

LIVING A LIE

by Owen Conquest.



SCHOOLBOYS' OWN
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THE SIGN OF THE PIRATE

DICK TURPINS of the high seas had a fine old time, undeterred by gunboats, submarines, destroyers, long-distance-firing warships, and aeroplanes—simply because these "avengers" did not exist in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which is when the pirates were most numerous and daring. There were no speedier ships than their own afloat, and none with more bloodthirsty crews. Fighting was part of the average pirate's day's work. He joined a sort of trade union of high seas highwaymen when he shipped under the Sign of the Jolly Roger.

The Pirate's Penalty.

Grum humour lurks in that name for the pirate's flag, which was flaunted mast-top high to set the chill fear of robbery and slaughter in the hearts of all peaceable seamen. Heavily laden merchantmen could not turn tail and flee when that flag poked up over the distant horizon. And if the merchantman happened to be armed—well, the odds were that its crew was not matched by a long way for a hand-to-hand fight with pirates, who knew no authority except their own skipper's.

The pirates' only fear "came on" when they, as captured criminals, were marched down to Execution Dock, on the Thames, there to pay the extreme penalty—and to hang in chains until a certain number of tides had covered their bodies.

There was never any modesty about the pirates and buccaneers. They hoisted their flag just as it pleased them to do so. In these days of wireless and trickily-covered seas they would be bounded out of existence. But their flags then flew with impunity. The

device of a skull above two crossed human bones, in white on an otherwise black flag, was sometimes varied by having the skull and bones in blood red. Master-pirates who thought that sign a bit commonplace, went a step further and hoisted a device of their own—a bony skeleton, full length, holding a dripping dagger in one hand and a flagon of rum in the other—"Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

Flags of Fear.

The figure of a rampant demon was sometimes used as the pirates' flag. He stood on two skulls—like sudden death in all its stark horror. A flaming sword in his hands completed the heart-fluttering picture. Fancy seeing that suddenly rise up over the skyline on a peaceful summer's day, when the sea was flat and happy and the very last thing in a law-abiding crew's minds was—pirates!

Sometimes the flag was embellished with a battle-axe and an hour-glass in place of the crossed bones, with the symbolical skull grinning above. These special flags were usually the distinguishing mark of several ships commanded by one pirate chief, the "small" chief, who had only one vessel, sticking to the conventional skull and cross-bones.

Combines of pirates thrived specially along the Barbary Coast of North Africa, where even shipbuilding ports were run by and for pirates, and the ships were financed on their far-roving expeditions by wealthy scoundrels who lived ashore, these receiving usually about one-tenth of the value of all captures made by the pirates with whose activities they were intimately concerned.

Sometimes British men-o'-war convoyed four or more merchantmen when these had to pass through regular pirates' strongholds, but even then the pirates would swoop down in force and boldly give battle for what they regarded as their "rights"—the fat prizes stored in the merchantmen's holds.

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To all outward appearances CUTHBERT MONTMORENCY, a newcomer to Rookwood School, is a supercilious dandy. But beneath his dandified exterior he holds a shabby secret—and he lives in constant dread of discovery!

CHAPTER I.

Cuffy's Request!

"MY dear Thomas——"
"Oh, can it!" growled Tommy Dodd.
"But, my dear Thomas——" persisted Clarence Cuffy mildly.

A soft answer is said to turn away wrath. But the soft answers of Clarence Cuffy of the Modern Fourth Form at Rookwood never had the effect of turning wrath away. Rather they increased it.

If there was anything that Tommy

Dodd could not stand with patience it was being called "Thomas." And "Thomas," of course, was not so intensely exasperating as "Dear Thomas." Clarence Cuffy always made it "Dear Thomas." His gift for saying the wrong thing, in the wrong way, at the wrong moment, amounted almost to genius.

"Tommy" had a frivolous sound, to Cuffy's serious mind. And Cuffy never was light or frivolous. Sometimes he was comic, but that was unintentional on his part.

"My dear Thomas, I trust I am not

interrupting your conversation with dear James," murmured Cuffy.

Dear James, otherwise Jimmy Silver of the Classical Fourth, grinned. Tommy Dodd scowled.

The two juniors, Classical and Modern, were talking cricket, and the talk was really of some importance, as it had reference to the match that was shortly coming off between the Modern and the Classical junior sides. Interruptions from anybody were not specially wanted—least of all from Clarence Cuffy. Any conversation, indeed, was too important to be interrupted by Cuffy, Cuffy being an absolutely negligible individual.

Tommy Dodd laid a hand on the shoulder of his inoffensive relative, and spun him half-round, so that he was facing Mr. Menders' House across the quad.

"See the doorway over there?" asked Tommy.

"Certainly, my dear Thomas. I see it quite plainly," said the surprised Cuffy. "My vision is not in the least impaired, I am thankful to say."

"Head for it, as fast as you can," said Tommy Dodd. "Run all the way and don't stop. See?"

"My dear Thomas——"

"Like me to start you with a kick?" asked Dodd.

"I should object very strongly, Thomas."

"Then hook it."

"But I have to speak to you, my dear Thomas, and though I am sorry to interrupt——"

"Look here, you burbling ass," said Tommy Dodd, in tones of intense patience, "we're talking cricket, and there's no time for you to burble. Get going. We're settling about Wednesday's match, fathead. Now cut!"

"But I want to speak to you about Wednesday's match, my dear Thomas," urged Cuffy.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Tommy Dodd. "Keep to things you understand, if you understand anything. Don't talk cricket."

"But I want to play on Wednesday, Thomas."

"Eh?"

"What?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Cuffy blinked benignly at the two astonished juniors.

"It is rather an important matter, Thomas," he said. "You see, my father is coming to Rookwood on Wednesday to see me, and he would be so very, very pleased to see me playing for the House."

"About the only merchant who would be, I fancy!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Play you!" said Tommy Dodd dazedly. "Why, you can't play cricket! You don't even show up at games' practice. You don't know the difference between a cricket-bat and a brick-bat. Are you joking?"

"Not at all, dear Thomas. It is true that I know very little about cricket," said Cuffy modestly. "It does not interest me as a game, and to tell the truth quite frankly, I prefer marbles——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"And I have often thought, my dear Thomas, that a half-holiday might be more comfortably spent sitting in a secluded and quiet spot, playing noughts and crosses," said Cuffy. "Nevertheless, it is my duty to please my dear father, and he wishes to see me play cricket, so I have told him that I will play on Wednesday while he is here."

"You've told him?" shrieked Tommy Dodd.

"Yes, my dear Thomas. I thought I would mention the circumstance to you, so that you could put my name into the list."

Tommy Dodd stared at his relative, almost speechless.

He had always known that Clarence Cuffy was a champion duffer. It was much to the credit of Tommy Dodd that he had always stood by Cuffy, who was only a distant relative, and who certainly was not the fellow to bring any credit on him at Rookwood.

Often and often had Tommy Dodd punched fellows for pulling Cuffy's innocent leg. Often and often had he kicked Cuffy for Cuffy's own good. That Cuffy was a chump, and couldn't help being a chump, Tommy took for granted, and with great kindness of heart he looked after the chump as much as he could, and helped to steer him through the storms and pitfalls of school life.

But that Cuffy should be chump enough to suppose that he could play for the Modern side in a House match was really surprising. There ought to have been some limit even to Cuffy's chumpiness.

But apparently Cuffy supposed that a fellow could butt into a cricket-match as unceremoniously as a fog in the Second Form could butt into a game of marbles.

Cuffy seemed surprised by Tommy Dodd's surprise. As Tommy did not speak, Clarence rattled on:

"I believe there are eleven fellows in a cricket-team, Thomas——"

"You believe?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Yes. I am not an unobservant fellow, my dear James, and on occasions when I have watched cricket, I have noticed that there are generally eleven fellows concerned. Besides, I have heard it spoken of."

"My only Uncle John!" murmured Jimmy.

"I have been looking at the list, Thomas, and observe that there are eleven names in it," went on Cuffy. "I do not wish to speak positively on a subject in which I am not well grounded, of course, but I have inferred from this that you have already made up the full team."

"Is he real?" asked Jimmy Silver, gazing with deep interest at Cuffy.

"If this should prove to be the case, Thomas, no doubt you will ask one of the dear boys to stand out and make room for me," went on Cuffy. "Cook or Doyle would not mind, I am sure."

"Go on!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Keep it up!"

"Or perhaps Silver would not object in your playing twelve cricketers for once," said Cuffy, looking at the captain of the Fourth. "He could also play twelve, and so it would be equally fair for both sides."

"Pan me!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"But I am willing to leave all details to you, Thomas," said Cuffy generously. "I have very little acquaintance with cricket matters; indeed, the only book I have read about such things is the 'Cricket on the Hearth'——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"So arrange it as you think best, Thomas. I shall be satisfied so long as I play on Wednesday, while my dear father is here. He will be very, very pleased."

Tommy Dodd drew a deep breath.

"It's no good talking to you, Cuffy," he said slowly.

"My dear Thomas," said Cuffy anxiously, "I assure you that I am prepared to give respectful attention and all due consideration to any observations you may think it incumbent upon you to make."

"It's no good talking," repeated Tommy. "In ten years I couldn't make you understand why you can't play in the House match on Wednesday. Forget it! Drop it! Chuck it! Go away while you're safe! See?"

"But my dear Thomas——"

"If you call me dear Thomas again I'll sit you down, hard!" roared the captain of the Modern Fourth.

"My dear Thomas——"

"That does it!"

Tommy Dodd laid both hands on the shoulders of his relative. Cuffy sat down in the quad. He sat hard.

"Whooop!" gasped Cuffy.

"Now," said Tommy Dodd, "I'm going to count three, and then I'm going to begin kicking you, Cuffy! I'm going to kick you so long as you stay in reach. One!"

"My dear Thomas——"

"Two!" roared Tommy Dodd.

"My dear——"

"Three!"

"My—yaaaaooooooooo!"

Tommy Dodd kept his word. Clarence Cuffy bounded up like an Indian rubber ball, and ran for his life. The question of the House match had to be left over—even Cuffy could see that his relation, Thomas, was not in a mood of sweet reasonableness and was not to be argued with at present. He stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once.

Tommy Dodd breathed hard and deep as Clarence Cuffy vanished in the distance, yelling.

"What a merchant to plant on a chap at a public school!" he gasped. "They asked me to look after him, and take him under my wing, and keep him from harm—and now he asks me to play him in a House match when he doesn't know the difference between a cricket ball and a fancy dress ball."

Jimmy Silver wiped his eyes.

"Born idiot!" he agreed. "Sort of rung in the family, I suppose."

"You classical am!" said Tommy Dodd. "He's only a distant relation of mine—practically no relation—sort of eleventh cousin ten times removed, or something."

"But the resemblance——"

"The what?"

"The resemblance—intellectually, I mean——"

Jimmy Silver had no time to get any further. Tommy Dodd rushed on him, and smote him on the head; and the next minute a crowd of Rookwood fellows had an entertaining view of a Modern and Classical junior hammering one another under the beeches in great style.

CHAPTER 2.

THE END STUDY!

JIMMY SILVER came up to the end study to tea on the following day a little late. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were already there, and Jimmy hoped that they had tea ready.

Jimmy had been delayed in the Form-room writing lines—a result of his encounter with Tommy Dodd under the beeches. As he came along to the end study he heard sounds of merriment within. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were roaring, apparently in possession of some great joke.

"Go it, Cuffy!" Lovell was saying, as Jimmy Silver came up, and there was another roar.

"My dear Arthur——" came the gentle tones of Clarence Cuffy of the Modern Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver looked in. His three comrades were yelling with laughter, as was Mornington of the Fourth, who was there to tea. Cuffy stood in the middle of the study, with a rather bewildered expression on his kind face, evidently at a loss to account for the merriment.

"What's the merry joke?" asked Jimmy as he came in.

"Here it is," answered Raby. "The name of it is Cuffy! The funniest thing that ever was!"

"I have been waiting for you, my dear James," said Cuffy, beaming on his captain of the Fourth. "I cannot account for this extraordinary outbreak of risibility on the part of these dear fellows. There is nothing, I think, of a ludicrous nature in a cricket match——"

"There would be if you played, old bean," chuckled Mornington.

"A cricket match?" repeated Jimmy, puzzled.

"Yes. I have simply mentioned my intention of playing in the Classical side in the match on Wednesday."

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell and Raby and Newcome and Mornington. And Jimmy Silver joined in.

"I will explain how matters stand, my dear James," pursued Cuffy. "For some reason which I do not thoroughly comprehend, my relative, Thomas Dodd, declines to include me in the Modern team. I have argued with

him very seriously, as it is impossible for me to disappoint my dear parent. But he does not seem amenable to reason—indeed, he has actually ejected me from his study, and jabbed me most brutally with the pointed end of a cricket stump as I left."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Properly speaking, being a Modern fellow, I should play on the Modern side," continued Cuffy. "But the important point is, of course, that I should not disappoint my dear father, who has expressed a wish to see me play cricket. I have therefore decided to play in the Classical team."

"You have decided?" gasped Jimmy.

"Yes, my dear James. You see, it is the only thing to be done in the circumstances," said Cuffy.

"Oh, my hat! I rather think there's something else that can be done! Frinstance, if we found you in the Classical team we might drown you in the fountain——"

"Eh?"

"Or boll you in oil——"

"My dear——"

"Or bury you darkly at dead of night," continued Jimmy Silver. "If you're not insured, better keep clear."

"My dear James——"

"Sorry, old man, but there's nothing doing," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "You see, cricket is cricket, and you're an ass. If you don't mind my mentioning it, you're a champion ass. In fact, in the asthine line, you're the very outside edge. See?"

"I do not quite see, my dear James. Even if I were very stupid—say, as stupid as any fellow here——"

"Eh?"

"Even in so extreme a case," said Cuffy innocently, "I should still be able to play cricket, a game that requires no intelligence, so far as I am aware. Throwing a ball at sticks set upright in the ground may be amusing, but it cannot be considered intellectual. My opinion is that a game like noughts and crosses places a far more severe strain on the intellectual powers."

"Noughts and crosses!" sobbed Lovell. "Oh dear! Noughts—Ha, ha! And—oh, my hat—crosses!"

"So I trust, my dear James, that you will make it a point to play me in the match," said Cuffy seriously. "I should rather play as a Modern, but it is Hobson's choice with me, and I must play as a Classical, as dear Thomas will not put me in. I will do my best to win the match for you; but if it should be lost, it is not, fortunately, a matter of any great consequence."

"Go it!" gasped Mornington.

"Trickle on, Cuffy! This is better than the Sixth Form Greek Play on Speech Day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is it arranged, my dear James?" asked Cuffy.

Jimmy Silver wiped his eyes.

"No, old ass. Run away and play noughts and crosses. Good-bye!"

Clarence Cuffy looked at the captain of the Fourth sadly, more in sorrow than in anger.

"Do you really refuse, my dear James?" he asked.

"I do, really and truly, my dear idiot," assured Jimmy Silver. "Sit down and have tea with us, and don't say anything more about cricket."

Clarence Cuffy sighed, and sat down to tea. Evidently he thought it was rather unkind of dear James to refuse him a place in the Classical Junior eleven. As he had told Lovell & Co., his dear parent would have been very, very pleased, and it did not seem to occur to Cuffy that there was any other aspect to the matter.

The Pictorial Four were quite pleased to entertain Cuffy at tea. They would not have been found dead, so to speak, in the same cricket team with him. But they liked old Cuffy; everybody liked him more or less. Indeed it would have been rather ungrateful not to like Cuffy; he added a great deal to the gaiety of existence at Rookwood.

So they filled him with cakes and buns and tarts, and Clarence beamed mildly over the festive board.

"Nother cup of tea, old chap?" asked Newcome.

"Thank you, my dear Newcome. I think I may venture to partake of another cup of that very refreshing beverage," assented Clarence.

"Shove some more hot water in the pot," said Lovell.

Cuffy jumped up. He was always glad to make himself useful.

"Pray allow me, my dear Newcome!" he exclaimed.

The kettle was jammed in the study fire, singing. Cuffy picked it out.

He held it in his hand for about the billionth part of a second.

In that brief space of time he made the discovery that the handle was exceedingly hot.

Then he dropped it.

Crash!

A kettle half full of boiling water crashed on the fender and rolled across the hearthrug, spluttering and streaming.

There was a fiendish yell from Valentine Mornington.

"Yaroooooh!"

Morny jumped up, knocking his chair backwards, and danced on one leg, clasping the other with both hands. Apparently Morny had bagged some of the hot water with the leg he was nursing.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Dear me! Are you scalded, Mornington?" asked Cuffy, in deep concern.

Mornington howled.

"Yow-ow! Oh, no! I'm doing a song and dance, that's all. Ow! Wow!"

"My dear fellow, I am so glad you are not scalded. I feared, from your sudden movement, that you were."

"Let that kettle alone, you dangerous ass!" yelled Lovell, as Cuffy stooped to pick it up.

"My dear Arthur——"

"Let it alone!"

But Cuffy did not let it alone. He

caught the handle in his handkerchief, on account of the heat. Thus without burning his fingers. Kettle in hand, he turned to the tea-table. There was still some hot water left in the kettle, and Cuffy was ready to pour.

"Will you hold out the teapot, my dear Arthur——"

"Well, be careful, you ass!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell, holding out the teapot.

"Certainly, my dear Arthur. I should be exceedingly sorry to scald your fingers——"

"Yaroooooh!"

The stream of water from the kettle missed the teapot. It did not miss Arthur Edward Lovell's fingers.

Crash!

The teapot went to the floor and smashed into some dozens of fragments.

Lovell sucked his fingers for a moment, with a look on his face that a Prussian Hun might have envied. Then, without a word, he rushed at Cuffy.

Cuffy was beginning: "My dear Arthur!" but he had no time to continue. Dear Arthur was upon him like a whirlwind.

"Yoop! Oh! Ow! Whoop! Help!" roared Cuffy.

"Lovell!" shouted Jimmy.

Lovell did not heed remonstrances. His fingers were scalded. He forgot that Cuffy was a guest in the end study. Cuffy's head was in chancery, and Lovell was punching him frantically. The yells of the hapless Cuffy rang along the Fourth-Form passage.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-owooooop!"

"Stop him!" panted Raby.

"Leave him alone," said Mornington. "The born idiot wants it—he's asked for it—he's begged for it—let him have it!"

"Yaroooo! Yoooo! Help! Ow!"

"Lovell!" yelled Raby.

"Let me alone!" howled Lovell.

"I'm going to smash him! I'm going

to pulverize him! I'm going to spicificate him! I'm going to slaughter him! I'm going— Leggo, you silly owls, I tell you!"

Lovell's chums grasped him and dragged him off Cuffy.

"Let go!" roared Lovell, struggling.

"I've not finished yet."

"You have!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Stop it, you ass!"

"Hook it, Cuffy!" gasped Raby.

Lovell was in a state of fury, and even the three found it rather hard to hold him in. Cuffy retreated to the door in great astonishment and dismay.

"My dear Arthur—" he gasped.

"Hook it, you ass!" shouted Newcome.

"Certainly, my dear fellow, but I desire to assure Arthur that it was quite by accident—"

"Get out!" yelled Jimmy.

"That I scolded his fingers, and that I regret exceedingly the anguish I have inadvertently caused him—"

Lovell broke loose at that point, and rushed at Cuffy again. Even Clarence Cuffy realized that he had better go without expressing any further regrets, and he scudded away down the corridor. Lovell, unopposed, scudded in hot pursuit.

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver.

It was ten minutes later that Arthur Edward Lovell came back to the study, breathless. He had a satisfied look, which seemed to indicate that he had overtaken the fleeing Cuffy, and left him for dead somewhere between the School House and Mr. Manders' House.

CHAPTER 2.

A Matter of Difficulty

"NEVER!" snapped Tommy Dodd.

"I should jolly well think not!" said Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle together.

Apparently the three Tommies of the Modern Fourth were in full agreement.

Certainly they expressed the same opinion, and they expressed it emphatically.

But Tommy Dodd, with all his emphasis, had a worried look. It might almost have been opined that he expressed himself so forcibly in order to drive away a lingering uncertainty in his own mind.

"It's quite impossible," went on the captain of the Modern Fourth.

"Quite!" said Tommy Cook.

"Arrah and so it is intirely," said Tommy Doyle; "and sure only a born gosssoon would have thought of such a thing, and by the same token I'll kick Cuffy again next time I see him."

"It can't be did, and that's an end," said Tommy Dodd.

"That's an end," agreed Cook.

"All very well to say that it's an end," went on Tommy Dodd, rather unreasonably. "But it happens that old Mr. Cuffy is an old friend of my father's, and I don't want to displease him if I can help it. He's been awfully good to me in one way or another. He's a bit of an ass, of course, but he gave me a canoe last summer."

"Good man," said Cook. "But you can't help it—and that's that!"

"If it were only that ass Cuffy himself we could kick him out of gates this afternoon," said Tommy Dodd moodily. The discussion was taking place in the recess after second lesson on Wednesday morning. "I like old Cuffy, with all his funny ways, and I don't mind kicking him hard at times, trying to kick a little sense into him. But I can't kick his father, I suppose."

"Nunno!" agreed Cook.

"I have had a letter from him, and he takes it for granted that Cuffy is playing in the match this afternoon, and tells me how pleased he is to see Clarence coming out in this way. He says he is sure that it is due to my kind care of him."

"Dear old gent!" murmured Doyle.

"It's beastly awkward," went on Tommy Dodd, in deep worry and dis-

dress. "Old Mr. Cuffy is an am, of course, and knows as much about cricket as the man in the moon. He's really backed up Cuffy in keeping out of games, thinking the dear chap is delicate. He's about as delicate as a cart-horse, I think. Now he seems no end backed at the idea of Cuffy playing for his House. He thinks I've taken the ass in hand, and trained the chump, and taught the fathead, and made a cricketer of the burbling idiot, and he thanks me in a very nice way for what I've done—I mean for what I haven't done and couldn't do. It's all that fat-head Cuffy, of course; he took it for granted that I should play him if he asked me, and told his father he was playing."

"Let's kick him again," said Doyle.

Tommy Dodd grunted impatiently. There was solace in a way, in kicking Clarence Cuffy; also, it was for Cuffy's good. But the present pressing problem could not be solved by the exercise of boot-leather on the person of Cuffy.

"The born burbler!" went on Tommy Dodd. "He's hurt because I can't put him in the team. He says that if I wanted to play naughts and crosses with him any time, even if it was inconvenient, he would agree at once."

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

"And old Mr. Cuffy will be here this afternoon!" growled Tommy Dodd. "He's lunching with the Head, and after that he's going to roll down to Little Side and see us play the Classics. How am I going to tell him that Cuffy isn't playing? I can't explain to a man that his son is such a born idiot that he ought really to be put in a home for incurables, can I?"

"Faith, and it wouldn't be polite."

"I can't knock Cuffy on the head," pursued Tommy Dodd gloomily. "He's not likely to fall down and break his leg, or anything of that kind, just to please me. In fact, if he fell down he would break somebody else's leg, if he broke anything. That's Cuffy."

Tommy Dodd looked very glum.

The other two Tommies exchanged rather alarmed glances.

They could quite easily read their captain's inner thoughts, and they knew that he was shrinking from offending the old gentleman who was coming to Rookwood School that afternoon. That was all very well; but cricket was cricket, and the Moderns wanted to beat the Classics. Cook and Doyle were loyal chums, and they felt for Dodd in his difficulty, but they were prepared to lynch him if he threw away a House match by playing a dud in the team.

"You can't play him," said Cook curtly.

"What am I to say to Mr. Cuffy?"

"Blessed if I know! Tell him that cricket is too rough a game for dear Clarence, and that he's likely to get damaged in tackling the goalkeeper," suggested Cook sarcastically.

"Oh, don't be an ass! I must tell him something."

"Tell him we're keeping Cuffy in reserve for a great hop-scootch match," went on Cook, still sarcastic.

"Fathead! Of course I can't play him, but—"

"My dear Thomas!"

Clarence Cuffy ambled up and joined the three Tommies with a cheery smile. Three separate and distinct glances were fixed on the happy Clarence.

"I trust, my dear Thomas, that you have now reconsidered your somewhat disconcerting determination," said Cuffy.

"Hark at him!" groaned Tommy Dodd. "A fellow who talks like that thinks he can play cricket!"

"My dear Thomas, I do not claim to be so expert at cricks, as at naughts and crosses," said Cuffy gently. "At the latter game I think I may say, without unbecoming boastfulness, that I can hold my own. In the cricket-match I can only say that I will do my best. No fellow can do more. Does it not occur to you, my dear Thomas, that you are attaching an undue im-

portance to what is, after all, merely a somewhat frivolous form of open-air exercise?"

Tommy Dodd did not answer that question. Silently he took Clarence Cuffy by the collar, and banged his head against the wall.

Then he walked away, leaving Cuffy rubbing his head, and blinking after him sorrowfully.

"He, he, he!"

Tubby Muffin of the Classical Fourth had seen a witness of that incident, and it seemed to entertain Tubby.

Cuffy glared at him.

"My dear Muffin," he said mildly, "there is no occasion for laughter. My inconsiderate relative has actually hurt my head by bringing it in sudden and violent contact with the wall. Ow!"

"What do you let him bang your silly head for?" asked Tubby.

"I trust, my dear Muffin, that Thomas' conscience will reproach him, and cause him to regret his hasty and thoughtless action."

"He, he, he! I'll give you another bang," grinned Tubby.

"What? Oh!"

Tubby Muffin grasped Cuffy's collar as Tommy Dodd had done, and again Cuffy's innocent head smote the wall. Cuffy roared, and Tubby Muffin chuckled. It was seldom that the fat little Tubby was able to "rag" anybody; he was generally rather the raggee than the ragger, so to speak. But the harmless and inoffensive Cuffy seemed quite a safe victim.

"My dear Muffin!" gasped Cuffy, in painful surprise.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Tubby.

Bang!

For the third time Cuffy's head knocked on the wall, and Tubby roared with laughter. This was quite entertaining.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Cuffy. "My dear Muffin, I can excuse the hasty and inconsiderate action of my dear relative Thomas, as he seems to be in

a state of annoyance for some reason unknown to me. But it appears to me, Muffin, that your conduct is founded upon a foolish and far from kind-hearted desire to cause physical suffering, and I feel that it is my duty to check you."

"He, he, he—— Yaroooop!" roared Tubby Muffin, as Clarence smote him unexpectedly on his fat little nose.

Bump!

Tubby Muffin sat down.

"I am sorry, my dear Muffin," said Clarence gently, "but in the circumstances I feel bound to check this reprehensible propensity on your part. I shall now kick you——"

"Yooop!"

"And I trust, my dear Muffin——"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Tubby Muffin fled without waiting for any more.

CHAPTER 4.

Tommy Dodd Takes the Plunge!

"THAT'S the jolly old merchant!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell.

Several fellows glanced round at Mr. Cuffy.

He was quite a nice-looking old gentleman. He had a round, ruddy, plump face, and white hair and whiskers, and gold-rimmed glasses, and an expression of unbounded benevolence. He looked the kind of man that any fellow would have been glad to have for an uncle at Christmas or on a birthday. He had a tipping look—an unmistakably tipping look. Not perhaps the kind of relative that a fellow would be proud to show round Rookwood; nevertheless, particularly useful in times of financial scarcity.

"That Cuffy's father?" remarked Mornington. "Looks as if he might be!"

"Nice old gent," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm glad he's not going to ask me to play Cuffy. I really shouldn't like

to say no to a dear old merchant like that."

Mr. Cuffy glanced towards the juniors, and they capped him respectfully. His kind eyes beamed at them benevolently over his gold-rimmed glasses. The juniors were in flannels, and heading for Little Side, and Mr. Cuffy seemed to be bound in the same direction. Tommy Dodd was not to be seen.

"Mr. Cuffy, I think, sir?" said Mornington.

"Just so," said Mr. Cuffy. "You are friends of my dear son, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! We all know Cuffy, sir," said Mornington. "A very popular fellow in the school, sir."

Mr. Cuffy beamed.

"I am truly glad to hear you say so!" he exclaimed. "Of course, I am sure that dear Clarence would be liked everywhere. I am sure that few boys have such kind and gentle manners."

"None at all at Rookwood, sir," said Morny. "Cuffy is the only one of his kind here."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Cuffy.

Jimmy Silver gave the dandy of the Fourth a warning glance. It was fairly obvious that Cuffy's innocence was inherited from his father; the old gentleman was as innocent and unsuspecting as his hopeful son. Jimmy Silver had a strong objection to the old gentleman's leg being pulled. But Mornington's view on any subject seldom coincided with Jimmy Silver's.

"We're expectin' great things of Cuffy this afternoon, sir," went on Mornington. "He's comin' out in the cricket. Of course, you've been a cricketer, sir?"

"I am afraid that in my youth I somewhat neglected such games," said Mr. Cuffy. "Neither do I wish Clarence to bestow an undue portion of his time on mere games. Nevertheless, I am glad to see him figure occasionally in such pursuits—time must not be wholly given to study. Mens

salis in corpore sano, what, what?"

"That's it, sir," said Mornington gravely. "But Cuffy has a natural gift for games. He's the Rookwood champion at bopecock."

"Is he really?" asked Mr. Cuffy, looking very pleased.

"And he has very few equals at noughts and crosses," went on Mornington.

"Dear me!"

"At blind man's buff there are few in the Sixth who are anywhere near his form," added Mornington.

Lovell seemed to be suffocating, and Raby and Newcome turned their faces away. Jimmy Silver kept his countenance as serious as he could.

"But you should see him at football," went on Mornington. "You know the game thoroughly, of course, sir?"

"No; I cannot say that I know the game at all well," said Mr. Cuffy.

"Then Cuffy's play would be an eye-opener to you, sir—an education in itself," said Mornington. "Last football match he played in he potted the red the minute the pistol was fired."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Cuffy.

Lovell made a gurgling sound.

"You should have seen him bowling the goalkeeper," went on Morny, with deep gravity. "After giving a wicket in basik, he trumped the ace and—"

"Eh?"

"And cannoned off the cushion," said Mornington. "That did it, of course. There was nothing left for the other side to do but to draw stumps and walk their chalks."

"Shurrup, you ass!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Cuffy looked a little bewildered by that description of a football match, as well he might.

"Here's Dodd!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd came up. Jimmy Silver & Co. walked on, and left Mr. Cuffy to him.

Tommy was looking, and feeling, extremely uncomfortable.

"Well, where is Clarence?" asked Mr. Cuffy cheerily. "Changing for the match—what, what?"

"H'm!"

"I suppose it is nearly time for the kick-off?" said Mr. Cuffy, glancing at his watch.

"The kick-off!" murmured Tommy Dodd. Mr. Cuffy was apparently as well "up" in games as his son Clarence.

"Yes. Yes. I am quite anxious to see Clarence playing for his School," said Mr. Cuffy.

"The House!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "It's a House match."

"Of course, said Mr. Cuffy, beaming. "I trust that Clarence is in great form, Thomas. I have just heard from that very nice boy about his skill at football."

"Have you?" gasped Tommy.

"Yes. There seems to be much more in that game than there was when I was a boy. I could scarcely follow some of the expressions the lad used. The game has developed—what, what? I hope that Clarence will show equal form at cricket. Indeed, I should not have come to Hookwood to-day but for the anticipated pleasure of seeing him play. Much credit is due to you, Thomas."

"Oh!"

"I know that you have done everything you can for Clarence," said Mr. Cuffy, beaming. "I am sure he owes it all to you, Thomas. I am very grateful."

"H'm! I——"

"But I am delaying you," said Mr. Cuffy cheerily. "Don't let me delay you, Thomas."

"I—I——"

"Is Clarence on the field?"

"Nunno. He—he——"

"Go and tell him, Thomas; he must not keep the game waiting," said Mr. Cuffy. "Procrastination is the thief of

time. Clarence must not procrastinate."

"B-b-b-but——"

"Hurry him up, my dear boy."

Mr. Cuffy waved a plump hand to Thomas Dodd, and trotted on towards the cricket-ground. Tommy Dodd stood and stared after him.

He was in the lowest of spirits.

He had intended to tell Mr. Cuffy that it was all a mistake, and that Clarence was not figuring that day in the Modern junior team. But he hadn't told him.

Tommy Dodd realized that he hadn't the heart to tell him. He simply couldn't. Disappoint that chubby old gentleman, who never would have understood.

But to play Cuffy——

Tommy Dodd shuddered at the thought.

All along he felt that it would come to this, that when the crisis came his courage would fail him. And it had failed.

Tommy Dodd drove his hands deep into his pockets, and strode away towards Mr. Manders' House.

He was going to play Cuffy!

The die was cast!

CHAPTER 2.

Cuffy, the Cricketer.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. blinked as Clarence Cuffy of the Modern

Fourth came on Little Side in spotless white, with a bat under his arm.

The Modern cricketers did more than blink. They positively glared.

Cook rushed up to Tommy Dodd and caught him by the arm.

"Dodd, you see——"

"Cheese it!" growled Tommy.

"You're not playing that dunnay?"

"Yes."

"Arrah, and it's mad ye are!" howled Tommy Dowie. "You want to make the Classics a present of a wicket!"

"We'll sack you!" hissed Cook. "We'll boot you out of the captaincy. Dodd! We'll—we'll lynch you—"

"Kick the dummy off the field!" said Towle.

"Good egg!"

Tommy Dodd's eyes gleamed. He had yielded under stress of circumstances, and the stress of circumstances had not improved his temper.

"Shut up, the lot of you!" he growled. "If you're not satisfied, I'll resign after the match. At present I'm captain, and you can jolly well shut up, see?"

"We'll jolly well make you resign!" howled Towle.

"My dear friends——" murmured Clarence Cuffy, quite distressed. "My dear, dear fellows——"

"Oh, you dry up!" grunted Tommy Dodd.

"Dear Thomas——"

"What larks!" grinned Lovell to the Classical cricketers. "Old Dodd's must be getting soft! He's actually playing that born idiot. I fancy they'll scalp him for this!"

"Serve him right if they do, I think," said Putty of the Fourth. "It will be a walk-over for us."

"Well, they won't let him bowl, of course," said Jimmy. "and they won't let him get in the way in the field. It's like playing a man short, or losing a wicket for a duck's egg. Dodd must be an ass to risk it. But, after all, we were going to beat them, anyhow!"

"Four, heart!" said the Classics. They were all agreed on that, at least.

Mr. Cuffy was accommodated with a comfortable chair before the pavilion, whence he could watch all the wonderful performances of his hopeful son. He was too deeply interested in Clarence to note the deep gloom in the face of Tommy Dodd, or the intense irritation of the rest of the Modern team.

Tommy Dodd won the toss, and elected to bat. He told his men tersely and almost savagely that he expected

them to play up and beat the Classic side.

"We're carrying a passenger," said Tommy Dodd. "That's all the more reason why we should play up our hardest."

"What are we carrying a thumping passenger for?" snorted Towle.

"You've left out young Lacy to make room for Cuffy," said Tommy Cook. "Call that cricket?"

"I asked Lacy," said Dodd, colouring. "He agreed——"

"Do you think that Cuffy is anything like his form? He's not much of a cricketer, but isn't he worth a bagful of Cuffies?"

"Yes, ass! But it's settled now!"

"And by the same token we're settled, too!" growled Tommy Doyle.

Tommy Dodd drew a deep breath.

"If we lose this match I shall resign the captaincy!" he said curtly. "Now pile in and don't let's have any more jaw. I'm fed-up."

And the Modern innings started with Cook and Tommy Doyle at the wickets.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle did their best, and their best was very good. They were exasperated with their chum, but they wanted to win; and with Cuffy on their backs, so to speak, no effort could be spared to pull the game out of the fire. And they did not want their chum to carry out his threat of resigning. With all his faults they loved him still, as it were.

The Classics went into the field, and Jimmy Silver bowled the first over. But the wickets stood through it, and there were runs. Springington bagged Cook's wicket in the second over, and Canny put Dodd to the rest soon afterwards. Towle was caught in the field by Putty.

Then Tommy Dodd, with a grim brow, came in to bat. It was a single innings game, and so all depended on the bowling. Tommy Dodd, fortunately, was in great form, and he was nerved to do his very best by the knowledge of the great handicap he had brought on his team by playing Cuffy.

He gave the Classical field plenty of leather-hunting, with Wadsley at the other end. The Modern fellows gathered round the field looked brighter as the runs piled up. Batsman after batsman came and went, and Tommy Dodd was still going strong.

"Bedad, and he's a bruth of a boy, though a silly owl to play that dummyn Cuffy!" said Tommy Doyle.

"Last man in!"

"That ass, Cuffy!"

Cuffy was last on the list. He picked up his bat with a cheery smile, and received an encouraging smile from Mr. Cuffy as he left the pavilion.

"Play up, Clarence, my boy!"

"Yes, my dear father," said Cuffy. "I shall certainly do my very best, and I hope to score a considerable number of runs. It will be a great pleasure to me to show you my quality as a cricketer, especially as I have devoted no great amount of time to the study of the game."

"Are you going in, Cuffy?" roared Tommy Cook.

"Certainly, my dear Cook. I was merely pausing to address a few words to my father in regard to—"

"Get a move on, ass!"

Tommy Cook made a hostile advance upon Cuffy, and that youth heaved into the field and went to his wicket. He passed Tommy Dodd on the way, and Tommy signed to him.

"Cuffy, old man—"

"Yes, my dear Thomas."

"We're sixty!" said Tommy Dodd.

"I do not quite understand you, Thomas. I am only fifteen," said Cuffy, in surprise, "and you, I think, are only a month or two older."

"The score is sixty runs, you crass ass," said Tommy Dodd, breathing hard. "That's the score, father!"

"Far be it from me to contradict you, Thomas, on matters of arithmetical enumeration, with which I dare say you are quite well acquainted," said Cuffy meekly. "But I should have supposed that a score was twenty runs. In

other matters, not appertaining to cricket, a score certainly is twenty. But perhaps in cricket the enumeration follows some different principle."

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Tommy Dodd. "Shut up and listen, ass! We've made sixty runs, and I want to make some more. Keep your wicket up, and don't play the goat. Don't try to make runs—you can't! Keep your wicket up while I make the runs. See?"

"I thought that taking runs was an inseparable part of the game, Thomas, but I will carry out your instructions!"

"Go it, then!"

Clarence Cuffy trotted to his wicket. Tommy Dodd, who had the bowling, nourished a faint hope. Even an ass like Cuffy ought to be able to keep his wicket up for a few overs, while Tommy did some more of his brilliant scoring. If Cuffy stone-walled steadily and patiently, that was all that was wanted.

The ball came down from Mornington, and Tommy sent it through the slips. Then he ran.

Cuffy didn't.

Dear Thomas had told him not to take runs; and Cuffy stood like a statue at his wicket. He regarded Tommy Dodd, as that youth came racing up the pitch, with a calm and interested eye. There was a roar round the field.

"Run, you ass!"

"You potty piffler, why didn't you shift?"

"Get a move on, Cuffy!"

But Cuffy did not get a move on. He had been told not to take runs, and he wasn't taking any. He stood immovable. Tommy Dodd was within a few yards of him, red with fury. But Tommy realised that he would never make Cuffy understand in time, and he whirled round and raced back to his wicket.

Crash!

His bat was a yard off the crease when the ball came in. The wicket went to pieces, and there was a groan

from the Moderns. Tommy Dodd stared at his wrecked wicket, and then he looked round at Cuffy. But he did not speak. It was useless to speak. There were no words in any dictionary, in any language, that could have done justice to the feelings of Thomas Dodd.

CHAPTER 6.

"Caught, Cuffy!"

"SIXTY to beat," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "We could do it on our heads!"

Arthur Edward Lovell went in with Mornington to open the Classical innings. Tommy Dodd led his merry men into the field. Tommy Dodd's face, as a rule, was merry and bright on the playing-fields. Now it was neither merry nor bright; it was thunderous. By this time Tommy had deeply repented him that he had allowed good-nature and a kind consideration for an elderly gentleman to induce him to put the impossible Cuffy in the team. Repentance came too late, of course—the harm was done. Even the prospects of giving Cuffy a study licking after the match was only a slight consolation.

"Where do I field, my dear Thomas?" asked Cuffy mildly, as the Modern skipper placed his men.

"Anywhere you like, so long as you keep out of the way!" growled Tommy Dodd.

"But, my dear Thomas——"

"Hook it!" howled Tommy Dodd so ferociously that Clarence Cuffy hooked it without another syllable.

His face was a little saddened as he faded away. His belief had always been that cricket, as a game, was much inferior to noughts and crosses. Now he could not help seeing that it had an effect on the temper, which noughts and crosses never had. His dear relative, Thomas, was quite cross, although Cuffy had done his very, very best to carry out all dear Thomas' instructions.

It was very sad, and it made Cuffy sigh. He felt that he had much better not play in any more cricket matches. On that point, at least, his dear relative was in full agreement with him.

The Classical innings opened well. But there were good bowlers on the Modern side, and the field was very good—with one exception. Cuffy was favoured with as much attention as the Classics could give him. But a catch from Towle in the slips put Arthur Edward Lovell out of action, and later on Tommy Dodd clean bowled Mornington, and after him Enroll, and after him, Raby, in a single over, amid loud and ringing cheers from the Modern spectators.

Matters were looking up for the Modern side, and Tommy Dodd allowed himself to hope, and no longer yearned to kick Clarence Cuffy.

When the Classics were seven down for thirty runs the spirits of the Moderns rose high. From several quarters of the field troops of Classics called out to Tommy Dodd to put on Cuffy—to let Cuffy bowl. But Tommy was not likely to act on that advice. In spite of the handicap of Cuffy the Moderns were pulling ahead—till Jimmy Silver came to the wickets.

Then the runs piled up again, Jimmy adding twenty-four of his own before he was bowled by Cook. Tommy Dodd's spirits, which had risen high, were reduced almost to zero again, and again he began to think of kicking Cuffy.

"Last man in!" came the word at last.

Oswald was at the wickets, and Newcome came in to join him. Newcome had no bowling, and he was a good and sound batsman. The Classical score was at fifty-eight, and in the opinion of the Classics, all was over bar shouting.

Tommy Dodd went on to bowl, with a grim expression on his face. He sent down a careful ball, which Newcome nicked away for a single. The batsmen ran and made good before the ball

came in, and the Classical fellows gave a cheer.

"One to tie, two to win!" Arthur Edward Lovell remarked to Jimmy Silver. "Oswald is good for a dozen. He's got the batting now!"

Jimmy nodded.

The ball was fielded and tossed back to Tommy Dodd. Tommy sent it down, and Oswald dealt with it easily enough. The ball rose from the willow and sailed away, and the white figures of the batsmen ran.

"Don't!" grunted Tommy Doyle.

All eyes followed the flight of the ball. Then there was a yell.

"Cuffy!"

"Cuffy!" babbled Tommy Dodd.

It was amazing! It was incredible! During the innings Clarence Cuffy had grabbed after the ball several times, and had been shoved out of the way in the most unceremonious manner by the nearest fieldman. Now he grabbed at it again. True, it was not a difficult catch—for any fellow but Cuffy—and the flight of the ball had given even Cuffy a chance. He grabbed at it—and he held it! He did not even let it slip through his fingers as if his fingers were buttered. He held it—in his hand! He held it high and hard!

"Caught!"

"Caught, Cuffy!"

"Oh, Great Scott!"

"Caught!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Caught, Cuffy! Oh, my hat! Oh, my only Aunt Sempronia! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bravo!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "Ha, ha, ha! Bravo!"

Oswald almost fell down as he saw what had happened. The Modern crowd yelled with merriment and relief. Cuffy's comrades surrounded him, laughing and cheering. Cuffy blinked at them in amazement.

"Have I done right, my dear Thomas?" he asked.

"Ha, ha! Yes, right as rain!" gurgled Tommy Dodd. "What on earth made you catch it, Cuffy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a giddy miracle!" gasped Tommy Cook, slumping Clarence on the back. "Oh, my hat!"

"Oh!" spluttered Clarence.

"Cuffy won the match!" gasped Tommy Doyle. "But if ye ever play him again, Tommy Dodd, we'll scalp ye!"

"Play him again!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "No fear! Miracles don't happen twice in the same place!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clarence Cuffy was marched off the field in the midst of a hilarious crowd of Moderns, back to where Mr. Cuffy was sitting. Mr. Cuffy beamed on Clarence and his comrades.

"Cuffy's won the game for us, sir!" grinned Tommy Dodd. "No end of a catch, sir!"

"I am truly glad and delighted," said Mr. Cuffy. "I was sure that he would cover himself with credit. I congratulate you, Clarence."

Everybody congratulated Clarence. And there was no doubt that Clarence was a fellow to be congratulated—he had had a narrow escape. For had the game been lost there was no doubt that Clarence's life would scarcely have been safe on the Modern side at Rookwood afterwards.

"My dear Thomas," said Clarence a few days later, "I have been considering very seriously whether to become a regular member of your eleven for the season."

"Oh, have you?" stammered Tommy Dodd.

"Yes, my dear Thomas. I have given the matter deep reflection, and have decided to stick to the quiet and sedate game of——"

"Noughts and crosses!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Precisely, my dear Thomas."

Tommy Dodd laid a kind hand on Cuffy's shoulder.

"Stick to 'em, old chap!" he said.

"We'll worry along, somehow, with the cricket on our own. Stick to noughts and crosses, old man."

And Cuffy did.

CHAPTER 3.

In Style!

"MONGMORANGCY!"

"Er?"

"What!"

"Mongmorangcy!" repeated Tubby Muffin loftily.

"Is that a name?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell doubtfully.

"It's the new fellow's name."

"Where on earth did he pick it up, then?" said Lovell. "Jever hear a name like that before, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"I dare say Tubby means Montmorency," he answered. "Tubby's giving it the real French pronunciation, in Muffin-French."

"Ha, ha, ha,!"

"His name's Mongmorangcy!" insisted Tubby Muffin. "Cecil Cuthbert Mongmorangcy. Sounds nobby, don't it?"

"Gorgeous!" yawned Jimmy Silver.

"He's no end rich," continued Tubby Muffin impressively. "Belongs to a terrific big family, I believe! I wonder what study he will be put into? There's room for him in mine, if Jones or Higgs or Putty Grace would clear out. I think they might, in the circumstances."

There was a chuckle from Jimmy Silver & Co.

Evidently Tubby Muffin was prepared to greet the new junior with the magnificent name in the most hospitable manner. Tubby was not distinguished for generous hospitality, as a rule. Possibly the fact that Cecil Cuthbert was "no end rich" had something to do with it. A fellow who was no end rich was an acquisition in any study—especially Tubby's.

"I don't care what study he's put in,

so long as it's not the end study!" remarked Lovell. "No room for new guys in our quarters!"

"No fear!" assented Raby and Newcome in a breath.

"Oh, he wouldn't want to come into the end study!" said Tubby Muffin, with a shake of the head. "He wouldn't care for it!"

"How the thump do you know he wouldn't?" demanded Raby, rather warmly.

The Pistical Four did not want newcomers in the end study, certainly. But it would have been an honour to anybody to be admitted to that famous apartment. There was only one opinion on that point—in the end study!

"Well, you see, he's an awfully aristocratic chap," explained Tubby Muffin. "He's bound to be a bit particular as to whom he associates with. Don't you fellows think so?"

Four separate and distinct glares were fixed on Reginald Muffin. But Tubby, heedless of the glares, rattled on happily.

"He won't want to come into your study. I should think he'd look over the Fourth, and pick out the dearest fellows to dig with. Only there's such a crowd in my study already——"

"You fat chump!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, in measured tones.

"It's very likely," continued Tubby Muffin, still unheeding, "that he's a relation of mine. The Muffins intermarried with the Montmorencies at one time——"

"Ha, ha, ha,!"

"I don't see anything to crackle at, you fellows! I tell you the Muffins are closely connected with the——"

"Crumpets?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"No, you ass—with the Montmorencies!" yelled Tubby. "I think very likely the chap's my relative—a sort of second cousin twice removed, or something like that. There's Montmorency blood in me, I can tell you——"

"More Muffin fat than Montmorency blood!" said Lovell.

"Yah!" was Tubby's retort.

And the fat Classical rolled away, to seek more sympathetic hearers than the Physical Four.

Jimmy Silver & Co., as a matter of fact, were only very faintly interested in the new boy, who was to arrive at Rookwood that day.

New boys were not of much importance in the eyes of such important youths as the chiefs of the Classical Fourth.

All they cared about was that the new kid should not be "shoved" into their study, where there were four already—or practically five, counting Lovell's feet, as Raby had once remarked.

And the Co. were not even remotely impressed by the fact that the new fellow was named Montmorency, and that he was no end rich.

Being a little more particular in money matters than Tubby Muffin, they had no designs upon the rich youth's cash, and so the fact that he was wealthy made no difference to them at all.

They had been talking cricket when Tubby Muffin joined them to give them the latest news, and they continued to talk cricket after Muffin had rolled away. And in one minute they had forgotten both Tubby Muffin and Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency. The match with St. Jim's, which was coming along shortly, was of more importance than all the Montmorencies in the universe. Valentine Mornington strolled up.

"You fellows heard?" he asked.

"Anything about the St. Jim's team?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"No; about the new fellow——"

"Oh, bless the new fellow!" said Jimmy. "We've had him from Tubby. Are you keen on Montmorencies, Morny?"

Morny laughed.

"Not in Tubby's way," he answered.

"But I'm rather interested in the new fellow, all the same. If he lives up to his name he ought to be pretty decent."

Jimmy Silver smiled slightly. Mornington was not rich, but he was connected with a third of the peerage, and he attached more importance to such distinctions than most of the Rookwood fellows.

"What's in a name?" said Jimmy. "Doesn't Shakespeare say—what does he say, now? We had it in English Classics the other day——"

"That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet!" said Newcome.

"That's it!" said Jimmy.

"Bother Shakespeare!" answered Mornington. "He's a pretty good poet, but he was a fellow of no family, after all."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Well," said Lovell sarcastically, "you can take giddy Montmorency to your waistcoat and kiss him on his baby brow, if you like, Morny, but we are not going to enthuse over him! I shall punch his nose if he turns it up, I know that!"

"Easy does it!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "He hasn't turned up yet, Lovell."

"Well, if he does——" said Lovell.

"Ass!" You don't want to be down on a fellow before you've seen him!" remonstrated Jimmy Silver.

"But if——" persisted Lovell.

"Hallo, there's a whackin' car!" exclaimed Mornington. "I shouldn't wonder if that's the Montmorency bird."

"Then he's coming in style!" said Jimmy Silver.

The juniors looked at the big, handsome Rolls-Royce with some interest. It swept over the drive to the Head's house, steered by a chauffeur in livery. In the car sat two persons—a fat, middle-aged person, who looked like a solicitor, and a boy of about fifteen. It was upon the latter that the juniors fixed their eyes. His well-cut, rather handsome face was quite impassive in expression; he looked neither to the right nor to the left as the car swung on to the house.

"So that's the merchant!" said Raby. Tubby Muffin came puffing by.

"He's come!" he gasped.

And Tubby rushed on towards the house, to get a closer view of the new junior when he alighted.

"Looks decent!" commented Montmorency.

"Looks a bit of a snob, I think," said Lovell.

Arthur Edward seemed to have taken a little prejudice against the new junior already.

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "I dare say he's all right. Anyhow, he won't worry us."

The car stopped and the occupants alighted. A dozen fellows in the quad had their eyes on the new junior.

He was rather tall for his age, slim in build, and exceedingly well-dressed.

With a leisurely movement, he extracted a gold-rimmed monocle from his waistcoat pocket, fixed it in his eye, and turned it, with a careless scrutiny, upon the fellows in the quad. His handsome face still remained impassive.

The elderly gentleman spoke to him in a low voice, and the two disappeared together into the house.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave a grunt.

"Looking us up and down," he said.

"Let him."

"What the thump does he want a glass eye for, like that howling ass Saybe of the Shell?"

Jimmy smiled.

"You can get an eyeglass for five bob," he said. "If he cares to spend his five bob that way, why shouldn't he?"

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

Evidently Lovell of the Fourth had not taken a liking to Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency.

CHAPTER 4.

Class!

CECIL CUTHBERT MONTMORENCY was presented to the Fourth Form that afternoon. The Head brought him into the Form-room,

and introduced him to Mr. Dalton, the Form-master. It seemed to the suspicious eyes of some of the juniors that the Head—even the august Head—was a little more condescending and affable to the new boy than he was accustomed to being to new boys. Apparently the Montmorency blood, or the Montmorency wealth, had made some impression on even the Head of Rookwood.

If that was so, Mr. Dalton did not share the Head's impression. His manner to the new junior was kind, as it was to all, but there was nothing more. Mr. Dalton treated Montmorency exactly as if he had been named Huggins or Higgs. When the Head had gone, and Montmorency took his seat with the Fourth, most of the juniors turned their heads to scan him. He excited more interest than new boys usually did.

The general attention would have discomposed most new boys. New "kids" were generally shy, and sometimes sheepish, much given to blushing when spoken to.

But there was nothing of that kind about Cecil Cuthbert.

He met the curious glances of the juniors with perfect indifference, evidently not in the least discomposed thereby.

Some of the juniors grinned when he placed the gold-rimmed monocle in his eye, to glance round the Form-room.

Smythe of the Shell, who was given to dandyism, sported a monocle, but only out of the Form-room. He would not have ventured to "stick it in" in class under the observation of Mr. Mooney.

Master Montmorency evidently did not recognise such limitations.

Mr. Dalton's eye dwelt on him a moment.

"Montmorency?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Is your sight defective?"

"No, sir."

"Then kindly remove that glass from your eye."

Montmorency stared at him.

"I'm accustomed to wear a monocle, sir," he answered.

"A foolish custom, Montmorency, if your sight does not need assistance," said Mr. Dalton. "You will not be allowed to use it in the Form-room. Put it away at once!"

"Really, sir—"

"I am not accustomed to repelling my orders, Montmorency!" said Mr. Dalton, his brow darkening.

"Oh, very well, sir!"

Montmorency gave a slight shrug of his graceful shoulders, and he removed the eyeglass. The shrug would not have passed unnoticed but for the fact that Montmorency was new to Hookwood. But Mr. Dalton forbore to take note of it; he did not wish to be severe with a new boy.

A little to the surprise of the Fourth, Cecil Cuthbert showed himself to be well up in the Form work. In that respect, at least, he was no fool, though most of the Fourth had decided that he was in other respects.

After lessons, Jimmy Silver & Co. had business on the cricket-field, and Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency passed out of their horizon. But they were reminded of his existence during cricket practice.

"There's that swankin' ass!" grunted Lovell suddenly.

Jimmy, who was watching Mornington bowl to Rawson, did not heed.

"Look at him!" grunted Lovell. "He's made some friends already—just the sort he would make, too!"

Jimmy Silver glanced round rather impatiently.

Montmorency had walked on to the field, with Townsend and Topham of the Fourth on either side of him. Evidently Towny and Topy, the dandies of the Fourth, had recognised a kindred new junior. Behind the elegant three Tubby Muffin was rolling, with an eager and dissatisfied look—left out, apparently, but anxious to be gathered in, as it were.

Jimmy Silver smiled as he glanced at them.

"Montmorency doesn't seem to recog-

nise Tubby as a relation," he remarked.

"Ha, ha! No."

"Well done, Rawson!"

Rawson had knocked away the ball, and all Jimmy's attention was given to the cricket again. Mornington, however, was bestowing some attention on the new junior, seemingly interested in him. Newcome threw in the ball, and Morny let it drop.

"Look out, Morny!" called out Jimmy Silver. "You're bowling, you know."

"Oh, all right," said Morny.

And he took the ball and bowled to Tom Rawson again.

Montmorency, Townsend, and Topham strolled along the field, Towny and Topy evidently pointing things out to their new chum. Behind them rolled Tubby Muffin, baffled, but determined not to be shaken off. Cecil Cuthbert had his eyeglass in his eye now, and on some of the juniors that eyeglass had a rather irritating effect. There was nothing exactly to be complained of in the new fellow's manner, but undoubtedly he had a sort of lofty way about him, as if, as Lovell remarked disgustedly, he did not consider the earth quite good enough for him to tread on.

Even a Montmorency was, after all, only a mortal, and there was no need for Cecil Cuthbert to elevate his nose, though it was a very well-cut and handsome nose.

"I shall be punching that chap before long!" Lovell confided to Jimmy Silver.

"What rot!" answered Jimmy.

"I've got a feeling that I shall," said Lovell with conviction. "He's asking for it his first day here!"

"Don't punch him hard, then," said Baby, laughing. "He looks as if he would break, if you did."

"Let him alone!" said Jimmy Silver severely. "I'm surprised at you, Lovell!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Shocked!" said Jimmy. "The kid's done nothing, except play the goat, and he doesn't know the ropes yet. He will

get his nonsense knocked out of him in a few days at Rookwood."

"I'll help to knock it out!" said Arthur Edward.

"Oh, bow-wow!" said Jimmy. "You're not going to do anything of the kind. What are you looking for, trouble?"

"It won't be any trouble to pinch his silly nose," said Lovell; "it will be a pleasure."

"Br-r-r-r!" said Jimmy, and he let the subject drop.

Arthur Edward was not to be reasoned with.

After cricket, Jimmy Silver & Co. repaired to the tuckshop for supplies for tea in their study. Then they came up to the end study in the Fourth. To their surprise, the study was not unoccupied. An elegant figure was standing by the window, looking out into the quadrangle. It turned as the four juniors appeared in the doorway, and an eyeglass gleamed at them.

"Hallo!" said Jimmy Silver.

Arthur Edward Lovell grinned.

"Want anything here, Montmorency?" asked Newcome politely.

"Is this your study?" asked Montmorency.

"Yes, rather."

"I've been lookin' along the passage," said the new boy. "I haven't settled on my study yet."

"Isn't Mr. Dalton going to settle that for you?" asked Raby. "New kids don't generally select their own studies."

Montmorency raised his eyebrows.

"I haven't consulted Mr. Dalton in the matter, so far," he answered.

"Mr. Dalton will stick you to a study, and without consulting you," said Lovell tartly.

"Really?"

"Yes, really!" snapped Lovell.

"I was thinkin' that this study would suit me," said Montmorency calmly. "It seems to be the best in the passage, and there are two windows; the others seem to have only one. It's the least peaky of the lot, I think."

"Think so?" smiled Jimmy Silver.

"Yaas."

"Yaas, indeed!" said Lovell, imitating Master Montmorency's accent, which was not without a trace of affection.

"Four of you in here?" asked the new boy.

"Yaas," grinned Lovell.

"That's rather a crowd, isn't it?"

"Oh, yaas!"

"Cheese it, Lovell!" muttered Jimmy Silver.

"Rats! If he can 'yaas,' I suppose I can 'yaas!'" said Lovell.

The new junior looked at him calmly.

"Well, I'd like this study," he said, after a pause.

"Go hon!" remarked Raby.

"Could you fellows change out?"

"Change out?" repeated Jimmy Silver dazedly.

"Yaas!"

"Are you off your rocker?" asked Jimmy. "Do you think we're going to change out of our study to hand it over to a fellow we don't know?"

Arthur Edward Lovell gave a snort.

"Look here, Jimmy Silver, I'm fed up with that silly ass!" he exclaimed.

"Young Hopeful, there's the door. See it?"

"Yaas."

"Get on the other side of it, then!"

"You'll excuse us, Montmorency," said Jimmy Silver, "we're just going to have tea, and, as you remarked, four is rather a crowd, so five——"

"You won't let me have the study?"

"No, you ass!"

"We'll let you have a boot if you don't travel!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell indignantly.

Montmorency shrugged his shoulders. Lovell made a stride towards him. But Jimmy caught his excited chum by the arm.

"Hook it, Montmorency!" he said. "If you go to Mr. Dalton, he'll tell you what study you've to have. Ta-ta!"

With another shrug Montmorency walked out of the study. Lovell

breathed hard as he glanced after the elegant figure that strolled away down the passage.

"Why didn't you let me punch his nose, Jimmy?" he demanded.

"Oh, let his nose alone, old chap. He's a spoiled kid, I should say," said Jimmy Silver. "I dare say he's been made a lot of at home, and thinks he is going to get the same at Rookwood. He will get woke up soon enough."

Lovell grunted as he sat down to tea. He was not quite so considerate towards the glibster stranger as Jimmy was. And, indeed, if Master Montmorency was to be "woke" up, Lovell was quite ready to contribute to awakening him.

CHAPTER 2.

A Discomfited Rebellious

"HERE you are, old fellow!" Tubby Muffin pounced upon the new junior in the Fourth Form passage. It was his first chance of catching Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency.

The fat Classical came up with a friendly grin, almost bubbling over with cordiality.

Cecil Cuthbert did not seem to reciprocate his kind regards.

He fixed his monocle in his eye, and took a survey of the fat and fatuous Tubby in a manner that was a little disconcerting even to Reginald Muffin, who was not thin-skinned.

"Did you speak to me?" asked the new junior.

"Certainly, old top! I've been looking for you," said Muffin, rather damped, but still effusive. "I've found a study for you. I say, I dare say you know my name—Muffin?"

"Is that a name?" asked Montmorency, in surprise.

Tubby Muffin turned red, and several juniors in the passage grinned. Townsend and Topham came out of their study, No. 5, with cheery smiles for the new boy, and scornful indifference for

Tubby. But the fat Classical stuck to his guns. Montmorency's manner was not flattering, but he was too valuable a prize to be lost if it could be held.

"Muffin—yes," said Tubby. "We're really relations, you know!"

"Nonsense!"

"Look here, old chap," said Tubby. "You might be civil to a fellow—especially a relation. I know all about you."

Montmorency gave a start.

"What line thump do you mean?" he exclaimed angrily. "I've never seen you before."

"I didn't say you had," said Tubby. "But, you see—"

"Oh, don't bother!" snapped the new junior.

"My dear chap, let a fellow speak," said Tubby patiently. Tubby had great patience with a fellow who was "no end rich." "What branch of the Montmorencies do you belong to?"

"No to the Muffin branch!" grinned Townsend.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Trot in, old chap," said Topham, putting his arm through Montmorency's. "I've asked Mr. Dalton, and he says you're to come into our study. You'll find it all right."

"We're glad to have you," said Townsend.

"I say—" began Tubby Muffin.

But Montmorency walked into Study No. 5 with Towny and Topy, leaving Muffin to waste his sweetness on the desert air.

Somehow the new junior seemed to be rather annoyed or disturbed by his talk with Tubby Muffin. But he recovered his usual impassive demeanour in a few minutes. He glanced round Study No. 5, which was rather a pleasant room. Towny and Topy spent a good deal of their ample pocket-money in adorning their quarters. Tom Rawson was seated at the table, and he looked up as the three came in. Montmorency's eye dwelt on him curiously. The

scholarship junior's garments contrasted very much with the elegant attire of Towny and Toppy.

"We shall be four in the study," said Townsend. "But most of the rooms have three or four, you know. That can't be helped."

"Is Montmorency coming here?" asked Rawson.

"Yes," answered Townsend shortly.

"You're welcome," said Rawson to the new junior.

"Thanks!" drawled Montmorency.

Rawson flushed a little. Taking his cue from Towny and Toppy, Montmorency was exceedingly distant to the rather shabby junior. Townsend began to clear the table for tea, and Tom Rawson quietly left the study. He seldom "fed" in his quarters, not being able to "go the pace" with his more expensive study-mates.

"Who the merry dickens is that?" asked Montmorency, when the scholarship junior was gone.

"A rank outsider," said Townsend. "Name's Rawson. His father's a plumber or something."

"Oh, gad!"

"Here on a schol," explained Topham. "Not a bad fellow in his way, but, of course, we keep him at a distance."

"By Jove, I should say so!"

"You needn't mind the fellow being in the study," said Townsend rather anxiously. "He just does his work here—hardly ever has tea, and he often does his prep in another study."

"Do the fellows let him, then?" asked Montmorency, raising his eyebrows.

"Well, it's jolly odd, but he's rather popular," said Townsend. "Jimmy Silver thinks a lot of him, and Silver's captain of the Fourth, you know. He's all right in his way, only rather surly and ill-bred. Of course we never have anything to do with him."

"Couldn't you know," said Topham.

"I should rather think not, by gad!" said Montmorency. "I'm dashed if I expected to meet that kind of outsider

at Rockwood. What are things comin' to, by gad! If my father knew——"

"Wasn't it your father who came with you this afternoon?" asked Topham rather unfortunately.

Montmorency stared at him.

"That was our solicitor," he said stiffly.

"Oh, sorry, of—of course!" stammered Topham.

"The pater was too busy to come, and his health's rather delicate," said Montmorency. "I dare say he will give me a look-in later in the term. It was his car, of course."

"Spankin' car!" said Topham. "Rolls-Royce, wasn't it?"

"Yass."

"You're a lucky barge!" said Townsend.

"Think so?" drawled Montmorency. "If you fellows would like a run in the car at any time, you've only to mention it, of course, as we're goin' to be study-mates, an', I hope, friends."

"My hat! Can you have that whackin' car whenever you want it?" exclaimed Townsend, in astonishment.

"I should only have to telephone. I suppose there's a telephone here?" said Montmorency negligently.

Towny and Toppy beamed on him. The new fellow was a fellow after their own heart, as his remarks on the subject of Rawson showed; and a fellow who could telephone for a "spankin' Rolls-Royce whenever he wanted to was a fellow Towny and Toppy delighted to honour.

Towny and Toppy might have been professional waiters, by the way they looked after their new chum at the well-spread tea-table. A cheery conversation was going on in Study No. 6 when the door opened and Tubby Muffin looked in, with a beaming smile.

No smile was bestowed on Tubby Muffin in return, however. His fascinating company did not seem to be desired.

"Out it!" said Townsend briefly.

"I've just dropped in to speak to my cousin——"

"Chuck it, you fat duffer!" exclaimed Topham. "What the thump do you mean by calling Montmorency your cousin?"

"Second cousin, twice removed, I

"You're not my relation!" exclaimed Montmorency. "Don't talk rot!"

"If you're a genuine Montmorency, I am!" retorted Tubby Muffin. "P'raps you're not genuine!"

Tubby Muffin made that retort out of sheer exasperation. He was very far from anticipating its effect on the new boy.

Montmorency's handsome face became quite pale for a second, as he stared at the fat Classical. Then a crimson flush swept over it.

"What!" he exclaimed. "What—what did you say? What—" He checked himself, and sprang suddenly from his chair. "You cheeky, fat rascal!"

He made an angry stride towards Tubby Muffin. Before the astonished fat junior could dodge, the new fellow had him by the collar. He shook him vigorously, almost savagely; and with a strength that few would have supposed dwelt in his slim frame.

"Grooogh!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "Yooogeeh! Chuck it! Yurragh! You're chook-chook-chook-choking me! Grooogh!"

Montmorency swung the fat junior round in the doorway, and kicked him hard. Tubby flew headlong into the passage.

Bump!

Montmorency slammed the door after him in a manner that was not at all aristocratic. He was breathing rather hard as he returned to the tea-table and sat down. Townsend and Topham exchanged a glance, and coloured as they saw that the new junior observed it.

"The cheeky cad wanted a shakin'," said Montmorency.

"Serve him right!" agreed Townsend.

"He asked for it!" assented Topham.

But the two juniors were perplexed, and once or twice during tea they glanced rather oddly at Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency.

CHAPTER IV.

A Shopping for Sergeant Kettle!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were coming down the passage, as Tubby Muffin sprawled outside the door of Study No. 5. Jimmy good-naturedly paused to give the fat Classical a hand up.

Tubby Muffin was set on his feet, gasping and spluttering.

"Ow! Grooogh! The horrid beast!" spluttered Tubby. "The awful rotter! Oh! Ow! Wow!"

"Been calling on your merry relation?" grinned Lovell.

"Grooogh! He says he ain't my second cousin twice removed—"

The Fistical Four went on their way, leaving Tubby Muffin still gasping and spluttering breathlessly. There was plenty of light left for cricket, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were going to improve the shining hour, with the St. Jim's match in mind.

While they were engaged thus, the chums of Study No. 5 came sauntering on the field. This time Tubby Muffin was not in attendance on Montmorency & Co. Apparently he was "fed" with his second cousin twice removed.

Towny and Toppo were showing their new friend round; and rather to their surprise, Montmorency showed some interest in the cricket. Towny and Toppo did not care much for games.

"You haven't seen the school shop yet," Topham remarked. "We'll give it a look-in, Monty."

"All serene—no hurry!" answered Montmorency. "That chap—Silver—bawls well."

"You play cricket?"

"I'm rather keen on it," answered Montmorency.

"The sergeant closes the school shop at seven," remarked Townsend.

Arthur Edward Lovell, who was

standing near, looked round as Montmorency remarked that he was keen on cricket. Lovell's expression was rather scornful. The elegant new junior did not look much of a cricketer, in Lovell's eyes.

"Ever handled a bat?" asked Lovell politely.

Montmorency glanced at him.

"Oh, yass!"

"Know one end from another?" asked Lovell, with an air of polite interest.

"Yass."

"Perhaps you'd like to show us what you can do," suggested Lovell, with deep sarcasm.

"I don't mind. I'll bet you two to one in quids that I could take your wicket, bowlin', anyhow," said the new junior coolly.

Lovell grinned.

"I don't bet," he answered. "But if you take my wicket in one over, I'll give you leave to pull my nose."

"Done!" said Montmorency.

"Here, hand me that bat, Rawson!" exclaimed Lovell. "Give Montmorency the ball for a minute or two, Oswald. He's going to show us some giddy miracles!"

"Yes, let's see how he shapes, by all means," said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell went to the wicket, grinning. Montmorency caught the ball Oswald tossed to him. It was rather a difficult catch, for Dick Oswald, as a matter of fact, meant to land the leather on Montmorency's chin. But the new junior made the catch easily enough, and walked to the bowler's wicket.

"Look out for fireworks!" grinned Ruby.

Lovell stood ready and watchful. Although he felt a complete contempt for the new junior, he was not taking chances.

But his watchfulness did not avail him. Montmorency sent the ball down—a seemingly easy ball—and Lovell drove at it—but he did not touch it. The ball broke in unexpectedly, and there was a yell from the cricketers as

Lovell's off stump was whipped out of the ground.

"Ha, ha! How's that, Lovell?"

Arthur Edward's face was a study as he stared down at his wrecked wicket. He had offered to have his nose pulled if Montmorency bowled him, and now he was clean bowled—there was no doubt about that.

Lovell fixed his eyes on Montmorency, who had tossed the ball back to Oswald. The new junior smiled. Lovell was ready to keep his word; but it was certain that the pulling of Arthur Edward's nose would be followed by a terrific "scrap" on the cricket-field. But Montmorency did not offer to hold the rash youth to his pledge.

"All serene," he said lightly. "I don't really see why you should think I can't play cricket, Lovell."

"Because you look such a lackadaisical ass!" growled Lovell.

"Thanks!" said Montmorency, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Dash it all, he can bowl!" said Jimmy Silver. "Dry up, Lovell! Chuck it now, you fellows, and come along to the sergeant's for a ginger-pop. You coming, Montmorency?"

Jimmy was a bowler himself, and he felt quite cordial towards the new junior, after that exhibition of his powers. He recognised that there was more in Cecil Cuthbert than met the eye.

Montmorency nodded cheerily.

"Pleased!" he answered.

And when the Petical Four repaired to Sergeant Kettle's little shop in the corner behind the beeches, Montmorency and Townsend and Topham walked with them, as well as a crowd of thirty cricketers. Sergeant Kettle came out of his little parlour to deal with the rush of custom.

"Ginger-pop!"

"Buck up, sergeant!"

"Don't let us perish of thirst, sergeant!"

"Ere you are, young gentlemen!" said Sergeant Kettle, busy behind his little

counter. "Ere, Master Silver! 'Ere, Master Lovell! 'Ere you are!"

"This way, sergeant!" said Townsend.

"'Ere you are, Master Townsend, and you, Master Topham, and——"

Sergeant Kettle stopped suddenly.

The glass of ginger-beer he held in his hand dropped on the counter with a crash.

His eyes were fixed on Towny and Topham's companion.

The sight of Cecil Outhbert Montmorency seemed to have exercised a magical effect on Sergeant Kettle.

"My hey!" he ejaculated. "My hey! Fancy seein' you 'ere, George 'iggins—fancy meetin' you, George!"

And the silence that followed was a silence that could be felt!

CHAPTER II.

A Mysterious Mistake!

"GEORGE HUGGINS!"

"My only hat!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell.

From Tubby Muffin came a squeak of merriment.

"He, ha, ha! Huggins! He, he, he!"

"What the merry thump——" said Townsend.

It was a peculiar scene.

In the little tuckshop behind the oocches at Rookwood School, Sergeant Kettle stood, with his hands resting on his little counter, staring across at Cecil Outhbert Montmorency, the new junior in the Fourth Form.

The ancient military gentleman, who for years had kept the school shop at Rookwood, seemed petrified with astonishment.

He gazed at Cecil Outhbert Montmorency as if Cecil Outhbert had been some grisly spectre, instead of a handsome and elegant and very expensively-dressed Fourth-Former of Rookwood.

The tuckshop was crowded with juniors fresh from the cricket-field, and they were all staring blankly.

Even Tubby Muffin stopped a jam-tart half-way to his capacious mouth in his amazement.

Cecil Outhbert Montmorency's eyelashes had dropped from his eye. The amazing greeting from the sergeant seemed to have stunned him.

He returned the sergeant's fixed gaze as if equally fascinated.

Townsend and Topham, the new boy's new chums, looked at one another, quite taken off their balance by the remarkable scene.

Montmorency of the Fourth had arrived at Rookwood School only that day; he was quite a stranger there.

Yet the sergeant addressed him as if he had known him all his life; and, more astonishing still, he addressed him as George Huggins.

"He, he, he!" Tubby Muffin's unmusical cackle broke the painful silence. "He, ha, he!"

Townsend broke in, with a glare at Sergeant Kettle, who seemed unable to take his eyes off the new junior.

"What the thump do you mean, sergeant? What are you calling Montmorency by that idiotic name for?"

"Eh? What?" said the sergeant confusedly.

"This chap's name is Montmorency, sergeant," said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh!" said the sergeant.

Towny jerked at Montmorency's sleeve.

"What's the matter with you, Monty?" he asked. "You look fairly flabbergasted, by gad! You'll make the fellows think your name really is Huggins, at this rate."

Montmorency made an effort to pull himself together.

But the colour was wavering in his cheeks, and his struggle to regain his calmness was plain to all eyes.

"I—I don't understand——" he stammered.

"I say, sergeant, do you know the chap?" squeaked Tubby Muffin, in great delight.

Tubby was annoyed with the new

junior, who had rejected without ceremony his chummy overtures that day. Tubby had been prepared to greet Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency with open arms. He had been snubbed unceremoniously. Whereupon Tubby had made up his fat mind that Cecil Cuthbert was a snob, and he was delighted to see the snob taken down like this.

"Is his name really Huggins, sergeant?" pursued Tubby. "I say, what a lark! Huggins don't sound so nobbly as Montmorency, does it?"

"Montmorency!" stammered the sergeant, blinking at the new junior.

"That is my name."

Montmorency had recovered himself now.

His aristocratic impassiveness of manner had returned. He jammed his monocle into his eye and took a cool and scornful survey of the astonished and confused sergeant.

"That—that's your name, sir?" stammered the sergeant.

"Yess."

"I—I—I thought——"

"Is he like somebody you know, sergeant?" asked Jimmy, to help the painfully-confused old gentleman out.

"Yes," gasped Mr. Kettle. "That's it, Master Silver! I—I thought——"

"This man Kettle has called me by a name that is not mine," said Montmorency calmly. "No doubt I look like somebody he knows of that name. I suppose nobody here is fool enough to think that my name is Huggins? Anybody who likes can see my name entered on the school books. The Head, I suppose, must know what my name is."

"That's a clincher," said Mornington.

It was convincing enough. For a fellow to be entered on the school books under an assumed name was impossible; all the fellows knew that. A chap was not admitted to Rookwood without the Head knowing who he was and where he came from.

"Of course," said Jimmy Silver. "The sergeant's taken you for somebody else, Montmorency."

"Isn't that——" asked Raby,

"Here's your ginger-beer, Master Lovell."

Sergeant Kettle did not answer Raby's question. That fact was remembered afterwards by a good many fellows.

CHAPTER 12. The High Hand!

CECIL CUTHBERT MONTMORENCY had already attracted a good deal of attention in the Lower School at Rookwood.

His sounding name, his wealth, his elegant manners, the "whacking" car in which he had arrived at the school, had all drawn attention to him.

After the peculiar scene in the tackshop, he was more than ever the cynosure of most eyes in the Lower Forms.

The incident was explained as a strange mistake on the part of the school sergeant; that really seemed to be the only possible explanation. But it was not forgotten.

It was odd enough that Montmorency should resemble a boy whom the sergeant knew so closely as to be mistaken for him by the old military gentleman.

It was, in fact, more than odd. For Montmorency was not an ordinary-looking fellow. His good looks and aristocratic bearing would have attracted a second glance anywhere.

It was extraordinary that, among Sergeant Kettle's private acquaintances, there should be a boy named Huggins, who was so like Montmorency that the latter could be mistaken for him.

Inquisitive fellows dropped into the tackshop to talk to the sergeant, and ask him questions about George Huggins.

To their surprise, Mr. Kettle declined to say a word.

The subject was evidently distasteful to him.

Generally, the sergeant was a civil-spoken man; but when he was asked questions about George Huggins, his manner became extremely gruff, and he snapped almost savagely.

Not a word of information could be drawn from him on the subject.

The curious inquirers soon gave the matter up; and, indeed, interest in it soon evaporated.

In a few days Montmorency had made a good many friends in the Fourth Form.

Towny and Tuppy were his devoted chums—Morny was friendly—and Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome did not dislike him. Arthur Edward Lovell, certainly, did not like him. Tuppy Muffin was down on him with a very heavy "down"; but Tuppy's condemnation alternated with effusive overtures of friendship, all of which were rejected by Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency. He utterly declined to believe in any connection between the families of Montmorency and Muffin; and though Tuppy claimed only to be his second cousin twice removed, Montmorency would not admit even that distant relationship.

So Tuppy—when he was not making overtures of friendship—expressed an opinion, with sage shakes of the head, that there was more about Monty than the fellows knew. He said that it was queer that the sergeant wouldn't say a word on the subject; and queer that Montmorency had looked so scared and startled under Mr. Kettle's eye; in fact, there was no limit to the queer circumstances Tuppy called to mind.

But as it was perfectly evident that a nod or smile from the new junior would have slain all Tuppy's suspicions and surmises on the spot, Tuppy's opinion was not valued by anybody but Reginald Muffin himself.

On Wednesday in the week following Montmorency's arrival at Rockwood, the big Rolls-Royce snorted up to the School House, and quite a number of fellows gathered round to look at it. It had called for Cecil Cuthbert, to take him out for the afternoon, it appeared, and there were a good many fellows who envied Cecil Cuthbert. Townsend and Topham were the happy ones selected to accompany him in his drive, and

Towny and Tuppy looked very pleased with themselves as they came out of the house with their superb chum.

Tuppy Muffin heard the car from afar, and came scuttling up breathlessly. Only half an hour earlier he had been remarking to several grinning fellows how "queer" were many circumstances in connection with Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency. But Tuppy had evidently experienced one of his kaleidoscopic changes, for now he beamed on the new junior with almost adoring affection.

"Your father's car, Monty?" he said.

"Yass," answered Montmorency coldly, without looking at him.

"Going for a drive?"

"Yass."

"Taking any friends?" hinted Tuppy.

"Yass, Townsend and Topham. Jump in, you fellows."

"You're lots of room for another fellow there!" said Tuppy.

Montmorency looked at him at last.

"I've asked Morny, but he's keen on cricket, and can't come," he said coolly.

"Get out of the way, Muffin, the door's goin' to be closed."

"I say, Monty—"

"Would you be good enough to refrain from callin' me Monty?" asked Montmorency, with polished contempt. "That's my name to my friends."

"I say, old chap—"

"Get off the grass, Muffin!" exclaimed Townsend impatiently. "You're not comin' in this car! Go and eat coke!"

"Montmorency, old fellow, I'd really like to come!" said Muffin, as if that settled it.

"Go an' eat coke!" answered the youth with the noble name. He reached out and closed the door, pushing Muffin aside.

The engine snorted.

Tuppy Muffin breathed hard with wrath. Once more he had offered the olive-branch; once more it had been refused with contempt. The Oriental proverb declares that contempt will pierce the shell of the tortoise. Tuppy Muffin

was probably thicker-skinned than any self-respecting tortoise; but he was hurt.

"If you think I want to come in your car, you're jolly well mistaken!" he exclaimed wrathfully.

"Good!" said Montmorency, and he signalled to the chauffeur to get a move on.

"Yah!"

The car glided down the drive.

"Yah!" roared Tubby Muffin, all adoration and affection gone now. "Yah! Huggins! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors, greatly tickled by Tubby's change of front.

From "Monty, old fellow," Montmorency had suddenly become "Huggins," in Tubby's estimation.

"Huggins!" shrieked Tubby. "Huggins! Yah!"

The car glided away, and turned into the road to Coombe. Townsend and Topham were laughing, finding something comic in Tubby's change of front, like the other fellows.

But Montmorency did not laugh.

To the surprise of his comrades, his handsome face was darkly clouded, and his well-cut lips quivered.

Towny touched him gently on the arm.

"Don't mind that fat cad, Monty!" he said. "Tubby would sling anybody who wouldn't let him sponge."

"I don't mind him," said Montmorency curtly.

"That sissy ass Kettle ought to be kicked," said Topham. "Fancy his thinkin' you looked like a fellow named Huggins."

"Old chump!" said Townsend.

Outside the school-gates the car had to slow and stop as a heavily-laden lorry came lurching along the middle of the road. The Rolls-Royce backed on the grass belt by the road to escape the big banks of timber with which the lorry was loaded. Tubby Muffin had rolled down to the gates, and finding the car still within range, so to speak, he rolled up to the door.

He had come to taunt the new junior,

in his annoyance; but the handsome turn-out, and the possibility of a motor-drive without expense to his worthy self, softened him. He was smiling by the time he reached the window.

"Too bad, those beastly lorries on the road, Monty!" he said.

Montmorency's eyes gleamed at him through his monocle.

"Will you clear off?" he said.

"I'll tell you what," said Muffin. "I'll come, and I'll stand tea for the whole party on the road. What?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"You're not good enough for this little party, Tubby," said Townsend, with cheerful insolence. "Couldn't be seen with you, you know."

"Exactly!" grinned Topham.

"Oh, quite!" assented Montmorency.

Once more Tubby Muffin's mantle of beaming friendliness dropped off him.

"Jolly stuck-up, Huggins, ain't you?" he said.

Montmorency turned a look on him that startled him, so intensely savage and passionate was it. It startled Towny and Tuppy, too.

"If you call me Huggins again, you'll get hurt, you fat cad!" said Montmorency, between his teeth.

"Yah! Huggins!"

Montmorency had a light came in his hand. He reached out of the car window, and before Tubby knew what was happening, Montmorency lashed him with the cane, full across his fat face.

"Yaroooh!" roared Muffin, in surprise and anguish.

The car moved on at that moment, and a second slash from the cane just missed Tubby Muffin, as he staggered and sat down in the grass.

Montmorency had his hand on the door, as if to open it and jump out. His face was convulsed with rage, and did not look very handsome at that moment.

Townsend, in alarm, caught him by the shoulder.

"Hold on, Monty! The car's movin'! Don't open the door—"

"I'm goin' to thrash that cad!" panted Montmorency.

"Sit down, old chap."

Towney pushed his new chin back into the seat.

Montmorency gave him a fierce look, but it was only momentary. Then he recovered himself, and nodded.

"You're right," he said. "He's not worth lickin'."

"Not worth takin' notice of," said Towny.

"Oh, quite!"

"I say, that was rather a hefty lick you gave him, Monty," said Topham uneasily. "It's goin' to leave a mark on his chivvy."

Montmorency shrugged his slim shoulders.

"Let it!" he answered. "The low rascal wanted a lesson."

"Oh! M'm! Certainly!"

The car rolled on, leaving Tubby Muffin sitting in the grass, dazed, with a thick red mark showing across his fat cheek.

CHAPTER 11

The Champion of the Oppressed!

"WHAT an earl's the matter with your chivvy?"

Jimmy Silver asked the question as the Fiscal Four met Tubby Muffin on their way to cricket.

"Been busting in a door with your face, old tub?" asked Lovell.

Tubby groaned.

He was hurt, there was no doubt about that. But his groan was deep enough and anguished enough for a very serious injury. It was like Reginald Muffin to make the very most of it.

"That beast Huggins—" he moaned.

"Do you mean Montmorency?" asked Jimmy Silver, with a frown.

"I mean Huggins!" said Tubby Muffin savagely. "I say Huggins, and I mean Huggins! Old Kettle called him Huggins—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"But did Montmorency give you that mark on your chivvy?" asked Baby.

"You-ow! Yes! He slashed me with his cane!" groaned Tubby.

"I say, that's rather thick, even if Tubby is an irritating little beast!" remarked Newcome. "Fellow ought not to hand out that sort of thing."

"Confounded brute, I think!" said Lovell. "I'd like to see him hand it out to me!"

"It is rather thick," said Jimmy Silver. "But Tubby ought to let him alone. I don't see why the chap should be insulted because he won't let Tubby sponge on him."

"Oh, I say, Jimmy—"

"Serve the fat cad right!" said Valentine Mornington.

"Oh, I say, Morny—"

Tubby rubbed the mark on his cheek. It was very painful and swollen.

"I'd give him a jolly good licking," he mumbled, "only—"

"Only you couldn't," said Mornington. "You have to take the kicks along with the hap'ence, Tubby. You shouldn't sponge."

"Yah!" snorted Tubby. "I'm jolly well going to show this to Mr. Dalton! He will make the cad answer for it."

"Don't sneek!" said Jimmy Silver, frowning.

"Dick Dalton will see it, in any case, and inquire into it," said Lovell, as the juniors went on towards the cricket-field. "Montmorency will be called to account, and serve him jolly well right! Like his cheek to lash a fellow like a dog!"

"Muffin annoyed him," said Mornington.

Snort! From Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Chap can be annoyed without acting like a dashed hooligan," he said. "And why should Tubby's rot annoy him so much? If his name's not Huggins, he needn't mind Tubby hooting Huggins at him so much. Blessed if it doesn't look—" Lovell paused.

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver uneasily. "We know the chap's name. It's on the books, isn't it? Think the

Head would enter him as Montmorency if his name was Huggins?"

"Well, then, I don't see why he should be so jolly waxy about it," said Lovell tartly.

"Bother him, and Tubby, too," said Jimmy. "Let's play cricket!"

And cricket soon drove the matter from the minds of the Fictical Four. But Tubby, naturally, could not dismiss it so easily. He had an injury, and it hurt him, and he was boiling with wrath and indignation. He paraded his mark up and down the Lower School, in search of sympathy. Some of the fellows told him that it served him right; but others, who had been annoyed by what they considered Montmorency's "uppish" ways, sympathized and were indignant. At tea-time Tubby marched into his study, No. 2, and displayed his injury to his study-mates, Jones minor and Higgs and Putty Grace.

"Whacked me across the face with his stick, you know, that cad Huggins!" said Tubby, thrilling with undying indignation.

"Serve you right!" said Jones minor.

"I dare say you asked for it," said Putty. "You shouldn't call a fellow by a name that isn't his."

"The sergeant said——"

"Oh, bother the sergeant!"

"I say, Higgs, you ought to lick the cad," said Tubby pathetically. "You could, you know! You oughtn't to let him treat your study-mate like this."

"That's right enough," said Higgs, with a nod. "I'll talk to him about it when he comes in."

"Look here, Higgs!" said Grace. "You let the chap alone! None of your confounded bullying!"

"I'll do as I like!" roared Higgs. The bully of the Fourth did not like being gainsaid.

"After all, he had no right to whack Tubby like that," said Jones minor. "It was brutal. When Tubby gets too annoying, the proper thing is to kick him. That's what we do in this study, isn't it, Tubby?"

"Yah!" was Tubby's reply.

"Who does this fellow think he is?" demanded Higgs warmly. "I spoke to him the other day, and he was dashed standoffish. Not that I care a rap about the fellow, but I'm not going to be looked up and down."

Apparently Higgs was one of the unfortunate youths who were kept at arm's-length by the superb Cecil Cuthbert.

Naturally, Alfred Higgs did not like that. As he could "whop" nearly all the Form, he considered himself a person to be treated with respect.

"If he thinks a Montmorency is better than a Higgs," continued the bully of the Fourth, "I'll give him some education on the subject."

"Oh, rats!" said Putty.

"Lashing a lad as if he were a dog!" continued Higgs. "I'll jolly well show him that it won't do at Rockwood!"

And Alfred Higgs, after tea, was hanging about waiting for the big Rolls-Royce to come in. Higgs' intention of taking up the quarrel for Tubby, and licking the new junior, was widely known in a short time. But Higgs received no admiration in his new role of champion of the oppressed. It was pretty clear that Higgs was only looking for an excuse to exercise his favourite propensity of bullying, and it was more than suspected that he wanted to avenge the "standoffishness" of Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency. But Higgs was not to be argued with.

It was about six o'clock when the great car came rolling in, and Montmorency & Co. alighted. The car departed, and the three knots came sauntering cheerily into the School House.

Then Higgs of the Fourth bore down upon them, with a very ugly and threatening look on his rugged face.

"A word with you, Montmorency!" he said gruffly.

The eyeglass—already celebrated in the Classical Fourth—turned loftily on Higgs.

"Yahs?" said Montmorency.

"Step into the Common-room!" said Higgs.

Montmorency did not stir.

"You hear me?" demanded Higgs threateningly.

"Yass. But the fact is," said Montmorency calmly, "I don't care for either your company or your conversation, Higgs, if you don't mind my mentioning it."

Townsend and Topham grinned, but they grinned rather uneasily. Higgs was not a safe person to talk to in this strain.

Higgs' rugged face became almost purple.

"Why, you—you cheeky cub!" he spluttered.

Montmorency raised his hand.

"That's enough!" he said.

"I asked you to step into the Common-room, out of the way of prefects, while I talk to you," said Higgs. "But you can have it here if you like!"

"I don't care for your conversation at all, thanks!"

"You cut Muffin across the face with your cane this afternoon," said Higgs. "That cane you've got there, I suppose."

"Quite so!"

"Do you think you can play stunts like that at Rookwood?" demanded Higgs.

"Yass."

"You cheeky cub, you cut a fellow across the chivvy because he calls you Huggins! Do you think I wouldn't call you Huggins if I chose?"

"Not unless you want to be served the same."

"Whin-a-t? You—you'd whack me with your cane if I called you Huggins—what?" spluttered Higgs.

"Yass!"

"Monty——" murmured Townsend.

"Huggins!" roared Higgs. "Huggins! There! Huggins! Oh, my hat!"

Lash!

Montmorency's arm came up like lightning, and Higgs, of the Fourth staggered back as the cane lashed across his face.

CHAPTER 14.

Kicked Out!

THERE was a rush of juniors to the spot. Jimmy Silver & Co., coming in from the cricket, halted to look on at the scene in the corridor. Mornington gave a shrug of approval.

"Well done, Monty!"

Higgs staggered, gasping for breath, scarcely able to believe for a moment or two what had happened.

But he recovered himself and straightened up, but the look he gave Cecil Cuthbert would have made a Hun envious.

"Put down that cane!" said Higgs thickly. "Put up your hands, you cheeky raffer! I'm going to smash you!"

Montmorency handed his cane to Townsend, who took it with a feeble hand. The new junior did not seem dismayed by Higgs' towering wrath. He pushed back his spotless cuffs.

"Monty!" gasped Townsend. "You—you can't thrash him—that halting brute!"

"I'm going to."

There was no choice about it, for Higgs was rushing on to the attack like a maddened bull.

Montmorency, with his hands up, faced him with perfect coolness.

The superb youth might be a snob, doubtless he was, but there was no doubt that he had plenty of pluck and plenty of nerve. Both were required to face Higgs' savage rush, and Montmorency faced it without turning a hair.

"By gad!" murmured Mornington. "That merchant's got the real stuff in him, by gad!"

Crash!

Higgs came on like a bull at a gate, and the next instant a furious fight was raging in the corridor.

A crowd of juniors stood round, looking on breathlessly.

There were not more than half a dozen fellows in the Fourth who could stand up to Higgs and give a good account of themselves. It seemed out

of the question that the slim, elegant Montmorency could stand against him for one minute.

But he did.

He gave ground a little, but he stalled off the fierce attack, and hardly one of Higgs' breathless drives touched him.

But as Higgs paused, a little out of breath after his furious attack, which had not got home, Montmorency suddenly attacked in his turn, and—as the juniors described it afterwards—"fairly walked into Higgs."

His fists moved like lightning, and Higgs' clumsy defence was nowhere.

Montmorency played him almost like a fish, driving in a blow here and a blow there, almost at his own pleasure. And the blows were heavy and hard, too, and had evidently plenty of muscle behind them. Higgs was knocked right and left, and finally a terrific right-hander swept him clean off his feet, and he crashed on the floor.

There was a buzz of deep-drawn breath from the crowd of juniors as the bully of the Fourth went down.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell.

Arthur Edward Lovell had entertained the idea of giving Montmorency a licking for his own good. He mentally decided now that that idea was the least feasible idea he had ever thought of.

"Hefty—what?" grinned Mornington. "I fancy the esteemed Higgs has had about enough to go on with."

Higgs sat up dazedly.

He gasped and spluttered helplessly. It was clear that he could not go on, unwilling as he was to give in.

"Oh! Ow, ow! Oh!" spluttered Higgs.

Montmorency, breathing hard, adjusted his eyeglass in his eye and glanced down at him with cold scorn.

"Have you had enough?" he asked contemptuously.

"Oh! Ow! Oh! My chin! My nose! Ow!" mumbled the unfortunate bully of the Fourth.

"He's had enough!" grinned Towns- end. "Monty, old man, who'd have

thought you were such a holy terror? You don't look it."

"Dashed if you do!" said Topham.

Montmorency smiled loftily.

"I fancy I can handle a cad like that!" he said carelessly. "If the brute's satisfied, we may as well go in to tea."

"Oh, don't crow!" snapped Lovell.

Montmorency walked on with his chums without heeding that remark. Lovell gave Higgs a hand up. He did not like Higgs, but he was sorry for him just at that moment.

Higgs stood very unsteadily, mopping a streaming nose with his handkerchief, and blinking painfully with his eyes.

"Who'd have thought it?" he gasped.

"Not you, evidently!" said Mornington.

"He's too hefty for me," said Higgs.

"He doesn't look it, but he is. But he's a cad, all the same, to crow when he's licked a fellow. His name may be Montmorency, but he's a cad!"

And Marny had nothing to say to that. Higgs' words found an echo in the minds of all present. Higgs staggered away, leaning heavily on Lovell's arm. He had been badly licked, and he was feeling very bad indeed. Arthur Edward Lovell was frowning when he rejoined his chums in the end study for tea.

"More in that spot than meets the eye!" he remarked, evidently alluding to Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency.

"He's hefty!" said Jimmy Silver.

"But Higgs is all rush and thump. There are tougher propositions in the Fourth than Higgs. Still, it was pretty good to knock Higgs out like that in five minutes. He can play cricket, too. He's got the right stuff in him, with all his funny little ways."

"He's got pluck," said Baby. "But —"

"He's a hefty boxer," said Newcome.

"But——" said Jimmy Silver, parsing his lips.

"But he's a cad!" said Lovell quietly. "There's a rotten streak in him. He

doesn't speak to Rawson in his study because Rawson's people are poor. He crowed over Higgs when he'd knocked him out. He's a puppy and an upstart!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Jimmy Silver.

"He's not genuine!" said Lovell obstinately. "A gentleman doesn't snub a chap because he's poor, or crow over a fellow who's down and out. His name may be Montmorency, but he's no gentleman, and I'm going to tell him so, if ever he wants to know my opinion."

"Let's hope he won't, then," said Jimmy Silver. "Pass the sardines, old top, and talk cricket!"

"Bother cricket! Old Kettle could tell us something about the fellow if he liked."

Jimmy looked grave.

"Chuck it, Lovell! Some of the fellows have been trying to worm something out of the sergeant, but that kind of thing isn't done in this study. Chuck it, old fellow!"

And Lovell coloured a little and chuckled it.

CHAPTER 12.

A Short-lived Friendship!

"MUFFIN!"

"Yes, sir!" said Tubby Muffin, with his mouth full.

It was the following morning at the breakfast-table of the Classical Fourth.

Mr. Dalton was at the head of the table, and his eye had fallen upon Tubby Muffin, and upon the swollen red mark across his fat cheek. It was not likely to escape the keen eyes of the Form-master.

"What has happened to your face, Muffin?"

Montmorency kept his eyes on his plate. Tubby Muffin coloured and coughed.

"M-m-my face, sir?" he stammered.

The juniors sat still as mice. They expected Tubby Muffin to blurt out the

whole story, with serious consequences for Montmorency.

To the general surprise, Tubby didn't.

"I—I—I got a knock on it, sir!" he stammered.

"It looks like the slash of a stick," said Mr. Dalton, eyeing him.

"Yes, sir; quite an accident, sir."

"You should be more careful, Muffin."

"Oh, yes, sir! I—I will, sir."

To Tubby's evident relief, the matter was dropped there. After breakfast the juniors came out into the quad, and Jimmy Silver dropped his hand on Tubby's fat shoulder.

Tubby was speeding towards the tuckshop, and he stopped unwillingly.

"I say, don't stop a fellow," he said.

"There's not much time before lessons, and the tuckshop——"

"My hat! Are you going to feed just after brekker, you porpoise?"

"Well, just a tart and some ginger-pop," said Tubby. "I never really get enough brekker, you know; and as Monty's lent me five bob——"

"Montmorency has!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Yes. Rather decent of him, wasn't it?" purred Tubby. "I mentioned to him that I was short of cash——"

"You weren't so jolly pally with Montmorency yesterday," said Lovell drily.

"Oh, that's all over," said Tubby loftily. "We're quite good friends now. Let a chap go, Jimmy!"

"I was going to say," said Jimmy Silver quietly, "that it was rather decent of you not to give Montmorency away about that cut on your face, Tubby."

"Yes, wasn't it?" said Tubby fatuously. "Of course, I wouldn't give a pal away."

"But it seems that he's given you five bob to keep your mouth shut," said Jimmy contemptuously.

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin warmly. "That's quite a different transaction, of course. Monty was—was rather hasty, and he

was sorry for it. He didn't want the matter gone into with Mr. Dalton."

"I shouldn't have thought his noble ribs would have come down off his perch to that extent just to dodge a caning," remarked Newcome.

Lovell gave a snort.

"It wasn't the caning," he said.

"What was it, then?"

"He didn't want Tubby to yell out about his name being Huggins—about the sergeant calling him Huggins, I mean," said Lovell shrewdly. "He doesn't want Mr. Dalton to hear the Huggins story."

"Oh, dash it all!" said Jimmy Silver uneasily.

But there was a feeling in his breast that Lovell was right.

Tubby Muffin cut away to the tack-shop, where he had just time to get rid of his five shillings before lessons. He rolled into the Form-room very shiny and sticky and happy, and bestowed a genial nod and smile on Montmorency. That youth had evidently made up for all his shortcomings in Tubby's eyes.

Jimmy Silver noticed, however, that Montmorency avoided meeting Tubby's genial eye. Jimmy was feeling very thoughtful and uneasy. He could not help feeling, with Lovell, that Montmorency had been anxious to keep from Mr. Dalton, not the fact that he had lashed Muffin with his cane, but the Huggins story which had led to the incident, and which would certainly have come out if Tubby had related what had happened. If he was above-board—if he had nothing to fear—why should he care?

There were no suspicions in Tubby Muffin's fat mind that morning. He was dwelling pleasantly upon his new friendship with Cecil Cuthbert. He had quite forgiven Monty—quite! Never again would he dream of calling him Huggins! He was going to call him Monty when he slipped an arm through his, after lessons, and strolled into the quadrangle with him.

But alas for Tubby's happy anticipations!

After lessons Montmorency walked out with Townsend and Topham, and as Tubby Muffin rolled up, with an affectionate grin, he was greeted by a stony stare from Monty. He made a feeble effort to slip his arm through Montmorency's, and the superb youth started away as though from the contact of an adder!

CHAPTER II.

Something Like a Snob!

"ROT!" said Lovell.

Arthur Edward Lovell always was emphatic.

"My dear chap—" said Jimmy Silver.

"When I say rot," said Lovell, "I mean rot!"

"When you talk rot, it is rot!" assented Jimmy Silver, and there was a chortle from Raby and Newcome.

Arthur Edward Lovell smiled.

The Pistical Four were in the end study in the Fourth, and Jimmy Silver was conning over a half-sheet of impot paper, with a pencil in his hand, and a thoughtful frown on his brow.

That half-sheet contained a list of names for the junior cricket eleven, a most important matter in the Lower School at Rookwood.

Lovell had looked it over with grim disapproval, and finally delivered himself of the weighty opinion that it was "rot."

"Utter rot!" continued Lovell. "Montmorency—rot! Montmorency—bosh! Montmorency—piffle!"

"The chap can play cricket!" observed Jimmy Silver.

"Look at the way he treats Rawson in his study!" went on Lovell. "He pals with Topsy and Toppy, and cutes Rawson dead, though he's his study-mate. Just because the chap's people are poor. Isn't Rawson all right?"

"Right as rain!" said Jimmy. "I've got Rawson down to play."

"Well, then—"

There was a step in the passage outside the end study.

Lovell broke off with a grunt.

Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency, the new junior in the Classical Fourth, stepped elegantly into the doorway.

His gold-rimmed monocle gleamed into the study.

"Hallo! Trot in, kid!" said Jimmy Silver affably, hoping that Montmorency had not heard Lovell's powerful voice as he came along the passage.

Montmorency came gracefully in.

Fellows who liked him least could not deny that Montmorency was handsome and graceful, and looked every inch on a par with his lofty name.

Although he had been so short a time at Rookwood, he was already the "glass of fashion and the mould of form" in the Lower School. Certainly he spent upon his clothes at least three times as much as any other fellow at Rookwood. Even Smythe of the Shell, a nut of the nuts, regarded Cecil Cuthbert with admiring envy.

Montmorency paid no heed to Lovell and his rather sulky looks. He bestowed his attention on Jimmy Silver.

"You were goin' to speak to me about the cricket?" he said.

"That's it," said Jimmy, with a nod. "Squat down!"

"I'm in rather a hurry," said Montmorency calmly. "Some friends are waitin' for me. Cut in!"

There was an unintelligible sound from Arthur Edward Lovell, and Raby and Newcome exchanged a smile. The Co. wondered how Jimmy Silver liked Cecil Cuthbert's "swank" now that he was getting some of it himself. The junior cricket captain was not a person to be treated in an off-hand manner, a fact of which Montmorency was apparently in ignorance.

But Jimmy Silver did not turn a hair. "I'm thinking of putting you into the eleven to play Bagshot on Saturday," he said. "I think you deserve it on the form you've shown."

"I'll be glad to play," said Montmorency.

"Good! Your name goes down!"

Montmorency glanced at the paper on the table before Jimmy Silver.

"May I look at the list?" he asked.

"I'd like to know what fellows I'm playin' with."

"Certainly!"

Jimmy handed over the list, and Montmorency scrutinised it with the aid of his celebrated monocle.

"You haven't got Townsend or Topham down," he remarked.

"For a good reason," answered Jimmy. "They can't play cricket."

"They're friends of mine."

Jimmy gazed at him. He wondered whether Montmorency's "swank" extended to the length of thinking that fellows ought to be put in the eleven because they were friends of his. Lovell & Co. grinned.

"I see you've got Rawson's name here," went on Montmorency.

"Yes."

"I suppose you know that the fellow is a rank outsider, the kind of bouncer that oughtn't really to be admitted to Rookwood at all?" said Montmorency.

"No," said Jimmy calmly. "I don't know that. It's news to me."

"Towmy says that his father is a plumber or something"—

"I shouldn't wonder," assented Jimmy. "Is it wrong to be a plumber, Montmorency?"

Montmorency shrugged his graceful shoulders impatiently.

"Talk sense!" he suggested.

"I'm waiting for you to do that."

"The fact is, I don't care to play in the eleven with bouncers of all kinds admitted to it," said Montmorency. "I suggest your droppin' Rawson an' puttin' in Towmy or Topham."

Jimmy Silver, still with great calmness, took the paper back, laid it on the table, and drew pencil through a name on it.

"You're crossin' out Rawson's name?" asked Montmorency.

"No. I'm crossing out yours."

"What?"

"And now," said Jimmy Silver, rising

to his feet. "you'll oblige me by walking out of this study as fast as you can, Montmorency. As I asked you here I don't want to lay hands on you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. Arthur Edward seemed to be considerably tickled by this ending to the curious interview.

Montmorency stared at Jimmy Silver.

"If you mean to be cheeky——" he began.

Jimmy pointed to the door.

Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency shrugged his slim shoulders again, turned on his heel, and walked out. When the cricket list was posted on the board later it was not adorned by the aristocratic name of Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency.

CHAPTER 17.

The Letter for Huggins!

'MONTMORENCY——'

It was Tom Rawson of the Fourth who spoke as he met Cecil Cuthbert on the stairs. Montmorency was going down, and Rawson was coming up, and the scholarship junior stopped to speak.

Montmorency went on as if he had not heard.

"Montmorency!" repeated Rawson, raising his voice a little.

At that the superb Monty paused, and glanced at Rawson. There was a calm and cold disdain in his look.

"Will you oblige me by not speakin' to me, Rawson?" he asked.

"I only wanted to say——"

"Probably you've heard somethin' from Jimmy Silver. If you're not satisfied I'm perfectly willin' to meet you in the gym, with or without gloves," said Montmorency coolly. "But nothin' obliges me to listen to your conversation."

Townsend and Topham, who were with the lofty pal, grinned. Towny and Toppo were "down" on their study-mate Rawson, though not to the same extent as the magnificent Montmorency.

Rawson stared at the latter.

"I've heard nothing from Jimmy Silver," he said. "I don't know what you're driving at."

"Oh, I thought he might have mentioned that I declined to play in the cricket eleven unless you were dropped."

Rawson coloured.

"I don't see why you should!" he said, in a low voice.

"Probably not!" assented Montmorency. "Is that all? I think I've mentioned that I don't care for your conversation."

"I don't know whether to pitch you downstairs," said Tom Rawson meditatively. "You're not worth the trouble, I dare say, you silly snob! I stopped to speak to you to tell you something you most likely want to know. There's a letter downstairs in the rack, and——"

"No bizney of yours."

"It's rather a queer-looking letter, and the fellows are making fun of it," said Rawson. "It's in the rack downstairs. That's all. I thought you'd like to get hold of it. I think it's some sort of a joke on you."

"Oh!"

Rawson turned with that, and went upstairs.

Montmorency stared after him, and bit his lip.

There was a quiet dignity in Rawson that ashamed a little the snob of Rookwood, and he realised, too, that Rawson had only wanted to do him a little service, and was not forcing acquaintance on him.

"What the thump does he mean about a queer-looking letter?" said Townsend curiously. "Let's go and see, Monty!"

"I'll go!" said Montmorency abruptly.

He hurried down the stairs.

Perhaps Towny and Toppo did not understand that Montmorency wanted to go alone to claim the letter. At all events, they followed him, and were at his heels when he arrived at the letter-rack.

A dozen fellows were gathered there, and some of them were laughing. As the dandy of Rookwood came up Tubby Muffin's squeak was heard.

"Here he is! He, he, he!"

"Letter for you, Monty!" exclaimed Peele. "Charmin' lookin' letter, by gad! From your pater, I dare say."

"The Hugginses!" chuckled Higgs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The colour burned in Montmorency's cheek. Any mention of the name of Huggins was anathema to him.

But on the present occasion he took no heed of Higgs' remark. His eyes sought the rack for his letter. He picked it out at once. The superscription was indeed queer, and it was not surprising that it had attracted attention among the juniors. The letter was addressed, in a rough, crabbed hand:

"GEORGE HUGGINS,
Rookwood Skool."

Montmorency's hand went instinctively to the letter. But he drew it back at once.

"Is it yours, Montmorency?" asked Mornington.

"How could it be mine?" he demanded. "It's not addressed to me."

"It's his!" squeaked Tubby Muffin. "He was just going to take it! Wasn't he, you fellows?"

"He was!" said Peele.

"Take your letter, Montmorency."

"Huggins!" chortled Higgs.

"You see, it must be for you, Montmorency," said Muffin. "There isn't anybody else named Huggins at Rookwood."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smack!

The back of Montmorency's hand smote Tubby Muffin full across his fat face, and Tubby staggered back with a howl.

"Yo-wowwoop!"

"Here, draw it mild!" exclaimed Conroy, the sturdy Australian, and he made a step in front of Tubby, as

Montmorency seemed inclined to follow up the smack with another.

"Yow-ow-ow!" howled Tubby.

Montmorency cast a fierce look round. Nearly all the juniors in the group were laughing. Townsend and Topham looked at one another very queerly. It was amazing that a letter addressed to George Huggins should arrive at Rookwood, when there was no person of that name at the school. Towny and Topsy were devoted to their wealthy pal; but they could not help remembering the scene in the school buckshop, when Sergeant Kettle had called Cecil Cuthbert by that name.

"It's not yours, then, Montmorency?" asked Peele, with a grin.

"You know it isn't!" snapped Montmorency.

"I'll take your word for it," smiled Peele. "As it's not for you, I'll take charge of it myself. There isn't any fellow at Rookwood named Huggins, so the letter hasn't any owner; oughtn't to have been put out in the rack at all. I'll look into it, and see where it comes from."

"Good idea!" said Gower.

"It ought to be handed to Mr. Dalton," said Mornington. "It's come here by mistake, and should be given back to the postman."

"It hasn't come by mistake," said Peele coolly. "It's addressed to Rookwood right enough. Whoever wrote it thinks there is a chap here named George Huggins."

"Well, Mr. Dalton ought to take it."

"But! I'll send it back to the writer. If his address is inside," said Peele.

Peele was evidently curious to know what was in the letter—as were some other fellows. Peele & Co. had been snubbed by the lolly Montmorency, who had very quickly appraised the standing of the black sheep in the Form, and treated them accordingly. Peele, Lattray, and Gower were three needy and shady young rascals for whom Montmorency had "no use." So

their feelings towards him were not kind.

"Open it, Peele!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "Let's see what's inside."

"Let it alone!" exclaimed Montmorency hastily.

"What does it matter, if it's not for you?" demanded Latirey.

"Don't bother about it, old chap!" murmured Townsend. "You'll make the fellows think——"

Montmorency did not heed.

As Peele stretched out his hand to the letter, Montmorency knocked it aside, and took the letter himself.

There was a buzz among the juniors.

It was clear enough that Cecil Cuthbert did not want them to see the contents of the letter—whether it was for him or not.

"Hand that letter over!" shouted Peele.

"You've no right to keep it, if your name ain't Huggins!" booted Tubby Muffin. "Is your name Huggins?"

"You remember what Kettle said!" chorled Riggs. "He called him Huggins the day he came——"

"Hand over that letter, will you?"

The letter crumpled in Montmorency's grip.

"This—this is a rotten joke on me," he said. "Some cad has written this letter, because of the ridiculous mistake Sergeant Kettle made about my name the other week. It's a rotten paper!"

"Likely enough," said Morington.

"Well, let's open it and see the joke," said Peele.

"I decline to do anythin' of the sort."

Montmorency turned on his heel and walked away, his well-shaped nose high in the air. And the crowd of juniors behind him broke out into a buzz of excited comment.

CHAPTER 15.

Montmorency Declines!

"SILVER!"

"Yes, sir!"

Jimmy Silver was passing Mr. Dalton's study, when the master of the

Fourth called him in. Jimmy stopped in the doorway.

"Will you go to the rack and fetch me a letter addressed to the name of Huggins, Silver?"

Jimmy started violently.

"Huggins, sir?" he ejaculated.

"There isn't any Huggins in the school that—that I know of."

"Exactly! It is very odd that the letter should have been addressed here, and it must be returned to the post-office. Please fetch it for me!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Jimmy.

He hurried away, his mind almost in a whirl.

The name of Huggins seemed destined to haunt Rookwood School ever since Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency had arrived at that ancient foundation.

It was no business of Jimmy's, of course; but he could not help feeling surprised and perplexed.

He found an excited group of the Classical Fourth in front of the rack; but no letter addressed to Huggins therein.

"One of you fellows bagged a letter from here?" asked Jimmy, looking round. "Letter addressed to Huggins. Dicky Dalton handed it out by mistake, and it's got to be sent back."

"Ask Montmorency for it!" chorled Peele.

"Has he got it?"

"He took it from the rack a few minutes ago—though he said it wasn't for him."

"What the thump did he take it for, then?"

"Better ask him," chuckled Gower.

"He's gone out into the quad with it."

Jimmy Silver hurried out into the quadrangle.

He sighted Montmorency, in company with Townsend and Topham. Montmorency's manner was not so cordial as usual towards his two chums. Both Towny and Topy were perfectly well aware that Montmorency wanted to shake them off just then, in order to examine the letter he had taken from the rack. But they were intensely

curious about that mysterious missive, and they declined to be shaken off.

"Let's see it, Monty!" Topham was saying, as Jimmy Silver came up. "If it's a jape, you can let your pals see."

Montmorency set his lips.

"Look here, you fellows," he said. "I'm goin' to burn the thing—it's only some chink from some cad—Higgs or Muffin or Rawson, or somebody. I'm not goin' to open it even."

"I've got a match," said Towny. "Let's burn it now."

He took a matchbox from his pocket.

He winked at Topham as he did so. Montmorency made no movement to produce the letter, and his chums were well aware that he did not intend to burn it till he had looked into it.

"Look here," muttered Montmorency angrily. "Let a fellow alone! I'll see you chaps presently."

And without further ceremony he turned his back on his comrades, and walked away towards Little Quad.

"Dashed cheek!" muttered Topham, much offended.

"Dashed queer, I call it," growled Townsend. "Blessed if I don't begin to think he's some sort of a Huggins after all. Hallo, there's Silver on his giddy trail."

Jimmy Silver ran past the two nuts in pursuit of Montmorency. He overlooked that elegant youth, as he was passing through the archway into Little Quad, and dropped a hand on his shoulder.

Montmorency swung round fiercely.

"Hands off, you fool!"

"Hallo! Keep your wool on, said Jimmy. "You've got a letter there, and—"

"Mind your own business."

"This happens to be my business, as Mr. Dalton has sent me for the letter," answered Jimmy Silver quietly. "He had it put out into the rack by mistake. You've no right to take it away, Montmorency."

"It's a caddish jape on me."

"Possibly; but Mr. Dalton wants the letter."

Montmorency's hand gripped the letter in his pocket hard.

"Hand it over," said the captain of the Fourth.

"I won't."

"Bring it to Mr. Dalton yourself then."

"Leave it to me, and I'll see about it."

"That won't do," said Jimmy Silver. "Mr. Dalton has sent me for the letter—he thinks it's still in the rack. Am I to tell him that you've taken it and refuse to give it up?"

Montmorency's eyes glittered.

"You can tell him anything you dashed well please!" he exclaimed. "Let me alone, and he hanged to you."

"My dear chap," said Jimmy Silver quietly, "you know there's been a lot of queer talk about you on account of old Kettle calling you by the name of Huggins the day you came. What do you think the fellows will suppose if you bag a letter addressed to Huggins?"

"They can suppose what they like!" said Montmorency arrogantly. "I hope I'm above the necessity of payin' any attention to their opinions."

"That sort of silly swank won't go down at Rookwood," said Jimmy. "But it's a question of Mr. Dalton now. He's sent me for the letter, and I can't go back without it. You can see that, I suppose?"

"I decline to discuss the matter with you."

Montmorency swung round on his heel to walk away.

Jimmy Silver's eyes gleamed, and he made a jump after Montmorency, caught him by the shoulder, and swung him back.

"Hand me that letter!" he snapped.

"I refuse."

"Then I shall have to take it," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "If you've any claim to it—and I don't see how you can have—you can come with me to Mr. Dalton, and explain to him. Will that suit?"

"No."

"Then hand me the letter."

"I won't!"

"You must be potty, Montmorency, to carry on like this!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in exasperation. "You know I've got to take the letter to Mr. Dalton, as he's told me to fetch it."

"Go and eat coke!"

"Will you give me that letter?" shouted Jimmy Silver, at the end of his patience.

"No."

"Then I shall take it——"

"Hands off, you cad!" shouted Montmorency.

The next moment they were fighting.

CHAPTER 18.

Trouble for Cecil Dalington!

"FIGHT!"

A "It's Jimmy——"
"And his Nibs!" chuckled Leyell.

There was a rush of fellows into the stone archway, as the fight began. Before the "scrap" had lasted a minute a dozen juniors were on the spot.

"Go it, Jimmy!" roared Arthur Edward Leyell.

"Back up, Manly, old bean!" chirruped Townsend.

Both the combatants were "going it" hot and hard. Jimmy Silver seldom lost his temper; but he was very angry now; and Montmorency seemed to be in a fury of passion. Jimmy was the great fighting-man of the Fourth; but Montmorency was a man worthy of his steel. Snob as he was, pretender as he possibly was, there was no doubt that he had pluck, and was a good fighting-man.

The juniors stared on breathlessly. There was a sudden squeak from Tubby Muffin.

"Cave! Here comes Dicky!"

Mr. Dalton came on the scene, with his long strides. The juniors fell back as the frowning Form-master arrived.

"Silver! Montmorency! Stop this at once."

The combatants separated, breathless, and still mutually defiant. Mr. Dalton fixed a stern look on Jimmy.

"Silver! I sent you to fetch a letter from the rack; and then I saw you, from my study window, follow Montmorency here, and quarrel with him. What does this mean?"

"I—I——" stammered Jimmy.

"Montmorency's got the letter, sir!" squeaked Tubby Muffin.

"What?"

"I—I couldn't bring it, because——" stammered Jimmy Silver.

"Montmorency, have you the letter I sent Silver to fetch?"

"Yaaa."

"Why did you not give it to Silver, then? I presume he told you I had sent him for it?"

No answer.

"You should not have taken it from the rack, Montmorency, as it was not addressed to you!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Give it to me at once."

Mr. Dalton held out his hand for the letter. Montmorency hesitated, the colour coming and going in his face.

"Do you hear me, Montmorency?" exclaimed the Form-master, puzzled and angry. "Give me the letter at once."

Slowly the new junior drew the letter from his pocket. There was no help for it; the Form-master's order had to be obeyed. Even the "swanking" Cecil Cuthbert did not think of retaining the letter until it was taken from him by force.

His face paled as the Form-master received the letter. To his relief, Mr. Dalton made no movement to open it. Still unopened, its mysterious contents still unknown, the letter was slipped into Mr. Dalton's pocket.

"And now, Montmorency, kindly explain why you took this letter from the rack and refused to give it up when Silver asked for it."

"I—I——" Montmorency panted. "It—it was only a—a joke, sir——"

"I cannot understand where the joke was, Montmorency. Your action seems to me to have been equally foolish and

insolent. I shall cane you for your conduct. Follow me to my study."

Mr. Dalton strode back to the School House, followed more slowly by Montmorency. Jimmy Silver dabbed his nose thoughtfully with his handkerchief.

"It's queer!" he said. "What the merry thump did he want with the letter, if his name's not Huggins?"

"It!" sniffed Lovell.

"But it can't be—"

"It's jolly queer, anyhow."

"Yes," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully, as he walked away with his chin up. "It is queer, there's no mistake about that—dashed queer."

Montmorency had followed Mr. Dalton into his study. The Form-master threw the letter on the table, and Montmorency's eyes followed it feverishly. Mr. Dalton picked up a cane.

"Hold out your hand, Montmorency."

Swish! Swish!

"You may go."

Montmorency turned to the door and hesitated, and turned back.

"Excuse me, sir—" he stammered.

"Well?" said Mr. Dalton coldly.

"May I—I ask what you are goin' to do with that letter, sir?"

Mr. Dalton raised his eyebrows.

"I fail to see how it concerns you, Montmorency. And you are surely intelligent enough to know what is usually done with a letter delivered in error."

Mr. Dalton sat at his table and picked up a pen. Across the face of the envelope he wrote: "Not known at Rookwood School." Montmorency drew an almost sobbing breath of relief. It was not the Form-master's intention to open the letter at all.

"I told you to go, Montmorency!" said Mr. Dalton, looking up.

"Yes, sir. May I drop the letter into the post for you?"

Mr. Dalton gave him a sharp look.

"I will see to that myself, Montmorency."

"Very well, sir."

Montmorency left the study. Five

minutes later he saw Mr. De'oon cross to the school letter-box with the letter in his hand, and drop it in.

It was gone past recall now. Montmorency's eyes had not seen the contents, but no other eyes at Rookwood had seen them.

But why that circumstance should afford Cecil Culthbert Montmorency a feeling of intense relief was a very deep mystery.

CHAPTER 26.

The Upstart's Secret!

TOM RAWSON rose to his feet in Study No. 5 and moved to the door. There was a cheery buzz of talk going on in the study, but Rawson was "out of it."

Townsend and Topham were in great spirits, and Montmorency seemed to be gay, though at times he dropped into silence, and the smile upon his handsome face seemed a little forced.

Rawson had been accustomed to the "marble eye" from his two nutty study-mates before Montmorency came. He had grown used to it, and he despised the worthy Towny and Topsy too much to care about it.

But the "marble eye" had grown more frozen since the coming of Cecil Culthbert. That haughty youth resented the presence of Rawson in the study quite openly. He was loftily offended at such a common person coming between the wind and his nobility, so to speak.

Rawson had learned to bear a good many slights with equanimity. He was at Rookwood to work and get on, and he found solace in work and progress.

But more than once he had winced under the polished scorn of Cecil Culthbert, and his most miserable days at Rookwood had been passed since that superb youth had dawned on Study No. 5.

More and more Rawson had fallen into the habit of doing his work in other studies, where he was welcome,

or of walking in the quad under the beeches.

He would stroll there for an hour or two sometimes in the evening memorising Latin verses, or thinking out knotty problems—a natural delicacy keeping him from inflicting himself too often in the end study, or Conroy's room, and from drawing attention to the fact, if he could help it, that his company was not liked in his own quaters.

He left Montmorency & Co. to the cheery chatter, and breathed more freely in the fresh air in the dusk under the ancient beeches. There he soon forgot the annoyances of Study No. 5, concentrating his mind on a "chunk" of *Aeneid* he had committed to memory.

He sat down on a bench under a beech after a time as the shadows deepened round him. The *Aeneid* passed from his mind, and he was thinking of home—the humble home from which his hard-won scholarship had brought him to a Public school, and which he never forgot.

If all the Rookwooders had been like Townsend and Topham, Rawson's life would have been a hard one. Fortunately, they were in the minority, and Rawson could recognise, too, that the chief fault of Towny and Toppy was a careless thoughtlessness. The scorn of Cecil Culbert Montmorency was much more deliberate and bitter.

Plunged into thought, Rawson hardly noticed that there was a sound of voices under the trees near him. Two or three sentences had reached his ears before he quite realised it.

One voice was the calm, cultivated voice of Montmorency of the Fourth; the other betrayed the deep, gruff tones of Sergeant Kettle.

"I've come, as you asked me, Kettle. What the thump do you want? I've told you once that you were mistaken."

"I wasn't mistaken, George, and well you know it!" came the sergeant's voice, deep and gruff, though subdued.

"How dare you call me George!" exclaimed Montmorency passionately.

"Hush! You don't want the young gentlemen to 'ear!' said the sergeant. "I'm not giving you away. I wouldn't say a word again the son of my old chum Oggins, what carried me on his back when I was shot down at Ypres. I'm sorry to see you playing this game, George, but it ain't for me to say a word. I asked you to come 'ere to warn you."

Rawson sat petrified. It was evidently a secret meeting in the deep dusk under the beeches, and neither the sergeant nor the dandy of Rookwood supposed that anyone was within hearing.

"To warn me?" Montmorency's voice was angry and contemptuous. "You've done me harm enough already with your babble. The least you can do is to hold your tongue."

"I'm 'olding it, George," said the sergeant. "You're up in the world now, and you've changed your name owing to your rich uncle, and I ain't the man to do you any 'arm. I tell you, I've got to warn you. Young Lurchey is in Coombe."

Rawson moved uneasily.

He was fully alive to his surroundings now. What he had heard had quite banished his thoughts of his own affairs. He did not want to play the eavesdropper, but he hesitated to make his presence known. He had already heard too much.

"Lurchey!" Montmorency repeated the name in startled tones. "Lurchey—in the village?"

"I've seen him."

"You've told him——"

"I've told him nothing. I don't know as he knows anything. But I wanted to warn you not to let 'im see you—if he ain't seen you already. He's a bad egg is young Lurchey, and it wouldn't do you no good——"

Montmorency groaned.

"It's too late. That must be whom the letter was from."

"The letter! Wot letter?"

"Lurchey—that cad, that rotten outsider—and he knows—" Montmorency muttered the words.

Rawson coughed loudly. He knew how bitter it would be to Montmorency to learn that he had heard, and he did not wish to inflict that pain on the vainglorious upstart. But it was better than to remain where he was and hear more.

"Somebody's there!" exclaimed the sergeant in startled tones.

Rawson came quickly through the dusk.

Montmorency peered at him, with a white face.

"Rawson, you low cad, you've been listening!" he exclaimed in a choking voice.

"I couldn't help hearing you, as you spoke in my hearing," said Rawson quietly. "I did not mean to, and I've shown up so that you shan't say any more for me to hear. I'm sorry I heard anything."

Montmorency clenched his hands convulsively.

"You rotter! You rotter!" he hissed wildly. "You've found out. But go and spin your yarn in the Common-room if you like. I'll deny it, every word, and you'll see whether the fellows will take the word of a gentleman or of a low-class outsider!"

"George!" muttered the sergeant.

"Shut up, you fool! You've done harm enough already!" exclaimed Montmorency passionately.

Mr Kettle drew a deep, hard breath.

"As for you, you spying cad, go and tattle what you've heard!" said Montmorency fiercely.

Rawson looked at him quietly. The taunts of the discovered upstart did not hurt him. He was feeling only compassion for the wretched pretender whose noble name was not his own, whose lofty swank was only the cloak of a humble origin.

"You're mistaken, Montmorency!" he said quietly. "I haven't any intention of repeating a word I've heard."

"You lie!" hissed Montmorency savagely.

"I shall not say a word. I shall forget it all as soon as I can," said Rawson steadily. "You may rely on that, I am a fellow of my word."

And with that Tom Rawson turned and walked away to the School House.

Montmorency stood as if rooted to the ground. In spite of himself, he knew the ring of truth and sincerity in Rawson's voice. He knew that his secret was safe with the boy he had taunted and scorned.

He drew a sobbing breath. Safe—for the present at least—safe to carry on his childish imposture, only with hatred in his heart for the fellow who knew his secret.

"Hang him!" he muttered. "A gentleman to be at the mercy of a cad like that!"

The sergeant grunted.

"Between you and Master Rawson, George, it ain't 'ard to say which is the gentleman!" he said slowly.

And then the sergeant tramped away, leaving Montmorency alone under the beeches—still Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency so long as Tom Rawson kept his secret.

CHAPTER XL

Calling on Huggins!

"H I, young feller!"

Jimmy Silver looked round. Jimmy was not used to being addressed as "young feller," or to answering to the salutation of "Hi!" But Jimmy was always polite, and he looked round with great urbanity.

He was leaning on one of the big stone pillars of the gateway, at Rookwood, waiting for his chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, who had gone to the village. The Co. had just come in sight when Jimmy was hailed by the stranger on the road.

Jimmy looked at him—not admiringly.

He was a young man, of slovenly looks, with a discoloured bowler-hat set rakishly on the back of his head. His eyes had red rims, and there was an

aroma of mingled rum and tobacco about him that did not strike the Rookwood junior pleasantly.

He looked like a tramp, and a rather unpleasant variety of a tramp, and Jimmy was glad that he had not met him alone in a dark lane.

"Well?" said Jimmy.

"This 'ere's Rookwood School ain't it?"

The red-eyed man removed a cigarette from his mouth with a dirty finger and thumb, and jerked it towards the grey old buildings.

Jimmy nodded.

"This is Rookwood," he assented.

"You belong 'ere?"

"Yes," said Jimmy Silver politely. "I belong here. Anything further that you'd care to know?"

"Know young Huggins?"

In the quadrangle, at some distance, Montmorency of the Fourth was sauntering elegantly with his friends Townsend and Topham.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome came up while Mr. Lurchey was talking.

They stopped.

Jimmy Silver glanced at his chums rather uneasily, and Lovell gave a grunt, and Raby and Newcome coughed. All the Pistical Four knew that Mr. Lurchey was alluding to Montmorency of the Fourth, whom he evidently knew, as Mr. Kettle had known him—as George Huggins.

"Nobody here goes by the name of Huggins," said Raby awkwardly.

"I seen him!" said Mr. Lurchey calmly. "I know he's here, but he don't want to see an old friend. Up in the world he is now—always a bit swanky George was, even when he was a boy in bullocks at the 'All."

"Who-at?" ejaculated Lovell.

"If he doesn't want to see you, what the thump have you come to see him for?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver hastily.

He felt he was hearing too much on the subject of Huggins.

Mr. Lurchey winked.

"He's up, and I'm down!" he explained. "Why shouldn't he give a 'clap' and to an old friend what's down

on his luck? I wouldn't 'ave come if he'd answered the letter, and come and seen me. But if he's going to do the likey and decline to reckernize an old pal, I'm goin' to roll 'im off his perch a bit—see? I'm arter George—Gentleman George we used to call 'im."

Jimmy Silver frowned.

"You're standing by 'im to shoo me off—what?" asked Mr. Lurchey, with an unpleasant snarl. "Bless your little 'eart, 'Orace Lurchey ain't shooed off so easy as all that! 'Orace is a stickler. If you won't give my message to young George, I'm coming in to see 'im!"

Jimmy Silver exchanged a look with his chums.

Montmorency was nothing to him: in fact, he did not like the snob of the Fourth, whose upish ways had irritated even the equable temper of "Uncle James" of Rookwood. But he felt called upon to stand between the junior and this dingy rascal.

"You won't come in!" he said curtly.

"Won't I?" exclaimed Mr. Lurchey.

"Who's going to stop me?"

"Little me!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Look 'ere——"

"Put your hoof inside this gateway," said Jimmy coolly, "and you'll go back into the road on your neck! That's a tip!"

Mr. Lurchey glared at him. Lovell and Raby and Newcome, grinning, lined up beside Jimmy Silver. The Pistical Four were quite prepared to give Horace Lurchey all he wanted, and a little over.

Just then, Montmorency, strolling along with Towny and Toppy, came to sight from where Mr. Lurchey stood outside the gates. The eye of Mr. Lurchey was on him at once.

"Why, there's Huggins!" he ejaculated. "You tell me Huggins ain't at this 'ere school, and there he is, as large as life!"

Old Mack came out of his lodge to close the gates. He gave the dingy Mr. Lurchey a look of grim disapproval and shook his head at the Pistical Four.

"I'm sprised at you, Master Silver, turkin' to tramps at the school gates!"

he said severely. "What would Mr. Dalton say? Ere, you travel, you wagrant!"

"I've called 'ere to see a friend!" exclaimed Mr. Lurchey indignantly. "Young 'uggins——"

"No sich name 'ere!" said Mack. "Git off the grass, afore I help with my boot!"

"Huggins!" roared Lurchey.

In the distance Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency spun round as that raucous shout reached his ears, and his startled eyes glanced towards the gates.

"I've called to see you, George!" roared Mr. Lurchey.

Montmorency's handsome face became deadly pale.

Old Mack gave Mr. Lurchey a shove, to move him out of the way of the gate, and clanged it shut.

"Now cut, you rotter!" said Jimmy Silver between the bars.

But Mr. Lurchey was not inclined to cut. Horace, as he had said, was a stickler. He put his stubbly face close to the metal bars and roared:

"George Huggins! Hi, George! Don't you know your old pal 'Orace? Aren't you going to see your old pal 'Orace?"

CHAPTER 22.

The Order of the Boot!

CECIL CUTHBERT MONTMORENCY was staring towards the gates, with a pallor as of death in his handsome face.

His eyeglass had dropped from his eye; he was quite able to see Mr. Lurchey without the aid of his celebrated monocle.

The hapless youth seemed rooted to the ground, as if Mr. Lurchey had been some grisly spectre that had started up suddenly under his eyes.

Townsend and Topham stared towards the loader, and then looked at Cecil Cuthbert, and then at one another.

Towny and Toppy were thunder-struck.

They had pooh-poohed the Huggins story, and had fully accepted Monty's explanation that Sergeant Kettle had been deceived by his chance resemblance to some person of the name of Huggins. As Montmorency was entered on the school books as Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency, the explanation carried sufficient weight, especially as the sergeant had uttered no word on the subject since. But here was another individual addressing Monty as Huggins. And Monty evidently knew him, and was scared out of his wits at the sight of him. Towny and Toppy had much food for thought now.

Townsend touched Montmorency on the arm.

"What's the matter, Monty?" he asked uneasily. "You don't know that horrid blighter, do you?"

"George!" roared Mr. Lurchey.

"Look 'ere, you clear off, you ruffian!" exclaimed old Mac. "I'll come out and shift you if you stand yellin' there!"

"Hi, George!" yelled Mr. Lurchey. "George Huggins! Gentleman George!"

"Monty!" exclaimed Topham.

Montmorency pulled himself together.

He fumbled for his eyeglass with a trembling hand, and turned it upon the dingy figure pressed to the bars of the gate.

"By gad!" His voice was not quite assured, but he was recovering control of himself. "What a merchant! Know who he is, you fellows?"

"Don't you know?" asked Townsend suspiciously.

"I don't know him from Adam, of course."

"Hi, George!"

"By gad, he's got an unpleasant voice, whoever he is!" yawned Montmorency. "Let's get out of this! The lower classes aren't pleasant at close quarters."

Monty was evidently quite himself again now.

He turned and strolled away, and Towny and Toppy went with him. Monty's aristocratic saunter was

changed for a rather quick walk, however, which soon took him out of Mr. Lurchey's range of vision.

"George!" yelled Mr. Lurchey. "Hi, George! Don't you know your old pal 'Orace, what used to clean the boots at the 'All where you was in buttons?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell.

"Open the gate again, Mack," said Jimmy Silver. "We'll jolly soon clear that blackguard off!"

"Who's he torkin' to?" inquired the bewildered Mack. "There ain't nobody 'ere named 'Uggins."

"Didn't I see 'im?" roared Mr. Lurchey. "That young covey with the eyeglass, that was 'Uggins!"

"You silly owl!" said Mack. "That's Master Montmorency."

"Wot!"

"Montmorency!" said Mack crushingly. "Now clear off!"

"Montmorency!" exclaimed Mr. Lurchey. "My eye! So he ain't called 'Uggins 'ere! 'OW was a feller to know that?"

"Are you going?" snapped Jimmy Silver.

"No, I ain't going!" retorted Mr. Lurchey. "I've called 'ere to see young 'Uggins, and I don't care whether he calls 'imself Montmorency or Montgomery, or any other blessed name, I'm goin' to see 'im! I can tell you 'Orace is a sticker!"

Bulkeley of the Sixth came along, his attention drawn by this extraordinary wrangle at the school gates.

"What's the trouble, Mack?" he asked quietly.

"This 'ere ruffian won't go!" said the porter. "He's calling names at Master Montmorency."

"Open the gate!"

Mack flung back the bronze gate with a grin. The stalwart captain of Rookwood was likely to make short work of Mr. Horace Lurchey if he declined to get a move on.

Bulkeley stepped out.

"Time for you to go, my man!" he said.

Mr. Lurchey gave him a glare of defiance.

"This 'ere road belong to you?" he sneered. "I'm staying 'ere as long as I dashed well choose!"

Bulkeley pushed back his cuffs.

"I give you two seconds——" he said.

"You lay a 'and on me——" began Horace Lurchey threateningly.

Bulkeley laid two hands upon him. Mr. Lurchey struck out furiously, and Bulkeley knocked his fist up. Then he swung the dingy loafer round and planted a heavy boot behind him.

Horace Lurchey fairly flew.

"Goal!" yelled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Lurchey came down on his hands and knees in the dusty road with a loud roar.

"Now travel!" admonished Bulkeley.

"I don't want to handle you, but you can't kick up rows at the school gates. Get along!"

"You young 'ound——"

"Are you going?" exclaimed Bulkeley impatiently.

"Yah! You cheeky young 'ound!" gasped Mr. Lurchey. "Ow! Yow! Yooop! Leave off kicking a 'bloke! I'm going, ain't I?"

And Mr. Lurchey went.

He departed down the road to Coombe at a trot, anxious to get out of reach of Bulkeley's boot.

Bulkeley turned back into the gateway, and the gates were closed again. Jimmy Silver & Co. walked away to the School House, but the captain of Rookwood stopped to speak to Mack for a few minutes, apparently interested in the amazing visit of Mr. Lurchey, and his still more amazing remarks.

There was a very thoughtful look on Bulkeley's face as he strode away to the School House. He glanced round the quad, but Montmorency and his companions had disappeared. The Rookwood captain went up at once to the Fourth Form passage, and stopped at Study No. 5.

He tapped at the door and entered.

Montmorency & Co. were in their quarters, chatting. Monty having recovered himself completely by this time. Rawson was working quietly at a corner of the table, unheeded by his suttu study-mates.

"Never seen the man before," Montmorency was yarning, as the Rookwood captain stepped in. "Extraordinary incident."

"Very!" murmured Topham.

"Hallo, Bulkeley!"

"I want a word with you, Montmorency," said Bulkeley, kindly enough. "Do you know anything of that blackguard who was yelling at the gates a few minutes ago?"

"Nothin', Bulkeley."

Tom Rawson glanced up from his work for a second, but immediately dropped his eyes again. Montmorency did not look at him.

"You've never seen the man?" asked Bulkeley.

"Never that I remember."

"Why the dickens, then, did he come to see you and call you by another name?" said Bulkeley. "It's very odd."

Montmorency shook his head.

"Very odd and no mistake," he assented calmly. "He addressed me as Higgins, I think—"

"Higgins," said Townsend.

"Oh, Higgins, was it?" drawled Montmorency.

"Yes, same as the sergeant did the day you came, you know," said Townsend.

Bulkeley started.

"Sergeant Kettle did!" he exclaimed.

For an instant there was a savage flash in Montmorency's eyes as Towsey "batted in" with that unfortunate remark.

"But your name is Montmorency!" said Bulkeley. "I don't understand this!"

"Sergeant Kettle thought I looked like somebody he knew named Higgins," Montmorency explained, with an air of boredom. "Apparently this man at the gate knows the same chap, and

took me for him. It's not very flattering to me—I really don't like lookin' like a fellow named Higgins."

"Oh, don't be a young ass!" said Bulkeley. "It's rather unfortunate, though. That dingy rascal plainly thought he knew you, and we can't have him hanging round Rookwood yelling through the gates. Perhaps it would be best to speak to the village policeman on the subject."

Montmorency's lip quivered for a moment.

"I don't suppose he'll turn up again," he remarked. "Just a tramp passin' along the road. I imagine—most likely he'll be miles away to-morrow."

"It's possible," assented Bulkeley thoughtfully. "If he turns up again he can be dealt with."

The Rookwood captain quitted the study. Then Montmorency glanced at Rawson—the junior who knew his secret. But Rawson kept his eyes on his book. In a few minutes the dandy of Rookwood was chatting cheerily as before, and Townsend and Topham felt their lingering doubts and misgivings dissolving.

But when, a little later, Montmorency lounged out of the study and the door shut him off from the sight of his chums, the easy indifference dropped from his handsome face like a cloak thrown aside.

That handsome, aristocratic face looked worn, almost haggard, and the eyes had a hunted look.

"What infernal luck!" He muttered the words low. "Kettle knows, and Rawson knows, and now that brute Lurchey!" He gritted his teeth. "But I'll beat them all! I'll play the game out! But—but if they knew—if they knew what Lurchey could tell them —"

At the thought a feeling almost of physical sickness came over the pretender. He leaned on the wall, his face pale, his brow moody.

Tubby Muffin came along the passage. There was no fellow at Rookwood who had been more thoroughly snubbed

by the snob of the Fourth than Tubby. But Tubby was prepared to forgive everything at a moment's notice. He paused to speak, with a friendly grin.

"Hallo! Peelin' down, old chap?" he asked sympathetically.

Instantly Montmorency was the cold, impassive, scornful dandy again. He had learned to play his part until it was second nature to him. Or perhaps it was his real nature, for he had been haughty and scornful in the days when, as a page-boy in buttons, his life's ambition had been to become a butler some day.

He turned his eyeglass on Muffin contemptuously.

"I think I've asked you before not to address me, Muffin," he said distinctly. "Do you want to be kicked?"

"Yah!" snorted Tubby Muffin indignantly. "Yah! I heard that chap at the gate—I heard every word! Yah! Huggins!"

And the fat Classical fled just in time to escape a drive from Cecil Cuthbert's elegant boot.

CHAPTER 22.

The Only Way!

"COME in!" sang out Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four were at prep in the end study, when a tap came at the door. It was Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency who lounged elegantly in.

Lovell granted, and went on with his work. He did not like the snob of Rookwood, and made no secret of the fact. Raby and Newcome looked up, and looked down again. But Jimmy Silver, constrained by politeness, gave Cecil Cuthbert a nod.

"Interruptin' you?" asked Montmorency, with a lofty manner that indicated that he did not care whether he was interrupting the juniors or not.

"Well, yes," said Jimmy. "Prep, you know. But cut in if there's anything you want to say."

"I won't keep you long," said Mont-

morency, leaning in an elegant attitude on the mantelpiece. "It seems that you had some talk with that extraordinary loafer who kicked up a row at the gates an hour or two ago."

"He talked to us," said Jimmy shortly.

"It's rather odd, isn't it?"

"Very!" said Jimmy.

"Most unfortunate for me to happen to look like some cad named Huggins," drawled Montmorency. "I suppose it might happen to any chap?"

"I suppose it might."

Jimmy's manner was dry. Ever since the snob of Rookwood had refused to play in the same team with Rawson, the scholarship junior, Jimmy had not taken the trouble to conceal his contempt for the great Monty. And the possibility that the snob was also a pretender, of an origin more humble than Rawson's, added to his contempt.

"But, to come to business," pursued Montmorency. "It's awkward for me, and I'm thinkin' of takin' measures. That loafer can't be allowed to bother a gentleman like this. I'm thinkin' of speakin' to the police at Coombe about it."

Lovell looked up.

"You can't have a man run in for calling you Huggins," he said, "and you might have to explain why he called you Huggins, if you could."

Montmorency did not heed that remark.

"Have you any idea where the man is to be found, Silver?" he asked. "Is he stoppin' in Coombe, do you know?"

"I should think he was staying at the Bird-in-Hand."

"Where on earth's that?"

"It's the pub you pass as you go into the village."

"Oh, yes; I think I've noticed it—just the place where such a loafer would put up, I dare say. The police will be able to find him there and warn him, no doubt."

"No doubt!" assented Jimmy.

"Thanks!"

Montmorency contrived to drawl the



"Hallo, George! George Huggins! Gentleman George!" The tramp clung to the bars of the gates of Rookwood and shouted across the quad. At the sound of his voice Montmorancy turned, and suddenly his face went deathly pale and his eye-glass dropped from his eye!

word "thanks" in a tone that implied that he was not thankful in the least, and sauntered out of the study. Arthur Edward Lovell kicked the door shut after him.

"That fellow gives me a bad taste in the mouth!" he grunted. "I can't stand him! Fancy his hurting poor old Rawson's feelings as he did, and it turns out that he's a sort of a manservant himself."

"It's not proved," murmured Jimmy. Snort from Lovell.

"That ruffian knew what he was talking about! It's as plain as anything that the Hugginses have got money from somewhere, and changed their name to Montmorency. Not an uncommon thing these days," added Lovell, with another snort. "The sergeant knew him as soon as he clapped eyes on him, and now there's Lurchey."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Well, it's legal for a chap to change his name if he pays the fee and has it done in order," he remarked.

"I know that! But he's no right to swank and out-Herod Herod with his dashed uppishness!" granted Lovell. "Swank from a real Montmorency would be dashed bad form, but from a rotten upstart—pah!"

To which Jimmy Silver made no rejoinder. As a matter of fact, he shared the sentiments of his emphatic chum.

Indifferent to the opinion of the end study—outwardly, at least—Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency sauntered down the passage and down the stairs. He exchanged nods with several fellows he was friendly with—Morrington, and Townsend, and Topham, and Smythe of the Shell, and Tracy and Howard—but he did not stop to speak to any of them. The clear summer moonlight in the quadrangle seemed to attract him, and he sauntered out of the house.

Once out of sight of the other fellows, however, he did not saunter. He broke into a run and reached the school wall. There he pulled a cap out from under his jacket and clapped it on his head. After a quick glance

round into the dusky shadows he clambered over the wall.

It was a rather serious matter for a Rookwood junior to break bounds after lock-up, but Montmorency did not seem to give that a thought. From calling-over to bed-time he was not likely to be missed. And even if his excursion were to be discovered, its object was not likely to be guessed—by the Head or the masters, at least.

He dropped into the road and walked away very quickly.

Keeping in the shadow of the trees by the lane he hurried on towards the village.

In a short time he was in sight of the Bird-in-Hand, the dingy-looking inn that lay back a little from the road on the outskirts of Coombe. It was a place not unknown to some of the Giddy Goats of Rookwood; but Montmorency so far had not shared in the escapades of Peele & Co., and the Bird-in-Hand was new territory to him.

Lights were gleaming from the low windows, and the sound of a raucous chorus came from within. Montmorency looked at the place with a black and gloomy brow. He had come there to see Mr. Lurchey—he had to see him. But to penetrate into the dingy, disreputable place was not only distasteful, but dangerous for a Rookwood fellow. He could not enter openly, and ask for the man he sought, but he had to see him. That was imperative, if Horace Lurchey was not to pay another visit to Rookwood, which might have more disastrous results for the pretender.

For a long time he stood, pondering anxiously, and at last he entered the side path that ran by the inn. From some talk he had heard among Peele & Co. he knew of that path, and of a veranda at the back of the house by way of which the Giddy Goats paid their surreptitious visits. He found himself at the back, and looked up anxiously at a lighted window that glimmered on the shabby veranda.

"Hallo, what are you doin' 'ere?"

came a gruff voice, and a heavy hand fell upon Montmorency's shoulder.

He started, his heart throbbing.

It was a stableman who had come suddenly upon him, and was evidently suspicious at finding someone lurking in the dark at the back of the inn. He held Montmorency's shoulder tightly and peered into his face.

"It's all right, my man!" breathed Montmorency.

"Is it? Looking for what you can lay your hands on?"

"I—I've called to see a man staying here," said Montmorency hurriedly. "I—I want to go in quietly."

The stableman grinned. By this time he had discerned that Montmorency was a well-dressed schoolboy, and he thought he understood. He had seen Peele and Smythe about the place before.

There was a glimmer of silver, and the man's manner became respectful at once as a couple of half-crowns were slipped into his hand.

"I catch on, sir," he grinned. "I understand. It's all right, sir, just as you say. Who might you want to see, sir—Mr. 'Ook'?"

"No, no; a man named Lurchey. Can you take me in quietly to see him?" whispered Montmorency. "I—I mustn't be seen here, you know."

"I know, sir. You follow me."

With a beating heart, Montmorency followed the stableman on to the veranda, where a door was tapped and opened. Montmorency blinked into the light of a smoky room.

"Young gentleman to see you, Lurchey," said the man, and he grinned, pushed Montmorency inside, and closed the door after him.

sphere was familiar to him, and such dens as the Bird-in-Hand not unfamiliar. But that was in the days before new-found wealth had turned Huggins into Montmorency.

Horace Lurchey was seated at a table, smoking, and playing cards with a fat, red-faced man—Mr. Hook, the bookmaker, though Montmorency did not know him.

Lurchey rose to his feet, startled, and burst into a laugh as he saw the pale-faced junior on the threshold.

"Hallo, George!" he exclaimed jovially. "Come to see your old pal, arter all? Didn't want me to call to-morrow—what!"

"I—I want a word with you," said Montmorency, almost appealingly, and he made a gesture towards Joey Hook.

That fat and ruddy gentleman rose.

"You'll skuse us for a bit, 'Ook'?" said Mr. Lurchey. "I've got some business with this young gent."

"If the young gent ever wants to do a bit of business in my line," said Mr. Hook graciously, "I'll be 'appy to oblige him."

And the fat bookmaker quitted the room.

Mr. Lurchey lighted a fresh cigarette, and then stood, with his hands in his trousers-pockets, regarding Montmorency with an insolent grin.

"'Ave a smoke, George?" he asked.

"No, no."

"Given it up?" asked Mr. Lurchey.

"You used to 'ave a tag on now and then when you was below stairs at the 'All."

Montmorency winced.

The coarse familiarity of the loafer cut him like a whip, as well as the reminder of early days he would fain have forgotten.

Horace Lurchey chuckled.

"Fancy meeting you up in the world like this 'ere!" he said. "When I saw you in a car with two young gentis, you could 'ave knocked me down with a feather. You could, rec'y! 'This is a bit of onright for me,' I says to myself.

CHAPTER 31.

An Old Pal.

MONTMORENCY caught his breath in the tobacco-laden atmosphere of the room. There had been a time when such an atmo-

"George is goin' strong," I says, "and he won't refuse to 'and out a little to an old pal," I says. I wrote to you—"

"The letter was sent back to the post-office," said Montmorency. "The name of Huggins is not known at the school."

"So I found out to-day," assented the grinning rascal. "It's Montmorency now. Ha, ha! You took a whopper while you was about it, George."

"It was my uncle, of course. My uncle's name is Montmorency."

"Ow much did it cost him?"

Montmorency set his teeth hard. He was longing to plant his clenched fist full in the grinning, insolent face. But he dared not. A few words from Horace Lurchey would have torn to tatters the fabric of pretence and falsehood in which the wretched upstart was clothed as in a garment.

The rascal knew his power, and he was enjoying the situation.

"Who'd have thought it, George?" he went on. "In them days when you was page at Goby Hall—"

"Hold your tongue!" hissed Montmorency fiercely.

"Page in buttons you was," pursued Lurchey, unheeding. "And very handsome and nobby you looked in them buttons. You was always turnin' up your nose, even in them days—lookin' down on me, too, though my job was as good as yourn. When old Goby sacked me, you was still there, lookin' forward to gettin' a job as under-footman—ha, ha!—when you grew up a bit. 'Ow on earth did it 'appen, George—you turning out like this 'ere? Was there some truth in the yarns you used to spin in the servants'-hall about your rich uncle?"

Montmorency bit his lip till the blood almost came.

If Rookwood fellows should hear the rascal talking like this—if they should learn that Montmorency's haughty manners had first been displayed among the footmen in old Sir Gilbert Goby's mansion—that he had been the dandy of the servants'-hall!

He shuddered.

"My uncle has adopted me," he said at last, in a low voice. "I have taken his name."

"His name? Ha, ha!"

"His legal name now, at any rate," said Montmorency fiercely. "You had better be careful, Lurchey. You were kicked out of Goby Hall for stealing, you scoundrel!"

"I served my three months," said Lurchey coolly, "and now I can't get another job without a character, I've dropped on an old pal who's playing the grand duke at a big school. Wet lock for 'Oraee! 'Ow much do you owe me, George?"

"I owe you nethin', you bound!"

"You want me to drop in at Rookwood, and mention certain things about boys in buttons and servants'-halls?" grinned Lurchey. "Is there a covey there that would speak to you, arter they knew?"

"Plenty!" said Montmorency savagely. "Plenty, if they'd known all along, and I hadn't taken them in. Plenty, if—"

He broke off. It was in his mind that Jimmy Silver & Co., at least, would have thought none the worse of him for his origin, if he had played a straight-forward and manly part. That was all they would have cared about. But he had alienated them by—what? By assuming a snobbish pride that would have been contemptible in a grandee of the bluest blood, and was ludicrous, as well as contemptible, in the presumptuous upstart.

"If!" mimicked Lurchey. "Why, I know 'ow you has carried on, jest as if I'd seen you at the game. You look like a gentleman, George, but you ain't one by long chalks. They called you Gentleman George at Goby Hall—downstairs. But you was proud in a way that a gentleman ain't and I'll bet you've made 'arf the fellers hate you by puttin' on airs; and if there's any poor beggar down on his luck, you've rubbed it into him—what? Don't I know you?"

The wretched junior winced again. Lurchey indeed did know him.

"Well, what's the figure?" asked Lurchey. "I ain't keen on making visits where I ain't wanted. If I'd known as you hadn't got my letter, I wouldn't 'ave walked up to Rookwood to-day. I'd have given you a chance. You're a snob and a purse-proud up-start, George, but I don't want to hurt you—not if you treat me decent. What's the figure?"

"A fiver, if you'll clear out and not come back," said Montmorency huskily. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Lurchey fairly laid back his head and roared. Montmorency watched him angrily till he had had his laugh out.

"Never knewed you was such a funny cove, George!" gasped Mr. Lurchey, wiping his eyes.

"Look here——"

"Make it a fiver now," said Mr. Lurchey. "and the same every week, and we'll see."

"Do you think I'm made of money, you fool?" exclaimed Montmorency shrilly.

"You look as if you was," answered Mr. Lurchey calmly. "That clobber and gold watch-chain never did you in for less'n fifty quid. You're rolling in it, George. You must 'ave been telling the truth at Goby Hall about a rich uncle, when we all thought you was swanking as usual. A fiver a week will keep your old pal a mile off Rookwood."

"I—I'll write to my—my uncle——"

"Oh, do!" said Lurchey. "Write to him as much as you like. Until he answers, keep up the fiver every week, unless you want me to drop in at Rookwood and tell 'em about the 'naughty Montmorency washin' plates and touchin' his 'at at Goby 'All. Remember the time when old Sir Gilbert twisted your ear, George, for tellin' lies——"

"Silence!" hissed Montmorency.

"You used to say 'Stow it!' in them days," grinned Lurchey. "I haven't seen the colour of the fiver yet, George."

Montmorency glanced at the clock

on the mantelpiece and started. It was nearly ten—bed-time for the juniors at Rookwood. He took out a handsome Russia-leather pocket-book, and extracted a five-pound note, which he tossed across the table to the grinning rogue opposite.

"I'll see what's to be donat!" he muttered. "Meanwhile, you keep away and hold your tongue!"

"Done—till the next fiver's due!"

Without replying to that, Montmorency turned and hurried from the room, and as he groped his way out of the dark veranda, he heard—without answering—the mocking farewell of Mr. Lurchey:

"Good-night, George! Good-bye, Gentleman George!"

CHAPTER 23.

Painful Prospects!

"MONTMORENCY!"

Mr. Dalton spoke very sharply as a breathless junior came into the School House at Rookwood at a quarter-past ten.

"Yes, sir?"

"What does this mean, Montmorency?" exclaimed the master of the Fourth. "You have been out of gates after lock-up and have remained till after bed-time."

"Yass."

Two or three of the Sixth were near, and they glanced curiously at Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency as he answered his Form-master. There was a cool, quiet impertinence in Montmorency's manner—as if he recognised, and wished to emphasise, the difference in social standing between a Montmorency and a mere Form-master at a school.

Certainly, no one at that moment could have guessed that the lofty and impertinent youth who "cheeked" his Form-master had been addressed only a short time before on equal terms by a character like Mr. Lurchey.

Mr. Dalton coloured a little.

"Where have you been, Montmorency?" he asked very quietly.

"I felt inclined for a stroll, sir."

"Is that all?"

"Naturally. I'm sorry I'm late for dorm," added Montmorency, his tone—as usual—implying that his "sorrow" was only a matter of polite form.

"I shall punish you severely for this breach of discipline, Montmorency," said Mr. Dalton. "Follow me to my study."

In Mr. Dalton's study the lofty Cecil Cuthbert received four cuts, well laid on, and was dismissed to his dormitory. There was a buzz of voices from a dozen beds as he came into the dorm and turned on the light.

"Here he is!"

"Been to see Lurchey, Huggins?" squeaked Tubby Muffin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!" said Jimmy Silver, glancing at Montmorency's set face.

"Can't you see he's been through it? He's been licked. Shut up, all of you!"

"Uncle James' word was law and Montmorency was suffered to go to bed in peace. But it was a long time before his eyes closed in slumber. He had stayed off exposure—for the present, at least—but he had a thorny path to tread at Rookwood; the future was full of uncertainty for "Gentleman George."

CHAPTER 31.

The Gold Shoulder!

"WHAT a fool—what a dashed fool I've been!"

Montmorency muttered the words aloud as he stood at his study window, staring gloomily into the old quadrangle.

He was alone in the study.

He stood with his hands driven deep into his pockets, his eyeglass dangling at the end of its cord, his whole attitude one of dejection.

In the quadrangle he could see Jimmy Silver & Co. in a cheerful group, chatting under the benches. The

Fistful Four looked cheerful enough that sunny afternoon. But they hadn't the gnawing trouble that weighed upon the mind of Cecil Montmorency.

"What a dashed fool!" he muttered again. "What a thumpin' fool! If I'd weighed out the truth to begin with, most of the fellows would have thought none the worse of me. What do they care whether my name's Huggins or Montmorency? But I couldn't—I couldn't! What a rotten run of luck I've had ever since I came to Rookwood!"

His brow darkened.

He caught sight of Tom Rawson, the scholarship junior, crossing the quad, with a book under his arm.

Rawson exchanged a cheery nod with Jimmy Silver. Evidently Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Fourth, was not worried by the fact that Rawson's father was a plumber, or a carpenter, or a gasfitter, or whatever he was. And Rawson was poor; the poorest fellow at Rookwood. Who cared whether he wore his clothes twice as long as any other fellow in the school? Nobody but a few duffers like Towny and Toppy and Peele.

But Rawson played the straight game, and that Cecil Cuthbert had never done. It was not in his nature to do it, apparently.

Montmorency could not help thinking, as he stared gloomily from the window, that matters would have gone better with him if he had taken the same line as Rawson.

But it was too late to change now, even if he wanted to change. And he was not sure that he did.

To admit that a year ago his name had been Huggins—that he had carried plates and answered bells at Goby Hall, clad in a suit adorned by rows of buttons—he shuddered at the thought.

To admit that, only twelve short months since, he had been on the same footing as Tupper, the house-page at Rookwood! That his uncle, who had adopted him, had had his head turned by the success of a lucky speculation on

the Stock Exchange, and had changed his name from Huggins to Montmorency—absurdly, though quite legally! The handsome, elegant youth who stared gloomily from the study window was quite fitted by Nature to live up to that grandiloquent name—but his uncle! Montmorency thought of the fat, self-important little gentleman, with his rubicund face and his flaring waistcoat—and his accent and manners that had changed little since he was a sporting publican.

Uncle Huggins had been a dashed fool, as he had been a dashed fool; he realised that only too clearly now.

But his luck had been cruel for a snob. First of all, Sergeant Kettle, who had known him years ago, turned out to be school sergeant at Rookwood, and had recognised him, and blurted out his real name before a crowd of fellows. Then Horace Lurchey, who had been his fellow-servant at Goby Hall, had turned up, and fastened on to him.

All the Lower School at Rookwood knew, or guessed, how the matter stood, to some extent at least, and his friends had begun to look coldly upon him.

Townsend and Topham, who had chummed enthusiastically with Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency, were very doubtful now whether they could continue to know him. They felt that there was something shady about Cecil Cuthbert, in spite of the fact that he had more fivers than any other fellow had half-crowns and he could telephone for his uncle's tremendous Rolls-Royce whenever he wanted to.

And fellows whom he had mercilessly snubbed, in his snobbish loftiness, gleefully welcomed the opportunity of "getting their own back" now—they even addressed him personally as George Huggins!

Who he was, and what he was, nobody knew exactly, but everybody knew or suspected that he was not what he pretended to be.

And the falsehoods he had told had to be bolstered up by more falsehoods,

and these again by more, until the hapless upstart hardly knew how many lies he had told.

The door of the study opened, and Montmorency swung round from the window.

In an instant the dejection had dropped from him—he was on his guard again, playing the part that custom had made second nature to him. He screwed his monocle into his eye, and glanced at Townsend and Topham as they came in.

Towny and Topy stopped when they saw him.

The cheery greeting they would have given him a few days before was conspicuous by its absence now.

Both of them coloured and looked uncomfortable; evidently not having expected to find him in the study just then.

"Trot in, old beans!" said Montmorency, with his aristocratic drawl, taking no notice of their very peculiar manner. "I was just comin' out to look for you!"

"Oh!" said Topham.

"I—I thought you were out!" stammered Townsend.

"I'm thinkin' of 'phonin' for the car, and takin' a little run this afternoon," yawned Montmorency. "Care to come?"

In spite of his careless manner, he was watching the two nifty juniors very keenly.

Only a few days before Towny and Topy would have jumped at that invitation; there were plenty of fellows in the Fourth who would have jumped at it now. But Towny and Topy were rather more particular than some fellows! They prided themselves on the fact that they were rather particular!

"Hee!" muttered Topham, with a glance at his chum.

"Thanks!" said Townsend. "But we're not thinkin' of goin' out this afternoon, Montmorency."

Before the appearance of Horace Lurchey at Rookwood, Montmorency

had been "Monty" to his two nutty pals.

Evidently he was Monty no longer! A hard glitter came into his eyes.

"Doin' anythin' special this afternoon?" he asked.

"Just roamin' round," said Townsend carelessly. "Come on, Topy; I don't think we'll stay in."

The Nuts of the Fourth turned out of the study again. Montmorency followed them into the passage.

His heart was heavy within him; he realised that this was the "cold shoulder" with a vengeance. But his manner was quite as usual—he was determined not to see what was plain enough for the blindest to see. He wedged between Townsend and Topham and walked down the passage with them to the stairs.

Towny and Topy exchanged an unhappy glance across him.

The dear pal they had chummed with was apparently not to be dropped so easily as he had been taken up!

The three juniors came out into the quadrangle together.

"Hallo, there's Talboys of the Fifth!" exclaimed Topham suddenly. "I've got to speak to Talboys!"

And he fairly bolted.

Montmorency's lips came hard together.

"Comin' out for a stroll, Towny?" he asked.

Townsend drew a deep breath.

He jerked his arm away.

"Excuse me!" he said curtly. "I've got somethin' to do—somethin' I'd forgotten."

And fairly turning his back on Montmorency, Townsend walked quickly away.

CHAPTER 37.

Lattrey's Luck!

"HERE comes cheery old Huggins!" "Shurrup!" whispered Jimmy Silver.

Arthur Edward Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

Prep was over that evening, and most of the Classical Fourth had gathered in the Common-room.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were talking cricket, the most interesting subject to them just then, when Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency appeared in the doorway.

There were at least a dozen smiles in the junior Common-room as he appeared.

Townsend and Topham, who were leaning elegantly on the mantelpiece and discussing the first-class places they had visited last vac, shifted their position a little, so that they should not meet Montmorency's eye. Higgs winked at Flynn, who grinned. Tubby Muffin, whose desperate efforts to get on a friendly footing with Montmorency had all failed, indulged in a fat chuckle. Lattrey and Peels and Gower, who were talking "horses" in a little group by themselves, smiled satirically. They had been treated to the lofty contempt of Cecil Cuthbert, and they quite enjoyed the Huggins story.

Such a reception might have made any fellow feel downhearted, coming into a crowded room. But Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency undoubtedly had a nerve of iron.

He sauntered gracefully into the room, his eyeglass glimmering in his eye, his manner careless, at ease.

He took no notice whatever of Towny or Topy, but moved across to where Valentine Mornington sat on a sofa. Mornington picked up a book and became immediately engrossed in its contents, though not a great reader as a rule.

If it had been Montmorency's intention to speak to him, he changed it instantly, and without a sign.

He sauntered past the sofa, and dropped into a vacant armchair, and crossed one elegant leg over the other with every appearance of easy comfort and satisfaction.

There was another chair beside him, in which Puffy Grace was seated. Grace rose after a moment or two, and strolled away.

If Montmorency had been touched with the plague his proximity could not have been more carefully avoided.

Yet his face still gave no sign.

He was among twenty or thirty fellows, but as severely solitary as if he had been in the middle of Coombe Heath.

But after a time Lattrey left his friends, and dropped into the vacant chair beside him.

Montmorency did not glance at him.

He had no desire to fall from the "best set" in the Fourth into the company of the black sheep. He was determined, somehow, to regain the position he had lost, and he could not do that by associating with such fellows as Lattrey & Co.

But Lattrey had come there to speak, and he spoke. He turned a grinning satirical face upon Montmorency.

"Feeling a bit down?" he asked.

Montmorency condescended to turn his eyeglass upon the junior by his side with a lofty stare.

"I don't understand you," he said icily.

"I think you do!" grinned Lattrey. "Your friends seem to be givin' you the go-by. Towny and Toppy figure it out that they've been taken in."

"I think I've mentioned before that I don't care for your company, Lattrey," said Montmorency, with deliberate calmness. "Would you mind addressin' your remarks to somebody else?"

"There isn't a fellow in the Fourth," said Lattrey, "who doesn't believe that your name's Huggins, and that you've borrowed Montmorency since your people made money. Old Kettle knew it, and that shady bouncer Lurchey knows it, and I know jolly well that you've squared Lurchey not to turn up at Rookwood again, though he's still hanging on at the Bird-in-Hand at Coombe. Dash it all, old fellow, it's no good swankin' any longer! Can't you see it's a chicken that won't fight?"

Montmorency did not reply.

He gazed across at a picture on the wall, as if deeply interested in it, and deaf to the voice at his side.

Lattrey set his lips a little.

Whether he was a pretender or not, Montmorency was certainly master of a supercilious manner that could be very cutting.

"I don't want to slang you," said Lattrey, after a pause. "I'm only pointin' out that it's no good surtyin' your nose in the air any longer. Towny and Topper have done with you, and Morry won't speak to you, and you know it. You've put half the fellow's backs up by bein' insuttin', and they're jolly glad to see you bowled out."

Montmorency seemed still deaf.

His calm, impassive face gave no sign that every word uttered by the cad of the Fourth was gall and wormwood to him.

He understood what Mark Lattrey meant now. He was really offering to receive him into his own shady circle, now that the nuts of the Fourth would have nothing to do with him. But Montmorency's pride was as high as ever, whether it was the pride of a Montmorency or the insolence of the servants-hall. Only a slight curl of his lip betrayed that he was aware of Lattrey's presence.

"Still swankin', what?" said Lattrey, with a sneer, and his eyes glittered. "By gad, this is really rich! I've heard that fellow Lurchey talkin'. You and he were servants at a place called Goby Hall, and now you're turnin' up your nose at Rookwood! Blessed if I ever heard of such a nerve! By right you should be blackin' our boots for us here. That's what you were used to before the Hugginses made money, I fancy."

Smack!

Still quite calm, Montmorency swept out his hand, and the palm came with a smack on Lattrey's face. The concussion sounded across the room like a pistol-shot, and it made a dozen fellows look round.

"Hallo! Lattrey's been asking for it!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"And getting it!" grinned Fishy.

Lattrey sprang to his feet, his face crimson. Montmorency rose calmly, facing him, evidently ready for trouble.

"You cheeky cad!" roared Lattrey.

"Do you want some more?" asked Montmorency, with a bitter smile. "You've only got to repeat your impertinence, my good fellow."

Lattrey clenched his hands with rage.

"Go for him!" called out Peele.

"I'm not fightin' with page-boys," said Lattrey. "I'd just as soon fight with Tupper in the boot-room."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you did I fancy Tupper would give you as much as you could carry home!" granted Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Punk!" snorted Higgs.

Montmorency came closer to Lattrey, with his fists clenched. Lattrey backed away, showing the white feather only too plainly. He was not of the stuff of which heroes are made.

"You will fight me, whether you like it or not, if I have any more of your insolence!" said Montmorency.

"I won't fight you," said Lattrey. "You're too good a man for me in that line. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll see that the Head knows that your name is Huggins, and that there's a bony blackguard in Coombe who used to be your fellow-servant at Goby Hall. That will bring you down off your perch, you cheeky cad!"

And Lattrey turned and walked quickly out of the Common-room.

"My hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

All eyes were on Montmorency.

The general impression in the Common-room was that Lattrey had gone to the Head's study to give away the half-kept secret of the upstart of Rookwood.

If the fellow really was a pretender, surely it was time now for him to blench?

But, to the surprise and perplexity of the juniors, Montmorency only cast a scornful glance after his enemy, and sat down again. He crossed one elegant

leg over the other as before, and looked quite at peace with himself and all the world. Townsend and Topham exchanged dubious glances, wondering whether they had made a mistake, after all.

"By Jove! The fellow's got a nerve!" murmured Newcome.

It was a quarter of an hour later that Bulkeley of the Sixth looked into the Common-room to shepherd the Classical Fourth away to their dormitory. Nothing had happened in the interval. Apparently Lattrey had not, after all, gone to the Head.

"Bed-time!" said Bulkeley. "Now, then!"

Montmorency rose to his feet with a slight yawn.

"I say, Bulkeley——"

"Hallo!" said the captain of Rookwood, glancing at him curiously.

"Do you mind if I detain you a minute? There's a fellow in the village—a fellow who calls himself Lurchey——"

Every eye was on Montmorency again. The Fourth-Formers waited with almost bated breath for what was to follow.

"I've seen him," said Bulkeley curtly.

"You mean that low blackguard who came here claiming to know you——"

"Yess. He thinks he knows me, and he doesn't," said Montmorency easily. "It's rather a rotten position for me. He spoke to me in the village the other day, and I don't like to get mixed up in a row with such a character, or I'd have knocked him down. As head prefect, I'm askin' you what I ought to do in the matter."

"Oh!" said Bulkeley.

"It's really amountin' to a sort of persecution," continued Montmorency, while the juniors stared blankly. "The fellow takes me for some sort of a rank outsider he knows named Huggins."

"I know that."

"It can't go on," said Montmorency. "Would you advise me to go to the police-station about it, Bulkeley?"

"I don't know that that would do any

good," said Bulkeley. "But if the fellow persists in speaking to you——"

"He does."

"And you don't really know him?"

"I've said I don't!" said Montmorency, raising his eyebrows.

"Very good," said Bulkeley quietly. "In that case, the fellow must certainly be stopped from persecuting you. I will see him to-morrow, if you like, and warn him off."

"You're awfully good," said Montmorency. "That's exactly what I should like, if you'd take the trouble."

"Then I'll do it. Get off to the dormitory now," said Bulkeley.

And the Classical Fourth marched away to their dormitory, in a state of wonder. Even Edward Arthur Lovell was beginning to doubt whether he had been too hasty in condemning the pretender. As for Townsend and Topham, they were in a most unhappy state of doubt. Was Montmorency the "real goods," after all? And had they displayed the cold shoulder to a genuine scion of a blue-blooded house, who was also rolling in money and expensive motor-cars? It was really a most painful state of dubiety for Towny and Toppy. And in the dormitory they melted towards their former chum, and bade him good-night in cordial tones, with a vague idea of being on the safe side, as it were.

But Montmorency was not to be so easily placated. He answered their good-night with a cool, steady stare, and turned his back on them.

At which Towny and Toppy coloured uncomfortably, and felt more than ever that they had made a mistake.

CHAPTER 32.

A Very Interesting Occasion!

"YOU coming, Jimmy?"

"Oh, rot!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"Nearly all the Fourth's going!" grinned Lovell.

"More asses like the Fourth!" said Jimmy.

"Well, dash it all, it's interesting, isn't it?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell. "I'm blessed if I can make the fellow out at all! If he's a spoofer, where does he get the nerve to call Bulkeley into the matter?"

"Perhaps he isn't a spoofer," said Jimmy Silver. "Anyhow, it's not the blincy of the end study. Let him rip!"

"But we're interested," argued Newcome. "If the fellow's a spoofer, he's got no end of a nerve! I want to see Bulkeley tackle Lurchey."

"I'm going," said Lovell decidedly.

"Nearly all the Form's going. You come, too, Jimmy. We may hear the whole history of the noble Montmorency, who was once a boy in buttons."

"Lurchey is sure to shout it out if Bulkeley tackles him!" chuckled Newcome. "I'm going!"

"What about the cricket?" said Jimmy. "It's a half-holiday, and we want to play cricket. Do you want St. Jim's to beat us?"

"We can spare an hour for Huggins, and still beat St. Jim's when the match comes off. Come on, Uncle James!" grinned Lovell, catching Jimmy by the arm. "Bulkeley will be starting soon, and all the fellows are hanging round waiting for him."

And the reluctant Jimmy was marched away by his chums.

Bulkeley of the Sixth was always an important person at Rookwood, as head-prefect and captain of the school. His doings were of great interest; his lightest opinion was regarded with respect. But it is safe to say that never had Bulkeley's doings excited so much interest in the Lower School of Rookwood as they did that afternoon.

Bulkeley was going down to Coombe to see the dingy blackguard who persisted in "knowing" Montmorency of the Fourth and in addressing him as "George Huggins" and "Gentleman George." Bulkeley was going to "warn

him off the course," as Mornington expressed in his slangy way. And if Lurchey was telling the truth with regard to Cecil Cuthbert, it looked as if the interview would be a very interesting one. If Lurchey was defiant or insolent, as was very probable, it was more than likely that Bulkeley would proceed to "handle" him, which would be worth watching. In any case, it was probable that interesting details with regard to Cecil Cuthbert would be made known—perhaps shouted out by the angry rascal. And Cecil Cuthbert was by this time such an object of interest to the Fourth Form that the juniors' curiosity was really excusable.

When Bulkeley came out of the School House, with a sick under his arm, at least twenty pairs of eyes were fixed on him from various directions.

Lovell blissfully surmised that that stick was intended for the shoulders of Mr. Lurchey—in which case, the expedition could not fail to be full of interest and excitement.

Montmorency came out with Bulkeley. He held his head high, as usual, and seemed unaware of the general interest taken in him and his companion. Apparently the dandy of the Fourth was to accompany Bulkeley on his expedition, and face Mr. Lurchey in his lair, as it were.

Lattrey eyed him evilly. Lattrey believed the worst of the fellow who had smashed his face in the Common-room—the worst he could imagine. But he was staggered now. If Montmorency was a humbug, he was playing out his particular game with a nerve that was amazing. And Lattrey, revengeful as he was, hesitated more than ever about making his threatened communication to the Head. He determined to see this affair through first, at all events.

Bulkeley of the Sixth turned out at the gates with Montmorency, and at least twenty juniors turned out after him.

Fortunately, it did not seem to occur

to Bulkeley that he was followed, for he did not look back as he strode along the leafy lane towards Coombe. Nearly all the Classical Fourth, and some of the Moderns, followed him.

"We're going to be in at the death!" chuckled Lovell. "That fellow Lurchey is always leaning against a post outside the Bird-in-Hand in the afternoon. It will be an al fresco entertainment!"

"And Montmorency has got the nerve to face him in Bulkeley's company?" said Mornington. "I'm blessed if I know what to think! What do you think about it, Jimmy?"

But Uncle James of Rookwood shook his head.

"My dear chap, I'm too busy thinking about my own affairs to think about Montmorency's," he answered. "What does it matter, anyhow?"

"Oh, rats!" said Mornington.

Jimmy Silver was the only fellow in the Fourth, apparently, who took that lofty, detached point of view.

The other fellows were frankly curious; and perhaps even Jimmy, at the bottom of his heart, was a little curious, too. Certainly, it would have been interesting to know the exact facts about Montmorency.

There was quite a buzz of excitement among the Fourth-Form contingent when the Bird-in-Hand Inn appeared in sight.

That disreputable establishment was out of bounds for Rookwooders, of course. The place looked very sleepy and deserted in the warm summer's afternoon. An osier sat on a fence, meditatively chewing a straw. And against a post before the inn leaned the ungainly and untidy figure of Mr. Horace Lurchey, smoking a cigar.

"There he is!" murmured Lovell.

Bulkeley of the Sixth strode up directly to the dingy loafer. Mr. Lurchey removed his cigar, and stared at him insolently. Montmorency, with his hands in his pockets, regarded the loafer through his eyeglass with

perfect self-possession. And the Rookwood juniors, gathering round breathlessly within earshot, looked on with eager interest.

CHAPTER 25.

Quite a Surprise!

"AFTERNOON!" said Mr. Lurchey affably, and he replaced his cigar in his mouth, and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"I want a word with you, my man," said Bulkeley of the Sixth quietly.

"A dozen, if you like, young feller," answered Mr. Lurchey, still affable. "I ain't no objection to a chat, I'm sure."

"Cheeky cad, talking to Bulkeley like that!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell indignantly.

"You have been making yourself objectionable, my man," said Bulkeley, still very quietly. "I'm here to tell you that it's got to stop. You have been persecuting this boy, Montmorency, who has asked me to interfere. You have been calling him a name that is not his, and spreading yarns about him, and generally making yourself unpleasant. It's got to stop."

There was a pause, and the Rookwooders were quite breathless. Now was the moment for Mr. Lurchey to blurt out the whole story—if there was any truth in his statements.

But he did not.

He chewed his cigar meditatively for a moment or two, and his manner was quite civil as he spoke again.

"I called the young gentleman George Huggins, sir," he said. "Feller I used to know. Gentleman George we called him, such a gentleman he was, with his 'aughty airs in the servants' all. You could 'ave knocked me down with a feather, sir, when I saw this young gent; he's so like Gentleman George. But now I've seen more of Jim I can see the difference."

Bulkeley eyed the man.

"You mean that you took Montmorency for some other person, and you

understand now that you made a mistake?" he asked.

Mr. Lurchey nodded.

"That's it," he assented. "I don't blame myself for the mistake, seeing as they're so alike. But I've 'eard from George since; he's got a job as books in a public-house down Reigate way. I'm sure I beg the young gentleman's pardon for my mistake!"

"Oh!" said Bulkeley, rather nonplussed.

The captain of Rookwood had been prepared for defiance and insolence, and the stick under his arm had been intended to convey a lesson to Mr. Lurchey in that event. This complete change of face on the part of the dingy loafer was startling.

Jimmy Silver & Co., who heard every word, exchanged glances. Townsend and Twynham looked quite sickly.

After Mr. Lurchey had swallowed his own statements in this way, there was no further doubt in their minds. They had made a mistake—they had turned down a pal who was well "worth knowin'." Towny and Topy could have kicked themselves.

"I really beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Lurchey, glancing rather queerly at Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency. "I jest made a mistake, sir, and I'm sorry for it. I'm leavin' Coombe this week, and I ain't troubling you any more. A man can't say more than that."

"I pardon you," said Montmorency loftily. "I simply want to hear nothin' more of your nonsense!"

"Then the matter's ended," said Bulkeley, still a little nonplussed. "I'm glad there's been no trouble."

"Same 'ere, sir," said Mr. Lurchey affably. "I'm sure that I don't want any trouble. Thinkin' the young gent was my old pal George, a-turnin' his back on me, naturally riled me. But now I know he ain't George, I don't mind owing up as I've made a mistake, and beggin' his pardon."

And Mr. Lurchey, with unusual and surprising politeness, touched his rakish

bowler-hat, and lurched away into the bar of the Bird-in-Hand.

Bulkeley turned away, satisfied with the result of the interview, so far as that went, yet, somehow, not quite satisfied in his mind. He came face to face, as he turned, with a score of Rookwood juniors, of whose presence till then he had seemed unaware. Bulkeley gave them a grim look.

"Well?" he said.

"Ahem!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"What do you fags want?"

"Just—just walking around, you know, Bulkeley," stammered Lovell.

Bulkeley passed through the crowd of juniors, and strode away up the road towards Rookwood, still strangely unsatisfied in his mind. Somehow, though Mr. Lurchey had said and done all that could possibly be expected of him, his recantation did not ring true. Bulkeley could not help feeling that there was something behind it—something he did not "catch on" to. But the matter was closed now, and he was glad of it.

"I half-expected old Bulkeley to wade in with lines, for following him here," said Lovell, greatly relieved.

Mornington laughed.

"He knew we were here all the time," he said. "He expected to make Lurchey eat his words, and he was willing to let us see, as as to set Huggins right with the Form."

"Huggins?" said Lovell, with a stare. "I think it's pretty plainly proved now that Montmorency isn't Huggins."

Morry shrugged his shoulders.

"Dash it all, Morry!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "The man's withdrawn every word he said."

"I know."

"He's heard from George Huggins, who's in a job at Reigate," said Raby. "I should think that makes it clear enough."

"Almost too clear," said Mornington, with another shrug; and he walked away without explaining himself further.

Jimmy Silver looked round for Mont-

morency. That elegant youth was polishing his eyeglass, preparatory to putting it in his eye again. Montmorency did not seem in the least surprised by the result of the interview. Perhaps he had his reasons. Jimmy hesitated a few moments, and then crossed over to the gilt-edged youth.

"I'm sorry, Montmorency," he said frankly. "I suppose you know that I believed that rotter's yarn, more or less?"

Montmorency put the eyeglass in his eye, and surveyed the captain of the Fourth with lofty superiority.

"Thanks!" he drawled. "I may mention, however, that I don't care a dash what you believed or didn't believe!"

And he walked away, with his noble nose in the air.

Jimmy Silver stared after him, wrath rising in his breast. He was sorely tempted to rush after the lofty youth, and plant a kick on his elegant person, which would have put a sudden end to his lofty swagger. But Jimmy restrained himself.

"Just like Jimmy!" grinned Lovell. "Don't you know by this time that the fellow's a rank cad, Jimmy Silver, whether he's a Huggins or not. He's the kind of chap you want to touch with a barge-pole, if you touch him at all!"

"Br-r-r-r!" granted Jimmy Silver. "What the thump have we been wasting our time on the fellow at all for? Let's get back to the cricket, for goodness' sake, and get the taste out of our mouths!"

And the Co. grinned, and walked back with their great leader to the cricket. The Rookwooders took their homeward way, most of them feeling rather disappointed. The interview with Mr. Lurchey had been tame—very tame—as Putty Grace remarked. The fellow hadn't been cheeky, and Bulkeley hadn't laid into him with the stick. The juniors had really had their walk for nothing. No startling details of the

career of George Huggins—Gentleman George—had come to light. Instead of that, the Huggins' story was disposed of for good and all, and Montmorency stood cleared in the eyes of the Fourth of all imputations of humble origin, whatever Morny chose to think. Montmorency's little ways had not made him beloved, and there were few who rejoiced to see him "set right" with his Form.

CHAPTER III.

All Secret!

"GET out!" Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency uttered those words quietly, but threateningly, as Lattrey looked into Study No. 5 an hour or two later.

Instead of getting out, however, Lattrey got in, and closed the door after him.

"You prefer to leave this study on your neck?" asked Montmorency, pushing back his spotless cuffs a little.

"Hold on a minute!" said Lattrey, with a bitter grin. "I've just a few words to say. I know your game. Do you think I'm blind, even if all the other fellows are? You've squared that rotter at the Bird-in-Hand, or your precious uncle's squared him. He's been paid to hold his tongue, and I fancy he's being paid regularly, or he would soon open his mouth again. It was fixed up before you asked Bulkeley to chip in, you knowing jolly well that the rogue was going to take back what he'd said, and he's being paid to go away from Coombe—"

Lattrey watched Montmorency's face intently as he spoke, fully expecting to read there some confirmation of his surmise.

If Montmorency's heart sank at finding himself read so easily and so keenly, he gave no sign of it.

Only a smile of contemptuous amusement appeared on his face.

"I'm not finished yet," said Lattrey, with an evil look in his eyes. "You

may or may not happen to know that my father is a private inquiry agent—"

"I'm sure I don't care a rap!"

"I'm going to write to him," continued Lattrey. "I'm going to ask him to let me know what he can about Goby Hall, and a servant that used to be kept there, named Huggins, and whether he changed his name to Montmorency when he came into money."

Montmorency gave a slight start.

"Ah, that touches you, does it?" sneered Lattrey.

"Not at all," drawled Cecil Cuthbert. "You're quite amusing, old bean. But I'm tired of your peculiar brand of conversation. Will you get out?"

"Not yet. I—"

"You will!"

Montmorency threw the study door open, and strode towards Lattrey. A moment more, and the end of the Fourth was grasped in a pair of hands that, though white and exceedingly well-kept, were very powerful. There was a yell from Lattrey as he went spinning through the doorway.

Crash!

"By gad!" Townsend and Topham were coming to the study, and they jumped back as Lattrey crashed at their feet.

Lattrey picked himself up, his eyes gleaming. For a moment he seemed about to rush furiously at the handsome, disdainful junior standing in the study doorway. But he changed his mind, and with a black brow strode away down the passage.

Towny and Topsy came into the room, and Towny coughed. Montmorency took no heed of the two ruffs.

"Monty, old man——" murmured Townsend.

"Monty, old top——" breathed Topham.

"Comin' out for a stroll before tea, old fellow?"

"Do, Monty!"

And Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency relented, and deigned to receive his ruffs

pals into favour again. And once more Rookwood School was treated to the gratifying sight of three elegant and lofty youths strolling arm-in-arm in the quadrangle.

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But the outward serenity of Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency, the aristocratic calm which he carefully maintained in public, went no deeper than his skin. The threat of Mark Lattrey still rang in his ears, and within the skin of Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency George Huggins quaked. For one danger had only been averted to give place to another, and his footsteps were still upon slippery paths. Outwardly all was serene, but inwardly there was doubt and dark foreboding for the upstart, who was living a lie.

CHAPTER 31.

Muffin Makes a Discovery.

TUBBY MUFFIN gave an apprehensive start as there was a footstep outside the prefects' room at Rookwood.

Muffin of the Fourth had no business whatever in the prefects' room, and apartment sacred to the great men of the Sixth. Any prefect finding him ensconced in an armchair there would have felt called upon to administer a cuff as a reward for his cheek. That was why Reginald Muffin sat up apprehensively as he heard the footfall outside.

It was not the comfortable armchair that had tempted Tubby into the forbidden territory. It was the fact that the prefects' room had been quite deserted, and that Tubby was looking for an asylum of refuge. Higgs of the Fourth was looking for Tubby. Tubby was very anxious not to be found.

There had been a misunderstanding about a cake in Study No. 2. Higgs had a hasty hand and a heavy boot,

and Tubby did not want to meet him till his wrath had had time to cool.

There was a senior match in progress on Big Side, and the Sixth were all out of doors; so the prefects' room had seemed quite a safe refuge to Tubby. Higgs was not likely to look for him there. Master Muffin had made himself quite comfortable, and devoured the remnants of the cake from his pocket with considerable satisfaction. And then there came the sudden footfall, and Tubby sat up like a startled rabbit.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Tubby.

Whether it was Higgs of the Fourth or a prefect, Tubby did not know; but he knew that in either case he did not want to be found. If it was a prefect, it was most likely Carthew, the bully of the Sixth, who was no cricketer, and was not playing that afternoon. Carthew was as bad as Higgs, or worse. He was quite certain to kick the fat junior out of the room, with unnecessary vigour, if he found him there.

Tubby rolled out of the armchair, and stood gasping for a moment. His fat brain did not work rapidly. But as the door-handle turned, Tubby Muffin made an instinctive dive behind the big armchair. There he crouched on his knees, concealed by the high back of the chair, breathlessly hoping for the best.

The door opened.

Tubby could not see who entered, and could not be seen. But the footfall struck him as curiously light and cautious. He heard the door close very quietly.

Tubby wondered.

Certainly it could not be a prefect who entered his own quarters in that stealthy way. Neither could it be Higgs, who was loud and heavy-footed. The fat Classical wondered whether it might be Jimmy Silver, or some other reckless youth, seeking to play some "jape" in the sacred apartment during the absence of the prefects. But he took care not to show himself. He was not taking any risks.

For a moment or two there was

silence, and then cautious footsteps crossed the room—towards the telephone by the window.

Still Tubby could not see who it was.

But he crouched lower, and spied under the chair, and caught a glimpse of a very elegant pair of boots, of turned up trousers, and an inch of silk socks of the most expensive kind.

Then he knew!

He knew those boots and those silken socks. It was Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency of the Fourth who had entered the prefects' room so cautiously and stealthily, and was now standing before the telephone.

Tubby Muffin grinned.

He had nothing to fear from Montmorency; and there was no reason why he should not show himself now, if he liked. Montmorency had "sneaked" into the prefects' room to use the telephone, taking advantage—like Muffin—of the fact that all the Sixth were out.

Tubby Muffin had nothing to fear from the dandy of Rookwood, excepting, perhaps, a glance of lofty contempt—which would not have hurt Tubby!

But he did not move.

His curiosity was aroused now.

Next to greediness, inquisitiveness was Reginald Muffin's besetting sin.

And he was very much interested in Montmorency and his affairs—as were, indeed, less inquisitive fellows than Muffin. There had been more talk about Montmorency than about any other fellow in the Lower School at Rookwood.

So Tubby Muffin sat tight, as it were.

He heard Montmorency remove the receiver from the hook and ring up the exchange. He heard him give a number, and caught the word "Trunks." Then the receiver was replaced, and Montmorency strolled to the window to look out into the quad.

Muffin crouched closer to the cover of the big chair.

Evidently Montmorency had no suspicion that anyone beside himself was in the room. And from his position

at the window he could see whether any of the Sixth came towards the House. He had given a number, and was waiting for his trunk call. Tubby Muffin's brain was not specially active, but he guessed that Cecil Cuthbert was telephoning home.

Tubby felt a tingle of curiosity all over his fat person.

It did not even occur to him to have any scruple about playing the eaves-dropper in this way. Tubby had a conscience, but it was a very accommodating one, and seldom gave him any worry.

Buzz!

Montmorency swung round quickly from the window as the bell rang, and hurried to pick up the receiver. He was "through."

"Is that you, uncle?"

Uncle!

Tubby Muffin listened with all his ears, which had been made unusually large by kind nature, as if for this very purpose! Montmorency was speaking to his uncle—the rich uncle who had adopted him and sent him to Rookwood. He was telephoning to Montmorency Court, his uncle's stately "place" in the country. At Montmorency Court Cecil Cuthbert was supposed to have spent his expensive earlier youth. The story that he had once been a boy in buttons at Goby Hall was well known, and was still a subject for jokes in the Fourth—fellows who did not like Montmorency often alluded to him as "George Huggins." But that story had been knocked on the head—it had few believers now.

Tubby trembled with curiosity. Was he going to hear some of the actual facts? Tubby would have given a great deal to hear what was said at the other end of the wire. But naturally he could only hear what Montmorency spoke into the transmitter.

"Yes, it's Cecil speakin' Yea, it was all right about that scoundrel Larchey. He owned up before a crowd or fellows that he had been mistaken, and that I was not the George Huggins he had

known at Goby Hall. I'm afraid you had to shell out rather severely, uncle."

Tubby grinned.

Undoubtedly he was beginning to hear some of the facts.

"So long as he keeps away from this neighbourhood that will be all right," went on Montmorency, in reply to something from his uncle, unheard by Tubby. "He will keep away so long as you square him. I'm not afraid of Lurchey now that it's in your hands. You're awfully good to me, uncle!"

There was a touch of real feeling in Montmorency's voice, and Tubby Muffin wondered to hear it.

"It's all serene now," Montmorency continued. "Lurchey's owing up knocked the whole thing on the head. Sergeant Kettle knows; but he is mum. But—but there's another danger, uncle."

There was a pause, and again Tubby would have given anything to hear what Montmorency was hearing at the receiver.

"There's a fellow here named Lattrey"—Montmorency was speaking again. "A rank outsider—a dingy cad who detests me because I'll have nothin' to do with him. He suspects that Lurchey was squared. No, I know he can't prove anythin', and he's a ratter, anyhow, and nobody takes any notice of him. I've heard that he came near being expelled once. But he's told me that his father's a private inquiry agent—some sort of a detective—and he's written to him to inquire about me."

Tubby Muffin winked at the back of the armchair.

He was quite enjoying himself now.

"I don't know whether his father will take it up—probably he won't—but if he does, it will be easy enough for him to go down to Goby Hall and learn the whole story."

Tubby Muffin wondered what Montmorency would have said if he could have known that he, Tubby, was learning the whole story, behind the armchair.

"Lattrey is an utter cad and outsider, and his father's probably of the same kidney. He could be squared easily enough. You can find him out, I should think, without much trouble. I'm givin' you a lot of trouble, uncle—I never supposed that my comin' to Rookwood would mean all this. But if I'm to play the game out, Lattrey will have to be bottled up. If—if the fellows knew about Goby Hall, and—and—" Montmorency's voice faltered.

There was a pause. Montmorency was listening to the voice over the wires, and it was some moments before he spoke again.

"Thanks, uncle! If he's squared, he will shut Lattrey up fast enough, and it will be all serene. Good! Oh, good! You've taken a weight off my mind. All serene now! Good-bye, uncle."

Montmorency hung up the receiver.

He turned away from the telephone, and crossed to the door. As the door closed behind him Tubby Muffin rose from behind the armchair, and grinned cheerfully. Tubby knew it all now! Sergeant Kettle, who knew, was silent; Mr. Lurchey, who knew, had been "squared," and got rid of; Lattrey, who might find out, was to be "bottled" up. But Tubby Muffin knew—knew it all, now; and the hapless upstart of Rookwood, who sailed so loftily under false colours, was at the mercy of Tubby!

CHAPTER 32.

Lattrey's Little Game!

"BLESS IT!"

There was a smell of methylated spirits in the end study, and the sound of a grousing voice.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome came in, red and warm from the cricket, and found Arthur Edward Lovell making the tea.

At all events, it was Arthur Edward's intention to make the tea.

So far, he had spilled methylated spirit over the fender and over his trousers, and had succeeded in starting what looked like a furnace, or a volcano in eruption, in the grate. On closer inspection, it could be seen that it was not a furnace or a volcano, but a spirit stove liberally supplied with spirit—very liberally supplied. A wavering tongue of flame soared nearly as high as the mantelpiece.

"Bless it!"

Arthur Edward Lovell said "Bless it"; but his looks and tone really did not seem to be calling down blessings on the spirit stove.

"Halla, setting the school on fire, old scout?" asked Jimmy Silver genially.

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I say, Lovell, this study isn't insured," said Raby anxiously.

"Fathead!"

"Is it an experiment?" asked Newcome in wonder. "Are you trying to do some of the stunts that belong to the Modern side?"

Lovell turned a red and wrathful face on his chums.

"If that's your thanks to a fellow who comes in early to get tea—" he began warmly.

"Oh, you're getting tea?" asked Raby.

"What the thump do you think I'm doing?" roared Lovell.

"Blessed if I know! Producing a cheap imitation of Vesuvius, I should say."

"Ass!"

"Better pass the word for the fire-bruckets," suggested Newcome.

"Look here," roared Lovell, "if you fellows can handle this rotten stove better than I can—"

"Go it, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver soothingly. "Put the kettle on."

"Can't put the kettle on till the flame goes down a bit, owl!"

"But why that flame?" asked Raby innocently.

"Do you think I spilled the spirit on purpose, you chump?" howled Lovell. "The dashed bottle jerked, and the

dashed spirit went all over the dashed stove and the dashed fender, and over my dashed trousers, too. If you silly owls would rather light a fire on a blazing afternoon you—"

"Not at all, old scout!" said Jimmy Silver laughing. "Better keep your bags away from the flame if they've got spirit on them."

"Kids shouldn't play with methylated spirit," said Raby, shaking his head; "it's dangerous."

Lovell breathed hard.

His intentions had been really good; he had been going to surprise his chums with the tea ready, when they came in. He had surprised them instead with a volcanic display; but that was not Lovell's fault.

"You dummies can boil the kettle," he said. "I'm going to wash off some of this stuff. And you can go and eat coke, you grinning asses!"

Lovell strode to the door, leaving the hapless stove still blazing merrily in the grate. As he strode wrathfully out, it happened that Mark Lattrey, of the Classical Fourth, arrived at the study doorway, with the intention of entering. There was a collision in the doorway, and Lovell staggered back, and Lattrey sat down.

"You silly owl!" roared Lovell.

"Ohi!" gasped Lattrey.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver & Co.

"What do you mean by bulging into a chap in his own doorway, Lattrey, you dummy?" howled Lovell.

"Oh, you silly goat, I didn't see you till you rushed into me like a mad bull," gasped Lattrey.

"I'll give you mad bull, you ass!"

Lovell started towards Lattrey, with hostile intentions. The collision really was not Lattrey's fault; but Lovell was excited, and apparently he was going to make Lattrey pay for the sins of the spirit-stove. Jimmy Silver caught him by the arm.

"Easy does it, old chap!" said Uncle James, of Rookwood, soothingly. "It wasn't his fault, you know."

"What does he want here?" snorted Lovell. "I suppose you haven't asked that cad to tea by any chance?"

"Oh, no."

"It would be just like you," growled Lovell. "You'll be asking that silly knob Montmorency to tea next."

"But I haven't asked anybody to tea," said Jimmy Silver mildly.

"Well, it would be just like you!" said Lovell.

"My dear ass——"

"Oh, rats!"

Arthur Edward Lovell strode out of the study. The spirit-stove having, by this time, moderated its transports, so to speak, Raby succeeded in jamming the kettle on it. Lattrey—carefully dodging out of Lovell's way as that excited youth strode forth—came into the study, rather to the surprise of the Co. The end study was not on speaking terms with the shady youth who had the worst reputation in the Classical Fourth at Rookwood.

"Anything wanted, Lattrey?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes."

"Well, heave ahead," said the captain of the Fourth. "Sorry we can't ask you to tea——"

"I don't want tea with you," said Lattrey sourly.

"Then it's all right," said Jimmy urbanely. "To what do we owe the pleasure of this unexpected visit?"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" grunted Lattrey. "I've come here to speak to you, as captain of the Fourth. I think you ought to take the matter up."

"What matter?"

"Montmorency—or, rather, Huggins." Jimmy Silver yawned portentously.

"Dear man, I'm fed up with Montmorency—right up to the chin," he said. "I don't want to hear anything more about him so long as I live. Wouldn't you rather talk cricket?"

"Don't be a goat!" howled Lattrey angrily. "You know that the fellow is a pretender, and an upstart; he's come to Rookwood calling himself Montmor-

ency, and he's really named Huggins——"

"Huggins, or Muggins, or Juggins, it's all the same to me!" answered Jimmy Silver imperturbably. "Give him a rest."

"Where's the ham?" Raby was looking to the study cupboard. "Has that fat villain Muffin been here?"

"I've been waiting for you to come in, Silver," said Lattrey. "I've had a letter from my father."

"No business of mine."

"It's about Montmorency."

Jimmy Silver raised his eyebrows.

"What on earth has your father got to do with Montmorency?" he exclaimed.

"My father's a private inquiry agent," said Lattrey, with a sour grin. "I've asked him to find out the facts about Montmorency. It's practically proved now that the fellow is a spoofer. All the school knows that he was recognised by the blackguard Lurchey as George Huggins, who was boy in buttons at Goby Hall and——"

"Lurchey owned up that he was mistaken."

"He was squared, of course."

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver uneasily. "Anyhow, it's no business of mine."

"That cad ought to be shown up," said Lattrey. "He pitched me out of his study when I told him I wasn't taken in!"

"I dare say it served you right."

"Well, I'm going to have the truth out," said Lattrey. "My father's answered my letter. He's taking the matter up. He agrees with me that it's a duty to show up a fellow who comes to school like this under false colours. He looks on it as performing a service to the school and the Head; and, of course, making inquiries is his profession."

"The ham's gone!" said Raby. "Muffin must have been here. I'll skin that fat villain."

"There's the eggs," said Newcome.

"We can boil 'em if Lovell's left any methylated spirit."

"When is that dashed kettle going to boil?" inquired Jimmy Silver.

Lattrey scowled. There was a plentiful lack of interest in the subject of Montmorency—in the end study at least. But the cad of the Fourth was not to be denied.

"I think you ought to know what my father says, Silver," he said. "You ought to take the lead in sending that pretender to Coventry. Listen to this—"

"I don't want to hear it."

"Just listen!"

Lattrey took a letter from his pocket and proceeded to read aloud from it, regardless of the evident disinclination in the study to hear it.

"I am very interested in what you tell me with regard to the boy Montmorency. Certainly the truth should be known, and it will be easy enough for me to ascertain the facts. The name is already familiar to me. A man named Huggins, who kept the Goby Arms in Surrey, made quite a sensation a year or two ago by a lucky speculation on the Stock Exchange, which made him a rich man. He bought a country estate, and changed his name by deed-poll to Montmorency. His place is called, I think, Montmorency Court. I have forgotten some other details, but there will be no difficulty in ascertaining the rest."

"That's all I need read out," said Lattrey. But that makes it pretty clear, doesn't it?"

Lovell came back into the study in time to hear the reading out of Mr. Lattrey's letter. Lattrey glanced at him. Lovell's dislike of the snob of the Fourth was well known, and Lattrey expected Arthur Edward at least to sympathise with him in his desire to "reveal the whole truth." But there was no sympathy in Lovell's look. He gave a most disparaging grunt.

"What the thump are you spying

into the fellow's affairs for?" Lovell snapped. "If the man changed his name legally it's his name, isn't it? No need for you to spy it all out!"

"Hear, hear!" said Ruby.

Lattrey set his lips.

"He's a low rotter and a pretender!" he said. "He ought to be shown up, even if he did change his name legally."

"Oh, rats! Give him a rest!"

"As captain of the Fourth, Silver—"

"Bow-wow!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Do you mean that you won't take the matter up, even if I prove that he's an upstart under a false name?" exclaimed Lattrey savagely.

"On your own showing, the name isn't false," answered Jimmy Silver. "It's legal to change your name if you pay the fees for doing it."

"That doesn't alter the fact that he's really Huggins, just as Larchey said, and that he was a servant in Goby Hall, and——"

"That wouldn't be against him if he wasn't such a snob now he's rich," said Lovell. "Anyhow, it's not our business!"

"Exactly!" said Jimmy Silver. "Take your dashed news to some study that would like to hear it, Lattrey!"

"And shut the door after you," said Newcome.

"You cheeky rotters!" shouted Lattrey, greatly exasperated.

Jimmy Silver picked up his cricket-bat.

"I give you two seconds——" he said.

One second was enough for Mark Lattrey. He jumped into the passage, and the door slammed after him.

CHAPTER 25.

Lattrey's Letter

"HUGGINS!"

The name was whispered, and it was followed by a laugh. Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency coloured over so slightly.

He was sauntering in the quadrangle with Townsend and Topham, his nutty and devoted chums—more devoted than ever since Mr. Lurchey's extraordinary story had been "knocked on the head."

Their attachment to their wealthy and aristocratic chum was quite touching, in fact.

If the Huggins story still survived, it was evidently due to Mark Lattrey, who had shown his father's letter about the Fourth Firm, and revived the discussion on the subject thereby.

More than once the upstart of Rookwood had come very near exposure, and although he had taken measures to meet this new danger, he was conscious that he still walked in slippery places.

Lattrey, Gower, and Peele were talking in a group, and the whisper of "Huggins" came from them as Montmorency & Co. strolled by.

Montmorency half-stopped. But Townsend touched his arm.

"Don't take any notice of the cads, Monty!" he whispered. "No good rowin' with them."

Montmorency nodded, and they walked on. They left Peele and Gower and Lattrey grinning.

"They're not worth noticin', old top," said Topham. "Everybody knows that Lattrey's only workin' this stunt because you won't speak to him."

"An' nobody believes a word of it," said Townsend.

"Quite so," assented Montmorency, his calm, smiling face giving no indication of the gnawing trouble in his breast. "But a fellow can't stand too much of this sort of annoyance. I've knocked Lattrey down once, and if he wants me to knock him down again—"

"Here's the car!" said Topham.

The big Rolls-Royce came in sight. Cecil Cuthbert had telephoned for it, and it had come to take the nuts of the Fourth out that afternoon.

A good many envious glances followed the trio as they stepped into the car and it rolled away with them.

"Lucky barge, that fellow Montmorency!" remarked Conroy of the Fourth.

"Huggins, you mean!" sneered Lattrey.

"Oh, ro!"

"I'm expectin' a letter from my father to-day," said Lattrey sourly. "I fancy it will put the lid on."

Conroy turned away without replying. He did not like the uppish airs of Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency, but he had nothing in common with Lattrey and his set. And all the Fourth knew that Lattrey & Co. had striven to get Cecil Cuthbert into their own dingy set, and that Lattrey's enmity was based on his failure.

Lattrey was very anxious for the letter he was expecting that afternoon. Two or three days had elapsed since the first letter had reached him, and he considered that by this time his father should be in possession of the required definite information. Lattrey had no doubt that the letter, when it came, would contain the fullest particulars of Montmorency's origin and real name, which could not fail to convince even Towny and Toppy.

And he knew that Monty's smart friends would drop him like a hot potato if the case was anything like proved. Towny & Co. had no use for a friend who had started life as a boot-boy.

There were plenty of fellows, certainly such as Jimmy Silver & Co., who did not care how a chap had started in life, so long as he was decent. But Montmorency had alienated fellows of that sort by his uppish airs and his snobbish intolerance towards fellows less advantageously placed than himself. Once the truth was out he would not have a friend left in the school.

Lattrey waited for the letters that afternoon. Jimmy Silver, who was expecting—or, at least, hoping for—a remittance from home, came along and found Lattrey & Co. lounging round the letter-rack.

"Not in yet," said Lattrey, with a

grim. "I hope to get some news for you by this post, Silver."

"I don't want to hear your news," said Jimmy Silver curtly.

"He, he, he!" That fat and unmusical cackle came from Reginald Muffin. "I say, Lattrey, bet you two to one you don't get any news!"

"What do you know about it, you fat duffer?" snapped Lattrey.

Tubby Muffin chuckled.

"More than you might think," he answered. "I could tell you something if I liked."

"Hallo! What keyhole have you been listening at now?" inquired Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Here's the letters, anyhow," remarked Lattrey. "I'm jolly keen on the news, for one."

"There won't be any!" chuckled Tubby Muffin.

"You seem to be jolly sure about it, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver, with a rather curious look at the fat Classical.

Tubby grinned.

"I know what I know!" he remarked mysteriously.

"Very likely," assented Jimmy. "It isn't much, is it? Spread out thin on a threepenny bit, what you know wouldn't cover the coin, would it?"

"You wait and see!" said Tubby loftily. "I know something. I can tell you that. Some fellows get to know things. Is that a letter for you, Lattrey?"

"Yes!" growled Lattrey.

"From your pater?" asked Gower eagerly.

"Now for the giddy history!" said Peela.

"Hallo! Here's his noble nib!" murmured Lovell.

Montmorency strolled up with Townsend and Topham, the nutty trio, looking very cheery after their drive.

"Any letters, dear boys?" yawned Montmorency.

"Lattrey's got one!" grinned Higgs of the Fourth. "From his father."

Montmorency glanced round.

A number of juniors had gathered

round, most of them interested in the fact that Lattrey's expected letter had come at last, and wondering what was in it. Many very curious looks were fixed on Montmorency. But if he had anything to fear, he did not show it.

Townsend and Topham eyed him almost anxiously. Though their faith in their lofty chum had been restored, they felt, perhaps, a secret inward misgiving. Lattrey's loudly-expressed confidence had shaken them a little.

But Montmorency only smiled.

"This is getting rather thick," he remarked. "I'm rather new at Hookwood, and don't know all the manners and customs yet. Is it a rule here for a fellow's private affairs to be nosed into in this way, Silver?"

"No, it isn't!" answer Jimmy Silver shortly.

"Just a little new custom started for my benefit—what?"

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders impatiently. He was annoyed with Lattrey for his prying investigation; but it was no business of his to interfere.

Lattrey had the letter in his hand, and there was an evil smile on his face. He had not the slightest doubt that the letter contained evidence that would crush Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency to the dust, and he was rather surprised by Monty's coolness. He could only conclude that the upstart was playing the game out to the end, with an iron nerve; though the end was now very near.

Montmorency came towards him. Lattrey put the letter behind him at once.

"Don't snatch!" he said mockingly.

"I wasn't thinking of snatchin' your rotten letter!" said the dandy of the Fourth contemptuously. "I've got a few words to say, and I want all the fellows to hear. There's somethin' about me in that letter?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Your father's some sort of a detective, and you've asked him to look into my family history, and tell you?"

"Exactly!" grinned Lattrey.
 "And the result's in that letter?"
 "Quite so."

"Very good," said Montmorency quickly. "In that case, you're goin' to read that letter out before the fellows, and let them see it."

"What?" ejaculated Lattrey, in blank astonishment.

"My hat!" murmured Lovell.

Montmorency glanced round again.

"I appeal to you, Silver, as captain of the Form," he said. "If Lattrey's father tells him he has made a silly mistake, I've a right for all the fellows to know it. If he makes any libellous statements, I've a right to hear them, so that my uncle can take legal action. Isn't that right?"

"Right as rain," said Jimmy Silver. "After all your talk, Lattrey, you're bound to make that letter public."

"Yes, rather!" said Townsend and Topham together.

"It's only fair play," said Lovell. "Give every dog his due."

"Go it, Lattrey!" said Higgs. "You can't back out now."

"Back out!" exclaimed Lattrey angrily. "I intend to make it public, of course, to show that fellow up. He knows that!"

"Then, if we're both agreed, you can have no objection to goin' ahead," said Montmorency, with a curl of the lip.

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

Lattrey breathed hard. Montmorency's confidence staggered him; he simply could not understand it. If he had shared Tabby Muffin's experience in the prefect's room he would have understood. But he hadn't.

"I'll show the letter fast enough!" he exclaimed. "I—I'll read it first, and then——"

He made a movement.

"You won't take that letter away till it's been shown," said Montmorency grimly. "Open it at once!"

"I'll do as I like with my own letter."

"Not after what you've said. If you don't open that letter at once, and let

it be seen, I'll take you to Mr. Dalton by the scruff of your neck, and ask him to judge between us," said Montmorency.

"Hear, hear!" said Townsend, greatly delighted. "That's the stuff to give him, old bean!"

"You'd better go ahead, Lattrey," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "You're bound to, after what you've said the last few days."

"I've no objection."

"Well, pile in, then."

With an angry scowl, for something like a dismayed unglving was in his breast now, Lattrey tore open the letter. And a crowd of juniors gathered eagerly round.

CHAPTER 22.

Quite a Surprise!

ALL eyes were fixed on Mark Lattrey as he unfolded the letter and looked at it. He read it in silence. The expression on his face showed at once that the contents were not as he had hoped and expected.

Blank dismay and surprise were betrayed in his looks.

The juniors exchanged glances. Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency maintained his attitude of superb indifference. As for Tabby Muffin, he seemed to be suffering from something like internal convulsions. But nobody took the trouble to heed Reginald Muffin.

"Well?" said several voices at last, when Lattrey had evidently finished reading the letter, and yet did not speak.

"What's the giddy news?" asked Gower.

Lattrey stammered.

"I—I—nothing!" he gasped. "My—my father doesn't mention——"

"Gammon!" said Townsend.

"No good lying, Lattrey!" said Montmorency coolly. "Show that letter up, for the fellows to read."

"I refuse! I——"

Montmorency's grasp closed on Lattrey's wrist, as he sought to thrust the letter into his pocket.

"Let me go!" shouted Lattrey furiously.

The dandy of the Fourth had a grip like iron. He forced Lattrey's hand up, with the letter in it.

"Take that letter, Towney!" he said.

"You bet!" grinned Townsend.

"Let me go!" yelled Lattrey. "I—I— Give me my letter, or I'll hit out!"

"You'll be sorry if you do."

"Let me go!"

"Rats!"

Townsend jerked the letter away, as Montmorency compressed his grip on Lattrey's wrist. Lattrey swung up his free hand, and struck Cecil Culbert full in the face.

"There, you cad! Oh!"

Montmorency released him, and struck back. Mark Lattrey went spinning along the floor.

"Get up an' have some more. If you want any, you cad!" said Montmorency quietly.

Lattrey sat up dazedly. But evidently he did not want any more. Montmorency wiped his cheek, where Lattrey's knuckles had touched, with a cambric handkerchief, as if to brush away a contamination. Townsend held up the letter, with a smiling face. Once more his confidence in his aristocratic chum was completely restored.

"Listen to this, you fellows!" he exclaimed.

And he proceeded to read aloud, with several of the juniors reading over his shoulders.

"My dear Mark,—I have made the fullest investigation, and find that you have made a very serious mistake. There is no connection whatever between Montmorency, of the Fourth Firm at Rockwood, and anyone of the name of Huggins. His uncle, Mr. Montmorency, of Montmorency Court, is a gentleman of an old and well-established country family, of great wealth

and very distinguished connections. I advise you to apologise to Master Montmorency, if you have hinted to him already of your very unfortunate suspicions."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Lovell.

Little as Arthur Edward Lovell sympathised with the cad of the Fourth, he had expected Lattrey's view to turn out substantially correct. This formal and complete contradiction was a surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from Tubby Muffin. Master Muffin, at all events, was not surprised.

"Oh, gad!" said Peele. "So that's the end of your giddy investigations. Lattrey! Of all the asses——"

"Of all the silly duffers——" jeered Gower.

"Of all the suspicious cads——" said Topham.

Lattrey staggered to his feet.

"I—I can't understand it!" he stammered. "I—I was sure—in fact, I'm still sure——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Jimmy Silver scornfully. "There's the contradiction in your father's own list. You'd better shut up."

"But I—I——"

"He said Lurchey had been squared!" grinned Gower. "Has your father been squared too, Lattrey?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lattrey turned away, almost choking with rage. Gower's mocking suggestion made him start. But certainly it was not possible for Lattrey to take up the attitude that his own father had been bribed to tell falsehoods. His game was up. Montmorency was safe from him now. And Lattrey strode away with a black brow, and rage and disappointment rumbling riot in his breast.

The letter was passed from hand to hand. In an hour's time every fellow in the Fourth had seen it. Montmorency walked the quadrangle with Townsend and Topham, his head held very high, his noble nose turned up

higher than usual. As Mornington put it humorously, he had left the court without a stain on his character, though it was noticeable that Moray himself did not speak to Cecil Cuthbert, whose bona fides had been so thoroughly proved.

It was an hour later that Montmorency sauntered into his study, with a calm and smiling face. The doubts and naggings that had weighed on the pretender were gone now. For the first time Cecil Cuthbert felt quite at ease and full of confidence. It was natural, considering the nature of Cecil Cuthbert, that in such a mood he should be more snobbish than ever. He found Tubby Muffin in his study, and the glance of contempt he gave him would have penetrated the shell of an oyster.

But it did not seem to worry Reginald Muffin. The fat Classical gave Montmorency a cheery nod and grin.

"All serene now, old top—what?" he asked.

"Get out of my study!"

"My dear old bean——"

"I'd rather not kick you out," said Montmorency. "It would soil my boot. But if you don't walk out——"

He made a stride towards the fat junior. Tubby dodged round the table.

"Hold on, Monty!" he said coolly across the table. "Just a word—one little word! I was in the prefects' room the other day when you 'phoned home——"

Montmorency stopped dead.

"I was there—behind the big arm-chair," said Tubby cheerily. "Heard every word, old chap. I knew that Lat-trey's father wouldn't play up. I knew he'd been got at. But would I give you away? Not for worlds, old chap, since we're so friendly!"

Montmorency's look was not exactly friendly. If looks could have killed, Reginald Muffin's fat career would have been cut suddenly short there and then. But looks couldn't; and Tubby rattled on cheerily:

"Rely on me, old fellow! I'll stand

by you—so long as you're really patty, of course."

Montmorency breathed hard, almost gasping. Once more he had succeeded in stifling the truth, and once more his success had turned to bitter ashes in his mouth. He could not speak, he only stared blankly at Tubby Muffin, as if fascinated by Tubby's fat, grinning face.

Tubby winked.

"Dear old bean!" he said. "That's right; take it calm and rely on an old pal to see you through. By the way, Monty——Tubby's manner grew very friendly and confidential——by the way, I'm rather short of tin. Could you lend an old pal a pound-note?"

In silence—the silence of dismay, almost of despair—the upstart of Rookwood fumbled in his pocket. Tubby Muffin rolled out of the study with a fat grin of satisfaction on his face and a pound-note in his fat paw. He left dismay and desolation behind him.

CHAPTER 25.

Beyond the Limit

"O L.D. man, it won't do!"

"Hardly!"

"It really won't, you know!"

"Not at all, Monty, old bird!"

Jimmy Silver glanced round, with a rather amused smile.

The speakers were Townsend and Topham, of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, and they were addressing Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency, of the same Form.

They did not heed Jimmy Silver, who was sitting on the stone balustrade by the steps of the School House, waiting for his shums to come out. The three Nuts were standing in a little group by the steps, quite regardless of the captain of the Fourth.

"If it was anybody else——" said Topham.

"Anybody but Muffin——"

"But that fat bounder——"

"That awful outsider——"

"A fellow can't stand him——"

"In fact, a fellow won't——"

"You see, we don't see your object, Monty——"

"Drop him, old chap!"

"Or drop us!"

Towny and Toppy were "going it" alternately, and Montmorency listened to their remarks, and polished his eyeglass, his face expressing nothing, but his eyes ever restless.

"Haven't you got anything to say, Monty?" demanded Townsend at last.

"We've told you what we think."

"There's no sense in it," said Topham. "You're in the best set in the Lower School at Rookwood, and you must take up that fat outsider, Muffin, an' chum with him, and inflict the horrid boulder on your pals. It's too thick."

"It's the limit!" said Townsend.

"The very outside edge!" said Topham.

Jimmy Silver smiled into space. As a matter of fact, he, as well as other fellows, had been surprised by the sudden friendship that had arisen between Montmorency and Tubby Muffin.

Up to a couple of days ago, Montmorency had treated Tubby with the utmost scornful indifference. Tubby had never ceased attempting to inflict himself upon the wealthy youth, and Montmorency had snubbed him mercilessly.

And now, all of a sudden, there was a change. Tubby Muffin was seen walking arm-in-arm with Monty. He dropped into his study to tea; he called him "Monty" and "Old bean," and now, on this special afternoon, he was going to join him in a motor run. The celebrated Montmorency Rolls-Royce was coming to Rookwood to fetch Monty and his friends, and Monty had announced to his chums that Tubby was to be one of the party.

And at that Towny and Toppy struck. They had endured their chum's new friendship in a very restive way, wondering about the why and the wherefore, and hoping that Monty would drop

Muffin as suddenly as he had taken him up. Instead of which, Tubby was turning out a fixture.

It was amazing, and it was extremely exasperating; and Towny and Toppy agreed between themselves that Monty could pal with Tubby Muffin if he liked, but that he couldn't expect them to follow his example. They weren't snobs, of course, but there was a limit, and Reginald Muffin was the limit.

"If it was anybody else," said Townsend, in a tone of thrilling indignation, "Peelo, or Gower, or even Lattrey, or even Rawson at a pinch to please you, Monty—but that grabbin' rascal, Muffin——"

A fat figure loomed up in the doorway. Tubby Muffin rolled out of the School House with a fat smile on his face, and his best silk hat on his bullet-head. He wore his brightest necktie, and a geranium in his coat, evidently having dressed for the occasion.

"Ready, Monty?" he asked. "The car's at the gates, I think."

"Yaas."

"These fellows comin'?" asked Tubby, with a glance at Townsend and Topham.

They were eyeing the fat Classical with great disfavour, and Tubby returned their scornful looks with interest.

"Yaas."

Tubby Muffin slipped a fat paw through Montmorency's arm.

"Come on, Monty!" he said. "Please yourselves, you two duffers, I don't want you, and I don't think Monty does. Come on, Monty!"

Montmorency hesitated a moment, and then, without looking at his nutty pals, he walked away with Tubby Muffin to the gates.

Townsend and Topham looked at one another, with feelings too deep for words. Lovell and Raby and Newcome came out of the School House with their bats, and joined Jimmy Silver, and they all glanced after the elegant, slim figure of Montmorency walking uneasily beside the fat and decidedly inelegant Muffin.

"Those two seem jolly pally the last day or two!" said Lovell.

"They do!" agreed Jimmy Silver.

"Towmy and Toppy don't seem to enjoy it!" grinned Raby.

"They don't!" said Jimmy.

"It's a bit queer!" Newcome remarked thoughtfully. "Montmorency wouldn't have touched Muffin with a barge-pole till the last day or two. Now they're always together, and he's always lending Muffin money. Muffin has been rolling in ten-bob notes."

"Jolly queer!" said Jimmy.

Montmorency and his peculiar chum disappeared out of gates, and the hum of the big car was heard on the road.

"Did you ever?" said Towmy to Toppy, finding his voice at last.

"Never!" said Toppy.

And the two nuts-walked away in great disgust. Jimmy Silver & Co. strolled down to Little Side for the cricket—Jimmy with a thoughtful shade on his brow.

He was thinking of that sudden, remarkable new friendship between the snob of the Fourth and the fat Tubby, which had astonished all the Lower School, and he could not help wondering what it meant, and there was suspicion mingled with his wonder.

CHAPTER 16.

Tubby Has a Moving Job!

"HAVING tea?"

Reginald Muffin asked that question as he rolled into Study No. 24 in the Fourth. He asked it in a very disparaging manner, with his fat little nose turned up, as if to convey his lofty contempt for the rather frugal feed that was going on in Study No. 2.

Putty Grace and Higgs and Jones minor were there at tea. Certainly they were not feeding on the fat of the land. But as Tubby Muffin seldom stood his "whack" in the study feeds, it really was not for him to turn up his fat little nose.

But he did turn it up—more emphatically than Nature had turned it up to start with, though Nature had done a good deal in that direction.

Higgs gave him a glare.

"Yes, and there's none for you!" he grunted. "Orub's short, and you're not going to sponge this time, Muffin."

Muffin sniffed contemptuously.

"Do you think I want any of your measly feed?" he inquired.

"You generally do!" remarked Jones minor, with a grin. "This time you're not going to have any."

"Bread and marge, and radishes, and a squeeze of jam!" said Tubby Muffin, surveying the tea-table scornfully. "Not much in my line!"

"Ass!" said Putty Grace good-humouredly. "You can have some of the radishes if you like along with your bread and marge."

"Catch me!" said Muffin. "No, thanks! The fact is, I've had a jolly good feed already."

"Whose study cupboard have you been robbing?" asked Higgs, with sarcasm.

"I've been out with my friend Monty —"

"And sponged on him for a feed?" grinned Jones minor.

"Monty stood me a whacking-feed at a first-class hotel," said Tubby Muffin loftily. "Monty would do anything for me."

"More fool Monty!" said Higgs.

Putty Grace regarded the fat junior curiously.

"What does this mean between you and Montmorency?" he asked. "Why has he taken you up, and why does he lend you money?"

"I'm his pal, you know. Both of us being such highly-connected chaps, we naturally pull together," explained Muffin.

"Highly-connected rats!" said Jones minor. "Half Rockwood believes that Montmorency's real name is Huggins."

"Pageboy at Goby Hall before his uncle came into money, according to what we hear!" asserted Higgs.

"Well, that yarn's been knocked on the head," said Putty Grace tolerantly. "Montmorency is entitled to the benefit of the doubt, anyhow. But I'm blessed if I can see what he wants to square Muffin for!"

"Square me!" ejaculated Tubby.

Grace nodded.

"That's the word! He dislikes the mere sight of you, and he doesn't lend you money expecting to see it again. You've got some sort of a hold over the fellow."

"Anybody could see that!" grunted Higgs.

"Oh, I say!" protested Tubby Muffin, greatly startled. "That—that's a rather rotten suspicion, Putty. If you think I've found out for certain that Montmorency's real name is Huggins——"

"Eh?"

"If you think he's keeping me quiet about it," continued the fatuous Tubby, "you're making a big mistake—you are really."

"Well, my hat!" said Putty, with a whistle.

"The fact is," said Tubby, "I pull with him—both of us being so highly unconnected, you know, and of the same aristocratic tastes. As for hearing him telephone home—I—I mean——"

"You heard him telephone home?"

"Nothing of the kind—never heard a word."

"Whom was he telephoning to at home?" asked Jones minor, staring at the fat Classical.

"His uncle—I mean, nobody! He wasn't telephoning home at all, and I wasn't in the prefects' room," said Tubby Muffin. "I never heard a word, and I don't know anything about his affairs. See?"

Putty Grace and his study-mates did see—much more than the obtuse Tubby supposed.

That there must have been some powerful reason for the sudden friendship between Tubby and Montmorency was obvious. Montmorency had never concealed his contempt and aversion for the fat Tubby—till lately. He had, in-

deed, treated Muffin with more contempt than he deserved—in his snobbish way.

And now they had become inseparable, and yet any fellow could see that Montmorency almost shuddered when the fat junior took his arm in the quad or poked him in the ribs.

"So you've found out that he's really Huggins, and you're making him chum with you to keep you quiet about it!" grinned Higgs.

"Nothing of the sort! Just the opposite in fact! Don't I keep on telling you it isn't so!" exclaimed Muffin.

"You fat rascal!" said Putty Grace, "You shan't have any tea now! Roll out of this study before I kick you!"

Sniff, again, from Tubby Muffin.

"I'm jolly well going to leave this study," he answered scornfully. "I never was satisfied with you fellows—my father's often told me to be particular about the company I keep."

"What!" roared Higgs.

"I'm going to change out!" said Tubby.

"Hurrah!" ejaculated Putty Grace.

"Bravo!" said Jones minor. "I'll help you carry your things out, Muffin! My hat! I'd do anything to see the last of you!"

"Yes, rather!" grunted Higgs.

"Only I don't believe it!" went on Jones. "We're landed with you, and can't help it; but no other chap would take you in, unless he was potty."

"I'm going into Study No. 5!" said Tubby loftily.

"Montmorency's study!" exclaimed Putty.

"Yes—my pal Monty's."

"Rats!" said Higgs.

"You'll see. Just lend me a hand to carry these books along the passage!" said Muffin.

"Pleased, old bean," said Jones, with alacrity. "I hope it's true, but I think it's too jolly good to be true. Monty's welcome to you."

Sniff once more. Putty and Higgs went on with their tea; but Jones minor obligingly lent Tubby a hand with his books and other portable possessions.

They came out into the passage, laden, as Jimmy Silver & Co. came in ruddy and cheery from the cricket.

"Hallo! Anybody seen a moving job?" sang Lovell.

"Breaking up the happy home?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Jones minor chuckled.

"Muffin says he's moving into Study No. 5. I'm helping him. I've told him it's too good to be true."

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Come on, Jones!" snapped Tubby Muffin.

The fat Classical and his companion moved on with their baggage. The Fistical Four followed them up the passage. They could not help being interested and astonished. Tubby Muffin's company never was yearned for; and it was really incredible that any fellow could want the fat Classical to move into his study. Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather interested to see how the "moving job" would turn out.

Tubby threw open the door of Study No. 5 as if the room belonged to him. Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency was alone in the study. He was standing by the window, staring out into the quadrangle with a gloomy brow.

The elegant junior glanced round quickly as Tubby Muffin appeared in the doorway. He looked at Muffin, and Jones, and at the interested faces of the Fistical Four beyond. For one second his eyes glittered.

"What do you want, Muffin?" he asked.

"I've come!"

"What?"

"I told you I was going to move into this study, Monty."

Montmorency's lip twitched.

"I—I said I—I should have to ask my study-mates!" he muttered.

"You can settle it with them," said Muffin. "Anyhow, here I am. Put the books on the table, Jonesy."

"Right-ho!" grinned Jones.

He thumped the dog-eared volumes down on the table, and retired chuckling from Study No. 5. It really seemed

to be true, after all, although it still seemed too good to be true.

"So Muffin's going to dig with you, Montmorency?" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"If—if my study-mates agree!" said Montmorency.

"They'll have to," said Tubby Muffin. "You can make them, Monty. Look here, do you want me, or don't you?" The fat Classical's voice took on almost a bullying tone. "Yes or no, sharp!"

"Yes!" gasped Montmorency.

"Good enough, then."

Tubby Muffin closed the door in the faces of Jimmy Silver & Co. The Fistical Four stared at one another, and went on to the end study.

"Montmorency is under that fat rotter's thumb somehow," said Arthur Edward Lovell sapiently. "He'd have given quids to kick him out of the study."

"He looked like it!" said Jimmy.

"Blessed if I see——" began Raby, puzzled.

"No business of ours," said Jimmy Silver shortly. "If Montmorency's got some shady secret, and that fat rad's got hold of it, it's his own lookout. Let's get along to tea."

CHAPTER 17.

No Rest for the Wicked!

TOWNSEND and Topham, of the Classical Fourth, came along the passage with frowning faces.

They were discontented and dissatisfied.

For the second or third time they had broken with their aristocratic study-mate, Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency; and this time it looked as if the breach would not be healed.

For they were determined not to stand Muffin; they would not stand him at any price. Fully they were agreed upon that. Almost any other fellow in the Fourth they could have stood with mere equanimity. But the fat, the fatuous,

the greedy and grabbing Muffin—not at any price should he be allowed to wedge into their select circle!

On the other hand, they did not want to break with Monty. He was flowing with wealth, he was lofty and snobbish, and expensively dressed, he had a Rolls-Royce car at his beck and call—in fact, he was in every way suited to be their very particular friend.

So they were worried and dissatisfied; but none the less determined. And when Towny opened the study door, and they came in and found Tubby Muffin sprawling in the most comfortable arm-chair, their looks were very expressive.

"Out of this, you fat cad!" snapped Towny.

"Yah!" was Muffin's extremely elegant reply.

"Let him alone!" muttered Montmorency.

"We don't want him here!" shouted Topham.

"Monty wants me!" grinned Tubby Muffin.

Townsend set his teeth. But he remembered that Montmorency, with all his dandy ways, was one of the bestest fighting-men in the Blackwood Fourth. There really was no comprehending Monty; but Towny did not want to quarrel with him if he could help it.

Tubby blinked at the two disgusted nuts, and grinned.

"I may as well tell you fellows right out!" he said. "Monty wants me to chance into this study, and I'm here for keeps."

"What?" yelled Townsend.

"You fellows needn't mind him here," muttered the wretched Montmorency.

"Mind him!" said Townsend furiously. "You can get with the fat cad if you like, and he hang to you; but you can't plant him on us in our study."

"Look here——"

"Outside, Muffin!" exclaimed Topham. "Are these books yours? Well, there they go!"

Topham picked up an armful of books and hurled them into the passage,

Tubby Muffin gave a roar of wrath.

"Monty, if you don't stop him——"

Townsend grasped the fat Classical by the collar.

"Get out!" he snapped.

Montmorency stood looking on moodily. Tubby struggled as Townsend jerked him towards the door.

"Rescue!" he howled. "Monty, if you don't help me, I'll——"

Montmorency strode forward.

"Let him alone!" he muttered thickly.

"Hands off, you rotter!" shouted Townsend, quite reckless now. "He's going out on his neck!"

"Let him alone, I tell you!"

"I won't!"

There was a fight the next moment. Topham rushed to his comrade's aid. But the two nuts of the Fourth together were no match for Montmorency. Whether he descended from the noble line of Montmorency, or whether he was a simple Huggins, there was no doubt that the elegant junior was a good man with his hands. Townsend found himself reposing on one corner of the study carpet; Topham discovered himself sitting in the doorway—both in a dazed condition.

Montmorency looked at them gloweringly. He was in a bitter and savage temper, though his inward rage was directed against the fat junior who held him under a merciless thumb. But he was not sorry to wreak his fury upon somebody.

"Do you want any more, dash you?" he snapped.

"Oh, gad!" gasped Towny.

"Oh crumbs!" moaned Topham.

Tubby Muffin chuckled gleefully.

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" he said. "Good old Monty! You stand by your pal and your pal will stand by you!"

Townsend and Topham rose to their feet, blinking. They did not seek to renew the conflict, but they gave Muffin and his pal deadly looks. It was just

then that Tom Rawson came into the study.

He glanced round in surprise.

"You fellows rowing?" he asked.

As a rule, Towsy and Tuppy did not deign to speak to the scholarship junior; but in their rage they forgot all about their snobbish dislike of the sturdy Rawson.

"Montmorency's asked that fat cad to dig in this study!" said Townsend in a choking voice. "We're not standin' it!"

"You'll have to!" grinned Muffin.

Rawson gave Montmorency a quiet look. Rawson had been the only fellow at Rookwood who knew the hapless upstart's secret; he had learned it by chance, and his lips had been sealed on the subject. But Tubby's proceedings during the last few days had made Rawson realise that Tubby, too, had somehow discovered the facts of the case.

Rawson would never have dreamed of making any use of his knowledge that Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency, the snob of Rookwood, had once been George Huggins, pageboy at Goby Hall. But Tubby evidently was not so particular. He had made a very good thing out of his knowledge so far, and he was bent upon making more.

Rawson was silent for a minute or two, thinking the matter over in his slow, stolid way. Then he spoke.

"You can't ask a fellow to share the study without your study-mates agreeing, Montmorency," he said.

"Towsy and Tuppy will agree," said Montmorency, with a sour smile.

"I don't agree," said Rawson quietly, "and you can't lick me as you can Towsy and Tuppy. You can try it if you like, but Muffin isn't going to dig in this study."

"Look here——" blustered Tubby, rather dismayed.

He had not expected any opposition from the scholarship junior, to whom Tubby felt himself immensely superior.

Tubby was of opinion that Rawson was highly honoured by having him. Reginald Muffin, for a study-mate. Apparently Tom Rawson was of a different opinion.

"Outside!" said Rawson tersely.

"Monty——"

"Montmorency can't help you," said Rawson quietly. "Townsend, kick that fat cad out, and I'll jolly soon stop Montmorency if he chips in."

Townsend grinned.

"Rawson, old bean, you're a good sort, an' I haven't treated you well!" he said. "I'm sorry! Now, then, Muffin——"

"Monty!" yelled Muffin as Towsy laid ready hands on him.

Montmorency stepped irresolutely forward. Tom Rawson faced him, with his hands up.

"Rescue!" yelled Tubby.

But there was no rescue for Tubby Muffin; Rawson was a lion in the path. The fat Classical descended with a bump in the passage. Townsend and Topham followed him out. With vigour and enjoyment, they kicked Tubby Muffin along the passage to Study No. 2. Townsend threw open the door of Study No. 2, and a fresh series of kicks landed Tubby in his old study.

"We've brought your pig home, you fellows!" said Townsend politely. And he closed the door.

Tubby Muffin sat up and roared.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow! Yooooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Higgs.

Patty Grace chortled.

"Yow-ow! I'll make Monty lick 'em! I—I—I!"

"Didn't I say it was too good to be true!" said Jones minor regretfully. "I say, Tubby, go and try it on again! Keep on trying it on! There's three fellows here who wish you luck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Tubby Muffin was apparently not disposed to try it on again just then. For a considerable time Tubby's chief occupation was rubbing his fat limbs and grinning.

CHAPTER XX.

A Desperate Trick!

"A—A fiver!"

Tubby Muffin opened his round eyes wide. It was a couple of days since Muffin had made his attempt to jump the claim, as it were, in Study No. 5. During those two days, Tubby had eyed his pal Monty, when he met him, with a morose eye. Tubby felt injured, and he missed the well-spread tea-table in Study No. 5, where he had fondly imagined that he would annex the lion's share every time. For Towny and Toppy, backed up by the muscular Rawson, had tabooed Tubby in that study, even as a guest. He had only to present himself there in order to get the emphatic boot. And as Montmorency, hefty as he was, could not handle Tom Rawson, there was no help for it—as even Tubby realised.

But Tubby was injured, and Tubby was wrathful, and he "took it out" of Monty!

He would treat him publicly with disdain, and he would make deep and meaning remarks before other fellows, and Montmorency was kept on the trembling edge of uncertainty, dreading every moment that the fat junior would blurt out all he knew.

And Tubby knew enough to destroy, at one fell swoop, all the network of falsehood and importance the wretched upstart had built round himself at Rookwood. During those two days Montmorency was not happy.

Now Muffin had run him down in Little Quad, with the intention of "sticking" his dear pal for a pound note. If he could not share Monty's expensive study, he could at least share his spare cash, and Tubby had no scruples whatever about doing so.

"Can you lend me a quid?" he asked, and his tone was rather more threatening than polite.

"A fiver, if you like," said Montmorency.

Tubby's eyes almost bulged from his head as Montmorency jerked a crisp five-pound note from his pocket.

"A—s—a—fiver!"

The wealthy Montmorency had fivers, and even tenners, but Tubby, unscrupulous as he was, had not dreamed of bagging them. His fat thoughts did not run beyond pound-notes.

He clutched the fiver with greedy fingers.

"Thanks, old chap!" said Tubby affably. "I'll let you have this back out of—of a remittance I'm expecting shortly."

Montmorency did not answer that. It pleased Master Muffin to keep up a thin pretence that he was only "borrowing" from his aristocratic pal. Even Tubby did not like to admit to himself that he was extorting money as the price of silence.

He rolled away with a gleeful face to the gates.

Obtuse as he was, Tubby realised that there had been too much talk already about his frequent loans from Montmorency, and he considered it judicious not to change the fiver in the school shop. He rolled away in Coombe to stand himself a record feed at Mrs. Wicks'.

Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency drove his hands deep into his pockets and strode away, with a glitter in his eyes. The poet has said that desperate diseases require desperate remedies, and it was a desperate device that Montmorency had hit upon to save himself from Tubby's greedy clutches.

The dandy of the Fourth strolled into Study No. 5 to tea, and found Towny and Toppy there. They eyed him grimly. The friendship of the Rookwood nuts had received a severe shock, from which it had not recovered. But Cecil Cuthbert surprised his nutty pals by nodding to them cheerily.

"I owe you fellows an apology," he said, smiling.

"You do?" granted Townsend. "But you needn't speak to us, Montmorency—not so long as you pal with Muffin."

Montmorency laughed.

"My dear old bean, I was only pulling your silly leg," he said. "You couldn't

"think I really wanted to chum with that fat cad? I was only leadin' him on to stuff him."

"Oh!" said Topham blankly.

"Gammoul!" said Townsend sourly.

"Harvest injun?" said Montmorency lightly.

"All the fellows are sayin' that Muffin's got some hold over you, and you don't dare to offend him," said Townsend, with a sneer. "Some of 'em say that he's got proof that your name's really Huggins, same as Lattrey said it was."

Montmorency shrugged his shoulders.

"I've pulled your leg, and I've apologised for stuffin' you," he said.

"If you want to know what I think of Muffin, wait till he puts his head into this study again. I undertake to lick him the length of the passage, if he does!"

"You mean that?" ejaculated Townsend.

"Don't I keep on tellin' you that I've only been stuffin' him, for a lark?" said Montmorency impatiently.

"Well, I can't say I see any fun in a lark like that," said Townsend. "But if you mean it, I'm willin' to be friendly."

"Same here!" said Topham cordially.

And there was peace once more in Study No. 5; and when Tom Rawson came in he was surprised to see the three nuts apparently on the best of terms. After tea, Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency strolled down to the gates and out into the road. He paced slowly along the road, looking towards the village, evidently in expectation. A glimmer came into his eyes at the sight of Tubby Muffin's fat figure coming towards Rookwood.

"Hallo, old bean!" Tubby greeted him with a cheery grin. "Like some apples? I've got some in my pockets."

Tubby's pockets were bulging, and his fat face was red and shiny, and he breathed stertorously. It was evident, from his looks, that Tubby had "done himself" remarkably well at Mrs. Wicks' establishment in the village.

He had done himself, in fact, not wisely but too well!

"Changed the five?" asked Montmorency carelessly.

The question was unnecessary. Tubby's look showed plainly enough that he had not only changed the five but had expended a considerable part of it in filling up his capacious inside.

"Yes, old chap; and, I say"—Tubby looked aggrieved—"Mrs. Wicks made me pay an odd account of ten bob last term. I call that rotten—a good customer like me! So I've got only thirty-five bob left."

Montmorency smiled—a strange smile, that made Tubby Muffin start. He blinked at the dandy of Rookwood, feeling uneasy, he hardly knew why.

"I suppose you know that fivers have numbers on them, Muffin?" said Montmorency, sinking his voice, though they were alone in the lane.

"Eh? Yes, I suppose so."

"Any tanknole can be traced by the police."

"Wha-at are you driving at?" asked Tubby uneasily.

"I've missed a five from my study!" said Montmorency in low, steady tones. "It has been stolen. I've got the number."

Tubby Muffin stared at him.

There was a long, long silence.

Tubby's fat brain worked slowly. But Montmorency's meaning sank into it at last, and a scared, frightened look came over Tubby's face, and the colour died out of it.

"You—you mean——"

"You've changed a five-pound note at the village shop this afternoon," said Montmorency, with an icy smile. "Where did you get it?"

"You—you awful rotter!" panted Tubby. "You gave it to me—you know you did."

Montmorency raised his eyebrows.

"That's not a good yarn to spin," he said coolly. "Why should I give you five pounds?"

"Because—because——" Tubby panted. "Because I know your name's

Higgins, and you were a servant at Goby Hall, and you're afraid I shall tell the fellows; and if they knew you'd been employed in Sir Gilbert Goby's kitchen——"

"Can you tell the Head that?" smiled Montmorency. "Can you tell the police that?"

"The—the police!"

"As soon as I make it public that I have lost a five-pound note, the police will be called in," said Montmorency grimly. "You can confess yourself a blackmailer if you choose, but that won't save you. You can give me away, Muffin, and then look out for yourself! A reformatory is the proper place for your sort. And if you breathe one word—one word, mind—about me, or what you think you've found out—if you ever dare to call me Monty again, or claim my acquaintance—you're going to a reformatory as a juvenile thief. Think it over, my fat tulip, and hold your tongue, if you know what's good for you!"

Tubby Muffin gasped.

Montmorency turned on his heel, and walked back to Rookwood, without giving the fat Classical another glance.

Tubby Muffin almost crawled in at the gates of Rookwood. Montmorency, Townsend, and Topham were sauntering in the quadrangle, chatting, and they all three glanced at the fat Classical. Tubby gave them a blink, and his blink, as it fell on Montmorency, was full of terror. Montmorency's eyes glittered. He called to the fat junker.

"Muffin!"

"Yes," gasped Tubby. "Yes, M-M-Monty, old fellow?"

"You've taken the liberty of calling me Monty several times," said Cecil Cuthbert icily. "It's not to occur again. If it does, I shall kick you! Catch on?"

"Yes, M-M-Monty!" stammered Muffin.

"There he goes again!" grinned Townsend.

Montmorency made a stride towards Muffin, and caught him by the collar.

The next moment his elegant boot thudded on Muffin's ample person.

"Yow-ow!"

"Now, cut off, you fat rascal, or——"

Montmorency lifted his boot again.

Tubby Muffin did not wait for the second kick. He dived into the School House and vanished.

The three nuts paraded the quad arm-in-arm, in their old lofty way, on the very best of terms. Montmorency was smiling and genial; he had saved himself once more.

The saunter of the Rookwood nuts brought them near Little Side, where Jimmy Silver & Co., coming off from the cricket, had stopped to speak to Tommy Dodd, of the Modern Fourth. Tommy Dodd had a letter in his hand, and a somewhat indignant expression on his rugged face. Apparently he was confiding his troubles to the Classical chums.

"It's rotten!" said Tommy Dodd.

"The pater don't know what a worry a new fellow is. Just because he knows a kid's father, he's asking me to take him under my wing, you know, and see him through his troubles at Rookwood. Of course, I've got to oblige the pater; but as for this blessed new kid, Goby——"

Involuntarily Jimmy Silver's glance turned upon Montmorency. Montmorency did not meet his eyes. He dropped the arms of Towny and Topsy and turned away, and walked quickly to the School House, with calmness in his face, but the bitterness of despair in his heart.

CHAPTER 32.

The Sword of Damocles!

"**B**OTHER!" growled Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth Form at Rookwood.

"Hard cheese!" agreed Jimmy Silver. Jimmy Silver, being the great chief of the Classical juniors at Rookwood, did not always agree with Tommy Dodd, the leader of the Moderns.

But on this special occasion he did agree heartily that it was hard cheese. Undoubtedly it was!

For cricket was on that afternoon, and Tommy Dodd was keen on cricket. And, instead of trudging down to Little Side with the other cricketers, Tommy Dodd had to repair to the railway station at Coombe, and there meet and greet a new boy whom he had never seen before, and did not want to see now, and was eager never to see in the future.

"Just my luck for the young jackanapes to drop in this afternoon when we're playing!" said Tommy Dodd, in a deeply aggrieved voice. "Why couldn't he be sent last night or to-morrow morning?"

"Echo answers 'Why?'" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"In fact, what the thump is he coming at all for?" grunted Tommy Dodd. "Just because my pater knows his pater I've got to be loaded with a new kid to look after—a sort of a giddy Old-Man-of-the-Sea to carry around. I want to do as the pater asks, of course; but young Goby's people might have sent him some other day instead of this. I really think they might!"

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"Perhaps Sir Gilbert Goby didn't know we had a cricket match on this afternoon," he remarked.

"It's just possible," said Raby.

"Just!" grinned Newcome.

Tommy Dodd snorted. He was in no mood for "numerous observations from the Classical four."

"The Head would have sent Mack to rope him in," said Tommy. "Or any fellow might have gone. But the pater is very particular about my takin' the new duffer under my wing, so I've got to cut the cricket. I only hope you fellows will be able to handle the Bagshot bouncers."

"Well," said Arthur Edward Lovell, with a thoughtful air, "I rather considered all along that Jimmy had put too many Moderns in the team—"

"Ass!" said Tommy Dodd peevishly.

"Well, it can't be helped," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm sorry you can't play, Doddy; but if your father wants you to pick up young Goby and carry him in, there's no help for it. Anyhow, you'll be the first to see him—and he's the centre of no end of excitement."

"Blessed if I want to see him!" growled Tommy Dodd. "I've been asked questions about him a hundred times since it came out that I knew he was coming to Rookwood. I'm fed up with the mention of his name!"

"Has Montmorency asked you about him?" inquired Arthur Edward Lovell, with a grin.

"He's the only one that hasn't!"

"I fancy he's more concerned than the rest, all the same!" chuckled Arthur Edward. "That is, if it's the same Goby—and I think it must be."

Peele and Gower of the Classical Fourth came across the quad towards the benches where Jimmy Silver & Co. were chatting with the aggrieved Tommy Dodd. Peele and Gower were smiling cheerily, as if they were in possession of some good joke.

"Young Goby's due this afternoon, I hear, Doddy!" remarked Peele.

"Yes!" grunted Tommy.

"Goin' to meet him at the station?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Gower. "We'll be there."

Tommy Dodd stared at them.

"What the thump do you want to be there for?" he demanded. "You don't know young Goby."

Peele chuckled.

"We want to!" he explained. "We're anxious to see him—awfully anxious. We want to ask him about Montmorency."

"Oh, rot!" snapped Tommy Dodd.

"Can't you two fellows mind your own business?" inquired Jimmy Silver.

"We could, but we won't!" said Peele cheerily.

"We're jolly well going to nail young Goby at once, and bring him face to face with Montmorency—"

"Huggins, you mean!" said Gower.

"Dry up!" muttered Lovell. "Here he comes!"

Peele and Gower turned quickly. Montmorency came up, with a faint colour in his cheeks. Certainly he had heard the last sentences uttered by Peele and Gower. But he took no notice of the ends of the Fourth. He addressed himself to Tommy Dodd, who regarded him rather curiously.

"I understand that your friend Goby is comin' this afternoon, Dodd," he said, in his drawing tones.

"No friend of mine," answered Tommy. "My pater knows his pater, so he's written to me to look after the kid. That's all. I'm meeting him at the station."

"Weren't you down to play Bagshot?" Tommy nodded.

"I'm havin' the car out this afternoon for a little run," explained Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency. "It occurred to me that if you'd rather play cricket, I'd pick up young Goby at the station an' run him along to Rookwood in the car."

Peele and Gower exchanged a wink. Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at the landscape with elaborate unconsciousness.

"Oh!" said Tommy Dodd. "What's his train?" asked Montmorency.

"He changes at Latcham and catches the local there, three-fifteen at Coombe," said Tommy Dodd hesitatingly. "But—"

"Well, I'll save you the trouble, if you like."

"Hem! It's awfully obliging of you, Montmorency—" Tommy Dodd broke off. Montmorency of the Fourth was far from obliging, as a rule. And the most unsuspicious fellow could not help suspecting that he had an "axe to grind" on the present occasion. Peele and Gower were openly chuckling.

"No trouble at all," said Montmorency. "Is it a go? You can give me a message for the kid. The car's outside now."

"Hem! Awfully obliged, but I'm bound to go and meet him," said

Tommy Dodd. "The pater's made a particular point of it, or I should have fixed it up with another fellow already."

"And we're goin', anyhow!" chimed in Peele. "You're not goin' to get at young Goby an' muzzle him before we've seen him, Monty."

Montmorency shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and turned away.

Tommy Dodd looked at his watch.

"About time I got off," he said dolorously. "It's rotten! Mind you fellows don't let Bagshot lick you. I suppose they'll finish up an innings ahead!"

"Bow-wow!" answered the Fistical Four cheerily.

Jimmy Silver & Co. strolled away to the cricket-ground. Bagshot were nearly due now. The Rookwood junior cricketers gathered on Little Side for the match, with the exception of Tommy Dodd, who walked down to Coombe in a far from contented mood. He did not go alone. Peele and Gower followed him. And after them came Tubby Muffin and Leggett and Jones minor and Flynn and Riggs, and several other juniors, all interested in young Goby, and all eager to see him as soon as possible. Certainly no new boy's arrival had ever caused so much interest and excitement at Rookwood before.

CHAPTER 42.

The Last Throw!

"**L**ATCHAM JUNCTION, as hard as you can go!"

Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency snapped out that instruction to the liveried chauffeur as he stepped into the handsome Rolls-Royce.

"Yes, sir."

The car glided away down the road, gathering speed.

Montmorency threw himself back on the soft cushions with a black and gloomy expression on his handsome face.

The lofty superiority, the super-

ellousness that had made him so many enemies at Rookwood, was gone from his looks now.

He was a prey to a deep and gnawing anxiety, and, alone in the car, he allowed his feelings to show in his face.

He was very near the end of his tether, and he realised it very clearly.

His nutty chums, Townsend and Topham, had seen the car arrive that afternoon and they had taken it for granted that they were going for a run with their dear Monty. But Monty had rebuffed them quite gruffly. That afternoon, at least, he did not want the company of the nuts of Rookwood, and he had left Towny and Toppy feeling rather sore.

But Montmorency had more important matters to think about than the wounded feelings of Towny and Toppy.

His edifice of lies was about to crash down about him, unless by some desperate device at the last moment he could contrive to keep it standing.

He glanced at his expensive gold watch, knitted his brows, and signalled to the chauffeur:

"Faster!"

The car rushed on, although it was already travelling at a dangerous pace.

There was no time to waste if Montmorency was to reach Latcham before young Goby changed trains for Coombe. And that was his object.

His thoughts were busy as the big car sped onwards at a breathless speed.

Latcham at last!

The Rolls-Royce drew up outside the station, and Montmorency looked at his expensive gold watch.

The journey had been done in record time, and he was ahead of the train. There were three minutes before the "local" pulled out for Coombe.

He jumped out of the car and ran into the station.

More than one glance was thrown at the handsome, well-dressed Rookwood fellow as he hurried to the local platform. More than one glance was envious. But Cecil Cuthbert Mont-

morency was little to be envied just then.

The Coombe train was in, and passengers were coming over the bridge from the other platform.

Montmorency looked about him keenly.

He walked along the train to ascertain whether any passengers were already in it.

"Good gads!"

It was a sudden exclamation from a boy seated in a first-class carriage, whose eyes had fallen on the handsome junior from the window.

He was a rather plump youth with a ruddy and good-humoured face and light-blue eyes. He was dressed in Etons, not nearly so nobby and expensive as Cecil Cuthbert's garments, however. Sir Gilbert Goby, of Goby Hall, did not possess anything like the financial resources of Mr. Montmorency, of Montmorency Court, once Mr. Huggins, of the Goby Arms.

Montmorency stopped at the carriage, and opened the door.

The plump youth blinked at him.

"Hallo, George!" he said.

His manner was quite kind and civil; but it was not the manner with which one Rookwood fellow would greet another.

It was the manner of a polite lad to one of his father's servants.

Montmorency turned quite pale.

That greeting, kind as it was, cut him like a whip-lash.

For a moment the unhappy upstart trembled, his hand on the carriage door, his lips quivering. But he recovered himself quickly.

"I—I came here to see you," he said.

"That's kind of you, George," said young Goby, evidently somewhat surprised, however. "Are you living in Latcham, then?"

"N-no."

"I hope you've got a good place."

Montmorency bit his lip hard.

"There's been a change—" he muttered thickly.

Goby nodded.

"I remember now. I heard something about that," he said. "I congratulate you, George."

"You—you were surprised when you saw me——"

Goby coloured a little.

He remembered that he had ejaculated "Good gadi!" in astonished tones at the sight of George Huggins in Etons and a silk hat.

"Excuse me, kid!" he said. "Perhaps I was surprised. I didn't mean——"

"It's all right," said Montmorency. He glanced along the train. The passengers were almost all in, and the guard was getting ready to see the train off. He had only moments now.

"Jump in, kid, and tell us all about it while we're going to Coombe," said Goby. "That is, if you've time to spare."

"I've got a car outside," muttered Montmorency.

"Really?"

"Will you let me run you across to Hookwood instead of taking the train?"

Goby hesitated.

Evidently he wanted to be kind to a lad who had once been in his father's employ. But he hesitated to accept such an invitation from the one-time "buttons" of Goby Hall.

"I—I've got somethin' I want to tell you," muttered Montmorency. "It's important—very important! Please——"

"Stand back, there!"

It was the guard's voice.

"Come, will you?" panted Montmorency.

"I—I can't!" said Goby. "We got to get on to Hookwood. I'm expected——"

"I'll run you across in the car," Goby shook his head.

"I'm sorry, George. I really can't. You can hop into the carriage if you like."

"That's won't do. Please come!"

"I can't!"

"Stand back!" roared the guard. He rushed along to close the carriage door.

Montmorency clicked his teeth.

He was desperate now.

As Goby sank back into his seat Montmorency suddenly grasped him by the shoulders with both hands. Taken completely by surprise, Goby was whirled out of the carriage and upon the platform before he could realize what was happening.

He plumped down with a grunt.

Slam!

The guard slammed the door.

"Here, hold on!" roared Goby, sitting up dazedly. "What's this game? I've got to catch that train!"

The guard was waving his flag. A row between two schoolboys was no reason for delaying the train, in the guard's opinion. He jumped in as the train moved.

Goby scrambled up.

"I—I——" he spluttered.

He made a rush for the train, and Montmorency gasped him by the shoulder and jerked him back.

"Too late!" he said curtly.

"You confounded cheeky cad——"

The train ran on out of the station, and Goby, with flushed face and clenched fists, stood facing Montmorency on the platform.

CHAPTER XI.

A Surprise for Master Goby!

MONTMORENCY breathed hard.

He had taken the only possible measure to delay Goby's arrival at Hookwood—to prevent his meeting with the crowd of Hookwooders who would be waiting at Coombe.

Montmorency knew that there would be a dozen at least of the Fourth there to meet Goby, as well as Tommy Dodd. As soon as Goby met them he would learn how matters stood.

That had to be prevented at any cost, and Montmorency had prevented it. But he had not exactly placated Goby by the method he had used.

Young Goby was in a rage, which was natural enough in the circumstances.

"You—you cheeky cad!" he stammered. "What the thump do you mean by it? Are you off your silly dot, Huggins?"

"It's all right!" muttered Montmorency.

"I've lost my train!" hooted Goby.

"I can run you across to Rookwood quickly enough in the car."

"The car?" growled Goby. "I don't want a run in a hired car with a—"

He broke off.

Montmorency crimsoned.

"It's my uncle's car," he said quietly.

"He sends it down sometimes on a half-holiday for me to use."

"Oh, my hat!" said Goby.

"You'll find it comfortable——"

"My baggage is in that train——"

"It's labelled for Rookwood. It'll be put out at Coombe all right."

"I dare say it will. I'll wait here for the next train."

"Come in the car——"

"Look here," said Goby. "I've had about enough of this, George. I don't want to hurt your feelings, and all that, but you know jolly well that I can't run about in a car with you. What the thump would the pater say if he knew? I'm sorry," he added as Montmorency's sensitive lips quivered. "But you've driven me to say it."

"You won't come?"

"I can't."

Goby glanced along the platform, and moved away to a seat evidently determined to wait for the next train. Montmorency followed him and sat down beside him.

"I must speak to you," he said.

"You can speak as much as you like. I've got hours to wait for the next train!" grunted Goby.

"You may have guessed from my clothes that I'm at school now," said Montmorency.

"I suppose so."

"You didn't guess that I was at Rookwood?"

Goby jumped.

"You—at Rookwood!" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"Good gad!"

Goby stared at the dandy of Rookwood blankly.

"Are you joking?" he asked at last.

"Not at all," said Montmorency. "I'm in the Classical Fourth at Rookwood."

"Thank goodness I'm going on the Modern side then!" said Goby. "But I can hardly believe it. If you're not pulling my leg——"

He paused.

"Well, after all, why shouldn't you be at Rookwood if your people can afford it?" he added more kindly. "We live in dashed democratic times, and no mistake. I shouldn't wonder if your people can afford it more than mine can," he went on, with a grin. "I know the pater had to screw a bit for the fees, and I dare say your rich uncle rolls 'em out without missing the money."

"He does."

"Lucky for you!" said Goby.

"My uncle changed his name by deed-poll," said Montmorency. "The same with me. My name is Montmorency now."

"Good gad!"

"Quite legally, of course."

"Oh, of course!" said Goby sarcastically.

"I haven't mentioned my earlier life at Rookwood," went on Montmorency in a low voice. "Something has got out, but nobody knows. I—I want you to keep it dark, Goby."

"Don't call me Goby!" said the new junior sharply. "I don't like it from you, George. You know it's not right."

"Don't you understand that I'm a Rookwood fellow now, and we're on an equal footing at Rookwood?"

"Good gad!" said Goby again.

It seemed to take him some minutes to digest that.

"Well, after all, we needn't meet," he said at last. "We're on different sides of the school luckily, though we shall be in the same Furr. You keep

out of my way, and I'll keep out of yours."

"There's a crowd of fellows anxious to see you——"

Goby stared.

"Blessed if I know why," he said. "I know nobody at Rookwood, excepting Dodd, and him only by name."

"They've heard something about me and—and Goby Hall, and they want to get the facts from you."

"Oh, I see!"

"It won't do you any good to give me away," muttered Montmorency. "I—I want you to keep it all dark, Goby."

Goby whistled.

"So that's why you lugged me out of the train?" he said.

"That's why."

"Like your confounded cheek, I think!"

"Will you do the decent thing, Goby?" said Montmorency. "If the fellows ask you whether you know me, as they will, simply say you don't. That will see you through."

"How the thump can I say I don't know you, when I know you well?" demanded Goby.

"You can say so."

"Do you mean that I can tell lies, and keep on telling lies all the time I'm at Rookwood? I couldn't do it even if I wanted to. I should forget, and let the cat out of the bag sometime."

Montmorency compressed his lips.

"I don't want to harm you," went on Goby. "You oughtn't to have borrowed a name that doesn't belong to you. That's where the trouble comes in. If a fellow asks me plainly whether your name's Huggins, I can't say it isn't when I know it is, can I?"

"But it's no business of mine what silly game you play, so long as you don't drag me into it. I'll make it a point to say nothing at all about you if I can help it. Only keep your distance, and don't claim my acquaintance. I couldn't stand that."

"But——"

"That's all," said Goby. "It's all I can do, and more than you've a

right to expect, by Jove! Now I'll be obliged if you'll sheer off, George, and leave me alone."

"But——" persisted Montmorency.

Goby rose deliberately, and walked along the platform. Evidently he had had enough of "Gentleman George."

Montmorency looked after him bitterly. But he was feeling a sense of relief. He had hardly dared to expect so much as Goby was willing to grant. Only too well he realised that, in Goby's place, he would have been mocking, supercilious, scornful; that he would have taken a pleasure in "setting down" a pretentious upstart. Goby, at least, had not served him as he would have served Goby had the cases been reversed. That was something for the pretender to be thankful for.

He quitted the station and returned to the car. Again envious glances were turned upon the well-dressed lad in the expensive car as the Rolls-Royce gilded away. But black misery was riding with the favourite of fortune.

CHAPTER 42.

The Blow Falls!

"MAN in!" called out Jimmy Silver.

"Hallo, Tommy!"

Tommy Dodd came on the cricket field with a knit brow. Tommy was not in a good temper.

"How's it going?" he asked.

"Bagshot all down for 50," said Jimmy Silver, "and little us six down for 42, so far. Get along, Lovell!"

Tommy Dodd brightened up.

"Then you can still put me in!" he exclaimed.

"What about Goby?"

"Bless Goby! Bother Goby! Hang Goby!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd explosively. "I've hiked down to the station for Goby—and a dozen other fellows, too—and he never came. I waited for the 3.15—and he wasn't in it! Missed the train at the junction. I suppose, the silly owl. And after I'd cut a cricket match for him!"

And Tommy Dodd snorted with indignation.

"Rather a disappointment for Peele & Co.," grinned Baby.

"Bother Peele & Co.!" said Tommy Dodd crossly. "I'm thinking of myself. As he hasn't come, that lets me out. I shan't have to peddle him round Rookwood all the afternoon."

"What about the next train——"

"Blow the next train!" said Tommy Dodd. "I'm not hanging around railway stations for next trains while you chaps are playing cricket. Can't you put me in, Jimmy?"

Jimmy nodded, with a smile.

"You shall be next man in, old top," he answered; "and jolly glad to have you. I'll tell Grace he won't be wanted, after all. I'll speak to Pankley of Bagshot."

Tommy Dodd had been greatly exasperated by Goby's failure to arrive by the 3.15, after he had so dutifully met that train to oblige his pal. But when he went in to bat his exasperation had gone. He realised that it was rather lucky that Goby had failed to arrive, after all. As for meeting the next train, Tommy didn't consider that incumbent on him at all. A silly ass who missed one train might miss another—and, anyhow, the fellow could get to Rookwood on his own, unless he was a born idiot.

So Tommy Dodd played cricket with great satisfaction, and helped to beat Bagshot by the narrow margin of 4 runs.

Peele & Co. were not so satisfied. They wanted very badly to meet Goby, and they had had a walk down to Cumber for nothing. They did not feel inclined for another walk to the station, so they hung idly about the cricket field, watching the match without much interest, and waiting for the new junior to happen in.

"There's money!" muttered Peele, as the elegant figure of Cecil Cuthbert was seen in the distance, strolling gracefully towards the School House. "He's been out in his thumpin' car——"

"Tewny and Toppo have been lookin' pretty black about it!" grinned Gower.

"Monty left them out this time."

"Hallo, this blessed game is over!" yawned Laitrey.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came off the cricket ground in high spirits. Bagshot departed, beaten, in their brake. And then it occurred to Tommy Dodd that he had forgotten all about the new fellow whom his father had recommended so specially to his care.

He called out to Peele & Co.

"You fellows seen anything of the new kid?"

"He hasn't blown in yet," answered Peele.

"Bother him!" growled Tommy Dodd.

"Hallo, here's the station cab, Diddy," called out Jimmy Silver.

"That'll be the ass!" said Tommy.

The cab rolled on up the drive to the School House, and Tommy Dodd hurried after it. So did a dozen other fellows—and the Fiskal Four followed: not because they were curious to see Goby, but because it was their way indoors. A plump, ruddy-faced youth stepped out of the cab.

Tommy Dodd hurried up to him.

"Goby?" he asked.

"That's my name," answered the plump youth.

"I'm Dodd!"

"Glad to meet you," said Goby, shaking hands with the Modern Junior. "I lost my train——"

"I was at the station for you!" grunted Tommy Dodd.

"Sorry. It really wasn't my fault. A fellow——" Goby paused. "I'm sorry. It really couldn't be helped."

"Oh, all serene," said Tommy Dodd, remembering that Goby's failure to arrive had enabled him to play cricket. "It's all right, Goby. My pal's written to me about you. I'm going to look after you a bit. This way in. You're under my wing now."

"Thanks awfully," said Goby.

"Here, hold on, we want to speak to Goby!" exclaimed Peele.

"Yes, rather!"

"I say, Goby——"

"Oh, rot!" said Tommy Dodd gruffly. And he marched into the house, leaving Peele & Co. wrathful and disappointed.

Jimmy Silver and his chums came in, and they noted that Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency was lounging gracefully about the hall. He was as calm as ever, and seemed quite undisturbed by the arrival of Goby. The Pistical Four could not help eyeing him curiously.

"I say, Montmorency, Goby's come!" Tubby Muffin howled across the hall.

Montmorency did not even glance at the fat Classical.

"Plenty of nerve, anyhow!" murmured Lovell.

Goby, as he accompanied Tommy Dodd, passed within six feet of Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency.

He looked at him, and Montmorency returned his glance with perfect calmness, though a steely look crept into his eyes.

The upstart certainly had plenty of nerve, for not a muscle quivered in his face as he met Goby's eyes, though there was the sickness of fear and almost despair in his heart.

A crowd of juniors looked on, almost breathlessly.

The two—Sir Gilbert's son and Sir Gilbert's former servant—had met face to face sooner than was expected. It was the hour for revelations.

Montmorency's face betrayed nothing. He knew that a word was enough to shatter for ever his edifice of deceit—and he was calm, with a hardy, desperate calmness.

Goby coloured uncomfortably.

Probably, in his heart, he pitted the wretched pretender, who was so helplessly at his mercy; certainly, he had no desire to injure him. He only wanted to have nothing to do with him.

"Come on!" said Tommy Dodd. "This way!"

"Hold on!" howled Peele. "Goby—I say, Goby——" He caught the new junior by the sleeve. "Goby, do you know that chap?"

"Shut up, Peele!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Rats!" retorted Peele. "I suppose there's no harm in Goby sayin' whether he knows Montmorency or not."

"Speak up, kid!" exclaimed Gower. Goby hesitated. He was uncomfortable under the stare of so many eyes, and he scarcely knew what to say. He stammered.

"He knows him!" exclaimed Peele triumphantly. "Isn't that the fellow who washed dishes in your father's kitchen, Goby?"

"I—I——" stammered Goby.

"Peele, you cad!" muttered Jimmy Silver. But Cyril Peele did not heed. He jerked Goby's arm.

"Can't you answer? You know him?"

"I don't know anybody named Montmorency!" stammered Goby at last.

"Ha, ha, ha! But you know somebody named Huggins?"

"Oh, let a chap alone!" exclaimed

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Goby irritably. "Haven't I got to see the Head, Dodd?"

"Yes; this way!"

"Hold on——"

Goby jerked his arm away from Peele, and hurried on with Tommy Dodd. Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency wedged his eyeglass into his eye, and looked round him with a haughty stare.

Grimacing faces met him on all sides.

Townsend and Topham, his nutty chums, met his eyes and dropped their own.

Montmorency understood.

Goby had done his best in his slow way; he had not wanted to betray the wretched impostor. But he would not tell direct falsehoods, and only the most substantial falsehoods could have saved Montmorency.

"Decent sort of an ass," Lovell murmured to Jimmy Silver. "He knows, but he won't give the chap away."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

Montmorency's stare was haughty—his well-cut lip curled. But a pallor as of death had crept into his face—the bitterness almost of death was in his heart. He turned and walked away with his head high—and a low ripple of laughter followed him.

Jimmy Silver & Co. went on to their study with thoughtful faces—in spite of their dislike of the snob of Rookwood they could not help feeling something like compassion for him. Peele & Co. were left triumphant, chuckling and gleeful. They had scored at last over the upstart who had disdained them.

In Study No. 5, with the door locked, Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency paced to and fro, tirelessly, incessantly—forgetful of prep, forgetful of everything but the blow that had fallen. What had only been rumoured and suspected before was known now—known as well as if Goby had spoken out and told the whole tale—all the Lower School at Rookwood knew that the dandy of the school, the snob who had wounded the

feelings of so many with his uppish and supercilious manners, was the servant who had washed dishes in the kitchen of Goby Hall. The edifice of deceit, and pretence, and snobbish pride had crashed at last! And the snob of Rookwood, like Cain of old, felt that his punishment was greater than he could bear.

CHAPTER 43.

Roby Is Wanted!

"YOU fellows playin' cricket?"

Peele of the Fourth asked the question, as Jimmy Silver & Co. came out of the School House at Rookwood in the sunny afternoon.

As the Pistical Four were in flannels, and Jimmy and Lovell had bats under their arms, and Roby had a ball in his hand, it was pretty obvious that they were going to play cricket. But Cyril Peele wanted to know for certain. He had his reasons.

Jimmy Silver glanced at him.

Half a dozen other fellows were with Peele, all members of the Classical Fourth. And they were all grinning. Jimmy Silver did not need telling that there was "something on."

"Yes; we're going down to the nets now," said Jimmy. "You fellows coming along? A little practice will do you good."

Peele shook his head, with a laugh.

"No, we're not argin' the piddy flyin' ball just now," he answered. "All serene, Silver. Just wanted to know, you know."

The Pistical Four hurried on, and for the present, at least, dismissed Peele & Co. from their minds.

Peele & Co., for their part, watched the departure of Jimmy Silver with great satisfaction. Never had they been so pleased to see Jimmy Silver's back.

"Those rotters are safe out of the way now," said Peele. "Now for young Goby! Silver would be bound to interfere. He don't like Montmorency any more than we do; but he would chivvy in

and stop us from screwin' the giddy facts out of young Goby.

"He would!" agreed Gower.

"He's safe now," said Lattrey. "Let's be goin'."

"What's the programme?" asked Higgs and Jones, minor and Flynn and one or two other juniors together.

"Simple as A B C," answered Peele. "I drop in at Mr. Manders' House, and ask young Goby over here to tea. I walk him into the Common-room. You fellows will all be there, and you'll see that the giddy fly doesn't get out of the spider's parlour once he's inside."

"Good!"

"Then we ask him for the whole story about Montmorency," said Peele. "If he doesn't spin the yarn, we put him through it till he does. It will be all serene, with these cricketin' cads safe off the scene."

"Go it, Peele!"

Cyril Peele sauntered away across the quadrangle.

He entered Mr. Manders' House, and made his way to the study of Goby of the Modern Fourth, the new boy at Rookwood. Most of the Modern fellows were out of doors, but the new boy was found in his quarters. Peele tapped at his study door, and opened it, and Goby looked up from his table, with a pen in his hand and a frown on his brow.

"Lines?" asked Peele sympathetically.

"Fifty!" grunted Goby. "Mr. Dalton gave them to me this morning for being late in class."

"Rotten, and you a new kid, too!" said Peele. "I've just looked in to see if you'd care to come over to tea."

Goby brightened up a little.

He had been only a couple of days at Rookwood, and he had not yet found his feet, so to speak. Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth had taken him under his wing; but Tommy had many occupations. At the present moment he was at cricket.

"We're makin' up a little party, and we'd like you to come," said Peele

smoothly. "Leave your lines till after tea. Mr. Dalton's a good sort. He won't mind so long as you take them in before bed-time."

"I'll come with pleasure," said Goby, rising from the table, and throwing down his pen.

"Good man!"

Peele linked his arm in Goby's almost affectionately, as he walked him out of Mr. Manders' House.

They passed Montmorency as they headed for the Classical side.

"You know that chap, I think," remarked Peele, with a grin, nodding towards the dandy of Rookwood.

Goby coloured, but did not reply.

Evidently, if he knew Montmorency or anything about him, he did not intend to confide the circumstances to Peele.

But Cyril Peele only smiled. Goby was going to be made to talk soon—as soon as he was safe in the hands of the Classics in the School House! Montmorency stared after them, with a gloomy brow, as they disappeared in at the big doorway.

CHAPTER 41.

Facing the Music!

"HERE he is!"
"Collar him!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Goby of the Modern Fourth jumped. Peele had walked him, with linked arms, into the junior Common-room, where ten or a dozen fellows were collected. As soon as they were inside,

Peele dropped the new junior's arm, and turned quickly and closed the door. The crowd of Classics gathered round, laughing and grinning.

"Got him!" chuckled Tubby Muffin.

"He, he, he!"

Goby looked alarmed. New as he was to Rookwood, he was aware of the rivalry between the Classics and Moderns, and it had dawned upon him that he had been led into a trap.

"Here, fair play!" he exclaimed. "Peele asked me over here to tea. No rag, you know!"

"All serene, old top!" chuckled Peele. "We're not goin' to rag you—if you behave. It's not a Classical rag—honour bright."

"What's the game, then?" asked Goby suspiciously.

"We just want to hear you talk."

"Merely the delight of your conversation, old scout!" chuckled Gower.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Goby cast a longing glance at the door. But three or four Classical fellows had their backs to it now, and there was no escape for the Modern junior.

"Sit down, old fellow," said Peele, pushing Goby into a chair. "Don't be alarmed. We're not goin' to hurt you."

"Nak if you behave!" grinned Higgs.

"Of course, if you don't do as you're told, we shall bod you in oil, or somethin' of the kind!" said Peele.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Montmorency ought to be here!" said Gower. "Only fair to let him hear the interestin' yarn."

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Tubby Muffin.

"He won't come!" said Peele.

"Make him!" suggested Higgs.

"Ahem!"

Peele & Co. did not seem to "catch on" to that suggestion. Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency was so "hefty" a youth with his hands that the idea of "making" him come did not appeal to the rascals at all.

"You go an' fetch him, Towny," said Flynn. "You're pally with him."

Townsend hesitated.

"After all, it's only fair for Montmorency to be present," said Townsend, after a pause. "I—I'll fetch him!"

"We'll ask him to come," said Topham.

"Do!" grinned Peele. "We'll wait for you, but don't be long. We've got

to get it over before that crew come in from the cricket."

"Right-ho!" said Towny.

Townsend and Topham left the Common-room together. They looked round the quadrangle for Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency. From the cricket field came a loud shout.

"Well bowled, Silver! Oh, well bowled!"

Towny and Topsy did not even look towards the cricket. It was a thing that did not interest their Kuntzy minds.

"There he is!" said Topham. And the Knuts of the Fourth bore down upon Montmorency under the beeches.

"The fact is——" began Topham.

"We—we want you to come in," said Townsend, taking the plunge, as it were. "We're goin' to stand by you, Monty."

"What's on?" asked Montmorency, in an easy drawl, though his heart was beating painfully.

He remembered that he had seen Goby taken into the School House by Cyril Peele.

"They've got the new Modern kid, Goby, in the Common-room," said Townsend. "Peele's goin' to ask him questions. It will be better for you to come in and face it out, Monty! If Goby's got anythin' to say against you, you can answer him."

Montmorency breathed hard.

"Peele's rotten games are rather beneath my notice," he remarked.

Townsend and Topham exchanged a quick glance.

"Look here, Monty," said Townsend abruptly. "You know what the yarn is—you're accused of takin' us all in, and puttin' up a spoof on the lot of us. If you don't see it through the fellows will think you've got nothin' to say—and you'll be set down as an impostor and an upstart. You don't want that!"

"Better face the music!" urged Topham. "You've got nothin' to fear if you've spun us a straight yarn, Monty."

Montmorency nodded.

"Come on, then," said Towny.

Montmorency walked to the School House between his two knotty chums, who glanced at him occasionally, and read nothing but a lofty boredom in his handsome face. They felt their doubts dissipate, and they were full of cordiality towards Monty by the time they reached the Common-room. Surely a fellow who was about to be exposed as a common cheat and impostor would not walk to his doom with so much calmness and indifference! Little did they guess the anxiety and gnawing trouble hidden under the calm exterior of the hapless upstart.

"Here's Monty!"

"Come in, Huggins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency strolled calmly into the Common-room. Peele quickly shut the door behind him.

Montmorency glanced round at the grinning faces.

The laughter died away under his look.

"Now, you rotter!" said Peele, between his teeth. "We've got Goby here—your old master's son—and he's goin' to tell us all about you."

Montmorency shrugged his shoulders.

"Nobody can tell the fellows anything that I shouldn't care for them to hear!" he said.

Goby stared at him blankly, so evidently astonished by this remark that his expression could not escape attention on all sides. Peele felt his confidence revive as he caught Goby's startled look.

"We'll see!" he exclaimed. "You're goin' to face the music now. Goby, we want to know all about Montmorency—before he came to Rookwood. Go ahead!"

Goby set his lips.

"You hear me?" snapped Peele.

"I've got nothing to say!" answered Goby firmly.

"You fool, you've got to answer!"

"Go and eat cake!" retorted Goby.

He jumped up from the chair. "I'm goin' out of this!"

And he made a dash for the door.

"Collar him!" roared Peele.

The next moment Goby, of the Modern Fourth, was struggling frantically in the grasp of half a dozen juniors.

CHAPTER 25.

Light at Last!

"COLLAR him!"

"Yank him back!"

"You chump! Goby——"

"Ow!" gasped Goby. "Leggo! Oh! Ah! Ooooooop!"

He struggled to reach the door, but he struggled in vain. Half a dozen Classics had a grasp on him, and he was whirled back to the chair.

"Give him the screw, Higgs!"

"You bet!" grinned the bully of the Fourth.

Goby looked apprehensive, and not without reason. While the other fellows held him, Higgs seized his wrist, and began to twist it. Goby struggled furiously.

"Stop it!" he gasped, at last. "I—I'll tell you anything you like! Ow! Oh! Stop it!"

"Loose off, Higgs!"

The bully of the Fourth unwillingly released his victim. Goby sat and panted.

"Now go ahead!" snapped Peele. "You won't get off so easy again. If you try any more cheek, I can tell you!"

"What do you want me to say?" muttered Goby feebly.

"Answer my questions," said Peele, with a grin. "I'm the giddy cross-examinin' lawyer. You knew that chap who calls himself Montmorency before you came to Rookwood?"

"Yes," gasped Goby.

"Was he called Montmorency when you knew him?"

No answer.

"Give him a twist, Higgs."

"Yoooooop!"

"Was he called Montmorency when you knew him?" repeated Peele.

"No!" gasped Goby.

"Was he called Huggins?"

"Yes."

"Was he a servant in your father's place, Goby Hall?"

"Yes," stammered Goby.

"Was he a boy in buttons, answering the bells, and washing the plates in the kitchen, and all that?"

"Yes!" muttered Goby.

He cast an almost appealing glance at the calm, stony face of Montmorency.

"You see I can't help it," he muttered. "I told you I'd keep it dark if I could—I wouldn't promise. You can see I can't help letting it out. I'm sorry, George. But you've only got yourself to thank. You shouldn't have told lies."

Montmorency did not speak.

"We're gettin' on!" grinned Peele, with great satisfaction. "Just a few more questions, Goby."

"I'll lick you for this!" muttered Goby.

"Speak up, you duffer! The fellow's name is George Huggins?"

"Yes."

"He hasn't any claim to the name of Montmorency?"

"Yes, he has—his name was legally changed, I believe, along with his uncle's."

"Who was his uncle?"

No answer.

"Another twist, Bliggs!"

"Stop it!" yelled Goby. "His uncle was a man named Huggins, who kept the Goby Arms public-house."

"Oh, my hat! How did he get his money?"

"He had a lucky speculation on the Stock Exchange, and became rich," said Goby. "Huggins left my father's service after that, and I never saw him again till I met him in Latham the day I came to Rookwood."

"Oh, you met him in Latham, did you?" exclaimed Peele. "He caught

you on your way here, and asked you to keep it dark, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"I fancy we've about squeezed the giddy orange dry," chuckled Peele. "Now have you got anything to say, Montmorency-Huggins?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door opened at that moment. Four sturdy youths in cricketer flannels appeared there.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "I thought there was something on! What's this little game? Let that chap go!"

"Mind your own business!" snorted Higgs.

"You're too late!" chuckled Peele. "We've had the whole story out of Goby, and dear old Monty is fairly shown up!"

Jimmy Silver's brow darkened. He understood now why Peele & Co. had been so anxious to see him off to the cricket-field.

"You ought to have held your tongue, Goby," he said curtly. "It was no blame of yours to give the fellow away."

"They twisted my wrist!" stammered Goby. "I—I couldn't stand it—"

"Oh, that was the game, was it?" said Jimmy. "Well, you've called the tune, Peele, and now you are going to pay the piper. Collar him, my infants!"

The Fistical Four rushed on.

Townsend and Topham dodged out of the doorway in time, and Tubby Muffin dodged under the table. But Peele & Co. were not so lucky.

The rush of the Fistical Four fairly swept them off their feet, and they were knocked right and left.

For a few minutes, something like pandemonium reigned in the Common-room.

Cyril Peele departed from the Common-room headlong, after his fleeing friends. And Jimmy Silver & Co., feeling that a strenuous duty had been

well done, walked off cheerfully to the tuck-shop to refresh themselves with ginger-beer after their exertions.

It was the following day that a big Rolls-Royce buzzed in at the gates of Rookwood, and stopped before the School House. A fat, red-faced, pursy gentleman descended from it. It was Mr. Montmorency, of Montmorency Court—once Mr. Huggins, of the Goby Arms. A good many curious glances were turned on the pursy gentleman as he came in.

Precisely ten minutes later Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency was seated by the side of the pursy gentleman in the big car, his extensive luggage was piled on top, and the Rolls-Royce bore him out of the gates of Rookwood.

As he departed, the fat voice of Tubby Muffin squeaked:

"Good-bye, Huggins!"

And there was a laugh. Jimmy Silver took Tubby Muffin by one fat arm, and Tubby squeaked again, in quite a different tone.

CHAPTER 46.

The Last of Gentleman George!

AFTER Montmorency left there was no news of the former dandy of Rookwood, till one day the name Montmorency caught Jimmy Silver's eyes in the newspaper.

He glanced at it, and jumped.

"My only hat! Look at this, you fellows."

The Pistical Four read the paragraph together. It stated that Mr. Montmorency, of Montmorency Court, was still being looked for by the police—his recent bankruptcy having disclosed the fact that he had been using other people's money as well as his own!

"His recent bankruptcy!" murmured Jimmy.

"Easy come, easy go!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, oracularly. "He made a fortune by a lucky spec on the Stock

Exchange—he's lost it again by another spec, unlucky this time!"

"Can't help feeling sorry for the chap!" said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "But I shouldn't wonder if it was all for the best, so far as Montmorency is concerned. Wealth didn't improve him, that's certain. I—I wonder what the chap will do?"

Jimmy Silver did not expect to hear any more of Montmorency, or to learn anything of what he "did." But there was a surprise in store for him—he was not quite done with Montmorency yet.

It happened in the vacation. Jimmy Silver's father had taken him to London, and they dined at a West End hotel, where Jimmy found great entertainment in watching the fashionable crowd, and the smart waiters who ran gracefully about. A very youthful, but very handsome and exceedingly neatly attired waiter came to Mr. Silver's table. His manners were graceful, and there was a touch of superb haughtiness in his manner—to simple folk he would have been almost terrifying.

Jimmy Silver blinked at him.

He could scarcely believe his eyes.

The aristocratic waiter's eyes fell on Jimmy Silver, and he started. His colour changed, and the hauteur dropped from his manner, and he seemed to crumple up.

He was gone before Jimmy could recover his breath.

"Montmorency!" Jimmy breathed to himself.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Silver, looking round perplexed. "Where has our waiter gone, just as I was about to give him the order? Where can that waiter have gone? Waiter!"

But the superb youth did not reappear. Another waiter came to take Mr. Silver's order, and Jimmy did not see Montmorency again.

It was the last time he set eyes upon "Gentleman George."

THE END.

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