

# MANDERS ON THE SPOT!

BY  
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SCHOOLBOYS' OWN  
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## THE ROMANY RACE

IT will not be surprising if you do not know what "hotchi" is, and more than probable that you have never tasted it, for it is Romany for hedgehog. Romany is gipsy language, and few people can "rokkra Romany," while many are unaware that the gipsies have a language of their own.

Gipsies are often mistakenly classed with tramps, vagabonds, and ne'er-dowells, for whose misdeeds they are often blamed; and yet for these types the true gipsy has the greatest contempt, which he expresses in his own word for them: "chorodies," which means dirty outcasts.

### An Historic Race.

The Romanies are an historic race who streamed from their original haunts in India and Persia across into the plains of Europe, early in the Middle Ages. From the first they suffered at the hands of stronger peoples who half-despised and feared them. Until fairly recent times they were always liable to be arrested on charges of witchcraft, kidnapping, cannibalism—or merely for being gipsies. Cruel punishment usually followed.

Their Eastern origin is revealed in their appearance. Swarthy skin, jet hair, slightly tilted eyes, of lustrous black; these are characteristic. They love bright colours and showy ornaments.

### Ingenuity and Skill.

Winter and summer alike they live out of doors, their only covering the crude, but roomy, gipsy tent; for, while it is the ambition of every Romany "chal" to possess his own caravan and horse, it is only the more prosperous minority who own a "vardo" and "gry," as they call them. They are industrious, and their

seemingly aimless wanderings are usually guided by the work that different localities and seasons bring them. Hopping, strawberry-picking, haymaking, cress-cutting—these are the gipsies' stand-by the year round. For lean times the Romany relies on his ingenuity and skill with his knife to make quaint wooden toys, clothes-pegs, brushes, brooms, grass mats and artificial flowers.

With his basket loaded with these articles he will go hawking round the houses of the neighbouring towns, or stand in the square on market days, returning at night to his camp, which is usually pitched well beyond the limits of the town to ensure privacy and freedom from the visits of the unsympathetic authorities.

### A Bond of Brotherhood.

If you could be fortunate enough to approach a gipsy camp at night without being noticed, you would be rewarded by a scene that is both interesting and picturesque.

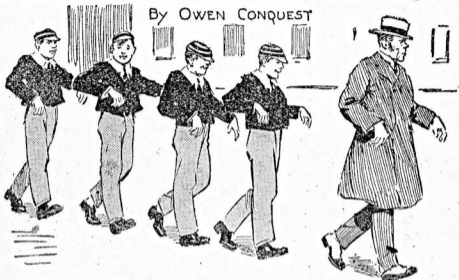
Over the fire, held by an iron tray, hangs the big iron kettle, without which no Romany household is complete. Young and old will be grouped round the flames, the soft Romany tongue will flow in easy chatter, and if it is a gala night, the savour of roasting "hotchi" will mingle with the smell of burning wood.

Perhaps, in one corner, some old granny will be reading the future from the tremulous palm of some country lass whose fears of the gipsy folk have been stifled by her curiosity about her fate. But "dukkerin"—that is fortune-telling—has been made illegal, and many a bright shilling has been lost with the banning of this art.

Quick to take an insult and to avenge it, the Romanies are long in remembering a kindness. In spite of persecution, their race has persisted, held by a bond that makes all Romanies brothers. A landless people, they yet can call the open heath and forest glen their home.

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Mr. MANDERS' shabby overcoat wouldn't fetch a bob at a sale—at least, so think JIMMY SILVER & Co., of Rookwood. But a certain "gentleman of the road", who knows a thing or two, is very anxious to get his thieving fingers on the coat.

## CHAPTER 1.

Stop Thief!

"THE Head!" whispered Jimmy Silver.  
"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Lovell.

Raby and Newcome were silent.

It was a moment when, however silvery speech might be, silence was undoubtedly golden.

The winter night had closed in on Rookwood School. The moon gleamed from a steely sky.

It was close on time for evening pre-

paration, and, inside Rookwood, fellows were going to their studies.

Jimmy Silver & Co., rather unfortunately, were outside Rookwood. They were out of bounds after lock-up. Which was a very unfortunate time for falling in with their headmaster.

Not that the chums of the Classical Fourth had been doing any harm. They had been down to the Roke, to slide on the frozen stream under the gleam of the moon.

Tommy Dodd and his pals of the Modern Fourth had done it after lock-up, and dared the Classics to do the

same. The end study never refused a challenge. So that was that!

They had dropped out, unseen, over Masters' gate; they had slid on the ice, and now they were coming back, to drop in as they had dropped out. And they had nearly reached the gate, when they spotted an imposing figure stopping at the gate and fumbling for a key. And they backed away as they recognised Dr. Chisholm, the headmaster of Rookwood.

Luckily he was not looking round, and he had not seen them. They backed under the trees on the opposite side of the road, from which, coming up from the river, they had been about to emerge. In black shadow they waited and watched.

Their hearts were beating fast.

It would have been bad enough to have been spotted out of bounds by their Form-master, Mr. Dalton, or by a prefect. But it would have been awful to have been spotted by the Big Beak himself!

"It's all right!" murmured Lovell. "He's not seen us—"

"Quiet!" hissed Jimmy.

"I tell you—"

"Shut up!" breathed Raby.

Lovell grunted and shut up.

The Head had glanced round. Did he know they were there? They hardly breathed.

Then a footfall came to their ears on the hard, frosty road. Someone was coming along from Coombe—the way the headmaster had come.

The juniors breathed again. It was the footfall on the road that had caused Dr. Chisholm to glance round.

Under the branches by the roadside it was very dark. But on the open road the moon glimmered, and the juniors had a view of the man who came along from the village. He was a burly, rough-looking man, with an unwashed face half hidden by straggling beard and moustache. Not the sort of man, on his looks, that anyone would have

liked to meet on a dark road at a late hour.

His eyes, glinting in the moon-gleam, fixed on the schoolmaster at the gate, and he suddenly accelerated.

Dr. Chisholm threw the gate open, but instead of going in he faced the burly man.

"Stand back!" They heard their headmaster's icy voice. "What do you want?"

The burly man stopped only a few paces from him. Jimmy Silver & Co. stared across the moonlit road. It flashed into their minds at once that a footpad had followed the headmaster from the village.

"You had better take yourself off, my man!" Dr. Chisholm spoke in a calm, contemptuous tone. "I am quite aware that you have followed me—I have heard your footsteps several times."

The burly man did not speak. He stood with the moonlight glimmering on his shaggy, hairy face. He seemed to be at a loss.

No doubt he had been following that well-dressed, elderly gentleman with the intention of closing in on him in some solitary spot. He was taken aback to see Dr. Chisholm at his destination—at the open gate in the school wall. That was not the spot that a footpad would have chosen for robbery with violence.

He was hesitating. And the juniors understood why Dr. Chisholm did not step in at the open gate. He did not want to turn his back on the ruffian while the man was so near.

"I have told you to go!" rapped Dr. Chisholm.

"No 'arm, guv'nor," said the man with the shaggy face. "Pr'aps you could 'elp a cove on his way."

"If you do not go instantly I shall telephone to the police station, and you will be looked for, and taken into custody!" answered the headmaster of Rookwood coldly.

"Aw, chuck it, guv'nor! A quid wouldn't 'urt you," said the man. "I

see you at the post office back there, changing a note. You got 'eaps!"

"That will do! Are you going?"

The man eyed him surlily and sulkily. He backed away a pace. His eyes, small and piggy, caught the gleam of the moon with an unpleasant glitter. But he seemed to have given up his designs on the headmaster of Rookwood.

But it was only seeming!

With a sudden spring like a tiger he hurled himself at Dr. Chisholm, taking him off his guard. Dr. Chisholm gave a startled cry, and staggered through the gateway, in the powerful grasp of the footpad.

They disappeared from the sight of the juniors across the road, though not from their hearing.

"Old your row!" came the ruffian's surly, savage voice. "I'm 'aving that notecase of yourn, if I 'ave to crack your nut to get it!"

"Help!" panted the Head, struggling.

The elderly schoolmaster was little use in such a brawny grip. He had gone over headlong, and was on the ground, the ruffian on him. But he was resisting. A thievish hand was already groping for the pocket where he had placed his notecase—under the greedy eyes that had watched him at the village post office. But Dr. Chisholm was not going to be robbed if he could help it.

He could not have helped it had not four juniors of the Classical Fourth been out of bounds—and on the spot. The school buildings were at some little distance, and at that hour no one was out of the Houses. His panting cry could not have been heard by anyone indoors.

But it was heard by the four juniors on the other side of the road. Already they were speeding across the road to the rescue.

"Back up!" panted Jimmy Silver.

He dashed in at the gateway, his chums at his heels. In the darkness

under the branches within he stumbled over the two struggling figures on the ground.

"Pile in!" yelled Lovell.

"Blow me pink!" gasped the footpad, astounded by that sudden rush of unseen figures. "Wot the blue blazes

—"

"Help!" panted Dr. Chisholm. "He has robbed me of my notecase! Hold him!"

"Collar him!"

It was rather difficult to see one from another in the deep gloom under the trees. But the footpad, with a stolen notecase in his grasp, wrenched away and leaped for the gate. Jimmy Silver and Lovell grabbed him at the same moment, and brought him down with a bump. He struggled like a tiger.

"Shut the gate, you men!" yelled Jimmy.

The man was too strong for the juniors to hold him. But he was not going to get away if they could help it. Jimmy had him round the neck, Lovell had hold of his arm. But the man's struggles dragged them both off their feet.

'Raby, groping to lend aid, stumbled over Dr. Chisholm, who was striving to rise. The Head collapsed, with Raby sprawling over him. But Newcome grabbed the gate and slammed it as he heard Jimmy's panting call.

The gate closed with a spring lock, and could only be opened with a key. It slammed, clicked, and fastened.

None too soon—for the thief, with a desperate effort, hurled Jimmy Silver off, and dragged his arm free from Lovell. He leaped again at the gate.

Newcome, in his way, grabbed at him, and was knocked spinning by a sweep of a heavy arm. He stumbled over Raby, and went down. The next moment the footpad made a jump to catch the top of the gate and clamber over into the road.

But Jimmy Silver & Co., breathless but full of beans, closed in on him.

They grasped him as he jumped and dragged him back.

All five of them rolled over—the footpad and the four schoolboys—in a wild heap on the gravel path. Gravel flew up like spray as they struggled with a herculean effort. The footpad wrenched himself from the grasping hands, and leaped away.

Jimmy scrambled up.

"Stop him!" he yelled. "Stop thief!"

With a panting gasp, a pattering of rapid feet, the fleeing man vanished into the quad. And after him, yelling to alarm all Rookwood, dashed Jimmy Silver & Co.

## CHAPTER 2.

### A Little Liveliness!

**T**OMMY DODD of the Modern Fourth Form stepped to his study window in Manders' House and stared out into the quadrangle. Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, who were getting out their books for prep, dropped those books and followed him. The three Tommies had just come up for prep—when a wild outbreak of uproar from the quad banished prep from their minds.

"Those Classical asses!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, as he threw up the sash. "Spotted, of course!"

"Prefects after them," said Tommy Cook.

"Faith, and it's loike them!" remarked Tommy Doyle.

The three Tommies were aware that, that evening, the Fistical Four had played up to their challenge, and gone out after lock-up to slide on the ice. So their first impression was that the Fistical Four had been spotted getting back, and were being chased.

But that impression lasted only a few seconds. Prefects in chase of elusive juniors might have shouted to one another, but the juniors would not have shouted. And it was juniors who were

shouting, and now that the window was open the three Tommies could hear them clearly.

"Stop him!"

"After him!"

"Stop thief!"

"Where is he?"

"That's Jimmy Silver's crowd," said Tommy Dodd in utter wonder. "What the jolly old thump can have happened?"

"Hallo, there's Bulkeley!" exclaimed Doyle. The big door of the Head's house was open, light streaming out into the dusk of the quadrangle. The well-known voice of the captain of Rookwood shouted:

"What's up? What's that row?"

"This way, Bulkeley!" shouted back Jimmy Silver. "A footpad—"

"There he goes!" yelled Lovell. "He's robbed the Head, Bulkeley—he's got his notecase—"

Moonlight fell in pools in the quadrangle, barred by black shadows of trees and buildings. The Modern juniors at the study window spotted running figures, appearing in the patches of light, disappearing into the shadows. They caught a glow of light from the opening door of old Mack's lodge, near the main gates. The school porter was alarmed, and coming out. From another direction the deep voice of Sergeant Kettle shouted.

"By gum!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "We're on this, you men! You heard what they said—the Head's been robbed!"

"How the dickens—" began Cook.

"Never mind how—come on!" exclaimed Tommy. "Look—the Classicals are out—we're not going to miss this!"

Across the quad a crowd of fellows were pouring out of the Head's House—the Classical quarters. The alarm was general now.

Tommy Dodd dashed across the study, tore open the door, and rushed to the stairs. If some footpad who had robbed the Head was scuttling about

the quad, the Modern fellows were not going to be left out of the hunt. A little liveliness like that was too rare to be missed.

They rushed down the stairs. Fellows in the passage were already buzzing with excitement. The House door stood wide open, and in the doorway stood the tall, spare figure of Mr. Manders, Housemaster of the Modern side of Rookwood. He was staring out into the quad in surprise—and waving back some Modern fellows who sought to go out.

"Dodd! Cook! Doyle! Stand back at once!" snapped Mr. Manders, as the three Tommies would have passed him.

"But, sir——" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Stand back! No junior boy is to leave the House!" snapped Roger Manders. "How dare you!"

The three Tommies drew back, with deep feelings. Across the quad, Classical fellows were pouring out of their House in swarms to share in the excitement. But it was like Manders to keep his boys in. Manders was always stiff, always crusty, and always mistaking a desire to make himself unpleasant for a strict sense of duty.

Knowles, Catesby and Frampton of the Modern Sixth passed him. As they were prefects, Mr. Manders allowed them to pass. Other fellows he angrily barred. Even Myers and Lister of the Modern Fifth were waved back. Only Sixth Form prefects were allowed out.

There was an angry and rebellious murmur behind Mr. Manders' bony back.

Mulberry of the Modern Shell shook a fist at the back of the Housemaster's head. He would have liked to land it there.

Manders, unfortunately, glanced round as he did so.

The hapless Mulberry strove, at the last moment, to turn his gesture into a less truculent one—affecting to be rubbing his nose. But it was too late! He was spotted.

"Mulberry!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" groaned the Shell man dismally.

"Go to my study, and wait for me there. I shall cane you!"

Mulberry trailed away sadly to Manders' study. Manders turned his back again, and stared into the quad—now seething with excited, shouting, running, and racing Classical fellows.

Tommy Dodd signed to his two chums, and they followed him. He led them down a back passage, where there was a window. That part of the House was absolutely deserted; everybody was gathered at the front to watch the scene in the quadrangle. Tommy switched off the passage light.

"That old ass isn't keeping us out of this!" breathed Tommy Dodd. "We're on in this, you chaps. Come on!"

He pushed up the lower sash of the window and dropped out. Promptly after him dropped Cook and Doyle. It was a risky proceeding, perhaps, but they were not very likely to be spotted in the dark, and in the midst of an excited crowd. Anyhow, they were risking it, Manders or no Manders.

They left the window open for their return, and scrambled away through thick, dark shrubberies at the side of the building. Emerging into the quadrangle, almost the first person they ran into was Jimmy Silver. Tommy Dodd grabbed him by the arm.

"What's up, Silver?"

"Footpad—robbed the Head—just inside Masters' gate!" jerked out Jimmy. "We nearly got him!"

Jimmy rushed off again.

"This way!" It was the voice of Mornington of the Classical Fourth. "I saw him—this way!"

There was a shout and a rush. The three Tommies joined in it. It led them away from their House and the watchful eyes of Mr. Manders in the doorway, which was all to the good.

Dr. Chisholm was standing in the moonlight, leaning on the arm of Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth. He was pale and gasping, and the knit-

ting of his brows showed that he was angry. The Tommies caught his voice as they passed.

"He is certainly within the walls. One of the boys was thoughtful enough to close the gate. He ran into the quadrangle. Mack, I think, turned him back from the school gates. Pray leave me, Mr. Dalton! I require no help. Pray go and assist——"

"Certainly, sir!"

Richard Dalton sped after the shouting crowd. A loud yell came from the dark archway that led from Big Quad into Little Quad. It drew the hunters in a new direction. In the darkness under the arch several running fellows stumbled over a prone form.

"Bulkeley!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton, helping the captain of Rookwood to his feet.

Bulkeley gasped, and dabbed a reddened nose.

"I got hold of him, sir. He knocked me flying, and broke loose. He got back into Big Quad——"

"After him!" yelled Morny.

"This way!" roared Lovell.

There was another rush in a new direction. Bulkeley dabbed his nose with a handkerchief. Evidently there was some danger in running that desperate footpad down. But the Rookwooders gave no thought to that. They were enjoying the wild excitement of the chase. It was ever so much more enjoyable than prep.

### CHAPTER 3.

Progress of Mr. Peggars!

"**B**LOW me pink!" breathed Slog Peggars.

The burly, hairy man was crouching in dark shrubberies under the shadow of a wall. He was a hard case.

Never, in all his long and lawless career as a snatcher-up of unconsidered trifles, had Mr. Peggars been in harder case.

He was breathless, tired, exhausted

in fact. He was hunted and harried—run off his legs. He had had some punches; he had stumbled and fallen a dozen times at least; he had barged into trees in the dark. From head to foot he had a feeling of being damaged. And he was inside the school walls, with escape cut off, and more than a hundred fellows hunting him.

He had a breathing space, crouching in that dark corner—but well he knew that it was only a breathing space. He was out of the moonlight; but dozens of the fellows had electric flashlamps, flashing the light here, there and everywhere. It was borne in upon the mind of the shaggy Mr. Peggars that the game was up.

Had Mr. Peggars foreseen all this dire trouble, he never would have bothered the headmaster of Rookwood at all. He was hard up—his last resources had been spent in support of the whisky trade. But the old gent's notecase was not worth all this.

Slog could have sworn that the road was clear when he tackled the old gent for his notecase. Nobody in sight—not a sound. Yet a whole bunch of coveys had suddenly rushed in at the gate and jumped on him. Who those coveys were, and where they had so suddenly sprung from, was a mystery to Slog Peggars.

It was from his slogging powers that he derived his nickname among his friends; but there had been too many of them for him to slog successfully. In fact, he would have been the sloggee, instead of the slogger, if he had not broken away and bolted for it.

Then a sort of hornet's nest had swarmed round him. He had fancied himself in the grounds of some private house—being a stranger in the neighbourhood, and quite unacquainted with Rookwood School. So it had simply amazed him to find scores of boys of all sizes pouring out after him. It dawned upon him that it must be a school that he had inadvertently barged into, and he felt that it was cruel luck.



He crouched and gasped for breath. Lights were approaching him; shouts sounded closer.

A notecase—a small but well-filled case of handsome Russia leather, stamped with a gold monogram—was grasped in his grubby hand. That was a solace, so far as it went. He still had his plunder—if he got away with it. But he realised dismally that he was not going to get away.

"He came this way, sir!" he heard a voice shout. It was Jimmy Silver addressing Mr. Dalton.

"Juniors keep back!" came Mr. Dalton's voice. "Bulkeley, Melville, Carthew, Scott, come with me!"

Slog could have groaned. They were after him. They had seen him dodge round that building.

He rose wearily from the shrubbery. The game was up; but he was going to run till he dropped, anyhow. Then he became aware of the fact that he was close by a window, and that it was open at the bottom.

Slog Powers caught his breath. It seemed quite a miraculous chance to him. Certainly it was dangerous to enter one of the school buildings, where he would be hopelessly cornered if he was spotted. But it was a case of any port in a storm. If he could hide for a time, and steal forth later when the coast was clear—

It was that or capture, evidently. The pursuers were closing in on him, and escape was hopeless if he ran.

Finding a downstairs window open, and no light within, was an unexpected and wonderful stroke of luck. He owed it to Tommy Dodd, for it was the window by which the three Tommies had left Manders' House. Slog did not hesitate a moment.

He dragged himself in at the window, stood inside, slid down the sash, and secured the fastening. All was dark within; he knew that he was standing in a passage of some sort, but it was not lighted.

Lights flashed on the panes outside.

Keeping well back from the window, Slog stood with pounding heart. He was invisible to the fellows outside; but in the flashing of a dozen electric torches he could see them. He could hear their voices.

Mr. Dalton stopped, on the very spot where Slog had been crouching hardly more than a minute ago.

"He was here!" exclaimed the Fourth Form master. "Look! The shrubbery has been crushed—broken!"

"Someone's been here, sir!" said Bulkeley.

"Show a light! He cannot be far away! Yes, look! The shrubs have been trampled here! Follow me!"

Slog was glad to see the chase turn off from that spot. Nobody dreamed for a moment that the window had been open a minute ago. But he was rather surprised by the direction the chase was taking. If they were picking up "sign," it was not Slog's. As a matter of fact, Mr. Dalton and his companions were now following the path of the three Tommies through the shrubbery. That, of course, the Classical master and prefects did not know, any more than Slog Poggers did. Lights and voices and footsteps moved off in the direction of Big Quad. A few fellows lingered, but most of them had moved off.

"Blow me pink!" murmured Mr. Poggers, in great relief.

He was safe for the time, at least.

Where he was he had not the faintest idea, except that he was in one of the school buildings. He had never heard of Mr. Manders or Manders' House, or, indeed, of Rookwood School at all.

He remained a few minutes to recover his breath, and to pack the Head's notecase safely away in a pocket. So far, it had remained clutched in his hand.

Then he peered about him, trying to discover where he was. At the end of the passage was a glimmer of light where it led into another. Three or four figures appeared at that end of the

passage, against the glimmer, and Slog crouched back in alarm.

"What the dooce is the light out for here?" asked Towle of the Fourth. "I say, the light's out in the passage."

"Some ass turned it off!" said another voice.

Slog trembled.

He was not aware that the passage light had been turned off by a junior for his own good reasons. But he was aware that if it was switched on, it would reveal him there.

But his luck was in. A harsh voice came from someone unseen.

"Why are not you juniors at preparation? Go up to your studies at once!"

It was Mr. Manders speaking.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

The figures disappeared from Slog's view. He gasped with relief. He had a momentary glimpse of a tall, spare, angular figure passing the end of the passage. Then all was quiet again.

It had been a narrow escape. Slog realised that he could not remain where he was—someone else might come along and turn on the light. He glanced at the window by which he had entered. Lights were gleaming outside, reflected on the panes; five or six fellows were rooting through the shrubberies. There was no chance that way.

He groped along the dark passage. A glimmer of light from above caught his eyes. He was at the foot of a staircase—not the main staircase of the building, evidently—a small, back stair. But there was a light above, and it stopped him.

But the next moment he stepped quickly on to that staircase. Someone had entered the passage and switched on the light. He stepped out of sight barely in time.

It was neck or nothing now! Taking the chance of what might await him above—and ready to "slog" anyone who tried to stop him—Mr. Poggers ran swiftly up the stairs.

Footsteps passed along the passage below as he did so. But he had passed

a bend of the staircase, and was unseen.

But a creak of the stair behind him made his heart jump. Whoever it was that had come along the passage was coming up the stairs!

Slog hurried on. With the certainty behind him of being spotted, he had to take the chance of what might be ahead.

He scuttled along a corridor, and found himself on a large landing, on which several doors opened. A shaded light burned there.

No one was in sight.

He could hear sounds from below. But he saw that he was now in the bedroom quarters of the building, whatever it was. He peered over banisters, into the well of a big staircase. He sighted the tops of several heads in the distance below, and popped back. One of those heads surmounted a tall, thin, angular figure, which he had already glimpsed once. Mr. Manders was coming upstairs!

Slog gritted his teeth desperately. Slogging that bony old gent would do no good—with any number of people within call.

He backed to the nearest door, opened it softly, and stepped in. Just as softly he closed the door behind him, felt for the key, and turned it quietly in the lock.

The room in which he stood was a bedroom, dark, and evidently unoccupied. A glimmer of moonlight at the window gave him a glimpse of his surroundings.

There was a big wardrobe at one side, and Slog hurriedly calculated whether it was big enough to hide him as a last resource. But he had no time to finish that calculation, when the doorhandle turned.

Slog jumped.

It was fortunate for him that he had locked that door when he entered. He had done it on the chance that that bony old gent might be coming to that very room. And that chance had

materialised. For it was Mr. Manders' room—and he was coming to it!

There was a sudden, startled, and angry yelp outside the door.

Mr. Manders naturally expected his door to open when he turned the handle, and he naturally moved to follow the opening door as he pushed. As the door did not open, however, he was brought up suddenly, his long, sharp nose tapping on a panel.

"Wow!" came from Mr. Manders.

"Blow me pink!" breathed Slog.

"Upon my word! What is the matter with this door. It cannot be locked. Upon my word!"

The door-handle rattled and shook furiously. Mr. Manders, never very good-tempered, was extremely bad-tempered now. It was annoying to find his door somehow jammed when he was hurrying there to get his overcoat from the wardrobe—and still more annoying to tap his nose on it. He rattled, he shook, and he wrenched at the door.

"Is anything the matter, sir?"

It was the voice of Mr. Bull, the maths master, who had his rooms in Manders' House.

"Yes, certainly, Mr. Bull! My door—this door. It seems jammed in some extraordinary way! It cannot be locked—the key is inside—yet it will not open! Some trick—some prank!" The door-handle rattled again. "I require my coat. I must go to see the Head—I hear that he has been attacked by some ruffian or footpad. Mr. Bull, see if you can open this door!"

"Certainly, sir! Why—what—Good heavens!"

"What do you mean, Mr. Bull? What—"

"Look, sir! There are muddy foot-marks here—"

"Some young rascal—"

"They are not the marks of a boy's boots, sir. Look! They appear to come from the back stair—some man in muddy boots! Mr. Manders, that

ruffian must have gained admittance to the House—they cannot find him anywhere outside. He must—"

"Good gracious, Mr. Bull! You really think—"

"Look, sir! Some man in extremely dirty boots—filthy, in fact! And—the marks lead to your door, sir—"

Mr. Manders let go the door-handle as if it had suddenly become red-hot.

"In my room—" he muttered.

"It would certainly appear so—"

"Good heavens! Help! Help!"

Slog Poggers groaned. The game was up now with a vengeance.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Caught!

JIMMY SILVER gave a yell.

"There he is!"

"Where?" panted Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Look!"

Jimmy pointed upward.

The hunt in the quad had been slackening down. Dr. Chisholm had gone into the house, very much upset and perturbed. Masters and prefects, assisted by a swarm of seniors and juniors, scoured and searched on every side; but the impression was growing that the footpad had, somehow, eluded so many hunters and escaped.

Either he was gone, or he was in hiding, and though the crowd still rooted about, it was with diminished hope. And then, suddenly, there was an outbreak of alarm from Manders' House—and the whole mob rushed in that direction.

Mr. Manders, again in the open doorway, was waving bony hands and shouting almost hysterically. Study windows were open, and fellows shouting from them.

The news spread that the fugitive footpad had somehow dodged into Manders' House—how, nobody knew, though there were three Modern juniors who thought that they could guess!

"Help, help!" Mr. Manders was shouting. "The man is here—the ruffian—the—the foodpad—he is here! Help!"

Mr. Dalton rushed up.

"Has he been seen?" he panted.

"He is locked in a room——"

"Follow me, Bulkelev!"

It was then that Jimmy Silver shouted—as he spotted an opening window upstairs in Manders' House—and a shaggy face peering out in the moonlight! That unshaven face, surmounted by a tattered, dirty cap, could belong to no one but the hunted man—and Jimmy pointed and yelled. Dozens of fellows stared up.

The man was clambering from the window.

Evidently he knew that his presence in the House was discovered, and was planning a desperate escape from the window by means of the thick ivy on the wall. But as Jimmy drew the general attention to him, he stopped and glared down at the up-staring crowd like a trapped animal.

"There he is!" went up a shout.

"Catch him as he comes down!"

"What-ho!"

The Rookwooders swarmed under the windows of Manders' House. Fifty fellows or more were ready to collar Mr. Poggers if he made the perilous descent. Instead of which Slog backed from the window and disappeared from sight.

"Got him cornered!" grinned Lovell.

"Dicky Dalton will get him if he stays there. We'll bag him if he drops out."

"What-ho!" chuckled Raby.

"He's got the Head's notecase!" said Newcome. "He won't get away with it!"

"No jolly fear!"

Plenty of fellows were waiting for the foodpad if he tried climbing down from the window. Others crowded into the House, to follow Mr. Dalton and the prefects up the stairs. Among the latter, Tommy Dodd, Cook and Doyle crowded in, fortunately unnoticed by Mr. Manders. Something very like an

army marched up the stairs, to deal with the fugitive in his refuge.

Mr. Dalton thumped on the locked door of Mr. Manders' room.

"Open this door!" he called sharply.

"You are known to be here, and resistance is useless. Unlock the door!"

Slog Poggers did not heed the command.

He stood in the middle of the room, panting, like a desperate animal, the moonlight from the window glimmering on his desperate face.

He was hopelessly cornered! He had three months' hard labour to expect for his assault on the schoolmaster. But even that did not seem so bad to him as the loss of the prize that was within his grasp.

He had the headmaster's notecase—it was his for the moment! He had had no time to look into it, but he knew that it was well-filled with notes—banknotes and currency notes. Thirty, forty, fifty pounds—perhaps more. Such a booty as had seldom, or never, fallen into his thievish hands before! And he was going to lose it again—and it seemed to him worse than the temporary loss of his liberty.

"Blow me pink!" groaned Mr. Poggers.

Knock! Knock! came at the door.

"Will you open this door?" rapped Mr. Dalton.

Slog did not trouble to reply. He gave a glare from the window—at a sea of upturned faces. He gave a hunted glare round the room. He had thought of hiding in the big wardrobe, but that was futile now that it was known that he was there. He knew that it would have been futile, in any case, for he had heard the bony old gent say that he had come up for his overcoat—which, of course, would be hanging in the wardrobe. The bony old gent would have found him there!

Nevertheless, Slog stepped towards that wardrobe, and silently unlatched and opened its door.

In these thrilling moments Slog's

brain, not naturally perhaps very bright, was working at double pressure.

Capture was certain now. But was there a remote chance of saving his plunder—of getting it back another time, when he came out of the "stone jug" after his "stretch"?

That was the idea in his brain now.

Hiding the notecase in Mr. Manders' room was, of course, useless. He would never be able to get back there and recover it.

But Mr. Manders' mention of the overcoat had put the germ of an idea into his desperate mind.

He stared into the wardrobe. Several coats were hanging there. Among them was a large, thick, grey overcoat. Evidently that was the overcoat belonging to the "bony old gent" who had come up for it, with such unexpected results!

"Open this door!"

Slog, unheeding, groped at the big, heavy coat. It was thickly and warmly lined. His little, piggy eyes gleamed. It was a chance—a good chance! He whipped a pocket-knife out, pulled out the lining of a pocket, and made a small slit.

Through that slit he pushed the Head's notecase.

It slid down between the lining and the material of the coat. Its bulk was small, and the coat itself was thick and bulky. It would never be noticed there. But later on, when he was free to handle the matter again, it would be easy for Slog to watch for a bony old gent wearing that overcoat outside the school.

That was the cunning rascal's scheme!

Bang! Bang! came on the door. Somebody with a chopper in his hand was slogging at the lock!

Mr. Poggers rearranged the coat as he had found it, and softly closed the wardrobe door.

With luck, his booty was safe now, till he had an opportunity of seeking its recovery!

Bang! Bang! rang at the door.

Slog Poggers crossed to the window again. He stared down at the faces staring up. He thought for a moment, and gave up the idea.

"Bang! Bang! Crash!

The lock cracked; the door flew open. The light was switched on, flooding the room with illumination.

Mr. Dalton strode in. After him came Bulkeley and Neville, Classical prefects—Knowles and Catesby, Modern prefects. Outside, there was a swarm of seniors and juniors.

Slog swung round from the window with clenched hands, snarling. The man-hunt was over; he was cornered and caught.

"You had better——" began Mr. Dalton.

He got no further. The ruffian was on him with a tiger's spring. Perhaps Mr. Poggers still nourished a faint hope of slogging his way out to freedom. But in Dicky Dalton, master of the Fourth, he had to deal with a hefty young man who was not only a Form-master, but a boxer. The prefects were ready to help, but Dicky did not need their help.

He met Slog with left and right.

Mr. Poggers had done some slogging in his time, but he got some now that surprised him.

His savage blows were knocked aside as he leaped at the young master—and Dicky Dalton's right landed on his stubby chin followed up by Dicky's left between his piggy eyes. Slog Poggers gasped, gurgled, and went backwards as if a tank had hit him. He landed on the floor with a terrific crash that made the furniture jump.

"Oooogh!" spluttered Slog.

Mr. Dalton rubbed his knuckles.

"Secure him!" he said.

It was quite easy to secure the footpad now. Indeed, he could not have got up without help. Bulkeley and Neville took an arm each, and lifted him. He tottered beneath them as they led him away.

"Take him to the Head's house,"

said Mr. Dalton. "He must be kept secure till a constable can be sent for to take him into custody. No doubt his plunder will be found on him. Take him away."

The prisoner was led away. A loud cheer greeted his appearance in the quad, walking dizzily between the two prefects, followed by Mr. Dalton. After them came Mr. Manders—now arrayed in a large, thick, heavy grey overcoat. Round them marched the whole crowd of Classics, escorting them in triumph to the Head's house.

"Got him!" chuckled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Got the blighter! I say, the beak will have to let us off with a jaw, you know, after what we've done. But for us, that sportsman would have got away with his notecase. Lots of tin in it, I expect. Lucky for the Head we were out of bounds, what?"

"Let's hope the Head will see it in that light," remarked Jimmy Silver, rather doubtfully.

"Oh, bound to!" said Lovell confidently. "He will get his tin back, see? We've got the thief, and the loot's on him. We're all right!"

They had got the thief, there was no doubt about that. And the loot was not far away. But whether it would be found or not was quite another question. No one—least of all Roger Manders—suspected that it was hidden in the lining of the overcoat in which the Modern master was whisking across the quad. Mr. Manders would have been very much astonished had he known that he was carrying about with him the sum of forty-five pounds ten shillings in a Russia leather notecase belonging to his chief!

#### CHAPTER 5.

Lovell, of Course!

"SILVER!"

"Yes, Bulkeley!"

"Head's study!" said the captain of Rookwood. "You, and the other three young sweeps."

Prep should have been going on in the Fourth. Instead of which, nearly every fellow in that Form was out in the passage, or standing in a study doorway—and all were talking. That evening at Rookwood School had been eventful—in fact, wildly exciting. The juniors were discussing it breathlessly when Bulkeley of the Sixth called up the stairs to Jimmy Silver & Co.

"We're for it!" groaned Jimmy.

"Rot!" said Lovell. "The Head simply can't—"

"Looks as if he's going to, whether he can or not," remarked Raby.

"I tell you he can't—"

"Oh, come on!" said Newcome. "Let's get it over."

"But he can't—" persisted Arthur Edward Lovell, addressing the backs of his comrades' heads as they went down the stairs.

The Classical Fourth passage was left in a buzz behind the Fistical Four as they went. Three members of the Co. looked very serious—but Arthur Edward Lovell was confident.

"You'll see," he said, as they approached Dr. Chisholm's study door. "I tell you he simply can't—"

"You'd better tell the Head that," suggested Jimmy. "He may not know that he can't!"

Whereat Raby and Newcome grinned, and Lovell snorted. Jimmy Silver tapped at the headmaster's door, and they entered.

They were rather glad to see their Form-master, Mr. Richard Dalton, with the Big Beak. Dicky Dalton, they hoped, would put in a word for them if the Big Beak proved waxy!

Dr. Chisholm did not look "waxy." But he looked very severe as he fixed his eyes on the four.

"Silver, Lovell, Raby, Newcome! You four boys were out of school bounds after lock-up!" he rapped.

"Yes, sir!" murmured Jimmy.

"May I point out, sir—" began Lovell.

"You may be silent, Lovell!"

"Yes, sir; but——"

"Be silent. Lovell!" rapped Mr. Dalton.

Lovell suppressed his feelings—and his remarks Silence was not Arthur Edward's long suit.

"This is a serious matter," said the Head. "What explanation have you to offer, Silver?"

"It was only a lark, sir," murmured Jimmy. "We—we went down to the Roke to slide—that was all, sir."

The Head looked at him very searchingly

"A very foolish and thoughtless proceeding, if true," he added dryly.

"It's true, sir."

Jimmy might have added that they had done that foolish and thoughtless thing because some Modern chaps, who had done it, had dared them to do likewise. But he could not give away Tommy Dodd & Co.; neither, probably, would the Head have comprehended that the end study could not possibly refuse a challenge!

"Do you accept this statement, Mr. Dalton?" asked the Head.

"Certainly, sir!" answered Richard Dalton. "I am assured that these boys of my Form have only acted thoughtlessly."

"And if we hadn't——" recommenced Lovell.

"Shut up you ass!" whispered Raby.

"If we hadn't," went on Lovell, unheeding, "we shouldn't have been at Masters' gate when you got there, sir, coming back from Coombe. We shouldn't have been able to barge in when that footpad went for you——"

"Barge in!" repeated the Head. "Went for me! Mr. Dalton, do these boys learn English in your Form-room?"

"Hem! Certainly, sir!"

"It is very singular, then, that they cannot address their headmaster in that language!" said Dr. Chisholm.

"I mean, we took a hand when that footpad went—I mean when he biffed you," stammered Lovell. "That

hooligan was after your notecase, sir, and you'd have been robbed if we hadn't barged—I mean butted—that is, if we hadn't interfered——"

Under the steady, icy stare of the headmaster, even Arthur Edward Lovell trailed off into silence.

"I think I understand your meaning, Lovell, couched as your remarks are in inelegant, slangy phrases," said Dr. Chisholm. "If you allowed me to speak——"

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

"I should have expressed my recognition of your act in intervening when I was attacked by that ruffianly person. That, however, does not alter the fact that you were out of school bounds at the time, when you should have been in your study at preparation. Neither, as a matter of fact, did you prevent me from being robbed, as the man did actually deprive me of my notecase!"

"But the man's been caught, sir," said Lovell. "He was cornered in Mr. Manders' room over on the Modern side, and they got him! I—I thought he was locked up in a room here waiting for a bobby——"

"A what?"

"I—I mean a peeler——"

"You mean a peeler?" repeated the Head.

"A—a—a policeman, sir!"

"Oh!" said Dr. Chisholm. "I am glad to be able to elucidate your meaning at last, Lovell! It is true that the man was caught, and is now awaiting the arrival of a constable from Latham to take him into custody. But my notecase has not been recovered, and as the man declares that he dropped it in his flight, it may never be recovered."

"Oh!" said Lovell. "But all the same, sir, I think and I'm bound to say—— Whoooooop!" Lovell yelled, as his foot was stamped on.

"Bless my soul! What——"

"Ow! Jimmy, you ass—wow!" gasped Lovell. "What I meant to say was, sir——"

"Did you stamp on Lovell's foot, Silver?"

"I—I thought he was talking too much, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

Something like the ghost of a smile glided over the severe face of the head-master of Rookwood.

"I was going to say——" gasped Lovell.

"Be silent, please."

"But I think I've a right to point out, sir——"

"Mr. Dalton, can you induce this boy of your Form to be silent, since he does not appear amenable to his head-master's authority?" said Dr. Chisholm.

Mr. Dalton, colouring with vexation, gave Lovell a look—which would have reduced any other fellow at Rookwood to the solemn silence of a stone image.

Lovell's view was that the assistance the Fistical Four had rendered when Dr. Chisholm was struggling in the grasp of Slog Poggers, entitled them to be let off for having been out of bounds at the time. Lovell thought this a reasonable view. As the Head did not seem to see it, Lovell was the man to make it clear to him.

"I only wanted to point out, sir, that considering that we weighed in to help you, when that blighter snaffled you just inside the gate, and that you'd never have known we were out of bounds if we hadn't——"

Mr. Dalton took Lovell by the back of the collar. That iron grip silenced even Arthur Edward Lovell. He wriggled indignantly.

"Now," said the Head, with grim sarcasm, "if I am permitted to speak I will conclude my remarks. I was going to say, that in view of your action in coming to my assistance, I should request your Form-master to excuse you for having broken school bounds, if he was satisfied that it was nothing worse than a thoughtless frolic."

Four faces brightened.

"But——" went on the Head in a deep voice.

Four faces clouded.

"But what I should have done on my own volition, I certainly shall not do when it is claimed as a right, which it certainly is not. Mr. Dalton, you will punish these juniors for their infraction of the rules of the school."

"Certainly, sir!"

"In the circumstances, I am unwilling that they should be caned. But detention on a half-holiday——"

"Quite, sir!"

"Very good! They may go!"

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome, with feelings too deep for words, if it had been the time and place to utter any, went to the door. Lovell gasped.

"Well," he began, "I jolly well think that——"

What Arthur Edward Lovell jolly well thought never transpired; for Mr. Dalton, with a jerk of his sinewy arm, hooked him out of the study by the collar. Lovell's remarks ended in a gurgle, and the closing door shut that gurgle off from the majestic ears of the Head.

#### CHAPTER 6.

##### The Boy Who Knew How!

"TRUST Lovell!" said Raby bitterly.

The fellows were in their studies at last, and more or less attention—generally less—was being given to prep. There was not much time left for prep after the exciting events of that evening—a man-hunt in the quadrangle after a footpad who had got away with the Head's wallet. Over in Manders' House the fellows were as excited as on the Classical side—or more so, for it was in Roger Manders' own room that the hunted rascal had been run down and collared. Now he was locked up in a room in the Head's house, and most fellows hoped that the constable would not arrive from Latham to take him away before prep was over. Naturally, they wanted to see the last act of the play, as Mornington described it.

Not much in the way of prep, it is



true, was getting done. But fellows could not go down from the studies till the appointed time.

One fellow in the Classical Fourth, however, disregarded that rule. That one was Lovell.

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome were in the end study, getting something done. Lovell had not come up with them after leaving the Head.

Perhaps he guessed that his comrades intended to boot him when they got him to the privacy of the end study. Or perhaps he had some other reason. Anyhow, he hadn't come up.

"Oh, trust him!" assented Newcome, nodding agreement with Raby's remark.

"He's the jolly old limit!" sighed Jimmy Silver. "If he'd only held his tongue in the Head's study——"

"Does he ever hold his tongue?" asked Raby.

"Well, we're going to boot him," said Jimmy. "That will be a comfort."

"The ass!" said Raby.

"The fathead!" said Newcome.

"The frabjous 'chump!" agreed Jimmy.

Anyone overhearing the remarks in the end study would never have guessed that the three fellows there were Lovell's loyal chums.

They were intensely exasperated with Arthur Edward. Clearly they would have been let off with a "jaw"—if only Lovell hadn't put the Head's back up. Lovell could always be trusted to put his foot in it.

The study door opened suddenly, and Lovell came in. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome rose to their feet, with grim looks.

Lovell did not seem to notice that. The expression on his face was keen and eager. Evidently he had something to impart.

He was not given time to impart it, whatever it was. Having shut the study door, he turned to his chums—to find himself in the grip of three pairs of vengeful hands.

"Here, what——" ejaculated Lovell. "Yaroooooh!"

Clump, clump, clump! Whirled round in the grasp of his loyal chums, he was smitten by three boots, which sent him staggering back to the door. The three thudded together, and thudded hard. It was a case of three soles with but a single thought, as the poet very nearly said.

Lovell caught at the door, steadied himself, and glared round in almost speechless wrath at the Co.

"Wharrer you up to?" he roared.

"Booting a silly fathead!" explained Jimmy Silver.

"You—you——" gasped Lovell. "You silly owls! You crass asses! I've a jolly good mind not to tell you my wonderful wheeze now for getting off detention! Ow!"

"You've got a wheeze, have you?" snorted Newcome.

"Ow! Yes, you silly fathead! Ow!"

"Take it away and boil it!"

"Look here!" roared Lovell.

"Br-r-r!"

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome sat down to prep again. Lovell stood wriggling, and glaring at them in great wrath.

"I've a jolly good mind——" began Lovell.

"A jolly bad one, to judge by the way it works!" said Newcome.

"Will you let a fellow speak?" shrieked Lovell. "I've a jolly good mind not to let you in this stunt——"

"You've let us in for a detention, anyhow!" said Jimmy. "What about shutting up, and doing some prep?"

"Blow prep! Look here! Do you fellows want to be detained on Saturday afternoon?" hooted Lovell. "I tell you, I know how to get off. If you'll listen to a chap——"

"Seems to me we never do anything else," sighed Jimmy. "But get on. Cut it as short as you can!"

"You heard what the Head said in his study?" Lovell commenced.

"He said he would have let us off, if

you hadn't barged in and put his back up."

"I don't mean that. He said that that sneak-thief who had bagged his notecase chucked it away while he was dodging about the quad with a crowd of fellows on his track. It wasn't found on him when Dicky Dalton and the prefects brought him over here from Manders' House."

"Well?"

"Well, suppose we found it for the Head? He's jolly ungrateful, telling Dalton to detain us after we helped him as we did. But if we got that wallet back for him, he would be bound to play up. Even headmasters are human."

"Are they?" asked Newcome, as if he doubted it.

"Well, more or less," said Lovell. "I believe there was a lot of money in that wallet—the man followed the Head here, you know, because he saw him open it at the post office in Coombe. May be pounds and pounds. Suppose we got it back for the Head—well, it stands to reason that he would let us off—it would be only decent."

"Are you proposing a search of the quad, and Little Quad, and both Houses before dorm?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Think we could get over the ground in an hour or so—especially in the dark?"

"No, I'm not!" snapped Lovell. "I'm proposing asking that thief where he chucked it."

"Wha-at?"

"That's what I've been up to while you fellows have been wasting time on prep!" said Lovell scornfully. "I've been scouting—and spotting where they've put the brute. He's locked up in the punishment-room. I suppose they thought that the safest place to put him till the bobby comes over from Latcham."

"Safe as houses," said Jimmy. "But what—"

"Dalton's left the key in the lock, on the outside," said Lovell. "I've spotted that. Of course, it hasn't occurred to

him that any Rookwood chap would cut in to see the man—especially as it's prep now."

"No," gasped Jimmy, "I suppose it hasn't! I suppose it wouldn't! And I jolly well know that he's right, too! Nobody's going to!"

"Do listen to a fellow! We go there and ask the brute where he was when he chucked away that notecase, and then we go to the spot, pick it up, and take it to the Head, and there you are!"

"You think he'll tell us?" asked Newcome sarcastically. "You think he'll feel so kind and obliging towards us because we helped to snaffle him?"

"I think he'll tell us, if we collar him and bang his head on the floor till he does!" retorted Lovell.

"Oh, crikey!"

"We're justified in handling the brute to get back what he pinched from the Head," said Lovell. "I'll bang his head hard enough, I can tell you."

"You think he'll let you?" inquired Raby.

"If you'd listen, instead of jawing, I'd tell you that Bulkeley tied his hands behind him with a duster before he was locked up in clink. He's a hefty brute, but he can't argue a lot with his paws tied."

"And suppose we're spotted?" gasped Jimmy.

"There's nobody anywhere near clink. We can turn off the light in the passage, too. The bobby can't get here under half an hour, at least. Everybody's at prep. What about it?"

Lovell's chums gazed at him. Arthur Edward Lovell was the man for hare-brained stunts. But this, to his faithful comrades, seemed the limit.

"You unspeakable idiot!" said Jimmy Silver at last. "If we were caught barging in, it would mean a flogging all round. And serve us jolly well right, too."

"Nuff said!" snapped Lovell. "I want you fellows to back me up. Are you going to back me up, or not?"

"Not!" answered three voices in unison.

"Then I'll handle it alone!" said Lovell determinedly. "It's as easy as falling off a form! The Head's bound to let us off detention, if we get his notecase back. We can make that brute tell us where he dropped it, and get out with a flashlamp and pick it up. Easy as winking."

"If you've done your funny turn, old man, sit down and do some prep," suggested Raby.

"Are you coming?" demanded Lovell.

"No!" yelled the three.

"Then I'll go and do it alone."

"You won't!"

Lovell dragged open the study door. Three fellows leaped up from the table and rushed at him.

He slammed the door and went. Pattering footsteps died away down the passage to the stairs.

Jimmy Silver jerked the door open in turn. The three juniors ran out into the passage—catching a last glimpse of Lovell disappearing down the staircase.

"Oh, the ass!" breathed Jimmy. "Get after him! If he's going to try it on, we've got to see that he comes to no harm—if we can."

And the three juniors raced down the passage after Lovell. They scuttled down the stairs.

But their luck was out. As they reached the foot of the staircase, Mr. Dalton came out of his study, with Mr. Manders, the Modern master. Richard Dalton's eye was on them at once. Lovell had already vanished, but Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome were in full view of their Form-master.

"What are you doing out of your study in preparation?" rapped Mr. Dalton.

The three made no answer. They could not explain to Richard Dalton that they were in pursuit of an unthinking ass who was hunting for trouble.

"Go back to your study at once!" said Mr. Dalton severely.

There was no help for it.

They went back to the end study—but not to prep. They were too worried about Lovell to think of prep. They wondered dismally what Lovell was doing, and what sort of a bungle he was going to make of his latest stunt. But their very worst anticipations fell far short of the awful truth.

## CHAPTER 7.

### An Exchange of Prisoners!

**S**LOG POGGERS moved about the punishment-room of Rookwood School—commonly called "clink" by the juniors—a good deal like a tiger in a cage.

The light had been left burning for him, but the light only showed him that there was no possible means of escape.

The door, of heavy oak, was locked on the outside. The window, small and deep in the thick wall, was protected by iron bars.

Left alone there, the pickpocket had soon ascertained the fact that he could do nothing but wait for the constable to arrive. The duster that Bulkeley had knotted round his sinewy wrists had not bothered him long.

But it booted not, as a novelist would say. At liberty to try door and window with free hands, it was only to make the discovery that there was no possible escape by either.

Slog's luck had let him down cruelly. Having actually "pinched" a notecase, wadded with notes, from the old "bloke" who had turned out to be headmaster of this school, he had had no chance of getting away with it. Hunted high and low all over Rookwood, he had been run down in Mr. Manders' room, over in Manders' House—and here he was!

He had one consolation—they hadn't got the wallet back! Hidden in the lining of the thick, grey overcoat hanging up in Mr. Manders' room, Slog hoped that it would remain there, unseen and unsuspected—till he came out

of the "stone jug" and was free to watch for the gentleman wearing that overcoat outside the school.

For which reason he had "confessed" that he had thrown the wallet away in his flight, and no doubt next day it would be hunted for far and wide. Mr. Poggers did not care where it was hunted for, so long as nobody thought of looking inside the lining of Mr. Manders' overcoat!

Caged in "clink," and in the worst of tempers, Slog Poggers moved about restlessly. There was no escape—but he still nourished a faint hope of making a rush for it when the door was opened. They would expect to find him with his hands tied, as he had been left, and he would very quickly demonstrate that his hands weren't. A lucky punch, taking the "copper" by surprise, might give him a chance—

The sound of the key grating in the door caused Mr. Poggers to stop his tiger-like rambling.

The door opened.

To Slog's utter amazement, it was the head of a schoolboy, not the helmeted head of a constable, that was inserted.

Almost spellbound, he stared at Arthur Edward Lovell.

Lovell gave him a look, stepped in, and quickly closed the door. Slog still stared. It came into his mind that some schoolboy, curious to see the prisoner, had come to give him a look-in, believing, of course, that he was tied and helpless. In his wildest dreams, Slog could never have dreamed of a stroke of luck like this.

"Keep where you are, my man!" said Lovell, his back to the door. "You can't do much harm with your hands tied—but if you try any tricks, I'll knock you spinning as soon as look at you!"

"Will you?" said Mr. Poggers, blinking at him.

"Yes, I jolly well will, and that's a tip!" said Lovell cheerfully. "Now listen to me! I've come here to ask you a question."

Slog listened. But he was listening less to Lovell than for sounds in the passage without. Had this schoolboy come there alone—was there nobody in the passage?

"You've told the Head that you threw his notecase away when we were all after you," went on Lovell. "I want to know where you threw it!"

Slog only eyed him—still listening for sounds from without. No such sound came to his ears.

"Ain't the copper come yet, sir?" asked Slog.

"Not yet, or I shouldn't be here," grinned Lovell. "He may be half an hour yet—it's a good step from Latham. Now, just where were you, my man, when you pitched the notecase away?"

"I don't rightly remember, sir," said Slog, eyeing him.

"Wash that out!" said Lovell. "You're not talking to a fool!"

"Ain't I, sir?" said Slog. He had a strong impression that he was—judging by Lovell's present proceedings.

"Cough it up, and don't waste time!" said Lovell. "I'm not standing on ceremony with you. You'll tell me, or I'll make you!"

"Ow'll you make me, sir?" asked Slog. He was really curious on that point.

"You see that table?" asked Lovell. "Well, I'm going to bang your head on it till you tell me where you dropped the Head's wallet!"

"Blow me pink and blue!" ejaculated Mr. Poggers.

"I mean it!" said Lovell briskly. "Now, you may as well cough it up before I bang your head—see?"

"I dessay somebody'd come in and stop you fast enough!" said Slog.

"That's where you're wrong!" grinned Lovell. "Nobody knows I've come here, and won't know till I've got that notecase. There isn't anybody within hearing if you yell your longest, so you can cut that out, my pippin!"

It did not occur to the astute Arthur

Edward that Slog was pumping him, and that he was telling the man exactly what he wanted to know!

Slog's little piggy eyes glittered. Fortune, it was clear, was favouring him after his run of ill-luck.

"Now, how about it?" rapped Lovell. He advanced a step. "I don't want to have to handle you, but you're going to tell me where to pick up that note-case, if I have to crack your nut! Get it out!"

"You better get on with the nut-cracking, sir!" said Slog. "I ain't going to tell you nothing!"

"Mind, I mean it," said Lovell, "and here goes for a sample!"

He stepped towards the pickpocket and grasped him by the shoulders. His intention was to give Slog's bullet head a tap on the table, as a tip that he had better speak, and speak without delay.

Had Slog's hands still been tied behind him, as Lovell did not doubt they were, no doubt Arthur Edward's programme might have been carried out. As it was, however, those hands suddenly whipped from behind Mr. Poggers, and closed on Arthur Edward with a grip like a steel vice.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell, quite taken by surprise.

"Gotcher!" grinned Mr. Poggers.

"Oh! Ow! Oh!" spluttered Lovell as he whirled helplessly in that powerful grip.

"Old your row!" snarled Slog. He knew, from Lovell, that no one was within hearing, but he was taking no risks.

Lovell thudded on the floor, resisting desperately. Slog grabbed the handkerchief from his pocket. Utterly helpless in the hands of the ruffian—those hands that were so unexpectedly free—Lovell struggled, and would have shouted for help. But he had no chance. Slog Poggers planted a sinewy knee on him, pinning him down, grasped his chin, opened his mouth by main force, and jammed the crumpled handkerchief therein.

"Gurrgrgh!" gurgled Lovell.

That was the limit of what Arthur Edward could utter.

Grinning, Mr. Poggers jammed the handkerchief well in. Then he drew Lovell's wrists together, and bound them fast with the duster that had been used on his own—binding them to a leg of the table.

Lovell, sprawling on the floor, breathing hard through his nose, half-choked by the gag, glared up at him.

Slog gave him a grin.

"Bang my 'ead, will you?" he said. "Not this time, I think, sir! No! Why, I'd crack your nut for you on them planks if I didn't feel so obliged to you for coming 'ere and letting a bloke loose!" Slog chuckled. "You're a clever young gentleman, you are, sir, and I dessay your 'eadmaster will think so when he comes 'ere with the copper, and finds you instead of me! I'll say good-hevening now, sir, if you don't object to a covey goin' in a 'urry!"

Lovell could not speak; but, anyhow, his feelings would have been too deep for words. Slog Poggers shut off the light and opened the door. The man stood there listening for a few seconds. There was no sound of alarm. Lovell heard the man's suppressed breathing in the dark. He heard him jerk the electric lamp from its socket and throw it into a corner of the room, where it smashed. The light could not be turned on now if anyone looked in.

Then Lovell heard the door close and the key turn in the lock. He heard the key withdrawn. Obviously, Slog if he got clear, wanted his escape to be discovered as late as possible, to give him a chance of placing a safe distance between himself and Rookwood.

Lovell heard another crack from the passage, and guessed that the passage lamp had been sacrificed to Slog's safety.

After that he heard no more.

The prisoner was gone.

Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth was left a prisoner in his place.

He was left there, to be found when the constable came.

In a state of utter desperation he wriggled in his bonds and chewed frantically at his gag. It was unnerving to think of Dr. Chisholm finding him there and the pickpocket gone; but he would have brought the Head and all Rookwood there if it had been possible!

But it wasn't!

Lovell had been secured with very great care by the wily Mr. Poggers. He could not get loose; he could only wriggle desperately; he could utter no sound but a faint gurgle. He had to wait till they came for Slog, with the happy knowledge, in the meantime, that the pickpocket was making his escape, and that he, Arthur Edward Lovell, was wholly and solely responsible for the same!

#### CHAPTER 8.

##### Only Lovell!

**T**UBBY MUFFIN put a fat, excited face into the end study.

"He's come!" squealed Tubby.

It was unnecessary to state who "he" was. "He," of course, was the expected constable from Latcham.

Prep was over in the Classical Fourth. Fellows were crowding out of the studies, all keen to see the pickpocket led away, like Eugene Aram, with gyves upon his wrist. But Jimmy Silver & Co were thinking more about Arthur Edward Lovell than the pickpocket.

It was nearly half an hour since Lovell had left them. They had hoped that he would come back. He hadn't come back.

Had he screwed the required information out of the prisoner, and was he, in those moments, rooting about in the dark quad with a flash-lamp for the lost notecase—incidentally breaking House bounds?

Or—as seemed more probable to fellows who knew Lovell—had he bungled somehow; or was he still hang-

ing about watching for a chance to get at the man in the punishment-room?

Lovell's pals could only wonder, with deep disquietude.

"Goodness only knows what's happened!" said Jimmy Silver. "But ten to one, of course, Lovell never got anywhere near clink. He's the kind of obstinate ass to hang on, watching for a chance, instead of coming back like a sensible fellow. Thank goodness that bobby's come; it will put a stop to Lovell playing the goat, anyhow! Let's go down!"

They followed the crowd of the Classical Fourth downstairs.

The whole House seemed to have gathered at the news of the constable's arrival. Modern fellows, over in Manders' House, had no chance of seeing what was to be seen; but all the Head's House, the Classical side, had swarmed out of the studies. Jimmy Silver had a glimpse of a burly man in a helmet led away by Mr. Dalton and the Head.

Every fellow who wished—and all wished—was free to follow on as far as the corridor that led to the punishment-room. Into that corridor, however, they were not allowed to crowd; and Bulkeley of the Sixth and a couple of other prefects stood there to see that they did not.

Barred off by the prefects, the swarming crowd watched the policeman, the Head, and the Fourth Form-master walk down the corridor.

To their surprise it was unlighted. Generally, of course, that unused corridor was unlighted, but on the present occasion the light had been left on by Mr Dalton after locking the pickpocket in "clink." Mr. Dalton was seen to grope for the switch. But the light did not come on.

"Please put on the light, Mr. Dalton!" The Head's voice was heard, with a note of asperity in it.

"Something appears to be wrong with it, sir," answered Mr. Dalton quietly. "The switch is turned down. Possibly the lamp is defective. I will ascertain."

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome, in the forefront of the swarm at the passage-end, exchanged eloquent glances. Had Lovell doused the glim, and was he, at that very moment, cornered at the dark end of the passage?

"The lamp is gone, sir!" came Mr. Dalton's voice from the shadows. "Someone has removed the lamp."

"Upon my word!" said Dr. Chisholm. "Bulkeley, please obtain another lamp—fetch the nearest!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Bulkeley pushed through the crowd. He took the nearest electric bulb from its socket, and took it back to Mr. Dalton. The Fourth Form master inserted it into the lamp-socket in the passage, and the light came on at once.

"Somebody's been larkin' here!" murmured Mornington.

"What silly ass——" said Smythe of the Shell.

"The Head looks waxy!" grinned Tubby Muffin.

There was no need for Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin to point that out. Dr. Chisholm's face was very grim. A "lark" with the passage light was particularly inappropriate at such a time. The Latcham constable was heard to grunt. However, illumination being restored, he trod ponderously on with the headmaster and the Fourth Form master to the door of the punishment-room, which faced the corridor at the end.

"The man is here, constable," said Dr. Chisholm. "He was locked in this room for security to await your arrival. Please enter and take him into custody!"

"P'raps you'll unlock the door, sir?"

"Kindly unlock the door, Mr. Dalton. You have the key?"

"The key was left in the outside of the lock, sir," said Richard Dalton, quite puzzled. "It was left in readiness——"

"You do not mean to say that it is not still there, Mr. Dalton?"

"It has been taken away, sir."

"Upon my word!"

"What larks!" breathed Morny.

Some of the mob at the passage-end chuckled. It looked to them as if some mischievous fellow had been "larking." Jimmy, Raby and Newcome looked at one another. Lovell was not to be seen in the corridor when the light came on; that was a relief. But they could hardly doubt that it was Lovell who had bagged the key. What had he done with it—and where was he?

"The awful ass!" breathed Jimmy.

"The giddy limit!" groaned Raby. "There'll be a fearful row abo't this! I—I say he may be in there, talking to the man now. What will the Head say?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Newcome.

"Not so bad as that!" breathed Jimmy. "The door's locked—Lovell wouldn't lock it on the inside. Even Lovell isn't such an idiot as that. I suppose he bagged it and was interrupted——"

"Keep it dark for goodness' sake!"

"Yes, rather!"

There was a long pause at the other end of the corridor. The Latcham constable had a very expressive expression on his face. The headmaster was almost pale with rage, Dicky Dalton red with vexation. It was an utterly unexpected obstacle in the way of getting the captured pickpocket handed over to the police and getting rid of him.

"Have you any idea where the key may be, Mr. Dalton?" asked the Head at last.

"None, sir! Some foolish boy, I presume——"

"Sergeant Kettle has a key to this room," said Dr. Chisholm. "Send——"

"Bulkeley! Please fetch Sergeant Kettle here, and ask him to bring his key to the punishment-room."

"Very well, sir!"

There was a long wait this time. At one end of the corridor the Head and Mr. Dalton and the constable stood—

the officer's ruddy face growing more and more expressive. At the other end all Rookwood swarmed, craning over one another's shoulders to watch.

Sergeant Kettle arrived at last. He came up the corridor with his military step and inserted a key in the lock.

At long last the door of the punishment-room was thrown open.

"Please switch on the light, Mr. Dalton!" came the Head's voice, quite acid now. "Really, Mr. Dalton——"

Dicky Dalton's hand was already on the switch inside the door. But the light did not come on in "clink."

"The man must have damaged the lamp, sir; the light will not come on," said Mr. Dalton. "Be on your guard, constable; this may mean some attempt——"

"I understood that the man's hands were secured, Mr. Dalton!"

"That is the case, sir; but possibly——"

"What is that sound?" ejaculated the Head, starting.

From the black interior of the punishment-room came a low, horrid gurgling sound. It was like the sound of some suffocated fellow trying to speak.

"Has the man fallen in a fit?" asked the startled Head.

"It certainly sounds——"

Gurgle!

"Bulkeley, get a flashlamp as quickly as possible. It would be injudicious for the constable to enter in the dark!" said Dr. Chisholm.

The Latham man gave him a look. The injudiciousness of such a proceeding had already occurred to the constable! So far from intending to enter the room in the dark the officer was taking out his truncheon in readiness for an attempted rush from the prisoner within.

The crowd, watching along the corridor, hardly breathed now with excitement as the constable was seen to grip his truncheon with a business-like air. They were in deep and

thrilling anticipation of a struggle and a shindy.

But no one appeared from the darkness of the room—no sound was heard but that low, moaning gurgle, repeated several times.

Whether the man was, indeed, in some sort of a fit, or whether he was playing some cunning trick, hoping to get a chance in the dark, it was impossible to tell.

But everyone was very much on his guard. Mr. Dalton dutifully placed himself in advance of the headmaster in case a desperate rush came. The constable held his truncheon half-raised. Sergeant Kettle prepared for active service. Thus they waited—till Bulkeley of the Sixth came back at last with an electric torch in his hand.

He would have entered the punishment-room with it, but Mr. Dalton took it from his hand. His was the post of danger!

"You will be on your guard, constable! The man is a muscular ruffian, and, I think, desperate——"

"I'm ready for him, sir, if you show a light," answered the officer stolidly.

Holding up the electric torch, and guarding it with his left, Richard Dalton stepped firmly into the dark room. The constable tramped heavily after him, truncheon in grip. Sergeant Kettle and Bulkeley brought up the rear. The most desperate rush would hardly have got through them. But no rush came.

Mr. Dalton flashed the light round.

For the moment nobody was to be seen. The Head's voice came acidly from the passage:

"The man is there, I presume, Mr. Dalton?"

"He must be here, sir—the door was locked—— Oh! Ah! What——"

The light in Mr. Dalton's hand concentrated on a wriggling, mumbling, gurgling figure on the floor. For a second he supposed that it was the prisoner—in a fit or something of the kind.



The next moment he saw that it was a member of his own Form, with a gag in his mouth and with his hands tied to a leg of the table!

"Wha-a-t——" stuttered Mr. Dalton, gazing spellbound at the prisoner of the punishment-room. "What——"

"Urrrrgh!" came from the sprawling figure.

The constable stared at Lovell.

"That ain't the man, I s'pose, sir?" he asked.

"Eh? Oh! No! Certainly not!"

"Then where is he?"

Dr. Chisholm looked in at the doorway angrily and impatiently. The light, wavering in Richard Dalton's startled hand, gleamed on the face of Arthur Edward Lovell. Dr. Chisholm gazed at him like a man in a dream.

"That—that—that is a Rookwood boy!" he articulated.

"It—it—it is Lovell of my Form!" stuttered Mr. Dalton.

Bulkeley stooped, in silence, removed the choking gag from Lovell's mouth, and untied the duster. There was an awful silence during this proceeding. With a helping hand from the Rookwood captain Arthur Edward Lovell staggered to his feet.

"Lovell!"

The Head's voice was not loud, but deep.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" groaned Lovell.

"What are you doing here?"

"I—I came——"

"Where is the man who was locked in this room?"

"I—I think he's gone, sir!"

It was only too clear that the man was gone!

"Mr. Dalton, take that boy away! I will deal with him later! Constable, I am sorry——"

Mr. Dalton led Lovell out of the punishment-room by the shoulder. There was a gasp and a yell from the watching crowd at the other end as they saw that member of the Classical Fourth emerge.

"Lovell!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Lovell!" squeaked Tubby Muffin.

"Great pip!"

"Holy smoke!"

Lovell could not speak. Even Lovell, for the moment, at least, was deserted by his usual self-satisfaction, and he felt, as he looked, the biggest ass ever!

"Lovell," said Mr. Dalton quietly, "your incredibly foolish meddling has caused the escape of a law-breaker! Go to your dormitory and remain there! You will probably be expelled for this! Go!"

In silence Arthur Edward Lovell went. His faithful chums gathered round him and went with him, also in silence. There was nothing for any fellow to say. The calamity was too awful for words. Lovell's wonderful stunt for getting Jimmy Silver & Co. off detention was likely to prove disastrous for Arthur Edward.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Caught Bending!

"WHO'S scoring this goal?" asked Tommy Dodd.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle chuckled.

The three Tommies of the Modern Fourth Form at Rookwood were nowhere near the football field, as might have been inferred from Tommy Dodd's question.

They were walking in the quadrangle, after dinner in Manders' House. And in the shrubbery at the side of that building they spotted Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth.

At Rookwood School a fellow from the Classical side who ventured into Modern territory did so at the risk of a booting. The same rule applied to Moderns who injudiciously wandered into Classical regions.

Arthur Edward Lovell seemed at the moment to be not only risking it, but asking for it. For he was bent double, groping in muddy shrubs, with his back to the three Modern fellows, and

they could see little of him but an expanse of trousering.

That was the "goal" alluded to by Tommy Dodd!

"Come on!" murmured Tommy. "When a fellow begs for it like that it would be bad manners to refuse."

He went along the shrubby path towards Lovell. Cook and Doyle, grinning, followed him.

Unfortunately for Tommy Dodd—though no doubt fortunately for Lovell—the bending junior rose to his feet just as they reached him. He glanced round and frowned at the three Moderns.

Tommy Dodd, lifting his foot, dropped it just in time. He had no doubt that Lovell would give him another opportunity soon. For he knew, of course, what Lovell was after.

For several days after the Head's notecase had been lost Rookwood fellows had hunted for it, up and down and round about. Failing to find it, they had given it up as a bad job—excepting Lovell.

Lovell was a stickler. He had reasons for sticking. Lovell was "gated" for every half-holiday that term. But if he had succeeded in finding that lost notecase, with forty-five pounds ten shillings in it, surely the Head would let him off that severe sentence.

Lovell thought it likely. Jimmy Silver & Co., his pals in the Classical Fourth, agreed that it was likely. Only they did not think it likely that Lovell would spot the lost wallet. Indeed, they did not think Lovell would have found it if it had been right under his nose. They did not in the least share Lovell's belief in his own sagacity.

Days and days after everybody else had "chucked" it, Arthur Edward Lovell might have been seen, as a novelist would say, rooting about in likely and unlikely spots for that lost wallet. In the course of his search he found a good deal of mud. So far, he had found nothing else.

"Got it?" said Tommy Dodd blandly.

Lovell shook his head gloomily.

"It's somewhere about," he said. "You see, that pickpocket who pinched it off the Head owned up that he chucked it away when he was being hunted up and down the quad that night. It wasn't found on him, so that was true enough. Well, it must be somewhere."

"Well, unless the blighter pitched it over the edge of the solar system, I suppose it must be somewhere," agreed Tommy Dodd. "Lovell's the man to work these things out, you chaps. It shows what a Classical education will do for a fellow."

Whereat Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle chortled.

Turning away from the three grinning Moderns, Arthur Edward Lovell bent down again and resumed rooting.

Tommy Dodd winked at Cook and Doyle.

Concentrated on his self-imposed task, it did not occur to Lovell that he was asking for it. He groped in muddy shrubs.

Bending over a puddle on the well-trodden gravel path, Lovell scanned it. The notecase might have dropped in that very puddle—it might be right under his nose! Lovell started groping in the rain-water with his fingers, bent double with his back to the Moderns.

The temptation would have been too strong for Tommy Dodd to resist—if he had thought of resisting it—which he didn't!

He stepped after Lovell and lifted his boot.

Thud!

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Cook and Doyle.

"Urrghh!" came from Lovell.

He was fairly caught bending. The thud of the Modern junior's boot sent him sprawling forward.

Splash!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell sprawled, apparently trying to explose the depths of that muddy

puddle with his features. The three Moderns shrieked.

"Groooooogh!"

Arthur Edward Lovell raised a face streaming with water and mud. He dabbed mud and water away with both hands.

"Urrgh! Gurrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tommy Dodd & Co.

"Groogh! You Modern—groogh!—fick, I'll—urrgh!—smash you! I'll—ooooogh—oooooch——"

"Hook it!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "That Classical tick's a bit too dirty to touch. Better go and get a wash, Lovell!"

The three Tommies scuttled off, chortling. After them sped Arthur Edward Lovell, forgetful of the lost notecase, and thinking only of vengeance. With vengeful eyes gleaming from a muddy face, Lovell dashed in pursuit of the three Moderns, muddy water trickling down his collar as he went.

#### CHAPTER 10.

##### Fed-up!

**M**R. MANDERS sniffed.

Dr. Chisholm raised his eyebrows.

Mr. Dalton looked vexed.

Arthur Edward Lovell was the cause of it. Dr. Chisholm was taking a little walk in the quad before lunch, honouring the Fourth Form master with his majestic company, when Mr. Manders came whisking up, to inquire whether the Head had heard anything of his lost notecase. And, as the three masters stood together, Lovell dawned on them.

Tommy Dodd & Co., sighting the beaks, ceased to sprint, and dropped into an orderly walk. They passed the majestic group with the quiet meekness of lambs. Lovell, blinded by wrath and mud, charged on, and did not sight the beaks until he almost charged into them. Fortunately he stopped in time, and gave them a

muddy blink. He would have backed away, but the Head held up a detaining hand.

"Is that a boy of your Form, Mr. Dalton?" he asked icily.

"I—I think so, sir," stammered Richard Dalton. "I—I think it is Lovell of my Form."

"It is scarcely possible to recognise the boy in that disgusting state," said Dr. Chisholm. "Lovell—if you are Lovell—how dare you appear in public, not merely with a dirty face, but with a face so disgustingly dirty?"

"Oh, sir," gasped Lovell, "I—I did——"

"It is singular," said the Head, "that this boy of your Form appears totally unable to behave himself, Mr. Dalton."

Mr. Manders weighed in. He did not like Richard Dalton, and he did not like those cheery members of his Form, the Fistical Four.

"That is the boy who released the pickpocket last week—is it not?" he asked.

"I didn't!" gasped Lovell. "I never——"

"That is the boy," said Dr. Chisholm. "A far from creditable member of your Form, Mr. Dalton."

Dicky Dalton's cheeks were pink. No beak likes a "slating" from his chief—especially in the presence of another beak. But the headmaster of Rookwood was deeply displeased with Arthur Edward Lovell. Lovell, certainly, had never intended to let Slog Poggers loose—never dreamed of it. His intentions had been good. Only he had, unfortunately, fozzled it. And the Head had taken note of what he had done, not of what he had intended to do, which at Lovell bitterly reflected, was just like a beak.

"Lovell," said Mr. Dalton, "go into the House and wash yourself at once!"

Lovell's face was crimson under the sticky mud.

"I—I—I fell over," he stammered.

"Go into the House at once! Take a hundred lines!"

Lovell, suppressing his words and his feelings, marched away. Dr. Chisholm cast a glance of deep disapproval after him. Mr. Manders curled his lip, and Richard Dalton frowned. Lovell tramped into the House, boiling. He was not to blame, surely, because a cheeky Modern tick had up-ended him with a boot, catching him bending over a puddle. But he was sent into the House to wash, like some grubby fag of the Second Form, and given an impot.

Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome met him as he came in. They stared at their discoloured chum.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Jimmy.

Lovell gurgled with wrath.

"That ass Dicky's sent me in for a wash!" he gasped.

"Well, you look as if you want one," remarked Raby.

"You jolly well do!" agreed Newcome.

Lovell gave them a look. If he had expected indignant sympathy, he was disappointed. His chums seemed to agree with Dicky Dalton that he needed a wash. In a silence that was more expressive than words, Arthur Edward Lovell tramped away to get that wash.

In a newly swept and garnished state, with a clean collar, he looked more like his usual self when he rejoined his chums a little later. But there was wrath in his brow.

"You fellows going out?" he asked.

"Didn't we arrange to go over to Latcham, fathead?" demanded Raby. "As you're gated, you said you were going to put in the afternoon hunting for that dashed wallet—if you didn't find it sooner. And I suppose you haven't."

"Blow the wallet!" said Lovell forcibly.

"Aren't you going after it?" asked Newcome.

"No," said Lovell, "I'm jolly well not! I'm fed-up with it—see? If a fellow goes rooting after a dashed

wallet, and a Modern tick shoves him into a puddle, and the beak glares at a fellow as if he was a dirty little fag, and a fellow gets an impot, then I can jolly well tell you that if the Head wants his notecase back he can jolly well root after it himself, and be blowed to him!"

Lovell evidently was shirty.

"I'm going out," he added. "I did nothing to be gated for, and I'm going out. I'm coming over to Latcham!"

"But you can't, old chap," urged Jimmy Silver. "The Head's awfully ratty with you now over your letting that man Poggers loose—"

"Who let him loose?" hooted Lovell.

"I mean, through your letting him get away—"

"Who let him get away?"

"Well, he got away," said Raby.

"And whose fault was that?" demanded Lovell. "If you'd backed me up, as I asked you, he'd never have got away."

"If you hadn't butted in at all—" said Newcome.

"Oh, don't jaw! If you don't want my company—and it seems you don't—I'll go out on my own. I'll—"

"Lovell!" It was Mr. Dalton's voice. "Have you written your lines?"

Lovell spun round.

"My—my lines," he stammered. "No, sir."

"Go to your study and write them at once!" said the master of the Fourth. "I shall expect them from you by four o'clock, Lovell."

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances as Lovell left them, and headed for the end study. They were sorry for poor old Lovell. It was rotten to be gated for half-holidays, and the fact that he had asked for it made it no nicer. Still, it was lucky that Mr. Dalton had barged in at that moment. It had prevented Lovell from making a reckless ass of himself. Disregarding the sentence of gating would have had very serious conse-

quences for Arthur Edward in his present state of general disfavour.

"Poor old Lovell!" said Jimmy. "If only the old chap wasn't such an ass——"

"If!" sighed Newcome.

"He might have been sacked, or flogged for letting that pickpocket get away," said Raby. "The fact is, the Head knows he's an ass, and must have made allowances for it, or he'd never have let him off with a gating."

"No good explaining that to Lovell," said Jimmy.

And Arthur Edward, being safe in his study, the three juniors walked out of gates, glad that the headstrong fellow had been saved from himself, as it were.

They had reason to be. Arthur Edward, in a state of deep wrath and grievance, sat in the end study and wrote Latin lines, and then took them down to Mr. Dalton's study. They were hastily written, not to say scrawled; but Dicky Dalton could be considerate, and he affected to be satisfied.

Lovell went out of the House.

"Gating" confined him to the precincts of the school. He could wander about the quad as much as he liked.

But he did not find much pleasure in doing so. His comrades had gone out of gates, and so had plenty of other fellows. When he bore down on Oswald and Putty of the Fourth for a little conversation they turned the conversation to the subject of washing, and Lovell marched off again, and left them grinning.

Lovell, shoving his hands deep into his pockets, tramped down to the gates. He was fed up with this. He was going out. Hunting for that lost wallet, as an occupation, no longer appealed to him. In his present resentful mood, he felt as if he would not have taken the trouble to pick up that wallet had it lain at his feet.

He was jolly well going out, and chance it.

But alas for Lovell. Mr. Manders was standing at the door of the porter's lodge, speaking to old Mack. He glanced round.

"Lovell!" he rapped.

The Classical junior breathed hard as he halted. A master on the Modern side at Rookwood had no right to give orders to a Classical man. Still, Manders knew that he was gated, and could see that he was going out. Lovell had no choice but to stop.

Mr. Manders, it seemed, was going out that afternoon. He was warmly wrapped in a thick, heavy grey overcoat against the cold weather. Unluckily for Lovell, he had stopped to speak to old Mack as he went.

"You are gated, Lovell," said Mr. Manders sternly. "Am I to understand, Lovell, that it was your intention to go out, regardless of your headmaster's order and authority?"

Grunt from Lovell.

"Go back at once, Lovell!"

Arthur Edward turned and tramped back into the quad. Mr. Manders watched him, frowning, till he disappeared, and then went out of gates.

Lovell did not approach the gates again. He sauntered away to a corner in Little Quad, where there was a tree that gave aid in clambering over a wall. Lovell's mind was made up.

Having negotiated the wall, Arthur Edward dropped outside. Then he ran. Outside the school walls he did not want to be spotted by master or prefect. He covered a quarter of a mile at a trot, and did not stop till he suddenly sighted a long, lean, angular figure in a long, thick grey overcoat in the lane ahead of him.

That back view of Mr. Roger Manders caused Lovell to stop quite suddenly. Had Manders looked round, he would have seen him.

Fortunately, Manders did not look round. And Arthur Edward Lovell blotted himself out of view in a gap of the hedge, to give the Modern master time to get clear.

## CHAPTER 11.

The Man With the Blue Chin!

"SPOT that sportsman!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Eh? Who?" asked Raby.

"Sitting on the stile."

The chums of the Fourth were walking down Coombe Lane towards the village. They were not hurrying. It was their intention to get over to Latcham that afternoon, but they were worried about Lovell. His lines would, no doubt, keep him busy for an hour at least, but after that there was no telling what the hot-headed Arthur Edward might or might not do.

Jimmy's eyes fell on a man who was sitting on the stile by the side of the lane, chewing an unlighted cigarette. The man on the stile looked up quickly at the sound of footsteps, and looked down again when he saw the Rookwood juniors. It seemed as if he was waiting, or watching, for somebody. And there was something in his aspect that struck Jimmy Silver as familiar.

He was a man of rather burly build, with a spotted muffler round his neck, a dingy bowler hat on the side of his head, and little piggy eyes that had a very sharp gleam in them. His face was clean-shaven, the chin blue, as if recently relieved of hirsute adornment. That he had seen the man before, Jimmy Silver felt certain, and as his eyes fixed on him, the man, as if by casual chance, turned his head and looked away into the field behind the stile.

"What about him?" asked Newcome.

"Only some tramp, or something."

"You haven't seen him before?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, I think I have," said Jimmy Silver. "Unless I'm jolly well mistaken, we saw him last week, when he had a beard like a doormat."

"Oh, crikey! Not Poggers?" exclaimed Raby.

"I'd know that beaky nose and those little piggy eyes anywhere," said Jimmy, with conviction.

His chums looked doubtful. The pick-pocket who had been caught at Rookwood, and who had escaped owing to Lovell's hapless intervention, had been bearded. This man was shaven clean—though certainly he looked as if that was a recent innovation, judging by the blue tint of cheeks and chin.

"But, my dear chap," said Newcome, "that man Poggers wouldn't come back to this quarter with the police looking for him. Why should he?"

"Asking to be run in," said Raby, shaking his head.

"The Head's wallet was never found," answered Jimmy quietly. "They searched the man when they got him. They found out his name from something on him—but they never found the wallet!"

"He owned up that he chucked it away."

"He may have remembered where he chucked it—and come back to look for it."

"But he isn't Poggers, old man."

"I feel pretty sure he is," said Jimmy, pausing in the lane, his eyes on the man on the stile, who still had his head turned.

"Oh, rot, old chap!" said Raby. "If he is, we can't prove it, and we haven't come out for a row with a tramp. Look here, come on!"

Jimmy Silver rather reluctantly went on his way with his chums. At a little distance he glanced back.

The man on the stile had turned his head again as soon as the Rookwood juniors were past. Chewing his limp rag of a cigarette, he was watching the lane once more in the direction of the school.

The chums of the Fourth walked on to Coombe, through which their way ran to Latcham. But when they had walked through the village to the country road beyond, Jimmy slowed down.

"You chaps keen on getting on to Latcham?" he asked.

"Well, we shan't see Latcham

Ramblers play if we don't," said Raby. "Tired?"

"No, ass! I was thinking about——"  
"About that sportsman on the stile?" grinned Newcome.

"No, fathead! About old Lovell," said Jimmy. "If the silly ass is asking for trouble again this afternoon——"

"If you want to go back and dry-nurse Lovell——"

"Well, look here, you men go on and see the Ramblers, and I'll go back," said Jimmy. "I'm pretty certain that Lovell's going to make a fool of himself, and I don't want him to get a Head's flogging."

Raby and Newcome grunted in concert. But, as a matter of fact, both of them shared Jimmy's uneasiness with regard to the hot-headed Arthur Edward.

"When father says turn, we all turn," said Raby. "Let's all go back. We'll jolly well boot Lovell for spoiling our half-holiday."

"Nice walk through the fields," said Jimmy.

"We didn't come out for a nice walk through the fields" grunted Newcome. "But let's go back—anything for a quiet life. I can see you're going to worry all the way to Latcham if we don't."

Jimmy Silver laughed, and the three juniors turned off the road, taking a footpath across the fields in the direction of Coombe Lane. It was quite a pleasant walk, on a fine afternoon, with an early breath of spring in the air. Still, they had set out to see a football match at Latcham, and they were feeling a little disgruntled. There was no doubt that Arthur Edward Lovell was rather a trial to his friends at times.

They strolled by one footpath after another, till they came in sight of the stile that gave on Coombe Lane. This time they approached that stile from the field side, and had a back view of the man sitting there. He was still there, though it was an hour since the juniors had passed him in the lane. If

he had stopped on the stile for a rest, he was making a long rest of it.

"There's that sportsman again," grinned Newcome. "Ask him if he's Poggers as we get over the stile, Jimmy."

"Guard with your left," chuckled Raby. "He looked rather a tough customer."

Jimmy Silver looked at the man on the stile as they came up the footpath across the field. His glance, passing that squat figure, fell on a pedestrian in the lane, coming from the direction of the school.

"Lucky Lovell isn't with us," he remarked. "That's Manders."

"Well, if Lovell had come we should be at Latcham by now, and Manders wouldn't spot him," said Newcome. "I say, what's that man up to?"

"Great pip!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The three juniors stared in utter amazement. Mr. Manders, coming along from Rockwood, was passing the stile, when the blue-chinned man jumped down from it, leaped at him, seized him with both hands, and bore him to the ground.

The sight was so utterly unexpected, so utterly startling and amazing, that Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome stared, spellbound, for a long moment; then Jimmy Silver gasped:

"Come on!"

And they raced down the footpath towards the stile. They were too far off to help Roger Manders for two or three minutes, at least, but they put on steam, and their feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground as they flew.

## CHAPTER 12.

The Stolen Overcoat!

"GURRRRRRRGH!"

That was what Mr. Manders said.

Never had a man been taken so utterly by surprise.

Walking down the lane to the village,

Mr. Manders had not the remotest idea of danger. He noticed the man with the blue chin sitting on the stile as he came along; he even noticed that he looked rather a rough customer whom he would not have cared to meet in a lonely place on a dark night, but it never crossed his mind for a moment that the man—even if a lawless character—would venture upon anything like this. Manders could, indeed, hardly believe that it was happening.

Roger Mander was no athlete. He crumpled up in the grasp of the muscular man; in a dazed and dizzy state he sprawled in the muddy lane where the ruffian hurled him.

"Gurrgh!" he gurgled. "Ooogh! Help! Police! Help!"

The blue-chinned man cast a swift glance up and down the lane. Anyone might have come along at any moment. Indeed, on a half-holiday at Rookwood it was fairly certain that Rookwooders would be coming up and down that lane. But there was, for the moment, no one in sight.

He stooped over Mr. Manders and grabbed him.

The Modern master struggled feebly.

"Ow! Help! Release me! If you dare to rob me—Gurrgh!"

"Off with that there coat!" hissed Slog Poggers—for the blue-chinned man was he, minus his shaggy beard. "Off with it, afore I knock your teeth through the back of your 'ead!"

"Mum-mum-my — my kik-kik-kik-coat!" stuttered Mr. Manders.

His first natural impression was that this was a desperate attempt at robbery in broad daylight. He supposed that the man wanted his money. It was amazing to find that the man wanted his coat.

Slog was already wrenching at it. Two or three buttons came off the thick grey overcoat as he wrenched.

"Urrgh! You—you—" gasped Mr. Manders.

"Gimme that coat afore I out yer!"

hissed Slog. He brandished a big, knuckly fist over Mr. Manders' terrified face.

"You—you—you may have the coat," gasped Mr. Manders. "Hold your hand — Ow! I—I—I will certainly give you the coat."

He sat up dizzily and fumbled with buttons. Slog wrenched at the overcoat and dragged it off, Mr. Manders feeling as if his bony arms were being dragged off in the process.

He gasped and squeaked breathlessly. At the same time he was relieved. His money was in his trouser pocket, and this amazing ruffian seemed only to want his coat. Manders certainly did not want to lose his overcoat, but it was by no means a new coat, and if he escaped with no further loss he was getting off rather cheaply in the circumstances.

He sat and squeaked as the coat was torn off. Three running figures loomed up in the adjoining field—Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome—going all out.

"Hold him, sir!" yelled Jimmy. "We're coming!"

"Stick to him!" panted Raby.

Slog Poggers spun round to run. From his grasp, stared savagely round. He glared at the three schoolboys tearing across the field to the stile.

"Blow me pink!" he gasped.

"Ow! Help! Ow!" spluttered Mr. Manders.

Slog Poggers spun round to run. From the direction of the village a cart came in sight, and the driver was staring blankly at the scene by the stile. Mr. Poggers turned in the other direction and ran.

With Mr. Manders' overcoat bundled under his arm, he ran like the wind up the lane in the direction of distant Rookwood.

Mr. Manders staggered to his feet.

He was winded, breathless, gasping, and very badly shaken. He stood unsteadily on his long, thin legs as the three juniors came panting to the stile. Jimmy reached it first.



"Mr. Manders——" gasped Jimmy.

"He has stolen my coat!" gasped the Modern master. "You saw him! A—a—a footpad!"

Jimmy had seen Mr. Manders lose his coat. But it was simply amazing that a footpad had knocked him over in the lane with the object of stealing nothing but his overcoat.

The juniors were not likely to guess that Slog, when he had been cornered in Manders' House a week ago, had hidden the Head's notecase in the lining of that grey overcoat hanging up in Mr. Manders' room.

"Follow him!" panted Mr. Manders. "Keep him in sight if you can! Obtain help! He has stolen my coat——"

"After him!" exclaimed Newcome.

"Come on!" gasped Jimmy.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had no great liking for Roger Manders—few fellows at Rookwood had, but that made no difference now. The Modern master had been robbed, though only of an overcoat that had seen its best days. They were more than willing to get it back for him if they could.

They rushed in pursuit of the thief.

After them panted Mr. Manders, shrieking:

"Stop thief!"

"Put it on!" gasped Jimmy. "Stop thief! Hi! Stop thief!"

They flew, panting. Mr. Manders panted behind; Slog Poggers panted ahead, watching the hedge for an opening to escape into the fields. On his right hand was a fence; on his left a hawthorn hedge, with gaps in it at intervals. Mr. Poggers intended to plunge through the first gap he came to, and, once loose in the fields, he fancied that it would be all right.

He had taken a desperate chance, but he had got away with it. Once he had a few minutes to himself he would grope in the lining of that coat for what was hidden there, but he had to have a few minutes to himself.

With the overcoat crunched under his arm, his battered bowler on the back

of his head, the ends of his spotted muffler flying in the wind, Slog Poggers flew, heading for a gap in the hedge he could see a little distance ahead of him. And he was still a dozen yards from that gap when a junior in a Rookwood cap stepped out of it.

## CHAPTER 13.

Lovell's Luck!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL  
A just stared.

He had remained five or six minutes on the safe side of the hedge to give Mr. Manders plenty of time to get clear.

Mr. Manders was a fairly quick walker, and by that time Lovell had no doubt that he was at a safe distance ahead. He was, of course, entirely unaware of the extraordinary happening that had stopped Mr. Manders at the stile.

Stepping cheerfully into the lane again from the gap in the hedge, Lovell stared at the flying figure coming towards him.

He did not recognise Mr. Poggers in his beaverless state, and had no idea that he had ever seen the man before. But he saw a man evidently in frantic flight, with an overcoat crunched under his arm—obviously not his own, for he was wearing one. Then over the hedges floated a yell:

"Stop thief!"

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

"Hi! Stop thief!"

Lovell jumped into the middle of the road. Arthur Edward Lovell was not, perhaps, particularly brilliant in the intellectual line. But nobody had ever doubted that he had plenty of pluck.

"Stop!" he shouted.

Poggers came down on Lovell with a bull-like rush, his piggy eyes glittering, his blue jaw set square. Plenty of fellows would have side-stepped that savage rush. Lovell braced himself to meet it.

Crash!

Slog Poggers rushed him down. The impact was terrific. Lovell was hurled over as if a traction-engine had hit him.

But Lovell, if not a brilliant man with his brains, was a good man with his hands. He spun over from the shock, but he grasped at the enemy as he spun, and grabbed hold; and Mr. Poggers, rather winded himself, went down with Lovell, sprawling.

The grey overcoat dropped to the ground. Beside it sprawled Mr. Poggers and Arthur Edward Lovell, both feeling as if a sledge-hammer had hit them.

Lovell was holding on, but a jolt on the jaw from a knucky fist, that seemed for the moment to loosen every tooth in his head, made him let go.

"Urrrh!" gasped Lovell.

He rolled over. His impression was that his chin had been knocked through the back of his neck. Lovell rolled and gurgled.

Slog Poggers staggered to his feet. One swift glance he shot backward. Three schoolboys came sweeping round a curve of the lane. Slog gave only that one swift look, then he stooped and grabbed at the fallen overcoat.

Grabbing it up by the collar, he started running again. But as he went a sudden jerk tore it from his hand.

Lovell, not beaten yet in spite of that terrific jolt on the jaw, grabbed at the tail of the coat and caught it as it went. That sudden jerk dragged it from Slog's grasp.

It fell to the ground again, and Slog, unable to stop, ran three or four paces before he turned.

Then, with a snarl of rage, he came whirling back. With one hand he grasped the disputed coat, with the other he gave Lovell a crack on the side of the head that sent him rolling.

He had lost only a few moments. But those few moments were his undoing. For Jimmy Silver, putting on a desperate spurt, reached him as Lovell went rolling under the savage blow. The sight of that blow, landing on his

chum, spurred Jimmy on. He flung himself headlong at the footpad, hitting out with both fists, and both fists landed in Slog's ribs.

Mr. Poggers staggered, tangled his feet in the trailing overcoat, and stumbled over. In a twinkling Jimmy grabbed at the coat and tore it away from him.

Slog, with a howl of rage, scrambled up. Lovell had lifted himself on an elbow, too dazed to get on his feet. It would have gone hard with Jimmy Silver had not his comrades been at hand.

But Raby and Newcome came up with a rush. Mr. Manders, in sight now, was waving and shouting. He was too far off to lend aid—if he could have lent any. But Raby and Newcome charged at the ruffian headlong, and sent Mr. Poggers staggering again.

"Collar him!" panted Jimmy.

Lovell heaved himself to his feet. The grey overcoat lay on the ground in a sadly muddled state. The Fistical Four were between it and Mr. Poggers. And they advanced in a body on Mr. Poggers—and he backed away from the combined attack.

"Get hold of him!" gasped Lovell.

Slog Poggers backed towards the gap in the hedge. Even with four to one against him he hesitated to take to his heels and lose his prey. He backed away, with glinting eyes and snarling mouth. But the game was up, and he realised it. As Jimmy Silver & Co. made a determined rush, Slog turned, leaped through the gap in the hedge, and started to run across the field.

"After him!" panted Lovell.

"Hold on—we've got the coat!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Manders' coat—"

It would not have been much use to get after Mr. Poggers. He was crossing the field like a hare. He vanished beyond a belt of willows, still running.

"Ooogh!" said Lovell. He had his hand to his jaw where a bruise was forming, and which ached horribly.

"Ow! He gave me an awful punch—  
Ooogh!"

"Here comes Manders."

Mr. Manders, gasping, winded almost to the wide, came tottering up. Jimmy Silver picked up the grey overcoat.

"Here's your coat, sir," he said politely.

"Oh, goodness gracious!" gasped Mr. Manders. "Oh, dear! I—I'm quite bub-bub-breathless."

He took the coat. Three or four buttons were gone from it, and it was smothered with mud. But Manders had got his coat back.

"The—the rascal!" he gasped. "Stealing my coat—in broad daylight! The scoundrel!"

"I believe it's the same man who robbed the Head last week, sir," said Jimmy Silver.

"Goodness gracious! The police must be informed at once. Help me on with this coat, Silver; I will return to the school immediately and telephone—  
Goodness gracious!"

Jimmy helped Mr. Manders on with his coat. Lovell, rubbing his damaged chin, wondered whether the agitated Modern master had noticed him. For several minutes Mr. Manders did not appear to be aware of the presence of the junior who was gated.

But that was too good to last. Having encased himself in the overcoat again, Mr. Manders was about to whisk away towards the school when he stopped and fixed his eyes on Arthur Edward.

"Is that you, Lovell? You are gated. What are you doing here, out of gates?"

"Stopping the thief getting away with your overcoat, sir," answered Lovell.

"It was Lovell stopped him, sir," said Jimmy Silver hastily. "We should never have caught him if Lovell hadn't got in his way—"

"If that is the case, Lovell, I am obliged to you, but that does not in any way excuse your disobeying your headmaster!" snapped Mr. Manders. "I have no choice but to report you to Dr. Chisholm. Now go in at once!"

With that Mr. Manders whisked away towards the school.

Lovell gazed after him, and then gazed at his chums.

"Nice old bean, ain't he?" he remarked. "It was worth while getting this slog on the jaw to save his rotten old overcoat, wasn't it? Ow! I'll tell you what, you fellows—if Manders reports me, I'm going to tell Manders what I think of him, and chance it!"

"Let's get in," said Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four went in. At tea, in the end study, Lovell entertained his chums—and rather alarmed them—by a description of the things he was going to say to Manders for reporting him. Lovell was exactly the fellow to be as good as his word, and his comrades argued in vain as they waited for Arthur Edward to be summoned to the Head's study.

But that summons never came.

Even Manders, it seemed, was not without a spot of the milk of human kindness in his acid nature. Perhaps he forgot. At all events, Lovell was not reported—and so Mr. Manders never had the advantage of learning what Arthur Edward really thought of him!

## CHAPTER 14.

### Following Manders' Footsteps!

"O LD clo'!"

Mr. Manders spun round like a humming-top as he heard the sound of those disrespectful words.

The long, lean Modern master of Rookwood, with his quick, jerky strides, was going down to the gates. He passed Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Classical Fourth, who carefully refrained from smiling till he had passed.

It was a fact that Mr. Manders looked rather shabby that afternoon. He was wearing an old, grey overcoat. It was such a very old overcoat that it might almost have been an heirloom in the Manders' family. Not only had it seen its best days, but it had seen the last of them a long, long time ago.

Nevertheless, it was an exaggeration

to regard Roger Manders as looking like an old-clothes man, and Jimmy Silver & Co. certainly would never have dreamed of calling out "old clo!" as he passed.

But as Mr. Manders spun round in his tracks he saw no one at hand but the chums of the Classical Fourth. He did not see Leggett of the Modern Fourth, because Albert Leggett was carefully blotted from sight behind the massive trunk of one of the ancient Rookwood beeches. So Mr. Manders had no doubts!

"Silver!" he rapped.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy politely.

"Did you speak?"

"No, sir."

"Did you, Lovell?"

"No, sir," answered Arthur Edward Lovell cheerfully.

"One of you spoke, uttering a disrespectful expression!" said Mr. Manders, his voice trembling with anger "Was it you, Raby?"

"No, sir," said Raby.

"Then it was you, Newcome, who called out 'old clo!'"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Newcome. "I never spoke, sir."

Mr. Manders cast a sharp glance round. Someone had called—that was certain. Only the Fistical Four were to be seen. Jimmy Silver & Co. knew that Leggett was behind the beech-tree, because they had seen him dodge behind it. Mr. Manders did not suspect it, and they were not likely to tell him.

"If you four boys belonged to my House," said Mr. Manders bitterly, "I would cane you with the greatest severity."

"Glad we don't belong to your House, sir!" said Lovell.

"You had better not add impertinence to disrespect and untruthfulness, Lovell!" hooted Mr. Manders.

"Who's untruthful?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell belligerently.

"It was not one of us who called out, sir," said Jimmy Silver hastily.

"I cannot believe that statement.

Silver, as there is no one else in sight," snapped Mr. Manders.

"Then you may please yourself, of course, sir," said Jimmy.

"I shall take you to your Form-master," said Mr. Manders. "Follow me at once to your House!"

"Very well, sir," said Jimmy. "But we never——"

"Silence!"

Turning back from the gates, the long-legged Modern master strode away towards the Head's House, and the chums of the Fourth followed. It was a great relief to Leggett, and as soon as they were at a safe distance, he dodged away and vanished.

Across the quadrangle, at a rapid rate, went Mr. Manders. After him went Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome.

Lovell took the lead of the four, walking behind Mr. Manders, imitating his jerky stride. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome, catching on at once to the joke, strung out in single file behind Lovell, also imitating the Modern master's jerky method of progression.

Dozens of fellows in the quadrangle stared at the absurd sight, and grinned and chuckled. Mornington cut across and joined on at the tail of the procession, also putting on an exaggerated imitation of Mr. Manders' jerky stride.

Oswald and Rawson, Townsend and Topham, scudded up and joined on. Then Tubby Muffin, grinning all over his fat face, attached himself to the tail. There were now ten Classical juniors strung out in a long file behind Mr. Manders, all jerking along in imitation of the Modern master.

"You young sweeps, what are you up to?" asked Bulkeley of the Sixth, hurrying up.

"It's all right, Bulkeley; Manders told us to do this," said Lovell.

"He's taking us for a walk, Bulkeley."

"We're following in father's footsteps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "You jolly well stop it! You——"

Mr. Manders glanced round over a bony shoulder. Instantly the procession ceased to process, as it were. The Modern master gave Bulkeley a frown.

"Kindly do not interfere, Bulkeley," he rapped.

"But, sir——" began the Rookwood captain

"I am taking these boys to their Form-master, to report them for insolence. I will not allow you to intervene, Bulkeley."

"Oh, very well, sir!" said Bulkeley, and he backed off.

If Manders chose to be "guyed" like that in sight of everyone, Bulkeley had no objection.

Morny began to chant a parody of an old song:

"We're following in Manders' footsteps,

We're following the dear old lad.  
He's lost his clobber from Savile Row,  
And pinched a coat from an old scarecrow!

His clothes are simply horrid,  
His temper's very bad.  
We're following in Manders' footsteps, yes,  
We're following the dear old lad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a hilarious yell from a hundred fellows, at least.

Amid the howls of laughter, Mr. Manders caught a part of Morny's improvised parody. He glared round.

"Mornington!" he thundered. "I did not tell you to follow me. What are you doing?"

"I'm following in your footsteps. I'm following the dear old lad!" said Morny in reply.

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Morny, you ass, shut up!" exclaimed Erroll.

"Rats!" retorted Mornington. "Now then, you fellows, all together—chorus!"

Morny burst into song again, and a dozen fellows joined in. Mr. Manders

glared at Mornington as if he could have bitten him. Then he whisked on to the Head's House, with the procession at his heels again. Nearly all Rookwood was looking on by that time, with howls of merriment. From the doorway of the House, Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, looked on—without merriment. Richard Dalton stared blankly at first, and then frowned.

Up the steps came Mr. Manders. Mr. Dalton stepped out to meet him. The chorus stopped at once at the sight of the Fourth Form master. Some of the fellows who had been "guying" Manders rather wished they hadn't when they realised that their own "beak" was a witness of the proceedings.

Sudden silence fell upon the whole hilarious crowd as Richard Dalton emerged from the House.

#### CHAPTER 15.

##### Six For Morny!

"MR. MANDERS," said Richard Dalton, "what does this mean—this ridiculous scene?"

"I ordered four boys of your Form, sir, to follow me!" hooted Mr. Manders. "The rest, sir, followed from the irrepressible impudence that seems natural to boys of your Form and House, sir!"

"Really, Mr. Manders——"  
"I demand the immediate and severe punishment of these four, for treating me with disrespectful insolence!"

"But what have they done?" asked Mr. Dalton. "Silver, is it possible that you have ventured——"

"Certainly not, sir!" answered Jimmy.

"We've done nothing, sir, except to follow Mr. Manders across the quad, as he ordered us to do," said Arthur Edward Lovell meekly.

"What have they done, Mr. Manders?"

"I will tell you, sir!" thundered the Modern master. "You are probably

aware, sir, that when taking a walk in Coombe Lane a day or two ago, I was robbed of my overcoat by a lawless ruffian, a man called Poggers——"

"Yes, sir; and I am aware that these boys of my Form recovered the stolen article for you," said Mr. Dalton.

"That is neither here nor there, sir. The coat was damaged—several buttons pulled off—and while it is under repair, sir, I have had to wear this old coat!" snorted Mr. Manders. "These boys, sir, seeing me in this old overcoat, had the audacity—the insolence—to call out 'Old Clo!' as I passed them!"

"We never did, sir!" exclaimed Jimmy. "It was another fellow who called out from behind a tree. Mr. Manders never saw him."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Manders. "I saw no one else! Mr. Dalton, I demand——"

"You have heard what Silver says, sir," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "I see no reason for disbelieving his statement!"

"Who was the boy?" demanded Mr. Manders. "If Silver saw him, he knows who it was."

"It was a Modern fellow, sir," said Jimmy.

"Another false statement!" said Mr. Manders. "No boy of my House would be guilty of such bad manners, such disrespect! You need say no more, Silver! You are speaking untruthfully!"

"I'm doing nothing of the kind!" retorted Jimmy. "I'm not going to give the fellow's name; but I saw him, and it was a Modern chap——"

"Silence! Mr Dalton, I demand the punishment of these insolent boys!"

"I can administer no punishment, sir, when I fully believe every word that Silver has spoken," answered Richard Dalton quietly.

Mr. Manders breathed hard through his long, thin nose. He was too intensely angry and irritated to believe Jimmy Silver. He felt rather like a tiger that saw its victim escaping. His gleaming eye singled out Mornington.

If there was a doubt about what Jimmy Silver & Co. might or might not have said, there was no doubt about what the reckless dandy of the Fourth had sung.

"That boy, sir," said Mr. Manders, with a long, thin finger pointing at Valentine Mornington, "repeated the impudent gibe—I hardly think he will venture to deny it. That boy, sir, alluded to my coat as having been purloined from a scarecrow, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Silence! Mornington, do you admit——"

"Only my fun, sir!" said Mornington. "No offence to Mr. Manders. Just clean, wholesome fun, sir!"

"Mornington, follow me to my study. I shall cane you severely for such insolence to a member of Dr. Chisholm's staff!"

Mornington did not say another word; but he winked at the crowd of fellows as he went up the steps, and left them chuckling behind him. Mr. Manders followed him into the House, no doubt with the intention of seeing that Morny was not let off too lightly.

Arrived in Mr. Dalton's study, the Fourth Form-master picked up a cane, and pointed to a chair with it.

"Bend over that chair, Mornington!" he said.

"Oh, certainly, sir!" yawned Morny. He bent over the chair.

The cane came down with a swish that quite banished the grin from Morny's cheeky face. At the second swish he set his lips. At the third, he had to grit his teeth to keep back a yell. Richard Dalton did not often lay the cane on hard; but there were occasions when he considered it necessary to put some beef into it, and this was one of the occasions.

At the fourth stroke, he paused. He was laying the cane on the table, when Mr. Manders barked:

"Mr. Dalton, it is surely not your intention to allow this impudent boy to escape so lightly?"

"Really, Mr. Manders—"

"This boy, sir, has pointed the finger of mockery at a member of Dr. Chisholm's staff in the quadrangle, under the eyes of the whole school!" snorted Mr. Manders. "I demand, sir, that this boy be adequately punished."

"If you are not satisfied, sir—"

"I am far from satisfied, Mr. Dalton! Favouritism to a boy who has insulted a master, sir—"

"Please say no more, Mr. Manders. Mornington, I have no choice but to concede what Mr. Manders requests, and you have only your own reckless impertinence to thank!"

"Oh, don't mind me, sir!" said Mornington coolly. "I should hate to disappoint Mr. Manders now he's tasted blood."

"Silence!"

Swish, swish, swish! The last three swipes would probably have been mild, but for Morny's remark. Now Dicky Dalton put plenty of his abundant beef into them, and Valentine Mornington fairly wriggled.

Mr. Dalton laid down the cane.

"I do not regard that, sir, as sufficient!" barked Mr. Manders.

"Mornington, you may go!" said Mr. Dalton, interrupting the Modern master.

Morny's face was quite pale as he rose after the infliction. He did not look at his Form-master, but he gave Mr. Manders a bitter look as he left the study. There was no doubt that Morny had exceeded the limit in "guying" Manders, but in his opinion three hefty swipes sufficed to pay off the score. He owed the additional three to Mr. Manders' bitter temper, and Morny was not the fellow to forget it.

"Had it bad?" asked Jimmy Silver, as he came out of the House into the spring sunshine.

"Oh, just a flick or two!" said Morny airily. "Nothin' to speak of! Ow! Wow!" he added involuntarily.

"That sounds like nothing to speak of!" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell.

"It was something to squeak of, at any rate."

Mornington gave him a look. Arthur Edward Lovell's little jokes were neither grateful nor comforting at the moment.

"Manders may be doin' some squeakin' when my turn comes!" he said, between his teeth. "Dicky was goin' to give me three, and Manders insisted on six! I owe Manders three swipes."

"Better leave that debt unpaid, old bean," said Jimmy Silver dryly.

"I always pay my debts!" said Mornington, and he walked away, Jimmy glancing after him rather uneasily.

## CHAPTER 16.

### The Wrong Coat!

MR. MANDERS grunted angrily. He walked out of gates in a far from a good temper, and the sight of a barrel-organ by the roadside, with a swarthy foreigner leaning on it and smoking a cigarette, seemed to annoy him. The organ-grinder was a little, dark, fat Italian, with a red-spotted handkerchief wound round his dark, greasy head in place of a hat. He was not performing on his musical instrument, but seemed to be taking a rest. But as Mr. Manders came by, he stepped from the organ and held out a dusky hand that was very much in need of a wash.

"Please, one penny, sare!" he said.

"If you beg from me," said Mr. Manders, "I will give you into custody! Go away at once."

The Italian stepped back without speaking again. But as Mr. Manders walked on, the Italian picked up the handles of his machine and trundled after him. Keeping pace with Mr. Manders, he trundled the barrel-organ along Coombe Lane.

Mr. Manders remained unaware of it, as he did not glance round. But the Italian's dark eyes never left the master. Out of sight of Rookwood School, he pushed the barrel-organ into

a gap in the hawthorn hedge and left it there, cutting across the field himself at a rapid run.

In a few minutes he was across the field, and entering a cattle-shed on the other side

In that shed a burly man, blue-chinned and piggy-eyed, sat on an upturned bucket, leaning back against the wall, and smoking a short, black pipe.

Jimmy Silver & Co., had they been present, would have recognised Slog Poggers, the pickpocket who had robbed the headmaster of Rookwood of a wallet containing forty-five pounds ten shillings in notes—and lost it again!

Mr. Poggers jumped up from the bucket eagerly as the dark, grinning face of the Italian looked in.

"Spotted that old bony bloke, Beppo?" he asked.

"Si, si!" grinned the organ-merchant. "I wait and I watch, and he pass—he walk on to the village."

"What coat was he wearing?" asked Mr. Poggers eagerly.

"He wear a thick, grey overcoat——"

"That's it!" Mr. Poggers' eyes gleamed. "Look 'ere, Beppo, you come along and lend me a 'and with him. Last time there was a crew of school boys round, and they stopped me when I had the coat in my 'ands! You——"

Beppo shook his greasy, dark head decidedly. Mendicancy and petty pilfering were in the Italian gentleman's line, but not Slog's two-fisted sort of work.

"It's a good thing!" breathed Slog. "I tell you, if I get that coat off the old bloke, it's worth a lot to me. I'll stand you a fiver!"

"Ecco!" grinned Beppo. "That coat—it is worth nothing——"

"Tain't the coat, you fool!" growled Mr. Poggers. "It's what's in it. Listen here!" He sank his voice, though there was no one to overhear. "I tell you, I got a wallet packed with banknotes off a crusty old schoolmaster a couple of weeks ago. They got arter me, and I hid in a room in the school,

and afore they collared me, I hid the notecase in the lining of a grey overcoat 'anging up in a wardrobe—get me?"

"Ecco! What a trick!" exclaimed Beppo.

"They'd have had it off of me if I hadn't got shut of it," explained Mr. Poggers. "I thought I was booked for quod when they got me—but I struck lucky afterwards all right. I tell you, that bony old bloke is wearing a coat with a stack of banknotes hidden in the lining. You come and lend a bloke a 'and, in case them young rips are around——"

"You lose him if you do not run," said Beppo. Evidently the music-merchant did not intend to take a hand in the robbery

Slog gave a short of contempt. But he lost no more time. He cut out of the shed and streaked across the field to Coombe Lane, in the direction of the village. Beppo, at a more leisurely pace, walked back to his barrel-organ.

Mr. Manders was more than half-way to Coombe when Slog emerged from the field into the lane behind him.

Slog ran on, hard and fast, and in a few minutes sighted the tall, angular figure of the Modern master ahead.

There was no one else in sight. Mr. Manders walked onward, unsuspecting. Closer and closer came the running pickpocket.

Slog's eyes were glittering with triumph now. Once he had got away with Mr. Manders' overcoat, and the hidden treasure therein, but Jimmy Silver & Co. had got it back before he could search the lining for the loot. This time he was not going to fail.

Naturally it did not occur to Slog that Mr. Manders was wearing a different coat. It was the same size, cut, pattern, and colour, only older and shabbier. Except that one was older than the other, the two overcoats were identical. And Mr. Manders would, in fact, have been wearing the coat that Slog wanted, but for the fact that it



had been damaged in the last encounter with Mr. Poggers, and buttons needed replacing.

Slog, nothing doubting, rushed on.

Mr. Manders noticed the sound of running feet behind him, and turned his head. He gave a jump at the sight of the footpad who had attacked him in that very lane a few days since.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Manders.

For an instant he stared at Slog in alarm. Then he spun round and flew. It was rather undignified to flee from a character like Mr. Poggers, but Mr. Manders was no pugilist, and he was no match for the ruffian.

He was still a quarter of a mile from the village. But his long legs covered the ground fast.

But Slog was the better sprinter of the two. Mr. Manders had covered about a hundred yards when the pick-pocket's hand dropped on his shoulder and dragged at him.

"Ooooh!" gasped Mr. Manders.

He went over backwards, landing in the lane, his long legs flying in the air. His hat flew off, and he gasped for breath.

Slog pounced on him like a cat on a mouse. He grabbed at the thick grey overcoat.

"Urrgh! Villain! Help! Help!" spluttered Mr. Manders.

"'Old your row, you old blighter, you!" growled Slog ferociously. "I 'ain't going to 'urt you! I want that there coat!"

Buttons flew to right and left as Slog, with a hefty hand, peeled the overcoat off the Modern master of Rookwood.

"Help!" yelled Mr. Manders.

"Didn't I say 'old your row?" hooted Slog. And taking Mr. Manders by the back of the neck, he rolled him over, and splashed his face into a puddle. "Pr'aps that'll keep you quiet a bit, you old bag of bones!"

"Gurrghh!"

Leaving Mr. Manders lifting a muddy face from the puddle, Slog Poggers

plunged through the hedge, with the coat over his arm.

"Wurrgh!" said Mr. Manders. He sat up, dabbing at water and mud. "Gurrgh! Ooooooch!"

He staggered to his feet. Across the hedge he had a glimpse of Slog Poggers streaking away through fields, with the stolen overcoat.

"Grooogh!" said Mr. Manders, dabbing mud. "The man is mad. Unless he is a lunatic, why should he waylay me and steal my overcoat—this is the second time—ooogh! How very fortunate that I was wearing an old coat!"

Mr. Manders picked up his hat, and, still dabbing mud, tottered away coatless. He was feeling very dizzy and upset, but he was glad that he had escaped without more serious damage from the hands of a man who seemed to him an irresponsible lunatic.

Three fields away, Slog Poggers came to a halt in a hollow screened by willows, and proceeded to examine his prize. He fairly gloated over that shabby old overcoat. Not that Slog wanted the coat. It was the Head's wallet that Slog wanted—and that he now believed to be safe in his thievish hands.

He grabbed at the overcoat pocket, and turned out the lining. To his surprise it was intact. It was the right pocket, and he remembered that he had cut a slit in the lining to push the wallet in out of sight. But there was no slit in that lining.

"Strike me pink!" breathed Mr. Poggers.

If the torn lining had since been mended, he could see no trace of the mend. Puzzled, Mr. Poggers opened a knife, and gashed the lining, and thrust his hand into the aperture.

He groped and groped. But he groined in vain!

"Strike me pink and blue!" hissed Mr. Poggers.

He turned the coat inside out. He jabbed at it, gashing the lining with

his knife in a dozen places. The coat was thickly and warmly lined, from collar to tail, and very soon it was all in rags and tatters. But nothing came to light. Again Mr. Poggers appealed to space to strike him pink and blue! Never had a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles been so puzzled and perplexed and enraged.

But the truth dawned on him at last.

"The blighter!" hissed Mr. Poggers. "It ain't the same coat! What did the dotty old covey want to come out in the wrong coat for, taking a bloke in? Blow 'im!"

Mr. Manders, safe in the village, was thinking that it was fortunate that he had been wearing his old overcoat that afternoon. To Mr. Poggers, it seemed far from fortunate! Mr. Poggers very nearly turned the atmosphere blue with his remarks during the next few minutes. He regretted—too late—that he had not cracked the bony old gent's nut for him. He hurled the overcoat into the grass, and jumped on it.

#### CHAPTER 17.

##### Morny's Midnight Rag!

"MORNIE, you ass——"

"Oh, shut up!"

"But, look here——" urged

Erroll.

"Do you want to wake the dorm, you silly ass? Shut up!"

Jimmy Silver awoke, and peered round him in the gloom of the Classical Fourth dormitory in the Head's House. Dimly, in the starlight from the high windows, he made out Valentine Mornington standing by his bed, and finishing dressing. Kit Erroll was sitting up in the next bed. And Jimmy sat up, too.

"What's this game, Morny?" he asked.

"You've woke Silver up, Erroll, you ass!" grunted Mornington. "Better call Dicky Dalton while you're about it."

"For goodness' sake, Morny——"

"Oh, ring off!"

"You're not breaking bounds at this time of night, Morny!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Why, it must be midnight!"

"That's why!" answered Morny coolly. "Manders mightn't have turned in earlier."

"Manders!" gasped Jimmy.

"Didn't I tell you that I owed him three swipes?" said Mornington. "I'm paying that little debt before it slips my memory."

"You mad ass!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Go back to bed, and don't be a silly idiot."

"Thanks for your advice, but when I want any, I'll mention it!" answered Mornington.

Three or four other fellows had awakened by that time. They sat up, staring at the dim figure of the dandy of the Fourth.

"Anybody like to come?" asked Mornington. "I'm going over to Manders' House to call on Manders!"

"Got your burgling outfit?" asked Peele, and some of the juniors laughed.

"I've fixed it with a Modern chap to slip down and leave a back passage door unlocked for me."

"So that's what you were confabbing with Leggett about!" exclaimed Erroll. "He ought to be jolly well kicked."

"Leggett's a useful tick," said Mornington. "He will do anything for anybody if it's made worth his while. Are you comin' with me, Erroll?"

"No, you silly ass! Get back to bed."

"You coming, Silver?"

"I'll watch it!" answered Jimmy.

"It will be worth seein'!" urged Mornington. "I thought of pinchin' Dicky Dalton's cane, and giving Manders the three swipes I owe him with it—but I've thought of a better one than that I don't want Manders to recognise me—he might mention it to the Head, and make things uncomfortable all round——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So I've laid in a can of red paint! Think of Manders getting half a gallon of red paint on his chivvy, and waking up to find himself turned into a Red Indian——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You potty ass, Morny!" exclaimed Newcome.

"I say, though, it's some stunt!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell. "I had lines to-day from Dicky, all through that tick Manders—hasn't he jolly well asked for it? I'll jolly well come, Morny!"

"Good egg!" said Morny. "Get a move on, then!"

"You jolly well won't. Lovell, you ass!" hooted Jimmy Silver. "Morny can go and ask for the sack if he likes; you're not going to!"

"I jolly well am!" said Lovell. "It's safe as houses—who's going to recognise us in the dark? If Leggett's left a back door open for Morny, we get in easily enough, and we know our way to Manders' room——"

"You're not going!" said Jimmy, Raby and Newcome together.

Lovell snorted and rolled out of bed.

"I'd like to see anybody stop me!" he said.

"Well, if that's what you'd like, old bean, you're going to have just what you want!" said Jimmy Silver, also turning out of bed. "Turn in!"

"Rats!"

"You're in the Head's black books already, and you're not asking for more. Chuck those trousers down."

"I'm getting into them, fathead!"

"You're not! You're getting into bed! Lend a hand here, you men."

"What-ho!" said Raby and Newcome.

Lovell's three faithful chums jumped at him together. The trousers went to the floor, and Lovell spluttered in the grasp of his devoted friends. So far as Jimmy Silver & Co. were concerned, Morny could ask for all the trouble he wanted, but Lovell had landed enough

trouble lately, and his friends were not going to let him ask for more.

Arthur Edward did not get into the trousers. He got into bed—in a sprawling, spluttering heap.

"Ow! You cheeky asses!" spluttered Lovell. "I'll jolly well—wow! Will you leggo? Will you gerrup? I'll—whoop!"

"Will you stay in bed?" demanded Jimmy.

"No!" roared Lovell.

"Then we'll sit on you!"

Lovell struggled wildly. But he was spreadeagled on his bed, and Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome sat on him there. Pinned down by the three, Arthur Edward wriggled and struggled, and, in infuriated tones, told his chums what he thought of them. They did not mind. They sat on Lovell—and that was that!

Valentine Mornington did not wait for him. It was clear that Lovell was not coming. The dandy of the Fourth slipped out of the dormitory and closed the door softly behind him.

Lovell gave a frantic heave.

"Will you gerroff?" he gasped.

"Not till Morny comes back!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Keep still, you ass! You can't expect fellows to sit on you if you wriggle like that!"

"I'm going after Morny!" shrieked Lovell.

"You'll have to carry us with you, old bean! Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell wriggled and gurgled with wrath, sat upon by his friends, what time Mornington slipped quietly out of the House and cut across in the midnight shadows to Manders' House.

#### CHAPTER 18.

Done in the Dark!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON gave a sudden start, and his heart thumped.

There was a sound in the darkness of the landing.

Everything, so far, had gone accord-

ing to plan. He had found a back door unfastened, as arranged with Leggett of the Modern Fourth. He had slipped into Manders' House and crept up the dark staircases with all the stealthy caution of an enterprising burglar. At that hour every light was out; the latest master had long gone to bed; all was silent. With the can of red paint in his hand, Mornington reached the landing on which the masters' rooms in Manders' House opened, and tiptoed across towards the door of Roger Manders' room.

All was dark, but a glimmer of light suddenly came through the dark. With quite an unpleasant jump at his heart, Morny realised that Mr. Manders' bedroom door was partly open and that a light gleamed within.

But it was a mere gleam and in motion, appearing and disappearing. It came from a flash-lamp in somebody's hand.

Morny breathed hard.

Wild and reckless fellow as he was, he had laid his plans carefully. At half past twelve, everybody was, or should have been, fast asleep. It was utterly unexpected for Mr. Manders to be up, still more utterly unexpected for him to be moving about his room with a flash-lamp instead of turning on the electric light. Such a check was entirely unlooked-for.

Almost any fellow but Mornington would have thrown it up at that point. Such a reckless jape was risky enough, in any case, but with Mr. Manders awake and up it was doubly dangerous. Even the reckless Morny hesitated and paused.

But he set his lips obstinately. He was not going back to the Classical Fourth dormitory to confess that he had been scared off his enterprise. Morny liked to make fellows wonder at his recklessness, and he did not like the idea of appearing as a fellow who undertook a risky jape and backed out through funking it at the finish. He was going to carry on.

But he was doubly cautious now.

Noiselessly he crept to the doorway and stood beside it, in the darkness of the landing, listening. The open can of paint was in his hand, ready for use if his chance came.

The moving light inside the room shifted and flickered. But there was no sound from the room. Mr. Manders—if it were Mr. Manders—was moving about the room as noiselessly as Morny himself outside.

What it could mean was a mystery to Mornington. He even wondered whether it was not Manders at all, but a burglar—it looked much more like it. But a burglar would hardly have headed for Manders' room—the Head's safe in the other House would have been his objective. There was nothing to reward a burglar in Manders' room in Manders' House. Mornington dismissed that idea; but he was utterly puzzled and perplexed by the strange proceedings of the unseen man inside the room.

Certainly he was not likely to guess that the man with the flash-lamp was looking for an overcoat! Slog Poggers could no more have opened the Head's safe than he could have opened a bank account. Slog was not thinking of safes.

He was thinking of an overcoat, in the lining of which he had parked a stolen wallet.

Having captured the wrong overcoat that afternoon, Mr. Poggers was now in search of the right one!

He had been lucky, for, prowling round the House at midnight, hunting for a way in, he had found a back door unlocked. For a quarter of an hour or more before Morny's arrival Slog had been rooting about Mr. Manders' room with a flash-lamp—hunting for that overcoat.

Mr. Manders, sleeping the sleep of the just, did not awaken. Perhaps it was fortunate that he did not, for Slog had a hefty punch, which he would have bestowed on Roger Manders with-

out scruple had the Modern master awakened and intervened.

Slog was not interrupted. But he did not find the garment he wanted. He found no overcoat at all. Mr. Manders' old coat still lay tattered and torn in the field where Slog had danced on it. His other coat was still in the House-dame's room, for the replacement of buttons. Mr. Poggers rooted and rooted, but he had no luck.

He could only conclude that the grey overcoat which had been hanging in Mr. Manders' wardrobe on the night he concealed the stolen wallet in the lining was now hanging somewhere else—as indeed it was! And he made up his mind at last to extend his search farther. Most of the night was still before him, and it was certain that that elusive overcoat was in the House somewhere. So Slog moved to the door, shutting off his flash-lamp.

Mornington, outside, suppressed his breathing.

He heard no sound from within. Slog moved very softly. But the faintest of sounds told him that the door was being opened wider—and he saw that the light was shut off.

Morny's eyes glittered.

Really, he could not have asked for anything better than this. He had been waiting for a chance, and now his chance had come! Mr. Manders—he still supposed that it was Mr. Manders—was walking fairly into his hands!

Standing back beside the doorway, he lifted the open can of paint, and waited!

A dark figure, a mere shadow in the dimness, came through the doorway. The door was softly closed behind it.

Then the dark figure trod away towards the stairs, passing within a few feet of the junior crouching back, silent, against the wall. Morny, on tip-toe, stepped after it!

Silent as he was, Mr. Poggers must have caught some faint sound, for he turned suddenly in the darkness, facing Mornington, peering.

At the same moment Morny's uplifted arm swept forward, and the contents of the can of red paint flew!

Swoooooosh! Swish!

Morny had a pint of red paint in that can, mixed very thin with oil to make it up to about two quarts. It came over Mr. Poggers' face in a drenching shower of fluid!

"Gurrgh!" he gurgled, and he staggered back, stumbled over, and fell on the landing with a resounding bump.

Morny jumped back.

From Mr. Manders' room came a sudden squeaky ejaculation of a man suddenly awakened and startled.

"Goodness gracious! What—what is that? Who—what—"

It was the voice of Mr. Manders! Morny, already running, stopped in a state of paralysed surprise and dismay.

It was not Manders he had swamped with paint! Who was it?

Then, amid the gasps and gurgles, came a suffocated, infuriated howl:

"Strike me pink! Urrgh! Strike me pink and blue!"

"Oh, gad!" gasped Morny.

Evidently it was not Mr. Manders! In his angriest moments Mr. Manders would never have used such expressions as that.

A door opened. A light flashed on. Puzzled, mystified, and exasperated, Morny did not linger. He flew down the staircase three steps at a time and vanished.

Mr. Manders flashed the light on and stared out of his room—at a figure that sprawled and spluttered and almost swam in red paint!

But that figure swiftly scrambled up and darted down the staircase—dropping paint at every step, spluttering and gurgling horribly as it fled.

Mr. Manders was left, shouting the alarm, what time a door below opened and shut, and then opened again, and was left open—Mornington vanishing first, and Mr. Poggers a few moments after him. Morny heading for home

and Mr. Poggers for the school wall, leaving behind him a trail of red paint.

Arthur Edward Lovell was still wriggling and protesting fiercely, and his three faithful friends were still sitting on him, when Morny slipped into the Classical Fourth dormitory. Then Jimmy, Raby and Newcome got off their human sofa.

"You've done it, you ass?" asked Erroll.

"Blessed if I know what I've done!" said Mornington. "Somebody's got the paint—but it wasn't Manders! Goodness knows who it was!"

"You silly ass!"

"Well, somebody will be sacked for it!" said Jimmy. "There'll be a fearful row in the morning! Glad we kept you out of it, Lovell?"

Lovell's reply did not indicate that he was glad. It lasted long and was packed with uncomplimentary expressions. Jimmy, Raby and Newcome were falling asleep by the time Lovell had exhausted his eloquence.

Meanwhile, an infuriated Mr. Poggers was shaking the dust of Rookwood from his feet as fast as he could go, still exuding red paint. In husky tones of rage Mr. Poggers invoked unknown powers to strike him pink. Really, it was unnecessary, for he had already been struck red—very red. And it was only after a long, long time, and after a most unusual amount of washing, that Mr. Poggers got rid of his rich and ruddy complexion.

#### CHAPTER 19.

##### A Modern Jape!

"WHAT'S the joke?"

Tommy Dodd, standing at the window of his study in Manders' House at Rookwood, chuckled.

His chums, Cook and Doyle, were sitting at the study table, writing lines. Mr. Manders, their Housemaster, had handed out impots that day—as he too frequently did.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, therefore, were in no chuckling mood. They were looking grim and glum. They glanced up as Tommy Dodd exploded into merriment. Something he could see in the quadrangle, apparently, amused Tommy Dodd. So they asked him what was the joke.

"Lovell," answered Tommy Dodd. "Come and look!"

"Blow Lovell!" grunted Cook. "We've got to get these rotten lines done for Manders—blow him, too!"

"I'm getting fed-up with Manders," growled Doyle. "His temper's getting worse and worse. Ever since that tramp pitched into him—"

"Never mind Manders!" interrupted Tommy Dodd. "Come and look at that Classical ass. He's at it again."

Leaving their lines, Cook and Doyle joined the captain of the Modern Fourth at the window.

It was a bright spring afternoon, and plenty of fellows were to be seen in the quad. Among them, Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth, was quite near Manders' House.

With a set and serious expression on his face, Arthur Edward was rooting through a shrubbery beside the House, evidently in search of something.

Cook and Doyle, much as they were worried by lines and Manders, grinned. It was the umpteenth time they had seen Arthur Edward Lovell rooting in the vicinity of Manders' House.

"He's a sticker, isn't he?" said Tommy Dodd. "It's weeks since Dr. Chisholm's wallet was lost, but Lovell is still after it. I've seen him at it twenty times at least."

"Silly ass!" said Cook. "It will never be found now."

"That," said Tommy Dodd, "is where you are mistaken. Lovell's going to find a wallet this afternoon."

"Eh! How?"

"I'm going to help him," explained Tommy Dodd.

Cook and Doyle stared at their leader.

"You?" said Tommy Cook. "What good will that do him? The wallet can't be found. That pickpocket, Poggers, who pinched it from the Head, chucked it away somewhere before he was nabbed. Goodness knows where it went. I believe every inch of Rookwood has been searched for it. Might have chucked it over the wall into the road. It can't be found."

"Look here."

Tommy Dodd slipped his hand into his pocket. He drew it forth with an article in it that made his chums jump as they saw it.

That article was a small wallet, which looked—at the first glance—as if it were made of Russia leather. At the second glance, it could be seen to be made of imitation leather.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Cook. "You've found it?"

"The Head's notecase!" exclaimed Doyle.

"Not exactly," said Tommy Dodd, grinning. "I found it—in a shop at Latcham. I gave two bob for it. I thought a jape on that Classical ass was worth two bob." He chuckled. "You see, we've all had a description of that jolly old wallet, so I was able to pick out one exactly like it to look at. The Head's notecase was full of banknotes—and this is going to be full of impot paper—can't afford banknotes."

"Oh!" ejaculated Cook and Doyle together.

"Any fellow seeing this wallet lying around would jump to it that it was the Head's," explained Tommy Dodd. "Even a bright fellow would—and is Lovell bright?"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" grinned Cook.

"That's how I'm going to help him. If I drop this wallet fairly under his nose, even Lovell will spot it. Fancy his joy when he picks it up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Tommies of Manders' House chuckled in chorus.

Nobody at Rookwood expected the

headmaster's lost wallet ever to turn up again, excepting, perhaps, Lovell of the Fourth. Dr. Chisholm had given up hope of ever seeing that wallet and the forty-five pounds ten shillings it contained. If it was still within the walls of Rookwood School, it was hidden so deep that no eye was likely to fall on it.

But Lovell frequently put in an hour or so of his leisure time in rooting after it. He had a special reason. Being "gated" for all half-holidays that term, Arthur Edward hoped to placate his headmaster by performing such a signal service as finding the lost wallet.

Turning from the window, Tommy Dodd picked up sheets of impot paper from the table, and a pair of scissors, and cut slips to the size of currency notes. These he packed carefully inside the two-shilling wallet. When it was shut and fastened, it had all the appearance of being stuffed with notes, as the Head's wallet was well known to have been.

"Natural as life, what?" grinned Tommy. "Lovell will jump for joy. And his face will be worth watching when he looks inside. By gum, I'll put a message for him inside."

Opening the notecase again, Tommy Dodd spread out the wad of "notes," and on the top of one wrote, in large capital letters:

"FATHEAD!"

Cook and Doyle yelled. Obviously such a jape on a Classical man was well worth two shillings of anybody's money.

They looked out at Lovell again. He was stirring among the shrubbery, in earnest search for what it was pretty certain was not there.

Suddenly he gave a bound. His voice, raised in surprise and anguish, floated to the ears of the three Tommies.

"Yaroooooh!"

"What the dickens——" ejaculated Tommy Dodd.

Lovell straightened up, and pressed

his hand to his neck, as if he had felt a sting there. He stared up at the windows of Manders' House, and seemed puzzled.

The three Tommies watched him in surprise. What was the matter with Lovell, they could not guess. He acted like a fellow who had been stung by a wasp. But there was certainly no wasps about so early in the year.

However, he stooped again, and resumed rooting.

A few moments later there was another wild yell, and Lovell fairly bounded.

"Whoop!" came his wild howl. He pressed a hand to his leg, and glared round him in amazement and rage.

Then the three Tommies spotted the face of Leggett, of the Modern Fourth, at another study window. There was a catapult in Leggett's hand. Evidently Albert Leggett was giving himself a little entertainment by catapulting Lovell, who was within easy range.

As Lovell glared, another pellet landed on his chin, and he roared. Then, shaking his fist at Manders' House, the Classical junior stalked away towards his own side of the quadrangle.

"That tick Leggett!" grunted Tommy Cook. "He ought to be scragged for catapulting a fellow!"

"He's going to be!" said Tommy Dodd.

Leaving his chums at work on their lines for Manders, Tommy Dodd left the study and went along to Leggett's.

He kicked the door open, and Leggett spun round from the window.

Tommy held out his hand.

"Catapult, please," he said tersely.

"I've got no catapult!" growled Leggett. Albert was not a truthful youth. It was strictly against the rules of Rookwood for any fellow to possess such a dangerous implement.

"Isn't there one in this study?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"No."

"I wonder if you could find one if I banged your head till you did?"

"Look here——" began Leggett.

He backed round the study table as Tommy Dodd came at him, then he made a rush for the door, but Tommy's grasp was on him before he could reach it.

"Leggo!" roared Leggett. "I've not got a—— Whoooooop!"

Bang!

Leggett's head smote the wall; he wriggled and roared.

"Have another?" asked Tommy Dodd affably.

"I tell you I've not—— Yooooop!"

"Oh, you rotter, here it is!" gasped Leggett, and he jerked the catapult from under his jacket and handed it over.

"I thought you'd be able to find one if you tried," grinned Tommy Dodd. He put his foot on the implement and broke it into pieces. "Now I'm going to shove those bits down your back."

Leggett wriggled and howled as the fragments of the catapult were stuffed down inside his collar. Leaving him wriggling and howling, Tommy Dodd walked out—and, with the imitation leather wallet in his pocket, went to look for Arthur Edward Lovell.

## CHAPTER 20.

### Found!

"HE, he, he!"

Tubby Muffin chuckled.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome grinned; so did other fellows.

Arthur Edward Lovell at the moment was rather calculated to provoke hilarity in the observer.

Coming away from the Modern side, Arthur Edward approached the Head's House with one hand pressed to his neck, and the other to his leg.

He seemed to have a pain in either spot, and those two pains seemed to fill his thoughts, and it did not seem to occur to him that a fellow looked a little unusual walking along with one hand to his neck and the other to his leg.



"What's that game, Lovell?" called out Mornington. "New sort of physical jerks?"

"Think it's funny?" grunted Lovell, glaring at the smiling juniors.

"Well, a little," admitted Jimmy Silver. "What are you doing it for?"

"I've been catapulted!" hooted Lovell. "A tick in Manders' House got me with a catapult from the window! And if a fellow had friends who could do anything but grin like a lot of potty hyenas they'd back him up in getting hold of that Modern cad and giving him jip!"

"Who was it?" asked Raby, as Lovell stood rubbing the injured places.

"I don't know; but I saw Dodd, Cook, and Doyle at their study window grinning like monkeys."

"It wouldn't be them," said Newcome. "Catapulting's a rather dirty trick; they wouldn't do it."

"Perhaps you think I fancied it!" hooted Lovell. "I'm jolly well going to bash Tommy Dodd, and chance it!"

"What's the good of bashing him if he didn't do it?" asked Jimmy Silver mildly.

"Well, he's a Modern tick, anyhow!"

"What about tea, old chap?" asked Jimmy Silver soothingly. "We've been waiting for you—"

"Blow tea!" growled Lovell. "I'm going to bash Tommy Dodd before tea. You fellows can come with me if you like."

"I think I'd rather have tea," grinned Raby.

"Have tea, then—and be blowed to you!" snapped Lovell. Evidently those stings from the catapult had ruffled Arthur Edward's temper considerably.

He rubbed his neck and he rubbed his leg, and his eyes gleamed in the direction of Manders' House. He wanted to punch a catapulter's head, but any Modern head would have served his turn in his present irate mood.

So it was with considerable satisfaction that he spotted Tommy Dodd

strolling along from Manders' House, with his hands in his pockets, and a cheery smile on his face.

Lovell cut across to intercept the Modern junior. He was not in the least aware that that was exactly what Tommy Dodd would have asked him to do. Arthur Edward, quite unconsciously, was playing into the hands of the japer.

Tommy, to his surprise, showed signs of alarm at his advance. Nobody had ever suspected Tommy of funk before. He stared at Lovell, stopped, turned, and ran.

"Here, hold on!" roared Lovell, charging after him.

Tommy scudded on. He did not head for Manders' House, which would have been a safe refuge; he cut away by a path under the beeches.

"Funk!" roared Lovell.

He raced in pursuit. Evidently to Lovell's mind—Tommy had been the catapulter.

But, as a matter of fact, Tommy was looking for a likely spot to drop the spool notecase. Dropping it in the middle of the quad would not have served his turn; it would have been rather too palpable. It had to be somewhere more or less out of sight if Lovell's leg was to be pulled according to plan. Under one of the old benches by the beech-trees seemed to Tommy a good spot.

On one of those benches sat Tubby Muffin. Tubby had sat down there to dispose of the contents of a packet of toffee.

Busy with the toffee, Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin did not heed the Modern junior as he came scudding by, with Lovell racing behind.

But he had to heed them when Tommy Dodd came to a breathless halt, dodged round the long bench and playfully tipped off Muffin's cap.

"Oh!" ejaculated Tubby.

Lovell came panting up.

"Now, you Modern rotter!" he gasped.

Tommy Dodd, behind the bench, grinned at him breathlessly. Lovell charged round the bench. Tommy Dodd retreated round it, and they changed places.

"You rotten Modern funk, I'm going to lick you!" hooted Lovell.

"You couldn't lick a postage stamp!" answered Tommy.

That was enough for Lovell. He charged round the bench again.

This time Tommy did not dodge.

Suddenly catching Tubby Muffin by the collar, he jerked him off his seat, and with a swing of his arm sat him down just in front of the charging Lovell.

"Whoop!" roared Muffin.

He had reason to roar. Lovell, unable to stop in time, stumbled over him and sprawled. Muffin, flattened out, roared and howled and squealed; Lovell, breathless from the shock, sprawled on him and gasped, while Tommy Dodd, grinning, cut off at top speed and vanished. Unseen by either Muffin or Lovell, he had now parted with the two-shilling notecase stuffed with slips of impot paper; it was left for Lovell to find on the gravel path under the beeches.

"Ow! Gerroff!" squealed Muffin. "Ow! You're squish-squish-squashing me! Will you— Ooogh! Gerroff!"

"You fat ass!" panted Lovell.

He wriggled off Muffin and staggered to his feet; he stood gasping for breath as Tubby scrambled up, also gasping.

"You silly fathead!" gasped Tubby.

"You fat blitherer!" panted Lovell.

Both of them broke off suddenly.

In the gravel of the path, considerably kicked up at that spot, lay a small object on which their eyes fell at the same moment.

It was a notecase.

It was—or looked—an expensive notecase of russia leather, exactly like the Head's lost wallet.

It looked as if it might have been buried in the gravel and kicked up by the scramble that had taken place.

They gazed at it—for an instant. Then both of them dived at it and clutched.

Thud!

Two heads came together with a terrific concussion.

#### CHAPTER 21.

##### Rival Claimants:

"O H!" roared Lovell.  
"Ow!" squealed Tubby Muffin.

Lovell staggered, nearly falling. Tubby Muffin staggered, and sat down on the notecase.

"You clumsy ass!" gasped Lovell, rubbing his head. "You silly chump! You—you— Get up! Get out of the way! Do you hear?"

Tubby Muffin, also rubbing his head, sat tight. He was sitting on the lost wallet—now found—and he continued to sit on it. Lovell might fancy that he had found that wallet, if he liked. Tubby's idea was that he had found it.

Lovell glared down at him.

"Will you shift, you fat idiot?" he roared.

"Ow! No, I won't!" gasped Muffin.

"That's the Head's notecase, you fat chump! You're sitting on it!" howled Lovell.

"I know that. I've found it!"

"I've found it!" roared Lovell.

"You haven't—I have!"

"Why, you silly, cheeky, blithering podgy, piffing fat rabbit—"

"You can call a fellow names," gasped Muffin, "but you jolly well ain't bagging that notecase! I've found it! I'm going to take it to the Head."

"You're not!" shrieked Lovell. "Get up, or I'll kick you!"

"Hold on, Lovell!" Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome came running up and grasped Lovell. Instead of going in to tea, they had watched Arthur Edward's wild and whirling proceedings, and now it seemed to them time to weigh in.

"Keep him off!" yelled Muffin. "I say, Jimmy, I found it!"

"I found the Head's wallet!" bawled Lovell.

"Wha-at?"

"It was stuck in this gravel, and got turned up here—that fat idiot's sitting on it."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I found it!" yelled Tubby indignantly. "I say, Jimmy, that man Poggers must have shoved it out of sight under the gravel—it turned up when that fathead Lovell sprawled over. I saw it, and I've got it."

With the three juniors holding Lovell back, Tubby shifted his position, grabbed hold of the notecase, and rose to his feet.

The chums of the Fourth stared at it.

"My hat! It's found, then!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, and I jolly well found it!"

Lovell wrenched himself loose, and made a jump at the fat Classical. Tubby Muffin promptly shoved the notecase into his pocket.

"Hand it over, you fat snail!" roared Lovell.

"Shan't!" retorted Muffin.

"I tell you I found it——"

"And I tell you I jolly well did!"

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed wrath. How many hours of his leisure he had spent hunting for that lost wallet he could hardly have counted. Now it was found—and there was a rival claimant.

A crowd of fellows began to collect on the spot, to see what was up. There was a buzz of excitement at the news that the Head's notecase was found.

"Look here, Muffin," said Jimmy Silver. "You seem both to have spotted it—but it's no use to you. Lovell may get off his gating if he hands it over to Dr. Chisholm. So hand it out."

"Blow Lovell!" retorted Tubby Muffin. "There's over forty pounds in this notecase, and——"

"There'll be less by the time the

Head gets it if it stays in your hands!" chuckled Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Muffin indignantly. "Think I'm going to pinch the Head's currency notes? He's bound to hand out a reward to the finder."

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"He can't do less," argued Muffin. "According to the description, there's forty-five pounds ten shillings in this wallet. Well, if the head gets that back, a fiver wouldn't hurt him."

"You fat boulder!"

"Look here, Muffin, you slug——"

"You can jaw!" said Muffin disdainfully. "I fancy you'd be after a reward fast enough if you'd found it. You jolly well keep off, Lovell. I found this wallet, and I'm keeping it till the Head goes to his study after tea, and then I'm going to take it to him."

Arthur Edward Lovell clenched his hands. He was strongly tempted to grasp Cecil Reginald Muffin and take the wallet away by main force.

But, angry and disappointed as he was, Arthur Edward had a sense of justice. Muffin's claim was at least as good as his.

Both of them had seen the wallet at the same moment, and it was Muffin who had got hold of it. Muffin's claim was, if anything, a little better than Lovell's.

Lovell stood uncertain, and Tubby Muffin, with a wary eye on him, backed away, the wallet safe in his pocket.

"Look here——" began Lovell.

"Nothing doing," grinned Leggett. "You're done, Lovell. You won't be able to stick the beak for a reward."

Lovell gave the cad of Manders' House a glare.

"Do you think I'd do it?" he roared. "Do you think I'd take anything for finding it — except getting off a gating?"

"Well, that's a reward, isn't it?" grinned Leggett.

Lovell did not answer that question

in words. He grabbed Albert Leggett by the collar and banged his head on a beech.

The malicious grin departed from Leggett's face at once. He wriggled and roared. Lovell was about to deliver another bang, apparently finding solace in the process, when Jimmy Silver dragged him away from the Modern junior.

"Chuck it, Lovell——"

Lovell snorted.

"I'm jolly well going to have that wallet!" he snapped, and he started at a run for the House in the direction in which Tubby Muffin had retreated with his prize.

Muffin looked back over a fat shoulder. One glimpse of Lovell was enough. He dashed into the House and scudded up the stairs. Lovell in hot pursuit, had a glimpse of a fat figure vanishing into Study No. 2 in the Classical Fourth passage. The key turned in the lock as Lovell reached the door.

He banged on the door.

"Muffin, you fat scoundrel!" he roared.

"Yah!"

"I'll spiflicate you——"

"Yah!"

"I'll kick you all over Rookwood——"

"Yah!"

Arthur Edward Lovell gave it up.

## CHAPTER 22.

### Muffin the Magnanimous!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. sat down to tea in the end study in a rather less cheery atmosphere than was customary in that celebrated apartment.

Lovell's face was gloomy and glum.

It was all through Lovell's fatheaded intervention that the pickpocket, Poggers, had escaped after being caught; hence the "gating" that had been awarded Lovell by his incensed headmaster. Matters would, no doubt, have been set right had Lovell found

the wallet and restored it to its owner. And, against all probability, he had found it at last—only to see it found and snaffled by another fellow at the same moment!

It was enough to make a fellow glum.

"I'll smash him!" said Lovell, for the tenth or eleventh time.

"Well, after all, he found it, as much as you did," remarked Raby. "You really can't bag it off him, old chap."

"I know that. But I'm going to smash him!"

The door of the end study opened.

A fat face looked in.

The Fistical Four stared at Cecil Reginald Muffin in surprise. Arthur Edward Lovell rose to his feet with quite a deadly look on his face.

"I—I say, I—I've come to tell you you can have it, Lovell," said Tubby Muffin just in time.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"You—you see," gabbled Tubby, "I—I've been thinking it over. I—I don't want a reward from the Head. On the whole, don't you fellows think it would be rather mean to stick the Head for a reward?"

"Rotten!" said Jimmy.

"Well, there's nothing mean about me, I hope," said Tubby.

"What a hopeful chap," remarked Newcome.

"Well, I mean it. I'm not going to take it to the Head. Why shouldn't Lovell, if he wants to?" said Tubby.

They gazed at him.

Had they been aware of the true contents of that wallet, they might have guessed that Tubby Muffin had looked into it while he had it safe in his study, and discovered that a reward was the least probable thing a fellow was likely to receive for taking it to the Head.

"If Lovell can get off his gating, let him," said Tubby. "But, look here! One good turn deserves another. I haven't had my tea."

"Oh!"

Tubby blinked at the table in the end

study. The Fistical Four had nearly finished tea, and there was little remaining in the way of provender.

"I found that wallet," said Muffin. "I'm going to let Lovell have it if he likes. I say, Mrs. Kettle has got some new cakes in. I think a fellow might stand a fellow a tea, if a fellow lets a fellow—"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Right as rain!" he said. "Let's go and see Mrs. Kettle's new cakes."

"Where's the wallet?" asked Lovell.

"In my pocket," answered Tubby.

"I—I'll let you have it after—after tea."

"Oh, all right."

Tubby Muffin's fat face, which had been rather overcast, brightened as he rolled away with Jimmy Silver & Co. He, like Lovell, had been disappointed, though in a different way. There was not going to be any reward from the Head. But a spread in the tuckshop was grateful and comforting.

Lovell's face was brighter, too, as he walked into the school shop with his friends. All was serene now. He had found that wallet, just as much as Muffin had—and he could truly state to the Head that he had found it. Dr. Chisholm could not do less than let him off the gating in consequence.

Tubby Muffin beamed as he sat down to cake in the tuckshop.

He liked cake, and even Tubby Muffin was satisfied, or almost satisfied with a five-shilling plum cake all to himself!

He gloated over it, and he gobbled!

Jimmy Silver & Co. had a doughnut each to wind up their tea. The cake was wholly left to Tubby.

Having finished their doughnuts, and settled Mrs. Kettle's bill, Jimmy Silver & Co. saw no reason for delaying till Tubby had finished.

"Trot it out, Muffin," said Uncle James.

"I said after tea," objected Muffin. "I haven't finished yet." Possibly Tubby dreaded that, when the wallet was handed over, a discovery would

follow that might interrupt the cake on its downward path. Obviously, in the peculiar circumstances, it was prudent to finish the cake before handing over the wallet.

But Lovell was impatient.

"Look here! The Head's in his study by this time!" he exclaimed. "Chuck that wallet over, fathead, and let a fellow eat."

Tubby gobbled.

"Look here, you fat ass!" exclaimed Lovell warmly.

Gobble, gobble!

"Do you want us to stand here watching you parking cake?" demanded Lovell exasperated. "Why can't you hand it over now, you silly ass?"

Gobble, gobble!

"Well, Muffin said after tea," said Jimmy Silver. "Hang on, old chap—it won't take him long at the rate he's going. Muffin can't be expected to leave off eating, even for a second, so long as there's anything left."

It was quite a large cake. Muffin finished it to the last crumb and the last plum. But he was finished at last. He sat looking very shiny and breathing rather hard.

"Now!" snorted Lovell.

Tubby Muffin slipped a fat paw into his pocket. He was not feeling wholly easy in his mind as he drew out the notecase. He wondered how Lovell was going to take it when he found what was in it. Anyhow, he had had the cake.

"I—I say, I—I haven't opened it, you know," murmured Tubby, as he produced the wallet. "I—I don't know what's inside."

"We all know what's inside—we've had it from the Head," answered Lovell. "I never supposed you'd opened it, you young ass!"

Tubby stared at him.

"Aren't—aren't you going to open it?" he asked.

"Of course not!" snapped Lovell. "Think I'm going to pry into the Head's notecase? What do you mean?"

"Oh!" gasped Tubby. "You're—you're going to—to take that notecase to the Head without opening it?"

"Of course I am, fathead!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Tubby. "I—I'd have let you have it sooner if you'd told me that. I—I mean——"

"What the dickens do you mean?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, nothing!" said Tubby.

Lovell walked across to the door. He was anxious to get it safely handed over to the Head. Tubby blinked after him, with an expression on his fat face that caused Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome to stare at him dubiously and suspiciously. It was clear to them that something was amiss, though they could not guess what.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Tubby. "I—I say, is—is—is Lovell really going to take that to the Head—without locking into it?"

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh, scissors!" mumbled Tubby.

It had never occurred to Tubby's fat mind that Lovell would hand over the wallet to the Head without looking inside—any more than it had occurred to Tommy Dodd when he planned that remarkable jape.

Remembering what the wallet contained, and what was written on the top slip of paper, Tubby fairly gasped at the idea of its being handed to the stern and severe headmaster of Rookwood.

"I—I say! Call him back!" he stammered.

"He's gone now," said Newcome. "But why——"

"Oh crikey!"

"Look here, Muffin——"

"Oh crumbs! He'll get into a row!" gasped Muffin. "I—I don't know who fixed it up, unless it was that Modern fathead, Tommy Dodd. I can't make it out. But—but—but—I mean, I don't know what's in that notecase. I don't know anything about it. But—but, I say, Lovell will get into a fearful row if he lands it on the Head. The

Beak will think he did it on purpose."

"That he did what?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Tubby. "I—I never knew it was spoof, of course, when I offered to let Lovell have it. Nothing of the kind, you know. I—I really thought it was the Head's notecase all the time."

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"Isn't it?" he gasped.

"Oh, yes—no! I—I mean—— I—I—I think, if I were you, I—I'd call Lovell back," stammered Tubby. "I—I—I— Oh ick!"

Jimmy Silver ran to the door of the tuckshop to call Lovell back. It was very right and proper, of course, on Arthur Edward's part to hand over the wallet without having opened it. But after Tubby's extraordinary gabblings and stammerings, Jimmy considered it only judicious to make sure what that wallet really contained before passing it on the Head.

But he was too late. That wallet was no longer in Lovell's hands.

#### CHAPTER 23.

Mr. Manders Asks For It!

**M**R. MANDERS barked:  
"Lovell! Stop!"

Lovell stopped unwillingly.

He was half-way to the House when the Modern master barked at him. Mr. Manders was coming away from the Head's House, and he met Arthur Edward face to face, and his sharp, glinting eyes fastened at once on the notecase in Arthur Edward's hand.

"Yes, sir?" grunted Lovell. "I'm in rather a hurry, sir."

"I have told you to stop!" snapped Mr. Manders acridly. "Answer me, Lovell! I have heard talk among the juniors that the headmaster's wallet, lost several weeks ago has been found. Is that the case?"

"Yes," grunted Lovell.

"When was it found?" snapped Mr. Manders.

"About an hour ago."

"Then it should have been handed over at once," said the Modern master. "I have just inquired of Mr. Dalton, and he has told me that he has heard nothing of it. Is that it in your hand?"

"Yes," muttered Lovell.

"Give it to me," said Mr. Manders.

Lovell's fingers closed more tightly on the well-stuffed wallet. It had to go to the Head, but Lovell was the man to take it to him. Lovell had good reasons for wishing to be the man to deliver the goods.

"Do you hear me?" rapped Mr. Manders. "The wallet should have been given up at once. I will take it to Dr. Chisholm."

Mr. Manders' narrow eyes gleamed. He was never patient of contradiction, and he was an interfering gentleman. Moreover, a wallet containing money certainly should have been handed over to the owner immediately.

"Why did you not take it at once, Lovell?" he rapped.

"Another fellow found it at the same time, and we had rather an argument about it," explained Lovell. "But I'm going now."

Mr. Manders held out a thin, claw-like hand.

"Nonsense!" he snapped. "I shall certainly not allow an article of such value to remain in the hands of a careless, thoughtless boy for one moment longer. I command you to hand it to me!"

Lovell looked at him. Manders, as a Modern master, had no right to give orders to Classical fellows. Still, he was a Housemaster, and it was difficult to refuse obedience.

Arthur Edward hesitated a moment or two, and then, with feelings that could not have been expressed in words, handed the notecase to Mr. Manders.

Mr. Manders whisked back into the House with it.

He hurried to Dr. Chisholm's study.

Mr. Manders was very pleased to be the man to restore the long-lost wallet

to its owner. Dr. Chisholm, it was certain, would be extremely gratified by the recovery of a considerable sum of money which he had given up as hopelessly lost. Manders, it was true, could not claim to be the finder; but he had, at least, taken the wallet from the careless hands of a thoughtless boy, who had delayed to hand it over, and might have lost it again. It was a chance for Manders—to ingratiate himself with his chief; and Manders never lost such a chance.

He tapped at the Head's door and entered.

Dr. Chisholm busy with papers at his desk, glanced up as the Modern master stepped in.

"Mr. Manders——" He did not seem pleased by the interruption.

The Modern master hastened to explain.

"I am glad, sir, to be able to tell you that your lost wallet has been recovered."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Head, with very lively signs of interest. "I had quite given up expecting——"

"Here it is, sir."

Mr. Manders laid the wallet on the Head's writing-table.

Dr. Chisholm's face, generally rather expressionless, expressed animated satisfaction as he picked it up. Forty-five pounds ten shillings was not a small sum. Undoubtedly, the headmaster of Rookwood was extremely gratified—for the moment!

His first glance at the leather wallet expressed sheer satisfaction—his second, doubt—his third, perplexity.

"That, sir, is your wallet," said Mr. Manders. And he waited for thanks.

"That, sir," said the headmaster, with a return of his habitual cold and formal manner, "is not my wallet. It resembles it very closely, in superficial appearance, but it certainly is not the wallet I lost. However——"

He opened the wallet.

His puzzled expression gave place to

the grimmest of looks as he hooked out, not a wad of banknotes and currency notes, but a wad of slips cut from impot-paper.

His eyes fixed on the top slip. There he read a word, written in capital letters, that made him doubt the evidence of his eyes:

"FATHEAD!"

Dr. Chisholm gazed.

Mr. Manders gazed.

There was an awful silence in the Head's study. It lasted only a moment—but it was a long moment. The Head broke it:

"Mr. Manders, may I ask whether you have taken leave of your senses?"

"Sir!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"I repeat, sir, have you taken leave of your senses? Such a trick—such an absurd trick as this—"

"Tut-tut-trick, sir!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"Such a foolish, insensate practical joke as this—unworthy of a thoughtless boy in the Second Form, and perpetrated by a Housemaster—"

"Dr. Chisholm!"

"I am amazed, sir!" Dr. Chisholm rose to his feet. "Amazed—astounded—outraged—dumbfounded! If you are in your senses—"

"I—I— What— I—I—I—I—I never—I was not—I—I—" Mr. Manders babbled helplessly.

"If you are in your senses, sir," exclaimed the Head, "this is an insult! An insult, sir! You may regard it as a practical joke. You may regard a headmaster sir, as a proper subject for practical jokes. I am bound to say that I do not agree with you!"

"I—I—I—"

"Take this absurd rubbish away! Needless to say, I shall expect your resignation!"

"Sir, I—I—I—"

"You need say no more, sir! I shall be obliged if you will leave my study!"

"I—I never—"

"There, sir, is the door—"

"Allow—allow me to explain—"

"I will allow you to leave my study, sir," said Dr. Chisholm, pointing to the door. "Kindly go!"

"But I—I—I—"

"Will you go, sir?"

Mr. Manders went.

He went in quite a dizzy state. He almost tottered as he went. Mr. Manders had a perfect genius for interfering in matters that did not concern him, and it had often led to trouble. But never had he put his foot in it to this extent. Never had Mr. Manders so deeply and sincerely repented that he had not minded his own business!

Rookwood roared over it.

Of course, the facts came out. First of all, Jimmy Silver & Co. shook them out of Tubby Muffin.

Muffin knew what was in that wallet; that was why he had so generously let Lovell have it. That was why he had been so dismayed at the idea of Arthur Edward taking it to the Head unopened.

What would have happened had Arthur Edward done so, hardly bore thinking of. Luckily, Manders had saved him by his genius for interfering.

Manders, of course, did not send in his resignation; he sent a note to the Head, instead, explaining the matter. Manders explained that he had not perpetrated that absurd practical joke, but had been the victim of it. He demanded an inquiry.

Which, of course, apprised the whole school of what had happened, and caused Rookwood to roar.

Lovell was called on the carpet; but he had innumerable witnesses to prove that he really had picked up that spoof notecase under the beeches; it was clear that Lovell was not the japer.

Who was?

The Head never knew, and Mr. Manders never knew. And it was extremely lucky for Tommy Dodd that



Manders never knew. Had he known, Tommy's life would hardly have been worth living in Manders' House afterwards!

#### CHAPTER 24.

##### A Shindy in Manders' House!

"H A, ha, ha!"  
Mr. Manders, Housemaster of Manders' House at Rookwood School, glanced from his study window and frowned.

Some middle-aged gentlemen, with happy natures, would have smiled at hearing that cheery peal of boyish laughter. But Mr. Manders did not smile. He hadn't a happy nature. He frowned. Frowns came more naturally to Roger Manders than smiles.

Besides, it was Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth who laughed. Manders did not like Arthur Edward. Neither did he like Mornington, who was talking to Lovell at a short distance from the open window. And what were two Classical fellows doing, anyway, on the Modern side of the quad, chattering and laughing almost under the House windows?

Morny had said something that made Lovell laugh. Mr. Manders wondered, sourly, whether it was anything in reference to himself. He thought that very likely it was. And, in point of fact, Manders was right. It was!

Lovell, still grinning, walked towards the doorway of the House—Manders' House, leaving Morny where he was.

Manders turned from the window. He was inclined to step out of his study and demand to know what the Classical junior wanted in his House. Still, fellows in the different Houses at Rookwood did call on one another sometimes, and even Mr. Manders could hardly find fault if Lovell had looked in to speak to Tommy Dodd about the football, or something of the sort. Mr. Manders grunted, and turned his attention again to the pile of papers on his table.

His attention remained fixed on those papers for about a minute. Then Mr. Manders lifted his head, breathing hard through his long, thin nose. From outside his study—from the direction of the staircase—came a sudden din. A heavy bump indicated that some fellow had fallen down. A loud howl hinted that the fellow had got damaged in the process. Then came a yell:

"Bag that Classical cad!"

Mr. Manders rose to his feet. He whisked across to his door, dragged it open, and whisked out of the study. That Classical junior, Lovell, was evidently making some disturbance in the House. No doubt that was why he had come—Dalton's boys were all unruly young rascals, in Mr. Manders' opinion.

Moderns and Classics at Rookwood were generally more or less at war, and Lovell, it seemed, was carrying the war into the enemy's country. Roger Manders was the man to deal with him—drastically.

With his gown fluttering behind him, Mr. Manders rushed down the passage like a thunderstorm. On the staircase, quite a lively scene was in progress.

At the foot of the stairs sat Tommy Cook of the Modern Fourth, in a gasping state. He, it appeared, was the fellow Manders had heard bumping. His chums, Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle, were on the stairs, with Arthur Edward Lovell in their grasp. Lovell, clinging to the banisters, was evidently resisting being sent rolling down after Cook. A dozen Modern juniors had gathered round—howling encouragement to the two who were handling Lovell.

"Cave!" gasped Tommy Cook, scrambling to his feet as his Housemaster appeared. "Look out, you men!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Dodd and Doyle together. And they released Arthur Edward Lovell with great suddenness. They had rather forgotten that such a din was likely to reach

Manders if he was in his study. Now they were reminded of it.

"Oooogh!" gasped Lovell.

He was in a breathless state. He looked untidy. His collar was crumpled under one ear, his tie under the other, and his hair looked like a mop. He spluttered wildly for breath.

"Boys!" thundered Mr. Manders.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"What does this uproar mean? What is that Classical boy doing here? But I need not ask!" added Mr. Manders bitterly. "You came here to cause a disturbance, Lovell! I have no doubt of that!"

"Me, sir!" gasped Lovell.

"You!" rapped Mr. Manders.

"It—it's all right, sir!" stammered Cook. "Lovell barged me over by—by—by accident, and I—I—I came a purler; I—I mean, I—I fell over—"

"You need make no excuses for Lovell, Cook. I do not believe that he pushed you down the stairs by accident. Lovell, did you push Cook down the stairs?"

"I—I—I sort of biffed into him, sir!"

"Do you dare to say that it was an accident?" thundered Mr. Manders.

Lovell did not answer that question. In point of fact, he could hardly claim that it had been an accident. Never had a fellow been more deliberately barged over than Tommy Cook had been.

"Descend the stairs at once, Lovell!"

Lovell, still gasping, descended the stairs. The three Tommies looked dismayed. They had been prepared to rag the Classical junior on their own. But they did not want Manders on the scene. They did not want Lovell taken to his Form-master for a caning. But it was one of Mr. Manders' ways to turn up exactly where he was least wanted.

Certainly, Lovell had asked for it. His amazing neck in walking into Manders' House and barging a Modern fellow down the stairs, was something

really rather out of the common. Lovell was a thoughtless fellow at the best of times, but this was a little out of even Lovell's limit.

"Follow me!" snapped Mr. Manders. "Do not put your collar straight, Lovell, and leave your tie where it is. I shall take you to your Form-master exactly as you are. Mr. Dalton shall see you in your present disgraceful and dishevelled state!"

"Oh, sir—"

Buzzzzzz!

The sharp buzz of a telephone-bell came down the corridor. Mr. Manders stopped, with a snappish exclamation of impatience. The telephone-bell was buzzing in his study.

"Lovell, you may go—I cannot take you to Mr. Dalton now. I shall report your conduct to him later. Leave this House at once."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Lovell. He stared after Mr. Manders as that gentleman's long legs whisked up the corridor, going back to his study. "Poor old Morny!"

He left the House—and glanced at the spot where he had left Mornington, near Manders' window. That spot was vacant. The dandy of the Fourth was no longer there, and as Lovell walked back to his own House he wondered what was happening to Valentine Mornington in Mr. Manders' study!

#### CHAPTER 25.

Tricked on the Telephone!

MORNY caught his breath.  
"Oh, gad! What foul luck!" he muttered.

The buzz of the telephone took Morny by surprise. It made him jump. He was not a foot from Manders' telephone when the bell started its raucous solo.

Tommy Dodd & Co. had wondered why Lovell had barged in and started the shindy on the stairs. They had not guessed—and certainly Mr. Manders hadn't—that it was a deep-laid scheme to draw the Modern master from his

study, and give him a little harmless and necessary occupation, while Mornington got busy in that apartment.

Only a few seconds after Manders left the study by the door, Morny had whipped in at the open window.

Swiftly, silently, he closed the door and got busy. To empty a bottle of gum into Mr. Manders' armchair was the work of a moment. To up-end his inkpot in the middle of his table was the work of another. Distributing the contents of the coal-scuttle over the carpet took longer—but not very long, for Morny was a rapid worker. Disconnecting the telephone was going to be the next step. But before Morny could carry out that playful design, the bell was buzzing, and the returning footsteps of Mr. Manders were heard in the corridor.

There was no escape for Morny. It was a matter of seconds. There was no time even to clamber out of the window—certainly not to escape from sight. Manders was almost at the door before the bell ceased its buzz. Mornington, barely in time, backed behind the window curtain. Luckily for him it was a long curtain that reached the floor, and as it was pulled aside from the window there was plenty of cover in its folds.

Barely was Morny behind the curtain when the door opened, and Mr. Manders whisked in. He noticed that the door which he had left open was shut, but did not, for the moment, attend to that circumstance. But he had to take note when he stumbled over a chunk of coal as he whisked across the room to the telephone.

The bell had ceased, and was about to buzz again. But Mr. Manders did not seize the receiver immediately. He stared blankly at the lumps of coal scattered over the carpet. Then his eyes fell on the up-ended inkpot in the middle of the table. Ink was flowing in streams over the table, and dripping down on the floor.

"What—what—what," stammered Mr.

Manders—"what rascal, what scoundrel—what—what—who—"

Buzzzz!

The telephone-bell restarted after the interval. Reminded thus that he had a call to take, Mr. Manders bounced to the instrument, grabbing the receiver off with a grab that made the telephone rock. He was breathing fury. He barked into the transmitter:

"Hallo! Yes—what—"

"That Latcham two-O?" came a rather husky voice. "Mr. Manders?"

"Yes. What is wanted?" rapped Mr. Manders.

He was in the very worst of tempers, and anxious to get finished, and at liberty to deal with the rascals who were booked for exemplary punishment.

"Speaking from Coombe Police Station, sir!" came the husky voice. "Constable Jones speaking, sir."

Mr. Manders had never heard of Constable Jones, of Coombe Police Station, and did not want to hear of him now. Likewise, he wondered why on earth a police-constable had rung him up from the village station. So did Morny, for that matter. Only the thickness of the curtain was between Morny and the telephone, and he heard the voice that came through almost as clearly as Mr. Manders did.

"What do you want?" snapped Mr. Manders.

"Can you come down to the station, sir?"

"No!" yapped Mr. Manders.

"If you could make it convenient, sir—"

"I can do nothing of the kind!" snapped the Housemaster. "I am not at present going out of the school gates at all I have been attacked on several occasions by a ruffianly tramp named Poggers, who is still at large—still at large, sir, which reflects no credit whatever on the local police force."

Morny grinned behind the curtain.

All Rookwood knew that Mr. Manders was keeping within the pre-

cincts of the school since his last encounter with Slog Poggers.

Really, Manders was hardly to be blamed for his caution. Slog Poggers was a rather hefty character, and Manders was no fighting man.

"But, sir——" came the voice over the wires.

"You need say no more," rapped Mr. Manders. "I absolutely decline to take one step outside the gates of Rookwood until the police have done their duty—their duty, do you hear? The duty of the police is to protect the public. I have a right to expect to walk the public highways without fear of being attacked by a rascally ruffian—a man, sir, who robbed the headmaster of this school."

"Yes, sir, but——"

"Enough!" hooted Mr. Manders. "I decline to do anything of the kind, and that is enough, until you can inform me definitely that the wretch Poggers is in custody!"

"Yes, sir; that's how it is——"

"Eh—what?"

"We've got him, sir!"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"We've got him at the station now, sir, and if you'd walk down and identify him——"

"Oh," repeated Mr. Manders, "I—I understand! Certainly, constable—I will certainly come, and without delay. You are sure you have the right man?"

"Well, sir he's got to be identified before he can be charged; but he's the man all right. A word from you, sir, will be enough, as you've seen him a good many times. And if you're going to charge him, sir——"

"Certainly I am going to charge him. I am going to charge him with assault—violent assault, and robbery. He robbed me of an overcoat—luckily an old coat, as it happened, nevertheless, a robbery. Most assuredly I shall charge him!"

"Very good, sir! Then you'll be coming——"

"Within the hour."

"Thank you, sir."

"Not at all, constable—not at all!" said Mr. Manders, quite genially.

He put up the receiver in a state of great satisfaction—such satisfaction that he forgot, for the moment, the rag in his study. It was an immense relief to Mr. Manders to hear that Slog Poggers had been at last laid by the heels.

Not only had the rascal robbed the headmaster of Rookwood of a wallet packed with notes—not only had he caused wild excitement at Rookwood School, hunted all over the place, and finally run down in Mr. Manders' own room, but since then he had haunted the vicinity, and made a special mark of Mr. Manders.

Why, was rather a mystery. Mr. Manders suspected that he was not quite right in the head—for his object seemed to be to rob Mr. Manders of his overcoat.

Naturally, it was very disquieting to Mr. Manders to be haunted by an insane, or semi-insane, ruffian with a maniacal desire to tear his overcoat from his back.

It was such glad news that Manders rose from the telephone with something approaching a smile on his face. It was a deep, deep relief to hear that that dangerous character was "lagged" at last. Mr. Manders purred with satisfaction.

And Mr. Slog Poggers stepped from a telephone-box at Latcham, equally satisfied, if not more so.

Mr. Poggers had cause to be satisfied, as the man he wanted had undertaken to walk down Coombe Lane within the hour, which gave Mr. Poggers ample time to get on the spot to lie in wait for him.

Mr. Manders' satisfaction would have been considerably dashed, no doubt, had he known that "Constable Jones" was otherwise named Slog Poggers—and that Mr. Poggers, so far from being in safe custody, had just been telephoning to him.

## CHAPTER 26.

Lovell Means Well!

"ANYTHING up?"

A Jimmy Silver hardly needed to ask that question. It was plain, from the look on Lovell's face, that something was up.

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome were looking for Lovell. He was late for tea in the end study. But they forgot tea at the sight of his dismayed face.

"Been hunting for trouble again?" asked Newcome, with a touch of sarcasm.

"And finding it?" inquired Raby.

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Lovell.

"Poor old Morny?"

"Morny?" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"What about Morny?"

"He's fairly landed," said Lovell dismally.

"Thank goodness it's Morny and not you!" said Raby. "You've woke up enough trouble this term. But where's Morny?"

"In Manders' study."

"What?"

"Come along with me," said Lovell.

"We may be able to help him somehow. He's trapped like a rabbit in Manders' study! Manders hasn't got him yet—I squinted at his window, and he was squatting at the 'phone. Well, he wouldn't be 'phoning like that if he knew that Morny was in the study, would he?" added Lovell argumentatively.

"Oh, my summer bonnet!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Morny must have scudded under the table, or something," said Lovell. "I'm certain Manders hasn't spotted him yet. We may be able to do something. Might get Manders out again somehow—what? Come on!"

The Co. followed Lovell across to Manders' House. As they went, Lovell explained how it had happened. His chums listened with feelings hardly to be expressed in words. It appeared that Lovell was already booked for a row for having kicked up a shindy on

the Modern side. Now he was going back to ask for some more.

From a safe distance the Fistical Four "squinted" at Manders' window. They had a glimpse of Manders. He was not sitting at the telephone now as when Lovell had taken his last squint. He was standing near the window—they glimpsed the lean figure and narrow face. Apparently he had finished on the 'phone.

"And—and Morny's there?" asked Jimmy Silver. Manders could be seen but there was no sign of Valentine Mornington.

"He's there," said Lovell. "There'll be a fearful row if he snaffles Morny. He got Morny a whopping the other day, and Morny had it fixed to make him sit up—a regular rag, you know! Morny's rather a reckless ass to try on such a game—"

"He seems to have got a more reckless ass to pull his chestnuts out of the fire!" said Raby.

"Don't jaw!" snapped Lovell. "Manders hasn't spotted him yet. Look here, if we could get Manders away—"

"Let's go into the House and kick up a shindy," suggested Newcome, with deep sarcasm. "You've only got one whopping to come, and you can do with another—and one each for us will be more amusing than tea in the study!"

"If you can't talk sense—" hooted Lovell.

"You wouldn't understand it if I did, old bean! What's the good of talking sense to a blithering idiot?"

Lovell breathed hard.

"Look here, I'm going to help Morny, if I can!" he snapped. "Manders seems to have forgotten that he was going to take me to Dicky Dalton. I'm going to remind him. That will give Morny a chance."

And Arthur Edward Lovell, leaving his friends, walked straight up to the open window of Mr. Manders' study.

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome watched him uneasily. They shared his concern for Mornington—hidden in the

study, with his escape cut off and discovery impending over him. Certainly, if Mr. Manders, reminded of Lovell, marched off to Dalton's study with him it would give Mornington a chance. But they were more concerned about Lovell than about Morny; neither did they think that any state of affairs was likely to be improved by Arthur Edward barging into it.

Lovell grinned as he looked in at the open window.

Mr. Manders was staring round the study with an expression on his face rather like that of a tiger eager to get at his prey. The satisfaction he had derived from the talk on the telephone faded away as he gazed at the coals scattered over his carpet and the ink streaming from his table. Now he had observed that his armchair was also streaming with gum. Breathing wrath, the Modern master gazed at the havoc.

"Who has done this?" Lovell heard his voice. "What young rascal—what depraved young scoundrel—"

Mr. Manders broke off as he sighted Lovell standing under the window. Arthur Edward ceased to grin immediately as the Modern master's baleful eye turned on him. Clearly it was no time for grinning!

"Oh! You!" almost hissed Mr. Manders, whisking across to the window.

"I'm waiting for you, sir!" said Lovell meekly.

"What—what?"

"I—I thought you were going to take me to Mr. Dalton, sir."

Mr. Manders stared at him. It almost seemed as if Lovell was anxious for the Modern master to take him to Richard Dalton—which was certainly very unusual. However, now that he was at liberty to deal with the young rascal, Mr. Manders asked nothing better.

"I shall certainly do so, Lovell, and at once!" he snapped. "You may wait for me at the door. I shall—"

Mr. Manders broke off, with a convulsive start.

Standing at the window to speak to Lovell, his elbow came in contact with the bunched curtain drawn to the side of the window.

There was nothing in that, of course, to make Mr. Manders start. What made him start was the fact that his elbow bumped on something behind the curtain.

It was, as a matter of fact, Valentine Mornington's nose—and Morny barely repressed a yelp at the unexpected knock.

"What—what—" stuttered the surprised Housemaster.

He stared, or, rather, glared, at the curtain. Something was behind it—something that moved! The truth flashed into Manders' mind at once! The "something" that stirred behind the curtain was evidently a "somebody." The ragger was still in his study—he had not escaped, as Manders had taken for granted—he had only dodged out of sight.

Grasping the curtain, Mr. Manders dragged it away with a wrench that nearly jerked the hangings off the rings above.

"Oh, gad!" gasped Mornington, as he was suddenly revealed.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Lovell.

"Mornington!" thundered Mr. Manders.

His eyes gleamed at the Classical junior. Morny's eyes flashed at Lovell's dismayed face, outside the window, for a second. Lovell had meant well—he had meant the very best. But he had, unfortunately, caused Morny to be discovered by drawing Manders to the window and causing him to establish contact between his bony elbow and Morny's nose.

"Mornington!" repeated Mr. Manders, almost in a shriek. "You—here! You have done this! You have upset my ink—upset my coals—you—you—"

Words failed Mr. Manders.

As a Modern master he had no right,

and no power, to inflict punishment on Classical juniors. He could only report a Classical offender to his Form-master, or, in serious cases, to the Head. But Mr. Manders forgot that now. He forgot everything but that his study had been ragged and that the ragger was standing there, under his eyes and within his grasp.

He reached out and grasped Mornington by the collar. With his other hand he grabbed up a cane from the table.

Whack, whack, whack!

Mornington roared.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh! Ow! Leggo!" yelled Mornington, as the cane descended in a shower of terrific swipes. He struggled frantically.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Lovell, staring in blankly at the window. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome, farther off, watched breathlessly. The swipes of the cane rang like pistol-shots through the open window into the quad.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooh!" yelled Mornington. "Leggo! Let me go, you old ass! You've no right to cane me—Yaroo! You've no right to—Whooooop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Right or wrong Manders was caning him—such a caning as Morny had never experienced before—though he had often asked for trouble in his career at Rookwood. A Head's flogging had been within his experience, but it was nothing to this.

Whack, whack, whack!

Morny struggled. But Manders' arm, though bony, seemed to have plenty of muscle in it. He held the dandy of the Fourth bent over the inky table, with a grip like steel, and his right arm rose and fell—whack, whack, whack!

Morny yelled and struggled and kicked. But it booted not. Outside, the Fistical Four gazed, spellbound. Within the House, Tommy Dodd & Co. listened to the uproar from Manders' study, and wondered who was getting

it! Headless of spectators, heedless of listeners-in, Manders whacked and whacked till his bony arm was tired.

Not till then did he cease to swipe. By that time Morny was more tired than Manders was.

"Now—now go!" gasped Mr. Manders. Breathless, he pointed to the door with the cane. "Go!"

And Morny went—wriggling like an eel.

## CHAPTER 27.

### Two in Ambush!

"I'D go to Dalton about it!" said Townsend of the Fourth.

"I'd go to the Head!" said Smythe of the Shell.

"Sneer cheek of Manders!" said Lovell.

"Whopping Classicals!" exclaimed Putty of the Fourth. "It's the limit!"

"The jolly old limit!" agreed Oswald.

There was general indignation on the Classical side. Sympathisers surrounded Morny in his own House.

His chum Erroll, said nothing. He sympathised, but he could not be blind to the fact that Morny had asked for it—begged for it. Certainly, it was quite out of order for a Modern master to whop Classical fellows. But it was hardly in order for a Classical fellow to be discovered in a Modern master's study, having just recklessly ragged the same.

Mr. Dalton, no doubt, would have been annoyed at what had happened. But it was difficult to see what he could have done—Morny being so utterly and hopelessly in the wrong.

Not that Morny had any idea of going to Dalton, or going to the Head. He hardly listened to the advice showered on him.

In his Study, No. 4 in the Classical Fourth, he wriggled and wriggled. Morny was tough—hard as nails. But that terrific whopping had got through his toughness. He uttered no sound, though he had yelled loudly enough in Manders' study.

There were a lot of fellows in the study and at the open doorway. It was quite an indignation meeting. Fellows had forgotten tea in the studies. Everybody was excited and indignant. Morny said nothing. He wriggled.

"Modern beaks can't whop Classicals!" said Arthur Edward Lovell argumentatively. "They just can't."

"It's too thick!" declared Topham. "I'd go to the Head——"

"Rot!" said Jimmy Silver. "If the Head heard what Morny did in Manders' study he might add a little more and Morny's had enough."

"I tell you Modern beaks can't whop Classicals," said Lovell. "I'd like to know what Rookwood is coming to when Modern beaks whop Classical men. I've got it coming—from Dicky. But I'd like to see a Modern beak lay a paw on me."

Lovell meant to be sympathetic, but, as usual, he put it unfortunately. Mornington's glittering eyes turned on him. "You fool!" he said.

"Eh!"

"Manders would never have found me in his study if you hadn't barged in, like the silly idiot you are!"

"I jolly well meant——"

"Idiot!"

"Look here, Morny——"

"Fool!"

"If that's all you've got to say when a man's sympathising with you, Morny——"

"Dolt!"

Arthur Edward Lovell tramped out of Study No. 4. Mornington glanced round at the other sympathisers.

"When you fellows are done jawing, you might cut and give a fellow a rest," he said.

They looked at him. Sympathy faded away to a considerable extent. Morny was not really a fellow to be sympathised with. He hated sympathy.

"Well, if that's how you take it——" said Smythe of the Shell warmly.

"Oh, get out!"

"Look here——" said Townsend.

"Get out!"

"I'll get out fast enough," bawled Towny, "and I'm jolly glad Manders whopped you, and I wish he'd given you a few more!"

And Townsend marched off with Smythe, and the rest of the sympathisers followed, leaving Morny with Erroll in the study. Jimmy Silver lingered in the doorway, and Mornington gave him a bitter look.

"Will you shut that door?" he asked.

"Don't be an ass, Morny!" said the captain of the Fourth quietly. "You asked for what you got from Manders. He's a bit of a tartar, but you asked for what you got. I can see what's in your silly head, and you'd better wash it out, and leave Manders alone."

Mornington gritted his teeth.

"I'll leave him alone when I've given him some of what he's given me," he said. "Now get out, and mind your own business."

"Keep an eye on that silly ass, Erroll!" said Jimmy Silver, and he shut the door and went.

Mornington, still wriggling, leaned at the side of the study window. It was a bright and sunny afternoon,—one of those balmy spring days that give promise of summer. Plenty of fellows were in the quad, and on Big Side games-practice was going on. But Morny did not look at the fellows in the quad or the game in the distance. His glance turned on the gates.

Erroll looked at him uneasily. Only too well he knew that thoughts of vengeance were burning in the mind of his reckless chum. He was intensely anxious about what Morny might do before the effect of that whopping wore off.

"What about tea, old chap?" he asked.

"Hang tea!"

"Look here, Morny, what are you thinking of?" demanded Erroll.

"You know what I'm thinking of," answered Mornington coolly. "I'm going to make Manders squirm." He laughed savagely. "I'm not going to



walk into his House and hit him in the eye. More ways than one of killin' a cat. I'm not goin' to ask for the sack. But——"

"But what?"

"Wait till he walks out!" muttered Morny. Wait till I get a chance at him outside the school, with nobody to see——"

Erroll smiled, relieved by that remark.

"You'll have to wait long enough for that," he said. "Manders never goes out of gates now, and isn't likely to till that man Poggers is run in."

Morny opened his lips—and closed them again.

He had not forgotten what he had heard on Mr. Manders' telephone. That afternoon Manders was to walk down to Coombe to identify Slog Poggers at the police station. No one knew anything about it, excepting Mornington—but Morny knew! And his fierce, angry thoughts were concentrating on that—on Manders walking down a shady lane, with no eyes to see what might happen to him. Manders had said that he would go within the hour—and it was nearly an hour now since Morny had heard that talk on the telephone.

That was why he was watching the gates from his study window. He was waiting to see Manders start.

At the moment Mornington was utterly reckless, and savagely resolved to give back some of what he had had from Manders.

There was no doubt that the Modern master had exceeded his authority, and over-done that whopping. That was no excuse for Mornington's savage thoughts of vengeance, and, indeed, the lapse of twenty-four hours would have made all the difference. It was unfortunate that the opportunity came while Morny was still writhing from that severe thrashing, and thinking of nothing but vengeance.

Erroll said no more, but busied himself getting tea in the study. He hoped

that his chum would feel better after tea. Anyhow, if he was going to wait till Manders went out of gates, thoughts of vengeance would have faded away long before that happened—so far as Erroll knew.

Unheeding him, Morny watched

His eyes gleamed at the sight of Mr. Manders walking down from his House. He was not wearing his overcoat on that warm spring afternoon, but he had his hat on, and was evidently going out. Quietly, Morny watched him till he passed out at the distant gateway.

Then he crossed the study to the door.

"Tea's ready, Morny," said Erroll.

"I'm going out for a stroll," Morny smiled sourly. "A walk will do me good—after what I've had from Manders."

"Oh, all right!"

Erroll glanced after him doubtfully as he left the study. But he did not know what Morny knew, and certainly had not the faintest suspicion of what was in his chum's mind.

Morny left the House—but did not approach the gates. It was not yet lock-up, but he did not intend to be seen going out—in view of what was to happen to Mr. Manders! He sauntered away to a quiet spot in Little Quad, and dropped over the school wall. A minute or two more, and he was in the fields, following Coombe Lane on the inner side of the hedge, out of sight of anyone walking in the lane. Then he went at a rapid run.

What was he going to do? He hardly knew himself—except that he was going to repay that savage beating somehow. He was ahead of Mr. Manders—a good distance ahead. He stopped, and cut a stick in the thicket. With the stick grasped in his hand, he hurried on—to wait at the dip in the lane, where overhanging trees made it very dusky—almost dark, now that the dusk of evening was at hand.

It was, perhaps, the feel of the stick in his hand that brought more keenly to Morny's mind the madness of what

he was planning—and not only its folly, but its wickedness. Even if he was successful, if he escaped unrecognised, what would he be, even in his own estimation, but a young ruffian and hooligan? And what chance had he of escaping unrecognised, unless he struck from behind like a coward? His face crimsoned at that thought.

More slowly he approached the hedge, where it looked over the dip in the lane. He was twitching with pain—he was bitterly and savagely angry and revengeful—but his mind was in doubt. He did not know what he was going to do, or whether, after all, he was going to do anything.

With a black brow—as angry with himself as with Manders—he peered through the hedge into the dusky lane. And then in his surprise, he forgot his thoughts of vengeance as he stared blankly at a figure crouching in the dry ditch beyond the hedge—with its back to him, watching the lane from that place of concealment. Although its back was to him, Mornington knew who it was—and knew that Slog Poggers was not in custody at Coombe Police Station, but was crouching in the dusky lane, waiting for Mr. Manders.

#### CHAPTER 28.

##### Kidnapped!

**S**LOG POGGERS heard no sound in the hedge behind him, or did not heed it if he heard. Slog's attention was concentrated on the lane, his ears intently straining at the sound of approaching footsteps. Crouching in the deep dry ditch, hidden by straggling willows from the road, he waited and watched—and his piggy eyes gleamed.

He knew that the "bony old covey" would come—he had only to wait. The lane was lonely, especially at the fall of dusk. At long last he was going to get his thievish hands on the overcoat, in the lining of which he had hidden the stolen wallet, that night weeks ago in Manders' House at Rookwood.

Mr. Poggers had been quite beaten by the Modern master's caution in remaining within the precincts of the school ever since Slog's last attempt. It seemed to Mr. Poggers quite a brain-wave, that idea of tricking Mr. Manders out of his refuge, by telephoning news of his own arrest. He had not been sure of success, but it had worked like a charm. For it was Mr. Manders who was coming up the lane.

One hefty punch, a grab at the thick grey overcoat, a rapid flight, and that would be that! Once the wallet hidden in the lining of that overcoat was in his hands, Mr. Poggers would not let the grass grow under his feet—he was not likely to stop till he was in the next county! This, he knew, was his last chance. Once bitten was twice shy, and the "bony old covey" could not be tricked out of gates again. But it was all right this time!

But was it?

He sighted the lean angular figure coming up the lane; he knew the hard, narrow face, he stirred in his lair, and prepared to spring, and then a startling change came over his stubby face.

It was the bony old covey—that was all right. But he was not wearing the overcoat!

Slog gazed at him blankly.

He had not counted on that. He had never even thought of it. Every time he had seen Mr. Manders out of the school Mr. Manders had been wearing an overcoat. Now he was not.

The warm mildness of that day accounted for it, of course. As the snow on their coats melted against Sisera, so the seasons fought against Mr. Poggers. Winter was giving place to spring, and, for the first time in Slog's experience, Mr. Manders was walking abroad without an overcoat.

It was bitter.

Slog felt that it was cruel luck. Fate was hard and unjust to a bloke who wanted nothing but to recapture a wallet he had pinched more than a month ago. It seemed like the K.O. to

the dismayed Mr. Poggers, for it was, as he realised clearly, his last chance. Manders would never be tricked out of safety again. It was now or never—and the bony old covey had come out without the much-desired overcoat. Slog could have groaned. He could almost have cried. Instead of either, Slog swore. With bitter emphasis, he requested unknown powers to strike him pink and blue.

Mr. Manders reached the spot where the footpad crouched in ambush. He was thinking of Slog; of the pleasure of identifying him at the police station, and making a formal charge. But he was not thinking of seeing him.

The next moment, he did see him—and felt his grasp. Slog, desperate, jumped out of the ditch and seized him by the collar.

"Oooogh!" gasped Mr. Manders.

He gave Mr. Poggers one startled, terrified gasp, and almost collapsed. He could scarcely believe his eyes as he saw the ruffian whom he supposed to be safe in the hands of the police. Slog, only too evidently, was not in the hands of the police. Mr. Manders was in the hands of Slog.

"You ole fool, you!" said Slog between his teeth. "You ole sketch, you! You come out without it, 'ave you? Strike me pink!"

"Urrgh!" Mr. Manders gurgled, half-throttled by the grasp on his collar.

"Ugh! Release me—urrghh!"

"You ain't got it on!" hissed Slog. "Blow you, you ain't got it on! Ow'd a bloke know you wouldn't 'ave it on? I ask you!"

"I—I—urrghh!" gurgled Mr. Manders.

He cast a frantic glance up and down the dusky lane. No one was in sight. Neither Mr. Manders nor Slog dreamed that a Rookwood junior was watching the scene from the hedge—grinning.

Morny, in his present mood, found this amusing.

In any other mood, he would have weighed in with the stick in his hand. Wincing with pain from the thrash-

ing he had had from Manders, he had no idea of intervening to help the man who had swiped him, only an hour ago, not wisely but too well! Keeping behind the hedge, Morny watched—and grinned.

"I got you," said Mr. Poggers, in a ferocious growl, "and I ain't got no chance of getting you agin. You ain't got what I want, blow your ugly mug. But mebbe you'll send for it, if I keep you safe in a quiet place for a bit—wot? Mebbe you'll see that I get it if I park you in the middle of the wood, and twist your neck occasional, till I get 'old of it!"

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Certainly!" gasped Mr. Manders. "I—I shall be very—er—ah—urrghh—very pleased—"

"Old your jaw," said Slog, "and 'op it with me. And you let out so much as one yelp, old 'un, and I'm telling you that you won't know what 'it you! That's a tip, you 'ole sketch, you!"

With an iron grasp on Mr. Manders' collar, Slog hooked him through a gap in the hedge, not three yards from the spot where Mornington stood watching.

There was a gasp from Mr. Manders—but not so much as a yelp. He did not want to test the weight of Slog's knuckly fist.

"Oh, gad!" breathed Mornington.

Keeping in cover of the hedge, he watched Slog and his prisoner with bulging eyes. The footpad was kidnapping Manders. It was amazing—but there it was. He wanted something or other from Manders, and he was going to keep hold of Manders till he got it. Blankly Mornington watched the ruffian hooking Mr. Manders along behind the hedge, till they disappeared into the dusky shades of Coombe Wood.

Oh, gad!" gasped Morny, when they were gone.

He pitched away his stick, jumped into the lane, and walked back to the school, laughing.

Old Mack was about to close the gates when the dandy of the Fourth strolled in, and old Mack gave him a

look as he passed. The grin on Morny's face made old Mack suspect that the young rascal had been up to some mischief—not a new thing for Mornington.

Jimmy Silver stared at Mornington as he sauntered into the House.

He was quite surprised by the change in Morny.

He had last seen him wriggling with anguish, black with rage, meditating vengeance. Now he saw him smiling cheerfully, like a fellow who found the world quite an amusing place to live in.

"Feeling better, old man?" asked Jimmy amicably.

"Heaps!" said Morny.

"Good! Let old Manders rip!" said Jimmy.

"I'm letting him rip!"

"That's right! Much better to leave him alone," said Jimmy.

Mornington chuckled.

"Think so?" he asked.

"Sure of it, old chap," answered Jimmy. "Leave him alone, and give him a wide berth and have nothing whatever to do with him."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Morny. "Silver, old man, that advice is too good not to be taken."

Morny walked on, leaving Uncle James of Rookwood staring after him, puzzled. Jimmy had given him good advice, and he could see nothing to laugh at in that advice—especially if Morny was going to act on it! Morny, apparently, saw some joke in it which was quite hidden from Jimmy Silver.

Morny kept the joke to himself. What was going to happen to Mr. Manders in the hands of Slog Poggers he did not know, and did not, at present, care. When late that evening a rumour spread that Manders was missing from his House, and that nobody knew where he was, Morny chuckled—and said nothing. Morny had asked for that whopping in Manders' study, but really it would have profited Mr. Manders not to have laid it on quite so hard.

## CHAPTER 29.

### Manders on the Spot!

ROGER MANDERS groaned. It was not his first groan.

He had been groaning at brief intervals for quite a long time.

Mr. Manders could, indeed, hardly believe that this was not some horrid dream from which he would awaken presently in bed in his room in Manders' House at Rookwood.

Such an experience as this had never come his way before. Mr. Manders was an orderly, precise, indeed, fussy, gentleman, and seldom or never stepped out of his groove. Now he had been jerked out of his accustomed groove in such a wild and whirling manner that it made his head spin.

While all Rookwood was wondering where Manders was he was not far away. He was, in fact, hardly a couple of miles from the school. He could have walked in under the half-hour—had he been able to walk.

Manders was a prisoner, in the power—as he firmly believed—of an irresponsible lunatic.

For unless Slog Poggers was insane, what was the meaning of this? Why did he want Mr. Manders' overcoat so desperately that he was preparing to take such lawless and desperate means to get possession of it?

Here was Mr. Manders—with his wrists tied together with a cart-rope, pinched by Slog from a neighbouring farm, no doubt. One end of the rope was tied on his bony wrists—the other end to the jutting root.

In the heart of Coombe Wood there was a deep hollow, a sort of cave, under the roots of an ancient tree. It was to that lair that Slog had led Mr. Manders the previous afternoon.

In that spot Mr. Poggers had sometimes camped during the weeks he had spent in watching the school for Mr. Manders. There were various camping utensils in the earthy cave—a kettle, a saucepan, a little rusty stove, two or three extremely dirty blankets, and

other such things—all, of course, pinched by the enterprising Slog, whose profession was that of a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles.

Mr. Poggers was accustomed to rough quarters, and no doubt that den under the old tree was as good as the corner of a barn or the lee of a haystack, to which Mr. Poggers was used. But Roger Manders, Housemaster of Rookwood, was by no means accustomed to rough quarters—he liked his little comforts. A night in the tramp's earthy den was a night of horror to Mr. Manders.

Slog had left him there; to sleep if he could, to stay awake if he couldn't—the heartless Slog evidently not caring two hoots, or one, which he did.

Mr. Manders might have shouted for help. But nobody would have been likely to hear him on a windy night in the heart of a lonely wood. And before leaving him, Mr. Poggers had warned him that he would not be far away, and that if he made so much sound as a whisper he would come back and give him something to keep him quiet.

During the long night, therefore, Mr. Manders had not made any attempt to call for help. He suspected that Slog was gone—but he could not be sure. He had no desire whatever to be given something to keep him quiet! He groaned—but he did not even groan loudly.

Now it was day again—and Manders was still groaning. Birds twittered in the boughs; spring sunlight glimmered through the trees, and a few glimmers penetrated into Mr. Manders' earthy prison.

Daylight brought him no comfort.

He was missed at Rookwood, of course. He dreaded to wonder what the Head would think of his unaccountable absence. Everybody would be wondering. Nobody would guess the truth!

It was so amazing that Mr. Manders himself could hardly believe that it was

not a prolonged nightmare. Still more amazing was Slog's reason for doing it. From the bottom of his heart Mr. Manders wished that he had been wearing his overcoat when he came out. For that was what Slog wanted. It was because the Housemaster had come out minus his overcoat that Slog had bagged the Housemaster. Obviously—to Manders—the man was mad!

Mr. Manders, certainly, did not want to lose his overcoat—but he would have sacrificed his whole wardrobe to have escaped this dreadful experience.

He groaned.

"Shut it!" said a voice, husky and unpleasant.

Mr. Manders started, sat up on the pile of dirty blankets and turned his startled eyes on the tramp as Slog ducked his head and pushed in. Mr. Poggers, at long last, had returned.

"For mercy's sake," gasped Mr. Manders, "release me! I beg you to release me from this dreadful place! I will allow you to keep the money you have taken from me—"

"Five bob!" said Slog, with a snort. "Five blooming bob!"

"I fear that I shall catch a cold—"

groaned Mr. Manders.

"You'll ketch something worsor afore I've done with you if you don't 'and over that blinking overcoat!" said Mr. Poggers threateningly.

Mr. Manders trembled.

Here was the man's insanity coming out again.

Nobody, looking at Slog Poggers' hard, sly face, his cunning, little, piggy eyes, would have supposed him a lunatic on his looks. They would have supposed him a sly, cunning, unscrupulous rascal. Even Mr. Manders had to admit that he did not look insane.

But if he were sane, why this peculiar obsession to possess an overcoat which, after all, was not new and of no great value?

"Arter all these 'ere weeks that I been 'anging about a-watching for

you!" said Mr. Poggers indignantly "Peelers looking for a bloke, making a covey's life 'ardly worth living. Then I gets you, and you ain't got the coat on! I don't know why I ain't knocked your ugly face through the back of your 'ead—strike me pink I don't!"

"I—I—I beg you—" gasped Mr Manders.

"Shut it!" said Slog.

He sorted in a ragged pocket and produced a cheap fountain-pen and a cheap blotter. Mr. Manders eyed those articles in wonder. Slog, it seemed, had visited a town to bring back writing materials. No doubt he had been expending Mr. Manders' five shillings at Latham.

"Now," said Slog in a husky tone of menace, "you're going to write a note, you are, for that there overcoat to be 'anded to the bloke you send for it. See? I got a pal waiting to take the note up to the school. I can't go personal, but I got a pal to go. I'm going to set your 'ands loose to write that note. You get me?"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"You write it jest 'ow you like," said Mr. Poggers. "I leave that to you, but you better make sure that they 'and that overcoat to my pal—'cause if he comes back without it I'm going to break every bone in your bony old-carcass!"

"I—I will—will certainly——"

"You better!" said Mr. Poggers darkly.

He released Mr. Manders' hands. Mr. Manders took the pen in hand and rested the blotter on a jutting root.

"You—you will release me when you have received the overcoat?" he gasped. Slog snorted.

"'Course I will!" he snarled. "Think I want to keep you about as a pet, or what?"

Mr. Manders began to write. Slog watched him with gleaming eyes.

At last he was going to get that overcoat, in the lining of which he had hidden the Head's wallet on the night

of the theft at Rookwood. Slog really felt that he had earned it by this time.

"There!" gasped Mr Manders.

Slog took the note, spelled through it suspiciously nodded, and folded it in an envelope, which Mr. Manders directed to his House dame at Rookwood. Then the kidnapped House-master was tied again, and Slog ducked out of the cave

His "pal" was waiting under the trees. It was Beppo, the grinning dark Italian organ-grinder, who had served Slog's turn several times, watching for Mr. Manders when, for reasons of prudence, Mr. Poggers did not desire to approach too near to Rookwood.

"'Ere you are!" said Mr. Poggers. "You 'ook it with this 'ere to the school, Beppo, and they'll 'and you the coat! And, mind," added Mr. Poggers, with a dark look. "I'll 'ave an eye on you when you come away with it, and don't you think of bunking with that there coat because you know what's in it. 'Cause if you do, I'm tipping you that you won't be able to grind no organ agin till you come out of the 'orspital. You get me, Beppo?"

"Si, si!" grinned Beppo.

The organ-merchant started for Rookwood—Mr Poggers following him at a distance and venturing as near the school as he dared, evidently not placing too great a reliance on his "pal." Mr. Poggers' way of life had not taught him faith in human nature.

Mr. Manders was left alone again. He only hoped that no difficulty would be made about handing over that overcoat. Otherwise he knew what to expect from Mr. Poggers—and it was a fearfully unpleasant prospect.

## CHAPTER 30.

What Morny Knew!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON had a thoughtful look on his face in third school that morning. There was a good deal of whispering in the Fourth. The mystery of Mr.

Manders interested everybody. No news had been received of the Modern master, and the belief was growing that something must have happened to him. Otherwise, it was simply impossible to account for his absence. Fellows wondered whether Dr. Chisholm would call in the police. They looked forward to a little pleasurable excitement.

Mr. Dalton had to let his class whisper—there really was no stopping them. He gave several fellows lines—but it was no use; the whispering soon restarted. Mr. Dalton himself was puzzled, like other members of the staff. Everybody at Rookwood, from the Head to the smallest fag, wondered what had become of Mr. Manders. Jimmy Silver had a lingering suspicion that Mornington knew—but he said nothing of that. Morny said nothing, but Jimmy noted that thoughtful expression growing on his face during third school.

So far, Valentine Mornington had seemed to treat the absence of Mr. Manders as rather a joke. But it seemed to be borne in, even on Morny's mind, that the matter was serious.

The fact was that the last twinges of the thrashing Mr. Manders had bestowed on Morny had now worn off. Morny was able to take a more equable view of the matter, and even to realise that he had fairly asked for that thrashing by perpetrating a record rag in Manders' study.

After third school, Morny joined Jimmy Silver when the Fourth were dismissed. Jimmy was going out with Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, as usual; but the dandy of the Fourth linked an arm in his and almost dragged him away from his chums.

"Well?" said Jimmy, rather grimly, when Morny walked him under the old Rookwood beeches, evidently so that no one else should hear what he had to say.

"That old ass, Manders——" began Morny.

"If you've done something mad and

idiotic, Morny——" said Jimmy, with a deep breath. "Have you told Erroll?"

"I've told nobody. I'm not goin' to, either; the Head would want to know why I haven't mentioned it before. Don't be an ass!" added Morny. "I never touched Manders I was goin' to, perhaps—but I never did. I was feelin' pretty wild after he pitched into me yesterday, and—and—well, never mind that. I never touched the old ass!"

"I'm glad of that, at any rate," said Jimmy, with deep relief. "But what has happened to Manders, then?"

"That man Poggers has got him."

"Got him?" repeated Jimmy. "Are you making out that a tramp has kidnapped a Housemaster, or what?"

"Just that! Listen, and I will a tale unfold," said Mornington flippanantly. "You know Manders got me in his study yesterday, when I was ragging there, and laid into me. Well, I was behind the curtain while he was taking his telephone call, and couldn't help hearing what was said on the 'phone."

"What the thump's that got to do with it?"

"Lots! It was that 'phone call that took Manders out. It told him that Slog Poggers had been arrested, and Manders was wanted at the police station to identify him."

"Oh!" ejaculated Jimmy. "That was why he went, then?" He stared at Morny. "But if Poggers was arrested, he can't have——"

"If you'd shut up a minute, I'd tell you. Knowing that Manders was going out, I kept an eye open and cut out after him. Never mind what I was thinkin' of doin'—I never did it! But followin' him along behind the hedge in Coombe Lane, I saw what happened. That blighter Poggers——"

"But you said he was under arrest at the police station," said Jimmy, in bewilderment.

"Will you let me tell you?" snapped

Mornington. "He grabbed old Manders in the lane, and let out that he had put up that 'phone call himself, to trick him out of gates."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He wanted something from Manders, and Manders hadn't got it with him—and he snaffled him and hiked him off into Coombe Wood. And that's the last I saw of either of them."

"You—you knew that, and—and you never——"

"Manders shouldn't have laid it on so hard when he had me in his study," said Mornington, with a sneer. "I wasn't bothering about Manders! You remember you advised me to let him alone," Morny grinned. "Well, I let him alone—and that's that!"

"I suppose it was that idiotic overcoat," went on Mornington. "You know that man Poggers seems mad on getting hold of Manders' overcoat. He's tried it on a lot of times, as everybody knows. I've heard that you and your pals got it back once when he bagged it off Manders. Must have a screw loose, I think."

"Looks like it," said Jimmy. "Of course, it was the overcoat he wanted—and he got Manders instead, as he went out without it. And you've held your tongue all this time, and left Manders——"

"I don't suppose the man will hurt him. It's that silly overcoat he wants—he's got Manders to get hold of it through him. But—the old ass has been away all night, and all the morning, and—and——"

"And you're getting worried about him!" snapped Jimmy. "Time you did, I think. You ought to have spoken out as soon as you got back to the school——"

"Well, I didn't," said Morny sullenly. "And I can't now—they'd want to know why I didn't spout it out before. I'm not askin' for a Head's floggin'. I've told you now——"

"No good telling me. It's the Head you ought to tell."

"I'll watch it!"

"But it can't be kept dark. Manders will——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Morny irritably. "I tell you I'm not askin' for a floggin'. Look here, that brute Poggers parked old Manders in Coombe Wood. It's to make him hand over that overcoat. There's only one thing he can do—make Manders send for the coat! 'Can't you see that?'"

"Yes—I suppose so. But what——"

"Somebody will come for the coat," said Mornington. "Can you see that—now I point it out to you? Well, whoever comes for the coat will be hand-in-glove with Poggers, of course——"

"Oh!" said Jimmy.

"I'm willin' to lend a hand if you'll play up. You can tell your pals, if you like—but don't howl it out all over Rookwood. Poggers can't mean anything, except to make Manders send for the dashed overcoat. Well, when somebody comes for it, we ask him nicely to tell us where Manders is—and go and fetch him home. What about that?"

"You think——"

"I know! No good askin' me why the man wants the coat—we know that he's chased Manders up hill and down dale trying to get it off him—and that's enough. I heard him say to Manders that he hadn't got what he wanted, and he was going to bag him till he got it. Isn't that clear enough?" demanded Morny. "Somebody will come for it—and we can ask him to tell us where Manders is parked——"

"Think he'll tell us?"

"Yes—if we bang his head on a tree till he does."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"There's no news yet—no word from Manders so far. It's coming," said Morny. "That's why I've told you. Poggers can't come himself—he's too well known here. He will send somebody, with some sort of message from Manders. All we've got to do is to keep an eye open for that somebody. See?"

Jimmy Silver admitted that he saw.



## CHAPTER 31.

## Bad Luck for Beppo!

OLD MACK, the Rookwood porter, cast a doubting and suspicious eye on the greasy, dusky-complexioned man who came in at the gates.

Old Mack had seen Beppo before, trundling his organ in the roads about the school. The music merchant had no organ with him now. Old Mack wondered what he wanted, and rolled out of his lodge to inquire.

Beppo gave him an uneasy grin and a bow.

"You show me ze Manders' House, sare!" he said. "I have ze message for ze Missis Moote at ze Manders' House."

"Oh!" said old Mack. He pointed out Manders' House, eyeing Beppo still with a dubious eye, as the foreign gentleman walked towards that building.

Outside Manders' House quite a number of fellows had gathered. There were both Moderns and Classicals in the group—for once on amicable terms with one another. There were five Classicals—the Fistical Four and Mornington. There were three Moderns—Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle. And as Beppo came up to the House, the eight juniors all eyed him, and exchanged glances with one another.

Morny's secret had been confided to Jimmy's pals, and to the three Tommies of the Modern side. All of them were rather doubtful, but more than willing to lend a hand, if it proved that Morny was right. That would be proved if some stranger arrived to fetch Mr. Manders' overcoat.

So the sight of a dusky-complexioned, rather tattered stranger naturally excited keen interest among the juniors.

"What did I tell you?" murmured Mornington.

Tommy Dodd stepped towards the dusky stranger as he came up to the House. Beppo glanced at him.

"Want anything here?" asked Tommy politely.

"Yes, sare. I have ze note for ze Missis Moote," explained Beppo.

"I'll take you to her, if you like."

"Zank you, sare!"

Tommy Dodd marched the dusky man into the House, bestowing a wink on the other fellows as he went. They waited eagerly. "Somebody" had arrived—with a note for Mrs. Moote. Obviously, it was to his House dame that Mr. Manders would send a note if he wanted his overcoat. Jimmy Silver & Co. were getting very keen.

Tommy Dodd conducted the messenger to the House dame's room in Manders' House.

"Man with a message, Mrs. Moote," said Tommy.

Beppo produced a letter. Mrs. Moote stared blankly as it was handed to her. She stared at the superscription in the well-known hand of Roger Manders.

"Bless me!" said Mrs. Moote. "It is from Mr. Manders!"

"By gum!" murmured Tommy Dodd. "I say, Mrs. Moote, tell us if there's news of Manders."

"Certainly, Master Dodd, as soon as I have looked at the letter."

Mrs. Moote slit the envelope, adjusted her glasses, and read—with great surprise growing in her plump countenance.

"Bless me!" she repeated.

"Manders all right, ma'am?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"Eh? Yes, certainly!" said the House dame. "Mr. Manders writes that he has been kept away unexpectedly, and will return shortly, and asks me to send his overcoat by this messenger. It is very extraordinary! I am quite sure the Head will be very much annoyed. So unlike Mr. Manders——"

"Ze gentleman say I take a parcel, madam," said Beppo.

"Yes, that is right," said Mrs. Moote. "Please wait here, and I will send for the coat—it is in a wardrobe upstairs—and I will wrap it up for you to carry. Please sit down."

Beppo sat down.

Tommy Dodd scuttled out, his face ablaze with excitement. Seven fellows outside the House gave him eager, inquiring looks as he appeared.

"It's a note from Manders—asking for his coat!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"What did I tell you?" grinned Mornington. "It was plain enough, I think! It's Manders' coat that potty tramp wants, not Manders. How could anybody want Manders?"

"Pretty clear now," said Jimmy Silver, with a nod. "Well, there's enough of us here to deal with that dago merchant, and with Poggers, too, if we come across him. Keep your eyes open."

The juniors kept their eyes open. Ten minutes later the dusky-complexioned man emerged from Manders' House with a bundle under his arm.

The coat had been handed over without question. Mrs. Moote knew Mr. Manders' handwriting well enough. Surprised as she was, there was nothing for her to do, but to hand over the coat as requested by Mr. Manders in his note.

Beppo walked away to the gates with the bundle.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged a glance—and walked after Beppo!

They quickened their pace as they reached the gates. When the Italian walked out they were at his heels.

Beppo glanced round as they followed him out. He quickened his pace a little in his turn. So did the eight juniors.

Beppo gave them another quick look. He saw no reason why he should be suspected—as he certainly would not have been had not Morny witnessed the kidnapping of Mr. Manders the previous day.

But he was feeling uneasy—and he walked still faster. Jimmy Silver & Co. accelerated. They preferred to deal with the man outside the school. Now

Beppo was in Coombe Lane—and they proceeded to deal with him.

"Collar him!" said Mornington.

"Snaffle him!" grinned Lovell.

Why he should be suspected and followed, Beppo did not know. But there was no doubting the fact, as the crowd of schoolboys closed round him.

With a quick dodge, Beppo eluded their grasp and broke into a run. Lovell jumped after him and grabbed him.

The Italian turned on him, swinging up the bundle. That bundle, containing the famous overcoat, fairly crashed on Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Yooo-hooop!" roared Lovell.

He went over backwards as if he had been shot. There was a heavy bump as he landed on his back in Coombe Lane.

"Oooooogh!"

Beppo ran.

Seven juniors sprinted after him, hard and fast. One lay in the dust, gasping. Jimmy Silver leaped at the organ merchant, grasped him by the collar behind, and whirled him over.

It was Beppo's turn to roar as he went down.

"Bag him!" gasped Jimmy.

"What-ho!"

The whole crowd hurled themselves on the hapless Beppo. The bundle rolled in the road, as the Italian struggled and yelled.

But Beppo had simply no chance. Collared on all sides, grasped by innumerable hands, he was dragged to his feet.

Lovell came panting up. He grabbed up the bundle, while the other fellows grabbed Beppo.

"Now, Mussolini," said Mornington, with a grin, "where's Manders?"

Beppo gasped.

"Take us straight to Manders," said Jimmy Silver. "If you brought that note from him, my man, you know where he is. Get on with it!"

Beppo spluttered.

"Are you going?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

"No!" gasped Beppo. "Mai, mai! I take ze bundle to ze signor, but I go alone viz myself—"

"This tree will do," said Mornington.

Beppo, hooked to the tree at the roadside, gave a fearful howl as his head was banged on it.

"Now are you taking us to Manders, Mussolini?" asked Mornington very genially.

"No!" yelled Beppo. "Mai, non mai! I— Yaroooooh!"

Bang!

"What about it now?"

"Cospetto! Wow! I take you—I do anyzing! La testa—la testa mia! I go—I take—yes! Knock not my testa on a tree! Oooogh!"

"Nothin' like makin' a chap see stars to make him see reason at the same time," remarked Mornington. "Lead on, Mussolini!"

Beppo, groaning, led on.

And Mr. Slog Poggers, from his cover in a hawthorn thicket at a little distance, watched them go—with feelings that could not have been expressed in words.

There were too many of the Rookwooders for Mr. Poggers to think of tackling them, slogger as he was. He kept in cover, to keep clear of sharing Beppo's fate!

And as he watched the Rookwooders disappear across the fields, in the direction of Coombe Wood, Mr. Poggers groaned in bitterness of spirit.

Once more fortune, after seeming to smile on Mr. Poggers, had let him down. That precious overcoat, with a wallet full of notes hidden in the lining, had been fairly within his grasp this time; and somehow—he could not begin to guess how—that mob of young rascals had spotted the game, and the game was up!

It was cruel luck. When the schoolboys were out of sight, Mr. Poggers crept from his cover and hit the open spaces—a sadder, if not a wiser, Poggers!

## CHAPTER 32.

## Rescue!

MR. MANDERS left off groaning and listened.

He heard a sound of footsteps and voices. He heard thickets and foliage rustle in Coombe Wood.

He started up from the pile of dirty blankets on which he sat, his heart beating faster. Was it help—and rescue? Quite a number of persons seemed to be coming—and Slog Poggers could hardly have returned with a crowd.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"Is this the place?" He heard a voice he knew—the voice of Jimmy Silver of the Classical Fourth.

"Si, si, signor!" came a gasping reply.

"Where the dickens have they parked him, then?" It was Mornington's voice. "Is Manders buried under leaves, like a Babe in the Wood, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up, you cad—"

"Here!" shouted Mr. Manders. He could venture to shout, now that he heard the familiar voices of Rookwooders, evidently looking for him. "This way! Help! Oh, help! This way, my boys—my dear boys!"

It was the first time in history that Mr. Manders had addressed any Rookwooders as "dear boys"!

But even Mr. Manders regarded them, at the moment, as dear boys—very dear boys indeed! They were coming to Mr. Manders' rescue! Even Mornington, for the moment, was a dear boy—though he had ragged Manders' study the day before, and Manders had whopped him for it.

"Hallo, that's Manders!" came Lovell's exclamation.

"Where are you, sir?" called Tommy Dodd.

Mr. Manders panted.

"This way—a cave under the tree—this way! Help!"

"Oh, crumbs!" exclaimed Lovell.

"They parked him safe enough! Look!"

The opening of that earthy den was low and narrow, and hidden by bushes. Daylight streamed in as the bushes were dragged aside. Faces looked in—some of them grinning!

"Help!" gasped Mr. Manders. "My dear boys—my dear, dear boys—how thankful I am to see you! My dear boys!"

"We'll have you out of that in a jiffy, sir!" said Jimmy Silver.

The juniors crowded in. They got hold of the rope and unfastened the knots. There was a sudden yell from the fellows outside—a scampering of feet, a wild rustling and trampling of the bushes.

Beppo, taking advantage of the general attention being concentrated on Mr. Manders, had wrenched away and fled. He vanished like a scared rabbit into the wood.

"That blessed dago's hooked it!" gasped Tommy Cook.

"Never mind Mussolini—we've got Manders!" said Mornington.

"My dear boys!" said Mr. Manders. "My dear boys!"

He tottered out of the tramp's lair, helped by Tommy Dodd and Jimmy Silver. He stared round him uneasily as he emerged—the juniors could guess why.

"Poggers isn't here, sir," said Jimmy. "We've seen nothing of him—only an Italian organ-grinder chap who brought a note—"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Manders. "My dear boys, I am thankful that you found me! That ruffian—that wretch—that—that insane hooligan, Poggers—that—that—"

"Like your coat, sir?" asked Lovell.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Mr. Manders. "Yes, I shall be very glad of the coat. I am chilled—chilled to the bone—and I am extremely muddy and dusty, after—after—"

"Here you are, sir!"

The bundle was unwrapped, and Mr.

Manders gladly enfolded himself in the big, thick overcoat.

"My dear boys," he said, "it was to steal this very overcoat that that wretch—that ruffian—seized me! I am very thankful that you found me, but how—"

"Mornington spotted the man who came for the coat, sir!" said Jimmy Silver demurely. "Morny suspected that the letter was a fake, got up by that man Poggers—and so we collared him and made him guide us to you, sir—"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the astonished Mr. Manders. "That was extremely intelligent of Mornington—very intelligent indeed! Mornington, you have shown extraordinary perspicacity! Amazing!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Morny gravely.

The whole party walked back to Rookwood with Mr. Manders. Mr. Manders was glad of their company.

It was no end of a sensation at Rookwood.

Fellows talked of hardly anything else for days.

Search for Mr. Poggers by the local police was renewed and intensified, and while it was going on, Mr. Manders remained within gates—not likely to be tricked out again by a spoof 'phone call! Mr. Manders—and his celebrated overcoat—were safe!

Everybody agreed that much credit was due to Mornington—the fellow who had spotted Poggers' confederate! They wondered how he had done it—and Morny did not explain. It was one of the things better left unexplained.

## CHAPTER 33.

### A Tick in Trouble!

**L**OVELL snorted.

Jimmy Silver frowned.

Raby and Newcome grinned.

In those various ways were the Fistical Four of the Classical Fourth

Form affected by the sudden sight of Albert Leggett.

Leggett of the Modern Fourth was a "tick."

All Moderns, of course, were more or less ticks from the Classical point of view. But Leggett really was a tick. He was a shady, shifty sort of fellow, little liked in his own House.

Coming down the footpath through Coombe Wood, Jimmy Silver & Co. sighted Leggett standing under a tree near the footpath. He was talking to a fat, red-faced man, who wore a bowler hat at a very rakish angle, and had a cigar in the corner of his mouth.

A Rookwood man—even a Modern tick like Leggett—ought not to have been in conversation with Mr. Gooze. Mr. Gooze had a reputation that could almost have been cut with a knife. He was reputed to know exactly what the inside of Latham Prison was like.

Had Mr. Manders, Leggett's House-master, seen him talking to Gooze, there would have been something like an earthquake. Fortunately for Leggett, only the chums of the Classical Fourth saw him.

Leggett did not see them. He was talking very earnestly to Gooze. Matters of deep import, apparently, had caused the cad of Manders' House to meet Mr. Gooze in the secluded shades of Coombe Wood.

Passing a dozen feet from him, Jimmy Silver & Co. could not help seeing him. Neither could they help hearing his voice as they drew near:

"I can't manage it—not this term. Look here, Gooze——"

Gooze was heard to give a grunt.

Arthur Edward Lovell slowed down.

"Hold on!" he said. "You see that tick——"

"Yes; come on!" said Jimmy Silver

"No bizney of ours," Raby pointed out.

"Isn't it?" snorted Lovell, coming to a stop. "Leggett's a Rookwood man. You know what he's up to—backing horses with that reptile Gooze. Gooze could be run in for it."

"Are you going to run him in?" inquired Newcome with sarcasm.

"Don't be an ass! I'm going to kick Leggett! You fellows may as well kick Gooze while I'm kicking Leggett—see?"

The sound of voices on the footpath caused both Leggett and Gooze to look round.

Leggett crimsoned at the sight of the Classical juniors. Gooze gave them a stare, grunted, and walked away into the wood.

Lovell turned from the path and crossed over to where Leggett stood under the tree. His friends followed him. The Modern junior looked like a fellow who had struck serious trouble.

"You tick——" began Lovell.

"Shut up, old man!" said Jimmy Silver. "Look here, Leggett, you ass, if you can't be decent, you might have a little sense. You'd be sacked if you were seen with that greasy bounder Gooze!"

"I know," muttered Leggett. "I had to see him. I say, Silver——"

He broke off, eyeing the captain of the Fourth furtively.

"What?" asked Jimmy.

The fact that Leggett evidently was in trouble of some sort disarmed Jimmy. "Uncle James" of Rookwood had a kind and tender heart.

"I—I'd like to speak to you," muttered Leggett.

"No charge," said Jimmy, with a smile.

"I—I mean——"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"You soft ass," snorted Lovell, "he means that he'd rather speak to you alone, to pull your leg, when your friends ain't on the spot to stop him. He wants to get something out of you. He'd like us to clear."

Raby and Newcome chuckled, and Jimmy reddened.

"Oh, ring off, Lovell!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Look here, Leggett, if you've got anything to say to me, cough it up, sharp!"

Leggett drew a quick, quivering breath. Jimmy's chums, if not Jimmy, had guessed that he would have preferred to speak to the captain of the Fourth alone. There was no chance of that, however, and Leggett made up his mind to it.

"Well, look here, Silver," he muttered, "I'm in a beastly scrape! I—I owe that man some money——"

"I guessed that one!" said Jimmy dryly.

"He's dunning me for it!" muttered Leggett.

"I guessed that one, too. He looked it, and so did you."

"Well, I—I—I——" Leggett stammered. "I—I say, be a sport, and—and lend me a quid to keep him quiet for a bit!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy.

That request came as a surprise to Jimmy, though not perhaps to his chums. Raby winked at Newcome, who grinned. Arthur Edward Lovell gave an emphatic snort.

"I'll square at the end of the term!" muttered Leggett. "I—I'm really in a scrape! I don't know what that man will do if I don't pay him something on account!"

Jimmy gave him a look. He could feel for a fellow who was down on his luck, even if it was due to his own dingy rascality. But lending him money to pay a gambling debt was quite a different matter.

"You worm!" said Jimmy. "Come on, you chaps! That fellow makes me feel ill!"

"I'm going to kick him!" said Lovell.

"Oh, come on!"

But Arthur Edward Lovell made a stride at Leggett, who backed away hastily. Jimmy caught his chum by the arm and dragged him to a stop.

"Cut, Leggett!" he snapped.

Albert Leggett did not need telling twice. He cut, vanishing through the trees at a rapid run. He did not look like getting a "quid" from Jimmy Silver, but he did look like getting a kick from Arthur Edward Lovell.

Lovell gave a roar of wrath.

"Leggo my arm, you cheeky ass! I tell you——"

"Chuck it, old man——"

Lovell wrenched his arm away. Jimmy made a grab at him, but he dodged, turned, and sprinted after Leggett.

"Lovell!" yelled Jimmy.

Arthur Edward Lovell did not heed. He vanished through the wood after Leggett. They disappeared, both going strong. The three Classics were left staring after them.

"Oh, the ass!" said Jimmy.

"Well, a kicking will do Leggett good," remarked Raby. "The more that tick is kicked the better. Come on. Leave him to it."

And the three juniors walked on down the footpath to Coombe Lane, and Lovell was left to it.

#### CHAPTER 34.

Pie for Mr. Poggers!

"I T'S like this 'ere——" said Slog Poggers.

"Oh!" breathed Leggett.

He stopped suddenly.

That husky voice reached his ears clearly through the thickets that were gleaming with the green of spring. And through interstices of the bushes he had a glimpse of the speaker.

No wonder he stopped! In the distance behind him, Arthur Edward Lovell was crashing in pursuit. But a dozen Lovells would have been preferable to a meeting, in a lonely wood, with the burly, piggy-eyed man whose voice came to his ears.

Mr. Poggers had made himself fairly well known at Rookwood School, and in its vicinity.

Leggett had covered quite a distance from the footpath. He had hoped to shake off Lovell. But the rustling and crashing behind him told that the indignant Arthur Edward Lovell was still in pursuit. Guessing that Arthur Edward was guided by the sounds he made, Leggett ceased to run, and crept.

Creeping silently, he hoped that Lovell would be thrown off the track. But Leggett's luck was out. So far as Lovell was concerned, his strategy was good; but creeping through the thickets, he almost crept upon Slog Poggers.

Luckily Poggers' husky voice reached him in time, and he stopped, while still screened from sight.

He breathed hard. The rustling and trampling behind was coming nearer. Slog Poggers was in front, and not alone; there was somebody else with whom he was talking. In desperation, Leggett crouched on the ground, under cover of a mass of brambles, and kept as silent as a hunted rabbit.

"Like this 'ere," Mr. Poggers was saying. "I'm going to tell you, 'Erbert. 'Cause why, I want your 'elp, and if you says 'arves, then 'arves it is."

"Give it a name, Slog," came another voice.

Loud rustling from the thickets drew Mr. Poggers' attention.

"'Ere, you 'ear that, 'Erbert?" he asked.

"I 'ear it, Slog," answered 'Erbert.

"I don't want nobody to see me 'ere," said Mr. Poggers. "I tell you, 'Erbert, I'm being 'unted something cruel, and all for nothing so far—I ain't made a bad sixpence out of it yet."

"'Ard luck!" said 'Erbert sympathetically.

Leggett, hidden in the brambles, heard Mr. Poggers rise to his feet from the log upon which he had been seated. He trembled in terror of the footpad spotting him. This was the man who had robbed Dr. Chisholm of his note-case, and had waylaid Mr. Manders half a dozen times.

Leggett dared not stir. He could hardly have moved now without attracting Slog Poggers' attention.

But Slog, listening to the rustling and crashing that approached, gave no attention to the mass of brambles near at hand.

Slog was listening uneasily.

The Latham police were seeking

very earnestly for Slog Poggers, and he had found a good deal of difficulty of late in keeping out of their reach.

Suddenly Leggett heard an exclamation from Mr. Poggers.

"That young rip!"

He had seen Lovell.

"'Ere, 'Erbert," came Mr. Poggers' husky whisper. "It's only a schoolboy—one of them Rookwood rips what got hold of me and got that there coat off me when I had it in my 'ands. I know 'im! I been jest longing for a chance to give him a 'iding! This 'ere is pie!"

Leggett grinned breathlessly.

"Keep your 'ead down," went on Mr. Poggers. "Don't let him spot you. He's coming this way, and I want to get 'old of him."

There was an assenting grunt from Herbert.

Leggett listened. Lovell was drawing nearer. Now that he could neither see nor hear Leggett, Arthur Edward was rather at a loss. But he was coming in the right direction, though he was not, perhaps, likely to stumble on the spot where the tick of Manders' House lay in cover.

Lovell was a sticker. He had told his chums that he was going to kick Leggett—and he was going to kick Leggett!

The more annoyed Lovell got, the more determined he got.

He tramped on savagely.

"Oh, here you are!" he gasped, as he spotted a figure crouching by a tree, and grabbed at it before he knew what it was. "You— Oh! Great pip!"

Lovell jumped back as he saw that it was not Leggett, but Slog Poggers.

In company with his friends, Lovell would have been glad to fall in with the man who had "pinched" the Head's wallet. Alone, even the headstrong Arthur Edward realised that Slog was too large an order for him.

He backed promptly, but as he did so, another man, hitherto unseen, reached out and dealt him a smack on the side of the head.

"Ooogh!" spluttered Lovell.

That unexpected smack sent him staggering.

Before he could right himself, Mr. Poggers was on him. He grasped Arthur Edward in sinewy hands.

"Gotcher!" grinned Mr. Poggers.

"Oh, crumbs! Leggo!" gasped Lovell, struggling wildly.

"You pitched into a bloke!" said Mr. Poggers venomously. "Pitched into 'im, and got away that overcoat wot I got off that bony old covey! Strike me pink you did!"

Mr. Poggers was not idle while he was speaking. Holding Lovell with his left hand, he punched him with his right.

It was his slogging capabilities that had earned Mr. Poggers his nickname. Arthur Edward Lovell now had an opportunity of observing that that nickname had been justly bestowed!

Leggett made no sound.

He would not have dared to go to Lovell's help if he had wanted to. And he did not want to. By the time Slog had done with him, Leggett fancied that Lovell would not be feeling like kicking anybody!

Lovell struggled frantically.

Slog Poggers was beating him like a carpet. Herbert, standing by with his hands in his pockets, was grinning.

Lovell struggled and roared. He was getting it hot, and getting it strong. In desperation he hacked at Slog's shins.

"Woouoogh!" howled Mr. Poggers, as he got that hack.

He relaxed his grasp on Lovell and hopped.

Lovell did not lose the chance. He fairly bounded away.

"Nail 'im, 'Erbert!" panted Mr. Poggers.

But Herbert clutched too late. Lovell dodged him, and cut off at top speed.

Damaged and breathless, he crashed away through Coombe Wood. Probably Herbert could not have overtaken him had he tried. But Herbert did not try; foot races did not appeal to Mr. Poggers' friend.

"Gorn!" said Herbert.

"Ow!" said Mr. Poggers. He nursed his shin. "Wow! Strike me pink! Wow!"

Lovell got back to the footpath, breathless, panting, perspiring, torn by briar and bramble. Had his friends been still there, he would have rallied them for an attack. But they were gone—and Lovell limped down the path to Coombe Lane—and sighted them again half-way to the school.

He trotted after them and shouted. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome looked back—saw Lovell, and grinned. Undoubtedly he looked untidy. They waited for him to come up.

"Had a good time?" asked Newcome, with that gentle sarcasm which was one of his little ways.

"Urrrrrgh!" gasped Lovell.

And for some time that was all that he could say.

#### CHAPTER 35.

##### A Startling Discovery!

"A CKING a covey!" said Mr. Poggers indignantly.

He sat down again on the log, resting one leg very tenderly in the grass.

"Urt?" asked Herbert.

"'Orrible!" said Mr. Poggers.

However, having rubbed the shin and rested the leg in the grass, Mr. Poggers came back to the subject under discussion.

"I was telling you, 'Erbert," he said. "And we better not 'ang about 'ere too long arter what's 'appened—that young covey what I walloped might bring a peeler along. We better be moving soon."

Leggett, 'im, under the brambles, was glad to hear it. He dared not move till Poggers and Herbert moved.

"Now, as I was a-saying, it's like this," went on Mr. Poggers. "I want your 'elp, 'Erbert, and it's worth your while."

"Give it a name!" said Herbert.

"It's weeks ago," sighed Mr. Poggers, "that I got a wallet, fair packed with



notes, off an old covey what turned out to be a schoolmaster. You see, I'd watched him open it in the post office, and follered him, and got him jest as he was going into a garding gate, as I thought. But, strike me pink, 'Erbert, it turned out that it was a school, packed with young rips like that one I've jest been wallopping; and afore I could 'ook it they was on me, chasing a bloke all over the shop."

"'Ard luck!" said Herbert.

"If I 'adn't dodged in at an open winder," said Mr. Poggers, "they'd have 'ad me. But it wasn't no good—they 'unted me down inside the 'ouse, 'Erbert. I got into a room upstairs, and 'oped I'd get clear later—but they found me out, and came a-banging at the door."

"I call it 'ard!" Herbert was very sympathetic.

"Well, I knowed then they'd get me and get the wallet back," went on Mr. Poggers, "so what do you think I did, 'Erbert? There was a big grey overcoat 'anging in the wardrobe, with a thick lining—and I jest cut the lining, and slipped the wallet inside to hide it."

Mr. Poggers glanced round.

"Did you 'ear anything?" he asked.

"Only a spadger!" said Herbert.

Leggett, under the brambles, had given a sudden start. He was quiet again now, though his heart was thumping, between his terror of being found and the excitement of the discovery he was making.

Leggett, like everybody else at Rookwood, had been mystified by Mr. Poggers' pursuit of Mr. Manders, and his repeated attempts to steal his overcoat. Now he was beginning to understand.

Slog, satisfied that that faint rustle close at hand had been caused by a bird or animal, resumed:

"You ketch the idea, 'Erbert? I knowed they'd get me, but I knowed that wallet would never be found where I put it, and the idea was to look for

that there overcoat when I come out of the stone jug."

"Cute!" said Herbert.

"But as it 'appened," went on Mr. Poggers, "I never got as far as the stone jug. They got me all right, and locked me in a room while they sent for a peeler, and not finding the wallet on me, they believed all right that I'd dropped it while they was 'unting me. Then a silly young idjit comes pokin' into the room where I was locked—that same young idjit what I've jest wallopped, 'Erbert—and I got 'old of him, and got away."

"Luck!" said Herbert.

"Well, arter that," said Mr. Poggers, "I s'posed that all I had to do was to 'ang about the school, a-watching for a bloke wearing that grey overcoat, and get it off of him. I shaved off my whiskers, thinking mebber they wouldn't know me agin, and 'ung about. But they knowed me all right when I was seen, strike me pink they did! And the trouble I 'ad, 'Erbert, trying to get that overcoat, you wouldn't believe."

"Looks easy to me," said Herbert.

"So it did to me," said Mr. Poggers sorrowfully. "But it wasn't easy, 'Erbert; it was 'ard! Last week I got that old covey agin, and had him fair and square—and what do you think? Bein' a fine day, he'd come out without his overcoat!"

"It's a 'ard life," said Herbert.

"Course, the bony old covey don't know what I'm arter—but he knows I'm arter him—and now he won't come outside the blinking school at all. Sticks in like a winkle in his shell, 'Erbert."

"Full of notes. was it?" asked Herbert.

"Forty or fifty pounds, at least."

Herbert sat up in the grass.

"Gum!" he said. Evidently Herbert was impressed.

"It's 'arves, 'Erbert, if you 'elp me get 'old of it," said Mr. Poggers. "Can't say fairer than that. I always was a square bloke. You ain't known at the school like I am—nobody ain't

seen you 'anging about. You ketch my meaning, 'Erbert?"

"I get you," assented Herbert.

"That bony old covey sticks in, jest as I said, but he can't stick in the 'ouse all that time; that stands to reason. They got a big place—gardings and such, inside them walls. You can bank on it that bony old covey takes his little walks inside the walls—and a bloke keeping an eye open, 'Erbert——"

"I get you," repeated Herbert.

"Is it a go?" asked Mr. Poggers eagerly, rising from the log. "You come along of me, and I'll point out the place from the top of the 'ill, and you can walk around and give it a squint, see?"

"I'm arter you," said Herbert.

Leggett, hardly breathing under the brambles, made no sound as the two gentlemen of the road shuffled away. For some minutes he heard the rustling in the thickets and the mumble of their voices as they went. Then there was silence.

He crawled out of the brambles at last.

Taking the direction opposite from that taken by the two tramps, he ran. He did not slacken pace till he was in the open lane.

Then he walked away towards Rookwood, his eyes gleaming with excitement from his sallow face.

The mystery of Mr. Manders' overcoat, which puzzled the whole school, was no mystery to Albert Leggett now!

Mystified as the Rookwooders had been by Slog Poggers' persistent persecution of Mr. Manders, nobody had ever thought of connecting it with the Head's lost wallet. Now Leggett knew—the only fellow at Rookwood who did!

Any other Rookwooder who had made that discovery would certainly have reported it at once. If Albert Leggett thought of doing so, he soon dismissed that idea from his mind.

Other thoughts were in Leggett's mind—thoughts that made the colour

waver in his cheeks and caused his heart to beat quicker. The cad of Manders' House had no intention of telling what he knew. What Leggett knew was Leggett's secret.

## CHAPTER 36.

### Dropping in on Manders!

"SILVER!"

"Sir!"

"Where is Lovell?"

"Lovell, sir?" said Jimmy Silver questioningly.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were coming in at the school gates. Mr. Manders was walking in the quadrangle.

Since his last encounter with Slog Poggers, all Roger Manders' walks had been taken within the walls of Rookwood, as Slog had told his friend in the wood. Never, till he heard officially that Mr. Poggers had been "run in," did Roger Manders intend to take a single step outside the school gates.

Rookwood fellows smiled when they saw Mr. Manders taking his walks in the quad. Really, Manders was hardly to be blamed for desiring to avoid encounters with so hefty a gentleman as Slog Poggers. Still, some of the fellows said that it was funky of Manders.

The Housemaster was not unconscious of the smiles, nods and winks. They gave a sharper edge to his temper—already sorely tried, and never very good. And the whole thing was Lovell's fault.

But for Lovell's fatheaded intervention, Slog would never have got away on the night of the man-hunt at Rookwood. He would have been safe under lock and key, and Manders free to take his walks abroad as he liked.

Perhaps it was not surprising, therefore, that Mr. Manders entertained quite bitter feelings towards Arthur Edward. He considered that the Head had let him off very lightly by gating him for all the half-holidays that term, instead of flogging him. But he could,

at least, see that Lovell received his just punishment if he disregarded that gating—as the unthinking Arthur Edward not infrequently did!

That was why he pounced, rather like a hawk, on Jimmy Silver & Co. as they came in at the gates. Lovell had been out with them—against orders, of course—and one glance at Mr. Manders' face showed that he knew. How he knew was hard to guess, for Lovell had not walked out at the gates—he had dropped over a wall, and joined his friends outside. Neither had he come in with them under the eyes of old Mack. While his friends entered in the usual way, Lovell scuttled along to negotiate a wall at a safe corner.

But Manders, it was clear, knew. "I have asked you a question, Silver!" he rapped. "Answer me at once! Where is Lovell?"

Jimmy looked round. "I can't see him, sir," he answered. "What—what?" snapped Mr. Manders.

"Shall I tell him you want him, sir, when I see him?" asked Jimmy Silver gravely and respectfully.

"Lovell is under sentence from the headmaster, Silver," said Mr. Manders. "He is not allowed out of gates."

"So I've heard, sir," assented Jimmy. "He has been out of gates with you this afternoon, Silver."

"Has he, sir?"  
"Answer me directly, Silver! Two hours ago I saw Lovell go into Little Quad, and when I looked for him he was not there. I noticed that you had just gone out. You cannot deceive me, Silver."

Jimmy's eyes glistened. "Nobody's deceiving you, sir. I'm not bound to answer any master but my own Form-master or the Head, and I'm not going to."

The reply was more like Lovell than Jimmy. But Uncle James was angry. He felt that it was time to let the meddlesome Modern master know where he got off, so to speak.

"That is impertinence, Silver!" thundered Mr. Manders. "Tell me the truth! Has Lovell been out of gates with you?"

"I shall tell you the truth or nothing, sir!" answered Jimmy, with a disdain he did not trouble to hide.

"Will you answer my question, Silver?"

"No, sir; I won't!" said Jimmy. "I'll answer Mr. Dalton, if he asks me—but it's got nothing to do with Manders' House."

That was a plain statement of fact. As a Modern master, of scientific training, and a whale on mathematics, Mr. Manders ought to have liked plain facts plainly stated. But his expression showed that he didn't.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Manders. "There appears to be no limit to the insolence of Mr. Dalton's boys. I am perfectly well aware, Silver, that Lovell has been out of school bounds, in your company."

"Then there's no need to ask me, sir, is there?" inquired Jimmy.

"Where is Lovell now?" hooted Mr. Manders. "I know perfectly well that it is his intention to enter the school surreptitiously, as he left it. I shall take him to the headmaster as soon as I find him. Where is he?"

"Do you think he's out of gates, sir?" asked Jimmy.

"I am assured that he is, Silver."  
"Then you can go out and look for him, sir, if you want to take him to the Head!" suggested Jimmy.

Mr. Manders crimsoned. He knew that Jimmy was alluding to the circumstance that he dared not go out of gates on account of Slog Poggers.

Not to catch a dozen Lovells would Mr. Manders have gone out of gates, as Jimmy Silver knew very well.

The Modern master made a stride forward—and Jimmy made a jump back.

"Come on, you men!" he said. "Time we got in to tea!"

Scuttling round Mr Manders, the

three headed for their House. They went at a trot, leaving Roger Manders breathing wrath.

As the Housemaster stood there, a junior of his own House came in at the gates—rather breathlessly.

It was Leggett of the Modern Fourth.

Leggett had lost no time in getting back to Rookwood from Coombe Wood. As Jimmy Silver & Co. had not hurried on the way, he had arrived very soon after them.

Mr. Manders glanced at him, noticing, with a frown, that he looked grubby and untidy—which was not surprising after his experiences in the wood.

"Leggett!" rapped Mr. Manders.

Rookwood fellows were not expected to come in dusty and grubby and untidy on half-holidays. Mr. Manders was in want of a victim for his irritated temper. Like many another bad-tempered man, he fancied that the wreaking of his irritation was a just severity dictated by a sense of duty.

"Yes, sir!" said Leggett.

He wondered for one terrified moment whether his Housemaster had learned anything of his dealings with Mr. Googe.

"How dare you appear in public in that untidy, indeed disgraceful state?" demanded Mr. Manders.

"Oh!" gasped Leggett. "It—it's not my fault, sir! Lovell was chasing me in the wood, and——"

Mr. Manders' eyes snapped.

"Lovell!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, and——"

"You met Lovell out of gates, Leggett?"

"Yes, sir, in the wood, and——"

"That will do, Leggett. You may go. Brush yourself down at once; do not let me see you again in that state."

"Yes, sir!"

Leggett walked on to Manders' House, and did not grin till his back was to his Housemaster.

It was not by accident that he had let Lovell's name slip. He was not

aware that Manders was already on Lovell's track, but he was quite aware how welcome that news would be to him.

Rookwood fellows would have called it sneaking, but Leggett took the view that Lovell shouldn't chase a chap through the wood if he didn't want it mentioned.

Mr. Manders set his lips hard.

He knew now. He could not go to the Head, taking a boy of his own House as tell-tale evidence. But he knew now that Lovell was out of gates, and all he had to do was to catch him as he came in.

He walked away quickly to Little Quad. He had no doubt that Lovell had gone out that way, and it was probable that he would come in as he had gone out. If he did, he was going to drop right into Manders' hands.

From the doorway of Manders' House Leggett looked back and grinned again as he saw his Housemaster disappear through the archway into Little Quad. If Manders was after Lovell he was safe away from his House for a time—and Albert Leggett had certain reasons for desiring Mr. Manders to be safe away from his House for a time. He went quickly into the House.

Mr. Manders went into Little Quad.

In a certain corner there, behind an angle of the library wall, was a deep recess, where one of the old Rookwood beeches grew. It was exactly the spot that a fellow would have selected for getting out unseen—and Manders had no doubt that it was the spot that Lovell had selected.

He was right!

As he turned the corner of the library, with the old beech and the school wall in front of him, he had a sudden back view of a pair of trousers.

They were Lovell's.

Having clambered up the wall from outside and clambered over it, Arthur Edward was now holding on, preparatory to dropping within—a drop of about six feet.

With gleaming eyes, the Modern master darted forward. Standing under Lovell, he grabbed at his ankles. Lovell was appearing over the wall again.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Lovell, taken utterly by surprise by that sudden grasp from below.

"Lovell," thundered Mr. Manders, "I have caught you, and now I will—Whooop! Yooop! Gurrrrrgg!"

Lovell, in his surprise, let go.

He had been about to drop. Now he dropped. Had not Mr. Manders been there he would have dropped on the ground. Mr. Manders being there, he naturally dropped on Mr. Manders.

"Urrrgggh!" spluttered Manders. He staggered.

Lovell, for a split second, was actually sitting on top of his head. Manders, naturally, crumpled.

He fairly folded up on the earth, and Lovell sprawled dizzily over him.

"Ow!" gasped Lovell. "Who—what

—"

"Urrrggh!"

Lovell scrambled up. He stared at Mr. Manders. Breathless, gasping, gurgling, the Modern master was strewn at his feet.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Lovell.

"Urrrggh!"

Mr. Manders sat up dizzily. He was breathless. He was hurt. He grabbed a bony knee which had knocked hard on hard earth. It had a pain in it—a distinct and severe pain.

"You—you—you—" gurgled Mr. Manders. "You—you—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You—you young rascal. You—you—you—"

Manders, with the assistance of a hand on the wall, dragged himself up.

He gave a yelp as he stood, his damaged knee undergoing a severe twinge. He almost hopped. He looked so dangerous that Lovell backed hastily out of reach.

"You—you young rascal!" gasped Mr. Manders. "You have been out of bounds! I shall report this to your

headmaster—wurrgh!—as soon as I have—gurrgh!—attended to my injuries—Oooooogh!"

Mr. Manders had intended to march Lovell off to his headmaster there and then. But he was feeling in no state now for performing that duty. He was breathless and flustered, stacked with aches and pains, and his damaged knee required attention. Gasping, he limped away to his House.

"Oh, crikey!" said Lovell.

And he walked away, with dismaying news for his chums in the end study. Not for the first time had he disregarded his headmaster's sentence—and now he had done so once too often. As a hunter of trouble Arthur Edward Lovell had few equals, and this time it was clear he had hunted it fairly down.

#### CHAPTER 37.

Brought to Light!

WHITE as chalk, Albert Leggett listened.

All was quiet.

He stood outside a door on the top landing in Manders' House.

On that floor there were only bedrooms, belonging to various members of the staff who lodged in Manders' House. There was little danger of being spotted there in the afternoon.

It was safe as houses, as Leggett told himself, creeping up the stairs. But the cad of Manders' House had not the courage of his rascality. He was scared at what he was going to do.

But it was quite safe. He whipped open the door of Mr. Manders' room, whipped in, and silently closed the door behind him.

Had Manders been in the House he would never have dared. But Manders was out of the House; he had watched him going into Little Quad. It looked as if he was after Lovell, and, if he were, he would be busy for some time. Anyhow, he was taking one of his walks in the quad and was not likely to come in yet. Even if he did he would go

into his study on the ground floor. There was no imaginable reason why he should come up to his bed-room. It was absolutely safe—and it was not fear of Manders, but fear of what he was going to do himself that made Leggett's face whiten and caused his knees to knock together.

He knew where his Housemaster kept that big overcoat, where Poggers had found it on the night of the man-hunt. He crossed quickly to the tall wardrobe.

He opened it, and the grey overcoat on its wooden hanger was before his eyes! With trembling hands he groped over it.

If the wallet were there it could not be felt through the lining. The description of that notecase had been made known to all Rookwood. Leggett knew that it was small, of slim Russia leather—only the notes in it gave it any bulk. The coat was of thick material and the lining was thick; it was not surprising that Mr. Manders had never discovered so small an article tucked away between material and lining.

Leggett groped in the pockets.

There must be a slit in the lining, from what Slog Poggers had said. But he found no slit. Every pocket was intact.

He stood with beating heart.

Poggers must have been stating the facts. He knew that. And yet— Suddenly he remembered.

That coat had been grabbed off Manders once, and Jimmy Silver & Co. had recaptured it for its owner after a tussle with the thief. Buttons had been torn off it. It had been left with the House dame for repair. That was why Manders had gone out once in an old coat, which Poggers had succeeded in snaffling. No doubt Mrs. Moote, in sewing on the buttons, had discerned that rent in the lining, and mended it.

That must be it! The slit had been there, but was no longer there. It was easy enough to make another—it only meant a little delay.

Leggett opened his penknife and cut a gash in the lining.

He groped within.

He caught his breath as his hand came in contact with a smooth surface and emerged with the wallet in his fingers.

It was the Head's long-lost wallet—packed with notes as when Slog Poggers' thievish hands had "pinched" it from Dr. Chisholm.

"Oh!" breathed Leggett.

He replaced the overcoat, and shut the wardrobe door. He stood with the Head's notecase in his hand.

It contained, as he knew, forty-five pounds, ten shillings. One of those pounds would be enough to keep Mr. Googe quiet, and give him a breathing-space.

He opened the wallet.

There were banknotes in it and currency notes. The former he dared not touch. It was possible that the Head had kept the numbers. A few of the currency notes—

He stepped to the window to pick them out in the light, but he hesitated to pick them out. Bad as he was, unscrupulous young rascal as he was, something within him seemed to rise up against what he was doing.

And as he stood, there came a sound of footsteps on the stairs, and he started and shuddered.

Someone was coming up to the top landing.

One of the masters going to his room. Not Manders—surely not Manders! He dared not think it was Manders.

He listened in terror to the footsteps. He heard a grunting, mumbling sound, like a man in pain. It was Manders—he seemed to be damaged somehow—Manders, coming up to his room.

Leggett's heart almost died within him.

Whatever Manders might think of finding him there, at least he was not going to know the facts. That would have meant the end of all things for Albert Leggett at Rookwood School!

He had a few moments. He pushed up the sash of the window. He snapped the wallet shut, and flung it out with all the force of his arm as far as he could. He heard a sound below as it struck a branch out of his sight. The next instant the window was closed, and Leggett standing with his back to it, as the door opened and Mr. Manders limped in.

"Leggett!" he exclaimed. "Leggett, what are you doing here?"

"I—I—" stammered Leggett.

Mr. Manders glared at him, in equal anger and astonishment. He had come up to his room for embrocation to rub on his damaged knee, but in his angry amazement at the sight of a junior in the room he forgot it.

"How dare you come here, Leggett? What trick have you been playing in my room? What—"

Leggett gasped.

"I—I—I came to—to get away from some fellows, sir. They were going to rag me, and—and I thought there was no harm—"

"No harm!" thundered Mr. Manders. "How dare you, Leggett! I do not believe you! Your statement is absurd! You were about to play some trick—if, indeed, your intentions were not dishonest. You have every appearance of a pilferer, Leggett. Go! Wait for me in my study!"

Leggett went.

He waited for Mr. Manders in his study. It was a long wait and a dismal one. His anticipations were dire. And when Mr. Manders came at last, those anticipations were fully realised.

Perhaps the sharp twinges in his damaged knee caused Mr. Manders to lay it on harder than he might otherwise had done. Certainly he laid it on hard enough. When he was finished, Leggett crawled away, almost folded up like a pocket-knife.

It was quite a long time before Leggett felt equal to going out into the quad to look for the wallet. And when he looked he did not find it.

## CHAPTER 38.

Not Having It!

"TAIN'T fair!" said Lovell savagely.

"My dear chap—"

"It's no good telling me it's fair, Jimmy Silver, because it isn't! And I'm jolly well not having it—see?"

Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth Form at Rookwood, spoke with emphasis and determination.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome exchanged hopeless looks. As Lovell's chums, they were deeply concerned. Other fellows in the Fourth grinned.

Fair or not, it was not of much use for Lovell to declare that he wasn't "having it." Whatever his headmaster awarded to any fellow, that fellow had to have.

"For goodness' sake, old chap—" said Jimmy Silver.

"I'm not having it!" said Lovell, in a tone of finality. "If Dicky Dalton sends me up to the Head, I shall say that—"

"Quiet, you ass!" breathed Raby. "He may come along and hear you."

"I don't care if he does."

Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth, seemed to be late that morning to take his Form. All the Fourth were there—Modern and Classical—second lesson being one that they shared in common. Moderns and Classics alike sympathised with Lovell. Everybody knew that he was booked for a Head's flogging. But they were equally amused by his statement that he wasn't having it.

"Here he comes!" said Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth, as a footstep was heard in the passage.

"Let him come!" said Lovell. "You'll jolly soon see!"

"You blithering ass!" whispered Jimmy Silver. "Dicky's late because the Head was speaking to him. You can guess what it was about. Now, for the love of Mike—"

"I jolly well tell you—" roared Lovell.

That roar remained uncompleted as Mr. Dalton, looking very severe, stepped into the Form-room. He gave Lovell a glance, and Arthur Edward, excited and wrathful as he was, was silent.

"Lovell," said Mr. Dalton quietly.

"Yes, sir," said Arthur Edward respectfully, but firmly.

"You will go to the Head's study after third school. Dr. Chisholm has instructed me to send you there, Lovell."

Lovell breathed hard and deep. Dalton, having made that statement, was ready to get on with the lesson as if the matter was closed. It wasn't closed.

"Will you tell me why, sir?" asked Lovell.

Mr. Dalton gave him another look.

"You are perfectly aware why, Lovell. Your headmaster gated you for all the half-holidays this term. Yesterday you went out of school bounds, disregarding the sentence. You will receive a flogging."

"Do you call that fair, sir?" asked Lovell.

Mr. Dalton jumped.

"What!" he ejaculated.

Again Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome exchanged hopeless looks. Lovell, as usual, having got more than he wanted, was asking for more. There was a thrill of excitement in the Fourth.

"Lovell," said Mr. Dalton, "what do you mean? Have you the audacity to question the justice of your headmaster?"

"I—I didn't mean that, sir!" Lovell stammered a little. "But——"

"Then what do you mean?" rapped Mr. Dalton.

"I mean it's not fair, sir!" said Lovell stubbornly. "And if a man isn't getting fair play, he has a right to expect his Form-master to get it for him."

Mr. Dalton gave Lovell a long, long look.

"That is certainly true, Lovell," he said at last. "And if it were in my

power to intervene, I would gladly do so. Do you deny that you went out of bounds yesterday, in defiance of the headmaster's order?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Lovell. "I went out all right."

"Then there is no more to be said."

"I think there is, sir," said Lovell. "Fair play's a jewel, sir."

Mr. Dalton breathed hard, but, to the surprise of his Form, he remained patient. Dicky Dalton was a very good-tempered young man.

"If you have anything to say, Lovell, I will hear you," he said. "But be brief."

"I'm not complaining of being gated, sir," said Lovell. "I think it was pretty rough luck, because I was only trying to get back the Head's wallet, which that man Poggers pinched, and I——"

"We will not go into that, Lovell!" rapped Mr. Dalton. "Your foolish interference caused the escape of the pickpocket who had robbed your headmaster. You were very lightly dealt with. Say no more!"

It was quite futile for Dicky Dalton to give that command. Lovell had more to say, and was going to say it.

"I call it rough luck, sir, as what I meant was to do the Head a good turn," said Lovell. "Still, I know I was gated, and I went out. But it was Manders who caught me, and reported me to the Head. It's not Manders' business, sir."

"Lovell!"

"I've a right to say what's fair, sir," said Lovell. "Modern masters haven't anything to do with the Classical side. If a Classical master started reporting Moderns, Manders would kick up a row fast enough."

"I cannot discuss that with you, Lovell."

"I'm pointing out that it's not fair, sir. If Manders had minded his own business, the Head wouldn't know I was out of bounds yesterday afternoon. Mr. Manders had no right to interfere.



Modern beaks oughtn't to hang about spying on Classical chaps."

"Lovell!"

"I don't think it's fair for a Classical man to be up for a flogging because a Modern beak can't mind his own business," said Lovell. "That's what I wanted to point out, sir."

How Lovell found the nerve to say all this to his Form-master was a mystery to his Form fellows. Every fellow, of course, fully agreed with him. Manders was a meddlesome old tick in the general opinion, and it was like his cheek to report Classical men. Very likely Richard Dalton, in his heart of hearts, had the same opinion as his Form. Still, it was obvious to everybody but Lovell that he was wasting his breath.

"I have listened to you patiently, Lovell," said Mr. Dalton. "You will now be silent. As you will receive a flogging from your headmaster after third school, I shall not punish you for your impertinence. But if you utter another word, I shall cane you!"

"But, sir——" Lovell immediately uttered two other words.

"Will you be silent, Lovell?" said Mr. Dalton.

"I'm trying to make you see, sir, that it's not fair!"

Mr. Dalton picked up the cane from his desk. He was a kind and patient young man, but Lovell had exhausted his patience.

"Step out before the class, Lovell," he said. "Now bend over that desk. Thank you."

Whack!

"You will now be silent, I trust," said Mr. Dalton.

Arthur Edward Lovell went back to his place. He was silent; his feelings were too deep for words. Dalton had given him only a flick—a hint that he was boss of the show, as it were, in the Fourth Form Room—but there was clearly more to come if Lovell did not shut up.

Lovell shut up, and sat through

second lesson with suppressed indignation that glowed in his face and gleamed in his eyes. In that frame of mind there really was no telling what Lovell might or might not say and do.

## CHAPTER 30.

### The History of the Mystery!

"SILVER, old chap——"

"Oh, don't bother!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

"I say——" muttered Leggett.

"Leave me alone!"

It was not like "Uncle James" of Rookwood to answer like that, even to a tick like Leggett, whom he disliked and despised; but Uncle James was fearfully worried, and, for once, his sunny temper failed him.

In break Lovell's chums had been arguing with him. It was useless, of course. Lovell had declared that he "wasn't having it"—and he adhered with stubborn obstinacy to that declaration.

According to Lovell, he wasn't going to the Head after third school. He had to—but he wouldn't! He ended the argument by stalking away, leaving his friends overwhelmed with apprehension.

With that worry on his mind, Jimmy naturally had no patience to waste on the cad of Manders' House.

But as the Modern junior stepped back, with pale face and quivering lip, Jimmy's kind heart smote him.

"Hold on!" he said. "Look here, what did you want to say? You know I'm worried about Lovell, but cough it up."

That Leggett was in trouble was hardly a secret. The dingy black sheep of Manders' House was not infrequently in trouble. In fact, Jimmy—who had seen him speaking to Mr. Googe in Coombe Wood the day before—had a pretty clear idea of the trouble. It was not the sort of trouble with which a decent, healthy fellow like Jimmy could sympathise very much.

"I know it's cheek to ask you," muttered Leggett. "We've never been friends. And—and I'm done for, Silver, if somebody doesn't help me out. And—and I can't ask anybody else."

Jimmy grunted angrily.

He knew perfectly well why Leggett had picked him out for help. He knew that he erred on the side of a too-easy-going good nature, and he thought it rotten of Leggett to take advantage of it. He felt inclined to kick the Modern junior; but, instead of kicking him, he listened to his tale of woe.

"You saw me yesterday," mumbled Leggett. "I—I had to see that man Googe. I owe him money. He's going to kick up a row"

"What did you expect?" grunted Jimmy. "Do you think you can play the shady blackguard without trouble to come?"

"I—I thought the horse was going to win—"

"You silly idiot!"

"I know I've been a fool," groaned Leggett, "but that doesn't help me now. I owe him the money, and I can't pay him. If he does kick up a row, goodness knows what will happen to me here!"

"The sack, I suppose," growled Jimmy. "You've asked for it."

Leggett winced.

"Well, I don't want to rub it in," said Jimmy Silver, remorseful again. "But, look here, what do you want?"

"If I let him have a pound on account he will leave me alone till next term. I can manage then."

Jimmy compressed his lips. He wondered whether Leggett knew that he had received a pound note as a "tip" from home that week. It looked as if he did.

"I know it's a cheek to ask you," mumbled Leggett drearily. "But I'm right up against it."

Jimmy had a struggle in his mind. His pocket-money was moderate, and he had plenty of uses for an extra "quid." To let it go to a dingy black-

guard like that man Googe was the very last use he would have thought of making of it. The wretched Leggett watched him with anxious hope.

"I—I say, I—I might be able to do something for Lovell in return," he muttered.

Jimmy stared.

"What the dickens do you mean? You can't get that fathead off his flogging, I suppose?"

"Well, there might be a chance," muttered Leggett. "If the Head's wallet was found, he might go easy with Lovell."

"You silly owl!" snapped Jimmy. "The Head's wallet has been lost for weeks—ever since that night Poggers pinched it and chucked it away, when we all got after him. It's been hunted for high and low. Why, Lovell himself put in hours hunting for it, thinking that the Beak might let him off the gating if he found it. What rot are you talking?"

"I mean it!" Leggett gave a cautious glance round, fearful that other ears might hear. "I'll tell you something, Jimmy Silver. But, for goodness' sake, keep it dark! In the wood yesterday I heard that man Poggers and a pal of his he called Herbert talking about the Head's wallet. You know that Poggers has been after old Manders, trying to steal his overcoat—"

"What on earth about that?"

"The wallet was in it!" whispered Leggett.

"The Head's wallet in Manders' overcoat?" repeated Jimmy Silver, wondering whether Leggett's troubles had turned his brain.

"I know it sounds weird," said Leggett. "But that's the truth. That's why that tramp has been hunting Manders for weeks, trying to steal his overcoat. I heard him tell the other brute. That night he was caught here, you remember, he was run down in Manders' House—hiding in Manders' own room. Well, he hid the wallet in a rent in the lining of Manders' over-

coat hanging up in the wardrobe there. I heard him say so. That's why he's been watching for Manders ever since, trying to steal that overcoat."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "But if you found this out yesterday, why haven't you——"

"I—I never said anything about it. After I came in, I went to Manders' room and—found it there in the lining of his overcoat, just as that man Poggers said——"

"Then——"

"Oh, you won't understand!" muttered Leggett. "That man Googe had been threatening me. I—I thought I'd borrow——"

"Borrow!" repeated Jimmy.

"Borrow a pound, to keep him quiet——"

"Are you mad?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"I was going to let it be found with the rest in it," muttered Leggett. "Don't look at me like that——"

"You make me sick!" said Jimmy.

"You ought to be kicked out of the school, you awful toad! You dare to tell me you pinched——"

"I never did!" panted Leggett. "Manders came up to the room and caught me there. I had just time to chuck the wallet out of the window before he could see it. He might have thought——"

"He might have thought the truth, do you mean?" said Jimmy savagely.

"Well, I never touched it, as it turned out. Manders thought I was there playing some trick, and whopped me. Afterwards, I looked for the wallet, but it couldn't be found. I think it hit a tree when I threw it out of the window—I heard it hit something a good distance from the House. I've told you this because—because I——"

"Because you can't find the wallet and pinch a pound note out of it!" said Jimmy, with disgust. "Oh, you toad!"

"I needn't have told you!" said Leggett sullenly. "It's somewhere

about, though I can't find it. It was losing all that money that made the Head so wild with Lovell. You've got to keep dark what I've told you—if you picked up the wallet they'd believe it had been about the quad all the time. If the Beak got it back, he'd go easy with Lovell——"

"How am I to find it, if you can't?"

"Well, there's a chance, anyhow. It must be somewhere, and not very far from Manders' House."

Jimmy stood silent. It was true enough that if the Head recovered that lost wallet, with the forty-five pounds ten shillings it contained, it might very likely make him take a more lenient view of Lovell's offences. But the chance was a remote one. It was pretty clear that Leggett had hunted for it and failed. But Jimmy was thinking not only of that, but of the wretched fellow before him.

"You had a stroke of luck, Manders catching you as he did," he said quietly. "You know what you'd be now if he hadn't. You must have been mad, even to think——"

Jimmy's hand slid into his pocket. The fellow was a rank outsider. But what he had thought of doing, what he had so nearly done, showed in what desperate straits he was. Jimmy Silver's pound note was booked!

#### CHAPTER 40.

##### Looking After Lovell!

"ROT!" said Lovell.

It was, of course, exactly like Lovell.

For weeks after the Head's wallet had been lost, Lovell had put in his leisure time hunting for it, hoping that if he found it the Head would let him off the gating. But now that Jimmy Silver proposed a hunt for the lost wallet, Lovell pronounced it "rot!"

"Utter rot!" he added, as Jimmy gave him an exasperated glare. "It can't be found. Haven't I hunted for it?"

"You're rather an ass, you know!" Raby pointed out. "It might be lying right under your nose and you'd miss it."

"Look here——" roared Lovell.

"Give me a chance to speak, you fathead!" said Jimmy Silver. "We're up to Monsieur Monceau for third school. We can chance it a bit with Mossou, and get in late. That gives us a chance to hunt for the wallet——"

"I've told you there's no chance!" said Lovell.

"I've told you there is. I can't tell you why I believe so, because it's another fellow's bizney, but you can take my word for it."

"Somebody pulling your leg, old chap," said Lovell. "You're a bit soft, Jimmy. Anybody can pull your leg."

In view of what Lovell had coming to him from the Head, Jimmy Silver did not punch his nose. But never had he felt more strongly tempted to do so.

Raby and Newcome were puzzled by what Jimmy had told them. He could not, of course, give Leggett's shady secret away. Had Leggett's dealings with that wallet become known, he would have been expelled from Rookwood on the spot. Jimmy, therefore, could only tell his friends that he had a reason to think that the lost wallet might be found if hunted for—and though Raby and Newcome were puzzled, they were willing to believe that Jimmy knew what he was talking about.

Not so Lovell! Lovell always knew best.

"I'm not bothering about that rotten wallet," went on Lovell. "No good thinking about that now. It's lost for good, or it would have turned up before this."

"I tell you I've heard something about it——"

"Well, what have you heard, then?"

"I can't tell you that, but you can take my word for it that there's a chance of getting hold of the wallet, and——"

"I can take your word all right," agreed Lovell, "but you haven't much sense, old chap, and you let fellows pull your leg. I saw you talking with that tick Leggett a few minutes ago, and I'll bet he got your pound note off you."

Jimmy crimsoned, and Raby and Newcome grinned.

"Never mind that pound note!" snorted Jimmy.

"Leggett's minding it, I expect!" grinned Lovell. "Did he spin you a yarn for it? Are you ass enough to believe him if he did? You ought never to go out without your friends, Jimmy. You're too soft."

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"Are you coming to help look for that wallet?" he asked.

"No! I've got something else on hand," answered Lovell. "The bell will go in a few minutes now. I've been thinking out what to do while you've been letting that Modern tick gammon you. I've decided——"

"To go to the Head?"

"Hardly!" Lovell snorted. "I'll watch it! It's up to Dicky Dalton to stand by me, only he can't see it. Manders has no right to report me, and I'm not having it. The old fox is shirty every day now, because of that tramp Poggers chasing him, and trying to steal his silly overcoat. Is it my fault if a lunatic gets after Manders? Well, he's not going to take it out of me. That's why he's down on me."

"All the same——"

"You needn't jaw—and there's not much time for jaw now, anyhow, if I'm to get clear before the bell goes."

"Get clear?" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"I'm ordered to go to the Head after third school, and the bell goes for third school in a few minutes. Well, I'm not going. I'm going to cut third school so that I shan't be on hand afterwards, see?"

"See?" gasped Jimmy Silver. "No, I don't quite see. You've got to go to the Head's study, or Bulkeley will take you there by your neck——"

"He's got to get hold of my neck first!" said Lovell. "My neck will be far enough out of his reach if I'm out of gates. I'm not going into third school. I'm going for a walk."

"You—you—you're going for a walk!" stuttered Jimmy Silver. "You benighted ass, you'd be sacked if you checked the beaks like that—"

"Sacked like a shot!" said Raby.

Lovell's face set obstinately.

"I don't think so!" he answered. "But I'm chancing it, at any rate! You can go and hunt for that jolly old wallet if you like. I'm off!"

With which Arthur Edward Lovell turned round and walked away towards the gates. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome stared after him, hardly believing their eyes.

Gates were open. Only seniors were allowed out in break, and Lovell was "gated," anyhow, and it was just on time for third school. Old Mack, the porter, was in the gateway; his eyes were on Lovell.

Arthur Edward Lovell was famed in the Rookwood Fourth as a hunter of trouble. But it was safe to say that he had never hunted it so hard as this before.

In his present state of indignant and obstinate stubbornness, Lovell was apparently prepared to set the whole school at defiance. With his chin up, he marched off to the gates.

"Lovell!" It was Mr. Manders' voice. The Modern master was in the quad, and he bore down on Lovell as the junior bore down to the gates. "Stop! Where are you going, Lovell?"

Lovell's eyes gleamed. He turned on Mr. Manders, looked that bony gentleman full in his bony face, and then deliberately turned his back on him.

Having thus demonstrated what he thought of Manders, Lovell marched on gate-ward.

Manders was left, glaring, crimson. "Lovell!" he shouted. "Stop! Upon my word! Stop!"

Lovell marched on, unheeding.

Old Mack blocked his way.

"You can't go out, sir!" said Old Mack. "Now, you jest—"

"Get out of the way, please!" said Lovell. "I don't want to push you over, Mack—and if you don't want it, either, just shift!"

"My eye!" said old Mack, blinking at him.

There was no doubt that in another moment or two Lovell would have pushed old Mack over and walked out. But at that moment there was a rush of feet behind him, and three pairs of hands were laid on him at the same moment.

Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome dragged him back—so suddenly and so forcibly that Arthur Edward hit the quadrangle with the back of his head, and roared.

"Hold him!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"You bet!"

"You cheeky louts!" bawled Lovell. "Leggo! Do you hear me?"

His chums did not let go. They

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grasped hard and tight, and whisked Lovell away. They went at a run, anxious to get him away from the gates.

Lovell objected strenuously. He struggled, he wriggled, and he roared. The bell was beginning to ring for third school as Lovell was hooked back to the House.

"Now, are you coming into Form?" panted Jimmy Silver.

"No!" roared Lovell.

"Hook him in!" said Jimmy.

"What-ho!"

Still wriggling and struggling, Lovell was hooked in, amid a grinning crowd of juniors. He was landed, with a bump, at his desk.

"Now, you blithering idiot—" gasped Jimmy.

Lovell bounced up again like an india-rubber ball. He made a bound for the door to escape.

"Look out!" shrieked Oswald.

It was too late! Monsieur Monceau, the French master, came in as Lovell bounded out!

They met in the doorway with a crash.

"Mon Dieu!" spluttered Mossoo, as he staggered back. "Vat is zat! Ooh!"

"Oooogh!" gasped Lovell.

Hands grasped him before he could dodge round the staggering French master. He was whirled back to his desk. His friends held him pinned there.

"Ciel!" gasped Monsieur Monceau. He tottered in. "Lovell! Vat for you give me vun crash like vun bull zat is mad? Vat? You will write vun hundred lines of ze Henriade after class—ecoutez! Vat is ze mattair viz you, head of a pudding?"

Lovell had to sit it out. But he gave his anxious friends grim looks. He was booked for third school; there was no escape from that. After third school he was to go to the Head—and a prefect would take him if he did not go. But Arthur Edward Lovell was not beaten yet! He had said that he wasn't having it—and what he had said, he had said!

## CHAPTER 41.

### A Startling Discovery!

"LOVELL!"

"Yes, Bulkeley!"

"I've been looking for you!" snapped the prefect.

"Well, now you've found me," said Lovell coolly.

The captain of Rookwood looked at him, so did about fifty other fellows.

Third school was over. Lovell, ordered to go to the Head, had not gone. It was known far and wide that he was not going—if he could help it. As the next item on the programme would be a Sixth Form prefect looking for Lovell, to take him to his headmaster, the general impression was that he couldn't help it.

Now the critical moment had come. Bulkeley of the Sixth had looked for him, and here he was. Breathless attention was concentrated on Arthur Edward Lovell.

"The Head is expecting you, Lovell!" rapped Bulkeley. "Follow me at once!"

He turned to go back to the House. Lovell stood stockstill in the quad. Bulkeley turned again.

"Did you hear me, Lovell?" he hooted.

"I'm not deaf!" Lovell pointed out.

"I told you to follow me!"

"I know that."

Bulkeley looked at him almost blankly. This was a rather new experience for George Bulkeley.

"Are you coming?" he rapped.

"No!"

Bulkeley, with a red face, strode straight at Lovell, with outstretched hand. Lovell jumped back.

"Chuck it, Lovell, you ass!" exclaimed Mornington.

"Lovell, old man—" called out Erroll

Lovell did not heed. Grim and stubborn determination was written in his face. Bulkeley rushed at him—and

Lovell dodged again, and cut off across the quad.

There was a roar behind him—of amazement, mingled with laughter. Lovell tore on. After him rushed the captain of Rookwood.

"Lovell!" shrieked Jimmy, in utter dismay.

Lovell headed towards the gates. Old Mack stood in the gateway—but he was prepared to up-end old Mack. But Neville of the Sixth was there, too—and up-ending Neville was another matter.

Changing his direction, Lovell ran towards Manders' House.

"Stop!" roared Bulkeley.

Lovell tore on, with the Rookwood captain in pursuit, and a whole mob of excited fellows following Bulkeley. Lovell had the spotlight now.

He ran hard. The chase swept round Manders' House and back into the quad.

"Stop him!" roared Bulkeley, and two or three Sixth Form men, on the Classical side, ran to intercept Lovell as he came back from the Modern side.

Lovell stopped, breathless.

Bulkeley's grasp was hardly a foot off him, when, in sheer desperation, he grabbed at the ancient beech that stood in front of Manders' House, and clambered up the trunk.

The Rookwood captain grabbed at him as he went. Perhaps it was by accident, in that wildly excited moment, that Lovell's heel clumped on Bulkeley's nose. The prefect gave a yelp, and clasped his nose, and Lovell escaped his grasp.

Clambering breathlessly, Lovell got into the tree. Lodged in the branches over the thick, ancient trunk, he panted for breath and glared defiance.

Under the branches a mob of fellows swarmed. Bulkeley, rubbing his nose, stared up.

"Will you come down?" he bawled.

"No!" gasped Lovell. "I won't!"

"You mad young ass!" howled

Bulkeley. "The Head's waiting for you. Do you want to be sacked?"

"Looks as if he does!" murmured Morny. "Never saw a chap beg for it so earnestly before!"

"Lovell," almost wailed Jimmy Silver "Lovell, old chap——"

"You can shut up!" retorted Lovell. "If you'd let me cut when I wanted to——"

"Oh, you awful ass!" groaned Jimmy.

"Come down, at once, Lovell!" Bulkeley spoke quietly. He was good-natured, and hated to see a fellow asking for it in this wild and reckless way. "I'm giving you a chance, you mad young idiot. Come down at once, or I shall have to call your Form-master to order you down."

"I'm not coming!"

"You'll have to come down if Dalton comes!" howled Raby.

"Shall I?" said Lovell. "You'll see!"

"Oh, you fathead!"

"What is all this?" Mr. Manders came jerking across from his House. "Lovell, what are you doing on this side? Come down out of that tree at once!"

"Did you speak to me, Mr. Manders?" asked Lovell.

"What? Certainly I did!"

"Then don't!"

"Wha-a-t!"

"Don't!" said Lovell.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"Neville," called out Bulkeley, "go and ask Mr. Dalton to step here, will you?"

Neville of the Sixth hurried away across the quad.

Breathless excitement reigned under that old beech now, as the Rookwood crowd waited for the arrival of Richard Dalton.

Lovell, perhaps, felt a qualm. If so, he crushed it down. Deliberately he clambered higher into the beech. The

branches were green with the new foliage of spring.

Suddenly Lovell uttered a loud exclamation as he stared at a small object wedged in the tree, sticking in a crevice between two jutting branches.

It was a slim russia leather notecase.

From its position it looked as if it had dropped from the sky—or, at least, had been tossed from a high window. Clearly it had fallen through the branches above, and lodged in that crevice between two branches.

In his amazement Lovell forgot, for the moment, that he was a hot-headed rebel, defying authority, for he knew what it was. It was the headmaster's long-lost notecase. It was the wallet "pinched" by Slog Poggers, which he was supposed to have flung away while being hunted up and down and round about Rockwood School on the night of the man-hunt. There it was, fairly staring Lovell in the face.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Lovell. "What luck!"

He knew nothing of the amazing history of that wallet. He did not know that it had ever been hidden in the lining of Mr. Manders' overcoat; that Leggett had found it there, and thrown it out of Manders' window the day before, just in time to escape being caught with it in his hand.

"My hat!" gasped Lovell. "No wonder it was never found, if that pickpocket chucked it up a tree. Who'd have thought it?"

He grabbed the wallet from the crevice. As he did so, the quiet but very authoritative voice of Richard Dalton reached him from below.

"Lovell, descend from that tree immediately."

And, rather to the surprise—but greatly to the relief—of the Rookwood crowd, Arthur Edward Lovell descended from that tree immediately. With the Head's lost wallet in his pocket, Lovell was prepared to go to his headmaster.

The situation was saved!

## CHAPTER 42.

### Fool's Luck!

DR. CHISHOLM turned the grimest of grim faces on the junior who—a little red and breathless—entered his study.

The Head had been kept waiting.

It was a serious matter for the Big Beak to be kept waiting. It would have been still more serious had the Head been aware of Lovell's extraordinary proceedings during the period for which he had been kept waiting. The expression on the Head's face, as he fixed icy eyes on Arthur Edward Lovell, might have befitted the grim visage of the fabled Gorgon.

"Lovell!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You have kept me waiting for you."

"I thought you'd like me to bring you your notecase."

"What?"

"Your wallet, sir. You remember the wallet that man Poggers pinched, sir."

"Do you mean that you have found my notecase Lovell, that was thrown away by that pickpocket in his flight?" asked Dr. Chisholm.

"Yes, sir."

Arthur Edward laid the famous wallet on the Head's table.

Dr. Chisholm looked at the wallet, looked at Lovell, and then at the wallet again. The grim severity of his expression relaxed very much.

"Bless my soul!" he said.

"I think that's your wallet, sir."

"Certainly it is!" Dr. Chisholm picked it up. "My dear boy, I had quite given up hope of ever seeing it again. Where did you find it? The whole school has been searched and searched again."

"It was in a tree, sir!"

"In a tree!" repeated the Head.

"Yes, sir; the old beech near Manders' House."

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head. "Extraordinary! It shows very little



sign of having been in the open so long. I am very much obliged to you, Lovell. It was certainly very intelligent of you to think of looking in a tree for it. No one else thought of such a thing, so far as I am aware."

The Head opened the notecase.

Quite a genial smile lighted his features as he examined the contents. It was packed with notes. The Head of Rookwood was not a poor man; still, the sum of forty-five pounds ten shillings was a considerable one. There was no doubt that Dr. Chisholm was glad, very glad indeed, to get it back.

"I am very, very much obliged to you, Lovell," he said.

"Not at all, sir!" said Lovell modestly. "I've put in a lot of time looking for that notecase, sir, one time and another. I'm jolly glad I've found it."

He had reason to be glad.

Dr. Chisholm laid the notecase on the table. Then his eyes fell on the birch, also lying on the table, which he had forgotten for the moment.

Lovell waited.

Dr. Chisholm looked at the birch; he looked at the notecase; he looked at Lovell. There was a pause.

"Lovell," said the Head of Rookwood at last, "it was my intention, as you know, to administer a flogging for your disregard of authority yesterday. I feel, however, that I cannot do so in view of the very great service you have only this moment performed. In the circumstances, Lovell, I shall pardon you."

"Oh, sir!" murmured Lovell.

"You may go, Lovell," said the Head, after another brief pause.

"Thank you, sir."

"One moment." Lovell's hand was on the door when the Head spoke again. "In view of this, Lovell, your sentence of gating for the remainder of the term is rescinded. I will mention the matter to your Form-master. You may go, my boy."

Lovell went—as if he were walking on air.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were waiting for him at the end of the corridor. When they saw him come sauntering down the passage, his hands in his pockets and a cheery satisfied grin on his face, they could hardly believe their eyes.

"Have you had the flogging?" gaped Jimmy.

"No, thanks!" grinned Lovell. "I thought I mentioned that I wasn't having it. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, don't be a goat! Why has the Head let you off, fathead?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Well, he's hardly likely to flog a chap who found his notecase for him," drawled Lovell. "He's let me off the gating, too. I rather thought he would if I found that notecase. You remember I told you more than once——"

"You've found the notecase?" yelled twenty voices.

Lovell nodded cheerfully.

"Oh, yes, I found it——"

"Where?" howled Jimmy.

"It was sticking in that tree. That's why I came down when Dicky called me. If it hadn't been for that——"

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy.

"Well," said Mornington, "if ever anybody tells me after this that there isn't such a thing as fool's luck——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Edward had been lucky, whether it was fool's luck or not; there was no doubt about that. His friends marched him away in deep relief. There were happy and smiling faces in the end study that day.

## CHAPTER 43.

### Rogue's Luck!

MR. MANDERS did not smile. He was deeply displeased. Taking his walk in the quadrangle that evening, wrapped up against a chilly east wind in his thick, warm, grey overcoat, Mr. Manders thought about it with great annoyance.

The discovery of the long-lost notecase had been a matter of chance. It

made no difference whatever to Lovell's offence. Yet the headmaster had seen fit to pardon him. And that miserable man, Slog Poggers, was still at large—and so long as he was at large Mr. Manders dared not venture outside the school walls, but had to take his walks within, as he was doing now. It was all very irritating to Manders.

Thinking over that matter with intense irritation, Mr. Manders was quite unaware of a lurking, slinking figure in the shadow of the beeches.

Within the walls of Rookwood, Mr. Manders felt safe from the supposed lunatic who had a remarkable mania for stealing his overcoat. Slog Poggers was too well known to venture near the school. Mr. Manders did not know that Slog now had an ally, who watched in his place, unknown by sight at the school. Still less did he know that that ally had spotted him over the wall and had dropped within, and was now watching in the dark shadows for a chance to snaffle him.

Mr. Manders had no idea of all that—till suddenly there came a rush of footsteps, a spring, and he was down on the ground, spluttering—and a pair of hefty hands was wrenching off his overcoat.

Manders forgot all about Lovell then. He sprawled and yelled. Fellows came running from the Houses; lights flashed in the dark quad; Manders was found, breathless, but not otherwise hurt. But his overcoat was not found, and neither was the unknown pincher who had pinched it. After its many narrow escapes that celebrated overcoat was gone at last.

In the dark lane 'Erbert was running

fast, with the overcoat bunched under his arm. At a little distance from the school a dark figure darted from the hedge and joined him.

"Got it?" panted Mr. Poggers.

"What do you think?" answered 'Erbert.

"Strike me pink!" said Slog Poggers.

They ran on together, to get to a safe distance before examining the prize. They dodged into a field at last and under the lee of a haystack. 'Erbert struck matches while Mr. Poggers went through that overcoat. He went through it at first with a joyful face. It was the right overcoat this time, and under the lining was hidden—or had been hidden—a wallet packed with notes. But the joyful anticipation faded out of Mr. Poggers' face as his examination of that overcoat proceeded. Dark dismay replaced it. He ripped every inch of lining out of the overcoat before he gave up hope. But it booted not. No wallet was there.

Slog Poggers sat down and groaned.

"It's been found!" said Slog faintly. "Strike me pink! 'Cause why, it ain't there! Strike me pink and blue!"

"You idjit, you!" said 'Erbert, perhaps by way of sympathy.

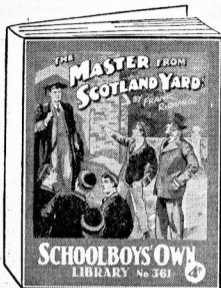
Two dismal figures disappeared, slinking into the night. A tattered overcoat remained to mark the spot of Mr. Poggers' cruel disappointment. Weeks and weeks had Mr. Poggers been after that overcoat. Now he had got it—and it had, as it were, turned to dust and ashes in his mouth. As he slunk away Mr. Poggers wondered, with great bitterness, whether, after all, honesty might not be the best policy!



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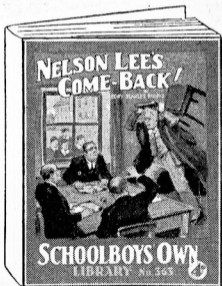


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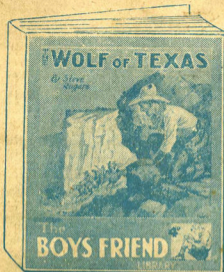
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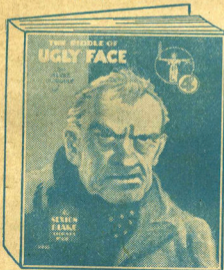
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