

# THE BOY WHO WALKED BY NIGHT!

By OWEN CONQUEST



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# THE BOY WHO WALKED BY NIGHT!



Under cover of darkness a mysterious unknown stalks through Rookwood School committing a series of lawless outrages and leaving no clue to his identity. Who is this mystery man? That's what JIMMY SILVER & Co. want to find out!

## CHAPTER 1.

### The Wrong Customer!

"KEEP quiet!" said Lovell.

That was Arthur Edward Lovell all over. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were not making a sound. They were still as mice.

It was necessary to be quiet, in the circumstances. Fellows could not be too quiet when they were waiting on a landing, with a paper bag of flour lodged on the head of a fellow expected from below. Especially when they were Fourth Form juniors, and the expected victim was a prefect of the Sixth Form.

Obviously, there would be trouble for the Fistical Four of Rookwood if Carthew of the Sixth discovered who

had dropped that bag of flour on his head.

So Arthur Edward warned his comrades to be quiet, heedless of the fact that they were still as mice, with the cat at hand.

Lovell held the flour bag. It was Lovell's stunt. He had arranged it all—planned it and schemed it. Lovell was the man for planning.

Mornington of the Classical Fourth had lines to do for Carthew. He had not done them. Carthew had doubled them and warned Morny that if they weren't handed in by three o'clock that afternoon he would come up for them, and bring his ashplant with him. Still Morny had not done them. He had got busy with those lines, but rather

too late. They were far from finished yet. And three o'clock had chimed out.

That was where Lovell came in.

Lovell declared, and his friends agreed, that if Carthew got that bag of flour bursting on his head as he came up the staircase, he would forget all about Morny for a bit, and give the chap time to get through.

Now there was a sound of a tread on the lower stairs. Any instant now the expected head might appear in the deep well of the staircase. Lovell was ready—peering over the banisters, ready to let fly. He was uneasy lest his friends should make a sound and warn Carthew. So he told them to be quiet.

"Dry up, you ass!" breathed Raby. "He'll hear you—"

"Quiet!" hissed Lovell.

Jimmy Silver made a movement forward to peer over the banisters. He wanted to be sure it was Carthew coming. "Uncle James" of Rookwood was a wary youth, and in such a case it was impossible to be too careful.

"Keep back!" said Lovell.

In his anxiety he forgot to lower his voice. Arthur Edward was always anxious lest some other fellow should put his foot in it. Generally, it was his own foot that went in.

"But—" whispered Jimmy.

Lovell jabbed him with an elbow.

"You fathead! Keep back! Do you want to warn him?"

Jimmy Silver breathed hard. It was no time for argument—that would have warned the fellow coming up.

"But look here," muttered Newcome, also making a forward movement.

Lovell jabbed him with his other elbow.

"Keep back!"

"Oh, you ass! Is—"

"If you fellows can't leave this to me—" breathed Lovell, with an indignant glare round at his comrades.

"But—"

"Shut up!"

Lovell turned back to the banister.

Already a head loomed in the well of the stairs below. Whiz! The bag flew.

Squash!

It burst!

"Got him!" gasped Lovell.

He had got him! The paper bag, smiting the head below, burst on that head, shedding flour in smothering clouds. A startled howl followed. Then a fall, and a gurgle.

Lovell backed from the banister.

"He's got it! Cut!" he gasped.

"Oooogh!" came a wild, gurgling howl up the stairs. "What—what—who—upon my word! Flour! What—what—who—"

Lovell stopped suddenly, as if rooted to the landing. He had expected to hear startled howls from Carthew of the Sixth. But it was not Carthew's voice that floated up the stairs. It was the voice of Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome gave a gasp of horror.

"That's Dicky!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Dicky Dalton!" breathed Raby. "Oh, you ass, Lovell!"

"You fathead!" hissed Newcome.

Jimmy Silver shot a hurried glance over the banister. He had a glimpse of Richard Dalton, M.A., sprawling on the stairs in a sea of flour. Then he jumped back.

"Cut, for goodness' sake!" he panted.

He grasped the petrified Lovell by the arm and dragged him away. The four juniors cut along the passage to the end study. They did the passage at about 50 m.p.h., bolted into the study, and shut the door.

Safe inside, they gazed at one another. Sounds could be heard from a distance—many footsteps and many voices. Fellows were gathering on the landing and the stairs to see what had happened. But Jimmy Silver & Co. did not think of joining them. They knew too much already.

Lovell was the first of the four to find his voice.

"You silly ass!" he exclaimed hotly.

"Wha-a-t!" gasped the three.

"If you hadn't jawed, and taken my attention off him, I should have seen that——"

"You—you—you——" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Another time," said Lovell, "leave it to me, and don't barge in with your silly jaw! Look what you've done now!"

"What we've done?" shrieked Newcome.

"Yes. Poor old Dicky's got the flour instead of that cad Carthew. You may think it funny to rag a decent man like Dicky. I don't!" said Lovell. "But you've done it now, and no mistake!"

"We—we—we've done it!" gurgled Raby.

"Yes; I only hope we shan't be spotted. It will mean a Head's whopping—banging a bag of flour on a beak. I really think you fellows might have had a little more sense. I must say that!"

Lovell's pals gazed at him. Words failed them. But that did not matter, for all three of them felt that it was a time for action, not for words.

As if moved by the same spring, they jumped at Arthur Edward Lovell, grabbed him, and up-ended him.

Bump!

Lovell smote the carpet in the end study with a smite that made the dust rise from it. He roared with wrath and indignation.

"Yoop! You silly asses! What the thump—— Leggo! I say—yaroop!"

"Give him another!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Bump!

"And another!" howled Raby.

Bump!

"And another!" yelled Newcome.

Jimmy Silver & Co. felt a little better. Lovell, not feeling a bit better, sprawled and spluttered. The door of

the end study suddenly opened, and the podgy face of Tubby Muffin looked in. Tubby was grinning.

"You fellows heard?" he gasped.

Jimmy Silver gave his chums a warning look.

"Heard what?" he asked casually.

"Anything happened?"

"Dicky Dalton!" gasped Tubby. "Somebody's buzzed a bag of flour at him on the stairs. He's smothered. Ha, ha, ha! Smothered from head to foot! Ha, ha, ha! Looks like a ghost! Ha, ha! Nobody knows who did it. I dare say it was Peele, or Gower—they're always up against Dicky. I say, you ought to have seen Dicky! He was a sight. Ha, ha!"

Lovell scrambled to his feet.

"You cheeky idiots! You silly idiots! I'll——"

"Oh, scissors!" howled Tubby. "You've got flour on your trousers, Lovell. How did you get flour on your bags? Ha, ha!"

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

"Keep it dark, Tubby, you ass!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

He slammed the door on the podgy nose of Cecil Adolphus Muffin. Tubby rolled away, gurgling with merriment. Lovell hurriedly sorted out a clothes brush and brushed spilt flour from his trousers. He glared indignantly at his comrades.

"You fellows might have tipped me that I was flouxy, instead of playing the giddy ox!" he snorted. "It's all right. We've only got to keep it dark."

"If Dicky bowls us out——" groaned Raby.

"He won't!" said Lovell.

They waited. In the circumstances they felt it wiser to remain in their own study, out of the public view, for a time. They waited anxiously—three of them, at all events. But Lovell was confident.

During the next half-hour he told his friends, several times, that it was all right. He was assuring them on that point once more when a tap came at

the door. It opened, and Timothy Tupper, the House page, looked in.

"If you please, you're wanted in Mr. Dalton's study," said Tupper.

"Oh!" said Lovell.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Not a Row!

**M**R. RICHARD DALTON—generally called "Dicky" in the Rookwood Fourth—sat in his study. His face was a little flushed, and his hair a little untidy. He looked as if he had been doing a lot of rubbing and scrubbing recently—as indeed he had. But his voice was as pleasant as usual as he called out "Come in!" to four members of the Classical Fourth who presented themselves at his study door.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came in very quietly. They had no doubt why they had been sent for, and they were very serious. Dicky was a good-tempered man—famous for his cheery good temper—but they did not expect him to take a lenient view of what had happened.

They were doubtful whether it was going to be a caning from Dicky, or a report to Dr. Chisholm and a flogging from the Head. Neither had any attractions for them; but one or the other was inevitable. Lovell, certainly, had told them, on the way to the study, that he was going to own up to Dicky that it was his stunt, and that he was the responsible party. To which his friends had only replied by requesting him to shut up.

They were all in the soup together; that was their view.

"Come in, my boys!" said Mr. Dalton. "You may shut the door, Silver. I have sent for you four boys, because——"

"Yes, sir; we know," said Lovell dispiritedly.

Mr. Dalton raised his eyebrows.

"I do not see how you can know,

Lovell, as I have not hitherto spoken to you on the subject. A short time ago I was coming up to speak to you in your study, but I was stopped by an extraordinary prank—an outrageous prank on the stairs——"

"We're awfully sorry, sir!" mumbled Lovell.

"I am glad to hear you say so, Lovell. I am afraid that a number of the boys regarded it as a joke," said Mr. Dalton. "It will prove far from a joke for the culprits. Silver——"

"It wasn't Silver, sir!" interposed Lovell.

"Eh? What was not Silver?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"I mean, it wasn't Jimmy who——"

Lovell broke off suddenly, staring at Jimmy, who was making an extraordinary face at him.

It had dawned on Jimmy, from Mr. Dalton's words and looks, that it was not in connection with the floury episode that the four juniors had been sent for. It was something else. It had dawned on Raby and Newcome also. But Arthur Edward Lovell was not so quick on the uptake. It was far from dawning on Arthur Edward.

The contortions on Jimmy's face were intended as a signal to Lovell to shut up. Lovell, not catching on, only stared at him. Mr. Dalton, following his startled glance, stared also.

"Silver, why are you making signs to Lovell?" he asked.

Jimmy crimsoned.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "I—I——"

"Please be serious!" said Mr. Dalton severely. "I have sent for you to speak about a serious matter."

"Not so serious as you think, sir!" said Lovell.

Mr. Dalton gazed at him. What Lovell meant was that it was not so serious as Dicky Dalton thought, because the flour had been meant for somebody else. But as Mr. Dalton was thinking about an entirely different matter, he was naturally astonished.

"Lovell, you had better be silent!" he rapped.

"What I mean is, sir——"

"Silver, you are making signs at Lovell again. If you cannot be serious in your Form-master's study——"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Jimmy.

"I will now tell you why I have sent for you, if Lovell will permit me to speak," said Mr. Dalton, with sarcasm.

"I want you to understand, sir, that I, and I alone, ought to have been sent for about this——"

"Upon my word! If you speak again, Lovell, I will cane you!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Silence! Now, Silver, I gather from what Lovell has said that you boys have heard something of the matter, though I do not know how. Are you already acquainted with Dudley Vane?"

"Dud-dud-dud-Dudley Vane?" stammered Lovell.

He wondered whether Mr. Dalton was wandering in his mind. Certainly, he seemed—to Lovell—to be wandering from the subject.

"That is the name of the new boy who is coming to-morrow," said Mr. Dalton. "If you are already acquainted with him, so much the better."

Lovell gasped. What had long ago dawned on his three chums, dawned, at long last, on Lovell's rather solid brain. Dalton was not talking about the flour!

"Did-did-did you send for us to speak about a new man in the Fourth, sir?" he stammered.

"I did, Lovell; and you will kindly be silent while I speak to Silver!" snapped Mr. Dalton.

"Oh, crikey!" murmured Lovell.

"I—I don't know the chap, sir!" stammered Jimmy. "I've never heard the name before. Is he coming into the Classical Fourth?"

"Yes, Silver, and I shall place him in your study," said Mr. Dalton.

"We've four already, sir," ventured Jimmy.

"Quite so; but it is a large study—the largest in the Fourth—and I have a particular reason for desiring to place this boy Vane with you. You are cap-

tain of the Form, Silver, and, from my observation of you, worthy of the position——"

"Thank you, sir!" murmured Jimmy.

This was very nice, of course, though it hardly consoled the captain of the Fourth for having a new fellow "banged" into a study where there were already four.

"You are a thoughtful and responsible boy, Silver," went on Mr. Dalton kindly. "I can trust you to be kind and considerate towards the new boy—who may need it. I can trust your friends also. Raby and Newcome are sensible lads—and Lovell, though foolish and unthinking, has, I am sure, a kind heart."

Lovell blinked. He had always respected Dicky; but this was rather too thick. Foolish and unthinking! What could have put such an opinion into Dicky's head Lovell really did not know.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome looked rather dismayed. What sort of a freak was this new fellow going to be that Dicky was so coolly landing on them? Obviously, he was something out of the usual run of new boys for Dicky to reel off all this jaw about him. They were kind-hearted fellows enough, always ready to help a lame dog over a stile. But really and truly they did not want a queer fish in the end study.

Mr. Dalton smiled faintly. It was not so very long since he had been a schoolboy himself; and he could read the schoolboy mind.

"What's wrong with the chap, sir?" ventured Raby.

"Nothing at all, Raby. But he has been ill," explained Mr. Dalton. "He would have come to Rookwood at the beginning of the term, but was unfortunately suffering from the effects of an accident to a 'plane, which crashed while he was travelling in it. I understand that his nervous system was somewhat affected, which was very natural. He has, however, recovered his health and is coming to the school to-morrow. But——"

Mr. Dalton paused a moment; and Jimmy Silver & Co. looked as dutifully willing to oblige as they could.

"But," added Mr. Dalton, "after so trying an experience—after some months spent in a nursing-home—the boy may need to be treated with some little consideration—some little kindness. I think I can trust you, Silver, to see to that."

"Oh, quite, sir!" murmured Jimmy. "I suppose you mean that the kid may be a bit nervy, and that sort of thing. We'll make it all right for him in the end study, sir."

"Anything in the nature of ragging, for instance—"

"I quite understand, sir."

"I am sure you understand; and it is unnecessary for me to say more. I will take up no more of your time," said Mr. Dalton kindly. "You may go, my boys."

They went.

Lovell grinned as the door of the study closed behind them. Having shut the door, he stood in the passage—grinning.

"Jolly narrow escape, old beans!" he murmured. "I say, it's lucky you fellows never let out anything about the flour."

"Us!" said Jimmy.

"Yes. He doesn't know, after all!" chuckled Lovell. "Only a jaw, after all, about some fatheaded freak of a new kid. Lucky you had sense enough to keep your mouths shut—you don't often have."

"You silly owl—"

"We're all right now," said Lovell. "I told you in the end study we were all right—and we are all right. Dicky Dalton hasn't the faintest idea that we mopped the flour over him on the stairs—"

Lovell broke off with a gasp as the door behind him opened. Mr. Dalton stepped out into the passage.

There was an awful silence.

It had not occurred to Lovell that Mr. Dalton might be leaving the study after dismissing them. Things never

did seem to occur to Lovell. Obviously, Richard Dalton had heard him as he opened the door.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

Dalton gazed at the juniors. They gazed at him. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome were crimson; Lovell had his mouth open with dismay, and looked like a fish out of water. Jimmy found his voice:

"It—it wasn't meant for you, sir. A mistake—another chap—I mean a chap—we never knew you were coming up—we—we—we— Oh, dear!"

Mr. Dalton spoke quietly—and unexpectedly:

"Please do not stand about in this passage," he said. And he closed his study door and walked away.

Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed after him, dumbfounded. But they realised that Dicky Dalton was going to take no official note of the words overheard by chance, not intended for his ears. They waited till Dalton was gone. When he had turned the corner, Jimmy and Raby and Newcome turned to Lovell. Quietly and savagely they kicked him, and kicked him again, and yet again. Then they, too, walked away.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Goal!

"STOP that ball!"

It was Lovell of the Classical Fourth who shouted.

The fellow whom he addressed must have heard, but he heeded not.

It was the following afternoon. A light drizzle was falling in the Rookwood quadrangle; the sky was misty, the trees damp and weeping. On such an afternoon, frowsters and slackers like Peele and Gower hugged the study fireside; but hardier fellows were punting a footer after class, heedless of inclement weather. The Fistical Four, and Mornington and Erroll, Conroy and Teddy Grace and Dick Oswald, and some other fellows were getting exercise and fresh air—and mud—especially



mud. But they did not mind. Lovell had given the ball a mighty lift, and it shot away towards the gates.

The gates stood wide open. In the gateway stood a fellow who was watching a taxi drive away. He had his back to the juniors. Had he heeded Lovell's yell, and been quick on the up-take, he could easily have stopped the ball and prevented it from whizzing out into the public road—where, of course, footers were not supposed to whiz. As he did not even turn his head, the muddy footer shot by, and went across the road—and it was rather fortunate that no car was passing at the time.

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell.

Still the fellow in the gateway did not heed. Obviously he did not know that he was being addressed. But he was left in no doubt on the subject when Arthur Edward Lovell rushed up, grabbed him by the shoulder, and whirled him round.

"You fathead," hooted Lovell angrily, "why didn't you stop that ball? Deaf—or silly—or what?"

Then, as the fellow faced him, Lovell recognised the fact that it was not a fellow he knew.

He was a sturdy, well-built fellow, with thick, curly hair, bright and keen dark eyes, handsome, clear-cut features, and a very pleasant cast of countenance. His voice was pleasant, too, though it was in surprised tones that he spoke:

"What the dickens——"

"Oh, fathead!" snapped Lovell. "Couldn't you stop that ball? It might have biffed into a car!"

"So it might. Must have been a silly ass who kicked it out of the gates."

"What?" bawled Lovell.

"Deaf, or silly, or what?" asked the other, repeating Lovell's own words, with a cheery grin.

Lovell glared at him. The fellow was, he supposed, a new fellow, as he was there, and Lovell had never seen him before. But he did not connect him in his mind with the new junior Mr.

Dalton had told the four about the previous day. From what Dalton had said, Lovell was expecting to see some pale, peaky, pitiful sort of "tick" when Dudley Vane came. This fellow was strong and sturdy, glowing with health, evidently hefty, and as fit as a fiddle. Not only was he full of beans, but he was, to Lovell's mind, full of cheek.

"You cheeky tick!" exclaimed Lovell wrathfully. "Who the dickens are you—some new Modern worm for Manders' House, I suppose? You'd better learn not to cheek Classical men, I can tell you! You're Modern, I bet."

At Rookwood School there were two sides—Classical and Modern. This was so familiar a fact to Lovell that it did not occur to him that the rest of the universe might not be aware of it. The curly-headed fellow looked puzzled for a moment, then nodded and laughed.

"I suppose I'm modern," he answered. "I'm not ancient, at all events! What the dickens do you mean?"

"I mean that if you give me any of your Modern lip, I'll bang your Modern head on that gate!" hooted Lovell. "Now go and chuck that ball in, or I'll bang it, anyhow, see?"

The new fellow smiled.

"Happy to oblige!" he answered. "I'll send the ball in if you like." He cut across the road.

Lovell stood in the gateway. The other juniors came up and joined him there. Some of the fellows glanced at the boy in the road.

"Who's that?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Not the new kid Dicky Dalton was telling us about yesterday?"

"No—a Modern cad," answered Lovell. "A new tick for Manders' House! As cheeky as the other Modern cads——"

"Send that ball in, you Modern tick!" called out Raby.

"Coming!"

The curly-haired fellow placed the ball on the other side of the wide road, glanced up and down to make sure that no traffic was coming, and kicked. The

next moment there was a terrific yell from Arthur Edward Lovell.

He had not expected that muddy footer to land on his features. He had not supposed, indeed, that the new "tick" could land it there if he tried! But he could—and did!

Whop!

Mud splashed from the ball, and from Lovell's face! Arthur Edward staggered back and sat down. Then there was another splash. There was a puddle behind him. Lovell sat in it.

The Classical juniors stared at him for a moment. Then they roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! Goal! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, crikey! Oh, crumbs! Oh, my hat!" spluttered Lovell. Sitting in the puddle he clawed mud from his face. "Oh, scissors! Ooooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

The new fellow came across the road to the gateway, grinning cheerily. Lovell scrambled up, wildly clawing mud, and dripping more mud. His face was crimson where it was not veiled by mud.

"You—you—you Modern worm!" he gasped. "You—you—I'll mop up the quad with you. I—I—I'll——"

"You asked me to send the ball in—in fact, told me to——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell jumped at him. Lovell's temper was often hasty. Now it was boiling.

Jimmy Silver caught him by the arm.

"Hold on!" he gasped.

"I'll smash him!" roared Lovell.

"Look at my face! Think I'm going to let a Modern worm buzz a footer at my face! Look at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I—I mean—hold on! You can't scrap with a new kid, even if he's a tick from Manders' House. You cut off, young fellow-me-lad! Lend a hand with this howling ass, you men."

Two or three grinning fellows lent a hand with Lovell. He was held back—raging. The new fellow did not seem in a hurry to depart—there was no sign

of alarm in his looks. However, with a smile, he turned away and walked across the quadrangle. And Lovell, spluttering mud and wrath, was held till he was gone.

#### CHAPTER 4.

Something Like a Shindy!

"YAROOOOOH!" roared Tubby Muffin.

There was absolutely no reason why Lovell should have kicked Cecil Adolphus Muffin as he came up the Fourth Form passage. True, there was an opinion current in the Rookwood Fourth that the more Tubby was kicked, the better it was for him. Perhaps that was Lovell's reason. More likely it was because Lovell's temper was in an excited state, and Tubby's fat grin hinted that he had witnessed the incident of the muddy football.

If it was Tubby's grin that offended Lovell, Tubby ceased to offend on the spot. His grin faded away instantly, and he roared.

Lovell tramped on.

"Yah!" yelled Tubby after him.

"Who stopped a footer with his silly face?"

Lovell spun round, flaming. Tubby made one jump into the nearest study and slammed the door.

Arthur Edward made a stride—and paused. Tubby was not a worthy object of his wrath. He resumed his way to the end study.

He was annoyed. There was no doubt about that. He was so annoyed that instead of joining his friends, who were tea-ing with Tommy Dodd over on the Modern side, he was going to have a solitary tea in his own study. Which really was not happy or pleasant, and added to his irritation.

He hurled the door of the end study open with a crash. There was a rather startled exclamation in the study.

"My hat! Don't knock the whole show over!"

Lovell jumped.

He knew that voice. He had heard it only once before, but it was only an hour ago.

He had been longing—in fact, yearning—to meet that new tick again. But he had never dreamed of meeting him in a Classical study—especially his own study! The cheek of the fellow in planting himself in a Classical study was really amazing. Still, Lovell was glad that he was there!

He strode in.

There was the fellow—seated in the study armchair, his legs stretched out, his handsome face glowing in the fire-light, looking merry and bright and thoroughly at home. From his looks a fellow might have fancied that the study belonged to him.

"You!" ejaculated Lovell.

"Oh—you!" said the fellow in the armchair. He smiled. Wrath gleamed in Arthur Edward's eyes and glowed in his cheeks. But it did not seem to worry the new fellow, who had so coolly and so amazingly taken possession of the Fistical Four's study. He just smiled.

"Get out of that chair!" roared Lovell.

"Is it yours?"

"Eh? No; it's Jimmy's! Get out of it!"

"I don't know who Jimmy may happen to be," drawled the curly-headed fellow. "But I'm quite comfortable here; and I'll stay here, if you don't mind, till Jimmy wants his chair."

"As it happens, I do mind," said Lovell grimly.

"I'll stay here, all the same."

"Will you?" said Lovell. He stood before the fellow, glowering in his wrath. "Get out of this study."

The new fellow raised his eyebrows.

"Out of the study?" he repeated.

"Yes!"

"And why?"

"Because I order you out!" roared Lovell. "See? Because if you don't

skip out this minute, I'll heave you out on your neck. See?"

"No!" The new junior settled himself a little more comfortably in the armchair. "No, I don't see!"

"I'll make you!" said Lovell.

He grabbed at the new junior's rather broad shoulders to hook him out of the chair. He gasped and dragged and tugged.

Lovell was a powerful fellow for his age. He was easily the heftiest of the Fistical Four—none of them weaklings. But he dragged at the smiling fellow in the chair in vain. The fellow had his hands on the chair-arms, gripping, and that grip was not loosened. Lovell dragged and tugged and heaved. The new fellow remained sitting in the chair. He even continued to smile—a smile that had an exasperating, not to say a maddening effect on Arthur Edward Lovell.

Arthur Edward put all his beef into a terrific tug. Still the new fellow sat tight—but the armchair moved, shifted by that terrific tug. It bumped into Lovell's knees, and Lovell, letting go, sat down quite suddenly.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Oooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the fellow in the chair. He seemed amused.

Lovell bounced up, as if made of india-rubber. If he had been boiling before, he was boiling over now.

But he did not grasp the sitter—he whipped round the chair and grasped the high back, dragging it over backwards, to tilt the new fellow out on the back of his neck. He dragged with all his strength.

As he did so, the new junior jumped out of the chair. The moment his weight was gone the armchair flew over backwards under Lovell's tremendous tug.

It crashed on Lovell. It hurled him over and landed on him.

Hardly knowing what had happened, Arthur Edward Lovell lay sprawling on his back on the carpet, the armchair on his legs, blinking up dizzily at a

handsome face that grinned down at him.

"Fine!" said the new fellow. "Topping! Do that again, old bean!"

"Oh!" spluttered Lovell. "Urrgh! Ah! Ow! Oh!"

"Doing it again!" smiled the new junior. "Or is it one performance only?"

Lovell did not answer. He couldn't. He hurled the armchair off his legs and scrambled furiously up. Instantly he was on his feet he hurled himself headlong at the smiling, exasperating new "tick."

Up went the new fellow's hands like lightning. But Lovell's wild rush drove him back. He bumped into the table, which went rocking. He gave a gasp as Lovell's fist caught his nose, and there was a spurt of red.

But he rallied in a moment and came back at Arthur Edward. A knock that seemed like the kick of a mule landed on Arthur Edward's chin, and jarred every tooth in his head.

Lovell panted, hurled himself forward again, and grasped the new fellow with both arms. He whirled him to the door.

"Out you go, you cheeky cad!" he gasped.

But the "tick" gave grasp for grasp! Lovell got him as far as the door, when they whirled back, knocking over chairs right and left. They reeled into the window curtains, struggled there, and dragged the curtains down in a heap. A foot was caught in the tangled curtains, and they rolled over together on the floor.

Lovell, crimson with fury, exerted every ounce of his strength. He was going to throw out that cheeky tick who had planted himself so coolly in the study, or he was going to know the reason why.

But the new fellow, it was clear, was as strong as Lovell—and he was a good deal more active and elastic. They rolled on the floor, struggling for the upper hand, but it was the new fellow

who got it. Lovell, panting with rage, found himself extended on his back, with the new fellow sitting on his chest and pinning him down to the study carpet.

He panted, he heaved, he rocked! But he was pinned! Quite a contrast to the infuriated Arthur Edward, the new fellow was still cool, and he smiled down at Lovell's almost frantic face.

"What about chucking it, old scout?" he asked a little breathlessly, but cheerfully and amicably.

"I'll smash you!" gasped Lovell.

"Make it pax, old bean!"

Lovell rocked. He was not thinking of "pax." He was thinking of war and vengeance. But he rocked and heaved in vain. And as he gasped, and rocked, and heaved in the midst of overturned furniture, tangled curtains, and scattered books and papers, footsteps came up the Fourth Form passage and astonished faces looked in at the doorway of the end study.

## CHAPTER 5.

### The "Invalid"!

"SILVER!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You have seen the new boy Vane?"

"Oh, not yet, sir!" answered Jimmy Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome had come back to the Head's House after tea with Tommy Dodd of the Modern side. They were going up to the end study when Mr. Dalton called to Jimmy. They were not, as a matter of fact, thinking about Dudley Vane, having forgotten him. They were thinking about Arthur Edward and whether he had got over his temper yet.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Dalton. "I sent Vane up to your study some time ago, Silver."

"We've been tea-ing out, sir," said Jimmy. "We forgot—I—I mean, we'll go up at once and see the new kid, sir. I—I think Lovell's in the study."

"We didn't know the chap had come yet, sir," murmured Raby. "But Lovell's there."

"Lovell will be looking after him all right, sir," said Newcome.

Mr. Dalton smiled.

"Since I have seen Vane," he said, "I find that he shows no traces of impaired health—indeed, he looks remarkably strong and fit. Nevertheless, in view of his recent illness, Silver, you will remember what I said to you yesterday."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" answered Jimmy.

The three juniors went up to the Classical Fourth passage. Raby gave an expressive grunt as they went.

"All very well for Dicky to land his dashed invalid in our study!" he said. "I'm not going to dry-nurse him, I know that!"

"It won't be so bad as that!" said Jimmy, laughing. "From what Dicky said, he can't be quite a tottering invalid. Still, we've got to look after the poor chap a bit. Hallo, that sounds like a row!"

It did! It sounded very much indeed like a row, as the three juniors arrived at the open doorway of the end study.

They looked in, or, rather, they stared! They stared with popping eyes. "What the holy smoke—" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Great pip?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Urrgh!" came in gurgling tones from Arthur Edward Lovell. "Gerroff, you cheeky tick! Gerroff!" He glimpsed his amazed chums at the door. "You silly idiots! Draggimoff! Urrgh!"

For a moment or two they stood spellbound. Then they hurled themselves into the study, grasped the new fellow, and whirled him off Lovell.

"Here, hold on!" came a protesting yell. "Fair play's a jewel! Three to one—is that what you call cricket here?"

Lovell staggered up. He gasped and

gurgled for breath, while his adversary wriggled in the grasp of the three.

"It's that new Modern tick!" gasped Jimmy. "What the thump are you doing on the Classical side, you bouncer?"

"I'm going to boot him out!" gasped Lovell. "I found him here, sitting in the armchair, just as if the study belonged to him. The cheek of it! I'm going to smash him and boot him out!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy, struck by a new startling thought. "Dicky Dalton said that new chap was here—"

"I'm going to smash him into small pieces!" roared Lovell.

"Let him get on with it," said the new junior cheerfully. "He hasn't had a lot of luck, so far! But let him get on with it."

Jimmy pushed him back, and stood between him and the enraged Lovell. Raby and Newcome let go the new fellow, staring. The three of them pushed Lovell back, and he spluttered wrath.

"Gerroff of the way! I'm going—"

"But Dicky said—"

"Bother Dicky Dalton! I'm going to—"

"He said the new kid Vane was here. Is your name Vane, you young ass—Dudley Vane?"

"Yes!"

"Wha-a-a-at?" gasped Lovell. "The—the sick chap—the chap wha-a-t—"

"The giddy invalid!" grinned Raby.

"The peaky, piny hospital case!" chuckled Newcome. "He looks it—I don't think!"

The new fellow stared.

"Who said I was an invalid?" he demanded. "You silly asses! Can't a fellow be laid up for a few weeks without being an invalid? You cheeky fat-heads—"

"Then—then—then this is his study!" stuttered Lovell. "You blithering young ass, why didn't you tell me this was your study?"

"Why didn't you tell me it was yours?" asked Vane.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

Arthur Edward cooled down considerably. Even Arthur Edward realised that it had been rather a high-handed proceeding to start chucking a fellow out of his own study!

"Oh!" he repeated. "Oh!" Then Lovell made an effort. "Sorry!" he gasped.

"All serene!" said Dudley Vane cheerfully. "No harm done—except to the study! Suppose we set it to rights?"

And all was—more or less—calm and bright!

Anyhow, it was a great relief. If Dudley Vane had been on the sick list before coming to Rookwood, it was clear that the end study was not going to have a peaky, pining invalid on its hands—anything but that! And that was a considerable satisfaction to Jimmy Silver & Co.—far from foreseeing the strange events that were to follow the coming of the new fellow to Rookwood.

#### CHAPTER 6.

##### The Heavy Hand!

"THAT cad Carthew!" growled Lovell.

"Better go!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Rats!"

"Look here, Lovell, you'd better——"

"Rot!"

When Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth Form at Rookwood spoke in that tone it meant that there was to be no further argument. When Arthur Edward had made up his mind, words of wisdom were wasted on him.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were at games practice on Little Side when Carthew of the Sixth came along. Standing in touch, Carthew shouted to Lovell.

It was irritating enough to all the junior footballers. No doubt Lovell

had lines. No doubt he hadn't done them. No doubt he ought to have done them. But no Sixth Form prefect at Rookwood School, except Mark Carthew, would have interrupted games' practice on a matter of lines. The fact was that Carthew was a bully, and had a special down on that cheery company, the Fistical Four. He liked to make himself obnoxious.

Arthur Edward had looked round as Carthew called him. But he took no further notice. The Classics were playing in a pick-up, to get into form for the House match with the Moderns which was coming off on Saturday. Soccer was more important than Carthew—in Lovell's opinion, at least. Lovell was in the Classical junior team. He was going to be at the top of his form on Saturday. He plunged into the game again, heedless of the prefect shouting on the touchline.

"Lovell," roared Carthew, "come off at once!"

And as Lovell still turned a deaf ear Carthew of the Sixth strode on the field, with the evident intention of grabbing Lovell and hooking him off. It was then that Dudley Vane, new fellow in the Classical Fourth, weighed in. He had the ball at his feet, and he kicked it—at Carthew!

Plop!

Carthew did not know that it was coming till it came! It landed on his ear, and the prefect went staggering.

"Ha, ha, ha!" a yell went up.

Carthew righted himself, clapped a hand to a muddy ear, and stared round, crimson with rage. His eyes had been on Lovell, and he had not seen who landed the leather.

"Who kicked that ball?" roared Carthew. "Was it you, Silver?"

"Not guilty, my lord!" grinned Jimmy.

"You, Raby—or you, Newcome?"

But Raby and Newcome grinned and shook their heads.

"Serve you jolly well right!" hooted

Lovell. "What do you mean by barging on the field? Get out of it!"

Carthew made a rush for him. Mornington put out a foot, and Carthew tripped and went over.

"Man down!" chortled Conroy, in goal. "Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush of the footballers. Carthew had interrupted the pick-up. They could not get on with the game with the bully of the Sixth throwing his weight about in the field. So a dozen fellows at once had the bright idea of making Carthew sorry he had barged in. Morny was the first to fall on him, then Erroll, then Oswald, and then Jimmy Silver, Raby, Newcome, and Lovell added their weight.

Carthew disappeared from sight. Juniors swarmed all over him and swamped him, and under them the bully of the Sixth wriggled and writhed and gasped and gurgled. He had asked for it—there was no doubt about that. And in the excitement of the moment the Fourth Formers rather forgot that they were dealing with a prefect!

"Ooogh!" gurgled the hapless Sixth Former. "Gerroff! You young—Urrgh! I'll report this—Urrgh! I'll—Yurrgh!"

How many muddy football boots were wiped on Carthew he could hardly have counted. They were wiped hard, too! Carthew of the Sixth, for some wild and whirling minutes, led the life of a doormat.

"Gerroff!" shrieked Carthew. "Stop stamping on me! Yaroooh! Gerroff! Will you lemme gerrup? Yooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ware beaks, you men!" called out Dudley Vane suddenly. "Here comes Dalton!"

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Lovell.

The Classical juniors looked round in alarm. Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth, was striding on the scene. From a distance Mr. Dalton had discerned that something unusual was going on, and he was hastening up to see what it was.

The crowd parted over Carthew. He sat up. He sat up and gurgled and gasped. He looked a shocking sight. His collar and tie were gone; his coat was split up the back; his hat had disappeared. He was covered with mud as with a garment. There was hardly a square inch of Carthew that was not muddy. He sat and spluttered.

Richard Dalton, arriving, gazed at him. He hardly recognised Carthew's face under a thick coating of mud.

"Who—who—who is that?" gasped Mr. Dalton. "Silver, who is that?"

"I—I—I think it's Carthew of the Sixth, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

"Carthew! A prefect! You have dared to lay hands on a prefect!" exclaimed the Fourth Form master.

"The cheeky ass barged into our game, sir," said Dudley Vane.

"Shut up, you ass!" whispered Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Dalton flashed a look at the new boy in the Fourth. Dudley Vane had been hardly a week at Rookwood, but he had made himself liked in the Classical Fourth. He was good at games, which was a passport to the esteem of Jimmy Silver & Co. He was good in class—unusually good and keen—which gave Mr. Dalton a good opinion of him. Dalton, like his Form, liked the new fellow, but he had no use for impertinence, even from a boy he liked.

"Vane, take a hundred lines for impertinence!" rapped the master of the Fourth.

"Sorry, sir!" said Vane. "I didn't mean to be cheeky, but Carthew did barge in and interrupt our game, sir."

"Carthew, what does this mean?"

Carthew staggered to his feet. He was still gasping for breath. He clawed mud from his face.

"Ooogh! Those young rascals—Ooogh! Look what they've done! I came here to call Lovell—oogh!—and they rushed me over—Groogh!"

"You had better go to the House, Carthew," said Mr. Dalton. "I will deal with these juniors. You need have

no doubt that they will be adequately punished for assaulting a prefect."

Carthew, still gasping, tottered away Mr. Dalton fixed stern eyes on the juniors. Seldom had the Classical Fourth seen their Form-master look so angry. They waited in silence for the thunderbolt. Even Arthur Edward Lovell, little given to reflection as he was, realised that it was a serious matter to handle a prefect of the Sixth—so serious a matter that the Fourth Form master could not have passed it over, even had he wished to do so. And Dicky Dalton did not look as if he wished to do so.

"Every boy here," said Mr. Dalton grimly, "will take five hundred lines, and will be kept in detention on Saturday afternoon."

There was a general gasp.

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Saturday's the House match—"

"I am aware of it, Silver. That is your punishment. If you behave like hooligans on the football field—"

"But we can't cut House matches, sir!" gasped Lovell, in consternation.

Mr. Dalton gave him a look, turned on his heel and walked away. Jimmy Silver & Co. stood looking after him—in silence. It was the silence of utter dismay.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Tubby Knows What!

JIMMY SILVER'S face was glum at tea in the end study that day. "Keep smiling" was the motto of "Uncle James" of Rookwood, but Jimmy's smile was now conspicuous by its absence.

House matches were rather important affairs at Rookwood. And Jimmy Silver had his team at the top notch, ready to wipe the Moderns off the face of the earth. Jimmy played centre-half himself. He had a keen eye for a fellow's form in the front line, and he had picked out the new fellow, Vane, to play forward—and from what he had

seen of him he regarded him as a rod in pickle for the Moderns.

The whole thing was absolutely rotten. Another date had to be found for the match; but the footballers did not want to find another date—they wanted to play the House match on the date arranged. They did not want to sit in detention, writing endless lines, instead of playing football.

"All Lovell's fault, of course!" remarked Raby.

Arthur Edward gave him a glare across the tea-table. Arthur Edward was rubbing an eye that persisted in winking.

"How was it my fault?" bawled Lovell.

"If you'd gone off when Carthew called you—" said Newcome. "After all, it wasn't a match—only a pick-up—"

"Blow Carthew!"

"The truth is, we all asked for it," said Jimmy Silver. "Ragging a prefect is outside the limit. Dicky was bound to come down heavy."

"Dicky's an ass!" growled Lovell.

"Well, that fathead Vane started the ragging," said Raby. "Look here, Vane, you're new here; but you jolly well know you can't kick a footer at the head of a Sixth Form prefect."

Dudley Vane laughed.

"The other fellows seemed ready enough to follow my lead," he remarked. "I think I saw you wiping your boots on the cad!"

"Well, yes; but—"

"Rot!" said Lovell. "Vane was right—and so were we. That cad Carthew came there to stir up trouble, and he got what he came for." Arthur Edward rubbed his eye again. "That silly ass Tommy Dodd had the cheek to say that we should have got licked on Saturday, anyhow, when I told him. I punched him."

Judging by the state of Lovell's eye, Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth had also done some punching.

"Well, it can't be helped!" sighed Jimmy Silver. "No chance of play-



ing on Saturday now— Oh, get out, Muffin!" he added, with an irritation unusual to Uncle James, as Tubby Muffin looked into the study.

But Cecil Adolphus Muffin did not get. He waddled in.

"It's all right, you fellows!" said Tubby cheerily. "Don't you worry about the House match on Saturday. It will come off all right."

The Fistical Four and Dudley Vane jumped. They forgot tea, and stared eagerly at Tubby.

They could only conclude from his words that Dicky Dalton had relented and washed out the detention for Saturday afternoon. If that was the message that Tubby Muffin was bringing to the study, he was as welcome as the flowers in May.

"Oh, good!" gasped Jimmy. "That's ripping! Have you got that from Dicky Dalton?"

"Eh? No!"

"Then what——"

"What I mean is," explained the fat Classical, "that you fellows ain't the only pebbles on the beach."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Only the chaps who were at games practice have got detention," said Tubby. "Well, there's a lot more fellows, ain't there? There's me, f'rinstance——"

"You!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Me!" said Muffin. "You needn't scratch that match, Jimmy. All you've got to do is to make up an eleven of the fellows who aren't detained. I'm prepared to captain the side."

The end study gazed at Tubby Muffin. They did not seem able to speak. They just gazed at him, like cows at a train.

"What about that?" asked Tubby.

It was true that there were plenty of juniors on the Classical side to make up another eleven, apart from the fellows who had fallen under the frown of authority. Unfortunately, they were not much use at footer. Slackers like Peele and Gower of the Fourth, dandies like Townsend and Topham,

were hardly the men to stop the Moderns. Superb youths like Smythe and Tracy of the Shell were more ornamental than useful. As for Tubby, he was neither ornamental nor useful—though no doubt the fat and ineffable Tubby would have been prepared to captain the side.

Apparently Tubby took silence for consent.

"Is it a go?" he asked. "I'll skipper the side with pleasure. I fancy I can pick out some pretty good men. After all, you chaps don't amount to much, if you don't mind my mentioning it. Look at the way Lovell barges about at half; look at the way Raby and Newcome fall over their own feet in the front line. Even you, Jimmy, old chap, stick at centre-half like a sack of coke, if you don't mind my saying so! If you like to leave this to me——"

Tubby Muffin got no further than that.

If Tubby had come to the end study with the kind desire to help Silver out of a difficulty, he was repaid with the blackest ingratitude.

Four fellows were still gazing at the happy Tubby, as if petrified, when Lovell woke to action. He grabbed a loaf from the table. He hurled it.

Crash! It landed on the best-filled waistcoat at Rookwood School. It cut short Tubby's remarks with startling suddenness.

"Urrghh!" gurgled Tubby as he staggered.

Bump!

The end study almost shook as Cecil Adolphus Muffin sat down.

"Ooogh!" spluttered Tubby.

"You fat, fozzling, frumptious freak!" roared Lovell. "Making us think that Dicky had let us off, and then——"

"Urrghh!"

"By gum, I'll——"

Instead of explaining what he would do, Lovell did it. He jumped up and rushed at Tubby.

Tubby Muffin squirmed out of the study doorway like a fat eel. He

squirmed swiftly, but not swiftly enough. Lovell's boot reached him in the doorway and helped him into the passage.

Muffin disappeared with a roar. Lovell slammed the door after him.

But Tubby Muffin's brilliant suggestion had not helped matters, and there were gloomy faces in the Classical Fourth that evening. For once, Dicky Dalton, generally very popular in his Form, was the most unpopular beak at Rookwood.

All the footballers agreed that it was too thick, and some mooted the idea of "getting back" on Dicky, and making it clear to him what his Form thought of him. And Arthur Edward Lovell, needless to say, was one of them. Arthur Edward could always be relied upon to rush in where angels feared to tread!

#### CHAPTER 8.

##### Looking After Lovell!

"**W**HAT the thump's that?"  
"That," said Lovell rather proudly, "is for Dicky Dalton!"

It was after class the following day.

In the Form-room that day many fellows had looked glum, even sulky. They wanted Dalton to see how he had fallen in their estimation.

If Dalton saw it he did not seem to mind. He carried on as usual, regardless of the lowered estimation of the Fourth.

After class there was only one topic—the cancelled football match and Saturday's detention. Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome were still on that sore topic in the quad when Dudley Vane came up to the end study, with a bundle under his arm, from the school shop, for tea. He found Lovell there, and he stared at Lovell and his occupation with wide eyes.

On the study table lay a large sheet of cardboard. On that card Arthur

Edward Lovell was daubing capital letters with a brush in ink. He was giving the final touches when the new junior came in. Vane stared blankly as he read:

"DON'T BE AN ASS, DICKY!

WASH IT OUT!

PLAY THE GAME!"

Having read that remarkable legend, Dudley Vane looked at Lovell. In Lovell's face was a smiling satisfaction—which might almost have been called fatuous. Lovell, evidently, was pleased with his handiwork.

"What on earth are you going to do with that?" gasped Vane. "If Dalton sees it, you'll get a whopping!"

"Dalton's going to see it!" said Lovell calmly. "I've done it specially for Dalton to see it, of course."

"Oh, my hat!" said Vane.

"It will let him know what the Fourth think of him—see?" Lovell condescended to explain. "It will be a strong hint that he's gone too far. There's plenty of time for him to wash out the detention before Saturday if he takes this tip."

"But," gasped Vane, "if Dicky Dalton sees that he'll march you straight to the Head. What do you suppose Dr. Chisholm will think of it?"

"I'm not going to sign my name to it!" said Lovell sarcastically. "And I'm not going to tap at Dalton's door and hand it to him personally!"

"Then how—"

There was a tramp of feet in the passage, and Jimmy, Raby and Newcome came in.

They, like Vane, stared at Lovell's card.

"What the merry dickens—" exclaimed Jimmy.

"For goodness' sake, you men, talk to that ass!" said Vane. "He's got that up for Dicky Dalton!"

"What?" yelled the three.

"It's all right, you fellows," said Lovell calmly. "I'm not asking for a flogging. I'm going to tack this card up in Dalton's study for him to find there—some time when he's not there, of course. Easy enough to go down from the dorm to-night and do it. Sec?"

Vane jumped.

"Go down from the dorm at night!" he exclaimed, evidently startled.

"Easy as falling off a form," said Lovell, complacently. "You're a new kid, Vane, and don't know the ropes. Think we've never been out of the dormitory after lights out before?"

"You'll be spotted!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Rot!"

"You'll be flogged!" howled Raby.

"Rubbish!"

"You're not going to do it!" shrieked Newcome.

"Bosh!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed at Arthur Edward. Breaking dormitory bounds after lights out was a serious thing in itself, though, as Lovell had said, fellows had done that before. Putting that notice up in Dalton's study was a much more serious thing. Even if Dicky Dalton was an ass—as the Fourth Form rather thought at present—it was not a safe game to tell him so. Painful truths of that nature could not be told to Form-masters.

Lovell, of course, thought that he was going to do this, with his usual astuteness, without getting spotted. But his chums knew what his astuteness was like. They had had some, so to speak!

"You—you—you ass!" said Jimmy Silver, at last. "You'll be spotted out of dorm bounds——"

"You know what a fathead you are," Raby pointed out.

"If there's a master up you'll walk right into him," said Newcome. "If there isn't you'll knock over something and wake one."

"For goodness' sake, chuck it!" said Vane.

Lovell's face set obstinately. Oppositions always had that effect on Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Don't talk rot!" he said. "And I don't want any cheeky advice from a new kid, Vane, either. I thought you fellows would think this a ripping wheeze!"

"Oh, topping!" said Jimmy. "Only—don't do it!"

"Well, I'm going to do it!"

"Look here, Lovell——"

"You can jaw," said Lovell, "till you're black in the face. But I'm going to do it, all the same."

Dudley Vane glanced round at the faces of the Co., half-resigned and half-alarmed. They knew from experience how useless it was to argue with Lovell.

"Are you going to let that ass do this?" asked Vane.

"You shut up!" hooted Lovell.

"Why not tear up that card and jam it down the back of his neck, as a warning not to play the goat?" suggested Vane.

"Why, you—you cheeky rotter!" roared Lovell, in great wrath. "I'd like to see anybody jam that card down the back of my neck. I'd just like——"

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Vane, old man, you're a new kid here, but you've got some jolly good ideas," he said. "You fellows, let's!"

"I'd like to see you do it!" bawled Lovell.

"Good! Then you shall," said Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Three fellows jumped at Lovell, and collared him. Arthur Edward gave a roar of wrath and resisted fiercely. But with Raby and Newcome grasping his arms and Jimmy Silver gripping the back of his collar, Arthur Edward had simply no chance.

"Go it, Vane!" panted Jimmy.

Dudley Vane, grinning, grabbed up the card. He tore it across, and across

again, heedless of Lovell's frenzied indignation. Then he proceeded to cram the fragments down Arthur Edward's back.

Lovell struggled frantically.

"You rotters!" he roared. "Leggo! I'll smash you! Ow! Vane, you cad, I'll bash you! I'll mop you up! Leggo!"

"Hold him!" grinned Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell was not easy to hold—but he was held. Struggling and wriggling wildly, he had the last fragment of the torn cardboard jammed down the back of his neck. He fairly raved with wrath.

"That's that!" said Jimmy Silver. "Don't be shirty, old bean; we're only saving you from a Head's flogging!"

"You cheeky rotters!" shrieked Lovell.

"Now let's have tea, old chap," said Jimmy amicably.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell was released. He stood crimson and panting. For a moment or two he looked as if he would hurl himself headlong at his friends, hitting out right and left. Fortunately, he refrained from those extreme measures. He swung round to the door, stamped out into the passage, and slammed the door after him with a terrific slam.

He was not present at tea in the end study that day. Later, at prep, his face was grim and unfriendly. His chums had the consolation of feeling that they had saved him from himself. But had they?

## CHAPTER 9.

### Done in the Dark!

## MIDNIGHT!

Lovell of the Fourth sat up in bed.

Lovell, when he went to bed that night in the Classical Fourth dormitory, fully intended to keep awake. He did keep awake for about a quarter of an hour, after which he dropped into slumber. But he did not sleep quite

so soundly as was his wont—which was as soundly as a top, as a rule.

It was on his mind that he had meant to keep awake. And when the deep boom of midnight came through the silence he opened his eyes and sat up, and blinked round him in the darkness of the dormitory.

All was dark, only a pale gleam of starlight dropping from the high windows. There was a faint sound of deep breathing, and a snore from Tubby Muffin. No other fellow was awake, and Lovell, sitting with the bed-clothes round him, sleepy and disinclined to turn out, was strongly tempted to lay his head on the pillow again and drop back into dreamland.

But obstinacy supervened.

It was warm in bed; it was cold and chilly outside. But Lovell was not the fellow to back down. What he had said, he had said! He had declared that he was going to stick that defiant message in Dicky Dalton's study. His friends had put "paid" to that—as they fancied. Certainly, Lovell had no idea of piecing together the sheet of cardboard which had been rammed, in sections, down his back. That would have been as difficult a task as putting Humpty-Dumpty together again, after his celebrated accident. But there are more ways than one of killing a cat!

His friends had had an eye on him that evening. Had Lovell been seen with another placard, like the first, that placard would certainly have followed the first, down Lovell's back. But they were not aware that Lovell had put a stick of chalk into his pocket before going up to the dorm. They were not aware that he was going, in spite of them, to carry out his stunt—though instead of sticking up a cardboard placard in Mr. Dalton's study, he was going to chalk his message on the looking-glass there.

Making an effort, Lovell stepped out of bed.

Once out, he dressed himself quickly, for two reasons—he was in haste, and it was very cold. If any of his pals

woke up there would be trouble, for it was very probable that they would intervene to prevent him from leaving the dormitory.

He made hardly any sound. Softly, on tiptoe, he reached the door, opened it noiselessly, and stepped out. Quietly he drew the door shut after him.

He stepped away down the passage, to the stairs, groping in the dark. He had left it very late—later than he had intended. Still, that made it all the safer, for at midnight it was absolutely certain that nobody would be out of bed. At the same time, Lovell did not enjoy creeping through a sleeping House, in darkness and silence.

Darkness and silence, however, were not dangerous; it was only a matter of nerves. Not a single light burned in all the great building of Rookwood School. Here and there, from a window, came a pale glimmer—that was all. He felt for the banisters, and groped down.

Masters' Studies were as silent as the tomb. Lovell's heart was beating a little faster as he reached Mr. Dalton's door. And it not only beat faster, but jumped at a sudden sound inside the study as he turned the door-handle.

He stood almost palpitating.

What was that sound?

Dalton could not be still up at midnight. Besides, there was no light in the study. He could not be there without a light. But what was that sound?

With thumping heart, he listened.

There could be nobody in the study. Yet he had heard a sound as of a sudden movement; as if someone inside the room had been startled by the turning of the door-handle. Thoughts of burglars flashed uncomfortably into his mind.

He listened. There was no repetition of the sound. A long minute passed—and another. Still deep silence.

He wondered whether he had imagined that sound. Or had it been the rustle of ivy at the window, stirred by the wind? He made up his mind

at last, and opened the door a few inches, and peered in.

All was dark—all was silent. He smiled at his own uneasiness, pushed the door wider open and stepped into the room.

What happened next seemed like some evil dream to Lovell.

From the darkness a dark figure dimly loomed, leaping from behind the door he had opened.

A violent shove sent him reeling and stumbling across the study, to fall with a crash. The next instant the figure was gone.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell. "Ow! Oh, what—what—"

He sprawled on the floor. He sat up dizzily. His hands went up instinctively to ward off attack. Something like terror seized on him there in the darkness—fear of an enemy in the dark—dread of the unknown, the unseen. His heart beat in great throbs.

But there was silence. A faint sound came from afar, like a retreating footstep in the distance. That was all. Lovell struggled to his feet.

His hands were wet. He realised it with amazement. How had his hands got wet on Dalton's carpet? He stood peering and shuddering. Someone had been in the study in the dark—had knocked him over to make his escape, and was gone. He knew now that he really had heard a sound when he stood outside the door—he knew that someone had been there, and had placed himself to be hidden by the door when it opened. Who?

The blinds were over the study window. It was no burglar from outside. It dawned on Lovell's startled mind that most likely it had been some fellow on an errand like his own. He was not the only fellow in the Fourth who had thought of a "rag" on Dalton.

That idea was rather a comfort to him. It was less horrifying if that dark and mysterious figure was only some reckless japer like himself—a Rookwood fellow out of dorm bounds.

Standing there in the dark, trying to think it out, Lovell rather forgot that he had made a terrific crash in going over, and that the Masters' rooms were over the studies. It was extremely probable that Mr. Dalton, in the room above, had been awakened by that crash in his study below.

That possibility was brought to Lovell's mind by the sound of an opening door. In the silence of the night he heard that sound from up the staircase. He caught his breath.

Someone had been awakened.

Lovell gritted his teeth. That fool who had been there in the dark, and had knocked him over, had spoiled everything. He had intended to draw back the blinds, and chalk his message on the looking-glass by the gleam of the starlight. Obviously, he had no time for that now. He had time to make his escape before he was discovered there—and lucky if he had that.

He groped towards the door.

Crash!

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Lovell.

He had barged into something in the dark. In amazement he realised that he was stumbling over a pile of books in the middle of the room.

He stumbled and fell, scattering volumes to right and left. His head knocked on something. It was the leg of an overturned armchair. He gave a startled howl.

The study had been ragged by the unknown predecessor. That flashed into his mind now. The whole room was in disorder. It was ink that smothered his hands, where they had come into contact with the carpet. Ink had been spilt all over the place.

He scrambled up wildly. He gave a yell, as his hands came in contact with broken glass on the floor. He banged his elbow on something—it was Mr. Dalton's bookcase lying on its side.

Amazed, horrified, wildly excited, Lovell got to his feet, and groped to the door. He stumbled over the legs of a chair, and ran into something that

seemed like a post—it was the leg of a table that was upside-down. A gleam of light from the passage flashed into the room.

Footsteps approached. He could guess whose. Lovell gasped. His escape was cut off. The light was in the passage.

He stood panting, horrified, at his wits' end, as an athletic figure, in a dressing-gown, stepped into the doorway. Richard Dalton switched on the light in the study.

"Lovell!"

Lovell could not speak. He could only stare at Mr. Dalton. He was fairly caught. Mr. Dalton's glance rested on him only for a second. Then it passed round the study. The look that came over his face almost petrified Lovell.

He also looked round. What he saw almost shattered his nerves. He had realised already that a ragger had been at work. Now, in the light, he saw the extent of the "rag." He could scarcely believe what he saw.

A "rag" was not an uncommon occurrence at Rookwood. Lovell had seen a study "shipped" before—had indeed taken a hand in such "ship-pings." But he had never seen anything like this.

The study was a wreck.

Tables and chairs were overturned. The armchair had been ripped, and the stuffing streamed out. Ink drenched the carpet, and splashed on the walls. The looking-glass, where Lovell had intended to leave his defiant message, was starred in the centre. The bookcase lay on the floor, the glass doors cracked and broken, the books heaped over the room. Papers from the desk had been torn and scattered, like scent in a paper-chase. Cinders and ashes from the grate had been flung about in handfuls. The clock lay in the fender, with the poker thrust into the works. Whoever had ragged that study had gone to work rather like a bull in a china shop. It was amazing that he had been able to carry out such a ragging without noise. Lovell fairly stut-

tered at the sight of that widespread wreckage.

Richard Dalton stood dumbfounded for a long moment. Then he spoke:

"Lovell, you will be expelled for this. Go back to your dormitory!"

Lovell stared at him. Not till that moment had it dawned on Lovell that he would be suspected of that outrageous rag.

"I!" he gasped. "I never did that—"

"What?"

"I never did it!" panted Lovell. "I haven't been here a few minutes—I never did a thing—I—I never—"

"That will do!" Mr. Dalton's tone was cold and contemptuous. "You need say no more, Lovell. Go back to your dormitory at once."

"But I—I—I—"

"Go!"

And Lovell went like a fellow in a dream.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Who?

"YOU mad ass!" said Valentine Mornington.

After breakfast in the morning, fellows were gathered in groups in the quadrangle, excitedly discussing the news.

That news was all over Rookwood School. All the Head's House—the Classical Side—knew, and it had reached Manders' House—the Modern Side. Moderns were as excited about it as Classics. It was an event in the history of Rookwood. It was such a "rag" as had never happened before, since the old school in Hampshire had had a local habitation and a name. Everybody knew what had happened, and knew that Lovell was under orders to go before the Head. Morny came out of the House, after looking in at the wrecked study, and came up to the Plistical Four, surrounded by a crowd of excited juniors.

"You potty idiot!" went on Morny.

"Were you off your rocker last night? You'll be sacked!"

"I never did it!" roared Lovell.

"Oh, don't be an ass! Didn't Dalton catch you doing it?"

"No," roared Lovell, "he didn't! He caught me there, but I never did it! I dare say you did it!"

"What?" yelled Morny.

"Well, you're reckless idiot enough," said Lovell. "I don't know any man in the Fourth who'd do it, unless you did."

Mornington glared at him, speechless.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were looking utterly dismayed. They had to take their chum's word that he had not done it. But it was putting their faith in his word to a tremendous strain.

"Think I'd do such an absolutely rotten and blackguardly thing?" bawled Lovell. "I went there to rag Dicky—I own that. But I wasn't going to do any damage. Think I'm a dashed hooligan, or what?"

"Somebody did it," said Peele of the Fourth.

"Yes; and it was the brute who was skulking in the study when I got there, and knocked me over, and got away in the dark!" gasped Lovell.

"Was there somebody?" grinned Cyril Peele.

"Yes, there was, you cad! I dare say it was you!" bawled Lovell. "You've always been up against Dicky, because he's whopped you for smoking. And you're cad enough to do it!"

"No good slinging round accusations at every fellow who speaks to you, old bean," remarked Dudley Vane.

Lovell gave him a fierce glare.

"Do you believe I did it?" he belted. He clenched his fists.

"No, I don't. I haven't been here long, but I've been in your study long enough to know that I can take your word. If you say you didn't do it, you didn't."

"Oh!" said Lovell, mollified

"That's decent of you, Vane. I give every fellow here my word that I never did it!"

"Let's hope the Head will take your word like Vane," chuckled Gower.

"Don't you?" roared Lovell.

"Well, it's a bit thick, isn't it?" said Gower. "Dicky caught you on the spot, with his study wrecked. Who did it, if you didn't?"

"I dare say you did."

"I?" gasped Cuthbert Gower.

"Yes, you're rotter enough!" And I dare say you did it because Dicky's whopped you for having a racing paper in your study."

"Why, you cheeky rotter——"

"I'll jolly well——"

"For goodness' sake draw it mild, Lovell!" said Jimmy Silver, interposing. "It wasn't you, as you say it wasn't, but don't accuse every fellow in the school, one after another."

"Well, it was somebody," said Lovell. "Might have been a Shell chap. Nobody was out of our dorm when I got back to it. If it was you, Smythe——"

"You silly ass!" gasped Smythe of the Shell.

"Well, if it was you, you'd better own up when I have to go before the big beak."

"I say, that man Lovell is getting dangerous," said Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth. "He'll be saying it was me next."

Lovell spun round at the Modern junior.

"I dare say it was!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Just like a Modern cad!" hooted Lovell. "Come to think of it, no Classical man would do a dirty trick like that. Modern all over!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled a dozen fellows.

"You can cackle!" roared Lovell.

"I'll bet it was a Modern cad all the time. Just a rotten Modern trick. You can all see that. I'd like to know how you got into the House, Dodd, if you did it."

"You silly owl!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "You did it, and you're jolly well going to be sacked for it, and serve you jolly well right! And—— Yaroooh!"

Lovell was on him before he could finish. Lovell's right landed on Tommy Dodd's nose—his left followed it up in Tommy's eye. The Modern junior went over with a crash.

"Lovell!" shrieked Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd was up in a twinkling, and hurling himself at Lovell. Arthur Edward met him more than half-way.

"Go it, Tommy!" yelled Cook and Doyle.

"Stop them!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Here comes Dalton!" shouted Vane.

But the combatants did not heed Dalton. They were fighting furiously, tramping and gasping, hitting hard, and hitting often.

Mr. Dalton, with a frowning brow, strode on the scene. He grasped Tommy Dodd with his left hand, Lovell with his right, and fairly wrenched them away from one another.

"Stop this instantly!" he snapped.

"Lovell, follow me! Dr. Chisholm is ready to see you."

"Ooogh!" gasped Lovell.

He dabbed his handkerchief to his nose, which streamed red. That handkerchief was very quickly spotted with crimson.

"Follow me!" snapped Mr. Dalton.

And Arthur Edward Lovell followed him, still with his handkerchief to his nose, leaving the crowd in the quadrangle in a wild buzz of excitement behind him.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Guilty or Not Guilty!

"HERE is the boy, sir!" Richard Dalton, master of the Rookwood Fourth, opened the door of the Head's study, and signed to Lovell to enter.

Lovell of the Fourth paused a



moment on the august threshold, to dab his nose with a red-stained handkerchief.

Lovell's nose had a damaged aspect. A fellow whose "claret" had been tapped was really hardly in a state to appear before his headmaster. Arthur Edward Lovell's face was almost as red as the spots on his handkerchief as he stepped in.

Dr. Chisholm adjusted his glasses, and looked at Lovell with cold disapproval. The Head of Rookwood School was a severe old gentleman. Lovell's damaged aspect was not likely to diminish his severity. With the stained handkerchief crumpled in one hand, Lovell stood before him, hoping that his nose wouldn't begin to bleed again. That hope proved ill-founded. It did!

Mr. Dalton closed the door and stood near it in silence, his eyes on that member of his Form and on the headmaster. There was a doubtful and uncertain expression on the young master's face. He had brought Lovell there for stern judgment, but he was assailed by a lingering doubt of his guilt.

"Have you been fighting, Lovell?" asked Dr. Chisholm icily.

Really, it was a superfluous question. Judging by appearances, at least, Lovell had.

"Ye-es, sir!" stammered Lovell. He gave his nose a hurried dab. "I'm sorry, sir, but it was a Modern chap—"

The Head's frown deepened.

"You were under orders to appear before me, Lovell, to hear your sentence. Yet this is the moment you choose to indulge in a renewal of the disorderly disputes between the Classical and Modern sides in the school."

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Lovell. "Only, you see, sir, that Modern chap made out that it was I who ragged Mr. Dalton's study last night, so I jolly well punched him."

Dr. Chisholm stared at him blankly.

He glanced at Mr. Dalton, and then stared at Lovell again.

"I fail to understand you, Lovell!" he rapped. "You are here to be judged for the outrage in your Form-master's study, of which you were guilty. Do you mean to say that you have assailed a boy for saying what is well known to the whole school?"

"You see, sir, I never did it!" said Lovell. "I'm not going to have a Modern cad making out I did it, either!"

"Upon my word! Is there any doubt of this boy's guilt, Mr. Dalton?" asked the Head. "I understood from you that you were alarmed by a noise in the night, that you came down and found Lovell in your study, and that the study had been wrecked."

"That is certainly the case, sir," said Mr. Dalton. "I had no doubt whatever that Lovell had done the damage, and so I reported to you this morning."

"I didn't, sir!" exclaimed Lovell, with another dab at his nose, which persisted in dripping crimson. "I never did anything of the kind. I wouldn't. I don't believe any fellow in the Classical Fourth did it. I jolly well know I didn't!"

"You do not deny that Mr. Dalton found you there, Lovell, after midnight?" asked Dr. Chisholm.

"Oh, no, sir! Dicky—I mean, Mr. Dalton—found me there!"

"You admit that you broke dormitory bounds after midnight, and went down to your Form-master's study?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Yet you have the effrontery to deny that you did the damage there?"

"It's the truth, sir!" said Lovell. "I know what it looks like. But I never touched a thing in the study—except falling over some of the furniture. It was all upside-down and chucked about when I got there."

"Then, for what purpose," said the Head, in a deep voice, "did you visit your Form-master's study at all in the middle of the night?"

Lovell's face, already red, grew redder.

"I—I was going to chalk a message on the glass, sir. You see, sir, Mr. Dalton's given us detention for Saturday afternoon, which means washing out the House match, and—and I was rather—rather excited about it. I—I know I was an ass, sir. But—but I was only going to put a chalk message on the glass for Mr. Dalton to see in morning, about the detention—"

"Bless my soul!" said Dr. Chisholm.

"You—you see, sir, I—I thought Dicky—I mean Mr. Dalton—might take a hint and wash out the detention," stammered Lovell. "As for ragging the study, I never dreamed of it. It was a rotten thing to do!"

Dr. Chisholm peered at Lovell over his glasses. Mr. Dalton's look was growing more and more uncertain. If ever a fellow had been convicted on overwhelming evidence, Arthur Edward Lovell had. Yet doubt was growing in the minds of both the masters.

"I know another fellow had been there, sir," went on Lovell. "I heard a sound in the study when I got there. When I went in, somebody rushed from behind the door, barged me over, and scooted—"

"And—and what?"

"I mean, bunked, sir—that is, buzzed off. I mean to say, he dodged out of the study and beat it!"

"And who was it?" demanded the Head.

"I couldn't see in the dark, sir. I never knew he was there till he knocked me over. He was gone in a jiffy—"

"In a what?"

"I mean, in a tick—that is, in an instant!" gasped Lovell. "I was left sprawling on the floor, all over ink, and when I got up, I fell over a lot of things thrown about the room. That is how Mr. Dalton came to see me there, sir. I hadn't time to cut!"

"Is it known, Mr. Dalton, whether

any other boy was out of his dormitory last night?"

"Not so far as I am aware, sir."

"Do you attach any importance whatever to this extraordinary story?"

Mr. Dalton hesitated a moment.

"I hardly know what to say, sir. I had no doubt that Lovell had done the damage in the study. But, foolish, reckless, and obtuse as this boy is, I have always found him truthful; nor should I, before this occasion, have dreamed for a moment that he could be guilty of such an outrage. I am bound to say, sir, that I feel that there is now an element of doubt in the matter."

"You can take my word, sir, that I never did it," said Lovell. "Why, sir, the clock was smashed and the book-case broken. It was what a rotten brute of a hooligan would do. It wasn't a rag—it was a beastly bit of black-guardism. I'd like to punch the rotter's head for it!"

The two masters gazed at Lovell of the Classical Fourth. Arthur Edward Lovell was not, perhaps, brilliant in the intellectual line. But it was difficult to doubt that he was sincere. And yet—

"If you would decide to reserve judgment until further inquiry can be made, sir," suggested Mr. Dalton, "it may possibly be ascertained whether any other boy left his dormitory during the night."

"Quite," said the Head. "Lovell will be caned severely for having broken dormitory bounds after lights-out. If it shall prove that he was guilty of the damage to the study, he will be expelled from Rookwood. Until the matter has been decided, he will be confined to the punishment-room. Take him away, Mr. Dalton!"

"Follow me, Lovell!" said the Fourth Form master quietly.

And Arthur Edward—with his handkerchief to his nose again—followed his Form-master from the Head's study.

## CHAPTER 12.

## In "Clink"

JIMMY SILVER were a worried look in the Fourth Form Room. His chums, Raby and Newcome, looked worried also, and their feelings seemed to be shared by Dudley Vane, the new fellow, who, as a member of the end study, consorted a good deal with the Fistical Four.

Other fellows in the Fourth looked excited or concerned. Poole and Gower were exchanging grins, apparently amused by the fact that Lovell was up before the Big Beak. Mornington had a sarcastic smile on his face, but his chum, Erroll, looked very serious. Tubby Muffin was full of excitement. Tubby's voice was heard in eager tones:

"Of course, it's the sack. They're bound to sack him. But, I say, are they going to boot him while we're in Form? It ought to be done in Hall, you know. I say, Vane, you've never seen a fellow sacked, I suppose, being a new chap? If they have it in Hall—"

"You silly ass!" said Dudley Vane. "Shut up!"

"Well, we don't often get an expulsion," said Tubby, "and I don't think we ought to be done out of it. What do you think, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver did not explain, in words, what he thought. He reached over with a ruler, and gave the cheery Tubby a crack that elicited a wild howl from Cecil Adolphus Muffin.

"Yoo—hoo—ow—whoop!" yelled Tubby. "Ow! Wow!—You rotter! Wharrer you banging me with that ruler for? Wow!"

"Shut up, you fat idiot!" said Oswald.

"Ow! Wow! Ow!"

"Here comes Dicky!" exclaimed Raby.

Mr. Dalton entered the Form-room. He was, for once, late for his class. All eyes were turned on him as he came in. Jimmy and Raby and New-

come watched his grave face almost in anguish.

They believed Lovell's denial of the ragging. They believed that their chum had, as usual, only been a silly ass—nothing more. But they did not expect that view to be taken by the beaks.

If Lovell was guiltless, he had taken no end of trouble to make himself look guilty, that was certain. And the headmaster could only go on the evidence, in this case overwhelming. They had to know what the verdict was.

"If you please, sir!" said Jimmy Silver, with a tremor in his voice. "What's happened to Lovell, sir?"

"Lovell is in the punishment-room, Silver," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "He is to remain there until the matter has been further investigated. He denies having been guilty of the damage to my study, and it is the headmaster's intention to sift the matter thoroughly before a Rookwood boy is expelled."

Jimmy almost gasped with relief. It was not the "sack" yet, at all events, little hope as there seemed for Lovell.

Mr. Dalton looked over the Form. His keen eyes seemed to linger for a moment or two on Peele and Gower. The two black sheep of the Form were the fellows he would have suspected in the absence of evidence.

"There is to be an inquiry," went on Mr. Dalton, "as to whether any other boy was out of dormitory bounds during the night. If any such boy is here, I command him to stand forward."

There was no movement in the Fourth. Mornington closed one eye at Erroll, who frowned and looked away. Morny was rather amused at the idea of a fellow being asked to stand forward to take the sentence of the "sack."

"There can be no doubt," resumed Mr. Dalton, after a pause, "that what happened last night was an act of revenge, whether for the sentence of detention passed on the Form, or for some other reason." His glance

lingered again on Peele and Gower. "Peele! Did you leave the dormitory during the night?"

"No, sir, I didn't!" said Cyril Peele between his teeth. "I don't think I ought to be suspected, sir, for what everybody knows that Lovell did."

"You have been punished before, Peele, for breaking bounds after lights-out," said Mr. Dalton. "That is why I have questioned you." He paused. "Did any boy here wake during the night, and notice that anyone was absent from the dormitory?"

No answer.

"Very well," said Mr. Dalton, "the matter is under investigation, and there it will rest for the present. We shall now proceed."

It was not easy for the Classical Fourth to fix their thoughts on Latin. Classics as they were, with a lofty scorn for Moderns and all their works, that classical language never seemed to have any great attraction for most of them. Now it had less than ever.

Every fellow was thinking of that tremendous "rag" in Dalton's study overnight and of Arthur Edward Lovell, segregated from the rest of Rookwood, shut up in the punishment-room on his lonely own.

Class, in the thrilling circumstances, was a bore—though no doubt Arthur Edward Lovell would have preferred it to the solitude of "clink."

When a fellow was put into "clink," as the juniors called the punishment-room, it was a preliminary to the "sack," and few doubted that when Arthur Edward came out of "clink," it would be to catch the train at Latham for home.

They were glad and relieved to be dismissed in break, when break came at last. Jimmy Silver & Co. went out with glum faces. Every fellow was discussing the mystery of Dalton's study—but only to the few fellows who believed in Lovell was it a mystery. Most of Rookwood had no doubt whatever that the right man was in "clink."

"Of course it was Lovell," Morn-

ington said to Kit Erroll. "Can't understand the man's cheek in delayin' it."

Erroll shook his head.

"Lovell's not a liar," he said.

"Oh, rot! Any fellow would stretch a point when he's up for the sack. I jolly well know I would—and have!" grinned Morny.

"Lovell wouldn't. Besides, that yarn of his sounds steep—but Lovell hasn't sense enough to make it up."

"Oh!" said Morny. He laughed. "Somethin' in that, by gad! But look here, old scout, if it wasn't Lovell, it was somebody else. If he really saw another chap there in the dark, who was the chap?"

"Ask me another!" Erroll's eyes dwelt uneasily on his chum. "Morny, if you played the fool last night, you're not the fellow to leave another chap to take your gruel!"

"You silly ass!" howled Mornington. "I never opened my eyes last night—after I shut them."

"I'm glad. But who the dickens could it have been? You're the only man in the Fourth reckless enough—and I know you'd see Lovell through if it was you. It beats me hollow."

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome had gone round the school buildings to stare up at the high barred window of the punishment-room. Their chum was there—a prisoner. Apparently Lovell anticipated that his friends might come round in break to look up at the window, for a hand came out between the bars, and was waved.

"Keep smiling, old man!" called out Jimmy Silver. His voice carried to the high window, and reached Lovell's ears. Unluckily, it reached others.

Carthew of the Sixth came round the corner with his ashplant under his arm, and an unpleasant grin on his face.

"I fancied I should find you here," he remarked. "Don't you know that this is against rules, Silver?"

Jimmy made no answer to that. He did not need telling that it was against

rules—very strict rules—to communicate with a fellow in “clink.”

“You were calling up to Lovell,” said Carthew.

“I didn’t know you were listening round the corner, Carthew!” answered Jimmy. “Is eavesdropping part of a prefect’s duty?”

Carthew set his lips and slid the ash-plant down into his hand.

“Touch your toes, Silver!” he said briefly.

Jimmy drew a deep breath. It was for ragging that unpopular prefect that the junior footballers had detention on Saturday. Never had Jimmy felt so strongly inclined to give the bully of the Sixth some more of the same.

From the barred window above came Lovell’s bawling voice:

“You there, Jimmy? I can’t get my head through these beastly bars. I say, listen to me. I’ve been thinking it over, and I think very likely it was Carthew did it.”

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome jumped. So did Carthew of the Sixth. Arthur Edward, unaware that the prefect was there, bawled on:

“Can you hear me, Jimmy? I say, I fancy it was that cad Carthew. He never liked Dicky Dalton—I’ve seen Dicky look at him, you know, as if he was dirt. So he is, if you come to that. I say, what about giving Dicky a hint that it was Carthew who ragged his study? Thinking it over, I believe he’s the only fellow at Rookwood who’s absolute rotter enough to do it.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the three juniors involuntarily. The expression on Carthew’s face as he listened to the words from above was too much for them.

Carthew gasped. His face was like a freshly boiled beetroot with rage. Instead of waiting for Jimmy Silver to “touch his toes,” he whacked out with the cane—catching Jimmy across the shoulders, and Raby and Newcome in swift succession.

“Hook it!” gasped Jimmy. The three juniors scudded off,

Carthew in pursuit with brandished cane. From the high barred window came Lovell’s bawl.

“You hear me? That cad Carthew, you know—that rotter Carthew—everybody knows that Carthew is an absolute rank outsider——”

But Jimmy Silver & Co. were gone at high speed, and the rest of Arthur Edward Lovell’s remarks were wasted on the desert air!

### CHAPTER 13.

By Whose Hand?

DUDLEY VANE stood before the school notice-board after class that day, and bit his lip as he read a paper in Jimmy Silver’s handwriting. It was the list for the House match, which Jimmy had posted up—and it included the new fellow’s name in the forward line. The date of that match was to have been Saturday, but the detention of the Classical footballers for that date left it “in the air,” as it were.

Jimmy had posted his list, all the same, perhaps with a lingering hope that it might touch Dicky Dalton’s heart when he saw it. Dicky was far from a hard man, as a rule, and Jimmy nourished a hope that he might yet relent, and cancel the detention for that awfully important date.

It was pleasant enough to Vane to see his name there. Although he was said to have had an illness shortly before coming to Rookwood, he was strong and sturdy, and looked as fit as a fiddle. He was keen on Soccer, and played a good game—so good that it had caught Jimmy’s watchful eye, and led to his chance.

Having been hardly more than a week in the school, it was rather a catch for Vane to be picked out to play for the junior House eleven, which made it all the more intensely irritating to him for the match to be indefinitely postponed. Good-tempered and equable as he

usually seemed, the new Classical was looking glum and moody now.

"Keep smiling, old bean!" Jimmy Silver came along and joined him. "It's rotten all round; but we'll play the match later, if not sooner. Not that even a House match matters a lot now."

"I thought you were pretty keen on House matches at Rookwood," said Vane.

"So we are; but with old Lovell in clink, I'm not worrying about it a lot," answered Jimmy. "In fact, unless old Lovell's free to play on Saturday, I'd rather postpone it."

"Lovell's not indispensable."

"No; but he's as good a half as we've got, and I should hate to play and leave him out—especially in clink. Of course, they'll let him out immediately they find out who mucked up Dicky's study—not that there seems much chance. I've gone over fifty fellows in my mind, and can't say one of them is likely to have done it."

Dudley Vane laughed.

"You needn't go over fifty fellows," he remarked. "Dalton only detained the footballers for ragging Carthew on Little Side the other day. It's one of the detained fellows, of course, sore about the game being put off."

"Well, I'm not so sure of that," said Jimmy. "Other fellows have grudges against Dicky Dalton. But if it's that, of course, it makes it all the less likely that Dicky will wash it out. It's rather like threatening him—and he's about the last man in the world to be influenced by threats."

"I don't see that," said Vane thoughtfully. "It looks to me as if the chap, whether it was Lovell or somebody else, meant to make Dalton understand that, if he kept on the high horse, he would get trouble. That might make him dismount!"

Jimmy gave a little start.

"Vane, old man, you don't mean to say you fancy there's any more to come?" he asked, alarmed at the idea.

"Well, look at it!" argued Vane. "Dalton washes out the House match—and his study is ragged, as a tip to him to chuck it. If he doesn't chuck it, the fellow, whoever he is, may hand out a second knock. I should think it jolly likely myself."

Jimmy whistled.

He had not thought of it before, but now that Vane mentioned it, he wondered.

"But who the dickens!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Have you the foggiest idea who the howling ass may have been, Vane?"

"I haven't been here long enough to know half the fellows. But I believe it was not Lovell—he says so, and his word is good enough for me. Whoever it was, I should say he was a fellow who doesn't stick at trifles when he goes off the deep-end."

"That fits Morny," said Jimmy. "But—it wasn't old Morny. He's reckless ass enough—but he wouldn't let Lovell take his gruel."

"Lovell's not taken the gruel yet. He's got the benefit of the doubt, so far. And if the fellow gets going again while Lovell's in clink, that will see him clear, I shouldn't wonder."

Jimmy Silver drove his hands deep into his pockets, and walked away in a worried and troubled mood. Vane, he knew, was a clever fellow, and it looked as if he had thought of something that the other fellows had missed. Certainly Jimmy would have been glad enough of a happening which would have seen Lovell clear. But the idea of some hot-headed fellow setting out to persecute Dicky Dalton into cancelling the detention was worrying and alarming.

"Silver!"

Mr. Dalton's voice rapped out.

"Yes, sir!" Jimmy turned his head and started as he saw the dark and angry frown on his Form-master's face.

"Step into my study!"

Wondering what was up, the captain of the Fourth obeyed. Mr. Dalton's study had been set to rights that day,

but it still showed a good many signs of the savage ragging it had had overnight. The glass doors of the bookcase were still shattered, and there was a star in the centre of the looking-glass. The carpet showed many stains of spilt ink.

Jimmy's eyes fixed on the glass. It was not the starred centre that drew his gaze. It was an inscription in ink, evidently drawn by a finger dipped in an inkpot:

"BETTER WASH IT OUT."

Jimmy stared blankly at the words. Then his glance turned to Mr. Dalton's angry face.

"Do you know anything of that, Silver?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Someone must have entered my study and written those words on the glass while I was gone to see Lovell in the punishment-room," said Mr. Dalton. "I should think that it was some more of Lovell's folly, but that foolish boy is still under lock and key. Those words must refer, Silver, to the order of detention on Saturday."

"I—I suppose so, sir," stammered Jimmy. Vane's words were fresh in his mind, and he could not doubt now that the new junior was right. Someone—goodness knows who—was on the war-path against Dicky Dalton!

"I need hardly say," said Mr. Dalton grimly, "that such an attempt to influence me will have no effect. The boy who wrote those insulting words will be flogged if discovered. You may tell the others so, Silver!"

Mr. Dalton took a duster and rubbed the glass clean. Jimmy left the study, and went up slowly to the Classical Fourth passage. Vane and Raby and Newcome joined him on the way up, and Jimmy told them of the inked message in Dalton's study. Raby and Newcome stared; Vane shrugged his shoulders.

"It wasn't Lovell this time, at any rate," remarked Dudley Vane.

"Yes, that's a cert!" agreed Raby. "But who——"

He broke off. Near the end study, at the end of the passage, was a tap and a sink. One or two fellows were there, with kettles for tea in the studies. Valentine Mornington was sluicing his slim and well-kept hands under the tap. Ink ran down in the stream of water from his hands.

Raby stared at him—and so did the others. Jimmy caught his breath. An inky finger had daubed a message on the glass in Dalton's study. Morny was washing ink off his fingers!

"Morny! You—you—you ass!" gasped Jimmy. "Then it was you!"

Mornington glanced round.

"What was me, fathead?" he asked.

"You've got ink on your fingers!"

"Never had ink on yours?" asked Mornington, staring. "I upset the inkpot in my study. What about it?"

"Have you been in Dalton's study?"

"No. Why?"

"Somebody's been there, and inked a cheeky message on the glass. There's a flogging for the man when he's spotted."

Mornington laughed.

"Not guilty, my lord!" he said lightly. He laughed again, and shrugged his shoulders. "You can believe me or not, as you like, of course! I don't give a hang for what you believe, Jimmy Silver!"

Jimmy made no answer. He went into his study, puzzled and perturbed. Lovell's word had to be taken, in spite of evidence. But Mornington's word was far from good as gold. Jimmy did not know what to think, and over tea in the end study that day, Uncle James of Rookwood had a worried and thoughtful brow.

#### CHAPTER 14.

##### Sacked!

**R**ICHARD DALTON paced the path under the old beeches in the Rookwood quad, with his hands in his pockets, and a deep line in his

brow. It was a cold, sharp, starry night, but little of the light of the stars penetrated through the old beech branches, bare of leaves as they were.

Nine o'clock had chimed from the clock-tower. Prep was over in the studies, but light gleamed from many study windows. From the open window of Smythe's study in the Shell came the sound of the radio. The House, of course, was closed—as was Manders' House, across the quad.

Dicky was pacing in the deserted quadrangle, partly for the fresh air, and partly because he wanted to be alone to think of the puzzling affair of what had happened in his study the night before.

The more he thought over that mystery, the more Dicky Dalton came to believe that Lovell had placed himself under suspicion by his usual reckless, unthinking foolhardiness, and that another hand had done the damage. But whose hand?

All investigation had drawn blank. All the evidence was against Lovell. He was still locked in "clink," and, unless something turned up in his favour, it seemed inevitable that he must be judged guilty and expelled. If he was guilty, he deserved it. But was he? Dicky could not feel satisfied on that point.

He came to a pause in his pacing, and stood under one of the old beeches, looking towards the glimmering windows of the House. A rustle caught his ears, and he looked round.

Even as he moved, something descended over his head, enveloping him in darkness.

Taken utterly by surprise, fairly dumbfounded, Mr. Dalton staggered.

It was a sack—a heavy coal-sack—that had engulfed him. It descended, completely blindfolding him, and half-suffocating him with coaldust. He dragged his hands from his pockets. But he had no time to struggle. A cord had been threaded round the neck of the sack, and it was instantly drawn tight.

He staggered to and fro helplessly, in black darkness, gurgling for breath. He made an effort to wrench away the sack. But the cord was drawn fast round the neck of it, fastening it round his legs. A slip noose had been used, and the action was instantaneous.

A violent shove in the back sent him reeling. Unable to make a motion to save himself from the fall, he crashed down on his face on the path.

The sack over his face saved his features to some extent. But his nose had a hard knock, and he felt the trickle of blood from it mingling with the coaldust.

With all his strength—and Dicky was an athlete—he wrenched at the sack as he lay prone under the dark beeches. But the sacking was stout and strong; it was impossible to burst it.

He felt unseen hands groping over him. He knew that the cord was being knotted behind him, imprisoning him inside the sack. Ends of the cord were tied round both his knees, below the edge of the sack, so that he could not possibly push it up over his head.

He was helpless in the hands of his unseen assailant. He shouted wildly, but the thick sacking muffled his voice. And a sudden shove on the back of his head jammed his face to the earth, soft and damp from recent rain. His shouting died away in a gurgling gasp.

Alarmed and angry, he was still more amazed. Who was doing this? The same desperate young rascal who had wrecked his study. He did not need telling that. Not Lovell—Lovell was locked in clink! Was it a junior at all? There was a strength in the grasp on him that seemed unusual, almost incredible, in a schoolboy. But if his assailant was a senior, a Fifth or Sixth Form man, that was more amazing still. Was that possible—could it be possible?

He struggled wildly, but hopelessly. He was utterly at the mercy of the unknown who had headed him up in the sack! The audacity of it was amazing. His assailant must have been watch-



ing him under the dark trees—watching for a chance to take him from behind by surprise—and he had succeeded. But he had taken reckless risks.

He strove again to shout for help. Again his face was jammed roughly and savagely in the damp earth. Then the unseen assailant finished knotting the cords.

Richard Dalton, gasping helplessly in the sack, heard a sound of retreating footsteps. He sat up, lurching and swaying, gasping for breath. The fellow was going—at a swift run for the House. Who was out of the House at that hour—late after lock-up, only half an hour before the juniors' bed-time? If he could have got loose the young rascal could have been spotted yet!

But he could not get loose. He struggled, and wrenched, and wrestled; but he was safely tied up in the sack. It was not easy to get on his feet; but he got up at last, and tottered away. He could see nothing, and he bumped into a tree, and then into another.

But for the fact that the radio was still on in Smythe's study, Mr. Dalton might have lurched about helplessly in any direction. But the strains of wireless swing were still streaming from the Shell study window, and Dalton could hear, if he could not see. The sound guided him, and he swayed and lurched towards the House—a strange and startling figure in the gleam of the stars.

## CHAPTER 15.

### The Mystery!

**D**UDLEY VANE gave a yell. "Great pip! What's that?" "What—" began Jimmy Silver. "Oh, my hat! Look!" yelled Vane. There was a rush to the window. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were in the end study after prep, grinding lines. Vane, however, had declared that Smythe's wireless was more entertaining than lines—as no doubt it was—and he had left them to it. It was near

bed-time when he had strolled back into the study, humming a swing tune, a cheery smile on his handsome face. He grinned at the three bent heads at the table and strolled to the window, where he stood looking out into the starry quad. Suddenly his gaze became fixed, and he gave the startled yell that drew his study-mates with a rush to the window.

They stared down into the quad. Out of the shadows of the buildings and the old beeches, the wintry starlight fell clear. And in that silvery light a strange figure appeared, lurching drunkenly towards the House.

Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed down at it, spellbound with astonishment. For a full minute they could not make out what it was. In the starlight, it looked like a very long and headless body, on very short legs.

Then they realised that it was a man, with a sack over his head that came down nearly to his knees.

"Is that some lunatic?" asked Vane. "What blithering ass could have got himself up like that?"

"Goodness knows. Let's get down!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, and he ran out of the study with his chums at his heels.

They scudded down the stairs. Other eyes, it seemed, had already fallen on that strange figure lurching towards the House, for the door was open, and a score of fellows had gathered there.

Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, had run out into the quad, with Neville of the Sixth after him, and Hansom of the Fifth. They guided the stumbling figure into the House. Strange muffled sounds came from within the tied sack. The occupant of that sack, half-suffocated with coal-dust, was trying to speak.

"One of you fellows got a pen-knife?" gasped Bulkeley. "It's Mr. Dalton, I think—"

"Dalton!" yelled twenty voices. Jimmy Silver had a penknife open in a moment; Vane had one open in

another moment. They gashed at the cord. Hanson of the Fifth helped with a pocket-knife. The sacked figure stood swaying, steadied by Bulkeley's hold on the coal-sack. Swiftly the knotted cords parted, and then Bulkeley and Neville grasped the sack and drew it up over the head—revealed in the glare of the electric light, black with coal-dust.

"It—it—it's Dicky!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Dalton was barely recognisable, his face thickly smothered with coal-dust, which was in his eyes and nose and mouth and ears. He stood gasping for breath when he was free of the sack.

"Here comes the Head!" breathed Vane.

There was a hush as Dr. Chisholm rustled up. He gazed like a man in a dream at Richard Dalton.

"Is—is—is that Mr. Dalton?" articulated the Head.

"Yes, sir! Oooogh! Yes—woooogh—choooogh—ooogh."

"What—what has happened? What is—"

"Urrrgh! I—I—I was suddenly attacked in—the—urrgh—quadrangle, sir, and—gurrgh—that sack whipped over my head, sir—urrgh!"

"This is—is—is amazing—unprecedented! I can scarcely believe my eyes, and my ears! A member of my staff—" Dr. Chisholm fairly gasped. "Bulkeley, please help Mr. Dalton to his room."

The unfortunate Form-master, still gasping and gurgling, tottered away with Bulkeley; the Head, with a thunderous frown on his brow, followed.

Arthur Edward Lovell joined the Classical Fourth when they went up to their dormitory. His chums gathered round him with bright faces. They were glad to see Arthur Edward out of clink.

"Gratters, old bean," said Mornington. "But what are you doing out of quod?"

Lovell grinned.

"I say, it seems that it's all right for me, you chaps," he said. "The Head came and let me out!"

"Good man!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I suppose that means that they're satisfied now that I never did it," said Lovell. "The Head said there had been an attack on Mr. Dalton, and he seemed to think it was the same chap who wrecked Dalton's study. My giddy aunt! There's some fellow who's got it in for Dicky—hard! He's asked for it, of course—mucking up our football match! But it's rather thick. I say, there'll be a fearful row to-morrow—they'll go over Rookwood with a small comb to get the fellow who got Dalton the sack!"

Lovell was right—there was a fearful "row." For a whole day, Rookwood School thrilled with the sensation of the "sacking" of the Fourth Form master—and the efforts of beaks and prefects to discover the unknown. Nobody doubted that it was the same fellow who had wrecked Dalton's study. But, whoever he was, he kept himself exceedingly dark—and no clue was found to him! And Rookwood could only wonder over the strange mystery.

## CHAPTER 16.

### A Scrap in the Study!

"**W**HAT rot!" said Dudley Vane. Arthur Edward Lovell stared, or, rather, glared, at the new junior in the Classical Fourth Form at Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome grinned.

Lovell did not like to hear his observations described as "rot." Perhaps it was a just description. But that did not make it any more palatable to Arthur Edward. Least of all did he like it from a new fellow, who had been only a few weeks in the school.

"Did you say rot, Vane?" inquired Lovell ominously.

Vane nodded cheerily.

"Just rot!" he assented. "Absolute rot! I know that Christmas is the time for ghosts and things—but it's just rot! Chap who believes in ghosts is an ass!"

"Who believes in ghosts?" roared Lovell. "I never said I believed in ghosts! I said I saw something when we were at Jimmy's place last Christmas, where the phantom monk is supposed to walk in the old Priory. And so I did! And if you say I didn't, I'll jolly well jam your head in the butter!"

Arthur Edward arose in wrath.

The Fistical Four and the new fellow were at tea in the end study.

It was the last day of term; Rookwood School was breaking up for the Christmas holidays next day. Jimmy's chums were going home with him for Christmas, and he had asked the new fellow, too—Vane being on the best of terms with the Co., and quite adopted as a member of the end study. In these circumstances, it was rather unfortunate for a dispute to break out. But Lovell never could stand much in the way of contradiction. His own opinion being the best available, he naturally expected other fellows to agree with it without a lot of argument.

"My dear chap——" murmured Jimmy Silver pacifically.

"Don't 'dear chap' me!" hooted Lovell. "I can tell that cheeky ass——"

"No need to tell all the Fourth!" suggested Raby.

"Why not shut up yourself, old bean?" asked Newcome. "That's a jolly good idea, though you never seem to think of it!"

"I can tell that cheeky ass," roared Lovell, evidently in no mood for shutting up himself, "that I don't want any check from a new tick! Last Christmas, when we went home with Jimmy, I saw something in the haunted passage where the monk walks, and if Vane says I didn't——"

"Is there a looking-glass in that passage?" asked Vane.

"Eh?" Lovell was taken aback by the unexpected question. "Not that I remember. Why?"

"Well, if there was, you might have seen something," conceded Vane. "You might have seen a hot-headed, excitable, silly ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Raby, Newcome, and Jimmy Silver.

"A—a—a what?" stuttered Lovell.

"A hot-headed, excitable, silly ass!" repeated Vane. "I mean, if you were standing in front of the looking-glass, you know."

Lovell did not make any rejoinder to that. It seemed to Arthur Edward a time for action, not for words.

He reached suddenly across the table and grabbed hold of Dudley Vane by his rather thick, curly hair.

Squash!

Before Vane knew what was happening, his face was squashed down in the butter-dish.

Lovell had said that he would do it! Now he had done it!

"Urrgggh!" came in a horrible gurgle from the new junior, as his features explored the butter.

"There!" gasped Lovell, as he rammed Vane's head well down.

"Lovell, you potty ass!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

The table rocked as Vane struggled wildly. The teapot went over, and its contents, rather hot, shot out. A wild howl from Newcome told where they landed. Newcome leaped up, grabbing at his knees. Hot tea on his knees seemed to excite him somewhat.

"Ow!" howled Newcome. "Oogh! You silly ass! Woogh!"

Dudley Vane jerked his head loose. He lifted his face from the butter-dish. It was veiled with clinging butter.

Lovell's wrathful glare changed, as he looked at him, to a wide grin. Vane's buttery face seemed to entertain him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "All

that butter's wasted; but you're welcome to it. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Urrggh!" gurgled Vane.

He dabbed wildly at the butter. His handkerchief was quickly reduced to a greasy rag. He gave Arthur Edward Lovell a buttery, furious glare.

"You blithering idiot!" he yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha! You shouldn't ask for it, you know!" roared Lovell. "I told you I'd jolly well do it, and I can jolly well say— Oh, crikey!"

Vane came round the table with a rush.

Generally Dudley Vane was a very good-tempered fellow. Once or twice, since coming to Rookwood, he had shown flashes of temper—but they were always instantly controlled; and, as a rule, he was as equable as any fellow at Rookwood. But the jamming of his handsome face in the butter seemed to have infuriated him—which, perhaps, was not surprising.

He hurled himself at Lovell, grasped him, and bore him backwards to the floor. Lovell went down with a terrific crash.

Arthur Edward was a rather beefy fellow. He was bigger and heavier than the new junior, and he had never entertained the slightest doubt that, in the event of a scrap, he could handle that fellow with one hand. He woke up now, as it were. He might have remembered that, on the day Vane came, there had been a little trouble in the end study, and he had not found the fellow easy to handle. Now he found it an absolutely hopeless proposition. Beefy and muscular as he was, Arthur Edward just crumpled up.

"Stop them!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Bang! Arthur Edward's head smote the floor of the end study, and smote it hard. Lovell's yell rang far beyond the study.

Jimmy and Raby rushed to separate them; Newcome was too busy with the knees of his trousers. The two juniors grasped Vane and dragged him off.

Under the greasy glimmer of the

butter his face was white. He wrenched himself free from Jimmy and Raby, and leaped at Lovell again. Lovell grasped him in return, and they rolled over on the carpet. An excited yelp was heard from the passage.

"I say, they're scrapping in Jimmy Silver's study! I say, they're smashing the place to bits!"

The door opened, and Tubby Muffin stared in. There was a scamper of feet in the passage as a crowd of other fellows came up. Mornington and Erroll, Peele and Gower, and Rawson, Townsend, and Topham stared into the end study.

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Morny. "It's a jolly old free fight! Getting ready for Christmas, you men?"

Lovell and Vane rolled over in wild combat. Jimmy and Raby rushed in again, and this time Newcome lent his aid. The combined efforts of the three dragged the combatants apart.

Arthur Edward sat and gasped, quite breathless. Vane was pitched into a corner of the study. He sprang to his feet—and as he did so he sighted the crowd of curious faces staring in at the door.

It was evident that his temper was quite out of hand, and the effort he made to control it was visible to all eyes.

The Fourth Formers were staring at him in blank astonishment. Nobody had ever imagined that Dudley Vane had a wildcat temper like this.

But his effort at self-control was successful. He calmed down so suddenly that the change was startling. His voice came cool, though breathless.

"Sorry, you fellows! I didn't mean to lose my temper. But jamming a fellow's face in the butter, you know—" He dabbed his greasy face. "But I'm sorry! I hope I haven't hurt you, Lovell!"

Lovell staggered to his feet. As a matter of fact, he was hurt—his head had been banged on the floor with a terrific bang that made him quite dizzy.

But Arthur Edward was not the fellow to admit that he was hurt.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" he snapped. "Think I'm made of putty? Fancy a chap like you could hurt me?"

Vane laughed. It was a clear, pleasant laugh, and it showed that he had quite recovered his usual good temper.

"I'm glad!" he said. "Let's call it a day, shall we? I rather want a wash!"

Lovell eyed him, rather like a bulldog. But Vane, determined that the shindy should go no further, passed him, and pushed through the fellows in the doorway, and went along to the tap at the end of the passage to wash off the butter.

"You ass!" said Lovell's three chums, addressing him together.

"Dashed wildcat!" growled Lovell, rubbing his head.

"All your fault!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Is that the last act?" inquired Mornington. "Don't say the show's over."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you get out!" yapped Lovell; and he slammed the door on the grinning crowd in the passage.

## CHAPTER 17.

### Off for the Holidays!

"MERRY Christmas!" shouted a dozen cheery voices on the platform of Latcham station. Rookwood School had broken up for the Christmas holidays. The five juniors of the end study were packed with cheery faces in a carriage, waving hands and hats to friends on the platform.

One of them, Dudley Vane, standing nearest the door, with his hand behind him, had a large, fat snowball in that hand, apparently intending to bestow it as a parting gift on one of the other Rookwooders. Lovell, in a good temper now, and the highest of spirits,

spotted Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth coming along looking for a carriage, and whispered to Vane:

"Let that Modern tick have it, Vane. Something for him to remember us by till next term."

Dudley Vane grinned.

"Just what I'm going to do," he answered. "But wait a bit. There's Dicky Dalton in the offing."

Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth, was there. He was speaking to Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, and the juniors noticed that his face was clouded and thoughtful.

They wondered whether Mr. Dalton was thinking of the mystery of Rookwood—still unsolved now that the term had ended.

It was still utterly unknown who was the "mystery man" of the school, who had perpetrated a series of wild and reckless rags.

No doubt the fellow was there in the cheery crowd going home for Christmas; but picking him out was a task to baffle Ferrers Locke. Mr. Dalton it was certain, did not like that strange mystery to be left in an unsolved state when the Rookwooders left—to crop up again the following term.

"Poor old Dicky!" said Jimmy Silver. "I bet he's got that mystery johnny on his mind! He doesn't like being beaten."

"Neither do any of us," remarked Vane.

"Sure thing," agreed Jimmy Silver. "I wish I could lay my hands on the mysterious ragger. A jolly good licking would bring him to his senses! Poor old Dicky!"

"Look here! Never mind Dicky," said Lovell. "Let Diddy have that snowball before he gets in. Or, rather, hand it to me. I shan't miss him."

That was Lovell all over. Dudley Vane might be a crack shot with a football. But Lovell had no doubt that he could go one better with a snowball.

"Leave it to me," said Vane. "And better wait till Dicky clears."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Lovell.

He jerked the snowball from the new fellow's hand. Vane shrugged his shoulders, and moved aside.

Tommy Dodd was coming along the train. Lovell drew back his hand, and the snowball flew.

It was like Lovell to slip in the carriage doorway, jerk his arm, and send the missile in an utterly unintended direction.

It went nowhere near Tommy Dodd. Where it went Lovell did not know for a moment. But the next moment he knew, as there came a sudden yell from Mr. Dalton, and he staggered over and sat down on the platform.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Vane. "You've done it now!"

"You ass, Lovell!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, scissors!" breathed Lovell. He backed hurriedly into the carriage out of sight. "What rotten luck!"

There was a general exclamation on the platform. Bulkeley stared round in wrath for the fellow who had bowled a "beak" over with a snowball.

The Form-master stood gasping, and dabbing away snow from his ear.

Jimmy Silver & Co. sat down. They hoped that no special attention would be directed to that carriage.

Luckily the engine whistled, and there was a scampering of feet, and shouting of voices, and a slamming of doors.

The chums of the Classical Fourth breathed more freely when the train moved out of the station.

"Jolly narrow escape!" said Jimmy. "You're lucky to get away without a whopping at the last minute, Lovell."

"It was Vane's fault, really," said Lovell.

"Mine!" exclaimed Vane. "How the thump do you make that out?"

"I mean, my foot slipped," explained Lovell. "If you'd handed me that snowball when I asked you, I

should have let Dodd have it before my foot slipped, and Dicky Dalton wouldn't have got it, and——"

"You mean, if you hadn't been a howling ass——"

"Look here——" roared Lovell.

Raby chuckled.

"I dare say Dicky will think that was the jolly old mystery man giving him a last shot," he remarked.

"Perhaps it was," said Vane.

Lovell jumped.

"What do you mean?" he roared. "Are you trying to make out that I'm the chap who's been ragging around and playing the mad ass? If you mean that, Dudley Vane——"

"What I mean is—the chap is clearly a silly, reckless idiot," said Vane. "And you can't deny that that description fits you, Lovell."

"To a hair," grinned Newcome.

Lovell's eyes gleaned.

"If you're joking, Vane, it's a rotten sort of joke," he said. "But if you mean it, I'm going to punch your silly head. Now——"

"Sit down, you ass!" said Jimmy.

"Rats to you!" Lovell stood in front of Vane, and displayed a clenched fist before his handsome, smiling face. "Now, you tick, do you want that on your nose?"

"I should hate it!"

"Then you'll take back what you just said, or you'll get it!" Lovell drew back his arm. "Now, which is it to be—yes or no?"

"Whichever you like," smiled Vane.

"Yes or no?" roared Lovell.

"Both!"

That was too much for Lovell. He landed out with his fist straight at Dudley Vane's nose.

Vane's head moved aside with the swiftness of lightning. Lovell's clenched knuckles landed on the wood behind with a crash.

Crack!

"Yaroooop!" bellowed Lovell, as his knuckles cracked on the wood. "Oh! Ow! Wow! Yoo—hoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Ow!" roared Lovell. "Wow!" He sucked his barked knuckles, and almost danced in the carriage. "Oogh! Ow! My hand! Wow! My knuckles! Ooogh! I believe my fingers are busted. Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Ow! I'll jolly well— Wow! I'll—"

"Sit down!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "What a fellow you are for rows, Lovell! Sit down and shut up!"

"Wow! I'll jolly well—"  
Lovell's chums pushed him into a corner seat. Dudley Vane smiled.

"Sorry, old bean!" he said. "But I'm rather particular about my nose. And I don't really think you're the jolly old mystery man. You'd have given yourself away long ago if you were. With a brain like yours—"

"Lemme gerrat him!" bawled Lovell.

"Shut up!" roared Jimmy Silver.

And Lovell was pinned in his corner till he calmed down. But he was still sucking his knuckles when the juniors came to their journey's end and alighted from the train. Not till the Rookwood party were gathered at Priory House, under the hospitable roof of Mr. Silver, did Arthur Edward Lovell condescend to smile again.

## CHAPTER 18.

### The Ghost Does Not Walk!

"SCARE the cheeky tick!" explained Lovell.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

It needed, of course, only that shake of the head to confirm Lovell in his determination. Opposition had that effect on Arthur Edward.

It was a jolly Christmastide at Priory House. Mr. and Mrs. Silver were kind and hospitable—Jimmy's Cousin Phyllis was charming, and even her young brother Algy behaved himself more or less. Uncle John and Uncle Peter were

seasonably hearty, and the old house glowed with holly and mistletoe and paper chains, and everybody was merry and bright. There was only one slight rift in the lute—Lovell was still rather sore with the new junior, Vane, who was pleasant and polite to everybody, evidently enjoying life, and apparently forgetful of all offences.

At this particular moment Jimmy Silver and Lovell were in an old room which was used as a sort of museum. Priory House was an ancient building, and adjacent lay the ruins of a still more ancient priory, destroyed in the reign of King Henry the Eighth. Many relics of the ancient place and its ancient inhabitants were preserved, among them several monkish outfits of robes and cowls. Lovell was sorting them over, with a cheery grin on his face.

"Scare him out of his silly, cheeky wits!" he said.

"Rotten silly trick to scare a chap!" said Jimmy. "Wash it out, old man."

"He made out that I was gammoning that day in the study. If he thinks what I said was rot I'll jolly well show him whether it was rot or not!"

Jimmy sighed. From of old he knew how futile it was to argue with Arthur Edward when his back was up.

And Arthur Edward's back certainly was up on that subject. He was jolly well going to teach that cheeky tick something about ghosts.

There was a legend of the old priory. According to the ancient tale, one of the monks had been slain when the priory was destroyed. Feeling rather "shirty" about it, he persisted in haunting the spot.

An old stone-flagged passage led from the house to the ruined priory. That was where the swords of the pursuivants had struck down the monk on the eve of Christmas many centuries ago. In that passage, when Christmas came round, the phantom monk walked—silent and ghostly, in trailing robes, his eyes glittering from his cowl. It was

true that no one had ever seen him at it! But last Christmas Lovell had watched for the ghost—and he had seen “something.” No doubt it was a stirring shadow of a branch outside the passage window where the starlight gleamed.

Lovell did not believe in ghosts—he was no such ass. But he had seen something. And his ire was deeply stirred by Dudley Vane making unceremonious fun of that something.

“Easy as falling off a form,” said Lovell. “I rig myself up in one of these jolly old outfits—”

“You don’t!” said Jimmy, shaking his head again.

“Our rooms all open on the passage next to the haunted passage,” went on Lovell, unheeding. “Easy to get on the spot—see? A ghostly figure glides in at Vane’s door—”

“It doesn’t!” said Jimmy.

“An icy finger will tap him on the nose—”

“It won’t!” said Jimmy Silver.

“And he will sing to another tune next time I tell him I’ve seen something in the haunted passage!”

“Wash it out, old chap!” said Jimmy. “Now, look here, Lovell! The pater was telling us the ghost story round the fire last night, and I noticed that Vane was drinking it all in—just lapping it up! It had a lot of effect on him, and he told me this morning that he’d dreamed about the phantom monk. Well, that shows that he’s not the sort of chap to play such tricks on.”

“Rot!”

“And you remember, too, that he had an illness of some sort before he came to Rookwood—”

“Looks an invalid, doesn’t he?” jeered Lovell.

“Well, no; but all the same—”

“Rats!”

“Playing ghost is a fool trick—”

Jimmy Silver broke off as there was a tramp of footsteps, and the other fellows came into the room—Raby, Newcome, and Vane. Jimmy gave

Vane a quick glance, wondering whether he had heard anything as he came. If so, Vane’s face gave no sign of it.

“Oh, here you are!” said Vane cheerily. “I say, the ice is as hard as a rock on the lake! Who’s coming out to skate?”

“Good!” said Lovell at once. “Let’s!”

And the schoolboys went out into the clear, frosty air; and Lovell took possession of Cousin Phyllis on the ice. Jimmy hoped that he had forgotten his hare-brained scheme of playing ghost and scaring that cheeky tick, Dudley Vane.

But he knew his Arthur Edward, and kept an eye on him subsequently; and was not surprised, later in the afternoon, to see Lovell conveying a bundle surreptitiously to his room.

Jimmy could guess what the bundle contained.

“Uncle James” of Rookwood was worried. He did not want idiotic tricks played on one of his guests and he did not want a row with another of his guests; but one of the two seemed inevitable. For which reason Jimmy consulted with Raby and Newcome.

The outcome of that consultation was a walk down to the village of Hadley Priors, where, at the village shop, three squirts were purchased. That evening after supper, as the party sat round the log-fire before going to bed, Lovell led the conversation to ghosts in general, and the phantom monk of the priory in particular. Jimmy, Raby and Newcome exchanged grins. It was evidently Lovell’s astute and artful intention to get Dudley Vane’s mind in a receptive state, as it were, for what was scheduled to happen that night.

Lovell had laid his plans! So had his friends!

After the juniors had gone to bed four out of the five remained wakeful. Dudley Vane, in his room, was sleeping the sleep of the just. Lovell, in his, was preparing for his ghost stunt.



Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome waited till all was silent, and then crept quietly out into the dark passage and joined up near the door of Lovell's room.

Each of the three had a squirt in his hand. Each of the squirts was charged to the brim with red ink.

There was no light under Lovell's door. Lovell was cautious. But they could hear sounds of faint movements in the room. Lovell was not in bed. He was getting busy.

"The blithering ass!" breathed Newcome.

"All serene!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Old Lovell will chuck up the idea when he gets this ink!"

There was a suppressed chuckle in the dark passage.

"Hark!" breathed Raby.

The sound of a bump came from Lovell's room! Arthur Edward's voice, in concentrated tones, followed:

"Blow it!"

Again the juniors had to suppress a chuckle. Lovell, apparently, had caught his foot in the trailing monk's robe and come a cropper.

"Blow the dashed thing!" came Lovell's voice again. "Bother the beastly rag! I shall have to pin up the tail! Where did I put those dashed pins? Blow!"

"Some ghost!" murmured Raby.

The three nearly exploded. Lovell, as a ghost, intended to be scaring and awe-inspiring, but there was undoubtedly an element of the comic in his ghostly stunts. A sharp yelp came through the door.

"Ow! Blow! Dash that rotten pin! Wow!"

Jimmy gurgled.

"He's stuck a pin in his finger now! I say, I shall burst if this goes on much longer!"

But Lovell seemed ready at last. His door opened—very cautiously.

His figure, draped in a monkish robe, appeared in the doorway against the dim glimmer of starlight from the window of his room. The cowl was

pushed back, and Lovell's face was dimly seen as he came out into the dark passage.

Squish-ish-ish!

Three squirts squished as one!

Three streams of red ink splashed on Arthur Edward Lovell!

One landed on his nose—two landed on his cheeks. Red ink spattered all over Lovell, and the startled howl that came from him rang above the winter wind that howled round the old chimney-pots.

"Oh! What— Ooogh! Oh, my hat! What— Yaroooh! Urrggh! Ink— Who— what— how— Groogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the three.

"Ow! Oogh! Oooch!" Lovell spluttering ink, tottered in the passage, caught his foot in the long robe, and went over.

Bump!

"Yoop!" howled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You— Ow! You rotters! Wow! I'll— Yaroooooh! Ooooooh!"

Jimmy, Raby and Newcome, spluttering with laughter, bolted for their rooms. They locked their doors—a necessary precaution. Lovell had got rid of the tangling robe, though not of the ink, when he came along to look for them—and he tried three locked doors one after another, and breathed blood-curdling threats through three keyholes before he gave it up. After which the chums of the Fourth were able to go to sleep—what time Lovell, in his room, was washing off red ink; a lengthy task that left him too tired to think any more about playing ghost!

The next morning Lovell came down frowning.

He gave his comrades the iciest of marble eyes. It was not till Cousin Phyllis, with her sweetest smile, asked him whether anything was the matter that Arthur Edward thawed and became his own bonny self again.

## CHAPTER 19.

## The Phantom of the Night!

CHRISTMAS night.

Boom!

Lovell shivered.

Erily through the darkness above the wail of the December wind, came the stroke of one.

Lovell almost decided to give it up—but not quite. Lovell was a stickler.

The Christmas party at Priory House had got to bed rather late that night. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were sound asleep. Lovell was wakeful—though he was feeling decidedly sleepy.

He stood in the shadowy passage, draped in the monkish robe, with the cowl over his head.

A couple of nights ago three merry juniors with squirts had put "paid" to Lovell's ghost stunt. The next night Jimmy Silver had kept an eye open, but Lovell had made no move.

But he was making a move now. He had only bided his time to lull suspicion—he did not want any more ink!

Now the ghost was going to walk! In the dark passage, with a pale glimmer of winter starlight from the window, he looked an eerie and spectral figure.

Save for the wail of the wind, the house was silent; all were slumbering. It was all clear for the ghost to walk, and the ghost was going to walk—but Lovell was not feeling comfortable.

He stared up and down the passage with uneasy eyes, and hesitated. Back into his mind, unpleasantly, came the recollection of the "something" he had seen in the haunted passage, only a dozen yards away last Christmas. It was a most uncomfortable and disconcerting recollection at such a moment. Lovell's game was to give Dudley Vane a scare; but he had a sort of goose-flesh feeling, as if he were getting scared himself.

That was all rot, of course! There weren't really such things as ghosts; but in the darkness, the silence—

broken by the strange, indefinable sounds of midnight—it almost seemed as if there might be.

Lovell gave quite a start as the wind howled suddenly more loudly than before. He heard a strange, thudding sound. Was it a footstep? He realised that it was only dislodged snow falling from a roof, but it made his heart thrill uncomfortably.

Instead of turning in the direction of Dudley Vane's room, he stood staring along the passage towards its junction with the passage that led to the ruined priory—the ghost's walk. Was there a sound from that direction? Had he heard something that was not the wind?

His heart missed a beat.

From the haunted corridor there came a low, swishing sound, and Lovell felt a thrill as of ice in his blood.

He knew that sound. It was like the sound made by his own trailing robe on the floor. It was the soft swish of a monkish robe trailing.

Lovell stood very still.

He could hardly have stirred at that moment to save his life. He had forgotten that he was playing ghost. He stood rooted, his heart barely beating, his starting eyes fixed on the corner of the passage, beyond which he heard that rustling, swishing sound.

It was approaching. It was nearing the corner. In a few seconds it would be in the passage where Lovell stood.

His lips parted, but no sound came. He stood frozen with horror.

From the darkness a figure loomed indistinctly. There was no sound of a footfall; only the ghostly swish of the monkish robe on the floor as the figure glided towards him.

Closer and closer. A figure in the ancient garb of a monk, with a cowl over the face—silent, spectral, shadowy, horrifying. Closer and closer it came. Lovell's eyes fixed on it in horror.

Was he dreaming, or was he mad? Or was that the phantom monk of the

old priory gliding on him from the darkness?

He could not move, he could not speak; he could only gaze in growing horror and fear. He tried to cry out, but only a faint, husky sound came from his throat. From the shadowy cowl two eyes that seemed to be burning glared at him; the robe stirred as a hand was raised; it touched him, it gripped him.

One fearful shriek burst from Lovell, and he fell on the floor in a dead faint.

Jimmy Silver leaped out of bed.

A wild and terrible shriek was ringing in his ears. It had awakened him, and as he started up from slumber he heard a fall.

He listened, with thumping heart, but no sound followed. What had happened in the darkness of the night? Lovell—

He ran to his door and dragged it open. Two doors opened along the passage; Raby and Newcome were awakened, too.

Jimmy groped along to the switch and turned on the light. There was a sudden flood of illumination in the dark passage. He saw the scared faces of Raby and Newcome looking out; he heard an opening door in another part of the house. That fearful shriek had rung far and wide.

"What——" stammered Raby.

"Lovell!" panted Jimmy. His startled eyes fell on a crumpled figure on the passage floor—Lovell, tangled in a monkish robe.

He ran to him.

"Lovell, old chap! Lovell!"

Lovell did not speak, he did not stir; his eyes were closed, his face wax-white in the light. Jimmy lifted his chum's head on to his knee.

"Lovell, old man!" he breathed.

"Is he hurt?" panted Newcome.

"Fainted, I think. What on earth can have happened?" Jimmy's face was pale with anxiety as he supported

Lovell's unconscious head on his knee. The three juniors stared up and down the passage. Nobody—nothing—was to be seen.

What had happened to Lovell? What had caused him to utter that terrible cry?

There was a hurried footstep, and Mr. Silver came hurrying up in a flowing dressing-gown. He stared blankly at the scene.

"Jimmy, what does this mean?" he exclaimed.

"I—I don't know," stammered Jimmy. "We heard a shriek, and came out and found Lovell——"

"But what——" Mr. Silver stared blankly at Lovell's strange garb. "What——"

"The duffer was playing ghost, I suppose," groaned Jimmy. "I know he had the idea of scaring that chap Vane by playing the phantom monk, but——"

"Vane does not seem to have been awakened," said Mr. Silver, glancing round. "There is no need for him to be disturbed. Carry Lovell into his room and get him back to bed, Jimmy."

The three juniors lifted Lovell and carried him back to his bed. He was like a log in their hands. He was quickly got into bed; and, to the relief of his chums, his eyes opened—but they opened with a wild and affrighted stare.

"It's all right, old chap!" said Jimmy. "We're with you."

Lovell panted.

"Did you—did you see it?"

"See what?"

"The ghost!" groaned Lovell.

He closed his eyes again, as if to shut out some fearful sight. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome looked at one another; Mr. Silver frowned.

"The foolish boy has been playing ghost and fancied that he saw something in the dark," he said. "You had better remain with him for the rest of the night, Jimmy."

"I won't leave him," said Jimmy.

Mr. Silver, frowning, quitted the room; the three juniors remained with Lovell. There was a tap at the door, and Dudley Vane's handsome face looked in, with a startled expression on it.

"Anything up?" he asked. "I thought I heard——"

"That ass Lovell playing ghost and scaring himself," whispered Raby. "He must have fancied he saw something; we found him in a faint——"

Vane stepped to the bedside.

"He looks pretty bad," he said, in a low voice. "What about staying up with him till dawn?"

"We're going to," said Jimmy Silver. "But don't you bother——"

"My dear chap, I'll stick it out with you," said Vane.

Lovell's eyes opened again.

"I—I saw it!" he whispered. "Jimmy, I—I saw it! The—the phantom monk, you know—I saw it!"

"Yes, old chap," said Jimmy soothingly.

"It—it touched me! It—it grasped hold of me!" Lovell shuddered. "I—I don't seem to remember after that. But I—I saw it!"

He closed his eyes again, but it was long before he slept; though his anxious chums were relieved to see at last that he had sunk into slumber. The winter dawn, when it came, found the four juniors still watching by Lovell's bed.

Arthur Edward Lovell was all right the next day. Boxing Day festivities helped to banish the horror of the night from his mind.

But he persisted that he had seen the phantom monk. Everybody else had not the slightest doubt that he had been scared by a shadow in the dark, and had fancied the whole thing. Lovell was absolutely positive that he had seen it; but even Lovell, in broad daylight, no longer believed that it was a phantom he had seen. But if it was

not, what was it? For he was absolutely certain that he had seen it.

He asked his friends indignantly whether he was the sort of fellow to make a silly, idiotic mistake—to which a regard for the truth forced them to reply that he was precisely and exactly such a fellow. To the Co. that was the simple and easy explanation; but to Arthur Edward Lovell it was as deep a mystery as the one they had left behind them at Rookwood.

But Lovell, at all events, did not think of playing ghost again. Lovell was a sticker, but he had had enough of the Phantom Monk.

## CHAPTER 20.

Sticking to it!

"NOT too much sticky!" said Lovell.

"That's all right!" replied Dudley Vane.

"I've got to get the blessed things off again, fathead!"

"Leave it to me, old bean!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were busy in Jimmy's room at Priory House. The chums of Rookwood, having had a Merry Christmas, were making preparations for a Happy New Year!

There was going to be a dance, in fancy costume, on New Year's Day. The five juniors had unpacked a large box, newly arrived, with all sorts of costumes and disguises in it. Now they were trying them on, and making their selections for the great occasion.

Lovell's taste ran to something rather striking. Lovell was going to make up as the Bearded Bandit. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome were busy with their own occupations, but Dudley Vane kindly lent his assistance to Lovell. Vane, the new fellow in the Rookwood Fourth, was an obliging fellow! He dabbed fixing gum on a huge moustache and fixed it to Lovell's upper lip; he gummed a big black beard, and fastened it to Lovell's chin;

he gummed gigantic eyebrows over Lovell's own. Now he was busy with a big black wig, which he was affixing over Lovell's hair.

There was no doubt that Lovell looked striking in that rig. Surveying himself in a pier-glass, he beheld the head and face of a fearful-looking ruffian, and was pleased thereby.

"I say, my hair feels sticky!" said Arthur Edward.

"Does it?" murmured Vane.

"You're rather an ass, Vane! You don't have to stick a wig on—only just a dab. I hope you haven't overdone it."

"Now try on the costume!" said Vane, unheeding.

Really, it was very obliging of Vane. He was not bothering about the selection of his own costume at all.

Vane sorted out the brigand costume and helped Arthur Edward into it. Meanwhile, the fixing gum which fastened on Lovell's hirsute adornments was drying—hard!

"We ought to have got on the costume first, you know," said Lovell. "I must say you're rather a fathead, Vane."

"Thanks!" said Vane.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome chuckled. Arthur Edward had his own way of acknowledging an obligation!

Lovell was complete at last—a most awe-inspiring figure of a bearded bandit. By that time, Jimmy Silver had transformed himself into a Cavalier, Raby had become a Pierrot, and Newcome a Highlander. Only Vane was still unchanged, having given all his time to Lovell.

"What are you going to try on, Vane?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, any old thing!" answered Vane carelessly. "Lots of time yet. I'm more interested in Lovell. Looks a knut, doesn't he?"

"No end of a knut," said Jimmy, laughing. "Hallo, there goes the bell; we'd better shift these things and get

down to lunch. You'll have to try on something this afternoon, Vane."

"That's all right."

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome were not long in stripping off the costumes. Arthur Edward was longer. He gave a squeak as he jerked off his moustache.

"Ow!"

"Anything the matter?" asked Vane blandly.

"I knew you'd put too much sticky on, you ass!" grunted Lovell. "That blessed thing would hardly come off at all."

He tugged at the beard.

"Wow!"

Lovell yelped.

The beard came off, but it almost seemed to bring a patch of skin off Lovell's chin with it. He glared at Vane.

"You ass! Didn't I tell you to be careful with that sticky?" he howled. "I don't believe these dashed eyebrows will come off at all."

"Let's all pull together!" suggested Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, keep away, you ass!"

Lovell tugged at his brigandish eyebrows. They came off, but very unwillingly. Lovell's face was crimson with exertion and wrath by the time they came off.

"You idiot, Vane!" he gasped.

"I'm rather glad I didn't help Lovell," remarked Newcome. "I should hate to be thanked in that hearty way!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" snapped Lovell. "I'm sticky all over! That howling ass must have used up pints of fixing gum on these things. I shouldn't wonder of he's stuck the wig down, too!"

"Just a dab of the gum!" murmured Vane.

"Yaroooh!" roared Lovell.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"It won't come off!" shrieked Lovell.  
"Oh, my hat!"

Lovell tugged at the hairy black wig. It refused to budge. Moustache and beard and eyebrows had come off, but a liberal dose of fixing gum, now dried hard, attached that wig to Lovell's own hair. It was as firmly fixed to his head as the hair that grew there!

He tugged, and howled—he tugged, and roared. He gasped for breath, tugged again, and shrieked. The other fellows chortled.

"You cackling fatheads!" howled Lovell. "Lend a hand with this, will you? Do you think I can go down to lunch with this mop on my napper?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co., quite taken by storm at the idea. As a part of a fancy make-up for a dance, that big black wig was all right. But as part of Arthur Edward's regular outfit, the rest of him being a junior school-boy, it was altogether too extraordinary.

"All hands on deck!" gasped Jimmy, and, while one gripped Lovell round the waist, the others grasped the hairy wig and pulled.

The yell that came from Arthur Edward Lovell as they did so rang far beyond Priory House. It rang over a good deal of Wiltshire!

"Yoo-hoo-hooop! Leggo! You blithering idiots, you're pulling my hair out by the roots! Yaroooh! Stoppit!"

"Well, you asked us!" gasped Raby.

"Yarooop! Leggo!" shrieked Lovell.

"I'll punch you! Leggo!"  
They let go. There was nothing doing. That big black wig was a fixture. Lovell gasped and spluttered. But he did not tug at the wig any more; it was too painful.

"That fool Vane!" he roared. "You did this on purpose, Vane! You must have pumped about a gallon of fixing gum on to it! You fooled about with the costume so as to let it dry hard. Think I don't know? You rotter!"

"Vane, you ass!" gasped Jimmy

Silver. It dawned on all the Fistic Four now why Dudley Vane had been so obliging.

"Don't you think it funny, Lovell?" asked Vane demurely.

"Funny?" bawled Lovell.

"Well, as funny as playing ghost to give a fellow a scare," suggested Vane.

Lovell did not answer that. With a crimson face under his hairy black wig he rushed at Dudley Vane, his fists clenched.

Vane dodged out of the room, laughing.

Lovell, about to pursue him, remembered the wig. He could not show himself about the house like that.

"I—I—I'll smash him!" he gasped "Pulling a fellow's leg——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Lovell. "Do you think this is funny? I'll jolly well punch that rotter! I'll smash him! How the thump am I going to get this beastly thing off? It's stuck in my hair——"

Dudley Vane's handsome face glanced in at the door.

"Soak it in hot water!" he suggested.

"What?" yelled Lovell.

"For about half an hour——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome at the idea of Arthur Edward soaking his head in hot water for about half an hour.

Lovell, frantic, made a rush at the door. Vane disappeared, his cheery laugh floating back as he went. Lovell paused again, breathing fury.

"I'll smash him!" he gasped. "I'll——"

"Oh, dear!" gurgled Jimmy Silver. "Well, you asked for it, old chap—you set out to pull Vane's leg, you know and it's only tit for tat!"

"What am I going to do?" raved Lovell. "I can't go down like this! Can I let your pater and mater and Phyllis and young Algy see me like this? What will the servants think?"

"They'll think it funny, you bet!" gasped Raby. "Look here, keep it on

till New Year's Day—only a couple of days—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I—I—I’ll—” gasped Lovell. “You sniggering dummies—you chortling chumps—you—you—you—” Words failed Lovell. He rushed at his chums, punching fiercely, and drove them, yelling like hyenas, from the room.

## CHAPTER 21.

### Lovell Loses His Temper!

**A**RTHUR EDWARD LOVELL did not come down to lunch that day.

He couldn't!

With that bushy black wig stuck on his head, immovable, he simply could not show himself in public.

Lunch was sent up to his room.

The servant who brought up the tray nearly fell down at the sight of Lovell. The tray had a very narrow escape.

Lovell heard the man gurgling as he went away.

He breathed fury.

Fortunately his fury did not affect his appetite. He made an excellent lunch. Afterwards he roamed round his room like a tiger in a cage.

Again and again he had tugged and twisted at that wig! But it would not come off unless his own hair came with it. And such a parting would have been altogether too painful.

Once or twice he suspected that he heard sounds of laughter from below. He even suspected that he heard the trill of Cousin Phyllis' laugh—which was the unkindest cut of all. Everybody had heard of that extraordinary jape which made him a prisoner in his room. Everybody thought it funny. What was funny in it was a mystery to Lovell.

His feelings towards Dudley Vane were almost homicidal.

He had never really liked the chap. He had been cheeky the day he arrived at Rookwood School. Lovell

had had trouble with him the first day, and had not had the best of it. He never did seem to get the best of it. His stunt of playing ghost had been a ghastly frost. Lovell's mind was made up; the minute he saw Vane again he was going to punch him—hard!

It was not, perhaps, in accordance with the manners and customs of the best circles for guests to punch one another. But if a fellow asked for it, and begged for it, a fellow was going to get that for which he asked and begged!

Arthur Edward's mind was irrevocably made up on that point.

Looking from his window in the frosty afternoon, Lovell had a view of a cheery party going down to the lake to skate. He saw Dudley Vane glance up at his window and smile. He fancied he saw Cousin Phyllis smile. There was no doubt at all that Raby and Newcome were grinning. Jimmy Silver was not with them—no doubt he would have been grinning, too!

Lovell's feelings were quite bitter.

Going off to skate—leaving him shut up here. Nice sort of way to treat a fellow. He was tempted to clear off home for the rest of the hols. Still, he couldn't clear off with that black, bushy wig on his head. He would have caused too much of a sensation en route.

Jimmy Silver came in—smiling. But he ceased to smile and looked as grave as he could as he caught the expression on Lovell's face. To Arthur Edward, at all events, it was no smiling matter.

“Now, let's get going, old chap!” said Jimmy. “Hot water will get that dashed thing off sooner or later.”

“You silly ass!”

“Hem! Keep smiling, old chap—”

“You frabjous fathead!”

“My dear chap—”

“Idiot!”

Jimmy Silver made no reply to that. The soft answer failed to turn away wrath, and silence was golden. Lovell

consented, however, to submit his unhappy napper to his chum's ministrations.

Jimmy laboured long. Plenty of hot water and patient manipulation worked the oracle—to the accompaniment of a series of painful yelps from Lovell. By the time "Uncle James" of Rookwood was through he was as fed-up with Dudley Vane's idea of a practical joke as Lovell was.

Lovell's hair was still sticky. His complexion was like that of a freshly boiled beetroot. His temper was at boiling point. But it was done, and Lovell at long last was able to emerge from retirement.

He went downstairs with Jimmy. He fancied he detected faint smiles on the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Silver. There was no fancy about the giggle he heard from young Algy.

He stuck his cap on his sticky hair and went out. Jimmy Silver judiciously kept him company. It was rather distressing to Jimmy to think of scrapping between two of his Christmas guests. He could hardly imagine what his father and mother would think of it. He could only hope that Vane would be careful to avoid trouble till Lovell had had time to calm down and remember what was due to good manners. Lovell headed for the lake—and, fortunately, Phyllis was there with the juniors. The most exasperated fellow could not think of scrapping in a girl's presence. So Jimmy hoped that it was all right.

Alas for his hopes! The skating was over and Raby and Newcome had walked away with Cousin Phyllis, who was going to show them the Monk's Leap in Priory Wood. Vane, who had already been shown that interesting spot, was coming back to the house, carrying the skates.

Lovell's eyes flashed as he saw him alone. Jimmy touched his arm.

"Keep your temper, old chap!" he murmured.

Lovell did not answer. His eyes

were fixed on Vane as the new junior came up the path. Vane smiled.

If Lovell had thought of keeping his temper, that smile would have torn it. Shaking off Jimmy's detaining hand, he made a rush at Dudley Vane, hitting out as he did so.

"You rotter!" bawled Lovell.

Vane, burdened with skates, was taken at a disadvantage. Lovell did not think of that. He did not think of anything. There was only one idea in Lovell's mind—the fixed idea of punching Vane's nose as soon as he came within punching distance of it.

And he punched—hard!

Dudley Vane went over backwards as if a bullet had struck him. There was a clatter of scattering skates, and the new junior thudded on the frosty ground on his back.

"Take that, you cad!" bawled Lovell.

Vane sprawled on his back, with the crimson spurting from his nose. He bounded to his feet, his eyes blazing. Jimmy Silver sprang between.

"Stop!" he gasped.

He grasped Vane and held him back. "Lovell, you fool, clear off!" he snapped. "Do you want to start a fight here, you dummy? You may be seen from the windows. Vane, old chap, for goodness' sake——"

"Hasn't he asked for it?" roared Lovell. "Do you jolly well think——"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Jimmy. "Get out of it, you fathead!"

Lovell, with knitted brows, tramped away. Jimmy was holding Dudley Vane back; but Vane, after the first moment of fury, had recovered his coolness and did not need holding.

"All serene," he said, in a low voice. "You needn't worry—I'm not going to make a fool of myself if Lovell does."

"One fool's enough!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"Quite!" agreed Vane.

He dabbed his streaming nose with his handkerchief. Jimmy Silver gathered up the skates. Lovell, tramp-



ing away sulkily with his hands in his pockets, disappeared into the wood.

"Let's get to the house," said Jimmy dismally. "You'd better bathe your nose, old bean."

"It needs it!" assented Vane.

They walked up to the house together. Mrs. Silver was in the hall when they came in, and she glanced at Vane.

"Dear me! Did you fall on the ice?" she asked. "You have hurt your nose."

"It's all right—just a tap," said Vane, with a smile. "I knocked it on something. I'll run up to my room and bathe it."

He ran lightly up the stairs. Jimmy Silver, relieved in his mind, went out again, to look for Phyllis and Raby and Newcome. As he had said, one fool was enough, and it was a great relief to "Uncle James" to know that Vane, at least, knew how to keep his temper.

## CHAPTER 22.

### The Monk's Leap!

"GOT it off?"

Raby and Newcome asked that question together. Cousin Phyllis smiled faintly.

"It was too bad!" she said. "I think it's very nice of Arthur to be so good-tempered about it. A good many people wouldn't."

Lovell flushed scarlet.

After leaving Jimmy and Vane he had tramped away into the frosty woods. Tracks in the snow, among the leafless trees, showed him the way Phyllis and the two juniors had gone after leaving the lake, and he followed the tracks. And so he met Raby and Newcome, and Jimmy's cousin coming back from the Monk's Leap which was a deep rift in the earth, in the heart of the solitary woods, a couple of miles from Priory House. Lovell had

covered half the distance when he met them.

The question asked by Raby and Newcome, referring to the sticky wig, would assuredly have led to angry words but for Phyllis' presence. The girl's remark had the effect of oil on the troubled waters. But it made Lovell feel rather ashamed of himself.

So far from having taken that jape good-temperedly, as Phyllis supposed, he had knocked Dudley Vane down; and he knew that Vane's nose would betray to all beholders the fact that something had happened. And Vane, who was the last fellow in the world to be knocked down with impunity, had let it go at that—from a regard for decorum, which Arthur Edward had forgotten.

Lovell was still very angry, but a little regretful of his hasty act; and now he felt ashamed as well. It was altogether a very uncomfortable state of feelings.

He mumbled something in answer to Phyllis and moved on. The girl went on towards the house with Newcome, but Raby, catching a sign from Lovell, dropped back to exchange another word with him. He suppressed a desire to grin, from a chummy consideration for Lovell's exacerbated frame of mind.

"Where are you off to, on your own?" asked Raby. "Come back to the house with us, only for goodness' sake, keep your temper when you see Vane."

"I've seen him—and punched him!" growled Lovell. "He's got a nose like a cauliflower now."

"Well, you utter ass!" exclaimed Raby in dismay. "What on earth will Jimmy Silver's people think?"

"I shan't know, anyhow, as I'm not going back," said Lovell savagely. "I'm clearing off. I can see I'm not wanted here. That's what I wanted to say to you. You can tip Jimmy to send my things after me."

"Look here, Lovell, you can't do it! You——"

"Jimmy doesn't want a chap here

kicking up rows and punching fellows' noses," said Lovell sardonically, "and I can tell you, if I see that grinning ape again, I shall punch his nose again. I'm fed-up with him—right to the back teeth! See you again at Rookwood!"

"But look here——" exclaimed the dismayed Raby.

"Jimmy can tell his people something. What the thump will they care whether I go or not?" snapped Lovell. "I dare say they thought it awfully funny for me to be made to look a silly fool. The man who brought up my lunch was giggling—why, you silly fat-head, you're giggling, too!" hooted Lovell.

"I—I didn't mean—— Look here——" gasped Raby.

"Oh, rats! You can give Jimmy my message. If he'd rather have his precious Vane here than me, well, he's got him!"

"He wouldn't. You——"

"Oh, rot! I'm going, anyhow. I shall cut across the wood to the village, and you can tell Jimmy I've gone."

Lovell tramped on, without waiting for a rejoinder. Raby looked after him, and then hurried after Newcome and Phyllis. It was useless to argue with Arthur Edward at any time, and less use now than ever. His back was up—and his mind was made up!

Lovell tramped on, his hands driven deep into his overcoat pockets, his brows knitted and dark.

He was a little ashamed of his outbreak of temper, and, at the same time, in a mood to give Dudley Vane some more of the same. Certainly, if he could not keep the peace at a Christmas party it was better for him to go. And he was not feeling like keeping the peace. Quite the reverse.

Between anger, indignation, a lurking sense of shame, and a deep feeling of grievance, Lovell was not in a happy mood as he tramped on sulkily through the frosty woods. Far in the distance, over the frosty, leafless branches, he could see the village spire, and he

headed in that direction, with the fixed intention of taking the train at the local station.

Suddenly he came to a halt. Before him, wide and deep, stretched a rift in the earth, barring his way.

Lovell breathed hard.

It was rather like him to have forgotten the Monk's Leap. Now he had arrived at it, and it stretched across his path, extending a great distance in either direction.

"Blow!" growled Lovell.

According to tradition, a monk of the old Priory, pursued by foes, had leaped across that deep rift to make his escape. But as it was about fifteen feet across, and the edges crumbling with snow, Lovell was not prepared to attempt to repeat the performance of that ancient monk. He stared angrily at the rift, turned, and tramped along it, to get round the end.

But after tramping a quarter of a mile he found himself up against a hillside, tangled with thickets, and banked with snow. Getting through that obstruction was almost hopeless. It would have meant at least an hour or two of desperate scrambling.

Breathing harder than ever, Lovell walked back along the edge of the rift to the spot where it narrowed to fifteen feet or so, where the monk was said to have leaped it.

He stopped there and stared across. The December afternoon was waning into dusky darkness now, and he did not want to be still tramping in the frosty woods when darkness fell. It was quite possible that he might lose his way when he lost sight of the village spire. Standing by the rift, he calculated his chances of making a successful jump.

But he shook his head. With a good run, on firm ground, and a good landing on the other side he fancied he could have done it—perhaps! But jumping from crumbling snow to land on uncertain snow at the other side was rather too risky, even for a reckless fellow like Lovell. How deep the rift

was he did not know, but he knew that a fellow who fell in would not find it easy to get out again.

A rustle in the frosty wood caught his ear, and he looked round.

Owing to his waste of time, walking along the rift and walking back again, Jimmy Silver had had ample time to get the message from Raby. Lovell wondered savagely whether Jimmy had hurried out to find him, and persuade him to return. Still, Jimmy could not know that he had blundered on the rift, and lost time.

He looked round, but he saw nobody. He was sure that he had heard somebody, but if so, the person he had heard had taken cover behind a tree or a snowy bush. There was no one to be seen.

Lovell's heart beat a little faster. He was a couple of miles from anywhere, and dusk was falling. It would not be pleasant to meet some wandering tramp in such a place. And he was certain that somebody was at hand, though out of sight.

He turned to the Monk's Leap again, almost making up his mind to the jump. But again he shook his head, realising that it would not do. He had to go back a good half-mile to reach the footpath through the woods to the village, and, unwelcome as the idea was, he had to make up his mind to it.

He turned.

Crash!

Something soft but heavy—he did not realise at the moment that it was a snowball—crashed right in his face as he turned.

He gave a muffled gasp and spun over.

The next second he was shooting downward, over the edge of the rift, amid a shower of dislodged snow.

Bump!

He landed in snow, deep down. It was fortunate for him that a couple of feet of snow lay at the bottom of the rift, for had he fallen on hard earth he

would certainly have been seriously damaged. As it was, he bumped hard and rolled over in snow, his leg twisting under him.

"Urrrrgh!" gurgled Lovell.

He struggled up. A sharp yelp of pain left his lips as he did so. His leg was hurt. He had twisted his ankle in falling, and the pain, for the moment, was excruciating. Half-fainting with that sudden rush of pain, Lovell sank on the snow.

He fancied he heard, on the winter wind, the sound of a laugh, and a rustling of thickets, that died quickly away. Silence followed.

Whoever it was that had knocked him over the edge into the rift was gone, leaving Lovell alone, to the silence, the solitude, and the thickening winter darkness.

## CHAPTER 23.

### Vans to the Rescue!

**D**ARKNESS thickened over the lonely, frosty woods. Lovell made an effort, and dragged himself to his feet. He had to get out of this.

He was not alarmed—so far. His chief feeling was of intense anger against the unknown fellow who had knocked him into the rift.

Who the dickens could it have been? Some ill-disposed tramp, lurking in the woods—some thoughtless village lad! Whoever it was, Lovell wanted to get at him—and he was in a mood to tackle the heftiest tramp that ever tramped, and give him something in return for that rotten trick. The fellow was gone; but there was plenty of light to pick up his track in the snow, and Lovell's idea was to get after him before he could escape reprisals.

That idea, however, was soon driven from his mind. He essayed to clamber up the steeply sloping side of the rift—and rolled back helplessly.

The side was steep, and twenty feet

to the top. It was slippery with snow. It was no easy climb at the best of times. And with his twisted ankle, Lovell could not do it.

Twice, thrice he made the attempt, and each time he fell back into the thick snow at the bottom. Then he lay gasping for breath.

It was very dark at the bottom of the Monk's Leap now. Overhead, there was still a glimmer of wintry sunset on the woods. But that would not last long.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Lovell.

Alarm was creeping into his breast now. Lovell had plenty of pluck—heaps of it. But he knew what his danger was.

Unhurt, he could have clambered out. Hurt, he could not.

The fellow who had knocked him in did not know that, of course—probably had not thought of it for a moment, even if he cared. Anyhow, he was long gone. And it came into Lovell's mind, with a chill, that the fellows at the house, two miles away, would not think of looking for him when he did not return.

He had sent the message back by Raby that he was going. By that time they would suppose that he had taken his train and gone.

Without being a magician, Jimmy Silver could not guess that he had blundered on the Monk's Leap, and that some unknown rotter had knocked him into it, and that he had hurt his ankle and could not climb out.

They would not expect him back at the house. When they went to bed that night they would fancy that he was going to bed, too, at home—a hundred miles away. And he would be—here! Here, freezing to death in the snow at the bottom of the Monk's Leap!

Lovell shuddered.

He was warmly clad, but the chill of the snow was already creeping through him, creeping to his very bones. What would it be like in an hour—two hours—all night?

He had to get out! He struggled up once more, and summoned all his strength, all his courage, all his obstinate determination for the climb.

Sweating, in spite of the bitter cold, he clambered up, gaining inch by inch foot by foot. Six feet—ten feet—nearly fifteen feet—the crumbled edge above was a dark rim to his eyes in the gloom. Then, as he slipped, he jammed himself hard on the slope to save a fall—his sprained ankle gave a pang of sharp pain, and he rolled back.

He clumped into soft snow again.

It was long before he stirred.

That terrible effort had exhausted his strength—and he had failed! He knew that he would never succeed now. Lying there, spent, breathing in spasms, he looked up at a dark sky, in which the stars were beginning to glitter.

He struggled to a sitting posture at last. His leg was too painful to stand upon. His face was almost as white as the snow about him.

There was only one resource left—to shout for help! He knew that it was useless. Who was likely to hear him in the heart of the solitary woods after dark—far from any path, save the one that led to the Monk's Leap—never trodden at night, and seldom even in the day-time?

If his friends could only have known, how they would have rushed to his help—even that rotter Vane. But they could not know—they could never dream—if they were thinking of him at all, they were thinking of him sitting in a railway train, nursing his sulky temper, on his way home.

No one would hear him—no one could hear him. But it was the only chance he had left—and he shouted hoarsely for help.

Again and again his despairing shout rose from the rift, and echoed among snowy thickets and frosty trees.

"Help! Help! Help!"

But only the echoes answered, and the wail of the December wind. He

gave it up at last, exhausted by his efforts.

There was no help—and he was a lost man! The gleaming stars in the dark wintry sky seemed to mock him.

Suddenly there was a flash of light—that was not a glitter of starlight. It flashed into the darkness of the rift from the edge above. Lovell, staring up dazedly, realised that it was the flash of an electric torch.

Someone was there—and he shouted, wildly and desperately:

"Help! Is that you, Jimmy? Help! Help!"

A call came back:

"Who's that? Is somebody down there?"

"Vane!" gasped Lovell. He knew the voice. "Is that you, Vane?"

"Great pip! Is that Lovell?"

"Yes!" panted Lovell. "Help!"

"What on earth are you doing down there?" Lovell saw a startled face looking down. Vane, lying on his chest, had his face over the edge, and was flashing the light on him and staring down at him. "Did you fall in?"

"No!" panted Lovell. "I'm not the fellow to fall in, I should think!" Even at that moment Arthur Edward was still Arthur Edward! "Some awful rotter knocked me over the edge with a snowball—hours ago!"

"Well, why the thump don't you climb out?"

"You silly idiot! Do you think I should be still here if I could climb out?" bawled Lovell. "I've hurt my ankle, and I can't budge!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Vane.

"Look here, you cut off, and tell them at the house. Tell Jimmy Silver——"

"My dear man, it's a couple of miles to the house, and it would take rather too long to fetch Jimmy. I'm coming down for you."

"Look here, I don't want you to! You cut off, and——"

Lovell was interrupted by a shower of dislodged snow falling on him. He

spluttered. Dudley Vane was coming down.

Swiftly the active Vane slithered down the slope.

He landed in the snow beside Lovell, and flashed on the light again. His handsome face was very serious—and it was not quite so handsome as usual, with a red and rather bulbous nose. It was no easy task that Dudley Vane had set himself—and he knew it.

But he set about it quietly and resolutely. He put the torch into Lovell's hand, grasped him, and lifted him from the snow.

Lovell was not a light weight by any means. But Vane had already shown that he was an unusually strong fellow—though it was said that he had been an invalid before he came to Rookwood School.

"You can't do it!" gasped Lovell. "You'll never be able to get me out! You'd better cut off and fetch the fellows——"

"And find you frozen to death by the time we get back, fathead! You're half-frozen already. Hold that torch and take a grip round my neck. Stick on my back, and I'll get you out."

"I tell you——"

"Rot!" said Vane cheerily. "We'll manage it, old man! I say, I'm sorry about sticking that wig on your mop this morning."

"I—I'm sorry I punched your nose!" gasped Lovell. "But——"

"Stick on!"

"Oh, all right! But you can't do it."

Lovell was wrong—which was not uncommon. Vane could do it—and did it! How he managed it Lovell hardly knew himself. But he did it. Slowly, clamping himself with hands and feet to the steep slope, with set teeth, he clambered, with Lovell on his back, holding on round his neck. It was slow—terribly slow—and again and again it seemed as if they must slip back and crash down into the snow at the bottom of the rift.

But they did not slip back. The dis-

tance was only twenty feet up, but it was a quarter of an hour before Dudley Vane's hands were over the edge at the top. He got a grip on frozen grass roots, and dragged himself over and out, and Lovell with him.

Strong as he was, he was exhausted. They rolled in the snow, two or three feet from the edge, and for long minutes neither of them stirred.

Vane was the first to move. He picked himself up, breathing hard and deep. Lovell blinked up at him.

"I say, I think I could get along if you lend me a hand!" he gasped.

"Lean on me, old fellow!"

Dudley Vane helped him to his feet. Lovell leaned heavily on his arm as they started up the path through the dim woods. Limping, and suppressing yelps of pain from the strain on his damaged ankle, Lovell leaned more and more heavily. Vane stopped at last.

"You can't walk, old scout! I'm going to carry you."

"You're not!" gasped Lovell.

"I jolly well am!"

"Look here, you ass——"

"Stick on!"

Vane had his way. There was, in fact, no help for it, for Lovell was at the end of his tether. Leaning forward, with Arthur Edward on his back, holding the torch to light the way, Dudley Vane tramped on—slowly but steadily, and without a halt.

It seemed an age to both of them before the lighted windows of Priory House came in sight. At the door Vane let Lovell slip from his shoulders, and, staggering with fatigue himself, gave him a supporting hand.

"All serene now!" he gasped. "No need to tell them I carried you home, you know."

He rang a peal on the bell.

Lovell gulped. It was a concession to his self-love; but Lovell was not going to accept that concession.

"Rot!" he gasped.

The door opened. There was a shout

within. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome ran out.

"Lovell—Vane—what——" stuttered Jimmy.

Mr. Silver hurried across the hall.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"Some brute knocked Lovell into the Monk's Leap with a snowball," said Vane. "I helped him out——"

"Chuck it!" gasped Lovell. "Vane climbed out of that awful place with me on his back, you fellows, and carried me home on his back—my ankle's hurt, and I couldn't walk. How he did it goodness knows; but he did——"

"After——" gasped Jimmy.

"Yes—after I'd punched his nose! He can punch mine now if he likes!"

"Fathead!" said Vane.

Arthur Edward Lovell did not clear off, after all.

He had a day in bed, and the day after that he was still limping; but he was quite merry and bright for the New Year celebrations.

And he was very pally with Vane.

It was sheer luck, as everybody agreed, that Vane had had a fancy for seeing the Monk's Leap by starlight. Who had hurled the snowball and knocked Arthur Edward into the rift remained a mystery; but nobody liked to think what would have happened had not Dudley Vane discovered him. Vane was the hero of the hour, and loudest of all in singing his praises was Arthur Edward Lovell—and there was general satisfaction at their change from foes to friends.

#### CHAPTER 24.

Back to Rookwood!

"BUCK up!" roared Lovell.  
"Sheer off!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"Barge those Modern cads!" shrieked Lovell.

It was the first day of term at Rookwood School.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had come back merry and bright after the Christmas holidays. The train from Latham

Junction had disgorged a swarm of Rookwooders at the village station of Coombe—seniors and juniors, Classicals and Moderns. From the village, the school bus was to take them on to Rookwood—and though there was a second bus, and even a third, everybody who was anybody, so to speak, was determined to go in the first.

The Fistical Four, of the Classical Fourth Form, would have led the way out of the station, but Lovell had caused a little delay. Arthur Edward Lovell had stumbled into Carthew of the Sixth—who had rewarded him with a lunge of his boot. Lovell, therefore, had lingered to get that unpopular prefect with a snowball from the cover of a stack of baggage on the platform.

Which was happy and satisfactory in its way, but caused Jimmy Silver & Co. to be at the tail, instead of the head, of the swarm of schoolboys pouring out into the old High Street of Coombe.

For which reason Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern Fourth were already taking possession of the bus, to the exclusion of Classical fellows.

Some Classical juniors, it was clear, had objected. Peele, Gower, Townsend, and Topham of the Classical Fourth were sprawling in slushy, trodden snow. Smythe of the Shell was chasing his hat, which had been knocked off by a snowball from the bus. Tubby Muffin, uttering a series of loud squeals, was whirling in the grasp of the three Tommies—Dodd, Cook, and Doyle—on the step of the bus, and as Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived on the scene, the fat Classical was hurled away in a squealing heap.

Arthur Edward Lovell yelled to his friends to buck up, and led a charge. It did not matter twopence whether fellows went by the first bus or the second—except that Classicals weren't going to let Moderns get away with it, and Moderns were not going to let Classicals get away with it. But it was a case of first come, first served, and

the bus was packed with Modern juniors, some of whom yelled defiance at the Classicals, while others howled to the driver to get going.

Jimmy Silver and Lovell, Raby and Newcome, reached the bus with a rush. With them rushed Dudley Vane. The five hurled themselves in a bunch at Tommy Dodd & Co. Behind them came more of the Classical Fourth—Mornington and Erroll, Rawson and Conroy, Teddy Grace and Jones minor.

But it booted not! The Moderns were in possession, and they packed their goal, as it were, and defended strenuously. Lovell got on the step—only to go backwards. Catching Jimmy and Raby with his flying arms as he went, he dragged them down in his company. Newcome, the next moment, was strewn across them. Dudley Vane, grappling with Tommy Dodd, got on board, only to find himself packed like a sardine among the Moderns.

"Give 'em beans!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Kick those Classical cads off! Chuck that fellow out!"

But it was not easy to chuck Dudley Vane out. By sheer force he drove his way into the bus, falling over there in the grasp of three or four Moderns, and struggling with them on the floor. Something like a dog-fight raged in the interior of the bus.

"Rescue!" yelled Vane.

Mornington jumped on the bus, and was hurled off again.

Jimmy Silver scrambled up. With his cap gone, his tie flying in the wind, and his coat smothered with mud and snow, Jimmy hurled himself at the enemy. His friends backed him up manfully. But again it booted not. The pack of Moderns kept them at bay, and suddenly there came a roar from Bulkeley of the Sixth:

"Stand clear, there! The bus is starting! Get clear!"

The attack had to back off. The bus rolled away down the High Street, the defeated Classicals glaring after it, the

victorious Moderns sending back howls of defiance and derision.

"Done 'em in the eye!" grinned Tommy Dodd breathlessly.

"Right in the jolly old eye!" chuckled Tommy Cook.

"Faith and we've got wan of thim inside!" said Tommy Doyle. "Sure I'm tired of sitting on his head! Chuck him off!"

If Tommy Doyle was tired of sitting on Dudley Vane's head, there was no doubt that Vane was still more tired of Doyle sitting there! His face was crimson, and he was gurgling for breath as Tommy Doyle shifted, and he was jerked to his feet.

He was the only Classical on the bus—surrounded by grinning and triumphant Moderns. He stood panting and gasping.

"Chuck him off!" howled the Modern juniors.

"Hold on!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "Can't chuck him off with the bus going! Shove his cap down the back of his neck, and—" Tommy Dodd broke off with a yell as Dudley Vane, heedless of the odds against him, reached out and punched his nose hard. "Yooohooooop!"

Tommy Dodd staggered.

"Collar him!" he gasped.

Six or seven pairs of hands fastened on Dudley Vane.

He struggled fiercely, his eyes blazing with angry excitement. But his struggles were not much use in the grasp of so many hands—neither did the Modern fellows handle him gently. In the unending rows and rags between Classicals and Moderns at Rookwood fellows were expected to keep their tempers—even if they occasionally got some rather hard knocks. It was, on the whole, a good-humoured rivalry—more fun than anything else—and a fellow who lost his temper was regarded as rather an outsider. And it was clear that Vane had lost his temper badly.

Tommy Dodd dabbed his nose with

his handkerchief. It was streaming red.

"You worm!" hooted Tommy. "Here, pitch him over and keep him on the floor if he can't keep his rotten temper! Jam his cap down his back, and stick your feet on him!"

"What-ho!" chuckled Tommy Cook. "You rotters!" panted Vane, struggling wildly.

"Oh, shut up!" said Towle. "There's only one rotter here, and he's a Classical!" And Towle jerked at Vane's cap and stuffed it down his back.

Bump! Vane went down on the floor.

"Keep him there!" gasped Tommy Dodd, still dabbing his damaged nose.

"Sure we'll kape the baste down!" chuckled Tommy Doyle. And he planted both his feet on Vane.

More feet were added. In fact, as many were added as room could be found for. Dudley Vane disappeared under boots—most of them muddy. Only his face was left clear—glaring up crimson and furious. But crimson fury only made the merry Moderns roar with laughter.

The bus rocked on to Rookwood School. Again and again the hapless Classical struggled to rise, but the numberless boots pinned him down.

By the time the school was reached, Dudley Vane was more than tired of the journey. Not till the bus halted at Rookwood was he released—then the Modern crowd swarmed out and left him lying—muddy and rumped and breathless.

He sat up, gurgling.

It was a full minute before he was able to follow the crowd out. The bus had stopped at Manders' House, the quarters of the Modern contingent at Rookwood. Vane had to cross the quad to get to the Head's House—the Classical quarters. As he staggered breathlessly away, loud laughter from the Moderns followed him; and as he cast a fierce look back, a snowball whizzed from Tommy Dodd's unerring hand and squashed on his nose.



"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from Manders' House.

Vane, gasping, stumbled on. Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, met him as he stumbled into his own House. Dicky Dalton surveyed the muddy, dishevelled junior with disapproval.

"Vane! Why are you in this state?" he asked. "Is that a proper state in which to arrive at school for the new term?"

"Do you think I got like this on purpose?" hooted Vane.

Mr. Dalton gave him a look.

"Take a hundred lines for impertinence, Vane! And go in and clean yourself at once! Not another word, or I will cane you!"

And Vane, with set lips, tramped into the House.

#### CHAPTER 25.

##### The Track of the "Mystery Man"!

**C**RASH!

Jimmy Silver jumped clear of the floor of Mr. Dalton's study.

Richard Dalton fairly bounded from his chair.

It was not yet lock-up. The January dusk was falling deep on Rookwood School; but it was not yet dark, and there were still a good many fellows outside the House when the stone crashed through a pane of the Fourth Form master's study window.

Fragments of glass were scattered all over the study. One or two of them narrowly missed Jimmy as he stood at Mr. Dalton's table. A great, gaping gash was left in the pane, and within, a large jagged stone clumped to the carpet.

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Jimmy, spinning round towards the window.

Jimmy, as head boy of the Fourth, was having an interview with his Form-master on the first day of term. But Form matters and school matters, and all other matters were forgotten as the window was smashed in.

Mr. Dalton stared for a second as if petrified; then he rushed to the window and threw up the sash. He stared out into the dusky quad, and Jimmy Silver, at his elbow, stared, too.

Figures could be seen in various directions. The voice of Arthur Edward Lovell was heard, booming. A crowd of Classics and Moderns were engaged in snowballing one another till the bell rang, and Arthur Edward was well to the fore.

"Give 'em beans! Sock it to those Modern cads!" came Lovell's roar.

"Barge those Classical ticks!" yelled Tommy Dodd.

The snowballers were at some little distance. Nearer at hand a fat figure could be seen. It was that of Cecil Adolphus Muffin, otherwise known in the Fourth as Tubby.

Tubby Muffin was staring blankly at Mr. Dalton's window. As he was the only fellow near at hand, Richard Dalton called to him sharply:

"Muffin!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped Tubby. "It wasn't me, sir!"

Jimmy Silver grinned. Whoever had had the nerve to "buzz" a stone through a Form-master's window, it was not likely to be Tubby Muffin. Nobody was likely to suspect Tubby of such a truculent deed.

"Did you see who broke my window, Muffin?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Muffin. "I felt something whiz by my head, sir, and then your window went. It made me jump, sir. I think it came from behind one of those beeches."

Mr. Dalton was a young and active man. He put his hand on the sill, and vaulted out of the window.

Like an arrow he cut across towards the trees. Three of the ancient and famous Rookwood beeches stood opposite the windows of Masters' Studies at a little distance. It was almost certain that the stone-thrower had taken cover there. Richard Dalton

did not lose a second, in getting after him.

Jimmy Silver followed his Form-master's example, dropping from the study window. He was at Mr. Dalton's heels as the young master ran across to the beeches.

Swiftly Mr. Dalton reached the trees. His face was pale and set with anger.

But there was no one to be seen under the beeches. Whoever had flung the stone had vanished swiftly in the dusk. Swift as Mr. Dalton had been, the unknown marksman had had a good minute, and he had evidently made the most of it.

"Gone!" muttered the Fourth Form master. He fixed his eyes on Jimmy, who came up, panting. "You saw nothing from the study, Silver?"

"No, sir, I was quite taken by surprise. I—I suppose——" Jimmy Silver broke off; but the Form-master read his thoughts.

"There is no doubt about it, Silver," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "The unknown person who committed a series of outrages in the school last term has recommenced—on the very first day of the new term. I have not the slightest doubt that the boy who threw that stone is the same who wrecked my study, and who later attacked me in the dark." Mr. Dalton's lips set hard. "Last term his identity remained undiscovered. This term I am determined that he shall be discovered and expelled from Rookwood."

"I hope so, sir," said Jimmy sincerely enough.

Jimmy could make allowances for a reckless ragger like Mornington, or a practical joker like Putty of the Fourth, but the "mystery man" of Rookwood was quite a different proposition.

Not that Jimmy would have given him away to the beaks. But he would have been glad to see him spotted, and turfed out of the school.

"I must report this occurrence to Dr. Chisholm," said Mr. Dalton. "I will see you again another time, Silver."

He walked away to the House.

Jimmy Silver, left alone, sorted a little electric torch out of his pocket, and bent down to examine the ground.

Jimmy was a first-class scout, and there was a good deal of scattered snow under the trees. It seemed to him likely that the unknown prowler had left "sign" behind him.

He was right, for in a few minutes he picked up footprints.

They were not very distinct, but they were distinct enough to show that some fellow had recently been standing behind one of the beeches, facing the study window where the stone had struck.

Jimmy's eyes gleamed.

Last term all Rookwood had been thrilled and excited by the strange and sensational series of outrages in the last weeks of the term. Every fellow, from the captain of the school down to the smallest fag, was intensely keen to know who the mystery man was. And though Jimmy Silver & Co. would not have given him up to official punishment, they would certainly have made things very hot for him personally had they discovered him.

This looked like a chance; and Jimmy scanned the indistinct tracks in the snow very keenly. He picked up traces where the fellow had left the spot—unmistakable traces, for the toe-marks were deeply indented in the snow, showing that the fellow had been running.

Jimmy followed on, with the torch gleaming on the tell-tale track, his face full of excitement.

The fellow had cut away, unseen in the deep dusk, towards the archway that led into little Quad.

If the tracks led into Little Quad, Jimmy felt that he had him. There were plenty of fellows in Big Quad, which lay between the two Houses; but no fellow was likely to stray away into Little Quad when dusk was falling, and the bell might ring any moment for lock-up. If he found a fellow hanging about there——

There was a sudden rush and a yell:

"Classical cad!"

"Barge him over!"

The light in Jimmy's hand as he followed the track in the snow had naturally caught many eyes. Tommy Dodd and Cook and Doyle spotted him, and as soon as they spotted a Classical they barged him over.

The torch flew from Jimmy's hand, and he rolled over in the snow, roaring.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the three Tommies.

"Ow! Wow!" gasped Jimmy. "You silly fatheads! Ow!"

He scrambled up breathlessly, only to be barged over again, sprawling.

"Back up, Classics!" came Lovell's roar.

And Arthur Edward came up with a rush. Raby and Newcome, Mornington and Rawson and Oswald came with him, and the three Tommies were barged over in their turn.

More Moderns came up, and more Classics. Jimmy Silver was in the midst of a shouting, struggling, bargaining mob.

Where his torch went he did not know. It was trampled out of sight somewhere in the snow. And there was no doubt that the mystery man's track was trampled out of sight, too.

Jimmy consoled himself by getting hold of Tommy Dodd and rubbing his face in the snow.

The battle was waxing fast and furious when a bell clanged out through the January dusk, and the merry crowd scattered. Tommy Dodd sat up dizzily with his hand on his nose. That organ had suffered rather severely from Dudley Vane's punch in the bus, and rubbing it hard in frozen snow had not made it feel better.

"Urrgh!" gasped Tommy. "My nose—ow! Jimmy Silver, you tick, I'll come across after roll-call and punch your head! Urrrrgh!"

"Do!" called back Jimmy, over his shoulder. "I'll give you some more of the same!"

"You Classical worm!" yelled Tommy.

"You Modern tick!" yelled back Jimmy.

And Tommy Dodd was left with his handkerchief to his nose.

## CHAPTER 26.

Done in the Dark!

"ROT!" said Tommy Cook.

"Rubbish!" said Tommy Doyle.

Tommy Dodd looked very obstinate. The three Tommies were in their study in Manders' House—the Modern side at Rookwood.

Tommy Dodd was not so cheery and good-tempered as usual.

His nose was swollen and painful. It was not a thing of beauty, or a joy for ever, and it had a distinct pain in it.

Moreover, it had earned Tommy fifty lines. Mr. Manders, his House-master, had spotted it, called it disgraceful, and "lined" Tommy for showing up in the House with such a proboscis.

"I said I'd go over and punch his head," said Tommy Todd, "and I'm going over to punch his head, see?"

"Better punch Vane's," said Cook. "It was that tick Vane who gave you that boko."

"We gave Vane teco in the bus!" grunted Tommy. "I told Jimmy Silver I'd punch his head—"

"Rot and rubbish!" said Doyle.

"Well, I'm going!" roared Tommy Dodd. "Think I'm going to have those Classical ticks making out that I'm funking going over?"

"Leave it till to-morrow," said Tommy Doyle. "You can't go over to the Classical side after lock-up, and you know you can't! I suppose you're not going to ask Manders for leave to go to punch a Classical chap's head?"

"I'm going to drop out of the lower passage window as we've done a dozen times before!" growled Tommy

Dodd. "I told Jimmy Silver I'd jolly well go over and punch his head, and twenty fellows, at least, heard me. Well, I'm going to do it, and you can go and eat coke!"

"Fathead!" said Tommy Cook.

"Ass!" said Tommy Doyle.

"Rats to you!" snapped Tommy Dodd, and he tramped out of the study and slammed the door after him.

He went down the stairs in a determined mood. There was nothing bitter or malicious about Tommy Dodd, the captain of the Modern Fourth—but his nose was sore, and his temper was sorer, and he did want to punch Jimmy's head.

He had said that he would, and all the fellows in the quad had heard him say so—and the bare idea of being suspected of "funk" by the Classics made Tommy ready to run any amount of risk.

And there was not a lot of risk about it on the first night of term. Certainly, fellows were not supposed to leave their House after lock-up. But on the first night there was no prep, and the fellows were allowed out of their studies, if they liked, in the hour and a half devoted on other evenings to that occupation.

Prefects of the Sixth were busily occupied with unpacking and settling down, and not so wary as they became later in the term.

Certainly, Mr. Manders was a very severe gentleman, and likely to deal with a fellow severely for breaking House bounds if he spotted him. But Tommy Dodd was not going to be spotted!

There was a window in a recess in the passage leading to the junior day-room in Manders' House. Tommy Dodd strolled down the passage, and sidestepped into that recess, unnoticed.

It was the work of a minute or less to push up the window-sash and slip out.

Leaving the window ajar for his return, Tommy Dodd scuttled away.

Across the quadrangle, the lighted windows of the Head's House shone through the January dusk. But those lighted windows, in the distance, only seemed to make the darkness in the quadrangle thicker.

But a Rookwooder, of course, knew every inch of the way. Near the fountain in the middle of the quad was the famous old Rookwood beech, a tree with wide-spreading branches, older than the buildings. The path ran under the spreading branches of that mighty tree.

As Tommy came into its black shadow he gave a little start, a faint sound falling on his ears.

He stared round him in the gloom.

It came into his mind at once that some other fellow was out of the House. Possibly that fellow had heard his footsteps and dodged out of sight.

"Hallo! Who's that?" called out Tommy in cautious tones.

He could hear a sound of breathing close at hand, but could see nothing in the dense blackness.

There was no answer.

But Tommy, as he stared into the darkness, felt a strange, uneasy thrill as the gleam of eyes struck him from the dark. He realised that a face was very close to his own.

He started back with a startled exclamation.

"You silly ass, who are you?" he gasped. "What are you skulking in the dark for, giving a fellow the creeps?"

There was a movement, and he was seized. In the sudden grip of a pair of powerful hands he was forced backwards.

Taken by surprise by that sudden and unexpected attack, Tommy Dodd staggered back, and went heavily to the ground.

His assailant fell with him, still gripping him. A clenched hand descended on him, crashing in his face, and crashing the back of his head on the ground with a force that half-stunned him.

Tommy gave a panting cry.

Who it was that had seized him in the dark he could not begin to guess—whether Classical or Modern, senior or junior. But the strength in that iron grasp seemed too great for a Lower boy.

He struggled almost frantically.

"You rotter!" he panted. "Let me go! Who are you? Leggo! Oh, you rotter—you coward—you brute——"

Another savage blow descended on him, with all the force of a strong arm. With a terrific effort, Tommy almost threw his assailant off.

But not quite. He was crashed down to the earth again, and again the clenched fist struck—and again—and again!

Struggling frantically, dazed by the fierce blows, Tommy Dodd punched blindly at the unseen dark figure over him. Another savage blow crashed his head back on the frozen earth, and his senses scattered.

Stunned, Tommy Dodd lay like a log. He did not hear the sound of running feet, did not know that his assailant was gone. In the blackness under the branches, he lay motionless, stunned and senseless.

#### CHAPTER 27.

##### The Missing Man!

**D**UDLEY VANE strolled into the end study, with his hands in his pockets and a smile on his handsome face. He looked quite unlike the fellow who had lost his temper so savagely in the school bus, and who had scowled so blackly at Mr. Dalton in return for his hundred lines. The Fistical Four were in the study, dealing with a cake that Jimmy Silver had unpacked, and they gave him welcoming looks.

There had been a little trouble in the end study between Arthur Edward Lovell and the new junior, but that had quite blown over during the

Christmas holidays they had spent together with Jimmy Silver.

Arthur Edward had not forgotten, and did not want to forget, how Vane had got him out of a deep rift, where he lay with a damaged ankle, and carried him home on his back. They had come back to Rookwood great friends. And Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome already liked Vane—as indeed most of the Classical Fourth did. If he occasionally had flashes of hot temper, he kept that temper well in control, and generally he was good-humoured, kind and obliging. And he was a first-class footballer, which counted much in his favour.

"Hallo! You've been a long time taking your lines down to Dicky Dalton!" remarked Jimmy, as the new junior came in.

Dudley Vane laughed.

"I've been enjoying Muffin's conversation. It seems that Tubby's left all his Christmas tips at home, by some oversight, and arrived at Rookwood short of cash! Touching, isn't it?"

The Fistical Four chuckled.

"Seen anything of Tommy Dodd?" asked Jimmy.

"That Modern tick!" said Vane. "I haven't seen anything of him in the House."

"Well, he wouldn't show up for prefects to see him out of bounds," said Lovell. "He would nip in quietly somewhere if he came over. But, of course, he hasn't—it was only Modern gas!"

"Well, if he leaves it till to-morrow he will forget all about it," said Jimmy Silver. "Tommy isn't the man to bear grudges. I handled him rather forcibly in the quad—the silly ass barged in when I was after that rotter who busted Dicky's window, and I was rather waxy!"

"You were after—who?" asked Vane, fixing his eyes on the captain of the Classical Fourth.

"The jolly old mystery man!" grinned Raby. "From what Jimmy says, he might have had him if those

Modern fatheads hadn't barged in at the wrong moment. Jimmy was tracking him in the snow, like a giddy blugbound."

"He cut off towards Little Quad, after busting Dicky's window," explained Jimmy. "I was trailing him when those Modern asses spoiled it all. By gum, I'd like to spot the rotter!"

Dudley Vale laughed.

"He's had a narrow escape, then!" he said. "Who the dickens can the fellow be? He seems to have started his game again pretty early in the term, if it's the same chap."

"Not much doubt about that," remarked Newcome. "It's the same chap all right. I wonder what he'll be up to next? Blessed if I don't think the fellow must be a bit cracked!"

Kit Erroll of the Classical Fourth looked into the end study. Jimmy Silver waved a hand, with a chunk of cake in it, in welcome.

"Trot in, old bean," he said. "Just in time for the cake!"

"Seen Morny?" asked Erroll.

"Morny! Not since roll-call. Has that ass gone out of bounds on the first night of term?" grunted Jimmy.

"Well, I can't find him anywhere. It's getting near dorm," said Erroll. "He was talking some rot about going down to the Rooke to skate by moonlight. It means a row if he's not back for dorm."

"What a fellow he is to ask for trouble!" said Jimmy. "He likes breaking rules, just for the fun of them. Dalton will give him six if he bags him. Come and have some of this cake."

Erroll nodded and came in. But he was evidently worried about his erratic chum, Valentine Mornington. It was one of Morny's ways to break rules right and left, just to make the other fellows wonder at his nerve. There was no great harm, certainly, in skating on the frozen river by moonlight, but breaking school bounds at night was a very serious matter indeed.

The cake finished, Jimmy Silver & Co went downstairs with Erroll. There they sighted Mr. Manders, the Modern master, in the doorway, speaking to Richard Dalton. Manders was just going, and after he had gone, Mr Dalton stood in the open doorway looking out into the dark quad.

"If that ass Morny comes along now——" murmured Lovell.

"He won't let Dicky spot him; he's too jolly wary for that!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I say, I've been looking for you Jimmy!" It was Tubby Muffin's squeak. "I say, what do you think Jimmy?"

"I think you're a fat ass, old chap!"

"I mean, what do you think's happened?" said Tubby. "Leaving home in a hurry to-day, I left all my money behind me——"

"All the gold and banknotes," asked Raby, "as well as the coppers?"

"I suppose you could lend me a pound or so till they send it on, Jimmy?" suggested Tubby. "I'll tell you immediately it comes."

"Oh, we shall see it coming!" remarked Lovell. "I suppose they'll send it on in a pantechnicon?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I could do with five bob. The fact is, I'm short——"

"You are," agreed Jimmy, "and fat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, I'm short of money, you fathead——"

"Hallo, what's the matter with Dicky?" asked Newcome.

Mr. Dalton had made a sudden jump out of the doorway, down the steps. There was a sound of a calling voice in the quad.

The juniors ran to the door.

"Manders taken a tumble," grinned Lovell. "It's rather slippery——"

"Something's up!" said Jimmy.

They stared out into the shadow. Mr. Manders' excited shrill voice could be heard.

Two figures appeared in sight, with a third sagging between them. Manders and Dalton were helping a junior towards the lighted doorway. A crowd of fellows gathered at the door, with Jimmy Silver & Co. They gazed at that unexpected scene in amazement.

"It's Tommy Dodd!" gasped Jimmy. The two masters came up the steps, half leading, half carrying the Modern junior. Tommy Dodd seemed only half conscious. The Classical fellows gazed at him in horror.

His face was dark with bruises. There were streaks of crimson on his cheeks. He moaned faintly as the two masters helped him up the steps and into the House.

"It is Dodd!" exclaimed Mr. Manders, blinking at him in the light. "A boy of my House—out of bounds! But what has happened to him? I stumbled over him, lying on the path under the beech; he appeared to be unconscious——"

"He has been attacked and savagely beaten!" said Mr. Dalton, in a low, tense voice. "Dodd! Can you speak? Tell us what has happened."

Tommy Dodd groaned.

"I—I was set on and—and knocked over in the dark!" stammered Tommy. "I don't know who—I—I never saw him—my head banged on the ground and——"

"What were you doing out of your House?" thundered Mr. Manders.

"I—I was coming over to—to see Jimmy Silver."

"Do you know anything of this, Silver?" snorted Mr. Manders, spotting the captain of the Fourth in the Classical crowd.

"Of course I don't!" snapped Jimmy indignantly. "You don't think I'd have punched you in the dark, do you, Tommy?"

"I know you wouldn't, old chap!" groaned Tommy. "It was some beastly brute—I never had a chance. I think I was stunned——"

"You should not have been out of

your House!" snapped Mr. Manders. "This is what comes of a reckless disregard of rules, Dodd."

"That is certainly true, Mr. Manders," said Richard Dalton quietly. "But the urgent matter is to discover who has committed this wicked and brutal attack. Mr. Manders, I suggest that you should ascertain immediately whether any boy is missing from your House, and I will do the same here. The boy who attacked Dodd must have broken House bounds."

"Certainly!" said Mr. Manders. "Come with me, Dodd. I will help you back to your House."

"Yes, sir," mumbled the helpless Tommy.

Mr. Manders whisked away again, with Tommy Dodd leaning heavily on his arm. Mr. Dalton shut the door and rapped out an order for the House to assemble instantly in Hall, and then hurried away to the headmaster's study.

There was a buzz of excitement all through the Classical side. Fellows of all Forms crowded into Hall. Dr. Chisholm appeared there in a few minutes, his severe face darker and sterner than usual. With a scuffle of feet and a buzz of excited voices, the Classics crowded in. Roll was to be taken to ascertain whether any fellow was out of the House—and if any fellow proved to be missing, it was obvious that suspicion would fall upon him.

"It's the mystery man again!" whispered Lovell, as the Classical Fourth gathered in their places.

"Must be!" said Jimmy Silver. "And if any fellow's out— Oh, my hat!" He broke off. "Where's Morny?"

"He went down to the river to skate," breathed Erroll. "He's not got in yet—it's still half an hour to dorm! Oh, the ass—they will think——"

"Silence!" called out Bulkeley of the Sixth. "Silence!"

The Head was about to take the roll. There was a breathless hush in Hall as Dr. Chisholm read out the names. "Adsum" came in answer every time

—till he came to the name of Mornington.

Then there was no reply. Dr. Chisholm glanced round over the packed Hall and repeated the name in a louder tone:

"Mornington!"

Silence.

The Head went on with the roll. To every other name the answer came. Only Valentine Mornington was missing.

"Mr. Dalton, it appears that a boy of your Form is out of House bounds!" said Dr. Chisholm grimly. "We shall not, I think, have to look farther for the boy who attacked Dodd—the same boy, I am assured, who committed a series of similar outrages in the school last term. Dismiss!"

"Morny, after all!" said Lovell, as the Rookwooders swarmed out of Hall. "So it's Morny who was the jolly old mystery man last term. The fact is, I thought of it more than once."

"You fool!" exclaimed Erroll angrily. "Do you think——"

"Yes, I do," answered Lovell coolly, "and so does everybody else!"

Erroll opened his lips—and shut them again. Whether Valentine Mornington was guilty or innocent, he had condemned himself by his own reckless folly.

#### CHAPTER 23.

Expelled from Rookwood!

"MORNINGTON!"

"Hallo, Bulkeley!"

"Where have you been?"

"Unpackin'."

The Rookwood captain's lip curled.

"You can tell that to the Head!" he said. "Follow me."

Morny looked at him. A score of fellows were looking at Morny. He was back in the House—and to judge by his careless look, it did not occur to him that he had been missed. He had turned up in good time for dorm, and but for the roll-call in Hall, certainly his absence would never have been dis-

covered. As it was, Bulkeley of the Sixth pounced upon him as soon as he was seen.

"You're takin' me to the Head, Bulkeley?" asked Mornington coolly.

"Yes; follow me."

"But I've only been in the box-room unpackin'——"

"You can cut that out!" said Bulkeley contemptuously. "Better not tell you lies to the Head. I may as well tip you that it's known that you've been out of bounds."

"What on earth's put the idea into your head?" drawled Morny.

"For goodness' sake, Morny, shut up!" almost groaned Erroll. "Roll was taken at nine, and you were missed."

Mornington was still cool and self-possessed as he followed Bulkeley to the Head's study. There he found Mr. Dalton with the headmaster. His composure failed him a little under the stern eyes.

"You have returned, then," said Dr. Chisholm. "No doubt you are aware what you have to expect, Mornington."

"I suppose I'm goin' to be caned, sir," answered Mornington. "I admit I've been out of bounds."

"You admit that you laid in wait for a Modern junior, and attacked him in the quadrangle, in the dark, and committed a brutal assault worthy only of a hooligan of the lowest type!" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm.

"Nothing of the kind, sir! I've done nothing of the sort——"

"Where have you been, Mornington?" asked Mr. Dalton quietly.

"Skatin', sir, on the ice."

"Skating—at this hour of the night!" said Dr. Chisholm contemptuously. "How dare you make such a statement, Mornington!"

"It's true, sir! I thought it would be rather a lark to skate by moonlight I——"

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

"Mornington! Last term a series of lawless outrages were committed in the



school. They have continued on the first day of the new term—first by the breaking of a master's study window, then by this cowardly and brutal attack on a boy of Mr. Manders' House. The culprit is discovered, at last—and will be immediately expelled from Rookwood."

Mornington stared at him blankly.

"But it was not I, sir!" he gasped. "I never——"

"You need say no more!" interrupted the Head icily. "You were the only boy missing from this House when the outrage was discovered. If you have, indeed, placed yourself under suspicion by a mere reckless and disrespectful disregard of authority, you have yourself to thank. But my fixed belief is that the author of a series of lawless outrages has been discovered. You agree with me, Mr. Dalton?"

"I cannot doubt it, sir!" answered the master of the Fourth.

Mornington looked almost wildly from one to the other.

"But——" he stammered. "But——"

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand.

"Silence, Mornington! You are expelled from Rookwood! But for the lateness of the hour I would send you away to-night. You will leave the school by an early train in the morning!"

"But——" shrieked Mornington.

"Take him away, Mr. Dalton!"

After prayers the following morning Mr. Dalton took his seat in a taxicab, with Valentine Mornington by his side, and Mornington's box on top. And as the taxi rolled out of the gates there were few fellows who did not believe that the "mystery man" of Rookwood was gone.

## CHAPTER 29.

### The Last Hope!

JIMMY SILVER drew a deep breath.

"Gone!" he said.

A taxi turned out of the school gates.

watched by a crowd of fellows in the quad. In it sat Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, and, by his side, Valentine Mornington.

Mornington of the Fourth, sacked from the school, was starting for the station under the charge of his Form-master.

Morny had always been cool, and he was cool now. His face was a little pale, his lips were set, and his eyes gleamed under his knitted brows. But he was cool as ice, and he turned his head and waved his hand to the crowd of Rookwooders watching him go.

The taxi turned into the road.

By the gate a junior stood—Erroll of the Classical Fourth. Morny's chum looked as if he felt the blow more severely than Morny did. He made a step towards the taxi as it was passing him and held up his hand. Mr. Dalton frowned, but he signed to the driver to stop. If Erroll wanted to say a last good-bye to his expelled chum, Dicky Dalton was not the man to prevent him. And the misery in Erroll's face touched his heart.

The taxi halted, and Kit Erroll came to the door. Mornington gave him a rather wry grin.

"Better to have cut out the jolly old last farewells, old bean," he said lightly. "You look rather sick, old fellow."

"Morny!" muttered Erroll.

"You're not losin' much in losin' me," said Morny, "and there will be a fearful lot of dry eyes in the Fourth! Look at Dicky! Jolly glad to get shut of me, aren't you, Dicky?"

Richard Dalton started a little. Probably he knew that he was called "Dicky" in his Form. But this was the first time that a Fourth Former had addressed him as Dicky.

"Please do not be impertinent, Mornington!" he said sternly.

"Why not?" drawled Mornington. "I'm sacked—and that's the limit. You can't do anythin' more, Dicky, except see me off at the station. And you're goin' to render me that last favour, whether I call you Dicky or whether

I call you silly ass. And you are a silly ass, you know," went on Morny in quite a casual tone. "Only a silly ass would fancy that I was the sportsman who knocked out Tommy Dodd in the dark last night!"

Mr. Dalton compressed his lips.

"If you desire to say good-bye to Mornington, Erroll, be brief!" he snapped. "We have a train to catch."

"Mr. Dalton," breathed Erroll, "can't you see—Morny never did it! Morny's as innocent as I am. He went out of bounds last night, like the silly, reckless ass he is—but it was a mere chance that he was out of the House when Dodd was attacked in the dark—"

"That matter is closed, Erroll."

"It was not Morny, sir! He's not the fellow they call the 'mystery man' who's been ragging in the school for weeks—he's not! You know, sir, Lovell was suspected at first, and it was proved that he was not the fellow! Morny's as innocent as Lovell was—it's somebody else—"

"I cannot listen to this, Erroll!" said Mr. Dalton. "Mornington has been judged guilty by his headmaster and expelled—and I fully concur in the judgment. Stand back and let me proceed."

Erroll's hand was on the taxi window. He did not stand back. It seemed as if he were unable to let his chum go.

"Bite on the jolly old bullet, kid!" said Mornington. "They've got the wrong man—but they don't know it! Can't expect much in the way of sense from a schoolmaster, you know."

"Be silent!" rapped Mr. Dalton.

"Morny," gasped Erroll, "be quiet, you ass! The game's not up yet. I tell you, the facts will come out and the Head will let you come back. I'm certain—as certain as I stand here—that you'll be cleared, and very likely before you reach home."

Morny blinked at him. Mr. Dalton stared.

"What do you mean, Erroll?" asked Richard Dalton. "If you have any

knowledge of the identity of the reckless rascal who has committed a series of outrages in the school—"

"I have not, sir. Nobody knows who the fellow is. But I know that the fellow, brute as he is, is not all bad, and that he will not let Mornington be sacked for him!" said Erroll earnestly. "Don't you remember, sir, when your study was wrecked, and Lovell was supposed to have done it, another outrage happened while Lovell was in the punishment-room—"

"What of it?" snapped Mr. Dalton.

"A lot of the fellows thought, sir, and I did, that the mystery man wouldn't let Lovell be sacked for what he hadn't done, and deliberately made it clear that Lovell was not the man!"

"Very possible!" said Mr. Dalton dryly. "Mornington, no doubt—"

"It was not Morny—and I feel certain that the rotter, whoever he is, will never stand for this," said Erroll. "I believe he will do as he did before—and after Morny's gone, sir, you'll find that the mystery man isn't gone."

"By gad!" ejaculated Mornington. His face brightened. "Erroll, old bean, I believe you're right! That blighter, whoever he is, is a bit of a sportsman in his own way. Sorry I called you Dicky, Mr. Dalton—I take it back. Mustn't call you Dicky if I'm coming back to Rookwood."

Mr. Dalton gave him a grim look.

"You need not flatter yourself that you will come back to Rookwood, Mornington!" he said. "Erroll, stand back at once. Driver, proceed."

Morny gripped his chum's hand.

"Thanks, old man!" he said. "You've bucked me no end! I hope that sportsman will play up as you expect. Salut au revoir, but not good-bye—what?"

The taxi rolled on towards Latcham. Kit Erroll walked back into the gateway. His face was white; he seemed almost dazed by the blow that had fallen and taken his chum from him. Yet there was hope in his heart.

In all Rookwood there were only two fellows who declared their belief that

Mornington was innocent—his chum, Kit Erroll, and Dudley Vane, the new fellow in the Fourth. Some of the others might doubt—Jimmy Silver doubted a little—but the general belief was that the chopper had come down in the right place. Morny had always been reckless and rebellious, often near the limit, and now he had gone over the limit. Certainly there was no hope for him unless the mystery man proved to be still in the school after he was gone.

To that Erroll pinned his faith,

### CHAPTER 30.

#### A Rag on the Head!

**D**R. CHISHOLM, headmaster of Bookwood, sat in his study. There was a thoughtful expression on his face, but he was, upon the whole, in a satisfied mood. The series of mysterious outrages in the school, culminating in the brutal attack on a Modern junior in the dark, had been a deep worry and problem to the Head, and it was a relief to his mind to have discovered the culprit and turned him out of the school.

Mornington, judged guilty on evidence that seemed complete enough, was on his way home in Mr. Dalton's charge—and the matter was at an end. At least, so the headmaster believed. Sitting before his study fire, he gazed into the glowing coals with a thoughtful brow, waiting for the bell to ring—when he was to take Mr. Dalton's Form during the Fourth Form master's absence.

A sudden gust of smoke from the fire made him start and cough. He rose to his feet, spluttering.

Another and another gust came from the chimney. It was surprising, for the day, cold and frosty, was not windy, and even a high wind should not have caused the chimney to smoke to such an extent.

Dr. Chisholm backed away from the fire, surprised and angry, coughing and

spluttering. Volumes of smoke followed him.

Something evidently was wrong with the chimney! In a couple of minutes the room was so thick with smoke that the Head could hardly see his way to the window to open it.

He grabbed at the casement to jerk it open. To his further surprise and wrath, it did not open.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head.

He wrenched at the window. But it remained fast. Something was wrong with it, as well as with the chimney.

It was at that moment that it flashed into the Head's mind that he was the victim of a "rag." With gleaming eyes, he bent his head to examine the window, peering through curling smoke. He made out the head of a screw, driven deep into the wooden frame.

The expression that came over Dr. Chisholm's face might have scared the unknown ragger could he have seen it.

Someone, it was clear, had entered the study while the Head was at breakfast, and screwed up the window. The same someone, it was equally clear, was responsible for the smoky chimney.

Breathing hard, Dr. Chisholm whipped across the study to the door. He fairly tore at the door-handle.

The door did not open.

The key was gone. He had not noticed that the key was gone when he entered the study. The door was locked on the outside. Incredible as it seemed, someone had tiptoed along the passage after he was in the study and locked him in.

"Upon my word!" gasped the Head.

The smoke was thickening. It was plain that the chimney had been blocked above. Swirling masses of smoke filled the room, rolling round the Head in clouds.

There was another door to the study—a small one beside the fireplace. Dr. Chisholm groped to it—he could no longer see his way. He reached it—and wrenched at it. It was locked—and the key gone.

Dr. Chisholm stood spluttering for breath, half-choked by the vapour thickening round him. He was a prisoner in his study, with the smoke rolling thicker and thicker.

He groped to the bell and rang. Then he groped back to the door. There was a tap—and the door-handle turned.

"Is that you, Tupper?" called out the Head, in gasping tones.

"Yessir! You rang, sir!" came the page's answer.

"Open the door, Tupper!"

"Eh, sir?"

"It has been locked on the outside!" hooted the Head. "Unlock it at once!"

"There ain't no key here, sir!" answered the surprised Tupper. "I say, sir, there's smoke coming out under the door, sir! Is the room afire, sir?"

"Gurrrrrgh!" gurgled the suffocating headmaster.

"Did you speak, sir?"

"Urrrrgh!"

"I didn't ketch that, sir!" said the astonished Tupper.

"Wurrrgh!"

Dr. Chisholm staggered across the study to the window again. Only a faint glimmer through the thick smoke showed where it was. He groped for something to break the glass. There was no help for it—he had to have air. He found a Greek lexicon, and dashed it through a pane.

Almost the whole pane went under the crash. Fragments of glass scattered like hail in the quadrangle outside. Dr. Chisholm put his face to the gap, and gasped in the fresh air.

There was an astonished yell in the quad. It was not yet time for class, and plenty of fellows were there—most of them discussing the departure of Valentine Mornington. The crash of the headmaster's breaking window drew a hundred eyes to the spot.

"That's the Head's window!" yelled Arthur Edward Lovell. "I say, Dicky Dalton's window was smashed yesterday. Now the Head's—"

"Can't be the jolly old mystery man again," said Raby. "He's gone!"

"It's the Head himself!" yelled Newcome. "Look! The study's on fire!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. rushed towards the Head's window. Fifty fellows at least rushed after them.

Through the jagged gap smoke was pouring out from within, and in the midst of it the headmaster's face could be seen—gasping for air. Bulkeley of the Sixth came rushing up.

"Fire!" yelled Tubby Muffin. "Say, fire! Somebody ring up the brigade!"

"Bulkeley," panted the Head through the gap. "I have been locked in my study, and the chimney has been blocked! Tell Sergeant Kettle to come at once, and bring his tools, and force the lock of my door!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped the Rockwood captain.

He cut off at once.

More and more fellows gathered under the Head's window. Even the expulsion of Mornington was forgotten now in the new excitement.

Crash! Smash! Two more panes went, under smites from the Greek lexicon. Smoke poured out in heavy volumes. Jimmy Silver came up to the window-sill.

"Shall I try to open the window, sir?" he asked. He supposed that it was jammed, somehow, as the Head broke the glass instead of opening it.

"The window has been screwed, Silver!" answered Dr. Chisholm. "I cannot be opened, or I should not be breaking the glass, you foolish boy! The Head's temper was not at its best."

"It's a rag!" breathed Lovell. "Some rag, believe me! Fancy any man raggng the Head!"

"A rag," repeated Kit Erroll. His eyes danced. "Yes—a rag! I jolly well knew it would come."

Lovell stared at him.

"You knew—"

"Yes, I knew," said Erroll. "It's the mystery man again—after Morny gone! They can't have got to Latcha—"

yet—and the fellow is at his tricks again, with Morny away!”

“Oh, my hat!” exclaimed Jimmy Silver. “If that’s it——”

“The fellow’s a sportsman in his own weird way,” said Erroll. “He’s barged in to see Morny clear——”

Lovell whistled.

Sergeant Kettle came hurrying up with Bulkeley. He went into the House, and a sound of knocking and clanging was soon heard. Nearly all Rookwood had gathered under the window, where the smoke was pouring out.

“I never believed that Morny was the man,” said Dudley Vane. “This looks to me like proof of it!”

The same thought was in every mind. Whoever was guilty of that amazing rag on the Head was the same fellow who had perpetrated the previous outrages. That there could be another fellow, so madly reckless, was unbelievable. One of them was surprising enough; two of them was incredible. It was the mystery man again, and the mystery man was not Valentine Mornington—it could not be Morny, who in those very moments was seated in a taxi with Dicky Dalton, heading for Latham Station.

The Head disappeared from the broken window. It seemed that Sergeant Kettle had got his study door open at last.

The bell rang, and the Rookwood fellows trooped away to the Form-rooms in a state of buzzing excitement. Morny was gone—the mystery man was still at Rookwood—and all the fellows wondered what was going to happen next.

#### CHAPTER 31.

##### A Startling Outbreak!

CARTHEW of the Sixth came in to take the Fourth in first lesson.

Mr. Dalton was still absent, and the Head, who had intended to replace the Fourth Form master with his majestic self, was otherwise occupied. Bulkeley and Neville and other pre-

fects were also busy, hunting for the mysterious unknown who had blocked the headmaster’s chimney. So Carthew was assigned to carry on in the Fourth—not much to the satisfaction of that Form. He was the least popular prefect at Rookwood, and the most unpleasant in his manners and customs.

As soon as Carthew appeared, all the Classical Fourth knew that they had to mind their step, as it were—which was not easy, for the whole Form was buzzing with excitement. Carthew had his official ashplant under his arm, and it was well known that he needed very little excuse to handle it.

So far as work went, things were easy with Carthew; he did not like work, and was not likely to bother much about what the juniors did, or did not do. As no prep had been set the previous evening—the first of the term—there was no “con.” Carthew set the Form a Latin paper, by the easy process of giving them a section of the *Aeneid* to write out and translate.

To save himself trouble he gave them the beginning of the first book, which most of the fellows knew almost by heart, so all was easy so far. But when Arthur Edward Lovell whispered to Jimmy Silver that he wondered what the big beak was going to do about Morny, a sudden whop on the knuckles made Arthur Edward jump and utter a yell that woke the echoes of the Form-room.

“Don’t talk in class!” said Carthew genially.

Lovell gave him a glare.

“Look here——” he bawled.

“Silence, Lovell! If you speak again I’ll have you out to give you six of the best.”

Lovell controlled his feelings with difficulty. The scratching of pens was resumed in the Form-room, and Carthew strolled about, his cane under his arm, waiting for another excuse to handle it.

He went to the window and looked out into the quad. His back was to the class for the moment.

In that moment there came a sudden whiz, and something smote Carthew on the back of the head. He gave a howl, and his nose tapped on the glass.

There was a gurgle of merriment from the Classical Fourth. But as the bully of the Sixth spun round from the window, with a furious face, all the juniors bent sedulously over their desks. An apple rolled on the floor—the missile that had clumped on the back of Carthew's head.

"Who threw that apple?" roared Carthew.

No answer.

"Stand up, Lovell!"

Arthur Edward stood up.

"I never threw it, Carthew!" he said meekly.

"I believe you did!"

"Well, I didn't!" grunted Lovell.

"You did—and I'll jolly well teach you not to buzz apples at a prefect!" snarled Carthew. "Bend over your desk."

"It wasn't Lovell, Carthew," said Dudley Vane. "He never moved."

"Perhaps you saw who it was!" snapped Carthew.

"Oh, quite!" assented Vane.

"Who was it, then?"

It was like the bully of the Sixth to ask a fellow to "sneak" about another fellow. No man in the Fourth was likely to do so, least of all, as it happened, Dudley Vane—for it was Vane who had buzzed the apple!

"Do you hear me, Vane?" hooted Carthew.

"I'm not deaf!" answered the new junior.

"You say it was not Lovell who threw that apple, and that you saw who it was! Give me his name at once."

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

"Hold your tongue, Silver! Vane, stand out before the Form!"

Vane hesitated a moment, and then stepped out. Carthew stood before him, his ashiplant gripped in his hand.

"Now give me the name!" he said savagely.

"I won't!" answered Vane coolly.

"You won't! Bend over that desk then!"

"I won't do that, either."

There was a deep breath in the Fourth. Carthew stared at the new junior as if hardly able to believe his ears.

"You—you won't!" he gasped.

"No! You've no right to ask a fellow to sneak or to cane him for refusing. Mr. Dalton wouldn't——"

"Never mind Mr. Dalton now. Bend over that desk!" roared Carthew.

Vane stood motionless. Carthew made a stride at him, gripped him by the collar with his left hand, and wrenched him towards the desk. Blaze came into Dudley Vane's eyes.

He twisted in the prefect's grasp, turned on him, and grappled with him. Carthew, taken by surprise, went rocking back in the junior's grasp.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Lovell. "Vane old man, chuck it!"

All the Classical Fourth were on their feet now. It was an amazing scene in a Rookwood Form-room.

Carthew, rallying, exerted his strength and bore the junior back. But, to his amazement, and to the amazement of the Form, Dudley Vane held his own. Carthew was no great athlete, but he was a Sixth Form man, head and shoulders bigger than Vane, and all the fellows expected to see Vane crumple up in his grip. Instead of which, the new junior not only held his own, but more than his own. Carthew rocked back again and again frantically in a grasp that was too strong for him.

He went staggering back, and was flung headlong to the floor. He landed there on his back with a terrific crash.

Vane stood over him, panting, with flashing eyes, his fists clenched. The Fourth stared at him, dumfounded.

Carthew lay gasping. He could hardly believe that he had been floored by a junior of the Fourth Form.

He scrambled up. The cane had flown from his hand. He rushed at the rebel of the Fourth with his fists clenched. Carthew's temper, too, was out of control now.

Under the amazed, staring eyes of the Fourth, Vane stood up to the towering Sixth Form man. The juniors could scarcely believe their eyes as they saw him dash Carthew's savage, lashing fists aside and hit out, knocking the Sixth Form man backwards.

Crash!

Carthew of the Sixth went down again, more heavily than before. As he sprawled, Vane jumped at him, grasped him by the collar, and dragged him by sheer strength to the door. He tore the door open, rolled the gasping, spluttering bully of the Sixth into the doorway, and kicked him into the passage.

"Vane!" shrieked Jimmy Silver in helpless dismay.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "Vane, you mad ass——" roared Lovell.

Dudley Vane did not heed. He kicked and kicked till Carthew, yelling, rolled out into the passage. Vane slammed the door on him.

Then he looked round at the staring juniors. He seemed suddenly to recollect himself. Crimson flushed into his white face. He went quietly back to his place and sat down.

"You utter ass!" said Oswald. "You'll be sacked for that!"

Vane did not answer. He did not look up. Quietly he took up his pen and resumed his task. Carthew did not come back. The Fourth remained undisturbed till suddenly there came the sound of a taxi outside the House. Erroll ran to a window.

"It's Dicky!" he shouted. "And—Morny's come back with him! Hurrah!"

## CHAPTER 32.

Called to Account!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON walked into the Fourth Form Room with his hands in his pockets and a cheery grin on his face. He nodded to the juniors, as cool as ever. All the fellows were out of their places—except one. Dudley Vane, with a dark, depressed look on his face, sat still at his desk, his eyes on his Latin paper. He gave Morny only one quick glance as he came in, and then went on writing. But the rest of the Classical Fourth crowded round Mornington, and Erroll thumped him joyfully on the back.

"Anybody glad to see me again?" yawned Morny. "I know Muffin's missed me—he hasn't borrowed anything of me this term yet."

"Yah!" said Tubby Muffin.

"So you're back again!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Looks like it, doesn't it? Turned up again like a jolly old bad penny!" grinned Mornington. "You were right, Erroll, old man! I gather that the mystery sportsman started his pranks again after I went?"

"That's right!" said Lovell. "But how did you know?"

Mornington chuckled.

"When we got to Latcham the station-master sorted Dicky out, and told him the big beak had rung up and wanted to speak to him on the 'phone," he explained. "You should have seen Dicky's face when he had taken the call! It seems that the mystery man broke out again, and the Head jumped to it that I wasn't the bloke, as I was miles away—remarkably intelligent deduction for a schoolmaster to make—the old bean's brain must have been working at double pressure—what? So instead of slammin' me in the train for home, dear old Dicky hiked me back in the taxi—and here I am."

"And the expulsion's washed out?" asked Erroll.

"Sort of," agreed Morny. "In fact,

I score all along the line. As the wronged victim of unjust suspicion, I'm rather an object of sympathy. Dicky's forgotten that I cheeked him in the cab—and the Head has pardoned me for breaking House bounds last night—in view of my jolly old narrow escape from getting it in the neck. All fearfully excitin', my beloved 'earers, but I'm glad it's over!"

"Gratters, old bean!" said Lovell. "I thought they'd got the right man."

"You would!" assented Morny. "With a brain like yours, old man, you might think anythin'."

"Look here, you cheeky ass——"

"Speech may be taken as read!" yawned Mornington. "Dicky's gone to the Head to jaw. I understood there was a prefect in charge here—has he left you on your jolly old own?"

"Vane kicked him out," said Raby.

Mornington jumped.

"Eh—what? Pulling my leg?" he ejaculated.

"Honest Injun!"

"Kicked a prefect out?" said Morny.

"Well, by gad, that's outside even my limit! Looks to me as if there's goin' to be another expulsion—without the happy victim bein' recalled this time! Are you potty, Vane?"

Dudley Vane did not answer or look up. With a black brow, he gave all his attention to his task—the only fellow in the Classical Fourth who was doing so.

"But tell me what happened," went on Morny. "What jolly old larks has the mystery man been playin' while I was off the scene and couldn't enjoy the fun?"

A dozen voices told him. Morny whistled.

"Blockin' up the Head's chimney—lockin' the old bean in his study!" he said. "Some lad, that chap! I hope they won't spot him. He's a wild beggar, and no mistake—but I tell you men, he's a good bit of a sportsman."

The Form-room door opened again, and Richard Dalton came in. There

was a scamper of the juniors to the places.

Mr. Dalton eyed them with a frown. "Is not a prefect in charge here Silver?" he asked.

"He—he left the Form-room, sir," stammered Jimmy.

"Indeed! That is no excuse for disorder. Take your places at once!" said Mr. Dalton severely.

Evidently Richard Dalton had not been informed of what had happened to Carthew of the Sixth. Nobody the Fourth was likely to tell him. Second lesson followed, and matters went on more or less normally; but in the Classical Fourth were given much thought to the lesson. It had been an exciting morning at Rookwood, and there was going to be more excitement when Dudley Vane was called to account.

The Fourth was dismissed for breakfast at last. Valentine Mornington was looking very bright and cheerful as he went out with Erroll. With all his assumption of cool indifference, there was no doubt that the dandy of the Fourth was immensely relieved by the way matters had turned out for him.

A man from Latcham was seen repairing the broken window of the Head's study. But it was soon learned that no discovery had been made of the mysterious ragger. A garret window that gave access to the roof had been found open, and a folded blanket had been fished out of the chimney-pot, but to the fellow who had done the deed, there was no clue whatever.

It was the mystery man, that was certain. That the Head believed was clear from his action in recalling Mornington. The secret ragger was still at Rookwood, and nothing was known about him for certain.

Who was he?

That was as perplexing as ever.

Dudley Vane took no part in the discussion on the subject. He walked the quad, with his hands driven into his pockets, and a black cloud over his brow. Evidently he was think-



of what must follow his fierce outbreak of temper in the Form-room. Neville of the Sixth came out of the House, glanced round, and called to him:

"Vane! You're wanted in your Form-master's study!"

"Very well, Neville," answered Vane quietly.

He went into the House, and slowly made his way to Richard Dalton's study. Carthew of the Sixth was there, with the Fourth Form master. His eyes glittered at Vane as he came in.

The new junior took no notice of him. He looked at Mr. Dalton.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"I have received a most extraordinary report from Carthew, Vane," said Mr. Dalton severely. "Is it possible that you so far forgot yourself as to attack a Sixth Form prefect placed in charge of my Form by the head-master?"

Vane breathed hard.

"I'm sorry, sir! Carthew ordered me to speak, and I wouldn't. No fellow in the Form would have done it!"

"I ordered him to give the name of the fellow who threw an apple at my head, sir," said Carthew, as Mr. Dalton's glance turned on him. "As he refused, I was going to cane him, when he——"

"You should have given no such order, Carthew. To cane a boy for refusing to accuse another boy was an act of tyranny!" snapped Mr. Dalton. "In other circumstances, a junior would be expelled for striking a prefect—but you appear to have acted wrongly in the first place."

Carthew set his teeth.

"The Head——" he began.

"The Head would not uphold your action any more than I do," said Richard Dalton. "I shall not report this to the Head. But you, Vane, will be severely punished for your action. I can scarcely understand such extraordinary and uncontrolled violence on the part of a boy usually so well-behaved—a boy I have always considered a credit to my Form."

"I'm sorry, sir!" said Vane, in a low voice. "I lost my temper when Carthew laid hands on me."

"No doubt! You must learn to control your temper better," said Mr. Dalton sharply. "You refused to be caned by Carthew. You will now be caned by him in my presence, and at my order. Refuse, and I shall take you to Dr. Chisholm, and I warn you that you will be sent home by the next train."

"I should never refuse to obey you, sir!"

"I am glad of that!" said Dicky Dalton dryly. "Carthew, take that cane! Vane, bend over that chair!"

Dudley Vane, silently, with compressed lips, bent over. There was no sign about him now of the fierce, passionate temper he had displayed in the Form-room. He had himself well in hand.

Carthew gripped the cane, his eyes gleaming. He would have preferred to see the junior "sacked," but he was going to make the most of the caning. He swished the cane in the air, and brought it down with a tremendous swipe.

Six times the cane rose and fell, and every cut was as hard as the bully of the Sixth could lay it on. Mr. Dalton looked on grimly. Not a sound came from Dudley Vane. His face was white, and his eyes burned, but he shut his teeth hard, and bore the infliction in silence.

"That will do, Carthew!" said Mr. Dalton sharply, as the prefect seemed disposed to continue after the "six" had been administered.

Carthew laid down the cane, and left the study. Dudley Vane rose, breathing very hard. His eyes dropped before Mr. Dalton's steady gaze.

"You may go, Vane!" said the Fourth Form master quietly.

Dudley Vane left the study.

Richard Dalton sat with his eyes fixed on the door that had closed behind the new junior, a deep line of thought on his brow.

## CHAPTER 33.

## An Alibi!

"MUFFIN, old man, what's the time?"

Tubby Muffin blinked at Dudley Vane.

They were in the end study, after prep. In Study No. 4, along the passage, Valentine Mornington and Erroll were holding rather a celebration. Morny was standing a study supper to celebrate his happy return to Rookwood after so narrow an escape of the "sack," and he had invited as many fellows as the study would hold—and a few more.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were all there, with a crowd of other fellows. Dudley Vane had been asked, but he had politely declined, which did not matter a bean to Morny. Study No. 4 was crammed, anyhow. And there was, alas! no room for Cecil Adolphus Muffin.

In which circumstances it was grateful and comforting to Tubby, when Vane came strolling along the passage, for the new junior to ask him to step into the end study and share a cake.

Vane sat down with his back to the fireplace. The study clock was on the mantelpiece, behind him.

Still, it rather surprised Tubby for Vane to ask him the time. He could have seen the clock by turning his head.

"It's just nine o'clock, old chap! I say, this is a jolly good cake!" said Muffin, with his mouth full. "I say, you're not eating any!" Muffin blinked sympathetically. "Still feeling that whopping—what?"

"I've got some work to do," remarked Vane. "Like to take the cake to your study and finish it, Muffin?"

"I say, you're awfully decent, old chap!" said Muffin. There was nothing that Tubby would have liked better. "Sure you don't want any?"

"Quite!" said Vane, with a smile.

"Right-ho, then!"

Tubby Muffin rolled out of the end study with the cake.

Ten minutes later there was a tramp of feet in the passage, and the door flew open, and the Fistical Four tramped cheerily in.

"Hallo, swotting?" asked Lovell, as he saw Vane seated at the table with his books.

"Just giving these the once-over," said Vane carelessly. "Morny's lit party over?"

"Yes," said Jimmy Silver. "You were rather an ass not to come, Vane. Jolly good spread and the best of company—ours!"

Dudley Vane laughed.

"I wasn't feeling like it," he said. "And I've had a cake with Muffin—was here a little while ago. Well, better chuck this."

He snapped his books shut and rose to his feet.

"Hallo! What does Dicky want?" ejaculated Raby.

He was standing in the doorway and he had a sudden view of Mr. Dalton coming hurriedly up the passage from the stairs.

The Fourth Form master came up to the end study with rapid stride. He looked in at the door, the expression on his face startling the chums of the Fourth as they saw it.

"Oh, you are here, Vane!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir," answered Vane.

"Has anything happened, sir?" ventured Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, Silver," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "Carthew of the Sixth Form has been attacked in his study."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"The mystery man again!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Vane," said Mr. Dalton, in the same quiet tone. "I cannot help recalling your extraordinary outbreak in the Form-room this morning and the fact that Carthew punished you severely in my presence. Where were you at nine o'clock?"

"Nine o'clock!" repeated Vane.

"At nine o'clock," said Mr. Dalton. "Carthew went to his study. It was

course, dark, and before he could switch on the light he was struck down by some person concealed in the study. The weapon used was a heavy ruler—which has been found. Carthew was stunned and—

"Stunned!" breathed Jimmy.

"He remained unconscious for some time," continued Mr. Dalton. "He has, in fact, only just recovered sufficiently to make known what has happened."

The juniors stood silent and horrified. Carthew was a brute and a bully, but this was terrible news. Of all the outrages that had occurred at Rookwood School since the mystery man had begun his lawless career, this was the very worst!

"Carthew remembers the exact time he went to his study," went on Mr. Dalton. "He heard the hour strike—it was exactly nine. Vane, I require to know where you were at nine o'clock?"

"I was in this study at nine o'clock, sir, with Muffin," replied Vane.

"Muffin!" repeated Mr. Dalton.

"Yes; he came in to help me with a cake. Lucky he did, if you suspect me of having knocked Carthew out in his study!" added Vane, with a contemptuous curl of the lip.

"Silver, fetch Muffin here."

Jimmy Silver left the end study without a word. He came back in a few minutes with Cecil Adolphus Muffin. Tubby was looking a little alarmed.

"Muffin, you have been in this study with Vane since preparation?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Tubby. "Vane asked me to have some of his cake, and then—"

"At what time were you here, Muffin?"

"Nine o'clock, sir, when I noticed the time."

Mr. Dalton glanced at the clock and at his watch. The clock was right.

"How long had you been here, Muffin, when you noticed that it was nine o'clock?"

"Only a few minutes, sir—five or six, I suppose," said the mystified Muffin.

Mr. Dalton stood silent. Arthur Edward Lovell winked at his chums with the eye farthest from the Form-master. According to Tubby's evidence, evidently sincere, Vane had been in the study before five minutes to nine—and it was at nine that Carthew had been knocked out.

An alibi could hardly have been clearer. Whoever had knocked Carthew out with the ruler, it seemed impossible that it could have been Dudley Vane.

"Very well," said Mr. Dalton, at last, "I must regard you as cleared of suspicion, Vane! I regret that such a suspicion occurred to me—your own outbreak of ungovernable temper was the cause. So far as you are concerned, the matter ends here."

And the Fourth Form master strode away down the passage. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another—Vane shrugging his shoulders. It was one more mystery added to the already long list, and it looked as if no investigation would ever be able to penetrate the mystery of Rookwood.

#### CHAPTER 41.

Lovell, as Usual!

"NOT after lights out!" said Jimmy Silver, shaking his head.

Arthur Edward Lovell looked at him.

"Fathead!" he said politely.

"What I mean is—" began Jimmy.

"Never mind what you mean, old chap," interrupted Lovell. "I've told you what I mean. If you've got cold feet you can stand out on them. See?"

Jimmy shook his head again. "Uncle James" of Rookwood was not likely to be suffering from "cold feet." Lovell, as usual, required the brake to be put on.

"A dormitory raid is all very well," explained Jimmy, "and I dare say it would be a lark to roll Smythe of the Shell out of bed. I've no objection to a pillow fight, if it comes to that. But—er—"

For the third time Uncle James of Rookwood shook his head.

"But what?" demanded Raby. "No harm in a lark."

"And that ass, Smythe, wants ragging!" said Newcome.

"And we're jolly well going to do it!" bawled Lovell, in tones that rang far beyond the end study and echoed down the Classical Fourth passage.

"Listen to your Uncle James!" said Jimmy Silver severely. "You know what happened to Mornington a week or two ago. He was out of House bounds when that mysterious beast, whoever he is, hammered Tommy Dodd in the dark. Morny was nearly sacked on suspicion—he just asked for it. Until the mystery man of Rookwood is found out and bunked we'd better mind our step."

"Rot!" remarked Lovell.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Suppose something happened while a fellow was out of his dorm? He would be under suspicion at once, just as Morny was that time."

Raby and Newcome nodded assent to that. Dudley Vane, the new junior, who was sitting on the corner of the study table, listening to the discussion, nodded, too. But Arthur Edward Lovell only snorted. Arthur Edward had many gifts and qualities, but sweet reasonableness was not included among them. Opposition only made Lovell more determined.

"Rubbish!" he said. "For one thing, that blessed mystery man hasn't been heard of for a week—not since Carthew of the Sixth was cracked on the head with a ruler in his study. My belief is that he's got frightened at what he's done, and chucked his potty games."

"You think so, Lovell?" asked Dudley Vane.

"Yes, I jolly well do! Anyhow, he's not likely to be up to his tricks to-night, just when we're raiding the Shell dormitory. And I don't care twopence if he is!" added Lovell. "I told Smythe I'd look in and bang him with a pillow

for putting on swank. And if I don't look in on Smythe to-night, and bang him on the head with a pillow, you can use my head for a football, Jimmy Silver!"

"Thanks, but a wooden football wouldn't be much use to me!" answered Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you cheeky ass!" roared Lovell. "I've a jolly good mind——"

"Use it, old fellow, if you've got one," urged Jimmy. "Looks to me as if you haven't!"

Lovell glared at him, while his comrades chuckled. Arthur Edward seemed at a loss for words for a moment. Taking advantage of the pause, Jimmy Silver went on:

"I don't believe the mystery man has chucked it. He's lying low for a bit, that's all. I know the beaks don't think he's chucked it. They're watching for him like cats, and I've a jolly strong suspicion that some of the prefects stay up at night to keep watch, to nail him if he prowls. Any fellow out of his dorm is liable to be nailed and taken up before the Head on suspicion of being that sportsman. Not good enough!"

"Rubbish!" roared Lovell.

And with that, Arthur Edward stamped out of the end study and shut the door after him with a slam.

Half an hour later Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, was seeing lights out for the Form. Dicky Dalton's face, wont to be cheery and good-humoured, was very grave in expression.

The mystery of Rookwood School weighed on his mind. Weeks had passed since the first of the strange and mysterious series of outrages had been committed, and there was not the remotest clue to the perpetrator. The whole staff, from the Head down, was puzzled and perturbed, and wondering, too, when and how the mysterious ragger might break out again.

Twice the finger of suspicion had pointed Mornington. In each case it had proved been pointed—once at Lovell, once at

to be a mistake. The mystery man was one of some hundreds of fellows, but whether senior or junior, or Classical or Modern, no one could say.

Certainly it was no time for any fellow to be recklessly regardless of rules. All the fellows realised that—except Arthur Edward Lovell.

When Dicky Dalton had turned off the light, and had gone, Lovell sat up in bed.

"Better give him time to get clear!" he remarked.

"Better go to sleep, like a sensible chap!" said Jimmy.

"Who's coming with me to pillow that ass Smythe?" demanded Lovell, addressing the Fourth Formers.

"Rats!" came in unanimous response from nearly every fellow.

"Well, of all the rotten funks!" said Arthur Edward, in utter disgust. "All right, then. I'll go alone!"

Arthur Edward slipped out of bed and jammed on his trousers and a pair of slippers. He snorted scornfully as he did so. Jimmy Silver sat up in bed.

"You silly, obstinate, pig-headed bandersnatch——" he said.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Lovell. "Keep in bed and try to get your feet warm!"

Jimmy stepped out of bed. Having done his best to restrain his hot-headed and hare-brained chum, and having failed, Uncle James was not going to let him go alone. The end study always stood shoulder to shoulder, Raby and Newcome silently followed his example.

Lovell blinked at them in the glimmer of winter starlight from the high windows.

"Oh, you're coming!" he grunted.

"Yes," answered Jimmy; "and if we get snaffed by a beak or a prefect we'll jolly well scrag you when we get back."

"Leave it to me, and I'll see you through all right," said Lovell. "It won't take us five minutes to mop up

Smythe and Tracey and Selwyn, and that gang in the Shell. Come on!"

And the Fistical Four quitted the dormitory and stepped out into the dark passage. It was a quarter of an hour since Richard Dalton had gone, and that was ample time for the beak to get clear. They had to go down the passage, and round a corner by the big landing to reach the door of the Shell dormitory. They tiptoed away silently.

Jimmy Silver gave a sudden start as they reached the landing. In the darkness there he caught a faint movement.

He stopped, his heart beating faster.

The thought of the mystery man, the unknown lawless prowler of Rookwood, came uncomfortably into his mind. It was not a pleasant thought, to run into the ruffianly rascal who had hammered Tommy Dodd senseless, and stunned Carthew of the Sixth with a ruler.

His three companions heard the sound at the same moment and stopped, too, with the same disturbing thought in their minds.

Someone was hidden in the darkness on the landing, and who could it be, skulking there in the dark, but the mysterious prowler?

The next moment a startled yell from Lovell broke the silence.

"Oh! He's got me! Oh!"

There was a fall, a bump, a scuffle, and then the sounds of a desperate struggle in the darkness.

## CHAPTER 35.

### A Lesson for Lovell!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL struggled wildly, almost frantically. He forgot all about the raid on Smythe & Co.—he forgot that he was outside his dorm after lights out, a serious matter if discovered. He forgot everything, but the startled horror of that sudden grasp in the black darkness. He yelled and

howled incoherently as he rolled over, struggled madly in the strong hands.

Not for a moment did he doubt that he had run into the "mystery man" in the dark!

A horrified terror thrilled through all his veins. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome peered and groped round them, striving to get to Lovell's help. Two struggling figures, rolling over, crashed against Jimmy's legs, and sent him spinning. He clutched hold of Raby and Newcome as he went, and dragged them over with him.

A light gleamed on the staircase.

Someone was hurrying up from the lower landing, with an electric torch gleaming in his hand.

"Have you got him, sir?"

It was the voice of Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood.

"I think so, Bulkeley! Switch on the light!"

That answer came from the unseen one who was grasping Lovell. The voice made Jimmy Silver & Co. wonder whether they were dreaming—for it was the voice of their Form-master, Richard Dalton.

There was a sudden flood of illumination as Bulkeley switched on the landing light.

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome scrambled to their feet. Bulkeley stared at them blankly as he saw them in the light.

Mr. Dalton staggered up, with his prisoner still struggling in his powerful grasp. He, too, stared blankly at the three.

"Silver! Raby! Newcome!" he exclaimed, "What are you doing out of your dormitory? And this— Lovell!"

"Urrrggh!" gurgled Lovell breathlessly. "Urrggh! Oh, crikey! Ow!"

Mr. Dalton released him. Arthur Edward Lovell leaned on the wall, gasping for breath. His eyes almost popped from his head as the light revealed his Form-master.

Evidently there had been a mistake in the dark. It was not the mystery man—it was Mr. Dalton, on the watch

for him! And it was clear that he had taken the junior he had seized for the mysterious prowler.

Jimmy Silver compressed his lips. He mentally resolved to kick Lovell.

"So it is you!" said Mr. Dalton quietly. "Explain at once why you are out of your dormitory, Silver!"

"It—it—it was a—a lark, sir!" stammered Jimmy. "Only a lark on the Shell, sir! We were going to pillow Smythe—"

"And at such a time as this, when watch is being kept for an unknown lawless character in the school, you indulge in what you are pleased to call a lark, after lights-out!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton sternly.

Jimmy hung his head. Kicking Lovell afterwards was all very well. At the moment he had nothing to say.

"Lovell, how dared you resist when I seized you?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"I—I—I never dreamed it was you, sir!" faltered Lovell. "I—I thought you'd gone down to your study! I—I—I thought it was that beast who had got hold of me in the dark—that mysterious brute!"

Lovell shuddered. He was reassured now, but he was not likely to forget soon the thrill of horror that had gone through him when he was gripped in the dark by unseen hands!

"You deserve the fright you have had, you stupid boy!" snapped Mr. Dalton. "You are fortunate not to be suspected of being the rascal for whom I was on the watch. Go back to your dormitory. I shall cane you all in the morning with the greatest severity."

In dismal silence the Fistical Four trooped back to the Fourth Form dormitory. In silence, they went in, and Jimmy Silver closed the door.

All the Classical Fourth were sitting up in bed. The uproar had reached every ear in the dormitory.

"Spotted?" asked Dudley Vane. "Snaffled?" grinned Mornington. Jimmy Silver breathed hard and deep.

"That idiot Lovell!" he said.

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Lovell warmly. "Was it my fault?"

"Whose fault was it, then?" howled Raby.

"Don't yell at me! How was I to know that Dicky Dalton was squatting there in the dark, keeping watch for the mystery man?" demanded Lovell.

"Oh, my hat! Was he?" howled Mornington. "And you walked into him! Ha, ha!"

"Nothing to snigger at!" growled Lovell. "He grabbed me in the dark, and thought I was the mystery man, and I thought he was——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, snigger!" snorted Lovell. "Funny, isn't it? We're going to get whopped in the morning! That's funny, too, I suppose?"

"Well, you've jolly well asked for it!" chortled Peele.

"Oh, shut up!" snorted Lovell. "We'd better turn in, you men, in case that ass Dicky gives us a look-in. Better give him plenty of time to clear now. I suggest waiting an hour before we go for Smythe."

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome blinked at Lovell.

They had been considering whether to kick him from one end of the dormitory to the other, or to bang his head on a bedstead. Lovell, apparently quite unaware that he had excited his comrades' dire wrath, had not, it seemed, given up his idea of raiding the Shell and pillowing Smythe & Co.

After what had happened, Lovell was still thinking of that dorm raid! Undoubtedly Arthur Edward was a stickler!

"No good talking to him!" said Jimmy Silver. "Actions speak louder than words—and words are wasted on that fethead, anyhow! Collar him!"

"Look here——" roared Lovell.

Three pairs of hands fastened on him like one, and he roared as he was swept off his feet.

Bump!

"Whooop!"

Bump!

"Yoo-hooooop!"

"Now are you going out of the dorm again?" hissed Jimmy Silver.

"Ow! Yes! I——"

Bang!

Arthur Edward Lovell's head smote a bedpost. His head was hard, but the bedpost was harder. The bed almost rocked under the concussion. Lovell gave a frantic howl.

"Now are you going back to bed?"

"No! I—— Yarcooh!"

Bang!

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a ripple along the rows of beds.

"Ow! Leggo! I—I—I'll chuck it, if you like!" gasped Lovell. "I—I—I'll go back to bed! Wow! My head aches! Ow!"

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome swung him up, and hurled him bodily on his bed. He landed there with a crash.

"Now," said Jimmy Silver, in concentrated tones, "you turn out again, you blithering idiot, and we'll tie you down to the bed with the sheets! Mind, I mean that!"

"Ow-ow! You silly ass—wow!"

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome went back to bed.

So did Lovell. He had more aches and pains distributed over his person than he could have counted. Even Arthur Edward Lovell did not want any more.

Slumber descended on the Classical Fourth dormitory. Lovell was the last to sleep. It was quite a late hour before Arthur Edward forgot his aches and pains in balmy repose.

#### CHAPTER 36.

##### Muffin is Mystified!

"HARD cheese!" said Dudley Vane sympathetically.

It was the following morning, and the Fourth had gathered at the door of their Form-room.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came up the passage to join the waiting Form.

Some of the Fourth smiled at them as they came. Tubby Muffin gave a fat chortle.

The aspect of the Fistical Four was, perhaps, a little comic. They wriggled up the passage rather than walked. Arthur Edward Lovell seemed to be trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife. Evidently the four had been through it. Richard Dalton had dealt with them faithfully for their escapade overnight.

"Ow!" groaned Lovell. "Wow!" Lovell had had it hardest. Probably Dicky Dalton had guessed that the hot-headed Arthur Edward was the chief offender.

"Hurt?" asked Tubby Muffin.

Lovell gave him a glare.

"Oh, no!" he said, with ferocious sarcasm. "Enjoying it! I'm making this row to show how amused I am!"

"Hard luck!" said Mornington. "But you really asked for it, you know. Dicky was bound to come down heavy."

"I don't see it," said Dudley Vane. "No great harm in a dorm raid. That ass Dalton shouldn't have been up watching—it was his own fault the fellows barged into him. Beaks shouldn't prowl round o' nights."

"Well, I don't see how they're to nail the mystery man if they don't watch for him," said Jimmy Silver. Uncle James was wriggling, like his friends, but he kept his just balance of mind. "The fact is, we asked for what we got—at least, Lovell did! But it's all the fault of that dashed mystery brute. I'd like to spot him and punch his silly head!"

Dudley Vane laughed.

"That's not likely," he said. "Whoever the fellow is, he seems to know how to keep himself pretty dark. Dalton can sit up every night, with a wet towel round his head, if he likes—but he won't snaffle him! I rather think Dalton amuses him."

"Shurrup!" whispered Erroll, as Mr. Dalton stepped into the passage and came up to the Form-room door.

Vane coloured a little. It was fairly

plain that Richard Dalton had overheard his remark, which had been spoken quite loudly and carelessly.

But the Fourth Form master took no notice of it. He opened the Form-room door, and the juniors went in and took their places.

Jimmy Silver & Co. sat rather uncomfortably through lessons that morning. Mr. Dalton passed them over lightly in "con." He was a kind master, as well as a severe one on just occasion.

There was no doubt that he was deeply annoyed by the happening of the night. All the fellows knew now that watch was kept for the "mystery man"—and among the rest, that mysterious individual knew. It placed him on his guard, and made it more difficult to catch him napping.

After morning school, the Fistical Four were feeling better. They joined the rest of the Form in punting about a footer in the frosty quad.

Few, if any, of the juniors noticed Mr. Dalton standing at his study window, gazing out into the wintry sunlight. His eyes were on the juniors—and he sighted Dudley Vane walking down to the gates.

Dicky Dalton's eyes followed the new junior till he disappeared. His brow was very thoughtful. Fellows were allowed to go out of gates between third school and dinner if they liked, and there was nothing surprising in Vane going for a walk on his own. But of late days, Dicky Dalton had been very keenly interested in the new fellow in his Form, and everything that Dudley Vane did had interest for him. He turned from the window at last, and sat down to a pile of Form papers with a thoughtful shade on his brow.

It was near dinner-time when Vane came back.

He walked in, and sauntered across to the House, with his hands in his overcoat pockets. Some of the juniors were still punting the ball, among them the Fistical Four.



Vane went into the House, and ran quickly up the stairs, heading for the juniors' studies—generally deserted at that time of the day. As he went up the Fourth Form passage, Higgs of the Fourth looked out of the doorway of Study No. 2.

"Seen that fat, fozzling, fat-headed, piefaced, pinching, pilfering pig?" asked Higgs.

Vane laughed.

"If you mean Muffin, I haven't seen him."

"Well, if you see him, tell him I'm going to smash him into little bits!" said Higgs. "Tell him I know who had my apples, and I'm jolly well going to whop him black and blue, and then blue and black."

Higgs, snorting, turned back into Study No. 2. Vane, laughing, went on up the passage to the end study.

He stepped into that study and closed the door after him.

His study-mates were all in the quad; he had seen them all there as he came in. But he gave a quick look round the room as if to make sure that it was vacant.

Then he crossed to the window alcove, where there was a box-seat.

He pitched aside the cushions, and lifted the lid. Inside the rather roomy receptacle was all sorts of lumber—old exercise books, two or three football boots, a tennis racket in a bad state of disrepair, some cardboard boxes, and some dog-eared volumes—the sort of lumber that accumulates in junior studies, and is shoved out of the way.

Taking a packet, wrapped in brown paper and tied with string, from his overcoat pocket, the new junior thrust it down in the box, and carefully stacked a quantity of the lumber over it.

Then he closed the lid, replaced the cushions, and left the study. With a smile on his face, he went downstairs and out of the House, to join the fellows punting the ball.

As soon as Dudley Vane had left his study and closed the door after him, a

fat face peered out from behind the armchair, which was backed into a corner.

It was the podgy countenance of Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin, alias Tubby. Tubby stared at the shut door.

Parked inside Tubby were the apples Higgs had missed from Study No. 2. Tubby, for the present, was keeping out of Alfred Higgs' sight. That was why he was in the end study.

He had popped behind the armchair in the corner when Vane came in, under the impression that it was Higgs hunting for him.

He was still under that impression; for, keeping carefully out of the junior's sight, he had not seen him.

He crept cautiously out of the corner, nothing doubting that Alfred Higgs had looked into the study for him and failed to find him. He was safe now till the bell rang for dinner, at all events.

Tubby rolled across to the box-seat in the window.

Although he had not seen Vane, he had heard him. And he wondered what on earth business Higgs had with Jimmy Silver's box-seat. The fellow had been rumpling and rustling the things in the box, as if hunting for something, or packing something away. Tubby was going to know what Higgs had been up to!

He raised the lid of the box and blinked in among the lumber. Nothing of an unusual nature met his eyes. The inquisitive Tubby proceeded to sort through the heap. He gave a squeak of surprise as he sorted out a packet wrapped in brown paper and tied.

Tubby picked it up and stared at it. That neatly wrapped and tied packet looked as if it had come fresh from a shop—as indeed it had. Tubby wondered whether it contained cigarettes. As he was Higgs' study-mate in Study No. 2, he knew that Alfred sometimes had cigarettes, which he kept carefully hidden from the eyes of authority.

"The awful rotter!" murmured Tubby.

Tubby saw it all—or fancied that he did. Higgs, he supposed, had taken the alarm, and hidden his cigarettes in a safe place—under the lumber in the box-seat of Jimmy Silver's study!

But he was going to make sure. He untied the string, and unfolded the brown paper.

Then he fairly squealed with astonishment.

The packet did not contain cigarettes. It contained a dozen jumping crackers such as were used on November 5th, but seldom or never seen at Rookwood at any other time of the year.

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Tubby.

Higgs—he was firmly convinced that it was Higgs—had sneaked into Jimmy Silver's study, and hidden a packet of fireworks in the box-seat! It was utterly amazing to Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin. His eyes popped in astonishment at the bundle of crackers.

Finally, he tied the packet up again and replaced it and closed the lid of the box-seat. He rolled out of the end study.

The bell was ringing for dinner now, and Higgs or no Higgs, Tubby could not cut tiffin. He rolled last into Hall; and Higgs, already at the table, gave him a glare—but under Mr. Dalton's eyes, he could not, fortunately for Tubby, give him anything more than a glare.

## CHAPTER 37.

### Bang!

**M**R. DALTON glanced at his study clock, and frowned.

It was half-past ten.

The January wind howled round the ancient roofs and chimney-pots of Rookwood School. It was long past bedtime for all the boys, and most of the masters had turned in.

But Richard Dalton was not thinking of turning in. In normal circum-

stances, he was early to bed, and early to rise. But the circumstances at present were not normal. The "Mystery man" of Rookwood was still undiscovered, and Richard Dalton was determined that the discovery was going to be made.

All the masters, from the Head down to Monsieur Monceau, were keen enough, but Richard Dalton was keenest of all. That was not only because he had been, more than once, the victim of the unknown prowler's enmity. There was a suspicion in his mind, growing to a conviction, that the mysterious prowler of the school was in his own Form. But the task of watching and waiting was a disagreeable and weary one, and it brought a frown to the young master's brow.

There was a light tap at his door, and Bulkeley of the Sixth looked in. Richard Dalton rose to his feet.

"Half-past ten, sir!" said Bulkeley. "I'm ready, if you think it any use."

"What happened last night was very unfortunate, Bulkeley," said Mr. Dalton. "But we must not give in. I have no doubt whatever that, sooner or later, that irresponsible boy will break out again, and I almost dread to think what his next action may be."

"The attack on Carthew was a desperate act," he went on. "Carthew is still suffering from his injury. Difficult as the task is, Bulkeley, the discovery must be made."

"But the fellow will be put on his guard now, sir," said the Rookwood captain. "He's pretty sure to lie low—"

"I do not think so, Bulkeley. I think he is so irresponsible, and so much a slave to an uncontrolled temper, that the fact that he is being watched for, now that he knows it, may very likely excite him to perpetrate some daring act—some act, perhaps, more outrageous than anything that has happened so far."

Bulkeley's face was very grave.

"That looks as if the fellow is a bit cracked, sir," he said slowly.

"I should not be surprised to learn that his mind is partly unhinged," answered the Fourth Form master. "The effect of a shock, perhaps, or an illness. For the safety of all the other boys, he must be found—there is no telling upon whom his unreasonable enmity may turn at any moment. He has generally acted after dark—and he cannot do so without leaving his dormitory. I do not think that what happened last night will warn him to desist. Upon reflection, I think it is probable that it will urge him to show his reckless contempt of what we can do, by some extraordinary freak."

"Very well, sir, I'm at your orders," said Bulkeley. "If he leaves his dormitory, whichever one it may be, we're fairly certain to spot him on the landing."

"I hope so, at least," said Mr. Dalton. He turned off the light in his study, and left with the prefect.

The big landing, on which the dormitory passages opened, was in dense darkness. Bulkeley stopped at the turn of the staircase, and Mr. Dalton went up to the landing, stepping on tiptoe and groping his way.

As he stood on the landing, peering round him in the darkness, the Fourth Form master felt a sudden thrill. He could see nothing—but he knew, somehow, that he was not alone in the darkness.

He had intended to watch and listen there for some surreptitious prowler after lights out. Now it occurred to him that the prowler had been first in the field, and was already there.

His heart beat fast.

He felt in his pocket for his electric torch, and drew it out. Suddenly he flashed on the light.

Holding up the torch, he swept the beam of light round in a circle. There was an exclamation from Bulkeley, and he came running up to join the Form-master on the landing.

"You've seen——" he gasped.

"I think I heard something!"

breathed Mr. Dalton. "I am sure—hark!"

There was a sound, from the black opening of the passage that led up to the door of the Classical Fourth dormitory. Someone was there!

Distinctly, in the silence, both of them heard the scratch of a match. It was a startling sound to hear, for the last thing they would have expected the prowler to do was to strike a light.

But that was what he had done—the lighted match itself could not be seen, as it was round the corner of the passage, but a glow in the darkness told that it had been lighted.

"Quick!" breathed Mr. Dalton.

He rushed across the landing, Bulkeley at his heels. From the opening of the passage, a red spark sailed through the air, describing an arc and dropping fairly in Mr. Dalton's face.

Something struck him, and dropped at his feet.

Bang!

"What——"

Bang, bang, bang!

The sudden roar of the explosions caused Dicky Dalton to leap clear of the floor. It roared fairly under his feet. Bulkeley jumped back with a yell.

Bang, bang, bang!

The deafening detonations rang through the House, shattering the silence, awakening fellows in all the dormitories.

Bang, bang!

"Good heavens—what——"

"Oh, crumbs! Look out——"

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

The roar of explosions was almost continuous. Something that seemed alive, was jumping about the landing. For several seconds the master and the prefect were too amazed and dazed to act—or think of acting. Then Mr. Dalton, heedless of the banging and fizzing round him, tore to the dormitory passage, and rushed into it.

But the unseen fellow who had thrown that bundle of jumping-crackers was gone. In the distance, up the passage, Mr. Dalton heard a door close.

He knew that it was the door of the Classical Fourth dormitory.

He tore up the passage.

Bang, bang, bang! roared behind him. Bulkeley switched on the light, and tried desperately to stamp out the exploding fireworks. But it was not one—it was many. A bundle of crackers had been fastened together, the fuses in contact; and the force of the explosions hurled them apart, scattering them over the big landing. Some of them fell through the banisters to the stairs below. On all sides sounded the incessant, deafening roar of banging crackers.

Doors opened—voices called—lights flashed on. The whole House was alarmed. Scores of fellows were turning out of bed, shouting to know what was the matter. The roar of the crackers answered them. Bang, bang, bang, bang!

Heedless of the uproar, Richard Dalton sped up the passage as if he were on the cinder-path. He reached the door of the Classical Fourth dormitory—and as he reached it, it opened and lights gleamed out. Someone had switched on the light in the dormitory. Jimmy Silver, in his pyjamas, with a startled face, was rushing out, as his Form-master arrived.

"What's up, sir?" gasped Jimmy.

Mr. Dalton, without answering, pushed him aside, and strode in.

His swift glance swept up and down the dormitory. Nearly every fellow was already out of bed—even Tubby Muffin was wide awake, sitting up, and squealing with alarm. Only one other fellow was still in bed—and that was Dudley Vane, the new junior.

He was raised on one elbow, rubbing his eyes, and staring in the light. He looked as if he had just been startled out of slumber. Mr. Dalton's searching eyes fastened on him at once. Vane did not seem to notice it. He rubbed his eyes, without even seeming to observe his Form-master at all.

"What's happened, sir?" asked Mornington.

Bang, bang, bang, bang! came in a roar up the passage. Some of the crackers were still going strong.

"Fireworks!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, in wonder. "What silly ass is letting off fireworks in the middle of the night?"

"No need to ask that!" said Dudley Vane, laughing. "There's only one man at Rookwood capable of such a jape!"

"The mystery man!" exclaimed Lovell.

Bang, bang, bang, bang! The crackers seemed inexhaustible. The House echoed from end to end with the explosions.

Fellows from other dormitories were rushing out. Already there was a crowd on the landing, and a loud buzz of startled voices. Amid the buzzing of boyish voices, came the deep roar of Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, and the excited squeak of Monsieur Monceau. But no fellow left the Classical Fourth dormitory; Mr. Dalton had arrived in time to stop a general exodus.

"Silver!" rapped Mr. Dalton. "Who has been out of this dormitory?"

"Nobody, sir, that I know of!" answered Jimmy. "I was fast asleep when the banging woke me up——"

"Listen to me, all of you!" said Mr. Dalton sternly. "Someone threw a bundle of fireworks from this passage—and I heard this door close as I pursued him. It is an absolute certainty that the boy entered this dormitory! He entered, Silver, less than a minute before you reopened the door——"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy. "I never saw him, sir. I switched on the light as I opened the door—it was dark till then——"

"The boy is in this dormitory now!" said Mr. Dalton. "There can be no further doubt that he is a member of the Classical Fourth! One of the boys here present is the boy who has committed a series of lawless outrages in the school, culminating in what has happened to-night. That boy must

have had fireworks in his possession to-day. Does anyone here know of a boy in this Form who had fireworks in his possession?"

There was a gasp from Tubby Muffin. "Oh, crikey!"

And all eyes in the dormitory turned on Cecil Adolphus Muffin.

CHAPTER 38.  
Under Suspicion!

"MUFFIN!"  
"Oh, crikey!" gasped Tubby.

He was blinking at Alfred Higgs with distended eyes. Higgs, like the rest, was staring at Muffin—everybody was staring at him. It was clear that Muffin knew something.

"It can't have been Muffin!" gasped Lovell. "Was it you, Muffin, you ass?" "Ow! No!" howled Tubby in alarm. "Don't you get making out it was me, you fathead! It wasn't me, sir! I—I wouldn't!"

Some of the fellows grinned. Certainly, it seemed wildly impossible that Tubby Muffin was the "mystery man." They would as soon have suspected the House dame's tabby cat.

"Muffin!" repeated Mr. Dalton. He strode towards Tubby's bed and fixed his eyes on the fat Classical's podgy face. "You know something of this matter. That is clear! Tell me at once what you know."

"Oh, lor! I—I—I—" stammered Tubby.

"Have you seen any boy in this Form in possession of fireworks?" demanded Mr. Dalton. He guessed at once that that was it.

"I—I—I—"

"Speak at once!"

"Oh, dear! I—I don't want to give a man away, sir!" gabbled the hapless Tubby. "He's a beastly brute, and he kicked me for eating an apple or two, but—"

Alfred Higgs gave a jump! He was the "beastly brute" who had kicked

Tubby for eating an apple or two! A dozen fellows looked at Higgs. His face grew crimson.

"Muffin, you must speak out," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "In ordinary circumstances I should never ask a boy to give information, as I think my Form is well aware. But this is a terribly serious matter, perhaps involving the safety of every boy in the House! You must give me the name of the boy you saw in possession of fireworks."

"Speak out, Tubby!" said Jimmy Silver. "You're bound to speak out—no fellow will call it sneaking."

"But—but I—I say, you won't let Higgs pitch into me?" gasped Tubby. "You know what a rotten bully he is—"

"Higgs!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. He swung round and fixed his eyes on the crimson, alarmed face of the bully of the Fourth. "Higgs! What have you to say?"

Higgs spluttered.

"Fancy Higgs!" breathed Lovell. "Just the chap when you come to think of it."

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Higgs! Speak! Muffin states that you were in possession of fireworks to-day, and—"

"I wasn't!" bawled Higgs, stuttering with rage and terror. "I haven't touched a cracker since the Fifth of November." He glared fiercely at Tubby. "You mad young ass, what makes you fancy I had any fireworks?"

"I—I wasn't going to give you away, but—"

"You mad idiot, you can tell Mr. Dalton anything you like!" roared Higgs. "It's all lies!"

"Oh, is it?" exclaimed Tubby hotly. "Perhaps you'll deny that you came into Jimmy Silver's study and hid the fireworks in his box-seat."

"In my study!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"I haven't been in Silver's study this term!" yelled Higgs. "Mr. Dalton, it's not true. Everybody knows that Muffin is a liar—"

"Calm yourself, my boy," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "It is quite clear that Muffin is not lying, but he may have made a mistake. Muffin, what were you doing in Silver's study?"

"It was about some apples, sir——" mumbled Tubby.

"Apples!" repeated Mr. Dalton, with a stare.

"Yes, sir. Higgs missed some apples, and made out that I'd had them, and—and I dodged into the end study to keep clear of him, as the fellows were out. Then I heard him coming, and hid behind the armchair in the corner, and he never saw me, and——"

"You saw him?" asked Dudley Vane.

"Silence, Vane! How dare you interrupt! Muffin——"

"I didn't see him," mumbled Tubby. "But I jolly well knew he was looking for me! I kept doggo! I heard him fumbling in the box-seat, and after he was gone I looked into it and found a packet. I looked in the packet—it was crackers! I left it there when I went down to dinner, and forgot about it afterwards—but——"

"I never——" shrieked Higgs.

"Muffin, you stupid boy!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "You heard someone enter the end study, who concealed the fireworks in the box-seat. But you did not see him?"

"No, sir, but I jolly well knew it was Higgs."

"How could you have known, if you did not see him?"

"Because he was after me——"

"I wasn't after him!" yelled Higgs.

"I never looked into any study for him. I knew I'd get him at dinner, and——"

"Oh!" gasped Tubby. For the first time it dawned on Cecil Adolphus' powerful brain that the fellow who had entered the end study was not Alfred Higgs. He had taken that for granted. He realised now that he had taken a little too much for granted.

"Muffin, you are a stupid boy!" snapped Mr. Dalton. "There is no reason whatever to suppose that it was Higgs who entered the study while you

were concealed there. It was much more likely to be a boy who belonged to the study!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances. It was not only likely, but fairly certain that a fellow who hid articles in the end study was a fellow who belonged to that study; though that fact was only beginning to dawn on Cecil Adolphus Muffin.

"There are five boys in the end study!" said Mr. Dalton, slowly and quietly. "Silver, Lovell, Raby, Newcome, Vane! Has anyone among you anything to confess to me?"

"No, sir!" said five voices in unison. There was a pause.

"Rot!" broke out Arthur Edward Lovell hotly. "I dare say it wasn't Higgs—I don't know who it was—but it was some rotter from outside who stuck those crackers in our study—if that fool Muffin didn't dream the whole thing! Not a Fourth Form chap at all, in my opinion."

"Thank you for your opinion, Lovell!" said Mr. Dalton dryly. "You will now be silent! Go back to bed, my boys."

The Classical Fourth turned in again, and Mr. Dalton put out the light and left them.

The next morning all Rookwood knew that the finger of suspicion was pointed at the end study. It was a dismaying state of affairs for the cheery chums of Rookwood.

## CHAPTER 39.

### Before the Big Beak!

"VANE!"

"Seen Dudley Vane?"

"Where's that ass got to?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were looking for Dudley Vane, the new fellow in the Classical Fourth at Rookwood. And they were looking exasperated.

It was after class. Most of the Classical Fourth were to be seen about, but Vane was not to be seen. And it was a most awkward moment for him

to be missing, as all the five members of the end study were under orders to proceed to the presence of the Head.

"Seen Vane, Morny?" called out Jimmy Silver.

"Not since class," answered Mornington. He grinned. "Perhaps he's not keen on seeing the big beak in the giddy circumstances."

"Oh, rot! Seen Vane, Erroll?"

"Yes," said Erroll. "I saw him going along by Masters' Studies—about ten minutes ago—"

Without waiting for Erroll to finish, the four juniors rushed away towards Masters' Studies. There was a path under the study windows, but nobody was to be seen on it.

"Not here!" growled Lovell.

"The silly ass!"

"Blow him!"

"Well, we can't keep the Head waiting," said Jimmy Silver. "Come on! We shall have to go in without Vane. The howling ass may have forgotten, and gone out of gates."

There was no help for it, and the four juniors ran back to the Head. Already the headmaster must have waited for them a couple of minutes. Keeping him waiting longer was unthinkable.

They ran into the House at top speed.

"Here, look out!" came a startled yell.

Arthur Edward Lovell, in the lead, crashed into a fellow who was looking out of the doorway.

"Vane!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

It was Dudley Vane. He staggered back as Lovell crashed, but actively recovered his footing. Lovell was not so lucky. He sat down, hard and heavy.

"Ow!" gasped Lovell. "You silly fat-head—"

"You clumsy ass!" gasped Vane. "Can't you see where you're running? Aren't you coming to the Head? I've been waiting for you."

"Waiting for us!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Yes; I was just looking out of the door for you."

Lovell staggered up.

"If we hadn't got to get off to the Head, I'd bang your silly napper on the banisters!" he spluttered. "You blithering chump, we've been rooting all over Rookwood for you!"

"Oh, come on!" said Jimmy hastily.

The five juniors went at a trot for the Head's study. They arrived there rather breathless.

Jimmy Silver tapped at the door, and they went in.

Dr. Chisholm, sitting at his table, gave them a stern glance. He had waited nearly three minutes—for such utterly unimportant members of the Rookwood community as juniors of the Fourth Form. Mr. Dalton, standing by the window, frowned at them.

"Silver!" he rapped. "You were ordered to come here at precisely—"

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Jimmy. "We were—"

"You are late!" snapped Dr. Chisholm.

"Yes, sir; we were—"

"That will do," said Dr. Chisholm icily. "At all events, you are here now."

The five juniors stood before the Head's table, and Dr. Chisholm fixed his eyes on them, coldly, searchingly. Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby and Newcome all looked a little flushed and uncomfortable. Dudley Vane's handsome face was cool and calm. But it was upon Vane's calm face that the Head's eyes seemed to linger. There was a brief silence.

"Now, my boys," said the Head quietly, "you know why you are sent for. Your Form-master and I have discussed the matter, and I have decided to question you personally. I need not tell you that, for many weeks past, a series of outrages has occurred in the school. It has been the talk of Rookwood, and you are aware—"

"Oh, yes, sir!" murmured Jimmy.

"So far," said the Head in a deep voice, "the unknown author of the

stragæ has not been detected. He has acted with such extraordinary cunning, as well as audacity, that no clue to him has been found. But——" The Head paused, a rather terrifying pause.

The juniors waited.

"But," resumed the Head, "what happened in the House last night affords, at last, something in the nature of a clue. Fireworks were exploded in the House at a late hour—hurled, in fact, at Mr. Dalton, who was keeping watch for the unknown delinquent. It has transpired that fireworks were concealed during the day in the study belonging to you five boys—the end study in the Classical Fourth. This places the study under suspicion. One of you——"

"Nothing of the kind, sir!" said Lovell.

"What—what do you mean, Lovell?"

"I mean that nobody in our study had anything to do with it, sir!" said Arthur Edward. "Anybody could have sneaked into our study and hidden a bundle of crackers there till he wanted them——"

"Silence!" rapped the Head. "One of you five boys had fireworks in his possession. It is impossible to doubt it. It cannot be discovered that anything of the kind was in the possession of any other boys——"

**BANG!**

The Head was suddenly interrupted. From somewhere in the House rang a loud and echoing bang, evidently that of an exploding firework. It was followed by a succession of ringing bangs, like the stuttering of a machine-gun.

Bang, bang, bang, bang! **BANG!**

#### CHAPTER 40.

##### The Mystery Man Again!

**T**HERE was a startled shout in the quad.

The dusk was falling, but there were still a good many fellows out of

the House when that sudden outbreak of explosions rang far and wide.

"Fireworks again!" exclaimed Mornington. "What ass——"

"In Dalton's study!" shouted Putty of the Fourth.

"It's the jolly old mystery man again, you can bet!" exclaimed Morny.

There was a rush to Mr. Dalton's study window. A crowd gathered under it, staring and listening. Loud banging rang from within the room.

The study had been dark, the light not turned on as Mr. Dalton was with the headmaster. Only a faint glow from the fire glimmered on the panes. But now flashes of blaze lighted the dark. Showers of sparks were flying in the study. Bang, bang, bang! Fizzzz! Squissh! It sounded like a Fifth-of-November celebration.

"Great pip!" said Oswald. "It's the mystery man up to his larks again! But, I say, those fellows are all with the Head, and everybody was saying that the mystery man belonged to the end study."

"Can't be one of them!" said Erroll. "They're with the Head, and this is going on while they're there."

Bulkeley of the Sixth came running across the quad. He stared at the study window, lighted by showers of sparks from within, and then rushed round to the door.

Mornington approached the window and lifted himself on the broad stone sill. He chuckled.

"I say, the window's an inch open at the bottom," he said. "Some sportsman has been in, or out, by the window. We were too late to spot him, though."

The light flashed on in the study. Bulkeley was there. Outside, the window was crammed with faces, staring in. Fellows craned over one another's shoulders to get a view of the interior of the study. Mornington pushed up the lower sash a little higher.

The banging and fizzing was still going on. Smoke floated over the



study, and a smell of gunpowder. The fire was leaping and blazing, and hot coals had been hurled over the hearth and the rug. They smoked and blazed on the floor. Evidently the explosion of the fireworks had taken place in the grate.

Bulkeley of the Sixth was stamping out hot cinders. There was still an occasional bang and fizz, as the last of the fireworks went off.

Mr. Dalton came striding into the study. After him, slow and majestic, came the Head. And behind the Head trailed five juniors with startled faces.

The conclave in the Head's study had been broken up by the outbreak of explosions, and it had drawn the Head and Mr. Dalton to the spot. Jimmy Silver & Co. followed on. They remained in the doorway of the study, while the Head and the Form-master entered.

Nobody, in the excitement of the moment, noted the sea of faces pressed to the window.

"Bulkeley, what has happened here?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Fireworks, sir. It looks as if a bundle of them has been thrown into your fire," said the Rookwood captain. "I heard the noise and came in—"

"Bless my soul!" said Dr. Chisholm.

He coughed. The study was full of smoke. He stared at the scattered cinders, the fragments of exploded crackers and squibs lying about, then at the five juniors in the doorway. He frowned as he caught Dudley Vane winking at his companions.

"Did you see anyone here, Bulkeley?" asked the Head.

"No one, sir—it was the explosion brought me here—"

"No one in the passage when you came?"

"No, sir."

"This is—is extraordinary!" said Dr. Chisholm. "Mr. Dalton, this outrageous act has been—must have been—perpetrated by the same person—"

"There can be no doubt about that, sir."

"But these boys were in my study—in my presence. None of them can have had a hand in it!" exclaimed the Head.

"It would certainly appear so, sir!" said Mr. Dalton. He compressed his lips. "Indeed, I have no doubt, sir, that this outrage was timed to take place while the boys were in your presence, in order to clear them of suspicion."

"Indeed!"

The Head raised his eyebrows.

"Some sportsman, you men!" murmured Morny at the window.

And the fellows nodded assent. Wild and reckless as the mystery man seemed to be, it was well known that he was a sportsman, so far as that went. Twice suspicion had fallen on the wrong man, and each time the mystery man had barged in, in time to see him cleared. It looked as if he had done the same thing again.

Dr. Chisholm pursed his lips. He was so intensely angry and exasperated with the unknown ragger who was causing sensation after sensation in the school, that he was reluctant to admit that there could possibly be any good in him. Yet it was clear that, in his own extraordinary way, the fellow had some idea of playing the game.

"He must be found!" said the Head at last. "He must be found and expelled from Rookwood. You are sure you saw no one in the passage, Bulkeley?"

"Quite, sir!"

"The boy may have entered by the window." Dr. Chisholm glanced at the window, and started at the sight of innumerable faces there. "Why—what—"

There was a scuttling back of the intensely interested audience. But Valentine Mornington stood his ground. Mr. Dalton strode to the window and pushed the lower sash higher.

"Mornington! Have you been here long?" he asked. "Did you see—"

"No, sir," answered Morny. "We all came up when the fireworks started. Nobody was about."

"Was the window open?" asked the Head.

"The sash was an inch up, sir."

"The window is always open at the top," said Mr. Dalton. "And so, as it was not fastened, it would be possible for a boy to push up the lower sash from outside. Doubtless that was what happened."

The Head, with a grim, frowning brow, turned from the window. He coughed again in the smoke.

The five juniors in the doorway looked at him demurely. What had happened was a stroke of good fortune for them. Dr. Chisholm's eyes lingered on them for a moment.

"Mr. Dalton," he said, "it appears that fireworks must have been in the possession of some other, after all—we have proof of it here. These boys cannot have been concerned in what has just taken place."

"I agree, sir," said Mr. Dalton. "And I am glad, at least, that the innocent have been cleared, even by such a ruffianly act as this."

"Oh, quite, quite!" said the Head curtly; and he rolled majestically from the study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked inquiringly at their Form-master.

"You may go!" said Mr. Dalton.

And they went.

#### CHAPTER 48.

"He's the man!"

JIMMY SILVER'S face was clouded the following day.

"Uncle James" of Rookwood was thinking, and to judge by the expression on his face, his thoughts were not of a pleasant nature.

Uncle James was worried—deeply worried.

What he was worried about rather perplexed his chums. The end study had been completely cleared. It was agreed, on all hands, that whoever the

mystery man was, he was not a member of the cheery circle in that celebrated study. Which ought to have bucked Uncle James.

But it did not. Jimmy seemed quite to have forgotten his customary cheerful maxim to "keep smiling."

Endless discussion was going on on the subject of the mystery man's identity—a greater mystery than ever since the later outrage.

Most of the Classics concluded that he must be a Modern, because such an awful rotter, if found at Rookwood at all, could only be found in Manders' House. The Moderns, on the other hand, were assured that he was a Classical; for, as Tommy Dodd declared, such a rotter, if found at Rookwood at all, could only be found on the Classical side.

Many of the juniors thought that the fellow must be a senior, while all the seniors were absolutely convinced that such an unspeakable trick was only to be discovered in the Lower School. The discussions did not get them any "forrarder"; nobody seemed to have the faintest idea who the fellow possibly could be. Three times had suspicion fixed—but always in the wrong place. It began to look as if the mystery never would be elucidated, and as if the mystery man would carry on all through the term undetected and undeterred.

Mr. Dalton was rather sharp with Jimmy Silver in class that morning. Jimmy not only "skewed" his con, but he gave random answers, showing only too plainly that his thoughts were elsewhere. Dudley Vane gave him two or three curious glances, and when the Classical Fourth went out in break the new junior tapped him on the arm.

"What's the trouble, old bean?" he asked.

Jimmy did not answer that question. His face flushed crimson, and with an involuntary movement he drew away from Vane's hand.

Vane gave him a quick, penetrating look.

He did not speak again, but walked on by himself; and Jimmy seemed to breathe more freely with relief.

In third school Vane looked at him—once. Then, compressing his lips, he gave Jimmy no further attention.

At dinner that day the same worried look was visible on Jimmy's face. After dinner the Fistical Four went out into the quad together. Lovell, Raby and Newcome expected Vane to join them—but the new fellow walked away, with his hands in his pockets.

Arthur Edward Lovell glanced after him, puzzled.

"Vane got his back up about anything?" he asked.

Jimmy coloured uncomfortably.

"He's got a rather queer temper," said Lovell. "You remember that time he broke out and pitched into Carthew. But I've never seen him sulky before."

Jimmy walked with his chums, with a moody brow. He wondered whether Dudley Vane, with the swift intuition he knew him to possess, had read, or guessed, the dark and troubled thoughts in his mind.

"Look here, Jimmy," said Raby, "what's up? All the morning you've been like a bear with a sore head, and fairly asking Dicky for lines!"

"Penny for 'em, old man!" said Newcome.

"Not worrying about that jaw with the Head yesterday?" asked Lovell. "We're all right with the Head. He knows now that nobody in our study is that blessed mystery johnny!"

"Does he?" murmured Jimmy.

"Look here, cough it up," said Raby uneasily. "I can see that you've got something on your mind, you ass!"

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"I'd better tell you fellows," he said. "I want to know what you think. But, for goodness' sake, let's get somewhere where we can't be heard! It's too fearfully serious to let it get out!"

"Come on!" said Jimmy curtly. And he led the way to the gate of the

Head's garden. That was a precinct juniors were not supposed to enter without special leave. But Jimmy had something to say to his friends that he was very anxious for no other ears to hear. He led the way into the garden.

His amazed chums stared at him. It was clear that Uncle James had something of deep and earnest import to communicate.

"It's awfully serious, you chaps," began Jimmy. "I think I'd better tell you fellows what's in my mind —"

"Hadn't we better call Vane, then?" asked Lovell.

"Vane!" repeated Jimmy.

"Well, he's one of us," said Lovell. "If it's a matter that concerns the whole study, I don't see leaving him out!"

Jimmy gave him a strange look.

"No," he said, "I don't think we'll call Vane, old chap. I'm going to speak to you about Vane."

"About Vane!" repeated Lovell. "What about him? You were looking so jolly serious and mysterious, I fancied you were going to jaw about the mystery man."

"So I am," said Jimmy in a low voice.

"Well, you've got me beat!" said Lovell. "If you think you've got an eye on that merchant, I expect you're mistaken. But you said you were going to talk about Vane—"

"Vane—and the mystery man," said Jimmy Silver.

Raby and Newcome, quicker on the uptake than Arthur Edward Lovell, gave him startled looks.

"Jimmy!" breathed Raby.

"Jimmy—you ass!" gasped Newcome.

Lovell looked from one face to another.

"What the dickens do you mean, Jimmy, if you mean anything?" he asked testily. "What's Vane got to do with the mystery man?"

"He's the man!" said Jimmy Silver.

## CHAPTER 42.

From Friends to Foes!

**A**RTHUR EDWARD LOVELL gazed at Jimmy dumbfounded. Raby and Newcome stood in amazed silence. Jimmy's face, deeply clouded and troubled, had a look of conviction on it. Lovell broke a tense silence.

"Mad?" he asked. "Vane—the mystery man! You mad ass! The chap who pulled me out of that rift at Christmas and carried me home on his back——"

"Who knocked you into it?" asked Jimmy quietly.

"Eh? We never found out!"

"I think I have—now!"

"Jimmy," breathed Raby, "you're potty, old chap! Vane—a splendid fellow—a sportsman down to the finger-tips——"

"Everybody says that the mystery man is a sportsman in his own way," said Jimmy Silver.

"A ripping footballer, too!" said Lovell.

"It was when Dalton stopped a football match that the rags started," said Jimmy. "That was the beginning. Everybody thought then that it was a footballer who wrecked Dalton's study."

"Oh, you've got an answer to everything!" grunted Lovell. "But you're talking piffle, all the same!"

"I've thought it over, you chaps," said Jimmy. "It's rotten to think such a thing of a fellow I've liked ever since he came, but——"

"Then stop it!" snapped Lovell. "Take my word for it that you're making an ass of yourself, Jimmy! It was proved yesterday that nobody in our study was the man, or could be. Don't you know what evidence is? Can a fellow be in two places at once?"

"Let Jimmy speak, old chap!" said Raby.

"It was that bang in Dalton's study that put it into my mind," said Jimmy quietly. "Most of the fellows seem to think that the mystery man chucked a

bundle of fireworks into Dalton's fire while we were all with the Head——"

"So he did," said Lovell.

"I think not," said Jimmy slowly. "You remember, when we were going to the Head we couldn't find Vane. Erroll saw him near Masters' Studies ten minutes before. We were hunting all over the House for him. But when we came in he met us in the doorway——"

"I ran into him——"

"Dalton's window was found open at the bottom," said Jimmy. "You men, Vane got into the study by that window, and he left afterwards by the door. He was in the study while we were looking for him outside."

"But the fireworks—chucked in the fire——"

"They were not chucked in the fire," said Jimmy. "I believe the bundle was stacked under the grate to take fire when sparks fell on them. It was bound to happen in a matter of minutes—and as soon as Vane got it ready he was in a hurry to find us and get to the Head's study. He was proving an alibi for himself—and for us, too, I'll do him that justice!"

"I—I suppose it's possible," said Raby slowly. "But——"

Snort from Lovell!

"If that's all, Jimmy!" muttered Newcome.

"It's not all, old man! Once I got going on it a hundred things came into my mind—all pointing to Vane—poor chap!"

"Poor chap!" repeated Raby. "If you're right, he's a dashed rascal!"

"That, too!" assented Jimmy. "But you remember what Dicky told us when he first came. He was ill after a crash in a 'plane he was travelling in—it upset his nervous system. He recovered all right—he's as strong as a horse. But—it may have left him with some nerve trouble—something that makes it impossible for him to control his temper at times—though at other times he's as decent a chap as you could want to know."

"He's got a temper," admitted Lovell. "That time he flew at Carthew of the Sixth, and kicked him out of the Form-room."

"That," said Jimmy, "got Dicky's eye on him. I know jolly well that Dicky suspected him from that day. Carthew was cracked on the head with a ruler the same night in the dark, and Dalton came straight up to our study——"

"And found that Vane couldn't have done it!" snapped Lovell. "Vane proved that he had been in the end study at nine, when it happened. Muffin had been with him, and noticed the time by the clock."

"Clocks can be wangled," said Jimmy. "He picked out the biggest fool at Rookwood to be with him—and fixed the clock!"

"Oh, rot!"

"I've thought the whole thing out, from beginning to end," said Jimmy miserably. "When did the outrages start? Only after Vane came to Rookwood. There was nothing of the kind before he came. The first was the wrecking of Dalton's study—Vane was ratty, like the rest of us, about the House match being cancelled. Then Dalton was bagged in a sack—Vane wasn't with us when it happened. Then, when you fellows came home with me for Christmas, Lovell had a fat-headed idea of playing ghost to scare Vane——"

"It wasn't a fat-headed idea! I——"

"And somebody played ghost and scared Lovell instead—nobody knew who. Then Lovell had a row with Vane and punched his nose. What happened next? He was knocked head first into a deep rift by a snowball—nobody knew who threw it——"

"But he got me out later and carried me home!" howled Lovell.

"How did he know you were there?"

"He happened to find me——"

"So we thought then," said Jimmy. "I don't think so now. I think, when he was cool again, he repented of what he had done, as he usually does, and came back for you. He's a good chap

when that awful fit isn't on him. A sort of Jekyll and Hyde—good and bad by turns."

"Rot!" growled Lovell. "Good all through!"

"Then, when we came back this term," went on Jimmy, "there was a row in the school bus, and Jimmy Dodd handled Vane, and he had a rough time. It was that night that Tommy was battered in the dark——"

"As if Vane would——"

"Not when he's his right self," said Jimmy, "but when that fit's on him I'm afraid he would do anything. At other times he's all right. He weighed in to save Morny from the sack. But when something happens to put his back up I think he broods over it, and then that fearful temper breaks out, and for a time he can't control himself. Jekyll and Hyde——"

"Jekyll be blowed and Hyde be jig-

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By FRANK RICHARDS.

#### "THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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gered!" grunted Lovell. "Vane's all right—and you're an ass, Jimmy!"

Jimmy sighed.

"I feel sure of it," he said. "It doesn't amount to proof, I suppose, but there's no doubt in my mind. Vane's the man! But I like the chap, as everybody does. I pity him if this awful state of things is due to his accident in the 'plane, and I believe it is. But what's going to be done?"

"That's an easy one!" said Lovell. "It's all rot, and you'd better chuck it right out of your mind. I'm fed-up with it, anyhow!"

And Arthur Edward, with a snort, tramped back to the quad, still snorting.

"What do you fellows think?" asked Jimmy.

"It—it seems to fit together," muttered Raby. "But—but it's awfully thick, Jimmy!"

"I can't quite get it down," said Newcome. "Anyhow, for goodness' sake, don't say a word—unless we get real proof, at least——"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Something will have to be done," he said. "But it wants thinking out. Not a word for the present, of course."

And the three juniors followed Lovell back to the quad.

Dudley Vane met them as they walked to the House.

He came up to them, and the three flushed uncomfortably. Raby and Newcome stopped. They were not convinced, or, at all events only half convinced, by what Jimmy had said to them. The fellow, after all, was their friend.

But Jimmy Silver, though he pitied Vane and still liked him, could not speak to him in the old friendly way with such fearful suspicion, or, rather, certainty in his mind. His face crimsoned, and then paled, and he walked on, as if he did not see the other junior.

Dudley Vane glanced after him, and the look that came over his face startled Raby and Newcome. It was a

flash of that fierce, ungovernable temper, of which they had seen signs more than once, careful as he was to control it. Leaving them, he darted after Jimmy and caught him by the shoulder.

"What does this mean, Silver?" he asked. His face was white, his eyes glittering, and the most careless eye could have seen that he had to struggle to keep cool. "We've been friends—and now you're cutting me in quad! What have I done?"

It was a question that Jimmy could not answer. Vane came a step nearer to him, breathing hard.

"Will you answer me?" he said, between his teeth.

"No," said Jimmy quietly. "And there's no need, Vane! You know!"

He knew that Vane knew! Dudley Vane stood looking at him for a moment, and then turned away and left him.

Jimmy went into the House, troubled and miserable. He knew the truth now, and Vane knew that he knew! What was to be the end of it?

## CHAPTER 43.

### The Mystery Man's Last Prowl!

"JIMMY, old chap——"

"Oh, cut, Tubby!" said Jimmy sharply.

"You needn't be so jolly ratty because you've got lines!" said Tubby Muffin in an aggrieved tone. "You asked Dicky Dalton for them. Never saw a chap so slack in class as you were to-day——"

"Buzz away!"

Tubby Muffin cast a blink at the cupboard in the end study, and Jimmy, in spite of his irritation, grinned. It looked as if Tubby knew that there was a box of chocolates in that cupboard, and he had expected to find the end study vacant after prep.

It was rather a disappointment for Cecil Adolphus Muffin.

Raby, Newcome and Lovell had gone

down with Vane—though Raby and Newcome soon wandered away from him. Lovell, determined to show Jimmy Silver, and all whom it might concern, that his faith in the new fellow was unshaken, stuck to Vane, making it a great point to be very pally. Jimmy was left alone in the study, to grind out the lines he had earned by his inattention in Form that day.

And Tubby, after a blink at the cupboard, departed, hoping, no doubt, that Jimmy would be gone down soon, and that he would have another chance. Jimmy Silver scribbled wearily at Latin lines.

It was not because he had lines that he had snapped at Muffin. Lines were not agreeable; but that was not what was worrying Jimmy. He was sure that he had spotted the identity of the mystery man of Rookwood. It was a blow to him—a heavy blow—and it placed him in a painful and awkward position. Could he keep secret what he knew, and allow the strange junior to carry on—from bad perhaps to worse? On the other hand, could he give him away?

Jimmy was intensely worried. It was such a problem as he had never been up against before, and he admitted that he did not know what to do. His thoughts were more on that problem than on the lines he was writing. Suddenly the light went out.

"What the dickens—" exclaimed Jimmy, starting to his feet.

He stepped to the door, groping his way by the dimness of an almost extinct fire in the grate. Startled and angry voices came up the passage. Most of the juniors had gone down after prep, but some were still in their studies, and they came groping out of the doorways.

The whole passage was in darkness. Fellows groped about dark studies in search of flash-lamps. Evidently a fuse had gone; but as Jimmy stared from the dark doorway of the end study, he wondered whether it was an accident,

or whether the mystery man was at his tricks again, plunging the place into darkness for one of his uncanny japes.

Even as that thought came into his mind there was a step near him, and he caught a quick-drawn breath. Before he realised what was happening, hands gripped his throat in the darkness, and he was borne backwards into his study.

He went over on his back, taken by surprise, his assailant falling on him. As he fell, the unseen fellow kicked the door shut, though it did not latch.

The grasp on Jimmy Silver's throat was as strong as a man's. But he knew that it was a boy's—knew, with a shudder of horror, that he was in the grip of the mystery man of Rookwood.

In silence—save for the quick, spasmodic breathing of his assailant, and a shuffling sound as they stirred—they fought in the darkness, Jimmy Silver striving madly to break loose, the mystery man striving to keep him pinned and silent—and succeeding! Jimmy was as strong and sturdy as any fellow in his Form, but he had no chance now. The strange and mysterious junior had the strength of two or three.

Jimmy choked in that deadly grip.

Even in the darkness he could discern two burning eyes that gleamed down at him—eyes that glittered with uncontrolled excitement and rage. He fought as if for his life.

The assailant was going to choke him into insensibility, and already his senses were swimming. The fellow was mad—mad for the moment—and Jimmy knew who it was—knew that he might have looked for some attack from the mystery man after he had roused Dudley Vane's angry resentment.

He knew that the unhappy boy had brooded over his offence till the black fit came on—the fit that changed him from a kindhearted, decent fellow to an unmitigated ruffian and brute; from the fellow that the end study knew to the lurking rascal who had beaten

Tommy Dodd in the dark, and stunned Carthew with a blow of a ruler—the change from Jekyll to Hyde.

Jimmy gurgled in the choking grip on his throat and felt his senses going.

The study door was pushed open.

Neither Jimmy nor his assailant, struggling on the floor, saw the fat figure that groped in the dark study.

Tubby Muffin, with outstretched hands, crossed towards the cupboard.

How and why the lights had gone off Tubby neither knew nor cared, but he knew that it gave him a chance to snaffle the box of chocolates in the end study cupboard.

He groped across the dark room—and gave a sudden startled howl as his fat legs came into contact with something alive in the darkness.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Tubby.

He sprawled over, grabbing wildly in the dark for something to save him. He caught a collar and dragged somebody over with him.

The deadly grip left Jimmy Silver's throat. He was able to breathe; he panted wildly.

He heard a muttered exclamation—and a yell from Tubby.

"Ow! Stop punching me, you rotter! Help! I say— Yaroooooh!" There was a heavy fall.

The unseen one had struck Tubby down—to escape. He was thinking now only of escape, and escaping detection. He had been interrupted, for the first time while prowling as the mystery man.

But Jimmy Silver, though his senses were dizzy, scrambled up and clutched fiercely at the dark figure scrambling to the doorway, and caught hold.

The escaping assailant turned on him like a tiger, and they grappled and fought madly. They stumbled over Muffin and rolled on the floor, still fighting, and Tubby yelled and howled frantically.

"What on earth's the row here?" Mornington flashed a light into the study. Erroll and Rawson looked on

by his side. "You fellow scraffin' in the dark? Why, what—"

"Jimmy!" exclaimed Erroll. "Vane!"

"Help!" almost screamed Jimmy Silver. "Help! Hold him! He's mad! For goodness' sake, hold him!"

It was Vane. There was no doubt now. The flash-lamp in Mornington's hand streamed light on his face.

That face was hardly recognisable as Vane's; it was dark, distorted, convulsed. It almost scared the fellows that saw it. Even as Jimmy shrieked, Vane, with a terrible exertion of strength, broke from his grasp and scrambled up.

He sprang to the door with flaming eyes.

"Vane," panted Mornington, "are you mad? What— Oh, I see it now! Collar him, you men—oh, collar him!"

Three pairs of hands grasped Vane—and even so they could hardly hold him, so terrible were his struggles. He knew now that the game was up; that all was known. And that knowledge seemed to place him beside himself. He struggled like a madman, and they swayed and rocked. A staring crowd gathered in the passage; half a dozen flashlamps illumined the strange, startling scene when Mr. Dalton came hurrying up from the stairs.

Vane, with a terrible effort, broke away. He stood dishevelled, panting, under the Form-master's eyes.

Richard Dalton's hand dropped on his shoulder, gripping hard. He understood. Jimmy Silver staggered from the study, white, strained, the marks of the choking fingers showing up with terrible clearness on his bruised throat. Mr. Dalton gave him one look.

"Come with me, Vane!" he said very quietly.

Vane looked at him; he looked round at the staring, horrified faces. It seemed as if the mists of fury rolled from his brain, and he came to himself. He gave a sudden shiver and, without a word, without an attempt at resistance, walked quietly away by the Form-master's side.



"By gad!" breathed Mornington. "Vane—Vane all the time! They've got the mystery man at last!"

Arthur Edward Lovell came into the end study. The light was on again. Jimmy Silver, white and shaken, was resting in the armchair, Raby and Newcome with him, and two or three other fellows; Tubby Muffin was munching the chocolates. Jimmy thought that he had earned them. Lovell glanced round the study.

"Seen Vane?" he asked.

Lovell evidently did not know yet.

"He's rather an ass," went on Arthur Edward. "He asked me to keep cave at the corner of Masters' Passage while he went to Greely's study to use his 'phone. I waited a quarter of an hour for him, at least. He never came back; must have gone out at the other end of the passage. Forgot all about me, I suppose. What do you think of that for a silly ass?"

"He had his alibi all ready," muttered Raby.

"Eh? What do you mean?" said Lovell, staring. "I say, though, I heard some fellows saying that the mystery man had been nailed as I came up. Anything in it?"

"Lots!" said Jimmy, with a faint smile.

"Oh, good!" said Lovell. "That will clear Vane, then. And convince even a silly ass like you, Jimmy—what? I say, what's the matter with your neck?" He stared at the black bruises on Jimmy's throat. "Jimmy, old man, you don't mean to say that he— that he—"

"Yes," said Jimmy.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Lovell. "And—and who was it, if they've got him?"

"Vane!"

"Vane!" repeated Lovell. "Mad? Vane was in Greely's study——"

"He was here choking me when Tubby came in and fell over him," said Jimmy. "Dalton's taken him away; we shan't see him again, I expect."

Lovell stared blankly. He could doubt no further:

"Well," he said at last, "who'd have thought it?"

"I did," said Jimmy.

But Arthur Edward passed that remark over, like the idle wind which he regarded not. He was silent for a whole minute—which was rather a record for Lovell—and then remarked again:

"Who'd have thought it?"

Dudley Vane was gone from Rookwood the next morning.

The Rookwooders knew that he had gone to be placed under medical care, and they hoped—and believed—that he would recover from the nervous malady that had affected him so strangely and so terribly. He had been a strange mixture of good and evil, but the fellows who had been his friends believed that the good was his real nature and the evil accidental.

In spite of all, he was remembered kindly in the end study, though it certainly was a relief to the whole school to have seen the last of the mystery man of Rookwood.



# THE CHRISTMAS POST!

ONE of the most important individuals at Christmas is undoubtedly the postman. Certainly this messenger of good tidings and bearer of presents is the most hard worked. As Christmas approaches the never-say-die emissary of the G.P.O. pulls up his socks and gets extra busy. We hear of the stacks of parcels which are dealt with at every post office, big and little, up and down the land. The amazing part of it is how the Postmaster-General and his merry men do it all, and make so few mistakes. Such a rare lot is expected of the G.P.O. It might almost seem as if the sender of the goose without an address imagined the postal servant to be a thought-reader; and imagine the feelings of a parcel sorter on finding himself confronted by a fat, juicy Christmas pudding that is bulging in several places through its thin covering of string and paper!

## Lost in the Post!

Lonely settlers in far-flung corners of the Empire look forward as eagerly to the arrival of their Christmas mail as those at home, but in most cases the welcome bearer of it is a very different fellow from the cheery postman we know.

It's an ebony-skinned, frizzy-haired native, for instance, who carries the mail across sun-baked deserts in Africa, and though he doesn't run the risk of being buried in a snowdrift, his job isn't all "jam." One messenger lost his way in the broiling wilderness, and after going back on his tracks he found himself utterly at sea. Even his knowledge of the country did not avail, and the poor fellow dropped at last, unable to go another step. He had eaten his small ration, and we can forgive him for what happened. He found amongst his consignment of parcels a Christmas

pudding, and the starving man made very short work of it. That prime pudding put new life into him, and he was able to shoulder his pack and finally reach his destination.

What the owner of the pudding said, however, when he heard what had become of it can only be guessed at!

## Speeding Up the Mails!

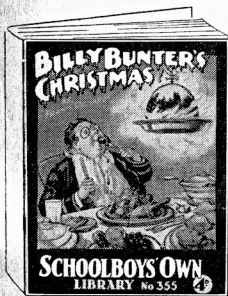
Nowadays, a portion of the Christmas mail has the honour of going by air. Australia and Africa have their air posts, with special air stamps to signalise the new mode of transit, and it is certain that the air post will help to speed up the mails in difficult parts of the world. Of course, there are wide areas of which most people scarcely ever think—remote islands, and districts cut off from the world by mountain ranges—where postal services must in the ordinary way be delayed, and a Christmas mail could be held up for weeks.

Thanks to the Air Mail, the risk of such a delay has been cut down considerably, and now the inhabitants of even some of the world's most out-of-the-way spots can expect their Christmas gifts and greetings at the right time.

## The Bad Old Days!

Here at home, the Christmas post has a thousand new facilities, with an underground railway in London used entirely for the letter bags, and the flying new expresses north and west, beating all past records. Gone for ever are the times when the yearned-for Christmas mail was all behind like the cow's tail, coming in a week or more late—delayed in transmission. Who says the good new days don't go more than one better than the old?

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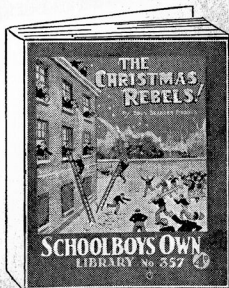


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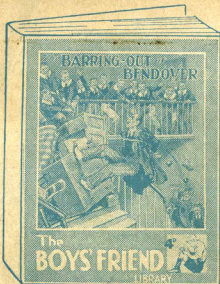
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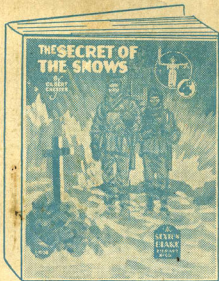
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