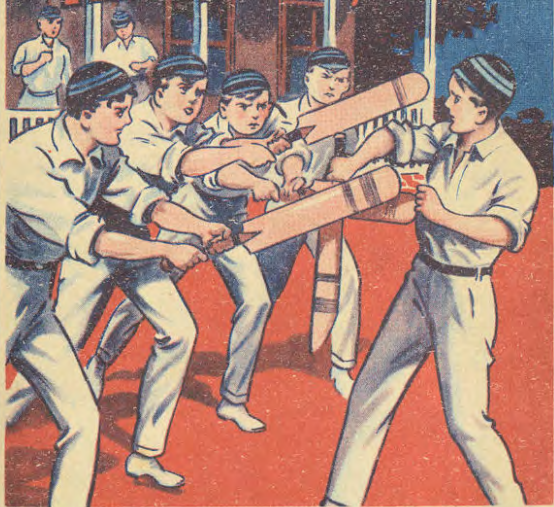


DROPPED FROM THE TEAM!

by
Owen
Conquest



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Dropped from The Team

By
Owen Conquest.



Not for the first time has Valentine Mornington's headstrong, unreasoning nature succeeded in turning his chums into enemies. But never before has the black side of the dandy of the Fourth's character led him to such lengths as described in this splendid story.

CHAPTER 1.

Let Down!

"BUTTER-FINGERS!"

A dozen Classical juniors howled out that uncomplimentary epithet on Little Side at Rookwood.

Valentine Mornington gave an angry glance round.

There was a big crowd on the junior cricket-ground at Rookwood. Jimmy Silver's team were playing the Modern juniors, and the game had been exciting. Luck had not been with the Classical cricketers. Jimmy Silver had done well in the Classical innings, and Lovell and Conroy had done fairly well; but Morny—generally a very reliable bat—had been dismissed for a duck's egg. And now, in the field, Mornington seemed, as a fieldsman, to be emulating himself as a batsman, and a drive from Tommy Dodd, which ought to have landed fairly in his palm, failed to materialise. The ball dropped at his feet, and the Classical crowd simply howled.

It was a catch that Tubby Muffin or Gunner could have made, and Morny had let it go!

"Butter-fingers!" yelled the Classics.

Tommy Dodd, at the wicket, breathed again. He was last man in on the Modern side, and the Modern score stood at 59; the Classical figure on their innings had been 60. Jimmy Silver had hoped for a hundred, but Morny's failure had let down the score. The game seemed up for the Classics, for Tommy Dodd at one end, and Towle at the other, had only to make one run to equalise, two to win, and both of them were good bats.

And then came that rather reckless drive, which had given Mornington his chance—the chance of a lifetime. An easy catch, and the Moderns out, one run short. Already the Classics had been prepared to yell for victory. And the ball slid past Morny's fingers and dropped, and instead of a victorious whoop there was a roar of angry derision.

"Butter-fingers!"

"Call that cricket?"

"What's the matter with Morny?"

"Silver was a silly ass to play him," Gunner told his immediate surroundings. "I offered!"

"Fathead!" rejoined Putty Grace.

"Well, if I couldn't make that catch—"
"scuffed Gunner.

Even Gunner, for once, was right. He could not have done worse than Mornington had done.

Morny's handsome face was crimson, his brows darkly knitted. He was not in form that day; at his best he was a splendid cricketer, but he was variable. Now, evidently, he was at his worst. The shouts that hailed his failure were anything but courteous; the disappointed Classics did not measure their words. An easy catch would have pulled the game out of the fire, and Moray had muffed it. So the Classical juniors let themselves go.

The ball came in smartly enough—no run was taken. But there was a new lease of life for the Modern innings, and every fellow on the ground knew what that meant. Tommy Dodd was not likely to give another chance like that. All was over bar shouting, as half a dozen juniors remarked.

Jimmy Silver was bowling to Tommy Dodd. Jimmy controlled his feelings well as he received the ball back. He had fully expected to see Tommy Dodd "out," and the game won. Now the result was uncertain; or, rather, it was certain in the wrong way. Jimmy sent down his best ball to the Modern wicket, but Tommy Dodd smiled and stopped it dead. He stopped the next ball dead; but at the next after that he let out with the willow.

This time there was no chance of a catch. The field were after the leather, and the batsmen were running. Once—and a chirrup from the Modern crowd announced the tie. Twice—and the roar announced the victory!

The ball came in seconds too late, scattering Tommy's wicket when it might as well have been left standing.

"Hurrah!" roared the Modern crowd. "Rotten!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Beastly!" said Newcome.

"Sickening!" grumbled Raby.

Jimmy Silver said no word; but his

looks were expressive, and his feelings were deep. Mornington met his eyes as the field walked off, with an expression of defiance, apparently expecting hot words. But Jimmy had nothing to say to the man who had let the team down. It was not Jimmy Silver's way to "rag" his men. Moray's failure was exasperating, and particularly unfortunate in the circumstances, but it could not be helped. Jimmy tried to live up to his own motto, and "keep smiling."

And as there was no reproach from his skipper, Mornington's defiant expression passed off, and a contrite look was on his face as he joined Jimmy Silver.

"I'm sorry, Silver!" he said.

"Can't be helped," said Jimmy. "It's rotten! The match was fairly in our hands, after all our bad luck. But these things will happen. But what was the matter with you?"

"Bit off colour to-day," said Mornington. "Not feeling quite up to the mark."

Jimmy compressed his lips.

The thought was in his mind that Valentine Mornington might have mentioned that earlier, in time for his captain to put another man in his place for the match. Matches between Classics and Moderns at Rookwood were very keenly contested—quite as keenly as School matches. There were half a dozen fellows who would have jumped at the chance of playing in Moray's place, and he had held on to the place when he was not up to the mark.

Words were useless, so Jimmy Silver did not waste his breath in uttering them.

He went into the School House with his chums, and Mornington walked away with Erroll. In the end study, while Lovell and Raby and Newcombe were getting a rather late tea, Jimmy Silver looked over a sheet of impot paper on which were scribbled the names of the Rookwood players selected for the match with St. Jim's, due in a few days. The list ran:

Silver, Lovell, Erroll, Van Ryn, Con-

roy, Rawson, Dodd, Cook, Doyle, Towle, Mornington.

After that day's match, Jimmy had intended to go over the list, making any final alterations that might be needed in the team, according to the form the players had shown. There was only one alteration needed for the St. Jim's list, but it was an important one. Jimmy wetted the lead of a stump of pencil, and drew a thick line through the name of Valentine Mornington.

Lovell glanced at the paper.

"Good!" he said.

"Nothing else to be done," said Jimmy. "I'm sorry Morny won't be playing, but the selection depended on to-day's match, and to-day Morny seemed to think he was playing marbles."

Lovell nodded.

"Morny will cut up rusty!" he remarked.

"Let him!" said Jimmy indifferently.

The prospect of the rejected player "cutting up rusty" did not worry Jimmy Silver. The junior cricket captain of Rookwood had plenty to think about, without taking into account considerations of that kind.

CHAPTER 2.

Trouble Ahead!

"HADN'T you better chuck it, Morny?"

Kit Erroll spoke in a tone of remonstrance. He had long finished his prep, and had been reading a book in Study No. 4 while he waited for his chum. Mornington was bent over his books at the table with concentrated attention, and a look of fatigue.

It was not like Morny to "swot," but he was swotting now. It was past nine o'clock, and bed was at half-past. Mornington had no special taste for the classics; indeed, he had been heard to deliver the opinion that they were "all rot," from Cæsar to Sophocles. But just now Morny was digging deep.

He did not answer Erroll's question—

he did not seem to hear it. His brows were wrinkled over a knotty phrase.

Erroll touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"Morny, old man——"

"For goodness' sake, don't worry!" snapped Mornington irritably.

Erroll drew back, colouring. His study-mate, his best chum at Rookwood, had a rather uncertain temper. Erroll had had plenty of experience of its uncertainty. He was always very patient with Morny. Passionate outbreaks, which were common enough with the dandy of the Fourth, were generally followed by repentance; and the friendship between the two was too deep and strong to be easily shaken.

Erroll sat down again, and Mornington looked up. The black cloud vanished from his face at once as he looked at Erroll, and he smiled. Morny's smile was very winning sometimes.

"Sorry, old chap! Don't take any notice of me," he said.

"I won't!" said Erroll, smiling, too.

"I'm a bear with a sore head now. The fact is, I was a bit of an ass to enter for the Head's prize."

"Not at all," said Erroll. "You've got as much chance as anybody in the Fourth or the Shell, I think."

"Excepting you," said Morny; "and you haven't entered. I believe because you knew I was goin' to."

"Rot!" said Erroll. "You've got a good chance, Morny, if you take care. But there's a limit to everything. You don't want to mug up Latin till your head spins. That's what you're doing now."

"Right on the wicket. My head's singin' like a hummin'-top with the dashed piffle," yawned Morny. "Conjugations and declensions are jolting up against subjunctive moods and deponent verbs in my poor old brain-box, and I can hardly tell t'other from which."

"Which shows pretty clearly that you've had enough for this evening."

"More than enough."

"Then come for a run in the quad

before bed and get some fresh air," suggested Erroll. "It's a ripping evening."

"I'm afraid of losing time," muttered Mornington. "I know I was an ass to enter. It's a bit above my weight. But now I'm in for it I'm goin' to win. It would be too rotten humiliatin' to fail to pull it off."

"My dear chap, there are a dozen fellows in for it, and eleven at least must fail to pull it off," said Erroll, with a smile.

"That's different," said Mornington, with a touch of arrogance. "I don't choose to be a failure. What's the good of startin' a thing and slippin' up on it? I'm going to bag the prize. I'll set up o' nights with a wet towel round my napper, if necessary, as I hear that Rawson does."

"You won't bag prizes that way, Morny. You want to keep yourself fit. Healthy mind in a healthy body, you know. You've been giving so much time to swotting lately you've mucked up your cricket."

Mornington frowned.

His failure that afternoon in the House match was bitterly humiliating to him to recall, and he did not like the mention of it even from his best chum.

Arrogance was a marked failing in Mornington's rather mixed nature. At any time he would rather have been first in a village than second in Rome. Nothing that was second-best was good enough for Morny; and the thought of failure was unendurable to him. It had surprised his friends when he entered for a difficult Latin exam of his own choice; but the idea having seized upon his volatile mind, he had thrown himself into "swotting" with his usual passionate intensity. He had "put in" for the Head's Latin prize, and he worked at his self-imposed task as if his life depended on it. At the same time, he was not willing for one moment to relinquish his place in junior cricket. With his usual superb self-confidence he was going to run the two things together, which was scarcely feasible.

With every leisure hour given up to intense study, he neglected cricket practice, and had hardly touched a bat for a week before the House match, with the result that he had lost the game for his side. Moderation in anything was quite foreign to Morny's passionate nature.

"You needn't rub that in, Erroll," he said rather sharply. "I had ill-luck to-day. After all, other fellows have scored duck's eggs and missed easy catches. Jimmy Silver's bagged duck's eggs before now—our great Panjandrum himself. I was feeling a bit off colour; fellow can't be always at the top of his form."

"I didn't mean to rub it in, old chap," said Erroll gently. "But the St. Jim's match is coming off soon, and you don't want to miss that."

"Not likely to miss it. It's our biggest fixture, excepting Greyfriars. I wouldn't miss it for worlds."

"The House match to-day was a sort of trial game," said Erroll. "The skipper was judging the fellows on their form."

Mornington raised his head haughtily.

"Silver would not be likely to leave my name out of the list, I hope!" he said.

"If you're not in form, old chap, he—"

"I shall be in form!"

Erroll did not answer. He could not help thinking that Morny was very unlikely to be selected for the school match after his pitiful show in the game with the Moderns. Mornington read the thought in Erroll's handsome, grave face, and he knitted his brows and drew a deep breath.

"By gad!" he said between his teeth. "If Silver should make that affair to-day an excuse for dropping me out of the eleven—"

"Be reasonable, old man," said Erroll. "Silver's a decent chap, and he wouldn't want to find an excuse for dropping you. He'd be only too glad to play you if you could help the team to win."

"And can't I?" demanded Mornington.

Erroll did not answer. He could see that his chum was in an unreasonable mood, and a dispute was futile.

"Can't I?" repeated Mornington angrily. "Are you backing up those fools who howled 'Butter-fingers' at me this afternoon? Can't a fellow go in for a prize without chuckin' up cricket?"

"Certainly," said Erroll. "But you're such a plunger, Morny. If you'd be a bit more moderate——"

"Oh, rot!" said Mornington irritably. "I could swot every hour we have out of the Form-room and still play cricket as well as any chap in the Fourth. I'm not goin' to have Rawson baggin' the Head's prize away from me. And I'm not goin' to be dropped out of the eleven. I'm goin' to bag the prize, and I'm goin' to play in the St. Jim's match, or there'll be trouble!"

Erroll did not reply to that. There was no reply to be made. Morny turned to his books again, but his ill-regulated energy had recoiled on itself. He was tired, his head was aching, and the Latin danced before his eyes. He rose from the table with an impatient exclamation.

"I'm fed up!" he exclaimed. "Let's get out for a run in the fresh air. Ten minutes will do me good, and I can put in another grind before bed-time. I've got to get on with it."

Erroll suppressed a sigh. He knew that after this passionate burst of energy Morny was likely to let two or three days go by in slackness, and lose in that interval most of what he had gained. Steady application was not in Morny's line.

The two juniors left the study and moved towards the stairs. There were three or four juniors near the head of the staircase, all but one of them grinning. The one who was not grinning was Peter Cuthbert Gunner, the new junior in the Classical Fourth. Gunner was talking. He generally was. There was indignation in his tones.

"Would you fellows believe it?" said Gunner. "As soon as I knew there was going to be a vacancy I hiked off to

Silver at once. And he said he would play me against St. Jim's—when do you think?"

"When?" chortled Tubby Muffin.

"When he plays them at marbles," said Gunner, breathing wrath. "Marbles, you know! Not at cricket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mornington stopped, with a rather curious expression on his face.

He tapped Gunner on the shoulder.

"What's that about a vacancy in the team?" he asked. "Do you mean the St. Jim's team?"

"Yes," grunted Gunner. "I heard Silver was dropping a man, after the game to-day."

"I saw the list in his study!" grinned Tubby Muffin. "He had it on the table, and there was a name crossed out."

"Whose name?" asked Mornington with outward calmness, though his heart was beating fast.

The fat Classical chuckled.

"Yours!" he answered.

"Mine?" said Mornington.

"He, he, he! Yes. After the way you mucked up the game to-day, you know——"

"Come on, Morny," said Erroll. His chum turned back along the passage.

"I'm goin' to see Jimmy Silver."

"But——" said Erroll uneasily.

Mornington did not look at him. With a black expression on his face he strode away to the end study.

CHAPTER 3.

Mornington Cuts Up Rusty!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. had finished prep, and were chatting in the end study before going down. Jimmy had been taking the advice of his chums on the subject of the vacant place in the Rookwood junior eleven. With both the Classical and the Modern sides to choose from, in making up a School eleven, Jimmy had plenty of material, in fact, so wide a range of choice that it was not easy to decide.

As Lovell was already in the team, his counsel was quite disinterested. But Raby could only suggest a youth named George Raby, while Newcome backed up the claims of Arthur Newcome! Whereat Uncle James of Rookwood smiled a gentle friendly smile. Only too gladly Jimmy would have put his best chums into the team for St. Jim's. But, good as they were, there were better men to be had, and the duty of a cricket captain came before all other considerations.

"Oswald!" was Jimmy's decision. "I can't help thinking that Oswald will fill the bill, as Morny's out."

"Well, he's a Classical, anyhow," said Raby. "Just like you to stick in another Modern, Jimmy, with four in already."

"I'd stick in any old Modern if he was better than Oswald," answered Jimmy Silver serenely. "We've got to win the match for Rookwood. I'm sorry, you chaps. You're no end hefty in House matches, but when it comes to a School match——"

"Bow-wow!" said Newcome.

"Rats!" said Raby.

But Jimmy's chums took his decision quite amicably. They knew that Uncle James would have left himself out if there had been a prospect of improving the team thereby.

That decision had been come to, and the Fistical Four were thinking of adjourning to the Common-room downstairs, when Valentine Mornington tapped at the study door and opened it.

Jimmy Silver nodded to him agreeably. He had unpleasant news for Morny, or he thought he had, and he desired to break it as gently as possible. Jimmy hated hurting any fellow's feelings—he was sorry even to wound a fellow's unreasonable arrogance. But with all his kindness of heart, Uncle James could be as firm as a rock when occasion required.

Mornington's manner was neither agreeable nor friendly. As a matter of fact, his late burst of energy at "sweating" had left him nervy and irritable,

and he was prepared to quarrel with anybody just then.

"I've heard something from Muffin," he said. "Is it true that you've scratched my name out of the list for St. Jim's, Silver?"

"I really don't know how Muffin knows," said Jimmy. "I certainly haven't mentioned it to him."

"Is it true?" demanded Mornington. "Quite."

"You're leaving me out?"

"Can't be helped, Morny," said Jimmy Silver amicably. "The fellows were on their trial in the House match to-day, and you know how you played."

"So that's the excuse?"

Jimmy compressed his lips a little.

"No need for any excuse that I can see," he said tartly. "You played like a fag in the Second Form. That isn't the style to take over to St. Jim's for the toughest match of the season bar one."

"Well, there's some need for 'an excuse," said Mornington. "Even our mighty Panjandrum can't play with the junior eleven just as he pleases without giving a reason. Is that the best pretext you could think of for dropping me?"

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothin' to say?" asked Mornington.

"Nothing, if you're going to talk like that. Not much use wasting breath on you, that I can see," said the captain of the Fourth.

Mornington's eyes glittered.

Arthur Edward Lovell grinned. He was not in the least impressed by Morny's "tantrums." Raby and Newcome looked on curiously. If there was going to be trouble they had every confidence in Uncle James. They were prepared to hold Jimmy's jacket for a fight, or to bundle Morny out of the study "on his neck," just as their study-leader should desire.

"And you think I'm goin' to stand this?" asked Mornington between his teeth. "Taken up and dropped just as you choose?"

"I don't see that you can do anything else. If you want to figure in School matches you must keep up to the mark. I'm leaving out two of my best pals because they're not up to the weight of St. Jim's," said the captain of the Fourth, "and either of them could play your head off, in your present form."

"Rubbish!"

"Let it go at that!" sighed Jimmy Silver.

"Then you're not putting Raby or Newcome in my place?" sneered Mornington.

"I've said so."

"Who's the happy man, then?"

"Oswald of the Fourth."

"You set up Oswald as a better player than I am?"

"Not as a rule," said Jimmy patiently.

"But he showed up well to-day, and you showed up rottenly. That settled it for the St. Jim's match."

"I'm not standin' it."

Another shrug from Uncle James. That kind of statement was not to be argued with. Arthur Edward Lovell broke in.

"Don't be a silly ass, Morny! You've got to stand it. Who the thump are you, anyhow?"

Mornington did not heed Lovell. His angry glance was fixed on the captain of the Fourth.

"So Oswald's baggin' my place?" he said.

"It isn't your place, Morny. A place in a cricket eleven belongs to the fellow who can fill it best."

"That's enough!"

Mornington turned on his heel and swung out of the study, closing the door after him with a slam. Jimmy Silver smiled slightly. It was not his first experience of Morny's "tantrums," and those tantrums did not affect his equanimity in any way. He was sorry to see Morny "play the ox," as he would have described it, and that was all.

"Cheeky ass!" commented Lovell.

And with that the Fistical Four strolled out of the end study and went

down to the Common-room, utterly unimpressed by Mornington's savage anger and resentment.

There was at least one fellow in the Fourth to whom the news of the change in the team was good news. That was Dick Oswald.

Oswald had worked hard at practice, in the hope of being selected, and now his ambition was realised. The following morning Jimmy Silver posted up the revised list, and Richard Oswald had the pleasure of reading his name there. Mornington looked at the list with a sardonic smile, and then looked at Oswald's smiling face.

"So you're goin' over to St. Jim's in my place, Oswald?" he said, with an unpleasant glitter in his eyes.

"Looks like it," said Oswald cheerily. "Sorry for you, Morny, and glad for myself. I'm in luck."

"Sure you'll be fit for the game?" asked Morny.

Oswald stared at him.

"I'm feeling pretty fit," he said, "and as the match comes off on Saturday, I don't see any reason why I should get out of form before then. What are you driving at, Morny?"

Mornington walked away without answering that question. Erroll, who had been looking on, followed his chum into the quadrangle with an uneasy look on his face.

"What have you got in your mind, Morny?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Nothin'!"

"No good feeling ratty with Oswald," said Erroll. "Silver gave him the place without being asked."

"It's my place. If a fellow bags my place in the eleven, he can take the consequences."

"What consequences?" asked Erroll sharply.

Mornington's lip curled.

"I'm not the kind of fellow to be treated like this," he said.

"Really, Morny, I wish you'd try to be a bit more reasonable," said Erroll, almost losing patience. "If you cut up

rusty in this way, your temper will get to be a standing joke in the Form. It's childish!"

"That is your opinion?" sneered Mornington.

"Well, yes. I think——"

"You've told me enough of what you think," said Mornington; and he turned and walked away.

"Morny!" called out Erroll, in distress.

Valentine Mornington walked on without turning his head.

CHAPTER 4.

Nipped in the Bud!

DICK OSWALD was at prep in Study No. 6 on Friday evening, when Mornington came in. His study-mates, Hooker and Flynn, glanced up at Morny's face, and exchanged glances. It did not need a second look to discover that the dandy of the Fourth had come to Study No. 6 to look for trouble. Oswald was chasing an elusive verb through the Latin dictionary, and did not look up till Mornington spoke.

"Busy, Oswald?"

"Well, yes, rather," said Oswald.

"Anything on?"

"I'll wait till you've finished," said Mornington politely.

"A good ten minutes yet," said Oswald.

"Right-ho!"

Valentine Mornington sat down, and crossed one elegant leg over the other. Oswald went on with his work, and Hooker and Flynn, after a curious stare at Morny, followed his example. There was silence in the study, broken only by an occasional yawn from Morny.

Dick Oswald finished at last, and rose from the study table. He gave Mornington an inquiring look.

"Go it, old top!" he said.

His cheery face set a little; he could see that trouble was coming.

"To-morrow's a giddy whole holiday for the fellows who go over to St. Jim's,"

remarked Mornington. "I'm sorry to deprive you of it, Oswald, but I want my place in the eleven."

"Don't be an ass!" said Oswald brusquely. "If you've come here for a row, Mornington, you'd better say so at once. I don't know whether I could lick you, but I'll put up a good try, if you're spoiling for it."

"Hear, hear!" said Flynn.

Mornington rose. His eyes were dancing with a mocking, wicked light, which showed that he was in his bitterest and most reckless mood. At that moment he seemed to be quite the old Mornington again—the Mornington of his worse days.

"Will you stand out of the eleven?" he asked.

"No."

"Let me explain," said Morny, with sarcastic politeness. "If you don't stand out, you won't be fit to play to-morrow, anyhow."

"Why not?"

"Because you'll have a fight on your hands this evening," said Mornington coolly. "Catch on? That's how I'm goin' to treat a pushin' cad who shoves himself into my place!"

Oswald flushed crimson.

"That's enough!" he said. "Put up your hands as soon as you like, Morny, you rotter! Pull that table out of the way, you fellows."

"Sure, and we will, and I hope you'll lick the baste," said Flynn. "Give me your jacket."

"What about the gloves?" said Hooker uneasily.

"Does Oswald insist on gloves?" asked Mornington, with a mocking, scornful grin.

"Come on!" said Oswald, between his teeth.

Oswald was a pacific enough fellow as a rule, but he was angry now.

Hooker and Flynn jerked the table and chairs away. They left the middle of the study free for the combatants.

No time was wasted. Mornington led off the attack, and Oswald met him half-

way, and in a few moments they were going it hammer-and-tongs. Oswald was angry, and Mornington was implacable, and from the start there was heavy punishment given and taken.

"Time!" called out Flynn, with his eye on the clock.

Mornington dropped his hands and stepped back. Oswald leaned rather heavily on the edge of the table.

"Enough?" asked Mornington.

Oswald did not even answer. He waited for the call of time, and when it came he plunged into the fight again.

There was a scuffle of footsteps in the passage, and the door opened, and Tubby Muffin blinked in. The scuffling and trampling and panting in the study had brought Tubby to the spot.

"A fight!" exclaimed Tubby. "Go it, Oswald! I say, what are they fighting for, you fellows?"

Crash!

Dick Oswald went down on the study carpet with a crash that made the dust rise from it.

He lay and panted.

"Time!" rapped out Flynn.

Mornington waited, with an evil smile on his well-kept lips. Two or three juniors gathered round the open doorway, looking on. Kit Erroll appeared among them, and his face was shocked and startled as he glanced into the study, and understood what was happening.

"Morny!" he exclaimed reproachfully.

Mornington glanced at him with a sneering smile.

"Well?"

"You're fighting Oswald because—"

"Because he's wedged me out of my place in the eleven," said Morny coolly. "Got anythin' to say about it, or can you mind your own bizney for once?"

Erroll crimsoned. Dick Oswald staggered to his feet for the call of time, and came on again gamely. He was outclassed in the fight. There were few fellows in the Fourth who could stand up to Mornington, and poor Oswald was

not one of them. But he had plenty of pluck, and he did not mean to give his enemy best so long as he could stand. But just as Flynn called time again, and the adversaries were closing in strife, there came an interruption.

"Stop!"

It was Jimmy Silver's voice. News had reached the end study by that time, and the Fistical Four had come along.

Jimmy Silver's brow was black as he strode into Study No. 6. As Morny did not heed his word, he grasped the dandy of the Fourth by the shoulder and swung him back.

Morny's eyes blazed at him.

"Let go my shoulder!" he hissed.

Jimmy let him go with a shove that sent Mornington staggering against the study wall. Oswald had dropped his hands, and he stood breathless and panting. Jimmy Silver gave him a stern look.

"Is that how you keep fit for a tough cricket-match to-morrow by scrapping in the study?" he rapped out.

"You—you see—" mumbled Oswald.

Mornington broke in.

"Would you mind gettin' out of the study, Silver, until Oswald and I have finished our little argument?" he asked, with mocking urbanity. "Two more rounds will finish him, I think, and then I shall be at your service."

Jimmy Silver swung round on the dandy of the Fourth. For once Uncle James was in a towering rage.

"This fight isn't going on," said Jimmy savagely. "Oswald, you're not to go on with it—not till after the St. Jim's match, anyhow. Got that?"

Oswald nodded without speaking.

"As for you, Mornington—" went on the captain of the Fourth.

"As for me," said Mornington coolly. "I'm goin' on with it, dear man; and if Oswald doesn't, so much the worse for Oswald. You don't really expect me to take orders from you, Silver?"

Jimmy's eyes flashed.

"You blackguard!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I can't see your game? You

want to knock Oswald out so that he can't play in the St. Jim's match tomorrow——"

"You're a giddy thought-reader!" said Mornington admiringly. "How do you spot these things?"

Some of the juniors crowded round the doorway laughed. But Jimmy Silver's face was angry and grim.

"It's a bit thick even for a swanking, evil-tempered rotter like you, Mornington," said the captain of the Fourth. "You're not going to touch Oswald again!"

"Who's goin' to stop me?" sneered Mornington.

"Little me!"

Mornington yawned.

"My dear man, if you choose to take Oswald's place, I'll lick you, with pleasure," he said, "and Oswald afterwards."

"Let him come on, Silver!" exclaimed Oswald.

"Dry up, Oswald! You've acted like a cad and a blackguard, Mornington, and you're going to have a lesson! Collar him, you fellows!"

Mornington sprang back.

"Hands off!" he yelled.

"Collar the cad!" roared Lovell.

Mornington put up his hands and struck out fiercely as half a dozen juniors grasped him, at the order of the captain of the Form. Lovell gave a yell as he received a hard set of knuckles on his nose, and Newcome sat down on the study floor with a jar. The next moment Valentine Mornington was swept off his feet.

"Let go!" he yelled, struggling fiercely.

For a few minutes there was a wild and whirling tussle in the study. Mornington, gasping with rage, struggled until he could struggle no longer. He came down on the hearthrug with a bump, and three or four pairs of hands pinned him there, face downwards. Jimmy Silver looked round, breathing hard.

"Give me a cricket-stump, somebody."

"Here you are!" chirruped Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy took a firm grasp on the stump. "Hold his ears and his hoofs and stand clear!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say——" began Oswald.

"Shut up!"

"If you dare to touch me with that stump——" gasped Mornington, choking with rage.

Whack, whack, whack!

The descending stump cut short Mornington's remarks.

The dandy of the Fourth struggled and wriggled, but he was well held, and the stump came down rhythmically, swiftly, and vigorously.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Jimmy Silver was angry, and, like the prophet of old, he felt that he did well to be angry. Mornington wanted a lesson, and he was going to get it. There was no doubt that he got it! A flogging from the Head would not have been more severe than the stamping Morny received on the hearthrug in Study No. 6. Knocking a fellow out to unfit him for a School match was beyond the limit, and the fitness of things had to be impressed on Morny, and Jimmy Silver did his best with the stump.

Twenty resounding whacks rang on Valentine Mornington, and then Jimmy Silver stopped, breathing rather hard.

"That will do!" he said. "That's enough for you, Morny. But be warned. Any more rot from you, and you'll get such a ragging you won't forget for whole terms! Will you promise to keep clear of Oswald now?"

"No!" yelled Mornington. "I—I'll——"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Will you give your word now?"

It was more than enough. Mornington turned up a white and furious face from the hearthrug.

"Yes! But I'll make you suffer for this, Jimmy Silver!"

"That won't worry me much!" said Jimmy, throwing down the stump.

"When you're cooler, Morny, I hope you'll be sorry for having played a dirty game like a cowardly blackguard. Get out, for goodness' sake!"

Mornington staggered from the study. His face was white, his eyes burning. He paused a moment in the passage to shake a fist at Jimmy Silver, and then he reeled against the passage wall.

"Come on, old fellow," said a quiet voice.

And Kit Erroll slipped his arm through his chum's and led him away.

CHAPTER 5.

Mornington is Mysterious!

"SEEN MORNY?"

Erroll of the Fourth asked that question in the junior Common-room at Rookwood, addressing nobody in particular.

It was getting towards bed-time for the Fourth, and most of the juniors were in the Common-room. But Valentine Mornington was not to be seen there.

Jimmy Silver shook his head as he met Erroll's glance.

"Not since——" Jimmy began, and stopped.

Arthur Edward Lovell chuckled, and finished the sentence for him.

"Not since we licked him in Oswald's study, Erroll. That isn't very long ago."

Erroll made no reply to that. After a rather worried glance round the Common-room, he turned and went down the corridor.

He paused at the foot of the big staircase, and then slowly mounted the stairs, and went to his study, No. 4 in the Fourth.

The quarter-past nine had chimed out; and, so far as Erroll had been able to discover, Mornington was not in the School House at all. He had looked for him in the study, in the Shell passage, and downstairs, and he was not to be found. If the scapegrace of Rookwood had gone out of school bounds, he was

in imminent danger of discovery, as he would certainly be missed if he did not turn up for dormitory at half-past nine. And Erroll, knowing that his chum was in a bitter and reckless mood that evening, was worried and a little alarmed.

He gave a slight exclamation as he came up to the door of Study No. 4. He had left the study in darkness, but the light was on now. Erroll pushed the door open quickly.

"Morny!"

Mornington of the Fourth was seated in the armchair in the study, his hands in his pockets, and his feet on the table.

He nodded coolly to Erroll as the latter came in.

"Hallo!"

"You here, Morny——"

"Nothin' surprisin' in findin' a chap in his own study, is there?"

"Well, yes," said Erroll. "I've been looking everywhere for you for the last half-hour. I—I was afraid you'd gone out of bounds."

"Lookin' for me?" yawned Mornington. "Well, I've been for a trot in the quad."

"I didn't see you come in."

"Oh, I got in at a window at the back!"

Erroll compressed his lips a little, but made no rejoinder. He knew now that Mornington had been out of the school after lock-up.

"Perhaps I went a bit farther than the quad," said Mornington meditatively. "Perhaps I dropped over the wall, and took a little ramble along the high-road in the giddy moonlight. Perhaps I met a man, and had a little chat with him. Why not?"

The dandy of the Fourth seemed quite cheerful, almost merry; but there was a sardonic, mocking light in his eyes that Erroll did not like. Certainly Morny did not look like a fellow who had received a Form licking a short time before—the effects of which he must still have been feeling. Erroll sat on the edge of

the table, regarding his chum with some uneasiness.

"And to-morrow," said Mornington thoughtfully, "is the merry cricket-match with St. Jim's. You're goin', Erroll?"

"Yes, as I'm in the team."

"You don't feel inclined to chuck it up, as a protest against your best chum bein' dropped from the team?"

Erroll looked deeply troubled.

"I can't very well, Morny, old chap. I wish you'd be a bit reasonable. Silver had to leave you out as you're not in form. I—I wish you'd let Oswald alone, Morny."

"You think it was rather high-handed to pitch into him, because he bagged my place in the team?"

"The place was given him, and you've made the fellows think that you wanted to crook him for the match to-morrow. I know it's unjust, but that's what they think now."

"They're right."

"Morny!"

"I was goin' to give Oswald a decorated visage that he couldn't possibly have been taken over to St. Jim's for a cricket-match," yawned Mornington. "Shocks you, old bean—what?"

"I should say so!" Erroll drew a deep breath. "If that's the truth, Morny, Silver was quite right to interfere, and you deserved the Form licking you got—every bit of it."

"Thanks! You always were a candid friend, old bean. But somebody may be sorry for that Form lickin', all the same," said Mornington, with a glint in his handsome eyes. "So you're goin' over to St. Jim's with the merry cricketers to-morrow, Erroll?"

"Certainly!"

"Leavin' me pinin' on my lonely own?"

"You don't ask me to cut cricket, Morny, because you've dropped practice and lost your place in the team?"

"Oh, no! Besides, you're vice-captain, and if anything happened to Jimmy Silver you'd be wanted to take the giddy command."

"That's not likely to happen."

"Stranger things have happened," remarked Mornington. "Somethin' might prevent Silver from goin' over. Then you'd be wanted. Suppose that were to happen, you'd play your own pal in the team, although Silver thinks he isn't good enough—what?"

Erroll gave his chum a startled look.

"Morny! You—you haven't—you can't have been playing any trick to keep Silver away from St. Jim's to-morrow! It's not possible——"

"How could I?" said Mornington, laughing.

"Of course, you couldn't," said Erroll.

"But if it happened——"

"What's the good of discussing what might happen, when it's practically certain not to happen?" said Erroll.

"Things do happen," yawned Mornington. "Jimmy Silver might be detained by the Head, or he might have an attack of apoplexy."

Erroll laughed.

"But if you did happen to get the captaincy for the day, Erroll, you'd play me?"

Erroll did not answer.

"Can't you give me an answer, Erroll?" asked Mornington, looking at his chum with a very unpleasant light in his eyes.

"How could I play you, Morny, when you're dropped from the team because you're utterly off your form, and not fit to take part in a fixture of any importance?" said Erroll impatiently.

"So friendship counts for nothin'?"

"It wouldn't in such a case. Why, Jimmy Silver has left both Raby and Newcome out of the eleven, though they're his pals, and jolly keen to play. If I were in his place, I hope I should do my duty as he does. So would you, Morny. But what's the good of discussing what won't happen? And it's bed-time."

Erroll slipped from the study table.

"I think you would play me, all the same, if you had the chance," said Mornington quietly. "If you had the

chance, and didn't stand by your chum, it would be the end of a good many things. I suppose you know that?"

Erroll shook his head.

"Then I'm glad the occasion won't arise," he said. "When you're more reasonable, Morny, you'll agree with my view. Anyhow, I'm not going to quarrel with you over something that won't happen. Let's get off to the dorm, before Bulkeley comes after us with his ash-plant."

Mornington said no more, and the two juniors joined the crowd of the Fourth on their way to the dormitory.

CHAPTER 6.

Called Away!

SATURDAY morning dawned bright and sunny on Rookwood School.

There were a dozen juniors that morning at Rookwood who were specially and particularly merry and bright.

For Jimmy Silver's team it was a whole holiday instead of a half, and the cricketers, who were going to St. Jim's, prepared for their journey instead of for morning classes.

Raby, who was not in the team, was going with them; but there was leave only for the round dozen, and Newcome was staying behind. It needed all Newcome's solid common-sense to realise that Jimmy Silver was right in leaving him out for a better man. Newcome did not quite see, personally, that the better man was better; and Jimmy's selection had shaken his faith a trifle in Jimmy's judgment. But he bore his destiny with cheerful resignation, and he helped Jimmy and Lovell and Raby to get ready. They were starting for the station soon after the rest of the school were due for classes.

"May give you a look-in in the afternoon!" Newcome remarked. "I think I'll come over and see the finish. I say, Jimmy——"

"Yes, old chap?"

"As Erroll's so jolly chummy with Morny he might like to hang on at Rookwood and keep him company!"

"Bow-wow!"

"He's helping Morny with his Latin, too, and Morny's swotting for the Latin exam——"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Newcome, old chap, give it a rest. Erroll's coming, if we have to carry him in a cricket-bag. Come over in the afternoon, if you can, and we'll all come home together."

The Fistical Four were in the end study just then, and there came a tap at the half-open door. Tupper, the page, presented himself there with a telegram in his hand.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "I hope that isn't from St. Jim's—can't be anything to prevent the match——"

"Master Silver——" said Tupper.

"Thanks, kid."

"Mr. Dalton said I was to bring it up to you, sir," said Tupper. "The boy's waiting for an answer."

Jimmy Silver nodded and opened the telegram. He glanced at it, with the same thought in his mind that had occurred to Lovell—that something might have happened at St. Jim's with regard to the match fixed for that Saturday. His chums watched him as he read it. They looked anxious as they saw Jimmy's colour change.

"Good heavens!" muttered the captain of the Fourth.

"They're scratching!" exclaimed Lovell.

"No—no! It—it's not from St. Jim's!" Jimmy Silver pulled himself together, but his lips were trembling. "It's from home! Father——"

"Bad news, old chap?" asked Lovell, his expression changing.

"Look!"

Jimmy's chums read the telegram. It ran:

"Your father seriously ill. Come at once.—PHYLLIS."

"It's from Cousin Phyllis," muttered Jimmy. "I—I didn't know she was staying at the Priory. Father ill—it must be jolly serious for a telegram to be sent calling me home. Oh!"

Jimmy caught his breath. He looked round the study rather blindly for a pen and paper.

"Ere's a form, sir," said Tupper quickly.

Jimmy took the form and wrote hastily:

"Coming by first train.—JIMMY."

Tupper took the telegram downstairs to be handed to the waiting telegraph lad.

Newcome had already got a time-table out of a drawer and opened it. Jimmy, with a white face, glanced over it for trains. All thought of the cricket match had been obliterated from his mind for the moment.

"Nine thirty-five at Latcham Junction," he said. "I can catch that on my bike, and leave the bike there. You fellows —"

"I'll get your bike out!" said Newcome.

"Hold on a minute. There's the cricket." Jimmy remembered that now. "I can't go over to St. Jim's. Erroll will skipper the team and Raby will play."

"That's all right!" said Raby.

"You can go with the eleven, Newcome, as a dozen fellows are given leave," said Jimmy Silver. It was just like Jimmy to think of his chum in that moment of deep trouble for himself. "I'll show this telegram to Mr. Dalton and speak to Erroll. You get my bike down to the gates ready, Newcome!"

"Right-ho!"

Newcome cut away down the passage. Jimmy Silver read through the telegram again and put it into his pocket. His face was pale still, but he was cool and collected.

"Good-bye, you fellows; play up at St. Jim's," he said. "I must see Erroll before I go, though!"

And Jimmy hurried out of the end study.

He looked into No. 4, but that study was empty. He ran downstairs, and came on Mr. Dalton in the passage. The Fourth master glanced at the telegram and looked very grave.

"You must go at once, Silver," he said. "I will explain to the Head. Let me know by wire or telephone if you are not able to return to the school to-night!"

"Yes, sir; thank you," stammered Jimmy.

He hurried out into the quadrangle. Mornington and Erroll were talking together there in the sunshine, and Jimmy spotted them. He hurried up to Erroll.

The latter stared at his pale, harassed face.

"Not time to start yet—" he began.

"I'm not going," said Jimmy hastily.

"I've had a telegram—"

"What!"

Erroll almost shouted the word.

"You're not going to St. Jim's, Silver?"

"No; I can't—now—"

Erroll turned a look full of black suspicion upon Mornington. He could not help remembering Mornington's words of the evening before; in his mind was the irresistible suspicion of a trick of some kind. Morny did not meet his glance. He was looking at the pigeons in the quad with a smiling face and whistling softly. His manner was perfectly cool and unconcerned.

"My father's ill," said Jimmy. "I'm called home—by telegram. I'm catching the train at Latcham Junction—on my bike. You'll skipper the team at St. Jim's, Erroll?"

"Yes, yes—but—"

"No time to waste. I've told Raby he's to play, and Newcome will come over with you. Beat St. Jim's if you can!"

"But—" panted Erroll.

"That's all!"

Jimmy Silver said no more, but started at a trot for the gates, where Newcome had already wheeled his bicycle.

Erroll made a step after him, but paused. He turned back to Mornington, who was still watching the pigeons.

"Morny—"

The dandy of the Fourth looked at him at last. He met Erroll's suspicious look with a cheery smile.

"So the unexpected has happened!" he said, laughing.

"Was it unexpected—to you?"

Mornington raised his eyebrows.

"What do you mean? I couldn't foresee the illness of Silver's estimable father, could I?"

"You were saying yesterday—" Erroll stammered. He had been unable to keep that black suspicion from flooding his mind; but already he was ashamed of it. It was impossible—there could be no trick. It was only coincidence!

"I was sayin'—what?"

"It doesn't matter," said Erroll. "The coincidence startled me—it's queer enough. I—I—"

"Poor old Silver!" said Mornington. "He looks a bit knocked over. Let's see him off."

He walked quickly down to the gates, and Erroll followed him. Newcome was coming back into the quad; it was too late to see Jimmy Silver off. Jimmy was on his bicycle, and the pedals were flying round. With his head bent over the handle-bars, Jimmy Silver was racing to Latcham Junction to catch the express. The cricket match—Rookwood—everything had vanished now from Jimmy Silver's mind—he was thinking of his father, of the house of sickness and danger, as he drove at the pedals, and the dusty road and hedges flew by him.

CHAPTER 7.

The Breaking of a Friendship!

"WELL?"

Mornington uttered that monosyllable in an interrogative and very significant tone.

It was close on time for morning lessons now, excepting for the cricketing party. Most of the juniors were discussing Jimmy Silver's hurried departure, with sympathy and concern for Jimmy and misgivings for the St. Jim's match.

The Rookwood juniors were going over to St. Jim's minus their skipper and best bowler. It put a different complexion on Rookwood's prospects. Kit Erroll was a good man in Jimmy's place, so far as the captaincy went. But Raby in his place, as a player, was a very second-best substitute. Raby was good enough in his way, and a fairly reliable bat, but it was the champion bowler that would be missed. Jimmy Silver was the last man that could be spared, with Mornington off his form and out of the team.

"Well?" repeated Mornington, as Erroll

did not answer. Erroll was deep in thought.

Morny touched him on the arm.

"Yes, yes, what is it?" asked Erroll.

"Thinkin' out the giddy problem?" asked Mornington, with a touch of sarcasm.

Erroll smiled faintly.

"Even cricket captains don't see eye to eye," he said. "Jimmy's put Raby into the team, and I should rather have picked out Putty Grace. But they're much of a roughness, so I shall leave it as it stands."

"You're cricket captain now!"

"For to-day!" assented Erroll.

"You've a right to choose your own men."

"Well, yes. But it wouldn't be quite the thing to make much of a change in the circumstances. After all, Jimmy's got good judgment, and he picked out Raby for the vacant place. I was only thinking that Putty is a bowler, and we want bowlers."

"His highness didn't stop to think of that," said Mornington satirically. "Raby's his chum."

"That wasn't his reason," said Erroll rather sharply. "I shall leave the team as Jimmy left it."

"Well, never mind about Putty Grace," said Mornington. "I wasn't wastin' time thinkin' of him, as a matter of fact. But there's a vacancy in the eleven, and you're not bound to play Raby."

"It's Raby or Putty, and I'm going to follow Jimmy's judgment. I think it's better so."

"What about little me?"

"You!" repeated Erroll, as if to gain time.

"Little me!" said Morny, with an unpleasant smile. "I'm supposed to be a cricketer."

Erroll looked worried.

"It's no good beginning on that, Morny. You know you're off your form."

"I know nothin' of the kind," said Mornington deliberately.

"In the House match—"

"Hang the House match!"

"Well, it's no good arguing," said Erroll. "You've been giving all your time for weeks to swotting for the Latin prize, and you've cut cricket. You don't want to go over to St. Jim's and let the side down, Morny."

"I think I should put up a good game,"

"Silver didn't think so."

Mornington's eyes glistened.

"Never mind Silver," he said. "Silver's off the scene now. I'm dealin' with you, Erroll. You're skipper to-day, and you can play any man you like. Silver dropped me from the team. I want you to put me in again."

"I can't, Morny!"

"You mean you won't?"

"No. I don't mean that, old fellow," said Erroll patiently. "You ought to know that I don't. If you were in your old form I'd jump at the chance of having you, we want you badly enough. But you know how you lost the Classical side the House match, and that was a trial match for this fixture. Silver had no choice about dropping you. And now we've lost Silver I couldn't dare to take risks with the team."

"So that duffer, Raby, is a better cricketer than I?"

"Not as a rule—not half so good as a rule. But he's better now, and you'd know it if only you'd only be reasonable."

"The long and short of it is that you won't play me, Erroll!"

"I can't!"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome came out of the School House with Conroy and Rawson. They were ready to start.

"Time, Erroll!" called out Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I'm ready!"

"Time for you to get into the Form-room, Morny," said Conroy. "The other fellows are gone in."

Mornington did not heed. His eyes were fixed on Erroll. There was bitter chagrin and anger on his face.

Lovell & Co. looked at him and at Erroll's distressed face, and they probably guessed what the ill-assorted chums had been discussing. They walked on towards the gates, Lovell shrugging his shoulders expressively. Erroll turned an almost beseeching look on his chum.

"I must get off now, Morny—we're ought to be in the Form-room. Mr. Dalton—"

"Hang Mr. Dalton!"

"Well, good-bye, Morny!"

"Hold on a minute," said Mornington, his eyes glittering. "There's still time,

Erroll. I was determined to play in the St. Jim's match in spite of Jimmy Silver. You know how I dealt with Oswald? Well, I failed in that. But I expected you to play me when you had to take Jimmy Silver's place as skipper."

"You—expected—" muttered Erroll, with a startled look.

"Yes."

"But you couldn't have known—you couldn't have foreseen—" That black suspicion came into Erroll's mind. "Morny!"

"Never mind that!" interrupted Mornington. "You've got the chance now to do me justice—your pal! Will you play me in the St. Jim's match? There's still time!"

"I can't!"

"Then what I've done I've done for nothin'!" said Mornington between his teeth.

"What have you done?"

"Nothin' that I choose to explain to you, Kit Erroll."

"Mornington."

Mr. Dalton appeared in the School House doorway. "You are late for classes. Come, come, my boy!"

The Fourth Form master turned back into the house, supposing that Mornington was lingering over his good-bye to his chum, little dreaming of the rage and bitterness that ran riot in Mornington's breast at that moment.

"Cut off, Morny!" muttered Erroll.

Oswald passed on his way to the gates with Van Ryn, giving Morny a rather grim look as he passed. Erroll made a movement to follow them.

"So that's the end!" said Mornington, almost choking. "All for nothin'! I'm left out of the team, after all! And it's my own chum who's given me the boot."

"Morny, old man," said Erroll miserably.

"Are you coming, Erroll?" bawled Arthur Edward Lovell from the gates. "We're starting. You'll lose the train!"

"I must go, Morny!"

"Leavin' me behind," said Mornington between his teeth. "You know I'd play you if I were in your place, if you wanted me to, if it cost us every win at cricket for the whole season."

"I hope not—it wouldn't be playing the

game. You ought not to ask me, Morny. You know you oughtn't!"

"That's enough! You refuse?"

"Yes."

"That's your answer! And here's mine!"

With that Valentine Mornington struck full at Erroll's face, and his open palm rang on the junior's cheek like a pistol-shot. Erroll staggered back with a startled cry, and fell in the quad.

Valentine Mornington stood for a moment, with a hateful smile on his lips, looking down at Erroll, and then he strode into the School House. Erroll rose dazedly to his feet. He put his hand to his cheek, and stood still looking dazed, staring after Mornington as the latter disappeared into the House. Then, compressing his lips hard, Kit Erroll hurried down to the gates and joined the cricketers on their way to the station.

CHAPTER 8.

A Surprise for Jimmy Silver!

JIMMY SILVER sank back breathlessly in the carriage as the express rushed out of Latham.

He had caught the train with some minutes to spare, and left his bike at the station. For some time he sat breathing hard, while the express rattled and thumped on its rapid way.

The journey was a long one, and it seemed to lengthen out before the anxious schoolboy.

A dozen times at least he read and re-read the telegram, and every time its significance seemed to grow more terrible, more fatal. Unless his father's state was very serious, he would not have been called away from school suddenly like this without any previous warning.

And the illness must have been very sudden. The last letter from home, only a few days before, had contained no mention of it. The torturing thought came into his mind that it was more than serious—that perhaps he would even be too late. He tried to drive the thought away, but it recurred, and would recur.

The gnawing fear that possessed him left no room for other thoughts in Jimmy's mind. Even the cricket match at St. Jim's, in which the Rookwooders, deprived of

their captain, would soon be making an uphill fight, was forced into the background by the unexpected blow that had befallen him.

He changed trains twice, almost like a fellow in a dream. It seemed to him that ages had elapsed before he stepped out at last at Denwood, the station for the Priory.

He hurried out of the station, and looked round for a conveyance, not doubting that the car would have been sent for him. But there was no sign of a vehicle waiting.

It was a surprise. He knew that his reply telegram must have been received. There was no vehicle available but the old hack that stood by the Red Cow, and Jimmy, without stopping to think the matter out, jumped into it and urged the driver to get on speed. But it was a slow journey over the mile of country lane to the Priory.

His home at last!

Jimmy jumped out of the hack, raced up the drive, and reached the door, which opened as he reached it.

It was opened by a grave-looking gentleman, who had evidently seen Jimmy's breathless arrival from a window, and had come out to open the door to him.

At the sight of him Jimmy gave a suffocated cry.

"Father!"

"Jimmy, my boy!"

For a second or two Jimmy Silver wondered whether he was dreaming. He had come home tortured with fear and anxiety, to find his father on a bed of sickness, and it was his father who opened the door to him, obviously in his usual health.

The reaction was too much for Jimmy.

He gave a choked cry and staggered, and would have fallen had not his father's arm caught him.

Mr. Silver's face was startled and anxious.

"Jimmy, what is the matter?"

Jimmy tried to speak, but he could not. The tears were running fast down his face.

His father drew him gently into the house and into the study that opened from the hall. Jimmy sank into a chair, feeling utterly weak and overcome.

"Now, my dear boy, what is the matter?" said Mr. Silver gravely. "I received your telegram, and was very sur-

prised to receive it. Why have you come home, Jimmy?"

"Father!" panted Jimmy.

"What has happened at Rookwood? Is there some trouble at the school?"

"Father, are you well?"

"Certainly."

"You have not been ill?"

"No."

Jimmy passed a hand over his dazed brow.

"Is Phyllis here?" he asked.

"No; she has not been here since the last holidays."

"Then—then it beats me!"

Jimmy Silver snatched the crumpled telegram from his pocket, and handed it to his father.

He was quick to recover himself now. There had been a mistake—or a deception. But his father was well. That hurried journey of fear had been for nothing.

Mr. Silver read the telegram with the greatest astonishment, and a deep frown came over his brow.

"You received this at Rookwood?" he asked.

"Yes. And I came——"

"A wicked, foolish trick!" said Mr. Silver. "It was not sent by Phyllis. It was not sent from here. My dear boy, you must have been startled when I opened the door to you." Mr. Silver understood now, and his face became soft for a moment. "My dear boy, I have never been better in my life. This is some silly practical joke!"

Jimmy clenched his hands almost convulsively.

"I want to get hold of that practical joker, then!" he said, between his teeth.

His father examined the telegram.

"Handed in at Denewood this morning," he said. "It was sent from the local post-office here by someone who knows our affairs, or he would not have used the name of Phyllis. I shall give information regarding this at the post-office, Jimmy, and the matter will be inquired into, and the scoundrel found and punished, whoever he is. But what can have been the object of such a trick I cannot imagine. And to-day, I think, was the cricket match you have told me so much about at St. Jim's. You are missing it."

"I wasn't likely to think much about a cricket match, dad, when I—I thought——" Jimmy stopped, with a catch in his voice. "Thank goodness you're all right, and it's only a trick!" But his father's words had brought the St. Jim's match back to Jimmy's mind, and he rose to his feet. "I—I wonder if there's time to——"

Mr. Silver looked very thoughtful.

"This wretched trick has kept you away from the match, Jimmy?"

"Yes, father."

"That might be the motive, yet how could anyone at Rookwood contrive to have a telegram sent from this place, so many miles from the school?"

Jimmy started.

"My hat! But it's impossible, father. Nobody from Rookwood could have come over here so early."

"Or sent someone?" said his father.

Jimmy wrinkled his brows. It came back into his mind that Mornington was missing after the Form licking the previous evening. He remembered how Erroll had been seeking him. It had struck him then that the reckless scapegrace of Rookwood had gone out of bounds. Was it possible that Mornington——

He remembered the attack on Oswald, who had Morny's place in the team. That was not much better than this trick, and as for an agent, Morny could have found one easily enough. He had old acquaintances at the Bird-in-Hand, at Coombe. Had Mornington played this cruel trick on him in revenge for being dropped from the team?

Jimmy Silver's eyes blazed at the thought.

Was it possible?

Mr. Silver was watching his son's face attentively. Jimmy flushed a little under the old gentleman's glance. If it was indeed Mornington who had descended to this business, Jimmy meant to reckon with him with his own hands. But to hint such a suspicion was impossible without the fullest proof. And there was no proof, only dark surmise, only his knowledge of Mornington's reckless, passionate temper.

"Well, Jimmy?" said Mr. Silver.

"If it was a Rookwood fellow, father; if it was——" Jimmy stammered. "I hope it couldn't have been. But if it was

"I'll find out. I—I don't care so much for the cricket match now—now it's all right at home, dad. But if there's a chance of getting to St. Jim's—"

"I am afraid not, my boy. Your friends must have left the school fairly early."

"Soon after I did."

"Then they must have reached St. Jim's before you reached home, Jimmy, as it is nearer to the school. You could not get there before the afternoon."

Jimmy drew a deep breath. He had had a heavy blow, but he mustered up his fortitude to stand it. It was no use crying over spilt milk. The game must have started at St. Jim's already.

"Can't be helped, dad," said Jimmy, with a faint smile. "I hope they'll pull it off without me. It's a good team, and Erroll's a good skipper."

Jimmy's heart was heavy, but he smiled. After all, his father was well. He was left off with the fright, so to speak, and that was a consolation for everything.

But as he sat at a late lunch that day at his home Jimmy's thoughts were with the Rookwood cricketers at St. Jim's, and never had he found it so difficult to live up to his own maxim, and "keep smiling."

CHAPTER 9.

Under Suspicion!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON sauntered in the quadrangle at Rookwood, with his hands in his pockets, whistling softly under his breath.

Lessons had long been over. It was a half-holiday, and the Rookwooders had dispersed in various directions. Some of the fellows had taken train to St. Jim's to see the finish of the cricket match. Mornington was not one of them.

Mornington thought he knew the result of that match in advance. Rookwood had lost their best bowler, as well as himself, and Kit Erroll was not likely to be at the top of his form that day. Mornington's lip curled with cynical bitterness at that thought. There was no remorse, no relenting in his hard heart. Remorse, repentance would come perhaps. There was good in Mornington as well as evil—more good than evil—but so long as he was under the

sway of his present mood of reckless bitterness there was no repentance.

It was in the summer dusk that the cricketers arrived from St. Jim's, and Mornington watched them come in. They did not look like a victorious team. Kit Erroll glanced at his whilom chum, and flushed, but walked on to the School House without speaking. He had not forgotten the scene in the quad. Neither had Morn' forgotten it.

"How did it go?" asked Mornington, addressing the cricketers generally.

Arthur Edward Lovell grunted.

"St. Jim's won by thirty runs, if you want to know."

"Dear me!" smiled Mornington. "What a pity you left out your best man!"

"Couldn't help leaving out Jimmy, as he had to go home."

"I wasn't thinkin' of the estimable Silver, dear boy."

"No," said Lovell, with a snort. "You were thinking of your estimable self and of the duck's eggs and muffed catches you might have put in."

And Lovell snorted again contemptuously and tramped on. Valentine Mornington shrugged his slim shoulders and smiled.

It was a little later that Jimmy Silver arrived in the end study.

"We—" began Lovell.

"I know," began Jimmy, with a nod. "I heard it from Tubby Muffin as I came in. Hard luck!"

"Your father?" asked Lovell.

"All serene. He hasn't been ill," said Jimmy quietly. "The telegram was a trick to keep me away from the cricket match."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Lovell. "Then who—what—"

"But it came from your home," muttered Raby. "Why should anybody there—"

"It came from the post-office at home," said Jimmy. "But it was a put-up job by somebody who wanted to keep me away from the match. Somebody at Rookwood"—Jimmy's jaw set grimly—"somebody I'm going to find and reckon with."

There was a silence in the end study. But one name was in the minds of the chums of the Fourth, one name, and that name was Valentine Mornington.

CHAPTER 10.
The Last Straw!

"YOU'RE not wanted here, Jimmy Silver."

Mornington of the Fourth spoke in a hostile tone over his shoulder, hardly looking round, as Jimmy Silver entered Study No. 4.

Jimmy did not heed.

He came into the study, closed the door behind him, and crossed over to the hearthrug, where Mornington sat in the armchair.

Kit Erroll, who was at the study table with his books before him, looked up uneasily.

But he did not speak. The look in Jimmy's face boded trouble, and Erroll knew that the trouble must come. Mornington, leaning back in the armchair, with one elegant leg crossed over the other, regarded the captain of the Fourth with knitted brows.

"I think I mentioned that you're not wanted here, Silver!" he drawled.

"Probably not!" assented Jimmy. "I've got a bone to pick with you, all the same, Mornington."

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"I've not come as an enemy—not as yet, at any rate," continued Jimmy Silver quietly. "I've got to get at the truth, and I'm willing to hear what you have to say."

"I've nothing to say to you."

"Rookwood were beaten at St. Jim's to-day," said Jimmy Silver. "You know, Mornington, that I was called home by a telegram just before the team started for St. Jim's."

"I'm not interested in your movements, my dear fellow."

"But you know that fact," said Jimmy Silver. "The telegram stated that my father was ill, and was signed with the name of my cousin Phyllis."

"I hope the excellent old gentleman is better," said Mornington carelessly.

"My father was not ill at all. The telegram was a spoof. It was sent from Denewood post-office, near my home, by some rotter who was playing a trick on me—"

"Quite a mysterious affair!" yawned Mornington. "But no need to tell me about it. I'm really not interested in

practical jokes played in your native village, Silver."

"It was not anybody belonging to the village that played the trick, Mornington. Nobody there had any motive. The telegram kept me away from the cricket match at St. Jim's. It was sent for that reason, and for no other reason."

"Really!"

Kit Erroll started to his feet. His look was startled.

"Silver," he exclaimed, "are you serious? You—you mean to say that the telegram was a trick—that—that—"

He broke off.

"Just that!" said Jimmy Silver. "I didn't find it out till I got home, and then it was too late to get to St. Jim's for the match."

"Good heavens!" muttered Erroll.

"I'm not interested," drawled Mornington. "But there's one point that seems to have escaped your powerful brain, Silver. I believe your home is about a hundred miles or so from this school. Could a Rookwooder get over there to send a telegram to you without bein' missed?"

"No. But he could get some rogue to do it for him."

"Oh, that's the idea, is it?"

"That's it!" said the captain of the Fourth. "I'm going into the matter to get at the facts, and the rotter who dished me over the St. Jim's match is going to get it in the neck."

"Still, I don't quite see why you should confide in me," smiled Mornington. "I'm not the least little bit interested in your adventures, and I really can't help you in any way."

"I want to know if you sent the telegram?" said Jimmy Silver bluntly.

"You know I never left Rookwood this mornin'."

"Don't beat about the bush, Mornington. Whoever did it got another fellow outside the school to take the telegram into Wiltshire and dispatch it from Denewood post-office. Did you do that?"

"What a question!" smiled Mornington. "You can hardly expect me to say 'Yes,' and if I say 'No,' you won't believe me. Upon the whole, I think I'll say nothing."

"That won't do."

"I'm afraid it will have to do," said Mornington negligently.

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath. He had come to Study No. 4 prepared for

silence from the dandy of the Fourth, and he was getting what he had expected. But he restrained his anger.

"Will you give me your word of honour, Mornington, that you had nothing to do with the sending of the bogus telegram?" he asked.

"I decline to say a word on the subject." Morny glanced at the door. "I've mentioned that you're not welcome in this study, Silver."

"That's all you have to say?"

"That's all, dear man."

"Very well. You will have to answer to the Form!" said Jimmy Silver. "The matter doesn't rest here."

The captain of the Fourth quitted the study without another word. Valentine Mornington stretched his legs and yawned. He gave Kit Erroll a rather curious, ironical look. Erroll had sunk into his chair again, his grave face pale and troubled. His eyes were fixed on Mornington.

"So that was it!" he said in a low voice when the door had closed behind Jimmy Silver.

"I don't quite follow!" yawned Morny.

"You got that telegram sent, Mornington. I know now. You were fixing it up when you went out of bounds on Friday night."

"Do you think so?"

"You did it to keep Jimmy Silver out of the way," continued Erroll, with increasing bitterness of look and tone. "Jimmy away, I took his place, as vice-captain. You worked it out that I should play you after Jimmy had dropped you from the team."

"And you refused," said Mornington.

"I refused, as I was bound to do, as you could not have put up a good game for Bookwood, though I did not then know what I know now," said Erroll. "A suspicion came into my mind, but I drove it away. You asked me what was unreasonable. I refused, and you quarrelled with me, and—and—"

"And punched you!" said Mornington coolly.

Erroll winced.

"I would have stood even that for the sake of our friendship," he said in a low voice. "It's not much more than I've stood from you at other times, Mornington. I've believed that you were decent at heart, and that your evil ways were only on the

surface. I've borne with you for that reason more than any other fellow would have borne, I think. But this—this is the finish."

Mornington laughed sarcastically.

"Is your back up at last?" he asked.

"You've played a dirty, cowardly trick, whether the fellows find you out or not," said Erroll in a low, distinct tone. "You made Silver believe his father was dangerously ill—a rotten, cowardly, dirty trick. You made us lose the match at St. Jim's by keeping Silver away. That's bad enough, though not so bad as the other. I've stuck to you through thick and thin, Mornington, till now. But I've nothing more to do with a fellow who forges a telegram. If it's found out, you'll be punished by the law. It means imprisonment. It will be what you deserve."

"Quite a long speech!" said Mornington. "Why not go to Mr. Dalton's study and tell our merry Form-master? He can telephone for the police."

"I shall not do that," said Erroll, rising. "I've told you what I think of your conduct, and it's the last thing I shall say to you. I shall not speak to you again."

Erroll crossed to the door and left the study, his face pale and set. Mornington half rose, a startled expression on his face, but he sat down again without speaking. The door closed behind Erroll, and Valentine Mornington remained staring at it.

Erroll was gone.

Mornington could hardly believe it yet. His friend had been so patient; never yet had he turned on the fellow who had tried his patience and his forbearance so often. Even the hasty blow struck in the quad would not have shattered the friendship, Morny knew that. But the realisation sunk into his mind now that it was ended, that he had lost, by his own wilful, passionate waywardness, the best and most devoted pal a fellow ever had.

Mornington sat a long time in silence in the lonely study.

His handsome face was clouded.

He had risked that friendship often enough, and always it had stood the strain he had put upon it; there had seemed no limit to Kit Erroll's patience and forgiveness. He had risked it once too often, and now it was a thing that had ended.

But when Valentine Mornington left the study later, and strolled down to the Common-room, his face was cheery and

smiling, and he looked like a fellow that had not a care in the world. No one would have guessed from his smiling face the black care that was eating into his heart.

CHAPTER 11.

Called to Account!

BULKELEY of the Sixth glanced round the dormitory.

The Classical Fourth were all in bed, and the captain of Rookwood was about to turn out the light.

The Classical juniors were very quiet, but Bulkeley of the Sixth knew them pretty well. He was aware of a suppressed under-current of excitement in the dormitory, and he divined that something was "on." So he paused before he turned out the light.

"Silver!" he rapped out.

Jimmy Silver glanced at him from his pillow.

"Yes, Bulkeley?" he said meekly.

"No larks in this dormitory after lights out!" said the prefect.

"Larks!" repeated Jimmy Silver innocently.

"Yes, you young rascal. I should think some of you, at least, would be ready to go to sleep after the journey you've had today. If you're thinking of celebrating the St. Jim's match with a pillow-fight, or anything of the kind—don't. I shall come along with a cane if there's any row."

And with that the prefect turned out the light and departed.

There was a chuckle from some of the beds.

"Keen as mustard, isn't he?" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell. "He doesn't know what's on, all the same."

"Not a pillow-fight, at any rate!" said Raby.

"Are we turning out now, Jimmy?" inquired Newcome.

"Give Bulkeley a chance to get clear!" answered Jimmy Silver. "He'll be safe in his study in ten minutes."

Erroll's quiet voice broke in.

"Is anything on, you fellows?"

"You're the only fellow that doesn't know," said Lovell. "You were moaning out in the quad when we were fixing it up. There's going to be a Form trial to-night."

"For what—whom?"

"Mornington, of course."

"Oh!" said Erroll, and he said no more.

"Takin' a lot of trouble on my account!" said Valentine Mornington's cool, drawing voice. "Dear men, I'm not worth it!"

"You're going to get it all the same, Morny!" said Lovell. "You'll get fair play, which is more than you gave Jimmy Silver with your dirty tricks."

"Hold on, Lovell!" chuckled Conroy, the Australian junior. "Don't find Morny guilty before the chap's been tried."

Arthur Edward Lovell grunted.

"He's guilty, right enough," he exclaimed. "But we'll give him fair play, and then give him his gruel."

"Perhaps he won't take his gruel," suggested Mornington's silky voice.

"There won't be any choice about that. You wait till we've found you guilty, you rotter!"

Evidently Lovell's mind was made up already, and he could hardly be considered an unprejudiced member of the jury.

The Classical Fourth waited impatiently for the interval to elapse till it could be considered safe for the dormitory to turn out of bed and constitute the court for the trial.

The story of the bogus telegram, which had called Jimmy Silver away on the eve of the St. Jim's match, was common property now, and suspicion generally rested on Mornington.

His bitterness at being dropped out of the team furnished the motive, and his attack on Oswald, who had been given his place in the junior eleven, was an additional evidence of what he was capable of.

Jimmy Silver had little doubt on the subject; Lovell none at all. But many of the other fellows thought it possible that Mornington might be able to clear himself—many of them hoped he could. The Form trial would, at least, give him a chance, and a good many of the Form kept open minds on the subject. Suspicion was strong against Mornington, but it had to be acknowledged that no actual proof had so far been forthcoming.

Jimmy gave the signal, by turning out of bed, and lighting a candle-end. The rest of the Fourth followed his example, and five or six candles were lighted—the juniors did not venture to turn on the electric light. It was necessary to keep

proceedings very private, and to keep masters and prefects from chipping in. Important as the affair was from the junior point of view, it was certain that Mr. Dalton, or the Head, or the Sixth Form prefects, would not have realised its importance if they had known of it.

The candles shed a glimmering light over part of the long, lofty dormitory. Every fellow in the Classical Fourth turned out, excepting two, Mornington and Erroll. Jimmy called to Kit Erroll, whose eyes were open; he was not thinking of sleep, although obviously he did not want to take part in the trial of his whilom chum.

"Turn out, Erroll."

"You won't want me, Jimmy," answered Erroll. "There's plenty for the jury without me, old man."

"You're wanted as a witness, not on the jury!" answered Jimmy.

Erroll bit his lip.

"I've no evidence to offer!" he said. "Whatever Mornington may have done, I was not in his confidence."

"I know that! I know you wouldn't have been a party to a dirty trick. But your evidence will be wanted all the same."

"Very well!" Erroll turned out, slowly enough. Then the captain of the Fourth called to Mornington.

"You're wanted, Morny!"

"Sorry!" answered Mornington, with cool politeness. "I'm goin' in for my beauty sleep, an' I'm afraid I can't be bothered."

"Turn out!" roared Lovell.

"Shush!" said Putty Grace. "You'll have the prefects here, old scout, if you do your Bull-of-Bashan toots."

"He's turning out," snorted Lovell, "or—"

"Mornington!" said Jimmy Silver quietly. "You know that you're going to be tried by the Form. Turn out."

"My dear man, get on with your kid games, an' don't mind me," said Mornington coolly. "I'll look on—if I don't go to sleep."

"Have him out!" snorted Lovell.

Several juniors made a movement towards Morny's bed. His cool nonchalance had an annoying effect on the Classical Fourth. But Jimmy Silver quietly interposed:

"Don't handle him yet!" he said. "If he chooses to be tried in bed, he can stay there for a bit. But I warn you, Morning-

ton, that you're doing your case no good by this cheek."

Mornington yawned portentously.

"I'll leave my case in your hands, dear man," he said. "I'm really not interested in these fag games."

"Are we going to stand his cheek?" howled Lovell.

"Never mind his cheek," said Jimmy Silver. "Let's get to business. Form up for the court!"

The court was soon arranged. As Mornington remained obstinately in bed, his bed was constituted the prisoner's dock. The other fellows sat on the neighbouring beds. Jimmy, as captain of the Form, was the judge, and the rest of the Form were the jury. Erroll was excluded from the jury, as a witness, which was a relief to him, for certainly he did not want to join in passing sentence on his former chum.

Mornington leaned on his elbow in bed, looking on at the proceedings with an air of cool contempt and indifference.

His manner, as Jimmy had warned him, did his case no good. Some of the juniors were annoyed by it to the extent of making up their minds without waiting for the evidence. The Form trial was an institution at Rookwood, and the juniors liked it to be taken seriously—not at all in the flippant, scornful manner in which Morny was taking it.

A bolster and a pillow having been disposed on a washstand to make up a seat for the judge, Jimmy Silver took up his position on that coign of vantage, and the court opened.

"Prisoner at the bar"—Jimmy's glance turned on Mornington—"guilty or not guilty?"

"Any old thing!" answered Mornington coolly.

"Will you answer?" asked Jimmy, breathing hard.

"I've answered."

"Then—"

"Hold on," interposed Erroll's quiet voice. "It's not been stated yet what Mornington is accused of."

There was a chuckle from some of the jury. The judge coloured a little.

"That's soon said!" he exclaimed. "He knows, anyhow."

"Stick to the forms of law, though," said Putty Grace. "The prisoner in the bed—I mean at the bar—is entitled to hear the charge."

"Yes, rather!" said Gunner. "I don't think much of this judge, if you ask me!"

"Nobody did ask you!" snapped Lovell.

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Look here, Gunner——"

"Silence in court!" exclaimed Conroy. "Jurymen are not allowed to slang one another in the jury-box."

"He, he, he!" came from Tubby Muffin.

"Order!" rapped out Jimmy Silver. "Mornington, you are accused, on suspicion, of having had a bogus telegram sent to me at the school, to call me away just before the St. Jim's match. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

All eyes were turned on Mornington. That youth closed his eyes, laying his head peacefully on the pillow.

"He's gone to sleep!" ejaculated Tubby Muffin. "He, he, he!"

And then there was laughter in court.

CHAPTER 12.

Tried and Condemned!

JIMMY SILVER held up his hand for silence. His face was clouded with anger. Mornington's insolence was trying his temper to the uttermost.

"Mornington, will you answer?"

No sound from Morny, and his eyes remained closed. Lovell started up with an angry exclamation.

"I'll jolly soon make him speak!"

"Order!"

"Hold on," said Jimmy, waving Lovell back to his place. "Order in court! The prisoner refuses to plead. The trial will go on."

"He's guilty, if he doesn't say he isn't!" snorted Lovell.

"We shall see. Mornington!"

Morny's eyes opened, and he yawned.

"Hallo! You fags still goin' it?" he drawled.

"Yes, we're still going it," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "Do you wish to answer to the charge now?"

"Not at all. You're barin' me."

"Very well. You know what you're accused of—one of the meanest and dirtiest tricks a fellow could play. Gentlemen of the jury, you are aware that Mornington was dropped out the cricket eleven, after playing the goat in the late House match, which was a trial match to pick the players

for the St. Jim's fixture. You are aware that he cut up rusty."

"Yes, rather!"

"Oswald!"

"Adsum!" said Dick Oswald.

"You will tell the jury what happened in your study."

"Go it, Oswald!"

Oswald stood up.

"Mornington came to my study, and picked a quarrel with me," he said. "He told me I'd got his place in the team for St. Jim's, and he was going to knock me out, or words to that effect. His game was to make it impossible for me to go to St. Jim's with the eleven. He would have done it, if other fellows hadn't chipped in and given him a Form ragging."

"Have you any fault to find with the witness' statement, Mornington?"

Yawn from Mornington. That was his only reply.

Jimmy compressed his lips.

"You can sit down, Oswald. Erroll!"

"Here!" said Erroll.

"On Friday evening, the day before the match, you were hunting for Mornington up and down the House?"

"Yes."

"Did you find that he had gone out of school bounds?"

"I—I supposed he had."

"Do you know for certain?"

Mornington looked across at Erroll with a mocking smile.

"We're waiting for your answer, Erroll," said the judge.

"I can't answer that question."

"Why not?"

"Well, I can't."

"Mornington!"

"Hallo, old bean?"

"Did you go out of school bounds on Friday evening?"

"Find out!"

"Did you go out," continued Jimmy Silver, "to see some shady rotter you knew in Coombe, to bribe him to go over to Denewood, near my home, and send a bogus telegram from there?"

There was a buzz in court, and all eyes were fixed on Mornington. The dandy of the Fourth smiled.

"What an idea!" he said.

"Yes, or no?"

"Whichever you like, old bean," said Mornington affably. "Like the little boy in the circus who wanted to know which

was the lion and which was the tiger, you pays your money and you takes your choice."

There were symptoms of laughter in court again; but the judge did not smile.

"The jury will note that the prisoner does not deny it," said the judge. "Erroll, when I was called away by a trick, you took over the captaincy of the eleven for St. Jim's. Did Mornington demand a place in the team on the ground of your friendship for him?"

"He asked for a place," said Erroll in a low tone.

"Did he betray any knowledge of the fact that I should be called away, thus making his own pal captain in my place, and able to give him what I had refused him?"

Every eye was fixed on Erroll now. He was silent, and his lips trembled a little.

"I'm sorry, Erroll, as Morn's your pal," said Jimmy. "But you see for yourself that we've got to get at the truth. It's your duty to state the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. You know that?"

"I—I know."

"If Mornington knew I should be called away, then the case is proved. Did he admit to you that he knew?"

"He did not say so."

"He wouldn't say so, I suppose. But did you think he knew from what he did say?"

"I—I may have had a suspicion," faltered Erroll. "But what I think isn't evidence, Jimmy."

"As soon as you knew that the telegram was a bogus one, did you believe then that Mornington had caused it to be sent?" demanded the judge. "Did it fall in with what he had let out to you?"

Erroll was silent.

"The jury are waiting for your answer, Erroll," said the judge, kindly but firmly. "You're bound to speak."

Still Erroll did not speak. He did not look at Mornington, though he felt his former chum's mocking eyes upon his face.

"Well?" said Jimmy Silver, after a long silence.

"I've nothing to say," said Erroll at last. "I can't give you facts, and my opinion is not evidence."

"This court rules that your opinion shall be stated. We've got to get the truth out

somehow, and we all know that you know it."

"Go it, Erroll!" urged Conroy.

Silence.

"Very well," said the judge. "I will put the question in a different manner. You shall not state your opinion, but you shall repeat everything that Mornington has said to you on the subject, and we will draw our own conclusions."

Still Erroll was silent.

"Several fellows saw, and partly heard, Mornington urging you to give him back his place in the team. I have been told so!" said Jimmy Silver. "Repeat your conversation with Mornington, as near as you can remember it."

No answer.

"The witness may stand down!" said Jimmy Silver, after waiting a full minute, during which there was a deepening buzz in court. "He has not done his duty, but we can make allowances for him, as he is the prisoner's pal. His refusal to answer makes things pretty plain. Mornington let out to him that he knew I was going to be called away from the match, and that he expected his pal to put him back in the team. That was why the telegram was sent. Erroll knows it, and will not say so."

"Clear enough!" growled Gunner. "Now, if I'd been put into the team for St. Jim's, the match wouldn't have been lost, and—"

"Shut up, Gunner!" howled the jury. Peter Cuthbert Gunner's views were evidently not wanted.

The judge proceeded to sum up.

"Gentlemen of the jury, you will now consider your verdict. If you consider the prisoner innocent, you will—er—find a verdict of not guilty, while if you consider him guilty, you will—er—find a verdict of—of—"

"Not innocent!" suggested Putty Grace, and there was a chuckle in court.

"Silence! Gentlemen, your verdict!"

"Guilty!"

There was not much doubt as to how the verdict would go. Mornington's refusal to speak condemned him more than anything else. His silence was not wholly due to lofty insolence, as the juniors well knew. Morny, with all his faults, was incapable of lying himself out of a scrape. He would have kept his rascally action a secret. But when he was directly charged with it, he

would not descend to falsehoods to save his skin. His pride, wrong-headed as it was on many points, saved him from that depth. His refuge was silence, and contemptuous disdain. And Erroll's evidence, or lack of evidence, had shown plainly enough what Morny's best chum believed what he would not have believed without proof enough. If Erroll was convinced, as he evidently was convinced, it was not likely that other fellows would doubt. There was a regular chorus from the whole of the Classical Fourth.

"Guilty!"

The judge turned to Valentine Mornington.

"You hear the verdict?" he said.

"I can hear a crowd of fags clatterin'!" assented Mornington.

"Have you anything to say?"

"Only that you kids had better turn in before a prefect catches you playin' the giddy goat after lights out."

"Is that all?"

"That's all, old bean."

"Then sentence will be passed on you, Mornington. You are found guilty of playing a dirty trick on a school-fellow, and causing a School match to be lost. You are sentenced to a Form-ragging, and to be sent to Coventry for the rest of the term."

"Hear, hear!"

"The sentence will now be carried out!" said Jimmy Silver. "The prisoner will run the gauntlet of the whole dormitory. After that, he will be cut by the Form. Mornington, turn out of bed!"

"Rats!"

"Have him out!" roared Lovell.

There was a rush at Mornington's bed, and this time Jimmy Silver did not intervene. Half a dozen pairs of hands were laid on Mornington.

Lovell went over with a yell, Ruby followed him. Then Mornington was dragged out of bed bodily and rolled on the floor in the midst of a struggling, trampling crowd.

CHAPTER 13.

The Sentence of the Form!

"BOYS!"

It was a voice of thunder in the doorway.

Mornington was still straggling desperately in the midst of an angry

crowd, when the door was flung open, and Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, appeared.

In the excitement of the struggle, on Mornington's resistance to his sentence, the Classical Fourth had quite forgotten masters and prefects. The din in the Fourth Form dormitory could be heard far beyond the bounds of that apartment.

It had brought the Form-master on the scene. Mr. Dalton stood staring into the dormitory with a frowning brow. His voice rang through the tumult.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell. "It's Dicky!"

"Cave!"

"Look out!"

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Richard Dalton, advancing into the dormitory.

The struggle ceased as if by magic. The juniors let Mornington go as suddenly as if he had become red-hot. They crowded back, leaving the dandy of the Fourth gasping on the floor.

Mornington sat up breathlessly.

Mr. Dalton glanced at him, and then fixed his eyes sternly on Jimmy Silver.

"You are head boy of the Form, Silver. You will explain to me what this disturbance means!"

Jimmy breathed hard. Mornington had been found guilty by the Form of an act that the Classical Fourth could not pardon. But nobody had any intention of informing the master of it. What Mornington had done was enough to earn him expulsion from the school. Indeed, it was a matter of which the law would have taken cognizance, if it had become known outside Rookwood. The hasty, passionate fellow had not realised it, but the sending of a telegram in another's name was counted a forgery in the eye of the law. Deeply as Jimmy Silver resented that miserable trick, he was not inclined to draw upon Mornington the full consequences of the act.

He stood silent, not knowing what to say. And the Classical Fourth, taking their cue from Jimmy, stood silent also. Mornington rose slowly to his feet, breathing in gasps.

"Well, Silver?" said the Fourth Form master.

"It—it—it's a rag, sir!" stammered Jimmy at last.

"Of which, apparently, Mornington is the victim?"

"Yes, sir."

"What has Mornington done?"

No answer.

"Mornington, you must be aware of the cause of this outrageous disturbance. You will tell me."

"The fellows have got their backs up about somethin', sir," answered Mornington breathlessly but coolly. "I think they don't quite like my tellin' them that they're a set of cheeky and silly fags."

"Is that all?"

"If Silver's got anythin' against me, sir, he can tell you," said Mornington. "He knows best."

It was a daring challenge, for Mornington could not have been sure that no voice would be raised to tell the facts. But Jimmy Silver was silent, and the Fourth followed Uncle James.

Mr. Dalton was silent for a minute or so, eyeing the juniors. He spoke at last.

"You will go back to bed. On Monday morning I shall cane every boy in the Form for this outbreak. If there is any further disturbance in this dormitory to-night I shall request the Head to take the matter in hand."

The Classical Fourth turned in obediently. Mr. Dalton collected up the candles, and left the dormitory with those relics in his possession. The door closed behind him.

"A licking all round on Monday, and all to-morrow to anticipate it!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "That's rather rich."

"I say, I'm not going to be licked!" howled Tubby Muffin. "Dicky Dalton ought to be told, and then he would let us off."

"Shut up, Muffin!"

"Well, I don't see takin' a lickin' just to screen a fellow who's played a sneakin' trick!" exclaimed Townsend.

"Can't be helped," said Jimmy Silver. "We can't give Mornington away to the beaks. It's too jolly serious for that."

"That's his look out!" growled Gower. "Ours, too! It can't be did. Keep smiling."

"And what about running the gauntlet?" exclaimed Lovell. "Is the rotter going to get off that just because Dicky Dalton butted in?"

"Cheese it, old chap! If there's any more row it's a matter for the Head. Who wants to go up before Dr. Chisholm?"

"Not little me!" said Conroy, with a

laugh. "Let it drop. Morny gets off the ragging, but he's sent to Coventry."

"Yes, rather!"

"That's settled!" said Jimmy Silver. "Every fellow in the Form lets him alone after this. I don't think any fellow can quite think him fit to speak to after what he's done."

"What about Erroll?" squeaked Tubby Muffin. "He always sticks to Morny, whatever he does. Morny punched his nose for not putting him into the eleven for the St. Jim's match and—"

"My hat! I should think that enough even for Erroll!" said Lovell, with a loud sniff.

"I saw it in the quad," said Tubby. "I say, Erroll, are you going to send Mornington to Coventry with the rest?"

No answer from Erroll.

"Speak up, Erroll!" came several voices. "You'd better speak, Erroll," said Jimmy Silver. "I know Mornington's your pal, and you always stick to him, but in this matter you ought to stand in with the Form. You know that."

Erroll spoke at last.

"You're mistaken," he said in a low voice. "Mornington and I are not friends now. I don't think I should have let the sentence of the Form make any difference to me—"

"Oh, wouldn't you, you cheeky ass?" broke out Lovell hotly.

"No. But it was over before that, for reasons of my own. Mornington has got what he deserves, and I have nothing to say for him or to him."

"That's good enough, old fellow!" said Jimmy Silver softly. "Good-night, you chaps! We shan't want to hear the rising-bell in the morning."

And the Classical Fourth were soon asleep—with one exception. Long in the silent night Valentine Mornington lay wakeful, his eyes staring sleeplessly at the high, starlit window, thinking—perhaps with remorse—of what his passionate waywardness had led him to at last—of the long-tried friendship he had thrown away as a thing of no value which could never be replaced.

Not a word was addressed to Mornington in the dormitory next morning. The sentence of the Fourth was being carried out.

When Jimmy Silver & Co. walked in the quad after breakfast, Mornington passed them without a word, but with a

mocking, contemptuous smile. Erroll was walking alone on the path under the beeches, and Mornington's steps led him in that direction. The glances of the Fistical Four followed him.

It seemed as if Morny could not wholly believe that the irrevocable had happened at last—that he could not realise that his old strong influence over Kit Erroll was at an end. He came down the path directly towards Erroll, and met him face to face, and stopped in his way to speak.

Erroll's eyes were fixed on him for one moment, and then he deliberately turned his back and walked away. Valentine Mornington stood still, as if he were incapable of motion, looking after the receding figure of the friend he had lost for ever!

CHAPTER 14.

Barred!

MR. RICHARD DALTON, the master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, stood at his study window, and looked out into the quadrangle.

He was frowning.

Richard Dalton—more familiarly known to his pupils as "Dicky"—was not given to frowning. Generally his handsome face was cheery and good-humoured. He was liked by all the Fourth—even Tubby Muffin admitted that he was not a "beast"; or, at all events, a lesser beast than other beasts. Even Peele & Co., the slackers of the Form, did not really dislike him. Jimmy Silver & Co. regarded him as the ideal Form-master, and they would have done anything—even detention tasks—for Dicky Dalton.

But it was upon Jimmy Silver & Co. that Mr. Dalton was looking now, and frowning.

He frowned and shook his head.

Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and New come were coming along in a cheery, chatting crowd. From the opposite direction came Valentine Mornington of the Classical Fourth.

The Fistical Four certainly saw Mornington. He was coming directly towards them on the gravel path.

But to judge by their looks, the space in front of them might have been entirely unoccupied.

They walked on unseeingly.

Mornington moved into the middle of the path, interrupting the route of the Fistical Four.

Still they did not see him.

They separated—Jimmy Silver and Lovell to the right, Raby and Newcome to the left—and walked past Mornington, still without seeing him.

Mornington turned his head, and cast a black and bitter look after them, before he resumed his way.

The Fistical Four did not dream of turning their heads; they walked on in utter unconsciousness of Mornington.

It was this little scene that called the frown to the brow of Richard Dalton. Evidently there was a rift in the lute in the Fourth Form, Mornington—hitherto a rather important member of that important Form—having been cut dead in the quad by four of the leading spirits of the Fourth.

Mr. Dalton, still frowning, let his glance linger on Mornington as the ostracised junior moved on slowly. Ahead of him, under the old beeches, Kit Erroll could be seen. Erroll was Morny's closest chum—or had been so until of late. But as Valentine Mornington came near him, Kit Erroll turned at right angles to his former course, and walked away under the trees, obviously to avoid Morny.

Mr. Dalton's frown deepened. There was trouble in the Fourth, and, as a dutiful Form-master, he was bound to take an interest in it. Still his glance followed Mornington, Tubby Muffin rolled into view from the direction of the tuckshop, and grinned as he saw Morny. Tubby proceeded to cut Morny, as the other fellows had done—but not quietly and unostentatiously, as they had done. There was never anything quiet or unostentatious about Reginald Muffin. Tubby rolled quite near Morny, and turned up his fat little nose, and twisted his wide mouth into a sneer of ineffable scorn, conveying by that look the most superlative and crushing contempt.

The effect was spoiled by Tubby coming too near. His sneering lip and turned-up nose were put within reach of the cut junior. Mornington suddenly reached out, and his finger and thumb closed like a vice on the little fat nose.

All the lofty scorn vanished from Regi-

red Muffin's face as that grip descended on his nose. An expression of the deepest anguish replaced it, and Tubby gave a howl that reached Mr. Dalton's ears, even at the distance of his study window from the scene.

"Owwwwwwwwwwww!"

Mornington, with a grim smile, tightened the grip of finger and thumb. The water rushed into Tubby's eyes.

"Wwwwwwwwwww!"

Then Mornington released Tubby's nose, and strolled on, leaving Tubby clasping the damaged proboscis with both hands, and wailing.

Mr. Dalton's glance followed Mornington. The barred junior was holding his head high, and his face was calm and unmoved. But his outbreak of temper with regard to Muffin showed that he was not so unmoved as he would have liked to appear. Three Modern juniors—Dodd and Cook and Doyle—met him on the path. They did not sneer as Muffin had done; they ignored Mornington in the style of Jimmy Silver & Co.

Mr. Dalton saw Mornington pause and swing round towards them, as if to speak. The three Tommies accelerated their pace a little, leaving Morny to speak to the desert air, if he spoke at all.

Then Valentine Mornington passed out of his Form-master's sight, and Mr. Dalton turned from the study window, frowning. There was evidently something wrong—something very wrong—in the Fourth Form, and Richard Dalton determined to make a judicious inquiry into it.

Quite unaware of the interest their Form-master was taking in their proceedings, Jimmy Silver & Co. came cheerfully into the Form-room about half an hour later, for afternoon classes. Mr. Dalton was already at his desk, and, mindful of what he had seen in the quad, his glance was very keenly on the juniors.

Mornington came in with the rest; but it was plain that he was with them, but not of them, so to speak.

Kit Erroll sat in his accustomed place next to Morny, but he had moved farther along the form. There was a little crowding at one end, to give room for leaving Mornington isolated in his place.

In the Form-room, and out of it, Valentine Mornington was isolated—barred by

the Fourth. Even his best chum, his own familiar friend, had turned against him with the rest.

That such a situation must have been bitterly humiliating to a proud fellow like Mornington, Mr. Dalton knew; but there was no sign of it in Morny's face. His look was calm and careless; he did not even seem to notice that he was avoided.

During afternoon classes, Mr. Dalton was not thinking wholly about the Form lessons. He took a kind interest in his boys, and he wanted, if he could, to learn what was wrong, and to help set matters right. But he knew that he had to proceed with circumspection. A schoolboy questioned by a master was only too apt to close up like an oyster if he regarded that master as stepping outside his own province.

When the Fourth were dismissed, Mr. Dalton beckoned to Mornington to remain behind the others. Jimmy Silver & Co. and the rest of the Form filed out. Mornington stopped at the Form-master's desk. He looked at Mr. Dalton with calm and polite inquiry.

Mr. Dalton coughed. It was not easy to get through that mask of indifference.

"I am afraid there is some trouble between you and your friends, Mornington," said the Fourth Form master.

"Do you think so, sir?" said Mornington politely.

"Is it not the case?"

Mornington did not answer.

"Come, come, my boy," said Mr. Dalton kindly. "In this matter you must look upon me as a friend rather than as a Form-master. Perhaps there is some little misunderstanding that could easily be set right."

"I think not, sir."

"You have quarrelled, somehow, with the rest of the Form?"

Silence.

"You do not wish to confide in me, Mornington?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Dalton coughed again.

"You may go, Mornington."

"Thank you, sir!"

Valentine Mornington walked out of the Form-room, and walked through a crowd of juniors in the corridor, with his head held high. Not a word was spoken to him as he passed.

CHAPTER 15. Cut at Cricket!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL gave a short, one of his ways of expressing his feelings when he was irritable.

"Here comes that rotter!" he said.

Whereat Jimmy Silver frowned.

Most of the Classical Fourth had gathered on Little Side for an hour at the nets before tea. Jimmy Silver was keeping his cricketers up to the mark for the matches that were coming along.

The defeat at St. Jim's was a worry on Uncle James' mind. The fact that it had been owing largely to Mornington helped to keep up the feeling against Morny in the Fourth. While the memory of it was fresh in their minds, and of the false telegram that had called Jimmy Silver away from the match, the Rookwood cricketers were not likely to forgive the offender.

Mornington, with his bat under his arm, came on the junior cricket-ground just as if nothing had happened, and just as if the whole Form had not turned against him. And the fact that Bulkeley of the Sixth was superintending the practice made matters awkward.

"If that fellow comes here I'm going off!" said Lovell.

"Same here!" declared Raby. "He ought to have the decency to keep clear, in the circle."

"Lot of decency about a fellow who sends a false telegram to dish his skipper, because he's left out of the team!" grunted Newcome.

"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver, with a worried look. "Bulkeley's on the ground. Bulkeley doesn't know anything about what Morny's done."

"We're not going to have the cad among us!" snorted Lovell. "How would he like us to tell Bulkeley about it?"

"It would mean the sack for Morny, or, at least, a flogging!" said Oswald. "We can't tell about him to a prefect. But that ought to make him keep clear of us."

"He's going to keep clear!" said Arthur Edward Lovell determinedly. "Here, you fellows, you back me up and bat him off!"

Mornington had arrived at the pavilion now. Arthur Edward Lovell and five or six more juniors marched on him in

a body, with their bats up like bayonets at the charge.

They did not speak, they let the bats convey their meaning. Morny had to recede before the array.

"What's the game?" he asked, with a bitter look at the batsmen. "I've come down to cricket practice."

No answer. The juniors were not to be drawn into speaking to the fellow who was barred by the Form. But they advanced on him in grim silence, with the bats at the charge. Mornington backed farther away, and then, with a black look, he swept up his own bat.

"Stand back!" he cried, between his teeth, "or——"

The array of levelled bats came on. Mornington crashed his own willow down on them with a terrific crash.

"Ow!" roared Lovell, whose arm was badly jarred by the shock.

Bump!

Conroy's bat bumped on Mornington's chest, and the dandy of the Fourth staggered back. He swung up his bat again in both hands, and just in time Jimmy Silver grabbed his arm and dragged the bat away. Morny turned on him like a flash, hitting out. The captain of the Fourth guarded the blow, and stepped back, cool and contemptuous.

"Get on with it!" grinned Oswald.

The array of bats advanced on Mornington again, driving him back. He would have been driven off the field in a few minutes more, but he turned his head and shouted to the captain of Rookwood.

"Bulkeley!"

"Hallo!" Bulkeley of the Sixth looked round. "What's the matter there? No ragging here, you young sweeps!"

"I've come down for practice," said Mornington coolly. "Am I to be allowed to stay or not?"

"Eh? Of course!" said Bulkeley, with a stare. "What's the row? Put those bats down! Do you hear?"

The bats were lowered. The captain of the school had to be obeyed.

"Now, then, what's the trouble?" demanded the prefect, looking round at the crowd of lowering faces.

"We're not going to practice with Mornington!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"You young ass! Why not?"

"He's in Coventry!" said several voices.

"Oh, he's in Coventry, is he?" grunted Bulkeley. "You fags are always up to some game or other."

"It isn't a game!" bawled Lovell, much incensed at hearing the solemn decision of the Fourth referred to in that contemptuous manner.

"Don't yell at me, Lovell, unless you want a licking," said Bulkeley gruffly. "What's Mornington done, to be sent to Coventry, you precious young duffers?" "He's sent to Coventry, anyhow!" said Lovell.

"Well, you can play what games you like in the Fourth Form passage," said Bulkeley, with a grin; "but this is cricket. Mornington's got to turn up to practice like the rest. Let him alone!"

"Then I'm going off!" snorted Lovell.

"You're not going off, Lovell! No slackening while I'm in charge."

"I don't want to slack!" howled Lovell, still more incensed at that imputation. "It's not that at all. You know I'm not a slacker, Bulkeley. But that cad——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Bulkeley impatiently. "You were as thick as thieves a few days ago, and you'll be as thick as thieves again in a few more days. I've no time for your fag nonsense. Get to it!"

Mornington smiled, a smile that had an extremely irritating effect on the Fourth-Formers. There was an angry squeak from Tubby Muffin.

"Look here, you fellows! If Morny brings a prefect into it, we ought to tell what he's done. He's asked for it."

"Shut up, Muffin!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, he shouldn't bring a prefect into it!" howled Muffin. "If he brings Bulkeley into it we ought to tell Bulkeley about the——"

Tubby Muffin was put to silence by a sudden jab in his fat ribs, which reduced him to a sitting posture and breathless silence at the same time.

"What's that? What's all this?" exclaimed Bulkeley.

"Nothing," said Jimmy Silver. "If we've got to practise with Mornington we'll do it, if you say so, Bulkeley. But we shan't speak to him!"

"Too much speaking here already!" snapped the Rookwood captain. "I'd like to see something done, and less said. Suppose you all shut up for a bit!"

Bulkeley was evidently cross. He was giving an hour of his valuable time to the instruction of the juniors, and naturally he did not want that valuable time wasted in what he regarded as "fag ragging." Bulkeley being apparently quite unaware of the importance of a decision reached in solemn conclave by the Fourth Form. To the high and mighty Sixth-Former it was "fag ragging," merely that and nothing more!

So Mornington took his place among the cricketers with a curl of the lip. The angry Fourth had to contain their resentment as best they could. As nobody would bowl to Mornington or bat to his bowling, Morny's triumph seemed to be an empty one. But again Bulkeley interposed, as he saw how matters stood.

"Get to the wicket, Silver! Mornington, take the ball. Chuck the ball to Mornington, Van Ryn!"

The South African junior tossed the ball to Morny, who caught it. Jimmy Silver, slowly and reluctantly, went to the wicket. He did not want to bat to the barred junior, but the authority of the head of the games was paramount. But Jimmy's idea was that though you could take a horse to the water the said horse could not be made to drink; and he proceeded to act upon that principle. Morny sent down a ball that knocked out the middle stump with ease. Some of the onlookers grinned. Jimmy Silver was not defending the sticks.

"Do you call that batting, Silver?" demanded the irritated coach. "Why on earth did you swipe to leg?"

"You—you see——"

"I see that my hair will be turned grey in teaching you fags to know one end of the bat from the other! For goodness' sake show that you know how to hold a bat, at least!" snapped Bulkeley.

The Rookwood captain stared round.

"Send that ball in! Where's that ball?"

The ball was not to be seen. That was accounted for by the fact that Higgs of the Fourth had sat on it—trying to look as if he were simply taking a little rest on the turf. Unfortunately for Higgs, Bulkeley's eyes were of the sharpest. He made a stride to Higgs, and lifted him from the hidden ball by the simple process of jabbing his foot in Higgs' ribs. There was a roar from Higgs as he rolled over, and Bulkeley picked up the ball.

"If there's any more of this fooling somebody will get a licking!" exclaimed the

captain of Rookwood angrily. He tossed the ball to Mornington with a frowning brow.

Morry bowled again, and again the wicket fell unresistingly.

"My only hat!" roared Bulkeley. "I'll get a fag of the Second Form to coach you after this, Silver! Call yourself a cricketer? Try again, Mornington, and for mercy's sake, Silver, try and stand at the wicket a little less like a sack of coke!"

Mornington's eyes were glittering. He saw more than Bulkeley saw, and he knew that he was to have the pleasure of bowling to an undefended wicket, so long as he bowled at all. That was very good practice in its way, but it was not what Mornington wanted. The grinning faces of the Fourth-Formers, and Jimmy Silver's contemptuous indifference, roused Mornington to the passionate anger that had so often been his undoing. The ball came down, not at the wicket this time. It broke from the pitch like a bullet, and crashed on Jimmy Silver's shoulder, and sent him spinning, to crash on the ground at full length.

CHAPTER 16.

Tea in the End Study!

"FOUL play!" roared Lovell.

Raby ran to Jimmy Silver, and the other fellows crowded round. Jimmy's hand flew to his shoulder, and his face was contracted with pain. He was on his feet in a few seconds, however, with Raby's help.

Mornington stood very quiet at his end. The moment he had done that passionate, malicious action, he had been sorry that he did it—he was neither cruel nor malicious by nature. But his perverse pride upheld him, and banished any outward sign of repentance; he looked on at the scene with cool indifference; indeed, with a faintly mocking smile on his face. Bulkeley hurried to Jimmy Silver.

"That was a bad knock," he said, with real concern. "Are you hurt?"

It was rather a superfluous question. Jimmy obviously was hurt. His face had become quite pale.

"Just a bruise, I think," he said, as coolly as he could. "I—I think I'll get off, Bulkeley."

"Do, and rub your shoulder at once with

Elliman's. You'll have it pretty stiff, otherwise."

Raby and Newcome went with Jimmy. He leaned rather heavily on Raby's arm. Arthur Edward Lovell remained, to deal with Mornington. He came across to the bowler, his fists clenched, and his eyes ablaze. There was hardly a fellow on the field who did not believe that Mornington had deliberately inflicted that injury on the captain of the Fourth. Lovell intended to call him to account at once, forgetful of Bulkeley and of cricket. The Rookwood captain shouted to him.

"Lovell! What are you up to?"

"I'm going to thrash that cur!" shouted back Lovell.

"Stop!"

Lovell did not stop. He was too enraged even to heed Bulkeley. But as he reached Morry, Bulkeley reached him, caught him by the collar, and swung him back.

"I don't know what your row with Mornington is," said the Sixth-Former, "but you're to keep your ragging off the cricket-ground."

"I'm going to thrash him!" panted Lovell. "He's hurt Jimmy——"

"That was an accident——"

"Ask him if it was an accident!" howled Lovell. "Look at the cad's grinning face! He did it on purpose, because he's cut by the Form for playing a dirty trick like a treacherous Hun!"

"Nonsense!" said Bulkeley. "Accidents will happen! I refuse to believe anything of the kind. There's been enough jaw! Get on with the cricket. Time's up soon."

"Well, it can wait!" said Lovell, with a vengeful look at Mornington—a remark that the worried captain of Rookwood affected not to hear.

The practice went on; but Lovell got away as soon as he could, and repaired to the end study of the Fourth. He found Jimmy Silver there, with his shoulder bare, and Raby rubbing it with embrocation. There was a black bruise forming.

"Feels pretty bad, I suppose?" asked Lovell.

Jimmy made a grimace.

"I shall have a stiff arm for a week!" he said. "No cricket for me—I shall have to keep you fellows up to the mark instead. I believe that awful cad biffed me on purpose."

"I know he did!" snorted Lovell. "And he's going to have a thrashing for it!"



The door of the End Study was hurled open from without and a startling figure staggered in. It was Arthur Edward Lovell—his face a regular study in bruises. Blinking with one half-closed eye, Lovell did not see the guest in the study for a moment. "I've licked Mornington!" he panted. "Fairly knocked the cad out!" (See chapter 17.)

"There isn't much punch left in this arm!" said Jimmy ruefully.

"Plenty left in mine, though," said Lovell. "Jevver hear of such a thorough-going rotter—forging telegrams, and then bashing a chap with a cricket-ball! Might have got it on your napper! By Jove, I'm simply aching to get my hands on him!"

For once Jimmy Silver did not say nay to his impetuous chum. Kind and forgiving as Uncle James of Reekwood was, he could not help agreeing that Mornington wanted a thrashing, and wanted it bad. Perhaps he had a lingering doubt as to whether Arthur Edward was equal to the task he had set himself; but he would not have hinted that doubt to his chum for worlds. Certainly, whatever the result of the combat, Morny would get severe punishment in the course of it; there was no doubt about that.

Lovell moved about the study like a restless lion, while Raby and Newcome attended to Jimmy's arm. Jimmy replaced his jacket at last, and bore the pain as stoically as he could. Lovell opened the door.

"I'm going to wait for him in his study," he said. "You fellows have your tea—don't wait for me. I'm not going to miss him."

"Leave it till after tea," suggested Newcome.

"No fear. I'm going to nail him the minute he comes in."

And Arthur Edward Lovell, still in a towering rage, went along the passage to Study No. 4, to wait there for Mornington to return to his quarters. When he returned there was to be a battle royal on the spot.

The three juniors prepared tea—or, rather, Raby and Newcome did, and Jimmy watched them. His arm and shoulder ached terribly, and he was not feeling inclined for any exertion. The trio were about to begin tea, when there was a tap at the half-open door of the end study.

"Trot in," said Jimmy, and he was about to add "fathead," when he recognised Mr. Richard Dalton in the doorway, and jumped up respectfully instead.

Mr. Dalton came in, with a nod and a smile.

"Don't let me disturb you, my boys,"

he said. "You are just going to have your tea, I think?"

"We were, sir," answered Jimmy.

"I wonder whether you would let me ask myself to tea in your study?" suggested Richard Dalton, with a cheery smile.

"Oh, sir!"

"Jolly glad, sir!"

"Welcome as—as—as anything, sir."

There was no doubt of the juniors' pleasure in welcoming their distinguished guest. It glowed in their faces, and was plainly sincere; and it was pleasant enough to Mr. Dalton. Jimmy jumped to pull the best chair to the table for him, and gave a sudden yelp of pain. He had forgotten for the moment his damaged arm.

"Ow!"

Mr. Dalton looked rather surprised, and Jimmy coloured, as he took the chair with his other hand and pulled it to the table. Raby hastily added tea to the pot, and Newcome, slipping quickly out of the study, tore along to Study No. 6 to borrow a cake from Oswald—providentially remembering that he had seen Dick Oswald bring in a cake for tea.

Mr. Dalton sat down, carefully and tactfully refraining from observing that Raby was secretly, though quite plainly, giving the spoons a rub on a duster, which added to their brightness even while it imparted to them a flavour of ink. Neither did he observe how a plate was placed to cover up a splash on the tablecloth, or how the cup that was before him was slipped away and replaced by one with a handle. He seemed equally blind when Newcome strolled into the study with exaggerated carelessness of manner, and a big bulge under his jacket. Newcome came to a halt before the study cupboard, and turned round with a cake on a plate—just as if he had produced it from the cupboard—and just as if the Fistical Four always had cakes in the study cupboard on the chance of their Form-master coming to tea.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were delighted with the honour done them, but a little confused in their state of unpreparedness for the honour; but Mr. Dalton's utter unconsciousness of the by-play in the study soon put them at their ease. Observant as Mr. Dalton was in the Form-room, he seemed the most unobservant of men in the study; and he was deeply occupied in cutting the cake for the juniors, when Jimmy Silver,

catching Newcome's eye, pointed to the sugar-basin, which was empty, and then indicated the door—and Newcome strolled out carelessly and returned with borrowed sugar—which again he produced as if from the study cupboard.

All these little preliminaries over, the tea-party settled down. Mr. Dalton declared, when an anxious inquiry was made, that his tea was delicious—which, if strictly veracious, indicated a curious taste on Mr. Dalton's part, as Raby had put in twice too much tea, and both Raby and Newcome had sugared it, each putting in three lumps.

"Lovell still at the cricket?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Nunno!" Jimmy Silver hesitated. It was quite impossible to explain Arthur Edward's engagement, which kept him away from the tea-table in the end study. "He—he's gone to see a chap—"

"Waiting for a chap to come in, in his study, I think," said Newcome.

"Mr. Dalton's cup is empty!" said Raby. Jimmy Silver picked up the tea-pot, unluckily using the damaged arm, which he had again momentarily forgotten. A terrible twinge reminded him, and he yelped, and put down the tea-pot hurriedly—so hurriedly that a stream ran from the spout over the cake.

"Clumsy!" said Raby, forgetting the distinguished presence.

Mr. Dalton looked at Jimmy.

"Have you hurt your arm, Silver?" he inquired.

Jimmy was crimson.

"A—a bit of a knock on the cricket field," sir," he stammered. "Nothing much!"

To his great relief, Mr. Dalton inquired no further, only expressing his sympathy.

The Form-master began to talk cricket, with reference to some coming junior matches—which he knew all about. The three juniors agreed that their Form-master was a really brilliant conversationalist. He talked about matters that interested them, and let them have their say as well—an example that many other Form-masters might have followed with advantage. Somehow or other—the juniors did not quite know how—the talk came round to Valentine Mornington—a subject they would gladly have avoided. Mr. Dalton had noted, it appeared, that Mornington had not been included in the junior

eleven for the late match with St. Jim's. The juniors were quite flattered by Mr. Dalton's interest in their sporting pursuits; but the topic was a thorny one.

"Morny was off colour," Jimmy explained. "He'd been swotting for the Head's Latin prize, and chucking cricket, so—" Jimmy hesitated and coloured. "Morny can't do two things at a time," he explained, lamely. "He let everything slide when he was swotting, and he went right off his form, so—"

"Mornington is a little impetuous, perhaps," said Mr. Dalton, with a kind smile. "I believe he is—or was—a great friend of this study."

"Well, we—we—he—he—" said Jimmy lucidly. He wished Mr. Dalton would talk about something else, and he was beginning to suspect that the Form-master had discovered that Morny was in Coventry, and that that was why he had done the end study the unexpected honour of coming to tea.

"I hope there has been no falling out," said Mr. Dalton, with a charming smile.

The juniors were silent and uncomfortable. Mr. Dalton drank his second cup of tea with an air of satisfaction. He quite realised how much discomfort he was inflicting on his hapless hosts, but he wanted to get at the facts regarding the split in the Fourth.

"So there's been some little trouble; what?" said Mr. Dalton, looking up over his tea-cup.

"Yes-s-s!" stuttered Jimmy.

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

Jimmy Silver was saved from the difficulty with which that remark confronted him, by the sound of a terrific crash in the passage.

It sounded as if someone had landed on his back on the passage floor, and the juniors in the end study had no doubt it was so. They realised that Mornington had come in, and found Arthur Edward Lovell waiting for him. Lovell, waiting in Study No. 4, had not seen Mr. Dalton arrive in the Fourth-Form precincts, and he had gone ahead.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome exchanged startled glances.

"Dear me! Has someone fallen down?" said Mr. Dalton.

"I—I'll see, sir!" gasped Raby.

He jumped to the study door and opened

it a couple of inches. That gave him a view of the passage—and did not give the guest a view. One glance showed Raby that someone had, indeed, fallen down. It was Mornington—and, as Lovell was standing over him with clenched fists, the cause of Morny's fall was quite apparent. He scrambled up as Raby stared out, and hurled himself upon Lovell, and the two foemen closed in deadly strife, trampling and struggling and punching furiously. George Raby hastily shut the study door.

"Only some chaps doing some boxing," he said, with great presence of mind. "Really, they—they oughtn't to box in the passage, only they don't know you're here, sir."

"I am not here as a master, but as a guest!" said Mr. Dalton, with a smile. "Boxing in the passage is not quite in accordance with our rules, but we must not be too critical. May I have another cup of tea?"

And three anxious juniors supplied Mr. Dalton with tea and sugar and milk, while the "boxing" went on in the passage—with a din and an energy that were seldom or never put into boxing.

CHAPTER 17. Unexpected!

MR. DALTON sipped his tea with a smiling face, apparently oblivious of the din from the passage outside. He was so much at his ease that Jimmy and Raby recovered some of their equanimity, in spite of the stress of the curious circumstances. They were glad when Mr. Dalton went on talking, hoping that it would take his thoughts from the extremely energetic boxing which was going on a little farther down the passage.

Bump!

Somebody was down, and Jimmy could only hope it was Valentine Mornington. Then the scuffling and trampling was resumed. Jimmy gave one ear to it, and the other to Richard Dalton.

"Now, as a matter of fact," said Mr. Dalton, with a winning smile, "I have noticed that Mornington seems to be on ill terms with some of the Fourth Form, and I am very sorry to see it."

"Oh!" murmured Jimmy, while Newcome and Raby coloured and coughed.

"You see, breaches of this kind are liable to deepen, in the course of time," said Mr. Dalton, "and they might interfere with the cricket—which we should all be anxious to avoid."

"Oh, yes! Cer—certainly!" stammered Jimmy.

"It was thoughtless of Mornington to neglect cricket practice, but that can be remedied," said Mr. Dalton. "Indeed, I think I saw him going down to the cricket this afternoon."

"Yes—he—he was there!" murmured Newcome. "Oh! Oh, yes!"

"If ill-feeling is kept up, it will make matters difficult in the coming fixtures, won't it?" said Mr. Dalton. "Mornington is a good bat, I believe, and an excellent bowler. You can't afford to leave him out of the eleven too long, Silver. Can you?"

"I—I—" mumbled Jimmy.

"Perhaps it is a question of dignity, and neither side in this little dispute is willing to say the first word?" suggested Mr. Dalton. "Perhaps I can help you there."

"You, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

"Little me, as you would say in the Fourth!" The juniors smiled. "You see," continued Mr. Dalton, "I want you to regard me, on this occasion, as a sort of old chum, rather than as a Form-master. Can't you, on these lines, tell me what is the matter, and why Mornington seems to be 'sent to Coventry' by the Fourth?"

The hapless juniors were silent. It was evident that Mr. Dalton supposed the cause of the trouble was some schoolboy quarrel, and had not the faintest suspicion that Morny had transgressed in a serious way that could not possibly be overlooked. Mr. Dalton's eyes roamed from Jimmy to Raby, and then to Newcome, and then back to Jimmy Silver.

Crash! came from the passage. Bump! Scuffle! Scuffle! Tramp!

Mr. Dalton seemed deaf, though his entertainers were only too conscious of the fearful din.

"Can't you confide in me?" asked Mr. Dalton. "Speak to me as Dicky—as, I believe, I am sometimes called in the Fourth—and not as Mr. Dalton."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Jimmy.

He was moved by the young Form-

master's kindness; but it was simply impossible to explain. For what Mornington had done was too serious for "Dicky" to deal with; it would have called forth the deepest wrath of Mr. Dalton.

"You—you see, sir," mumbled Jimmy unhappily, "we—we can't—we—we—"

"You can't tell me?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"But Mornington's offence, whatever it is, surely cannot be of a very serious nature!" said Mr. Dalton, a little startled. "Am I to understand that Mornington has done something calling for punishment from the authorities of the school if it were known, and that that is the reason why you cannot give me your confidence?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged looks of hopeless dismay.

They did not speak; there was nothing to say. Mr. Dalton looked from one to another; and his face was very grave. He realised that there was something here more serious than he had dreamed of suspecting; something that the juniors would not and could not tell to anyone holding an official position in the school.

There was a short silence in the study, broken, however, by the sounds of fierce combat down the passage. There came another crash, and it was followed by a buzz of voices, but the scuffling and the tramping had ceased. The fight was over, apparently, and three juniors yearned to know the result, and it was with great difficulty that they remained quietly at the tea-table, politely attentive to their distinguished guest.

"I am surprised," said Mr. Dalton at last. "If the trouble concerning Mornington is a matter in which I should be bound to act—" He paused, but the juniors did not speak. "In that case, I will not ask for your confidence."

"Thank you, sir!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"I shall, of course, dismiss from my mind what has been said in this study," said Mr. Dalton. "That is only fair play."

Which was a relief to the juniors. But they had known that Dicky Dalton would always be sporting, and that he would never make official use of any information derived in friendly conversation. The silence of the juniors and their obvious

discomfort had given him a clue; but he considered himself bound not to follow it.

The Form-master rose from the table.

His visit to the end study had not been a success; he was more puzzled than ever. He had done his best without result. But Mr. Dalton was not destined to leave the study unenlightened, as it happened.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome rose, too. Honoured as they were by the visit of their distinguished guest, the interview was so awkward that they were not sorry the time had come for departure.

"Thank you very much for a ripping tea," said Mr. Dalton, with a cheery smile. "And now—"

He was interrupted. The study door was hurled open from without, and a startling figure staggered in.

For a moment, Arthur Edward Lovell was hardly to be recognised. His nose was swollen, and streaming red, one of his eyes was closed—his face was a regular study in bruises and other signs of combat—he was gasping for breath, and his collar and tie were gone, and his clothes dusty from head to foot. The ancient gentleman who drew Priam's curtains at the dead of night, and told him Troy was ablaze, was not a more startling apparition than Arthur Edward Lovell at that moment.

Lovell staggered, and held on to the door, blinking with one half-closed eye, not seeing the guest in the study for the moment.

"I've licked him!" panted Lovell. "I've licked Mornington, the rotter—fairly knocked the cad out! He won't be sending any more forged telegrams in a hurry, or chucking cricket-balls at chaps and cracking their shoulders—what? I've fairly got—"

"Shut up!" hissed Jimmy Silver, in anguish.

Lovell broke off, his half-closed eye discerning Mr. Dalton.

"Oh, crikey!" he gasped.

Richard Dalton certainly had heard every word, and understood. But he did not look as if he had.

"Well, I must be going!" he said cheerfully. "Thanks again for a very pleasant tea!"

And Mr. Dalton walked out of the study, Lovell blinking at him blankly.

"My only hat! You've done it now!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Dalton's footsteps died away down the passage; and the Fistical Four stared at one another. It was quite a long time before they could do anything but stare.

CHAPTER 18.

Mossoo Insists!

"SILVAIR!" Jimmy Silver decided that he had better be deaf.

"Silvaire!"

Jimmy was hurrying out of the School House, with his bat under his arm, to join Lovell and Raby and Newcome on the cricket ground. The voice of Monsieur Maximilien Monceau, the French master of Rookwood, was not welcome to his ears at that moment.

For it reminded Jimmy that he had completely forgotten to hand over fifty lines of the "Henriade," due to Mossos, in fact, long overdue. Mossos wanted his lines, but Jimmy wanted cricket, so he accelerated his pace a little, turning a deaf ear.

"Silvaire!"

Monsieur Monceau almost shrieked.

Jimmy almost stopped, but not quite. He felt that he was far off enough for his deafness to be plausible, at least. Mossos appeared in the doorway, gesticulating after the disappearing junior. Mornington of the Classical Fourth was loafing near at hand, with his hands in his pockets, alone. Valentine Mornington was in Coventry, and he was always alone now. Mossos waved an excited hand to him.

"Mornington!"

"Yes, sir," drawled Morny.

"Zat Silvaire, he is loud, he hear me not, isn't it! Run affair him and tell him zat I vant him, queeck!"

"Certainly, sir."

Mornington darted on the track of the captain of the Fourth. Jimmy was comfortably out of hearing of Mossos now, and felt that all was well. A grasp on his shoulder from behind disturbed his equanimity all of a sudden.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy, spinning round, for the moment supposing that Mossos, forgetful of his dignity, had chased after him. "I—I beg your pardon, Monsieur Monceau. Did you—oh!"

Jimmy broke off as he saw Mornington.

He jerked his shoulder angrily away from Morny's grasp. But he did not utter another word. Mornington was "cut" by the Fourth, and Jimmy was not to be drawn into speaking to him.

"Mossos is calling you!" said Morny. "You're wanted, Silver."

Jimmy turned to walk on.

"Mossos told me to tell you," grinned Mornington. "He knows you know now. You can please yourself."

Valentine Mornington strolled back to the School House. Jimmy hesitated a moment or two, and then very reluctantly, he turned and followed. Now that he could not assume ignorance, it would have been disrespectful to ignore Mossos's summons.

Maximilien Monceau stood on the doorstep. He was arrayed in his tight-waisted frock-coat, and shining little pointed boots, and had his silk hat in his hand. He was apparently going out; Jimmy could only wish that he had gone. He bent a severe frown on the captain of the Fourth, as that youth came reluctantly up the steps.

"Silvaire! I have call you one, two, three times!"

"Have you, sir?" murmured Jimmy.

"You shall be deaf, isn't it?" said Mossos crossly. "Is it zat you have written zose lines, Silvaire?"

"I—I—"

"You go to play ze cricket when you have not done zose lines, hein? You are one mauvais garcon, Silvaire!"

"Oh, sir," murmured Jimmy.

"You vill go to my study, Silvaire, and sit you at ze table and write out zose lines," said Monsieur Monceau sternly.

"The—the chaps are expecting me on Little Side, sir—"

"I am expecting zose lines, Silvaire. Go to my study and write zem out. Do not leave zat study till you have done zem. You are one bad boy, Silvaire. I go to walk viz myself to have my vatch mended, and perhaps I may arrive affair ze shop is close, because you make zese delays."

"Sorry, sir," murmured Jimmy.

"If I find not zose lines done ven zat I am of return," said Monsieur Monceau, "I complain to ze headmaster. Take varning. Go to my study, mauvais garcon que tu es."

With a final stern frown, Monsieur Monceau jammed his shining silk hat on his shining bald spot, and walked down the

steps. Jimmy Silver gave a grunt. So far as the Fourth-Former could see, there was nothing pressing in a French imposition—and cricket was very pressing. Cricket always was pressing on a sunny afternoon, and Jimmy would have been satisfied to leave French impositions until the Greek Kalends, or a further date, if possible.

"Rotten!" growled Jimmy Silver.

He frowned as he caught a mocking grin on Mornington's face. The barred junior was lounging by the steps again, idly; and he was evidently enjoying the discomfiture of the captain of the Fourth.

"Can I take a message from you to your pals, old bean?" asked Mornington. "If they're expecting you—"

Jimmy looked round without answering. Monsieur Monceau was disappearing out of gates; and Jimmy reflected. If the French master was going to Coombe to have his watch mended, he could scarcely be back under half an hour. There was time to get to Little Side and join the cricketers for ten minutes or so, and still get well on with the lines in Mossoo's study before he returned.

Jimmy certainly ought to have obeyed the French master's injunctions without delay. But his chums were expecting him—and the sunshine and the fresh air seemed to be calling him—and the French master's study was stuffy, and the "Hemlock" was a ghastly bore. Jimmy was tempted, and he fell. He tucked his bat under his arm again, and cut off to the cricket ground—to enjoy his ten minutes, at least.

Valentine Mornington looked after him curiously. He turned in at the door after a few moments; and Kit Erroll, coming out with his bat, passed him. Erroll did not look at him or speak, and Mornington passed with a face of indifference. Even the fellow who had been his best chum was against Mornington now; in all the Lower School of Rookwood, there was not one to give the outcast a friendly look or a friendly word.

The look of indifference seemed to fall from Mornington's face like a mask, as he found himself alone in the dusky corridor. His haughty pride kept up appearances before the school; he was bitterly determined that no one should see him wince. But it was a hard game to play.

Even Erroll had turned against him—Erroll, whose loyal friendship and patience had once seemed inexhaustible. But it was Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth, to whom Mornington attributed his downfall—it was against Jimmy Silver that all his bitterness was directed. Jimmy had presided at the Form trial, when Mornington had been sentenced to Coventry. Jimmy was at the bottom of it all, in Morny's perverse thoughts. In his heart of hearts, Morny well knew that he deserved what had befallen him, or more; but he would not admit it, even in his thoughts. He was conscious only of a bitter desire to inflict as much upon his enemy as he suffered himself—and it was Jimmy whom he chose to regard as his enemy.

CHAPTER 19.

Mornington's Temptation!

"BY gad!"

Mornington's dark and gloomy face broke into a grin, as he looked into Monsieur Monceau's study.

On the study table, glimmering in the sunlight from the window, lay a big, old-fashioned gold watch.

Mossoo had gone down to Coombe to have his watch repaired, and while polishing his silk hat, and giving the final touches to his neatly-trimmed beard and waxed moustaches, the little gentleman had completely overlooked the watch in question.

No doubt he supposed that it was safe in his watch-pocket; whereas, he had left it on the study table behind him. It was just like the absent-minded Mossoo, and Morny grinned as he thought of Mossoo arriving at the watchmaker's—minus the timekeeper that was to be repaired.

Mornington came into the study and closed the door.

He stood for some moments staring at the watch. Strange thoughts were working in Morny's brain.

He knew that Jimmy Silver was safe on the cricket-field for a little while at least. He had come to the study, in his angry bitterness, with the intention of playing some "jape" there, which Mossoo, when he discovered it, would naturally

attribute to Jimmy. Jimmy would be in the study, dismally writing out lines from the "Henriade," when Mossco returned. And if Mossco found his slippers full of gum, or his clock full of ink, there was little doubt that his wrath would fall upon the detained junior. It was a miserable trick to play, of which Morny would have been, at one time, incapable. But although he deserved the punishment the Rookwood juniors had meted out to him, that punishment was having a deteriorating effect upon Mornington's nature. In silence and solitude, bitterness grew in his breast, banishing any thought of repentance, banishing everything but a desire to retaliate in any way that came to his hand.

He picked up the watch at last, and looked at it. It was a heavy, old-fashioned timekeeper, winding with a key. It was stopped now, and it did not tick as it was moved. Something was wrong with the works. Morny clicked open the outer case, and read on the inner plate the name and style of a Parisian firm, "Goezman et Cie, Rue Royale." On the outer case was engraved, "Mon ami Maximilien." Apparently the watch was a present to Mossco from some ancient friend. Heavy and old-fashioned as it was, it was very valuable from the quantity of precious metal it contained—twenty guineas at the least.

Mornington turned the watch over in his hand. His handsome face was quite pale.

Strange and dark thoughts were in his disturbed mind. He was struggling with the black temptation that had assailed him—a temptation that would never have occurred to his mind in normal moments. But now all Mornington's nature seemed "like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh."

Jimmy Silver would be in the study; and Mossco would return knowing that he had left his watch on the table there! If it were missing when he came in—where would his suspicions fall?

It was a hideous thought; it drove the colour from Mornington's cheeks as it came into his mind, like a whisper from the Evil One.

He shivered, and laid down the watch, and turned quickly to the door, as if to flee from temptation. But he turned back.

No one knew he was anywhere near the French master's study; he had taken care

that the coast was clear before he ventured there. It was safe—safe—and Jimmy Silver, who had led the Lower School in holding him to scorn, would be pointed at himself with the finger of scorn. What Mornington suffered, in disgrace and contempt, Jimmy would suffer in his turn, and more bitterly.

Morny's heart beat quickly.

He would let the watch be found later—after Jimmy Silver had tasted of the bitterness he had tasted so deeply. That should be the worst that he would do. He slipped the watch into his pocket, and turned to the door again.

There he hesitated. His better nature was not dead; he hesitated in doubt with the beginning of remorse. But the thought assailed him that Jimmy Silver might arrive at any minute now; and if he found him there—He hesitated no longer, but opened the study door, peered into the passage, and stepped out. With assumed carelessness he walked away. The house seemed deserted after lessons that fine afternoon; Mornington did not meet a single soul as he went to his study in the Fourth Form passage.

There—with the gold watch in his pocket—a revulsion of feeling came over him. But even as he was thinking of hurrying back to the French master's study with the watch, a glance from the window showed him Jimmy Silver coming towards the School House.

It was too late.

Mornington shrugged his shoulders with reckless resignation. After all, it would serve Jimmy Silver right; let him have a taste of public scorn and avoidance!

But it was evidently unsafe to keep the watch about him; certainly it would be searched for. After some troubled thought, Mornington went to the box-room at the end of the Fourth Form passage, and after a glance round the dusky room, he slipped the watch into the chimney. The grate was never used, and the watch was safe enough from damage there.

Then he left the box-room, and the School House. He walked down to Little Side, where most of the Fourth were at cricket practice.

"Here comes that rotter!" It was Lovell's voice he heard. "If he butts into the cricket again there'll be more trouble."

And Arthur Edward Lovell bestowed a

glare upon the ostracised junior. Raby and Newcome did not even glance at him; Conroy, Putty Grace, Oswald, and the rest, took no heed of his existence.

Mornington stood looking on at the practice with a bitter smile on his lips. Erroll was bowling, and when he left off he passed quite close to Mornay, without looking at his whilom chum.

Mornington leaned on the pavilion, watching, with bitterness in his heart. The thought of the trick he had played in the French master's study no longer weighed on his mind. The finger of scorn was pointed at him, and his repentance, if he repented of his wrong-doing, would make no difference, and Valentine Mornington, like Pharaoh of old, hardened his heart.

CHAPTER 20.

Black Suspicion!

"**J**E chante de ces heres qui— Oh, dear! Bother the 'Henriade,' and blow Henri, and bless Mossoo!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

The captain of the Fourth had torn himself away from the cricket-ground, leaving the fresh air and sunshine behind him. Never had Monsieur Monceau's study seemed so stuffy. Mossoo hated open windows, like most of his nation; even on summer days his study was almost hermetically sealed. Apparently he breathed the same air over and over again, and liked it with a ripe flavour of age. Jimmy Silver did not like it the least little bit. He would have preferred his own study, but Mossoo's order had been strict. He did not mean to give the delinquent junior a chance of forgetting the lines again. They had been overdue for several days now, and perhaps it was not surprising that the little gentleman had lost patience.

That did not alter the fact that the study was stuffy, and that there were fresh air and sunshine outside, and that Jimmy Silver wanted to be at the cricket. However, as it could not be helped, Jimmy Silver remembered his own special motto, and tried to "keep smiling."

He dipped Mossoo's pen into Mossoo's ink, and began to write out his lines—worrying lines, as he had to put in the

accents. He would not even permit a vertical jab which might pass muster for either an acute or a grave accent. If it did not slope the right way, Mossoo wanted to know the reason why, which had a very exasperating effect upon Mossoo's pupils, who declined to see that there was any importance at all in such nice distinctions.

Jimmy had had rather more than ten minutes with the cricketers, and he could scarcely hope to get his fifty lines completed—accents and all—by the time of Mossoo's probable return. As a matter of fact, he was not half through the imposition when he heard Mossoo's boots creaking in the corridor. Mossoo had returned unexpectedly soon, which was accounted for by the fact that his conversation with the watchmaker had been very brief, as he found that he had forgotten to bring the watch.

Jimmy Silver rose respectfully as Monsieur Monceau entered the study looking warm and flustered after a walk in the sunshine.

"Ah, you are here, Silvair!" said Monsieur Monceau. "Mon garçon, I have had ze walk for nozzings. I have ze departure of ze brain."

"The—the what, sir?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"I go to vatchmaker to repair vatch, and I leave my vatch," explained Monsieur Monceau. "I remember trop tard zat I take him out of my pocket to see if he will go if I shall shake him, and I lay him on ze table, and zen he go out of my pauvre tete—my poor head, isn't it. Zat is vat you call ze departure of ze brain, n'est-ce-pas?"

"Oh, absence of mind!" said Jimmy, with a smile.

"Zat is it—ze absence of ze mind," said Mossoo. "Zere is a difference zere, you say absence of ze mind, not departure of ze brain. Oh, yes! You have find zat watch on ze table, isn't it?"

Monsieur Monceau was looking round for the watch while he was speaking. Naturally, he did not see it.

"No, sir," said Jimmy. "I didn't see it when I came in."

"You have put some papairs over him, perhaps. Look for zat vatch, mon garçon!"

"Certainly!"

Jimmy moved everything on the table,

looking for the watch. But it was not to be discovered.

Monsieur Monceau looked annoyed.

"Perhaps you put it into the wrong pocket, sir," suggested Jimmy Silver.

"Zis vill not do, Silvair! Tell me at vunce vere zat vatch is!"

"I haven't seen it, sir!"

"Pouf! You have hidden zat vatch because I do give you some lines—isn't it? You play me a choke! I varn you, Silvair, zat you shall not choke me!"

"But I'm not playing a joke, sir," said Jimmy. "I give you my word that I have not seen the watch."

"It was on ze table—I remembair perfectly vere I lay him! Zere, vere you were sitting, Silvair! You could not have come to ze table vizout seeing him!"

"It wasn't there, sir."

"Nonsense! Vere is zat vatch?" exclaimed Monsieur Monceau angrily.

Mossoo's wrath was not without reason. The watch certainly had been there, and Jimmy, as Mossoo supposed, had come to the study directly its owner had gone out, and nobody else could be supposed to have had any reason for entering the room. Mossoo's belief was that the detained junior was playing a "choke," as he called it, and Mossoo had had enough of the joke. He fixed his little black, twinkling eyes on Jimmy Silver, with angry impatience.

"I haven't seen the watch, sir. I can't say more than that. I give you my word, sir."

"Has somevun else come into ze room and take him?"

"Not than I know of, sir."

"Silvair, if you do not give up zat vatch at vunce I sall begin to ziuk zat you steal him!"

Jimmy's eyes flashed.

"Silvair, give me zat vatch!"

"How can I, when I haven't it?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Ozzervise I call in your Form-master to deal viz you!"

"I don't mind, sir! Mr. Dalton will take my word, I'm sure!"

"You will remain here, zen, while I call Monsieur Dalton!"

And to make sure that Jimmy Silver did not leave, Monsieur Monceau locked the door on the outside when he went to look for Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth Form.

Jimmy remained in the study, as angry now as Mossoo himself. That gentleman's absence of mind was well known at Rookwood—indeed, it sometimes amounted almost to "departure of the brain," as he called it himself. Jimmy had no doubt that he had placed the watch somewhere and forgotten it—possibly in one of his pockets. The junior was tempted to drop from the study window and clear off while Mossoo was gone for the Form-master; but, fortunately, prudence restrained him. If the watch was really missing, such an action would look suspicious, as Jimmy realised. Besides his lines were not yet finished. With a worried brow, Jimmy sat down at the table and worked at his imposition, and it was finished just as footsteps halted outside the study door.

The key turned in the lock, and Monsieur Monceau ushered Mr. Dalton into the study. Jimmy turned a flushed face to his Form-master.

"Silver, if you have hidden Monsieur Monceau's watch—"

"I haven't, sir! I haven't even seen it!"

"Monsieur Monceau is positive that he left it on the table, just where your papers are lying, Silver."

"It was not there when I came in, sir."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Mossoo angrily. "It was zere! I remembair par-faitement!"

Mr. Dalton looked very searchingly at the captain of the Fourth. That the junior might have pulled Mossoo's leg on the subject of his beloved ancient watch was probable enough, but it was not probable that he would lie about it. If he lied, it was not to hide a practical joke, but to hide something much more serious than that.

"You are aware, Silver, that the watch is a valuable one?" said Mr. Dalton, after a pause.

"I know it's a gold one, sir. I've seen it sometimes," said Jimmy.

"It is a very serious matter if it is not found."

"I—I suppose it is, sir."

"Zen you give him to me—isn't it?" exclaimed Mossoo excitedly. "Zat montre-zat vatch, he is one present from my old friend zat is now mort. I vill not lose him for zousands of francs!"

"Patience, monsieur!" said Mr. Dalton. "It doesn't seem possible, Silver, that anyone else can have played this trick. You

came to the study immediately after Monsieur Monceau left it——"

"No, sir!" said Jimmy quickly.

"Monsieur Monceau tells me that he directed you to do so, as you had not done your lines."

"I—I went down to the cricket-ground to—to speak to the fellows first. I—I came in about ten minutes afterwards—or perhaps a quarter of an hour."

"Nonsense!"

"Patience, Monsieur Monceau! Silver's statement can be verified, if true, by reference to the boys on the cricket-ground."

"You can ask Lovell or Raby or Newcome or Conroy or anybody," said Jimmy.

"Twenty fellows at least can tell you."

"We will take that point as settled. So the study was left empty for about ten minutes?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"But no vun shall know zat ze vatch is left here!" exclaimed Mosscoo hotly. "I do not know myself till I reaches vatchmaker's! Somevun do not come to take vatch vizout knowing zat zere is vatch!"

"That is true," said Mr. Dalton, knitting his brows. "Yet some boy may have entered the study—tricks upon an absent master are not unknown. Silver, have you left the study since you came to write your lines?"

"Monsieur Monceau looked me in, sir."

"I mean previous to Monsieur Monceau's return from Coombe?"

"No, sir. I was doing lines all the time."

"Very good. Have you any objection to turning out your pockets?"

"Not if you think I should, sir," answered Jimmy Silver, though his face crimsoned.

"You had better do so, I think."

"Vrai—and now we see ze vatch!" said Mosscoo.

In silence Jimmy Silver turned all his pockets inside out. Certainly there was no sign of a watch, excepting Jimmy's own silver one.

"It is hide?" said Monsieur Monceau. "Perhaps in ze souliers or in ze gilet—vat you call veskit——"

"Do you think I am a thief?" burst out Jimmy Silver savagely.

"If you not give up zat vatch, you are one teef!"

"Mr. Dalton——"

"Calm yourself, Silver. This investigation is for your own sake," said the Fourth Form master. "You do not object to Monsieur Monceau searching you before you leave the study?"

"I think it's rotten!" exclaimed Jimmy. "But if Mosscoo wants to search me, let him! There's nothing for him to find, I know that!"

A fat face peered in at the open doorway, and Jimmy gave it a black look. The fat face belonged to Tubby Muffin. Tubby had scented out trouble like a war-horse that scents the battle from afar. His ears were pricked up, and his little round eyes fairly blazed with excitement. Jimmy realised that the fat Classical must have seen the excited Mosscoo dragging Mr. Dalton off to the study, and followed, with his usual inquisitiveness to learn what was the matter. Evidently he had heard all, and it was equally certain that ere long all the Lower School would know what Reginald Muffin knew. Jimmy's ears burned as Mosscoo began to search him, and Tubby Muffin peered in from the passage. The scene was humiliating enough to Jimmy Silver, and it was still more humiliating that all Rookwood would know about it and comment on it.

Monsieur Monceau made his search thoroughly. He even made Jimmy take off his shoes, to ascertain that the big watch was not concealed in one of them. He groped and fumbled and pinched, and certainly would have discovered anything larger than a pin's head that had been concealed about Jimmy. But there was nothing to discover.

"Muffin!"

Mr. Dalton suddenly caught sight of the fat Classical in the passage through the partly-open doorway.

"Ow! Yes, sir!" gasped Tubby.

"How dare you stand there staring into the room? Go away at once, and take a hundred lines!"

"Oh, dear!" said Tubby.

And he rolled away at once, much dismayed by the hundred lines, but much bucked, on the other hand, by the exciting item of news he had to impart to the other fellows. On the whole, Tubby Muffin was more bucked than dismayed.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Silver stood, flushed and biting his lip with anger, waiting for what was to come next. The search had re-

vealed nothing, excepting the fact that there was no gold watch concealed about him.

"Are you satisfied, Monsieur Monceau?" asked Mr. Dalton.

Mossoo gave a shriek.

"Satisfy! When my vatch he is stolen—ze vatch zat was cadeau—a present from old ami zat is mort. Jamais! Silvair has taken ze vatch, and he has taken it away before I am of return. Vrai! Mais si! Zat ze vicked boy tell me vere is zat montre."

"Silver, you give your word, for the last time, that you know nothing about the watch?" asked Mr. Dalton, deeply troubled.

"I give you my word, sir," said Jimmy steadily.

"Pas vrai—pas vrai——"

"Calm yourself, please, Monsieur Monceau. The watch certainly seems to have been taken away; but it is quite possible that some boy came in here before Silver, and that the whole affair is nothing but a stupid joke. Silver, you may go for the present."

"Thank you, sir!" said Jimmy.

And in a dismal mood, the usually cheery captain of the Fourth quitted the French master's study.

CHAPTER 21.

Trouble in the Fourth!

"WATCHES were made to go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"First it was a gold watch, and now it's a Silver one." continued Higgs of the Fourth, who was apparently bent upon being humorous.

And there was a laugh in the junior Common-room.

Which was all decidedly unpleasant to the ears of Uncle James of Rookwood, as he came in with his chums.

The story of the missing watch was all over the school now.

Monsieur Monceau was crying his terrible loss from the house-tops as it were. He mourned, like Rachel of old, for what was lost, and would not be comforted.

He refused to believe for one moment that the affair was a "choke." His watch—that magnificent gold timekeeper which had been given him by a valued old friend who was now "mort"—had been feloni-

ously stolen, and Mosscoo wanted to discover the thief. Indeed, it was only a sharp remonstrance from the Head which prevented Mosscoo from telephoning for the police.

The Head agreed with Mr. Dalton's opinion, that some thoughtless young rascal—Silver or another—had hidden the watch for a foolish practical joke on the French master, well knowing that his excitable disposition would lead him to make an absurd scene.

The Head had issued his lofty command that whoever had taken away the watch should restore it without delay, without specifying what was to follow. As a flogging was extremely likely to follow, it did not seem probable that the practical joker would be in a hurry to get a move on. He was much more likely to understudy Brer Fox, and "lie low and say nuffin."

Meanwhile there was much excited comment on what had happened in Mosscoo's study. Tubby Muffin related it breathlessly, forgetting that he would have been much better occupied in getting his hundred lines done. Tubby quite forgot the lines in his breathless interest in this startling affair. Tubby was the fellow that knew, and he was generously willing to impart his knowledge. But the fact that Jimmy Silver had been suspected first was known from other sources. Mosscoo made no secret of his belief. And the general opinion in the Fourth was that Mosscoo was a born idiot, and that Jimmy would have been justified in punching his nose.

But not everyone in the Fourth was a friend of Jimmy's, though most were; and those who, like Higgs, the bully of the Form, were "up against" Uncle James, did not lose this opportunity. Certainly, no one believed for a moment that Jimmy was a thief, or capable of becoming one. That was simply unthinkable about Jimmy Silver, whether a fellow liked him or not. Nevertheless, Higgs allowed himself to be humorous and sarcastic. It was a score over the captain of the Fourth, anyhow.

Jimmy Silver came into the Common-room while Higgs was going strong. Peele and Gower and Lattrey burst into a loud laugh as he came in; and Higgs, encouraged by applause, rattled on.

"Watches were made to go—and Mosscoo's has gone! He shouldn't leave watches about on study tables to tempt

thoughtless youngsters. But, you see, he thought it had stopped. After Silver came into the study, it didn't stop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peele & Co.

Jimmy Silver's eyes glittered. He came over towards Higgs, and the laughter died away. The expression on Uncle James' face was not provocative of mirth.

Mornington, lounging in an armchair, watched Jimmy Silver with cool curiosity. Even in the excited discussion no one had spoken to Mornington; he was barred as sedulously as ever. But there was a faint smile on his handsome face; a wicked amusement in his eyes. The purloined watch was still hidden in the box-room chimney. Later on, he intended to take it back to Mossco's study, and leave it on the table there to be found by the French master, who would know then that the whole thing was only a practical joke. But not yet—not until Jimmy Silver had tasted something of the cup of bitterness of which Mornington had had to drink deep.

That Jimmy was already feeling his position acutely was easily to be seen. Less keen eyes than Mornington's could see it. The shame of the suspicion, the humiliation of the search, had hit Jimmy hard, and his face was clouded, his temper less equable than of old, and he was much quicker to take offence. Higgs' foolish words had roused his ire, and Higgs did not like his look at all.

But Higgs did not intend to "back down" at a frown from Jimmy Silver. He faced him with an air of bluster.

"Want something?" he asked. "I've looked up my watch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peele.

Smack!

Jimmy's open palm rang on Higgs' cheek, and the bully of the Fourth staggered back.

"Why, I—I—I—" he spluttered, in breathless wrath.

"There's some more if you want it," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "A fellow's honesty isn't a subject for jokes."

"I'll smash you!" roared Higgs.

"Come on, then!"

Higgs came on fast enough. But what he came on to seemed to him like a hurricane of fists, and he was knocked right and left. Jimmy's temper was in a blaze, and never had the Fourth seen Uncle James

hitting out in that style before. Higgs had badgered him at the wrong moment, and he had to pay not only for his own sins, but for those of Mossco, and for the unpleasant circumstances generally.

It seemed to the hapless Higgs that Jimmy Silver had five or six fists, all as hard as iron, and all hammering on him at once.

There was a terrific crash when Higgs went down, and he lay gasping and sprawling, quite beaten.

"Ow, ow! Wow! I'm done!" gasped Higgs. "Yow-ow!"

"Chap doesn't prove his innocence by punching a fellow!" remarked Cyril Peele. Jimmy turned on him.

"My innocence doesn't want proving," he said.

"That's all very well!" gasped Higgs. "But if the watch doesn't turn up, Morny isn't the only chap in the Fourth who'll be sent to Coventry."

"Do you want some more?" snapped Jimmy Silver.

"You're not going to bully me!" roared Higgs. "I'll say what I like."

An elegant form lounged out of an armchair and interposed.

"Hands off, Silver! Higgs has had enough!"

It was Mornington. Jimmy Silver stopped, and stared at the dandy of the Fourth.

"Get out of the way, Mornington!"

Mornington did not move. "I don't want your help, Mornington!" growled Higgs. "And if you come to that, I don't believe Silver knows anything about the watch, so there."

Mornington laughed.

"Dear me! You're speakin' to me, too, Higgs. This will never do. I'm in Coventry, you know, though I'm not a thief, at least."

And he grinned mockingly at Jimmy Silver.

"Do you dare to say that I am a thief, Mornington?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Mayn't I have my own opinion?" smiled Mornington. "Mayn't I put two and two together, and assume that when a gold watch vanishes with only one person present, that person probably knows something about the curious incident? The Form found me guilty of sendin' a spoof telegram on much less evidence than that."

"Oh!" murmured several voices. Some of the juniors looked at one another oddly. Mornington had scored a point.

Jimmy Silver panted.

"I know your game!" he said savagely. "You want to throw suspicion on me if you can, because you're cut by the Form for playing a dirty trick. Put up your hands, you rotter!"

"With pleasure. Leave me my watch, though," said Mornington.

Jimmy, pale with anger, made a spring forward. But Arthur Edward Lovell caught him by the shoulder and dragged him back.

"You've had one fight," he exclaimed. "That's enough! What that cad wants is a ragging for his dirty insinuations, and that's what he's going to get!"

"Let go, Lovell!"

"Rats! Collar that grinning cad, you fellows!" shouted Lovell. "Give him a jolly good bumping and chuck him out!"

"Hear, hear!"

Raby and Newcome, and four or five of the juniors collared Mornington without ceremony. The dandy of the Fourth resisted fiercely, but he resisted in vain. Thrice he was bumped on the floor of the Common-room, and then he went spinning through the doorway into the corridor outside.

He scrambled to his feet and turned away, choking with rage. Lovell slammed the door.

Valentine Mornington, his face white, his eyes glinting strangely, crept quietly into the box-room, and then into the end study in the Fourth, now dark and deserted. He was a few minutes in that study—Jimmy Silver's study—and when he came out he was breathing hard, and his hands were trembling.

The missing watch was no longer hidden in the chimney of the box-room. What Mornington had never intended to do he had done now, in his rage and resentment. The die was cast!

CHAPTER 22.

The Search in the Study!

"LOOK out, Jimmy!"

Tubby Muffin whispered the words mysteriously.

His fat face was full of excitement.

Tubby had opened the door of the end study in the Fourth about two inches, and he blinked in and whispered from the passage without entering the study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at him.

The four chums did not seem duly impressed by Tubby's mysterious manner. Jimmy frowned. Raby grinned. Newcome stared, and Arthur Edward Lovell even picked up an inkpot, as if to throw it at the excited face in the doorway.

"Look out!" repeated Muffin, in a thrilling whisper. "Don't you chuck that inkpot at me, Lovell, you rotter! I say, they're coming, Jimmy!"

"You burbling jabberwock!" said Jimmy Silver crossly. "Who are coming, and what does it matter, anyhow?"

"The Head!"

"What?"

"And Mr. Dalton!"

"What the thump do the Head and Mr. Dalton want in this study?" said Raby, startled.

"And Monsieur Monceau!"

"Mossoo?" exclaimed Lovell.

"And Tupper!"

"What a merry party!" grinned Lovell.

"You silly ass, it's jolly serious!" gasped Tubby. "They're coming up the staircase now, and I cut ahead to warn Jimmy. They're after Mossoo's missing watch, of course!"

"What?" roared Lovell.

"Do you think they expect to find Mossoo's blessed old watch in this study?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "Chuck that inkpot at him, Lovell!"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin indignantly, "when I've come to put you on your guard. Of course, I don't think you really stole Mossoo's gold watch, Jimmy, though you were in his study alone when it went. But Mossoo thinks you did, and if they find it here——"

"You fat idiot, how could they find it here?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, greatly exasperated.

"Well, I've given you the tip!" said Tubby; and he jerked his head away and departed in a hurry. There were heavy footsteps sounding along the Fourth-Form passage, close at hand.

The Fistical Four all rose to their feet.

They were looking startled, and Jimmy Silver was looking angry. Tubby Muffin's warning had been meant good-naturedly;

but it showed that Tubby did not consider it impossible that monsieur's missing watch was hidden in the end study.

"Dash it all, they can't be coming to search the study!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "The Head wouldn't insult us like that."

Jimmy compressed his lips.

"It looks like it," he said, "You fellows needn't mind. It's I who am under suspicion."

"We jolly well do mind!" exclaimed Lovell hotly. "What right has Mosscoo to suspect you, just because you were in his study, and he missed the silly old watch about the same time. If Mosscoo wasn't a silly old cackling goose he would know better."

"Shurrup!" murmured Raby hastily.

There was a tap at the door, and it opened. Lovell's powerful voice had certainly been heard outside by the party that had now arrived.

It was a very imposing party.

Dr. Chisholm, the headmaster of Rookwood, was in the vanguard, as it were, lofty and stately. Mr. Dalton followed him, with Monsieur Monceau. Tupper, the page, brought up the rear. Farther on, half the Classical Fourth were following, greatly excited. In the crowd the face of Valentine Mornington could be seen, amused and mocking. The Fistical Four stood facing their visitors, Lovell dumb now, and a little dismayed. For the crimson wrath in Monsieur Monceau's face showed that he had heard Lovell's observation.

"Mon Dieu! Suis-je seely cackling goose?" exclaimed Monsieur Monceau.

"Vat is zat you say, isn't it, Lovell?"

"I—I—" stammered Lovell.

Dr. Chisholm raised his hand. The Head was not disposed to take note of what had been accidentally heard. Moreover, it was barely possible that he shared Lovell's opinion to some extent. Since the loss of his famous gold watch, Mosscoo had shown a striking resemblance to a startled fowl.

"Silence, Lovell!" said the Head.

"Monsieur Monceau, kindly leave this matter to me."

"Mais, monsieur—"

"Silver," said the Head, ruthlessly disregarding Mosscoo. Mosscoo had to content himself with gesticulating, which he did with great energy.

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy.

"The missing property of Monsieur Monceau has not yet been restored, Silver. I have allowed an interval to elapse, to enable the person who abstracted it to return the watch to the owner. It has not been done. I now ask you, Silver, whether you know anything of this?"

"Nothing, sir!"

"He was in ze study!" recommenced Mosscoo, again to be ruthlessly disregarded.

"I hope," said the Head, in a deep voice, "I hope and trust that this act will prove to be nothing but a foolish, reprehensible practical joke. Yet the retention of the abstracted property by the—the purloiner, gives the incident the appearance of theft. Silver, if you have hidden Monsieur Monceau's watch, I ask you, for the last time, to restore it, and take your punishment for playing a foolish prank."

"I have not done so, sir!"

"Suspicion rests upon you, Silver, because you were in Monsieur Monceau's study when the watch was left on the table. So far, the suspicion is merely of a disrespectful prank. If the watch is not immediately restored I shall be driven to the conclusion that actual theft is intended."

Mr. Dalton looked at Jimmy with a troubled brow.

"If you know anything, Silver—" he said.

"I know nothing of it, sir!"

"Zat is not true! You take zat watch!"

"Silence, please, monsieur!" said the Head. And the little French gentleman was once more driven to gesticulation as a last resource for expressing his feelings. "Silver, in the circumstances, I am forced to subject your room to a search. If the watch should be found, it will be too late for you to offer a foolish practical joke as an explanation. You will be adjudged a thief!"

Jimmy's cheeks crimsoned.

"I know nothing of the watch, sir!" he answered quietly.

"Very well! Tupper!"

"Yessir!" said Tupper.

"You will make a thorough search of this room, Tupper, in my presence. Kindly lose no time."

"Yessir!"

Dr. Chisholm signed to the Fistical Four to step into the passage. Mr. Dalton and

Mossoo remained in the study with the Head, looking on while the page began the search. And in the corridor there gathered more and more of the Fourth, and some of the Third and Shell, buzzing with excitement.

CHAPTER 23.

Guilty!

JIMMY SILVER stood quietly, with a set, calm face. The Co. were looking wrathily—even in the Head's presence they did not take the trouble to conceal their indignation. Their feelings were shared by most of the Fourth—for the thought of Jimmy Silver as a thief was an impossible one to entertain. Indeed, Conroy declared, in an audible whisper, that he did not believe the watch was missing at all—the absent-minded Mossoo had put it somewhere and forgotten, in the Cornstalk's opinion. If the Head overheard Conroy's remark, he paid no heed to it. His eyes were upon the page, who was going through the end study like a skilled searcher. Nobody believed for a moment that the missing gold watch was there; but if it was there, it was pretty certain that the industrious Tupper would unearth it. Only on Valentine Mornington's face there lingered a curious, faint smile of mockery.

"What is that, Tupper?"

The Head's deep voice was heard.

The juniors in the passage crowded as near as they dared, craning their necks to get a partial view of the interior of the end study.

Tupper was turning out the study cupboard—in the lower part of which there was a rather old collection of lumber. A chair with one leg, a clock that had ceased to "go," a bicycle pump, a superannuated punch-ball, a frying-pan with a hole in it, and several other articles were turned out. Then from the dusky recesses Tupper turned out a small paper parcel. It looked like a sheet of old brown paper carelessly twisted up and thrown into a corner.

"Only some old paper, sir!" said Tupper.

"Does it contain anything?"

"I'll jest see, sir."

Tupper unrolled the twisted sheet of thick paper. He gave a sudden startled gasp.

"My heye!"

"What is it, Tupper?" asked the Head, in a grinding voice.

"A—a—a watch, sir!"

"It is ze montre—it is ze yatch!" shrieked Monsieur Monceau.

The low buzz of whispering in the passage died away. A chill silence succeeded.

Jimmy Silver stood as if turned to stone.

In full view of a score of pairs of eyes, Tupper held up the watch he had taken from the twisted brown paper.

It was recognisable at a glance—everybody had seen Mossoo's big old-fashioned timekeeper.

Dr. Chisholm fixed his eyes upon it. He stretched out his hand, and Tupper placed the watch in his palm.

"Monsieur Monceau! Is this your property?"

"Mais oui! It is my watch!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Mr. Dalton.

"You have been deceived in that boy, Mr. Dalton!" said Dr. Chisholm. "Silver! You may come in, Silver."

Jimmy did not move.

He was so utterly thunderstruck by the discovery of the watch, that he seemed deprived of the power of motion.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome were staring at him with horrified eyes.

They could scarcely believe what had happened; but there was the stolen gold watch—it had been rolled in paper, and hidden behind the lumber in the lower part of the cupboard—a place where it certainly never would have been discovered without a strict search. But for the search, the cupboard would not have been turned out till the end of the term.

"Silver!" repeated the Head.

Lovell nudged his chum. Jimmy started, and moved, and went into the study with faltering steps, looking like a fellow in a dream.

Dr. Chisholm held up the watch.

"Do you claim this as your property, Silver?"

"N-no, sir."

"Do you admit that it is the property of Monsieur Monceau?"

"Of—of course, sir! We all know Mossoo's watch," said the captain of the Fourth dazedly.

"Take your property, monsieur."

Monsieur Monceau fairly clutched at the watch. His little black eyes were twinkling with delight at the recovery of his

property. The Head fixed his stern glance on Jimmy Silver.

"I am surprised," he said. "I did not believe for one moment that the stolen property would be found in your possession, Silver. Your Form-master deemed you incapable of theft; I shared his opinion. You have deceived both of us!"

"I—I—" stuttered Jimmy helplessly. "No doubt you believed that the stolen property was safe from a search in that recess," said the Head, "or perhaps you were so foolish as not to foresee a search Silver, I am shocked and grieved at this. You are not only a thief, but you have lied in the most brazen way to cover up your act. Such unscrupulous duplicity is almost incredible."

Jimmy panted for breath.

"I—I—I never did! I—I—"

"What?"

"I never touched the rotten watch!" broke out Jimmy Silver. "Some rotter has done this for a rotten joke on me!"

"Do not add to your guilt by fabricating further falsehoods," said the Head coldly. "Your study-mates are quite clear of suspicion. They did not have access to Monsieur Monceau's study, whence the watch was taken. You alone are guilty. Without the strongest evidence I shall not believe that your study-mates knew anything of this."

"Of course they didn't!" panted Jimmy. "And I knew no more than they did! I never touched the watch—"

"That will do! You will follow me to my study, Silver."

"But, sir—"

"Bring him with you, Mr. Dalton."

The Head swept majestically away, and Mr. Dalton, dropping his hand on Jimmy's shoulder, led the junior after the head-master. They passed through a silent, horror-stricken crowd in the corridor. Not a word was heard till they had disappeared down the staircase.

"Who'd have thought it?" exclaimed Gunner, who was the first to speak.

"I say, I really suspected it all along, you know," said Tubby Muffin, with a sage shake of the head. "Very suspicious, you know, I thought."

"What a surprise!" murmured Valentine Mornington, with a mocking glint in his eyes. "Fancy—Silver!"

Arthur Edward Lovell, with a crimson

face, strode towards the dandy of the Fourth. His eyes were blazing with rage.

He forgot that Mornington was in Coventry. His eyes blazed into the mocking face of the Rookwood outcast.

"You rotter!" panted Lovell. "Are you calling Jimmy a thief?"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you call him?" he asked. "Mossoo's watch was stolen, and you know where it was found!"

"It's a trick—a vile trick of some kind!" said Lovell, choking. "Only a fool would think Jimmy did it."

"Your pals don't agree with you," said Mornington mockingly.

Lovell cast a hasty look at Raby and Newcome. They coloured.

"Rot!" said Raby. "It—it—it looks horribly bad, but—but there's a mistake somewhere—somehow—"

"There must be," said Newcome miserably. "Jimmy couldn't do it—he couldn't."

"Rot!" snorted Higgs.

"The Head's goin' to kick him out of Rookwood, anyhow," smiled Mornington. "The Head's satisfied. And if you stand up for a thief, Lovell—"

Crash!

Mornington went spinning backwards as Lovell hit out. He rolled on the passage floor.

Lovell glared round furiously.

"Anybody else say the same?" he roared.

Mornington sprang to his feet and rushed at Lovell. In a second they were fighting furiously.

"Cave!" yelled Rawson, along the passage.

Bulkeley of the Sixth came striding on the scene. He grasped the two fighting juniors, and dragged them apart by main force.

"Stop this!" he snapped. "What's this rowing about, bother you?"

"Better asked Lovell!" sneered Mornington.

"He called Jimmy a thief!" panted Lovell. "I'll smash him! I'll—I'll—" Lovell choked.

"Don't be a young fool!" said Bulkeley sharply. "Silver is proved a thief, and I've already been told by the Head that I'm to take him home. Keep your temper!"

Lovell staggered against the passage wall.

"Take Jimmy home!" he repeated.

"Yes! First train in the morning!"

"You—you mean he's sacked?"

"Do you think the Head would let a thief stay at Rookwood?" snapped the prefect.

"It's a lie! He's not a thief! It's a lie!" roared Lovell, utterly forgetful that it was the captain of the school he was addressing. "I'd say so to the Head, too!"

Bulkeley raised his hand—and dropped it again.

"Calm yourself, kid!" he said, gently enough. "I know it's a shock to you. But you mustn't talk rot like that. Go into your study and stay there!"

He pushed Lovell into the end study. Ruby and Newcome followed Lovell in, and the door closed. In the crowded passage there was ceaseless buzz of excited voices—in the end study three juniors sat in grim silence, staring at one another; dismayed, dumbfounded, in such utter misery as they had never experienced before in their young lives.

CHAPTER 24.

Mornington's Triumph!

VALENTINE MORNINGTON lounged into his study. It was nearly bed-time—and hardly any of the Fourth had given a thought to prep. that evening. Even Kit Erroll had forgotten his work in the excitement of the discovery and the condemnation of Jimmy Silver.

Mornington was smiling evilly.

The sentence of "Coventry"—rigidly enforced as it had been till now—had broken down under the stress of the excitement. Morny had joined in the discussion, and the juniors seemed to have forgotten that he was an outcast. Jimmy Silver had been the prime mover in the sentence on Mornington, and now Jimmy was down—so low that even Mornington might have pitied him.

He was judged a thief on evidence that scarcely any reasonable fellow could doubt. Even his own chums were staggered, though they clung to their faith in him in spite of evidence.

Mornington threw himself into the arm-chair in Study No. 4, with his hands driven deep into his pockets, and smiled genially. The fall of Jimmy Silver, the black disgrace

that had overwhelmed the captain of the Fourth, clothing him with shame as a garment, seemed to afford Mornington solace. He had been through it—now Jimmy Silver was going through it—and worse. How did he like it? Mornington wondered cynically.

He laughed aloud.

The study door opened and Kit Erroll came in. He heard Morny's laugh, and knitted his brows. He closed the study door and came over towards Morny, who smiled and nodded.

"Just remembered your prep.?" he asked.

Erroll did not answer that. He stood with his eyes fixed on Morny's face—searching it as he would search his very soul.

"Oh, I forgot! I'm in Coventry!" smiled Mornington. "You're in with the rest! Don't trouble to speak!"

"Never mind Coventry now, Mornington," said Erroll. "I'm going to speak—I must speak!"

"Please yourself!" said Mornington, shrugging his shoulders.

"What do you know about what has happened, Mornington?"

The dandy of the Fourth stared.

"Just what all the fellows know," he answered. "Mossoo made Silver write out an imput in his study, and Silver bagged his watch, which was left on the table."

"You believe that?"

"Don't you?" smiled Mornington.

"I can't!"

"The Head seems to be satisfied. Of course, even a headmaster is liable to make mistakes."

Erroll's eyes still searched his face.

"You know no more than that?" he asked.

"What could I know?"

"We're pals no longer, Mornington. But I think I know you better than the other fellows do, and I ask you again, what do you know about what has happened in Jimmy Silver's study?"

Mornington yawned.

"We're pals no longer," he repeated.

"Exactly! Quite so! May I take the liberty of mentioning that your conversation bores me, Erroll?"

"Someone took that watch from Monsieur Monceau's study," replied Erroll, unheeding. "I've believed—up to now—

that it was a silly practical joke on Mossos. It's clear now that it's worse than that!"

"Quite clear, I should say!"

"Did you take the watch, Mornington?"

"Begad! Little me?"

"And plant it in Jimmy Silver's study cupboard?"

"What an idea!"

"For revenge on him for getting you sent to Coventry for your dirty trick over the St. Jim's match?"

Mornington laughed lightly.

"And this is the chap who used to be my pal!" he remarked. "Are you asking me all that seriously, Erroll?"

"Quite seriously!"

"Then you can go and eat coke! Go and tell the Head what you suspect—and offer him what evidence you can find!" sneered Mornington.

"I have no evidence!"

"Gad! Then it would be rather wiser to shut up, and take care not to slander a fellow—what?"

"The suspicion came into my mind—I could not help it," said Erroll. "If Jimmy Silver is a thief, I can never trust anyone again! I would as soon believe myself a thief! It's impossible! Somebody's played a horrible trick. Mornington!"—Erroll's voice softened, it became almost pleading—"Morny, if you've done this, think—think, before it's too late! You're not a villain, though now you're so bitter you may think that you can act like one and be glad of it! If Silver goes—if he's disgraced, and it's all false—do you think you'll get any satisfaction out of it? I tell you, Mornington, you'll suffer more than Silver! If you've done this—if it's another dirty trick of yours—think, before it's too late."

Erroll broke off abruptly, as Mornington rose to his feet.

The dandy of the Fourth was laughing.

"Have you finished?" he asked easily. Erroll looked at him—dumb. "Good! I've mentioned that you bore me, old bean! Ta-ta!"

Valentine Mornington strolled out of the study.

He went down to the Common-room. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were keeping to their study; Jimmy Silver was not to be seen. From the talk of the juniors, Morny learned that the captain of the Fourth had been taken to the punishment-room for the night. The Head had re-

solved that he should exchange no word with the other Rookwooders before he left—the wretched thief, as Dr. Chisholm regarded him, was to be separated immediately from the rest of the school. Tubby Muffin had seen Jimmy conducted to his new quarters by Bulkeley and Carthew, and he was giving a description of it when Morny lounged into the Common-room.

"First train in the morning!" said Tubby. "I say, I saw the Head—he was looking in a frightful wax. Never seen him with such a chivvy on! Dicky Dalton looked quite sick! He feels it, you know! So do I—I'm awfully shocked at Silver! You never knew a fellow till you find him out, do you, you know!"

"Oh, dry up!" grunted Conroy. "I don't believe it yet!"

"That's rot!" said Tubby. "I suppose the Head knows! Besides, who could have bagged the watch if Silver didn't? Nobody else knew that Mossos had left it on his table—Silver only knew because he was sent to the study. The fact is, I suspected all along—"

"Rot!" grunted Conroy.

"You fellows will remember that I've told you lots of times that Silver was rather fishy—"

"I don't remember!"

"You remember, don't you, Morny?"

"No, you fat idiot!" said Mornington.

"For goodness' sake, shut up, Muffin!"

"Yah!" was Tubby's defiant reply.

Bulkeley of the Sixth looked in. His face was grave; the affair had been a shock to him, as well as to the juniors.

"Bed-time!" he said curtly.

The Classical Fourth were still in a state of excitement when they marched into their dormitory. Lovell and Raby and Newcome came in rather late, and they turned in without a word to the rest of the Form. Some of the juniors stared at them curiously. They had wondered how Jimmy Silver's best chums would take it; and it was clear that Jimmy's chums were taking it badly. Lovell's face was white, and Raby and Newcome looked utterly wretched and troubled. It seemed like a horrid dream to them—that their chum was, in those very moments, confined to the punishment-room, segregated like a leper from his schoolfellows, as if his touch were contamination, under sentence of leaving the school in ignominy. Yet they felt that the Head could not have decided differently.

They did not even suspect, as Erroll had done, that there was a wicked plot against their chum; their stunned minds did not even seize on that theory. They did not know what to think—what to believe; only, with almost pathetic loyalty, they clung to their faith in Jimmy Silver, and refused to believe that he was a thief.

Jimmy a thief! Jimmy expelled from Rookwood! It was like the bottom being knocked out of their little world. It gave them a dazed feeling—they knew it was true, yet the realisation of it would not come home to their minds.

They were very silent, after lights out, taking no part in the excited buzz of talk in the dormitory. But they did not sleep. When the summer morning dawned upon Rookwood School it dawned upon three juniors who had hardly closed their eyes during the long hours of the night.

CHAPTER 25.

His Better Self!

"MR. DALTON!"

MR. DALTON stood up at the breakfast table. The Fourth Form master, at the head of the table, glanced at him kindly. It would have been difficult to be stern with the junior just then, after a glance at his haggard face, his eyes red with trouble and want of sleep.

"Yes, Lovell?" said Mr. Dalton kindly.

"I want to see Jimmy—I mean Silver, sir, before he goes."

Mr. Dalton shook his head.

"I want to see him, sir—just a word! He's not a thief, sir—" Lovell's voice broke, and there came a rush of tears to his eyes in spite of himself. "I know he isn't, sir—I know he isn't! He couldn't do it! I want to see him, sir—just a minute, to tell him I—I—" Poor Lovell's voice died away chokingly.

"I understand, my boy," said Mr. Dalton. "But you cannot see him. Silver has already left Rookwood."

"Left!" stammered Lovell.

"Dr. Chisholm judged it better for him to go without seeing any of his school-fellows, in order to avoid any possibility of a scene," said Mr. Dalton. "Bulkeley is now on his way to the station with him. You may sit down, Lovell."

Arthur Edward Lovell felt, rather than

sat, in his seat. He looked overwhelmed. It was the last blow.

Erroll turned his eyes on Valentine Mornington mutely, accusingly. The dandy of the Fourth did not meet his glance.

Mornington's face was not happy that morning. He had some cause for satisfaction—the sentence of Coventry was at an end. It had been forgotten in the stress of excitement the previous evening—and no one seemed disposed to resume it. Mornington and his offence, in fact, were completely overshadowed by what had happened to Jimmy Silver.

If that was any satisfaction to Morny, he had it. But he was not looking satisfied. His face was a little pale, there was a wrinkle in his brows, and his lips twitched at times. Mornington had tasted revenge—and he found the taste of it like Dead Sea fruit, bitter in the mouth. He hardly touched his breakfast; his thoughts were with the hapless junior tramping along the sunny road that morning, in charge of a prefect—sent home under a load of shame that was heavy enough to break the proudest spirit. In his mind's eye Morny could see his victim—tramping along, with despair in his heart; he could picture the arrival home, the misery that would be caused there, the shame of old Mr. Silver, the tears of Cousin Phyllis. Mornington turned from his untasted food, and he was glad when the Fourth left the dining-room. He had tasted revenge—and, as it was written of old, what had tasted as sweet as honey had turned as bitter as gall.

Mr. Dalton was turning away in the hall when he felt a touch on his sleeve. He glanced down at Valentine Mornington.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Can I speak to you, sir? It's rather important," said Morny, in a low voice.

"It—it's about Silver, sir."

"That matter is closed, Mornington."

"I have something to tell you about it, sir," said Morny.

"I do not see—"

"The Head's sent Silver away early to keep him out of the way of the fellows," said Mornington. "But the train's not till nine—they'll have to wait at the station. There's still time to send for him."

"Send for him? What do you mean? There is no question of Silver returning to the school."

"There will be when I've told you what

"I have to say!" answered Mornington in a low, even voice.

Mr. Dalton looked at him steadily, searchingly, for a long moment. Then he signed to the junior to follow him to his study. Mornington followed him with an unflinching step.

"Now kindly explain your words!" said the Fourth Form master, when the door was closed.

"Silver is innocent, sir."

"And how do you know?"

"Because I put Monsieur Monceau's watch in his study last evening."

"What?"

"Only about an hour before it was found there, sir!" said Mornington.

There was a long pause.

"Is it possible, Mornington, that you have acted with such incredible baseness?" said Mr. Dalton at last, and the contempt and horror in his voice brought the blood in a rush to Mornington's pale face. But his voice was steady as he answered:

"Yes, sir."

"You know, I suppose, that if this confession is taken as true, you will be expelled from the school, Mornington?"

"I know it."

"And you persist in it?"

"Yes."

"And why, Mornington," said Mr. Dalton, his voice softening a little—"why did you do this wicked thing, and why have you come to tell me so?"

"I suppose because one rotten thing leads to another," said Mornington. "You know I was sent to Coventry by the Fourth—"

"I know it, and by accident I learned the cause. Is it true that you sent a false telegram to Silver, calling him home on the pretence that his father was ill, to keep him away from a cricket-match?"

"It's true."

"And why—"

"I was wild at being dropped out of the team," said Mornington. "That's why I did it. I—I was sorry afterwards; but it was too late then. And they found me out and sent me to Coventry. I don't say I didn't deserve it. I know I did. But—but it came hard. My best chum joined against me with the rest. And—and yesterday I—I—" He broke off. "I've told you enough, sir."

"Tell me all, Mornington."

"I took the watch out of Mossou's study

to give Silver a taste of what I'd had," muttered Mornington. "I thought he'd be suspected and avoided and cut, as I'd been. Then—then they ragged me, and—and I went to the box-room and got it, and put it where it was found. I never meant Silver to be expelled. I didn't think so far as that. I only wanted him to go through what I'd been through."

"On your own showing," said Mr. Dalton sternly, "you deserved all that you went through, Mornington."

The wretched junior hung his head.

"I know it, sir."

"You have, at least, made what reparation was in your power, by making this confession before it was too late, Mornington. You are prepared to repeat it in the presence of the Head?"

"If you like, sir."

"That is necessary. But I cannot hold out any hope to you, Mornington, that Dr. Chisholm will take a lenient view of the matter. He is quite certain to send you away from Rookwood."

Mornington nodded without speaking. He had known what he had to expect. He did not hope for mercy. He hardly cared so long as he relieved his mind from the burden of guilt that had grown too heavy for him to bear.

Mr. Dalton rose.

"Follow me!" he said quietly.

Some of the Fourth saw Mornington going to the Head's study with his Form-master, and they wondered what was "on." They little dreamed what it was. In a few minutes the Fourth Form master came back from Dr. Chisholm's study, but Mornington did not come with him. He remained with the Head.

"Neville!" Mr. Dalton called to the Sixth Form prefect. "Will you take your bicycle and ride to Coombe, and overtake Bulkeley if possible. You will find him at the station, at least, and you will tell him that the Head desires him to return at once with Silver."

"With Silver, sir?" ejaculated Neville.

"Yes."

A dozen fellows were looking on breathlessly. Arthur Edward Lovell fixed his eyes on Mr. Dalton, scarcely daring to understand his words aright. Mr. Dalton glanced round.

"The truth has now come to light," he said quietly. "Monsieur Monceau's watch

was not stolen at all. A junior of the Fourth Form has confessed that he hid it in Silver's study for a cruel trick. Neville, will you make all the haste you can?"

The Sixth-Former fairly ran for his bicycle.

Arthur Edward Lovell ran towards Mr. Dalton.

"Jimmy, sir," he panted—"Jimmy's coming back?"

"Yes, Lovell."

"I knew—I knew he wasn't a thief, sir. I told you so."

"You were right, Lovell, as it proves," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "None can be blamed for the injustice done. The evidence was clear enough. Fortunately, the wretched boy who played this cruel, wicked trick confessed in time."

"Who was it, sir?" asked several voices. "Mornington!"

And the name was repeated in a buzz.

"Jimmy—Jimmy, old chap!"

Lovell rushed at his chum. Jimmy Silver walked in at the gates of Rookwood between Bulkeley and Neville, the latter wheeling his bike. Jimmy had a dazed expression on his face. But he brightened, and looked quite the old Jimmy again as Lovell rushed up and fairly hugged him.

"Jimmy, old infant," gasped Lovell. "I knew it was all lies! Mornington's confessed, the rotter! Oh, Jimmy—"

"Right as rain now, Jimmy!" said Raby, grabbing Jimmy's right hand, while Newcome grabbed his left.

"Good old Jimmy!" roared the Classical Fourth. The whole Form had turned out to welcome their captain, and cheer him in his triumphal progress across the quadrangle.

Jimmy Silver, feeling like a fellow in a dream, marched to the School House in the midst of a cheering crowd, and Mr. Dalton met him at the door with extended hand. The captain of the Fourth's eyes danced when he went into the Form-room with his comrades, the familiar old Form-room he had never expected to enter again. It was like light after darkness, triumph and happiness after the bitterness of despair.

There was one place vacant in the Fourth Form-room, the place of Valentine Morn-

ington. And in his happiness Jimmy could spare a thought of compassion to the wretched junior who had wronged him, but who had repented at the eleventh hour.

CHAPTER 26.

Exit Mornington!

"**R**UBBISH!" said Lovell. "I'm going to try!"

"Rot!" Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Rookwood Fourth, did not heed his emphatic chum.

He left Lovell standing at the corner of the corridor with Raby and Newcome, and walked along to the door of the Head's study.

Arthur Edward Lovell indulged in a snort. Raby and Newcome looked very dubious. But Uncle James of Rookwood had made up his mind, and he was going serenely ahead.

Jimmy tapped at the door of the Head's study, and entered. It was close on time for lessons, and Dr. Chisholm was about to leave the study to proceed to the Sixth Form room.

He gave Jimmy a kind glance, however. "What is it, Silver?" he asked.

Then Jimmy hesitated. What he had come to ask the Head was, he realised, "cheek." He did not quite know how the headmaster would take it. But it was too late for retreat now, if he had wanted to retreat.

"It—it's about Mornington, sir!" he stammered.

Dr. Chisholm frowned.

"Mornington is leaving Rookwood at once," he said. "You will not see that unscrupulous boy again, Silver. In a very short time he will have ceased to disgrace Rookwood with his presence."

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

It was no wonder that the Head was incensed against Valentine Mornington, considering what that reckless youth had done, but it made Jimmy's task all the harder.

"I—I thought, sir—" he stuttered.

"Well?"

"Morny acted badly, sir," said Jimmy, "but—but he owned up at the last minute. If he hadn't owned up you'd have believed that I—I took the French master's watch, and would have sent me away from the

school. I am sure that Mornny never really meant to make me out a thief. It—it was just his beastly temper, sir. He owned up before it was too late—"

"Well?" said the Head grimly.

"I—I was thinking, sir, that—that you might let him stay," faltered Jimmy Silver. "He did the right thing at the finish, sir, and he might—"

"I hardly expected you to speak for the iniquitous boy who nearly caused you to be sent away from Rookwood in disgrace, Silver."

"Well, sir—"

"It is true that Mornnington repented at the eleventh hour, and confessed the truth regarding the dastardly trick he had played," said Dr. Chisholm. "Possibly he is not all bad. But I could not dream of allowing such a boy to remain at Rookwood now that I know his character. I could not run the risk of his playing such a trick a second time, when he might not repent."

"But, sir—"

Dr. Chisholm waved his hand.

"I have allowed you to speak, Silver. You have said enough. My answer to your request is a most decided negative. You may go."

Jimmy Silver stood silent. He had more than half expected that answer. The Head could not overlook what Mornnington had done. But Jimmy could think of many extenuating circumstances that were unknown to Dr. Chisholm.

Dr. Chisholm glanced at the clock.

"Mornnington is even now leaving the school!" he said. "There is nothing to be said, Silver. You may go."

Jimmy Silver, with a heavy heart, left the study. He had done all he could for the fellow who had been his enemy, and he had failed. Lovell & Co. met him at the corner of the passage.

"Well?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell grimly.

"Nothing doing."

"After all, Jimmy, he ought to go," said Baby slowly.

"I must say so, too, Jimmy," remarked Newcome. "You're a bit soft, old chap."

Jimmy nodded absently and walked on, and looked out into the green quadrangle. He could not help pitying Mornnington, whose wilful, perverse temper had brought him down with a crash at last. Erroll of the Fourth was standing on the steps, and he glanced quickly at Jimmy.

"He's not gone yet?" he asked.

"Just going, the Head says," answered Jimmy.

"Poor old Mornny!" muttered Erroll.

"I—I've spoken to the Head, but there's nothing doing. I—I can't wonder at it," said Jimmy. "I'm sorry, all the same. There's a lot of good in Mornny. But for his beastly temper—"

"Thanks!" said a drawling voice behind Jimmy Silver.

The captain of the Fourth spun round. Valentine Mornnington, the expelled junior, was coming out of the House with Bulkeley of the Sixth. Bulkeley had the task of conducting him to his home, to hand him over to his guardian.

Jimmy coloured.

"I'm sorry you're going, Mornny!" he said.

"After I jolly nearly did you in?" grinned Mornnington.

"Yes, even after that. You couldn't carry it through. You weren't bad enough for that," said Jimmy Silver quickly. "It was a rotten trick you played—awfully rotten—but you stopped in time. I can't forget that. You've got the sack by owing up."

"More fool little me—what?" said Mornnington, shrugging his shoulders. "But I'm not sorry I owned up. I'm sorry for a good many things, but not for that. I wish we'd pulled better together here, Silver."

"I wish we had!" said Jimmy sadly.

Mornnington, after hesitating a moment, held out his hand. Jimmy Silver shook it cordially enough. Then the expelled junior ran lightly down the steps after Bulkeley.

Erroll had not spoken. But he followed Mornnington as he went. A dozen fellows were coming towards the School House, and they all looked curiously at Mornnington.

There was no desire on the part of the Rookwood juniors for a demonstration. They were all down enough on what the reckless fellow had done, but his last act in owing the truth and facing the result did much to restore him in their opinion. He had acted like a rascal, but he had lacked the rascality to carry through his scheme.

So the Fourth-Formers, though they watched him curiously as he passed, remained silent and undemonstrative.

Erroll followed Mornnington down to the gates, where the station hack was waiting with his box on it. There was a strange mingling of emotions in Kit Erroll's breast.

He had broken with his chum, but now

that Mornington was going for good, Erroll realised that the old friendship was not so dead in his breast as he had deemed.

Mornington did not look at him—did not seem aware of his presence. Old Mack opened the door of the cab, blinking curiously at Morny. Morny still held his head high. If he knew that he was the observed of all observers, the circumstance did not seem to affect him in any way. His look was quite indifferent.

"Morny!" said Erroll, as the expelled dandy of the Fourth was stepping into the hack.

Valentine Mornington turned, and his face broke into a grin.

"I wondered, if you'd speak before I went!" he said, with a laugh. "You've done it, old bean."

"Wouldn't you have if I hadn't?" said Erroll in a low voice.

"No!"

Erroll sighed.

"Then I'm glad I did. Morny! Give me your hand before you go—let's part friends, at least!"

"With all my heart!"

Their hands met. Morny stepped into the hack. Bulkeley made a sign to the driver.

As the hack rolled away, Valentine Mornington glanced at his whilom chum from the window, and smiled. He could smile, even at that moment, when the gates of Rookwood were closing behind him for ever. Erroll waved his hand, and turned back into the quadrangle with an aching heart.

His chum was gone. And now that he was gone, Erroll realised how much he cared, in spite of all. If he had stood by his pal more resolutely, if he had been more patient, might not Morny have been saved from that last mad outbreak that had wrought his ruin?

Be that as it might, it was too late now to think of it. Valentine Mornington had gone from his accustomed place, the school gates had clanged after him, and Rookwood knew him no more.

CHAPTER 27.

The Highcliffe Match!

DURING the week that followed, the expulsion of Valentine Mornington was the chief topic in the Lower School at Rookwood.

He was missed in the Classical Fourth.

Of late weeks, certainly, he had been in deep disfavour—he had been sent to Coventry by the Form, and he had deserved it.

Yet the juniors missed him from the place where they had been accustomed to the sight of him.

Rookwood, somehow, did not seem quite the same without Morny, with all his faults and exasperating failings.

Erroll's face was very grave in these days; he had Study No. 4 in the Fourth to himself now, and he did not ask any other fellow to share it with him. Tubby Muffin offered to replace Mornington in Study No. 4—which would have been a great improvement for the study, in Muffin's opinion. Erroll declined without thanks.

Perhaps he had a lingering hope that somehow, some time, his chum might be permitted to return, improbable as it seemed.

But if Erroll kept Morny's memory green, he was probably the only fellow who did so, after a week or two, with one exception.

Schoolboys have short memories, and in the course of time things went on much as if Valentine Mornington had never come to Rookwood at all.

For a week or more, certainly, he was the one topic among the juniors; even the seniors discussed the matter with some interest. As a rule, Fourth Form fags might come and go, without affecting the serenity of such mighty Forms as the Fifth and Sixth. But Morny had been a little out of the common—there was not a prefect whom he had not cheeked, hardly a senior at all who had not had, somehow, to take note of the existence of the dandy of the Fourth.

But the seniors soon forgot Mornington; and the juniors proceeded to forget him—excepting Kit Erroll and one other. The other was little Herbert—Mornington secundus of the Second Form. More than once Snooks & Co. of the Second noticed signs of blubbing on the chubby little face of Mornington secundus. He missed his cousin sorely, though he had really seen little of Valentine Mornington during his stay at Rookwood—Morny was not a fellow to chum with Second Form fags.

Sometimes, now, Mornington secundus dropped into Study No. 4 in the Fourth to see Erroll; oftener, in fact, than he had done when Morny was at Rookwood. They

talked of the absent junior, gradually forgetting his faults and follies, and remembering only his good qualities, as is usual in the case of the absent.

But, with those two exceptions, the Rookwood Fourth soon went on its way as if Valentine Mornington had never been at the school at all. He was not missed in the cricket team, for he had been out of the cricket for some time before he left, owing to his trouble with the Fourth. Only when Jimmy Silver was making up the list of the eleven for the forthcoming Highcliffe match, he thought of Mornington regretfully. Highcliffe was a new fixture with the Rookwood juniors. Jimmy Silver had met some of the Highcliffe fellows at Greyfriars on the occasion of a match there, and the fixture had been arranged later. Highcliffe were a strong team, and Jimmy was much exercised in his mind over the selection of the eleven that was to visit them. He wanted the new fixture to begin with a victory for Rookwood, and he would have been glad of Valentine Mornington—at his best. Still, he consoled himself with the reflection that Morny was quite likely to be at his worst on any occasion when he was specially wanted.

"If——" Jimmy Silver remarked, as he sat with pencil and paper in the end study the day before the Highcliffe fixture.

Arthur Edward Lovell interrupted him.

"Rats!" he said.

"If——" repeated Jimmy.

"Cut it out!" advised Lovell. "I know what you're thinking. If Morny was here, if he could be got somehow to play the game, and if he would condescend to keep in form, he would be jolly valuable in the match to-morrow. But he isn't here; he wouldn't play the game if he was, and he wouldn't keep in form if he didn't choose—so what's the good of 'ifing'! You're a soft ass, Jimmy!"

"Possibly!" assented Jimmy cheerfully. "All the same, I wish Morny hadn't come such an awful cropper."

"He asked for it a dozen times and never got it!" granted Lovell. "He got it at last; and serve him right!"

"Well, he's gone now, anyhow," said Jimmy. "What do you fellows think of this for an eleven? Little me——"

"Fairish!" grinned Raby.

"Fathead! And Lovell——"

"Ripping!" said Arthur Edward.

"The three Tommies of the Modern side——"

"So-so!" said Newcome.

"And Towle——"

"Too many Moderns!" said Lovell. "Still, Towle's fairly good in the field."

"Conroy, Erroll——"

"Right as rain!"

"Raby, Newcome, and Van Ryn."

"Hear, hear!" said Raby and Newcome.

"Oswald will come over as a reserve," said Jimmy Silver. "Number's limited, as it's such a jolly long way and the railway fares are so steep. I don't suppose we shall have any followers, as far off as Highcliffe. But we'd better take an extra man."

"It's a good team," said Lovell, "and I don't see why we should miss Mornington. The extra place gives you a chance to play the whole of this study, too, and that's something."

"I think I'd rather beat Highcliffe," remarked Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy went down to post the list on the board—where it met the approval of the fellows whose names were mentioned in it, and considerable disapproval in other quarters, as was in the nature of things. Kit Erroll called to Jimmy as he was coming back to the staircase. Erroll was standing by a hall window, with a letter in his hand. Jimmy joined him there.

"News of Morny?" he asked.

"Yes, if you'd care to hear."

"Certainly I would!" said Jimmy Silver at once. "I hope he's getting on all serene with his guardian. They used to have a lot of trouble, I believe."

"I'm afraid they have it still," said Erroll. "There's the letter, if you'd like to read it."

Jimmy read the letter with some interest. It was written quite in Morny's style.

"Stacpoole Lodge.

"Dear Erroll.—Thanks for yours; why haven't you forgotten me? I fancy everybody else has—unless it's little Herbert. If you get any chance of doing that kid a good turn, I'd be glad. Might have done so myself while I was at Rookwood, only—too busy thinking about my worthy self.

"I've had a high old time at home. Uncle Stacpoole gave me two hours, by the clock, on the disgrace of being sacked from school. The effect was really spoiled by my lighting a cigarette in the middle of the lecture.

"The excellent old johnny declines, at

present, to send me to another school. He says I've thrown up my chances, and can take the consequences. I rather fancy he's not sorry to save the fees for a term or two. There's something very gratifying in being dependent on an uncle who hates the sight of one's merry chivvy.

"My Stacpoole cousins, luckily, are away at school. When they're at home I expect a regular beano.

"Will it surprise you to learn that I am fed up already with home comforts and avuncular affection? I'm going off on a little holiday on my jolly own. After you get this, my address will be G.P.O., Folkestone, till I write again. Dear old nunky is jolly glad to stand me a tanner and see the last of me for a week or two. We shall both get a rest.

"Kind regards to Jimmy Silver, and tell Lovell I'm sorry I didn't punch him before I left.

"Yours always,

"VALENTINE MORNINGTON."

"Same old Morny!" said Jimmy Silver, with a smile. "We won't show this to Lovell. But, dash it all, Morny couldn't have expected his uncle to be pleased when he arrived home—sacked! It must have been a rather painful shock for the old gentleman."

Erroll nodded. Jimmy Silver returned to the end study to tea, thinking a good deal over that letter. Under its careless persiflage he recognised the chafing of a proud spirit—the bitter regret, too, of a fellow who had had chances, and had thrown them away in sheer perverseness—and understood his folly too late. And from the bottom of his kind heart Jimmy was sorry for the exile from Rookwood.

CHAPTER 23.

Lovell Knows Best!

"IF you'll stand the fare, Jimmy, old

"Eh?"

"I'll come."

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"I will, really," said Tubby Muffin. "I'm sure I could get leave if you tell Mr. Dalton that you specially want me as a reserve. And you fellows can whack out the fare!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No takers, Tubby!" chuckled Oswald.

And the cricketers started, leaving Tubby Muffin disconsolate on the School House steps. Muffin had to go in to lessons with the rest of the Fourth, feeling greatly aggrieved. It was a good distance to Highcliffe, in Kent, and the cricketers had early leave, which was only extended to members of the eleven and one extra man.

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked down to Coombe in cheery spirits. It was a glorious summer's morning. They boarded the local train in a merry party, and ran on to Latcham, where they changed for the express. All the team were in great form, and looking forward to their game with Courtenay & Co., of Highcliffe. At Latcham Junction they secured a carriage to themselves, and Arthur Edward Lovell brought in a bag of tartan and another of scones for refreshment on the long run. He stood on the platform at the open carriage-door, and handed them round to the crowd inside.

"Better get in, old chap," said Raby. "Nearly due to start."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Lovell. "Don't you worry."

Arthur Edward Lovell had many virtues and good qualities, but he always knew best.

"Jump in, old man!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Bow-wow!" said Lovell. "Lots of time yet. My hat! I didn't pick up my change! Shan't be a tick!"

"Come back, you ass!" shouted Jimmy, from the doorway, as Lovell ran back to the buffet. "Blow your change!"

Lovell ran on fast. He had left the change out of a pound note behind—besides, he knew best! Jimmy sat down again, looking wrathful. He was not given to taking chances unless they couldn't be avoided.

"They're shutting the doors!" remarked Conroy. "Somebody yell to that ass Lovell! He'll get left behind at this rate."

"That wouldn't be a disaster, really," grinned Oswald. "You've got a jolly good reserve with you."

But Lovell's chums did not agree with Dick Oswald's view. Raby leaned out of the carriage and stared anxiously along the platform. He could not see Lovell.

He jumped out of the carriage, and put his hands to his mouth to make a trumpet, and shouted:

"Lovell! Fathead! Lovell! Buck up!"
Slam! Slam!

The guard was coming along fast. He had waved his flag as a signal to the engine-driver. He slammed the door of the juniors' carriage, and passed on.

George Raby spun back to the carriage—forgetting even Lovell in his anxiety not to be left behind himself.

"Stand back, there!"

Heedless of the porter's warning yell, Raby clutched at the handle of the carriage-door, not even noticing that the train was already in motion.

The porter rushed at him, grabbed him by the shoulders, and spun him back so suddenly that Raby sat on the platform with a bump.

"You young fool! Want to be killed?" yelled the porter wrathfully. "Making a man's 'eart 'op in his mouth, you young idiot!"

The train was rushing out of the station—Jimmy Silver's dismayed face framed in the carriage-window. Arthur Edward Lovell came speeding back—his change in his hand, and a blank look on his face.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "Hi! Stop that train! We—"

"Likely!" jeered the porter.

Raby staggered up.

"You ass! You've got both of us left behind! You crass chump!"

And for once Arthur Edward Lovell hadn't a word to say for himself—a most unusual circumstance.

In the crowded carriage where the Rookwooders congregated, already out of sight of the station, there was wrath and dismay. Instead of twelve Rookwooders, there were now only ten. Instead of a reserve in excess of the required number, Jimmy Silver had a man short.

Jimmy's feelings were too deep for words.

He sat down again, breathing hard, Arthur Edward Lovell was his chum, but the captain of the Fourth could have punched his nose with pleasure at that moment.

"You'll want me, anyhow!" said Oswald, trying manfully not to derive any personal satisfaction from the disaster.

"Just like a Classical ass to get left behind!" remarked Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth, disparagingly.

"Oh, just!" said Tommy Cook.

"Might really have expected it, almost!" observed Tommy Doyle, in a reflective sort of way.

Jimmy Silver did not heed the little jokes of the Modern trio. He was too dismayed for that. He groped for his time-table at last, and consulted it desperately. He knew that there was no train by which Lovell and Raby could come on in time for the match, but perhaps he hoped, by a savage scrutiny of the time-table, to discover one. If so, he was disappointed. The blackest and grimmest scowl could not discover a train that wasn't there.

"When's the next?" asked Conroy.

"Two hours!" said Jimmy.

"Then—" said Tommy Dodd.

"Then," said Jimmy Silver, "we've got to ask Highcliffe to wait two or three hours—which we can't do, and which wouldn't leave time to finish the match—or we've got to play a man short. Nice—for our first fixture with them!"

"We'll rag Lovell when we get back!" suggested Towle.

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"That won't win the match!" grunted Van Ryn. "We shall have to borrow a man from Highcliffe, Jimmy. A rotten resource."

"I suppose so!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

A good deal of the cheeriness departed from the Rookwood crowd during the long run to Courtfield, in Kent. If only Lovell had been left behind it would not have been so bad; but the loss of two members of the team was utterly disconcerting. Jimmy Silver felt quite nonplussed.

At Courtfield the Rookwooders found a brake waiting for them, and a handsome, cheery junior came forward to meet them. It was Frank Courtenay, the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth. Jimmy Silver & Co. piled into the brake and rolled away to Highcliffe School. Courtenay was obviously a little puzzled to see only ten men in the visiting party, and Jimmy explained what had happened.

"What rotten luck!" said Courtenay. "Of course, we can offer you a man if you like—plenty will be glad to play for you if you say the word."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"I suppose that's the only way!" he said.

But he did not speak very cheerfully—he did not like the prospect. And if Jimmy Silver's arm could have stretched, telescopically, as far as the spot where Arthur Edward Lovell then was, Jimmy certainly would have punched Lovell's nose—hard! All would have gone so well—if only Lovell hadn't known best!

CHAPTER 29.

Play Up for Rookwood!

THERE was already a crowd on Little Side at Highcliffe when Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived. The Highcliffe cricketers were ready; and most of the Fourth and the Shell were there to see the game. Among the onlookers was a stranger within the gates, a handsome, slim fellow in elegant grey lounge clothes, whom some of the Highcliffians regarded with surprise. It was not uncommon for strangers to drop in to see senior matches; but junior games, naturally, were seldom so honoured. But the handsome youth in grey had secured a good place, and evidently meant to see proceedings through. Jimmy Silver &

Co. followed Courtenay to the pavilion, unheeding the glances the Highcliffians turned upon them, or the comments upon the fact that they numbered only ten. Jimmy Silver had not settled his little problem yet, and it had to be settled now! He consulted Newcome and Conroy and Tommy Dodd.

"Most likely Lovell will come on by the next train, though he will be two or three hours late," he said. "If he does—"

"Lovell mayn't come on at all, after he's looked out the trains," said Conroy. "Still, as he's got his ticket—"

"What about borrowing a man from Greyfriars?" said Oswald. "It's near here, and a chap could borrow a bike and scoot over; and Wharton or Bob Cherry would jump at it to oblige us—"

"That's the best idea so far!" said Jimmy, brightening a little. "And I think

"Great Scott!" shouted Erroll suddenly.

"Hallo! What's the row?"

Erroll did not answer. He suddenly quitted the group before the pavilion, and cut away across the field. Jimmy Silver & Co. stared after him in astonishment.

"What on earth's biting him now?" exclaimed Jimmy irritably. "There's no time to waste!"

"He's speaking to a Highcliffe chap!" said Conroy, staring after Erroll. "A chap not in Etons—why, my hat! I know that chivvy! Morny!"

"Morny!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"As large as life! What the merry thump is he doing here?" exclaimed Oswald. "There's Erroll yanking him this way!"

Jimmy Silver blinked at them. Erroll was hurrying back to the pavilion, almost dragging Valentine Mornington by the arm. The expelled Rookwooder was about the last person in the world whom Jimmy Silver would have expected to see on Little Side at Highcliffe. But he remembered Morny's letter, in which Mornington had mentioned that he was going for a holiday in Kent. Evidently the dandy of Rookwood, remembering the date of the Highcliffe match, had dropped in at Highcliffe to see his former schoolfellows play. He came up, rather breathlessly, with Erroll, and his cheeks coloured under the astonished gaze of the Rookwooders.

"Erroll's fault!" he said apologetically.

"What on earth are you doing here?" exclaimed Newcome.

Morny shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothin'! Killin' time at Folkestone, when I remembered the date—and I thought I'd run across and see the match, as it's not far. So I hired a bike, and here I am! I didn't intend to speak to you fellows—never thought I should be spotted in a crowd like this. Erroll seems to have the eyes of a hawk!"

"I noticed lounge clothes among the Etons," said Erroll, with a smile. "Then I saw your chivvy, old man."

Jimmy Silver's eyes danced. He realised at once what was in Erroll's mind, and what Morny's presence meant to the Rookwood eleven—or, rather, ten. Erroll gave him an anxious look.

"As soon as I spotted Morny I thought——" he began.

"Right as rain!" said Jimmy Silver. "Morny, we're a man short, owing to two duffers getting left behind. Like to play for Rookwood again?"

"Good egg!" said Newcome heartily. "Dash it all, let bygones be bygones! Even if Morny isn't fit, he's better than a man short!"

Mornington flushed. For a moment his eyes had sparkled; but now he seemed to hesitate.

"You—you want me?" he stammered.

"I thought of it at once!" said Erroll.

"You see, we're a man short," explained Jimmy. "Highcliffe would lend us a man, or we might get one from Greyfriars; but, of course, I want to play a Rookwood team——"

"I'm not a Rookwood chap now!" muttered Mornington, with a gloomy brow. "I might have been—if you hadn't dropped me from the team a few weeks back, Jimmy Silver. That led to it all."

Jimmy compressed his lips. In his delight at finding a recruit at the last moment, he had forgotten everything else. Was it, after all, the same old perverse and obstinate Mornington he had to deal with now? Had he, after all, learned nothing and forgotten nothing?

"Very well!" he said quietly. "It's as you like! I was willing to forget old troubles, Mornington. But——"

"Hold on!" said Mornington coolly. "I simply mentioned that I'm not a Rookwood chap. But I'm willing to play! I'd be jolly glad to show up in Rookwood colours once more. But the Head——"

"It's nothing to do with the Head."

"He mightn't approve——"

"Stuff! Will you play for Rookwood?"

Morny nodded.

"Yes."

"Good man; that settles it! We've got Lovell's things, luckily. Enough said—you're in the team!"

Jimmy Silver crossed over to Courtenay.

"Ready now! We've found a man—an old Rookwooder happened to be on your ground. All serene."

"I'm jolly glad!" said the Highcliffe junior skipper heartily.

Courtenay won the toss, and elected to bat. Mornington was ready in a remarkably short space of time, and he went into the field with Jimmy Silver & Co. His handsome face was very bright. The cordial welcome he received from every member of the team had a curiously exhilarating effect on him. No one, seeing him now among the Rookwooders, would have guessed that a few weeks before he had been the outcast of his Form, and had been expelled from Rookwood. It was like wine to Morny to find himself among his schoolfellows again, playing the grand old game for Rookwood. His eyes were bright, his step was elastic; he seemed to be walking on air. And a catch that deprived De Courcy, of Highcliffe, of his wicket soon showed that Morny was in his best form. Jimmy Silver, with a delighted grin, gave him the ball, and Morny bowled as he had done in his best days at Rookwood. It was to his bowling that Frank Courtenay fell at last after putting up forty for his side.

When Highcliffe were all down for seventy, Jimmy Silver clapped Mornington on the back.

"Jolly good, man!" he said heartily. "You've kept in form since you left Rookwood! I hardly think I'm sorry that Lovell lost the train now!"

And Mornington chuckled.

Mornington opened the innings for Rookwood with Jimmy Silver, and stood up to the bowling in great style. All down for sixty was the result; but a third of the sixty

belonged to Mornny. Mornny's was the ninth wicket to fall; and last man in passed him as he went out. Mornny, with a flushed face from run-getting, came back to the pavilion with his bat under his arm, and then came face to face with two fellows who had just arrived there. Arthur Edward Lovell and George Raby stared at him as if he had been a ghost.

"Mornny!" ejaculated Lovell.

"Mornny!" gasped Raby. "Playing for Rookwood!"

"Little me!" smiled Mornnington.

"What the thump are you doing in the Rookwood team?" demanded Lovell.

"Taking the place of a silly ass who got left behind at a railway-station," answered Mornnington sweetly. And he walked on before Arthur Edward could think of a suitable rejoinder.

Lovell and Raby were spectators of the rest of the match. They had come on as soon as they could, wondering what Jimmy Silver had done, certainly not dreaming that the expelled junior of Rookwood had filled the vacant place. And Lovell, at least, was not pleased. His brow was grim. He did not even smile when Mornny captured Frank Courtenay's wicket in the second Higheliffe innings. Lovell could not forgive quite so easily as Jimmy Silver.

Higheliffe were all down for 74 in their second innings; leaving Rookwood with a considerable leeway to make up. At tea Lovell happened to be next to Mornnington, who did not seem to notice it, however—if he did, he was indifferent. He chatted with the other Rookwooders, ignoring Arthur Edward. And he came up cheerily for the Rookwood second innings after tea.

"Opening the innings with the bounder!" Lovell murmured indignantly at Raby.

"What's Jimmy thinking of?"

"Mornny seems to be in great form!" remarked Raby.

"Br-r-r-r-r!" grunted Lovell. Which remark, if not very intelligible in itself, at least expressed Arthur Edward's feelings at the moment.

"Eighty-four wanted to tie, eighty-five to win!" said Lovell, when the first wicket went down for a duck's egg. "Looks promising—I don't think!"

The Higheliffe bowling was deadly. At 20 runs, Rookwood had five wickets down;

but Mornnington was well set and going strong. Batsmen came and went, but he seemed impregnable. Jimmy Silver joined him at last, and then the fur began to fly, as Raby expressed it. The score took a big jump as the partners, both at the top of their form—ran and ran, and piled up the runs. And it was in a gallant attempt at 4 that Jimmy Silver received his quietus at last.

"Six down for seventy!" said Lovell. "Looks better! But——"

"Mornny's doing well!"

"Blow Mornny!"

Two other wickets fell without adding to the score. Lovell's face lengthened. And yet another!

"Last man in—and it's Oswald! All up!" grunted Lovell.

"Mornny's got the bowling!"

"Bless Mornny!"

"Wait and see!" said Jimmy Silver.

Mornnington had the bowling, and all eyes were feverishly fixed on him. Four—and four—and four! There was a yell of delight from the Rookwooders looking breathlessly on.

"Bravo!"

"Good old Mornny!"

Lovell's face changed. His eyes brightened.

"Great pip! Is Mornny going to do it?" he gasped. "I—I say, Jimmy, what—what luck that he turned up here!"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Go it, Mornny!" roared Lovell.

The ball came down again—the best that Higheliffe could send. Mornnington cut it away, and the batsmen ran—and ran. A roar from Rookwood announced the tie. And they were still running. The ball was coming in. Lovell gasped with anxiety. Jimmy Silver clenched his hands. "Whiz! Crash! But the bat was on the crease.

"Not out!"

Lovell was the first to reach Mornnington and bang him on the shoulder. Mornnington gasped—and laughed.

"Good man!" roared Lovell. "Oh, good man! Mornny, old man, I'd give a term's pocket-money if you were coming back to Rookwood with us!"

And Arthur Edward Loyell meant it.

The Rookwood cricketers and Mornington parted at the station. Every fellow in the team shook Morny's hand hard. They were sorry to leave him. He had won the match for Rookwood, but that was not all. They were sorry to part—but it had to be!

"See you again some day!" said Jimmy Silver at last.

"At Rookwood, perhaps."

"I—I hope so; but——"

"One never knows!" said Mornington, with an odd smile. And then he was gone.

During the run home to Rookwood Jimmy Silver thought a good deal of Mornington's words, and of the smile that had accompanied them. What was it the exile of Rookwood had in his mind? The Head was adamant. He could never return. And yet— From the bottom of his heart, Jimmy Silver hoped that, somehow, some time, he would see Valentine Mornington in his old place in the school.



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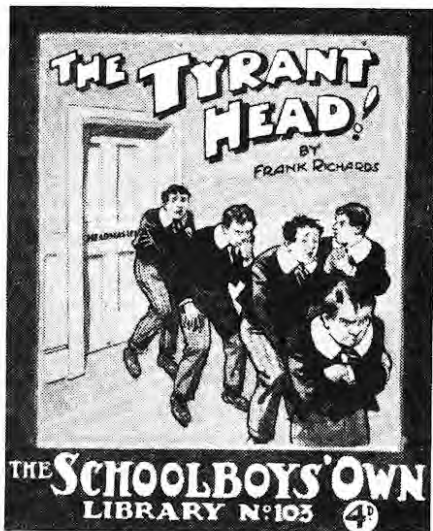
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