a stone wall, spluttering.

"Grooooh!"

"You fat rascal!" said Jimmy Silver. "You've jolly nearly given the game away already. I've a jolly good mind——"

"Ow! Leggo! I—yaroooh!—I say, leggo, you know! I won't say a word if you stand me the sevenpence!"

"What?" roared Jimmy Silver.

"I—I mean I won't say a word any way!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "I—I

suppose you know I'm an honourable chap."

"There's honourable chaps like you in chokey!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Let's bump him! If we burst him, so much the better."

"Help!"

"Hallo, what the thump's the row about?" demanded three voices at once, as Tommy Dodd, Cook, and Doyle came through the archway. The three Tommies were evidently interested.

Jimmy Silver & Co. released the spluttering Tubby.

"N-n-nothing!" stammered Lovell. "You Modern bounders mind your own bizney!"

"Can't allow bullying on the Classical side!" said Tommy Dodd, shaking his head seriously.

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

"It's all right, Dodd," said Tubby Muffin. "Only fun, you know. These fellows are really going to lend me sevenpence—ain't you, you fellows?"

The Pistical Four looked at Tubby.

Tubby's eyelid quivered in a fat wink. He held out a podgy hand.

"I'm waiting, old chaps!" he said.

The three Moderns were looking on curiously. Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath. The unscrupulous Tubby held the whip-hand. Slowly—very slowly—Jimmy Silver slid his hand into his pocket, and extracted therefrom a sixpence and a penny.

"Thanks, old fellow!" said Tubby Muffin affably.

And the fat Classical scudded through the archway, heading for Sergeant Kettle's little tuckshop—where he was quickly enjoying the sevenpenny cake, as an appetiser before dinner.

CHAPTER 37.

Tubby Muffin Makes a Discovery:

"THE important thing is, to keep it dark!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Faith, and ye're right, Tommy, darling!"

It was tea-time in Tommy Dodd's study, in Mr. Manders' House, on the Modern side of Rookwood.

The three Tommies were discussing fried kippers and tea, and also still more important matters. And Tommy Dodd's chums fully agreed with their leader that it was very important to keep it dark.

"So far," continued Tommy Dodd, "I suppose a chap must admit that those Classical bounders have played up rather well. I found out what was the matter at Mrs. Wickers'; but—but I admit I didn't get on to anything to be done to help. Of course, it was sheer cheek of those Classical duffers to hike along there and keep the bailiffs out. But—but they did it."

"Sure, they did it!" assented Doyle. "Faith, and I wish I'd been with them intirely."

"Still, that only gains time," said Tommy Dodd. "Poor old Mrs. Wickers can't stand a siege for long. I've been down there on my bike to-day, and the bailiff's man, Smunk, was sitting on the front gate, watching for a chance to dodge into the house if the door was opened."

"Rotten!"

"Old Grubb has got to be paid his rent," said Tommy Dodd, "and it comes to six pounds. I don't deny that the Classical chumps have done a good turn for Mrs. Wickers so far; but they've only gained time. The chief thing is to pay the bill, and see the poor lady clear."

"Yes, rather!" said Cook. "But —"

"If we do that, we score, and no mistake about it," said Tommy Dodd. "It's the chief thing, and it's up to us. Those Classicals are all very well for a row with a bailiff, but that's their limit. Now, there's no reason at all why our concert shouldn't be a success."

"Hear, hear! Pass the kippers!"

"It's a stunning idea, though I say it myself," said Tommy Dodd modestly,

"To be quite candid, I don't say that the chaps would pay two bob a time simply to see us give a concert. But it's the cause that will do it—the good cause, you know. We shall have a notice up that it's for the benefit of a soldier's widow, and that will do the trick. Rookwood's patriotic. The fellows will roll up."

"Sure to!" said Cook. "I say, these kippers are good."

"Oh, bother the kippers! But it's understood, from the beginning, that it's a Modern concert," said Tommy Dodd impressively. "That's important. We can't have the Classics bragging that they did the business. We do the whole thing; but you know what rotters they are—they'd think nothing of starting a rival concert to give us the kybosh. Not that it would be any good, of course."

Tommy Dodd paused; not, like Brutus for a reply, but to tackle his kipper, which was getting cold. But he was soon going strong again.

"We can give a good concert. Putting up a play would take time—rehearsals, and all that. But we can give a concert on our heads. I will sing the Toreador song from 'Carmen'—"

"You will!" ejaculated Doyle.

"Certainly; why not?" asked Dodd, rather warmly.

"But—but will the fellows stand it?" asked Doyle thoughtfully.

Tommy Dodd gave his chum a withering look.

"If you're going to be a funny idiot, Tommy Doyle, you may as well shut up at once. Is this a serious discussion, or is it a time for idiotic jokes?"

"Well, sure, I thought it was a serious discussion, till you said you would sing the Toreador song from 'Carmen'—"

"Look here——" began Tommy Dodd wrathfully.

He stopped suddenly, and fixed his eyes on the door. With a rather grim look, he rose quietly from his chair, stepped quietly to the door, and threw it suddenly open.

There was a startled gasp outside.

The fat face and plump figure of Tubby Muffin, of the Classical Fourth, were revealed by the sudden opening of the door. Tubby was in a bending position—and it was pretty evident that his fat ear had been very near the keyhole.

"You fat rotter!" roared Tommy Dodd. "Listening, by Jove! I thought I heard a grunt like a pig!"

"I—I wasn't!" stuttered Tubby, in great alarm. "I—I was simply bending down to—to—to look for a—a pin I'd dropped—I—I never heard a word, and—and I don't know anything about you rotters—I mean you fellows—giving a concert. I—I never heard a word, and I think you'd sing the Toreador song rippingly, old chap!"

"Howly Moses! It's all out now!" groaned Doyle.

Tommy Dodd grasped the fat Classical by the collar and dragged him into the study. Tubby Muffin had apparently come there on a visit to the three Tommies; but he seemed very reluctant to enter their quarters now. He felt a good deal like Daniel entering the lion's den. But he had no choice about the matter, with Dodd's grasp upon him.

The Modern junior kicked the door shut, still grasping Tubby's collar. He looked a rather alarmed Tubby.

The hapless Peeping Tom of Rookwood grinned feebly round at the three Moderns, as if seeking to propitiate them.

"I—I—I'm going to keep it dark," he murmured. "I haven't heard a word, you know—not a single word, and I won't repeat it. Honour bright, you know!"

"Scalp him!" growled Tommy Cook.

"I—I say——"

"I'll bet the fat beast has been listening before," said Tommy Dodd. "You know those Classical chumps were mumbling something about a concert in the quad to-day——"

"I haven't!" howled Tubby Muffin.

"And I didn't listen now. I was simply stooping to look for a sovereign I'd dropped——"

"A what?"

"I—I mean a currency note, of course——"

Tubby Muffin wriggled painfully in the Modern junior's grasp.

"What did you come here for, you fat rotter?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

"Because it was tea-time—I—I mean, because you—you fellows are such good company, you know. I—I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind singing the Toreador song from 'Carmen,' old chap——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Serve him right if you did, Tommy!" remarked Doyle.

"You silly ass!" howled Tommy Dodd. "Look here, Doyle, you Irish idiot——"

"I say, I'll stop and have tea with you, if you like," said Tubby Muffin. "You leggo my collar, Tommy Dodd."

"I'm going to smash you——"

"You'd better not, if you don't want me to tell Jimmy Silver about the Modern concert!" grinned Tubby Muffin, recovering courage a little. "As a pal, I'm willing to keep it dark. But——"

Tommy Dodd released the fat Classical's collar.

"Will you keep it dark, you fat rotter?" he asked dubiously.

"Of course, if you treat me decently. I heard it quite by accident, while I was stooping down to look for a half-crown I'd dropped. Of course, an honourable chap wouldn't repeat what he heard by accident—not if he was treated decently, I mean," added Tubby Muffin hastily. "Did you say you wanted me to stay to tea?"

Tommy Dodd did not answer. He was a prey to very mixed feelings. His strong inclination was to seize the happy Tubby and dust the study with him. But it was only too clear that if he did so, the secret would be out, as soon as Muffin escaped from Mr.

Manders' House. The question was, whether the secret could be kept by making terms with Reginald Muffin. And that came to a question of feeding him.

Tubby dropped into Tommy Dodd's chair at the table, grinning affably at the company. He had quite recovered his assurance now.

In fact, he was congratulating himself. He did not intend to breathe a word respecting the Classical concert. Being in possession of the secrets of both sides, Reginald Muffin looked forward to quite a happy time till the rival concerts came off. Keeping the secret for two parties was quite a paying proposition, and the happy Tubby already looked upon himself as a pig in clover.

Tommy Dodd, after an inward struggle, sat down quietly.

His chums looked at him, and he looked at his chums. And there was silence.

But Tubby Muffin did enough talking for three.

Tubby was in a very cheery mood. He cleared the tea-table in great style and volunteered his services to look into the cupboard and see if there was any more. There was more, and Tubby industriously handed it out—all of it. And he did not rise from the table till the last crumb had vanished.

Then Reginald Muffin looked round him, like Alexander, for fresh worlds to conquer. But there was nothing left, and Reginald took his leave.

"Ta-ta, you fellows," he said, with a cheery wink. "Rely on me, you know. I'll drop in to supper if you like."

"Oh, do!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Have it a bit early, will you? I'm going to have supper with Jimmy Silver, as it happens, and I don't want to be late."

"Oh! Ah! All right!"

And Tubby Muffin, with a friendly nod, rolled out of the study. The three Tommies sat in silence for some moments after he had disappeared.

"Well——" said Tommy Dodd at last.

"Faith, and how I kept me hands off the baste I don't know!" said Tommy Doyle.

"We—we—we've got to toe the line till after the concert!" said Tommy Dodd. "But when it's over I—I—I'll burst him!"

Tubby Muffin strolled away from Mr. Manders' House, feeling quite satisfied—unconscious of a dreadful fate which was hanging over his head.

CHAPTER 38.

Great Preparations!

"FRIDAY EVENING AT 7!
A GRAND CLASSICAL CONCERT
will be given in the Fourth Form-
room by the Classical Players.

SPLENDID PROGRAMME!

The concert will be given for the benefit of a soldier's widow in Coombe, and all patriots at Rookwood are expected to

RALLY ROUND!

Treasurer: J Silver.

NO EXPENSES! All takings will go to the FUND!"

"There, I think that sounds all right!" said Jimmy Silver, with considerable satisfaction.

"Ripping!" agreed Lovell. "But, I say, to-morrow night's rather soon, isn't it?"

"The sooner the better. We can't leave Mrs. Wickers besieged in her house over the week-end," said Jimmy. "We've got to raise the wind, and take the money down to old Grubb and pay the rent. After all, we don't need a lot of rehearsals."

"Well, I don't," agreed Lovell thoughtfully. "I can turn on my tenor solo at a moment's notice. But the other fellows—"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"That's all right; I've had a lot of offers, and I've only got to draw up the programme," he said. "If the thing isn't exactly classical, it really doesn't

matter—the great object is to raise the wind. I—"

"Jimmy, old chap—" came a fat voice in the doorway of the end study.

The captain of the Fourth looked round with a frowning brow. Tubby Muffin had been to supper in the end study—after supper with Tommy Dodd—and the delights of his society had palled upon the Fistical Four. But those delights were not easily to be got rid of.

"Well, you cormorant?" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"I say, a chap's asked me for the half-crown I owe him," said Tubby.

"Pay him, then!"

"I haven't got a half-crown."

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard through his nose. His hand strayed towards a ruler.

Tubby Muffin watched him warily. The path of an amateur blackmailer was beset with perils—though Tubby was quite unaware that he was a blackmailer. He simply considered that he was "on" to a good thing, which it behoved him to make the best of. He was not given to deep reflection. If he had been, he might have reflected upon what was likely to follow, on both sides of Rookwood, once the concert was over.

"I've told you I'm stony, you fat worm!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"Awfully sorry for you, old chap; I know what it's like."

"Well, cut off!"

"Raby had a remittance to-day," remarked Tubby Muffin casually.

"And Raby's keeping it in his trousers'-pocket," remarked the owner of that name grimly.

"Oh, all right! I dare say Tommy Dodd will lend me a half-crown, if I ask him! Don't you worry."

Raby looked at his chums. Tubby Muffin gave them all a lofty blink, and turned away.

"Here's—here's your half-crown!" said George Raby, in a suppressed voice.

"Thanks, old chap—sure you can spare it?" asked Tubby genially.

"Oh, get out!"

"If you can't be civil, Raby——"

"Get out!" roared Lovell.

And as Lovell was starting towards him with the ruler, Reginald Muffin decided to get out—especially as he had annexed the half-crown.

"I—I—I'll burst him, after the concert!" breathed Lovell, little guessing that Tommy Dodd, on the Modern Side, had the same feecious intentions for the same reasons.

"Must keep the fat beast's mouth shut till after the concert to-morrow, though," said Jimmy Silver. "Then you can burst him as soon as you like. We'll get on with the programme."

"Have you asked Mr. Bootles——"

"Yes, that's all right. We can have the Form-room at seven, and Mr. Bootles has given us his best wishes."

"Has he given you the price of a ticket?"

"Well, no! Still, we've got the Form-room. And we'll sell plenty of tickets. We start canvassing to-morrow."

And the Fistical Four bent their heads over the task of drawing up the concert programme; somewhat to the detriment of prep that evening.

Little as they guessed it, another programme was being drawn up in Tommy Dodd's study, over in Mr. Manders' House. The three Tommies were very busy upon it, after prep—prep having been finished rather hastily on this occasion.

"Must get all the arrangements through this evening," Tommy Dodd remarked. "There won't be much time for practice—but every fellow must do his best, that's all. We've got to put the thing through on Friday, so as to get Mrs. Wickers' rent paid on Saturday. Can't leave her in that uncomfortable state over the week-end."

"Faith, and ye're right," said Tommy Doyle.

"I went to the Head about the room," continued Tommy Doyle. "The

Head was very kind when I explained that the concert was for the benefit of a soldier's widow, and we weren't keeping anything for expenses. I dare say he's heard of those giddy benefit concerts where the people who get 'em up keep nine-tenths of the takings for exes. He was really sympathetic, and though he said he couldn't be present, he took a two-shilling ticket. Rather brickish of him, what?"

"Good old Head!" said Tommy Cook approvingly.

"That's the first two bob," said Tommy Dodd, with satisfaction. "It'll be six pounds by to-morrow, you see! And we've got the Form-room from seven."

"Good!"

"The programme will be really topping—Toreador song from 'Carmen,' sung by Thomas Dodd——"

"Oh!"

"What did you say 'Oh!' for,

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Doyle?" asked Thomas Dodd in a dangerously calm tone.

"Ahem! Go on, old chap!"

"If you're going to say 'Oh,' I'm quite ready to give you something to say 'Oh' for, Doyle."

"Order!" murmured Tommy Cook.

"Let's get on with the washing. What am I down for, Tommy?"

"But if Doyle——"

"My dear chap, you can sing the Toreador song from 'Carmen' till you burst your crop," said Tommy Doyle. "I can't say fairer than that."

Tommy Dodd sniffed, and the painful subject was dropped. But the three Tommies were quite amicable again as they went on with the work of drawing up the Modern programme. They finished it to their satisfaction, about the same time that Jimmy Silver & Co. finished the Classical programme to their satisfaction.

So both parties were satisfied, which really does not often happen in this dissatisfied world.

CHAPTER 39.

A Little Surprise!

THERE were thoughtful faces in the Fourth Form at Rookwood the following day.

Quite a number of the juniors, both Classical and Modern, seemed to have plenty of food for thought.

That the extra thinking they were putting in was not on the subject of their lessons was pretty clear. Never had Mr. Bootles had such an absent-minded class, and never had lines fallen so thickly at Rookwood as they did in the Fourth Form-room that day.

Leaves in Vallombrosa were not in it, as Putty of the Fourth remarked, in comparison with the lines showered around by Mr. Bootles.

But everything comes to an end, and so did lessons on that great and important day. The juniors were relieved of Mr. Bootles at last, and he was relieved of them, and over tea there was

deep and earnest discussion in nearly every Fourth Form study, on both sides of Rookwood.

Tubby Muffin had kept both secrets so far, and nobody else on either side was likely to let it out. So the rivals of Rookwood were going ahead cheerily, preparing a great surprise for one another, and preparing different performances which were to take place at the same hour in the same spot, preparations which could scarcely fail to end in trouble.

That neither party had any suspicion of the other's intentions was natural enough, as both had permission to use the Form-room. Only Jimmy Silver had asked the Form-master for permission, while Tommy Dodd had applied to the Head. And neither gentleman had the remotest idea that the Form-room had been asked for by another party.

After tea Jimmy Silver & Co. were very busy.

Tickets, marked with various prices, had been written out on impot paper, and scissored into neat little squares. Lovell took a bundle to the Sixth-Form passage, for the prefects to purchase, while Raby canvassed the Fifth with another bundle. Newcome, with a third stack, started operations with the Shell and the fags.

Jimmy Silver was left in the study cutting up a fresh sheaf of tickets, with which he intended to visit Mr. Manders' House. Now that it was too late for Tommy Dodd & Co. to devise any rival stunt they were to be apprised of the benefit concert, and politely invited to attend as audience!

That was Jimmy's intention, but his intentions were never carried out. For he had not yet finished cutting the tickets when there was a tap at the door of the end study, and Tommy Dodd came in.

Tommy Dodd nodded smilingly to the captain of the Fourth.

"Busy, old scout?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, rather! In fact——"

"Well, I won't detain you. I've simply brought something for you to look at," explained Tommy Dodd. "Read it over, old man! Tickets can be had in advance, in my study, two bob each."

"Tickets!"

"Yes; otherwise you pay at the doors, you know."

"The—the doors!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"Exactly!"

Tommy Dodd threw a sheet of impot paper on the table, and walked out of the study, still smiling.

Jimmy Silver mechanically picked up the sheet.

And he read:

**"IMPORTANT NOTICE!
GRAND MODERN CONCERT**

will be given in the Fourth Form-room this evening, at seven o'clock precisely. The most talented artists on the Modern Side of Rookwood have consented to appear.

THIS GRAND CONCERT is given for the benefit of a soldier's widow in Coombe, and no expenses will be deducted from the takings. Roll up in your thousands!

PATRONISED BY THE HEAD!"

The programme followed; but Jimmy Silver did not read the programme. He was not interested in the Modern programme. He stood rooted to the floor, staring. He was still staring at it when Lovell and Raby and Newcome came back into the study.

"Hallo! What's up?" inquired Lovell.

Without a word Jimmy Silver held up the paper. His chums fairly blinked at it.

"Mud-Mud-Modern concert!" bawled Lovell. "Oh, my hat! Then—then they knew, after all!"

"That fat villain!" roared Raby.

"Tubby, of course!"

"Why, I'll—I'll—we'll——"

"But we've got the Form-room!"

howled Lovell. "They can't give a concert in our Form-room. Bootles gave us permission——"

"Patronised by the Head! Does that mean he's gone to the Head?"

"It's Tubby—that awful rascal, Tubby!" Lovell spluttered with rage.

"Why, I—I—I'll——"

"Hallo, Jimmy!"

It was the mellifluous voice of Reginald Muffin at the door. Lovell broke off, on the point of choking. Tubby Muffin was just the fellow he wanted to see at that moment.

Tubby came smilingly into the study.

As the concert hour was now close at hand Tubby considered it judicious to reap a last harvest, before it was too late. But, as a matter of fact, it was too late.

"Well?" said Jimmy Silver, with a deadly look at the fat Classical.

"Could you stand me five bob, Jimmy?"

"Oh, is the price going up?" asked Jimmy sarcastically.

"I don't understand you," answered Tubby, with a great deal of dignity. "I am simply asking you for a small loan. If you can't lend me the tin I dare say Tommy Dodd can. Shall I ask him? I—— Oh! Ah! Wharrer marrer? What the—how the— Yaroooh!"

Arthur Edward Lovell's grasp was on the fat Classical.

Tubby Muffin was swept off his feet, and he came down on the study carpet with a mighty bump and a terrific roar.

"Scalp him!" yelled Raby.

"Bump him!"

"Scrag him!"

"Yaroooh! Help! Geroff! Fire! Oh, crikey!"

"You fat rotter!" roared Lovell. "So you gave us away to the Moderns, after all!"

"I—I didn't! I never! I wasn't—— Yooooop!"

"Roll him over!"

"Bang his napper!"

"Yoop! Help! Oh, crikey!" shrieked the unhappy Tubby. "Leave

off! Leggo I tell you I didn't—never—wasn't— Yaroooh!"

But the Fistical Four did not leave off till they were tired, which was not till after Reginald Muffin was tired. When they had given Tubby enough, or, perhaps, a little too much, the fat Classical went rolling out into the passage, with four pairs of boots behind him to help him on his way. Reginald Muffin was feeling as if he had been under several motor-cars in succession by the time he scrambled away and fled.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell breathlessly. "I'm feeling a little better now. But what the thump's going to be done, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows. He was feeling rather breathless, too, after his exertions on Tubby Muffin's account.

"We're going to be done, unless we're jolly sharp!" he said. "Never mind about selling any more tickets. We've got to get into the Form-room, or those Modern rotters will be collaring it over our heads!"

"My hat! Come on!" exclaimed Lovell, in alarm.

The Fistical Four raced down to the Form-room.

But the room was not empty.

There were six or seven Modern juniors there, and they were making preparations for the evening concert. Towle of the Modern Fourth grinned at the excited faces in the doorway.

"Too early!" he called out. "Concert begins at seven."

"Turn them out!" roared Lovell.

"Back up, Classics!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

Conroy and Van Ryn and Pons came running up, and then Mornington and Erroll, Rawson and Putty. It was quite a little army that rushed into the Form-room, led by Jimmy Silver.

They smote the Moderns hip and thigh, and bundled them out of the Form-room in a sprawling heap in the passage.

"We'll give you Modern concerts!" gasped Lovell, as the last Modern went whizzing. "You can come to the Classical concert, if you like—if you pay at the doors! Scat!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

The hapless Moderns "scattered"—there was no help for that. In a dusty crowd they fled to the Modern Side, to acquaint Tommy Dodd with the raid. And Jimmy Silver & Co., a little breathless, but victorious, continued the preparations started by the Moderns, transforming the Form-room into a concert-hall, ready for the performance of the Grand Classical Benefit Concert.

CHAPTER 40.

Disconcerted Concerts!

TOMMY DODD breathed wrath.

Achilles of old, in his hour of most destructive wrath, was "not a circumstance" to Tommy Dodd at that moment.

"Collared the Form-room," stut-tered Tommy, "when we had permission from the Head! Collared it—bagged it! Why, I—I—I'll—"

"It's a put-up job, you know!" gasped Towle. "They must have known of it long ago, because I saw one of them sticking up a bill on the door, with a programme all finished! They had it all ready!"

"Muffin!" yelled Cook. "Muffin gave us away, after all!"

Tommy Dodd clenched his fists.

The three Tommies had been making up for the concert, but all thought of that was thrown aside now.

"Come on!" shouted Tommy Dodd. "We'll see whether they'll bag our concert-hall! Call up the fellows! Every chap's got to roll up!"

"Yes, rather!"

In a very few minutes nearly every member of the Modern Fourth was speeding across to the School House on the warpath.

They came down the passage to the Fourth Form-room with a war-like whoop.

"Look out!" shouted Mornington, at the door. "The giddy enemy!"

"Back up!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

The Classics crowded to the doorway in defence of their quarters.

"Now, then, let us in, you Classical rotters—" began Doyle.

"Bow-wow!"

"The Head's given us permission to use this room for our concert!" howled Tommy Dodd.

"Mr. Bootles has given us permission!" retorted Jimmy Silver.

"But we got permission yesterday!" roared Tommy.

"So did we!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"And you've only bagged our wheeze, or tried to! You got it out of Tubby Muffin!"

"What!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "You mean you're bagging our stunt, and you got it out of Tubby Muffin!"

"Rats!"

"Will you give up this Form-room?" roared Tommy Dodd.

"No fear!"

"Then you'll be hoofed out!"

"Rats!"

"Nuff said!" shouted Doyle. "Go for the spalpeens!"

"Charge!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"Back up, Classics!"

The Moderns charged, but the Classics stood firm. The next moment there was a terrific combat in progress.

Tramp, tramp! Crash! Bump! Crash!

"Bless my soul! What—what—" It was Mr. Bootles' voice. The master of the Fourth came up with whisking gown, his eyes almost starting through his spectacles. "What—what—what is this unseemly disturbance about?"

A dozen voices were raised in explanation at once. Mr. Bootles put his fingers to his ears.

"Silence! You explain, Silver!"

Jimmy Silver explained with great heat, but he was soon interrupted by Tommy Dodd. Mr. Bootles listened in perplexity, but he had an idea how matters stood at last.

"My dear boys," said Mr. Bootles kindly, "you must join together to carry out this excellent scheme, and on that condition I will overlook this—this riot! Otherwise I shall forbid a concert to be held at all!"

"Oh!"

"Hem!"

"We—we'll do as—as you say, sir!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Sus—sus—certainly!" stammered Tommy Dodd.

"Very good!" said Mr. Bootles.

The concert was an hour late, and the programme was rather mixed, but it was a great success. Modern juniors crowded in to cheer the Modern performance; Classics came in droves to shout for the Classical. And between the two, the takings were very considerable.

After the concert Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd quite amicably counted the takings, which came to the sum of five pounds, nineteen shillings and sixpence. And the rivals of Rookwood tossed up who should add the final sixpence required.

And the next morning Mr. Bootles kindly gave both of them leave from lessons to cycle down to Coombe and call on Mr. Grubb with the money. On their way back they looked in at Mrs. Wickers' cottage. Mr. Smunk, the bailiff's man, was leaning on the gate, but he gave a snort of disgust and retired when Jimmy Silver flourished the landlord's receipt under his beery nose. And that receipt brought joy to the home of the widow of Coombe.

The widow's home had been rescued by the juniors of Rookwood, though they had been rival rescuers!

SCHOOLS IN REVOLT!

READERS of school stories have vivid remembrances of the way Greyfriars or St. Jim's have resorted to a barring-out when some big injustice has had to be fought. The same thing has happened in real life. The year 1889 stands out as the memorable date.

Schools On Strike!

Shorter hours, fewer lessons—that was the slogan of the strike movement. It was not a question of one school rising against tyranny or overdone enthusiasm for work on the part of some unpopular master. It was a carefully planned and organised affair among several schools, and the newspapers gave it much publicity.

School after school all over the country threw in its lot with the movement for easier times, but certainly there was no spirit of slacking in the manner in which the strike was carried through, and eventually the schools won the day.

In Revolt!

Winchester was not in the strike, but that famous school has had its share of rebellions. The biggest was in 1793. The others took place in 1803, 1818, and 1848.

The struggle in 1793 was serious. It started because of a refusal to allow fellows to listen to the band of the Bucks Militia in the Cathedral Close. It seemed a modest enough request.

The scholars put their grievance into first-rate Latin prose, and presented the document to the warden. The warden hardened his heart like Pharaoh of old. He would have no Bucks Militia music. The fellows of Winchester were stung by the contemptuous silence with which their protest was received.

The masters were bluntly informed by the boys that their services would not be needed. There would be nothing doing in school. Dr. Warton, the Head, bowed to this order, but Mr. Goddard, the warden, declined to submit. When Goddard turned up as usual, he was met with missiles and torrents of abuse. But he succeeded in gaining entrance to the school and escaping the rebels.

Stormy Scenes!

The boys then secured the porter's keys, burst into the School House, battered their way through rooms which had been hastily barricaded, and made for Goddard's headquarters. He raced for safety to the big dining-hall, and there, along with one of the fellows, he was imprisoned.

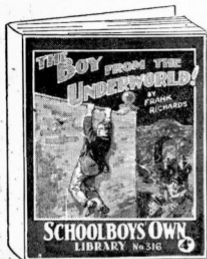
There were stormy scenes. The rebels had gone too far to recede. It was all or nothing.

The warden escaped from his prison in the dining-room and made a dash for the sheriff. He found that official, and once the powers of the law were invoked, it was bound to be all up with the rebels. Yet, though knowing what was coming, they did not give way.

There was a determined attempt to hold the school against the forces of law and order. Flagstones were dragged up from Chamber Court and hurled down from the outer gate. The defence was a stout one. It was so stout, indeed, that peace terms were discussed, and order was restored. But there was some hitch after the peace. Thirty-five of the boys were expelled.

Twenty-five years later there was another big row at Winchester. Prefects' privileges had been curtailed and the liberty of commoners encroached upon. The fellows rose against it to a man, and charged through the old city, a tumultuous, shouting, excited pack of enthusiasts all out for their rights and for liberty. They were met by a company of soldiers with fixed bayonets, and the rebels had to surrender!

TWO MORE TIP-TOP SCHOOL TALES TOO GOOD TO BE MISSED!

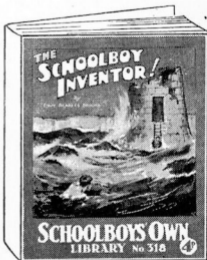


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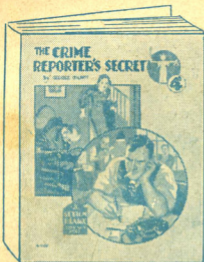
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