

LOVELL on the WAR-PATH



by
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CHAPTER ONE WRATHY!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL came up the Fourth-form passage to the end study with a heavy tread.

Three fellows, in that study, looked at one another, as they heard him coming. Jimmy Silver smiled, Raby grinned, and Newcome shrugged his shoulders.

Lovell's feet were not small. And he was rather a big and heavy fellow for the Fourth. Generally he could be heard coming. But on this occasion his tread was much more emphatic than usual. He was, in fact, stamping his way up the passage: which indicated that Arthur Edward was in a very bad temper, and did not care if all the Fourth knew it—or all Rookwood School, for that matter.

"That's Lovell," remarked Raby, as the heavy tread impinged up the three pairs of ears in the end study.

"And he's in a bait!" sighed Jimmy Silver. Lovell was a good fellow, and a good pal, and they all liked him: but it was not to be denied that Lovell had a somewhat hot and hasty temper, and that

he was not infrequently in a "bait."

"Something," remarked Newcome, in his faintly sarcastic way, "has come between the wind and his nobility."

Bang!

The study door flew open.

Arthur Edward Lovell came in—or, to be more accurate, he stamped in. His face was red, his eyes glinting. He bore, indeed, a resemblance to the young man in the Alpine poem, whose brow was set, and whose eye beneath flashed like a falchion from its sheath. Only too clearly, Lovell was in a "bait."

His friends surveyed him—Jimmy Silver with sympathetic inquiry, Raby with a faint grin, Newcome with a hint of disapproval.

Something, no doubt, had happened to rouse the ire of Arthur Edward Lovell. Even Lovell didn't get into a "bait" about nothing. But Rookwood men were not supposed or expected to show off temper. A certain self-restraint was expected of them. Howsoever irritated or exasperated, a fellow was not supposed to blow off steam in the public eye. Lovell, indeed, could see that quite clearly, in the case of others. Nobody could be more derisive

than Arthur Edward Lovell when Mornington of the Fourth flew into one of his "tantrums". Nobody could be more contemptuous when Carthew, of the Sixth, displayed angry temper, as he frequently did. Nevertheless, when Arthur Edward was in a "bait" he was wont to let himself go: as if his own wrath was some special and particular sort of wrath, to which ordinary rules did not apply.

He was letting himself go now, with even more freedom than usual. Having stamped into the study, he hurled the door shut. There was a second bang, which woke every echo in the quarter of the Classical Fourth. Then he strode across to an armchair. Another chair being in the way, Lovell did not walk round it, or lift it aside. He kicked it out of the way. It went clattering against the study wall.

Then Lovell sat down in the armchair.

He sat there for about the millionth part of a second. Then he bounded up with a sharp ejaculation.

What had happened to Lovell, since his chums had seen him last, was evidently something that made him unwilling to sit down.

"Ooooh!" gasped Lovell.

He wriggled.

"Licked?" asked Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome, with one voice. Lovell's antics enabled them to guess that one!

"Oh! Ow! Wooh!" said Lovell, which was apparently to be taken as an answer in the affirmative.

He leaned on the mantelpiece. Lovell was the only fellow in the end study tall enough to lean on the mantelpiece. Perhaps for that reason he rather liked the attitude. Anyway he did not want to sit down at present.

"Fellows have been licked before, without raising Cain about it," remarked Newcome, in a casual sort of way, "Anything special about your licking?"

Lovell gave him a black look.

"I've been licked for nothing," he snapped.

"We're always getting licked for nothing," signed Newcome, "There never was such an innocent study."

"If you don't believe me, Newcome, I'm ready to punch your silly head," said

Lovell. "I'd rather punch Carthew's, but if—"

"Carthew!" said Jimmy Silver, "Well, you can't punch Carthew's head, old bean, as he's a prefect in the Sixth."

"I've a jolly good mind to, all the same," said Lovell, darkly, "Carthew's a rat, and a twerp, and a funk at footer, and a bully, and a rotter—"

"All that and more," agreed Jimmy, pacifically, "But even Carthew can't lick a man for nothing. Old Bulkeley would jolly soon be down on him if he did. How many have you had?"

"Six—as hard as that rat could lay them on," said Lovell, savagely, "And I'll bet I could whop him with the gloves on—I'm jolly nearly as big as he is, Sixth-Form swob as he is. I'd like to try.

"But why did Carthew lick you?" asked Raby.

"Because he's a bully."

"Hem! Any other reason?"

"Because he's a rotter."

"Oh! Yes! But any other—?"

"Because he's a twerp."

"Is that the reason he would give, if Dicky Dalton asked him why he licked a man in the Fourth?" inquired Newcome, gently sarcastic.

"No! He would say it was because I crashed into him on a slide in the quad.," answered Lovell, "A pre. has to have some reason for whopping a man, even a bully like Carthew. That's what he would say, if our beak asked him."

Lovell's three chums gazed at him.

"He couldn't say that unless it had happened," remarked Jimmy Silver, drily.

"It did happen," said Lovell.

"Oh!"

"It's against the rules to make a slide in the quad.," continued Lovell, "But fellows do make one, when it snows, all the same. Some of the fags, I expect, made that slide, over by the elms. I didn't, anyway. I never knew it was there till I stepped on it—"

"Oh!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome. They tried not to smile, but without much success. Arthur Edward Lovell was, in his own esteem, the brainy man of the end study. Nevertheless, he was just the man to step on a slide without

noticing that it was there.

"Grin!" said Lovell, bitterly, "It's awfully funny, I suppose, to step on a slide without noticing it, and find yourself whizzing away you don't know how—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the three involuntarily. It looked as if they did think it awfully funny!

"Cackle!" said Lovell, in the same bitter way, "I've had six of the best, for nothing, and when I come to my own study, all my pals can do is to cackle. Cackle away! Don't mind me."

"Hem!" Jimmy Silver checked his merriment, "But where does Carthew come in? He wouldn't whop you for stepping on a slide you hadn't made. Of course, he might have thought you were sliding on it—"

"I think he must have heard about the slide, and was coming to see about it. You know Carthew—always nosing into things. I never even saw him till we crashed. I hardly knew what was happening, whizzing off suddenly like that—I shouldn't wonder if Carthew was skulking behind a tree, waiting to catch somebody on the slide—that's the sort of twerp he is. Anyhow he popped up suddenly from nowhere, and I bashed right into him, and he went over in the snow."

"Oh, my hat! Was he hurt?"

"He sounded as if he was," said Lovell, "He got up in a fury, and made me bend over there and then, and gave me six. He fancied that he'd caught me sliding, and that I'd crashed into him on purpose. At least that's what he made out. I had a jolly good mind to knock him spinning—pre. as he is."

At which Lovell's chums smiled. Knocking a Sixth-form prefect spinning was the sort of thing a junior might dream about in happy dreams, but never hope to put into practice. The penalties were too dire.

Lovell frowned as he detected the smiles,

"I had a jolly good mind to do it, I can tell you!" he declared.

"Lucky you had a jollier good mind not to, old bean," remarked Newcome, "You'd go home early for the Christmas hols. if you did, and you wouldn't come back."

"That's why I didn't," said Lovell, "But

I've had six from that twerp for nothing, and I'm not taking it lying down. I'm going to make Carthew cringe."

"Not so jolly easy, making a Sixth-Form pre. cringe," remarked Newcome, "How are you going to do it?"

"Think I'm going to let him give me six on the bags for nothing?" bawled Lovell, "I'm going to give him as good as he gave, with a little over, and then some, see? I expect my pals to back me up."

"Oh!" said Lovell's pals, dubiously.

"That is, if you're game, of course," added Lovell, sarcastically.

"Hem! We're game enough, if you come to that. Carthew's a twerp, and everyone would like to give him one for his nob. But—"

"But—!" murmured Raby.

"But—!" remarked Newcome.

Lovell's pals were game. There was no doubt that they were game. They disliked Carthew of the Sixth, as every man in the Lower School at Rookwood did. If he was not exactly a bully, he was extremely overbearing, often bad-tempered, and wont to make excessive use of his 'whopping privs.' as a prefect. All the end study would have been pleased to give Carthew a fall. But—there was a very serious "but," though Lovell seemed to disregard it. A "feud" with a Sixth-Form prefect was a big order for juniors in the Fourth Form.

"But—" jeered Lovell, "But—but—but—go it! Butt like a set of billy-goats! If you funk Carthew—"

"This study doesn't funk anybody in the wide world," said Jimmy Silver, "But a pre. is a pre., and you can't walk round that, old bean."

"Nobody wants to call on the Head to be asked about ragging a pre.," remarked Newcome.

"Hardly," said Raby, "We want to go home for the Christmas hols., old scout, but we don't want to have to stay there next term."

Snort, from Lovell. In his present mood, Lovell, it seemed, was prepared to declare war on a Sixth-Form prefect, regardless of consequences. But really that was not practical politics, as Lovell's chums could see if Lovell could not.

"Oh, all right," said Lovell, "Carthew's gone out now—gone over to the Modern side to see some other twerp there. You don't feel like lending me a hand at shipping his study while he's gone?"

"Wha—a—at!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Go to sleep and dream again, old chap."

"I've had six!" roared Lovell.

"Fellows have had six before, without putting up a song and a dance," remarked Newcome, "Wait till it wears off, and forget all about it."

Arthur Edward Lovell did not reply to that in words. His feelings seemed too deep for speech. He gave his chums a concentrated glare, stamped out of the end study, and banged the door after him with a terrific bang.

His chums were left wondering uneasily whether Lovell—even Lovell!—was ass enough to entertain seriously the idea of "shipping" a Sixth-Form study. They hoped that he was not—but they had to admit, sadly, from their experience of him, that Arthur Edward Lovell was ass enough for anything.

CHAPTER TWO

SHIPPING A STUDY!

George Bulkeley, captain of Rookwood, paused.

Bulkeley was going to his study in the Sixth. It was a sound from another study—Carthew's—that made him pause. Carthew, he was aware, had gone to tea with Knowles, on the Modern side, so he couldn't possibly be in his study on the Classical side. Even had Carthew been there, he could hardly have been occupied in breaking up his own crockery. And it was a sound of breaking crockery-ware that came from the study and reached the ears of the captain of Rookwood. And that strange and startling sound was followed by a breathless chuckle.

Something unusual, it was clear, was going on in Carthew's study—something into which it behoved a prefect to look!

So George Bulkeley, instead of going on

to his own quarters, walked to Carthew's door, to look in, and see what was going on. As his hand touched the door-handle he heard a sudden startled gasp from within the study, which indicated that someone there had heard him, and was disconcerted by his arrival.

He opened the door and looked in.

Nobody was visible there. Someone, Bulkeley had no doubt, was in the room: but he was not to be seen.

But other things were to be seen—quite startling things. The captain of Rookwood stared quite blankly into the study.

"By gum!" he breathed.

He could hardly believe his eyes for a moment.

Studies had been "shipped" at Rookwood before. But Carthew's study, on this occasion, had been "shipped" with remarkable and unusual thoroughness. The shipper had been putting in some good work.

The study table was on its side. Books and an inkpot were strewn on the floor, and from the inkpot flowed a stream of ink. The carpet had been dragged up, and was gracefully draped over a heap of chairs. Three or four broken tea-cups and saucers lay about among books and ink. Apparently the "shipper" had been shying crockery-ware at the pile of chairs and carpet, when his activities had suddenly ceased. And that was not all. Some of the ink had been used to daub an inscription on the looking-glass, "Footer Funk."

"By gum!" repeated Bulkeley.

He stepped into the study.

His face was grim.

Bulkeley did not think much of Mark Carthew. Few liked him, even in his own form. But he was a fellow-prefect: he was invested with authority by the Head: he was—or was supposed to be—above and beyond reprisals by disgruntled juniors. Had Carthew been ten times the twerp he was, this was outrageous—a dire offence against all the laws and rules and manners and customs of Rookwood School. It was an offence to be visited with the direst punishment.

Bulkeley stared round the study in search of the dire offender.

Evidently that offender had packed

himself somewhere out of sight when he heard a sound at the door. Equally evident, he was still in the study, though doubtless he hoped that that was known only to himself.

"Well," said Bulkeley, in a deep voice, "Where are you?"

No reply. ...

There was only one possible place of concealment in the room. That was in the bed alcove. The bed had been "shipped" like the rest. The bed-spread which made it look—more or less—like an ottoman by day, was in a crumbled heap on the floor. Blankets and sheets were wildly disarranged. And under the bed, Bulkeley had no doubt, was hidden the reckless youth who had done all this damage—having dodged rapidly into the only cover available.

"You may as well come out," said Bulkeley.

Silence.

"Get out from under that bed."

Not a sign of life came from under the bed. Perhaps the unhappy shipper still hoped to escape discovery.

If so, that hope was quite without foundation. Bulkeley glanced round again, and picked up Carthew's ashplant—the same ash that, an hour ago, had established contact with Arthur Edward Lovell's trousers, and started the trouble.

Stooping beside the bed, Bulkeley reached under it with the cane, and swished.

Then there came a sudden sign of life from the hidden recesses.

"Yaroooh!"

It was a wild roar.

"Coming out now?" asked Bulkeley.

"Ow! wow! Yes," came a gasping voice.

It was Arthur Edward Lovell who crawled out from under the bed. He picked himself up, breathlessly, and stood facing Bulkeley, with a crimson face.

Lovell was still angry. Like the prophet of old, he considered that he did well to be angry. But at the present moment, he was rather more apprehensive than angry.

His luck had let him down cruelly.

Lovell rather fancied himself as a planner. He had planned this with care. He had ascertained that Carthew was over

on the Modern side, in Manders' House, teeing with Knowles there. He had made quite sure of it before he acted—being a careful planner. The coast being absolutely clear, Lovell had set to work—and he had done his work well and truly. But his planning, as happens so often with so much careful planning, had come unstuck. He had not counted on another Sixth-Form man butting in while he was at work. Now he stood facing the captain of the school, and he realised glumly that his last state was worse than his first.

"You did all this?" asked Bulkeley, with a wave of the hand at the wrecked study.

"You know I did," grunted Lovell.

"Do you know that if I reported this to the Head you would be flogged?"

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

Bulkeley stood looking at him. He was a good-natured fellow, and he could surmise, too, that Carthew had probably laid on the ash not wisely but too well, to evoke this act of reckless retaliation. And that young ass had evidently not considered what might happen to him if caught. He had counted on not being caught, and left it as that. There was a long pause.

"You dithering young ass," said Bulkeley, at last, "I ought to march you straight to Dr. Chisholm, and you know it as well as I do. But—"

He paused again: and Lovell hoped.

He was as keen as ever on making Carthew cringe. He was going to make him cringe, somehow, before Rookwood broke up for Christmas. But the prospect of facing his head-master's calm inquiring gaze made him feel almost dizzy. He was glad that it was old Bulkeley who had caught him, and not some other prefect. There was a chance, at least, with old Bulkeley.

"Now, look here," said Bulkeley, after a long, long pause, "Carthew won't be back for some time yet. Get this study to rights before he comes back. Put everything in order, as neat and clean as a new pin. Get some more crocks from somewhere to replace those you've broken. Then come to my study for six!"

Bulkeley walked out of Cardew's study.

Lovell drew a deep, deep breath.

He was getting off cheap, and he knew it. But it was tough—very tough! Tough as it was, there was no help for it; and Arthur Edward Lovell set to work on a long, long task. And long before he was through, he was wishing from the bottom of his heart that he had not shipped Carthew's study quite so thoroughly.

CHAPTER THREE

LOVELL ALL OVER!

Mornington of the Fourth winked at Townsend and Topham, who grinned. Tubby Muffin chuckled. Several other fellows smiled—while Jimmy Silver frowned.

Lovell was the cause.

It was the following day. The sun had gone down on Arthur Edward Lovell's wrath: and risen upon it again, finding it undiminished. His luckless experience as a shipper of studies had not daunted Lovell: rather it had made him more determined: it was one more item in the account against Carthew of the Sixth. He had had fairly to slave, to set the shipped study to rights after shipping it: and it was a bitter memory. At the end of his weary labours, Bulkeley had laid on the 'six' lightly: for which Lovell was duly grateful: still, "six" was six, especially when preceded by an earlier six as in Lovell's case. Altogether, Lovell was in an extremely disgruntled state of mind: and though the effect of both "sixes" had worn off the next day, he had not forgotten them. And he seemed to lay a good deal of the blame on his chums.



As that dim figure rushed in, three fellows leaped as if moved by the same springs.

They had not backed him up in shipping Carthew's study. Lovell might have overlooked that, had they been prepared to back him up in his next move on the war-path. But Jimmy and Raby and Newcome were, rather naturally, not eager to enter into a row with the prefects: still less were they anxious to do so under Lovell's leadership. For Lovell, of course, had to be leader: he had great faith in his own leadership. His chums had no doubt whatever that following Lovell's lead in this feud would land them, in a bending attitude, under a prefect's ash—and the prospect was not attractive.

The grins, smiles, and winks among the Fourth-form fellows, and Jimmy Silver's frown, were caused by Lovell, with his nose in the air, stalking away from his three friends in the quad. The December dusk was falling, and it was near lock-up, and many fellows were going into the House. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome were going in when they met Lovell coming out. That Lovell had his back up, they were aware—but they affected to be unaware of it, with the idea that if they did not take note of it, his back might come down again. So they hailed him cheerily, and asked him whether he was coming up to the study for baked chestnut.

Without wasting a word in reply, Lovell stalked off into the falling dusk. His three friends were left staring after him, and five or six other fellows grinning. Baked chestnuts, evidently, had no appeal for Lovell just then—neither had the voice of friendship. He did not walk away—he stalked: his aspect making it clear what he thought of fellows who failed to back him up in the time of need.

"Oh, the ass!" murmured Raby.

"Oh, the fathead!" sighed Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, let him rip!" said Newcome, "He will come round—what about those chestnuts?"

Jimmy looked after Lovell, his frown deepened.

"I don't like the look in his eye," he said, "He's up to something."

"Then we'd better give us a wide berth. It won't do him any good to get landed in a row along with him."

"I—I think I'll cut after him," said

Jimmy: and he cut. "Uncle James" of Rookwood was a little worried about his headstrong chum. Lovell had had a narrow escape from a flogging: and he might be looking for the "sack" this time!

Raby and Newcome went into the House: Jimmy Silver hurried after Lovell, who was trudging through the snow in the quad, towards the archway that led from Big Quad. to Little Quad. Why he was heading in that direction Jimmy could not guess, unless he was going to the school library for a book. But he certainly did not look like a fellow who was going to the library for a book.

"Hold on a minute, Lovell," called out Jimmy.

Lovell did not hold on, or look round. He tramped on. Jimmy would have accelerated and overtaken him: but just then Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, of the Modern Fourth, happened. The three Tommies were heading for Manders' House when they spotted Jimmy Silver: and Jimmy being Classical, and the three Tommies Moderns, they naturally reached for snowballs. There had been a heavy fall of snow, and it was thick all over the quad. In a moment whizzing snowballs were smiting Jimmy Silver right and left: and he had to dismiss Lovell momentarily from his mind.

It was a hot action, lasting several minutes: and the Modern trio, being three to one, had the best of it, though Jimmy landed a few good ones. Then Tommy Dodd and Co. chuckling, cut on to Manders House, leaving Jimmy Silver sitting in the snow in a rather breathless state.

He picked himself up, brushed away snow, and looked round for Lovell. That youth had disappeared in the dusk.

Jimmy hurried on to the archway, to look for him in Little Quad. beyond. It was deeply dusky, almost dark, under the arch. Jimmy was going at a trot, and he was rather surprised, and somewhat disconcerted, to be greeted by a snowball whizzing from the shadows.

Smash!

It landed on his nose, and broke all over his features, and he staggered.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Then he heard a familiar voice.

"Oh! You! You ass, get out of it."

It was Arthur Edward Lovell. He had not gone through to Little Quad.: he was lurking under the dark archway.

Jimmy Silver dabbed snow from his face, breathing hard. Then he pushed on, and joined Lovell under the stone arch.

He peered at him in the gloom. Lovell was standing there with a well-kneaded snowball in either hand. Close by him was a little heap of prepared snow-balls—six or eight of them. Apparently he had been getting ammunition ready—for what, or whom, Jimmy could not begin to guess.

Lovell did not give him a welcome look. He glared.

"What are you butting in for?" he demanded, "I thought it was that twerp when you came mooching in. Get out of it."

"Oh!" Jimmy was enlightened, "Are you waiting here for Carthew?"

"Yes: get off the grass. You don't want to be mixed up in a row with a pre.," jeered Lovell, "You play safe! Go and hide in the study."

"Carthew's not likely to come out just before lock-up—"

"That's all you know! I happen to know that he's got a history paper to take to Reece, and I suppose you know Reece's rooms are over the library in Little Quad."

Lovell, evidently, had been planning again! He had gained information as to Carthew's movements—or probable movements: and this was his second essay on the warpath. Carthew, when he came all unsuspectingly under that dark archway, was to be greeted by whizzing snowballs from the gloom. Jimmy Silver had had a sample of what Lovell was going to do, when Carthew accrued.

"Look here, Lovell, old man, you can't carry this on," said Jimmy Silver, earnestly, "You can't snowball a pre.—"

"Can't I?" jeered Lovell, "You'll see. He won't see me—not that I care!"

"You'll get the wrong man as likely as not—"

"If another ass like you comes butting in, he's welcome to one or two," said Lovell, coolly. "But I'll get Carthew all

right."

"Look here—"

"Oh, don't jaw," said Lovell, "You've let me down, that's what you've done—and now I don't want any jaw. If you were a pal, you'd stand by me, and let that cad have a few when he comes along.

"But—" urged Jimmy.

"Pack it up," said Lovell, "I don't want Carthew to hear anybody here—I want him to get what's coming to him. If you're not going to back me up, get out."

"It's time we were in the House—the bell will be going any minute now—"

"Nobody's stopping you. Hike off to the House as soon as you like."

"But I tell you—!"

"Quiet!" hissed Lovell. An overcoated figure loomed up in the December dusk. Up went Lovell's right hand, and the snowball it held flew with a deadly aim.

"Oh, stop!" panted Jimmy, clutching at Lovell's arm. But he spoke, and clutched, too late! The snowball whizzed like a bullet.

Crash!

"Oh! Ag! What—what—what—Oh!"

Bump!

The overcoated figure sat down, with a bump, in snow, spluttering. Lovell grabbed the ready snowball from his left hand with his right, to repeat the dose without delay. This time Jimmy Silver grasped him and stopped the shot.

"You mad ass—!" he hissed.

"Leago!"

"That's not Carthew—!" breathed Jimmy.

"Rot! Leago—!"

"It's Dicky Dalton!"

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

The overcoated figure, dim in the December dusk, was struggling up from the snow. Its voice was heard:—

"Upon my word! Who threw that snowball? Who—"

Arthur Edward Lovell stood transfixed with horror. It was the voice of Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth—his own Beak! He had not "got" Carthew! First he had "got" Jimmy Silver—now he had "got" Mr. Dalton—and getting a Rookwood form-master full in the visage with a snowball was so awful an action

that Lovell seemed paralysed by what he had done.

How long he would have remained transfixed cannot be said—probably until Mr. Dalton penetrated into the deep shadows under the arch and collared him. But Jimmy Silver grasped his arm and dragged him frantically away.

"I—I—I say," gasped Lovell, "I—I—"

"Cut, you idiot!" breathed Jimmy, dragging him on, "You thumping chump, you might be sacked for this. Cut!"

Even Lovell realised that a prompt departure was indicated. They ran into Little Quad., and the dusk swallowed them. As they went, they heard the voice of Richard Dalton behind. He seemed to be exploring the dark archway in search of the snowballer.

"Who was it threw that snowball? Upon my word! Who—?"

Jimmy Silver and Lovell flew on, out of hearing. Richard Dalton, luckily, had not seen them, and he was not likely to see them now. They dodged round the library, and by a devious route got back to Big Quad., without going anywhere near the archway. When they reached the House, they passed Carthew coming out: no doubt on his way to Mr. Reece's rooms with his history paper.

Carthew passed them without a glance: he was not interested in Fourth-form juniors, and probably he had already forgotten the "six" he had administered to Lovell the previous day. But one of them, at least, was interested in Carthew, and Lovell bestowed a grim look on his back as he went on.

"What rotten luck," muttered Lovell, "If that ass Dalton hadn't barged in, I should have got him all right—"

"You blithering ass!"

"Look here—"

"You unspeakable idiot!"

"Look here, Jimmy Silver—"

"You dithering dunderhead!"

Lovell snorted, and stalked into the House: apparently having heard enough of what "Uncle James" of Rookwood thought of him!

CHAPTER FOUR

BACK UP!

"This won't do "

Jimmy Silver made that announcement in the end study.

George Raby nodded, while Arthur Newcome shrugged his shoulders.

They agreed with Jimmy that it wouldn't do. But they did not quite see what was to be done.

Lovell was not in the study. Lovell rather avoided that study now. Lovell on the war-path seemed quite a different Lovell, much more unreasonable and exasperating than the normal Arthur Edward. He was always a little exasperating, with his unbounded confidence in himself, his serene conviction that he possessed practically all the brains in the study, and his annoyed surprise when fellows failed to concur in his opinions as a matter of course. But there was a difference between being a little exasperating, and a lot—now he was a lot!

Several days had elapsed: and almost any fellow but Lovell would have forgotten that six on the bags administered by Carthew of the Sixth. No doubt it had been unjust: but in an imperfect universe such things will happen, and the rough has to be taken with the smooth. Lovell did not see it.

Not that Lovell was a fellow to remember grudges. He really was very good-natured, and would forget offences very readily. But that six from Carthew rankled. It had been unjust: it had been unduly severe: and it was kept green in Lovell's memory by his successive failure to make Carthew "cringe." He had told the end study that he was going to make Carthew cringe for that six. What he had said, he had said!

So far, he had captured a whopping from Bulkeley, and very narrowly escaped a terrific row with Richard Dalton, in his campaign to make Carthew cringe. But he was going on, just the same, if only to show the end study that he was the man to do it. He suspected that his rather ludicrous failures made them chuckle—a well-

founded suspicion. Well, they were jolly well going to see!—and in the meantime, he kept up an attitude of lofty and offended dignity, as one who scorned pals who failed to back a fellow up.

Jimmy Silver and Co. might have been content to leave it at that, and let Arthur Edward come round, in his own good time, as no doubt he would have done in the long run—for even Arthur Edward could not have nursed offended dignity for ever. But it was the end of the term. It had been arranged long ago that Lovell and Raby and Newcome were going home with Jimmy Silver for the Christmas holidays. And how could a fellow go home with a fellow for Christmas in an attitude of lofty and scornful resentment.

That was why Jimmy Silver pronounced that it would not do. Uncle James of Rookwood was quite worried about it.

For it was now the last day. On the morrow, Rookwood School was to break up. How could the "Fistical Four" set forth together for a merry Christmas, with one member of the four in a state of freezing dignity and lofty scorn?

"The ass!" said Raby.

"The fathead!" said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver nodded. He agreed that Lovell was an ass and a fathead, so far as that went. But that was no present help in time of need. The pressing question was, how to prevail upon Arthur Edward to behave in a less asinine and fatheaded manner.

"Anybody might think that no fellow had ever had six on the bags before," grunted Raby.

"Well, they're very special bags, you see, being Lovell's" remarked Newcome, in his sarcastic way. "Tain't as if one of us had had the six! Nothing in that! But six on Lovell's bags—well, isn't it time for the skies to fall?"

"Lovell's got to chuck it," said Jimmy.

"He doesn't look like chucking it."

"Nothing we can do."

"Well, perhaps there is," said Jimmy Silver, thoughtfully, "Lovell's got his silly back up because we won't join in his potty campaign. Well, suppose we give him his head, and back him up."

"And get into a row with the pre.'s,

and go up to the Head?" asked Newcome, "Nice way to start the Christmas hols."

"Not good enough," said Raby, shaking his head.

"Well, the fact is, Lovell's going on," said Jimmy, "and goodness knows what he may do next—get himself sacked, as likely as not. And after all, Carthew is a twerp. Everybody would be glad if Carthew had a jolt."

"Very likely: but whatever Lovell does, he will bungle it as usual. We shall all get landed in the soup," said Raby.

Jimmy Silver sighed. He knew that it was only too probable that Raby was right. But he stuck to his idea.

"He's brooding over something now," he said, "Goodness knows what—but something up against that twerp Carthew. Look here, let's go and sort him out, and tell him we'll help."

"Um!" said Raby.

"Um!" said Newcome.

They were very dubious. But they followed the lead of Uncle James, as they always did. So they left the end study, and proceeded to look for Arthur Edward Lovell—to sort him out, as Jimmy expressed it.

They had not far to seek. Arthur Edward Lovell was standing by the bow window at the end of the Fourth-form passage, in talk with Mornington and Townsend of the Fourth. Arthur Edward's face was grim and serious. Morny's and Towny's, on the other hand, indicated merriment.

Apparently, Lovell's own study having let him down, as he considered it, he was seeking new allies. But Morny and Towny did not look like promising recruits.

"Look here, will you back a fellow up, or not?" snapped Lovell, as Jimmy Silver, and Co. came up the passage.

"If I didn't want to come back to Rookwood after the Christmas hols., old bean I'd do it like a shot!" said Mornington, "But I do!"

"Same here!" chuckled Townsend.

And they walked away laughing, leaving Lovell frowning.

He gave his three old friends a very grim look as they came up. Jimmy Silver smiled a propitiatory smile. But Lovell

did not smile. He seemed to be bent on understudying the ancient king who never smiled again.

"What, what's on, old chap?" asked Jimmy, affably.

"You'd better not inquire," jeered Lovell, "There might be a row. You might get landed in it. It's rather risky backing up a pal."

"You silly ass—!" began Raby.

"Oh, let's help," said Newcome, "Shall we go and ship Carthew's study, and get copped by old Bulkeley? Or shall we whiz a snowball at Carthew and get Dicky Dalton in the eye?"

Lovell breathed hard. A masterly planner naturally did not like being reminded of his failures.

"That's enough!" he snorted, and he made a movement to walk away. Jimmy Silver caught him by the sleeve.

"Hold on, old bean," he said, amicably, "If you've got something on, tell us what it is, and we'll help if we can."

"Oh!" said Lovell. He thawed considerably, "Well, the fact is, I need the help of two or three fellows in what I've planned. I was asking Morny and Towny, but they funk it. I asked Rawson, and he told me not to be a fool. That's all the help I've got so far."

"Well, what's the game?" asked Jimmy, patiently.

"If you're going to help, I'll tell you. You ought to back up a man in your own study, as you jolly well know. Mind, I don't want any advice or anything of that kind," added Lovell, "I've planned it all from beginning to end—I've got it all cut and dried. All I want is help in carrying out my plan. I've simply got to be helped, if I'm to do it at all—you see, I can't be in two places at once."

"Not even you?" murmured Newcome.

Lovell glared.

"Shut up, Newcome," said Jimmy, hastily, "Go it, Lovell, and tell us what's the bid idea."

"Besides, I couldn't handle Carthew on my own," went on Lovell, "After all, he's a Sixth-form senior, though he's a twerp and a funk at footer."

"Handle Carthew!" repeated Raby.

"Oh, my only hat!" said Newcome,

"Is that the big idea—handling a Sixth-Form prefect?"

"Oh, it's safe enough," said Lovell, scornfully, "Carthew isn't a cat to see in the dark, and he will never know who handled him. He might fancy it was me, as he gave me that six, but I've thought of that—I'm going to be on view when it happens—my job will be to get him to walk into the trap. All I want is two or three fellows to wait for him, where I've planned it—pitchy dark, see? He won't see a thing, and once he's collared, he won't know what's happening, until it's too late. You collar him, smack a duster over his phiz to keep him from yelling, tip him up, and give him six on the bags—same as he gave me. What about that?"

Lovell asked that question quite triumphantly. Evidently he was greatly pleased with his big idea, which he had thought out like the master-planner he was. But Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome did not answer his question. The idea of collaring a Sixth-Form prefect, and giving him six on the bags, seemed rather to have taken their breath away. They did not answer the cheery Arthur Edward—they gazed at him, speechless.

CHAPTER FIVE

FOOL-PROOF!

"Well?" said Lovell, impatiently.

"Oh, holy smoke!" murmured Raby.

"Six on the bags—a prefect!" breathed Newcome.

"Lovell, old man—!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Snort, from Lovell.

"Funk it?" he asked, "All right—clear off, and I'll go over to Manders House and see whether I can get the Modern chaps to back me up. Tommy Dodd isn't a funk, anyhow."

"We're not exactly funks, old scout," said Jimmy Silver, mildly, "But I suppose you know that a fellow would get sacked like a shot for laying hands on a prefect."

"I wasn't thinking of calling on the Head, and telling him about it," explained Lovell, with heavy sarcasm, "I've no idea whatever

of taking Dr. Chisholm into my confidence in this affair."

"You don't think that Carthew would kick up a row if he got six on the bags?" asked Newcome.

"Let him!" said Lovell, "He can kick up all the row he likes. What will it matter, if he hasn't the faintest idea who gave him the six?"

Lovell grinned. Evidently he was greatly taken with his big idea.

"You see, that's the beauty of it," he explained further, "If Carthew wants to know who walloped him, he can pick and choose from all Rookwood. There's hardly a man in the school who wouldn't jolly well like to whop him, Moderns as well as Classicals. Might be anybody—in the Fourth, or the Fifth, or the Shell, in our House or in Manders' House. How's he to know?"

Lovell spoke with such complete confidence, that his friends wondered whether, for once, he might have succeeded in planning a plan that would hold water. But they knew their Arthur Edward: and they wanted to know more.

"Let's have it clear," said Jimmy Silver, "You think that you can get Carthew to walk of his own accord into some dark corner where he can be collared without seeing who collars him?"

"I don't think—I know!"

"Well, how?" demanded Jimmy.

"I'll tell you! You know that the fags are always turning the light off in the junior lobby, and larking about."

"We know that. Your minor, Teddy was whopped for it only yesterday. What about that?"

"Look here," said Raby, "there's been rows about that, and silly ragging fags chucking overcoats about in the dark, and all that. We're Fourth-Form men—we can't mix up in that kind of thing."

"Are you going to let a fellow speak?" inquired Lovell.

"Oh, cut on," grunted Raby.

"The pre.'s get ratty about it," said Lovell, "They don't like being bothered by fag tricks. Well, suppose I go to Carthew and tell him the light's out in the lobby again—he's the sort of twerp who likes fellows to report things to him—

well, what would he do?"

"I suppose he'd go to the lobby, to catch the fag who'd turned out the light, if he could," said Jimmy Silver, "But—"

"When you've done butting, I'll go on."

"Oh, go on!" sighed Jimmy.

"Carthew goes to the lobby," said Lovell, "Well, you fellows will be there in the dark, and he'll walk right into your hands."

Raby give him a pitying look

"There's one thing you've forgotten," he remarked.

"What's that?"

"Carthew will switch on the light as he goes into the lobby."

"Think so!" jeered Lovell.

"Well, won't he?" demanded Raby, warmly.

"Not if the electric bulb has been taken out of the socket," answered Lovell, "The fags just turn the light off, when they're larking—we're going to take the lamp out of the socket, so that it can't be switched on, see?"

"Oh!" said Lovell's three chums, all together.

Evidently, Arthur Edward Lovell had been thinking this out. He must have been putting quite an unusual amount of thinking into it. His plan really began to assume quite a practicable shape.

"Carthew can play about with the switch as much as he likes, but the light won't come on," went on Lovell. "He will hear somebody there, and he will try to grab him in the dark—won't he?"

"Yes: but—"

"Well, instead of grabbing somebody, he gets grabbed himself," said Lovell, "You up-end him, smother his monkey-face with a duster to keep him quiet, and lay into him with a ruler—six good ones on the bags. It will all be over in a minute."

"Um!"

"You cut by the lobby door on the quad., the next minute," resumed Lovell, "You get into the House again by the window in the form-room passage, which will be unfastened ready. You'll be safe in the House, among a crowd of fellows, before Carthew's got his wits about him again."

"By gum!" said Raby. He was impressed.

"Carthew comes yelling out of the lobby, to tell all Rookwood that he's been whopped like a fag," said Lovell, with relish, "He will be laughed to death over it. Even the pre.'s will laugh. Of course, they'll be wild, at a pre. being whacked, but they'll laugh all the same. And nobody will ever know anything. How could they?"

"Looks all right," admitted Newcome.

"Carthew will look no end of a fool—whacked on the bags like a fag in the Third!" grinned Lovell, "He can hunt all over Rookwood for the fellows who did it. He won't have a lot of time for it, though, as we break up tomorrow."

"It does look—!" said Jimmy Silver, slowly.

"It looks, and it is, safe as houses," said Lovell, "No objection to whacking Carthew, I suppose?" he added, sarcastically, "He's whacked you all this term, at one time or another. He's rather fond of whacking fellows."

"No objection at all, to that," said Jimmy, "Carthew's a toad, and every junior in the House would like to wallop him. But—"

"Cut out the buts, and back up," said Lovell.

His three friends looked at one another.

The prospect of whacking Carthew of the Sixth was in itself, attractive. Carthew whacked not wisely but too well: too often and too hard. To whack Carthew, in his turn, was a scheme to which no Rookwood junior could possibly object, in principle. It was only the dire penalty for handling a prefect that mattered.

But really, Lovell seemed to have guarded all points this time. Where was the risk?

"If Carthew doesn't go to the lobby after all—!" said Raby.

"If he doesn't, the whole thing's washed out, and you're no worse off," answered Lovell. "But he will—you know the nosy brute."

"If he takes a light with him—"

"Why should he, when he will expect to turn the light on as usual? But if he does, you don't collar him—you're all right."

Lovell seemed to have an answer for everything.

"It's water-tight, and fool-proof," he

said, "It can't fail, and there's absolutely no risk. Ten to one, Carthew will rush right into the lobby, hoping to catch the fag who turned off the light. That's how he copped my young brother yesterday. Well, he rushed right into your hands!"

"By gum!" said Jimmy. Even Uncle James of Rookwood was impressed. "But —!" he added.

"What, what's the 'but' this time?" jeered Lovell.

"It's a mug's game to handle a pre.," said Jimmy, "Look here, old chap, why not wash the whole thing out, and forget all about it, and let's talk about the Christmas hols."

"Oh, can it!" snapped Lovell, "I'll go over and see Tommy Dodd about it—"

"Hold on, ass. If you're bent on it, we'll back you up, and chance it," said Jimmy, "I'd like to wallop Carthew, if you come to that, as much as any fellow would."

"Same here!" said Raby.

"Only—!" murmured Newcome.

"Enough said!" grunted Lovell, gruffly, "I've made a fool-proof plan, as you can jolly well see, and there's nothing to do but to carry it out. Are you backing me up? Yes or no!"

There was a brief pause. Then his three chums answered together:

"Yes!"

The die was cast. It only remained to go into action, and that the "Fistical Four" now prepared to do.

CHAPTER SIX

UNEXPECTED!

"Get out!" said Lovell.

It was a little autocratic. A couple of fags were larking in the junior lobby, when four Fourth-form men strolled in. Fags were not wanted on the scene, so Lovell told them to get out. Which drew indignant stares from Snooks of the Second and Wegg of the Third.

"Look here—!" began Snooks.

"We're not getting out for you!" said Wegg.

That was an error on Wegg's part. Lovell wasted no time: his great plan

could not wait while fags larked about. He cuffed them both impartially and emphatically, and Snooks and Wegg departed, in a state of deepest wrath, rather resembling Lovell's own after the 'six' from Carthew.

This somewhat high-handed proceeding cleared the scene of action. Lovell glanced out into the passage. Except for the departing figures of Snooks and Wegg, nobody was to be seen in the offing.

"O.K." said Lovell, "Go to it."

Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome, prepared to "go to it." They were ready for business. Jimmy had a ruler up his sleeve, and he now slipped it down into his hand. It was a fairly long and heavy round ruler, quite well adapted for administering severe "whops." In Jimmy's vigorous hand, it was certain to produce effect when laid well and truly on Carthew's trousers, once Lovell's masterly strategy had placed Carthew in a position to receive it.

Raby had an ample duster, borrowed from the form-room. It was rather stuffy and smelly with chalk, but that was no drawback: that was likely to make it all the more effective in keeping Carthew quiet, once it was "smacked" over his visage, and the corners tied behind his head.

Newcome, for his part, was ready to hook out the electric lamp from its socket as soon as all was ready. When that lamp was removed, there would be no possibility of switching on a light, until it was replaced. Darkness would reign, till all was over. And Carthew, not being a cat, obviously would not be able to see who had handled him in the lobby.

Lovell was fairly bubbling with satisfaction over his masterly planning. For once, his chums really began to think that Arthur Edward was not wholly such an ass as they had thought him, and that his scheme, and indeed would, come off. And if all went well, undoubtedly there was satisfaction in the idea of giving Mark Carthew such a six, as he had often handed out to the heroes of the Classical Fourth. Six on the bags was, beyond cavil, one of those things which it is more blessed to give than to receive.

"O.K." repeated Lovell, after a last

look round, "Mind, the minute you've whopped Carthew, you bunk. I'll set the door on the quad. ajar ready."

The three smiled at one another, as Lovell unlatched the door that gave on the dark and dusky outer air. It was hardly necessary to warn them to "bunk" immediately after they had performed such a feat as whopping a Sixth-Form prefect. Outside the House, the December darkness was deep, broken only by a glimmer of snow: and it was quite certain that, once Carthew was whopped, the three would vanish like spectres into that deep darkness. The swiftest of spectres would have nothing on them, in performing the vanishing trick.

"I've unfastened the window in the form-room passage," went on Lovell, "You'll only have to push it up from outside. There's no light in that passage, so you couldn't be spotted getting in."

"True, O King," said Raby, "But—"

"Well, what?" asked Lovell.

"Hadn't you better get going? If we hang about talking here, somebody will be butting in, and spoiling the show."

Lovell frowned. He was not, in his own opinion, "hanging about talking." He was in the position of a general giving final instructions to his followers.

"Don't be a cheeky ass, Raby," he said, "Now, look here, sure you understand all the details? If there's anything you haven't got clear, I'll explain it to you, before I go."

"For goodness sake, get going," said Raby, "The sooner we get through with this, the better. It's not a thing we want to hang out."

"Look here, Raby—"

"Ow!" ejaculated Newcome, "Wow!" Newcome was standing on a chair, to take the electric lamp out of its socket. He had rather forgotten that, while it was burning, it was hot!

He sucked his fingers.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Lovell, irritably.

"The dashed thing's hot—"

"It's been on ever since dark—did you expect it to be cool?" yapped Lovell, "Wrap your hanky round it. I'll switch off the light: but no time to wait for it to cool—you fellows have wasted enough time

already."

Lovell switched off the light. The darkness that filled the lobby was as black as the inside of a hat. Jimmy Silver and Co. could not see one another—only as the dimmest of shadows. It was evident that Carthew would see nothing, especially as he would come from a lighted passage, and the change from light to darkness would have a completely blinding effect.

Newcome, wrapping his handkerchief round the electric bulb, removed it from the socket. He stepped down from the chair, and collided with somebody in the darkness and dropped it. There was a shattering smash on the floor.

"Oh!" gasped Newcome, "Who—what—!"

"Now you've dropped it," came Lovell's voice, "You clumsy ass, it's smashed all over the floor."

"You—you idiot! What did you barge into me for in the dark?" hissed Newcome.

"You barged into me, you mean—"

"You howling chump—"

"You clumsy fathead—"

"Look here, Lovell, you potty dunder-head—"

"Look here, Newcome, you cheeky, footling, clumsy ass—"

"For goodness sake, chuck it!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, "Are we going to stick here till dorm., while you two slang one another?"

"Well, that idiot Lovell—"

"That clumsy ass Newcome—"

"Get going, if you're going to get going at all, "hooted Raby, "I'm not going to stick here much longer, I can jolly well tell you."

"I'm going now," said Lovell, "Keep quiet here, and don't jaw. Don't make a sound till you hear Carthew coming. Try to be a bit cautious, like me. You don't hear me making a row—ow! wow! Yaroooo! Whooooo!"

There was a crash, a bump, and a howl, in the darkness. Lovell seemed to have met disaster in the dark, somehow.

"What on earth—?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Ow! Ooogh! that chair!" panted Lovell, "That chair Newcome was standing on—ooogh—I walked into it—wow!—I've

barked my shins, and banged my funny-bone, falling over the beastly thing! Wow."

"You would!" said Newcome.

"If you want me to punch your cheeky head, Arthur Newcome—"

"Oh, get going!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, "We can't stick here for ever, Lovell. You're wasting time."

"Don't talk rot!" said Lovell.

However, he got going. The door on the passage opened. It let in the merest glimmer, the light in the passage being at a distance. Lovell was a mere shadow as he passed out through the doorway.

He rubbed his elbow as he went up the passage. The bang on his funny-bone seemed to worry him a little. In the darkness in the lobby, Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome waited for what was to follow—it could only be a matter of minutes now, before Carthew came, and fell into avenging hands. They waited in almost breathless, suppressed excitement.

Lovell, despite twinges in his funny-bone, was quite cool as he walked, or rather strolled, away to the Sixth. There was nothing to get flustered about, when a fellow had planned the whole thing thoroughly, down to the last detail, and it only remained to carry out an absolutely fool-proof plan. Unless the unexpected happened, everything was bound to go like clockwork: and Arthur Edward Lovell could not see how anything unexpected could happen.

He was booked to see, shortly! The best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft aghly, as the poet has told us.

He was looking for Carthew, and he found Carthew talking to Bulkeley at the door of the Prefects' Room.

Both the seniors glanced at Lovell as he came up—Bulkeley with his usual genial expression, Carthew with his usual sharpness.

"Well, what do you want?" snapped Carthew, before Lovell could speak. Carthew was always unpleasant: and both his look, and his tune, made Lovell glad to think of what was coming. But his manner was meek and mild.

"The light's out again in the junior lobby, Carthew," he said, "I've pumped over a chair there, and hurt my elbow."

"Couldn't you have turned on the light, you young ass, if it's been turned off," said Bulkeley, staring at him.

"It won't come on," said Lovell, artlessly, "I think the lamp's gone."

Carthew knitted his brows. He rose to this, just as that master-planner, Lovell, had expected. Carthew never lost an opportunity of handling the official ash.

"I'll look into this," he said, grimly, "It's time those young rascals had a lesson. All right, Lovell, I'll go along to the lobby at once."

Lovell, outwardly meek and mild, inwardly rejoicing, backed away. But he suddenly stopped, with a shock, as he heard Bulkeley speak.

"Leave it to me, Carthew. This fag larking is getting altogether too thick. I think I'd better take it in hand."

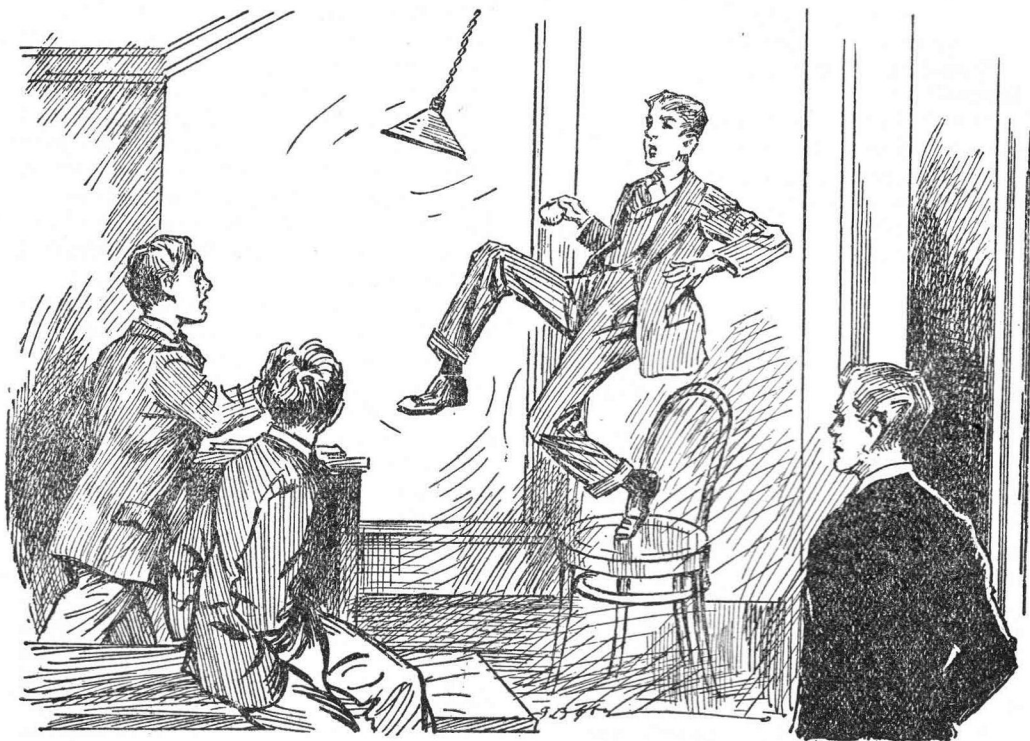
Lovell's heart stood still.

Carthew grunted assent. Bulkeley was head-prefect, and his word was law. If Bulkeley considered the matter serious enough for him to look into it personally, that was that, and there was nothing more to be said.

"I think I'll take my ash," added Bulkeley, "It's here somewhere." The captain of Rookwood turned into the Prefect's Room.

Lovell felt his head almost turning round.

For a moment, he was rooted to the floor with horror. It was not Carthew, it was old Bulkeley, who was going to the dark lobby to look into what was going on there. It was not Carthew, it was old Bulkeley, who would walk into the ambush. It was not Carthew, but old Bulkeley, who would be suddenly seized in the dark, up-ended, a duster smacked over his face,



"Ow!" ejaculated Newcome, "wow!" "What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Lovell irritably.

and a ruler applied to his bags! For in the dark—so carefully planned by Arthur Edward—Jimmy Silver and Co. could not possibly see that it was Bulkeley and not Carthew—they would carry on as planned, and the captain of Rookwood would get the benefit of it!

It made Lovell's head swim.

But it was only for a moment that he stood rooted. There was time yet—old Bulkeley would be a minute or two getting his ash, and he would not hurry on his way—there was time for Lovell to dash back to the dark lobby, warn his friends of the unexpected that had happened, and clear them off the scene before old Bulkeley arrived. There was time—but none too much time—Lovell had not a second to waste. He turned, and fairly ran, bolting as if for his life. To get back to the lobby, to clear away the ambush, to prevent the awful catastrophe of old Bulkeley getting what was intended for Carthew—that was Lovell's only thought. He raced.

A breathless Lovell charged down the passage to the lobby doorway. Breathlessly, he rushed in. And then—!

CHAPTER SEVEN

A WHOPPING IN THE DARK!

"Here he is!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

"We're ready for him!"

"Here he comes!"

The three juniors, wrapped in darkness in the lobby, whispered almost inaudibly, as rapid footsteps approached the door on the passage.

They were ready—quite ready! They had the advantage, too, that their eyes were now accustomed to the dark, and they could at least make out a figure dimly. So when a figure as tall as Carthew's rushed in, they had no doubt that all had gone according to plan—Lovell's masterly plan—and that the unpleasant and unpopular prefect was in the bag.

As that dim figure rushed in, three fellows leaped, as if moved by the same springs.

Three pairs of hands clutched at the newcomer, grasped him, and in a split

second up-ended him on the floor.

Bump!

He went down hard! That could not be helped. There was no time, or indeed inclination, to stand upon ceremony with him. Nothing doubting that Carthew of the Sixth was in their hands, Jimmy Silver and Co. dealt with him promptly and faithfully.

He bumped on the floor—hard. A breathless splutter escaped him as he bumped. But that was all. Instantly, the duster, in Raby's hands, was "smacked" over his face, almost suffocating him with chalky dust. It was smacked tight and hard, and while Jimmy Silver and Newcome held him fast, jammed on the floor, Raby tied the ends of the duster behind his head.

Face down on the floor, the captured victim struggled and spluttered frantically, gulping chalky dust.

Raby, having secured the gagging duster, grasped his back hair with both hands, cramming his face down on the floor. Newcome seized his thrashing legs and held them fast. Jimmy Silver wielded the ruler.

Whop!

It was such a whop as Carthew himself, in one of his tempers, might have landed on a hapless junior's 'bags'. It fairly rang.

It elicited a frantic, maddened splutter from the sprawling victim with his dustered face pressing on the floor. He heaved and rocked. But he was safely held. Up went the ruler again.

Whop!

"Gurrrrrggh!" came a suffocated gurgle through the chalky duster.

Whop!

Jimmy Silver laid it on well. He had himself taken "six" in his time, from Mark Carthew's ash. This was the very first opportunity he had ever had of returning the compliment. Whopping a prefect was a rare, refreshing experience, never likely to recur. It was natural for Uncle James of Rookwood to make the most of it while it lasted. And he did.

Whop!

"Oooooorrrrrgggh!" came a choking gurgle. The hapless victim struggled, in

vain, and strove to yell, still more in vain. Lovell's plan was working like clockwork—he was absolutely helpless in the hands of the Amelekites. Never had a plan worked so perfectly—with the exception of one detail of which Jimmy Silver and Co. were not yet aware!

Whop!

It rang like a pistol-shot in the dark lobby. Jimmy Silver had a stout right arm, with plenty of beef in it. He was putting all his beef into that whopping. WHOP!

The sixth and final whop fairly banged. "Six" was the limit: so Jimmy made it one that the recipient would remember. So well and truly was it laid, that the ruler almost flew from his hand.

The next moment, three shadowy figures, releasing the wriggling, writhing, gurgling, gasping figure on the floor, rushed for the door on the quad.

They disappeared like spectres—really like supersonic spectres—into the December darkness and mist outside the House.

It was time: for footsteps were already coming along the passage!

Outside the House, the three lost no time. They flew through darkness and mist, and in a matter of seconds, reached the window on the form-room corridor, which Lovell had so thoughtfully unfastened to permit their re-ingress into the House.

A few more seconds, and Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome, dropped one after another into the corridor within. That corridor was unlighted: there was no danger of being spotted there.

Jimmy Silver shut and fastened the window. Then, in the dim corridor, the three permitted themselves a breathless chuckle.

"Safe as houses!" said Raby.

"O.K." chuckled Newcome.

"It worked," said Jimmy Silver, "Not a hitch anywhere. First time Lovell's ever brought off a success—but he's done it this time."

"Beats me hollow," said Newcome, "It was Lovell's plan—Lovell from start to finish—yet it worked! Nothing at all went

wrong—so far as I can see."

"Nothing," agreed Raby.

Jimmy Silver rubbed his nose thoughtfully. It was strange, it was remarkable, it was really almost incomprehensible, for one of Arthur Edward Lovell's masterly schemes to work like a charm. Yet this one had, apparently done so! Not a thing—so far as the Co. could see—had gone amiss.

"Well, come on," said Jimmy, "The sooner we join the mob in hall, and put up an alibi, the better. It's safe as houses—but we can't be too careful."

They strolled out of the form-room corridor, with an air of elaborate carelessness. Many fellows were heading for hall, where there were to be speeches. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome joined the throng. They looked round for Lovell, but Lovell was not to be seen.

Tubby Muffin poked Jimmy in the ribs with a fat thumb.

"I say, know what's up?" he asked.

"Is anything up?" asked Jimmy Silver, with an air of mild surprise.

"Well, something's going on in the junior lobby," said Tubby, "Somebody was yelling there, and Bulkeley's gone there, and—"

"Fags up to something, perhaps," yawned Newcome.

"I heard a fellow say that the light was out again, and somebody scrapping in the dark, or something," said Tubby, "There's some sort of a row."

"Those fags!" said Raby.

And the chums of the Fourth, smiling, went into Hall with a crowd. There, again, they looked round for Lovell: but still he was not to be seen.

But Raby suddenly clutched Jimmy's arm, and whispered:

"Look!"

"Oh!" breathed Jimmy.

All three stared—at Mark Carthew, of the Sixth Form, coming into hall with Neville of the Sixth.

They stared blankly.

After what had happened in the lobby, they hardly expected to see Carthew strolling into hall, especially looking his usual normal self, with no sign whatever of having been through a record whopping

or anything else.

After six tremendous whops on his trousers, Carthew ought to have been fairly doubled up. He ought to have been wriggling. He ought to have been writhing. He ought, above all, to have been in the worst temper ever.

But there was no signs of anything of the sort. Carthew looked absolutely as usual, chatting lightly with Neville as he came into hall. If there was one thing perfectly plain and clear about Mark Carthew, it was that he had not been through a record whopping that evening: that nothing out of the common, in fact, had happened to him at all.

After the first moment of utter astonishment, Jimmy Silver felt something like a chill.

Carthew had not been whopped. But somebody had! Jimmy turned an almost ghastly look on his comrades.

"Who—?" he breathed.

"It—it—it must have been Carthew—!" stammered Raby.

"It can't have—look at him!"

"But who else—?"

"Goodness knows."

"Not—not—not Bulkeley!" breathed Newcome, almost faintly, "That idiot Lovell was bound to bungle—Muffin said that Bulkeley was there—"

"Oh!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

The awful possibility made his head whirl. They had collared and whopped somebody in the dark lobby, nothing doubting that it was Carthew—according to plan. Obviously, not, it was not Carthew. Who was it? They had not the faintest idea—all they had seen was a dim shadow in the dark.

"That idiot Lovell!" groaned Raby.

"That dangerous lunatic Lovell—!" murmured Newcome.

"But who—who—who could it have been!" mumbled Jimmy, "It was—was somebody—but who?"

"If it was Bulkeley—"

"Oh, don't!" groaned Jimmy.

"That footling fathead Lovell—"

"That dithering dunderhead Lovell!"

"Oh, the ass!"

"Oh, the chump!"

Jimmy Silver gave a sudden gasp of

heart-felt relief, as Bulkeley of the Sixth came into hall. Little did the captain of Rookwood dream what a gladsome sight he was, at that moment, to the eyes of three utterly dismayed juniors.

"There's Bulkeley!" breathed Jimmy, "All right—it wasn't Bulkeley—"

"Thank goodness."

"Yes, thank goodness for that! But who—?"

"Who the dickens—"

"Let's get out and look for Lovell," said Jimmy, "I suppose he will know—as he did the bungle. Come on."

And the three pushed out of hall, and went to look for Arthur Edward Lovell.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LOVELL!

"Ow! wow! wow! ow! Oooh!"

Those sounds, proceeding from the end study in the Fourth, were a guide to three juniors looking for Lovell.

They had looked almost all over the House, without finding Lovell. He was not in hall, he was not in the day-room, he was not in the passages, and at last they came up to draw the studies for him. And those sounds of anguish, falling upon their surprised ears, apprised them that Lovell was in the end study, and in a state of woe, at present unaccountable.

"He's there," said Jimmy, "Come on."

They looked into the end study.

Lovell was there.

He was leaning on the study table. He was wriggling. He was writhing. He was emitting sounds such as might have been heard in the halls of the Spanish Inquisition. He looked as he had looked two or three days ago after his "six" from Carthew, only more so—much more so. Lovell, only too clearly, had been through it—severely. How and why, his chums could not guess—but the fact leaped to the eye.

"What's up, Lovell?" asked Jimmy.

"Ow!"

"You've been licked?" asked Raby.

"Wow!"

"Well, licked or not, we want to know

what's happened," said Newcome, "Look here, Lovell, you made a muck of it, as usual—it wasn't Carthew who came to the lobby and bagged that swiping—we've just seen him in hall, and he's all right."

"Wow! ow!"

"It wasn't Carthew," said Jimmy, "But it was somebody! Somebody rushed into the lobby in the dark, and of course we thought it was Carthew, and collared him and whopped him—pretty stiff, too! Do you know who it was?"

Lovell looked at them.

"You dummies!" he said.

"Eh?"

"You footling idiots."

"What?"

"Ow! wow! Ooogh! Oh, gum! I shan't be able to sit down again till tomorrow! Wow."

"Look here, we want to know," hooted Newcome, "As you bungled it, I suppose you know who rushed into the lobby and got that whopping. Who was it?"

"Me!" howled Lovell.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

Jimmy Silver and Co. fairly blinked.

They had wondered and wondered who it could have been who had captured that whopping, in the dark, intended for Carthew. It had not occurred to them that it was the sublime master-planner himself.

Their eyes popped at Arthur Edward Lovell.

"You!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"You!" stuttered Raby.

"You!" gurgled Newcome.

Lovell glared at them.

"Yes, you idiots, me! Bulkeley was coming instead of Carthew, and I rushed back to warn you off. And then—oh, you fatheads—then you grabbed me and pitched into me, not giving a chap a chance to utter a word—wow!"

Lovell broke off, with a gasp, wriggling spasmodically. Evidently he was feeling that six from the ruler in the lobby—feeling it deeply. For a few moments he seemed to be understudying the farmer of Hythe, who sat on a scythe, and did nothing but wriggle and writhe—while his chums stared at him blankly.

"Why couldn't you give a fellow a chance to speak?" he resumed, "Collaring

a chap in the dark, and not giving him a chance to speak a syllable—"

"Wasn't that the plan?" gasped Jimmy, "That was exactly what you planned for Carthew and we only did what you told us—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Newcome.

Lovell gave them a deadly glare. His masterly planning had led to a tremendous whopping—for himself! It struck his friends as comic. Arthur Edward Lovell could see nothing whatever comic about it.

"So you think it's funny!" he roared.

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" gasped Jimmy Silver, "You—you—it was you—you—you planned for a fellow to be copped in the dark and whopped—and—and rushed in and got it yourself! Oh, holy smoke! Ha, ha, ha."

"You cackling chumps!" yelled Lovell, "Grabbing a fellow in the dark and up-ending him and pitching into him with a ruler—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you'd given me a chance to speak a word—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Think it's funny?" shrieked Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co. They were sorry for old Lovell, of course. But undoubtedly they did think it funny. They yelled. They shrieked. They almost wept.

"Look here—!" roared Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you can't do anything but cackle—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You dithering dummies—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words failed Lovell. He glared round the study, caught up the poker from the fender, hurled himself at the yelling three, and fairly drove them out of the study, still yelling like hyenas.

ROOKWOOD SCHOOL broke up for Christmas the following day, and it was the end of the war-path for Arthur Edward Lovell. There were still some lingering aches and pains clinging to Arthur Edward, when the "Fistical Four" went off together for Christmas: but he was the only one unable to see the funny side of the affair.