

UNDER FALSE COLOURS!

By
Owen Conquest.



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UNDER FALSE COLOURS!

By
Owen
Conquest.



Featuring JIMMY SILVER & CO., of Rookwood, in a sparkling long complete school story.

CHAPTER I.

The Alarm in the Night!

"**T**HE last night out!" said Jimmy Silver.
"Rotten!" remarked Lovell.
Jimmy Silver nodded thoughtfully.

It was a clear September night. The velvet sky was spangled with stars. The Rookwood holiday tramps were camped on the edge of a wood in Berkshire. Trotsky, the pony, lay asleep in the grass. The baggage-cart rusted on its shafts by the side of the lane that bordered the wood. The tent was up, and Baby and Newcome and Putty Grace had already turned in. Arthur Edward Lovell was yawning.

Jimmy Silver, seated on a camp-stool, looked away among the trees, where the starlight fell in patches. He was in a thoughtful mood.

Everything comes to an end, and the

tramp of the Rookwooders was ending. They had enjoyed themselves on the open road, and they would willingly have prolonged their march for a few more weeks. The weather had not always favoured them, but they had had a good time. And in a few days now Rookwood School would be assembling for the new term, and on the morrow Jimmy Silver & Co. were to start for home.

Jimmy was not inclined for bed, though the hour was late. He was more inclined to make the most of the last night out.

"We've had a jolly good time," remarked Lovell. "But, after all, I shan't be sorry to turn up at Rookwood again. There'll be the football."

"That's so," agreed Jimmy.

"And we shall see all the fellows again." Jimmy nodded.

Arthur Edward Lovell yawned and rose to his feet.

"Better turn in," he observed.

"Go ahead. I'll follow."

"Right-ho!"

Lovell strolled to the tent under the trees.

Jimmy Silver was left alone. He leaned back against the trunk of a big beech-tree behind his camp-stool. The night was very silent. A rabbit scuttled out of the wood, and stopped and blinked at Jimmy Silver, and then scuttled off again. From somewhere in the far distance came a chime. It was midnight.

Then suddenly, through the stillness of the wood, came a sharp, ringing sound, startling in the deep silence of midnight.

Crack!

Jimmy Silver started.

"A giddy poacher!" he murmured.

He rose to his feet, staring into the wood. His first thought was that there was a poacher at hand, but he realised that what he had heard was not the report of a gun. It was a pistol-shot.

Far across the wood was the manor-house—Deepdon Manor. Earlier in the evening the campers had seen the lights from its high windows glimmering through the wood, but all was dark now.

Jimmy Silver breathed rather quickly.

The pistol-shot had been fired in or near the house—he knew that. What did it mean?

He stared through the trees, and out of the darkness came a sudden flashing of lights. First one window, then another, of the distant house leaped into brightness.

There was a confused sound of shouting. Jimmy could not distinguish the words, but the shouting told of sudden alarm.

"Burglars!" breathed Jimmy.

He stood still in the shadow of the beech-tree, watching. He was too far from the house to think of rendering assistance, even if it were needed. And that was not likely. There were a dozen servants at least at Deepdon Manor. Jimmy had been up to the house at sundown to ask permission to camp in that wood, a permission that was generally granted by the squire of Deepdon.

If only in return for that genial hospitality, Jimmy Silver would have been glad to chip in if his help were wanted. He was wondering whether to make his way through the shadowy wood towards the house when a sound of hurried trampling came to his ears.

Hurried, running footsteps were approach-

ing the spot where the Rookwooders were camped.

Jimmy's eyes gleamed.

The camp was on the edge of the wood, where it was bordered by the lane, and the running man was evidently taking a short-cut through the trees to the lane to escape.

As the footsteps came nearer Jimmy heard the panting breathing of the runner, though in the shadows he did not see the man yet.

It was obviously the burglar who was running to escape, and the pistol-shot was yet ringing in Jimmy Silver's ears. It was a thief, or perhaps a murderer, who was tearing towards him through the shadows. Jimmy's heart beat faster, and he clenched his hands. The second he should not escape if Jimmy could help it.

He saw the man now—a man of powerful build—panting as he ran. As he came into view he was glancing right and left like a hunted animal. The starlight fell full upon his face. A face with regular features, dark eyes, and well-cut mouth—a face that would have been handsome but for the deadly palor that was in it now, and the expression of mingled fear and rage.

Jimmy, standing in the thick shadow of the beech, was invisible; but the tent glimmered under the trees, and the running man saw it. For an instant he paused, staring at the tent. Then he ran on, passing under the wide branches of the beech where Jimmy Silver stood.

And as he passed the Rookwood junior sprang at him.

The attack was utterly unexpected. Jimmy's grasp closed on the man's collar, and he came down into the grass with a crash.

A revolver rolled from his hand as he fell.

He uttered a breathless cry of panic as he sprawled in the grasp of the sturdy Rookwood junior.

"Lovell! Raby! Help!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"Let me go! Let me go!" panted the man as he turned on the schoolboy and struggled to rise.

"Help!" roared Jimmy.

There was a shout from the tent.

"Jimmy! What—"

"Help!"

Lovell, in his pyjamas, came springing out of the tent. Raby's startled face appeared behind him.

Jimmy Silver was struggling desperately with the thief, striving to hold him till his chums should come to his aid.

But the man was powerful and utterly desperate. He rolled over in the grass with the Rockwood junior, and came uppermost.

"Let go!" he panted.

Jimmy held on like a bulldog.

"Hold on, Jimmy!" yelled Lovell, and he came racing up.

Crash!

A savage fist was dashed into Jimmy Silver's face, dashing his head back against the hard ground.

Jimmy gave a cry, and, half stunned by the concussion, released his hold. In an instant the fugitive had torn himself away, and he was leaping towards the lane. Lovell came up a second too late, grabbing at him and missing. The man leaped into the lane and ran, and the shadows swallowed him up, only the echo of his running feet coming back for a few seconds.

CHAPTER 2.

The Cracksmen's Escape!

"JIMMY!"

Lovell turned to his chum.

He helped Jimmy Silver to his feet, and the captain of the Rockwood Fourth stood unsteadily, his head spinning, leaning on his chum's shoulder.

"You're hurt, Jimmy!" gasped Lovell.

Jimmy Silver gasped.

"Only a thump. Oh, my napper! Ow! Has that brute got away?"

"He's gone," said Lovell. "Who the dickens was it?"

"What on earth's happened?" exclaimed Newcome, coming out of the tent.

"A footpad!" asked Putty Grace.

Jimmy Silver could not explain for the moment. His head was aching and spinning from the savage blow he had received. He leaned on Lovell, panting for breath.

"Something's up at the house!" said Raley, pointing to the flashing lights in the distance.

"They're coming this way."

Two or three lanterns were moving under the trees, and footsteps and voices were coming nearer. The Rockwood juniors watched and listened.

"It's a burglary!" gasped Jimmy at last.

"I got hold of the burglar. He's dropped his revolver here."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Lovell.

"Here they come! And here's the shooter," said Putty of the Fourth, picking the revolver out of the grass.

One chamber of the weapon had been discharged, as he could see.

Three or four men came hurrying up to the group. At the head of them Jimmy recognised the squire of Deepden—a stout old gentleman, half dressed, with a golf-club in his grip. He shouted to the juniors.

"Did he pass this way?"

"Yes!" called back Jimmy.

"You saw him?"

"Yes—and collared him!"

"Good lad!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "Which way—?"

"Down the lane!" said Lovell, pointing in the direction in which the cracksmen's footsteps had died away.

"After him!" shouted the squire.

Two or three keepers and men-servants ran on in the direction indicated by Lovell. There was little chance now, however, of running down the cracksmen: his start was too great, and the shadows had long swallowed him up. The squire stopped to speak to the schoolboys.

"You're hurt, my boy," he said.

"I had hold of him," said Jimmy ruefully. "He banged my head on the ground—it aches like thunder—and I had to let go! Another minute and my naps would have had him—the rest! There's his revolver. He dropped it when I tackled him and brought him down."

The old gentleman took the weapon from Jimmy.

"The police will want this," he said.

"Did you see the fellow's face, Master Silver? Could you give a description of him?"

"I saw him clearly, sir—a man of about thirty. I should know him anywhere again," said Jimmy.

"Good!"

"But—has he hurt anybody at the house?" faltered Jimmy. "I heard the pistol-shot—"

"He fired at my butler, who found him at work at the safe," said the squire. "Luckily he missed, but he got away. He will be charged with attempted murder when he is caught. If you can give a description of him, I've no doubt the police will have him soon."

"I can do that," said Jimmy confidently.

"I've sent a man to the village for the

police," continued the squire. "You boys are remaining here, of course?"

"Yes, sir; they'll find us here."

"Good!"

The old gentleman followed the keepers and disappeared. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another—and Jimmy rubbed his head ruefully. There was a bruise on his forehead where the cracksmen's knuckles had struck, and a bump on the back of his head where it had hit the ground. And Jimmy had a terrific headache.

"Feel pretty bad?" asked Lovell sympathetically.

"Ow! Yes, rather! Wow!"

"What a giddy excitement for our last night out!" said Raby. "I hope they'll get the buff. You were rather an ass to tackle him, Jimmy. Suppose he had potted you!"

"He's made my head ache, anyhow."

"Better turn in," said Lovell. "We'll wait up for the lobbies, and call you when they come."

* Jimmy Silver nodded, and went into the tent. He was glad to lay his aching head upon a pillow. In spite of the ache, he was soon fast asleep. He was feeling rather better when Lovell called him about an hour later to interview the police-sergeant from Deepden village.

Jimmy gave a succinct account of what had occurred, and a very complete description of the cracksmen, feature for feature. The man's white, desperate face was imprinted like a photograph on Jimmy's memory. The sergeant took down the description with much satisfaction.

After he was gone, Jimmy returned to bed, and slept soundly enough till morning.

In the fresh September morning he felt almost his old self, though he had a couple of lumps that were not likely to disappear for some days at least.

A message came from the manor house asking the Rookwooders to breakfast there, an invitation they accepted with alacrity. It was nearly noon that day when the Rookwooders broke camp and left Deepden behind them, and yet there had been no news by that time of the capture of the cracksmen. And in the days that followed the episode faded from the memories of Jimmy Silver & Co., though it was to be recalled ere long in a way of which Jimmy Silver certainly did not dream.

CHAPTER 3.

The Face Jimmy Knew!

"**L**ATCHAM JUNCTION!"
"Here we are again!" sang out Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Hallo, old Jimmy!"

"Cheerio, Rawson!"

The platform at Latcham swarmed with Rookwood fellows. Seniors by the dozen, junior by the score crowded the station, arriving from all points of the compass, to take the local train from Latcham to Crombie. There were shouts of greeting and yells of recognition, most of the Rookwood fellows apparently considering it a bounden duty to make as much noise as possible. And if that was their object, they succeeded admirably.

Tommy Dodd and Cook and Doyle, the three Modern juniors, came along the crowded platform, knocking off every Classical hat they could reach—in the exuberance of their spirits even knocking off Fifth Form hats as well as fags' headgear. Talboys of the Fifth was seen chasing a handsome topper—which was not handsome by the time it had been rescued from a few hundred feet. Bulkeley of the Sixth, towering over the crowd, came within reach of the three Tommies, and they were tempted to knock off even Bulkeley's hat, but refrained. The hat of the captain of Rookwood was sacred, even to exuberant Modern juniors on the first day of term.

They gave him a yell instead:

"Cheerio, old Bulkeley!"

And Bulkeley of the Sixth nodded and smiled.

Smythe of the Shell appeared just in time to compensate the three Moderns, as it were, for sparing Bulkeley's hat. Adolphus Smythe's elegant silk topper went flying, and there was an infuriated yell from Adolphus.

Tommy Dodd & Co. roared with merriment, till the Fiscal Foot of the Classical Fourth bore down on them at the charge. The three Moderns went rolling over on the platform, and they roared still more energetically, but not with merriment this time.

Jimmy Silver & Co. marched on victoriously, leaving them sprawling.

"Cheerly Modern worms!" said Lovell, with a chuckle. "They want a lesson to begin the term with."

"And they've got it!" chorused Raby.

"Yah! Classical rollers!" roared Tommy Dodd treacherously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here's the train!" yelled Conroy of the Fourth.

There was a rush for the train. Rookwooders of all Forms crowded along the opening doors. Way had to be made for the Sixth, but fellows of all other Forms had to take their chance. Hanson & Co. of the Fifth were successfully charged off by a mob of juniors, who swarmed into the local train with yells of triumph. Ordinary passengers who wanted that train hadn't much chance in the Rookwood mob.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were the first to bag a carriage, and they stood on guard at the door to keep Moderns out. Towls of the Modern Fourth, recklessly seeking to enter, found himself on his back on the platform, with Classics treading on him. The three Tommies came up in a rather dishevelled state, and they had to flee again, looking still more dishevelled. The Fistical Four allowed Classics to enter—and Classics only. Rawson and Conroy, and Putty Grace and Tubby Muffin, crowded in, and then Pons, and Van Ryn, and Erroll and Oswald. After that even Classics had to be refused admission. It was a railway carriage and not a sardine-tin, as Lovell explained to further applicants.

Townsend and Topham arrived, to find Jimmy Silver leaning from the window and Lovell holding the door.

"Pass on up the train, gent!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"The dashed Moderns have got the next carriage!" gasped Topham. "They've hatched my hat—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go and bash theirs!"

"Let a chap in!" pleaded Topham.

"No room!" grinned Lovell. "We're packed already. Cut along!"

Towny and Toppy cut along. A Modern paw reached out of a carriage and captured Topham's topper in passing, and roars of laughter greeted Toppy's frantic demands for its restoration.

Jimmy Silver sat down in the corner seat, laughing.

"Jolly old crowd!" he remarked.

"I say, give a fellow room!" panted Tubby Muffin. "Gerroff my knee, Rawson! Gerroff my other knee, Conroy! Wow!"

"Roll Tubby under the seat," suggested

Putty. "He takes up enough room for three sideways."

"Why, you rotter——" roared the fat Classical.

"Ho, ha, ha!"

"Just going!" said Lovell. "Hallo, here's another merchant wants a seat—a common or garden person who doesn't belong to Rookwood at all! Awful neck is it that he can get into this train."

A rather handsome young man, with a bag in his hand and a rug over his arm, snugged at the door of the carriage and looked in.

"No room!" sang out half a dozen voices.

"Hook it!" chuckled Italy.

"Slide along, old bean!" chirruped Newcome.

"Now then, where's your manney?" said Jimmy Silver severely, and he turned to the young man, whose head and shoulders were framed by the window. "Surey, sir, but the carriage is full—in fact, over full," Jimmy continued, with elaborate politeness. "Why, wha-a-a at the——"

Jimmy broke off suddenly.

He stared at the young man outside, as if the rather pleasant, handsome face, with its regular features and dark eyes, had been the face of a grisly phantom.

Jimmy's jaw dropped as he stared.

"You!" he stammered.

The young man, seeing that the carriage was crammed, walked on down the train, without heeding Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy put his head out of the window, and stared after him.

The young man was walking along the carriages, looking into one after another, in search of a seat.

Jimmy's glance followed him, as if fascinated.

For he knew the man's face—feature by feature it was imprinted on his memory, as if the scene at Draydon Manor had taken place only the day before.

It was the face of the crackman in the wood—the face of the man with whom Jimmy Silver had struggled on that wild night.

Four carriages down the man found a seat, and Jimmy saw him disappear into the train. A few seconds later the train was in motion, and the last doors slammed. Jimmy Silver sank back into his seat, dumfounded.

He had never expected, of course, to see again the crackman of Draydon. He

had hoped to hear of the man's arrest, but certainly he had never expected to set eyes upon him.

And here he was—in the local train for Coombe, in the midst of a crowd of Rookwooders bound for the old school!

It was amazing! The man, searched and hunted for by the police, was travelling in broad daylight, as if he had not a fear in his heart, not a shadow of care on his mind.

Jimmy Silver wondered dizzily whether he was dreaming.

It was the man—he was sure of that. He knew every feature of the face—the well-cut mouth, the straight, handsome nose, the dark eyes with their rather long lashes. The last man in the world who, from his looks, Jimmy would have guessed to be a criminal had he not seen him in circumstances that left no doubt on the subject.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Jimmy.

Jimmy's chums were looking at him inquiringly. The other fellows in the carriage were all talking at once, and Tubby Muffin was complaining loudly of being squeezed and shoved. But the Co. had noticed Jimmy's amazed interest in the stranger.

"What's the row, Jimmy?" asked Lovell.

"Do you know that chap?"

"Know him?" gasped Jimmy. "I should say so!"

"He didn't seem to know you," said Baby.

"I don't suppose he does! He didn't see my face in the dark that night, of course."

"What—who—?"

"It's the man," said Jimmy.

"The Deepden man?"

"Yes."

"Great Christopher Columbus!"

The Co. fairly blinked at Jimmy Silver. There was very strong doubt written in their faces.

"Draw it mild, Jimmy," said Lovell at last. "You're letting your giddy fancy run away with you, you know."

"Am!" said Jimmy.

"He looked a decent sort," said Baby very doubtfully.

"I know that."

"It can't be—" began Newcome.

"It is!" said Jimmy quietly. "Unless it's his twin brother, it's the man!"

Lovell whistled.

"Well, if you say so—" he murmured dubiously. "Is he on the train?"

"Yes; I saw him get in."

"Then he's going to Coombe," said Lovell. "Look here, Jimmy, better have a good look at him before you say anything. You don't want to make a mistake; it's too jolly serious for that."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"I'm going to make absolutely sure, of course," he said. "But I'm sure already, for that matter. No need to say anything yet; he's on the train, and if he gets off before Coombe, we get off, too."

"That's all right," assented Lovell.

"Hallo, what are you fellows confabbing about?" called out Oswald.

But the Fistical Four did not answer that question. Lovell and Baby and Newcome were deeply doubtful, and Jimmy Silver had his head out of the window watching.

If the suspected man alighted before Coombe was reached, Jimmy's mind was made up—he and his chums would alight, too, and keep him in sight till he could be handed over to the police. It was his duty to see that a thief and attempted murderer did not escape justice, and Jimmy was prepared to do his duty.

But the man did not leave the train at any of the little local stations the train passed through. He remained on board till Coombe was reached, and at Coombe he descended with a crowd of Rookwooders. And the Fistical Four hurried along the swarming platform to keep him in sight.

CHAPTER 4.

Classicals Against Moderns!

"THERE he goes!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell.

"After him!"

More and more doubtful the Co. looked as they followed the athletic young man from the station platform at Coombe. Jimmy Silver, indeed, was invaded by a faint glimmer of doubt. The young man strode away with a light, springy step, his head well up, his manner easy, care-free. He was an athlete—a glance was enough to tell that. He looked in the best of condition—healthy, full of vigour and good-nature. Looking at him, it seemed almost impossible to con-

met him with the white-faced wretch who had fled through the Deepden woods, and who had been brought to the ground, revolver in hand, in Jimmy Silver's grasp.

Yet as the young man stopped and spoke to a porter, half-turning his head, Jimmy had a full view of his face again. His momentary doubt was dispelled. If it was not the man of Deepden, it was that man's double—and the latter was too far-fetched a theory to recommend itself to Jimmy's practical mind.

But he realised how necessary it was to be quite sure before he made so startling a charge against a perfect stranger. Jimmy was thinking hard as he followed with his chums.

In the station doorway the young man stopped again, and, to the amazement of the juniors, he was in speech with Bulkeley of the Rookwood Sixth. He stood for some minutes chatting quite pleasantly with Bulkeley, watched by the amazed juniors. Evidently he was known to some extent to the captain of Rookwood—at all events, Bulkeley did not seem to be treating him as he might have treated a stranger.

"Bulkeley knows him, Jimmy!" murmured Lovell.

"Looks like it," admitted Jimmy.

"He can't be the man."

"He is the man," answered Jimmy Silver. "Come on—he's going!"

More and more dubious, and feeling that their chum had made a mistake, Lovell and Raby and Newcombe followed Jimmy into the village street. There was a rush of the Rookwood mob for the school brakes, but the Fistical Four did not take part in it. A crowd of Moderns sheered off a Classical crowd from the nearest brake, and there were yells from Conroy and Putty and Oswald to "back up," addressed to the Fistical Four. But for once Jimmy Silver & Co. passed a "rag" unheeded.

The suspected man had glanced at the brakes, and then swung on lightly down the old High Street of Coombe.

Jimmy Silver looked round quickly, hoping to see the substantial figure of Police-constable Boggs, who represented law and order in Coombe. He caught sight of the stout constable across the way, and made a movement to run across the road.

Lovell caught him by the arm.

"Jimmy—" he breathed.

"Let go, you ass!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver impatiently. "Do you want the man to get away?"

"It can't be the man! For heaven's sake, Jimmy, don't make an ass of yourself, and land in a brutal scrape!" exclaimed Lovell.

Jimmy shook off his detaining hand. The suspected man was striding down the High Street at a good rate, and there was no time to be lost.

"Look out!" came a roar.

One of the brakes was in motion, and Jimmy had to jump back to the pavement as it came careering by. Then there was a swarming of Classical juniors along the pavement outside the station, shouting and yelling, and the Fistical Four were caught in the crowd.

"Back up, Classics!" Putty Grace was yelling. "They've got our brake!"

The first brake had started with a cargo of seniors. The second was fought for by Classics and Moderns, and Tammy Dadd & Co. had had the best of it. Moderns were swarming into the brake, after driving off the Classical crowd.

"Back up!" roared Lovell. "Down with the Moderns!"

The Classics rallied, and returned to the attack.

Lovell and Raby and Newcombe rushed with them, the defeat of the Moderns being apparently more important in their eyes than the capture of Jimmy Silver's crackman. As a matter of fact, Lovell & Co. were quite convinced by that time that Jimmy was in error.

"This way!" yelled Conroy. "Back up, Jimmy Silver!"

The Classics rushed for the brake.

Jimmy did not heed. He was staring down the street in search of the athletic figure which had been lost to view as the first brake swept past. It had vanished from sight.

Jimmy set his lips.

The man was gone—probably by one of the winding turnings in the village street—possibly into one of the old cottages or cottages. It was too late to point him out to P.C. Boggs—and that plump, rural gentleman, as Jimmy realised, would have wanted a lot of convincing that the Rookwooder was not pulling his plump official leg in giving him such information.

"Come on, Jimmy!" yelled Lovell, who was hotly engaged with the enemy.

Jimmy Silver gave it up. He mentally determined to speak to his Form-master on the subject as soon as he reached Rookwood. After all, the cracksman was in Coombe, and did not know that he was suspected. Mr. Dalton or the Head would act as soon as Jimmy informed them of what he knew; and that probably was the best way of dealing with the curious affair. Having decided that, Jimmy Silver joined his chums. The Moderns were in possession of the brake, and the Classics were having an uphill struggle to deal with them. Jimmy Silver rushed into the fray.

"Back up, Classics!"

"Yah! Classic cads!"

"Modern rotters!"

"Kick 'em off!" roared Tommy Dodd.

"Order there, you fags!" shouted Bulkeley of the Sixth from the station doorway.

"Order, I tell you!"

But on the first day of the term, even the voice of old Bulkeley did not carry full authority. The Rookwooders had not settled down to the collar yet, as it were. They turned a deaf ear—or, rather, two or three score deaf ears. The attack on the brake was going strong, and Tommy Dodd, who had clambered into the driver's seat and taken the whip, was trying to start the horses. But five or six Classics held the horses' heads, and refused to let go, though Tommy lashed round with the long whip in a very liberal manner.

"Rush the rotters!" shouted Lovell breathlessly, getting a foothold on the vehicle at last.

Jimmy Silver was after him in a moment more, and the rest of the Classics backed up their leaders in great style. The odds were on the Classical side, and they gained a footing; and the Moderns were driven along the vehicle, and knuckled or pushed off. Tommy Dodd let go the reins as he was gripped by the back of the collar.

"Gw! Loggo!" roared Tommy.

"Chuck him overboard!" cried Lovell.

"Varoooh!" howled Tommy Dodd, as he drove into the road. "Oh, my hat!"

"Bump him!"

"Get those gorgers going!" howled Coombe.

Jimmy Silver, with a grin, dropped into the driver's seat and gathered up the reins and cracked the whip. The Classics jumped clear as the big vehicle started, and crowded round to jump on behind.

There was a last desperate rally of the Moderns, and some of the Classics were seized and dragged off. But the brake was in motion, and it went down the village street, rocking and rumbling, Jimmy Silver cracking the whip, and a crowd of Classics standing up and waving their hats and shouting.

"Our win!" roared Lovell. "Hooray!"

And the driver of the brake, who had dropped into the Red Cow for a little refreshment before starting, came out in time to see his brake disappearing down the street. Behind it went a crowd of Moderns, running and yelling, answered by cheers and catcalls from the Classics on the brake.

CHAPTER I.

Amazing!

"SILVER!"

Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, was standing at the gates of the school, and he stared as the brake came rocking up, driven by a junior of the Fourth Form. Jimmy Silver could drive; he handled the horses well, and he brought the brake to a halt at the gates with a flourish.

"Silver, what are you doing?" exclaimed the Fourth Form master.

Jimmy raised his cap politely.

"Driving the brake, sir!" he answered cheerily.

"Where is the driver?"

"Haven't seen him, sir."

"We—we were in rather a hurry to get back to school, sir," ventured Lovell.

"Hurray for us!" came in a roar from a crowd of fellows on the brake who had not seen Mr. Dalton. "We've beaten the Modern rotters!"

Mr. Dalton suppressed a smile.

"Mack!" He called to the school porter.

"Please take charge of the brake. Silver, you will take a hundred lines."

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy. "I—I mean yes, sir!"

The Classics crowded out of the brake, and swarmed into the quadrangle. Except for a contingent of the Sixth and Fifth, they were the first to arrive. They made the old quad ring with their jubilant voices as they swarmed in.

"Nice far me!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Hundred lines before I've fairly set foot in the school!"

"Never mind, we've beaten the Moderns," grinned Lovell. "Besides, they were not so; for imposts on first day of term. Come on!"

The Fistical Four marched across the quadrangle arm-in-arm, taking possession, as it were. They "capped" several masters in the quad, and elaborately ignored Mr. Manders, the Modern master—and gave a derisive howl to Knowles of the Sixth, the Modern prefect. Jimmy Silver in the excitement and exuberance of the moment, had quite forgotten the man he had lost sight of in Coombe.

There was a table spread in Hall, at which fellows came and went as they liked, on the first day of term. Tubby Muffin was the first junior to reach it, and he was very quickly busy. Jimmy Silver & Co. joined him there, and Tubby blinked at their jollity.

"Try this ham!" he said, with an extensive mouth full. "It's prime—real prime—and there's lots!"

"Here we are again," sang out Gunner of the Fourth, coming in with his heavy tread. "I say, have you seen Wilmot, you fellows?"

"Wilmot?" said Jimmy Silver, who was carving ham. "Who's Wilmot? New chap?"

Gunner grinned. "No; football coach. Just heard about him—Head's engaged him; no end of a tremendous footballer. Looks a good man just seen him. He won't have much to teach me, but he'll be useful to you fellows!"

"Fathhead!" said the Fistical Four with one voice.

"By the way, what became of that joliny you were so keen on, Jimmy?" murmured Lovell. "I forgot him."

"He's somewhere in Coombe," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm going in the Head about it."

"The beak won't thank you for worrying him on opening day with a cock-and-bull story, old chap!"

"Aa!" said Jimmy. "I've got to do it. I tell you I'm perfectly certain——"

"Dow-wow!" said Lovell.

"Too thick, old chap!" murmured Raby.

But when Jimmy Silver left Hall his chums followed him at once. They were more doubtful than ever on the subject of

the supposed crackman, and almost dismayed at the prospect of Jimmy going to the Head with his strange story. In the doorway of the School House Mr. Dalton was standing in conversation with a young man who carried a bag in his hand, and a rug over his arm. Jimmy Silver jumped almost clear of the floor as he saw Mr. Dalton's companion.

"Here!" he stammered.

"What?" asked Lovell, looking round.

"Why, my hat! It's the giddy joliny!"

The Fistical Four stared at the man. There he was—the man of the train—the man Jimmy Silver was prepared to swear was the crackman of Deepden—standing on the School House steps, chatting pleasantly with the master of the Fourth. It had not even occurred to Jimmy, of course, that the man could possibly be coming to Rookwood. He could scarcely believe his eyes as he beheld him.

"Bulkeley knew him—and Dalton seems to know him!" grinned Raby. "Oh, Jimmy!"

Jimmy stood silent, amazed. Was he mistaken, after all? He felt he was not, and yet——

Mr. Dalton called to Tupper, the page. The stranger came into the house, and followed Tupper, and the glances of the Fistical Four followed him till he disappeared. Jimmy Silver drew a deep, deep breath.

"Still going to the Head?" murmured Lovell, and there was a subdued chuckle from Raby and Newcome.

Jimmy did not answer. Mr. Dalton was standing in the doorway, looking out into the crowded quad, when he felt a touch on his arm, and looked down.

"Well, Silver?"

"Would you—would you mind telling me who that was, sir—the gentleman you were speaking to?" stammered Jimmy.

"That was Mr. Wilmot, the new football coach, Silver."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy. "Thank you, sir!"

Lovell grasped him by the arm, and marched him up the staircase to the end study.

"You can see now it's all rot!" he said.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"I can't understand it," he said. "It may be Mr. Wilmot, the new football coach, but he's the man I saw at Deep-

den. I—I don't know what I'd better do."

"Nothing!" suggested Lovell, with a grin.

And Jimmy Silver decided that, for the present at least, he would do nothing; he had a problem to think out that was not to be solved in a hurry.

CHAPTER 5.

The Test!

"YOU'LL be late, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver did not answer. It was the well-known motto of Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Rookwood Fourth, to "keep smiling." But for once Jimmy Silver was wearing a worried look.

Arthur Edward Lovell grinned at him through the doorway of the end study as he noted that worried look. Raby and Newcome grinned, too. Whatever was the trouble that weighed upon the mind of Jimmy Silver, evidently it was not taken very seriously by his chums.

"Better get a move on, Jimmy!" said Raby. "We've got to turn up for footer with the new coach, you know."

"Mr. Wilmot's on the ground already," said Newcome.

Lovell gave a chuckle.

"Still got that fat-headed idea of yours in your head, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jimmy quietly.

"Get rid of it, old fellow," urged Lovell. "You can take my word for it that there's nothing in it."

"Unfortunately," said Jimmy Silver, with mild sarcasm, "I can't take your word for it, Lovell. You see, the opinion of a born ass isn't much use to me!"

"Look here—" began Lovell warmly.

"Dash it, Jimmy, you must be mistaken, you know!" urged Raby. "If the man is a dashed crackman, how could he get a job at Rookwood as coach? It's not reasonable. The Head must have known all about him before engaging him."

"Besides, his record's known," said Newcome. "He was a professional player for Leamshire United. He had a good record in the War. Lots of the fellows know about it."

"I know!" said Jimmy.

"Then you see that you're wrong," said Lovell.

"No, I'm right!"

"Oh, rats!" said Lovell impatiently. "Blessed if I ever knew you were such an obstinate ass, Jimmy. If you were to go to the Head with a yarn like that, you'd jolly well get canned. Do you think Dr. Chisholm would listen to you for a single moment if you told him that his new football coach, a well-known man, was a giddy burglar?"

"No!" said Jimmy, with a deep breath.

"That's why I've said nothing so far. I don't know what to do."

"Take my tip and chuck the rot out of your head," said Lovell kindly. "Anyhow, we've got to turn up for footer with the Wilmot bird, so come along."

"There's one thing," said Jimmy Silver slowly. "I saw his face clearly that night, and he must have seen mine as clearly. I've kept out of his way since we came back for the new term. Now I shall have to meet him face to face—and he will know that the chap who collared him that night at Deepden is a Rookwood chap. When he sees that, he's bound to show some sign, I should think."

"If it was so," grinned Lovell. "But it isn't so. But I'll tell you what we'll do, Jimmy. You shall meet the johnny face to face, and we'll stand round and watch him, and look for the signs of a giddy guilty conscience. What?"

Jimmy Silver rose.

"That's a good idea," he said. "Keep your eyes on him, all of you, and see how he shows up. It's bound to give him a start, finding me at Rookwood. Of course, that night at Deepden he couldn't have had any idea that I belonged to Rookwood. He will find it out for the first time to-day."

"And if he's the man, he'll bolt!" grinned Raby.

"Very likely."

"If he does, we'll all collar him!" chuckled Lovell. "I'll get him by the left ear—you bag his right, Raby. His hair for you, Newcome."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyhow, come along, or we'll be late!" urged Lovell.

Jimmy Silver joined his chums, and they went downstairs, the Co. smiling, but Jimmy Silver in a very grave and thoughtful

ful mood. What he ought to do, in the strange circumstances, was a mystery to Jimmy Silver. In the few days that he had been at Rookwood School, Mr. Wilmot had already won golden opinions; almost everyone liked the young man. Jimmy would have been favourably impressed by him, but for his secret knowledge of what the man was—or what Jimmy believed him to be.

To state what he knew to the Head was almost impossible.

Jimmy could imagine his headmaster's stare of cold surprise; he could foresee Dr. Chisholm's utter disbelief. It was, indeed, a staggering comment to make.

Yet Jimmy was absolutely certain that Wilmot was the crackman whom he had collared at Deepden Manor in Berkshire. The Reading police were still hunting for the man, armed with Jimmy's description of him—a description that was Mr. Wilmot's to the last detail.

The Viscial Four joined a crowd of the Fourth going down to Little Side, where Mr. Wilmot was to take them in hand for the first time.

Some of the juniors were grumbling—slackers like Peele and Gower and Tubby Muffin. But they had already seen enough of Mr. Wilmot to know that he was not to be trifled with; and they had to turn up for the practice. All the Classical Fourth arrived on Little Side, where they found the new football coach.

Eric Wilmot looked very fit and cheery. He was a good-looking fellow, with well-cut features and handsome eyes. It was almost impossible to believe that this cheery, good-humoured young man was what Jimmy Silver believed him to be. Yet, as Jimmy looked at him again, he could trace feature for feature in his face, exactly resembling the face that was imprinted on his memory.

Lovell & Co. were grinning.

"Speak to him, old top!" whispered Arthur Edward. "Make him look at you. We're all ready to jump on him as soon as he gives himself away, you know."

"I'm going to speak to him," said Jimmy quietly. "You fellows keep your eyes on his face."

"You bet!" grinned Lovell.

There was no doubt that the Co. would watch the meeting closely—if only to prove to Jimmy that he was mistaken.

Mr. Wilmot was speaking to Errol and Rawson and some others of the Classical Fourth, when Jimmy came up with his companions. Errol made a gesture towards Jimmy, drawing Mr. Wilmot's attention to him.

"This is Jimmy Silver, our football skipper," he said.

Mr. Wilmot looked round, and gave Jimmy a pleasant nod and a smile.

Jimmy drew a quick breath.

Wilmot's eyes were full upon his face; and, surely, if he was the crackman of Deepden, he was bound now to betray some sign of recognition, if not of alarm.

If it was so, Eric Wilmot was certainly a master of his feelings, for his handsome face expressed nothing but a polite interest in the Rookwood footballer.

"Ah, you are Silver, the captain of the Fourth?" he said.

His voice was deep and pleasant.

"Yes," stammered Jimmy.

"Your friends have been telling me about you," said Wilmot. "From what I hear, you have little to learn from me."

"Oh!" said Jimmy confusedly.

Lovell suppressed a chuckle. Mr. Wilmot had stood the test; there was no mistake about that. Arthur Edward decided to push the matter a little farther.

"Jimmy thinks he's seen you before somewhere, Mr. Wilmot," he said.

"Yes?" said the young man inquiringly.

"Were you ever in Berkshire?" asked Lovell.

Jimmy caught his breath.

"Many times," said Mr. Wilmot. "In my days as a professional footballer my team visited Reading more than once, and I played there. You may have seen me play, Master Silver."

"Oh, no!" stammered Jimmy.

"It was in the summer vac. this year," said Lovell. "Jimmy thought he saw you at a little place some miles from Reading towards Newbury."

Mr. Wilmot shook his head.

Still his handsome face showed no sign whatever of alarm, or even of any special consciousness.

"No, I was not in Berkshire this summer," he said. "You must have been mistaken, Master Silver."

He dropped the subject at that, as if he had only wasted a few minutes upon it from motives of politeness.

"And now to business."

The football coach proceeded to business, and the practice started. Jimmy Silver's brain was in a whirl.

He did not heed the unannounced amusement of his chums.

What could it all mean, he was asking himself? Jimmy had intended to say nothing of the holiday adventure to Eric Wilmot; but Lovell had said enough to tell him that he was recognised as the crackman of Deepden. And he had given no sign.

Was it merely the iron nerve of a practised criminal, accustomed to hold himself in check in the moment of sudden danger? Or was Jimmy Silver mistaken, after all? Was that possible?

At all events, the crackman knew that he was known now, and the next move was up to him. And by that next move Jimmy felt that he had to be guided.

But if Eric Wilmot was a man with a guilty secret weighing on his conscience, he showed no sign of it that afternoon. He devoted himself to his duties quietly, calmly, and with keen interest; and by the time the practice was over, the opinion of the Classical Fourth was that Eric Wilmot was a "good man"; in fact, the right man in the right place.

CHAPTER 7.

Tubby Muffin's Discovery!

"THE awful rotter!"

Thus Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy Silver smiled as he came along the Fourth Form passage, and found Tubby gasping and groaning on the window-seat. Reginald Muffin looked as if he found existence too heavy a burden to be borne by his plump shoulders.

"What's the trouble, Tubby?" asked the captain of the Fourth, stopping, with the generous intonation of giving a few minutes to listening to the recital of Muffin's woes.

"That awful beast Wilmot!" groaned Tubby.

Jimmy started.

"What about Wilmot?" he asked quickly.

Jimmy wondered whether the Peeping Tom of Rookwood had found out anything regarding the suspected man. Certainly, if anyone had a secret to keep, it was not safe to keep it in the neighbourhood of

Tubby Muffin. It had already occurred to Jimmy that if the man was what he suspected, evidence of some kind would exist in his room in the School House. Jimmy would have regarded with utter disdain the thought of spying upon him; but if the inquisitive Tubby had found out something

"He's a thorough rotter!" said Tubby.

"What do you mean?" asked Jimmy impatiently. "Have you found out anything about him?"

Tubby blinked at him.

"Eh? What is there to find out?" he asked.

Jimmy bit his lip.

"Well, what's the matter?" he asked gruffly.

"The horrid beast!" groaned Tubby. "I've explained to him that I'm delicate, and can't keep on turning up at footer practice, and he takes no notice whatever!"

"You fat slacker!" said Jimmy, in disgust.

"I've been to Mr. Dalton," said Tubby, "and he says that in football matters we're under the authority of Wilmot, and we're to do exactly as he tells us."

"Quite right, too!"

"Yah!" said Tubby. "I say, the beast says I eat too much pastry——"

"So you do!"

"And don't take enough exercise——"

"So you don't!" cried Jimmy.

"And I'm to take up running," said Tubby dolefully. "Regular trots round the quad, you know."

"Good!"

"You're as big a beast as he is!" howled Tubby Muffin. "I tell you we're not going to stand it. Peelo and Gower are wild about it, too. They're talking of ragging the brute."

"They'd better keep to talk, then," said Jimmy laughing. "Mr. Wilmot doesn't look a safe man to rag."

"He's a suspicious beast, too," said Tubby. "Fancy a man suspecting a chap of looking at his letters, Jimmy!"

Jimmy was turning away, but he turned back at that. Lovell and Baby and Newcome were coming up the stairs, and they stopped with Jimmy.

"Tea-time!" remarked Lovell. "I say, Wilmot is a bit of a corker. He's picked out the slackers, and put them down for

special exercise. Peelo is talking about sniping him."

"And Tubby says he doesn't like fellows looking at his letters," observed Jimmy Silver.

"Hallo! Prying again, you fat rotter!" growled Lovell.

"I wasn't!" howled Tubby indignantly. "He dropped a letter in the quad this morning, and, of course, I picked it up for him, like a well-bred chap. Lot of good wasting courtesy on that brute though. He actually took hold of my ear—mine, you know! I'm a Rookwood chap, and he's only a paid coach, and he pulled my ear! Think of that!"

"Serve you right if you were reading his letters," said Lovell.

"I wasn't, I tell you. I may have glanced at it by accident as I picked it up. I was just going to run after him with it when he saw me. It wasn't a minute. I never saw a word that was written in it. I was just glancing at the newspaper cutting that was pinned on it. I suppose a fellow can read a newspaper cutting?" said Tubby, in an injured tone. "It was rather interesting—about a burglary."

"What?"

"The Fictical Four uttered that startled exclamation in chorus.

"Oh, you're interested, too, are you?" said Tubby. "I jolly well don't tell you about it, as you're so unsympathetic. Where was the harm in a fellow looking at a newspaper cutting? Besides, I remembered that you fellows were in Berkshire in the time—"

"In Berkshire?" repeated Jimmy Silver. "Was the newspaper cutting about a burglary in Berkshire?"

"I only saw a few lines," said Tubby. "Something about a burglary at Deepwater. No, it wasn't that. Deepford? No, Deepdon—that's it—Deepden. Somewhere near Newbury or Reading."

"My only hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"I dare say Wilmot knows the place, as somebody sent it to him," said Tubby Muffin. "Where was the harm in a fellow looking at it, I'd like to know? He pulled my ear." Tubby Muffin rubbed a fat ear reminiscently. "And he's only a paid coach, you know. I'd complain to the Head, only very likely he would think—"

"Oh, rats! Serve you right for spying!" said Lovell gruffly. And he tramped on to the end study, followed by his chums. Tubby Muffin was left to mourn over his woes in solitude.

Jimmy Silver's face had a curious expression as he entered his study. During the past week he had pondered over his strange secret, without getting any nearer a solution of his problem.

He had looked for some move on the part of the suspected man. But Eric Wilmot had gone about his duties at Rookwood in a perfectly normal way, and certainly given no grounds for suspicion. Jimmy had been driven to wondering whether, after all, he had been deceived by a startling resemblance; and he was glad now that he had said nothing on the subject outside the circle of the Co.

But what Tubby Muffin had said brought all his half-satisfied suspicions to new life.

Even Lovell looked surprised and uneasy.

"After all, there's nothing in that!" Lovell said at last. "Anybody might send anybody a newspaper cutting."

"He might!" said Jimmy.

"Some friend of Wilmot's probably lives near the place, and thought it might interest him," said Lovell.

Jimmy looked at his chum.

"That's rot, and you know it!" he said.

"Look here, Jimmy—"

"Deepden is a tiny place in the country, and nobody could be interested in a description of an attempted burglary there," said Jimmy. "Not unless he was somehow concerned in the matter. Somebody's cut that paragraph out of one of the big newspapers—and sent it to Wilmot. Why?"

"Oh, rot!" said Lovell.

If Lovell saw any reason to change an opinion, it was likely to make him more obstinate in holding that opinion. That was one of Arthur Edward's little ways.

But Raby and Newcome both looked very worried.

"It's queer!" Raby said slowly.

"Jolly queer!" said Newcome. "But—let—there can't be anything in it, Jimmy! The Head must know all about the man!"

Jimmy nodded and the matter dropped. But Jimmy Silver had plenty of food for thought now, and his secret was like a weight upon his mind.

CHAPTER I.

Mysterious!

"YOUNG gentlemen, stop, please!" Lovell glanced round. Raby put on his brake. The two juniors were riding back from Coombe to Rookwood on Wednesday afternoon when they were hailed by a man leaning on the stile in Coombe Lane.

Jimmy Silver had gone with Newcome for a ramble in the woods that afternoon—Newcome being of botanical tendencies, and Jimmy kindly taking an interest now and then in his pursuits. Lovell and Raby had preferred a spin on the bikes for the afternoon, and they had been round the heath and Low Coombe, and were now on their way back to the school by way of Coombe. Both the juniors looked rather curiously at the man who hailed them, and as Raby had put on his brake, Lovell followed his example, and they jumped down.

"What is it?" asked Lovell, not very graciously.

The man was dressed in dusty tweeds, with a Homburg hat. His face was red, as if with exposure to wind and sun, and his chin was stubbly, his mouth half hidden by a straggling moustache. His eyebrows were thick and bushy and dark. Lovell was not favourably impressed by his looks, and he did not see why he should jump off his bike because a stranger called to him for no apparent reason. So Arthur Edward was not very gracious.

"Excuse me, sir!" said the man very civilly. "You belong to Rookwood School, I think."

"That's so," said Lovell, "and I'm in rather a hurry to get there!"

This was meant to be sarcastic.

"Sorry, sir; but if you would not mind doing me a favour, sir—"

Lovell stared. He saw no reason whatever why he should do the man a favour. But Raby had chimed in before Arthur Edward could express his opinion on that point.

"What is it, then?"

"There's a gentleman at the school I'd like to speak to, sir," said the man in tweeds. "I dare say you know him as you belong there—a Mr. Wilmot."

"Oh!" ejaculated Lovell. "Yes, we know Wilmot. If you want to speak to him, he's at the school. Follow this lane

till you come to the school gates, and you're there."

"Would you be kind enough to tell him, sir, that an old friend wishes to speak to him?"

"I suppose I could tell him," said Lovell, puzzled. "Do you mean that you don't want to come to the school?"

"Yes, sir, if you'd be kind enough to mention to him that Bill Smith is waiting for him in the lane."

Lovell glanced involuntarily at Raby. Lovell was quite determined to believe that there was nothing in the least suspicious about Eric Wilmot. But even Lovell could not help feeling that this was rather odd. There was no apparent reason why the man with the bushy eyebrows could not walk off to the school.

"I'll tell him," said Lovell shortly.

"Thank you, sir. Tell him his old friend Smith is waiting for him under the trees yonder." The man jerked his finger towards the edge of Coombe Wood, where it bordered the lane a little further on.

"I'd be ever so much obliged, sir!"

"I'll do it!"

Lovell remounted his machine, and rode on with Raby. The two juniors did not speak till Rookwood School came in sight, though their thoughts were busy.

"That's rather odd, Lovell!" Raby remarked at last.

"I don't see it," said Lovell.

"Oh, you don't?"

"No, I don't!" said Lovell obstinately.

"That chap's a bit shabby, and he mayn't care to show up at a big school and call on Wilmot. I dare say that's all there is in it."

Raby shrugged his shoulders slightly, and said no more. Argument only confirmed Lovell in his opinions. Raby, as a matter of fact, was coming round to Jimmy Silver's suspicion.

The two juniors arrived at the school, and after putting up their bikes, they looked for Mr. Wilmot. They knew that he was engaged on the football ground with the Fifth that afternoon, so he was certain to be within the school precincts.

Eric Wilmot was coming off the football ground when they found him, with Hansson and Talboys of the Fifth, chatting pleasantly with the two seniors.

He stopped as Lovell and Raby came up,

seeing that they wanted to speak to him, and Talboys and Hansom strolled on.

"I have a message for you, Mr. Wilmot," said Lovell.

"Yes?" said the footballer. "From the Head?"

"Oh, no; a man named Smith."

Wilmot started.

"Smith?" he repeated.

Lovell explained.

The footballer listened quietly, and Raby, who was watching his face curiously, noticed how his lips tightened, and a glitter came into his handsome, dark eyes.

Raby did not need telling that Mr. Smith's message was extremely unwelcome to Eric Wilmot, and that the footballer had no desire whatever to see his "old friend Smith."

"Very well," said Mr. Wilmot. "Thank you very much for bringing me the message!"

"Not at all, sir!" said Lovell. "Glad to be of any service!"

He added that little bit of politeness chiefly for Raby's benefit.

Eric Wilmot nodded, and went rather quickly into the School House. Hansom and Talboys of the Fifth made a movement as if to rejoin him, to continue their football chat. But Mr. Wilmot did not seem to see them, and he disappeared into the house.

Lovell looked at Raby half accusingly.

"I suppose you think that's suspicious!" he said.

"Well, I think it's jolly odd," said Raby.

"Jimmy would think so, too. People who are above-board don't generally have surreptitious meetings like this."

"I don't see anything surreptitious about it," said Lovell. "I think Wilmot's a splendid chap in every way!"

"Well, you're an ass, you know!" remarked Raby.

"Br-r-r-r!" said Lovell.

The two juniors stopped to speak to Rawson of the Fourth in the quad, and when they went into the house a few minutes later, Mr. Wilmot passed them coming out.

He had on his hat and coat, and was evidently going to keep the appointment with his friend Smith. Monsieur Monceau, the French-master, came out of the House at the same time, in his frock-coat and silk hat, and he addressed Mr. Wilmot on the steps.

"You go for leetle promenade, isn't it, mon ami!" said Monceau genially.

He was on pleasant terms with the young footballer, as most of the Rookwood masters were.

"Yes," said Mr. Wilmot briefly.

"Bien! I walks wia you, if you sink so," said Monceau. "I also go for leetle promenade."

Lovell and Raby could not help waiting to hear what Eric Wilmot would say in reply to that. If there was anything surreptitious about his meeting with Smith, he was not likely to take the French master of Rookwood along with him if he could help it. There was a distinct pause before Wilmot answered.

"I am afraid you would not care for a ramble in the woods, Monsieur Monceau."

"Ciel! Non!" said the Frenchman. "I walks wia myself on so route, isn't it? You go ramble in so wood, yes?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Zen," said Monceau, smiling. "I promenades wia you as far as so wood, and so we parts company."

"Excellent," said Mr. Wilmot.

And the two gentlemen walked down to the gates together.

"Well?" jeered Lovell. "Nothing suspicious about a chap who takes Monceau with him to meet the Smith man, Raby."

"But you he drops Monceau before he starts the Smith bird!" answered Raby.

"Oh, rats!"

"Bake after them!" grinned Raby.

"I wouldn't if I suspected the man," said Lovell. "But as I don't suspect him, I'll do it just to prove that you're in the wrong. Come and get out the jiggers again."

"Done!"

The two juniors wheeled out their machines, and rode at a leisurely pace in the wake of the two walkers. They soon sighted them ahead, sauntering along the leafy lane. They had passed the stile, and reached the border of Coombe Wood, where, according to what he had told Lovell, Smith was to be in waiting. There was no sign of Smith to be seen; he was among the trees, if he was there at all. In the lane the two men stopped.

Lovell and Raby rode on and passed them. As they passed, Monceau was speaking.

"Oui, I am a leetle fatigued! I sink I

rest here on this grass bank, isn't it, while you take your ramble in to both!"

"The grass is a little damp, sir, I think," said Mr. Wilmot. "You are liable to catch cold."

"Mon Dieu! Ouf! I did not sink of rain! I walk on, I sink!" said Monsieur Mousseau; and he walked on, leaving the footballer alone.

Lovell rode forward grimly; he would not look back. But Raby glanced over his shoulder, and saw Eric Wilmot disappear among the trees after the Frenchman was at a distance. Then the two juniors rode on without speaking. It was obvious to Raby, at least, that Wilmot had been desirous of getting rid of the Frenchman before Smith appeared in sight; and it would have been obvious to Lovell also, but for that youth's remarkable tenacity in sticking to an opinion once formed.

"Well?" said Raby at last.

"Rot!" said Lovell.

CHAPTER 5.

For Life or Death!

"JOLLY good afternoon!" said Arthur Newcome.

"Oh, ripping!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy had quite enjoyed the ramble through Cuombe Wood, already rich in autumn tints. But his interest in the various botanical specimens Newcome had bagged was a little perfunctory.

The two juniors had sat down to rest in the wood near the lane, Jimmy lying with the back of his head in his clasped hands in the grass, taking his ease, Newcome, sitting near him, arranging his specimens.

"You ought to take this up, you know, Jimmy."

"Um!" murmured Jimmy.

Newcome grunted, and went on with his specimens. Jimmy was content to rest in the grass till he was finished, meanwhile thinking out certain details in connection with the Rookwood junior eleven for the forthcoming match with Greyfriars.

The deep woods were silent, save for an occasional twitter from the branches overhead. From the lane there came a faint whirr of bicycles for a moment or two, and then there was silence again. Suddenly, through the stillness of the woods, came a sharp, angry voice—a voice

the two juniors knew well, though they had not heard it in such angry tones before.

"You scoundrel! So you have followed me here!"

It was the voice of Eric Wilmot, the new football coach of Rookwood School.

Jimmy Silver sat bolt upright in the grass in utter astonishment.

Arthur Newcome started, and dropped two or three valuable specimens that he had been arranging in his botanical portfolio.

Without speaking, the two Rookwooders stared at one another.

Wilmot was evidently close to them in the wood, though a thick screen of under-woods hid him from their sight.

Another voice—a cool, mocking voice—answered:

"I wrote to you. You did not answer."

"Did you think that I should answer your letter, you rascal? How dared you write to me at all!"

"Oh, draw it mild! I gave you time to answer, and you did not. That is why I have come."

"You scoundrel—you scoundrel!"

"Possibly the headmaster of Rookwood would consider somebody else a scoundrel if he knew the facts."

Jimmy Silver stared at Newcome blankly. His face was quite pale. If he had needed confirmation of his suspicion he had it now. Newcome opened his lips, and closed them again. The juniors could not speak without being heard by the two men close at hand. Neither of them had any desire to play the eavesdropper; but they had no choice in the matter.

"Better keep a civil tongue," went on the cool voice. "I think you have as much to fear from me as I have from you, Eric. You've got to help me."

"Help you?"

"You're in clover and I'm on my uppers. You know that I'm in need of help. You know that I'm wanted."

"I know that."

"If I'm run down here, what will become of you in your new job at the school? Do you think I shall hold my tongue, when I've got nothing more to lose? Do you think the headmaster will let you hang on? Isn't he more likely to believe you came to Rookwood for what you could lay your hands on? Birds of a feather, you know."

"Good heavens!" breathed Jimmy.

He rose to his feet in the grass. Newcome followed his example. The two juniors were determined not to linger and listen to that startling conversation.

"So that is it!" said Mr. Wilmot's voice.

"That's it, my old pal!"

"And you think I fear you?"

"I know you do! Ah, would— Oh!"

Crash!

A fierce blow had been struck, and a staggering figure came crashing through the thickets towards the spot where the two startled Rookwood juniors were standing.

The footballer had hit out straight from the shoulder, and the man with the bushy eyebrows fairly spun away from the blow.

He crashed down in the grass only a few feet from Jimmy Silver and Newcome, who jumped back out of his way.

Through the broken thicket, the pale, set face of Eric Wilmot appeared, staring after the man he had knocked down. He did not see the juniors; his eyes glittered at the fallen, sprawling man.

"That's my answer to you, Dandy Jim!" he said, between his teeth.

"Gad! I'll—"

For a second or two the man sprawled, and then he leaped to his feet with a yell of rage. His hand went under his coat, and reappeared, and there was a flash of steel in the sunlight that filtered through the green branches overhead.

Weapon in hand, the ruffian swung himself at the footballer. A moment more, and the blow would have been struck.

But in that moment Jimmy Silver, almost dazed as he was with the suddenness of the happening, acted promptly.

He sprang at the man, and struck with all his force. His clenched fist crashed on the side of the ruffian's head, and the unexpected blow sent him spinning again.

The knife dropped into the grass, and Newcome jumped at it, picked it up, and sent it whirling away among the tree-tops.

"You—you here!" Eric Wilmot stammered the words as he saw the juniors under the dusky trees.

The man he had called Dandy Jim sat up dazedly.

"Collar him!" panted Jimmy Silver.

Wilmot stood irresolute, but the two juniors sprang towards the ruffian. Dandy

Jim scrambled to his feet, and dashed away into the wood.

"Come back!" Wilmot was shouting. "Boys, come back! That man is dangerous! Come back at once!"

Newcome caught Jimmy Silver by the arm.

"Cluck it, Jimmy!"

Jimmy's impulse had been to pursue the ruffian, but he nodded, and turned back. The two juniors rejoined Mr. Wilmot, who was standing with a pale and troubled face. There was no doubt that Jimmy Silver had saved the young footballer from a terrible injury, if not from actual death, and Eric Wilmot knew it. Yet it was not difficult to read in his troubled face that he wished the Rookwooders had been anywhere else just then.

"Thank you, Silver!" he said at last, speaking with an effort. "You—you have done me a great service!"

Jimmy nodded. Newcome stooped to pick up his scattered specimens. Mr. Wilmot's glance followed his movement, and he understood how the juniors came to be there. He gave them no explanation of how he came to be there himself.

"You are returning to Rookwood now?" he asked. "You had better, in the circumstances."

"Yes," said Jimmy.

"I will go with you, in case that rascal comes—"

He did not finish. The three left the wood together, and walked in grim silence towards the school.

At the gates of Rookwood Eric Wilmot spoke, in a low tone.

"I cannot ask you to be silent as to what has happened. I have no right to ask it. But if you wished to do me a great service, you would say nothing of what has occurred."

Without waiting for a reply, the young man strode in at the gates, and crossed with rapid strides towards the School House. Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"Well——" he said.

"Well!" breathed Newcome.

"Let's get in!" said Jimmy abruptly. "This will want thinking over."

And they went in in silence.

Lovell and Raby came in to tea, and found Jimmy Silver and Newcome in a thoughtful mood. Raby related the story

of "Mr. Smith," Lovell grunting the while. They did not guess that their chums had seen Mr. Smith, and knew more about him than they could tell. Jimmy Silver proceeded to enlighten them, and Raby whistled.

"It begins to look pretty clear," he said. "Wilmet's the man of Deepden, and Danby Jim is a rotter in the same line of business."

"It looks like it," said Jimmy Silver slowly. "But—but—" He hesitated.

"You're not beginning to doubt it yourself?" ejaculated Raby.

"I'm blessed if I know!" said Jimmy frankly.

CHAPTER 14.

The Man from Scotland Yard!

THERE was a tap at the door of the Fourth Form room, and the round, chubby face of Tupper, the page, looked in. Morning lessons were in progress in the Fourth, so the juniors were pleased to see Tupper. His advent to the Form-room gave them a rest, if only a brief one.

Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, did not look pleased. He did not like interruptions of lessons, not being at all in agreement with his Form on that point.

"Well?"

Mr. Dalton rapped out that word interrogatively. Arthur Edward Lovell, who was in difficulties with his construe, stopped in great relief; and Jimmy Silver, who was next to him, was able to give him a whispered tip while Mr. Dalton's head was turned.

"If you please, sir, the 'Ead wishes to see Master Silver in his study, sir!" said Tupper.

"Immediately!" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir; immeget!"

"Very good!"

Mr. Dalton turned to his class again. Jimmy Silver ceased whispering to Lovell just in time.

"Silver, Dr. Chisholm wishes to see you in his study. You may leave the class."

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy.

The captain of the Fourth left his place at once. He was wondering a good deal why the Head wanted him during classes—it was an extremely unusual summons. When the Head wanted to see a Fourth-

Former—which was very seldom—he generally contrived to do so at a time when classes would not be interfered with.

Some evasive glances followed Jimmy as he left the Form-room. He had not done his construe yet, and probably he would not have to do it now! Lovell rasmied with "Juncus rubescens radialis mare," and wished that he, instead of Jimmy, had been called to the Head.

Tupper was in the passage, and Jimmy tapped the youth in buttons on the shoulder.

"What's up, Tupper, old beanet?" asked Jimmy. "Is the Head in a wax?"

Tupper grinned.

"I don't think it's a row, Master Silver. The 'Ead's got a visitor with 'im!"

"Oh! One of my merry relations called to see me!" asked Jimmy.

"Nunno! Gentleman name of Troops."

"Never heard the name," said Jimmy.

"I took in his card to the 'Ead," said Tupper. "There was some letters on the card—'C.I.D.' Dunno what it means. Looks a tough sort of gent, he does; got a jaw like a steel trap. After he'd been some time with the 'Ead the 'Ead rings and says I'm to fetch you from the Form-room, Master Silver."

Jimmy Silver started.

He knew that the letters "C.I.D." stood for Criminal Investigation Department. It was a gentleman from Scotland Yard who had called upon the Head of Rookwood—taking him away from his duties in the Sixth Form-room—and who wished to see Master Silver of the Fourth.

"Thanks, Tuppy, old man! It's not a licking, at any rate, then," said Jimmy, and he hurried away to Dr. Chisholm's study.

His heart was beating a little faster.

The open doorway of the School House gave him a view of the sunny quadrangle; and in the quad. he caught sight of Eric Wilmet, the new football coach of Rookwood School.

The young footballer was sauntering under the beeches, with his hands in his pockets, and a thoughtful expression on his handsome face.

Jimmy paused a moment to look at him.

The sun glimmered on his handsome face, showing up the regular features and well-marked brows and dark eyelashes. His likeness to the escaping crackman Jimmy had seen at Deepden during the vacation

was more striking than ever at that moment.

Was it no account of that Deepden affair that Mr. Troops of Scotland Yard wished to see Jimmy Silver? There could be no doubt about it. So far, Jimmy had said nothing of his suspicions regarding Eric Wilmot, save to his chums Lovell and Raby and Newcome. His suspicions were as strong as ever; yet somehow, in spite of them, he rather liked the young footballer. As he went on towards the Head's study, he was wondering whether he ought to keep his secret still a secret. He could only decide to be guided by circumstances.

He tapped at the Head's door, and entered.

Dr. Chisholm signed to him to approach. A rather burly man, with a hard, composed face, was seated in the Head's study, and he turned a pair of very keen and penetrating eyes upon the junior.

"You sent for me, sir?" said Jimmy.

"Yes, Silver. This gentleman is Inspector Troops, of Scotland Yard. He wishes to speak to you in reference to some episode which apparently occurred during the summer vacation."

"Yes, sir."

"This is Silver, Mr. Troops."

Inspector Troops fixed his eyes on the Rookwood junior.

"I understand that you were on a walking tour during the school vacation with some friends, Master Silver," he said. "One night you camped in a wood at Deepden Manor, in Berkshire."

"That is so," said Jimmy.

"There was a burglary at the manor house, and the crackman, in escaping, passed close to your camp, and you seized upon him. He escaped, but you were able to give his description to the local police."

"Yes, sir."

"You appear to have acted very courageously and creditably, Silver!" said Dr. Chisholm graciously.

"Thank you, sir!"

"The matter remained in the hands of the Reading police," resumed Mr. Troops. "But your description of the man, Master Silver, which was very intelligently given, tallies with that of a well-known criminal for whom the London police have been looking for a long time. The matter is, therefore, of more importance than an ordinary attempted burglary in a little

country place. It has come into my hands."

Evidently Mr. Troops of Scotland Yard was an important person!

"Now, it seems that you noted the man's face very carefully, from the description you gave," said Mr. Troops. "Do you think you would know him if you saw him again?"

"Certainly!"

"Would you, do you think, recognise a photograph of him?"

"I am sure of it."

The inspector allowed a look of satisfaction to appear upon his stolid face.

"Very good!" he said. "I have here a photograph of James Stacey, one of the most dangerous criminals in the country. He is the man whom your description appears to fit. If it turns out to be the same man, this may help us in laying him by the heels!"

Inspector Troops took out a pocket-book, opened it, and extracted a photograph from it. He passed it to Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy's hand trembled as he held it.

The photograph was that of a handsome young man of about thirty, with regular features, straight nose, well-cut lips. It was a photograph which any Rookwood fellow would have said was that of Eric Wilmot, the Rookwood football coach.

It was proof—proof positive that his suspicion of Eric Wilmot was well founded. He had not been deceived by a chance resemblance; this was the face itself—the face of the crackman of Deepden, and the face of Eric Wilmot.

Jimmy felt almost giddy for a moment.

The inspector was watching him curiously. He certainly could not guess the junior's thoughts, but he could see the signs of some strange emotion in Jimmy's face, and he wondered.

"Well," he said, breaking the silence, "is that the face of the man you found escaping after the burglary at Deepden, Master Silver?"

"That is the face," said Jimmy.

"You are sure of it?"

"Quite sure."

Jimmy had to answer; the inspector had a right to ask. But he could have added more, and he did not. Why he did not add that the face was also that of Eric Wilmot, he hardly knew. Somehow, the more proofs piled up against the young

man, Jimmy Silver felt, strangely enough, a doubt growing up in his own mind.

"Very good!" said the inspector, with satisfaction. "Thank you very much, Master Silver!"

"One moment!" said the Head.

There was a startled look on Dr. Chisholm's face. He had seen the photograph as the inspector passed it to Jimmy.

Whether Jimmy Silver would have spoken or not he never knew. But he knew that it was unnecessary now.

Dr. Chisholm stretched out his hand for the photograph, and the inspector, in some slight surprise, passed it to him.

The Head made Jimmy Silver a sign to leave the study.

Jimmy went gladly enough. The man, if he was a crackman, ought to be denounced and arrested; there was no doubt about that. But Jimmy had a strange repugnance to taking part in the denunciation.

"Bless my soul!" said Dr. Chisholm, as the door closed on Jimmy Silver.

He adjusted his glasses, and stared hard at the photograph.

"Is it possible that you know the face, sir?" asked the Scotland Yard man, in surprise.

"Certainly, I think I do. It can be, of course, only a resemblance," said the Head. "But the resemblance is amazing. I should certainly have said that this was a photograph of Mr. Wilmot, the professional footballer whom I have lately engaged as a coach for the boys here."

Inspector Troop's eyes glinted.

"Is it possible?" he ejaculated. "May I ask what you know personally of this Mr. Wilmot, who so strangely resembles a criminal long wanted by the police, Dr. Chisholm?"

"Little, but I received the best recommendations with him," said the Head. "He formerly played as a professional for a club called Leamshire United, and is a very agreeable young man of a steady character. He has been here a fortnight, and has given every satisfaction, and is well liked."

"The boy Silver undoubtedly noticed the resemblance," said the inspector dryly. "Such resemblances occur, but they are rare. I think it will be my duty to interview Mr. Wilmot, sir."

"There is no objection to that, of course," said the Head. "Even if it is only barely

possible that I may have been deceived in him, I should be glad to have the matter set at rest. Of course, you will understand that the less said upon such a subject the better. Perhaps you will stay to lunch with me, Inspector Troop, and this afternoon you will be able to see Mr. Wilmot on the football-ground, and satisfy yourself. If it is merely a case of resemblance, as I hope and believe, there need be no unpleasant talk; if otherwise, of course, you will do your duty."

"A very excellent arrangement!" said Mr. Troop.

CHAPTER II.

Jimmy Silver is Puzzled!

JIMMY SILVER returned to his place in the Fourth Form-room. Some of the juniors glanced at him curiously and inquiringly, and his chums, at least, noted that Jimmy looked worried. Jimmy was, in point of fact, very much worried, and he gave very random attention to his lessons for the rest of the morning. For once Jimmy Silver's "condrus" was on a par with Tubby Muffin's.

He could not help it.

The thought of the young footballer was in his mind, and of the grim-faced, square-jawed inspector from Scotland Yard. He knew what the Head's recognition of the photograph must lead to; indeed, he almost expected to hear some sound showing that an arrest was taking place within the precincts of Rockwood School itself. Somehow it troubled him to think of Eric Wilmot being marched away, like Eugene Aram, with gyves upon his wrists. Yet if he was guilty he deserved it, and more; and all the evidence was that he was a guilty man. Jimmy hardly knew how a doubt had crept into his mind.

After morning lessons Jimmy was pounced upon in the corridor by Lovell and Raby and Newcome. His chums wanted to know!

The captain of the Fourth did not answer them till they were out in the quadrangle, out of hearing of the other fellows. Then he explained what had taken place in the Head's study.

"That's a clincher!" observed Raby. "No need for you to speak out now, Jimmy."

"I'm glad of it," said Jimmy Silver.

"Looks as if you were right all along," said Newcome thoughtfully. "Blessed if I'd ever have thought so!"

Lovell gave a grunt.

"It looks bad!" he said. "But—Dash it all, I believe Wilmot is a decent man! He looks one. I shall be awfully sorry to find out that he's a rotter, anyhow."

"What do you think yourself, Jimmy?" asked Raby.

Jimmy Silver wrinkled his brows.

"I'm blessed if I know!" he said. "I hadn't a doubt on the subject at first, but now—"

"Now it's proved," said Raby.

"I know. But—"

Jimmy Silver did not finish. He shook his head, and was silent. Tubby Muffin rolled up to the Fistical Four in the quad., and the discussion ceased at once.

"Seen that chap?" asked Tubby.

"Eb—what chap?"

"Chap with a face like a rat-trap," said Reginald Muffin. "He's over yonder. I've asked Tupper, and he says the man is staying to lunch with the Head. Says he's a giddy inspector—beard the Head call him Inspector Troope. I say, I wonder what he's hanging about Rookwood for?"

The Fistical Four did not enlighten Tubby Muffin. They glanced at the burly Scotland Yard inspector, who was sauntering under the beeches.

"Wilmot knows him," said Tubby.

"How do you know that, Fatty?" granted Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Well, he was standing round when I was asking Tupper, and then the inspector jolny came along," explained Muffin. "Wilmot just blinked at him, and then turned round and walked away as quick as anything. He knows him, and don't like him, you bet." And Tubby Muffin wagged his head sagely. "I say—"

"Ob, buzz off!" said Arthur Edward Lovell gruffly.

And the Fistical Four walked away.

That Inspector Troope was "hanging on" at Rookwood the juniors soon had proof, for after dinner they sighted him strolling in the quadrangle again.

It was half-holiday that afternoon. There was a senior football match due on Big Side, and Jimmy Silver & Co. intended to honour it with their presence. Lovell and Raby and Newcome went down to the football-ground, and Jimmy Silver, who had lines to do for Monsieur Monceau.

proceeded to the end study to grind them out.

Jimmy had just finished his fiftieth line from the "Henriade" when there was a tap at the door of the end study.

"Come in, fathead!" sang out Jimmy Silver.

The door opened, and it was Eric Wilmot who appeared in view. Jimmy Silver jumped up, colouring a little.

"Ob, I—I didn't know—" he stammered.

"Can I come in?" the young footballer asked quietly.

"Trot in, sir!"

Mr. Wilmot entered the study. There was unusual colour in his handsome face, and his manner was a little uncertain. Jimmy wondered whether this unexpected visit had any connection with Inspector Troope's presence at Rookwood.

"I—I wanted just a word with you, Master Silver," said Wilmot, his colour deepening.

"Anything you like, sir!" said Jimmy.

"Last Wednesday," said Eric Wilmot, speaking with an evident effort, "you—happened to see me in the wood near Coombe, where I met a—a man. He threatened me, and I knocked him down."

"I remember, Mr. Wilmot."

"Probably you heard me speaking to him—"

"I couldn't help it, sir," said Jimmy.

"I heard him threaten you, and I heard you address him by the name of Dandy Jim."

"I told you," resumed Wilmot, "that I had no right to ask you to keep the occurrence a secret, but that I should be obliged if you said nothing about it. May I—may I ask whether you have mentioned it?"

"Only to my friends, sir," said Jimmy—"Lovell and Raby and Newcome. Newcome was present, sir, and Lovell and Raby knew about the man, so—"

"Yes, yes; but to no one else?"

"No, sir; and my friends haven't spoken of it, either."

"Thank you very much, Silver!"

With that, Eric Wilmot nodded to the junior, and left the end study. Jimmy Silver looked after him curiously and compassionately. He knew that the Scotland Yard inspector's presence in the school had startled the young man, and evidently alarmed him. Evidently he had surmised

that Jimmy had spoken of that strange affair in Cousin Wood, and that that had something to do with the Inspector's visit to the school. Yet, if he was a guilty man, and with the bloodhound of the law so close at hand, why did not the footballer make an attempt to escape from Rookwood while there was yet time?

It was a puzzle; and Jimmy Silver could only give it up. He finished his lines, and took them to Monsieur Monceau, and then made his way to Big Side to rejoin his chums—wondering what was to happen at the old school that afternoon. For that something was certain to happen he had no doubt whatever.

CHAPTER 12

Wilmot is Wanted!

GEORGE BULKELEY, of the Sixth Form, wore a worried look. Neville and Scott, of the Sixth, who were in the captain's study, looked worried, too. An open telegram lay on the study table.

"It's rotten!" said Bulkeley. "I shall have to cut the match. In fact, I shall have to get a move on to catch my train."

"And Greyfriars will be here in an hour!" said Neville dismally.

"The match is a goner!" said Scott.

Bulkeley wrinkled his brows and glanced at the telegram again.

"My pater specially wants me this afternoon," he said. "He wouldn't wire if it wasn't important. I'm afraid there's no help for it, you fellows; I shall have to go. It's wretchedly unlucky that Knowles should be laid up now; he would have captained the team, of course."

"Not that we want to be captained by a Modern," said Neville.

"Well, Knowles is vice-captain, and would naturally take my place," said Bulkeley. "But he's in sunny with a cold, so that's out of the question. Frampton and Pateby are both off colour, too; it really looks as if Wingate's team will walk off with us on this time. I—I wonder—"

"The ground!"

"Well," said Neville. "No good worrying. It's all over bar shouting, any-

way."

"The giddy coach!"

Bulkeley nodded thoughtfully.

"It's a bit unusual, I know," he said. "But as the team will be in such jolly low water, why shouldn't Wilmot play for us? Wingate of Greyfriars is a real sportsman, and I'm sure he wouldn't raise any objection."

Neville and Scott brightened up.

"By gad! What a stunt!" exclaimed Neville. "Wilmot is a real good man, and if he would play—"

"He would play if we asked him," said Scott. "But, after all, I don't see why not. He was going to referee that match, but Mr. Bohun would do that willingly."

"I think I'll speak to him," said Bulkeley. "I know he would like to play in a match. We let Greyfriars play a master once, when they were short of a man—you remember they played their master, master, a hefty chap named Lascelles. One good turn deserves another. Wingate will not think of raising any objection, I'm sure. Anyhow, you fellows can put it to him when the Greyfriars crowd comes along. I'll speak to Wilmot; it's the only chance to pull the fixture out of the fire."

"Good!" said the two Sixth-Formers together.

And Bulkeley left the study to look for Mr. Wilmot, the Rookwood football coach. Eric Wilmot was lodged in the School House, in a room which looked upon the old balcony on the south side of the building. Bulkeley caught sight of him on the balcony from the quad, and came towards the narrow stone steps that led up. Wilmot did not see him for the moment. He was leaning with folded arms on the iron rail of the balcony, his gaze on the distance, and an expression of deep thought upon his handsome face.

But he glanced round as Bulkeley came up the stone steps. He greeted the captain of Rookwood with a smile. The football coach pulled very well with Bulkeley, and, indeed, with nearly all Rookwood.

"You were going to referee for us this afternoon, Mr. Wilmot," began the Rookwood captain. "Will you play for us instead?"

"You want me to play?"

"I'm called away," explained Bulkeley. "One of our best men is laid up, and some others are off their form. If you'd play it would give the team a leg-up, and very

likely save the match. I only mean, of course, if you'd care to do it."

Eric Wilmot smiled.

"I'd be very glad," he said frankly. "In fact, there's nothing that I'd like better."

"Good!" said Bulkeley. "Then it's settled. I'm asking Neville of the Sixth to captain the team; but he'll give you any place that you choose to ask for, Mr. Wilmot."

"On the contrary, I shall leave it to Neville to place me," said Eric Wilmot. "Count on me by all means."

"Many thanks!"

And Bulkeley nodded to the young footballer, and left him very much relieved in his mind.

Ten minutes later the captain of Rookwood was on his way to the railway-station, bag in hand, homeward bound. And when the Rookwood first eleven came down to Big Side, Eric Wilmot came with them, looking very handsome and fit in Rookwood colours.

"Hallo, there's Wilmot among the players!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell, in surprise. "He's not in that rig to referee, I suppose!"

"Playing for Rookwood!" said Baby, with a whistle.

"And that blessed steel-trap-faced bouncer hanging about all the time!" murmured Newcome.

The chums of the Fourth glanced round, half expecting to see Inspector Troope of Scotland Yard near at hand. But the detective was not at present to be seen.

"Here come Greyfriars!" shouted Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth.

"Keep back, you cheaky Moderns!" shouted Lovell, as there was a shoving in the junior crowd for good places.

"Close up, there!" howled Tommy Dodd.

"We're keeping room for Jimmy Silver!"

"Blow Jimmy Silver!" retorted Tommy Dodd. "Only a dashed Classical, anyway!"

"You cheaky Modern as—"

"You silly Classical chump—"

"Now then, order there, you fags!" shouted Carther of the Sixth, a houseman.

"Yah!"

"Order, you Modern cads!"

"Stop shoving!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell, in great wrath. "Who's that

shoving me? I'll—I'll— Oh, is that you, Jimmy!"

Arthur Edward turned his wrathful face, to see Jimmy Silver at his elbow.

"Little me!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "I've had to shove to get here! Now then, leave off pushing, you fellows!"

"Well, I like that!" howled Putty of the Fourth indignantly.

"Well, if you like it, what are you grouting at?" asked Jimmy Silver amiably. "Hallo, what is Wilmot doing among the players in that rig?"

"Looks as if he's playing for Rookwood!"

"My hat!"

Neville of the Sixth was seen in talk with Wingate, the captain of the visiting team, and Wingate was seen to nod with a pleasant smile. When the toss was made for ends, and the two teams lined up, Eric Wilmot lined up with Rookwood as inside-right in Neville's team. And then Mr. Bohon blew the whistle, and the ball rolled.

"Good for Rookwood!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "We've got a good man in young Wilmot—what?"

"A jolly good footballer, anyhow!" said Baby.

"A good man all round," said Lovell obstinately. "A thoroughly decent chap. I tell you, and I'd say the same to that chap with a face like a hatchet if he asked me!"

"Ahem!"

It was a cough at Lovell's elbow, and he looked round quickly. The burly gentleman from Scotland Yard was standing, towering over the crowd of juniors, close at hand. Arthur Edward Lovell had the grace to blush.

Jimmy Silver glanced at Detective-inspector Troope, and his face clouded a little.

It was not likely that the gentleman from Scotland Yard had stayed on at Rookwood that day simply to witness a football match. He had an object in being present. And Jimmy Silver did not need telling what that object was. Inspector Troope was there to observe Eric Wilmot—to observe him narrowly and closely—and to make up his mind whether the young man was what he pretended to be, or whether he was the crackman James Stacey. And Jimmy Silver could only wonder how it would end.

CHAPTER 12.

In the Name of the Law.

"LAY up, Rookwood!"

"On the ball!"

From the kick-off the match was hard and fast. It was a good eleven that had come over from Greyfriars, the best men of Greyfriars Sixth and Fifth Forms. Rookwood First was not at full strength, and there was no doubt that but for their new recruit, they would not have been able to hold the visitors. But from the beginning it was clear that Eric Wilmot was a tower of strength in the front line.

The Greyfriars forwards made a hot attack on the home goal, but the ball was cleared by midfield, and then the new inside-right had his chance. He captured the ball and carried it up the field, well backed up by the Rookwood forwards. He contrived to Neville join in time, and Neville drove the leather in. North, in goal, drove it out again, but before the backs had a chance of clearing, Eric Wilmot was on the leather.

"Goal!" roared Lovell, in perfect delight. Goal it was!

Eric Wilmot had put the leather in with a shot that beat the Greyfriars custodian to the wide.

The Rookwood crowd roared applause.

"Goal! Goal! Bravo!"

Eric Wilmot was smiling cheerily as he walked back in the centre of the field and the teams lined up. He looked very handsome and almost boyish in his football rig among the Sixth-Formers of Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver glanced at Mr. Troope, wondering what effect the roar of applause would have on that hard-featured gentleman—if any. He noted a perplexed look on the detective's face.

Inspector Troope met his glance, and moved a little nearer to Jimmy, whom he remembered as the junior he had seen in the Head's study that morning.

"Enjoying the game, sir?" said Jimmy demurely.

"Oh, yes—quite!" said Mr. Troope. Though it was clear that his thoughts were not very much upon football. "Who is the gentleman who is acting as referee, Master Silver?"

"That is Mr. Bohun, the master of the Second Form here, sir."

"Oh, I understood that a Mr. Wilmot, the football coach, was acting as referee."

"He's in the team, sir," said Tommy Dodd, volunteering the information while Jimmy hesitated to reply.

"Oh!" said Mr. Troope.

"Inside-right, sir!" said Tommy.

"Thank you!"

Mr. Troope's perplexed glance had been following the referee. Certainly the Second Form master bore no resemblance whatever to the man of whom he was in search. He now began to scan the players themselves.

Jimmy's glance was on his hard face, and he noted the glint that came into the inspector's eyes. Mr. Troope had his eyes upon Eric Wilmot now, and from that moment his attention never left the young footballer.

Most other eyes on Big Side at Rookwood were following Eric Wilmot, too, though with a different kind of interest. The football coach was playing a great game.

Close on half-time the ball went in again, and this time from Neville's foot. On the first half, when the whistle blew, Rookwood were two up.

When the play ceased Inspector Troope made a movement. His jaw had set grimly, and his hand, in the pocket of his coat, grasped something that gave a faint metallic clink. Jimmy Silver heard it, and he started, as he understood what it meant.

He caught hold of the burly gentleman's sleeve.

"Not now!" he exclaimed hurriedly, and then he coloured as he met the inspector's stare of blank astonishment.

"What?" ejaculated the Scotland Yard man.

Jimmy Silver crimsoned.

"Let the game finish!" he breathed. "Let him alone for the other half, sir. What difference will it make?"

Inspector Troope stared at him hard.

"What do you know about this matter, Master Silver?" he asked in a low, stern tone.

"Most of it, I think," answered Jimmy quietly. "And I can't believe that Mr. Wilmot is the man you think he is, though I believed so at first. Anyhow, he's safe, and you don't want to spoil a good game, sir."

Inspector Troope looked very hard at Jimmy Silver, possibly wondering where that cheerful youth got his nerve from. He stood in deep thought for a few moments, and finally gave a slight shrug of the shoulders. He remained where he was, looking over the heads of the juniors at the football field, watching the players as the game was resumed after the interval.

Evidently he had made up his mind to let the match be played to a finish before he sprang his surprise upon the football crowd and upon the man who was "wanted." But his eyes remained fixed on Eric Wilmot with the keenness of a hawk's.

Greyfriars "bucked up" in the second half, and a goal came to Wingate, and another to Potter, of the Greyfriars Fifth. The score stood equal when there were still ten minutes to go.

"Two to two, and ten minutes more!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, with a glance at his watch. "We'll win yet, Jimmy."

"It would have been a goner without Wilmot," remarked Raby.

"But with him it's all right," said Lovell confidently. "What do you think Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver nodded assently.

He was not thinking so much about the footer now as about the hapless footballer upon whom so terrible a blow was to fall as soon as the game was over.

If Eric Wilmot was guilty—if he was the man of Deepden—the crackman whom Jimmy had seen escaping from a scene of crime—he deserved his fate. Jimmy had no sympathy to waste upon a criminal. But was it possible that the athletic player, who had played a clean, straight game, a game he evidently loved, was a thing so base as a thief and criminal? It must be so—and yet—

Yes Jimmy's heart was heavy. He had kept the secret so long as it was in his power, but the matter was out of his hands now. The iron meshes of the law were ready to close upon the doomed man—playing there, in the sight of the cheering crowd, in ignorance of what was about to happen. If the sight of the Scotland Yard man had alarmed Wilmot, he showed no trace of it now; it was manifest that he was thinking only of the game he was playing.

"Getting close now," said Tommy Dodd. "Looks like a draw."

"There they go!" roared Lovell. "Play up, Rookwood! On the ball! Oh, bravo, Wilmot! Good man—good man!"

There was a roar of cheering. The Rookwood forwards had got away in great style, almost at the finish, and the Greyfriars defense broke down under the attack. North, in goal, fisted and the ball, but it came back like the pip from an orange from a ready foot.

"Goal!"

"Rookwood wins!"

"Bravo, Wilmot!"

"Oh, good man—good man!"

The Rookwood crowd roared and yelled. It was a goal—the odd goal for Rookwood, and it had been taken by Eric Wilmot. Neville rushed up to the young footballer and clapped him on the back.

There was an time for Greyfriars to equalize. The teams came off with the score at three to two.

Inspector Troope moved forward with a grim face, and Jimmy Silver & Co. watched him. Arthur Edward set his teeth.

"Is he going to—" Lovell breathed incredulously.

"Yes," muttered Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, the rotter!"

"He's doing his duty," said Jimmy.

"Rot! He's making a silly mistake! I hope the Sixth will scrag him!" hissed Arthur Edward Lovell. "I know I'll jolly well lend a hand if they do!"

Jimmy Silver was silent, his face tense, his eyes fixed on the inspector's bony form. The man from Scotland Yard stepped in the way of the players as they were running off the field. They stared at him in surprise.

"What—" began Neville.

There was a buzz of amusement in the crowd. All eyes were on the burly inspector now.

He stopped in front of Eric Wilmot, who halted. The young man's flushed face paled, but his looks were steady; his glance did not falter as it rested on the man from Scotland Yard. Inspector Troope raised his hand.

"Eric Wilmot, alias James Stacey, alias Dandy Jim, you are my prisoner!" he said in a clear, distinct voice that was heard far and wide.

"What!" came a yell from the footballers.

"Are you mad?" shrieked Neville.

The inspector did not heed. His eyes were fixed on the pale, handsome face before him.

Eric Wilmot found his voice.

"On what charge?" he asked steadily.

"Burglary," said the inspector tensely.

"I am innocent."

"You will have every opportunity of proving it," said the inspector, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "I warn you that anything you say may be taken down to be used as evidence against you."

And, in the midst of a growing roar of amazement and rage from the Rookwood crowd, Inspector Troope led his prisoner away.

CHAPTER 11.

Under Arrest!

"SHAME!"

"Let him go!"

It was a roar of voices in the old quadrangle of Rookwood School. Dr. Chisholm started from his chair, and stepped hurriedly to his study window. Never had the reverend Head of Rookwood been so startled.

"Shame! Let Mr. Wilmot go!" came the roar.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head.

He stared out of the study window.

The inspector had been leading his prisoner towards the House, but he had been forced to stop, as the crowd of Rookwood fellows surged round him. Every face in the crowd was excited and angry and menacing looks were cast at the burly, grim-faced man from Scotland Yard. These looks of menace did not affect Inspector Troope in the least; his hard face hardened a little more, and his grip on the shoulder of the young footballer tightened a little, that was all. But the surging of the excited Rookwooders round him forced him to a halt.

"Hearken!" howled Lovell of the Fourth.

"Shame!"

Jimmy Silver caught Lovell's arm.

"Shut up, you ass!" he whispered.

"Kiss it!" yelled Lovell, unheeding.

"Kick him!"

Dr. Chisholm threw up his window. It looked

as if a riot was about to break out in the Rookwood quadrangle.

"Boys!"

The Head's deep voice rang through the excited buzz. All eyes were turned upon Dr. Chisholm.

"Perhaps you will command those boys to clear the way, sir?" said Inspector Troope, with unmoved calmness. "They are obstructing me in the execution of my duty!"

"Rats!" yelled Lovell.

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "Silence, at once! Neville, what does this mean?"

Neville of the Sixth turned a face flushed with anger towards his headmaster.

"It means that Mr. Wilmot is arrested by this—this man!" he said savagely. "He's just played in a match for us, sir, and helped us to beat Greyfriars. And this—this fool has arrested him on a silly charge—"

"Moderate your language!" rapped out the Head. "Inspector Troope is doing his duty. Mr. Troope, I apologise for this unseemly outburst. Boys, disperse at once. Anyone raising a hand to obstruct Mr. Troope will be expelled from Rookwood."

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

Inspector Troope, grim and unmoved, marched his prisoner into the House, followed by a chorus of groans and hisses and cat-calls. In their angry excitement, the Rookwood crowd overlooked the fact that Mr. Troope was only doing his official duty. They believed that he had made a ludicrous mistake, and they resented the humiliation put upon the popular footballer.

Dr. Chisholm closed his study window with a bang. Through the closed window a buzz of angry voices still came to his ears.

He opened the door of his study.

Inspector Troope entered, with the handcuffed footballer. Calm as Eric Wilmot looked, it was easy to read in his white face how keenly he felt the shame of his position.

Dr. Chisholm looked distressed. He had a liking for Wilmot, like the rest of Rookwood.

"I am sorry to see this, Mr. Wilmot," he said awkwardly. "You realise, of course, that the inspector is doing his duty. If you are innocent—"

"I am quite innocent, sir!" said Wilmot.

The inspector gave a slight grunt.

"You think, Mr. Troope—" began the Head.

"I do not think—I know, sir!" said the inspector. "This man is James Stacey, the crackman, otherwise known as Dandy Jim. He is wanted for a dozen robberies, some of them with violence."

"Good heavens!"

"His last exploit was an attempted burglary at Deepden, in Berkshire, where the boy Silver almost caught him escaping," said Mr. Troope. "Since that affair he has been in hiding—we have lost track of him entirely. I confess it never occurred to us that he had obtained a post as football coach in a Public school. It is very fortunate for you, sir, that I came here to-day."

"Undoubtedly, if the matter is as you state," said the Head, with a deeply-troubled look. "You—you are sure that there is no error—no possible error! It is—*is* amazing to me!"

"A dozen witnesses will identify him," said the inspector. "May I ask you for a conveyance, sir, to take him to the station?"

"Certainly! But—but—" The Head stammered. "I—I cannot help feeling, Mr. Troope, that there is some mistake!"

"I have shown you the official photograph of Dandy Jim, the crackman, sir. Is it not this man's photograph?"

"Certainly the resemblance is amazing. But—one moment! I will send for Silver. He has seen the actual criminal face to face, and his evidence should be conclusive."

"Very good, sir."

The Head touched a bell.

CHAPTER 15.

Innocent or Guilty!

"MASTER Silver!"

"Hallo, Topper!"

"Ead's sent for you, sir."

"Right-ho!"

Arthur Edward Lovell caught Jimmy Silver by the arm.

"You know why you're wanted, Jimmy," he muttered. "It's to identify Wilmot as the burglar you saw at Deepden in the van."

Jimmy Silver nodded. He was quite

well aware of the Head's reason in sending for him just then.

"You thought Wilmot was the man, Jimmy; but you made a mistake, you know," urged Lovell. "Don't say anything against him."

"I can't believe he's the man," said Newcome.

"Nobody here will believe it, I think," said Baby. "Anyhow, don't say anything you're not sure of, Jimmy. Be careful, you know."

Jimmy nodded again, and went into the House. His face was sorely troubled. If Eric Wilmot was not the crackman he had seen escaping at Deepden, he was at least his living image. Yet Jimmy liked the young footballer, and felt somehow that he was to be trusted. His instinct was in conflict with his reason.

He tapped at the Head's door and entered. Whether Wilmot was innocent or guilty, Jimmy Silver would gladly have avoided taking a hand against him. But there was no help for it now.

Wilmot stood pale and silent, and did not look at the junior as he entered. The Head coughed. It was a grim-faced inspector who addressed the captain of the Rookwood Fourth.

"Master Silver, look at this man."

Jimmy looked.

"Do you identify him as the man you saw escaping from Deepden Manor House after the attempted burglary?"

"He—he's very like him, sir," said Jimmy slowly.

"Is he not exactly like him, to the best of your belief?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Do you or do you not believe that he is the same man?" rapped out the inspector sharply.

"I—I did, sir," faltered Jimmy. "Now I—I—I can't."

"An explanation is required from you, Master Silver!" said Inspector Troope grimly. "You gave a description of the escaping crackman to the Reading police. The description was that of James Stacey, alias Dandy Jim. When I showed you the photograph of Dandy Jim you recognised it as that of the man of Deepden. Yet this man has been two or three weeks at Rookwood. You have seen him every day, and on the very first occasion you could not

have failed to recognise him. You did not tell your headmaster?"

"No, sir."

"Did you tell anyone?"

"Only my chums, sir."

Wilmot raised his eyes and looked curiously at Jimmy Silver for a second.

"And why," said the inspector, "did you keep such a secret? Are you aware that you were shielding a criminal from justice, and rendering yourself an accessory after the fact?"

Jimmy crimsoned.

"I—I wasn't sure," he stammered. "I thought he was the same man at first, but my friends laughed at the idea. Then, Mr. Wilmot seemed so decent that—that I felt there must be some mistake somewhere. I—I simply couldn't believe that he was a criminal."

"You should have spoken to your Form-master, at least, Silver," said the Head severely.

"I—I was going to, sir; but—but the more I saw of Mr. Wilmot, sir, the more I felt that he couldn't be the man of Dee-den."

"You have acted very injudiciously, to say the least!" snapped the inspector. "However, at the present moment you are able to identify the man?"

Jimmy was silent.

"The man appears to have obtained a curious influence in this school, Dr. Chisholm," said the inspector dryly. "You can see, of course, that the boy is quite assured of his identity, but does not care to say so."

Dr. Chisholm gnawed his lip.

"If you can tell the inspector anything, Silver, it is your duty to do so," he said.

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"I am sure there is a mistake, sir," he said steadily. "Mr. Troope calls him Dandy Jim. I know that there is another person who is called by that name."

"And how do you know that?" demanded the inspector gruffly.

"I have seen the man," said Jimmy quietly. "Last Wednesday I saw Mr. Wilmot meet a man in Coombe Wood. He addressed him as Dandy Jim. The man threatened him, and Mr. Wilmot knocked him down."

Jimmy looked at the young footballer.

"Mr. Wilmot, tell the inspector—"

Instantly Troope looked a little startled.

"What was the man like?" he asked.

"He was the same size and build as Mr. Wilmot, but he wore a moustache, and his face was very dark, and his eyebrows black and bushy," said Jimmy.

"That is not a description of the Dandy Jim known in the records at Scotland Yard," said the inspector dryly. He fixed his eyes upon the young footballer.

"You deny your identity as Dandy Jim Stacy?" he asked.

"Yes," said Wilmot quietly.

"Then you assume that there is another man in existence who resembles you so closely as to be mistaken for you and for him?"

"Obviously."

"It is at least possible," murmured the Head.

"Are you acquainted with such a man?"

No answer.

"Have you a relation who closely resembles you?"

The young man's lip quivered, and his pale face seemed to grow paler. But he did not speak.

"Mr. Wilmot," said the Head, in a moved voice, "you are bound to speak, if only for your own sake. You have not been long among us, but we are all your friends here. If you can clear yourself of this fearful charge—"

Wilmot raised his eyes to the doctor's.

"I am innocent," he said. "In twenty-four hours I shall return to Rookwood with my name cleared if you will permit me to return, sir, after this disgrace."

"If you are innocent, Wilmot, you will be welcomed back!" exclaimed the Head warmly. "But in what do you hope?"

The young footballer smiled slightly.

"They have an almost infallible system of identification at Scotland Yard, sir," he said. "Finger-prints of criminals are taken and recorded. Mr. Troope doubtless can lay his hands upon the finger-prints of Dandy Jim, the crackman."

"Your finger-prints—yes!" said the inspector grimly.

"Mine, sir, will be found different," said the young man. "No two human beings have finger-prints alike. The record will show that I am not the man you seek."

"Surely that is an excellent test, inspector!" exclaimed the Head.

The inspector shrugged his shoulders

"As nearly infallible as possible, sir," he answered. "But—"

"There are other circumstances," said Mr. Wilmot quietly. "I was in the army, sir, through the War, as you know. I was not demobbed till six months after the armistice. The regimental records will prove that. But at that time Dandy Jim, the crackman, was serving a sentence at Dartmoor."

The inspector started a little.

"That is true," he said. "If you can prove what you say—"

"The official records will prove it."

"And if you are speaking the truth, how do you know so much about Dandy Jim, Mr. Wilmot—you, an innocent man?"

"I am not called upon to explain that," said Wilmot composedly. "My business is to prove my own innocence, and that I shall do. In the meantime, sir, I am your prisoner."

The Head made Jimmy Silver a sign to leave the study.

Ten minutes later the Head's motor-car was bearing Inspector Troope and his prisoner away from Rookwood. But even in the grim mind of the inspector there was now a lurking doubt.

CHAPTER 15.

Light at Last!

"ROTTER!"

Arthur Edward Lovell made that remark with emphatic disgust as the school gates closed behind the car.

The Fistical Four had watched Inspector Troope depart with his prisoner, as well as a crowd of other Rookwood fellows. There was angry and excited discussion on all sides. From the Sixth Form to the Second, all the sympathy of Rookwood School was with the inspector's prisoner. Moderns and Classics felt alike on the subject. Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth was almost as eloquent as Arthur Edward Lovell. The opinion all through the school was that the man from Scotland Yard had made a ridiculous mistake; that Eric Wilmot would prove his innocence, and cover his captor with confusion. And when he came back to Rookwood in triumph, the fellows intended to give him a great reception.

But Jimmy Silver & Co. knew that, even if the inspector had made a mistake, it was not a ridiculous mistake. Wilmot's resemblance to Dandy Jim was so striking that Mr. Troope could scarcely have acted otherwise than as he had done. That resemblance, however, was not generally known to the Rookwood fellows, and the Fistical Four did not speak of it.

"Wilmot will be back here in a few days," Lovell said, as the Fistical Four gathered to a late tea in the end study.

"He's right as rain. I know that, and he'll prove it. No need to mention about his being like the crackman to look at, Jimmy. It won't do him any good."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Keep it dark," he assented. "Goodness knows, if he's innocent, I'm ready to back him up. It's pretty clear that if he isn't James Stacey, he's a near relation of that rotter."

Lovell grunted.

"Might be like him, without being a relation," he said.

"It's not likely," said Stahy. "If there's two of them, they're relations right enough, and it won't do Wilmot any good to have it known here. So the least said, soonest mended."

"And that man he met in the woods?" said Newcome.

Jimmy knitted his brows.

"He spoke to him as Dandy Jim," he said. "That's the crackman's nickname. It was the crackman, of course, and he looked different because he was made up somehow. That's pretty clear now. He's some connection of Wilmot's—from the likeness, and from the fact that Wilmot met him."

"He threatened to give Wilmot away at Rookwood," said Newcome. "We heard him. If Wilmot's all right, how can—"

"I think I understand that now," said Jimmy. "Wilmot isn't the crackman, but a near relation, and that's his little secret. The real Dandy Jim was threatening to give him away as a connection of a criminal—not as a criminal himself."

"Oh!" said Lovell.

"I don't know what view the Head would take if he knew that Mr. Wilmot was closely related to a well-known criminal," said Jimmy Silver. "He might want Wilmot to go. Anyhow, naturally, a man would keep such a thing dark. That gives

the brute a bold over Wilmot. I jolly well wish we could lay hands on him!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had little doubt that they had arrived at the correct solution of the mystery at last. From the moment when he had heard the inspector address Wilmot as "Dandy Jim," Jimmy Silver had guessed the truth, remembering the scene in Coombe Wood. And Eric Wilmot's confidence in the finger-print test had convinced him that, in spite of all appearances, the young footballer was not the man of Deepden. The man Wilmot had knocked down in Coombe Wood was the real crackman, and Jimmy had not recognised him, for the simple reason that he was disguised. He was hunted by the police, and he had come to his relation at Rookwood in disguise for help in escaping them. To Jimmy Silver's mind, it was all clear now. And it was clear, too, that Eric Wilmot had no guilty dealings with the crackman. That knock-down blow in Coombe Wood was proof enough of that.

"Poor borgan!" said Raby. "I suppose he's always been in danger of being taken for Dandy Jim. It must have given him a jump when he saw the inspector here. Perhaps it's all the better for him to have the matter thrashed out and cleared up."

Jimmy Silver nodded thoughtfully.

"Anyhow, you own up that you were wrong, Jimmy?" grinned Lovell. "You know now that Wilmot isn't the giddy burglar of Deepden!"

"Yes. But I don't blame myself. Inspector Troop has made the same mistake," said Jimmy quietly. "But now I know the facts—." He paused. "We know that Wilmot has some reason for not handing the matter over to the police—he could have done it last Wednesday. The man wrote to him and asked him to meet him, as we know. Wilmot didn't go, and the fellow sent a message by Lovell. Wilmot could have taken a hobby with him, and landed the rascal. He didn't. But if he had a chance—"

"I jolly well wish we had!" granted Lovell. "I'd make short work of him—I know that. He's not my relation, anyhow."

"That's what I'm thinking of," said Jimmy quietly. "Now, it's plain enough that the fellow came down here to get back from Wilmot, if he could. We heard him say so much. He's hunted by the

police, and he's in straits. Wilmot refused to help him. But—"

Jimmy paused.

"Well?" said Lovell.

"Where is he now?" said Jimmy. "He's in hiding somewhere from the police. They've no suspicion so far that he's been in this neighbourhood, except that Mr Troop thinks he's got him in our football coach. Suppose—suppose the rascal is still hanging about in this quarter—"

Lovell whistled.

"In the wood, do you mean?"

"It's likely enough," said Jimmy. "There are places in Coombe Wood where a man could be hidden for weeks, if he chose. He would only want a supply of grub, and he might have brought that. Wilmot refused to give him help, but he may still hope to get something out of him. And he said something, too, about disgracing Wilmot at Rookwood if he came to the end of his tether. It looks to me—"

"My hat!" Lovell's eyes gleamed. "It would be doing Wilmot a good turn if we could get the real rascal laid by the heels!"

"That's what I was thinking," said Jimmy Silver. "Dandy Jim has been in chokey once, and the sooner he goes back there the better for all concerned. If he's anywhere near Rookwood—"

"What price a scout run with the giddy crackman at the end of it?" grinned Lovell. "Next half-holiday?"

"It's worth trying, anyhow."

Prep, that evening was rather neglected in the end story. Jimmy Silver & Co. had something more important than prep to discuss.

CHAPTER 17.

Hunted Down!

ROOKWOOD SCHOOL waited anxiously for news of Eric Wilmot.

Many of the fellows supposed that, as soon as the young footballer was at Scotland Yard, he would proceed to prove the mistake in identity at once, and take the next train to Rookwood. They did not make allowance for the "law's delays."

Day followed day, and there was no news of the footballer.

It was obvious to Jimmy Silver & Co., at least, that the authorities would require a considerable demonstration that Eric Wil-

foot was not the "wanted" man, and that would take time.

In the meantime, the Fistical Four were making their own plans, and the next half-holiday saw them on the warpath.

Four juniors in scout rig left the school gates soon after dinner that day, leaving the other fellows at football practice. They lost no time in getting into Coombe Wood.

The chums of the Classical Fourth knew the wood pretty thoroughly, extensive as it was. It was a favourite hunting-ground of the Rookwood scouts. And Jimmy Silver, who had thought the matter out carefully, knew where to make a start. In the very heart of the wood there was a ruin which was called locally the "Roman camp," supposed at least to be a relic of an ancient Roman fortification.

It was overgrown with trees and thickets, and difficult of access, but the Rookwood Boy Scouts had rambled over it more than once. If the hunted crackman was indeed lurking in the vicinity of Rookwood, the old Roman camp was his safest lurking-place, and that was the objective of the Fistical Four when they left the school that sunny afternoon.

It was a good mile by tangled tracks through the wood to the ruin. The Fistical Four tramped on cheerfully.

If nothing came of the search, there would be, as Jimmy Silver said, no harm done. But if by good luck they came upon the rascal, they were quite confident in their ability to lay him by the heels. Four sturdy juniors of Rookwood were a match for any crackman. The Fistical Four were quite assured of that.

"Here we are!" murmured Arthur Lovell at last.

Through the trees and thickets a fragment of an ancient wall loomed into sight. It was almost covered with moss and creepers. A few minutes more, and the Fistical Four were in the mossy old ruin.

A rabbit scuttled away from their footsteps, and there was a twittering of birds in the trees that jutted among the broken old brickwork. Save for that, all was silent and deserted. The juniors looked round them, and Ruby grinned a little.

"No sign of the giddy crackman here!" he remarked.

"If he's here, he's sporting his cak!" remarked Newcome humorously.

"Well, he wouldn't be sitting on top of the wall, waiting to be looked at," said

Jimmy Silver. "There are cellars under this cracked old pavement. That's where he would be."

"Jolly cold down there, I should fancy."

"Not any colder than a cell at Dartmoor, perhaps. Anyway, we've come here to look for him," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "From what we heard him say to Wilnot that day, I feel pretty certain that he meant to hang on near Rookwood. If he hides in the cellars, he has to come up—"

"Come up to breathe, like a whale!" chuckled Newcome, who seemed to be in a humorous mood that afternoon.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Jimmy Silver. "He would come up, of course, and dodge into the cellars if anybody came in sight. We're going to see if he's left any sign."

"Good!"

The Fistical Four proceeded to explore the ruins. The entrance to the stone cellars below was blocked by a mass of thorny thickets and creepers, through which it was difficult to force a way. Jimmy Silver examined that natural screen, and a gleam came into his eyes.

"You can see that this has been disturbed lately," he said. "Look! That twig was broken to-day some time—the break is quite fresh."

"Some village kid exploring the place!" murmured Ruby. "The Coombe kids play along here sometimes, you know."

"Somebody, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going down."

"Ought to have brought a lantern for that!" said Lovell.

"I've got my electric torch."

"Oh, good!"

Jimmy Silver forced aside the thicket, and pushed his way into the opening. A broken brick stairway led in the old stone cellars, with weeds and brambles growing in every interstice. The Co. followed in Jimmy's footsteps, grasping their staves. Their hearts were beating faster now. So far, it had only seemed to them just possible that the crackman was hidden in the ruins of the Roman camp. But at every step they saw fresh proofs that the tangled thickets over the steps had lately been disturbed. It was possible that it had been done by some schoolboy explorer that very day; but it was also possible, at least, that the signs were of the passage of the man they sought.

Black as midnight the cellar looked as

the juniors stepped into it. Jimmy Silver flashed the light of his torch round him, and the juniors, with thumping hearts, stood on their guard.

A sharp exclamation broke from Jimmy. "Look!"

"Almost at his feet, two or three ground-sheets and a rug lay on the damp stone floor.

Lowell caught his breath.

"Somebody's been camping here!" he muttered.

"Nobody would be likely to camp in this damp hole but—"

"Look out!" shrieked Raby.

Crash!

A fragment of stone whizzed from the blackness and crashed on the electric torch in Jimmy Silver's hand.

In an instant the cellar was plunged into utter darkness.

From the impenetrable gloom there came a sound—the sound of a man moving.

"Good heavens!" breathed Lowell, his teeth chattering.

The Bookwooders drew close together in the dark, with throbbing hearts. For they knew now that Jimmy Silver's surprise had been only too well founded, and that within the narrow confines of the old cellar, in the thick darkness, they were shut up with a desperate criminal.

CHAPTER 13.

Face to Face!

JIMMY SILVER stood motionless.

In the darkness and the terrible silence he could almost hear the thumping of his heart.

But his courage did not falter.

The man he sought was there, lurking in the blackness, close at hand. He knew that an attack was coming—that the scoundrel, knowing that his hiding-place was discovered, would make a desperate attempt to escape, and the four juniors were between him and the stair that led upward to the daylight.

"Look out!" breathed Jimmy.

Perhaps at that moment the reckless juniors realised the recklessness of their search, and wished themselves safe above ground. But it was too late to think of that now.

In the dead silence that followed the crash of the stone they listened, and a sound came suddenly.

"He's coming!" gasped Lowell.

There was a rush in the darkness. Something crashed into Jimmy Silver, and he struck with his stove, and there was a cry. The next moment he was clutched in desperate hands, and was rolling on the stone floor, struggling for his life.

"Help!" shrieked Jimmy.

"Back up!" gasped Lowell.

The juniors could see nothing, but the sounds guided them. They grasped at the struggling forms on the floor.

But the unseen man had the advantage. The Bookwooders, in the black gloom, clutched at one another as well as at the enemy. The hidden man drove savage blows on all sides. Lowell rolled over, half stunned.

Jimmy Silver felt the man drag himself away. He struggled up breathlessly.

"Look out!"

There was a crashing of the thicket over the stair. The desperate rascal was forcing his way out to freedom.

"After him!" yelled Jimmy.

He dashed at the stair.

Above his head the daylight glimmered as he struggled through the tangled thickets.

His chums followed him gasping and panting.

Jimmy forced his way free of the tangle, and leaped out into the open air, panting for breath. He caught sight of a running figure less than a dozen feet away.

"There he is!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

He rushed in pursuit. He knew the man. It was the man who had met Eric Wilnot in the wood a week before. It was the same figure, and the same shabby tweed clothes. As the man had turned to leap over the broken wall, Jimmy saw his face. The thick moustache and the bushy eyebrows were gone now. Evidently they were a disguise, and had been torn away in the struggle in the cellar. And in spite of the darkness of the skin, the man's resemblance to Eric Wilnot was startling, now that the greater part of his disguise was gone. It was a face with well-cut, regular features—a face that would have been handsome but for the hard and savage look of desperation upon it.

"Collar him!" roared Lowell.

The Bookwooders were close on the heels of the fugitive as he clambered over the old wall. He disappeared from their sight, and they heard the sound of a heavy fall.



As the juniors scrambled over the wall, the man turned his head and shook his fist at them. His eyes blazed with anger and his teeth showed in a snarl.

The crackman man had lost his footing and rolled down on the other side.

"Quick!" panted Jimmy. "We've got him now!"

He scrambled furiously over the crumbling wall, followed fast by his chums. They were in time to see the fugitive leap in his feet and start at a run into the wood.

"After him!"

The man turned his head for a second, shaking his fist at the juniors. His eyes were blazing with rage, his teeth showed in a snarl like that of a wild animal. His face at that moment was the face of the crackman of Deepden, the ruffian who, in the vacation, had struggled with Jimmy Silver at the camp in the Berkshire wood. Its resemblance to Eric Wilnot was startling; even at that moment when it was convulsed with fury.

It was only for a second that the ruffian stared back. Then he dashed into the wood, running with almost the speed of a hare.

The Ruckwenders rushed recklessly in pursuit. Through bush and briar they tore on desperately, guided by the crashing and rustling ahead of them. But the guiding sounds ceased at last. The juniors came to a halt in the thick wood.

The crackman was gone.

Jimmy Silver gritted his teeth.

"Keep on!" he said. "We won't give in while there's a chance!"

For an hour or more the juniors hunted, but the search was in vain. The crackman was gone, and they gave it up at last, tired out and angry and disappointed.

"Well, he's got away!" said Lovell, as the Fistical Four tramped away in the direction of Rookwood at last. "But he'll be nailed all right as soon as the police know what we can tell them. And we can prove now that old Wilnot isn't the man they call Dandy Jim. That's something."

It was a tired and dusty quartette that arrived at the gates of Rookwood an hour later. Jimmy Silver & Co. started for the House at once. Tubby Muffin met them in the quad, with a fat, excited face.

"You fellows heard!" he exclaimed.

Jimmy paused.

"Any news of Wilnot?" he asked.

"Yes, rather," grinned Tubby. "Where have you fellows heard? All the giddy school's buzzing with it."

"What's the news?" exclaimed Lovell impatiently. "Get it out, you duffer!"

"Don't snapp a fellow's head off!"

"Tell us what's the news!" roared Lovell.

"All right, old chap. I'm telling you, ain't I?" said the fat Classical. "Wilnot's coming back! The Head's put up a notice on the board about it. He proved that he isn't the man that old duffer of an inspector thought—proved it right up to the hilt."

"Good!"

"Proved that he was in the Army when the other chap was in chockey," said Tubby, with a fat chuckle. "That must have made old Troops feel pretty ill, what? Fat-headed mistake to make, I say. Wilnot's coming back to the school. It's on the board, in the Head's fist. He's coming back in a day or two!"

"Hurrah!"

The Fistical Four hurried on to the Head's house. In a few minutes more they were in the presence of Dr. Chisholm, and giving him an account of their adventure at the Roman camp in Coombe Wood. The Head blinked at them over his glasses.

"You should certainly not have taken this risk," he said severely. "I should have forbidden you if I had known. If you should ever do anything of the kind again—" Dr. Chisholm paused. "However, the discovery you have made will certainly be useful to the authorities. I shall telephone to the police at Rookham at once. You will hold yourselves in readiness to be questioned. You may go."

And the juniors went.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked quite pleased with themselves that evening. Their adventure at the Roman camp had to be related a dozen times at least in the Fourth, and even Bulkeley of the Sixth sent for them, to hear their account of the hidden crackman.

Inspector Sharpe came over from Rookham, and the story had to be told again. That evening telegraph and telephone were at work, and it seemed fairly certain that the "wanted" man, hunted out of his secret refuge, would not be long in falling into the grasp of the law. Which, as Arthur Edward Lovell remarked, would be good news for Eric Wilnot when he came back to Rookwood.

CHAPTER 19.

A Very Great Occasion!

"SILENCE in the class!"

Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, frowned a little. It was about the tenth time that morning that he had had to call for silence.

The amount of whispering that was going on in the Rookwood Fourth was a record.

Even Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Form, and generally a model pupil, was as bad as the rest.

Something evidently was occupying the attention of the juniors, to the exclusion of less important matters, such as lessons.

The buzz died away as Mr. Dalton spoke, and the class concentrated their attention as well as they could on the history of ancient Rome.

But that did not last.

On that morning, at least, the Fourth were more deeply interested in modern Rookwood than in ancient Rome. The long struggle between the patricians and the plebeians, exciting enough when it happened, only bored the Rookwooders dreadfully.

"Start at three," Jimmy Silver murmured to Arthur Edward Lovell. "The train gets in at three-forty-five."

Lovell nodded.

"That'll give us good time," he murmured.

"Every chap's got to turn up," said Baby.

"Every man jack!" agreed Jimmy Silver.

"It's going to be a record celebration!"

"A giddy triumphal march!" grinned Newcome.

"Just that!" said Jimmy.

"Wilmot will be pleased, I imagine!" murmured Tommy Dodd.

"Bound to be! You see——"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Dalton.

"Oh dear!"

"Silver, you were talking!" exclaimed the master of the Fourth.

"H'm!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

He could not deny the soft impeachment. Certainly he had been talking.

"This class seems to be quite out of hand this morning!" said Mr. Dalton severely.

"I am afraid that I shall have to detain the class this afternoon!"

"Great Scott!"

Blank dismay fell upon the Rookwood Fourth. That afternoon was a half-holiday, and happenings of the greatest importance

were to take place. The bare thought of detention dismayed Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Lovell. "You—you see, sir——"

"I see that scarcely a boy in the class is giving his attention to his lessons!" said Mr. Dalton.

"We—we—we——" stammered Jimmy Silver. "It—it—it——"

"Kindly be a little more lucid, Silver, if you have anything to say."

"Oh, yes, sir! It's Wilmot, sir——"

"What?"

"Mr. Wilmot is coming back to Rookwood this afternoon, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "We've been arranging for a crowd of fellows to meet him at the station and give him a reception, sir. We want him to know what Rookwood thinks of him."

"I understand," said the Fourth Form-master. "I have a high opinion of Mr. Wilmot, and I am very glad that he has been able to clear himself. But such matters must not be discussed during lessons."

"Oh, no, sir! Only——"

"And if there is any further discussion in class," continued Mr. Dalton grimly, "the whole Form will be detained for the afternoon until five o'clock."

"Oh!" gasped the Fourth.

"We will now resume," said Mr. Dalton.

From that moment there was not a single whisper in the Fourth Form-room. The prospect of being detained for the afternoon was too staggering.

But everything comes to an end, and so did morning lessons at Rookwood on that great day.

Never had Jimmy Silver & Co. received the word to dismiss so gladly.

They marched out of the Form-room in great glee, and there was immediately a buzz of voices in the corridor, to make up for the enforced silence of the Form-room.

"Blessed if I thought it would ever end!" said Arthur Edward Lovell with a gasp of relief. "Never knew that Dicky Dalton was such a fearful bore, you claps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I like Dalton, as a rule," continued Lovell; "but I must say I wish somebody had gagged him this morning!"

"Shurrup, you ass!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Dalton was following the class from the Form-room, and Lovell, who had his back to the class, was blissfully unconscious

of the fact that his powerful voice was quite audible to the approaching Farm-master.

"Shush!" hissed Baby.

"Rot!" said Lovell, my understanding the almost frantic looks his chums were giving him. Arthur Edward Lovell was always a little slow on the "uptake," as it were. "Rot, I tell you! Dalton bored me almost to tears this morning! I really wanted to tell him to ring off, you know, and go home and take a rest! And—"

"Instead!" said a quiet voice at Lovell's elbow.

Arthur Edward gave an almost convulsive jump.

"Oh! Oh, my hat!"

He spun round like a humming-top.

"I—I—I didn't see you, sir!" he gasped.

"Oh dear! I—I—"

"I am sorry, Lovell, that I bored you in class this morning," said Mr. Dalton gravely.

"Oh, sir! I—I—"

"I must try on future occasions to be a little more entertaining," said Mr. Dalton. "We can only do our best, Lovell."

And with that Richard Dalton passed on, leaving Lovell rooted to the floor, crimson with confusion. The crowd of juniors chuckled as Mr. Dalton turned the corner and disappeared.

"Well, you put your foot in it that time, and no piddy mistake!" chuckled Putty Gray of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell gasped for breath.

"My hat! But isn't he a real brick!" he said. "Old Greely or Wiggins would have lined a chap for that! I—I suppose Dicky Dalton was pulling my leg! He's a real brick! I—I say, suppose I'd got detention!"

"We could have run the reception without you, old chap!" remarked Conroy.

"And a pretty meek you'd have made of it!" said Lovell.

"Why, you are—"

"I'll get off to the study and finish my speech!" said Lovell. "It's understood that I'm to do the speechifying."

"No jolly fear!" said five or six voices.

"Rata!" said Lovell.

And he walked off regardless. According to Lovell, the great feature of Eric Wilmot's reception was to be a speech of welcome, composed by Arthur Edward Lovell, and delivered by him—his comrades standing round and applauding. That was quite

settled in Lovell's mind; but there were a good many other opinions on the subject that were not at all in agreement with Arthur Edward's.

CHAPTER 15.

The Crackman's Cousin

ERIC WILMOT sat in a corner seat in the express as it rolled on towards Latcham Junction.

His handsome face was grave; but it was contented. The young footballer was feeling in great spirits.

He had been through an experience that could not be called pleasant. He had been arrested on the football ground at Rookwood School on the charge of being James Stacey, alias Dandy Jim, the crackman. And his amazing resemblance to the rascal had made Inspector Troope of Scotland Yard quite assured that he had the right man.

It had been a slow matter to prove the truth to the satisfaction of the authorities. But it had been proved; Eric Wilmot's identity was established, to the satisfaction of even Inspector Troope. Now he was returning to Rookwood.

He had hesitated, wondering whether he should return—wondering whether the school authorities would wish him to do so—after the startling scene that had taken place on Dig Side.

It was no fault to bear a resemblance to a man who was wanted for robbery and forgery. But it was unpleasant enough. And now that the circumstances were known to the whole school, it gave the young footballer a notoriety that was not agreeable.

But Dr. Chisholm had written him a kind and friendly letter, urging him to return and resume his duties as football coach at the school. Bulkeley of the Sixth had written also, and there had been another letter, signed by about a score of the Lower School, telling Mr. Wilmot that they wanted him back.

There was no doubt that he would be welcomed home, as it were; and gladly enough the young man had resolved to return to Rookwood.

The trouble had come, and it had gone; and his face, though grave, was very cheerful as he drew nearer and nearer to Rookwood.

There was still a cloud on the horizon.

Dandy Jim, the crackman, was still at large. It had been reported in the papers how the hunted man had been discovered in the woods near Rookwood School by a party of juniors and routed out, narrowly escaping capture. But he had escaped, and he was still at large. For reasons of his own, Eric Wilnot was not sorry to hear that the man had escaped; but he fervently hoped that he would never set eyes upon Dandy Jim again.

"After all, it's not likely!" he muttered. "He's been hunted away from Rookwood; he'll never dare venture near the school again. I—I hope he'll get out of the country. Anyhow, I'm done with him! One thing I am resolved upon. If he comes in my sight again, I will hand him over to the police!"

And Eric Wilnot's jaw set grimly.

"Letcham!" sang out a porter as the train slowed down. "Letcham Junction! Change here for Rookham, Coombe, and Rookwood School!"

Eric Wilnot stepped from the express.

Bag in hand, he started for the bridge over the line. It was a short run on the local line to Coombe, the village near Rookwood. In little more than an hour now he would be at the old school, among the crowd of fellows who were eager to welcome him back. Eric Wilnot little dreamed of what was to happen before he saw Rookwood School again.

A man was lounging on the platform by the end of the bridge. Wilnot glanced at him carelessly in passing.

He started a little as he caught two dark, keen eyes fastened upon him and stopped.

The man was shabbily dressed, and had a stubbly beard and a patch of court plaster on his nose. He looked a good deal like a rascally loafer who had been through hard times.

Wilnot's heart beat faster.

The man moved to intercept him, and stopped in front of him with a grin on his face.

"You?" muttered Wilnot.

"Little man!" The man spoke in a low voice, glancing round. "But, in the name of wonder, how did you know me? I believe even old Troope himself would not know me in this rig."

Wilnot set his lips.

"I think I should know your evil face,

anywhere, Dandy Jim! You have been watching for me."

"Right on the nail!"

"How did you know I was coming by this train, then?" exclaimed the young footballer in astonishment.

The disguised crackman laughed.

"That was not difficult," he remarked.

"It is the talk of Rookwood."

"You have ventured near the school?"

"I never wanted for nerve, dear boy," said Stacey with another laugh. "I've even pumped the school porter!"

"Well, and what do you want now?" asked Wilnot grimly. "You have no business with me, Dandy Jim."

He spoke in his ordinary tone without subduing it, and the crackman's eyes gleamed with anger and alarm.

"Quiet with that name!" he muttered.

"I shall speak the name loudly enough when I hand you over to the police!" said Wilnot coolly. "You must be mad to betray yourself to me, James Stacey! Do you think I shall allow you to escape—especially after what has happened!"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then you are mistaken!" exclaimed Wilnot angrily. "I shall speak to the station policeman at once!"

Dandy Jim's eyes glittered.

"You will hand over your cousin—your own flesh and blood—to the police?" he said in a low voice. "You will send the son of your mother's brother to prison for seven years?"

"You've left me no choice. I've no right to leave a human beast of prey at large!" Wilnot's voice trembled a little. "I've spared you before. I could never make up my mind to give you up to justice when you tempted me! But that's over now."

"And you are willing to have your name dragged through the papers in the account of the trial?" sneered the crackman. "You may bet your sweet life that I shall rub it in for you!"

"Another threat, you rascal, and I will hand you over at once!" the young footballer exclaimed.

Stacey breathed more freely. The words showed that the young man was already hesitating to carry out his intention.

"I don't mean to threaten," he said; "but it will be bad for you, Eric. After all, we're cousins—blood relations. I've got a reason for speaking to you. I'm at the end of my tether."

"No business of mine."

"I had a safe hiding-place in the woods near the school," muttered the cracksmán. "I was hunted out by a gang of school-boys—"

"I was glad to hear of it!"

"I've got a shanter now, Wilmot. I want only a little help to get out of the country. Once I can get safe away, I'm going to chuck up the whole game—I swear that! You'd rather see me an honest man than see me in prison. Won't you help me for the last time?"

Wilmot looked at him, hesitating, doubtful. But his look showed that he was wavering.

"If I could trust you——" he muttered.

"We can't talk here," whispered Stacey. "I've run a frightful risk coming here at all, even in this rig. But I had to see you. They're hot on my track—I can't get back to any of the old haunts—I swear I'm going straight if I can get out of the country! And you can help me. Look here! Come out of the station——"

"My train goes at three-fifteen."

"That gives you twenty minutes. If I do not satisfy you in a quarter of an hour, hand me over to the Latham police and go your way."

There was a long pause.

"Give me a hearing—that's all I ask!" muttered the man. "You won't be sorry for it. I mean business!"

Wilmot made up his mind.

"I'll give you a chance!" he muttered. "But if you are attempting to deceive me, the handcuffs will be on your wrists in ten minutes!"

And Eric Wilmot followed the cracksmán from the station.

CHAPTER 21.

A Change of Identity!

"WELL!"

Eric Wilmot spoke impatiently. He had followed Stacey from the station along the railway viaduct over which the line ran for some distance. The arches under the railway were mostly boarded in, some of them being used as warehouses, some as shops, and others as lodgings. It was into one of the latter that James Stacey led the young footballer, pushing open a slinky door. Within was a rather dismal room, lighted by a small cobwebbed window. Stacey

closed the door carefully when they were inside.

Wilmot glanced round him and shivered. A criminal life had not brought much profit to his rascally cousin. In that wretched den, which only the poorest would have taken for a shelter, the cracksmán was not even safe. If the rascal had resolved to "go straight," it was not surprising after such an experience of the wages of sin.

"This is my lodging at present," said Dandy Jim bitterly. "It's to be pulled down, and is vacant at present. I've sneaked in unknown. Tramps sleep in here; but generally I have it to myself. It's a shelter, at least, as long as it lasts."

"And this is what crime has brought you to!" said Wilmot. "You had better chances in life than I had; your people were better off. If you'd been content to keep straight, you could hardly have finished worse than this."

"I know it!"

"Well, what have you to say?" asked Wilmot, seating himself on a rickety box. "If you mean to turn over a new leaf, I will help you as far as I can. I had kindnesses from your father when he was living, and I've not forgotten. But if you are lying—as you have lied before——"

"Give me a chance!" muttered Stacey.

"That's why I'm here. What is it you intend?"

"This!"

As he muttered the word the cracksmán was upon Wilmot with the spring of a tiger.

For the moment the footballer was off his guard.

He went spinning backwards in the grasp of the ruffian, and came with a crash to the brick floor.

"You scoundrel!" he panted. "You—— Oh!"

Crash!

There was a loaded stick in Dandy Jim's hand now, and as the young footballer struggled he struck savagely.

Then he sprang to his feet, holding his weapon ready to strike again if the second blow were needed. But it was not needed. Eric Wilmot lay on the muddy bricks, senseless.

Dandy Jim threw down the stick, and wiped the perspiration from his brow. Then he hurried to the rickety door, and fastened it securely, and dragged a box against it.

Eric Wilnot did not move.

How long he lay unconscious, he never knew; but when his senses struggled back he opened his eyes and stared round him feebly, with aching head.

For some minutes he did not realise what had happened. But recollection returned as he caught sight of Dandy Jim.

The crackman was no longer in the disguise he had worn at Latham Station. The stobby beard and the court-plaster were gone, his face was washed and cleanly shaven; and in his natural state his likeness to the young man lying on the floor was amazing.

There were other changes in him, too. He had discarded the shabby, patched clothes, and was dressed in a well-cut grey suit—the suit Eric Wilnot had been wearing when he arrived at Latham. Wilnot recognised it, and glanced down at his own limbs. He was dressed now in the crackman's discarded clothes, even to the dirty muffler round his neck and the ragged boots. And he was bound hand and foot, and a gag was in his mouth, fastened there by a cord round his head.

He could not move, he could not speak; he could only lie on the bricks, staring at the rascal dazedly.

Dandy Jim did not even notice for the moment that his victim had returned to consciousness. The crackman was busy before a little looking-glass stuck on the wall. He was giving the finishing touches to his metamorphosis.

"Good!" he muttered aloud, at last. "I fancy I shall please!"

Wilnot made an effort to move. The crackman's eyes gleamed round at him at once.

He laughed.

"The tables are turned, my affectionate cousin!" he remarked. "I think I have the whip-hand now!"

Wilnot's eyes gleamed at him with rage and scorn. He made an effort to speak, but the gag choked his utterance.

Dandy Jim smiled down at him.

"I'm keeping my word, dear boy," he said. "Turning over a new leaf—with your assistance! Ha, ha, ha! What do you think of my new line—football coach at a Public school? You catch an't?"

Wilnot stared at him.

"They're fairly close on my heels," muttered Dandy Jim. "but there's one place

where I shall be safe to lie low as long as I like—Rookwood School, under the name of my excellent cousin Eric! The police have already satisfied themselves that Eric Wilnot, football coach at Rookwood, is not Dandy Jim, the crackman. They will not think of troubling him again. What do you think?"

Wilnot could only stare at him.

His aching brain was slow to understand the daring scheme the hunted rascal had formed; but he understood at last.

"I have your clothes, your papers and letters, your bag, and your loose cash!" Stacey chuckled. "I shall arrive a little late at Rookwood—I have lost your train. Ha, ha! Otherwise, all will go as arranged—only the Eric Wilnot who reaches Rookwood will not be the Eric who left! What do you think of the game?"

An unspoken question could be read in the young footballer's eyes. Dandy Jim understood it.

"What is going to become of you?" he said. "Yes, that's the difficulty. The safest way would make it an unpleasant matter—which would not suit my book. But I shall take care of you, my loving cousin—don't be afraid of that! You won't get away to talk. So long as it suits me to remain at Rookwood, you will be in a safe place. And when it's safe for me to go, I shall clear with something to start afresh with. I believe Dr. Chisholm's safe is fairly well lined. Eric Wilnot may have the credit of lightening it, when I disappear!"

He chuckled.

"I've had this plan in my mind ever since I found you were football coach at Rookwood," he said. "I wondered whether I should ever get a chance—and now I've got it, when things were looking desperate. Everything comes to him who waits!"

He sat down and lighted a cigarette, puffing out the smoke with great enjoyment.

Eric Wilnot lay with aching head and dizzy brain, with something very like despair in his heart.

The crackman smoked for some time. Evidently he was waiting for something. A low whistle sounded at last outside the door of the wretched tenement.

The crackman rose to his feet. He answered the whistle. And then three distinct taps sounded on the door.

Evidently it was a signal, for Dandy Jim unfastened the door at once. A burly man with a thick beard entered. He started at the sight of Dandy Jim, and then his glance went past the crackman to the bound man lying on the floor.

"All O.K., Lurcher!" said Dandy Jim, with a laugh.

"My eye! You've landed him, guv'nor!" said the Lurcher, in great admiration.

"As you see. You'll remain with him till dark, and then get him away in the cart as arranged. Keep the gas safe, and roll him in the canvas before you move him."

"You're going now, guv'nor?"

"I must! Eric Wilmot is expected at Rookwood!" grinned Dandy Jim. "I must not lose the next train!"

A few minutes more, and the Lurcher was fastening the door of the wretched tenement behind the crackman, Dandy Jim, with a cigarette between his lips and a smile on his face, walked away cheerily to the railway station, leaving behind him his hapless victim, a prey to black despair.

CHAPTER XX.

In False Colours!

"**R**OTTEN!"

That was the general verdict.

Jimmy Silver & Co., and about fifty other Rookwooders, were gathered outside the little station at Combe.

They were all prepared to welcome Eric Wilmot when he arrived by the three-forty-five.

The three-forty-five local train had come—and gone! But there was no Eric Wilmot!

Lovell had scouted into the station, and returned with the news that Mr. Wilmot was not there. Evidently he had not arrived by the expected train.

So the disappointed crowd of Rookwooders pronounced that it was rotten, at interest, it was.

"Must be rather an ass to lose the train!" said Lovell. "Of course, he's missed the connection at Latcham."

"That's it," said Jimmy Silver. "But so's old. There's about twenty minutes to wait for the local at Latcham, according

to the time-table. And he must have come by the express; he said he would."

"Perhaps he was having a feed in the buffet, and forgot all about the train!"

That valuable suggestion came from Tubby Muffin.

"Ho, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's happened to me!" said Teddy. "More than once, too!"

"It might happen to you, fatty, but it wouldn't happen to Wilmot!" growled Lovell.

"Still, he's lost the train!" yawned Tommy Dodd. "When is the next local to from Latcham?"

"An hour!" said Jimmy Silver, with a grimace.

"Are we going to wait for it?"

"The giddy ass might miss the next, and perhaps he hasn't come to-day at all!" was a comforting suggestion from Potty of the Fourth.

Jimmy looked rather doubtful. Waiting an hour was not exactly pleasant; but waiting an hour for a man who might not arrive at all was still less agreeable.

"Hallo, here comes Dicky!" exclaimed Lovell.

Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth, was seen coming up the village street on his bicycle. The juniors cooed him respectfully as he jumped off his machine.

"You are waiting for Mr. Wilmot, my boys?" asked the Fourth-form master, with a smile at the Rookwood crowd.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy. "He seems to have missed his train, and we don't know whether to wait any longer."

"He has sent a telegram," said Mr. Dalton. "Knowing that you boys were waiting here, I thought I would come along and tell you."

"Oh, sir, you're awfully good!" said Jimmy gratefully.

It was just like "Dicky" Dalton to do his Form a good turn like that.

"Mr. Wilmot has telegraphed to the Head from Latcham," said the Form master. "He lost the connection there, and is coming by the next train. He will arrive by the four-forty-five."

"Oh, good!"

"Thank you so much, sir!"

"The Head is sending a conveyance for him," said Mr. Dalton. "Doubtless he

will be pleased to find so many friends waiting him."

And, with a pleasant smile to the juniors, Mr. Dalton remounted his machine and rode away.

"Isn't Dickie a real brick!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "I say, he was jolly friendly with Wilmot at the school; he used to have him in his study to jaw, you know. Suppose we ask him to take part in the reception? I—I'd let him make a speech, if he wanted to!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what are you chuckling at?" snorted Lovell.

"Dickie wouldn't be found dead gassing your speech, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Look here——"

"Besides, that speech isn't going to be made," said Patty Grace. "We're here to give Wilmot a rousing reception. Lovell's speech would send him to sleep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want any silly rot!" roared Lovell.

"We don't, either!" said Patty affably. "That's why we hear the giddy speech, old bean!"

Arthur Edward Lovell snorted scornfully, and declined to make any other reply.

"I say," remarked Tubby Muffin, "if we're going to wait an hour, we may as well get along to the tuckshop! I say, I'll jolly well stand ginger-pop all round!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You'll lend me ten bob, won't you, Jimmy?"

"Not this year!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

"Then I shan't be able to stand the ginger-pop. Suppose you stand it, Jimmy?" suggested Tubby.

"My dear chap, I'm standing round," said Jimmy Silver. "That's about as much as I can stand!"

"Yah!" was Reginald Muffin's elegant rejoinder to that.

Most of the Rookwood crowd strolled away about the village, to fill in the time of waiting; but they all turned up again at the station in good time for the four-forty-five.

Arthur Edward Lovell, who, somehow, had a conviction that he was master of

ceremonies, took his stand in the station entrance. He warned his comrades with a shout when the train came in.

"Look out for jolly old Kriel!" he shouted. "Train's in!"

"Good egg!"

"Here's old Kettle with the trap!" said Ruby, as the vehicle from Rookwood came up to the station and halted. "He's not going to drive Wilmot off before we've spoken to him!"

"No jolly fear!"

Sergeant Kettle descended from the trap. He stood stolidly waiting for Mr. Wilmot to emerge from the station, apparently unmoved by the general enthusiasm. There was another yell from Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Here he comes!"

"Hurrah!"

A handsome, athletic fellow appeared in the station entrance. Handsome he certainly was, and to the eyes of the Rookwooders he was Eric Wilmot, whom they had come to greet. Certainly he was exactly like the fugitive cracksmen whom Jimmy Silver & Co. had chased out of the ruin in Coombe Wood. But Wilmot's resemblance to Dandy Jim was common talk at Rookwood since Inspector Troope's visit to the school. And if there was a look in the man's eyes that was not like Wilmot's, the crowd of juniors were not likely to observe it.

"Hurrah!"

It was a roar from the Rookwood crowd.

The newcomer stopped dead, staring at the crowd. Obviously he had not been looking for anything of the kind. Eric Wilmot doubtless had had a suspicion that some welcome was intended, but of that Dandy Jim knew nothing. He was surprised and startled, and the look on his face for the moment was not pleasant.

Confident as he was in his impersonation of his cousin, the rascal was far from desiring any publicity that he could possibly avoid. And he had many difficulties to contend with. He had planned to play his cards very carefully, gradually finding out details that, as Eric Wilmot, he was supposed to be perfectly familiar with. Now he was suddenly brought face to face with a crowd of fellows, every one of whom he was supposed to know personally—and not one of whom did he know by name.

It was a critical moment even for the iron-nerved rascal who was playing so desperate a game.

"Good old Wilmot!"

"Hurrah!"

"Welcome home, sir!"

Lovell was grabbing desperately in his pockets for the manuscript of his speech, so carefully written out for this great occasion. Lovell was certain that he had put it in his pocket when he started—it had stuck out of his pocket in full view, in fact. And he was quite unaware that Putty Grace had jerked it away and relieved him of it.

"Where's that dashed speech?" gasped Lovell. "Oh, dear! I—I say, sir—Mr. Wilmot—Welcome home, sir!" Lovell was not blessed with a good memory. He made a desperate effort to recall his written eloquence. "On this auspicious occasion, sir, when—"

"We're here to welcome you, Mr. Wilmot," said Jimmy Silver, surprised by the curious expression on the young man's face.

Never had a man looked so taken aback, and the most imaginative junior present could not imagine that the new arrival looked pleased.

"Welcome back to Rookwood, sir!" roared the juniors.

"On this auspicious occasion," gasped Lovell, "the whole school rises as one man to testify—"

"Dry up, Lovell!"

"To testify—to testify to—to—in the auspicious occasion—" Lovell was losing his thread.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Wilmot spoke at last. He spoke in a rather gasping voice.

"Oh, yes! I—I am very glad—glad to be—welcomed like this! Thank you!"

With that he came out of the station, and as he righted the sergeant standing beside the trap he strode towards him. Sergeant Kettle touched his hat to the young man.

"Ead sent the trap for you, sir," he said.

"Very good."

"If—if you don't mind, sir, we—we—we have a few words to say!" stammered Lovell.

The footballer did not seem to hear. He stepped quickly into the trap. It was ob-

vious to the least observant that he was anxious to be off the scene, and Jimmy Silver & Co. could not help feeling that their great reception had failed to have the expected "hacking" effect upon Eric Wilmot.

Sergeant Kettle gathered up his reins.

"Speech! Speech!" shouted Conroy.

"I—I've lost the speech—" gasped Lovell.

"Fadhead. I don't mean your jaffle! Speech, Wilmot!" shouted Conroy.

In the circumstances, Mr. Wilmot might have been expected to say a few words, at least, to his youthful admirers and supporters. But he did not. He made the sergeant a sign to drive on, and Kettle put the horse into action at once. It was obviously as an afterthought that the footballer raised his hat to the crowd of juniors as he drove away. As a matter of fact, the impostor dared say nothing, lest he should inadvertently betray himself. He was only anxious to be gone.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, with a whistle, as the trap bowled down the street. "Rather a frost—what!"

"Blessed if I like Wilmot so much as I thought I did!" grunted Baby. "He seems to have changed somehow!"

Jimmy Silver nodded. That had struck him also.

"There ought to have been a speech," said Lovell. "Naturally, he would expect a speech of welcome. That would have made it go off all right."

"Fadhead!"

"This yours?" asked Putty, shoving a roll of impot paper into Lovell's hand.

"Good! Where did you find it?"

"In your pocket, old chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—you—" gasped Lovell.

"Well, you can make the speech, after all, old top!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "We'll get home to tea while you're doing it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Rookwood crowd streamed homeward to the school. Every fellow had a sense of disappointment, not only in the failure of the great reception, but in Eric Wilmot himself. Somehow the footballer they had admired and loyally rallied round seemed a changed man in their eyes. Why, they could not have told, but they all felt a subtle change.

CHAPTER 22.

Very Wet!

"JIMMY, you are——"
 "Jimmy, you chump——"
 "Jimmy, you duffer——"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome of the Rookwood Fourth were not always in agreement. On the present occasion, however, they agreed quite unanimously.

Jimmy Silver did not answer.

He granted,

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were in a parlous plight. The rain was coming down, not merely in torrents, but in whole cataracts. Round the four juniors stretched the waste of Coombe Heath, weeping with rain. The scattered trees were drenched and dripping, the bushes ran with water, and the grass was like a bog. And several miles lay between the chimneys of the Fourth and the school.

It had been Jimmy Silver's idea to spend that half-holiday in a long tramp across country. The weather had looked doubtful, but Jimmy had declared that they could not afford to take into account such an uncertain quantity as the British climate. In rather watery sunshine the Fistical Four had tramped across Coombe Heath, and the rain began to fall while they were having their tea at an inn far from Rookwood. It had fallen, heavier and heavier, all the way back, till now it was fairly gushing over them.

And it looked like getting worse, if worse was possible.

Hence the remarks of Lovell and Raby and Newcome. Jimmy had led them into this, and there was some slight solace in telling the captain of the Fourth what they thought of him.

"You awful ass!" continued Lovell. "Of all the duffers——"

"Keep smiling!" urged Jimmy Silver.

"I'm soaked!"

"Drenched!" said Raby.

"Dripping!" gasped Newcome.

"Nerve mind—keep smiling!" said Jimmy. "No good grouting! We've got to get through it somehow."

Arthur Edward Lovell halted.

"Ass!" he said. "Fathers! I'm not going to splash along any further! We've got to find a shelter!"

"Nothing but them dashed trees!" growled Raby. "And they're wetter than the rain."

"Must be something somewhere," said Lovell, peering through the thickening gloom and the lashing downpour of rain. "A cattle-shed would be better than nothing."

"Oh, come on!" said Jimmy.

"I'm not coming on!" roared Lovell. "It's a good two miles to Rookwood, and I'm fed up! There must be a shelter somewhere."

Jimmy Silver halted. He would have pushed on to the school, but it was clear that the Co. were not of the same mind. Jimmy, by that time, repented of defying the weather. Certainly, he could not have foreseen this tremendous rainstorm.

"There's a cottage on the heath not far from here," he said. "Nobody lives there, but we might be able to get in. You remember that old shepherd's cottage that was damaged in an air raid in the war-time—it's somewhere about here."

"Where?" granted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver blinked round him. The wet September evening was darkening over the heath, and what little light was left was obscured by thick clouds. Jimmy remembered having seen the half-ruined, deserted cottage, but he did not remember its exact location.

"Hallo, there's a light!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"By Jove!"

From a fringe of dark trees at a little distance the light glimmered through the gloom.

"That's it!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I remember now. The cottage is on the other side of those trees."

"You said nobody lived there," said Lovell. "If that's so, why the blazes is there a light?"

"Well, nobody lived there last term," said Jimmy. "Perhaps it's occupied now. There's a shed to it, and we can get shelter—if anybody's there, he'll let us come it out of the rain, I suppose. This way!"

Jimmy turned from the muddy footpath and started towards the trees, the wind and rain lashing in his face. Lovell & Co. followed him.

It was no time to think about being late for call-over at the school. What they wanted was shelter from the rain—and the warmth of a fire, if possible.

They tramped on through the blinding

rain, squeaking mud at every step. The light grew clearer as they advanced.

They passed through the trees and came in sight of the cottage. It was too dark now to make out the building clearly, but they could see the square of the window with the light shining through the blind.

"There's a tenant there now, that's certain," said Jimmy. "There were no blinds to the windows when I passed the place last term. Whoever it is, he'll let us dry our clothes at the fire, and wait till the storm's over."

That prospect cheered the juniors a little. They tramped on, and reached the door of the solitary cottage on the heath.

It was a small building—one room downstairs and one up, with a lean-to shed at the side. The shed was in a bad state of disrepair, and open to the wind, if not to the rain. But the cottage, which had been disused since its damage years before in a Hun raid, had been roughly repaired. The porch was in a tottering state, but the door looked strong and stout. Jimmy Silver knocked loudly.

There was a sound of a movement within, and Jimmy thought he caught the murmur of voices. But no one came to the door.

"Bang on it!" said Lovell savagely. "We've got to get in."

Thump, thump!

There were footsteps at last in the room. The door was on the room itself; there was no passage within. Whoever was in the room obviously could not fail to hear the knocking at the door. The footsteps came across the room to the door, but the latter was not opened. A rough, harsh voice called from within:

"Who's there?"

"We're caught in the storm," answered Jimmy Silver. "Will you give us shelter for a while——"

"Not!"

"What's that?"

"I'm not letting tramps into my house! Get on your way!"

"We're not tramps," roared Lovell, "and we want shelter from the rain! We'll pay for it!"

"Get out!"

The footsteps receded again. In the darkness in the shaky old porch the juniors looked at one another.

"Inhabitable rotter!" groaned Newcome,

Lovell set his teeth.

"My hat! Of all the rotten brutes!" he breathed. "I'd like to be within hitting distance of that chap's nose. What are we going to do?"

"There's the shed," muttered Raby. "Better ask——"

"No good asking," said Lovell. "The rotter might say 'No.' Let's get into it—better than the open air, anyhow."

And the Fiskal Four, in dismal spirits and a very angry mood, moved away from the cottage and groped their way through rain and gloom into the shed.

CHAPTER 21.

A Startling Discovery!

INCESSANT rain pattered and splashed on the lean-to roof of the shed as the shivering juniors groped into it.

Within there was blackness. But through the blackness there glimmered a thin beam of light, which puzzled the juniors for a moment or two. But they soon ascertained that it came from a crack in the crazy old wall of the cottage where the shed adjoined it.

"Quiet!" whispered Jimmy Silver. "If that rotter hears us, he may turn us out of this!"

"I'd like to see him turn me out!" breathed Lovell. "I'd damage his features for him. I know that!"

"Might set a dog on us!" murmured Raby.

"Oh!"

It was evident that the unknown occupant of the cottage on the heath was utterly inhospitable and unfeeling, and it behoved the Rockwood juniors to be careful. The shed was cold and dark and damp; but the sloping roof kept off most of the rain, and it was a great improvement on the torrents falling outside.

The hapless four drew as close as possible to the cottage wall, where the shed was driest and most sheltered. The wall was of ancient weather-boards, tarred; but it was old and crazy, and had been patched in several places by new boards, showing cracks here and there.

From the little opening whence the light came the beam fell across Jimmy Silver's cheek in the dark, showing up a fragment of his face with a rather ghastly effect.

from the slit, too, a smell of tobacco escaped. The sound of a voice came to the ears of the juniors—the harsh voice that had answered them at the door.

"Only somebody wanting shelter. They've gone."

Evidently the man was answering someone who had spoken to him in the room.

"Sure they've gone?"

That was a softer and more cultivated voice—and it was a voice that made Jimmy Silver jump.

For he knew it!

There was a muffled exclamation from Lovell.

"Quiet!" breathed Jimmy.

"That's Mr. Wilmot's voice!" whispered Lovell.

"Quiet!"

"Oh, they've gone!" the harsh voice said again. "It's all right. Not likely to hang about in this weather, Jim!"

"I ought to be gone, too; but I fancy I'll wait for the rain to stop!" said the familiar voice. "Hang the weather!"

Jimmy Silver was almost trembling with excitement.

It was several days now since Eric Wilmot had returned to Rookwood School after his absence.

Dandy Jim was still at large. And the man with the harsh voice had addressed his companion in the cottage as "Jim."

Was that the explanation of his seeming inhospitality; was that lonely cottage on the heath the hiding-place of the cracksmen for whom the police were hunting? It was not only in looks, but in the tones of his voice, that Dandy Jim resembled Eric Wilmot. And the voice Jimmy had just heard was exactly that of Mr. Wilmot, the football coach at Rookwood.

The four juniors scarcely breathed now. The same suspicion was in all their minds, and they realized that if it was well founded they were in dangerous quarters.

Jimmy moved cautiously, to bring his eyes on a level with the crack in the old wall.

That gave him a view of a part of the interior of the cottage. A lamp burned upon a small table, upon which stood a bottle and two glasses. The atmosphere was thick with tobacco-smoke.

Jimmy drew in his breath hard.

He had a partial view of a harsh-featured, bearded man—evidently the man

who had answered him at the door. And he had a full view of a handsome, athletic figure—who was either Eric Wilmot or his double. In looks the two were alike; but Jimmy had no doubt that this was the cracksmen, for he was smoking a cigar, and sipping whisky-and-water—to neither of which was the young footballer addicted.

The young man appeared to be listening; and, from the expression on his face, Jimmy thought that he was not quite so satisfied as his companion that the applicants for shelter were gone. He spoke again abruptly.

"I thought I knew the voice that called to you, Lurcher. If I'm not mistaken, it was a Rookwood boy."

"What would a Rookwood kid be doing 'ere in this weather?" grunted the other.

"You're sure they've gone?"

"Course they are!"

"The rain's pretty heavy. They might have stopped into the shed."

"You can go and look, if you like, Dandy Jim!" answered the Lurcher, in a tone of sarcasm. "I'm not putting my 'ead out in this!"

The man rose to his feet.

"I shall look!" he said quietly. "We can't afford to run risks, Lurcher!"

Through the crack in the wall every word came to the ears of the four Rookwood juniors.

Jimmy moved away silently from the wall.

"Cut!" he whispered.

There was no time to be lost. The man was James Stacey, alias Dandy Jim; there was no doubt now. It was certain that he was armed, and the juniors, from a previous encounter, knew that he was desperate.

In haste, but with caution, the chains of the Fourth graped out of the shed into the heavy rain.

heedless of the rain, they hurried towards the trees. There was a sudden flare of light behind them, as the cottage door was thrown open, and the lamplight streamed out into the gloom.

But the darkness hid the juniors now. Looking back, they could see the cracksmen's figure outlined in the lighted doorway.

"Come on!" breathed Jimmy Silver. The juniors hurried on.

CHAPTER 23.

Mysterious!

"H E, he, ho! You look wet! Ho, he, ho!"

That was Tubby Muffon's sympathetic greeting.

The Fistical Four did look wet—there was no doubt about that. They were drenched and dripping.

"Caught in the giddy storm!" asked Conroy of the Fourth.

"Looks like it!" gasped Lovell.

"You've missed call-over," said Puffy of the Fourth.

"Blow call-over!"

"Mr. Dalton's been asking after you!" remarked Oswald.

"Bless Mr. Dalton!"

"Lovell! Silver! You have returned, then!" Mr. Dalton came out of his study.

Lovell crimsoned; but if the Fourth-Form master had heard his remark, he took no note of it.

"Where have you been, Silver?"

"We've been caught in the rain, sir!" gasped Jimmy.

"I can see that!" said Mr. Dalton, smiling slightly. "You had better go and get changed at once!"

"Yes, sir!" mumbled Lovell.

The Fistical Four were glad to go and get changed. Never had they felt so thoroughly in need of a change.

Half an hour later, in dry clothes, and seated at tea before a blazing fire in the end study, they felt better. Outside, the rain was still beating against the walls and windows of Hookwood, though the storm had slackened now.

"By Jove, I feel better now!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, as he tackled his third egg and his fourth round of toast. "Just as well that we didn't hang on at the cottage, after all. We didn't get much wetter tramping home."

"But what were we going to do about what we saw?" asked Raby. "Had we better report to Mr. Dalton, Jimmy?"

"We're bound to report it," said Newcomb. "The police are looking everywhere for that assassin! I never guessed that he was still hanging on near Hookwood."

Jimmy Silver nodded thoughtfully.

"He's got to be arrested," he said. "But I was thinking we'd better tell Mr. Wilmot."

"Good egg!" agreed Lovell. "Wilmot was arrested in mistake for that rotter, and he's bound to be keen on getting him nailed. Why, the same thing might happen again! We'll tell Wilmot, and he can get the police to go with him to the place. He'll be glad of this chance."

"That's the idea," said Jimmy. "If Mr. Wilmot doesn't care to take a hand in it, we'll go to our Form-master. But I fancy he will jump at it—and we shall be doing him a good turn. I've got to see him about the junior practice, so I'll buzz along after tea and let him know."

And as soon as tea was over the captain of the Fourth quitted the end study, and made his way to Mr. Wilmot's quarters.

The football coach had a couple of rooms in the School House, at some distance from the junior quarters. The sitting-room was a pleasant room on the south side of the building, with a balcony and steps to the ground. More than once Jimmy Silver had interviewed Mr. Wilmot in that room on the all-important subject of junior football.

Jimmy tapped at the door, and turned the handle.

There was no reply from within, and the door was evidently locked, for it did not open.

The junior noticed that there was no light under the door. Apparently Mr. Wilmot was not in his quarters.

Jimmy could not help being surprised. If Mr. Wilmot had gone, as he sometimes did, to Mr. Dalton's study for a chat, it was odd that he should have locked the door and taken the key away. It was odd, anyhow, that he should lock his sitting-room door, even if he had gone out. And certainly it was very unusual weather for taking a walk out of doors.

Tipper, the page, came along the passage while Jimmy was standing at the door, and the junior called to him:

"Do you know whether Mr. Wilmot is indoors, Topper?"

"Dunno, Master Silver," answered Tipper. "Ain't seed him this afternoon. But he generally goes in and out by the balcony, I believe. Never know when he's in his room or when he ain't."

"The door's locked," said Jimmy.

Tipper gave no audible sniff.

"It generally is," he answered. "I

know whether Mr. Wilmot thinks as anybody would poke into his room and look for his vallybles. Very careful gent, Mr. Wilmot, sir." And with another audible sniff, Tipper went his way.

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

It was obviously necessary for some action to be taken without delay concerning the crackman's secret hiding-place at the cottage on the heath. If Mr. Wilmot was not available, Jimmy felt that he ought to go to his Form-master or the Head.

He resolved to wait a while, and give the young footballer a chance to return. If he was, after all, somewhere about the House, he was not likely to be long.

Jimmy strolled along the passage, and stood looking out of the window at the end, which gave a view of the quad in the daylight. Now it was all dark, save for the light that fell from the School House windows. He could dimly make out the iron rail of the balcony outside Mr. Wilmot's room, and the curved iron stair that led down to the ground.

"I'll give you half an hour," murmured Jimmy.

But ten minutes had not elapsed when the junior, with a sudden start, noticed a moving shadow in the gloom before him, and someone wrapped in a raincoat ascended to the balcony of Mr. Wilmot's room.

Evidently it was the footballer; no one else had any business on that balcony, which gave admittance only to Wilmot's room.

Jimmy walked back along the passage to the door of the footballer's room.

He heard the sounds from within of the French windows opening, and the young man entering, before he reached the door.

Evidently Mr. Wilmot had been out in the rain, like the Physical Four.

Jimmy Silver tapped at the door.

"Who is there?"

The voice came sharply from within. Light gleamed under the door; the young man had turned on the electric light just before Jimmy arrived there.

"It's Jimmy Silver——"

"What do you want?"

"I should like to speak to you, Mr. Wilmot."

"Very well, Silver. Please excuse me for a few minutes—I am rather busy finishing a letter for the post."

"What!" stammered Jimmy.

"It's about football, I suppose!"

"Yes, and——"

"Well, come back in ten minutes, if you don't mind, Silver. I really must get this letter finished."

"Oh, yes! Right!" gasped Jimmy. "I—I thought you had gone out, sir!"

"In this weather!" The young man laughed. "No, I am only writing letters—saving up my correspondence for a rainy day, you know!"

"I—I—I'll come back!" gasped Jimmy.

He walked away with his brain in a whirl.

CHAPTER 26.

Strange Suspensions!

"TOLD Eric?"

Arthur Edward Lovell asked that question as Jimmy Silver came back into the end study. The Co. were chatting before the fire, glad enough of its warmth and ruddy light after their experiences on Coccombe Heath that afternoon.

Jimmy shut the door.

The expression on his face startled his chums. They rose to their feet, looking at him inquiringly.

"What's the row?" asked Raby.

Jimmy breathed hard.

"I'm blessed if I know," he said. "There something wrong—something awfully fishy! Did you fellows ever think that Eric Wilmot was a liar?"

"What rot!" grunted Lovell. "You know he isn't!"

"I'd have sworn to it," said Jimmy, with a nod. "But—— Well, it heats me! Did you fellows know that Wilmot was out this afternoon?"

"Not likely!" said Lovell. "Only a fellow like you, Jimmy, is idiot enough to stare for a long tramp on a day like this!"

"Well, he was out, and his door locked, said Jimmy. "I waited for him, and happened to see him from the window coming in by the balcony."

"What about it, ask? He can go out if he likes, I suppose?"

"No reason why he should keep it dark, if he does," said Jimmy quietly. "When I knocked at his door he told me he was writing letters—had a letter to finish."

"What-a-at!"

"And he had only just come in and

turned on the light," said Jimmy. "He doesn't want anyone to know he was out in the rain. If he'd opened the door, I should have seen him streaming wet, as we were when we came in. And he said he was writing letters—a barefaced lie!" Jimmy Silver knitted his brows. "Wilmot, as we know him before he was arrested and taken away, never seemed that sort."

"He seems different in a good many ways since he came back," said Ruby. "Nothing you can specially put your finger on, but he seems different, somehow."

"The way he had forgotten fellows' names," remarked Newcombe. "He never struck me as absent-minded before he went away. But in less than a week he seemed to forget a lot of things."

"I can't understand it," said Lovell. "Wilmot is as straight as a string. He wouldn't tell lies."

"He's just done so," said Jimmy Silver. "Why should he want to keep it dark that he was out?" demanded Lovell. "I suppose he's not been anywhere that he can't explain?"

Jimmy drew a deep breath. "I don't know," he said slowly. "But there's something fishy about this. I believe there's something fishy about this. I believe he was away he doesn't seem the chap he was before."

"Tubby Muffin likes him better!" grinned Ruby. "He's forgotten all about the special exercises he set Tubby to bring his fat down!"

"And he doesn't harry the slackers like he used to," said Newcombe. "Peele and Gower and their gang have been taking it much easier."

"I've noticed that," said Jimmy. "And I've noticed he's not so keen on football himself; and I've heard some of the seniors remark that his knowledge of the game isn't what they thought it was at first. But—"

Jimmy was silent.

Vaguely, a strange and terrible suspicion was in the back of his mind—but it was so vague, and so wild, that he hardly cared to formulate it even to himself.

The captain of the Fourth glanced at the study clock. Ten minutes had more than elapsed.

"I've got to see him again," said Jimmy. "I told him I'd come back."

And he left the end study, and returned

to Mr. Wilmot's room. But he was not now thinking of informing Mr. Wilmot of the discovery at the cottage on the heath.

He tapped at Wilmot's door. "Come in!" called out a cheery voice. Jimmy entered the room. The football coach was seated at his table, pen in hand, addressing an envelope.

He nodded pleasantly to the junior. There was no sign about him of having been out in the rainstorm. Yet he had been out in it; Jimmy knew that. Undoubtedly he had changed in the adjoining bed-room with great rapidity. Jimmy Silver had no doubt whatever that if he could have looked into that room he would have seen wet boots and raincoat. But the communicating door was closed.

"Sit down, my boy!" said the footballer. "Rotten weather for our game, what! No play to-day!"

"No, sir!" said Jimmy.

"How have you been getting through this wretched afternoon?"

"We went for a tramp. Mr. Wilmot," answered Jimmy, his heart beating a little faster.

Why did the man want to know where he had been that afternoon?

"In this weather!" said the footballer.

"Well, we went out early, and were caught in it coming back," said Jimmy.

The voice of Dandy Jim was still ringing in his ears, with the words he had heard the crackman utter at the lonely cottage. Dandy Jim had fancied that it was a Rookwooder's voice at the door. How did Dandy Jim know a Rookwood voice when he heard it? Jimmy Silver had come into contact with the rascal twice—on each occasion only for a few minutes, and then hardly a word had been spoken. How did the crackman, then, know that it was a Rookwooder asking for admission at the lonely cottage? And why did the crackman's double want to know where Jimmy Silver had been that afternoon? Jimmy, with beating heart, waited for the footballer to continue—wondering almost breathlessly whether the man would approach the subject of the lonely cottage in his inquiries.

"You must have got wet," said the young man, with a smile.

"We did, and no mistake!" said Jimmy.

"You see, we were caught in the storm right out on the heath."

"Couldn't you get any shelter?"

The young man spoke carelessly enough, but his eyes were very keenly on the junior's face as he spoke, and Jimmy was aware of it."

"We tried, but had no luck," said Jimmy.

"You do not mean to say that you were refused shelter in such weather?"

"We were," said Jimmy, with a nod. His suspicions were well founded. Mr. Wilmot wanted to know whether it was indeed Jimmy Silver who had knocked at the cottage door that afternoon. How did he know anything about the matter?

"Upon my word," said the young man, "you surprise me! Who could have been so inhospitable?"

"I don't know," said Jimmy. "The man we asked for shelter was a stranger to us, you see."

"Then it was not near Rookwood?"

"A couple of miles away," said Jimmy. "It was rather rotten; the man refused to let us in out of the rain and we had to tramp back to Rookwood in it."

"The fellow must have been a rotter!" remarked Wilmot, his eyes still keenly on the junior. "In such a case, I think I should have been tempted to push it, in spite of such an inhospitable character. Wasn't there a barn or a shed you could have got into?"

Jimmy Silver wondered at his own coolness in keeping composed and giving no sign of his suppressed excitement. The man was coming very close in his inquiries now.

"Well, that would have been trespass," said Jimmy calmly. "Might have set a dog on us. After all, we didn't get much wetter tramping home. Lucky we didn't catch colds, though."

"Yes, you've been lucky," assented Mr. Wilmot.

"About footer practice on Saturday—"

began Jimmy. And the talk turned to football. But when Jimmy Silver left Mr. Wilmot's room his heart was beating almost to suffocation. That vague, wild suspicion had taken form in his mind now—he knew, as well as if he had seen it, that Dandy Jim had looked into the shed, and seen the beams of light from the hole in the cottage wall; and had been startled and scared by the possibility that the applicants for shelter had seen and heard. And Mr. Wilmot had concealed the fact that he had been in the

rain that afternoon and had questioned Jimmy Silver closely.

Because Dandy Jim had recognized Jimmy's voice at the cottage door, Eric Wilmot had wanted to discover whether Jimmy had taken refuge in the shed, and seen or heard anything that had passed in the cottage.

And the conclusion Jimmy was driven to draw was that the man he had just seen was not Eric Wilmot, (the football coach at all, but was the man he had seen a few hours earlier at the lonely cottage! And that conclusion was so startling, so amazing, that Jimmy Silver resolved not to tell it even to his chums—not till he was sure!

CHAPTER 27.

Past to the Proof!

"JIMMY!"

"Well?"

"What are you going to do about it?"

It was the following day, after morning lessons. Jimmy Silver had been in a very thoughtful mood that morning; and his chums in a very puzzled frame of mind.

So far nothing had been said of the discovery at the cottage on the heath. The Co. were accustomed to following the lead of Uncle James of Rookwood, and they had followed his lead in this. But they were seriously uneasy.

Jimmy Silver had told them that he wanted to think it out. That was all very well, as Arthur Edward Lovell remarked; but duty was duty, and in this case the duty of the juniors was plain. They had seen a criminal who was wanted by the police in a secret hiding-place, and their plain duty was to inform the authorities. And if Uncle James of Rookwood persisted in his policy of silence, it was pretty certain that his comrades would take the bit between their teeth, as it were.

"We've got to do something," said Lovell. "That scoundrel is wanted for a dozen crimes, and we're not letting him go, if we can help to get him landed. I don't understand you, Jimmy!"

"You wouldn't, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver affably.

"Look here—" roared Lovell.

"Shush! Leave your mind to think it out," said Jimmy Silver apologetically. "My

dear chap, I've been having a big think, and I'm going to surprise you soon."

"That's all very well," grunted Lovell. "But I want to know what we're going to do."

"We're going to have a little chat with Mr. Wilmot before dinner," said Jimmy cheerily. "There he is under the beeches. Strike the iron while it's hot!"

"You're going to tell him, after all—"

"No, you say! Not a word!" said Jimmy hastily. "If you breathe a word to him, it will spoil everything. Just come along with me and listen while I talk to him. I've got a reason."

"Blessed if I see it!" growled Lovell.

"You will—soon!"

The Fistical Four strolled towards the old Rookwood beeches, where the football couch was to be seen sauntering. The young man gave the juniors a pleasant nod.

"A very pleasant day after yesterday's rain!" he remarked.

"Topping!" said Lovell.

"There was a little matter I wanted to mention to you, Mr. Wilmot, if you don't mind," said Jimmy Silver diffidently.

"Yes?"

"You remember the day before you went away—before you were taken away, I mean," said Jimmy, "you borrowed my penknife?"

"Yes, Master Silver."

"Well, you didn't return it to me, Mr. Wilmot," said Jimmy, with a smile. "I—I thought perhaps you had forgotten borrowing it."

"Not at all; I remember perfectly. But I'm sorry to say that I must have lost it," said the footballer. "You see, things were rather in confusion just then; it was a rather startling experience for me."

"Yes, rather!" said Lovell warmly.

"That inspector chap was a silly owl, sir, and we were jolly glad when you came back safe and sound, Mr. Wilmot."

"Thank you, Master Lovell!"

"But that penknife—" said Jimmy Silver.

"Rather sour silly old penknife, Jimmy!" said Lovell in a stage whisper.

"Chuck it!"

"Bo—"

"I am sorry I appear to have lost your knife, Silver," said the footballer. "I shall certainly purchase another in its place."

"Oh, no, Mr. Wilmot: not at all!" said

Jimmy Silver. "I merely thought that if it had slipped your memory—"

"Not at all, Master Silver. I will look through my pockets, and I may possibly find it," said the footballer, with a smile.

"Otherwise, I shall insist upon giving you a new one."

"Oh, no," said Jimmy. "I don't want that. But if you could find the same knife, I'd be glad. You remember it—a pearl-handled one, with my initials cut on the handle?"

"I remember," assented Mr. Wilmot. "I will look for it, and do my best."

"Thank you very much."

With a nod to the juniors, the young man walked away towards the house. Arthur Edward Lovell glared at his chum, and as soon as the footballer was out of hearing, he burst out emphatically:

"Well, you crass ass! What a thumping lot of fuss about a silly old penknife! What do you want to worry the chap like that for about a dashed old penknife?"

"He remembers my lending it to him the day before he went!" said Jimmy Silver grimly.

"Naturally he would."

"He remembers that it was a pearl-handled knife, with my initials cut on it."

"Why shouldn't he?" snapped Lovell.

"Well, it's odd, to say the least."

"How is it odd, you ass!"

"Because," said Jimmy Silver deliberately. "I never lent Mr. Wilmot a penknife the day before he went away!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"I never possessed a pearl-handled penknife, and so certainly I've never lent one to Mr. Wilmot, and so he cannot possibly remember my doing so!" said Jimmy Silver in a low, quiet voice. "Catch on now?"

Baby and Newcome whistled. Arthur Edward Lovell looked blank.

"So you were pulling his leg?" said Lovell at last.

"Yes; catching him."

"Why should he tell lies about it?" demanded Lovell gruffly. "There's a mistake somewhere. Why should he pretend to remember it if it never happened?"

"Because he doesn't dare not to remember anything that's referred to as having happened to Eric Wilmot!" said Jimmy Silver quietly. "Because, if he did, the fellows would tumble to what I've tumbled to."

"And what's that?"

"That that man is not Eric Wilmot at all."

"What?" gasped Lovell.

"Jimmy?"

"Draw it mild!"

"I knew it," said Jimmy. "But I wanted to prove it to you fellows, so I put it to the test. If that man had been Eric Wilmot, he would have answered at once that I was mistaken—that I never lent him the penknife. He is not Eric Wilmot."

"Then—then—who is he?" stuttered Lovell.

"Dandy Jim!"

"What?"

"Dandy Jim, the crackman," said Jimmy Silver. "Dandy Jim, who has come here in Eric Wilmot's name and in his likeness—Dandy Jim, the crackman, whom we are going to expose and hand over to the police!"

CHAPTER 24.

A Meeting in the End Study!

"BUZZ, off!"

Arthur Edward Lovell gave that terse command emphatically, as Tubby Muffin put a fat face into the doorway of the end study.

But Tubby did not retreat.

It was tea-time, and there was a gathering in Jimmy Silver's study.

Jimmy was there, with Raby, Lovell, and Newsome, his study-mates, and Conroy, Pons, and Van Ryn of the Fourth had dropped in, and Errol and Oswald had followed. And Tubby Muffin, who had the nose of a bloodhound for a study spread, promptly followed on.

But there was a lion in the path, in the shape of Arthur Edward Lovell.

Lovell was apparently acting as door-keeper. He passed the juniors in, one by one, till Reginald Muffin arrived, and then he extended a sturdy arm across the doorway, and commanded Muffin to "buzz."

Ransom and Patty of the Fourth came along the passage, and Lovell admitted them to the study. Tubby Muffin, seeking to dodge in after Ransom, was caught by the collar.

"Leggo!" roared Tubby.

"Ontario!"

"Look here, I'm coming to the feed!" howled Tubby indignantly. "I say, Jimmy,

you're not leaving out an old pal, are you?"

Jimmy Silver looked round.

"Fathead! It's not a feed."

"Eh? What are all the fellows turning up for, if it's not a spread?" demanded Tubby suspiciously.

"It's a meeting."

"Well, I'll come to the meeting," said Muffin. "Leggo, Lovell! I don't want to punch an old pal, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Punch away, Fatty!"

"I wouldn't—not when I'm coming to your spread," said Tubby Muffin. "Yow-ow! Leggo!"

"We're all here now," said Jimmy Silver. "Shut the door, Lovell!"

"I say, Jimmy—"

"Oh, buzz off, Muffin!" said the captain of the Fourth impatiently. "It's not a spread, and there's nothing to eat."

Lovell jerked the fat Classical into the passage by his collar, and sat him down there with a bump. Then the door of the end study was slammed.

Tubby Muffin sat and gaped for a minute, or two. Then he scrambled to his feet, and approached the study door cautiously. Tubby was by no means convinced that it wasn't a feed, and he meant to know. If it was a study spread, Tubby was going to be present somehow; he was determined on that.

Jimmy Silver's voice was audible in the study as Tubby bent cautiously over the keyhole.

"I dare say you fellows are a bit surprised at being called in—"

"Yes, if it isn't a food!" said Oswald, with a laugh.

"It isn't. It's something a good bit more important and serious."

Jimmy Silver's tone was very grave. Tubby Muffin sniffed, but he did not leave the keyhole. It wasn't a spread, but Tubby's curiosity was excited, and he wanted to know all about it. The fellows in the study evidently had forgotten the existence of the Peeping Tom of Rockwood.

The meeting in the end study regarded Jimmy Silver with curious glances. What the captain of the Fourth was driving at was a mystery to them so far.

"Well, what's the game, anyhow?" asked Conroy.

"It's about Wilmot."

"A meeting in the study about the football coach?" said Oswald, in astonishment.

"That's it."

"You see, we've made a tremendous discovery!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, and two unsuspecting fat ears outside the study door picked up in happy anticipation.

"You fellows remember," said Jimmy quietly, "that Mr. Wilnot was arrested in mistake for a man wanted by the police—a man just like him to look at, named Sney—Dandy Jim, as he was called."

"That's not likely to happen again," said Conroy. "Mr. Wilnot proved that he wasn't the man, and they let him go."

"Then he came back to Rockwood," said Jimmy. "Have you fellows noticed any difference in him since he came back?"

"Yes," said Conroy at once. "He doesn't seem anything like the good footballer he was before. I've heard Bulkeley of the Sixth mention that, too."

"Nor so good-tempered," remarked Oswald. "But he's easier-going in some ways. He lets off the slackers, a thing he never used to do."

"He had a queer way of forgetting fellows' names," said Erroll. "It was odd he should have forgotten so much while he was away only a few days. But what are you getting at, Jimmy?"

"This," said Jimmy Silver—"he is not the same man!"

"What?"

"My hat."

"Draw it nigh, old top!"

"I've proved it," said Jimmy quietly. "Putting a lot of things together, I came to suspect it—and then I put him to the test. I asked him about things that happened—and didn't happen—while Mr. Wilnot was here, and he gave himself away completely. He's not Mr. Wilnot. Now, there's only one man who resembles Mr. Wilnot so closely as to be taken for him, and that one is Dandy Jim, the crackman. And my belief is that Mr. Wilnot was somehow got at as he was coming back in Rockwood, and put away somewhere, and this rascal took his place and his clothes, and had the nerve to come here as Wilnot."

The Rockwood juniors stared blankly at Jimmy Silver.

They had not known what to expect when they were called to the meeting in the end study, but most decidedly they had not expected this.

"Great Scott!" said Rawson at last. "But—"

"The other day," continued Jimmy, "we were caught in a thunderstorm, and took cover in a shed next to an old cottage on the heath. There, through a crack in the wall, we saw Dandy Jim. Another man was with him who called him by name. Now, if the real Mr. Wilnot has been made a prisoner and put away somewhere secretly, that's the place. It's a lonely cottage, in the middle of the heath, and this man must have had a reason for going to such a place. My belief is that he goes there to make sure that his prisoner is safe; also, perhaps, to see his confederates about their schemes. We're going to look into it."

"My hat!"

"I'm quite certain of what I say," continued Jimmy; "but, naturally, we want actual proof before we can speak out. We're going to find the proof at the cottage on the heath. But we're dealing with pretty desperate characters, and we'd like you fellows to back us up, if you feel inclined. That's how it stands."

Lovell rose to his feet and made a quick step to the door. In his breathless excitement Tubby Muffin had knocked on the door-handle and rattled it. Lovell threw the door open, and there was a startled yelp as the fat junior almost tumbled into the study.

"Ow! I—I wasn't listening—Yarsooooooh!"

Tubby Muffin did not stay to explain further. He fled, and Arthur Edward Lovell, in great wrath, dribbled him down the passage as far as the stairs. Tubby went down the stairs at a wonderful speed, and Lovell snorted, and tramped back to the end study, where the council of war was resumed unheeded by Reginald Muffin of the Classical Fourth.

CHAPTER 25.

The Shadow of Fear!

C RASH!

"Whoop!" roared Tubby Muffin. It was a terrific collision. Tubby, under the impression that Arthur Edward Lovell was still raging on his track, close at his flying heels, went down the staircase almost as if he were going down a toboggan.

Naturally he had no time to look where he was going.

A sturdy, good-looking young man was crossing the lower landing, and Tubby Muffin crashed into him like a battering-ram.

Tubby reeled from the shock, and sat down with a breathless bump.

The young man he had butted into fared worse. He staggered across the landing, brought up against the wall, and slid down at the foot of it, fairly hurled off his feet by the impact of Tubby's heavy weight.

Tubby blinked at him dizzily.

"Oh, dear! Groogh! It's Mr. Wilmot! Oh crumbs! Ow! 'Twasn't my fault, Mr. Wilmot! Groogh!"

The footballer sat up, a loud and savage exclamation leaving his lips. Even in his breathless, dazed state, Tubby was startled to hear him. Eric Wilmot, the football coach of Rookwood, was a fellow respected by all the school, liked by almost all Rookwood. That he was capable of uttering the savage words that were now streaming from his lips no one at Rookwood had imagined for a moment. Certainly, if the Head had heard him he would not have remained five minutes longer within the walls of the old school.

He staggered up, his face black with rage. The collision and the fall had hurt him, and roused all his savage temper. Tubby blinked almost in terror at the enraged fawn, remembering what he had overheard at the door of the end study. And into Tubby's fat brain sank the knowledge that Jimmy Silver had stated the facts—that this was not the man Rookwood School had known as Eric Wilmot, but the crackman, who resembled him so closely. Jimmy Silver was right.

The man made a spring towards the gasping Tubby, grasped him by the collar, and dragged him to his feet.

"You clumsy young hound!" he hissed.

"Yarook! Leggo! Help! Murder! Thieves!" howled Tubby Muffin. "I—I—say, I'll call the police! I'll hand you over! Leggo!"

"What!"

The rage in the man's face died away suddenly; it became fixed, startled, fearful. His eyes glittered at the fat Classical. For one terrible moment it came into Dandy Jim's mind that his secret was known.

"I—I— Leggo! I couldn't help it!

Accident!" gasped Tubby. "That beast Lovell was after me!"

"You said——" hissed the footballer.

"I—I didn't say anything! I—I never heard Jimmy Silver tell the fellows anything about you!" gasped Tubby Muffin, in mortal terror as the grasp of his collar tightened.

"What did he say?"

"Nothing! I wasn't listening. I—I believe you are Mr. Wilmot. I'm sure it's all right!"

A terrible look came over the face of Eric Wilmot's double. But he calmed himself and released Tubby Muffin's collar. Dozens of ears were within range of Tubby's yelling, and it was no place to deal with the fat Classical junior.

"All right, my boy," said Dandy Jim, choking back his fury and speaking calmly, and with a smiling face. "You rather hurt me, you know, bumping me over like that."

"Sorry!" gasped Tubby. "That beast Lovell——"

"Why was Lovell after you?" asked Dandy Jim smoothly.

"He thought I—I was listening, you know. I wasn't, of course, I never heard a word."

"They were talking about me, what?"

"Yes, Jimmy thinks—I mean, no—you see, I never heard a word," said Tubby Muffin. "Don't you think I believe anything of the kind. Just as if a crackman could come here pretending to be our football coach!"

Dandy Jim's face was pale.

"I was just going to my room to tea," he said. "Come and share a cake and a cup of tea with me, Master Muffin."

For the first time on record, Tubby Muffin failed to be attracted by a free feed. He was quite convinced now that the man before him was the crackman, Dandy Jim, and his only anxiety was to get safely out of his reach.

"Thanks! I—I'm going to tea with Mr. Dalton," he stammered.

"Mr. Dalton is out of doors."

"I—I mean the—the Head——" stammered Tubby.

"Come, my boy," said the young man, smoothly and smilingly, and he made a movement towards Reginald Muffin.

Muffin gave a yell of terror and fled. He went down the lower staircase like a deer.

What the football coach might think of his terrified flight Tubby did not know or care. He only knew that he wanted to get safe away.

Dandy Jim did not follow him.

He wanted very much to "pump" Tubby Muffin and learn what the fat Classical knew or suspected. But evidently that was out of the question now; he did not wish to draw a crowd. He cast a black look after Tubby, and strode away to his own room.

He locked the door of the room, and went out on the little iron balcony by the French window. There he stood in deep, grim thought. He was thinking—and he was watching. Unlikely as it seemed to the cunning plotter, Tubby's gasping words seemed to imply that Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth Form, suspected the true identity of the man who was known at Rookwood as Eric Wilmot. It was unlikely—impossible—yet—Dandy Jim was assured that he had covered up his tracks thoroughly, and yet—What did the fat fool's bubble mean?

If Jimmy Silver, by some unheard-of chance, knew or suspected the truth, what would he do? Had he, on the day of the visit to the lonely cottage on the moor, seen or heard something of which Dandy Jim knew nothing? In that case, what would he do? Go to the Head—with so strange a story? Go to the police? Or go to the lonely cottage to make a cautious investigation before committing himself to a startling accusation?

The last was the most probable.

Dandy Jim knew that Jimmy Silver & Co. were now in the house. If Jimmy went out—

He gave a sudden start and caught his breath.

In the quadrangle below he caught sight of a number of juniors crossing towards the gates. Jimmy Silver was there, and with him were a crowd of fellows—Lovell, Raby, Newcome, Oswald, Conroy, and two or three others. Dandy Jim noted that the schoolboys were all carrying sticks under their arms—a rather unusual equipment for a half-holiday walk.

From the little balcony he saw the crowd of juniors turn out at the school gates and disappear.

He drew a deep, hissing breath. They were gone—wither! Something like steam poured with black rage in the

passionately imposter's heart. If the truth was known—

A minute later Dandy Jim was hurrying down to the gates.

CHAPTER 20.

Rookwooders to the Rescue!

"HERE'S luck!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

As the crowd of Four-Formers started for Coombe, there was a whirr and a hooping on the road, and they looked round to see a lumbering motor-bus coming on behind. It was the bus that plied twice a day between Woodend and Coombe.

"That's a lift for us!" said Jimmy.

"Good!"

Jimmy Silver held up his hand, and the bus slowed down. The Fourth-Formers clambered on the big vehicle, and it rolled on towards the village.

It was disappearing in the distance when the man who called himself Eric Wilmot came out at the gates.

Dandy Jim gritted his teeth.

The road was clear, and he could guess that the juniors had gone on the motor-omnibus. He had intended to keep them in sight, and learn whether their destination was the lonely cottage on the moor. He was left hopelessly behind now.

The juniors, unaware of what the imposter had learned from Tubby Muffin, did not even guess that the suspected man was following them. They gave him hardly a thought, as the motor-bus rolled on to Coombe.

At the village they descended, having saved a mile of the long walk to the cottage on the heath.

From Coombe the party struck across the heath at once. It was a cold, clear afternoon, and all the party were ready for a tramp on the open heath. But most of them were very doubtful as to what they would discover at the end of their long walk.

Jimmy Silver was quite certain in his own mind; but even Jimmy had taken his time to think over the strange affair, and wanted to get hold of definite proof before making his suspicions known outside the

circle of his own chums. Lovell and Ruby and Newcome agreed with their study-leader; but they had lingering doubts. The other fellows had still stronger doubts, but they were prepared to back up Jimmy Silver and put the matter to the test.

It was a long tramp across the heath, but the Rookwooders came in sight of the lonely cottage at last.

A thin column of smoke was rising from the chimney showing that the hovel was inhabited. The front door was open, and a man was bending beside a bicycle outside the door, apparently engaged upon repairing a puncture.

He stood up as he caught sight of the juniors, and stared towards them with a dark and lowering face.

"Is that the Johnny you fellows saw there before?" asked Conroy.

"That's the man!" said Jimmy. "Dandy Jim called him Lurcher."

"Ye gods, what a name!" grinned the Australian junior.

"He looks a pretty tough customer," remarked Oswald. "I say, Jimmy, we're not going to rush the man's house, I suppose, and search it for a giddy prisoner? What about the law?"

"We ought to have dropped in at the police-station and barrowed a search-warrant," murmured Potty Grace.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're going to be guided by circumstances," said Jimmy. "But, anyhow, we're going to know the facts. If Mr. Wilnot is a prisoner in that den——"

"If!" murmured Potty.

"We're going to have him out, and that will be proof enough against that rotter who's using his name at Rookwood. If he's there, he's in the upper room—there's only two," said Jimmy. "Come on!"

The juniors approached the cottage.

The man Lurcher scowled at them as they came up. Whether he was acting the part of gaoler in the lonely cottage or not, evidently he did not desire visitors.

Potty Grace greeted the scowling man with a cheery smile and a nod.

"Is this the place for refreshments?" he asked.

"No, it ain't!"

"This ain't where they do the shilling teas for cyclists?" asked Potty pleasantly.

"No!" growled the man.

"Then what's your figure for a tea all round for this little party?" asked Potty.

"This 'ere ain't tea-rooms!" growled Lurcher. "You get on your way. You can't come in here!"

"Don't you want our company?" asked Potty, with a gained look.

"No, I blooming well don't!"

"Never mind; we've only called to see your lodger," said Jimmy Silver.

The man started violently, and his eyes glittered as they turned on the captain of the Fourth.

"Whatcher meant?" he snarled. "There ain't any lodger 'ere!"

"The chap in your upstairs room, I mean," said Jimmy.

"There ain't nobody there."

Jimmy glanced up at the little window of the upper room. It was tightly closed and thickly curtained. Lurcher was watching him with savage suspicion.

"Well, what are we going to do, Jimmy?" asked Lovell.

"We're going to watch the place, while one of us goes to Coombe for a policeman," said Jimmy Silver. "We've got to take care that Mr. Wilnot isn't removed before the police arrive."

There was a gasping exclamation from Lurcher. Jimmy's words took him utterly by surprise—as they were intended to do. The ruffian made a spring towards Jimmy, and grasped him by the shoulder, his savage, bready eyes peering into the school-boy's face.

"You young bound!" he panted. "So you was spying——"

"Let go my shoulder, Mr. Lurcher," said Jimmy calmly, though his heart was beating fast. "Your gun's up here, my man. Dandy Jim——"

"What do you know about Dandy Jim?" panted Lurcher.

"Lots!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"You see, I happen to know that he is going to be arrested at Rookwood to-day——"

"At——at Rookwood!"

"Where he is pining himself off as Mr. Wilnot," smiled Jimmy.

Lurcher almost staggered.

The Rookwooders were watching him with breathless keenness. Jimmy Silver

was blushing; and if his suspicions had been ill-founded, it was rather difficult to imagine what the man's answer would have been. But it was clear enough that Jimmy's suspicions were well founded—that the ruffian was startled and terrified at what he knew.

The man's glance passed the group of juniors and swept the open heath, searchingly. They knew what he was looking for; they could see the terror of the police in his face.

He moved closer to the bicycle, and grasped it. His glance swept round the heath again, and then fixed savagely on the juniors.

"Keep off that bike!" said Lovell. "You're not getting away, my man. You're wanted for kidnapping—Mr. Wilmot."

"Collar him!" shouted Conroy.

That was enough for Lurcher. He made a sudden rush with the bicycle, and drove through the crowd of Rookwooders, hurling them right and left. The next moment he had his leg over the saddle and was riding away before he was fairly seated. The bicycle bumped and jolted over the rough track on the heath at a great rate.

The juniors stared after him blankly. That sudden and complete proof that Jimmy Silver was on the right track took his comrades by surprise.

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"I fancy that settles it," he said. "That rotter knows that it's all known, and he's only thinking of saving his own skin."

"My hat!" gasped Lovell. "I—I say, we ought to collar him!"

"No need yet," said Palty. "But as he's bolted, we can take the liberty of looking into his cottage."

"Yes, rather."

Without a single glance back, Lurcher was pedalling away across the heath as if for his life. Obviously he was not giving a thought to the prisoner in the cottage or to his belongings there; he was only thinking of saving himself from the law. But the business of the Rookwooders was not with Lurcher. They crowded into the cottage; every one in the party convinced now that Jimmy Silver had hit upon the truth, and also Eric Wilmot was a prisoner in the house on the heath.

CHAPTER 21.

The Rescue!

"MR. WILMOT!"

Arthur Edward Lovell had a powerful voice, and it fairly thundered in the little cottage as he shouted the name of the young foot-baller.

"Are you there?" roared Lovell.

"Hark!"

There was no answer; but from above came a heavy dragging sound. It was the sound of someone moving with difficulty; someone who had heard, but could not speak.

The upper room was approached by a heavy wooden ladder in the corner of the cottage. Above was a trapdoor, hinged underneath. Jimmy Silver mounted the ladder while Lovell was shouting, and shot back the bolt.

He threw up the flap and passed into the attic above.

It was a small room, dark and dirty, and cobwebby, dimly lighted by a glimmer from the little window. Its only furniture was a bed of rugs on the floor and two or three boxes.

On the bed lay a man, whose ankles and wrists were shackled with knotted cords, allowing him small liberty of movement. Over his mouth a cloth was tied securely.

The face, as Jimmy Silver saw it in the darkness, was ghastly white, the eyes hollow and feverish.

"Mr. Wilmot!"

Ghastly as the prisoner's face looked, Jimmy Silver recognised it. It was the once healthy and handsome face of Eric Wilmot, the double of Dandy Jim.

"Is he there?" shouted Lovell from below.

"He's here!"

"Hurrah!"

Lovell came clambering up the ladder.

Jimmy hurried across the dim attic to the bound man on the rugs. He opened his penknife, to cut the cords that secured the gag.

The hollow eyes of the prisoner were fixed upon him with a painful intensity. The hopeless despair of the prisoner could be read in the haggard face. Now that help and rescue had come, it seemed like a dream to the crackling's victim.

"I'll soon have you loose, sir!" breathed Jimmy.

He cut the cords, and drew away the gagging cloth. The white, numb lips of the prisoner moved, but only a faint inarticulate sound came forth. The hapless footballer could not speak.

Quickly Jimmy sawed through the cords that secured him. The rascals had run no risks with their prisoner; escape had been impossible, and they had taken measures to prevent him from giving the alarm to any chance visitor to the lonely cottage. Evidently they had cared little or nothing how much he had suffered in their hands. The once sturdy footballer was the ghost of his former self.

He could not speak, but there were tears rolling down his ghastly cheeks, as Jimmy freed him.

"Poor old chap!" breathed Lovell. "It's Wilmot!" And that scoundrel at Rookwood—

"He's going to pay for this!" said Jimmy Silver, between his teeth.

"Yes, rather! Let's get Mr. Wilmot downstairs."

"Lend a hand here, you chaps!" called out Jimmy Silver.

Three or four of the juniors ascended into the garret. The young man was raised among them, and they helped him to the trap. With some difficulty, and the assistance of the rest of the party from below, he was got down the ladder.

He was placed in the most comfortable chair that could be found, and the juniors gathered round him. It was clear that the exhausted man was in no state to leave the cottage then.

"We shall have to get a lift, somehow," said Jimmy Silver. "He couldn't possibly walk the distance to Rookwood—if he can walk at all, poor chap! One of you fellows cut off to Coombe, and bring the trap from the Red Lion here!"

"I'll go!" said Lovell.

"Back up, old chap! Put it on, and take a rest in the trap coming back," said Jimmy.

Arthur Edward Lovell started, and disappeared across the heath as if he were on the cinder-path.

Several times the white-faced man in the chair tried to speak, but still no words

would come. Putty Grace hunted through the cupboards, and found tea; the fire was lighted in the rusty old grate, and a rusty kettle was soon boiling. A hot cup of tea was placed to Eric Wilmot's lips, and he smiled faintly and sipped it. It revived him, too, and when he had finished the tea he was able to speak.

"Silver and you others, you've saved me!" His voice was faint and choked. "Heaven bless you! I had given up hope! I knew that villain was at Rookwood in my name—"

He broke off.

"It was all Jimmy's doing, sir," said Raby. "He spotted that awful rotter, and found out that it wasn't you!"

"Heaven bless you, Silver!"

"Thank goodness you're found!" said the captain of the Fourth. "And that villain will be collared as soon as we get back to the school!"

Eric Wilmot's eyes gleamed.

"My cousin—James Stacey—" he muttered.

"He is your cousin!" exclaimed Jimmy. "You."

YOU'LL ENJOY THESE, TOO, CHUMS!

THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY

Nos. 133 and 134.

"That Guy Fish!"

By FRANK RICHARDS

"True Blue!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

REMEMBER THE DATE:

THURSDAY, OCT. 2nd,

But order now to avoid disappointment!

"I—I thought he must be a relation, from the likeness."

"He is my cousin—and for that reason I have spared him more than once!" muttered Wilmot. "But after this let him get what he deserves! My cousin—it will all come out when he stands his trial—he will not spare me the shame of having it known."

"No fault of yours, sir!" said Conroy. "Rookwood won't think any the less of you for it, Mr. Wilmot!"

"Not a bit!" said Jimmy Silver. "And the safest place for that villain is Dartmoor."

Wilmot nodded.

"And you've been a prisoner here, all the time he's been at Rookwood in your name!" said Baby. "You've had a hard time, sir!"

"I think I should have died if it had lasted much longer!" muttered Wilmot. "I think you have saved my life!"

Jimmy Silver gave a start as there was a sound from without.

"That can't be Lovell already——"

"Look out——"

There was a hurrying footstep, a sound of panting breath, and a man stood in the open doorway. Wilmot started from the chair, his eyes blazing.

"Dandy Jim!"

CHAPTER 32.

Landed at Last!

DANDY JIM stared at the scene in the hut.

He had come there with fear in heart—fear and disquietude. But he had not expected this. The cottage was swarming with Rookwooders, and Eric Wilmot, his prisoner, was free in their midst. The rascal, taken utterly aback, stood staring into the cottage with flaming eyes.

There was a yell from Conroy.

"Collar the villain!"

"Rush him!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

Wilmot made a step forward, but sank back on the chair from sheer weakness. But the juniors rushed in a crowd at the ruffian.

Half a dozen sticks had almost reached him, when Dandy Jim sprang back from the doorway, panting. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked after him fiercely. The crackman's

hand was in his pocket; it came out with a weapon glittering in it.

"Stand back!" he panted hoarsely.

"Stand back, or——"

Crash!

Conroy, the Cornstalk, hurled his stick over the heads of the other fellows. It crashed in the face of Dandy Jim, sending him spinning backwards.

"Down him!"

As the ruffian staggered, and almost fell, Jimmy Silver reached him, and his stick crashed on the rascal's arm. The revolver went to the ground.

"Collar the rotter!"

A moment more, and the crackman was in the grasp of six or seven pairs of hands, struggling desperately.

The odds were too great for him, and he had no chance, but he put up a fearful struggle. For long minutes he fought, and tore, and struck, and struggled; but the Rookwooders never let go, and at last the crackman came to the ground, with the juniors swarming over him. Even then he did not yield till he was utterly exhausted, and lay helpless and panting under his assailants.

Conroy planted a heavy knee on his chest.

"Get a rope!" he said breathlessly.

Patty of the Fourth dashed into the cottage, while the other fellows kept the crackman secure in their grasp. He came out with the cords which, an hour before, had held Eric Wilmot helpless on the ground, unable to stir hand or foot.

Only his furious eyes glittered at the juniors, with volumes of hate and rage in them. But his savage looks had no effect on the clumsy heroes of Rookwood.

"Looks like a win for us—what!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

And in great spirits, in spite of some hard knocks they had received in the conflict, the Rookwood crowd returned into the cottage, to keep Eric Wilmot company until Lovell arrived with the trap.

Arthur Edward Lovell jumped from the trap at the door of the cottage on the beach, half an hour or so later. The driver from the Red Lion stared at the bound man lying before the doorway. He stared still more when the Rookwooders crowded out of the

cottage, helping Eric Wilmot in their midst. Lovell fairly chirruped with satisfaction at the sight of the bound crackman.

"So that beauty came along here!" he exclaimed. "Lucky you fellows managed to bag him."

Arthur Edward seemed a little surprised that his comrades had been so successful in his absence. However, there was no doubt about their success. There was Dandy Jim, tied hand and foot.

"We've got him!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "We'll drive back through Coombe, and drop him at the police-station. It will give Mr. Boggs the surprise of his life."

"What ho!"

Eric Wilmot was helped into a comfortable seat in the trap, and the prisoner was hauled into the bottom of the vehicle. Jimmy Silver and Lovell stepped in after them; the rest of the party had to wait. The driver started the horse, and the trap jolted away by the rough track over the heath, the Rookwood crowd trotting along with it.

Coombe was reached, and they halted outside the residence of Mr. Boggs, which was attached to the little police-station of the village. Mr. Boggs was called out, and he blinked at the bound man blankly. His first impression was that this was a Rookwood "rag," but when the facts sank at last into P.-c. Boggs' stolid brain, he grinned with satisfaction. Mr. Boggs had never taken in charge before any criminal more desperate than a village urchin for robbing an orchard. Dandy Jim was his first crackman! And the bare idea of bagging a well-known criminal who was sought in vain by the London police made Mr. Boggs swell with importance to such

an extent that he really seemed in danger of bursting his well-filled tunic.

Mr. Boggs took charge of Dandy Jim, sorting out a rusty old pair of handcuffs to fasten on him. As he was lifted from the trap the rascal turned his eyes upon the cousin he had wronged and injured. Perhaps, even at that moment, he still hoped that Wilmot might relent towards him. The young footballer avoided his glance. Not that he could have helped the rascal if he had taken pity on him—Jimmy Silver & Co. would have seen to that.

Leaving Dandy Jim in the careful hands of Mr. Boggs, Jimmy Silver & Co. drove on to Rookwood School. Their arrival at the gates of Rookwood caused a sensation. Two or three of the party had cut in to the school during the delay in the village and spread the news. Rookwood School was buzzing with it when they arrived.

A cheering crowd greeted Eric Wilmot as he was helped from the trap. He went into the house leaning on the shoulder of Bulkeley of the Sixth, and Dr. Chisholm met him at the door with an amazed face, but a welcoming handshake. The footballer's homecoming, after his terrible experience, was a regular triumph.

Afterwards there was a great celebration in the end study. Eric Wilmot was in the sanatorium, under the doctors' care; and Inspector Troops, of Scotland Yard, apprised by telephone of what had happened, was hurrying down to Coombe to take possession of the wanted man. Dandy Jim went to what he had earned, and the cousin he had wronged was troubled by him no more. But no one at Rookwood was wasting a thought on the wretched crackman. The end study were enjoying their triumph, and celebrating their success—and great was the celebration thereof.



THE LUCK OF THE LEVISONs!

A Short Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER I.

The Talisman.

"MANY happy returns of the day, Ernest!"

"Thanks, Franky, old man!"

Thus Frank Levison, of the Third Form at St. Jim's, greeted his elder brother Ernest, of the Fourth Form at the same ancient foundation, on the morning of the latter's birthday.

It was just after breakfast, and morning school would begin in about twenty minutes.

The brothers Levison strolled out into the old quadrangle in company, Ernest with several letters and packages in his hand.

"Got a good post—eh?" said his brother, with a grin. "I suppose there's a remittance from father there?"

Ernest turned over a small package about the size of an ordinary matchbox.

"This has come from father," he said, in a puzzled voice. "Blest if I can guess what it is! But there's a letter from him, too. Let's see what he says."

Levison major opened one of the letters, and scanned it. As he did so his expression became more puzzled still.

"Just listen to this!" he exclaimed, when he had finished it. "Blest if it doesn't beat the band!"

He began to read:

"Dear Ernest,—I am sending you a one-pound note in honour of your birthday, with my love and best wishes. I am also sending, in another parcel, something which you will doubtless be surprised to get. It is an old Hebrew ring, set out with a curiously carved green stone, which came to light yesterday in a corner of the old bureau which belonged to your grandfather. I have not seen it for many years, but I remember being told the story of it. Our family used to call it 'The Luck of the

Levisons," and the story runs that if worn by the eldest son of our house it is a talisman that will bring him good fortune whenever he is in need of it. In various misfortunes which befell them, the family appear to have lost faith in the "luck," which was put away in the old bureau. But as it happened to turn up yesterday, I thought I would send it to you, as the eldest son of the house. You might give its luck-bringing qualities another trial.—My love to Franky and yourself.

"YOUR LOVING FATHER."

"My hat!" said Levison minor, as his brother finished reading this missive. "That's a corker, if you like! Let's look at the ring, Ernest!"

Levison major unwrapped the parcel, and the brothers looked curiously at the ring it contained.

The ring itself was a narrow silver band, and the curious green stone with which it was set was quite small and delicately carved in a quaint old pattern.

Levison slipped it on to his finger.

"Well, I'll give it a trial, anyway, at the dad suggests," he said, with a laugh. "I'll slip it on when I want a bit of extra luck."

"What'll the fellows say about it, I wonder?" said Levison minor musingly.

"Better not say anything about it," said Ernest. "The chaps would only chip me if they heard the story. We'll keep that a secret. I shan't wear the ring all the time, of course—just slip it on when I think it might do some good. Probably no one will notice it. Chaps at St. Jim's aren't supposed to wear rings, of course."

"Well, let me know what happens when you give it a trial," said Frank. "If there's anything in it—"

"If there's anything in it we'll have some fun," said Ernest, with a grin. "Why,

with a real talisman I might do anything, even"—his brow clouded for a moment—"even get back to Greyfriars!"

Frank Levison was silent. In the past his brother Ernest had been a member of the Fourth Form at Greyfriars School; but he was very wild in those days, and his behaviour had led to his being removed from the school. He was lucky enough to get into St. Jim's, where he was very happy. But his dearest wish since his reformation was to get back to Greyfriars before his school days were over, and wipe out the disgrace which clouded his name there.

"Well, it's time for lessons, nearly," said Levison miserably, after a pause. "What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Cricket," said Ernest. "Tom Merry is trying me in the team for the School House against the New House. It's jolly decent of him, as I have been badly off my form lately. I'm going to play up like anything. If I don't do well I shan't get another chance of playing in the team. I know that. Besides, Doris is coming over this afternoon—at least, she says in her letter she will cycle over if she can get permission."

"Oh, good! I can look after her while you're playing," said Frank. "Hallo, there's the bell! I must buzz off, or old Selby'll give it to me hot."

He dashed off to morning school, and Ernest, taking off the ring and thrusting it into his waistcoat-pocket, went into class in a thoughtful mood.

What between thinking of the curious ring and of his sister Doris, Levison's morning almost ended in disaster. But upon mild little Mr. Lathom threatening to detain him for the whole afternoon if he showed any further sign of inattention to his lessons, Levison managed to pull himself together and emerge from the ordeal without further damage than an imposition of fifty lines.

CHAPTER 2.

Levison's Luck.

"FEELING fit, Levison?"

Thus Tom Merry, the cheery captain of the School House team, as Levison came out of the Fourth-Form dormitory after dinner in his flannels.

"Fit as a fiddle!" said Levison. "I'm going to play up this afternoon, I can tell you, Tom Merry! We shall beat them!"

"Good man! I hope we shall!" said Tom Merry. "But Figgins has got a jolly good team together, you know. It's Fatty Wynn's bowling I am afraid of. If our chaps can only stand up to that, we shall beat them!"

Levison nodded thoughtfully. Fatty Wynn, the stout Welsh member of the famous New House Co., was a demon bowler, and when he was in form there were few junior batsmen who could stand up to him with much hope of success. And he was known to be in great form just at present. Figgins & Co. were openly looking forward to seeing their fat chum "make hay" of the School House wickets in this afternoon's match. Levison knew that Tom Merry's evident doubts were only too likely to be justified. If only he, Levison, could make a really good stand against the demon Welshman! Levison knew that if he could, he would be hailed as the hero of the match, and his position in the School House junior team would be assured. His lips tightened as he went into his study to get his bat and pads. He was quite determined that, if he failed, it would not be for lack of trying.

Cardew, his study-mate, looked up as he entered.

"Good luck, old man! You'll have to play up this afternoon."

"I mean to!" said Levison grimly.

He made his way down to the pavilion on the junior ground, where the cricketers were gathered. Figgins & Co. were in high spirits, and the New House were quite evidently anticipating a victory.

"Your men all here?" asked Figgins of Tom Merry. "May as well get on with the washing."

Tom Merry glanced round.

"Reilly's not here, but he will be in a minute. Let's toss for innings."

"No hurry, I suppose, Figg?" said Fatty Wynn casually. "It's only twenty-five past two. I just want to—to—"

"To what?" said Figgins grimly.

"Well, to—to run over to the tuckshop!" said Fatty Wynn defiantly. "I'm hungry!"

"Rats!" said Figgins firmly. "Let me catch you going over to the tuckshop any fat pippin! You've got to bowl this afternoon—and bowl like an angel!"

"But I tell you I'm hungry!" said Fatty Wynn pitifully. "You wouldn't let me have any more pudding at dinner, you know. I can bowl better if I have a snack."

"No fear!" said Figgins, drawing his arm through his fat chum's. "No stuffing till we've beaten those School House boulders. Then we'll have a jolly good feed!"

"Oh, really, Figg?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Heads or tails?" said Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Tails!"

The coin spun, and fell to the grass.

"Tails it is!" said Tom. "What are you going to do?"

"We'll bat first!" said Figgins.

"Right-ho! Out you come, chaps!"

And the School House cricketers trooped on to the field.

Tom Merry took the first over. Redfern and Kerr were the first men in for the New House, Kerr taking the bowling first.

The run came mortally, Kerr especially showing great form. Tom Merry at one end and Dick Brooke at the other sent down their best deliveries, but twenty runs were scored before either batsman gave a chance.

Then Kerr, playing forward, misjudged the pace of a ball from Tom Merry. The ball shot up in the air towards cover-point. Cover-point was Ernest Levison. Burning to distinguish himself, he dashed forward too eagerly. Over-running the ball, he clutched at it, caught it, and promptly dropped it again.

There were shouts from the ropes—groans from the School House, and cheers from the New House.

Levison turned crimson with mortification. He caught a very expressive look from Tom Merry, but the junior skipper did not utter a word of reproof. He could see that it was through over-eagerness that the Feldeman had failed.

After this let-off Kerr went on scoring freely. Redfern was dismissed at last, with 17 to his credit. Figgins, the next batsman, made another stand, but was finally caught in the slips by D'Arcy for 21. By this time Kerr had made 30, and the New House were stood at 70 for ten wickets. Their supporters were in high feather.

Tom Merry, who had made several changes in the bowling, took the ball again himself, looking very determined. This would not do at all. He proceeded to send down a deadly over, in the course of which two New House wickets fell. Things began to look better. Noble, the Australian junior, bowled "googlies" from the other end, which puzzled the batsmen mightily, only Kerr being able to score off them. The hundred went up just before the seventh wicket fell. The next batsman added 5, before Noble bowled him. Owen then joined Kerr, and they took the score to 125 before Owen was caught in the long field by Monty Lowther. Koumi Rao, the Indian junior, was last man in, and kept his wicket up until Kerr, running out to hit, was smartly stumped. The total New House score was 145, of which Kerr had made 76 off his own bat. He received a great ovation from the New House supporters.

As they walked in from the field, Levison approached Tom Merry.

"Awfully sorry about that catch!" he muttered.

"Couldn't be helped!" said Tom, as cheerily as he could. "It was an expensive mistake, as it happened, but you were over-keen; that's all. We shall have our work cut out to beat their score against the bowling of Fatty Wynn and Koumi Rao. I'm thinking!"

"Who's going in first?" said Levison, after a pause.

"Blake and Noble. How do you feel about batting? I was thinking of putting you in about half-way down the list."

Levison was silent a moment. He put his hand into his pocket, and felt there the ring he had received that morning. "The Luck of the Levisons."

"Why not try it now?"

"Look here, Tom Merry!" he blurted out, flushing. "Will you let me go in first with Noble?"

Tom Merry looked at him in some surprise. He noted keenly Levison's flushed face and his air of suppressed excitement. And Levison was such a cool fellow, as a rule.

"I suppose you have a special reason for asking this, Levison?" he said quickly.

"Yes, I—I can't tell you just what it is, but I feel——"

"Right," said Tom molly. "You can open the innings with Noble."

"Thanks!" gasped Levison.

Tom looked at him curiously as he hurried off to a shady corner of the ground, where his sister Doris was sitting with Frank Levison and Cardew. The junior skipper did not regret the impulse that had led him to accede to Levison's unusual request. He could see that Levison had something on his mind, and, above all, was anxious to distinguish himself in the match. And unless someone on the School House side played a quite exceptionally good innings, Tom knew that the New House would win. Fatty Wynn and Koumi Rao were, when in form, the most deadly pair of junior bowlers at St. Jim's. Some members of his team, Tom decided, would have to play the innings of their lives if the School House were to win. It was just as likely to be Levison as another. Anyway, he had given him his chance. And it was not long before Tom Merry was thanking his lucky stars that he had done so.

After a chat with his sister, Ernest Levison hurried to the pavilion and donned his pads. There was some surprise in the team when it was known that he was going in first.

"What's the game, Tommy?" inquired Jack Blake jocularly. "Levison been lending you money, or what?"

"Who's skipper of this team?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Oh, all right! What's the batting he gets out first ball?"

Levison heard, and looked grim. He slipped on his batting-gloves, which quite concealed the ring from view. Then he walked to the wicket with Noble.

Noble was one of the best junior bats at St. Jim's, and had made some very fine scores this season. But to-day he obviously was not comfortable with the bowling. Both the bowlers were making the ball swerve and break in a way that would puzzle any batsman. Noble appeared nervous, and was soon in difficulties. Levison, to everybody's surprise, seemed quite at his ease. He was perfectly cool and collected, and batted with confidence.

Noble was clean bowled when he had made 5. Jack Blake followed him in—and out again. D'Arcy and Lowther and Manners failed to stop the rot. But Levison was batting magnificently. After the

sixth wicket went down Tom Merry came in. He walked straight up to Levison.

"I'm going to try and stay here while you get the runs, Levison," he whispered. "I shan't try to score—I can see that you are on the ball, so I'm going to leave it to you."

Levison nodded.

"Right—ho!"

Tom Merry was as good as his word. He kept his bat down, and refused to hit out at even the most tempting balls. Levison, on the other hand, hit out at everything. It was an amazing partnership—perhaps the most amazing that had ever been seen on the junior cricket-ground at St. Jim's.

Levison, as Jack Blake put it, was batting like an angel. No bowling came amies to him, and Fatty Wynn exhausted all his wiles in vain against him. The score mounted up and up, and just before six-thirty, Levison made the winning hit—a boundary—which brought the School House score to 147!

Levison had scored 120 of these off his own bat. The School House had won by four wickets and two runs.

The ovation that Levison received from the enthusiastic School House juniors was a record one. Even the New House fellows were constrained to cheer him. He was carried shoulder-high to the pavilion, and again all the way to the School House. He finally escaped, much ruffled, from the hands of his admirers, and was able to join his brother and sister.

Doris Levison greeted him with a proud smile.

"It was splendid, Ernest!" she said. "Just wonderful! And how your school-fellows cheered you! You're the hero of the hour!"

"Here! I should think he is!" exclaimed Frank, clapping his brother on the back. "Good old Ernie! A hundred and twenty, not out, against the best junior bowling at St. Jim's! How ever did you do it, old chap!"

"Have you forgotten?" whispered Ernest. "I tried it this afternoon for the first time!"

"Tried it?" repeated Frank Levison, puzzled.

"Yes—'The Luck of the Levisons'! It was that that did it!"

THE END.

OUR MAGAZINE CORNER

THE "TOY-BOX"!

"Sound-Faker-in-Chief."

"What's the matter with the taxi on page 15? Never heard a taxi make a row like that! There's too much hooter! Ah, that's better!"

That was the amazing conversation I heard in a small, whitewashed room in the basement of the B.B.C.'s headquarters at Savoy Hill when I first made the acquaintance of the "sound-faker-in-chief." The latter is the fellow who is in charge of the "noises off" effects when Savoy Hill stages a radio play.

In this small room, known as "The Toy-shop," are to be found the most amazing collection of miscellaneous odds and ends, switches and handles, gadgets and devices, ever gathered together in one apartment. But I speedily comprehended that all these things served a definite purpose, occupied a prominent place in the sound-faker's programme.

"What can we do for you?" said the sound-faker-in-chief, smiling agreeably, half like a magician, half like a shop-walker.

"Anything you like!" I said cheerfully.

"What about an aeroplane leaving the ground?"

"Simple!" he observed, and touched a handle. Immediately the roar of the engine thundered in my ears, and the whirr of the propeller gathering speed, caused by two bent bamboo canes whirled by electricity. "We had a topping crash some time ago!" he went on, reducing the noise so that I could hear him. "We bought a couple of old aeroplane wings, fixed them two feet above the floor, and then at the required moment dropped heavy cylinders on to them. The effect was jolly good, believe me. And the row— But it wasn't so bad as when we actually dropped bombs outside the studio door, and listeners heard the fall of heavy timber directly afterwards. That heavy timber was unfortunate. You see, the door of the studio had been blown in!"

"Try a galloping horse," I suggested.

Imitating a Hurricane!

He got busy with a couple of large box-work pill-boxes, clapping them together—

clap, clap, clap, clap—so that I almost imagined I could hear the rumble of wheels as a coach-and-four went rattling past.

"That's a galloping horse on road," he said. "Now on grass!" And he banged one of the pill-boxes on the outside of a closed leather suit-case, giving more muffled hoof-beats.

"What about a motor-boat cruising round a harbor?"

Hey, presto!—My demonstrator shot out an arm and touched a switch, and the staccato crackle of a powerful motor-launch engine filled the room. This effect is achieved by whirling a disc very fast by electricity. Fastened to this disc are a number of pieces of knotted string, and these beat on pieces of wash-leather stretched tight over hollow pipes. What about the noise of the propeller screw? Merely three pieces of rubber revolving in the zinc tank full of water, and the wash, a broad wooden paddle in the tank.

"Now," said the wizard calmly, "I will show you how we imitate a hurricane."

He did! He brought on a most terrifying storm by beating great sheets of iron for thunder, whirling long bamboo canes at tremendous speed for the wind, and, in fact, nearly making me put my umbrella up. Any moment I expected him to turn on a shower-bath or something from a tank over the ceiling.

The "Flying Scotsman" Departs.

Next I heard the "Flying Scotsman" leave King's Cross.

"Phoop!" I was allowed to blow the right-away whistle—the penny whistle. Shush—shush—shush went a scrubbing-brush across a large drum. Shush—shush—shush—escaping steam—and then clatter, clatter, clatter as the mighty locomotive got under way, and roller-skates were run over an empty steel tank to produce the effect of the mighty pistons and driving-wheels clanking into motion.

Fasten and faster went the scolding-brush, faster and faster rolled the skates, louder and louder they clanged on the hollow steel tank, and then softer and softer as the locomotive laughed herself to silence in the distance.

I left the "Toy-Shop," about-mindedly putting the tin whistle into my pocket. But the magician-shopwalker follow me, so I didn't get away with it!

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