

HIS OWN ENEMY!

by
Owen
Conquest



THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN
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LASSO WONDERS!

The Cow-hide Rope.

Cinema cowboys accomplish hair-raising tricks with the stockwhip, but you don't often see them wield the lasso—chiefly because the average cinema actor cannot. You know what a lasso is: a length of rope with a noose at one end.

Using it on horseback, until you are an absolutely expert lasso-wielder, has to be done whilst you bear most carefully in mind two big precautions—that you don't hang or decapitate yourself with it, and that you don't bind yourself in an inextricable tangle to your horse.

That's the reason why the cowboys on the "pictures" carry their lasso curled up on the pommel of the saddle, or dangling in a great coil picturesquely down from the steed's side. It's safest there, unused! You want to see a South American native or settler in full swing with his lasso!

The Deadly Lasso!

His is usually a rope made by plaiting raw cow-hide, and it may be anything between sixty and one hundred feet long, with a noose eight feet wide at the business end. He flings that great noose with incredible speed and accuracy over the horns of cattle he wishes to capture, and once the noose is drawn tight there is nothing he cannot do with the entrapped beast.

The Indians of the South American pampas do not restrict the lasso's use to cattle-catching only. They can kill wild game with it—by getting the noose right over the animal's head and, with the aid of their galloping horse, break the captive's neck.

Outkicking a Train!

The lasso has even entered into warfare, with victory for the lasso men. Every now and again, as you know, they have a revolution in South America, just by way, apparently, of breeding things out. In one of those bust-up troops were ordered out

against the revolutionaries, with caution to persuade the other side to go home again. But the other side was armed with the weapon which every native youngster there is born with, in a manner of speaking.

A few of the more dare-devil revolutionaries got close enough to the Government artillery to let fly with their plaited cow-hide ropes. They lassoed the cannon and dragged them away! Only the most expert men, with trained horses, could be capable of such a staggering feat, and we doubt if ever it could be repeated.

When a railway track first ran in the Argentine the local natives regarded this invasion of their privacy as a colossal piece of cheek on the white man's part. There were too many watchers and workmen about for the natives to risk hauling up the short track, but they knew a trick worth two of that.

Roping Lions!

The trick was to be brought off with lassos. A bunch of Indians lay in wait for the train and flung their lasso loops at it. They "tagged" the engine's tall funnel, dug spurs into their horses' flanks, and actually hauled the puffing locomotive completely off the rails!

The lasso has also been used very successfully by big-game hunters in Africa for roping lions, and even that out-size in monsters, the rhinoceros. A sort of half-circle of the lasso is sometimes employed to capture animals alive for zoological gardens. This is the bolas, consisting of two heavy stones or iron balls joined by about eight feet of rope.

One ball is held in the right hand, the other being swung round the head at the full extent of the rope. When there is enough speed on it, the whole whirling contraption is let go, to fly around the animal's legs; and wallah—the animal comes crashing down, ready for transport to the zoo!

His Own Enemy!

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Not for the first time has Valentine Mornington's headstrong, unruly nature been the cause of trouble in the Fourth Form at Rookwood. Seldom, however, has it led him to such lengths as described in this splendid story.

CHAPTER I.

Mornington is Ruffed!

"**S** EEN Erroll!" Valentine Mornington asked the question as Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome were passing through the old gateway at Rookwood.

Mornington was leaning on his bicycle, evidently waiting for someone. That someone was evidently Kit Erroll of the Fourth, his clam.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came along arm-in-arm cheerily. They smiled as they noted the expression on Mornington's face. The dandy of the Fourth was clearly not in the best of tempers that bright winter's afternoon.

"Seen Erroll?" repeated Mornington.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Not guilty, my lord!" he answered cheerfully.

"Ask me another!" said Raby.

"Search me!" invited Newcome.

"You silly asses—" began Mornington.

"Hold on!" said Lovell, halting. "I have!"

"You've seen Erroll?"

"Yes!" said Arthur Edward, smiling.

"Where?" snapped Mornington.

"In the Form-room!"

Mornington stared.

"In the Form-room?" he exclaimed.

"What the blump is he doing there now?"

"Goodness knows—if he is there now!"

"The—the footling ass!" said Mornington irritably. "I've been waiting over fifteen minutes for him! He said he'd be out in three minutes!"

With that Mornington banged his machine against the gatepost and started off at a run for the School House.

Lovell watched him vanish indoors, and then he chuckled.

"You silly dummy!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, staring. "Did you see Erroll in the Form-room, Lovell?"

"Yes," chuckled Lovell. "We all did—at lessons this morning! I didn't say he was there now, though!"

"Oh!"

"Oh, you ass, Lovell!"

"Mornington will dot you on the nose for this!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "He doesn't like his leg being pulled, and you know what a temper he's got! He looks in a fine old buzz already! Better clear off before he comes back—he'll be raging!"

Arthur Edward shook his head and

chuckled. Like all humorists, he wanted to see the end of his little joke.

"No fear!" he grinned. "I want to see Morny's olivry when he comes back! It'll be worth a guinea a box!"

"Better wait!" advised Newcome, grinning. "A dot on the nose will spoil the joke for you, old chap!"

"Rot!"

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver. "Don't be such a funny ass!"

"Rats!"

"But Morny will smash you——"

"Dow-wow!"

Evidently Arthur Edward's mind was made up.

"Oh, all right! If you're asking for trouble——"

"Here's Morny now!" interrupted Raby. Mornington emerged from the doorway of the Classical Side of Rookwood. His face was red, and he was looking very angry. It looked as if he had "tumbled" to Lovell's little joke.

"You—you silly fool!" he snapped, flushing, as he came up with the grinning juniors. "I suppose you think that funny, Lovell!"

"What's funny?" asked Lovell innocently. "You asked me if I'd seen Erroll. Well, I had, and I told you so—in the Form-room this morning."

"You—you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell.

It was the climax of the joke, and the humorist roared.

"And you think that funny?" said Mornington.

"Eh? Of course!"

"Then see if you think this is funny!" snapped Morny, and he hit Lovell full on the nose.

"Yooceep!"

Arthur Edward roared—in a different key now—and sat down hard on the gravel.

He was up again in a flash, however, and at Mornington with a hellow and a rush. Obviously Arthur Edward hadn't thought "that" funny.

"Here, chuck it!" laughed Jimmy Silver. "Drag the asses apart, you chaps; we'll never get off to-day at this rate!"

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome managed to drag the combatants apart—though all three suffered from stray blows in the process.

"Chuck it!" gasped Jimmy Silver,

"That's enough, Morny; no need to get your rag out like that. Lovell was an ass, but——"

"Let go!" bellowed Mornington, his face white with anger. "I'll teach him to make a dashed fool of me!"

"Let him come on!" roared Lovell, struggling furiously.

"Hallo! Stop that, kids!"

It was Bulkeley, the Rookwood skipper. He came along with Price of the Sixth, and frowned at the scene in the gateway.

"Only a little argument, Bulkeley!" said Jimmy Silver weakly.

"Looks to me more like a scrap!" said Bulkeley grimly. "Stop it and cut off! D'you hear!"

"But that hot-tempered fool hit me on the nose!" roared Lovell. "I'm going to smash him!"

And Lovell dragged himself free with a wrench and made for Mornington again. Bulkeley gave two swift strides, caught him by the collar, and planted a boot gently behind him.

"Now cut!"

"Look here——" roared Lovell, struggling. "I'm going to—— Yaw!"

Arthur Edward roared again as Bulkeley twisted him round and applied his boot again.

"Want another?" Bulkeley lifted his boot again. Lovell tore himself free and fled. He didn't want another. It was useless to argue with the skipper of Rookwood—even Lovell saw it at last.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome strolled after him, smiling. Bulkeley resumed his stroll and his chat with Price of the Sixth.

Mornington scowled, and put his tie and collar straight. The little incident had not improved his temper at all. Another three or four minutes had also gone by, and his chum Erroll had not turned up—and Mornington did not like waiting for anyone.

As he stood there scowling Clarence Cuffy of the Modern Fourth and the biggest duffer at Rookwood—or outside of Rookwood, for that matter—came ambling up to him.

"My dear Mornington——"

"Cut off!" snapped Mornington; he was not in the mood to chat with the long-winded Clarence, far from it.

"But, my dear Mornington——"

"Clear out!"

Clarence jumped at the ferocity in Morry's tone.

"But, my dear Mornington, pray attend to my remarks," he observed, with a pained expression on his guileless features. "If you refuse to listen to my remarks, then it will be quite impossible for me to deliver the message entrusted to me by your friend Erroll."

"You—you ass! Let's have it, then—and cut it short!"

"My dear Mornington, I fear you are feeling very cross this afternoon. Allow me to point out that anger is a very grave and——"

"What is it?" shouted Mornington wrathfully. "Where is Erroll?"

"Oh! Dear me! Pray do not raise your voice so. You have put me in a flutter, my dear Mornington."

"You—you——"

"Erroll is engaged at present," went on Clarence hastily, warned by the expression on Morry's face, "in attempting to close up, with the aid of solution and rubber, an orifice in the inner tube of a bicycle tyre from which the air has been escaping."

"Oh!"

Mornington's angry brow cleared a little. If Erroll had a puncture to repair, then he could hardly be blamed for keeping him waiting. Still, he might have let him know earlier!

Leaving the long-winded Clarence Cuffy standing there, Mornington grabbed his machine, and hastened round the quadrangle to the cycle sheds behind the chapel.

He found Erroll sure enough, at the rear of the sheds, busily repairing a big tear in an inner-tube, his face red and perspiring.

"You ass, Erroll!" he snorted. "Why the thunder couldn't you let me know where you were?"

"Sorry, old man!" gasped Erroll, looking up. "I thought I should have finished this job long ago. But that ass——"

"Why, that's not your bike, Erroll!" interrupted Mornington.

"Eh! Oh, no! It's Cuffy's!"

"What?"

"The silly duffer is as big a dud at repairing punctures as at everything else," said Erroll, smiling. "Like an ass, I offered to help him—thinking it would only take

a couple of minutes. But the duffer insisted on helping me to put the tube back afterwards, and—well, of course, he went and burst it again—a tear nearly two inches long, the frightful dummy! But I've nearly finished now," added Erroll hurriedly, suddenly uneasy at the gathering fury in his chum's face.

"Well, I'm blast!" stammered Mornington, his temper now right out of hand. "And you've kept me waiting all this time while you repair a dashed puncture for that silly owl!"

"Yes, I'm sorry, old man. If I'd known——"

"Oh, go and eat cake!"

Mornington, crimson with wrath, ran his machine round to the front of the cycle sheds, and Erroll heard him hauling it in some alarm. He dropped the tube he was holding, and ran round to him.

"Morry, old man! No need to get into a wax like this! Aren't you going out——"

"Not with you!" snapped Mornington, his eyes glinting. "I'll leave you to go for a dashed ride with Cuffy—as he's so much more important than me!"

"But, Morry, old man—I say——"

"Rats!"

Leaving his alarmed chum staring blankly after him, Mornington strode swiftly away. He reached the quad just as three juniors came out of the doorway of the Classical House. They were Peele, Gower, and Lattrey—Peele & Co., the rads of the Fourth. A dogged, reckless look came over Mornington's handsome face.

"Going out, you fellows?" he called.

Peele & Co. stopped.

"Yes. Can't you see we are?" said Peele surlily. "What d'you want?"

"Nothing, only I'll join you if you like," said Mornington. "I'm getting a bit fed-up with life, and need a bit of excitement. Mind if I join you?"

"My hat! Yes, do!"

The three shady scamps were only too pleased to have Mornington back again in their select Co. In the old days Mornington was as big a rotter as themselves, if not worse. But since he had turned over a new leaf, Peele & Co. had lost a valuable friend.

But just then Kit Erroll came running up behind Mornington.

"Morry, old man!" he panted. "Hold

on! Don't set the goat! I'm sorry."

"So am I," said Mornington coolly. "Sorry I can't come biking with you, after all, Erroll. I'll leave you to your pal Cuffy. I'm just off with these chaps. A little game and a smoke, I hope!"

"What!" gasped Erroll, aghast.

"Just that! Come on, you fellows!"

"Right you are!" said Peole, with a grin, as he understood.

The four walked away. Kit Erroll ran after them.

"Morny—Morny, old man! Hold on!"

"Rata!" snapped Mornington over his shoulder.

Erroll halted, and stood staring after the four, as they vanished through the old gateway.

CHAPTER 2.

A Face from the Past!

KIT ERROLL stood as if turned to stone.

He knew his chum well enough to realize that it was useless to run after him—useless to argue with him when in one of his angry, perverse moods. At the best of times—good chums as they generally were—Erroll could never feel quite sure of Mornington. He was always liable to do the unexpected.

He had done so now—though Erroll understood the reasons quite well.

It was a half-holiday at Rockwood, and Mornington had wanted to go over to Letcham to see a boxing match, while his chum had not. And for a very good reason, in Erroll's opinion. The match was to be held in a low part of the town, and from all accounts it was to be a very shady sort of prize-fight affair—certainly not the kind of thing for a Rockwooder to attend.

But Mornington seemed to have set his heart on going, and it was only after a great deal of argument and pleading that Kit Erroll had succeeded in persuading his chum not to go. Morny agreeing, very sulkily, to go for a bike ride with him instead.

Yet, though Erroll had known his chum had resented having to change his plans, he had not dreamed how deeply angry and resentful he was over the matter.

But he realised it now—just as he knew his chum was using the fact that he had kept him waiting as an excuse to show his resentment and disappointment.

"Oh, blow that ass, Cuffy!" groaned Erroll. "If only I hadn't kept Morny waiting I should have been out now, and I could easily have talked him out of his paddy. What rotten luck!"

Acting on sudden impulse, Erroll ran down to the gates and glanced up the lane. There was no sign of Mornington or Peole & Co.

A deep shade of uneasiness settled on Erroll's brow. He knew that his chum had gone off with the cads of the Fourth chiefly to irritate him—out of sheer ill-temper. Yet—

Erroll also knew Mornington's wilful, perverse nature. Only his own influence, Erroll was aware, had prevented his chum from "kicking over the traces" on more than one occasion.

And now he had actually gone off for the afternoon with Peole & Co.—for a little game and a smoke, as Morny himself had claimed to hope.

"It's awn, I believe, just to irritate me—just his rotten, silly temper!" muttered Erroll uneasily. "But—"

With sudden decision he turned and started off down the lane, his footsteps quickening as his resolve strengthened in his mind. If Morny wanted to kick over the traces he could not stop him; but he would try for all that, useless as it seemed.

He had quite forgotten Cuffy, and the bike now. He hurried along the wintry lane, hoping to catch up with the four before they left the lane.

"Jest a minute, sir!"

Erroll halted. Before him stood a shabby youth, with dusty, soiled clothes, with a thin, pinched face. Erroll had noticed him tramping along, and had glanced at him, a compassionate glance as he saw the tattered boots and limping, footsore gait.

Erroll's hand strayed to his pocket. The boy was obviously a youthful tramp, and was going to beg for alms. But even as he did so Kit Erroll gave a violent start, his eyes fixed sharply on the stranger's face.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," said the youth respectfully. "But am I right for Rockwood School, young gent?"

"Yes," Erroll answered slowly, striving to recollect where and when he had seen the face before. "But, look here! I know you. I've seen you before somewhere."

"Cricket!"

The youth stared at him, and then a glimmering of recognition came into his blue eyes.

"Blow me if it ain't—But," he gasped, "you're a young feller!"

"Yes, I am now, I suppose," smiled Erroll, as remembrance came to him, too. "But I wasn't always, Albert Biggs. You see, I remember your name. What on earth are you doing round here, Bert?"

"Cricket!"

It seemed all the youth could say. Erroll eyed him keenly, his face saddening as he noted the too obvious signs of hunger and want on the waif's features. Back into his mind came a memory of the past—that dark past when he had been an unwilling pupil in the power of a gang of cracksmen, when he, too, had been a ragged waif, friendless and often enough hungry.

And one incident in that dark past stood out now in bold relief.

It was when he had escaped for a time from his old associates, only to come face to face with the starvation. It was then he had met a boy—a poor newspaper boy—who had shared his last crust with him, had taken him to the garret he called home, and had saved him from starvation, if not worse.

And that boy's name was Albert Biggs, and he was standing before him now.

Since that time—since his father had found him and rescued him from the rascally gang, Kit Erroll had tried in vain to trace the boy who had befriended him. But Biggs had left his former haunts and had completely disappeared.

Now, from out of nowhere, he had reappeared, a waif, destitute, down and out, on that country lane that ran past Rookwood. Kit Erroll grabbed the grimy hand of the boy impulsively.

"Don't you remember?" he said eagerly. "The old days in Barker's Rents, when you shared your last bit of grub with me. I do, if you don't, Bert Biggs."

"Cricket! O' course I does," mumbled the youth, staring unbelievably at the well-dressed schoolboy before him. "My faget! Ain't you a feller now? Haw—where—"

"I'm at Rookwood now—a school close to here, Biggs. But why are you here? Why were you asking the way to Rookwood? Did you know I was there? Were you going to see me?"

"Blow me, no!" was the astonished answer. "You see," went on the boy, flushing, "I'm after a job there—a job as garden boy. I'm tramping it, looking for work. That's what I'm doing round 'ere. Then I seen the advertisement. It were on a piece of newspaper what was wrapped round some sandwiches a lady give me in Loxham. I thought as I'd try for it, though I knows as I'd stand little chance with no references and dressed in rags like this 'ere. Still—"

"So that's it!" exclaimed Erroll, his eyes gleaming. "Then here's my chance to pay back some of what I owe you, Bert. I'll do all I can to help you get the job. I'll speak to Dicky Dalton for you. He's my Form master and a good sort. My hat! We'll work it, Bert!"

"I don't want to trouble you. You're a young swell now—"

"Rats! I'm doing it. My hat, it'll be ripping to have you near, to talk over old times! You were a real pal to me in the old days, and I'll be a pal to you," said Erroll. "Come with—Hold on, though! You need some grub, I can see that. We'll go to the village for some tea, and then we can talk things over."

"Me come with you—a feller like you!" exclaimed Biggs, flushing again. "Me in rags like this 'ere, and you—"

"Don't talk rot! Wasn't I worse than you in the old days?" said Erroll, with a harsh laugh. "You're coming to the village tuckshop for some grub—if I have to drag you there!"

"But—"

"Chuck 'em!" said Erroll, with a cheery laugh. "You've got to come! Come—Oh, my hat, though!"

Erroll broke off and clapped a hand to his pocket, remembering he had no money with him at the moment.

"Wait here, Bert!" he said quickly. "I'll just run back to school; it's only a hundred yards down the lane. I'll be back in two jics. You'll wait, won't you?"

"I—I don't like botherin'—"

"Blow your likes!" said Erroll. "Promise you'll wait. I'll be dashed sorry if you

don't. I want to talk, to hear your story, Bert. Don't throw up an old pal."

"If—if you really mean it, sir——" stammered Bert.

"Of course I do. And don't call me sir, or I'll punch your nose, Bert. You'll wait? I shan't be two minutes."

"Yes; if you really want a bloke to wait, I will, blow me!"

"That's good enough!"

Kit Erroll nodded, and scudded away. He knew he could rely upon the boy's word. Bert Biggs stared after him, his pinched face full of colour now. As he stood there in the wintry lane, a sound reached his ears, and he started.

It was a low laugh, and it came from beyond the hedge close by where he was standing. He glanced round quickly, and then he started again as he glimpsed several forms through the bare, leafless hedge.

Stepping to a gap, he looked over into the field beyond.

Then he saw. Only a yard or two from where he stood was a stile leading to a foot-path across the meadows. And seated on a fence running parallel with the path were four Rookwood juniors. One was an elegant youth with a handsome face sadly marred by a dark smel. It was Mornington, and the others were Peel, Gower and Lattery.

All four were smacking, and Peel & Co. were grinning.

Albert Biggs flushed as he met their grins, sneering looks. Obviously they had heard every word that had passed between Kit Erroll and he, and obviously they were much amused.

"Oh!" gasped Albert Biggs, startled.

"Good-afternoon!" remarked Peel blandly. "Have you used Pears' soap lately?"

"Years ago—since when he used no other!" grinned Gower. "His pal Erroll's just gone to school for some. Quite a movin' incident, wasn't it you chaps? Excuse these tears! Long-lost pals meet again after many years! Boo-hoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quite entertainin'!" chuckled Peel. "My boy! Ain't you a toff now, Herroll! You'd better look out, Morny, old bean! You'll have to take a back seat now Erroll's old pal's turned up," he added, giving Mornington a sly glance. "I don't suppose

you'll care about playing second fiddle to a dirty, unwashed tramp! I shouldn't!"

"Rather not!" grinned Lattery, winking at Peel behind Mornington's back.

Mornington's eyes glittered.

Keen as he usually was, it did not occur to him that Peel & Co. were striving to sow seeds of mischief between Erroll and himself. And he was just in the mood to believe or think anything. Had this fellow—this unwashed tramp—come from nowhere to take his chums from him? Strange as was the ill-assorted friendship between the two, it was a very real friendship on both sides—real and deep. And at the thought a sudden, unreasoning hatred of the wail came over Mornington. Mornington always had been strangely jealous of any friends his chums made, and a blind fit of bitter jealousy took possession of him now.

Hadn't Erroll himself spoken of getting this ragged wail a job at Rookwood—and of renewing a friendship of long ago? He felt he could guess what that would mean—he would have to take a back seat, unless

Mornington's eyes were glittering as he jumped from the fence, crossed the stile, and faced the startled youth. Peel & Co. followed him, grinning gleefully.

"Now, you ragamuffin!" he hissed, pointing up the lane. "Off you go—sharp! You hear me? If you don't clear out of this district sharp, I'll have the police put on you, my pippin!"

Albert Biggs stared, his pinched face flushing again.

"Look 'ere, guv'nor——"

"Clear!" snapped Mornington. "I'll give you two seconds!"

"I—I won't!" said Albert Biggs, a flash of spirit appearing in his eyes. "I don't know who you young gents is, but I got as much right 'ere as you 'ave! I'm waitin' 'ere for a pal!"

"Oh, won't you?" said Peel, grinning. "Boot the beastly tramp away, Morny! Here, this is to encourage you, my friend!"

And snatching off the wail's cap, Peel threw it yards away up the lane. A flash came into Bert Biggs' eyes.

"Look 'ere!" he growled. "I don't want no trouble wi' you gents, but I'm stayin' 'ere, and you ain't makin' me—— Ow!"

He broke off suddenly with a gasp as a chunk of turf hit him full in the face. It was from the hand of Mark Lattery, who

had hung it from several yards away. The next instant Lattrey wished he hadn't. Though half-blinded with soil, Albert Biggs leaped at him and—a fist, as hard as iron, took Lattrey under the chin.

Lattrey yelled and sat down hard. Peele gave a roar.

In the ordinary way Peele & Co. disliked a scrap. But with the odds at three to one they did not hesitate. The next moment Albert Biggs, rubbing his bungled up eyes frantically, was sent crashing over with Peele, Gower and Lattrey swarming over him.

Mornington seemed on the verge of joining in, but he drew back swiftly as running footsteps sounded on the hard road, and Kit Erroll came dashing up, his eyes blazing.

With one look at Mornington he charged straight into the fray, hitting out right and left. There was a chorus of howls, and Lattrey went one way and Gower another. A third punch sent Peele spinning.

But Albert Biggs did not rise. He sat as if dazed, rubbing at his eyes, half-blinded by the earth.

"You rotten coward!" shouted Erroll indignantly. "Morry!"

The next moment Erroll was fighting hard as the three cads rushed at him, raging. But Mornington did not heed his chum's call for aid. He replaced his cigarette between his lips and seated himself on the stile. He sat and watched the fight coolly, though his eyes were glittering.

"Smash him!" snarled Peele. "Get him down!"

Erroll went crashing down at last—the odds of three to one were too much for him. Biggs was still helpless to aid him. That Mornington would disregard his appeal did not even occur to Erroll.

"Morry!" he panted. "Morry—lend me a hand!"

Mornington did not move.

He sat on the stile as if utterly indifferent to the unequal fight going on in the lane a couple of yards from him. Erroll was on his back now, struggling furiously, with Peele and Gower holding him down with difficulty, whilst Lattrey pummelled him unmercifully.

Albert Biggs, the ragged youth, staggered to his feet, still rubbing at his eyes. The turf Lattrey had flung into his face had burst full before his eyes, and he

was still half-blinded and practically helpless.

"Morry!" panted Erroll again, amazed at his chum's inaction. "Help me!"

Mornington took his cigarette from his lips and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"I'm not interferin'!" he said calmly, though his eyes were glittering strangely. "If you will back up beasty tramps against Rookwood men, then it's your own look out, Erroll! You asked for it!"

CHAPTER 2.

Erroll Speaks for His Chum!

"THAT'S the ticket, Morry!" panted Peele. "Here, help us with the rotter, old man!"

"Go and eat cake!" said Mornington coolly. "If Erroll will promise to give this beasty tramp the boot, though, I'll jolly soon chip in and help him make mince-meat of you, Peele!"

Erroll did not answer. His face went a trifle white, and his eyes gloamed. Not even to gain his chum's help would he do that. He guessed now that his chum had overheard his conversation with Albert Biggs, and he felt he understood Morry's attitude now. His tilt with his chum earlier in the afternoon had just put the perverse Mornington into the mood for any excuse to quarrel with him.

With blazing eyes he redoubled his efforts, and after a fierce struggle managed to stagger to his feet.

Peele staggered back under a drive that jarred every tooth in his head, and Lattrey went spinning away again, his nose streaming. But they closed in again instantly, while Gower, dodging Erroll's fists, leaped on his back from behind.

Erroll went down with a heavy crash again.

"Now into the dashed ditch with him!" hissed Peele, his face convulsed. "God! We'll make the rotter—Owl!"

Peele howled and crashed over under an unexpected drive from a grumpy fist as hard as iron.

It was Albert Biggs joining in at last, his eyes blinking and bloodshot. He joined in like a tornado, his fists whirling.

"Good man, Bert!" panted Erroll.

It was help at last, and Erroll scrambled up again, his eyes gleaming with fight.

Mornington scowled and stepped from the stile as though to intervene. But he changed his mind and seated himself again, looking on sardonically.

"Come on, you men!" gasped Peele savagely, scrambling up again in a fury. "Lattrey, you funk, come on! We're three to two! Smash the cads!"

Lattrey ceased hugging his nose—he was hanging back now, but as Peele and Gower made another rush he joined in—not very willingly, however. Nor did he stay in long. A grimy fist rattled his teeth, and a second smacked home on his nose again.

It was more than enough for Mark Lattrey, and he dodged and ran, stopping a few yards away to nurse his injuries. The next moment Gower was also out—sent spinning yards away by a hefty drive from Erroll's fist. And he stayed out.

Both Erroll and Albert turned their attention to Peele, but Peele was not hero enough to face them alone. He broke away, shouting furiously at his chums.

It was just then that four juniors came scudding along the lane. The four were Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby and Newcome. They stopped and stared at Erroll and Biggs, and then at Peele & Co. savagely musing their hurts some yards away.

"Hallo, what's the merry trouble?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Dear old Peele again, I see—three to two, eh?"

"And it looks as if the two have licked 'em," grinned Lovell. "What was the trouble, Erroll?"

Erroll mopped his heated face without replying. His glance went to Mornington, still seated on the stile, and it was a troubled glance.

Jimmy Silver did not fail to notice it, and he looked curiously at Mornington.

"What's the game, Morny?" he asked, staring. "We saw something of what was going on when we came along. It looks as if to see a fellow sitting watching while a gang of cads pitch into his pal!"

"Any of your lousy?" drawled Mornington.

"Yes, it is! It's too thick sitting there smoking beastly fags while your pal fights against odds!" said Jimmy Silver curtly.

"Some pal!" snarled Lovell. "I don't think! Blessed if I should care to have a pal like that!"

"Erroll asked for trouble and got it!" said Mornington coolly. "He was backing

this filthy tramp up against Rookwood chapel! I wasn't going to back him up in that, pal or no pal!"

"Oh!"
The juniors looked very curiously at Albert Biggs, who was rubbing his eyes and panting breathlessly, and looking very flushed and unhappy.

Erroll spoke then.
"This chap isn't a tramp, Morny," he said quietly. "He's a fellow who's on his beam ends at the moment—a decent chap who befriended me when I myself was down and out years ago. He's an old chum of mine, and I wasn't going to see cads like Peele bully him. If you'll come along with me now, Morny, old chap, I'll explain."

"With—with this filthy tramp?" asked Mornington, a glitter in his eyes.

"With my chum, Biggs," said Erroll steadily. "He's a good sort, really, Morny, and I'd like you to know—"

"Thanks, but I'd prefer not to!" said Mornington. "I'll come along quickly enough if you'll boot that low cad back the way he came. But if you prefer his company to mine—"

"It's not that, Morny—you know it isn't," said Erroll in great distress. "I can't turn—look here, old man: come along and I'll explain just why—"

"Thanks, no!" said Mornington deliberately. "I should be afraid of losing my wallet or my watch! Come on, Peele, old chap! We'll continue our little stroll."

And Mornington, giving Albert Biggs a deadly look, dropped from the stile and joined Peele & Co., who were just moving away. They walked on towards Rookwood, Peele & Co. mopping injured noses and eyes.

Erroll stood staring after his chum with a look of amazement.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "The rotten cad! That was a rotten thing to say before that chap!"

"Rotten!" muttered Lovell warmly. "The chap's down on his luck; but he looks a decent enough kid! What started it, Erroll?" he went on, raising his voice.

"I left my friend here, waiting in the lane for me," said Erroll huskily. "I was coming back again when I saw Peele, Gower and Lattrey attack him. So I rushed up and joined in. That's all."

"All, is it?" said Lovell, with a sniff. "And you mean to say that Mornington,

your best pal, set there and let those cads hassle you without offering to interfere? He wouldn't be a pal of mine long if he did that to me—let me down in that rotten way!"

"Not worth calling a pal!" said Baby. "Don't look so pipped, Erroll—you're well rid of a chap of that kind!"

Erroll flushed, and caught Albert Biggs' arm.

"Come on, Biggs!" he said huskily.

He led the ragged youth away towards Coombe, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. to themselves. His heart was heavy, but he felt no bitterness towards Mornington, seriously enough. He was of a forgiving nature—too forgiving, perhaps.

He felt sure that had Morny not been in such a bad temper he would willingly have come to his aid against Peete & Co. In fact, the incident would never have taken place had not his elum been in one of his evil moods. Erroll never dreamed that it was Mornington himself who had started the trouble with Albert Biggs. Had he done so, he would have been far more upset than he was.

As the two got out of earshot of the Fistical Four, Albert Biggs turned to Erroll, his pinched, bruised face full of distress.

"I'm sorry this 'as happened, sir," he said. "I wouldn't 'ave come after this job of garden boy at Rookwood if I'd known as you was there, Master Erroll. I can see as it won't do you no good knowing a ragged bloke like me there."

"What rot!" exclaimed Erroll, setting his lips hard. "I'm jolly glad you came, Bert!"

"I know. You're a good sort!" said the wad huskily. "But it won't do, and I ain't allowing it. It'll only cause trouble between you and your pals like. Look 'ere! Don't you come no farther w' me. I'm clearing out this place right away. Not as I ain't grateful to you—you can lay to it that I am. Out—"

"What rot!" said Erroll. "We'll see about that. Think I care for those chaps—these three who scrapped with us, I mean? They're about the biggest mobs and cads in Rookwood. You needn't worry about them, I can tell you."

"I ain't worrying about them so much," said the ragged youth. "I'm thinking about that other bloke—the one as sat on

the stile. I ain't goin' to come between you and 'im, though—"

"Rats! I'm getting you that job, Bert!" said Erroll flatly. "As for Morny—the chap you mention—you needn't worry about him either. He doesn't really mean what he says, and he just happens to be in a bad temper this afternoon. He's mad with me because I wouldn't go with him to a boxing affair at Latcham. But he'll be right as rain when he gets over it."

"Yes; hot—"

"No good battling, old chap!" said Erroll grimly. "I've found you now, after all these years, and I'm not letting you go. Bert, I've never forgotten how you stood by me when I was down and out. I should have starved but for you. I've never forgotten. I owe you a lot, and I'm going to repay it."

"Master Erroll—"

"You're coming with me now for some grub!" said Erroll quietly. "After that I'm going to rig you out in some clothes. Luckily my legs will about fit you. Then we'll see about that job. I'll eat my hat if I don't— Oh, my hat!"

Erroll broke off in some alarm, and hurriedly finished straightening his collar and tie. Coming towards them was the athletic figure of Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth at Rookwood.

As Erroll expected, the master sighted his dishevelled appearance at once.

"Erroll!" called the master, glancing at Albert Biggs curiously. "One moment! I wish to speak with you."

"Yes, sir."

Kit Erroll crossed over to the master of the Fourth.

"You have been fighting, Erroll?"

"Ye-es, sir," said Erroll.

"Who is this—this individual, Erroll? Am I to understand that you have been fighting with him? He appears—"

"Oh, no, sir! He—he is a friend of mine, sir!"

"What?"

"Some—some fellows were bullying him," said Erroll hurriedly. "I dropped in because—because he's a friend of mine, sir."

"Oh, indeed!" Mr. Dalton looked curiously again at Albert. Fellows at Rookwood were not expected to make friends with tattered youths of the road. Indeed, Dicky Dalton was astonished.

"You—you say this youth is a friend of yours, Erroll?"

"It's quite true, sir," said Erroll, flushing. "You—you see, sir, I know him years ago—in the old days when I was living in the slums—before my father found me and rescued me."

"Oh, I—I see!" said the master. He knew Erroll's history quite well, and he understood now. "He—he was a friend of yours then?"

"Yes, sir," said Kit Erroll stoutly. "He's one of the best. He took me home and befriended me when I was starving and homeless. I haven't forgotten, sir."

"And now he has come to Rookwood to visit you, Erroll?" said Mr. Dalton, the stern note leaving his voice.

"He—he didn't come to visit me, sir. He didn't even know I was at Rookwood. He saw an advertisement in the newspaper for a garden boy at Rookwood, and he came to apply for the job."

"Oh!"

Dicky Dalton looked again at the ragged wail. It must have struck him that a youth dressed as he was dressed and obviously without references could have little hope of obtaining such a post. Erroll read his thoughts.

"I—I was going to see you about him, sir," he said in a low, eager tone. "Please don't look at the way he's dressed, sir. He's had bad luck, and has been tramping round for work. I can supply him with decent clothes, and you'll see he will look a different fellow then. And he's as straight and honest as any fellow at Rookwood. I can vouch for that, sir."

"I'm! You were going to speak for him, Erroll?"

"Yes, sir, I met him by accident just now in the lane. I remembered at once what I owed him, and I determined to do my best to get him the job," said Erroll, looking pleadingly at Dicky Dalton's handsome face. "If—if you could only do something for him, sir—I know it sounds like awful cheek on my part, but—"

"I quite understand, my boy," said Dicky Dalton.

He called across to Albert Biggs, and the ragged youth came over, looking rather scared. He raised his ragged cap to the master.

"Do you wish to apply for the job of garden boy at Rookwood?" asked the master.

"Yes, sir. Only—only—" Albert Biggs halted, looking at Erroll in some confusion.

"He's afraid he's worrying me too much," explained Erroll hurriedly.

Mr. Dalton smiled. He had intended to question the boy, but the frank blue eyes of the ragged youth were quite enough for Dicky Dalton. He had not spent years as a schoolmaster without acquiring a good knowledge of character.

"Very well!" he exclaimed. "It is quite out of my province, of course, Erroll. The matter chiefly concerns Babbage, the Head's gardener. But I will speak to him on your friend's behalf, and I have no doubt, if the position is not already filled, that it will be all right. Your friend had better come along at six o'clock."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" gasped Erroll, while Biggs also mumbled his thanks.

"It's a jolly decent of you, sir!"

"Not at all, my boys!"

With that, Dicky Dalton smiled and walked on.

"That's our Form master," said Erroll breathlessly. "By jingo, I think you're all right now, Bert! He's a jolly good sort, and he'll work it for us."

"Then—then you think—"

"It'll be as right as rain, old chap! Now come along for that feed, and afterwards I'll get you some old tops of mine."

And with that Erroll led his old friend towards the village, delighted to think that the chance had come his way to repay in some small measure the debt he owed to the wail who had befriended him in those dark days of the past.

CHAPTER 4.

Mornington's Ultimatum!

"WELL!" Valentine Mornington spoke half mockingly.

The dandy of the Fourth was sprawling in the armchair in the study he shared with Erroll. He had apparently just finished tea, for the tea-things were still on the table. There was a cigarette in his fingers, and he eyed Kit Erroll through half-closed lids as that junior entered the study.

Kit Erroll eyed him steadily, a cloud on his face. He had had tea at the village

lockshop with Albert Biggs. After tea he had left his old friend in the woods, and had returned to school for a suit of his old clothes—an old lounge suit that fitted Albert Biggs fairly comfortably. Kit had left him there to change, and had returned to Rookwood, though it had required all his persuasion and pleading to make Biggs either accept the suit or to continue with his desire to get the job at Rookwood.

Biggs was no fool, and he had already seen that his friendship with Erroll promised to make things unpleasant for that junior in more ways than one. But Erroll's arguments and pleadings had overcome his doubts and fears, and eventually Biggs had promised to turn up at six, as instructed by Mr. Dalton.

Since the trouble in the lane Erroll had not seen Mornington, and so he looked at him expectantly now. Certainly some explanation was only to be expected from his elms for his disloyalty that afternoon.

"Well!" repeated Mornington. "Go it, old chap! I'm waitin' for the tellin'-off—the scoldin' scene and contempt you feel for the pal who let you down so badly! Go it!"

Erroll closed the door quietly. Despite his chum's half-mocking smile and words, he saw clearly enough the uneasiness and the trace of shame in Mornington's face.

"I'm glad you understand the position, Mornington," said Kit quietly. "But I've nothing to say!"

"You mean you'd rather not speak to me?" said Mornington. "You've decided to throw me over, what?"

"No, not that," said Erroll quickly. "I mean that I would rather let the matter drop, Morny. I know you acted as you did because you were in a bad temper—you weren't yourself! I feel very sick about it but I'd rather let it drop and forget it!"

Mornington puffed at his cigarette in silence for a moment or so. He was plainly taken aback by his chum's attitude, having expected recriminations, if not a row.

"Had your tea?" he asked at last.

"Yes, in the village!"

"With that—that beastly tramp, I suppose?"

"With Albert Biggs, my old chum!" said Erroll quietly. "Morny, old fellow, I do with you'd drop this attitude. Biggs is a decent kid—a fellow down on his luck through no fault of his own. He was absolutely starv-

ing—hadn't had a bite to eat since yesterday noon. I'm only trying to repay a debt I've often longed to repay."

Mornington laughed harshly.

"What rot!" he sneered. "The outsider's spoonin' you, trying to sponge on your good nature, Erroll! Where is he now?"

"I left him in the woods! I've taken him a suit of clothes to change into!"

"I thought as much!" said Mornington. "Poco told me just now that he saw you hurrying out of gates with a bag! I guessed that was it. So you're going on with this rot, going to try to get that beastly young fooligan on the staff at Rookwood!"

"Yes, I've already spoken to Dick Dalton, who's seen him and promised to do his best for him. He's got to come here at six for the interview. I think he'll get the job all right."

Mornington's face darkened, and he threw his cigarette into the grate with a savage gesture.

"You fool, Erroll!" he snapped. "I suppose you mean to pat on with the brute here—a dashed low tramp!"

"I don't suppose I shall be allowed to pal on with him, Morny; at least, it wouldn't do for me to knock about much with him. It wouldn't do, as the chap is on the staff. But I certainly shall be his friend, and shall do my best to make him comfortable and happy here—just as he did with me in the old days."

Mornington rose from his chair, his eyes glittering.

"You mean that, Erroll?" he snapped.

"Certainly! I can do nothing less! Why should it matter to you, old man; it won't interfere with our friendship!"

"Yes, it will!"

"But how—?"

"I'll see to that!" said Mornington, his eyes blazing with unreasonable fury. "Think I'm goin' to be pals with a chap who pals with gutter-snipes? Not likely!"

"Morny—" began Erroll miserably.

"Let's have this straight!" said Mornington savagely. "You mean to go on with this foolery, Erroll?"

"Yes!"

"Whether I like it or not—whether I object to your picking a chap out of the gutter and bringing him here to make a pal of him?"

"You're looking at it in the wrong way, Morny," said Erroll earnestly. "Look here, what has come over you, old chap! You've been jolly decent for a long time now—it's ages even since you smoked—and now, all at once, you start this game—palling with scamps like Peele and smoking rotten fags! Chuck it, old man! There's better stuff in you than—"

"Oh, can it!" said Mornington, his lip curling. "We get sermons enough on Sundays. I asked you a question, Erroll: I want an answer here and now! Are you goin' on with this foolery?"

"It's the least I can do for a fellow who shared his last crust with me, who helped me when I needed help badly, Morny—"

"Yes or no!" snapped Mornington ruthlessly. "You can choose between the two, Erroll—myself or that sweep. You can see what he is—a low-down gutter-snipe, probably—almost certainly—a thief and a vagabond! You'll be introducing him into Rookwood. There'll be robberies—things stolen right and left! I'm not gettin' mixed up in things like that, and I don't want you to. Bah! Take my advice and have nothing more to do with him. Give him some cash and clear him out!"

"I—I can't do that, Morny," said Erroll, in great distress. "I can't turn the poor kid down, especially after raising his hopes. He's a good kid, and he's keen to become respectable—to live an honest life. He's used to squalor and criminal surroundings. But there's stuff in him to fit him for something better than that. It's a chance to give him a fair start in life. I can't let it go—can't throw him aside now. I should never forgive myself, Morny."

"You mean that?"

"Yes. But, Morny—"

"That's enough! If you prefer a low, thieving tramp to me, then you're welcome to him—for good! And be banged to you!"

And with that Mornington pushed angrily past his protesting study mate and flung out of the study, slamming the door after him.

Kit Erroll drew a deep, deep breath. Mornington was a fellow not easy to get on with at the best of times. The dandy had once been known as the hardest case at Rookwood—one of the worst fellows, perhaps, in the school. But those days had

gone, and for a long time Mornington had been a changed fellow, respected and liked by most.

None the less, there were times when the old nature seemed to assert itself, and only Erroll's influence, as was generally felt, kept Valentine Mornington from "kicking over the traces" again.

Many times and oft Kit Erroll's patience had been sorely strained. But this time it appeared to be perilously near breaking-point.

And Kit knew that, with all his faults, Mornington was a fellow of his word. Morny had said that Kit would have to choose between him and his chum from the slums, and he knew Morny meant what he said.

Leaving the study, Erroll made his way down to the gates. It was already past six, and he was anxious to learn how Albert Biggs had fared in his interview.

As Kit neared the gates he was startled to see two fellows struggling there. One was a youth with a pale, pinched face, dressed in a lounge suit—a suit Erroll easily recognized as his own. It was Albert Biggs, and the other fellow was Mornington.

"Outside, you low-down cad!" Mornington was shouting. "Now, Peele, you funky cad, come and lend a hand! Help me pitch this pushing sponger out into the road, where he belongs!"

Peele, Gower, and Lettrey were lounging by the gates, and they seemed to grasp the situation in a moment.

"Gad! It's that rotten tramp!" yelled Peele. "On him, chaps! Now's our chance to get our own back. Down him!"

Erroll stared a moment, his brow darkening. Then, as Peele & Co. dashed to aid Mornington, Kit set his teeth hard and rushed for the spot, his eyes blazing.

"Morny," he panted desperately, "let the kid alone! It's not like you to do this sort of thing, old fellow. Chuck it! Be decent, old man!"

"Rats!" hissed Mornington. "I've vowed to kick this interloping sponger out of Rookwood, an' I mean to do it!"

"Morny—"

Mornington took no heed of his chum. Albert Biggs had come in sight for the moment, and, twisting the wall round with savage fury, Mornington raised his boot and lashed out at him.

At the critical moment Erroll grabbed

Mornington's arm again to prevent him, and the kick missed its object by a foot. But the sheer force of the lunge almost overbalanced the junior, and he all but fell over.

CHAPTER 5.

Caught in the Act!

THERE was a laugh from several fellows who had just rushed up, and Mornington's handsome face flamed with passion.

He turned on Erroll in a fury.

"You interfering sod!" he panted. "I—I— Take that!"

Mornington's flat hand struck Erroll's cheek, with a crack that could be heard half-way across the quadrangle.

Erroll staggered back with a cry.

"My only hat!"

There was a murmur from several juniors, Jimmy Silver & Co., who had come up, stood and stared at Mornington dumb-founded. Well as they knew Morny's ungovernable temper, they had never expected him to strike his chum.

There was a huzz.

Mornington himself stood motionless. His face was still full of passion, but there was a dropping of his glittering eyes that suggested he was already regretting that hasty, passionate blow.

"You cad, Morny!" said Jimmy Silver indignantly. "It was your own fault—your own rotten temper!"

"Shut up!" snarled Mornington. "You keep out of this, Silver! If Erroll's got anything to say or do, I'm waitin'."

Erroll, a crimson patch showing where Mornington's hand had struck him, placed his hands in his pockets.

"I've nothing to say."

"Right!" said Morny coolly. "Then I'll get on with chuckin' his bootigan out!"

He made a stride at Albert Biggs, who was standing as if undecided, his fists clenched.

The wail's eyes gleamed.

"Stand back!" he howled. "I ain't done you no 'arm as I knows of, and I ain't givin' to be touched agen! An' if you touches Master Erroll agen I'll go for you!"

"Will you?" snarled Mornington. "By gosh!"

He rushed at the youth, his face savage. But his fists were knocked aside, and a harder fist took him full on the nose.

"Diggs——" gasped Erroll.

But others were before him. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Lovell grabbed the raging Mornington and dragged him back.

"No, you don't!" snapped Jimmy Silver, his brow dark. "You'd leave that kid alone, you cad! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, Morny!"

"I—I——"

In the grasp of the juniors, Morny spluttered with rage. A thin stream of crimson was trickling from his nose, and his face was white with passion. He struggled furiously.

"You may as well chuck it, Morny!" said Lovell in disgust. "Cut off, kid—you've no right in here! Erroll, better tell your friend—— Hold him!"

Lovell broke off with a gasp as Mornington dragged himself free with a desperate effort. But even as he jumped towards Biggs a sharp voice rang out.

"Mornington!"

"Oh, my hat!"

It was Dicky Dalton, the master of the Fourth. His face was dark and angry.

"Mornington! How dare you!"

Mornington palled up, biting his lips. He knew better than to disobey Dicky Dalton.

"Mornington, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said the master angrily. "How dare you attack that youth!"

Mornington was silent for a moment, his face working.

"Because he's a beastly, thieving tramp!" he said at last. "He was trespassing in here, and I was trying to turn the cad out!"

"The boy is not trespassing!" snapped Dicky Dalton. "He is now a member of the school garden staff. Nor is there any reason for you to call the boy such disgraceful names, Mornington!"

"He pitched into me!" said Mornington thickly. "I was——"

"That is enough, Mornington," said the master, his eyes gleaming. "I myself witnessed all that happened from my window. You attacked this boy for no obvious reason—your attack was entirely unprovoked. You began all the trouble, and I distinctly heard you call to Peela to aid you in your ungenerous treatment of this

boy. You then struck Erroll because he attempted to stop you."

"Oh!"

"In attacking a stranger, whether a member of the school staff or not, you have shown yourself to be ungentlemanly and a bully!" said Mr. Dalton curtly. "I am ashamed of you! You will go at once to my study and await me there, Mornington!"

"Yes, sir!" almost hissed Morny.

He turned, and with a bitter glance of hatred at Biggs walked away to the School House. Mr. Dalton turned to Biggs.

"You should not have been loitering here in this quadrangle, my boy," he said, his voice becoming kindly. "Your position—"

"It—it was my fault, sir!" said Erroll hurriedly. "I asked him to meet me here at the gates. I was anxious to know how he had gone on with his interview."

"Oh, I see. Very well," said the master, looking from Erroll to Biggs dubiously. "I think it would be as well, Erroll, if you saw your friend, when you wish to see him, out of gates. I can see no objection in the circumstances to that."

"Very well, sir. And thank you!"

Mr. Dalton seemed as if he was going to speak to Albert Biggs again, but he closed his lips and walked away.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "Is—is this chap on the domestic staff now, Erroll?"

"Apparently—yes!" said Erroll quietly. "He came after a job as garden boy here."

"Fancy Dicky Dalton seeing it all!" grinned Lovell. "Old Morny's for it now!"

Jimmy Silver's face clouded, as he noted Erroll's distress.

"Dry up, Lovell!" he said quietly. "I'm sorry about this, Erroll, old chap! I don't like to see old pals like you and Morny come to blows."

"We shan't come to blows," said Erroll steadily, though there was a suspicious catch in his voice. "Morny lost his temper: he wouldn't have done it otherwise. I shan't fight him, anyway!"

"Not after that smack?" said Conroy.

"No!"

"My hat! Morny's a bit too fond of losing his temper for my liking," said Arthur Edward Lovell, with a growl. "Catch me letting a blow like that pass! I'd punch his head quickly enough—pals or

not! He's not much loss as a pal, anyway!"

"I suppose it was through this chap, Erroll?" asked Jimmy Silver, eyeing Albert Biggs curiously. "It was too bad of Morny—"

"I'd rather not discuss it, Silver," said Erroll, and he took Biggs' arm, and the two went out through the gates together.

"Rotten!" said Jimmy Silver, gazing uneasily after them. "I'm afraid there's going to be trouble if that chap remains here. Now he's punched Morny's nose—"

"My hat—yes! Morny never forgets or forgives an injury!"

"Morny's right!" snarled Peele, rubbing his nose tenderly. "And I won't forget or forgive, either! What's that cad Erroll doing bringing a rotten dirty tramp here? We don't want our dashed pockets picked. He ought to be booted out! We don't want low hooligans at Rookwood!"

"You think they ought to be kicked out, Peele?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Of course!"

"Then we'll start on you!" said Jimmy Silver pleasantly. "You're a low hooligan, if ever there was one! Here you are!"

"Yooooooo! Oh, you cad!"

Peele howled furiously, as Jimmy Silver's boot caught him. He jumped away, scowling, and he was wise enough to say nothing more than on the subject of kicking low hooligans out of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 6.

Plotting a Plot!

"MORN, old man!"

Kit Erroll spoke quietly, and his voice was calm and collected.

It was some time later, and Erroll was settling down in prep in the study.

Erroll had been for a short stroll with Albert Biggs, and had heard with satisfaction that his old friend had obtained the job at Rookwood, and was now a member of the staff, as Dicky Dalton had said. He was also more than glad to learn that the ragamuffin's wanderings had ended; that he was to find shelter under the roof of Rookwood, having been allotted an attic bed-room in the servants' quarters. Biggs had been overwhelmed at his good fortune; the clean garret, with its sloping roof, its

window, and plain furniture, was something like a palace to the homeless waif; and Erroll had smiled at his enthusiastic praises of it.

Yet Erroll's satisfaction had been mingled with gloomy forebodings. He knew Mornington better than anyone else, perhaps, at Rockwood, and he knew he would neither forget nor forgive. Erroll saw trouble ahead if Mornington did keep on with his unreasonable feud against the innocent Albert Diggs.

And his own position was a delicate and unpleasant one. Determined as he was to befriend the hapless waif, he saw quite clearly what it was leading to. Already Morny had shown how he regarded the position—already he had done a thing that would have definitely broken any ordinary friendship and brought chums to blows.

But Kit Erroll was not an ordinary fellow; he was forgiving to a fault, and he felt he understood Morny. He strove to forget that hasty blow, and he had hopes even yet of bringing the wrong-headed Morny to be reasonable, though he had a dismal fear that that blow from Diggs and the final interview Morny had had with Mr. Dalton would have put an end to all his hopes.

And the look on Morny's face now added to his fears. The dandy of the Fourth sat sprawling in the armchair again, his brows dark, his eyes glinting under them. He seemed to have no intention of starting prep. He had entered the study and flung himself there without a word to Erroll. Now Erroll, after trying to work for some minutes, flung down his pen and spoke.

"Morny," he said quietly, "I want to speak to you."

Mornington looked up at him.

"You want to speak to me after what's happened?" he said, with a sneer. "To arrange the scrap, I suppose?"

"No; I'm not going to scrap with you, Morny."

Mornington gave a scoffing laugh.

"Gad! Have you considered what the chaps will think? They'll think you funk it, Erroll."

"I don't care what the chaps think," said Erroll. "I'm not fighting you, Morny!"

"Funk it, what?"

"You know I don't funk it, Morny!" said Erroll, keeping calm with an effort.

"You're talking hot air, and you know it! You're just allowing your silly temper to make you do and say things you'll be sorry for later on—is you aren't already! I'm taking no notice of that—that matter in the quad; because I know you aren't yourself to-day."

"Turning the other cheek, what?" jeered Mornington. "My hat! I never knew you were such a worm, Erroll!"

Erroll flushed crimson, and an angry light came into his eyes—only for a moment, though; it vanished swiftly. Mornington's face coloured, and his eyes dropped before Erroll's steadfast look.

"You're talking rot now!" said Erroll. "You're ashamed of yourself—and you know it, Morny!"

"Am I?" snapped Mornington angrily. "You'd better mind what you're saying, Erroll! I'm about fed with you! Ashamed of myself for tryin' to stop a fool irraging a rotten tramp into the school! Not likely! I tell you this, Erroll—you've managed to get the brute in; but I mean to get him out! I'll stop at nothin' to do it, either! I warn you!"

"Morny—"

"He pinched me!" blurted Mornington, touching his nose tenderly. "An' he made me look a fool before the fellows—a low, thievus' ragamuffin from the slums! That's not all! He got me a lickin' from Dalton an' a rotten slingin', too! Am I likely to forget that?" he added savagely.

"I'm sorry about that!" said Erroll. "But it couldn't be helped; you attacked him and you attempted to kick him. No fellow of spirit would have stood it. The fellow's done you no harm, Morny! You're entirely in the wrong, and you know it."

Mornington got to his feet, his eyes blazing.

"So you're still backin' the brute up?" he asked. "Still takin' his part against me, though you know what it's already led to?"

"I can do nothing less, Morny. Right's right; and I can't forget the past," said Erroll, with sudden earnestness. "Morny, can't you see my position? I can't forsake that kid. For goodness' sake, be decent, old man! I'm forgetting what's happened; I'm more than willing to be friends again as before."

"But I'm not!" said Morny savagely.

"Morny—"

"Unless you clear that interlopin', spongin' rotter out of Rookwood!" said Mornington, his dark eyes glittering with savage determination. "That's my answer, Erroll—I mean it! Clear that ragamuffin out and finish with him, and I'll be friends quickly enough. You can make your choice between that brute and me!"

"I—I can't, and I won't, Morny! Do listen——"

"That's enough! I'm listenin' no longer!" snapped Mornington. "Gad! To think a dirty little sweep like that chap should come between you an' me! Well, you're welcome to him, Erroll, and you can go to pot! I'm finished with you for good!"

And Mornington left the room, slamming the door viciously after him. He heard Erroll call frantically after him, but he ignored the shout, and made his way to the study shared by Peele and Gower.

Inwardly, Mornington had nothing but scorn and contempt for those shady rotters, but he knew they were the only fellows in the Fourth likely to support him in his unreasonable feud against Albert Biggs. Like himself, they had felt the force of the wail's iron-hard fists.

Peele and Gower stared at him as he stamped into the room, and Peele grinned and exchanged a private wink with Gower. A day ago they would have eyed him suspiciously, with hostile looks. But things had changed in a day—Mornington had changed. They could not quite understand why he had changed. But they were more than willing to accept him on friendly terms now.

"Come in, old man!" said Peele cordially. "Have a fag, old fellow?"

Mornington accepted a cigarette, lit it, and flung himself into the easy chair. Peele grinned as he noted his black brow.

"Quite like old times, what!" he remarked, winking again at Gower. "Dropped in for a little game, Morny? We've done all the prep we're goin' to do—all serene!"

Mornington blew out a cloud of smoke.

"No. I haven't come for a game!" he said. "I've come for a talk about that tramp, Peele; you're not goin' to sit tight after what's happened, I suppose? He punched your nose, an' he punched mine. I hope you're not the fellow to take an insult like that from a low sweep without a kick."

Peele's eyes glittered—he understood the motive for the visit now.

"Good man!" he said. "I'm with you, Morny! Gower an' I have been tryin' to think of wheezes to get our own back, as a matter of fact! We're with you all the way, old man!"

"Hold on!" said Gower sulkily. "Peele was gassin' about payin' the howling sweep back, but—count me out! I'm fed up! It isn't good enough. Fellows aren't supposed to row with servants, an' now this bouncer is a servant here——"

"You rotten funk!"

"I don't care! It'll only mean trouble for us," scowled Gower. "We're not supposed to touch servants—it isn't done! An' now Erroll's backin' the brute up—and Dicky Dalton——"

"Dicky Dalton gave me six—three on each hand!" said Mornington, between his teeth. "I don't want more! But there's more than one way of killin' a cat! An' we draw the line now at scraggin' with servants!"

"That's just it!" said Gower. "We——"

"But we don't draw the line at payin' out a low-down hooligan who's got into Rookwood by trickery, and has insulted and struck fellows whose boots he's not fit to lick!" said Mornington, with glittering eyes. "We shan't scrap with him—he's not fit to touch! But we're goin' to make him wish he'd kept his dashed paws off us, and we're goin' to get him shifted from Rookwood. That's the programme!"

"That's just what I've been tryin' to point out to this finkin' fool, Gower, Morny!" said Peele. "I'm your man; anyway! Got any ideas?"

Mornington nodded slowly.

"I think so!" he said. "I've vowed to get the chap shifted out of Rookwood, and when I say a thing I mean it! Our programme is to make Rookwood so hot for the brute that he'll be only too jolly glad to get out!"

"But what about Erroll?" asked Peele.

"Hung Erroll!" said Morny savagely. "I'm finished with him!"

"Phew! Then you meant it when you slapped his chivvy," said Peele, with a grin. "Good man. I never liked the cad myself—too jolly snug for my likin'. I always wondered why you palled on with a chap like that, Morny."

Mornington wheeled,

"Never mind Erroll!" he snapped. "The less you say about him the better, Peele! I'm finished with him; but—anyway, it's the old Biggs we're deslin' with."

"Oh, quite so!" said Peele smoothly. "I'm dashed if I'm interested in Erroll, though he did handle me!"

"I'm not forgettin' that!" said Morny sharply. "But you'll leave Erroll alone, Peele—unless you want trouble with me!"

"Oh, gad!" Peele looked curiously at Morny. As a matter of fact, Peele's enmity was as much against Erroll as Biggs—if not more so. But he saw that Morny, whether he had quarrelled with his old shum or not, would not have anything said against Erroll. "Oh, all right," he went on coolly. "We'll leave Erroll out of it; just as you like, Morny, old man! What's the game, anyway? I hear this hooligan friend of his has been given a blessed room at Rookwood—inside the dashed walls! We'll have to lock up our dashed valuables now!"

"I know all about that!" said Mornington, smiling unpleasantly. "He's been given a garret next to the one Tupper, the page, sleeps in. I've taken the trouble to make inquiries, you see!"

"Good! You mean business, old chap!" said Peele.

"I do!" Mornington set his teeth. "I've worked it out, and this is the game for a start! We're going to raid his room to-night—"

"To-night!" echoed Peele blankly.

"Yes—to-night, old bean! We're goin' to raid his room—you, Gower, and myself—and we're going to bundle him up in his dashed bedclothes, tie him up, and, after doing that, we're goin' to shove him out into the lane, and lock him out. How's that?"

"Phew! Good wheeze! But—"

"Safe enough!" said Mornington curtly. "No one will know! He won't know himself who did it—we'll watch that!"

"They—they'll guess, though!" stammered Gower.

"They can prove nothing!" snapped Mornington.

Peele nodded slowly, his sharp eyes glinting.

"I'm out!" he breathed. "Gad! Yes, rather!"

CHAPTER 7.

AT DASH OF NIGHT!

"LOOK here!" began Gower. "Gower's on, too!" said Peele coolly. "He knows better than his fellow to back me up—don't you, Gower?"

Gower said nothing. "He's a dashed fink if he won't!" said Morny, his lip curling. "We can't manage it with less than three of us, that's certain. That chap will take some carrying! You're on, Gower!"

"Oh, all right! Though—" Gower halted feebly. He invariably objected to Peele's schemes—not because of their shadiness, but because of the risk. Gower was no hero! Yet he knew what to expect from his "pal" if he refused, and he invariably gave in in the end. He did so now, though with obvious unwillingness. "All right," he repeated; "I'm on. But—"

"That's enough!" snapped Mornington, cutting him short. "That's settled, then. And if the cad won't take the hint from bein' slung out in the middle of the night, then we're goin' to keep on until he does get fed-up!"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Peele. "But we'll have to be careful not to wake Tupper, or anyone!"

"We'll see to that—we'll gag the blighter, first go off!" said Mornington coolly.

"Anyway, I'll see to all that, and I'll give you chaps the tip when to get on to-night. Now I'm off to get some rope from somewhere."

With that Mornington threw what remained of his cigarette into the fire and walked out coolly. Peele looked at Gower and grinned.

"It's risky!" muttered Gower. "Peele, old chap—"

"Oh, day up, you fink!" grinned Cyril Peele. "Fancy Morny startin' his old games again! I knew he hadn't really reformed—at least, I knew it couldn't last. Well, I'm dashed glad—there'll be some fun goin' now! As for that cad, Erroll—well, we'll see!" added Peele, his eyes glittering. "Hang that dashed guttersnipe! I'm up against the bound willingly enough! But Erroll's my meat, an' whether Morny likes it or not, I'm goin' to get my own back! I haven't finished with Erroll, if Morny has! Gad! No fear!"

And Peele rubbed his nose slyly—the nose Erroll had damaged that afternoon.

Morley was a fellow who rarely forgot or forgave, but Peele never did!

Kit Erroll woke suddenly.

What had awakened him he did not know for some moments. He opened his eyes drowsily, and peered about the dark dormitory.

All was darkness, save for a dim glimmer of moonlight stealing in at the tall windows of the room. Around him was the soft breathing of his sleeping Fourth Form fellows, while from the corner where Tabby Mullin slept came a resounding snore.

Kit Erroll sat up—then he saw!

A figure stood by the side of the next bed to his, and from the movements dimly seen, he knew the figure was dressing. He also glimpsed three more dim forms farther along the row of beds.

"Morley!" he whispered. "What's on?"

The next bed was Mornington's, and he knew it was Mornington standing there. He guessed the other figures to be Peele and Gower and Lattrey—the three shady "sportsmen" of the Fourth. Erroll caught his breath.

To him it could only have one meaning, on first thoughts. Peele & Co. were known to go out at nights on the spree, and they were going out now, and Mornington was joining them. Mornington was starting his old games again!

The thought filled Erroll with dismay. To the last he had hoped that his old chum was only "pulling" with the shady gang to irritate him—to force him to agree to his demands regarding Biggs, probably.

Now he felt that it must be more serious than that.

"Morley!" he breathed. "You're not going out with that gang? Don't be a fool!"

Mornington did not reply. He finished dressing, and with a whispered word to Peele, who was nearest, he left the dormitory. The next moment the other three left it just as silently.

Erroll sat motionless for a full minute. Then he sprang out of bed, and, shoving on his trousers and jacket at express speed. Then, snatching a torch from his locker, he hurriedly left the room.

A sudden, startling thought had occurred to him. Was it for their usual blackguardly purposes that Peele & Co. were going out—and with Mornington? He felt suddenly

certain that it couldn't be. It seemed impossible that Mornington could suddenly break out into such ways.

It was something else. He could not forget Mornington's threats, and he knew how ruthless and reckless his old chum could be; how headstrong and defiant. Moreover, he had not failed to note that there was something "on" between the ends and Morley.

In a flash the truth had come to Erroll. They were going to rag the new garden boy—if not worse! It seemed a wild theory, and yet the junior felt instinctively that he was right. He would make sure, anyhow, and if they were up to tricks—

Erroll gritted his teeth as he hurried along the dim passages, now and again switching on his light. Albert Biggs was under his "wing" at Rockwood; he was in the position of a servant, and could safely defend himself against the cads. Well, it was up to him to do that, come what might.

By various dim passages, twisting and turning, Erroll hurried until he reached the servants' quarters. He came at last to the little, winding staircase, at the top of which he knew was the great garret bed-rooms occupied by Tupper and Biggs.

As he reached the foot of the stairs he paused a moment, fancying he heard a sound quite close to him. But after listening for a moment in the deep darkness he switched on the light and proceeded cautiously up the stairs.

The stairs creaked alarmingly, but he went on, reaching the landing at last. He knew which was Tupper's room, and as there were only two on the landing, he knew the other must be the one.

Cautiously he turned the knob and peered into the room.

A pale glimmer of moonlight came into the room—right across the iron bed and its occupant. To his ears came the soft breathing of a sleeper. A glance round the room showed him there was no one else there; there was no place for anyone to hide.

Softly Erroll closed the door again; the catch slipping home with a click that made him catch his breath for a moment. Then he trod swiftly downstairs again. He knew Biggs had had a tiring day, and he saw no reason to wake him.

"I was wrong, then!" he breathed to

himself thankfully. "Well, I'm glad—glad Morny isn't up to those tricks again. But—oh, the fool! I never dreamed he would be fool enough to join those cads in their shady outings!"

And with a heavy heart Erroll went back to bed. He had scarcely disappeared down the narrow staircase, however, when a door at the bottom opened cautiously and a head looked out. It was Cyril Peele, his face showing white in the gloom.

"All serene!" he whispered. "He's gone!"

"Who was it?" said Mornington, though he guessed. "Was it—"

"Erroll, the muskin' cad!" breathed Peele. "I watched him through the crack of the door. Good job you spotted his light coming along behind, Lattrey!"

"He'll know it was us!" muttered Mornington. "But—but he won't give us away. Go on!"

"Better chuck it up after this!" muttered Gower uneasily. "He'll give us away quickly enough, you fool, Morny!"

"He won't, for my sake," said Morny, flushing in the darkness. "Don't be a dashed funk. Come—Shush! Back in here!"

Mornington's voice ended on a sudden, alarmed note. At the same moment a light flashed on the top of the stairs—the light of a candle. In a flash Morny and his companions had slipped back into the room, and this time they closed the door carefully. They waited in dead silence. Then, to their alarm, they heard footsteps on the stairs, and voices.

"Tupper!" breathed Peele. "And Biggs! He must have been warned by Erroll, and he's bringin' Tupper to look for us, the fool!"

The footsteps on the stairs sounded cautious, slow. They stopped at the door outside. The cads crouched down, their hearts beating fast. If they were discovered and reported by the two servants—

Click!

All the juniors jumped in great alarm.

It was the click of a key turning in the lock—the lock of the room they were in!

And as they waited in amazement, startled surprise they heard footsteps on the stairs—thumping footsteps without caution now. They died away, and a couple of moments later a new sound was heard—a sudden

crash and a yell, followed by further yells in Tupper's well-known voice.

"Burglars! Quick, sir! We've got 'em nabbed! Quick! Burglars!"

"Oh gad!" panted Mornington.

CHAPTER 5.

"Burglars!"

IN the darkness of the box-room, behind the locked door, Peele & Co. and Mornington stood in scared alarm, their hearts thumping.

From somewhere downstairs came the murmur of excited, questioning voices, above which could be heard the shrill treble of Tupper's voice. The shouts of "Burglars!" had ceased now.

Mornington gave a stifled groan.

He guessed at once that the page-boy, Tupper, and the new garden-boy, Albert Biggs, must have seen them from the landing above, and had taken them for burglars—or were pretending to take them for burglars.

Tupper and Biggs apparently had crept downstairs and had quickly locked them in the room in which they had taken refuge!

And now—Mornington groaned again. Soon a swarm of masters and others would be coming to investigate. And they would find them locked in the box-room like rats in a trap.

To have left their beds at that hour was bad enough, but to be found in the servants' quarters was a far more serious matter. Moreover, Albert Biggs, knowing as he did how determined they were to persecute him, would undoubtedly claim that they had intended to rag him.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Morny. "We're for it now, chaps!"

"I know how it would be!" groaned Gower, fairly quaking with fright. "I advised you to leave the rotten cad alone, Peele! What a fool I was to come with you!"

"And I was a bigger fool!" snarled Mark Lattrey.

"Oh, shut up!" said Peele. "How could we expect this to happen! Gad! This is Erroll's doin', Morny! He's warned that cad Biggs and put him up to do this—to pretend he thought we were burglars. It's just his rotten, crafty way of questionin'! Oh, the cad!"

Mornington said nothing, but his eyes

were glittering in the darkness. The same thought had occurred to him. Errol had seen them leave their beds and had followed. They themselves had watched him go up to Biggs' garret. He had warned Biggs, and had put the garden-boy up to this game.

"Oh, hang the luck!" muttered Peele. "That and— Here they come! Now for it!"

With sudden desperation Mornington switched on his electric torch and cast it about the room they were in. It was an unusual room, dusty and empty. There wasn't a cupboard or packing-case—nothing where one of them could hide. And though the window was unbarred, Mornington knew that escape that way was out of the question.

He stifled a groan, and his lips set hard. Moroy was not the fellow to show funk even in such desperate straits.

Heavy footsteps sounded on the stairs, and there was a buzz of excited voices, loud enough now. A light showed under the door.

Then came a deep voice—Mr. Dalton's voice.

"Stand back, boys! Ah, Bulkeley, you, Neville, Lonsdale, and Prier may remain here!"

"Yes, sir!"

The seniors' voices were excited, but determined. Mornington, even in that moment, could not restrain a grin. There was a surprise in store for the burglar-hunters!

The lock clicked. The next moment the door was swung wide, and the lights from several torches and candles flashed into the room.

In a last desperate hope the ragers had scrambled behind the shelter of the door. It availed them nothing, however.

Dicky Dalton marched boldly into the room with the four seniors behind him. A swarm of half-dressed fellows surged in the doorway.

"Oh!" gasped Dicky Dalton.

The light he carried flashed round the room and settled on Peele & Co. and Mornington, showing up their white, scared faces.

There was a yell from the crowd in the doorway a yell of stupefaction.

"Peele! Oh, my hat!"

"And Moroy! Well, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver, who was in the forefront of the crowd.

Mr. Dalton's brow grew dark as his eyes

rested on the scared, frightened faces of the would-be ragers.

"Mornington—" he stuttered.

"Yes, sir!"

Mornington had a nerve of iron, and he had recovered it now. He was not the fellow to show fear or dismay, at all events.

"So—so this is the meaning of the disturbance!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton, his voice icy. "What are you boys doing here at this hour, may I inquire?"

"Nothing at present, sir," answered Mornington coolly. "We were just having a stroll round when some fool locked us in here!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

There was a gasp at Mornington's studied insolence. Well as the juniors knew Mornington, they had, in the circumstances, scarcely expected such a reply.

Mr. Dalton's face grew grim.

"Insolence will not help you, Mornington!" he said quietly. "I demand to know what you are doing here? Answer me at once!"

"Nothing, sir!" said Mornington.

Mr. Dalton turned to Tupper, his eyes gleaming. The page was looking dumbfounded.

"Tupper, I was awakened by hearing someone pass my room. I hurried out, and you, with this other boy, dashed into me shouting burglars!" he said grimly. "Did you not see these boys before you locked them in the room?"

Tupper's knees knocked.

"It weren't my fault, sir," he gasped. "This 'ere new feller wakened me up—said he'd heard noises and that somebody opened 'is door. We went out on the landin' to listen, and we saw some figures on the bottom landin'. We thought they was burglars, sir!"

"It were my fault, I s'pose, sir," stammered Albert Biggs, showing himself behind the scared Tupper. "I 'eard a noise right enough—I 'eard my door closed. Then I 'opped outa bed and wakened Tupper. Then, arter we'd spotted somebody on the bottom landin' and saw 'em vanish inter this room, I 'opped downstairs and locked the door on 'em. I—I didn't know as it was these young gents, sir."

"I think I understand," said Dicky Dalton, his glance resting on Mornington's hard face. "You are sure you heard your door close, Biggs?"

"Oh, yesir! Quite, sir!"

"Nothing has been interfered with in your room, my boy?"

"Noddin', sir! I lit me candle and looked round fast, sir!"

Mr. Dalton gazed sternly at the ragger. "Mornington and the rest of you," he said sternly, "I wish to know why you are here, though the reason seems fairly clear to me after what happened to-day at the gates. Did you come into the servants' quarters to play a trick on this boy, Biggs?"

"Yes, sir!" said Mornington coolly. "Just that!"

Peelo, Gower, and Lattzey snarled savagely, and gave Mornington bitter looks. They had determined to deny everything, but Mornington had "done" them now absolutely.

"I thought so!" said Dicky Dalton, his face showing his disgust and indignation. "I can imagine no other reason, indeed! I had occasion to punish three of you severely only this evening for an unwarranted attack on this boy! Why you should do so is beyond my comprehension. But—"

"The fellow is a beastly tramp!" said Mornington through his teeth. "He is a low thief and a hooligan, and is not fit to be at Rookwood either as a servant or anything else."

"Silence, Mornington! How dare you?"

"I don't care! The low bound—" Mornington paused as Dicky Dalton took an angry stride towards him.

"How dare you, Mornington!" said the master angrily. "Have you any knowledge of the boy's character?"

"No, sir; but—"

"Then you should be thoroughly ashamed of yourself!" said Mr. Dalton sharply. "You have basely slandered this lad for no reason whatever excepting your own suspicious dislike. If Biggs has injured you in any way, you should have reported the matter, instead of taking the law into your own hands in this mean and cowardly manner. Biggs is a servant who cannot defend himself, and your persecution is unmanly and shameful!"

"The rotter struck me—" began Mornington savagely.

"I myself witnessed the incident in the quadrangle!" snapped the master of the Fourth. "You attacked him—you attempted to turn him out through the gates by brutal force, Mornington. Any boy of spirit

would have resented such treatment, and he had every excuse to strike back."

"I—I—"

"That is enough!" snorted Mr. Dalton in disgust. "This is neither the time nor place to go into the matter. Apart from your unmanly attempt to play tricks on this boy, you have broken a strict rule of this school by leaving your dormitory after lights out, and a still stricter rule by entering the servants' quarters. The matter is very serious. I shall report it to Dr. Chisholm in the morning. Bulkeley, kindly see these boys back to bed."

"Yes, sir."

The captain of Rookwood gave the ragers a grim nod, and led them out, his face showing his own personal disgust. The rest of the crowd broke up and made for their dormitories, leaving with excitement and discussing the affair in whispers. But it was plain that every fellow shared in Mr. Dalton's disgust, and even Mornington's face burned with shame as he noted the scornful glances cast at him.

The feeling soon passed, however, and when he reached the Fourth Form dormitory Mornington's handsome face was white with rage, and he was inwardly seething. Once again his hatred and persecution of Erroll's humble chum had brought him trouble. But this time Moray resolved that Erroll himself should pay.

Kit Erroll's face was white, and his heart was heavy as he made his way back to the dormitory with the crowd.

So he had been right, after all—Mornington and his shady companions had left their beds to rag Biggs as he had at first suspected!

Kit wished from the bottom of his heart that when he had visited the garret he had awakened Biggs instead of leaving him to sleep. He would have told Biggs what he suspected, and warned him to be on his guard. Biggs would then have known who the night-prowlors were, and the cry of "Burglars!" would never have arisen—nor would there have been any such disturbance.

More than ever was Erroll amazed at his chum's attitude. That Mornington should allow his foolish, unreasonable jealousy to go to such lengths filled him with astonishment as well as disgust. Well as he knew his chum's passionate, jealous disposition, he had scarcely expected this.

And now Mornington was booked for serious trouble through his dogged, headstrong folly. Of Peele & Co. Erroll cared little; they certainly deserved all they got.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Jimmy Silver as the juniors crowded back into the dormitory. "Moray, I'm absolutely disgusted with you! You were a howling rotter to go trying to rag that poor beggar."

Mornington said nothing. He seemed careless of the looks cast at him from all sides.

CHAPTER 5. Forced to Fight!

"HOWLING rotters, the lot of them!" snorted Arthur Edward Lovell. "If they weren't already booked for trouble, I'd lick the lot of them myself for disgracing the Form like this!"

"They'll get enough in the morning," said Flaby, "and serve them jolly well right!"

"Stop that chatter, and get that light out, sharp!" came Bulkeley's voice from the door.

"Right, Bulkeley!"

The juniors scrambled quickly into bed, and the light was extinguished. But as the door closed there came a movement from Mornington's bed. The next moment a light glimmered.

"That you, Moray?" snapped Jimmy Silver, sitting up in bed. "What's the game now, you rotter!"

"You'll know in a minute!" said Mornington coolly.

The next moment the gas flared up as Mornington lit it. The fellows sat up in bed and stared at him. Mornington's eyes were glittering.

He crossed over to Kit Erroll's bed and glowered down at him.

"Now, you rotter!" he said, through his teeth. "Out you get! I've got a settlement with you, an' it can't wait! Out you get!"

"Moray"—Erroll looked pained and alarmed as he sat up in bed—"Moray, what's the matter? What—"

"Out you get, or I'll yank you out, you cad!" hissed Mornington.

And, grabbing Erroll's bedclothes, he dragged them viciously off his chair. Erroll

stared at him, white-faced, and then he got slowly out of bed.

As the same moment Jimmy Silver sprang out of bed and jumped between the two. He saw at once Mornington's intention.

"Stand back, Moray!" he snapped.

"Get aside, Silver!" said Mornington fiercely. "This is none of your dashed business!"

"Yes, stand aside, Silver," said Erroll quietly and steadily. "If Moray has something to say let him say it."

"I'm goin' in!" said Mornington coolly, though he was trembling with rage. "You fellows are quick enough to show your dashed disapproval at chaps treatin' a thief an' guttersnipe as he should be treated. But I want to know what you think of a fellow who sneaks in a cowardly, crawling way on a pal—or a chap who was his pal!"

"Moray—"

"You've sold me out, you cad!" grunted Mornington. "You've sold the chap who's been your pal, who's stood by you through thick an' thin! Gad! I never dreamed—"

"Moray, what on earth do you mean!" interrupted Erroll, in great distress. "I haven't sold you—I've never sneaked about anyone, much less you!"

"Liar!"

"What?"

Erroll's face flushed crimson, but he set his teeth and did not move.

Every fellow was out of bed now and crowding round.

"Mornington, stop that, you rotter!" said Lovell angrily. "Haven't you caused enough trouble to-night?"

"Shut up!" snapped Mornington, his lip curling. "Ask Erroll who's caused the trouble. Your rotten work, Erroll! Ask Peele, an' Gower, an' Latimer—they're good reason to know, as I have! It was Erroll's rotten, cadlike sneakin' that got us nabbed to-night!"

"Mine?" exclaimed Erroll.

"Yes. You've no need to look innocent!" sneered Mornington. "You saw us leave our beds—you even spoke to me. You guessed what our game was, an' you followed."

"I did," admitted Erroll very quietly. "I suspected you were going to rag Biggs, and I followed, hoping to be in time to stop you. But—"

"Then perhaps you'll admit the rest, then?" sneered the dandy of the Fourth. "You followed us, an' saw us hide in that dashed box-room. Then you went upstairs and warned Biggs. You put him up to doin' what he and Topper did. You told them to shout 'Burglars!' and to lock us in that room."

"I—I didn't!" panted Erroll, aghast. "I never dreamed—"

"Liar!" repeated Mornington calmly. "Peele will bear me out, an' so will the rest."

"That's right!" put in Peele savagely. "The cad must have done it. Those two low hounds saw us below—they must have seen us, and knew perfectly well we weren't burglars. It was a dashed put-up job—a dirty trick to get us nabbed without openly speaking about us."

"That's it!" said the white-faced Gower. "Erroll can't deny it, the howling sweep!"

"Go for him, Morny!" hissed Lattrey.

"Hold on!" snapped Jimmy Silver, again coming between the two. "This isn't the time for rowing, Mornington. Don't be a fool! If you want to have it out with Erroll you can do that to-morrow."

"I'm not waitin' until to-morrow!" hissed Mornington. "Stand aside, Silver, you interferin' fool! Let Erroll face me."

"I'm not afraid of facing you, Morny!" said Kit Erroll, striving hard to restrain his temper. "You're making a mistake—a big mistake! I did not even speak with Biggs to-night."

"What rot!" jeered Peele. "What a rotten lie! I— Oo!"

Cyril Peele yelped and went spinning across the room as Erroll turned on him and landed out with his fist.

"If I allow Mornington to call me liar," he said, through his teeth, "nobody else here is going to! Morny—"

"That's enough!" shouted Mornington, shoving Jimmy Silver aside swiftly. "Leave Peele alone; you'll have enough dealin' with me, Erroll. I—"

"I tell you I swear, Morny—"

"I'm listenin' to no denials!" hissed Mornington, his eyes blazing. "You sneakin' toad, Erroll! This evenin' I struck you! You refused to fight—you took the coward's blow! We'll see if you'll take it now!"

Snack!

Erroll reeled backwards, his hand to his burning face.

"You rotter, Mornington!" said Jimmy Silver.

For a moment Erroll stood motionless, undecided and dazed. But Mornington gave him no chance this time to refuse to fight.

"Now put your hands up, you and!" he snapped.

With that grim warning Mornington sprang at his former chum, and Erroll jumped back with his hands up. He saw at once that nothing could avoid a conflict. Indeed, forgiving and patient as he was, Erroll found that last blow too much for him. His eyes suddenly blazed, and after that first jump back he gave no more ground.

The next instant they were fighting furiously in the dimly-lit dormitory.

CHAPTER 10.

Now the Fight Ended!

"STOP them!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "They'll have the beaks here in a tick, the idiots!"

But there was no stopping the two juniors.

The sheer fury of Mornington's mad attack roared through Erroll's defence again and again, but Erroll stood his ground and gave blow for blow, and very soon he had himself well in hand.

"Go it, Morny, old man!" called Peele excitedly. "You've got him!"

Mornington heard this call, and his face crimsoned. He could scarcely believe it was true—that within twenty-four hours he should have quarrelled with his best chum, should be cheered on by a shady rascal like Cyril Peele while fighting his chum.

And it was his own doing—his own headstrong temper and unreasoning jealousy had caused it. Despite all, Morny, at the bottom of his mind, could not help knowing the truth.

But he gritted his teeth as he remembered what had happened, and what was to happen in the morning. To do Morny justice, he really believed that Biggs had purposely roused the school in order to get them caught, and that the idea had been prompted by Erroll.

Crash!

Mornington was down. He was, perhaps, the better man of the two, but his temper was his undoing. Erroll seemed to grow

cooler as the fight went on, whilst Mornington grew more and more reckless and savage.

"That's enough!" snapped Jimmy Silver, jumping between the two once again. "This has gone far enough—it's a marvel nobody's heard the rumour already. You amos can finish this to-morrow—if you're horn idiots enough."

"Stand aside, Silver!" Mornington was on his feet again, red trickling from a cut lip. He did not wait for Jimmy to stand aside, but rushed round him and at Erroll. "Come on, Erroll, you cad!"

They were at it again the next moment. Jimmy Silver and several other fellows who might have interfered looked on helplessly. The sunny-tempered junior skipper was looking grim and deeply disturbed. He did not like seeing old friends fall out in this manner, though he could not help feeling that Erroll was not losing much by losing Mornington's friendship. He had liked Mornington well enough since his reform—they had been friends enough, but "Uncle Jimmy," good-natured and good-tempered himself, could not understand Mornington allowing his temper to get the better of him.

It was not good enough. Morny's savage temper found no sympathy in Jimmy Silver.

The fight went on with no thoughts of time-keeping or rounds. Morny was cooler now—that crashing fall had brought him to his senses, and he gave no more openings for a knock-down blow. Backwards and forwards, now thudding into a bed, now into a washstand, they lured and struggled.

But a minute after Morny's fall Erroll was caught napping, and Mornington's right drove into his face, and he crashed down in his turn.

"Good man, Morny!" called Lattrey. "Go it!"

Suddenly the door opened and Bulkeley walked in, a cane in his hand. He looked round, and his face set grimly as he saw what was happening.

There was a sudden silence—caution had been forgotten in the excitement of the last few minutes.

"Well, you—you young swags!" said Bulkeley. "So you're not satisfied with having caused enough trouble to-night, Mornington? Are you begging for the sack, you young fool? What's this mean, anyway?"

"It means," said Mornington, deliver-

ately, "that I'm givin' a meakin' cad the hidin' of his life! Erroll was my friend, but he's no friend of mine now."

"It looks like it, I must say!" said Bulkeley dryly. "You young idiots! I won't go into the trouble now, and as you're already booked for trouble enough, Mornington, I won't report this. But if you're not all in bed in one minute, I'll start on you with this ashplant. Sharp, now!"

Bulkeley switched his cane, and there was a hurried scramble for the beds. Erroll climbed into his, and after hesitating a moment, his face black with fury, Mornington followed his example—even Morny knew better than to defy the Rookwood skipper.

"That's all right!" said Bulkeley pleasantly. "And I might warn you that if I hear another sound from this room to-night I'll give you a licking all round. Mind that!"

And, turning the light out, Bulkeley went out, closing the door behind him.

"Good for you, Bulkeley!" remarked Jimmy Silver. "Even a giddy prefect's useful sometimes. Well, that's that, and if you two idiots will take my tip you'll chuck—Hullo! You getting up again, Morny, you fool!"

"Yes," answered Mornington's voice coolly in the darkness.

There followed the scraping of a match and once again the gas-jet flared feebly. Every fellow sat up in bed and blinked in amazement at the headaring, self-willed Morny.

"Now, Erroll," said Mornington calmly. "we can carry on again. Out you get! I mean to settle this to-night, and neither Bulkeley nor anyone else will stop me! Out you get or I'll drag you out!"

Erroll did not move or answer. Jimmy Silver slipped from his bed, his face set and grim.

"So you mean to start the trouble again, after Bulkeley's warning?"

"Yes, and you won't stop me, either!" hissed Mornington.

"Right!" said Jimmy Silver quietly, turning and facing the rest of the fellows. "You hear that, you chaps? Mornington's a rotten, unreasonable cad to go on as he is doing! I know the reason as well as Erroll does. That chap Biggs is a decent kid—a poor ragamuffin who did Erroll a service years ago—saved him from starvation, I believe. Erroll naturally is anxious to repay the debt, and he got Dicky Dalton to get the

kid a job here, as he was tramping the country looking for work."

"Good for you, Erroll!" said Potty Grove. "Go it, Jimmy!"

"I'm going it!" said Uncle James. "Well, for no reason at all, just out of sheer jealousy and ennobleness, Mornington chooses to get up against the kid—to do his best to get him kicked out. He's even gone to the length of quarrelling with Erroll over it—though we know Erroll isn't the fellow to quarrel for nothing. And now—well, you know what happened to-night. With his new pals, Peele, Gower, and Lat-trey, the cad went to rag Biggs in his room."

"Erroll swears he didn't get Biggs and Tupper to ransack the school like they did, and I believe Erroll," said Jimmy bluntly. "It isn't in him to do that! Mornington's a rotter to believe it, knowing him as he must do."

"I didn't do it!" said Erroll quietly. "I found Biggs asleep, and knowing he had been tramping the roads all day I did not wake him, but crept back and got into bed. I'm sorry for what happened afterwards, but it was no doing of mine—I swear that!"

"Liar!" said Mornington doggedly; but there was an uneasy doubt creeping into his mind now.

"That's enough!" said Jimmy Silver. "The fellows know what to think now. You were a howling cad to dream of playing caddish tricks on a servant—a fellow who daren't hit back, Mornington! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, and you've disgraced the Form! Now are you going to let this drop for to-night or not?"

"I'm going to drag that cad from his bed and lick him, and you won't stop me!" hissed Mornington.

"That's good enough, then!" said Jimmy Silver. "Out of bed, you fellows! We'll put him into bed ourselves, and if he refuses to go, he's booked for a Form licking—a licking he jolly well deserves! Come on—collar him!"

"Hear, hear!"

There was a chorus of grim responses; practically every fellow excepting Peele & Co. jumped out of bed, and advanced on Mornington.

Mornington drew a deep breath. But he made no attempt to get into bed. His eyes glittered, and he placed his back to the wall.

Only twenty-four hours before he had been popular—regarded with respect and some admiration by the best fellows in the Form. And now— His glance met the scornful, angry looks of his disgusted Form-fellows, and he went crimson. But it was only a momentary flush of shame, and next moment his voice was heard hoarsely.

"Come on, the dashed lot of you!" he hissed.

CHAPTER 17.

Mornington's Defiance!

"DOWN him—down the cad!"

"Give the cheeky, southern idiot what he's asking for!" gasped Lovell wrathfully.

There was a rush of the Fourth towards Mornington. But he did not move—he stood with his back to the dormitory wall, his fists up ready, his eyes glittering with the savage, reckless determination not to give way.

Lovell was the first to meet Mornington with a rush, and he stopped a hefty drive from Morny's fist that sent him spinning away.

"Come on!" hissed Mornington, like a hunted tiger at bay.

"Down the rotter!" panted Lovell, scrambling up, raging. "I'll smash—"

"Quiet, you idiot!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "We don't want Bulkeley back here again with his ashplant. Now, Morny, once and for all, are you going to get into bed and leave Erroll alone, or not?"

"I'm thrashing Erroll before I get into bed!" choked Morny. "I'd have finished the job if that fool Bulkeley hadn't interfered."

"Right! Go ahead, then, charge!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

He had lost patience with the reckless, wilful junior, and he meant to end the matter with a Form licking—which Mornington undoubtedly had earned. The rest of the fellows were equally determined, and after that pause they came on quickly enough. But before they reached him another junior had jumped before them and stood with his back before Mornington.

It was Kit Errull, and his face was set hard.

"Hold on!" he snapped. "This is my

affair, you fellows! You're not touching Morny, if I can help it!"

There was a sudden silence. Erroll had been Mornington's closest chum until that evening, but only a few moments before had been fighting furiously with him, and they were astounded at his attempt to defend Morny now.

Mornington himself was staggered, and a deep flush came over his face. Even yet, despite his treatment of him, Erroll was loyal. Mornington felt a sudden lump in his throat—he felt a sudden bitter remorse for his attitude—for allowing his ungovernable temper to drive him to this.

But it passed as quickly as it had come. He had gone too far now to draw back.

"Stand back, Erroll!" he breathed. "You don't escape a lickin' by tryin' to crawl round me now!"

It was a caddish remark, and Mornington knew it only too well. It brought a deep flush into Erroll's white cheek, and it brought a chorus of angry, disgusted exclamations from the decent fellows in the Fourth.

"You howling cad, Morny!" said Jimmy Silver. "That settles it! Stand away, Erroll!"

Erroll hesitated a brief moment.

"This—this is my affair, you fellows!" he said in a low voice. "If Mornington's bent on the fight going on, then I'm ready to go on, too. I'll either fight him properly to-morrow in a decent manner, or I'll finish the fight here and now as we began it."

"No, you jolly well won't!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "You can fight Morny again if you want to, Erroll, but the Form aren't allowing you to scrap like hooligans at this time of the night. There's been quite enough trouble to-night. Into that bed, Mornington!"

"I won't, hang you!"

"Right! Caller him!"

There was a rush, and though Mornington fought like a wild cat, it was useless. He was grabbed on all sides, and he went crashing down, held firmly by numerous hands.

"Bring him along!" panted Arthur Edward Lovell. "Dip the cad's head in cold water to cool him down a bit to begin with!"

"Good idea!"

Struggling furiously, Morny was dragged towards a washstand.

"Let me go!" he cried through his teeth. "You rotten cads! Give me a chance, and I'll thrash any two of you!"

"You've had chances enough," said Jimmy Silver. "You've disgraced the Form, and for that alone you've earned a Form licking. I didn't want to handle you, as you're for it with the brags to-morrow. But as you refuse to drop your game we've no choice but to make you!"

"Hang you! Let me go!"

"For the last time—will you get into bed quietly?"

"No, hang you!"

"Go ahead!"

They went ahead. Despite his raging struggles and threats, Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth, was whisked off his feet. A basin of water had been prepared, and his head was ducked in it again and again. He was allowed to stand on his feet at last, his eyes blazing with passion, water streaming down him from hair and face.

"If that hasn't cooled you, then we'll give you a dozen with a cricket-stump!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

"Hang you!" spluttered Morny, in deadly tones. "I—I'll dashed well—"

He dragged his arms free, and hit out right and left. He was collared again at once. Plainly enough, he was not cooled down.

Still resisting furiously, he was flung across his own bed, with fellows holding desperately to his thrashing legs and arms. No cricket-stump was forthcoming, but Putty Grace hauled a five-bat from his locker and handed it to Jimmy Silver.

"Go it!"

"If—if you dare to touch me with that!" panted Mornington.

"Give way to the wishes of the Form, and we'll leave you alone quickly enough, Mornington!"

"I won't! I'll see you hanged first, you howling ruffians!"

Jimmy Silver hesitated no longer. He knew that the moment they released Mornington he would be fighting like a wild cat again, and he meant to show the Irish fellow it did not pay.

The five-bat rose and fell, Mornington wriggling savagely. Twelve strokes were laid on, and then Jimmy Silver stopped. As he did so Mornington dragged a leg free and kicked out viciously at him.

Luckily it missed Jimmy, but it was enough to show that Mornington was still defiant.

"Give him some more!" said Putty Grace. "He likes it!"

There was a cloude, and Mornington flushed with mingled rage and humiliation. All at once it came to him that instead of his defiance showing his grit and determination, it was only showing him up as a fool and making him a laughing-stock. Moreover, he realised at last that it was hopeless—that he could not go on with his defiance indefinitely. He would have to give way sooner or later.

"Well, am I to go on?" snapped Jimmy Silver. "I can keep this up longer than you, you know! Am I to make it another dozen?"

"Don't be a fool, Morry!" said Peele. "Chuck it!"

Even Peele was calling him a fool. Mornington bit his lip until the blood came.

"That's enough!" he said huskily. "You can drop it, Silver. But—but someone shall pay dearly for this!"

"That's good enough!" said Jimmy Silver.

He did not wish to rub it in—he knew too the proud, haughty dandy was feeling well enough. But his face clouded at the threat. Mornington had given way—for the moment. But his spirit was by no means broken.

The victim of the Form licking was released, and he slid from the bed, trembling with helpless rage and chagrin. He gave Jimmy Silver a bitter look, and then he went to a washstand, and, getting a towel, started to rub his drenched head and face.

The fellows followed Jimmy Silver's example, and climbed into bed. They knew that, for all his faults, Morry was a fellow of his word.

In a few moments the junior had dried himself, and then he slipped off his jacket and his pyjama coat, which was wet. In a moment he was changed into a dry one, and then he climbed slowly into bed. Jimmy Silver slipped out of bed and put the light out. And after that, silence reigned in the Fourth-Form dormitory. Nobody wished to rub it in, and Mornington had nothing further to say for that night. But, as Erroll knew—for he himself was awake for hours after that—Mornington

was not asleep, and Erroll felt sick at heart and full of gloomy forebodings for the future. Morry was subdued for the moment. But Kit knew there was trouble ahead—that Mornington would neither forgive nor forget.

CHAPTER 32.

A Place in the Team!

"MORNINGTON—just a minute!"

Jimmy Silver spoke quietly.

It was a day or two later.

Jimmy Silver had scarcely spoken to Mornington since the night of the trouble in the dormitory, and he looked at Mornington uneasily now. Mornington, Peele, Gower, and Lattrey had been before the Head the morning after the "burglar" alarm, and, as was expected, they "got it" heavily—though not as badly as many expected.

The Head was naturally astounded and angry. While Peele & Co. had been humble and contrite—outwardly—Mornington had been defiant and almost insolent. It wasn't in Mornington to cringe and plead for mercy. For their part in the night's expedition Peele & Co. had got a flogging each, and Mornington also; but his had been extra severe. His defiant, impudent attitude had told the Head that he was the ringleader in the affair, though Morry made no attempt to hide that fact. And had Morry only known it, he narrowly escaped something worse than a mere flogging.

But Mornington did not think he had escaped lightly; nor did Peele & Co. They had left the Head's presence inwardly raging and full of bitter thoughts of revenge against the innocent cause of the trouble—Albert Biggs, the new garden-boy! But to Peele, at least, the chief blame for their trouble was placed at Erroll's door.

As yet, however, they had been subdued—and only by the way they eyed Erroll when they met him did they show the thoughts of bitter animosity that was in their minds. Curiously enough, Morry made no mention of wanting to finish the fight with his old chum. He ignored him completely. And Erroll certainly had no intention of causing an outbreak. It had been bad enough to fight with his old chum as it was, and he

would have done anything he could to have avoided it.

The plain fact was that Mornington, now he had time to reflect, had reached the decision that he had been wrong—that Erroll had told the truth that night. Erroll had not sneaked, after all, and caused them to be captured in the servants' quarters. He knew now—too late—that it was beyond his chum to do anything so mean and underhand. It was a belief that was not shared by Peele, Gower, and Lattrey, however. It was a trick they would never have hesitated at doing, and they believed Erroll had done it, and hated him accordingly.

Peele, Gower, and Lattrey were with Mornington now when Jimmy Silver called. It was, of course, impossible for Morny and Erroll to remain in the study together, and realising how matters stood between them, Mr. Dalton had wisely allowed Mornington to join Peele and Gower in Study 10. It was not a change for the better—for Mornington. The company of Peele & Co. was not good for anyone. Yet Mornington seemed glad enough to join them. The dandy of the Fourth, as Jimmy Silver remarked to his chums, seemed determined to change himself into a blackguard as soon as he could manage it.

For the last day or two he had been rarely seen without Peele & Co. It was a change for the worse that filled Kit Erroll with dejection. Mornington had kicked over the traces at last with a vengeance. It was just what he had feared.

And Jimmy Silver had feared it also—for more reasons than because he hated seeing a decent fellow play the blackguard. There was the footie to be considered. There was still one more match to play.

Mornington was a good footballer—a dashing wing forward when he cared to play well—which had been often enough since his reform. He was a regular member of the Rookwood team these days, and the thought of losing him gave Jimmy some anxious moments. Since the trouble he had wondered many times and oft what Mornington intended doing.

He decided to settle the matter now.

"Morny!" he said, as the four stopped short. "I want to have a word about the footie."

Mornington raised his eyebrows.

"Godd! You don't say!" he drawled.

"You haven't had a word with me this last day or so about anything, have you?"

Jimmy Silver flushed; he saw the innuendo in the remark quickly enough.

"That's over and done with as far as am concerned, Morny," he said patiently. "You asked for it, and you can't blame anyone for giving you what you asked for."

"Is it over an' done with?" remarked Mornington, a glint in his eyes. "I rather think not, Silver. But you wanted to discuss footie, I think."

"Yes," said Jimmy, very quietly. "I see no reason why what has happened between us should interfere with the footie, Morny. I want to know if you are ready to play this afternoon in the match with Bagshot?"

"You want me to play, dear man?"

"Yes, I do!" said Jimmy, his eyes gleaming a little at the mocking note in Mornington's drawling voice. "I shouldn't ask you if I didn't."

"But you don't usually trouble to ask me," said Mornington. "You usually put my name down an' leave it at that. Why this thursn, might a fellow ask?"

Jimmy Silver bit his lip.

"Don't talk rot!" he snapped. "I asked you this time because—well, if you want the bare truth, Morny, it's because you've changed since the last time you played. Now you've got it!"

"Dear man!" drawled Mornington. "I've changed, you fellows—Silver thinks I've changed. I do hope he doesn't blame you, Peele, for the change in me! Is it for better or worse, Silver?"

"For worse!" said Jimmy Silver curtly. "You're knocking about too much with them rotters for you to have changed any other way, Morny. I can't understand a fellow acting as you do at all!"

"All your fault, you see, I've said," said Morny. "You're dragging a poor innocent fellow down to the low-down! Uncle James is gettin' quite concerned, I can see."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peele & Co. roared.

Jimmy Silver kept his temper.

"Cut out this rot, Mornington!" he said curtly. "Am I to put your name down for the match or not? I've left it as long as I could; but I must know now. I've got another fellow to take your place if you don't want it."

Mornington hesitated, and the sneering grin left his face.

He was keen on footer, and he had been looking forward to playing in the match. He had felt pretty certain of his place. He wanted to play, and yet—

Peele nudged him and gave him a warning wink. It was a reminder of something Mornington was forgetting for the moment.

It reminded him that he had already planned something else for that afternoon—something far different from football.

But even as he framed an insolent reply, refusing the offer, another thought came to Mornington.

Jimmy Silver had said he had another man in view for the place—and he knew who that man was well enough. Erroll was a good, steady player—a forward useful and reliable. But he lacked Mornington's dash and brilliance. And of late his play had been not quite up to first team standard.

Yet he was the next man on the reserve list—he knew that. If Mornington dropped out, then that man to take his place would be Kit Erroll!

There was no doubt about that.

Mornington gritted his teeth, a fight taking place in his mind—a fight between the evil and the good in his wayward nature.

But though there was plenty of good there, the bad won now. He had not forgotten or forgiven—as Erroll had expected.

"You really want me to play, Silver?" he inquired, yawning.

"Yes, if you mean to play up to your usual form. I certainly do, Morny. We want to lick Bagshot this time—in fact, we're pretty certain to if you play."

"Thanks, dear man," said Morny. "Fancy handin' out such compliments to a bad lad like little me! Well, you can put me down!"

"What?" It was Peele who gasped out the question. "But—but Morny—"

"You dry up, old bean!" said Mornington coolly. "Yes, put me down, Silver. Put me down twice if you like. Ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Very well, Morny; I'll put you down. Thanks!"

Jimmy Silver walked away, not a little uneasy in his mind now. Morny had agreed to play, and that was O.K. But how would he play—would he play up as he should

do? Jimmy Silver knew quite well that, though subdued enough now—though he made no move openly against either Erroll or Albert Higgs—he was only biding his time—knowing that Picky Dalton, not to mention the Fistical Four, had their eyes on him. The light, mocking manner in which he had accepted the place did not inspire confidence—far from it.

Yet he simply could not believe that Morny would willingly slack in the match. He had his evil points, but he played up when he did play. Jimmy cast aside his doubts and went indoors to place the list—finished now—on the board.

When he had gone, Peele turned on Mornington angrily.

"You—you silly fool, Morny!" he snapped. "What about our plan this afternoon? Are you forgetting, you idiot? Goin' to dashed well spoil that for a rotten game of footer! Oh, you idiot!"

"Dear man!" drawled Mornington, winking at Lattrey and Gower, who were eyeing him just as angrily. "Am I likely to allow footer to interfere with puttin' it across that sweep of a guttersnipe? Not likely!"

"But—but—"

"I told dear Uncle James that he could put my name down," said Mornington coolly. "But that doesn't say that I shall play!"

"Oh!"

"I was goin' to refuse right enough!" said Mornington, his eyes glinting. "An' then it struck me that if I did that sweep Erroll would get my place. I'm not keen for him to have the pleasure of playin' in my place!"

"Oh, I see!" said Peele. "Oh, good man, Morny!"

"Besides," resumed Mornington slowly, "I think we have a little settlement with the Form as a whole—at least, I have. I haven't by any means forgotten what happened to me in the dormitory. An', as you know, I'm not a fellow who forgets things."

"You—you're goin' to let 'em think you're goin' to play until the last moment!" clamoured Gower blankly.

"Just that! If I do let 'em know earlier, then they'll have the chance to play Erroll. I fancy Erroll will be with his guttersnipe pal, otherwise—or, at least, he will not be asked to play in time for the match. See the wheeze?"

"Oho! The—the fellows will be furious, Morney!"

"Let them! The more furious the better!" said Mornington viciously. "Play for Jimmy Silver! I'll see him hanged first! Anyway, let's finish our little plan for this afternoon. I had a little chat with Topper just after brekker, and I obtained the useful information that Errol had asked Master Hubert Biggs to watch the match, so, according to Topper, he means to. That will suit our plans very nicely indeed—couldn't be better, in fact. Our little showin' up couldn't be better staged than on the footer field before the crowd—what?"

"Good! wheeze!" grinned Gower.

"But that's all very well!" said Peele, scowling. "Don't forget I'm the man taking the dashed risk in this. It'll be more risky than ever before such a crowd."

"Not at all!" said Mornington. "Safer, you mean! Anyway, that's the programme."

"But——"

"Rats!"

Mornington had already made his mind up, and Peele's feeble protests went for nothing. Mornington was ruling the roost now, and not Cyril Peele, as Peele was finding out. As usual, the stronger will won.

CHAPTER 13.

Tommy Dodd & Co. Take a Hand!

"ROTTER!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Not fair!" growled Tommy Doyle.

"A beasty swizz!" granted Tommy Cook.

The three "Tommies" of the Modern House at Redwood were evidently not in a very cheery mood.

"Fancy all three of us out of a school match, and the blessed Bagshot match, too!" growled Tommy Dodd dismally. "Still, you can hardly blame Jimmy Silver, after all."

"Eh? How's that?"

"Well, it ain't his fault that I sprained my dashed foot!" said Tommy Dodd excitedly. "And it ain't his fault that you two can't play footer for nats!"

"Look here——"

"You cheeky owl!"

"All right! Only pulling your giddy

legs," chuckled Tommy Dodd. "Still, he would have played me all right—no doubt about that. And he really ought to have included one of you two fellows. Like his cheek to leave you both out. Those cheeky Classics are getting a bit too top-heavy, you know."

"Blast if I know why a skipper should be from the Classics at all!" granted Tommy Doyle. "This sort of injustice wouldn't happen if we had a Modern skipper, of course!"

"Ahem! Well, hardly that!" grinned Tommy Dodd, shaking his head. "That would be admitting a Modern skipper wouldn't know good players from bad."

"Why, you are——"

"You silly doffer——"

"Not that I mean you fellows were bad, of course," said Dodd hastily. "Anyway, it can't be helped. We'll go and cheer our giddy men just the same, of course, whether they're Classics or not. School comes—— Hullo! What are those merchants up to!"

Tommy Dodd halted his men.

They were strolling round by the chapel at the moment, and Tommy Dodd's keen eyes had glimpsed something unusual.

"What was it?" demanded Tommy Cook.

"Peele & Co., and that ass Mornington!" remarked Tommy Dodd, frowning thoughtfully. "I just spotted 'em sneaking into the wood-shed. They're up to no good in there!"

"Only going for a rotten smoke!" sniffed Tommy Doyle. "Blow the spalpeens! I must say I'm jolly disgusted with that chap Morney. From what I hear he's fairly goin' the pace now he's chummed with Peele's crowd!"

"It isn't a little smoke!" said Tommy Dodd. "Morney carried a bag—a pretty hefty cricket-bag by the look of it. I vote we investigate, chaps. Wait a bit, though, and give 'em a chance to settle down."

"Right-ho!"

The three Tommies watched Peele & Co. vanish into the shed and close the door behind them. They waited for several minutes, and then Tommy Dodd gave the word and they crept up to the little wooden building.

Tommy Dodd craned up to the little window and peered cautiously through into the gloomy shed.

"Well, what's the game?" whispered Tommy Cook.

Tommy Dodd did not answer for a moment. He was staring through the window in sheer amazement. And no wonder, for what he saw was enough to stun anyone.

CHAPTER 14.

Mornington's Scheme!

"WHAT is it?" repeated Tommy Cook, in an impatient whisper.

Tommy Dodd peered through the window a moment longer, and then he turned a grinning face round to his two chums of the Modern House.

"I know it!" he breathed. "These cads are up to some—some shady game, too, if I'm not mistaken. Look!"

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle both stretched up to the little window of the wind-shed and peeped inside.

As they knew, Peele, Gower, and Lattrey were there, with Valentine Mornington—though at first they quite failed to recognise Peele. For that shady worthy was dressed—

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle almost rubbed their eyes.

Peele was just getting into the uniform of a police-constable, aided by his chums. He already had the trousers on, and now he was shoving on the tunic carefully over his body, which was padded skilfully with a pillow and other aids to an artificial portliness of figure!

A belt, a pair of handkerchiefs, and several other items were lying by the opened cricket-bag, while an opened box of make-up and false hair and whiskers lay within reach.

Lattrey and Gower were grinning gleefully. Mornington looked grim and satisfied, whilst Cyril Peele looked anything but happy—perhaps because he was evidently to be the prime mover in the "game," whatever it might be.

Even as the two Modern Tommies looked inside, however, Mornington spoke, evidently answering Peele.

"I tell you it's safe as houses, you funky ass!" he said curtly. "Why, man, there isn't a fellow scarcely at Rookwood who can beat you at masquerading, or as skilful at make-up. Nobody will dream at guessin'

the truth, you fool! Pull your dashed self together, Peele!"

"That's all very well! If I've bowled out—"

"You're not goin' to be bowled out!" snapped Mornington. "You've got to pull yourself together, Peele, and you'll pull it off like a dashed star!" All you need is the nerve to keep it up for a few minutes until you get off the field. Nobody will dream of suspectin'!"

"Safe enough, Cyril!" agreed Lattrey, with a chuckle. "Good gad! I've seen you take off a bobby before, an' you did it a treat! It isn't likely there'll be any seniors about—only Hansons refereeing. He's too dashed easy-goin' to twig anythin'!"

"That snivellin' ragamuffin may not be there, though!" said Peele, evidently still none too convinced. "If he isn't, what then?"

"We've got to dashed well find out where he is—that's all!" said Mornington coldly.

"But Tupper told me he was goin' to watch the match—that his pal Master Errell had asked him to go—told him it would do him good!" asserted Morny. "I saw Tupper an hour ago, and he repeated it."

"If you've made Tupper surper!—" began Peele in alarm.

"My dear man, am I the fellow to do that?" inquired Morny, with a sneer.

"Don't talk rot! I bet that footling thick-head of a page doesn't even realise that I asked him about Biggs. I did it cautiously, you may bet! Anyway, he'll be there! If he isn't, we'll find him, Peele!"

Peele nodded without speaking. His chum's confidence in his ability in the difficult arts of make-up and masquerading had given him fresh courage. Indeed, the very fact that Mornington had urged him to take on the job was enough to prove to Peele that if a keen fellow like Mornington believed him capable of the job, then he undoubtedly was. He knew perfectly well that Mornington, in his reckless, ruthless desire for revenge, would have been only too pleased to have carried the thing through himself if he hadn't known Peele was a better man for the job.

"Oh, all right!" he said, giving a more confident grin. "I'm game enough. Don't you worry! Only I don't want all this dashed trouble for nothin'!"

"Well, don't grouse so much—and huck up!" said Mornington, with a scarcely-

veiled sneer. "Some fellows might think you faked it, y'know! Now, you understand what to do? You march on the ground and ask for Biggs—ask anyone! Then—well, you go and arrest the dashed sweep! And mind you let everybody hear why—that he's wanted for theft, and that he's a rogue and a vagabond well-known to the police of several counties as well as the underworld of London. That should make the fellows stare, and put the kybosh on our dear friend Erroll's dearly beloved pal—what?"

"Rippin'!" grinned Peele. "It really is great! But I'm not so sure how it will end. If—"

"My dear man, have I got to go into all that again?" drawled Mornington. "You simply yank the cad away and take him rewards the lane. I've already ordered a giddy cab to be waitin' there at about three-fifteen. You order the sweep into the cab—he won't be likely to resist before the crowd—and then you join him, and the cab will, according to my orders, stop by the station. When we've seen everything's gone off well we'll pelt after it on our bikes. Then you simply rush your giddy prisoner on to the platform and into a giddy carriage. See?"

"That—that's the dashed risky part!" muttered Peele.

"Not if you're slipshy about it. Nobody's likely to be about on the station, not the village bobby, anyway," said Morry. "As we'll keep the cab outside the village until the train's nearly in. It's a through express to London—a non-stop. You make quite certain the blighter has no cash on him, and then—well, just as the train's startin' again, you hop out swiftly and slam the door. And our dear friend will be wafted like a magic wand to London town, where he'll find himself stranded without a giddy penny in his pocket!"

"Ripping!" said Lattrey, looking admiringly at Mornington's flushed face and glinting eyes. "It's a great wheeze, Morry—a stroke of genius!"

"But suppose the cad writes to the Head, explainin' or complainin'?" said Carter. "You haven't thought of that."

"Haven't I?" remarked Mornington coolly. "Your mistake, old man! Our friend Biggs will never dream it is a hoax. He'll be amazed, of course, but he can't tell anythin' if he does write. And," went

on Mornington dryly, "do you suppose that the Head, or anyone else at Rookwood, will leave the kid back, will even trouble about him again after his being arrested and yanked away like that—as a thief an' a vagabond? Not likely. I tell you the Head will only be furious with Erroll—furious at havin' been tricked by dear Erroll into shelterin' such a bad character. No, Biggs' goose will be cooked for good! He won't come back to Rookwood again."

"Phew! Great! Go ahead, Peele!"

And Peele went ahead with his dressing. Tommy Dodd, Tommy Doyle and Tommy Cook looked at each other eloquently.

Never had they heard such a casually, villainous scheme.

They saw it all now. They had heard all about Mornington's unreasonable hatred of the new garden-boy, and they were astounded and shocked—shocked to think that a fellow like Morry, a fellow they had respected, should sink to such a mean and casually device to get rid of the fellow he was so bitterly jealous of.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Tommy Dodd, his own face going crimson with indignation. "Did you ever hear such a rotten, candid trick in your life? But—"

"We're stopping it!" gritted Tommy Cook.

"Holy Moses, yes!" said Tommy Doyle, his good-natured, merry eyes glistening now.

"But—how? Shall we rush in and smash—"

"No, no! Quiet's the word!" breathed Tommy Dodd.

He dragged at his chums, and they followed their leader as, like the Arabs of old, he silently stole away. Then, when well away from the woodshed, Tommy Dodd, his eyes glimmering with mingled mischief and indignation, told his plans to his chums. And when the chums of the Modern Boys at Rookwood went indoors a minute or two later they were grinning cheerfully.

CHAPTER 15.

A SENSATION!

"WHERE'S that wee Mornington?" Jimmy Silver asked the question suddenly. Apparently he had just missed Valentine Mornington of the Fourth.

And as it wanted just five minutes to the



As the figure of Dr. Chisholm appeared round the bushes, Jimmy Silver turned the hose full on. Swoosh! A cold stream of water hit the head of Hookwood fairly in his face, and then drenched him from head to foot. "Oh, crumbs! What--what--!" gasped Biggs the gardener's boy, staring in utter amazement at the scene before him.

(See chapter 20.)

start of the Bagshot match. Jimmy could be excused for asking the question in some alarm.

His brow clouded as he stared about the changing-room.

"Any of you fellows seen the chump?" he demanded. "Has he been in here? I'd forgotten him completely."

"There was a general shaking of heads.

"Haven't seen him since dinner," said Puffy Grace. "He's a cheeky owl, leaving it until the last minute like this! Now, if you'd asked me to play, Uncle James—"

"Oh, rats!"

Uncle James frowned crossly. As a matter of fact, he could not help feeling a little bit uneasy as he remembered Morry's mocking smile when he had agreed to play.

"Just like Morry!" said Raby, with a sniff. "I expect he's just hanging back out of sheer impudence!"

"Or to have a last whiff at a cigarette," said Lovell. "Blest if I know why you shoved him in for this match, Jimmy! I bet he won't play up to his usual form after what's happened; and if he tries his wind will let him down—"

"Oh, rats! He was the best man available, especially as Daddy's crooked!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "If you've finished dressing, Raby, you might trot up to his study and yank him out. We'd better get along to the ground."

"Right-ho!"

Raby hurried away. The rest of the juniors finished changing and hurried down to Little Side. Pankley and his men from Bagshot School were still in the pavilion changing, but as the Rookwood fellows arrived they came out, and after exchanging chaffing greetings with them, started to punt a ball about the field.

Hansom of the Fifth came up to Jimmy Silver. Hansom had very kindly lowered his lofty dignity to the extent of agreeing to referee the match.

"You kids ready?" he demanded, glancing up at the clock-tower. "Nearly on the stroke of three now!"

"Mornington hasn't turned up yet," said Jimmy Silver. "I've sent— Oh, here's Raby now."

Raby shook his head as he ran up and joined the Rookwood footballers.

"Can't find the idiot anywhere!" he said. "He seems to have vanished. I thought he

must have come down here, but— My hat! Where can the cheeky owl be?"

Jimmy Silver's good-humoured face darkened. Was it possible that his first faint suspicion was right—that Morry meant to let them down at the last minute? He could scarcely believe it, and yet—

Jimmy remembered Morry's tone to get his own back on the Form for the Form licking! He also knew that Mornington, when his evil temper had the upper hand of him, was capable of any reckless act—was heedless of consequences.

The fellows were looking at Jimmy Silver strangely now, their faces grim.

"Looks to me as if the howling cat means to let us down at the last moment!" exclaimed Lovell.

"We'll give him another half-minute!" said Jimmy Silver. "Grace, you might trot round and find Erroll in case. You never know what Morry will do."

"No good doing that!" said Conroy briefly. "Erroll's gone out of gates!"

"What!"

"Gone on his bike with a telegram for Dickie Dalton," said Conroy grimly.

"Oh, my hat!"

The half-minute elapsed. Jimmy Silver's brow was dark and angry now. He saw it all. Mornington had never intended to play at all. It was sheer perverseness on his part. He had been laughing up his sleeve all the time, intending to let the Form down at the last moment—to give them no chance to get a suitable man to take his place.

CHAPTER 16.

A Startling Interruption!

THE Bagshot fellows were waiting in a group now, staring curiously towards the Rookwood juniors, politely surprised at the delay. Hansom was shouting sarcastically.

"We've waited long enough!" snapped Jimmy Silver, his eyes blazing. "You see what this means, you fellows—that howling cat Mornington has let us down; intended to let us down all along. I half-expected something of the kind. We'll know how to deal with him for this, though. Grace, get into your footer togs—sharp!"

"Good man!" grinned Puffy Grace.

"You're showing signs of sanity at last, Jimmy. You'll make a skipper yet!"

And Potty Grace changed with alacrity.

A couple of minutes later the whistle went and the game started. But every fellow on the Rookwood side was inwardly raging at Mornington's trickery, and their play suffered in consequence. Even Jimmy Silver's play was careless, and his kicking erratic.

Within five minutes of play Bagshot had scored, and a roar of wrath went up from the Rookwood spectators.

But the desertion of Mornington had put the Rookwood players off their form completely—Jimmy Silver's erratic play alone was enough to put his men off and kill their keenness.

It was only by a miracle that the Bagshot men were prevented from scoring more than once in the next ten minutes, and after a corner kick that had narrowly missed their goal by a sheer fluke, Jimmy called his men in a desperate attempt to pull them together. He realised that Mornington would delight in a Rookwood defeat, and he set his teeth hard and determined that his evil desire should not be satisfied.

After that Rookwood played up well enough, and until the half-time whistle went they more than held their own.

"By Jove! I thought we were booked for the licking of the year!" panted Jimmy as they trooped off the field. "For goodness' sake, forget all about that rotten Morny—we can deal with him afterwards, and we will! Play up—if only to lose him the satisfaction of getting licked!"

"That's just what he wants, the cad!" said Ruby breathlessly. "My hat! Yes, we will play up, Jimmy!"

"Leave it to me!" said Potty Grace. "If it hadn't been for me—Hallo, what's on?"

Something was obviously "on!"

Near the pavilion a crowd had gathered—an excited crowd. And above the heads of the swarm of juniors showed a policeman's helmet.

"What the merry dickens—"

Jimmy Silver and his fellow footballers hurried to the spot, filled with wonder and astonishment. The sight of a constable in the sacred precincts of Rookwood was something new and surprising.

Pushing their way through the crowd, Jimmy Silver and his stalwarts soon

reached the centre of the commotion. A police-constable was standing there—a short, tubby man with a big, heavy black moustache, thick, black eyebrows, and a ruddy face.

"My hat!" gasped Lovell. "What the dickens does he want here?"

"Must be after Potty Grace!" grinned Ruby. "For chucking that jumping-cracker into the dog-lancier's chop in Letcham last half. I believe the dogs were barking for hours afterwards, and a lot of people complained."

"What real?" grinned Potty. "More likely he's after Tubby Muffin for trying to palm off a bad shilling at the tuckshop!"

But they very soon learned what it really was!

"Diggs 'is name is!" the constable was pulling importantly, glaring about him. "That's the name—leastways, it's the name as 'e's gain' under in this 'ere district. An' a right bad lot he is, too—thief an' vagabond, and he's wanted by the p'lice o' three or four counties as well as London! We've received information as he's at this here skool, and I've come for 'im!"

"Plew!"

"Diggs—that's the new gardener's chap!"

"My only hat!"

There was a buzz of excitement.

CHAPTER 17.

Another Sensation!

"BIGGS—wanted by the police!"

"My hat!"

"I was telled at the skool as he was 'ere on this here football field," went on the constable pompously. "If any of you young gents 'as seen 'im—"

The constable jingled something in his tunic pocket—the sound brought a hush on the excited, alarmed crowd.

"I know the outsider was a wrong 'un!" said Gower loudly. "My hat! What about Erroll's references now, eh?"

"Erroll ought to be sacked for bringin' such a person to the skool!" said Lattrey, his eyes gleaming as he noted the looks on the faces of the startled crowd. "By gad! It's a marvel we haven't been robbed before this. I suppose the brute was keeping quiet until he'd got the law of the land!"

"You young gents know 'im, then?" said the constable.

"Oh, yes!" said Gower coolly. "We had our suspicions from the first, only— My hat! There the rotter is!"

There came a shout from the fringe of the crowd, and next moment Biggs, his face scarlet, came through as the crowd hurriedly broke away to make room for him.

Albert Biggs looked a far different fellow from the ragged, dusty tramp whom Erroll had succeeded in getting into a job as garden-boy at Rookwood. He still wore one of Erroll's lounge suits, and it fitted him well. He was spotlessly clean, and altogether he looked a respectable youth. Behind him showed Tupper, the school page, his rather vacant face showing his great alarm and amazement. Since he had come to Rookwood, Biggs had quickly made friends with Tupper, and as it was their Saturday half-day off they had naturally come along to see the match.

Biggs looked at the police-constable quietly—almost defiantly. It was plain that a man in an official blue uniform held no terrors for him.

"You arskin' for me, mister, I believe!" he said. "I 'eard you arskin—and 'ero I am! What do you want me for?"

"He's cool, anyway, by jingo!" whispered Putty Grace. "Blessed if I'd take him for a thief!"

"Nor me!" muttered Raby. "Looks jolly decent! There's something wrong about this! If he had a bad conscience the kid wouldn't come on his own—he'd bolt!"

"It's queer!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

He was deeply concerned—little as he had had to do with the fellow who had befriended Erroll years ago, he had taken a liking to the wail.

And now—

The constable was eyeing Biggs like a gorgon. His hand came out of his pocket with a jingle, and a second hand fell swiftly on the shoulders of Albert Biggs.

"You're Albert Biggs, me lad! Yes—I've seen your face on wanted notices afore this scores of times!" said the constable in a deep, grim voice. "You come along o' me, and no larks, my lad!"

With a swift movement he grabbed one of Biggs' hands, and then he grabbed at the other.

"Hold 'ard!" gasped Biggs, panting. "I wants to know what I've done, mister! I ain't never done nothin' wrong—never

stole a thing in my life! I swear on that! You can't prove nothin' agen me! Let me go!"

He began to struggle, his eyes blazing. Jimmy Silver felt a sudden throb of pity for the hapless wail. He did not suspect—not a fellow there dreamed of suspecting that the whole thing was a rascally hoax. They looked on with varying looks of pity—at least, many like Jimmy Silver did, though a goodly number looked angry—angry that Rookwood should have sheltered such a bad character.

Erroll suddenly appeared, pushing his way unceremoniously through the crowd. His face blanched as his eyes fell on the sight of his old friend struggling in the grip of the constable.

"What—what—Biggs!" he faltered. "What has—"

"You stand back, young gent!" snapped the constable. "Don't you dare to interfere with the course of justice, young man! This here—"

There was a sudden buzz—a fresh buzz of amazement. The crowd suddenly parted again, and the constable stopped short as he felt a hand clapped on his shoulder.

He looked round—and almost fell down as he sighted the man whose hand had fallen on his shoulder.

He was a rather short individual—portly like himself, and with bushy eyebrows, a heavy but smartly clipped moustache, and he wore a blue serge suit and a bowler hat. And by his side stood another constable!

Cyril Peele, for the first "constable" was that daring masquerader, almost fainted with sudden fear.

"What—what— Oh gad!"

"You had better come with me, my man!" said the plain-clothes man in deep, stern tones. "Leave that boy alone! Constable, this is the fellow without a doubt—the fellow who is going about masquerading as a police official. Constable, here is your man!"

Cyril Peele's knees fairly knocked together. Never in his life had he been so terrified. He knew well enough that to masquerade as a police official—and worse, to attempt to arrest an innocent person—was a serious crime in the eyes of the police. Moreover, what would the Head say—what would he do? To play such a cowardly trick, to attempt to humiliate

an innocent fellow in such a way, would mean nothing less than the sack.

The hapless masquerader shuddered. The man's hand was still on his shoulder—a terrible feeling. He was either a police-inspector or a detective, of course! That much seemed obvious to others as well as to the hapless schemer.

"Look here—" he faltered.
 "You can say what you have to say at the station, my man!" snapped the plain-clothes individual. "Constable, handcuff this prisoner!"

"Yes, sir!"
 The constable grasped Peele's hands—he was too terrified, too utterly dumbfounded to attempt to resist or refuse. The fellows looked on in dead, breathless silence. The dramatic intervention had staggered them, and they could only stare. Gower and Lattrey looked on in terrified apprehension. Another fellow squeezed through the crowd and looked on in startled wonder.

It was Mornington. That iron-nerved junior had come to see the "fun," regardless of glares from his Form-fellows or possible troubles. He came to see the "fun"—but he saw no fun in the situation now.

He was absolutely taken aback—he simply could not understand it.

But before the handcuffs—they were "property"—handcuffs taken from the Rookwood junior dramatic society's property cupboard—could be clapped on Peele's wrists, the plain-clothes individual gave a sudden chuckle.

To the utter amazement of the crowd, he calmly knocked off Cyril Peele's helmet. Then he dragged off his mop of black hair, revealing a close-cropped head of dark hair, neatly parted. After which he calmly tugged off Peele's huge moustaches.

The result was astounding—to the crowd. There arose a howl of amazement.

"Peele! It's that howling cad, Peele!"

CHAPTER IV. Bowled Out!

"PEELE!"
 There was a howl of utter amazement, and the name ran swiftly from mouth to mouth in the fringe of the crowd on the faster field.

The "constable" who had tried to arrest Albert Biggs, the Rookwood gardener's

boy, was Cyril Peele, of the Fourth. It was a hoax!

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

His brow darkened. He saw it all now. It was a hoax—a cruel, heartless hoax on Biggs by a fellow who hated him. It was obviously done to humiliate him—possibly the schemer had something worse in mind for the hapless garden-boy had not the plain-clothes detective and the constable come along.

And now they were about to arrest Peele in his turn.

Jimmy Silver could not understand the whole amazing affair. Yet he could understand Peele's rascally motive. Moreover, he knew now why Mornington had not wanted to play—he had this rascally game on with Peele.

But how came the detective and constable on the job?

The matter was serious now, though all the crowd was amused at the detective's curious and dramatic action in exposing the masquerader—in removing Peele's helmet and disguise.

Moreover, the detective's ruddy features were twisted into a grin now—even the portly constable holding the trembling Cyril Peele was grinning now.

Albert Biggs himself was crimson with indignation, though his eyes showed his deep relief. He had never for one moment dreamed that the "constable" who had come for him was Cyril Peele, his enemy.

"Peele, you rotten cad!"
 It was Arthur Edward Lavell who broke the dead silence following the revelation. His face was full of disgust and indignation.

"Take the rotten away, inspector!" shouted Gummer, of the Fourth. "Take the cad away—we don't want scheming tricksters like him at Rookwood any longer! Take him away!"

"I—I—" Peele's face was haggard as he stammered helplessly. But it occurred to him that it was all up now, and that it was better to have the Head on the job rather than be dragged away to the police-station. "I—I—somebody run for the Head!" he articulated.

"Hold on! Don't do anything of the sort!" called the "detective" in a surprisingly youthful voice. "Just sit on Gower, some of you!"

With that, while the crowd gazed transfixed, the detective calmly removed his

mustache and his false hair. Then he rubbed his face vigorously with his handkerchief.

At a wink from him, the constable removed his helmet, false hair, and mustache.

There was a stupefied pause, and then a howl:

"Tommy Dodd!"

"And Tommy Cook!"

"Oh, great jip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a stupefied pause, and then a laughter as the crowd understood.

But Mornington, Peele, Gower, and Lattrey did not laugh. Their faces were fiendish. Gower, trembling with fear and dismay, started to sneak away, but Tommy Dodd's voice rang out sharply:

"Stop Gower, you fellows—don't let the cad escape! Stop Mornington, and Lattrey, too—they're all in this! Stop them!"

Lattrey was also just about to sneak away, but neither he nor Gower had the slightest chance of doing so. Jimmy Silver made a rush at Mornington, and grabbed him, though Mornington made no effort to escape—it was beneath Mornington's pride to make an attempt. He stood, trembling with bitter rage and mortification.

Meanwhile, Gunner, Lovell, Baby, and Grace had grabbed Gower and Lattrey, and were holding the schemers fast.

"Daddy!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"Well, my only hat! You—you spoofer! What does it all mean?"

Tommy Dodd chuckled.

"It doesn't need many brains to see that, my dear man!" he grinned cheerfully.

"But as you Classical duffers haven't any at all, I'd better explain!"

"You chooky Modern cad—"

"Hold on—no ragging now!" said Tommy Dodd, holding up his hand. "Hold those merchants fast, to begin with—you'll want 'em presently, especially dear old Morny, who's let the school down in order to help Peele with this little game!"

Dozens of angry looks were cast at Valentine Mornington. He flushed crimson with mingled rage and shame as he met the glances of scorn on all sides.

"You—you knew they were going to play this game, and you did this to stop it!" said Jimmy Silver.

"You've hit it, though we rigged ourselves up like this to give dear old Peele the fright of his life, and to give the

rotters a proper public showing up. I think they deserve it!" said Tommy Dodd. "You see—"

"How—how did you find it out, hang you?" hissed Peele.

He was almost fainting with overwhelming relief. He had feared police-court proceedings—the sack, anything. And now it was only Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook, two jokers from the Modern side!

But a glance round at the angry, disgusted faces told Peele that he was not to escape scot-free, for all that.

"How did we find out?" said Tommy Dodd sweetly. "Why, we spotted you sneaking into the woodshed, and we heard you discussing the game, and saw you driving and making up, old fruit!"

"You sneakin', cavedroppin' bounds!" hissed Mornington.

"Thanks, dear man!" said Tommy Dodd, unmoved. "If you had praised me I should have been seriously disturbed. But I think the fellows will approve of what we did, especially now they know just what your game was."

"It—it was only a lark!" stammered Peele.

"Yes, we've heard a lot about your larks against this kid Biggs!" said Tommy Dodd calmly. "So you call it a lark to try to ruin this chap's character, to call him a thief and a vagabond, and to try to ruin him before a crowd like this? You call it a lark to lead everyone to suppose that the police of several counties are after him—that he is a bad lot? You call it a lark to take him off a prisoner, to bring yourselves within the reach of the giddy law, and to take his money away, to shove him in the London express and send him off to London, and leave him stranded there without a penny!"

There was a deep murmur. Daddy went on, his voice changing:

"You rotten cad!" he snapped. "You knew the Head would never allow him to come back after being arrested in public with his character gone; it was your way to get rid of a fellow who's never done you any harm excepting what you've made him do! I know what I think about it, and I know what any decent fellow would think, too!"

"So was that the game?" gasped Jimmy Silver. "To—to send Biggs to London and leave him stranded there?"

"Just that!" said Daddy, nodding. "We

found it all—we heard them planning it. I'm dashed glad we did, too!"

"And Mornington's in it; this is why Mornington let us down—one reason, at all events!" said Jimmy Silver, his lip curling. "The howling rotter never intended to play. He left without saying a word that he didn't intend to play! I think we know how to deal with a rotter like that, chaps!"

"Smash him!" roared Cuthbert Gunner, his rugged face red with wrath. "Here, let me get at the sweeps! I'll take all four on together and give them a licking they won't forget!"

"No, you jolly well won't!" said Tommy Dodd, chuckling. "I think this is a Form matter, and my suggestion is to yank the four cads to the end of the playing-fields and duck 'em in the pond there!"

"We'll give 'em the ragging of their lives to begin with!" said Lovell. "Collar the cads!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Go it!" roared Gunner.

"You dare!" panted Mornington, turning at bay with glinting eyes and savage features. "Lay a hand on me——"

"Here goes!" yelled Gunner.

And he rushed at Mornington.

It was the beginning, and in a moment Mornington and his fellow-plotters were held fast. Despite their yells, they were twisted over, and then, in a long procession, the crowd of angry juniors frog-marched them away towards the end of the playing-fields.

They had completely forgotten footer now. Hanson of the Fifth raged, but they ignored him and marched on. Mornington's treacherous desertion had been enough to begin with, but the mean and cowardly trick on Biggs filled them with wrath and indignation. Most of them had scarcely seen Biggs, nor did he come within their sphere at all. But the schemers had disgraced the Form, and they would not stand it.

Mornington & Co. had to go through it!

The Bagshot fellows stared as they looked on—forgotten now. Plankley & Co. were amazed, but they were too polite to ask questions or interfere. They looked at each other, and waited for the return of the Rookwood footballers.

Erroll had left Little Side the moment he understood the facts. He was relieved beyond measure in regard to Albert Biggs, but the disgrace on Mornington he felt

keenly. He could hardly believe that in such a short time his chum—or his former chum—could have descended so low as to take part in such a mean and cowardly trick. He went back to his study, not desiring to see the ragging of Mornington, and he went with a heavy heart.

Meanwhile, the angry Fourth-Formers reached the pond with their struggling, apprehensive victims. Knowing the state of the pond, Peel, Lattrey, and Gower howled for mercy, but Mornington did not, though he fought and struggled like a tiger. But he was too proud to plead.

"In with them!" yelled Gunner. "Chuck the rotters in!"

There was a brief, whirling struggle, and then the raging Mornington, looking far from a dandy now, went flying through the air into the pond. Peel, Gower, and Lattrey followed him in turn.

The pond was not a nice pond at all, as the schemers soon discovered. What it lacked regarding depth of water it made up with deep, evil-smelling mud and slimy weeds, and when Mornington & Co. climbed out at last they looked fearful sights.

"Well, that's that!" gasped Jimmy Silver, setting his lips. "They deserved it, if anyone ever did. But—but you see how that cad Morny glared at us! I'm afraid this means more trouble from him for this. He's a reckless, revengeful fool! Anyway, let's get back to those Bagshot fellows, if they're still there."

Plankley & Co. were still there, and though they waxed sarcastic and humorous, they asked no questions and did not refer to the incident—it was not their business! And a minute later the whistle went, and the second half commenced. But Jimmy Silver & Co. were feeling better now, and they dismissed from their minds the happenings and settled down to the game in right good earnest.

It was a grueling half from start to finish. Rookwood attacked again and again, determined to level up that one goal against them. And ten minutes before close of play Puffy Grace put the ball through with a brilliant "daisy-cutter" that beat the Bagshot goalie to the white.

It was not the last, either. Ten seconds before the whistle went for time, Jimmy Silver got home with a header from a corner kick—a breathless incident in the game that filled the spectators with wild

excitement, and made the Hookwood supporters wild with delight.

It was a win for Hookwood, after all—a win by one goal—and an ending to the game that filled to the brim Valentine Mornington's bitter cup of rage and mortification when he heard the result. He had lost, after all! Once again he had failed—failed hopelessly—in his revenge! He had failed again to get the boy he hated with so unreasonable and senseless a hatred cleared out of Hookwood, and he had failed in his treacherous and disloyal attempt at revenge on his Form! In his study, after a prolonged visit to the bath-room, Mornington sat and smoked cigarette after cigarette, refusing tea, and refusing to talk to Peele and Gower. But from the glitter in his dark eyes his chums knew that he was far from being subdued, far from being beaten. His headstrong self-will was going to drive him on still; the campaign was not yet ended with Mornington.

CHAPTER IV.

Tubby Muffin's Howl!

"H E, he, he!" That unmusical exclamation came from Tubby Muffin of the Fourth.

It was some days later. Since the remarkable happenings on the footer field at Hookwood, the feud between Mornington and Albert Biggs, the garden-boy—or, rather, between Mornington and Peele & Co. and others in addition to Erroll's humble chum—had seemed to be dropped. Mornington did not exchange a word with Jimmy Silver & Co.—indeed, few in the Classical Fourth at Hookwood would speak to him. Erroll and Morny were, of course, not on speaking terms, in any case. The very fact that Mornington was now on such ally terms with Peele & Co. was sufficient for the decent fellows to give him a wide berth.

But Mornington did not seem to care, though his eyes gleamed curiously whenever he met any of the fellows whom he knew despised him for his conduct in the matter. He knew he was out of the footer now, and he pretended to care little. He went his way quietly, and for days nothing happened.

Jimmy Silver & Co., however, knew him

better than to suppose that he had given up his campaign. They knew he was only biding his time; that he knew others in addition to the Fiscal Four were keeping their eyes on him and on Peele & Co.

And Peele & Co. knew it also, and they took care not even to mention Biggs' name or Erroll's outside their own select circle.

Amongst themselves, however, they discussed the fellows they hated many times and often—though Peele & Co. had learned to take care how they spoke of Erroll to Mornington. Though Morny had better enough things to say himself concerning his former chum, curiously enough he would allow nobody else to say them.

It was against the innocent Albert Biggs that Mornington's bitter animosity was aimed. It had all happened since he had come to Hookwood. He was the cause of it all. Before he had come Mornington was respected by all—a fellow high in the estimation of his fellows. And he had been happy in his deep friendship with Kit Erroll.

Now, in a few short days, all that had changed. He was scorned and looked upon with contempt by the majority. Even Tubby Muffin curled his lofty lip as he passed him, making sure Morny was in no position to kick him when he did it, of course. And he was out of the footer, and, worst of all, he had lost Erroll's friendship for good.

That it was all through his own folly—his giving way to his passionate temper—he would not admit. It was all the fault of Biggs—a ragamuffin from the slums!

It was an unjust, unreasonable view, and at the bottom of his wayward mind Valentine must have known it. But he allowed his passionate temper and bitter jealousy and prejudice to blind him to the truth.

In any case, nothing would have induced his proud and haughty nature to admit it and to give up his campaign now.

It was Valentine Mornington whom Jimmy Silver & Co. were discussing when Tubby Muffin came along with his unmusical exclamation.

"He, he, he!" he repeated, joining the Fiscal Four. "I say, you fellows, Morny's at it again!"

"Oh, soot, Tubby!" said Jimmy Silver. He did not wish to discuss Mornington with Muffin.

"Yes, clear off!" snapped Erroll.

"We want no alarm clocks, old chap."

said Patty Grace. "Take it somewhere else, Patty."

"Alarm clock! What d'you mean?" said Tubby.

"Isn't that an alarm clock making that noise inside you?" said Patty blandly. "Run away and let it run down somewhere else."

"You silly ass!" grinned Tubby. "He he, he! I say—"

"There it goes again!" said Patty Grace. "Here, let me stop it, Tubby."

"Hold on!" gasped Tubby, as Patty Grace made as if to pinch his ample waistcoat. "I say, Morry's at it again. You ought to clip in and stop his rotten game, Jimmy. Not that I approve of backing up a low outsider against a Rookwood man," ended Tubby loftily. "Only—"

"Oh, cheese it, and cut off!" snapped Raby.

"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver.

It was curious that they were just discussing Morry and his ways. In the ordinary way Jimmy Silver took little notice of Muffin's chatter. It was usually the result of eavesdropping, and he rarely took advantage of Tubby's news.

But he felt it just as well to do so on this occasion.

At dinner he had noted the fact that Mornington had dropped his sullenness and bitter scowl. His face had worn its old mocking smile—a certain sign, under the circumstances, that Morry was up to mischief.

"What is it, Tubby? What's Morry up to now?"

"Ho, he, he!" grinned Tubby. "I happened to overhear—"

"Prying again!" sniffed Lovell.

"Not at all. It was like this—"

"Now for a whopper!" grinned Raby.

"Oh, I say, Raby—"

"What's Morry up to?" snapped Jimmy Silver. "Out with it, you scolding fat dummy!"

"Ho, he, he. He's going to dress up as the Head and order that chap Biggs to cut down all the laurels in the Head's shrubbery."

"What?"

"It's a fact!" grinned Tubby Muffin. "So the kid will get sacked, you know. Rather thick, what? I say, you won't tell Morry I told you, though?" ended Muffin, in sudden alarm.

"Phew!"

The Juniors looked at each other in a scared way.

If Biggs took the order from Morry—if he did cut down the shrubbery in front of the gates of the Head's private entrance, there was nothing more certain than serious trouble for Albert Biggs. The sack probably.

Dr. Chisholm took great pride in his garden, and he would "tear his hair" at such wanton destruction.

There would be a most frightful row, the Juniors realized that. In any case, Babbage would tear his hair if the Head did not. He would insist upon having a new boy with less destructive tendencies. So far as they had heard, Albert Biggs was giving every satisfaction at his job. He was a hard worker, and he was tidy and painstaking. Babbage was not likely to stand a destructive lad, anyway.

And if the order came from Dr. Chisholm himself, or if Biggs believed it came from him, he would, whatever his own private thoughts concerning such an order, carry it out to the best of his ability.

That much was certain.

"Well, the—the rotten cad!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "What a rotten trick! I knew the cad was hatching some mischief or other. Are you quite certain of this, Tubby?"

"Absolutely!" said Tubby Muffin. "I thought it a rotten sort of wheeze myself. I knew the cads were up to something. The beastly little dreamer I was behind the couch—I mean just passing the door—and happened to hear what they were saying, you know."

"You heard all that while you were passing the door?" grinned Raby. "What a whepper! You were behind the couch in their study, of course!"

"D-did you see me?" gasped Tubby. "I say, don't tell Morry, for goodness' sake! He might blame me about a cake being missing. It was only a measly cake, anyway; not a plum in it or a raisin. Morry's getting mean, I think, as well as dashed bad-tempered."

"So that was it!" said Lovell grimly. "You went into their study to pinch a cake, and when they came in you hid behind the couch, eh?"

"Certainly not! At least, I didn't pinch any cake. It was that cad Gower who scented it, I bet. I say, you won't let on to that cad Morry, will you?" demanded

Tubby anxiously. "I've suffered enough, having to crouch down behind that rotten couch all the while they were talking the plot over. Morny's bound to think I touched his cake, though I only went to— to borrow a Latin grammar!"

"You—you fat hide!"

"Oh, I say, Newcome!"

"Choose it, Newcome!" snapped Jimmy Silver, his face dark. He did not doubt Tubby's story now, not for a moment. It was just like Tubby Mullin to go after Morny's cake, and just like him to hide when they came in. "Tubby, you ass! Where's Morny and his pals now?"

"In the woodshed, getting ready, I expect," grinned Mullin. "I followed them from the study and watched 'em go there. Then I cut along to look for you, Jimmy. I knew—"

"Then the cads are doing it at once?" snapped Jimmy.

"He, he! Yes, Morny's been scouting round, and found out Babbage is in the kitchen garden at the back, while Biggs is at the front, digging or something. He'll have to do it now, anyway, because of afternoon classes."

"You're sure Morny himself is impersonating the Head?" said Jimmy. "I should have thought those cads had had enough of that sort of thing."

"That's why Morny's doing it," grinned Mullin. "Peele refused to take the job on. He said he'd had enough. So Morny's doing it on his giddy own. Awful ass, ain't he?"

"Well, my hat!"

"He, he, he! I say, can any of you fellows oblige me by changing a cheque, by the way?" asked Mullin carelessly. "If you like, you can hand me half-a-crown now, and then hand me the rest when the cheque comes to-morrow. Yooop!"

Tubby Mullin howled as Jimmy Silver threw him a shilling, catching him on his pocket nose with it. But Tubby pocketed the coin after grumblingly picking it up again, and as Lovell lifted his boot, the fat junior took the hint and departed—hurriedly. Jimmy felt the information was worth the hob, and he did not want to hear Tubby's usual explanation about the cheque. He knew it existed only in Tubby's vivid imagination. It was just Tubby's little way of borrowing money he could never pay back.

"Well, you're going to look into this, Jimmy?" said Lovell, his frank face angry

and indignant. "We can't let a thing like that go on."

"Not likely," said Jimmy Silver through his teeth. "I didn't want any further trouble with Murnington. But it seems he's determined to keep his games up, and we'll see he finds trouble all right. We're going to put the hybids on his game, anyway."

"But how?" said Newcombe. "We can't show him up—can't sneak, at all events."

"We're going to stop it, anyway!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "Come on—we'll sneak in the Head's garden, and risk getting caught. And we'll keep an eye on Biggs, and if Morny does turn up—well, we'll give him ginger!"

"Good egg! We're on!" said Patty Grace.

Without hesitation, Jimmy's charms and Patty Grace followed him as he led the way and scudded round Sergeant Kettle's lodge to the Head's front garden, climbing the fence after a hasty glance about them.

But nobody was in sight, and reaching the garden, they began to look about for Biggs.

The trees lining the winding drive hid them from the house, and almost at once they sighted the new gardener's help. He was working away with a hoe on a flower-bed some yards from the thick laurels of the shrubbery.

"Oh, good!" muttered Jimmy Silver. "Quick, better hide at once! No knowing when Morny will come along."

"Hold on!" whispered Patty Grace. "What about that giddy old engine over there?"

"Eh? What about it?" said Jimmy Silver quickly. "Oh, you mean that old garden engine and hose? By Jingo, I see!"

"Good for you, Patty!" chuckled Baby. "Let's hope there's some water in it!"

Along by the fence some distance away, and just by the side of the house, was a garden engine and hose—an ancient tank on wheels with pump and hose complete. Followed by the rest, Jimmy Silver scudded down to it, running on the grass bordering the gravel-path. On either side bushes and trees hid them all from the toiling Biggs, and the house.

To their joy, the tank was half full of water—though it smelled none too fresh. In a flash the daring juniors had whirled it round, and were running it back along the grassy border to the shrubbery.

The ancient vehicle made plenty of noise,

but they were breathless at that. In a few breathless seconds they had reached the shrubbery. Selecting a spot well hidden, they rapidly uncoiled the hose, which was wound round the tank. Jimmy Silver grabbed the nozzle.

"Man the pumps, me hearties!" he whispered cheerfully. "I fancy dear old Murry's booked for a surprise when he does turn up. Hello, Biggs has heard us! Oh, blow!"

Biggs had undoubtedly heard them. He was staring at the border of trees and shrubs that hid the grassy border along which they had trundled the engine. And even as Jimmy spoke, he started as if to come towards the spot where they were hidden.

But just as he did so he pulled up short again as a step sounded on the gravel. Then an august form in cap and gown came across the lawn towards him.

It was the figure of Dr. Chisholm—at least, Biggs thought it was, and he waited respectfully, his hand going to his cap.

"Now for it!" murmured Jimmy Silver breathlessly.

"What-oh!"

"Then go it with the pump—now!"

And Jimmy's chorus "went it" with a pump.

CHAPTER 20.

A Damp Reception for the "Head!"

SWOOOOOOSH!

From the nozzle in Jimmy Silver's hand shot a shining stream of water.

It went up into the air gracefully, and then it dropped—splashing on the lawn exactly a yard from the august, awe-inspiring figure of Dr. Chisholm.

It drenched him from head to foot, and a sprinkling of water reached Biggs, the gardener's boy, and he leaped back with a startled yell.

The next moment Jimmy had the range, and the stream took the staggering figure in cap and gown full in the face, almost bowling him off his feet.

"Oh, crikey!"

Albert Biggs stared aghast—terrified out of his wits at the startling calamity that seemed to have befallen the Head of Rookwood—a gentleman for whom Albert Biggs had a most unfeeling respect and awe.

But as he stared, his terror van-

ished abruptly—giving place to amazement and bewilderment.

For as well as the Head's mortar-board, that solid, shining stream of water had washed away that majestic white hair—and quite a lot of the pinky complexion, likewise the pince-nez.

As Biggs stared, transfixed, the deadly stream fairly enveloped the staggering, spluttering figure in the flying gown.

He turned and dodged and twisted, but the stream followed him remorselessly. In less than a minute he was soaked to the skin from head to foot.

"Go it, chaps!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "I can recognise Mornington's dear old chivvy. Tubby Muffin was right, then. Go it! Let the howling end have it good and strong!"

Clang! Rattle, rattle! Clang!

Swoooooosh!

"Well, I'm blowed! It's—it's that there Master Mornington!"

Even the scared Biggs had recognised the drenched figure in the gown now. It was Valentine Mornington right enough—the fellow who hated Biggs with a deadly hatred, the fellow who had vowed to hound him from Rookwood! His figure was padded well, and his face still bore traces of grease-paint and make-up. But it was Mornington without a doubt—Mornington who had been masquerading as the Head of Rookwood.

And he had done it well enough, though now Biggs could see from his height alone that he was an impostor.

But why—what—

Biggs' startled glance shot towards the engine, and its crew. Jimmy Silver & Co. were hidden, likewise the garden engine. But the stream came from the shrubbery—a fact Mornington saw only too clearly.

His face fiendish with passion, and with water streaming down him, he gave a gasping cry, and made a rush towards the shrubbery, heedless of the deadly stream.

Swoooooosh!

Mornington staggered drunkenly, the solid stream hitting his face, blinding and half-dazing him. But he recovered himself, and came on with a rush. There was nothing of the coward about Mornington, despite his many faults.

"Back up!" called Jimmy Silver.

The pump ceased to clank, and the hose-pipe, giving a final shake and a shudder, ceased to rush forth water. The next

moment Jimmy Silver & Co. were on their feet, and met the raging Moray.

Grash!
He went to earth with five juniors grasping him.

"You rotten hound!" he spluttered, recognising Jimmy Silver. "I guessed it was you! Hang you—hang you!"

"Hold him, chaps!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Hallo, here's friend Biggs! Keep cave, Biggs, old chap!"

Biggs came rushing up, his face showing his utter bewilderment.

"Young gent's," he gasped, "what—what's this 'ere? If you're copped 'ere

"We'll explain in a second, Biggs!" said Jimmy, taking a hand in holding the raging Mornington down. "Just you keep cave!"

"I dunno what you mean by cave!" muttered Biggs.

"Keep a look-out for anyone coming!" grinned Jimmy. "Now, Moray, my pippin, the game's up once again! Better take it quietly!"

"Much better!" said Patty Grace cheerfully. "If the books happen along—if they hear the row and come to investigate—well, you're for the high-jump! The Head won't approve of you taking him off to play your rotten tricks on Biggs!"

Mornington ceased to struggle abruptly. He knew only too well that Patty was right—that it was madness to create a bigger row.

"You've got me—beaten me again, hang you!" he hissed. "Let me go! I shan't struggle again!"

The juniors released him—they were only too glad to do so, for Mornington was very wet. He staggered to his feet, looking a sight with his wet, bedraggled gown and clothes, and ruined make-up.

He stood, fairly trembling with fury and bitter humiliation. Once again his plotting had miscarried; once again he had got the worst of it—though how it had come about he could only guess.

"Who—who gave me away?" he said, choking with the rage that gripped him. "You know—"

"We knew your rotten game—yes?" said Jimmy Silver scornfully. "You were going to order this kid—the fellow who had never willingly harmed you—to cut down all these laurels. It was a caddish trick!

You meant him to get into serious trouble—to get the sack! But, luckily, we got on the game! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, you howling rotter!"

CHAPTER 21.

Challenged to Fight!

BIGGS drew a deep breath. He understood now, and his honest, open face went red with indignation. He looked at Mornington with a look that almost shrivelled that youth, cynical and hard as Moray was.

"Well, what a rotten, dirty trick, Master Silver!" he stammered. "I thank you gents more'n I can say for savin' me! It isn't the first time, neither, that you've done me a good turn! As for this young gent—he ain't a gent at all, the rotter!" he added, with a glance of scorn at Mornington.

"You—you insolent hound!" hissed Mornington.

He would have leaped at the gardener's boy, but Jimmy Silver, Patty Grace, and Ruby dragged him back, struggling.

"You said you wouldn't try any games, Moray!" snapped Jimmy. "Chuck it! If you don't—"

"Let 'im come on, Master Silver!" snapped Albert Biggs, his face red with anger. "It's time me and 'im 'ad a settlement, I can see that! I don't want to lose my job, goodness knows, but I ain't standin' no more of this from that fellow! I ain't never done 'im no 'arm—he knows that well enough!"

"You hear that, Silver?" gritted Mornington eagerly, a glint appearing in his savage eyes. "Biggs wants a settlement with me. I'm ready to fight the dashed guttersnipe any time he likes, with gloves or without. It's beneath a chap to fight with a servant cad, I know! But I'm ready. Nothin' would give me more satisfaction than to lick the hide off the crawlin' spongin' sweep!"

"You—you rotten cad!" snapped Lovell. "For two pins I'd thrash you here and now—or try to, anyway! You'll leave this kid alone—you've done enough already against him, you rotter!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver.

The junior skipper of Rockwood was frowning thoughtfully. On the face of it,

it seemed madness for a fight between a scholar and a servant in the school. If the authorities got to know such a thing was going on there would undoubtedly be a "row" about it. And yet—

Jimmy Silver wondered if it would not be for the best.

For Biggs' own person Jimmy did not trouble. Mornington was one of the best boxers in the Lower School. But only that morning Jimmy had heard from Erroll an interesting piece of news concerning Biggs.

He had already had witness that the wall was full of grit and fight. But Erroll had also told him that he could box—that his father, who died some years before, had been a professional "bruiser," and that he had taught Albert Biggs to box at a very early age, intending to make a "pug" of his son.

The remembrance of this came to Jimmy in a flash, and he could not suppress a grin at the thought. Morny was clearly thinking that a thrashing would be the inevitable for Biggs.

Jimmy knew that this would be far from certain, and he wondered if it would not be for the best to allow the two to fight it out. It was quite possible a scrap would clear the air—would put an end to Mornington's bitter animosity towards Biggs.

"You really mean it, Biggs?" asked Jimmy, making up his mind suddenly. "You're willing to fight Mornington?"

"Yes, that I am!" said Biggs fiercely. "I'm fed-up with 'is rotten tricks. If I gets the sack for it—well, it can't be 'elped, I s'pose."

"I'll see you don't get sacked for it," said Jimmy quietly. "And I'm quite certain Mornington won't report you, whether he's licked or not."

Mornington's face was dark, but his eyes gleamed at that.

"I'm a rank outsider, according to general opinion!" he said, with a bitter sneer. "But you have my word that I won't do anything like that. But I'm going to give the lad the hammerin' of his life!"

"We'll see," said Jimmy. "Better not make too certain of that, Morny. Personally, I hope he gives you a thrashing; for if anyone ever deserved one, you do, Morny!"

"You—you really mean that you approve of them fighting?" gasped Lovell. "Why, you idiot, Morny will smash him to bits! It's getting the poor kid slaughtered, Jimmy, you born idiot!"

"Yes, rather!" said Raby, staring at Jimmy Silver in amazement.

"We'll see," said Uncle James. "Now, let's get out of this. Biggs, shud we say in the woods at two-thirty to-morrow, or would you rather wait until later?"

"To-morrow!" snapped Biggs. "I'd rather not wait longer."

"I won't wait, either!" said Mornington.

"Right! That's settled, then!" said Jimmy Silver coolly, disregarding the astonished glances of his chums. "You'll be by the stile in the lane—it's half-way to Coombe, and I expect you know it, Biggs. Be there at about two-fifteen."

"That I will, Master Silver."

And so it was settled. The juniors hurriedly took back the garden-engine, while Biggs resumed his work. Mornington, without another glance at the juniors, squelched away, dragging off his trampled gown viciously as he went. His brow was black as thunder; yet in his heart was a savage exultation. At last his chance had come; not perhaps the chance he longed for, to get Biggs "busted" from Rookwood, but to give him the licking of his life.

Jimmy Silver, however, was not so sure that that would happen—nor were the chums when he told them what Erroll had told him. It was more than possible there was a nasty disappointment in store for Valentine Mornington!

CHAPTER 12.

Spreading the News!

"H E, he, he! What a scream!" Once again Tubby Muffin, the Falstaff of the Fourth at Rookwood, gave vent to his gleeful exultation—the noise which Putty Grace had humorously likened to a cheap alarm-clock.

He grinned and gurgled, as he raised himself cautiously from his hiding-place in the shrubbery in the Head's front garden.

Tubby Muffin, the biggest gossip in all Rookwood, had seen and heard all that had taken place in the garden.

Anxious as he had been to spend Jimmy Silver's shilling at the tuckshop, Tubby had been still more anxious to know just what Jimmy Silver & Co. would do in the matter of Mornington's "whoosa."

His eagerness and curiosity quite overcame his hunger for once.

The moment he had seen the Fistical Four and Puffy Grace vanish into the Head's garden, Tubby had followed with great caution, his heart thumping against his fat ribs. Tubby knew the terrific risk he was running in trespassing in the sacred garden only too well.

But his eagerness and curiosity overcame even his fear.

He trod softly after the juniors, and he had been hidden scarcely half a dozen yards from them all the time. He had heard all and seen all.

Jimmy Silver had intended that no word of the forthcoming fight should leak out, and he had warned his chums to keep silent in the matter. The risk of such an affair coming to the ears of the authorities was great, and he meant to take no risks. He even decided it unwise to tell Erroll—and certainly not kind to do so. Erroll would take no pleasure in seeing either of the principals beaten. Quite the reverse, in fact. Jimmy decided it was better for him not to know.

Jimmy Silver, however, had not counted upon Tubby Muffin.

Bursting with excitement and glee, Tubby watched the juniors out of sight, and then he cautiously made his way back into the quadrangle and rushed indoors.

Jimmy Silver and his chums had gone into the School House, but several fellows were standing chatting just inside the hallway.

They stared at Muffin's face, blazing with excitement.

"Hallo! What's up, Tubby?" inquired Conroy. "Don't say that cheque's come—the one I cashed for you on my first day here, is it?"

There was a chuckle, but it had little effect upon Muffin.

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows, I've got some news if you like! You've missed it—missed a scream!" he chuckled almost hysterically. "Morny—He, he, he! Did you see him come in just now?"

"We saw him come in—yes," said Dickenson, with sudden interest. "What happened to him, Tubby—do you know? He was drenched through, but he only bit our giddy heads off when we asked him what had happened."

"He would!" grinned Tubby. "It's a

wonder he didn't hit you, one on the nose. He's fairly raging. He, he, he! You should have seen it!"

"Seen what, you fat ass?"

"Silver and his lot!" grinned Tubby. "They fairly swamped him—and serve the rotter right. Mind you, I don't hold with backin' up a low servant—especially a chap who was a dashed tramp. But—Leggo, you ass!"

"What's happened?" snapped Conroy impatiently, shaking the fat youth. "Out with it, or I'll bust you quickly enough!"

"Yow! Oh, you rough beast! All right, I'll tell you quickly enough!"

And as Tubby told the story the faces of his hearers grew grim.

"Well, what a caddish trick!" said Gunner, almost bursting with indignation. "Don't I just wish I'd been there! Good for Jimmy Silver!"

"And is that a fact, Tubby—about him going to fight that rotter Mornington?" exclaimed Dick Oswald in astonishment.

"Yes! He, he, he!"

"And Jimmy Silver's encouraging it?"

"Yes, old chap! I say, won't that dashed tramp get a licking, you fellows?"

"He will, for a pension!" said Dick Oswald, frowning. "I'm surprised at Jimmy Silver. I know nothing about this chap Birge and care less; but it's not playing the game to let Mornington get his own back by hammering the kid!"

"Rather not! Rotten!"

Cuthbert Gunner spluttered.

He was a fellow who never could mind his own business—though he was good-hearted, and his interference in what didn't concern him was always well intentioned.

"I'm not standing this, you fellows!" he snapped. "Jimmy Silver ought to be jolly well ashamed of himself letting that poor kid in for a thrashing like this. We all know what that rotter Morny's after—to get his own back. It just suits his book to hammer the kid to a jelly. I'm going to stop it!"

"You keep out of it, you silly chump!" said Dickenson, Gunner's chum. "Jimmy Silver knows what he's doing, I suppose!"

"Rot! Nice skipper he is, I must say! I'm jolly well going to tell him what I think of him! Come on!"

"Hold on—"

"Rats!"

Cuthbert Gunner marched away, his

roughed face determined, Dickenson winked at the others, and they followed Gunner. There was always something interesting happening when Gunner was on the war-path.

They found the Fistic Four in the end study chatting. Gunner marched in without troubling to knock.

The rest of the juniors congregated round the doorway.

"Ho, ho, ho! Tell him off, Gunner!" grinned Tubby Muffin encouragingly.

"I'm going to!" snapped Gunner. "Now, Silver, what's this about Mornington going in scrap with Biggs?"

"Eh?" Jimmy Silver started. "Who told you about that, Gunner?"

"This fat ass, Muffin!" snapped Gunner. "Is it true, then?"

"Muffin told you——" Jimmy Silver set his lips and glared at the grinning Tubby. "Muffin, you fat eavesdropper——"

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled Tubby Muffin. "I saw it all, you fellows. I was hidden in the shrubbery, and I saw you down that end Morry. I heard all—— Yooop! Keep him off, you fellows! Yarrooogh!"

Tubby roared as Jimmy Silver took one angry stride and grasped him by a fat ear.

"You—you prying fat worm!" he gasped. "And we wanted to keep it a secret! Now it will be all over the school, and the beaks will hear of it as likely as not. Oh, you fat rotter!"

"Yow! Leggo!" roared Muffin. "Rescue, Gunner, old chap—rescue!"

Jimmy Silver, angry and dismayed now, sent the fat youth spinning. Gunner then grasped him, and lifted his boot—not in an effort to rescue Tubby, however—quite the reverse!

The crowd scattered round the doorway, and Tubby Muffin flew through, with Gunner's heavy boot behind him.

"Yarrooogh!"

"That's settled that sneaking fat ass!" said Gunner, turning to Jimmy Silver grimly. "Now, Silver, so it's a fact that Morry's going to fight that chap Biggs, is it?"

"Yes, it is!" snapped Jimmy. "I suppose it's no good trying to keep it dark now that fat ass knows about it! But what about it?"

"What about it?" snorted Gunner witheringly. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, encouraging such bullying?"

"Bullying?" ejaculated Jimmy.

"What else is it?" demanded Gunner indignantly. "That poor kid knows nothing about boxing, and Morry's one of the best chaps with the gloves in the School House! It's nothing short of bullying. It's got to stop!"

"Oh, run away and play!" snorted the embarrassed Jimmy. "I know what I'm doing, and you can leave this to me, Gunner! Now get out!"

"I'm jolly well not—not until I've told you what I think about you!" snorted Gunner. "Are you going to stop this rotten bullying, or not, Silver?"

"Not, old chap! Now clear out—your face worries me!"

"You cheeky owl! Why, for two pias——"

"Outside!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Help me chuck this cheeky idiot out, chaps!"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Ruby.

"Will you? Why, I'll——"

Gunner got no further. As one man the Fistic Four grasped him, and despite his furious struggles, they rushed him to the door, all arms and kicking legs. They never had much patience with Cuthbert Gunner.

"Look out!"

Crash!

"Yacooooooph!"

Gunner fell in the passage with a crash and a howl, and Jimmy Silver & Co. returned to their study and slammed and locked the door.

Gunner scrambled up, fuming, but finding the door locked he gave it up, and heedless of the chuckles around him, went to his own study to recuperate. But he wasn't beaten. Gunner felt it his duty to put down bullying, and the present case, he felt convinced, was bullying.

CHAPTER 22.

Coaching Albert Biggs!

"IT'S up to me!"

Peter Cuthbert Gunner made the remark emphatically. (He's a study-mate, Dickenson, groaned——)

When Gunner talked like that there was always trouble in store—usually for Gunner, and very often for Dickenson. Gunner was

undoubtedly one of the best, and he always meant well. But he was very trying for all that. Gunner had a remarkably good opinion of his own importance, and he was one of those persons who deemed it his duty to put the world to rights.

"It's up to me!" repeated Gunner emphatically. "I can't stand bullying—you know that, Dickenson, old chap!"

"Oh, rather!" yawned Dickenson. "What's the trouble now?"

"About this kid Biggs, of course!" said Gunner, shaking his head. "It's a bit thick. I think, allowing this fight to go on! A kid like that can't have had any chances to use his mitts; that cad Morny is lured to slaughter him—nothing else for it. It isn't good enough! Morny is out to half kill the kid. I'm not going to allow it!"

"That's right!" said Dickenson, nodding. "It is a bit thick, I'll admit. I don't care twopenny about the merchant myself. But I think it ought to be stopped, though—"

"Though what?" snorted Gunner.

"Well, Jimmy Silver isn't the chap to allow it to go on if he thinks it will be giving Morny all his own way," said Dickenson sagely. "Jimmy knows what he's about, I expect. Better leave it to him, Gunny."

"Hut!"

"Oh, all right!" yawned Dickenson. "If you can stop it, go ahead, old chap. I shan't mind!"

"I'm not thinking of stopping it," said Gunner, smiling.

"Eh? I thought you were, old chap."

"No. I've got a better wheeze than that!" smiled Gunner. "Now you know how I can handle the gloves, Dickenson!"

"Ahout! Yes, old chap! Like a—an elephant!"

"What? If that's cheek, Dicken—"

"Not at all," said Dickenson hurriedly. "I mean you're as strong as an elephant, old man! But what's the wheeze? Going to offer to take Morny on yourself instead? That wouldn't suit Morny. He just wants to smash that kid!"

"I know that. Well, I would mind giving Morny a licking for that matter—he deserves that and more. But my idea is this! There isn't a fellow at Rookwood to touch me with the gloves—you know that."

"Ahout!" Dickenson coughed at that.

"So my idea is," reasoned Gunner enthusiastically, "to give this kid a few tips—to get him ready for the scrap. There's good stuff in the kid. I think, and a bit of coaching from me will give him a chance to put up a decent fight!"

"Oh, my hat! But the fight comes off to-morrow!"

"Plenty of time for a bit of coaching, though!" said Gunner calmly. "A few tips from me will make all the difference. I shall also second the kid during the fight, so that he can have the benefit of my advice throughout. See?"

"Oh, yes, but—"

"No time like the present," said Gunner, rising and getting his cap. "Come on!"

"But what about tea? I'm hungry!"

"How tea! I want to give the kid an hour now, and another hour in the gym after tea. Then another hour before breakfast in the morning, and another at noon. That should be enough! Come on! We'll find him knocking about somewhere."

"Oh, my hat!"

Gunner walked out, and Dickenson grinned and followed. As they were passing the end study the Fistical Four emerged. Gunner stopped.

"Hold on!" he said. "I've changed my mind, Silver! I've decided not to stop the fight, after all!"

"Oh, have you?" gasped Jimmy.

"Yes. I'm going to coach that kid instead—get him ready for the job, see? You kids can come along and look on, if you like—you could all do with a bit of coaching, in any case."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You're going to coach Biggs?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Yes. I shall tell him to go all out and see how he shapes against me," smiled Gunner. "I shan't hurt the kid, of course! You can rely on that. Coming?"

Jimmy Silver looked at his chums, and they chuckled.

"Yes, we'll come!" said Jimmy cordially. "That's a good idea, Gunner. I'd like to see Biggs going all out at you, old chap. You may learn something from him, even—you never know! Lead on, Mac-duff!"

And Gunner grinned and "led on."

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed smilingly.

Knowing that Biggs was the son of a "pug," almost brought up with the gloves on, they felt that the kindly Culbert Gunner was booked for a surprise and they were looked for an entertainment. So they followed.

Culbert Gunner marched along, his face grim and determined. The Fistic Four and Dickenson were smiling.

"Hallo, there he is!"

Albert Biggs, the new garden boy at Rookwood, came round by the chapel, a rake over his shoulder. Gunner called to him:

"Biggs, I want you! Come here!"

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

Biggs came over. He smiled in return at Jimmy Silver & Co. Biggs had his sleeves stripped up, and Gunner rather stared as he noted the biceps, firm, muscular arms.

"Finished work, Biggs?" said Gunner, eyeing him over approvingly.

"Jest kuckin' off, young gentles!" said Biggs.

"Right! Then come along to the gym," said Gunner. "I suppose you don't realise, kid, what you're up against to-morrow in your fight with Mornington!"

"I shall do me best," said Biggs, his blue eyes going steely.

"That's the spirit!" nodded Gunner. "Well, come along, kid! I must say there's good stuff in you. It just wants knocking into shape. I don't suppose you'll be able to hold your own against Morny, but with my help you'll be able to put up a decent show instead of getting simply slaughtered."

"But what——" murmured Biggs, eyeing the juniors.

"I'm going to give you a bit of coaching," said Gunner kindly. "I can't stand bullying. That's why I've chipped in. I'm going to give you a few tips, and when I've done with you you'll be able to make some sort of a show against that cad, Morny! See?"

"Oh! I—I see!" said Albert Biggs, suddenly catching a wink from Jimmy Silver. "Thank you very much, sir! It's kind of you to trouble about a feller like me, Master Gunner!"

"Not at all, kid!" said Gunner loftily. "Come along!"

Biggs went along. Profoundly Jimmy Silver's wink was enough for him. In any

case Biggs was only too glad of the chance to have the gloves on with anybody, just to keep his hand in. The juniors led him into the gymnasium, and at a word from Gunner Biggs took off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves. Gunner declined to do likewise—in his view it wasn't necessary for him to remove anything. He just turned back his cuffs and started putting on some gloves, aided by Raby.

Jimmy Silver helped Biggs into his.

"Now," said Gunner, when they were ready. "Listen to me, kid! I want you to go far me for all you're worth—all out! Don't be afraid of hurting me—I'll see to that! I want first just to see how you shape with the gloves on. Afterwards, I'll show you where you go wrong, and how to hit! Ready?"

"Yesir!" said Biggs solemnly.

"Then go ahead, kid—and mind you really let yourself go! I shall give you a few taps, but I won't hurt you; you needn't be afraid of that," added Gunner kindly.

"I'm not, sir," said Biggs.

"Then here goes! Look out!"

And Gunner squared up and opened the proceedings with a careless, gentle swing at Biggs' head.

Biggs' head, however, wasn't in the same place the next second, and something hit Gunner's chin with a jolt that sent Gunner's head jerking back.

"Ow!" gasped Gunner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Biggs," said Newcome. "That's Gunner's first tip, and your first tap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hope you don't mind, Master Gunner!" said Biggs smiling. "It didn't hurt you, did it?"

"Ow! Not much!" gasped Gunner.

"Jingo, what an awful flake! You mustn't hit out wildly like that. It just happened that my head was in the way, of course! Go a bit more warily."

"Oh, my hat!"

Biggs grinned. If Gunner chose to regard it as a fluke, he didn't mind.

"And don't be afraid of hitting out!" said Gunner encouragingly. "I shall hit harder than that, I warn you. You must learn how to stand hard knocks, you know. Now again."

It was "again." But this time Albert Biggs took Gunner's advice to heart. En

did hit hard. Gunner's glove was flicked aside like a feather and something that seemed like a battering-ram struck Gunner in exactly the same place again—under the chin.

Gunner's head went back and his feet went up—off the floor.

Crash!

CHAPTER 24.

Asking for It!

"MAN down!" called Jimmy Silver. "Ha, ha, ha!" Colthbert Gunner scrambled up. "Another fluke!" inquired Baby.

"Owl!" Gunner gazed at Albert Biggs rather fixedly.

"Sorry, sir!" said Biggs. "But you told me to 'it out!'"

"Then—then you really tried to hit my chin!" gasped Gunner, feeling his chin to make quite sure it was all there.

"Yeah! I'll aim for your nose next time, if you like!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Dickerson; it was dawning in on his mind that Albert Biggs had handled a pair of gloves before.

But Gunner didn't see it—or wouldn't see it. He gave Biggs a little more kindly advice, telling him exactly how to go about things.

"If you can get near my nose, do it!" he said. "But mind you don't leave your guard open."

"Or—right, sir! Thank you, sir!"

"Now go ahead again!" said Gunner. "And don't stop if you do have any more flukes like that—just go ahead and pile in for all you're worth. Stop when I give the word. Ready! Go!"

They started. Biggs had said he would go for Gunner's nose, and he did so—lingering a streamer of red from that organ. He did not stop. Following the tap on the nose, Biggs tapped Gunner's ear, his eye, his chin, and then his nose again—and he obeyed orders and tapped hard.

Gunner's face was a picture of astonishment. That any fellow could have such a remarkable series of flukes astounded him. But after being driven round and round the gam once or twice, with gloves hitting him, seemingly from every part

of the building, Gunner began to wonder if they were really flukes.

Biff, biff, biff!

"Owl! Oh, my hat!" gasped Gunner.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Jimmy Silver & Co. were howling with laughter. In a matter of two minutes Gunner was down on the sawdust four times—and even then it was not clear that Biggs was playing with him.

A final upper-cut lifted Gunner off his feet, and he sat and blinked up at the fellow he was "coaching."

"Owl!" he gasped, blinking rapidly.

"Oh, my hat! That—that's enough, kid!"

"Very good, Master Gunner!"

"Is the first lesson over, then?" asked Jimmy Silver. "It's all right, Gunner, old chap! Don't look so worried—I don't think you've hurt your pupil a bit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner staggered up, feeling various parts of his face. He felt as if he had been through a coffee-grinder in those whirling few minutes.

"Well, my hat!" he stammered. "I—I believe that kid knows as much about the game as I do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I think that will do 'for now!'" panted Gunner, eyeing Biggs not a little admiringly. "You can hit and no mistake, kid!"

"Thank you, Master Gunner!"

"I don't think I can teach you much—scarcely time in any case!" said Gunner approvingly, mopping his nose. "I think, after all, you'll be able to hold your own with Morny without any further coaching from me. Of course, I was only giving you a chance to let yourself go. Still, you're not so bad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly duffer!" laughed Jimmy. "Biggs was only playing with you, Gunner! He was having boxing lessons when he first walked! His pater was a pro. boxer, and he taught him nearly all he knows."

"Is—is that so?" stammered Gunner.

"And—and you silly dummkopf let me go on—pulling my dashed leg, you cheeky owl."

"Just that. Chiefly to take some of the silly swank and conceit out of you!" smiled Jimmy. "You asked for it, you know!"

"You—you—"

Gunner broke off suddenly, and his wrath changed to a grin. He held out his hand to Albert Biggs.

"Good man, Biggs!" he said, patting his shoulder. "If you can do that to me, then you'll handle that cad Morny all right! I'm going to be your second, and I jolly well hope you mop the ground up with that scheming cad!"

"I'm gunn' to try, Master Gunner!"

"Good man!"

Gunner marched out of the gym to clean himself up a bit. He was a sportsman, and now he saw how Biggs could shape. Gunner was of the opinion that Valentine Mornington was booked for a surprise!

CHAPTER 22.

Mornington's Fear!

"FEELING fit, old man?"

Cyril Peele asked the question as he entered the study after dinner. Mornington was seated in the arm-chair, his brow black, a cigarette between his lips. As he spoke Peele winked at Gower, who was seated on the window-seat, swinging his legs. There was more than a sneer in Peele's voice.

Mornington glanced up, and his eyes glittered. He did not fail to note the sneer, and he did not like it.

"Peele," he said curtly. "I want none of your dashed cheek! I've got one fight on this afternoon; but I'm quite ready to thrash you if necessary before that one!"

Peele's grin vanished abruptly.

"All right, I was only askin' a civil question, Morny," he said. "You needn't bite a chap's head off like that!"

Mornington did not reply. He sat savage and sulky, his brow deeply-lined with savage thought. Peele did not speak again for a while—he felt it was not safe. There was none too much love lost between the "pals" in that study, though they were friendly enough on the surface. But Mornington's bitter temper proved too much for Peele & Co. at times.

Just at present, however, Mornington was in a particularly vicious humour. And Peele and Gower knew the reason quite well—which explained Peele's sneer as he spoke to Morny.

And Mornington knew they knew the

reason. And it was the fact that they did which made Mornington angry now.

Despite Jimmy Silver's caution the news of the forthcoming fight soon got out, and by the previous evening all the Lower School knew of it. Jimmy did his best to stop the story spreading, but it was too late—Tubby Muffin had seen to that.

And so also had Mornington. Mornington—though he did not, naturally, mention what had led up to the fight being arranged—made no bones about letting anyone know. In his savage exultation, he was anxious for all to know. He wanted a crowd there when he thrashed the fellow he hated with such an unreasoning hatred.

But that was before he heard the news that Albert Biggs was no duffer at boxing!

When he did know that interesting fact, Valentine Mornington ground his teeth with helpless, mortified rage. The affair in the gymnasium was soon common property, and Gunner's "coaching" of Albert Biggs caused a great deal of hilarity.

Mornington, however, saw no fun in it. He knew Biggs was bigger and heavier than himself, and had a longer reach. But he had relied absolutely on the fellow knowing nothing whatever of boxing. He had fully expected a fight—he knew Biggs would fight like a wild-cat—but he had expected his superior knowledge of boxing would make up for all that. He had been supremely confident of thrashing the fellow. Such a possibility that he might be licked himself had never crossed Mornington's mind.

But it did now. And the thought—the dread—that he might be licked, after all, filled Mornington with savage apprehension.

He could not bear to think of it. After all that had happened—after being beaten again and again in his efforts to bring his enemy down, Mornington felt he could not stand a thrashing at his hands. It was not to be thought of. Mornington regretted bitterly now that he had agreed to fight. He would have given anything to withdraw.

But it was too late for that now. He knew only too well what the fellows would think if he did. Yet in his pride and haughty arrogance, Mornington felt he

could never bear the bitterness of defeat at the hands of the gardener's boy.

Mornington was thinking of it all now, and Peele and Gower were quite aware of what was in his mind. Peele spoke again after a pause.

"Morry," he said hesitatingly, "what's the good of gettin' ratty with your pals like this? You'll want someone to back you up this afternoon. But—but if you'll take my tip, old man, you'll back out of the scrap before it's too late!"

Mornington did not answer.

"I believe the little sweep's a bit of a wonder!" said Peele, eyeing Morry curiously. "I believe he handled Ganner like handling a baby! It won't do you any good to get licked, old man. Back out, that's my advice!"

"When I want your dashed advice I'll ask for it, Peele," snapped Mornington. "Think I don't know I'm up against it? You know dashed well I daren't back out!"

"Well, backin' out's better than gettin' licked!" said Peele cynically. "After what's happened that chap is bound to let you have it good and strong! Besides—well, I'm blessed if I should care to be licked in public by a chap like Biggs!"

Mornington gritted his teeth.

Peele was only echoing what was in his own mind. To do him justice, Mornington was not faking the fight—he had plenty of luck, and was not afraid of getting hurt—for from it. It was the hurt to his arrogant pride—the dread of defeat at the hands of this fellow—that he feared.

At all costs he must avoid that. Yet how could he if what he had heard regarding Biggs' ability with the gloves was true?

"Peele's right, Morry," said Gower, venturing to speak at last. "Climb down now you've got time, Morry! You can easily spin the yarn that you refuse to soil your dashed hands on the brute. I would, quickly enough."

"I know you would," sneered Mornington. "You'd climb down if Clarence Cuffy challenged you, you rotten funk. Shut up!"

Mornington got up from his chair and reached his cap. Then, without a glance at his elbows, he left the study, slaving mine the door behind him.

Peele chuckled when he had gone.

"Rather a lark, Gower, what!" he

grinned. "How are the mighty fallen! He was fairly gloating at the chance to make mince-meat of that kid. An' now he knows the kid can fight, he's fairly wallowin' in miserable funk!"

"Nice chap to call me a funk!" grinned Gower. "My hat! I'm blessed if I don't think a good licking would do him good—take some of the rotten bounce and swank out of him. He treats a chap like dirt sometimes!"

"He's not a funk, though," said Peele, shaking his head. "It's the dashed humiliation that he's funk'n'. Well, he asked for it! We'll be there all right to see the fun, what?"

"Yes, rather," grinned Gower. There was evidently little sympathy for Mornington in that study. It was because Mornington's wallet was "well-lined" that Peele & Co. "stood" Mornington—not because they liked him by any means.

Meanwhile, Mornington had walked out into the quad. There was plenty of time before the fight was due to start, and he meant to go for a stroll to think things over. He wanted to be alone. Toby, Muffin and several fellows were loitering by the gates. Toby chuckled as Morry came along.

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows," he grinned. "Morry's going out of gates! What price suddenly discovering he's got another appointment somewhere else? He funks that chap—yoo-hoo!"

Toby's cackling observations ended in a sudden howl as Morry made one quick stride and, before the fat youth could dodge, a vicious smack sent him spinning.

Toby finished spinning, and sat down with a hump and another howl. Mornington walked on, his face showing the size of his mind.

"Serves you jolly well right, Tabby!" grinned Tom Rawson. "Morry's a bad-tempered rotter, but he isn't a funk. You asked for it!"

"Yow-ee!" wailed Toby. "Oh, the beast! I believe he's gone off to dodge the fight, anyway."

"Rats!"

Toby Muffin rolled away, dimly rubbing a burning ear, and Rawson, Van Ryn and Pons strolled away chuckling.

Mornington walked on, his brow blacker than ever. He knew only too well the state of the general feeling in regard to the

fight. Some held that it should not be allowed; but he knew that nearly everyone hoped he would get thrashed. He wondered bitterly what Errol's hopes were. If only he hadn't taken the fight on!

As he walked through the gates and along the lane, a tradesman's tricycle came out of the tradesman's entrance of Rookwood, with a big, burly youth, with a red, ugly fawn on it. He wore a butcher's striped apron, and he had a big basket on the carrier.

He rode past Mornington, giving the junior a far from genial glare. It was "Butcher" Bagnall, the son of the local butcher—a youth who was the leader of a gang of village youths who were always more or less "up against" the Rookwood fellows. Jimmy Silver—and Mornington himself, for that matter—had more than once come to blows with Bagnall.

But as he sighted him now Mornington's eyes gleamed. Morny was in an evil mood now, and all that was left in his nature was uppermost. At all costs he meant to escape a hiding at Biggs' hands—or the risk of one.

He shouted after Butcher Bagnall, and the red-faced youth jumped off and waited for him.

"What's up?" he said sullenly and suspiciously.

"A chance to earn a quid!" said Morny coolly. "Show your like in the hedge out of sight, and come behind the hedge with me."

CHAPTER 25.

A Rascally Scheme!

BAGNALL stared at him.

"It's a genuine offer," said Morny, "an' it's a chance for you to get some of your own back on some of the fellows at Rookwood—fellows you're up against."

"Well, if it's like that, I'm on!"

Bagnall remounted his bike under cover. Then he followed Morny behind the lodge, after the latter had taken a quick glance round. Bagnall felt he had nothing to fear—Mornington was alone, and he knew he was a match for Mornington if that junior was up to trickery.

"What's the game?" he demanded. "If you're pullin' my leg, mister—"

"I'm not!" said Morny, showing two Treasury notes. "The game's this! There's a fellow from Rookwood I want putting away in a safe place for the afternoon. Bagnall. He'll be coming along this lane about two or after. It's your half-day off this afternoon, isn't it?"

"Just done me last round now."

"Good! I want you to get some pals—a couple will do—and collar this chap when he comes along, and take him into the woods as far as you can. Then tie him to a tree or somewhere, and leave him to it. Got that?"

"Crikey! What you take me for!"

"You've done worse than that many a time," said Morny impatiently. "Don't be a fool, Bagnall. A quid's a quid, anyway! It'll just be taken as a village rag—you can disguise yourselves if you like. Anyway, are you on?"

"Who is the bloke first?"

"It's not a Rookwood chap," said Mornington. "He's on the staff—works in the garden with old Babbage; you must have seen him—"

"I know the chap," grinned Bagnall, grinning as he jerked his thumb towards Rookwood. "I seed 'im just now workin' in the garden. New chap, he is—"

"That's the fellow!" said Mornington. "You needn't ask any questions—I shan't answer them if you do. But you can take it from me that you'll be doin' somethin' against Silver and that gang if you do this for me!"

Bagnall eyed him grinningly, and then he nodded.

"I'm on," he said. "I can 'andle that chap meself."

"You'll need two more, I tell you!" snapped Mornington. "He's a handful, I believe! But, remember this, you'll have to be careful. He'll be crossing the stile or to the woodland path. But there'll be plenty of fellows about. You'll have to be smart and slippery. If anybody happened to see you—"

"I'll watch that!" grinned Butcher Bagnall. "You leave it to me, Master Mornington. What about the quid?"

"Here's ten bob now," said Mornington, his eyes glinting with satisfaction. "You'll get the rest when the job's done. You understand? You—"

He broke off suddenly. A footstep had sounded in the lane. Pacing was up the

this hedge, Mornington sighted a youth hurrying along from Rockwood. His eyes blazed with sudden excitement as he recognized Albert Biggs, his green apron tucked round him.

"Pshaw!" Mornington gripped the hedge youth's arm fiercely. "Here he is! Take your apron off—sharp! We'll do it between us here and now! Down him and wrap that dashed apron over his head!"

"But—but——"

"Quick, you fool!" snarled Mornington, snatching out his handkerchief and tying it round his face below the eyes. "I'll chip in when you've got his head covered! Right! Now call him!"

Bagnall suddenly understood, and he ripped his apron off and held it ready, his pig-like eyes gleaming. Mornington jumped for the shelter of a thicket and dodged down behind it.

The butcher had stopped to the hedge.

"Hold on, kid!" he shouted excitedly. "Just a minute! Help!"

Albert Biggs almost jumped out of his skin. He stopped and stared at the hedge. Then he sighted the village youth, though he could not see his face.

"What——" he began; and then he hurried to the hedge. It suddenly occurred to him that there had been an accident. He had not the slightest suspicion of treachery, and without hesitation he squeezed through the hedge, jumped the shallow ditch beyond it, and landed safely on the grass.

Biggs' feet had scarcely touched the ground when a form suddenly sprang upon him—too swiftly for him even to glimpse what or who it was.

He crashed down, struggling furiously, but the apron flung round his head blinded and hampered him and the next moment he knew he was in the hands of more than one attacker.

The sheer unexpectedness of the attack dazed Biggs; but he was a quick-witted youth, and an instant later he was struggling with a strength and ferocity that must have given his attackers more than enough to contend with.

Over and over they rolled, fighting furiously. But the apron was now firmly wound round Biggs' head, and he was fairly gasping for breath, and could see

nothing. But he fought on, kicking and hitting out furiously.

It could not last, however. Mornington alone was more than his match in the present circumstances, while Butcher Bagnall was a couple of years older, and big and powerful at boot.

After several whirling seconds of silly fighting Biggs was held powerless, his new apron being torn into shreds and used to bind his arms to his sides. The other apron was right over his head now, the strings tied round his neck. It was impossible for Biggs to see anything, though he could breathe better now.

Who his attackers were he could only guess as yet. But he had seen the butcher's bicycle, and he knew by the smell of the apron that it was a butcher's apron. And as he had seen Butcher Bagnall riding up the tradesman's drive, he guessed who one was.

"You—you rascals!" panted Biggs. "What's this game? I know one of you, anyway! I see that bike, and I can smell this 'ere apron! I'll regret this lot, you see if I doesn't!"

There was no reply. Butcher Bagnall grinned at Mornington, who was mopping a streaming nose. It was not the first time that nose had been in contact with Albert Biggs' fist, and Mornington pointed into the woods and nodded.

"Right!" grinned Bagnall.

He was a reckless rascal, and he did not think of consequences. Indeed, he had taken part in far worse affairs than this. He finished tying the knots of the thick strips of green felt that had formed Biggs' apron, and then he gave Biggs a kick.

"March!" he said. "This way, my lad!"

"I won't!" panted Biggs. "If—if you 'adn't shoved this over my 'ead you wouldn't 'ave beaten me so easy. Let me get me 'ands free, anyway!"

"You won't, eh?" grinned Butcher Bagnall.

He grasped the lad's arms in a cruel grip, and twisted them, pushing him a few steps into the wood. Biggs writhed and struggled, but he gave it up at last. He knew it was foolish to resist in his helpless state, and he realized he was in the hands of ruthless enemies.

Amazed and seething with helpless rage, he allowed himself to be led into the woods, deeper and deeper. Brambles and branches tore at him as he stumbled blindly on for

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fully five minutes. Then he was halted and placed with his back to a tree.

"You 'owling ruffian!" he panted, withering in his attempts to break the tight bonds. "I'll make you sit up for this, Mister Butcher. I knows you, anyway!"

Mornington drew Bagnall aside.

"I'm off now!" he said coolly. "Here's the other ten bob! You can take your apron off him now—he knows you, and it's no good losing it. Besides, if it does cause trouble, you don't want to leave evidence. You can easily swear black's blue that it wasn't you! Give me two minutes, and then you can take it off!"

"Hold on!" said Bagnall, with an evil grin. "You mean to leave the bloke like this 'ere all night? A bit too thick, ain't it?"

Mornington bit his lip. He realized he could not do that.

"You can cut him free at about six o'clock," he said. "It'll be dark enough then; only I warn you to have somebody else with you. You see what a handful he is!"

"Right, mister! Leave it to me!" said Bagnall, grinning again. "But—but what's the game?" he added curiously. "I can't see what—"

"That's my business!" snapped Mornington curtly. "You're doin' the job, an' bein' well paid for it. That's enough for you, Bagnall!"

And Mornington plunged into the woods and tramped away. He felt no disgust—no remorse for what he had done. His bitter, evil temper and desire for revenge had full control of him now, and his better feelings were in abeyance. There was undoubtedly more good than evil in the head-strong, willful dandy of the Fourth, and yet the evil had the upper hand now.

Instead, he felt only triumph. He would turn up at the appointed time for the fight, but Biggs would not. Certainly the friends of Biggs would demand that the fight should be fought another time if Biggs himself did not. But he had saved his face; he now had a good excuse to refuse to fight Biggs another time. And he would. The fellows knew his passionate, arrogant temper—Mornington was wearing his old smoking-uniform as he entered the gates of Rookwood.

He would not have felt so satisfied, however, had he seen what happened to Biggs after he had left him.

Butcher Bagnall gave Mornington a few minutes, after which he unwrapped the apron from his prisoner's head. Then, with a mocking grin, he hurried away. Biggs, blinking dazedly, called furiously after him, but he did not heed.

A curious, startled suspicion had occurred to him at last.

Was this yet more of his enemy's work? He had not seen or heard a word from the second attacker. Yet it was quite possible that it was Mornington. Biggs knew nothing of the feud between the village roughs and Rookwood, and he could think of no other motive for the assault. The fellows at Rookwood were not likely to suspect Mornington, as Mornington well knew. Such a trick, subtle as it would seem, was quite in Butcher Bagnall's style.

As Biggs stood blinking there was a rustling in the bushes; and then, to his amazement, a figure stood before him. He was a Rookwood junior—a quaint-looking figure with a round, queerly-shaped head and big spectacles, through which blinked mild, benevolent eyes. His head, indeed, seemed too big for his body and legs.

It was Clarence Cuffy, the doffer of Rookwood—a relative of Tommy Dadd's, and a member of the Modern House.

"Dear me!" stammered Clarence, blinking at Biggs. "You appear to be in a very unpleasant predicament, my friend. Can I be of any assistance to you? I beg you not to hesitate to request my aid if you should require it."

"Blow me!" said Biggs, unable to help grinning. "I should just think I did, young gent! I seen you knockin' about Rookwood! Cut me loose, young gent, if you'll be so kind!"

"Most certainly—most decidedly I will!" said Clarence, with trembling eagerness. "I was looking for Mornington when I lumbered here, and I was most astounded—nay, shocked and horrified—to see you tied to this tree, and that brutal fellow, Butcher Bagnall, standing before you. I fear the misguided fellow is very wicked indeed! As I found a gold cuff-link belonging to Mornington, I thought I would do my fellow-pupil a good turn by returning the same to him. You see—"

"If you wouldn't mind cuttin' me loose—"

hinted Biggs, eyeing the eloquent junior curiously.

"Dear me! I was forgetting your unpleasant predicament, my friend!"

And Clarence, after much difficulty, cut Biggs loose.

"Thanks, young gent!" said Biggs, rubbing his cramped arms. "Now I'll be off, if you don't mind! I got to go to the nurseries in the village for Mister Babbage, and I got to 'urry back for an appointment at two-fifteen or so. Excuse me, young gent; I'll thank you properly agen when I see you."

With that Albert Biggs nodded gratefully to Clarence and dashed away through the woods at top speed.

"Dear me!" murmured Clarence, blinking after him. "What a very strange circumstance! But where can Mornington be? I imagined I was following him. I had better return with all speed to Rookwood."

Which Clarence promptly did. He was feeling disappointed that he had been unable as yet to complete his good turn to Mornington. But he felt very thankful that he had been able to do a good turn to Albert Biggs, the gardener's help. Clarence Cuffy little dreamed, however, what a very bad turn he had done Mornington.

CHAPTER 27.

A Shock for Mornington!

"READY, Mornington!"

R Jimmy Silver asked the dandy of the Fourth that question grudgingly as he met him in the quadrangle. From Tubby Muffin Jimmy had learned that Morny had gone out of gates, and the thought had occurred to him that Morny had gone off to escape the fight. He knew quite well that Mornington dreaded it—all the School House knew. Morny had been openly gloating at the prospect of thrashing his enemy—until he had learned what had happened to Gunner. After that Morny had shown his rage and apprehension by sulking and scowling at all and sundry. Naturally the fellows soon realized why.

The knowledge that he had gone out of gates an hour before the fight was booked to start was rather curious, and many fellows had grinned and talked about funking. But while Jimmy knew Morny wouldn't funk the actual fight, he also knew he would do anything to escape it now.

He was here, however, and Jimmy's face cleared again. Despite all he had done,

Jimmy could not help remembering that Morny had been decent until Biggs had come to Rookwood, and he hoped from the bottom of his heart that the fight, however it ended, would finish the absurd feud between the two.

"Yes," said Mornington, "I'm ready any time. You think that outsider will really turn up, Silver?"

"Of course I do!"

"Well, I don't!" said Mornington. "I don't believe that dashed yarn about him being such a wonderful boxer; it's spoof from beginning to end! It's sent out to try to put me off—to try to frighten me. But it won't come off! And now the lad knows I mean to go on, he won't turn up—you'll see!"

"What ret?"

Jimmy Silver broke off and hit his lip as Mornington, with studied insolence, turned his back and strolled away. A junior was just coming out of the School House. It was Kit Erroll.

Mornington's eyes glittered as he sighted him and walked over to him.

"Goin' to see the fight?" he inquired, with his mocking smile.

"No, I am not," said Erroll quietly.

"Afraid of seeing your precious pal knocked about—what?" sneered Mornington.

"I should not care to see him knocked about, Morny," said Erroll. "Nor should I care to see you knocked about by him."

He pressed, and looked at Mornington appealingly.

"Look here," he said steadily, "won't you drop this business, Morny—call this wretched fight off!"

"Afraid of your dear pal Biggs getting ticked?" jeered Morny.

"Not at all. I know he'll fight until he drops, and I know you also will fight until you drop," said Erroll, his brow clouding. "I'd give anything to be able to persuade you to call it off, Morny. It can do no good—only increase the bad blood—though goodness knows Biggs isn't the fellow to want trouble—you know that, Morny."

"It's all my fault, of course!" grumbled Morny.

"You know it is," said Erroll in distress. "Morny—"

"That's enough!" snapped Morny. "I tell you this, I'm going to make mince-meat of that kid, if he does turn up. But I fancy he won't—he knows better!"

Without another word—Morrington walked away, heading towards the gates to join Peels & Co., who were waiting there, obviously for him. Keroll gazed after him, strange thoughts working in his mind. He turned and went indoors, glum and sad. He wondered why Morny should suggest that Biggs might not turn up. But he had no intention of seeing the fight himself, and he went along to his study.

With Peels & Co., Morrington started out for the woods, and Jimmy Silver & Co. followed. They were not the only Classical juniors heading that way at that moment. Everyone wanted to see the fight.

"I feared Morny would fail to turn up, or try some of his tricks on," said Jimmy to his chums. "But he's going to too the line all right."

"He's no funk, anyway," grunted Lovell. "I don't like not backing up a Rockwood chap, but—well, I'm—I'm rather hoping that Morny doesn't win!"

"I'm afraid that's general," said Jimmy Silver. "His rotten trickery and unreasonable hatred of that poor kid has sickened the chaps. They're fed-up, and I don't wonder!"

The juniors crossed the stile and joined the crowd of fellows heading for a shaded dell in the woods where school fights often took place. Before dinner Jimmy had had a few words with Biggs, and he had given him careful instructions where to find the spot, though it was a very little distance from the woodland path, and very easy to find.

They arrived there, and preparations were made. The Fistic Four had brought all that was necessary, for Jimmy was determined that the affair should be done properly. The Classical Fourth had turned up almost to a man.

"Perhaps old Babbage won't allow him to come," suggested Dick Oswald suddenly. "He ought to have been here by this."

"He's asked old Babbage for an hour off—it's not his afternoon off, of course," said Jimmy Silver. "That's all right. He'll be along presently."

But Biggs did not come along presently. Jimmy Silver looked at his watch again and again impatiently, his face showing more and more surprise. It was two-thirty-five now.

"Blowed if I can understand this!" said Nanny Silver. "The kid knows the time, and should have been here long ago. Out

along to the path and see if he's coming, Baby."

"Right-ho!"

Nabby trotted off. He came back presently shaking his head.

"No sign of him," he said briefly. "Looks as if he's been delayed, or something."

"He, he, he!" laughed Tabby Muffin. "He funks it! I know he would. I say, you fellows, if he doesn't turn up, why don't one of you fellows take Morny on? Knock the conceit out of him, you know, The beast— Oh, I didn't see you there, Morny! I meant to say— Keep the beast off, you fellows! Yooop!"

Tabby fairly flew as Morrington made a savage stride towards him. But Morny suddenly halted and gave a mocking smile.

"So your man hasn't turned up, after all, Silver?" he said coolly. "I rather feared somehow he wouldn't. Well, I'll give him five minutes, and then—"

"One moment, my dear Morrington!"

It was Clarence Cuffy, and in Clarence's outstretched hand was a gold cuff-link.

"My dear Morrington, pray allow me to hand you this," he observed, beaming. "I have been hunting for ever an hour for you in order to return this to you. However," proceeded Cuffy, with smug satisfaction, "I am exceedingly glad to say that my time was not wasted. Though I had a very unpleasant journey into the depths of the woods while following you, I am very glad to say that by going I was instrumental in doing quite an unexpected good turn to a humble member of the school staff—Biggs, I believe his name is. He was—"

Clarence halted, quite frightened by the expression that had suddenly appeared on the face of Valentine Morrington. Morrington's face was floodish.

CHAPTER 22.

Hot Rice for Morrington!

ALL eyes turned on Morrington. The expression on his dark face was startling.

"You—you— What do you mean?" Morrington was stammering, a sudden terrible dread in his heart. He was wondering what Clarence was going to say next.

"What's that, Cuffy?" asked Jimmy

Silver, smiling. "You've seen Biggs—within the last few minutes, do you mean?"

"Oh, no, my dear Silver. On the contrary, it must have been nearly an hour ago," said Cuffy, blinking at the captain of the Fourth. "I was exceedingly distressed, as you may imagine, at seeing the unfortunate Biggs in such an unpleasant predicament. I immediately cut him loose from the tree, and he dashed away in a great hurry. He stated—My dear Mornington, what is the matter? I cannot understand why you are glaring at me in that extraordinary manner. Have I made you cross in any way? I sincerely trust not!"

Mornington flushed crimson. He bit his lip till the blood came in a desperate effort to control his feelings. He knew the worst now.

"Shut up, you long-winded, blithering idiot!" he snapped, trying to speak carefully. "Get out! Clear off, you footling ass! We've no time to listen to your tummy-rot now."

"But, my dear Morn—"

"Hold on!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "Cuffy, don't get I think we had better hear your story first. Don't you, you fellows?"

"My hat! I should jolly well think so!" said Culbert Gunner warmly, his glance on Mornington's livid face. "There's something fishy here, I fancy!"

The fellows eyed Mornington curiously now. Peels exchanged a wink with Gower and Lattrey. He felt that he understood, if nobody else did.

"Now, Cuffy, old man!" said Jimmy Silver quietly. "What's this about Biggs being tied to a tree? You said that—"

"I will certainly explain, my dear Silver," said Clarence, quite pleased at having an interested audience for once. "As I was explaining, I was following Mornington. I followed deep into the woods, being led onwards by the sound of someone—two or more persons, it seemed to me—advancing ahead. They stopped at last, and then, proceeded Cuffy impressively, "to my utter alarm and distress, I discovered Biggs tied hand and foot to a tree, with a butcher's apron over his head."

"Wha-at?"

There was a buzz of amazement from the Fourth-Formers.

"You—you don't mean that, Cuffy?"

"Most decidedly! And standing before

Biggs was that wicked youth Bagnall, of Coombe! As I watched him I saw him remove the apron from Biggs' unfortunate head, and then he went away. Recovering from my natural alarm, I at once ran to Biggs and released him."

"Well, my hat!"

"Who the confederate of Bagnall was I cannot say," proceeded Clarence mildly. "He must have disappeared the moment before I appeared upon the scene. It is a most remarkable occurrence, is it not, my dear fellows?"

"Phew!"

"It is very strange that you did not see them, my dear Mornington," said Clarence, blinking amiably at the black-headed schemer. "Very strange indeed! Your disappearance was most remarkable. However, I have found you now, and I am exceedingly pleased to have been so useful this afternoon!"

And Clarence Cuffy handed Mornington his gold cuff-link.

Mornington took it almost mechanically. He could feel—though he dared not look round—the scores of suspicious eyes fastened upon him.

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The silence was broken by Tabby Muffin. "If he, he! I say, Morny," he giggled, "where did you disappear to? There's a whole lot of grease on your coat-sleeve, old chap. Is it off Bagnall's sweat?"

"You—you fat ratter!" hissed Mornington, almost beside himself with bitter rage and mortification. "Why, I'll—I'll—"

He made a sudden spring at the cackling Tabby Muffin, but Jimmy Silver jumped between and pushed him back.

"No, you don't!" snapped Jimmy, his eyes glancing scornfully. "I fancy Muffin's hit the nail on the head! Where is Biggs now? We'll deal with this matter when Biggs arrives!"

"Here he is!" said Dick Oswald suddenly. "Oh, good!"

Through the trees a youth came dashing up breathlessly. It was Albert Biggs, right enough.

Mornington gave one look at the gardener's boy, and then he started to take off his coat.

But the dandy of the Fourth was howled out. He knew that no further evidence was needed by the juniors; their looks were condemning already. Mornington had failed, and there was nothing left but to fight it out. He was no coward, and he would fight to the last gasp. But Mornington's heart was bitter, and his rage made him tremble from head to foot.

"Here you are, Biggs!" said Jimmy Silver, handing the gardener's boy the gloves and eyeing the youth closely. "Why are you so late?"

"I'm sorry, sir!" panted Biggs, giving Mornington one long, searching glance. "But some fellows collared me and tied me to a tree in the woods. An' I 'ad to go to the village for Mister Baldage after that. It weren't my fault. This 'ere young gent with the specs will tell you all about it!"

"Yes, indeed!" observed Clarence, stepping forward again. "I must remark—"

"No, you won't!" said Jimmy Silver. "You're had your innings, old chap. Run away and play! Now, Morny, bolero we make a start, I'd like to ask you a question: Biggs was collared, and it looks to me as if it was just to keep him away from the fight. Do you know anything about it?"

Mornington drew a deep breath.

Nothing could be proved against him unless Clutcher Bagnall chose to give him

away, and the butcher's boy was unlikely to do that. But—

Mornington's eyes blazed recklessly. He knew that, whether he admitted it or not, the fellows had already made up their minds on the question.

"You want to know?" he asked sweetly.

"Yes—and I mean to find out sooner or later!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "These sort of tricks won't do for Rookwood."

"Then I'll tell you!" hissed Mornington, his face ablaze with reckless passion. "I was the fellow who helped Bagnall, and I paid him a quid for the job. So put that in your dashed pipe and smoke it—and hang the lot of you!"

"That's enough!" snapped Jimmy. "If you're ready, Biggs is. And I hope he gives you the thundering good thrashing you deserve, you rank outsider!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm ready!"

Mornington slipped on his gloves and jumped into the ring. Biggs faced him, his gloves dropping as Mornington refused to shake.

"Time!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

CHAPTER 22.

The Fight!

THE crowd of excited fellows closed in breathlessly as Jimmy Silver called out the word.

Knowing the bitter feelings in Mornington's breast and Biggs' deep, seething indignation at the cruel, unjust treatment he had received at Morny's hands, the juniors expected an exciting, grueling fight.

And they were not disappointed.

Mornington was flying at his enemy in a flash, scarcely waiting for the word. Biggs awaited his onslaught coolly, his arms brown and sinewy, showing up in striking contrast to the white arms of the dandy of the Fourth.

There was not much to choose between the two in height, weight, or reach. But the knowledge that Biggs was the son of a bruiser—a fellow who had been trained by his father almost from the cradle—made success for Mornington very doubtful indeed, despite the fact that he was one of the best men with the gloves in the Lower School at Rookwood.

But that first rush of Mornington's told that something else was not going to be in his favour—his own ungovernable temper.

The knowledge that his scheme had failed by the most unexpected for Blake—that it was now common knowledge, and that his rascally trick had filled his schoolfellows with contempt and scorn—was bitter indeed. It made Mornington more reckless and careless than anything else could have done. He was mad with rage and shame.

Since learning that Biggs could box, Morny had realised he would need all his skill, all his coolness and self-control, to hope to hold his own against the gardener's boy.

But he forgot all that now—or, if he did think of it, he did not heed or care.

He came on with a whirling rush, and smashed a blow at Biggs that would have felled the lad instantly had it struck him.

It didn't reach its mark, however, for Biggs' head moved a trifle, and the blow did pass him. As it did so Biggs' right flashed out, hitting Morny's chin with a jolt that rocked the junior from head to foot.

By a miracle Morny kept his feet, and as he swayed, a second clam went home under his left ear.

This time Mornington simply crumpled up and went crashing down.

"Begging and praying for it!" remarked Dick Oswald. "My hat, Morny's going to finish it quickly, as he said he would!"

There was a grim chuckle, and the dandy of the Fourth crimsoned as he heard it. Before three had been counted he was on his feet again, his hands up.

Biggs made no attempt to attack him, and Morny took the lead again swiftly enough.

"Steady, you fool!" called Peele.

But Morny ignored the call, wise as it undoubtedly was. He had fully intended to be careful—very, very careful. He had vowed, as he scrambled up after that severe shaking up, that he would control his savage temper and keep cool. But it was beyond him.

A tap on his nose from Biggs' left did it.

He went for Biggs like a whirlwind again, and Biggs smiled grimly and tacked away, his brown, flexible arms taking every blow, his head moving easily.

A sudden jolt pulled the dandy of the Fourth up sharp—a right hook that nearly

lifted him off his feet again. It was followed with dazzling swiftness by two more of the same kind. Mornington rocked on his feet, frantically defending himself to little purpose. And then—

The call of "Time!" undoubtedly saved him.

Mornington sank down on a fallen tree, viciously shoving aside the sponge Peele was offering.

"I'm all right!" he panted.

"You silly fool!" muttered Peele.

"You're simply chucking the game away. You won't last another round at this rate! For goodness' sake, pull yourself together and control your rotten temper! Why, Muffin could put up a better, show than that!"

Mornington ground his teeth. He knew only too well that unless he pulled himself together he was hopelessly beaten, though he had a bitter feeling that whatever he did that would happen. It was a feeling shared by every fellow there, and he knew it. He knew—he felt almost certain—that, if he had cared to, Biggs could easily have finished the fight in the first few seconds.

Mornington started the next round more cautiously, leaving the attack to Biggs this time. And he showed some of his own style, keeping Biggs off by desperate defence, though again he had the feeling that Biggs was only playing with him—that he could have got through the defence if he had liked. The thought filled Mornington with seething rage and mortification.

"I wish Biggs would finish it!" said Jimmy Silver to Raby. "This is— Oh, my hat! Good for you, Morny!"

An involuntary cry of approval escaped Jimmy. Morny had attacked with amazing suddenness, and his first blow slammed through Biggs' defence. It caught the garden-boy clean under the chin, sending his head back with a jerk.

It seemed to daze the youth, and before he had recovered Mornington sailed in with a fury and vigour that was as swift as it was unexpected.

A final right-hander with all Morny's weight behind it sent Biggs crashing down.

"One—two—three—four!"

Jimmy Silver suddenly ceased counting. Biggs was on his feet now. His lip was bleeding, and a bruise showed over his right eye, though Morny was in a far worse state already.

They were at it again next second, but Biggs had had his lesson. Morry did not touch him for the rest of the round, and Morry himself received severe punishment as he strove to follow up his brief success.

"Don't take him too easily, Biggs!" whispered Tommy Dodd warningly, as he fanned the gardener's boy's heated face. "He might easily have got you for good that time! If he once feels his feet, you won't and it too easy to lick him!"

"It won't 'appen again!" said Biggs.

Nor did it. Biggs up to now had shown little of what he could do in attack, though his defence had been superb. So far there had been little excitement, but now a change came over the fight.

It was very clear to all in the next round that Biggs had decided to dally no longer. His face was set hard, and he took the offensive at once.

Desperately Morry tried all he knew to defend himself against the attack. Back he went, struggling desperately, while Biggs rained blows upon him ruthlessly.

Crash!

A left hook sent Morry crashing down, but he was up again in a flash, a look of almost vicious determination on his face. Biggs was on him at once, punching hard, his defence never at a loss, driving the Rookwood junior round and round the ring.

Again Mornington went crashing down, and again he scrambled up, panting and bruised, but game enough.

"Go it! Oh, good man, Biggs!"

"Fislah it, man!"

The Haskwood fellows had been loth to shout for Biggs—at least, they were loth to shout against a Rookwood man. But they did now, for the fight was warming up in real earnest.

"Time!"

It was lucky for Morry that it came just then, for he was staggering and obviously helpless, though he was still game.

Biggs danced into the ring as fresh as paint when the call came for the next round, but Morry was groggy. He was blinking dazedly, and he staggered a little as he retreated before Biggs.

Only Mornington's iron determination seemed to be keeping him on his feet. A flying right-hander on the nose brought tears to his eyes, and his temper, which would never since Peole's warning, he had

held under control to some extent, suddenly blazed out.

Throwing all caution aside, Mornington went for the cool, steady Biggs like a cyclone, his exhaustion forgotten in a fit of ungovernable passion.

But Biggs eluded him like a will-o'-the-wisp by a dazzling display of swift footwork. Then, swinging backwards, he brought his left across with a wicked hook that sent Morry spinning.

That was the beginning of the end for the dandy of the Fourth. The sheer fury of that brief attack had exhausted him beyond belief. Following that wicked punch, Biggs set his lips and sailed in in deadly earnest. Morry retreated, desperately, vainly trying to avoid the rain of blows to face, ribs, and head that landed with deadly force.

Then came another of those wicked left hooks, apparently from nowhere—or so it seemed to the hapless Morry. It took the reeling junior clean under the chin, to send him crashing down on his back.

Biggs waited, his chest heaving slightly. But Morry lay there, a sea of excited faces swimming around him. Twice he struggled to rise, and each time he fell back helplessly. Jimmy Silver's voice went on steadily.

It finished at last, and Biggs reached for his jacket. Mornington strove desperately to pull himself together, seemingly unconscious of the fact that he was counted out.

"I'm not done yet!" he panted huskily. "I—"

"You're counted out!" said Jimmy Silver quietly. "The fight's over, Mornington. Biggs wins!"

"I—I— Hang you!" panted Morry.

He stared about him dazedly. Peole and Gower grasped him and helped him to his feet. Gower handed him his jacket.

"I—I'm not done!" exclaimed Morry. "I—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Peole roughly. "Dash it all, can't you see you're been licked, Morry? Blessed if I ever saw a chap put up such a footling scrap! What in thunder was the matter with you! Your rotten temper, I suppose!"

Mornington gave his "friend" a bitter, savage look—though he could scarcely see through either of his half-closed, swollen eyes. But he said nothing more.

He was beaten—hopelessly beaten! He

know he had not fought as he was capable of fighting. But at the same time he knew also that for most of the fight Biggs had also not done anything like what he might have done. He had played with him—could have knocked him out in the first round had he wanted to. He had not seemed to take the fight seriously—until the last.

It was bitter, humiliating knowledge to the dandy of the Fourth.

He was defeated, at all events—there was no doubting that. It was what he had feared—what every fellow there had expected, though they had certainly expected Morny to make a better show than he had done.

The fellows were moving away now, some of them looking disappointed, many of them wearing mocking grins. Biggs had his jacket on, and he came across to Morny and held out a hand frankly.

"I'm sorry it had to be, Master Mornington," he said quietly. "But I 'ope—"

"Get out, you hound!" gritted Mornington, and he dashed the proffered hand away violently.

Biggs half raised his fist, and then he dropped it and turned away, flushing.

"You—you rotten cad!" snapped Jimmy Silver. He had little sympathy for Mornington even in his hour of bitter defeat after that. "Now, look here, you rotter! There's been more than enough of this sort of thing. Now let's have no more of your rotten trickery, Morny. Biggs has licked you, and he's licked you in fair fight. But he's still a servant here, and he can't defend himself against a fellow who's bad enough to take advantage of his position. I give you fair warning, Morny, if you don't leave the kid alone then you'll be made to. Understand?"

Mornington's eyes burned.

He could scarcely stand or see. He had received terrible punishment, and he was a sight. But his deadly glare of animosity told Jimmy Silver that his words of warning were wasted.

"We'll see!" Mornington muttered hoarsely. "I'm not done yet! I know who I've to thank for all this, and I'm not likely to forget! I've been beaten all along the line, but my turn will come! And that—that sneakin', crawling guttersnipe shall know it when it does!"

Jimmy Silver did not reply; he turned his back, without a word, and joined his elbows standing a few yards away. Biggs had already departed, and Jimmy Silver & Co. followed the crowd back to Rookwood. The fight was over; Mornington had been thrashed.

CHAPTER 35.

Not Beaten Yet!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON sat in an armchair in deep thought. He had flung himself there after a prolonged visit to the bath-room, sick with misery and bitter humiliation.

The dandy of the Fourth's body felt a mass of bruises, and his face certainly was. His nose was puffed and red, and both his eyes were swollen and discoloured. He ached in every limb, and his head felt like lead.

But the hurts Mornington had received in that gruelling fight troubled him little—he scarcely gave them a thought. His thoughts were too full of the position in which he now found himself.

He had been licked—hopelessly thrashed by the fellow he despised—or affected to despise—and hated with a fierce hatred. He had been thrashed in public—thrashed by a servant belonging to Rookwood—a fellow he had done his best—or worst—to get "shifted" from the school by trickery and treachery.

But that was not all. Mornington had been exposed in public once again—exposed and condemned by his fellows for a trick that he knew full well was mean and contemptible. He had tried, by bribing a villager, to keep Biggs away from the fight because he knew Biggs would thrash him.

And he had failed. All he had gained was the scorn and contempt of all who knew him at Rookwood.

Even now, as Mornington crouched in the armchair, his brow black, his mind full of bitter, savage thoughts, he tried to excuse himself, tried to justify himself. But it was a failure. Deep in his heart he knew that it was his own folly—his own stupid, unreasoning jealousy, his savage and ungovernable temper, and suspicious mind. He tried to tell himself that his rival for Errol's friendship had triumphed—that Biggs had won, had taken away his

friend as he had suspected would happen from the first.

But he knew it was not true; he knew that he himself had lost his friend through his own wayward, wilful attitude.

With this realisation coming home to him Mornington found himself thinking of some way to regain his old chum. All his bitter animosity towards Biggs seemed to fade out of his mind. The old Valentine Mornington was beginning to take the upper hand.

Fed up with the position he had brought upon himself, he got up and left the study, and went for a walk, deep in thought still.

He looked the picture of misery as he strolled out of the gates into the lane, heedless of everything and everybody about him.

But the sound of footsteps behind brought the dejected Morny back to earth. He looked round, to see Biggs, the gardener's boy, with a big parcel under his arm, coming towards him.

"I'm sorry I've come between you and Master Erroll, Master Mornington," said Biggs, as he drew level with Morny. "I've decided to leave, as I don't like to upset such a nice chap as Master Erroll."

Mornington was silent for a few moments. He would never regain his chum, he thought, if Biggs left Rockwood. Erroll would blame him. There was nothing for it. Mornington must sink his pride and make it up with the gardener's boy, and stop him from leaving.

He held out his hand silently to Biggs.

"I'm sorry I've been a heartless beast to you—I've treated Erroll and you like a rotter. I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself now. I'd like you to believe that!"

"I can see you mean it, Master Morny," said Biggs, his voice trembling a little. "But I ain't letting Master Erroll down any more."

"Listen!" said Morny. "You haven't let Erroll down—and you are not going to leave Rockwood!"

And with that Morny gripped Biggs' arm, and they retraced their footsteps to Rockwood.

Erroll was standing by the gates as the pair came up. He stared at his old chum, a strange suspicion forming in his mind. Gone was Mornington's mocking smile. It was the Mornington he knew best—the Mornington he liked and admired—who stood by him now.

"Come up to the study—the old study, Erroll!" said Morny quietly, a break in his voice. "Can you forgive a chap who's been a howling cad and knows it, and wants to make amends?"

"Yes, I'll come!" said Erroll quietly. "And I'll forgive you, if you really mean it. I believe what you say about being sorry for what you've done!"

And he came! Over tea—with Biggs the honoured guest, though behind locked doors—the three made up their differences. Mornington had fully repented, for he was his old chummy self again, and nobody realises more than he that he had been his own enemy all the time.



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