

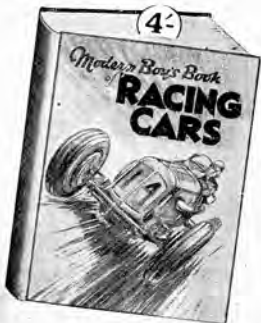
The SNEAK of ROOKWOOD!

By OWEN CONQUEST



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THE SNEAK OF ROOKWOOD!

By OWEN CONQUEST



The nastiest piece of work that ever arrived at the old school, his coming leads to big trouble for TOMMY DODD and his pals of the Modern Fourth.

CHAPTER 1.

By Order!

"DODD!"
"Oh, dear!" murmured Tommy Dodd under his breath.

The sharp voice of Mr. Manders was never pleasant to hear. It was particularly unwelcome just at that moment.

Mr. Manders was looking out of his study window in Manders' House at Rookwood. Tommy Dodd was standing near the window, in the quadrangle, with his elbows, Cook and Doyle. The three Modern juniors were chatting for a few minutes before going down to Little Side, where a House match was nearly due.

Tommy Dodd looked round to the study window.

"Yes, sir," he said respectfully.

Dodd of the Modern Fourth tried to look as if butter would not have melted in his mouth. He did not want any trouble with Mr. Manders just then. Mr. Manders was the only master at Rookwood who had no regard for games, and, indeed, looked upon them as a species of frivolity that did not deserve encouragement. But a House match was a House match, and Tommy Dodd was captain of the Modern junior team. Whether Mr. Manders understood it or not, a football match was a matter of importance.

"Kindly step into my study, Dodd," said Mr. Manders.

The Modern master disappeared from the window.

Tommy Dodd looked at Cook and

Doyle, and Cook and Doyle looked at Tommy Dodd.

"We're jolly nearly due on Little Side!" murmured Cook. "Don't let him keep you long, Tommy!"

"Bother the man!" muttered Doyle. "I dare say he doesn't even know there's a match to-day! Tell him, if he keeps you long!"

"After all, he looked almost good-tempered," said Tommy Dodd hopefully. "It mayn't be trouble."

Tommy was not a perfect youth, and there were a certain number of sins on his conscience, any one of which might have come to the knowledge of Mr. Manders and evoked his wrath. He had punched Leggett's nose only that morning. Leggett, as usual, had asked for it, but it would be quite like Mrs. Manders to detain him if he had noticed the blossoming state of Leggett's nose. No other Rookwood master would have detained a fellow when a House match was on. But Roger Manders was quite capable of it.

So it was almost in fear and trembling that Dodd entered Mr. Manders' study.

To his great relief, Mr. Manders did not look cross. He seemed, indeed, to be quite good-humoured for once.

"Ah, come in, Dodd!" he said, blinking at the Modern junior over his horn-rimmed glasses. "I trust you have no special engagement for this afternoon, Dodd?"

Tommy Dodd's heart sank.

As it was a half-holiday, he was, in theory, free as air. But if Mr. Manders wanted him, Mr. Manders' word was law.

"The fact is, sir—" he began.

But he had no time to tell Mr. Manders that he was engaged for a football match. The Modern master went on ruthlessly:

"You are not detained by your Form master, Dodd?"

"No, sir. The fact is, I—"

"In that case, Dodd, I wish you to do something for me."

"Certainly, sir. But—"

"Please do not interrupt me, Dodd. My nephew is coming to the school to-day—my nephew, Marcus Manders."

"Indeed, sir!"

"He is to enter the Fourth Form, Dodd, and will belong to the Modern side and will be an inmate of this House."

"Yes, sir," said Tommy Dodd, trying to look interested. "I—I shall be very glad to meet him, sir."

Really, Tommy was wondering why Mr. Manders was telling him all this. He had no objection to Marcus Manders, or the whole Manders tribe, coming to Rookwood School. But he could not possibly be interested in the matter, especially when he was thinking about football. By that time Jimmy Silver and the Classical footballers would be on Little Side, and it was time that Tommy Dodd turned up there. But he had to stand with a submissive countenance, listening to the droning voice of Mr. Manders.

"Marcus arrives at Coombe at three o'clock," said Mr. Manders. "I find that I have not the time to meet him at the station. I shall therefore be glad, Dodd, if you will do so, if you have no pressing engagement for the afternoon."

"Oh!" gasped Tommy.

He was quite well aware that Mr. Manders uttered his concluding words only as a matter of form. Mr. Manders did not consider that any junior could possibly have an engagement pressing enough to keep him from carrying out any wishes of his Housemaster.

But Tommy Dodd was feeling nearly desperate.

Kick-off was due on Little Side, and he simply couldn't—and wouldn't—chuck up a House match for the sake of meeting Marcus Manders at the railway-station. It was asking too much—much too much.

Mr. Manders was looking at his watch.

"You will have ample time to walk

to the station, Dodd," he said. "You will wait on the platform for the three o'clock train, and look for my nephew. Doubtless you will know him easily enough."

"But, sir——"

"You will give instructions for his box to be sent on to the school, and walk to Hookwood with Marcus," said Mr. Manders. "There is no need to take any conveyance here from Coombe."

"If you please, sir——"

"Kindly take care that you do not miss my nephew at the station, Dodd, and be kind enough to show him every attention."

"Yes, sir. But——"

"There is no need to say more," said Mr. Manders. "Bring my nephew directly to the school. You may go, Dodd."

"But, sir——" gasped Tommy Dodd. "That will do."

"We're playing football this afternoon, sir," blurted out Tommy Dodd desperately. "The fellows are waiting to kick off now, sir. Would you mind sending some other fellow to meet your nephew, sir?"

It was a desperate appeal, and Tommy Dodd knew it. Mr. Manders was not in the least given to considering others—least of all, junior school-boys. And he disliked football.

"Am I to understand, Dodd, that you are unwilling to oblige your House-master in this small matter?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no, sir! I—I should be glad! Only, you see, sir, I'm skipper of the Modern team, and I can't very well leave the fellows in the lurch."

"I selected you, Dodd, for this errand because you are head of the Modern Fourth Form, and therefore I am entitled to place reliance upon you."

"Yes, sir. You're very kind, sir. Only——"

"In short," interrupted Mr. Manders, "you desire to disoblige me, Dodd, for the sake of playing some game?"

"Oh, no, sir! But—but——" stammered Dodd.

"In a word, do you consent to go to the station or do you not?" exclaimed Mr. Manders.

It was like putting one's head into the lion's mouth to refuse, but the case was desperate. Tommy Dodd thought of his men putting up a losing fight against the Classics, deprived of their leader—their captain gone, and a new man shoved into the team at the last moment. Mr. Manders gave him his choice, so he took it.

"No, sir!" he gasped.

"You decline to go?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Tommy Dodd, in desperation.

"Very well!" said Mr. Manders in a grinding voice. "You refuse to oblige me by acceding to my request, Dodd. You have every right to refuse a request. But you have neither the right nor the power to disobey a command."

"But?"

"I now command you to do what I previously requested you to do," said Mr. Manders grimly. "You will proceed to the station, Dodd, and carry out my instructions with regard to my nephew. This is an order which you will disregard at your peril."

"Oh, sir!"

"Leave my study!"

Tommy Dodd limped to the door. He was fairly caught; in offering him the choice of assent or refusal, Mr. Manders had been trapping him, as it were; and it was just like Mr. Manders. At the door the hapless junior turned.

"Mr. Manders——"

"You may go."

"If you'd let me off, sir."

"I shall come you before you go, if you utter one more word, Dodd," said Mr. Manders icily.

Tommy Dodd did not utter the one word more. He limped out of the study, leaving Mr. Manders frowning in great displeasure.

CHAPTER 2.

Just Like Jimmy!

"FIVE minutes late!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Keep smiling!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Five minutes won't hurt us."

"There's such a thing as punctuality," said Lovell.

"Punctuality is the thief of time!" said Valentine Mornington, laughing. "Give Doddy a few more minutes."

Snort from Arthur Edward.

"Keeping a fellow kicking his heels!" he grunted.

Jimmy Silver and the Classical footballers were all ready. The Modern footballers were on the ground, with the exception of their captain. Hanson of the Fifth, who was going to referee the junior match, was there. Only Tommy Dodd had failed to arrive.

Some of the juniors were putting a footer about to keep themselves warm. It was a fine but very keen November day, with a sharp wind stripping the last leaves from the old Rookwood beeches.

Fellows who had come along to see the House match wanted to know why it was not beginning. Gunner of the Classical Fourth inquired loudly, incessantly and sarcastically why they did not begin. But the match could not begin without Tommy Dodd.

"I say, you Modern duffers!" bawled Lovell. "Has your skipper gone to the dorm for an afternoon nap?"

"Patience, old man!" said Raby.

"Rats!"

"You've kept fellows waiting before now, you know," remarked Newcome.

Another snort from Arthur Edward Lovell. The fact that he had kept fellows waiting in his time was no reason why he should be kept waiting in a keen November wind. To keep waiting, and to be kept waiting, were two quite different and distinct things.

Cook and Doyle came over to the Classics.

"Can't be helped, you fellows," said

Tommy Cook. "Mr. Manders called Daddy in at the last minute, and he's keep him jawing, I suppose."

"That's where Moderns come out strong—jawing!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell. "All jaw, in fact."

"You silly owl!" said Doyle. "I suppose Tommy couldn't tell Manders to go and eat coke, could he?"

"If we had a master like Manders on the Classical side, we'd jolly well lynch him," growled Lovell.

"If you had Manders on your side, you'd jolly well put up with him, the same as we do!" snapped Cook. "Don't gas!"

"You cheeky Modern cad——"

"You burbling Classical ass——"

"Look here——"

"Well, you look here——"

"Here he comes!" called out Towle.

Tommy Dodd appeared in the offing, scudding towards the football field. His appearance stopped an argument which looked like developing into active warfare.

"Here we are again, Doddy," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "Waiting for you, old man."

"Sorry——"

"It's all right, now you're here. Let's get going."

"Can't!" said Tommy Dodd glumly. "I'm out of it! I've got to put a new man in and clear."

"Oh, rotten!"

"You're not detained!" shouted Tommy Doyle. "Even Manders wouldn't——"

"No; but it comes to the same thing," growled Tommy Dodd. "I've got to hike down to Coombe. Here, Lacy!" He called to a Modern junior in the crowd. "You'll be wanted—get into your things."

"Right-ho!"

Lacy hurried away to change.

"You'll have to wait a minute or two, you chaps," said Tommy Dodd. "Sorry, and all that, but it can't be helped. I'm out of it."

"I say, that's hard cheese," said

Lovell. "Your crew wouldn't have had much chance, anyhow; but without their skipper——"

"Oh, can it!" snapped Tommy Dodd. "We were going to wipe up the ground with you. But with me out of it, you may have a dog's chance."

"You cheeky ass——"

"Shut up, Lovell, old man!" said Jimmy Silver. "Look here, Diddy, this is rather rotten. Can't anything be done? What's the giddy trouble?"

Tommy Dodd grunted.

"Old Manders has a sneaking nephew coming to Rookwood, and he's turning up his ass enough to butt in on this special afternoon; and the old donkey wants the young donkey to be met at the rotten station, so I've got to hike off and pick him out of the train—it seems that the born idiot can't walk to Rookwood by himself—so I've got to cut the footer! I'll jolly well kick him, anyhow!"

"Never knew old Manders had a nephew," said Doyle.

"Or cared!" added Cook. "I know we don't want any more Manders."

"Well, he has, and the little beast was bound to butt in to-day—he wouldn't be a Manders if he didn't make himself a nuisance."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Well, it's not the kid's fault," he said. "Look here, Diddy, this rather lets your side down."

"I know it does!" growled Tommy Dodd.

"We should have licked them anyway!" remarked Lovell.

"It would have taken you a century or two!" snapped Tommy Dodd.

"Look here——"

"Peace, my infants!" said Jimmy Silver. "Let your Uncle James speak. Manders is a tick, but you can't argue. But a House match is a House match. We want to beat you fair and square, or else take a beating fair and square. If you have to stand out, Diddy——"

"I've got to."

"Then I'll follow your example," said

Jimmy Silver. "I'll trot along with you to Coombe, if you like, and help you beat the society of young Manders. You'll need sustaining a little, if he's anything like old Manders."

"Oh!" said Tommy Dodd.

He looked dubiously at the Classical junior captain; but there was no doubt that he was pleased and relieved. Really, it was hard lines for the Moderns to lose their best man at the last minute; and Jimmy Silver's generous offer equalised matters again. Jimmy was the best man on the Classical side—with one exception, in Lovell's opinion.

"That's fair play!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"But you don't want to miss the game," said Tommy Dodd.

"No more than you do, old bean; but it's a go. Morny, old man, you're going to captain the side. Pick out another man."

"Pleased!" said Mornington.

"You're rather an ass, Jimmy," said Lovell. "Still, fair's fair, and we can beat the Moderns without taking any advantage. Morny, old man, if you want a tip from me about a new man——"

"Thanks; I don't!" said Mornington.

"Well, you cheeky ass——"

"Come on, Diddy," said Jimmy Silver, with a smile. And the two skippers walked off, leaving the footballers to it.

With Morny captaining the Classical side, and Tommy Cook the Moderns, the House match was soon in progress. Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd went in to change into Etons, and then walked down to the gates together.

Both of them cast regretful glances in the direction of the football field as they went. Both were keen on football, and specially keen on the House match.

"You're a decent chap, Silver," said Tommy Dodd gratefully. "I don't mind admitting that my lot wouldn't have stood much chance without me, and with you captaining the Classics."

"Thanks!" said Jimmy, with a smile. "It's rotten to make you miss the game."

"No more rotten for me than for you."

"Well, that's so! We'll jolly well kick that young scrubby cad Manders at the station."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"He may be quite a decent chap," he said. "Go easy with him! He's rather unfortunate in his choice of uncles, but——"

"If he's anything like his uncle——"

"Perhaps he mayn't be! Hope for the best, anyway."

"My hat! If he's much like Manders he won't have a good time in the Modern Fourth!" said Tommy Dodd. "We have to stand being Mandered by a master—but we shan't stand any Mandering in the Form!"

"Perhaps he's quite a nice chap—not a bit like his uncle," suggested Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"I hope so, for his own sake!" said Tommy Dodd, with a grim look.

And the two juniors walked down to Coombe in the keen November wind.

CHAPTER 3.

A Glimp at the Old Block!

"IS that it?"

"It" referred to Mr. Manders' nephew.

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd had arrived at Coombe Station in plenty of time for the train. They waited on the platform till the three o'clock local from Latham Junction came in.

Among the passengers that alighted they looked for a fellow who was likely to be the new junior for Rookwood.

There was not much room for a mistake, for among the half-dozen passengers who stepped from the train there was only one boy of school age. It Mr. Manders' nephew had come by the train, evidently that was he.

The two Rookwooders looked at him.

He stepped from the train and looked up and down the platform as if expecting to be met there. He had a bag

in his hand and a rug over his arm. He was rather tall and rather weedy in figure; he had a long face and a long nose that was quite like Mr. Manders'. The Rookwooders, on the second glance, could have picked him out by his resemblance to his uncle.

He was not a handsome youth—the fact that he resembled his uncle prevented that.

He had rather small eyes, extremely sharp in their glance, and he gave sharp looks about him in a bird-like sort of way. He was anything but prepossessing to look at. But Jimmy Silver was a good-natured fellow and Tommy Dodd had recovered from his annoyance by that time, so both of them were prepared to be civil and kind to Marcus Manders and to make the best of him.

"Better speak to him, I suppose," said Tommy Dodd.

"He's coming this way."

Master Manders had evidently spotted the two Rookwooders with his sharp little eyes. He came across to them.

"You belong to Rookwood School?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tommy Dodd. "We——"

"I suppose you know Mr. Manders, a Modern master?" asked the newcomer.

"He's my Housemaster."

"Oh!" The stranger stared at Tommy Dodd. "I see! Then you know him! Do you know if he's about the station here, anywhere?"

"No; I——"

"I'm his nephew, Marcus Manders. I expected to be met at the station. Isn't he here?"

"Mr. Manders sent me here to meet you," said Tommy Dodd. "I'm to take you to the school if you're young Manders."

"I thought my uncle was coming," said Marcus in an aggrieved tone. "My uncle's very fond of me."

"Is he?" said Tommy Dodd politely.

"Oh, yes; he thinks a lot of me," said Marcus.

"Matter of taste, I suppose," said Tommy Dodd. "This chap is Jimmy Silver, of the Classical side, Junior captain of Rookwood," added Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy Silver held out his hand to the new boy in a friendly way. It was one of Jimmy's ways to be kind to new "kids," who generally found themselves rather lost and strayed in a big school. Marcus Manders took his hand with a hand that felt, to Jimmy, like a cold fish. He just touched it and dropped it. Obviously, he was not in the least conscious of the fact that so important a person as the junior captain of Rookwood was being kind to him. It was, indeed, clear that Marcus Manders regarded himself as a person of considerable importance, perhaps basing that belief on the fact that he was a near relation to a Rookwood Housemaster.

Jimmy Silver surreptitiously wiped his hand on his jacket when Marcus Manders relinquished it. Young Manders had a clammy touch that was not at all pleasant. Jimmy was rather pleased that Master Manders was to be on the Modern side of Rookwood. He felt that the less he saw of him the better he would like it.

"Let's get out!" said Tommy Dodd restively. Marcus Manders had made no better impression on him than on Jimmy Silver.

"I've got to look after my box," said Manders.

"I'll speak to the porter about that."

The three juniors left the station together. As they came out into the street Marcus looked about him with his keen, penetrating eyes.

"Is there a cab?" he asked.

"Mr. Manders said we were to walk."

"Is it far?"

"Under the mile."

"I don't want to walk a mile," said Marcus sulkily. "I think my uncle might have sent a car, or at least a trap."

"Well, he hasn't," said Tommy Dodd. "We've got to hoof it. Come on."

"Take this bag, will you?"

"Eh?"

"Take this bag."

Tommy Dodd stared at him.

Tommy would have had no objection in the world to giving the new fellow a lift with his bag, if asked civilly. But Master Manders was not asking him civilly—he was giving directions, as if to a porter.

"Carry the dashed thing yourself," said Tommy Dodd curtly.

"Didn't you say my uncle sent you to meet me?"

"Yes; but he didn't tell me to carry your luggage," said Tommy Dodd indignantly, "and I jolly well shouldn't, even if he had told me—see?"

"Wouldn't you?" said Marcus Manders unpleasantly. "I'll ask my uncle about that when I see him."

Tommy Dodd breathed hard.

"Here, I'll lend you a hand with the bag, if you like," said Jimmy Silver, "Hand it over, young Manders!"

Jimmy took the bag, and young Manders held out his rug to Tommy Dodd. Tommy put his hands in his pockets and walked on regardless; and the new junior cast an extremely unpleasant glance after him.

"This way to Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver, with determined cheerfulness.

Master Manders had a most unpleasant effect on him, but he was determined to remain civil and polite during the short time that the company of Master Manders had to be endured.

"Look here, there's a cab at the station," said Marcus Manders. "I suppose we can take it."

"Certainly, if you like to pay the fare."

"How much is it?"

"Four shillings."

"That's an imposition," said Marcus Manders at once. "Two shillings would be quite enough."

"Better tell the driver so."

Marcus Manders nodded and walked over to the old hack which stood outside the station, with the driver half-

dozing on the box, meditatively chewing a straw.

"Here, you!" said Manders.

The old gentleman on the box looked down at him.

"How much will you drive me to Rookwood School for?"

"Four shillings, sir."

"I'll give you two."

The driver eyed him.

"You won't!" he answered.

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd impatiently. "Can't you walk a mile, young Manders?"

"I could if I liked, but I'm not going to," said Marcus Manders. "Look here, you two fellows come in with me and stand me a bob each. That's fair."

"We don't want to stick in a stuffy old hack," growled Tommy Dodd.

"What's the matter with walking?"

"Healthy exercise, you know, young Manders," murmured Jimmy Silver.

"I'm not going to walk."

"Then you can go in the old hack by yourself, and be blowed to you!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, out of patience.

"Hold on, old man," whispered Jimmy Silver in his ear. "This merchant looks like a chip of the old block, and no mistake. And you were told to take him to Rookwood. You don't want trouble with your Housemaster."

Tommy Dodd nodded in assent to that sage counsel. He seemed to swallow something with difficulty and turned to Marcus Manders again. That young gentleman was eyeing him rather viciously.

"We'll go in the hack if you like," said Tommy Dodd with an effort.

"Chuck that bag in, Jimmy! Chuck yourself in, young Manders!"

"A bob each, mind!" said Marcus Manders.

He seemed very particular upon that point.

"We won't rob you," said Tommy Dodd sarcastically. "We'll stand our bob each, eh, Silver?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Jimmy.

"You can cut if you like, old man," added Tommy Dodd. "You're not bound to stand this tick, as I wot."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"I'll stick to you, old man!"

And the three got into the hack together, and the driver tooted the ancient vehicle down the High Street into Coombe Lane, heading for Rookwood School.

CHAPTER 4.

A Regular Rascal!

MARCUS MANDERS settled himself comfortably in the hack as it rolled out of Coombe behind the ancient horse. Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd sat silent, not in the least pleased or satisfied with their company. They had not really expected much of young Manders, considering it probable that he would resemble his uncle, more or less. But they had not anticipated meeting such an absolute "tick" as this. Both of them were anxious to land him at Rookwood and have done with him. And that reconciled them to the journey in the stuffy old hack, which was a little quicker than walking. All the same, it was unpleasant enough to be stuffed into the dingy old vehicle, especially with Marcus Manders' thin and meagre features opposite.

Marcus Manders ran his bony hands through his pockets and produced a couple of pennies. He twirled them in his thin fingers, and looked at the two juniors opposite with his penetrating, inquisitive look.

"You chaps ever played pitch and toss?" he inquired.

"What?" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Pitch and toss?" repeated Tommy Dodd blankly.

"Yes. Ever played it?"

"Do you mean to say that you play pitch and toss for money?" asked Jimmy Silver, staring at the hopeful nephew of Roger Manders.

Marcus Manders grinned.

"Lots of times."

"You'd better chuck it, then, at Rook-

wood," said Jimmy. "It would mean a Head's flogging if you were found out."

"I shouldn't be found out."

"Don't you know it's against the law?" asked Jimmy Silver. "A bobby could drop on you for it."

Young Manders shrugged his thin shoulders.

"That makes it all the more interesting," he said.

"Does it? I shouldn't care for that sort of interest myself," said the captain of the Rookwood Fourth dryly.

"Nor I," said Tommy Dodd. "You seem to be a pretty precious sort of a young blackguard, young Manders."

"Oh, choose it!" said young Manders with contemptuous derision. "If you're afraid to risk your pennies say so, I can see that you're a fellow with no pluck, anyway."

Tommy Dodd flushed crimson.

"You cheeky rotter——" he began.

"Come off!" said young Manders.

"If a fellow's a funk he's a funk, and there's no getting out of it. Let it go at that."

Tommy Dodd clenched his fists almost convulsively. To be called a funk by this skinny, clammy, unpleasant young rascal was too much.

"Hands off!" said young Manders cheerfully. "If you lay a finger on me I'll tell my uncle!"

"You'll—you'll what?"

"I'll tell my uncle. You'll get licked. Chuck it!"

"My only hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "You've bagged a bright specimen for your house, Doddy. You're welcome to him!"

"You—you—you—" gasped Tommy Dodd, glaring at the cheerful Manders. "You—you—you— There isn't a word for it. You clammy worm!"

Young Manders laughed.

"What's the good of rowing?" he said. "Let's chuck up the coins to while away the time. Suppose you lose a tanner or so? I suppose you're not so hard up as all that."

"I'm not a gambling rotter!" growled Tommy Dodd.

"Are they all as soft as you at Rookwood?" asked Marcus Manders derisively. "Fi-jaw, because you haven't the nerve to risk a penny or two!"

He tossed up a penny and caught it in his hands.

"Head or tail?" he asked.

Tommy Dodd glared at him. To be accused of "pi-jaw" was bitter; and it was clear that this hopeful specimen attributed his repugnance to pitch and toss not to principle, but to funk. To be despised by this mean, clammy fellow was more than Tommy Dodd could stand.

"Head!" he snapped.

Marcus Manders unclosed a clammy hand and revealed the penny in the palm of the other (clammy hand, tail uppermost).

"You owe me a penny!" he grinned.

Tommy Dodd handed over a penny. Jimmy Silver gave him a warning look, but the Modern Junior was too angry and excited to heed. He did not even realise that he was being drawn into gambling by a designing young rascal.

"Here goes again!" said young Manders. "Head or tail?"

"Tail!" said Tommy Dodd this time.

Tail it was, and the Modern Junior received his penny back.

"What's the good of fooling about with pennies?" said young Manders.

"Look here, I'll chuck the penny up and let it roll. Head, you give me half-a-crown, tail, I give you half-a-crown. What?"

"I haven't any half-crowns to chuck away."

"You haven't any nerve, you mean!" said young Manders derisively.

"It's a go!" said Tommy Dodd savagely. "Half-a-crown a time. But chuck it on the floor and let it roll. No tricks!"

"There it goes!"

Young Manders threw a penny on the seat. It rolled to the floor of the

hack, and rolled round and settled there. Evidently he could not have manipulated the fall of the coin in these circumstances.

"There you are! What's up?" he asked.

"Head was up!"

"Head!" muttered Tommy Dodd, staring down at the coin.

"You owe me half-a-crown, then."

Tommy Dodd breathed hard and dived into his pocket. Half-a-crown was not a trifle to a Fourth Form junior, but he had to shell out.

"Hold on a minute!" said Jimmy Silver quietly.

"Oh, don't you butt in," growled Tommy Dodd. "I've lost, and I'm going to pay."

"Hold on, I tell you! Is that the same penny you used at first, young Manders?" asked Jimmy.

"Of course it is!"

"I'm not so sure of that. Look at it, Duddy."

"What the thump does it matter?" snapped Tommy Dodd. "All pennies are the same, aren't they?"

"Not always, when you're dealing with a tricky merchant like this," said Jimmy Silver. "Look at the penny."

"Oh, rot!"

"Then I'll look."

Jimmy Silver stooped to pick up the coin that lay on the dusty floor of the hack. Marcus Manders clutched at it and grabbed it up before the Classical junior could reach it.

"That's my penny!" he snapped.

"Show it me."

"Rats!"

Jimmy Silver grasped the chimney wrist. He had been suspicious, and he was certain now.

"Open your hand, and let's see that penny," he said grimly.

"Let go my wrist!" shouted Marcus Manders.

"Open your hand."

"I won't!"

"Then I will!" said the captain of the Fourth coolly, and did so.

"I thought so," he added, as he picked up the penny with his free hand. "I've heard of such tricks before."

He showed the penny to Tommy Dodd, first one side and then the other. There was a head on each side. It was a double-headed penny, that peculiar coin manufactured by rogues for the cheating of particularly green greenhorns. Tommy Dodd stared at it blankly.

"My only hat! You awful rascal!"

"Give me my penny!" shouted Marcus Manders furiously.

Jimmy Silver spun the double-headed penny out of the open window of the hack, and it dropped into the mud of the ditch by the roadside.

Young Manders gave him a venomous look. Probably it was not easy for him to replace that valuable article.

"You—you—you toad!" - gasped Tommy Dodd.

He had been tricked into gambling with young Manders, and that was bad enough. But to discover that he had been cheated—and cheated in a way that implied that he was looked upon as a fool—was too much for him. He forgot that the young rascal was Mr. Manders' nephew, and that the consequences of handling the Housemaster's nephew might be serious. He forgot everything but the urgent necessity of punishing this young rascal. And he grasped Marcus Manders in a hefty grasp, and the next moment the old hack rang with yells and howls as the head of Marcus Manders was banged, and banged again and again on the seat of the vehicle.

CHAPTER 8.

Handling Manders!

"YOOOOOP!"

Bang!

"Yaroooooh! Help!"

Bump, bump!

"Ow! Leggot. I'll tell my uncle! Yarooooop!" yelled Marcus Manders, as

Tommy Dodd banged away, and the dust rose in clouds from the old worn leather of the seat.

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Don't knock his head off, Doddy," he said. "Old Manders will expect to see it on his shoulders when he arrives."

"Whoooop! Help! Yooop!"

"I'll smash him!" roared Tommy Dodd.

"Yahooh! Help!"

The hack driver blinked round in surprise. Jimmy Silver caught Tommy Dodd by the arm and fairly dragged him away from young Manders.

"Chuck it, old man!" he said. "Enough's as good as a giddy feast."

"The sneaking toad—"

"Ow, ow, ow!" Marcus Manders collapsed on the seat, gasping and spluttering for breath. "Ow! Oh, dear! You rotter! I'll get my uncle to thrash you for this. Ow! Ow! Wow!"

"Shut up!" roared Tommy Dodd. "I'll give you some more if you don't shut up!"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Sit down, old bean," murmured Jimmy Silver soothingly. "The miserable object will break if you handle it any more."

"Ow, ow! Oh, dear! Wow!"

Tommy Dodd sat down, his brows knitted savagely. But he got up again.

"I can't stand that toad," he said. "Manders' nephew or not, I can't stand him, and I won't! I'm walking to Rookwood."

He shouted to the driver to stop.

The hack halted, half-way to the school. Tommy Dodd jumped out, and Jimmy Silver followed his example.

Marcus Manders gave them an evil, bitter look. He was still breathless and gasping; but he had not forgotten one important matter.

"If you rotters are walking——"

"We are!" said Jimmy Silver. "Sorry, but a fellow can't breathe the same atmosphere with you, young Manders. I advise you to change your

manners and customs a little when you're at Rookwood."

"I'll ask you for your advice when I want it," said Marcus Manders. "Keep it till then. About the fare——"

"The what?"

"You're paying a bob each towards the fare."

"Oh, I forgot that."

"I didn't," sneered young Manders: "and you jolly well didn't, either, if you come to that."

Tommy Dodd made a movement to re-enter the hack, evidently for the purpose of banging young Manders' head again. The captain of the Fourth jerked him back.

"Chuck it, old man, and shell out," he said.

"Let's get away from him," grunted Tommy Dodd. "He makes me sick!"

Two shillings were tossed into the hack, for Marcus Manders to pick up, and then Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd turned their backs on him and walked off towards Rookwood School.

Tommy Dodd was breathing hard.

"Jevver see such a horrid tick?" he asked.

"Never!" said Jimmy.

"Even Leggett's a gentleman beside him."

"He is!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "I've always thought that Leggett was the limit. But this chap is the outside edge."

"I suppose this means trouble with old Manders!" said Tommy Dodd, after a pause. "The fellow's a sneak as well as a rascal and a cheat. He will complain to old Manders."

"I'm afraid so," said Jimmy.

"Well, I'm glad I banged his head anyhow."

The hack came rolling up the lane, and it passed the two juniors. Marcus Manders gave them a venomous glare from the window as he passed. His look showed plainly enough that there was trouble in store for Tommy Dodd, if the hopeful youth had any influence with his uncle.

He shook a body fist as he glared.

The hack rolled on ahead. But the speed of the ancient horse was not great, and the two juniors, stepping out briskly, kept it in sight all the way to the school.

They saw it halt at the school gates, and old Mack came out to take the bag from Marcus Manders. The hack was still there, and young Manders engaged in talk with the driver, when Jimmy and Tommy Dodd reached the spot. The driver was looking extremely surly, and glaring down at young Manders from his box. Old Mack stood looking on, with quite a curious expression on his face.

"I've given you two shillings, and that's all you'll get from me!" young Manders was saying, as the two juniors came up. "You can't impose on me, any more, my man. I know my way about."

"Didn't I tell you the fare was four bob, back at Coombe?" demanded the driver.

"Yes, and I told you I'd give you two."

"You're a blik, you are, sir!"

"No impudence!" said young Manders. "Clear off with you."

"I ain't going without my fare, if I 'ave to go in and speak to your 'cad-master."

"I've paid you. Get out!"

Young Manders was so busy with his altercation with the driver that he did not notice the arrival of Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd. He was apprised of their arrival by a grip on the back of his neck, and he spun round with a gasp, to find himself staring at Tommy Dodd's furious face.

"Let go!" he yelled.

"You unspeakable tead!" shouted Tommy Dodd. "Pay the man his fare! Why, you sneaking worm, we gave you two bob towards it. You've only given the man our two bobs, and nothing of your own. Pay him, I tell you!"

"Leggo!"

Bang!

Marcus Manders' head came into

rough contact with the side of the hack, and he gave a fearful yell.

"Oh, my eye!" murmured old Mack. The driver grinned.

"Now will you pay him?" roared Tommy Dodd.

"Yow-ow! No!"

Bang!

"Ow! Wow! I'll pay him!" shrieked young Manders. "Ow! Leggo! I'll pay him if you like! Ow! Wow!"

"Buck up, then, you blinking cad!"

Young Manders extracted two shillings from his pocket and handed them to the driver, who pocketed them with a grin and drove away. Marcus Manders stood rubbing his head, which probably had an ache in it. Tommy Dodd's methods had not been gentle.

Taking no further notice of the hopeful nephew of Mr. Manders, Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd walked in, and headed for the football-ground to see the finish of the House match.

CHAPTER 6.

Mr. Manders is Wrathful

"GOAL!"

"Classicals win!"

"Hurrah!"

Hansom of the Fifth blew the whistle.

The House match finished as the two juniors arrived on the ground. The Classical crowd were shouting and cheering the winning goal, which had come from Valentine Mornington.

"Our win, Duddy!" said Jimmy Silver, with a smile.

"All Manders' fault!" growled Tommy Dodd. "If I'd played—Well, never mind. I'm glad I banged that tick's head."

The footballers streamed off the field. Arthur Edward Lovell gave Jimmy a cheery nod.

"We beat them all right," he said. "One to nil—right at the finish. But they had a lot of narrow escapes. I very nearly put the ball in from centre-

half. Morny put me into your place, if you like I'll keep it. I rather fancy myself at centre-half."

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"I don't happen to share the fancy, old bean!"

"Now, look here, Jimmy—" began Arthur Edward in his most argumentative tone.

"Blow Manders!" said Tommy Cook. "It was touch and go, Doddy. We'd have beaten them hollow if you'd been with us."

"Sure, we nearly walked all over them as it was!" said Tommy Doyle. "It was just a miss!"

"A miss is as good as a mile!" chuckled Baby.

"And a little better!" said Valentine Mornington. "It's been a good game, you chaps, and we missed you, Jimmy. Did you land your fish all right at Coombe?"

"Yes—and a jolly fishy fish it was!" said Jimmy Silver. "Of all the toads I ever saw, Manders' nephew takes the bun! They're welcome to him in Manders' House!"

"Rotten shame, putting him in our House!" growled Tommy Dodd.

"Head's House is good enough for him!"

"Why, you cheeky ass," exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell, "we wouldn't have a Manders found dead in our House! Or, rather, if we had one, he would be found lynched! It don't make much difference to your House! You're all ticks, more or less, in Manders'!"

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver. "No rags now!" And the captain of the Fourth Jerked Lovell away and walked him off to the changing-room.

Tommy Dodd walked away rather gloomily with Cook and Doyle. He was not in a cheery mood. He cherished a belief that the House match might have been won by the Moderns had he been able to play. And he was still more convinced that there was trouble to follow his handling of young

Manders on the way to Rookwood as soon as old Manders heard of it. And it was probable that old Manders had heard of it already, for if ever there was a fellow who looked a sneak and tell-tale to the very life, it was Manders junior.

He explained the matter to his chums while they changed, and as they left the changing-room together, Cook and Doyle deeply sympathetic, Knowles of the Modern Sixth came up.

"Dodd, you're wanted in Mr. Manders' study,"

"Just what I expected!" he said.

"Cut off," said Knowles, with a sharp look at Tommy Dodd. "I hear you fetched Mr. Manders' nephew from the station, and punched him on the way here."

"Not exactly punched him," said Tommy Dodd cautiously. "I banged his head on a seat."

Knowles laughed.

"More duffer you! You ought to have too much sense to handle your Housemaster's nephew—though I must say he looks an unpleasant little beast!"

Tommy Dodd, not in merry spirits, wandered away in the direction of Mr. Manders' study. He was not anxious to arrive there, and his steps were slow. But he knew that he had to go, and he went. In the corridor he found Marcus Manders, who grinned at the sight of him.

"I've told my uncle!" he said.

Tommy Dodd regarded him steadily.

"You've told him—what?"

"About you pitching into me, you cad!" said Marcus maliciously. "He sent you to the station to bring me to Rookwood, not to hammer my head on the seat of the hack! I've told him all about it, and you're booked! You'll find it best to keep a civil tongue in your head, my fine fellow, and to keep your paws to yourself, if I can warn you!"

Tommy Dodd eyed him.

"Have you ever been to school before?" he said. "Have you ever mixed with any decent fellows? Haven't you ever spoken to a white man? Don't you know that sneaking and carrying tales to masters is barred, and that a fellow's life won't be worth living here if he takes up that kind of thing?"

Young Manders smiled complacently.

"That's all very well for a chap who isn't the Housemaster's nephew," he answered coolly. "But I happen to be Mr. Manders' relation and his favourite. I can tell you that I can twist him round my finger if I like. As for my life not being worth living here, let me see any fellow who will dare to lay a finger on me after my uncle's fished with you! I fancy you're going to be a warning to all the rest!"

Tommy Dodd clenched his hands, but he unclenched them again. His disgust was too deep for words, but it was not a time for action. He turned his back on the young rascal and went on to Mr. Manders' study, leaving young Manders chuckling in a gnomish sort of way. And as the captain of the Modern Fourth passed into Mr. Manders' study Marcus leaned against the wall near the door, grinning, apparently to enjoy the sounds of woe from Tommy Dodd when Mr. Manders got busy with the cane.

"Dodd"—Mr. Manders rose from his chair, eyeing the junior across the table as he came in, and a cane lay ready to his hand, as Tommy Dodd noted at once—"I have seen my nephew."

"Yes, sir," murmured Tommy Dodd.

"You were unwilling to oblige me this afternoon by meeting my nephew at the station, Dodd—"

"Not unwilling, sir, I—"

"Do not interrupt me. You appear to have indemnified yourself, Dodd, for having obeyed my commands by treating my nephew in a brutal and

ruffianly way as he came to the school."

"Not at all, sir," said the junior. "We had a row, sir, but it was nothing much."

"Do you deny that you seized him in the back and struck his head with great violence upon the seat of the vehicle?" demanded Mr. Manders angrily.

"I—I banged his head a little, sir," confessed Tommy Dodd. "But the provocation was on his side, sir."

"I place no faith whatever in that statement, Dodd. I am prepared, however, to listen to any complaint you have to make regarding my nephew's conduct," said Mr. Manders, with a glare. "Proceed!"

Tommy Dodd's lip curled involuntarily. He had no complaint to make.

He was not built in the same way as Marcus Manders.

"Further," said Mr. Manders, as the Fourth-Former did not speak, "my nephew informs me that you assaulted him a second time—at the gates of the school—and forced him to pay an over-charge to the driver of the cab."

"It's not true, sir!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd indignantly. "He was bilking the driver—"

"What?" roared Mr. Manders in a formidable voice.

"I—I mean—"

"You dare to accuse my nephew of dishonesty?"

"Well, he wasn't paying the full fare, sir, and—and as I was with him when the hack was engaged, sir, I felt that it was up to me to see that the man had his money, and—"

"Marcus tells me that the man impudently overcharged him, and I have not the slightest doubt that his statement is correct."

"In that case, sir, it's no use my saying any more," said Tommy Dodd. "But Silver of the Fourth was with us, and he knows—"

"I have a very low opinion of Silver of the Fourth, Dodd, and I should

absolutely decline to take his word against my nephew's. It comes to this—that you assaulted my nephew in the cab, and assaulted him again at the gates, taking part against him in a dispute with a cab-driver. You cannot expect me to pass over this lawless and villainous conduct, Dodd. Bend over that chair!"

Tommy Dodd gritted his teeth and bent over the chair indicated by Mr. Manders' cane. It was useless to argue, and he knew it. Mr. Manders had to be given his head.

Whack, whack, whack!

The cane rose and fell, and dust rose from Tommy Dodd's trousers. He ground his teeth to keep back a yell of pain. Mr. Manders was not sparing the rod.

Whack, whack, whack!

It was six—and as severe a six as Tommy Dodd had ever experienced. He was quite pale, when he rose after the infliction.

"You may go, Dodd! Bear in mind that my nephew is to be treated with proper consideration and respect!" said Mr. Manders harshly. "I shall keep an eye on you—a very sharp eye! Any further maltreatment of my nephew will be visited with the severest punishment! Go!"

Tommy Dodd, with feelings too deep for words, limped out of the study. He was fairly wriggling with anguish. As he was closing the door he saw Marcus Manders' grinning face only a foot away from him.

Young Manders grinned at him with malicious triumph.

"You've had a lesson—what?" he murmured.

Tommy Dodd was at the end of his tether so far as controlling his temper went. A gust of wrath fairly overpowered him as young Manders grinned offensively and maliciously into his face. He did not stop to think. He acted on simple instinct as he reached out and grasped the young rascal by the collar, shook him as a

terrier shakes a rat, and then flung him away.

Marcus Manders spun helplessly away from that hefty swing and crashed against the door of Mr. Manders' study. The door flew open, and Marcus Manders went reeling and staggering into the room, to collapse in a breathless heap fairly at his astonished uncle's feet.

Tommy Dodd gave one horrified stare into the study, realising what he had done.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped.

And he fled.

"Dodd!" roared Mr. Manders.

But Tommy Dodd was gone.

CHAPTER 7.

The Refugee

"TOMMY DODD!"

Four Classical Juniors uttered that name in tones of surprise.

Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood had arrived at the end study rather late for evening prep. They expected to find their study dark and untenanted, and, to their surprise, the light was on and a junior was sitting in the study arm-chair. And that junior was Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth.

Modern side fellows had no business on the Classical side; and at that hour the Houses were closed, and all juniors were supposed to be within House bounds. So the Fistical Four were naturally astonished to see a Modern sitting in their study.

"What's this Modern bouncer doing here?" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell suspiciously. "What are you up to in our study, Tommy Dodd?"

"Let's bump him anyhow!" suggested Raby.

"And roll him along the passage," said Newcome.

Tommy Dodd did not move. He heard those cheery suggestions, but they seemed to have no effect on him. His face was darkly clouded, and he looked as if all the troubles at Rook-

wood School had suddenly descended on his youthful shoulders in a bunch.

"Hold on, you chaps," said Jimmy Silver. "Anything up, Doddy?"

Tommy Dodd nodded without speaking.

"Oh, rot!" said Lovell. "It's a Modern jape on us, and he's been up to something. Bump him!"

Jimmy Silver caught Lovell by the arm and jerked him back.

"Hold on!" he repeated.

"Look here, Jimmy——"

"Chuck it, fathead! Give a chap a chance to speak," said Jimmy. "Now then, Doddy, what's the row? House rags are off if there's trouble—and you look as if there was a lot."

"I'll get out if you like," said Tommy Dodd. "I came over to this side to lie low a bit. I'm dodging Manders."

"Dodging your Housemaster?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"That's it."

"Oh, my hat! But you can't dodge your giddy Housemaster," said the captain of the Fourth. "You'll have to turn up in Manders' House for dorm."

"I—I suppose so. I'm putting it off," sighed Tommy Dodd. "Manders may cool down if I give him time. You see, I'm for it, and the longer it's put off the better. Oh dear!"

"Old Manders is a corker, and no mistake," said Lovell. "I hear he's got a nephew come to Rookwood, who's a chip of the old block. You fellows over there must be getting too much Manders."

"That's the trouble!" groaned Tommy Dodd.

"Manders' nephew—that new kid in the Modern Fourth?" asked Raby.

"That worm!" assented Tommy Dodd.

"Is he a worm?" asked Newcome.

"Well, not exactly," said Dodd, with an air of reflection. "I can't say I like worms; but it's insulting a worm to compare Marcus Manders to it. The wormiest worm is quite nice after young Manders."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder," said Jimmy Silver, with a grin. "I've seen the young cad as I came with you to the station to meet him this afternoon. But what has he done?"

"What hasn't he done!" said Dodd ferociously. "You know we had a row coming to the school. He wanted to bilk the cabdriver, and I made him pay up. He's told his jolly old uncle all about it, and I was licked."

"Well, a fellow can stand a licking!" said Lovell. "Dash it all, even a Modern kid ought to be able to take a licking without making a lot of fuss about it!"

Tommy Dodd glared at him.

"You Classical ass!"

"Look here——"

"You frabjous chump——"

"If you want a thick ear, Tommy Dodd, as well as a licking from Manders——" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Cheese it, old man," said Jimmy Silver. "What else, Tommy? There's something beside the licking, I suppose?"

"Lots! Young Manders was waiting for me outside old Manders' study, and he jeered at me when I came out, licked. And—and——"

"Why didn't you punch him?" demanded Lovell.

"I did."

"Oh, good!"

"And he sneaked to old Manders again?" asked Newcome sympathetically.

"Worse than that! I knocked him right into old Manders' study."

"Oh!"

"He rolled right in, and slammed down right at old Manders' feet!"

"Great Scott!"

"What on earth did you do then?" exclaimed Raby.

"Bolted."

"Well, I suppose that was the best thing to do," said Jimmy Silver. "But——"

"I've kept clear of my House since

then," said Tommy Dodd diamally. "You see, old Manders gave me a tough licking for handling his nephew, though the clammy little beast was in the wrong, and fairly asked for it. You know he asked for it, Jimmy—you were there!"

"I know," assented the captain of the Fourth. "He fairly begged and prayed for it. Didn't you tell Manders—"

"Lot of good telling Manders! He wouldn't hear a word against his precious nephew. The cad had pitched his yarn first, and got old Manders' back up. I didn't mind the licking so much—old Manders often licks a chap. But—but now—you see, the little beast was punched right into his study, and nearly cannoned him as he went down. If he gave me a fearful licking for handling the young cad on his way to Rookwood, what will he give me for that?"

Lovell whistled.

"If you fellows don't mind, I'll hang on here a bit," said Tommy Dodd dispiritedly. "I know I've got to face the music. But——"

"You may get it worse for keeping out of your House after hours," said Baby.

"I can't get it worse. I'm booked for the worst old Manders can hand out. I'm hoping he may cool down a bit by bed-time."

"Stay on as long as you like, old chap," said Jimmy Silver hospitably. "You may be right—he may cool down. We've got to get on with our prep; but you can have the armchair and the fire. And there's a cake in the cupboard."

Tommy Dodd grinned faintly. He was in no frame of mind to be soothed by a cake.

"Never mind the cake," he said. "But I'd be glad to stay, if you chaps don't mind."

"As long as you like, old man."

"Yes, rather!" said Lovell.

The four Classics sat down to their

prep, and Tommy Dodd remained in the armchair, blinking at the fire, with deep and gloomy reflections in his mind, and a deep cloud on his face. While Jimmy Silver & Co. worried over Virgil, Tommy Dodd was thinking of what awaited him when he returned to his House and the anticipation was not pleasant. The cloud on his brow grew darker and darker as he thought of it.

CHAPTER 6.

Dodd is Wanted!

MR. MANDERS looked up with a frown, as Knowles of the Modern Sixth entered his study, on the Modern side of Rookwood.

His glance passed Knowles, as if he expected to see someone else following the prefect into the study. But Knowles came in alone.

"Where is Dodd?" exclaimed Mr. Manders. "Why have you not brought him to me, Knowles, as I instructed you?"

"He's not to be found, sir."

"What? The House is closed at this hour. Dodd must be within House bounds," snapped Mr. Manders.

"He doesn't seem to be, sir," said Knowles. "I've looked for him everywhere, and asked his study-mates, and they don't know anything about him. He must be out of the House."

"Nonsense!"

Knowles coloured.

It was not all honey, so to speak, to be head prefect in Mr. Manders' House. It brought a fellow into pretty constant contact with the Housemaster; and Mr. Manders was not a pleasant gentleman when his temper was irritated, as it very often was.

Knowles was a Sixth Form man, a prefect, and captain of his House, and so he did not like to hear his remarks characterised as nonsense. But when Mr. Manders was annoyed even so great a man as Knowles was liable to be given the rough edge of his tongue.

"Nonsense!" repeated Mr. Manders.

"The boy must be in the House!"

"Well, I can't find him, sir."

"Nonsense! The boy must be found. I do not believe for a moment that, especially in the circumstances, he would venture to break House bounds. The matter is serious, Knowles."

"Is it, sir?" murmured Knowles.

His glance dwelt for a moment upon a junior who was sitting by Mr. Manders' fire. It was Marcus Manders, the new fellow in the Modern Fourth. The fact that he was sitting in the evening by the Housemaster's fire was a testimony that Marcus Manders was not considered a fellow to be treated like other fellows in his Form. There was a cheeky expression on his meagre face as he returned Knowles' glance, an expression that would have earned any other junior a cuff from the prefect. Marcus Manders was fully aware of his advantage in being the relation and favourite of the Housemaster. He was not afraid of Knowles, Sixth Form man and prefect as the latter was.

"My nephew, a new boy here, was savagely attacked by Dodd," said Mr. Manders. "I had already caned Dodd for ill-using him, and he had the unparalleled effrontery to attack him again, in the very doorway of my study."

"Indeed, sir!" murmured Knowles, mentally deciding that he would let Tommy Dodd off some lines he had given him that day.

"Yes, indeed, Knowles! I shall deal with him with unsparing severity," said Mr. Manders. "My nephew is seriously hurt."

"Look at my nose!" growled Marcus.

Knowles did not look at his nose, or give any sign of hearing the remark. If Mr. Manders liked to let a junior butt into the conversation like this, Knowles did not intend to follow his example. He ignored Marcus Manders utterly.

"Dodd must be found, and he must be found at once!" rapped out Roger Manders. "If you cannot find him, Knowles, I must take the matter in

hand myself. But this is not what I expect from my prefects, Knowles. I am not satisfied with you, Knowles!"

"Sorry, sir!" said Knowles, "But —"

"You may go, Knowles."

"Very well, sir!"

Knowles left the study with deep, suppressed feelings. He had been rated by his Housemaster in the presence of a junior, and such a very unpleasant, sneering fellow as Marcus Manders. Knowles would have given a great deal to tell Mr. Manders what he thought of him, and he debated in his mind, as he went, whether he would risk losing his prefectship if he gave Marcus Manders a terrific thrashing at the first opportunity.

"You may remain here, Marcus," said Mr. Manders, rising from his table. "Make yourself comfortable. I am sorry that your first day at Rockwood has been so very unpleasant, but rest assured that Dodd will be given such a lesson that he will never dare to raise his hand to you again."

Marcus grinned at the anticipation.

"The boy attacked you so savagely. I am assured, because you informed me of his conduct," said Mr. Marcus.

"That was it, uncle."

"You will have nothing to fear in the future, and you must not let this unpleasant episode make any difference, Marcus. You will be careful to keep me informed of any occurrences in the House that may be of interest or use to me."

"Yes, uncle," grinned Marcus.

Mr. Manders left the study, leaving his hopeful nephew rubbing his damaged nose. The task of spying and sneaking did not seem an ungenial one to the worthy Marcus.

A few minutes later the door of Tommy Dodd's study in the Modern Fourth passage was opened by Mr. Manders.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle jumped to their feet at once.

Mr. Manders glanced sharply round.

The three Tommies of the Modern Fourth were generally together, especially after the House was shut for the night. But only two Tommies were in the study. Tommy Dodd was not to be seen.

"Where is Dodd?" asked Mr. Manders harshly.

"We don't know, sir," said Cook. "Knowles has asked us already, sir, but we haven't seen him."

"He belongs to this study. Has he not been here?"

"No, sir."

"You must know whether he is in the House!" snapped Mr. Manders.

"We don't sir," said Cook. "He left us at the changing-room, to come to your study, and we haven't seen him since."

"I suppose you know that he made a brutal attack upon my nephew?"

"Hem! We—we heard there was some trouble, sir," stammered Cook.

"The severest punishment awaits Dodd when he is found," said Mr. Manders. "Is it possible that he has gone into hiding?"

The two juniors did not answer. They thought it very probable, but they had nothing to tell Mr. Manders.

The Modern master set his lips.

"You two juniors are close friends of Dodd's, I believe?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Cook and Doyle.

"I am convinced that you know where he is. I command you to tell me at once, so that he may be found."

"We don't know, sir."

"I do not believe you, Cook."

Tommy Cook was silent; he had no rejoinder to make to that. He would have liked to reply that Mr. Manders was no gentleman to doubt a fellow's word. But replies like that could not be made to a Housemaster.

Mr. Manders stood looking at the two juniors for a few moments doubtfully, and then he quitted the study. Doyle and Cook exchanged dismal glances.

"Poor old Tommy's for it this time!" murmured Cook. "I say, we'll jolly well

rag that speaking cad, young Manders, to-morrow."

"And have old Manders on our trail," said Doyle. "Not good enough!"

Mr. Manders went along the Modern Fourth studies, and in each he demanded information of Tommy Dodd's whereabouts. But the Modern fellows had no information to give.

It dawned upon the Modern master at last that Dodd was no longer in the House. He went down, and came on Knowles and Tresham of the Sixth in the lower hall.

"It appears that Dodd is not in the House, Knowles," he said. "He must have gone over to the Head's House."

"I told you, sir——" began Knowles.

"Never mind what you told me, Knowles," snapped Mr. Manders. "Go over to the Classical side at once, and ask Mr. Dalton whether Dodd is there, and bring him back with you. Lose no time."

"Very well, sir."

Knowles of the Sixth walked across the quad to the Head's House, the Classical side of Rockwood. Knowles was a good deal of a bully, and he was seldom reluctant to hand over a junior for punishment. But on this occasion all his sympathy was with the delinquent, and he would rather have given Tommy Dodd a pat on the back than a caning for his "attack" on Marcus Manders. Quite unaware of those thoughts in his head-prefect's mind, Mr. Manders returned to his study, to await there the arrival of Tommy Dodd, with a black brow and a cane ready on his table. The hapless Tommy had hoped that Mr. Manders would cool down, but it was a very delusive hope. Mr. Manders' wrath seemed to improve, like wine, with keeping.

CHAPTER 9.

For III.

TUBBY MUFFIN put a grinning face into the end study, where Jimmy Silver & Co. were busy at prep.

"Anybody seen a Modern cad?" he asked.

"Eh? What's that?" asked Jimmy, looking up.

"They've lost one in Manders' House," chuckled the fat Tubby. "Lost, stolen, or strayed! Knowles of the Sixth has come over asking after him, as if we'd have any of their measly Moderns over here."

Tommy Dodd jumped up from the armchair.

"Knowles?" he exclaimed. "Oh, my hat!"

Tubby Muffin started and stared at him.

He had not noticed the Modern junior in the armchair.

"You here!" he exclaimed. "I—I say, I—I didn't exactly mean that you were a measly Modern, Duddy—I meant——"

"I'm not going to kick you, fatty," snapped Tommy Dodd. "Shut up! Where's Knowles?"

"Downstairs, speaking to Mr. Dalton," said Tubby. "I heard him asking if you were over here, and Dicky Dalton said he thought not. You'll get into a row for being out of your House."

"Hallo, there's Dicky!" murmured Lovell, as a deep voice floated in from the Fourth Form passage, through the open door.

"Has anyone seen Dodd of the Modern Fourth?" Mr. Dalton was inquiring in the passage, and there was an answer in half a dozen voices. "No, sir!"

The Fictical Four looked at Tommy. He looked at them glumly. Evidently it was useless for Dodd to linger longer in the Classical study. Mr. Manders did not mean to wait till bed-time for dealing with him.

"I—I suppose I'd better go," muttered Tommy.

"Can't be helped now, old chap," said Jimmy Silver. "Awfully sorry."

Tommy Dodd nodded and stepped out of the study into the passage.

Richard Dalton sighted him at once, and called to him.

"Dodd!"

"Yes, sir!" Tommy Dodd walked down the passage towards his Form-master.

"What are you doing in this House, so late in the evening, Dodd?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton severely. "You should have been in your own House long ago."

"I—I know, sir——"

"Mr. Manders has sent a prefect to fetch you. Knowles, here is Dodd!"

Knowles of the Modern Sixth came along from the staircase. Rather to Tommy Dodd's surprise, Knowles did not look unpleasant. Indeed, he gave the junior an almost friendly nod.

"Come with me, Dodd," he said.

"Yes, Knowles."

Tommy followed the Modern prefect down the stairs and out of the House. A good many Classical fellows stared at them as they went, wondering what a Modern had been doing on the Classical side so late in the evening.

In the misty quadrangle, Tommy lagged by the side of the prefect as they crossed over to Manders' House. Knowles did not snap at him to get a move on; he seemed unusually patient.

"You've been handling Mr. Manders' nephew—what?" he asked.

"He asked for it, Knowles."

"I can quite believe that. I never saw a more sneaky, cheeky, rotten-looking young cad in my life," said the Modern captain. It dawned upon Tommy Dodd that Knowles was not pleased with his Housemaster's nephew. "I never saw a little beast that looked so much as if he wanted thrashing. Still, I'm afraid you're for it, kid!"

Tommy Dodd mumbled dismally; he was quite sure of that himself.

"Don't check Mr. Manders," said Knowles. "He's pretty waxy; don't make him worse. It will be a bit tough for you, anyhow. And you needn't do those lines I gave you to day, Dodd."

"Thank you, Knowles," said Tommy, quite astonished by this unexpected kindness from a senior who was known to be a good deal of a bully. He realised that Marcus Manders must have put Knowles' prefectorial back up very considerably.

"The little beast is in Mr. Manders' study now, frowning over the fire," added Knowles. "Looks as if he's going to be a Housemaster's favourite. I rather think—" There Knowles broke off, realising that he was talking too freely to a junior.

He said no more, and they arrived at Mr. Manders' House. Knowles piloted the recaptured junior to the Housemaster's study.

"Here is Dodd, sir!"

"Very good!" said Mr. Manders, with a glimmer in his eyes. "Come in, Dodd. You may go, Knowles."

Cecil Knowles went.

Tommy Dodd stood unhappily before his Housemaster. Marcus Manders grinned at him from his seat by the fire. A scene was coming that the amiable Marcus was going to enjoy.

"Dodd!" ground out Mr. Manders. "You have been absent from your House after hours. That is very serious. I required your presence, and you could not be found. Dodd, you struck my nephew almost in my presence, after I had already chastised you for ill-using him. Have you anything to say before I administer the most condign punishment?"

Mr. Manders' swished his cane.

"I—I never meant him to fall in your study, sir," stammered Tommy Dodd. "I—I was rather waxy, sir, at his jeering at me after I'd been licked."

"If my nephew acted in such a way, Dodd, it would be no excuse for you; but I should certainly not allow him to do so, Marcus!"

"Yes, uncle?"

"Is there any foundation whatever for Dodd's statement?"

"No, uncle!"

"I was assured that there was none,"

said Mr. Manders. "Dodd, you will bend over that chair."

"He is lying, sir!" said Tommy Dodd desperately.

"What?"

"He did leer at me just after you'd licked me, sir, otherwise I wouldn't have touched the rotten cad!" blazed out Tommy Dodd.

"What—what—what epithet did you use?" ejaculated Mr. Manders. "You dare to call my nephew such names in my very presence? Are you out of your senses, Dodd?"

"I wouldn't have touched him if he'd let me alone, sir. He shouldn't have leered at me when I was licked."

"My nephew says that he did nothing of the kind."

"It's a lie, sir!" Tommy Dodd was too desperate now to care much what he said.

"I shall punish you still more severely for that allegation, Dodd. Bend over that chair!" thundered Mr. Manders.

Tommy Dodd breathed hard.

"I've been beaten once to-day, sir," he said.

"You will be beaten again, and still more severely," said Mr. Manders grimly. "For the last time, bend over that chair."

Slowly, reluctantly, Tommy Dodd obeyed. There was no help for it. He set his teeth to endure his punishment.

The cane rose and fell with loud whacks that rang through Mr. Manders' study and could be heard in the passage outside.

Mr. Manders did not spare the rod.

Marcus Manders looked on with a grinning face. The fellow who had handled him so unceremoniously was paying dearly now for having laid hands on him. Undoubtedly Tommy Dodd was likely to think twice before he laid so much as a finger on his Housemaster's nephew again. Whack, whack, whack! rang the cane.

Tommy Dodd wriggled and squirmed.

But he would not utter a sound to gratify Mr. Manders' nephew.

The cane ceased to fall at last.

"I trust that will be a lesson to you, Dodd!" said Mr. Manders, in a grinding voice. "You may go."

Tommy Dodd, without a word, and with a white face, limped from the study. Marcus Manders followed him out and closed the study door.

Dodd leaned against the wall, breathing hard. His punishment had been very severe, and he did not feel, for the moment, capable of limping as far as the Fourth Form quarters. Marcus Manders came up to him grinning.

"Worse than the last lot—what?" he said.

No answer.

"Sorry you laid your paws on me, aren't you?" grinned Marcus.

Dodd was silent.

"You'd better be jolly careful!" grinned the amiable nephew of the Housemaster. "I'll jolly well make you toe the line, and the other chaps, too. Like to punch my head again, would you?"

He thrust his grinning face fairly into Tommy Dodd's. Tommy panted. He would have given worlds to plant his fist fairly in that grinning, malicious face, and send the new fellow spinning. But it was not good enough—he simply could not face another "bending-over" in Mr. Manders' study. He set his teeth, and was silent, and Marcus Manders chuckled again.

"You've got a little more sense now—what?" he asked jeeringly.

Tommy Dodd, with a great effort, controlled his feelings, and moved away. He limped up the stairs to the Fourth Form passage, and went to his study. Cook and Doyle jumped up as he came in, startled by the expression on his face.

"Tommy, old man!"

"Tommy, old chap!"

Tommy Dodd leaned on the table, and groaned. He could not help it. He was feeling done to the wide.

"Where have you been, Tommy?" asked Cook.

"On the Classical side, keeping out of Manders' way!" muttered Tommy Dodd. "It wasn't much use; he sent a prefect over to fetch me, and—and it was worse than ever when I got it. All through that young cad, Manders."

"What's that?" asked a sneering voice.

Marcus Manders walked into the study.

Tommy Dodd eyed him.

"Get out of this study!" he said quickly. "Housemaster's nephew or not, I won't stand anything from you in my own study. Get out!"

Marcus Manders laughed disagreeably.

"It happens to be my study, too," he said.

"What!" exclaimed the three Tommies together, in blank dismay.

"My uncle's put me in this study," explained Marcus agreeably. "You fellows got anything to say against it?"

"Oh, dear!"

The three Tommies had plenty say against it. But it was useless to say it. The Housemaster's word was law in such matters.

"Well, this is the limit!" said Cook.

"The outside edge!" groaned Doyle. "Planting him on us—us!"

Tommy Dodd's face was awful. It was bad enough to have the fellow in the House at all, but to have him in the study—it was, indeed, the limit. Marcus Manders grinned at the expression on the juniors' faces. He threw himself in the study armchair, from which Cook had risen. Tommy Dodd looked at him with a gleaming eye.

"Get out of that chair!" he said.

"Shan't!"

"It happens to be our chair, personal property," Cook explained. "The school don't provide armchairs. Any other fellow would be welcome to it; but we don't choose to have our things

contaminated by a reptile like you—see? Get out of it!"

"Put me out!" sneered Marcus Manders.

"I'll do that, fast enough!" shouted Tommy Cook. And he grasped the back of the chair, intending to shoot the occupant out in a heap on the hearth-rug.

"Do—and I'll tell my uncle!" said Marcus.

"Who-a-ty?"

"You'll get a licking, like Dodd! Go ahead, if you want one."

"Why, you sneaking cad, I—I—I'll—" spluttered Cook.

"Check it!" said Tommy Dodd, very quietly. "The cad will sneak to old Manders, and it means a licking. He doesn't mind telling lies along with his sneaking. Let him alone."

"But—"

"It's not good enough," said Tommy Dodd. "Come on, let's get out of this. Mr. Manders can put him in our study, but he can't force us to put up with his company. Let's get out of it."

The three Tommies left the study, leaving young Manders in triumphant possession.

For the rest of that evening there was only one topic among the juniors of Manders' House—Marcus Manders, and what a rank outsider he was, and what they would have done to him if he hadn't been Mr. Manders' nephew.

CHAPTER 10. Rough Justice!

KNOWLES of the Sixth saw lights out in the Fourth Form dormitory in Manders' House that night. If Knowles noticed that there was a good deal of suppressed whispering going on in the Modern Fourth, he affected to be unaware of it.

Something, certainly, was on the tapis; the whole dormitory seethed with suppressed, or half-suppressed, excitement. Any prefect might have guessed that lights out that night

would not be followed at once by balmy slumber in that particular dormitory. As there was a new fellow in the Form, taking his place in the dormitory for the first time, a prefect might have guessed that there was some scheme of putting that new fellow "through" it.

Perhaps Knowles did guess it. Perhaps he had no objection to Marcus Manders being put through it. At all events, he was resolute not to observe that anything was amiss; and when Towle of the Fourth excitedly whispered to Lacy that he had brought up the rope's-end, and was dismayed the next moment to see Knowles at his very elbow, it seemed that Knowles was deaf.

"Turn in, you young scamps!" said Knowles, with unusual geniality. "But you're not all here; where's young Manders?"

"He hasn't come up yet," said Wadsley.

Knowles frowned. He did not want to get into Mr. Manders' black books by heckling his favourite; but to hang about at lights-out, till it pleased Master Manders to come up to bed, was not to be thought of.

"Do you know where Manders is, Wadsley?"

"In his study, I think, Knowles."

"Go and tell him to come up at once."

"Yes, Knowles."

Wadsley left the dormitory. He returned in a few minutes with a lurking grin on his face.

"Well, where's Manders?" snapped Knowles.

"He says he won't be long."

"By gad!" muttered Knowles.

The Modern juniors were turning in. They exchanged curious glances as they heard that cheeky message from young Manders. Apparently the House-master's nephew supposed that he could "throw his weight about," as Tommy Cook expressed it, among the prefects as well as among the juniors.

They wondered what Cecil Knowles would do. He was the very last man in the Sixth to put up with impudence from a junior.

Most of the juniors were in bed when Marcus Manders loafed into the dormitory. Knowles strode towards him.

"What the thump do you mean by being as late as this, young Manders?"

"Am I late?" yawned Manders.

"You are ten minutes late."

"Dear me!"

The Modern juniors looked on with bated breath. Knowles had his official ashplant under his arm. He slipped it into his hand.

"Bend over that bed, Manders."

"Wha-a-t?"

"Bend over, you cheeky young rascal!" In his anger at that moment, Knowles did not care for Mr. Manders or the whole tribe of Manders, to the thirtieth and fortieth generation.

Marcus Manders backed away, eyeing Knowles civilly, and with evident trepidation.

"I—I say——" he stammered.

"Bend over!" snapped Knowles.

There was a step in the doorway, and the angular figure of Roger Manders appeared there, and his sour face looked in.

"Knowles!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"This will not do, Knowles. I am surprised to see you thinking of punishing a new boy on his first day at Rockwood," said Mr. Manders. "On several occasions, Knowles, I have heard complaints of bullying on your part. I must say that this looks as if these complaints were well-founded."

Marcus Manders' apprehensive look vanished, and he grinned. He felt that he was safe now. Knowles stared at his Housemaster.

"What — what?" he stammered. "Manders is ten minutes late for dorm, sir, and he has answered me impudently. I hope, sir, that this junior is not to be allowed to set the prefects at defiance."

"Nothing of the kind, Knowles. My nephew will render all just obedience to constituted authority, or I shall deal with him myself," said Mr. Manders. "I shall not, however, allow bullying in this House, and you will bear that in mind, Knowles."

"I—I—I——" stammered Knowles.

"You may leave the dormitory. I will see lights out for the Form," said Mr. Manders.

Knowles, choking with rage, quitted the dormitory, and tramped away to the Sixth Form quarters, there to pour his tale of wrong into sympathetic Sixth Form ears.

Marcus Manders glanced up and down the dormitory before he turned off the light, with a watchful and suspicious eye.

The juniors were as still as mice; two or three of them even affected to be asleep already; nobody met Mr. Manders' eye. Possibly the Modern master had some suspicion that there might be a "rag" in the dormitory after lights-out; he could not have failed to be aware that the new fellow had made himself rather unpopular.

But all seemed calm and quiet; and the Housemaster turned out the light at last, and the dormitory door closed on him.

For ten minutes more all was calm. Not a fellow in the dormitory had closed his eyes; but they sagely gave Mr. Manders plenty of time to get back to his study before they stirred. The Modern master's study was at a good distance from the sleeping quarters of the Fourth, and he was not likely to hear any little disturbance there. As for the prefects, that had to be risked; but some of the juniors had a shrewd suspicion that the prefects would not be keen to intervene on Marcus Manders' behalf. Certainly he had not much to expect from Cecil Knowles, after the way he had talked to the captain of the House.

Tommy Cook gave the signal for a move at last by turning out of bed and

lighting a candle-end, which he stuck on his washstand. Tommy Doyle and Towle followed suit; and then the rest of the Form, with the exception of Tommy Dodd. Dodd, captain of the Modern Fourth, generally the leader in all rags and rows, remained where he was.

"Aren't you getting up, Tommy?" called out Towle.

"Not! You fellows turn in again," said Tommy Dodd quietly.

"Rats! That sneak is going to be put through it."

"Yes, rather!"

"Get up, young Manders!" shouted Cook.

Tommy Dodd sat up in bed.

"Chuck it," he said. "I keep on telling you it's not good enough! The cad will sneak to his uncle, and it means trouble for the whole Form. Get back to bed and chuck it."

There was a howl of refusal from the Modern Fourth.

"Isn't it the rule that sneaks are ragged?" demanded Lacy. "Haven't we ragged Leggett for sneaking more than once?"

"Leggett isn't the Housemaster's nephew," said Tommy Dodd dryly. "Look here, you fellows, chuck it!"

"Rats!"

"Rubbish!"

"Turn that sneak out of his bed!"

Marcus Manders sat up in great alarm. Alone in the dormitory with the angry juniors, his protecting uncle far away, he had good reason to be alarmed. Punishment for the raggers on the morrow was all very well; but that was not much of a consolation for the wretched sneak if he had to go through it in the dormitory.

"Have him out!" shouted Wadley.

"Turn out, you cad!"

The Modern juniors surrounded Manders' bed.

"Look here!" panted Marcus Manders. "You keep off! You know what Dodd got! You'll get the same."

"That's why you're going through it,"

said Cook. "You got Tommy Dodd two awful lickings, and now you're going to sit up for it. Did you bring up that rope's-end, Towle?"

"Here it is," said Towle.

"Roll the cad out!"

"I'll tell my uncle!" shrieked Marcus Manders desperately.

He rolled on the floor of the dormitory in a tangle of bedclothes.

"You'll tell him, will you?" grinned Towle, as he dragged Marcus out of sheets and blankets. "Tell him I attacked you at the same time—like that—"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Tell him I kicked you!" chorled Doyle.

"Whooop!"

"Tell him we bumped you!" shouted Lacy; and Marcus Manders, in the grip of four or five excited fellows, was swept off the floor and bumped down on it hard.

"Ow! Wow, wow! Yow!"

"Now shove him over the bed," said Towle, flourishing the rope's-end. "He's going to have twice as many as Daddy had. How many did you have, Daddy?"

"I gave up counting," said Tommy Dodd, with a rueful grin.

"Then we'll make it twenty."

"Yow-ow! Leggo!" roared Marcus Manders. "Help! Yoop! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gug-gug-gug-gug—grooooh!"

Marcus Manders gurgled wildly as his face was slammed down into a pillow. A dozen hands held him across his bed, while Towle wielded the rope's-end.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Go it, Towle!"

"Give him jip!" chuckled Cook. "If he's going to tell Manders in the morning, let him have plenty to tell."

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Towle was going strong. Marcus Manders struggled and squirmed and strove to yell for help, but succeeded only in gurgling horribly. The rope

whacked and whacked and whacked again on his pyjamas.

In their excitement the Modern juniors did not detect a faint footfall in the passage without. They did not even hear the door open. It was not till the electric light was switched on that they realised that someone had arrived.

Then there was a gasp.

"Manders!"

The wriggling rascal on the bed was released as suddenly as if he had become red-hot. And the Modern Fourth stared in dismay at Mr. Manders as he strode into the dormitory with an expression on his face that might have put the Gorgon of ancient times to the blush.

CHAPTER II.

After the Feast the Reasoning!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. stared.

After breakfast in the morning the chums of the Classical Fourth had sauntered across the quad, to learn what had happened to Tommy Dodd at the hands of his Housemaster. They were quite concerned about Tommy. As the Classical juniors came up towards Manders' House their eyes were greeted by a curious sight.

From the doorway of that House emerged Cook of the Modern Fourth, with Doyle by his side. It was a sunny morning—unusually sunny for the time of year, and the sunshine had had quite a cheery effect on Jimmy Silver & Co. But on Doyle and Cook it obviously produced no effect whatever. They could not have looked more dismal if the sky had been overcast by the blackest of thunderclouds.

They were wriggling and writhing as they came out, twisting most uncomfortably. They rubbed their hands at the same time.

After them, Towle emerged from the House.

He was writhing also as he walked. In fact, he did not walk, he wriggled along.

Then came Lacy, and then Tommy Dodd, and then Wadsley, and then Cuffy. Then more and more of the Modern Fourth, till every member of that Form was in the quad with the exception of the new junior, young Manders.

And every one was wriggling and mumbering. Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at the scene in astonishment. The sight of all the Modern Fourth wriggling out of Manders' House one after another was really extraordinary. Every member of the Modern Fourth seemed to be understudying the young man of Hythe, who was shaved with a scythe, and did nothing but wriggle and writhe.

"Well, my only hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "What's the matter with them? The whole giddy Form can't have been 'licked' early in the morn'ing!"

"They look like it!" grinned Lovell.

"What a jolly way to start a day!" murmured Newcome. "Manders has some original ideas."

"There's that toad!" said Raby.

The "toad" referred to was Marcus Manders. Last of all the Modern Fourth, he came out of the House, but he did not follow the rest into the sunny quadrangle. He stood on the House steps and grinned at them. The sight of all his Form-fellows wriggling and writhing evidently had an entertaining effect on young Manders. He looked quite bucked.

Some of the wretched Moderns looked round at him. Their looks showed how much they would have liked to collar young Manders and mop up the steps with his skinny person.

But no one approached him. Not a hand was raised to remove the derisive grin from his ill-favoured countenance.

The Modern Fourth had had their lesson. Marcus Manders was not to be touched. He grinned and chuckled unchided and unlicked.

Dismally the Modern Fourth trailed

into the quadrangle. Every face was speechless. Some of them stared at the four Classics glumly. The cheery faces of the Physical Four were in startling contrast to the looks of the juniors of Manders' House.

"Oh, dear!"

"Mmmmmmm!"

"Ow! Wow! Wow! Oh!"

"Oh, crumbs! Oh, scissors! Oh, dear!"

Such were the remarks of the Modern Juniors.

"If I were one of that Modern gang" said Arthur Edward Lovell emphatically, "I'd mop up that grinning monkey yonder, and give him something to grin at."

"You wouldn't," said Cook, with a groan. "We mopped him up last night in the dormitory for sneaking about Tommy Dodd. Ow!"

"Hence these tears. What?" asked Lovell.

"Ow! Wow! Yes."

"Manders came in—spying, as usual," groaned Doyle. "Caught us giving the young beast the rope's-end."

"Well, I'm glad you gave him the rope's-end," said Jimmy Silver. "That's so much to the good."

"Yes; but oh, dear!"

"What did Manders do?" asked Raby.

"You can see what he's done," groaned Tommy Dodd. "Ordered the whole Form to turn up for a licking in the morning. Every fellow in the Modern Fourth. Even Leggett, who (unked taking a hand in ragging young Manders; even Cuffy, who was fast asleep, and wouldn't have ragged a fly if he'd been awake. No exceptions for Manders! His dear nephew had been ragged, and the whole dormitory got it in the neck."

"Six on the bags and three on the hands," said Tommy Cook. "Something like a licking. What?"

Jimmy Silver whistled.

"Manders is going strong," he remarked.

"Of course, he wants to make us

understand that dear Marcus can do as he likes, and mustn't be touched," said Tommy Dodd. "I knew how it would be, but the fellows wouldn't listen to me. Caning a whole Form! Some punishment. What? Old Manders' arm must have ached when he'd got through."

"Oh, dear!"

"Ow! Ow!"

"And there's the cheeky cad grinning at us and enjoying it," said Cook savagely, "and we can't touch him. Can't even call him names without being reported to Manders and licked again. I've had enough licking to go on with. Oh, scissors!"

"I'm not touching him any more!" mumbled Towle. "It's not good enough, as Tommy told us. Let him sneak as much as he likes."

"It's rotten!" said Jimmy Silver. "But you can't rag the cad if Manders is going to hand it out like this every time. But look here, Tommy Dodd, there's more than one way of killing a cat. You can't thrash the worm, and you can't rag him, but you can leave him alone. Send him to Coventry."

Tommy Dodd's clouded face brightened.

"I hadn't thought of that yet," he said. "I don't know whether the measly worm would mind. He's got the skin of a rhinoceros. And he's put in our study, too!"

"All the better, if you cut the rotter," said Jimmy. "He won't like being sent to Coventry in his own study. Manders can lick you for ragging the cad, but he can't order you to talk to his nephew. Fellows are not bound to speak to a chap if they don't choose."

Tommy Dodd nodded.

"Good for you, Jimmy," he said. "It's the only thing we can do—and we'll do it. You hear that, you chaps? We're sending that unspeakable toad to Coventry, and nobody is to speak a word to him, or answer him if he speaks. Not a syllable."

"Good egg!"

Much as the Modern Fourth had suffered, there was a general brightening of faces now. In that one way, at least, they were able to "get back" on the sneak of the House, and it was difficult to see what Mr. Manders could do, even if he took heed of what was going on. Even a sneak and a tell-tale like Marcus Manders could scarcely report to his uncle that fellows showed an aversion to his conversation. It might be an offence in Mr. Manders' eyes, but it was scarcely an offence of which a Housemaster could take official cognizance.

"That's the game!" said Towle. "Send the cad to Coventry! Let him jaw to his jolly old uncle if he wants to jaw! Ow! Wow! My hands! Ow!"

Marcus Manders strolled down the steps of his House at last, his hands in his pockets, his ill-favoured face still grinning and cheery. He had had a rather painful time in his dormitory the night before; but it had been brief, and he had been quite solaced by the wholesale punishment that had fallen on the raggies. It was not likely that there would be any more rags in the Modern Fourth dormitory.

Tommy Dodd and his friends moved away as the cad of Manders' House came along the path. Jimmy Silver & Co. stayed where they were, and Marcus Manders came up to them. His look was insolent and cheeky, and the Fictical Four wondered whether he supposed that he could be "sidey" with them as he was with the Moderns. He had been only a day at Rookwood, and it was quite possible that he did not realise that his uncle's authority, paramount of the Modern House, did not extend to the Classical side in the very least.

"They look a pretty moul'in' crew, don't they?" grinned Marcus, with a nod towards the mourning Moderns. "They've had it hot and strong. Mind you don't get same of the same, young

Silver. You were pretty cheeky yesterday, and I haven't forgotten it."

"You horrid worm!" said Jimmy in disgust.

"What?"

"If we had a sneak like you on the Classical side, we'd boil him in oil!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Don't speak to us."

"You're calling me names, are you?" said Marcus Manders, with a sneer. "All right; I'll mention it to my uncle!"

"Mention it to your uncle, and your aunt, and your grandfather, if you like," said Jimmy Silver contemptuously. "If you want to sneak about us, you silly young ass, you must sneak to a Classical master—we're Classics! And there isn't a master on the Classical side who will listen to a tell-tale."

"Oh!" said Marcus, rather taken aback.

"Keep it for Manders' House," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Manders is the man for it! And while you're mentioning to Manders that we called you names, you can mention at the same time that I pulled your nose."

Marcus jumped back, but not quite in time. Lovell's forefinger and thumb closed on his sharp nose, in a grip that was like that of an iron vice.

"Moooooooooh!" spluttered Marcus.

Lovell compressed his grip. At a distance, the Modern juniors grinned as they looked on. There was comfort in the sight for them.

"Moooh! Leggo! Led do ob be faze!" spluttered Marcus Manders.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Young Manders clenched a hand and raised it. Lovell, with a grim look, clenched his free hand, and raised it also. And Marcus Manders did not strike. He realised that he would be knocked spinning the next moment if he did; and his craven spirit failed him. He stood wriggling but unresisting, while the Classical junior tweaked his nose.

"Look at him!" breathed Tommy Dodd. "Letting a Classical chap pull his nose in open quad! Even Leggats wouldn't. Jevver hear of such a warr!"

If anything could have added to the contempt and disgust of the Modern fellows, that would have done it. Marcus Manders wriggled and spluttered and snubbed till Lovell chose to let go his nose.

Lovell released him at last.

"Now cut, before I kick you!" he said.

And young Manders, with an evil look, cut. The derisive grin was no longer on his face, and his sharp nose looked, like Marian's in the ballad, red and raw. The Fistical Four looked at one another.

"What a specimen!" said Jimmy Silver.

And they strolled back to the Classical side.

CHAPTER 12.

Sent to Coventry!

"**F**EELING better, what?"

Marcus Manders asked Tommy Dodd that question, in the morning break, with a grinning face.

He expected some tart or angry answer, perhaps some angry objurgation that could be reported to Mr. Manders. But he did not receive any answer at all.

Tommy Dodd did not look at him, or speak, or appear conscious of his existence. He walked on regardless.

Marcus Manders stared after him in surprise and annoyance.

"Are you deaf?" he hooted.

Tommy Dodd did not state whether he was deaf or not. He made no statement whatever. He walked on.

Manders, with a puzzled look, turned to Towle, who had just come out of the House.

"What's the matter with Dodd?" he exclaimed. "What sort of a fool's game is this?"

Towle looked full in Marcus

Manders' face, but without a sign of recognition, and did not speak. Without a word, he passed on his way.

More and more puzzled, not yet catching on to what was in the wind, Marcus Manders hurried after him and caught him by the shoulder.

"Look here, Towle—I think your name's Towle—"

Towle jerked his shoulder away, still without speaking.

"Can't you speak?" hooted Manders.

Towle walked away.

"Well, my hat!" murmured the sneak of Manders' House. "I wonder what this means? Something's up!"

It was soon quite clear that something was up. He bore down on Lacy, and spoke to him, and Lacy turned his back without a word. He called out to Wadsley, and Wadsley stared at him and did not answer.

By the end of morning quarter, Marcus Manders was feeling extremely annoyed and uncomfortable. He had not exchanged a word with a fellow that morning. He had spoken a good many times, but he had received no answers. Among themselves the Moderns talked enough, and he sometimes saw them grinning; but whenever Master Marcus approached a cheery group, that group broke up at his approach, and he was left alone.

At dinner the same state of affairs obtained. By that time it had dawned on Marcus Manders that he was cut by the Form.

At tea-time young Manders went to his study—the study of the three Tommies, and he found them there. He gave them a surly look.

"I hear that the fellows generally have tea in their studies here," he said. "I'm going to have mine here with you."

Silence.

"I don't want you to stand treat!" sneered Manders. "I'm going to stand my whack! What's it to be?"

Unbroken silence.

"Look here, you cads!" shouted

Manders, his temper breaking out. "Can't you speak? Do you think I'm going to stand this? Are you dumb, you silly, cheeky owls?"

Tommy Dodd rose to his feet, "Tea in Hall this time, you fellows," he said.

"Yes, rather."

The three Tommies left the study. Marcus Manders glared after them.

"You cheeky cads!" he shouted.

The three Tommies did not seem to hear. They walked to the staircase and disappeared.

After tea Marcus Manders emerged from the House with a black brow. In the quad the three Tommies were chatting cheerily with Jimmy Silver & Co. Manders came up, scowling.

"Look here, Dodd——"

The Rookwooders walked away. With an angry, excited face, Marcus Manders rushed after them.

"I can jolly well tell you, Dodd——" he bawled.

The Modern juniors seemed deaf as adders. But Arthur Edward Lovell turned back, grasped Marcus Manders by the collar, and sat him down heavily on the ground.

"Ow!" gasped Manders.

The juniors walked on, with smiling faces, leaving Marcus Manders sitting on the ground, blinking after them. And it began to dawn upon the malicious mind of young Manders that the way of the transgressor was, after all, hard; and that matters did not, after all, look very rosy for the sneak of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 12.

The Heavy Hand!

"DODD!"

"Yes, Knowles?"

The three Tommies—Dodd, Cook, and Doyle—were in their study in Manders' House when Knowles of the Sixth looked in. They were having tea, greatly relieved by the fact that their new study-mate, Marcus Manders, was not present.

In the study, the three Tommies

ignored Marcus utterly, and the sneer of Manders' House seemed to have become fed-up with the chilly silence which always followed his entrance.

Knowles, of the Sixth, glanced rather curiously at the three Modern juniors, and they eyed him rather doubtfully. Knowles was a good deal given to bullying, and the Tommies had had their troubles with him, but since the coming of Marcus Manders they had found Knowles quite kind. The cheeky Marcus, sure of his uncle's protection, "cheeked" the prefects, including Knowles, head prefect and captain of the House. He was safe from the ashplant; the Modern prefects were not looking for trouble with their Housemaster and the fact that Tommy Dodd had licked the cheeky young rascal on his first day at Rookwood seemed to have found his favour in the House captain's eyes.

"What have you been up to, Dodd?" asked Knowles, quite genially.

"Nothing, that I know of."

"You're wanted in Mr. Manders' study."

"Oh," said Tommy Dodd, his face falling.

"Have you been punching your Manders again?"

"No, fear!" said Tommy Dodd. "I haven't touched the cad since I was licked last time. I haven't said a word to him."

The three Tommies grinned as they saw the disappointed expression of Knowles' face. Apparently, he had hoped to hear that young Manders had been punched.

"Well, if you've done nothing, all right!" said the Modern prefect. "But the young cad was in Mr. Manders' study when he sent for you. You'd better go at once."

"Yes, Knowles."

Tommy Dodd took his way to the Housemaster's study in some trepidation. Mr. Manders was a gentleman with a sharp and irritable temper rather given to punishing first and in-

quitting afterwards, and no fellow ever pleased being called into his study. But Tommy had been extremely careful in his treatment of Mr. Manders' nephew, and he really could not see what could possibly have been reported against him now.

"Come in, Dodd!"

Marcus Manders was standing before the fire with a lurking grin on his face. Tommy Dodd ignored him, keeping his eyes on the Housemaster.

"Dodd, I have heard something very serious from my nephew," said Mr. Manders.

"Indeed, sir," said Dodd.

"It appears that there is a conspiracy against my nephew in the Fourth he belongs to," said Mr. Manders.

"Oh!"

Tommy Dodd had a glimmering now of what was coming.

"My nephew was ill-treated on his first day in the school, and very properly reported the matter to me," said Mr. Manders. "Since then it appears that he has been the victim of a conspiracy of which I suspect you to be the leader."

"I don't know anything about any conspiracy, sir," said Tommy Dodd. "I have not even spoken to Manders of the Fourth, sir."

Mr. Manders' eyes glittered. Tommy Dodd made that statement quite innocently, as if that very circumstance was the head and front of his offending, so to speak.

"My nephew has been the victim of a conspiracy," repeated Roger Manders, raising his voice. "It is called, I believe, sending him to Coventry. I believe that is the term used."

Tommy Dodd did not answer.

"Dare you deny, Dodd, that you and your friends entered into a league against my nephew, and no one speaks to him, or answers him if he speaks first?"

"No, sir," said Dodd quietly; "I don't deny that."

"You have, in fact, sent him to Coventry, as I believe you call it?"

"Yes, sir."

"You dare to admit it, Dodd?"

"You asked me, sir!"

Mr. Manders compressed his lips.

"Is this your view of the way in which your Housemaster's nephew should be treated, in his uncle's house at Rookwood?"

"A fellow isn't bound to speak to a fellow he doesn't like, sir," said Tommy Dodd uncomfortably. "I never speak to Leggett, either."

"Is Leggett sent to Coventry?"

"No-no, sir."

"Then the two cases are not the same. Do you state that they are the same?"

"No, sir."

"Then you are prevaricating, Dodd."

"I didn't mean that, sir. I only mean that if nobody wants to speak to Manders, of the Fourth, a fellow isn't bound to."

"All this is prevarication, Dodd. Is it not the case that there is an arrangement, or compact, in the Modern Fourth Form, that no member of that Form shall communicate with my nephew?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Quite so. This must cease at once, Dodd."

Tommy Dodd's face set obstinately. Mr. Manders was much given to fussy interference and meddling, but, really, this was too "thick." It was a pretty state of affairs, Tommy Dodd considered, if a fellow was not to choose what fellow he would speak to without instruction from his Housemaster.

"You understand me, Dodd?"

"I understand you, sir."

"My nephew is present. Kindly tell him at once that you are sorry for what has happened, and that nothing further of this kind will take place."

Marcus Manders grinned at Tommy Dodd.

The captain of the Modern Fourth set his lips.

"Do you hear me, Dodd?" exclaimed Mr. Manders, taking up a cane from his table.

"Yes, sir; but—but I can't speak to Manders of the Fourth, sir. He's sent to Coventry," stammered Tommy Dodd.

"You dare to utter such words in my very presence!" thundered Mr. Manders. "You astonish me, Dodd!"

"You see, sir——"

"I see that I have to deal with a rebellious and impudent boy," exclaimed Mr. Manders. "This is of a piece with your previous conduct, Dodd. You are the leader of this persecution of my nephew. I order you to speak to him at once, in my presence, or take the consequences of disobedience."

Mr. Manders swished his cane.

"I—I can't, sir."

"Hold out your hand, Dodd!"

Swish!

"The other hand!"

Swish!

"Now," said Mr. Manders, laying down the cane, "I have punished you for your impertinence, Dodd. I have said that this persecution of my nephew must cease. I will not tolerate it, Dodd."

Tommy Dodd squeezed his hands in anguish. But he did not speak to Marcus Manders, or look at him.

"From now," went on Mr. Manders, "all holidays are cancelled for the Modern boys in the Fourth Form. Special tasks will be set for Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, the customary half-holidays."

"Wha-a-ah?"

"Extra classes will be held, under my personal supervision, on those afternoons. An extra hour daily will be given to mathematics."

"Oh!"

"This will continue, Dodd, until you and the other members of your Form express your regret to my nephew for

your unfeeling and cowardly persecution. You may go, Dodd."

Tommy Dodd went.

Mr. Manders had come down heavy. Even upon the dull, obstinate mind of the Modern master it had dawned that he could not order juniors to speak to his nephew, or to answer his nephew's unwelcome remarks. At all events, such an order was one that could not be enforced. Neither was it practicable to inflict incessant canings on such frivolous grounds. But Mr. Manders was the fount of authority in his own House. Only the Head was above him, and junior schoolboys were not likely to take the tremendous step of appealing to the headmaster against the Housemaster. Mr. Manders' wholesale sentence of detentions meant no more football for the Modern Fourth, among other things, and Mr. Manders undoubtedly had the power to enforce that sentence.

Tommy Dodd almost tottered into his study. Cook and Doyle looked at him in alarm.

"What's the row?" they exclaimed.

"We're dished."

"But what——"

Tommy Dodd explained breathlessly. "Oh, my hat!" said Cook, with a whistle. "Why, that means scratching all the House matches, or, at least keeping out of them! It means no Moderns playing for school this term in Jimmy Silver's team!"

"He does mean it!" said Dodd.

"Mander's can't mean it!" said Doyle.

"Then——"

"We're dished! That unspeakable toad, young Manders, has done us again! If we cut him, we've got to cut footer, too, for the rest of the term. We're dished, and he knows it!"

And for several minutes Tommy Dodd poured out a stream of eloquence, all on the subject of that unspeakable toad, young Manders, who most indubitably, had dished the fellows who had sent him to Coventry.

CHAPTER 14.

Mr. Dalton Not Taking Any!

JIMMY SILVER was surprised. The Rookwood Fourth were in class in third lesson the following morning. Third lesson dealt with that important branch of knowledge, Geography, and Moderns and Classics were all in the Fourth-room together, with Mr. Dalton. Among the Moderns was the new fellow, Marcus Manders. And Jimmy Silver, to his great surprise, saw Manders lean over and make a remark to Tommy Dodd, which was answered.

Marcus Manders grinned as he spoke to Dodd, and grinned still more as Dodd answered him.

The sentence of Coventry, apparently, was revoked.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave a grunt. He had observed the incident also.

"They've let that cad out of Coventry!" he whispered to the captain of the Fourth.

"Looks like it."

"Well, we jolly well won't!" said Arthur Edward. "The Moderns can speak to him if they like; but he won't get anything more than a boot on the Classical side."

Marcus Manders whispered to Tommy Cook, and Tommy Cook answered his whisper with a grimace. A few minutes later he made a remark to Tommy Doyle, who also murmured something in response. Then he whispered to Towle, who made a hideous grimace, but spoke to him in return.

For some reason, unknown so far to Jimmy Silver & Co., the Moderns had let Mr. Manders' nephew out of the cold shades of Coventry, and the cheeky youth was obviously "showing off" the fact that he had brought his Roman-fellows to heel. There could have been no occasion for all this whispering in class, save young Manders' desire to show the Classical fellows that he had scored over the fellows who had cut him.

Mr. Dalton, who for a few minutes had been busy with an atlas on his desk, looked round rather grimly.

"Manders!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You must not talk in class."

"Indeed, sir!" said Marcus Manders.

Mr. Dalton eyed him. He had already spotted a disposition to impudence on Marcus Manders' part. It seemed that young Manders fancied that he could be "sidey" even with the staff, on account of his relationship to a member of the staff.

"I have had occasion to speak to you before, Manders," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "I am dealing with you leniently because you are a new boy, and unaccustomed to Rookwood as yet. I will now tell you plainly, Manders, that I do not approve of your manner, which is impertinent, and I warn you that impertinence in this Form-room will not be tolerated."

"Indeed!" said Manders.

The Fourth Form looked on with keen interest. Marcus Manders was fairly asking for it, and Mr. Dalton was not likely to be asked in vain.

Richard Dalton picked up a cane from his desk.

"Stand out before the class, Manders."

"What for, sir?"

"To be caned!"

"You are not going to cane me, Mr. Dalton?" said Marcus Manders, eyeing the Classical Form-master evilly.

"I am certainly going to cane you, Manders. You will step out and bend over this form," said Mr. Dalton.

Fellows who had to "bend over" in the Form-room were generally objects of sympathy from the rest of the Form. But there was no sympathy for Marcus Manders. Every Modern there, and most of the Classics looked forward with pleased anticipation to his licking.

"My uncle will not like my being caned, sir," said Manders.

"What?"

"My—my uncle——" faltered Manders. He faltered in spite of himself, under the steady eyes of the Form-master.

"I must explain to you, Manders, that your relationship to a Rookwood master makes no difference whatever to your position in your Form," said the master of the Fourth. "You must be a stupid boy to suppose that you are privileged in any way." He made a motion with the cane. "Step out, Manders!"

But at that point the craven spirit of the spy of Manders' House failed him. As Mr. Dalton was plainly in earnest Marcus Manders backed down with great promptness.

"I am sorry, sir," he stammered. "If—if you will let me off this time, sir, I will be more careful."

Mr. Dalton laid his cane on his desk.

"Very well," he said, "I will overlook your offence, Manders, as you are new here. But bear in mind that it must not occur again!"

It was not likely to occur again. After that incident, young Manders' manner was as meek and mild as could possibly be desired. Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged sarcastic looks. Tommy Cook winked at Tommy Dodd, and Manders, catching the wink, gave him an evil look.

Towards the end of third lesson Tommy Cook refreshed himself with toffee from a place of concealment in his desk, taking great care not to be observed by his Form-master. The rule against bringing tuck into the Form-rooms was very strict. Hospitably, Tommy Cook passed wedges of toffee to Jimmy Silver and Lovell, who happened to be near him.

The voice of Marcus Manders was heard.

"Mr. Dalton, sir?"

"What is it, Manders?"

"Cook and Silver and Lovell are eating toffee, sir!"

A bombshell in the Fourth Form room could scarcely have startled the Fourth Form more.

Mr. Dalton stared blankly at the informer. The juniors stared at him too, scarcely believing their ears.

Marcus Manders smirked.

Obviously he judged other masters by his excellent uncle, Roger Manders, and supposed that his information would be welcome to the master of the Fourth. Never had he made a greater mistake.

He had yet to learn that there was no other master at Rookwood who followed the system of Roger Manders.

For a moment or two there was breathless silence in the Form-room.

"You—you—your horrid load!" breathed Cook.

"Silence, Manders!" rapped out Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir. Cook had the toffee in his desk, sir, and he gave some to Silver and Lovell," purred Marcus, still not understanding how matters stood. "I saw them, sir, and thought I ought to tell you, sir."

"I cannot believe, Manders, that you thought you ought to tell me. No boy could possibly act the part of an informer from a sense of duty!" said Mr. Dalton sternly.

"Wha-a-t?"

"The boys you mention have broken the rules. I cannot, however, punish them, as the matter has come to my knowledge in this underhand way."

"Oh!"

"I can scarcely imagine, Manders, where you have received your early training," said Mr. Dalton; "but I must warn you that this kind of thing is not tolerated at Rookwood. No boy is desired to give information about other boys; the part of an informer is base and dishonourable. I will overlook this, as you do not know our ways; but if you should volunteer information in the same way again I shall punish you severely."

"Oh!" gasped young Manders. Evidently Richard Dalton was built upon lines very different from his respected Uncle Roger.

Manders sat with a burning face, fully conscious of the mocking and contemptuous looks of the rest of the Fourth.

"Mr. Dalton!" he gasped.

"That will do! Say no more!"

"But Cook called me names!" exclaimed Manders excitedly. "Cook called me a toad, sir."

"And so you are a toad!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell, forgetting for a moment the presence of his Form-master. "A sneaking, spying, cringing toad!"

"Silence, Lovell!"

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"Cook, you should not use such expressions," said Mr. Dalton. "You should not speak in class at all, and certainly not in such a way. Why did you apply such a name to Manders?"

"Because he sneaked about the toffee, sir," murmured Cook, with a very red face.

"I understand. Your own conduct caused Cook's remark, Manders," said Mr. Dalton. "Kindly say no more."

"But——"

"Silence!" rapped out Richard Dalton.

And Marcus Manders was silent.

He sat sullenly through the remainder of third lesson, while the other fellows felt quite bucked by the incident. The peculiar ways of Marcus Manders prospered in his own House, but Mr. Dalton had made it clear that there was no demand for them in the Form-room. It was a defeat for the spy of Manders' House, and all the Fourth rejoiced in his discomfiture.

When the Fourth were dismissed after their third lesson, the juniors crowded out, discussing the incident and chuckling over it. Marcus scowled at the chery crowd and walked away towards his House.

CHAPTER 18.

Coal!

"COVENTRY'S off—what?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd nodded gloomily.

"Manders took a hand," he explained.

"But he's no right!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell.

"A fat lot he cares about right!" growled Tommy Cook. "He's backing up that sneaking spy all along the line, and that's all he cares about."

Tommy Dodd explained how the matter stood, and the sympathy of the Classical fellows was deep. But they agreed that the Modern had had no choice about toeing the line. Detention for the whole term, and no more football, was rather too large an order to be taken on.

"We've got to put up with the cad somehow," said Tommy Doyle. "If he speaks to us we've got to answer. We can't chuck up the footer for the whole season—and extra maths for an hour a day—grooogh!"

"It's hard cheese," said Mornington of the Classical Fourth. "The cad seems to have got you in a cleft stick."

"Just that!" grunted Tommy Dodd.

Knowles of the Modern Sixth came out of Manders' House, looked round, and bore down on the group of juniors.

"Cook!"

"Yes, Knowles?"

"Mr. Manders wants you in his study."

"Oh!"

With a dismal look, Tommy Cook started for his House. His face was a picture of gloom as he tapped at Mr. Manders' door. What was the matter, he did not know; but he knew that there was trouble, and he had no doubt that it was due to the sneak of the House.

Marcus Manders was in his uncle's study, and he gave Cook a malicious look as the junior came in.

"You sent for me, sir!" mumbled

Cook, stopping at his Housemaster's table.

"Yes, Cook," said Mr. Manders. "I hear that you applied a very rude and approbrious epithet to my nephew in class this morning."

Tommy Cook breathed hard. He understood now for what he was to answer.

"D-d-did I, sir?" he stammered.

"Did you call my nephew a toad, or did you not, Cook?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Is that suitable language for a boy belonging to a respectable school, Cook?"

"I-I-I—"

"There is such a thing, Cook, as good manners. I shall endeavour to impress that on your mind."

Swish, swish, swish!

"Now, go, Cook, and remember that if you should repeat your offence, your punishment will be more severe. I will not have the boys of my House talking like hooligans."

Tommy Cook departed from the study wriggling, and in savage silence. His face was pale with rage when he rejoined the Juniors in the quadrangle.

"What was it this time?" asked Tommy Dodd.

Cook gasped.

"That—that—that filthy tick!" he stuttered. "That unwashed tick, young Manders! He reported me for calling him a toad in class when he sneaked to Dicky Dalton! Three cuts!"

Jimmy Silver whistled.

"This is getting too thick!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd savagely. "My hat! Where was that unspeakable toad brought up? He takes to sneaking like a duck to water."

"We mustn't touch him, we mustn't send him to Coventry, and we mustn't even call him a toad!" breathed Tommy Cook. "He's going to be cock of the walk in the Modern Fourth, and we've all got to kowtow to him. There will be trouble if this goes on."

"Keep smiling, old bean!" said

Jimmy Silver consolingly. "Come and help us punt a ball about till dinner and forget the beast."

The Modern fellows found solace punting about a footer in the winter air. Marcus Manders came along while they were so engaged and gave Tommy Cook a sneering grin. Cook had the ball at his feet and was strongly tempted to send it in the grinning face of the sneak. Manders' House, Valentine Mornington called to him.

"Send it to me, Cook."

"Good man!" said Cook, understanding at once.

He dropped the ball at Morn's feet. Valentine Mornington kicked, as air a kick as he had ever taken at goal.

Crash!

There was a wild yell from Marcus Manders.

He sat down with great suddenness. The football had bumped fairly on his sharp nose.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd of Juniors.

"Goal!" yelled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Marcus Manders sat quite dazed with his hand to his nose. The ball had been through a good deal of mud and had collected some of it, and a good quantity had been transferred to young Manders' features. Marcus blinked dizzily and furiously at the yelling Juniors through streaks and daubs of mud.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Send that ball back, young Manders," called out Jimmy Silver. "You've got a lot to learn about footer if that's the way you head a ball."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Marcus Manders scrambled to his feet. He rushed at Valentine Mornington, with a red and furious face.

"You rotter! You did that on purpose!" he yelled.

Morn eyed him coolly.

"Do you think so, dear boy?"

"I know you did!" yelled Manders.

"This chap is a bright lad," said Mornington admiringly. "His uncle must be proud of him. The way he sees the obvious is really remarkable."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotter! You cad! You—you—" spluttered Marcus furiously. He brandished clenched fists at the cool face of the dandy of the Fourth.

"You're callin' me names, I think," drawled Mornington. "I never allow anyone to call me names, especially a sneakish tick who doesn't wash. Sit down!"

"You rotter! You—you— Yaroooooh!" In the midst of his tirade Marcus Manders received Morny's fist full upon his nose, and he went over backwards as if a cannon-ball had struck him.

"Man down!" chuckled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A fight—a fight!" shouted Newcome. "Up with you, young Manders! Morny, you're for it now!"

"A fight!" yelled the juniors, Classical and Modern, gathering round in a swarm. "Go it, young Manders!"

Marcus Manders might have been the most popular fellow in his House from the way the other Moderns rallied round him and backed him up for a contest with Mornington of the Classical Fourth. They joyfully anticipated seeing him face one of the best boxers among the juniors of the Classical side.

"Come on, Morny!" called out Jimmy Silver. "You can't refuse, you know, after punching the fellow's nose."

Morny chuckled.

"I'm ready!" he said. "I'm your man, young Manders!"

"Back up, Manders!"

The three Tommies helped Marcus Manders to his feet. He did not seem very eager for help.

"Get behind the beeches," said Raby. "We don't want masters or Prefects busting in."

"No fear! This way, Manders."

"Let go my arm!" yelled Manders.

"I'm not going to fight anybody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you must, you know," urged Tommy Dodd. "You can't let a Classical man punch your nose."

"I'm going straight to Mr. Manders—"

"You silly tick!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell. "Don you think anybody on the Classical side cares for Manders?"

"Put up your hands, you funk!" roared Towle.

"Give him another, Morny, and wake him up!"

Mornington made a movement, and Manders jumped back. Heedless of the laughter and jeers round him, he broke through the crowd of juniors and fairly ran for Manders' House.

CHAPTER 16.

"Mate off!"

"IT'S up to us!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, at tea in the end study.

Lovell cracked his egg thoughtfully, and then raised his hand, pointing his remarks, as it were, with his egg-spoon.

"That worm!" he said.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome did not need to ask to whom Lovell was alluding.

"That reptile!" went on Lovell. "That tick! That unwashed toad! It's up to us!"

"To wash him?" asked Raby, and Jimmy and Newcome chuckled.

"No, ass! It's up to us to educate him," said Lovell. "After all, I suppose he came to Rookwood to be educated. We'll educate him. The Modern fellows daren't lay a finger on him for their giddy lives. Muffin's been over to Manders' House, and he found Daddy and his pals waitin' and gnashin' their teeth. They got it hot and strong because Morny knocked the toad down. I suppose it was a crime to look on when young Manders was knocked down. Ruffianly conduct in the quad,

old Manders called it. Well, they're helpless. But we're not. Duddy has been licked, but you'll notice that Morny hasn't been spoken to, and it was his knuckles that bluffed on young Manders' back. Old Manders can't touch a Classical chap."

"He can't," assented Jimmy Silver.

"So it's up to us," said Lovell. "As Classics, we're the senior side of Rookwood—the top-side, properly speaking—the guardians and protectors of the poor old Moderns. See?"

"Better tell them so," grinned Newcome.

"Well, they ought to know it," said Lovell. "They never admit that we're top dogs, and they're often cheeky, and we have rows with them, but in a case like this we're going to look after them. Modern chaps can't touch that scurvy fiek, but Classics can touch him and touch him hard. My idea is that we should wade in to make young Manders' life not worth living so long as he keeps up spying and sneaking and general rottenness."

Arthur Edward Lovell looked round at his comrades.

It often happened that Arthur Edward had ideas, and it happened almost as often that his ideas were not received with enthusiastic applause in his own study.

But on this occasion three heads nodded approval at once. For once Arthur Edward had put his finger on the spot, so to speak.

"The fact is, I was thinking of something of the kind," said Jimmy Silver. "It's really a disgraceful state of affairs and not good enough for Rookwood. Duddy is being badly treated, and if we can help him out it's up to us, as you say, Lovell."

"Hear, hear!" said Baby heartily. "I'm in. Any old thing from kicking young Manders across the quad to boiling him in oil."

"I must say I'd be willing to walk across the quad any time to punch him," assented Newcome.

Lovell looked gratified. This was the unanimous support he felt that he merited, but which he did not always receive.

"Well, if you fellows are on," he said, "we'll take the young rogue in hand after tea. It may do him good. He doesn't understand Rookwood, and his jolly old uncle encourages him in sneaking, a thing no other Rookwood master would do. Manders is no gentleman, in point of fact."

"Hear, hear!"

After tea the Pistical Four left the study, and sallied out into the quadrangle to look for Marcus Manders. The whole Co. agreed that Lovell's wheeze was a good one—excellent, in fact. Every time Marcus Manders "sneaked" and brought punishment upon his House-fellows, the Pistical Four were going to go unto him as he deserved, and they had hopes that in the long run young Manders would come to realise that spying and sneaking did not pay. Whether the desirable result was obtained or not at least it would solace the persecuted Moderns to know that the sneak of Manders' House got it "in the neck" every time he landed them into trouble with their Housemaster.

"Seen young Manders?" asked Lovell, as he came on Tubby Muffin in the quadrangle.

"I've seen him, and don't want to see any more of him," grunted Muffin. "He knocked my hat off."

"Knocked your hat off?" said Jimmy. "I didn't believe he had pluck enough to knock anybody's hat off. Did you slaughter him?"

"Well, I was going to," said Tubby Muffin cautiously. "In fact, I am going to. Of course, I wouldn't let a Modern head knock my hat off. I haven't licked him yet. Later on—"

The Pistical Four grinned. Reginald Muffin was not a fighting man, and it was clear that he was going to think the matter out very seriously before he avenged that insult.

"Well, where is he now?" asked Raby. "In the school shop stuffing doughnuts," said Tubby. "Greedy little beast, you know. He wouldn't offer a chap a doughnut, though he had half a dozen. Not that I'd have accepted one, of course. I spoke to him quite civilly."

"You needn't tell us that, if he had half a dozen doughnuts," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm sure butter wouldn't have melted in your mouth, Tubby."

"Well, a fellow can be civil," said Tubby, "and instead of offering a fellow a doughnut—I mean instead of answering civilly, he knocked my hat off. I came jolly near smashing him, I can tell you. But I thought that a fellow like that ought to be treated with contempt. I turned on my heel and left him," concluded Reginald Muffin loftily.

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled, and walked on to Sergeant Kettle's little shop behind the beeches.

There they had a view of Marcus Manders, sitting at one of the little tables. Apparently he had finished the doughnuts, for he now had a cake before him, and was demolishing it at a good rate. Two or three Moderns were in the shop and they gave the sneak of the House looks of dislike, but when Marcus Manders spoke to them, with a sneering grin on his meagre face, they answered with forced civility. The sentence of Coventry was very much a thing of the past; Mr. Manders' heavy hand had abolished it as a blow.

The Pistical Four strolled in, and Manders scowled at them. Lovell walked past the table, reached out and knocked the hat from his head.

"Oh!" ejaculated Manders. His hat flew across the tuckshop.

"Pass!" shouted Putty of the Fourth. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Oswald passed the hat to Putty, with a neat kick, and Putty of the Fourth took the pass, and sent the hat spinning out of the doorway. Gunner of

the Classical Fourth was lounging in the doorway, and he brought down a heavy foot on the hat, and it crunched. It did not look much like a hat after Gunner's large foot had landed on it.

Manders sprang up with a furious face.

"You rotter, Lovell!" he shouted.

"Keep that for the Modern side, old bean!" said Lovell. "You mustn't call Classical names! If you do, you get collared—like that——"

"Let go!" roared Manders, as Lovell gripped his collar.

"And slewed round, like that——"

"Leggo!"

"And kicked, like that——"

"Yaroooh!"

Marcus Manders spun away from Lovell's boot. He spun helplessly, quite losing his balance. His shins came in contact with a large box of eggs leaning against the sergeant's counter, and he plunged forward.

Crash!

Scrunch!

"Groooooooooogh!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a howl of merriment in the tuckshop as Marcus Manders' head and shoulders disappeared into eggs.

CHAPTER 17.

Once Too Often!

SCRUNCH! Scrunch! Smash! It was a large box, and it was stacked with eggs in straw. Eggs innumerable crashed and smashed round Marcus Manders as he plunged and struggled with his head and shoulders in the box. The juniors in the tuckshop yelled with laughter.

"Look 'ere, you stop that!" shouted Sergeant Kettle. "You'll 'ave to pay for them eggs! You 'ear me, Master Manders?"

"Grooogh! Ooooh!"

Manders struggled out of the box. He lifted a horrid face, streaming with broken eggs and fragments of egg-shell and wisps of straw, and his extra-

ordinary aspect made the juniors shriek.

"Ugh! Gug-gug-gug! Ooooh!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Ten shillings' worth of eggs gone!" howled the indignant sergeant. "Them eggs will 'ave to be paid for."

"Ooooh!" spluttered Marcus Manders. "You old fool——"

"What?"

"Look at me—I'm smothered!" roared Manders, gouging egg from his eyes with both hands. "Ooooh! Groooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That merchant needs a wash more than ever!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Go and put your head under the fountain, young Manders!"

"Go and show it to Mr. Manders!" chortled Oswald.

Marcus Manders spluttered furiously. He was smothered with eggs, his face and hair and ears streamed with them, and they streamed over his clothes in horrid, sticky streaks. Some of the eggs did not seem to have been of the freshest description, to judge by the aroma that floated around young Manders. He coughed and gasped and spluttered and gurgled wildly, while Moderns and Classics yelled with laughter. Even the old sergeant grinned, concerned as he was for his property.

Manders cast a furious glance round at the juniors. His eyes gleamed evilly at Arthur Edward Lovell.

"You wait a bit!" he gasped. "You wait till my uncle's seen this!"

"I'll wait with pleasure, old bean!" grinned Lovell. "I hope old Manders will enjoy the sight. It's enough to make a cat laugh, I assure you!"

With a furious glare the sneak of Manders' House rushed from the tuckshop. Loud laughter could be heard from the quad as he passed fellows there, streaming with broken eggs.

"What on earth's happened to young Manders?" asked Tommy Dodd, coming into the tuckshop with Cook and Doyle.

"He fell into a box of eggs," said Lovell blandly. "Something jolted him—I think it was my boot——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look 'ere, who's going to pay for them eggs?" demanded Sergeant Keble warmly.

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Dear man, we'll have a whip round to pay for the eggs," he said. "It's worth it."

"Worth it!" chortled Tommy Dodd. "I should jolly well say it was, if the eggs were a bob each."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The eggs were paid for very willingly; there was not a fellow there who would not gladly have paid for a second lot to be used in the same way. Moderns and Classics were still chuckling over the episode when Muffin put his fat face into the door-way.

"You fellows, old Manders has just gone to Mr. Dalton's study—he's got young Manders with him. Something's up."

The laughter died away.

"That's trouble for you, Lovell. I'm afraid," said Tommy Dodd anxiously. "Old Manders can't touch you, being a Classical; but he's gone to report you to your Form-master."

Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

"Let him!" he said.

"There'll be a row, old chap!" said Cook.

"My dear man, it's all right," said Lovell confidently. "Dickie Dalton is the man to see justice done. You see young Manders is what the masters call the aggressor, when they're inquiring into a row. He started it."

"Did he?" ejaculated Tommy Dodd. "I can't imagine young Manders starting a row with anybody more dangerous than Tubby Muffin or Cuffy."

"Exactly. He started on Muffin, and I started on him!" chuckled Lovell. "I've got it all out and dried."

Bulkeley of the Classical Sixth looked in.

"Lovell!"

"Yes, Bulkeley."

"Come with me to Mr. Dalton's study."

"Certainly, Bulkeley."

Arthur Edward Lovell cheerily followed the captain of Rookwood, and the whole crowd of juniors followed Arthur Edward Lovell.

Lovell's manner was respectful, but quite confident, when he entered his form-master's study. Richard Dalton met him with a rather severe look. Mr. Manders and his nephew were there, Marcus still showing many signs of the eggs after a hurried clean-up.

"There is the boy!" exclaimed Mr. Manders as Lovell entered. "That is the boy who hurled my nephew into a box of eggs, Mr. Dalton. The most severe—the most condign punishment—"

"I must inquire into the matter, Mr. Manders," said the Classical master coldly.

"Undoubtedly," hooted Mr. Manders. "But I will not allow my nephew to be ill-used by Classical boys, Mr. Dalton. I will not tolerate—"

"This matter is in my hands," snapped Richard Dalton sharply. "Leave it to me, Mr. Manders. Lovell, Manders of the Modern Fourth accuses you of kicking him and causing him to fall into a box of eggs. What have you to say?"

"You do not doubt my nephew's word, I presume, Mr. Dalton?" hooted the Modern master.

"I am inquiring into the matter, Mr. Manders, and I shall be obliged if you will not interrupt me."

"What—what? Well, upon my word!"

"What have you to say, Lovell?"

"I kicked young Manders, sir," said Lovell meekly. "He was the aggressor, sir."

"It is false!" exclaimed Mr. Manders.

"You were not present, sir," said Lovell.

"Do not bandy words with me, boy! Mr. Dalton, —"

"In what way was Manders of the

Fourth the aggressor, Lovell?" asked Mr. Dalton, taking no heed of the excited Modern master.

"He applied what Mr. Manders calls an opprobrious epithet to me, sir," said Lovell, with great meekness.

Mr. Dalton's face twitched for a moment. There was a faint chuckle from the corridor outside, revealing the presence of a crowd of listening juniors.

"What do you mean, Lovell? Speak plainly."

"He called me a rotter, sir; a very opprobrious epithet, as Mr. Manders will admit," said Lovell. "Mr. Manders has caned fellows in his House, sir, for calling young Manders a rotter."

"Hem!"

"Is a fellow to be called a rotter, sir, by another fellow?" asked Lovell, with an air of injured innocence.

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Dalton. "It appears, Mr. Manders, that your nephew was responsible for the trouble —"

"I called him a rotter because he knocked my hat off, and the other fellows kicked it about," shrieked Marcus.

"Oh! Did you knock off Manders' hat, Lovell?"

"Yes, sir."

"An unprovoked attack!" exclaimed Mr. Manders. "My nephew informs me that Lovell walked into the school shop and deliberately knocked off his hat without the slightest provocation. I do not approve of my nephew applying an opprobrious name to Lovell, but it was natural in the circumstances—very natural."

"It appears, Lovell, that you were the aggressor," said Mr. Dalton sternly.

"No, sir; I knocked off young Manders' hat—"

"He admits it! He glories in it! An act of ruffianism—of savage hooliganism!" hooted Mr. Manders. "The act of a street arab, a ruffian—"

"Would you mind letting me finish, Mr. Manders?" asked Lovell with great politeness. "I knocked off young

Manders' hat, sir, because he had knocked off a Classical fellow's hat—a fellow who couldn't stand up for himself, sir."

"A falsehood!" exclaimed Mr. Manders, "a palpable falsehood!"

"It was Muffin's hat, sir," said Lovell. "Muffin will bear out what I say."

"Yes, rather!" came a fat voice from the corridor.

"Step in here, Muffin."

Reginald Muffin rolled into the study.

"Manders of the Fourth knocked your hat off?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir; in the tuckshop, sir," said Tubby. "I spoke to him very civilly, sir, though all the fellows treat him like a cad and a rat, sir, as he really is——"

"That will do, Muffin! It appears, Manders, that you treated Muffin in the way you complain that Lovell treated you."

"I—I didn't!" gasped young Manders.

"Lots of fellows saw him, sir!" exclaimed Muffin. "Sergeant Kettle saw him, sir! Ask the sergeant, sir."

"I shall certainly inquire——"

"I—I—I mean, I—I forgot——" stammered Marcus Manders in dismay. Mr. Dalton gave him an icy look.

"You could not possibly have forgotten, Manders. You must mean that you spoke falsely in denying it, and have changed your mind on realising that your act of aggression can be proved by witnesses."

Marcus Manders bit his lip. Mr. Manders gave his nephew a grim look.

"It so appears," went on the Fourth-Form master, "that Manders of the Fourth performed what you have described, Mr. Manders, as an act of hooliganism—an act of ruffianism—his victim being a boy much smaller than himself. Lovell—thoughtlessly, no doubt—did to your nephew what he had done to Muffin. The rest followed. In this matter, Mr. Manders, it is clear that Manders of the Fourth was the aggressor in the first instance, and was

to blame for the whole occurrence. Lovell, you may go!"

"Thank you, sir," said Arthur Edward demurely.

And Lovell joined his delighted comrades in the corridor.

Mr. Manders breathed hard.

He realised that, with the help of his nephew, he had made a complete fool of himself. That Lovell had astutely seized on the incident of Tubby Muffin's hat was likely enough, but there it was—Marcus Manders had started the whole thing by handling the fat Classical. Mr. Manders realised that there was nothing for him to say. But Mr. Dalton had a little more to say.

"I have inquired into this matter, Mr. Manders, because you reported it to me as a serious incident. I do not regard it in that light. If Rookwood masters are to inquire into every petty disagreement among the juniors, if every trivial incident is to be reported and made the subject of inquiry, we shall find our work very onerous, Mr. Manders. I am sorry to say that I have already found your nephew willing and eager to play the part of a tell-tale and informer, and I think he should be strongly discouraged from following this course. I think, sir, that it is your duty to discourage him."

In the corridor Jimmy Silver & Co. listened to that little lecture to the Modern master with blissful feelings. They heard Mr. Manders utter a sound between a grunt and a snort in response.

"Come with me, Marcus!" he snapped.

Through a grinning crowd of fellows Mr. Manders and his nephew walked out of the House. There was a black frown on Mr. Manders' face, a rather apprehensive expression on his nephew's. For once the favourite was in his Housemaster's black books; Mr. Manders had made a fool of himself, and the worthy Marcus was the cause. And Marcus Manders' apprehensions

deepened when he would have slipped away in the quad, and Mr. Manders chuckled:

"Follow me!"

Marcus limped into Manders' House at the heels of his uncle.

Five minutes later, Towle of the Modern Fourth came bolting out of Manders' House, breathless with joyful excitement.

"You fellows!" he gasped.

"What's the giddy news?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Old Manders—young Manders—ticking!" gasped Towle, incoherent with excitement. "Six—young Manders! Yelling like a hyena—in old Manders' study! Oh, ain't it ripping!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Juniors roared. Old Manders' came in active play again, and this time it was young Manders who was getting the benefit of it! For once the sneak of Rookwood had sneaked not wisely, but too well. Tommy Dodd slapped Lovell on the back ecstatically. Classics and Moderns yelled with merriment, while Marcus Manders, in Mr. Manders' study, was yelling in quite a different manner, and realising, perhaps, that there were drawbacks to the career of a sneak.

CHAPTER 12.

LINES FOR LOVELL.

"**L**INES!" growled Lovell.

"Oh, rotten!"

It was a half-holiday at Rookwood, and December had brought a fall of snow. These two things happening together were quite fortunate, from the point of view of Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Classical Fourth. Snowballing the Modern fellows was obviously the right and proper proceeding.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were free to proceed upon the warpath as soon as they liked. But Lovell had lines.

"You fellows get on with it," said Arthur Edward Lovell, "and if you see that young cad Manders, give him one

for me! I've got to hand in my lines before tea-time—and there's a whole Georgic!"

"But Mr. Dalton hasn't been handing out lines," said Jimmy Silver, puzzled. "Where did you bag your impot?"

Lovell growled.

"The blessed Beak!"

That was Lovell's rather disrespectful way of alluding to Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood.

"And what have you done?" asked Raby.

"Nothing!"

Three Juniors grinned. The Head of Rookwood was sometimes a severe old gentleman. But in his severest moments he was unlikely to hand out a whole Georgic for nothing.

"Well, nothing to speak of," amended Lovell.

"We never do anything—and we're always getting something!" said Newcome. "It's a hard life for really innocent chaps like us! What was the 'nothing' the Beak lined you for, old chap?"

"Punching young Manders!"

"He ought to have given you a medal for that!" said Jimmy Silver.

"He's given me a Georgic instead!" growled Lovell. "All the same, I shall punch young Manders again! Jever see a cad that wanted punching so much as that Modern tick?"

"Never!" agreed Lovell's chums.

On that point there was unanimous agreement in the Fourth Form at Rookwood, among Classics and Moderns alike. There was not a fellow in the whole Form who would not have given a week's pocket-money to punch hard the hopeful nephew of Mr. Roger Manders, the Modern master. But a fellow who was a Housemaster's nephew and favourite was not to be punched with impunity—as many of the Fourth had found, and as Lovell had found again.

"He chucked a snowball at me!" went on Lovell. "I wouldn't have

mind that; but there was a stone in it—just one of his dirty tricks! So I punched him—and he told old Manders! And old Manders went to the Head! He's fed-up with taking his complaints to Dicky Dalton; Dicky cuts him rather short. So he barged in to the Beak with it, and I got a Georgie. I wouldn't have minded fifty lines for punching young Manders—it's worth that! But a whole giddy Georgie!"

"It's rotten, old chap!"

Lovell's comrades were sympathetic. But there was nothing to be done—excepting the lines. They had to be done!

"You fellows go and rag the Moderns!" said Lovell. "Give that Manders tick something if you get a chance! I'll get along to the study and grind out that dashed Impot!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell, with a clouded face, went into the House, leaving his chums in the wintry sunshine of the quadrangle.

Lovell lounged reluctantly along the Fourth Form passage towards the end study. Most of the fellows were out of doors; the studies were silent and deserted. He did not pass a single fellow as he went along to his study.

He hurled open the door of the end study and strode in.

There was a sudden startled exclamation in the study.

Lovell jumped.

He had expected, naturally, that the end study would be empty, as his study-mates were out of the House. But it was not empty.

A thin, meagre-featured junior was bending over Lovell's desk in the corner of the room, and he swung round with a startled face and an exclamation as the door flew suddenly open.

Lovell stared at him.

"Manders, you cheeky cad!" he shouted.

It was Marcus Manders, the new fellow in the Modern Fourth. No Modern junior had any business on the

Classical side, especially in a study with the owners absent. And the expression on young Manders' thin, meagre face was one of startled guilt.

"You cheeky cad, what are you doing here?" thundered Lovell indignantly. "What dirty trick are you playing now?"

He strode towards the Modern Junior, and young Manders backed away, breathing hard.

"Nothing!" he panted. "I—I came here to—to speak to you."

"You lying worm!" said Lovell scornfully. "You never expected to be caught here! What were you doing to my desk?"

"I—I haven't touched it!"

"You were touching it when I came in. Were you going to muck up my accounts, you rotter? That would be like one of your tricks!"

Lovell, secretary and treasurer of the junior football club, was a great man at accounts. He did not have to deal in large sums, but he kept extensive accounts. And on the occasion when he attended to them, his chums were wont to retire hurriedly from the study and leave him to it. Lovell's account-books—comprehensible only to Lovell if even to him—were locked up in that desk, along with the funds in hand. It did not occur to Lovell's mind that the cash in his desk might possibly have been young Manders' object—even of young Manders he did not think so badly as that. But he considered it very probable that the young rascal had intended to "muck up" his accounts, and that only the lock on the desk had stopped him. Indeed, unless young Manders had some such object, it was difficult to fathom why he had been meddling with the desk at all.

Marcus Manders backed away as far as he could, till the wall stopped him, and he could back no farther. Lovell was between him and the door, and Lovell's expression was grim and savage.

He owed his detention to young

Manders' sneaking; and now he had found young Manders meddling in his study—in the very act of playing some trick. That put the lid on, so to speak.

"You rank outsider!" said Lovell in measured tones. "You've got me a Georgie to-day, with your sneaking!"

"I—I never meant——"

Lovell laughed grimly.

"You never meant it to bring me to the study and catch you, you cad! But it may interest you to know that if you hadn't got me that Georgie, I should be out with my friends, and shouldn't have caught you!"

Manders of the Modern Fourth eyed him savagely and maliciously. For once the results of his sneaking had come home to roost, as it were.

"I've got a Georgie for punching you," went on Lovell. "Well, I'm not going to punch you this time—I'm going to kick you out of the study! You can report it to Mr. Manders, if you like, and Mr. Manders can jolly well complain to the Head. I fancy the Head will tell him that Modern cads should keep out of Classical studies. Anyhow, I'm going to chance it."

"I—I tell you——"

"You needn't tell me anything—it would only be crammers, anyhow. Out you go!"

Lovell made a rush at the Modern junior.

Marcus Manders dodged desperately round the table, and fled for the door. But Lovell's grasp was on him before he reached it.

"Oh! Ow! Leggo!" yelled Marcus. Bang!

There was a loud concussion, and a scendish yell, as young Manders' head came into collision with the door.

"That's for the start!" grinned Lovell.

"Yaroooh!"

"Now travel!"

Marcus Manders was swung round in the doorway, and Lovell released his collar.

The Modern junior made a desperate

leap into the passage; but his leap, rapid as it was, was not so rapid as the movement of Lovell's foot.

Crash!

Arthur Edward's boot landed.

"Goal!" chortled Lovell.

Marcus Manders landed on his hands and knees in the passage. He sprawled there and roared. A door along the passage opened, and Valentine Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth, looked out. Lines had kept Morny in also, as it happened; and the crash in the passage had startled him.

"What the merry thump!" exclaimed Mornington. "Hallo! What's that Modern cad doing here?"

Lovell chuckled.

"He was messing about with my desk in my study, and I caught him at it. I've given him my boot."

"Good egg! I'll give him mine!"

Marcus Manders leaped up and ran. But to reach the staircase he had to pass Morny; and Morny stepped quickly out of the doorway as the sneak of Manders' House passed him.

Crash!

"Yooop!"

Once more Marcus Manders sprawled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell.

The Modern junior scrambled up, yelling, and fled for the stairs. He turned to shake an enraged fist at the two grinning Classics, and then vanished down the staircase.

Lovell tramped back into the end study feeling better. He sat down to his Georgie, comforted by the reflection that the sneak of Manders' House would not feel like sitting down for some time to come.

CHAPTER 18

A Bad Egg

"RAIN!" growled Raby.

"Bother!"

"And wet rain!" said Jimmy Silver ruefully.

Really, that afternoon was not Jimmy Silver & Co.'s lucky afternoon.

In the first place Lovell was detained, grinding lines in his study. In the second place, Jimmy Silver & Co., having crossed over to the Modern side to snowball Tommy Dodd & Co., of the Modern Fourth, learned from Towle that the three Tommies were under detention—young Manders having reported them to "Old Manders" for "calling him names." No doubt the three Tommies had applied some expressive terms to the sneak of Manders' House; but detention for a half-holiday was a rather severe penalty. And Raby, having expressed the opinion that it was a "shame," was unfortunately overheard by Mr. Roger Manders, who came by in his usual silent, stealthy way and told Raby, with savage snappishness, that his remark would be reported to his Form master. After which Jimmy Silver & Co. walked down to the village looking for Bagshot fellows for a little snowballing. But there were no Bagshot fellows to be seen; and when they started back to Rookwood the deceptive fine afternoon showed itself up in its true colours, so to speak, and there was a sudden down-pour of rain.

"Keep smiling!" said Jimmy; but he found it hard to smile. The fine day had tempted the juniors out without their coats, and a torrent of rain was no joke.

"We're up against it all round today!" growled Newcome. "Let's get under something, if it's only a tree."

"Cut across the fields to Giles' shed," said Jimmy. "It won't last long; it's coming down too fast. Sprint for it!"

The three juniors plunged through a gap in the hedge, and cut across the field in the rain. Giles' shed was in the farther corner of the fields, and they were rather damp by the time they reached it. The doorway was on the farther side, and as they moved round the shed, they heard the sound of voices within. Apparently, somebody else had taken refuge from the rain in the shed.

"I can't do it, Padger! I tell you, I can't. It's impossible!"

The three juniors started, as they heard that voice. For they knew the whining tones only too well; of all the voices at Rookwood, it was the one least welcome to their ears. It was the voice of Marcus Manders.

"That tick!" granted Raby.

"Impossible, is it, Master Manders!" came a deep, husky voice in answer to the sneak of Manders' House. "Do you owe me five pounds or don't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"Are you going to pay, or ain't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"You a 'ousemaster's nephew, and can't raise five quid!" sneered Mr. Padger. "Don't tell me! Anyhow, you can 'and over the five, or else I shall ask your uncle for it, as I've told you afore."

"Look here, Padger——"

Marcus Manders broke off suddenly. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome came tramping in at the open doorway of Giles' shed.

Young Manders' jaw dropped, as he saw them. Gladly enough the three Classics would have given him a wider berth; they did not want to share a shelter with Manders. But the rain was heavy, and they had no choice.

A squat man with a shaggy moustache and a red face was in the shed with young Manders. He was smoking a cigarette as he sat on a bench. Jimmy Silver & Co. had seen him before, at a distance; he was one of the "horsey" characters who congregated at the Bird-in-Hand at Coombe. Naturally, they had never spoken to him; but they were not at all surprised to see Marcus Manders in talk with the man. Almost everyone in Manders' house at Rookwood, excepting Mr. Roger Manders himself, knew that Mr. Manders' nephew had a taste for dingy blackguardism, and a good many of the Classics knew it, too. Indeed, Jimmy Silver had seen something of it on young Manders' very

first day at Rookwood. More than one fellow had seen young Manders talking with the loafers of the Bird-in-Hand, and information on that point would have surprised Mr. Roger Manders very much. But even if any Rookwooder had been disposed to follow young Manders' example in sneaking, it was not likely that the Modern master would have believed a word against his favourite nephew.

Mr. Padger glanced at the three juniors over his cigarette and went on speaking, regardless of their presence, and regardless of young Manders' almost frantic signs to him to be silent.

"I'm fed-up with this 'ere, Master Manders," said Mr. Padger. "Don't you make faces at me—I'm talking to you straight, I am. You borrowed that silver from me to put on a 'orse. Did you or did you not?"

Manders panted.

"For a few days, says you," resumed Mr. Padger indignantly. "Now it's a few weeks, and you ain't squared. But, if you can't pay me, your uncle can, and I tell you straight I'm going to ask Mr. Manders for it."

Jimmy Silver & Co. could almost have compassioned the cringing Manders.

He was his uncle's favourite; Mr. Manders' favouritism had made him detested throughout his House by juniors and seniors alike, by fags and by prefects of the Sixth. Mr. Manders always lent a willing ear to his reports, and backed him up through thick and thin. But there was undoubtedly one point upon which Mr. Manders' regard for his nephew would have failed. Roger Manders was very close with his money. Upon any request for hard cash, Mr. Manders would have shut like an oyster. In his present emergency, Marcus Manders could not apply to his uncle for help. Five shillings, probably, would have been too much to ask. Five pounds he would never have dared to mention. Only too well Manders knew it, as he cringed under

the threatening, bullying manner of the public-house loafer.

"You—you can't speak to my uncle!" he muttered. "It—it would mean ruin for me at Rookwood!"

"You pay what you owe, then," said Mr. Padger. "Besides, ain't you told me you're your uncle's favourite? He's going to stump up if you don't."

Jimmy Silver stared out into the rain. He was extremely anxious to get away from this scene. But the rain was falling too heavily.

Marcus Manders gave the three Classics a stare of hatred, and spoke to the loafer in a low voice.

"I don't care!" said Mr. Padger. "All Rookwood can 'ear me, if it comes to that. I want my money, and you promised it."

"I've tried——"

"Well, I ain't waiting any longer," said Mr. Padger. "You was to bring the silver 'ere this afternoon. Have you brought it?"

"No. I—I——"

"That does it! I'll see Mr. Manders about it."

"My uncle would not pay you a farthing to save me from being turned out of the school!" hissed Manders.

"We'll see about that," sneered Mr. Padger. "Pr'aps he won't want to let the 'eadmaster 'ear about his nephew coming along to the Bird-in-Hand for cards and billiards, and such."

"If he knew it, he would turn me out himself!" snarled Manders. "He wouldn't pay you a shilling. You rotter!" The young rascal's spiteful temper broke out at last. "You scoundrel! It was fixed up between you and Joey Hook about that silver. Joey Hook raked me out of it, and a fiver of my own, as well. I don't really owe you anything. It was a trick!"

Mr. Padger rose from the bench and threw away the stump of his cigarette.

"That does it!" he said. "I'm fed-up with you, young Manders! Making out you had lots of oof and taking a man in. Don't you talk to me! I'm going to ask Mr. Manders for my

money; and if I don't get it, anyhow you'll get something for yourself, and serve you right for a sneaking, lying, swindling young scoundrel."

And Mr. Padger tramped indignantly out of the shed and disappeared in the rain.

CHAPTER 25. Dark Suspicions!

MARCUS MANDERS stood panting, staring after the shabby rascal who had gone. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome exchanged glances. Young Manders, who had brought trouble at one time or another upon every fellow in the Fourth Form at Rookwood, seemed to have landed himself into worse trouble than he had ever brought upon anyone else. His face was white, and he trembled till his bony knees knocked together. He knew—better than Mr. Padger knew—what would be the result of Mr. Manders learning his true character. Sneaking and tale-bearing were not, apparently, faults in the eyes of Mr. Manders; but the discovery that his nephew was a gambling young black-guard, a "pub-haunter," in danger of being expelled by the Head for bad conduct, would have moved Roger Manders' deepest ire. Indeed, it would have been difficult for Mr. Manders to hold up his head at Rookwood School again if his nephew had been "sacked" from the school; certainly, at least, it would have taken him a long time to live down such an episode. Once he became aware of the danger, favouritism would have changed instantly to overwhelming wrath. It was a prospect that might have dismayed a more courageous fellow than the sneak of Manders' House.

Manders gave the three Classics a bitter look. He cared nothing for their opinion. He did not fear sneaking on their part; and he was assured that his uncle would never believe a word against him from a Rookwood fellow, even if they told. But even the dingy, impudent, shameless young rascal

would have preferred no witnesses to that interview.

"You fellows had to butt in," he said savagely. "You couldn't mind your own business. You've accused me of spying, too."

Jimmy Silver gave him a look of contempt.

"We came in here out of the rain," he said. "We had no idea that you were meeting that shabby rotter here. And we shan't sneak about you, you worm, as you would about us if we were in the same scrape. Don't talk to us—you're not fit to speak to a decent fellow!"

Manders gnawed his lip.

"You—you heard what that fellow was saying——"

"We couldn't help hearing what he said, only a few feet away from him!" snapped Raby. "Did you expect us to go out into the rain so as not to hear?"

"You needn't be afraid," said Newcome contemptuously. "Your uncle won't hear anything of this from us."

"I'm not afraid of that—he wouldn't believe you!" sneered Manders. "More likely to believe that you fellows were here to meet Padger, if I told him so."

"You'd better hope that he won't believe Padger either," said Jimmy Silver. "You seem to have landed yourself with your dirty tricks."

"I—I don't think he would believe him, but—but—he will know that I know the man; he may find it all out," Manders' lip quivered. "He would be frightfully wild. It would reflect on him at Rookwood if I got into trouble in the school. I—I say——" He hesitated. "I—I say, Silver, could you—could you——" He stammered.

"Could I what?"

"Lend me some money?" said Manders desperately. "I—I'll settle up out of some Christmas tips I'm expecting soon. Honour bright."

Jimmy Silver stared at him blankly. Well as he knew the meanness and impudence of Mr. Manders' precious nephew, this surprised him.

"Oh, my hat!" he ejaculated. "You're asking me to lend you money to settle a racing debt with a wetcher! You! My pal's detained this afternoon through your rotten sneaking—and you ask me—" Jimmy Silver turned away. "Come on, you chaps—the rain's better than young Manders. I can't breathe the same air with that rotter!"

Jimmy Silver tramped out of the shed heedless of the rain. Raby and Newcome followed him. Young Manders stood and stared after them, gnawing his thin lip.

"Well, that chap is the giddy limit!" said Raby, as they tramped across the field. "The sooner he's kicked out of Rookwood the better, it seems to me."

Jimmy Silver breathed hard.

"A rotten sneak, always spying on fellows and getting them called over the coals," he said, "and about the worst chap at Rookwood himself! Even old Manders would be fed-up with him, if he knew. And he would see what a rotter he is, if he wasn't a good bit of a bad egg himself! My hat! I'm fed-up with the whole tribe of Manders!"

The three Classics stopped under a tree for shelter. It was an imperfect shelter in a downpour of rain, but really it was better than the shed with the company of Marcus Manders.

The rain stopped at last, and the chums of the Fourth tramped home to Rookwood. It was nearly tea-time now, and they hoped to find that Arthur Edward Lovell had completed his task. But when they came into the end study, Arthur Edward was still labouring at his Georgic. He gave them a dismal look as they came in.

"I almost wish I hadn't punched young Manders this morning," he said dolorously. "I say, what could have made Virgil such a silly ass as to write all this awful stuff?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"We'll get tea while you're winding up," he said. "I've brought in some-

thing from the tuckshop. Morny's coming to tea."

"Oh, dear!" groaned Lovell.

On a corner of the study table, Arthur Edward continued to grind out his Georgic, while his three comrades prepared tea. Mornington lounged into the doorway of the study.

"Too early?" he asked.

"Not at all, old man; trot in," said Jimmy Silver. "Chuck it till after tea, Lovell. You'll feel better then, old chap."

"I wish I could chuck it at Manders' head!" sighed Lovell, as he left his unfinished task.

The five Classics sat down to tea, and Arthur Edward cheered up under the genial influence of fried eggs and tea and toast. He related quite cheerfully the pleasing episode of kicking young Manders out of the study earlier in the afternoon.

"We've seen the rotter, too," said Raby. "From what we saw, I should have thought that he had something more serious to think of than playing tricks in a fellow's study. He's got himself something worse than a giddy Georgic."

"How's that?" asked Mornington.

The Classics described the meeting in the shed in Giler's field. Lovell gave a snort of angry disgust.

"He ought to be jolly well booted out of Rookwood!" he growled. "He's a disgrace to the school."

"It will come to that, if he keeps on as he's started," said Jimmy Silver.

"Goodness knows what will happen, if that man Padger speaks to Mr. Manders."

"Manders won't believe anything against his dear nephew," said Mornington. "Still, he's a sharp old bird. He may tumble to the facts. If he does, it will be serious for Marcus."

"A flogging, anyhow," said Lovell with a grin. "Old Manders would be frightfully waxy if he found the fellow out. Why, if the Head knew, he'd sack the cad from the school. Fancy

Manders' face if his precious nephew was bunked from Rookwood! Ha, ha, ha!"

"That idea almost consoled Lovell for his Georgie.

Morny whistled.

"That fellow was messing about with your desk when you found him here, Lovell?" he said.

"Yes—only it was locked," grinned Lovell. "I fancy he was going to play some trick with my account books."

"Anythin' else in the desk?"

"Only some papers and letters, and the club money, of course," said Lovell. "I keep it locked up there."

"Manders likely to know about the money?"

Lovell jumped.

"Great Scott! You don't think—Draw it mild, Morny! Even young Manders—"

Valentine Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"He's up against it, and he's rotter enough for anything," he said. "You'd better keep that desk locked, if you want to keep the money in it, while young Manders owes debts at the Bird-in-Hand."

"Oh crumbs!"

The Pistical Four exchanged startled glances.

But for what they had seen of Manders' interview with Padger that afternoon, Jimmy Silver & Co. would have scouted the suggestion. But they could not scout it now. Only Lovell shook his head.

"That's too thick," he said. "Dash it all! A Housemaster's nephew! You're a bit too suspicious, Morny, old man. Manders never meant that. A Rookwood fellow wouldn't be a thief—even that ead! Draw it mild."

Morny shrugged his shoulders again.

"All the same, keep the desk locked," said Jimmy Silver uneasily. "The fellow's a real bad egg. Goodness knows what he might do, with that racing rotter threatening him. Keep it locked."

"Fathead!" said Lovell. "I always keep it locked, and the key in my pocket. But even young Manders has his limit. He wouldn't do a thing like that. You're rather an ass, Morny old bean."

"Nous verrons!" said Morny lightly.

"Pass the jam, Jimmy."

The unpleasant topic dropped, and the Classics chattered cheerily on the more pleasing subject of the coming Christmas holidays till tea was over and it was time for Lovell to get on with his Georgie again.

CHAPTER 21.

Morny Takes a Hand!

"**B**ACK up, Classics!"

"Go it, Moderns!"

"Give 'em beans!"

The December dusk was falling, and through the dusk rang the merry voices of the Rookwood juniors. Tommy Dodd, and Cook and Doyle, released from detention, had come out of their House, looking for a little trouble to liven them up. The rain was long over, and it was bitterly cold and almost freezing. Under the old Rookwood beeches there was still plenty of snow, and the three Tommies were not long in finding the trouble they sought.

A snowball landing on the back of Gunner's neck started the ball rolling. Gunner and Dickinson minor replied in kind, and more Classics came to their aid, and more Moderns rallied to Tommy Dodd & Co., and a terrific battle was soon in progress. Jimmy Silver & Co. came racing out of the House to join up, Lovell's Georgie having been, at long last, completed and handed over. More and more Classics and Moderns crowded into the fray, amid terrific shouting and scrambling and stumbling and yelling of rival war-cries.

The scrap was going strong when Marcus Manders came in at the gates, and stared gloomily and maliciously in the direction of the snow fight. Young Manders had no taste for that

child of fun, and no desire whatever to back up his House in a scrap. Indeed, but for other troubles on his mind, he would probably have seized the opportunity of reporting to Mr. Manders that scrapping was going on between Moderns and Classics. But for once young Manders had something more important than sneaking to think about.

After the interview with Padger in Giles' shed the wretched outsider of Manders' House had loafed about, in an unenviable frame of mind, trying to think of a way out of his difficulties. He dared not ask his uncle for money. Mr. Manders would have given him nothing but a searching inquiry as to what he wanted it for. It was equally useless to write home for such a sum as five pounds. He had made himself too generally detested in his Form to have any hope of borrowing the money in the Fourth. And Padger, left unpaid, might at any moment carry out his threat of speaking to Mr. Manders. So far as the sporting gang at the Bird-in-Hand were concerned, Marcus Manders was a squeezed orange. They had nothing more to expect from him, and were not likely to show him much consideration. If ever a young blackguard repented of his blackguardism, Marcus Manders did; but repentance came too late. He was in the toils now. How he was to get out of the toils without being shown up and turned out of Rockwood, was the pressing problem that he had to solve.

He stood and stared at the snow-balling juniors in the distance. All the Fourth seemed to be involved in the battle; even Tubby Muffin had rolled up to back up his House. Even the slacker Leggett was in the ranks of the Moderns. Manders stood looking at them with black thoughts passing in his anxious mind. He moved off at last with set lips, and he did not go to his own House. He crossed over to the Head's House on the Classical side.

All, or nearly all, the Fourth were out there in the December dusk, and it was an opportunity he had hardly dared to hope for. Lovell had unexpectedly caught him in the end study that afternoon, but Arthur Edward Lovell was too busy now to give him a thought. Marcus Manders loafed into the House with a casual air, looked at the notice-board as if interested in the papers there, and, with watchful eyes about him, took an opportunity of slipping up the staircase. He scudded as soon as he entered the Fourth Form passage and reached the end study breathless.

The passage was deserted, all the studies were dark. It seemed as if not a fellow was indoors. He was safe—safe! And he would not be long. But his heart was beating quickly as he entered the end study and closed the door softly behind him.

His face was white.

To save himself from the consequences of what he had done there was only one way—a deeper plunge into shame and guilt. He had desperately made up his mind to it. The man Padger had to be paid—somehow, anyhow! There would be an outcry when Lovell missed the club money from his desk—inquiry, excitement. He might be suspected, accused, but there would be no proof, and hard lying might see him clear. His uncle, at least, would stand by him and believe in him, if only he could keep Padger silent. Padger would be silent if he were paid. Besides, why should he be suspected? He had not been seen to enter, he would not be seen to leave. Lovell's desk was locked, but it was a common, flimsy lock. It would break easily enough. He would not be many minutes.

The interior of the room was growing quite dark, but he did not dare to turn on the light. He hurried across to Lovell's desk, and groped at it in a faint hope that it might now be unlocked. But it was locked, and he took

out his pocket-knife and opened the largest blade, and inserted it under the lid of the desk.

Snap!

It was the blade of the knife that snapped, and in the silence the sound startled him and made his heart throb.

But he thrust in the stump of the broken blade and pressed, and this time the flimsy lock snapped.

A moment more and he raised the lid.

Thievish fingers groped in the desk.

In a little compartment he found several currency notes rolled up, and a little heap of silver. Six or seven pounds—

Click!

Marcus Manders spun round from the desk. That click came from the door of the study.

He stood rooted to the floor.

There had been no key in the lock, and yet that click was the click of the key as it turned.

He was dumbfounded.

Slowly it forced itself into his startled, terrified mind that he had not been, as he supposed, unobserved when he crept to the study; some Classical fellow had seen him from a study. Yet how did it happen that the key of the door had been removed, and was in the possession of the fellow who had watched him.

His heart almost died within him.

He had been watched, and not only watched, but expected! Whoever it was that had now locked the door of the end study on him had expected him to come, otherwise these preparations could never have been made. Someone who knew how Lovell had found him that afternoon meddling with the desk, and guessed his real object.

He was not thinking of the money in the desk now, or even of the man Padger and his threats. A nearer danger paralysed him. He was locked in the study, with the desk broken open to convict him!

He moved at last, dragging himself with almost palsied limbs to the door. He knew that it was locked; but he tried the handle. The door did not move.

The sneak of Manders' House was a prisoner in the end study.

He bent to the keyhole, and whispered hoarsely:

"Who is there?"

"Little me."

"Mornington?" hissed Manders.

"Right in once."

"Open the door!" breathed Manders. Mornington laughed.

"Open the door, for mercy's sake!" Manders spoke through the keyhole in a shrill, frightened whisper, "Let me out, Mornington! Let me out before they come in!"

"Have you bagged the club funds yet, you reptile?" asked Mornington scornfully. "Lovell's cash safe in your pocket—what?"

"I—I haven't touched—"

Morny laughed again.

"I heard the lock go," he answered.

"I was waiting for that before I turned the key on you."

"Oh!" breathed Manders.

"You see, I knew what it meant when I heard what you were at this afternoon," chuckled Mornington; "and when I heard about your merry meeting in Giles' shed, I rather figured it out that you would try again. That's why I borrowed the key of the study when those chaps went out, thinking out this little stunt for your benefit. I was in my study on the watch, you reptile, when you came sneakin' along. I fancied you'd jump at a chance like this, and you did." Morny laughed lightly. "You rank outsider, you've walked into it—fairly into it. I was prepared to keep an eye on you for days and days; but I suppose cheery old Padger won't wait, and you were pressed for time. Ha, ha, ha!"

Manders trembled.

"Let me out, Mornington, I—I have—"

"You can go down on your jolly old knees and beg, and it won't make any difference," said Mornington. "Good-bye!"

"Mornington!" breathed the wretched Junior.

Valentine Mornington slipped the key of the end study into his pocket and walked away down the dusky passage, whistling. Marcus Manders staggered across the study, and collapsed into the armchair, almost fainting with terror.

CHAPTER 22.

The Prisoner of the End Study!

"MORNY, you slacker——"

"Why didn't you join up, Morny?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell. "We've had no end of a tussle with the Modern cads."

A crowd of Classical fellows came tramping cheerily into the House, after the snow-fight with the Moderns. Many of them were muddy, and most of them were breathless, but all were merry and bright. After a really terrific battle Tommy Dodd & Co. had been driven right back to their own House and snowballs had whizzed fairly into Manders' House after them, till Knowles and other Modern prefects sallied out with their canes, and the Classics retreated. Mornington, lounging in the hall with his hands in his pockets, grinned cheerily at Jimmy Silver & Co. as they came in, breathless and ruddy.

"We've beaten them," said Putty of the Fourth. "Fairly drove 'em home. I say, old Manders must be gone out, or we should have heard from him."

"Blessed if I hadn't forgotten old Manders!" chuckled Lovell. "Lucky for us he was out; it would mean a report to Mr. Dalton—disorderly conduct on the Modern side—yah!"

"I didn't notice young Manders either," grinned Gunner. "I looked for him to give him lip, but he wasn't with the Modern crowd."

"Too jolly funky!" sniffed Lovell.

"Why didn't you join up, Morny? You must have heard the row."

"I've been busy, old bean," answered Mornington lightly. "So has young Manders. He's in your study now."

"In our study!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Just that!"

Lovell gave a snort.

"I'll boot him out fast enough!" he exclaimed. "I'll give the cad butting into my study!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell almost flew up the stairs.

The Fourth-Formers followed him up to the passage, and Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived at the door of the end study. Lovell was thumping on it angrily.

"The door's locked!" he exclaimed.

"I locked it," said Mornington.

"Eh?"

"Come along to my study, and I'll explain."

"Blessed if I can understand——"

"You wouldn't, old bean, with a brain like yours. But perhaps you will understand when I've explained. I'll try to put it in words of one syllable."

"Look here——" roared Lovell.

Valentine Mornington walked into his study. Arthur Edward Lovell gave an angry snort, and thumped on his door again.

"Are you there, young Manders?" he roared. "Are you there, you sneak?"

There was no answer from the end study. Manders, palpitating with terror, was silent.

"Oh, come on!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "Let's hear what Morny has to say."

The Fistical Four followed Mornington into Study No. 4. Errol was there with the dandy of the Fourth, and Oswald was in the study.

"Now, what's all this rot?" asked Lovell testily.

"Listen, and I will a tale unfold, old bean," said Morny cheerfully. "I've been lookin' after the club money while you've been snowballin' the Moderns."

I had a sort of idea that young Manders had come after it, and would come after it again—and he did."

"Draw it mild," said Lovell incredulously.

"Go ahead, Morry," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "Shut up a minute. Lovell, old man. Give your chin a bit of a rest."

"Look here——"

"Give it a rest, and give us a rest," said Newcome. "Get on with it, Morry!"

Mornington explained in a few words.

"So I locked young Manders in the end study," Mornington finished up with a grim smile. "He pleaded to me to let him out, but there was nothin' doin'."

"Great pip!" ejaculated Lovell. "You actually heard him crack the lock of my desk?"

"Actually!"

"The awful rotter!" exclaimed Oswald indignantly. "We jolly well ought to call the Head to find him there."

"The fellow's a thief," said Mornington. "But now he's locked in the study he will take jolly good care not to be found with the money in his pockets. He's a good hand at lyin', but I think he will find it rather hard to explain away breakin' the lock of a desk where money is kept, though. But we don't want an awful disgrace in the school—fellow expelled for stealin'. My idea is to give him a jolly severe lesson. Let him roost in the study for a few hours, thinkin' that the Head is comin' to see him there; and after that, I fancy he will keep his hands from pickin' and stealin'. He's an awful bad egg, but I've saved him from becomin' a thief, and if the lesson's impressed on his mind, he may keep to honesty as the best policy—what?"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Good!" he said. "He's about the baddest egg I've ever struck. He doesn't seem to have any decency at

all. But a lesson like this may be him straight in the future."

"He jolly well ought to be bum from the school!" growled Oswald.

"We'll give him a lesson instead."

Jimmy Silver put the key of the end study in his pocket.

"We'll leave him there till prep," said. "He can meditate on his jolly old sine, and think it out that honesty is the best policy. The money's safe enough. He won't dare to touch it, the cireg. Let him roost!"

And the Pistical Four went downstairs again, and Marcus Manders was left to "roost," as Jimmy expressed it, in the end study.

He "roosted" there in an uneasy frame of mind.

The money was in the desk. He dared not touch it now. Every moment he expected to hear the tread of a master brought to discover him there. If hard lying he might make it out that he had broken into Lovell's desk only to play some trick on his account books. But a forcibly-broken lock would require a deal of explaining away, especially when it was a lock on a desk where money was kept.

The wretched junior lurked in the dark study, aching with terror.

The way of the transgressor is hard, and the sneak of Manders' House was finding it out. He fully expected to be shown up in his true colours; and the "sack" loomed before his eyes. These fellows told of him—as he would have told of them—as he had "sneaked" about them on innumerable occasions! What right had he to expect to be done by more generous than he had done by others?

Every sound in the Fourth Form passage made him start and tremble. He dreaded to hear the footsteps of Mr. Dalton or the Head. He dreaded the accusing eyes, the stern inquiry. There was no doubt that the rascal Rookwood needed a severe lesson; there was no doubt at all that he was getting one!

CHAPTER XX.

The Last of Marcus Manders!

OLD Mack the porter stared. Often and often he had seen Mr. Roger Manders looking cross.

But he had never seen Mr. Manders look so terribly cross as he looked now, whisking in at the gate with a face like thunder.

Mr. Manders did not heed the school porter, or even observe his astonished stare.

He strode away to his own House, with a black brow.

Knowles of the Sixth was in the hall, chatting with Catesby by the fire, and Mr. Manders called to him.

"Knowles!"

The Modern prefect looked round.

"Find my nephew, and send him to my study at once."

"Certainly, sir."

Mr. Manders whisked on to his own study.

In that apartment he did not sit down; he paced to and fro, angry and impatient, waiting for Marcus to come.

He was terribly disturbed. That shabby, coarse, red-faced man whom he had met in Coombe Lane—was it possible, was it barely possible, that he had spoken the truth? How could he have told such a story, if there was no truth in it?

But if Mr. Padger's story was true, what then? The nephew whom he had befriended and favoured, whom he had supported through thick and thin, was a young rascal, an arrant young black-guard; there was danger—terrible danger—that he might make the name of Manders a byword in Rookwood School—that he might, at any hour, bring overwhelming shame and disgrace upon the Modern Housemaster.

Mr. Manders paced his study with hurried, jerky steps. Was it true—was it possible? He would not believe it, and yet—Mr. Padger had met him in the lane, had impudently asked him to settle his nephew's debt—was it possible that so circumstantial a

story had no foundation whatever? Where was his nephew—why did not the boy come to answer his searching questions? Marcus Manders did not come.

Knowles of the Sixth came at last. But he came alone.

"Manders of the Fourth is not in the House, sir," said Knowles.

"Nonsense!"

Knowles bit his lip.

"He is not in the House, sir."

"The gates are locked," said Mr. Manders. "He cannot be out of gates. He must be in the House, Knowles."

"He may be over on the Classical side, sir," suggested Knowles, wondering at the anxious disturbance in his Housemaster's face.

"He has no friends on the Classical side!" snapped Mr. Manders. "Why should he be there?"

Knowles might have replied that Manders of the Fourth had no friends on the Modern side, either. But he judiciously remained silent.

Mr. Manders gave him an angry stare.

"You are sure he is not in the House, Knowles?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Very well. I will see myself if he is in the Head's House!" snapped the Modern master ungraciously.

And Knowles walked away, wondering whether the Housemaster's nephew was in his uncle's black books, and fervently hoping that he was.

Mr. Manders left his House, and crossed the quadrangle to the Classical side. It was extremely irritating that his nephew was not to be found at such a moment. There was no time to be lost. He had to know whether there was any truth in Padger's statements. He met Mr. Dalton in the hall, surprising the master of the Fourth by his knitted brows and glinting eyes.

"Can you tell me whether my nephew is in this House, Mr. Dalton?" he asked snappishly.

"Really, I do not know," answered Mr. Dalton. "As it is not yet time for lock-up, he may be here. Perhaps some of the juniors can tell you. Silver!"

"Yes, sir."

Jimmy Silver came up.

"Do you know whether Manders of the Modern Fourth is in this house?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Oh!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"I see that you know something about it!" snapped Mr. Manders surlily. "Where is my nephew, Silver?"

"I—I—" Jimmy Silver stammered.

He was quite taken aback.

The Fistical Four had intended to let Marcus Manders out in ample time for House lock-up. But it was not lock-up yet; and nobody had supposed that Mr. Manders would come over to the Head's House seeking his nephew.

"Where is he?" exclaimed Mr. Manders angrily.

"If you know where Manders of the Fourth is, tell Mr. Manders at once!" said the master of the Fourth sharply.

"He—he—he's in my study!" stammered Jimmy Silver.

"And what is he doing in your study?" snapped Mr. Manders. "I did not know my nephew was a friend of yours, Silver, and I should certainly not approve of such a friendship."

Jimmy Silver coloured.

"He's not a friend of mine!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Nothing of the kind. I never asked him into my study. I jolly well wouldn't."

"No jolly fear!" chimed in Lovell hotly.

"That will do, my boys," said Mr. Dalton severely. "It is very odd that Mr. Manders' nephew should be in your study at all."

"I suppose this is what these boys would call a rag," said Mr. Manders bitterly. "Some wretched trick has been played on my nephew. But I shall soon ascertain."

And Mr. Manders whisked up the staircase.

He reached the door of the end study in the Fourth, and turned the handle. The door remained fast, and Mr. Manders struck on it with angry knuckles.

"Let me in at once!" he exclaimed.

There was a gasp in the study.

"The door's locked, sir!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, hurrying up, key in hand, his comrades following him. "I'll unlock it at once, sir."

"What!" thundered Mr. Manders.

"My nephew is locked in your study! What lawless ruffianism is this?"

Jimmy inserted the key in the lock without answering.

"The Head shall hear of this!" boomed Mr. Manders. "My nephew locked in a Classical study—upon my word! Disgraceful!"

"He should have kept out of the study, sir," said Arthur Edward Lovell tartly.

Jimmy Silver threw the door open.

Mr. Manders strode into the end study. It was dark; but Jimmy put on the light at once. Mr. Manders' angry stare turned on his nephew blinking at him in dread.

"Marcus!"

"Uncle! I—I—" Marcus Manders gasped.

"What are you doing here?"

"I—I—"

"If you have been forced into this study, and locked in, as it seems, tell me exactly what has happened. I shall report the whole affair to Dr. Chisholm!" thundered Mr. Manders.

Marcus' knees knocked together.

"Manders came in of his own accord, sir," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "He was locked in as a lesson to him."

"That is a falsehood, Silver. I do not believe your statement for one moment. This is an outrage, which will be reported to the Head without delay. Come with me, Marcus."

"Uncle!" gasped the terrified junior.

"I—I—I—"

"Come!" boomed Mr. Manders.

The Classics exchanged glances.

"For goodness' sake, sir, let him speak before you take him to the Head!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"What! What do you mean? How dare you interfere, Silver? This outrage shall be reported to Dr. Chisholm at once!" snorted Mr. Manders. "Come, Marcus! You shall tell the Head in my presence how these young ruffians have treated you, and I shall see them flogged—flogged!"

"For your own sake, sir, stop!" almost shouted Jimmy Silver.

"What! What! How dare you——" spluttered Mr. Manders.

"If you want your nephew expelled from the school, sir, you have only to take him to the Head!" said Jimmy Silver. "We were willing to let him down lightly; but the Head would not. If it comes before the Head, we shall have to speak out."

"What?—What?—What?"

Jimmy Silver, in silence, pointed to Lovell's desk. Mr. Manders followed the direction of the pointing finger, and saw the broken lock—the half of the broken knife-blade lying on the floor. The angry crimson faded from his face.

"Silver!" His voice was husky. "What—what do you dare to insinuate——"

"Nothing, sir," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "Your nephew can tell you why he came to this study, and what he was doing here when he was caught and locked in. But let him tell you in private, not before the Head."

Mr. Manders looked at him, a long and searching look. Then his gaze turned upon his nephew—white, terrified, cringing, his knees knocking together with fear. The Modern House-master seemed to breathe with difficulty. His voice was hardly more than a whisper when he spoke again.

"What—what is kept in that desk, Silver?"

"The funds of the junior football club."

Mr. Manders did not speak to Jimmy Silver again. He fixed his eyes upon his nephew.

"Follow me, Marcus!" he said. "Come back to your House at once!"

He strode out of the end study, and the wretched junior limped after him.

There was surprising and welcome news in the Fourth Form of Rookwood the following morning.

Marcus Manders was gone.

Why he had gone never transpired officially; but a good many fellows knew. He had gone that night—after a long talk with his uncle in Mr. Manders' study. He had gone by a last train; and it was understood that he was not returning to Rookwood.

It was great news in the Fourth. Dodd & Co. fairly beamed over it; it really seemed too good to be true that they were never going to see the sneak of Manders' House again.

But, good as it was, it was true. Marcus Manders was gone, and for good. His sins had found him out at last; and the sneak of Manders' House had been turned out of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 22.

ON FOR CHRISTMAS

"THE young ass!"

"It's all right, Lovell.

"It isn't all right!"

"Oh!"

"The silly young ass!" went on Lovell.

Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth Form at Rookwood, wore a worried look.

His three comrades, on the other hand, looked merry and bright.

Rookwood School had broken up for the Christmas holidays and the Fiscal Four of the Fourth Form were in the train, speeding westward through a snowy landscape.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome did not see anything to worry about. So they did not worry.

The chums of the Fourth were bound

for Lovell's home in Somerset. They had a carriage to themselves. Somewhere on the train, also, was Lovell's young brother, Teddy of the Third.

Teddy Lovell was the cause of Arthur Edward's worried look.

Lovell, feeling the responsibility of an elder brother—feeling it a little too much in the opinion of his chums—had advised, warned, and commanded Teddy Lovell to keep in the carriage under the guardianship of the elder-brotherly eye.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not yearn for the society of the Third Former; but they were prepared to tolerate it for Lovell's sake.

But a Third Form man of Rookwood was not the fellow to take orders from a Fourth Former, even when the Fourth Former happened to be his elder brother.

Unfortunately, it was a corridor train. Teddy Lovell had taken the first opportunity of wandering along the corridor and vanishing from the sight of the elder-brotherly eye.

"The silly young owl!" continued Lovell. "We change at Templecombe, and he will be left on the train for a cert."

"Teddy knows how to change trains!" murmured Raby.

"There will be a row if I arrive home without him!" said Lovell crossly.

"It's a good way to Templecombe yet," said Newcome. "He will turn up all right, like a bad penny."

"Suppose he doesn't!" granted Lovell. "Suppose we have to go on without him? What then?"

The looks of Jimmy Silver & Co. indicated that they would not regard the loss of Teddy's society as an irreparable misfortune.

Lovell gave a sniff, and rose from his seat.

"I'd better look along the train for him," he said. "You fellows mayn't care if he gets lost. But he happens to be my brother, you see. I'll look for him and jolly well smack his head."

And with that brotherly intention, Arthur Edward Lovell quitted the carriage and tramped along the corridor in search of the elusive fag.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged smiles.

Lovell, as a matter of fact, was not in the best of tempers that day. Certain little incidents which had preceded breaking-up at Rookwood had annoyed him. Moreover, he had confided to his comrades that his Uncle Peter was coming to Lovell Lodge for Christmas. He had not seen his Uncle Peter for years and years and years, not since he had been quite a little chap, in fact; but he remembered him as a very crusty and sharp-tempered gentleman with a chronic dislike for boys. Lovell's opinion was that his parents might very well have left Uncle Peter over for another occasion—saved him up for a rainy day, as it were—instead of asking him to the Lodge at the time Lovell was taking his school friends there. But Lovell's parents had not consulted him on the matter, as Arthur Edward apparently considered they should have done.

On top of all this—putting the lid on, so to speak—Teddy Lovell was displaying his independence as a Third Form man who declined to take orders from any chap in the Rookwood Fourth, brother or not. Lovell was certain to be blamed, at home, if Lovell minor got left on the train, or changed into the wrong train, as the young scamp was well aware. Yet he had scuttled out of the carriage and disappeared from the brotherly supervision, and had failed to reappear.

"Bother these fags!" said Raby, as Arthur Edward went tramping down the corridor.

"Bless 'em!" said Newcome. "Lovell's like a hen with a chick about his blessed minor. Of course, the young sweep will turn up all right—and what does it matter if he doesn't?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"There he is!" he said.

Arthur Edward Lovell had only been gone a couple of minutes when the cheeky face of Lovell minor looked into the carriage from the corridor.

Teddy Lovell grinned at the three Fourth Formers.

"Arthur gone to look for me?" he asked.

"Yes, you young rascal," said Jimmy Silver.

"Good! Then I'll sit down."

The fag sat down in the corner seat, next to the corridor. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at him expressively.

The circumstance that his brother was hunting up and down the train for him did not seem to worry the cheeky Third Former; rather it seemed to provide him with a little mild entertainment.

There was a heavy tramp of footsteps in the corridor about a quarter of an hour later, and Lovell, with a red face, tramped past.

"Lovell!" called out Jimmy Silver.

Lovell did not heed.

He tramped on and disappeared.

Having searched one end of the train for his elusive minor, he was now going to search the other end.

It did not occur to him that, in the meanwhile, Teddy might have returned to the carriage; he did not even look in as he passed, and he was too cross to heed the call of the captain of the Fourth.

Teddy chuckled. He sprawled comfortably on the seat, and drew Lovell's rug over him.

"The dear old chap's waxy," he remarked.

"He's looking for you," said Jimmy Silver. "Why couldn't you call out to him, you young rascal?"

"What rot! This will keep him amused till we get to Templecombe, and save us all from his chin-wag!" bawled Teddy.

Ten minutes more passed, and then Lovell came tramping back along the corridor. The station was drawing near now, where the Rookwooders had to change trains.

Lovell tramped into the carriage, without noticing the fag curled up in the corner of the seat next to the corridor, with a rug pulled over him. Lovell had left his travelling-rug there, and it was of ample size, and nearly all of Teddy had disappeared under it.

"He's not on the train!" snorted Lovell.

"Eh?"

"I've looked in every carriage, from end to end. He must have gone out at an earlier station," said Lovell.

"Goodness knows where he is now."

"But—" began Jimmy Silver.

"No good butting—"

"But—"

"I tell you it's no good butting, like a blinking billygoat!" roared Lovell. "The young ass isn't on the train, and he's lost somewhere on the way here from Hampshire—goodness knows where! I must say it's you fellows' fault."

"What!"

"Why couldn't you help me keep an eye on him, instead of chipping a fellow for looking after his young brother?" demanded Lovell. "It's rotten! And you needn't grin; it's not a grinning matter, I can jolly well tell you!"

But Jimmy Silver & Co. really couldn't help grinning.

The fact that Teddy was curled up under the big plaid travelling-rug at Lovell's very elbow as he stood in the carriage, struck them as comic.

Only Teddy's face showed over the rug in the corner, and Lovell had his back to that, having come half-across the carriage from the corridor with one wrathful stride.

Lovell did not think of looking round.

He glared at his comrades.

The matter was serious. Grinning was quite out of place. Arthur Edward Lovell was intensely exasperated.

"Look here, you dummies, you can grin!" he bawled.

"Right-ho—we will!" agreed Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall be at Templecombe in a few minutes now. We can't take the next train without Teddy. If you think I'm going on home without my brother, you're jolly well mistaken."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses——"

"It's all right, old chap, we won't lose Teddy!" grinned Raby. "I'm sure he'll turn up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Over the top edge of the rug Teddy Lovell winked at the three Fourth Formers. Otherwise he gave no sign, and Arthur Edward remained in blissful ignorance of the fact that Teddy was there. Lest he should glance round, however, Teddy slipped his head under the edge of the rug, and was now quite invisible if Lovell did look round.

"Well, I call this rotten!" hooted Lovell. "Here's my brother lost—gone off goodness knows where—and we've got to hunt for him up and down the railway; at least, I've got to hunt for him. And all you fellows can do is to grin like a lot of Cheshire cats, and cackle like a lot of chickens."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, I'm fed-up with this!" roared Lovell. "If you dummies can't see that it's a serious matter——"

"It's all right, old man!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I'm sure Teddy's on the train!"

"He's not!" roared Lovell.

"I know he isn't far away," said Raby.

"You're a silly ass, Raby!"

"Thanks, old man. Same to you, and many of them."

"Look here, Lovell, old chap——" began Newcome.

"Oh, cheese it! I've no time for jaw with silly owls!" said Lovell, whose temper had obviously deteriorated during his search up and down the train for his minor.

"I was going to say——"

"Rats!"

"But——"

"For goodness' sake ring off while I try to think out what's going to be done!" hooted Lovell. "Here we are at Templecombe."

The express rattled to a halt, Jimmy Silver & Co. gathered up rugs and bags and various impedimenta and jumped out on the platform. Lovell glared after them.

"Come on, Lovell."

"What about my brother? I'm not going on to the other platform without him!"

"Well, you don't want to stay in that train, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver. "Pick up your rug and hop out."

Lovell snorted, but he followed that advice. He grabbed up his travelling rug from the seat.

Then he gave a yell of astonishment.

"Why—what—Teddy!"

The Rookwood lag yawned and sat up.

"Time to change train, what?" he asked. "All serene! Don't leave anything in the carriage, Arthur. You know what an ass you are."

And Teddy Lovell coolly alighted from the train and joined the chuckling trio on the platform. Arthur Edward Lovell, with feelings too deep for expression in words, gathered up his rug and followed.

CHAPTER 25.

Not Wanted!

"HERE'S the jolly old train!" said Raby cheerily.

"Lots of time!"

"And here's an empty carriage—oh nearly empty."

"Good!"

The train for Shepton, the next stop for the Rookwooders, was waiting at the station. Three cheery Fourth Formers and one frowning Fourth Former and a grinning lag arrived at the train and stopped at a carriage that had only one passenger in it. It was

not a corridor train this time. Jimmy Silver jerked open the door and tossed in a bag.

There was the sound of an annoyed grunt in the carriage.

Only one passenger was there—a gentleman of middle age, wrapped in a fur-lined overcoat with a big fur collar, and a silk hat. The gentleman's face was somewhat crusty in expression when in repose, and it grew much more crusty as the juniors stopped at the carriage. Doubtless the old gentleman had expected, or hoped, to have that carriage to himself, and was not pleased to see it invaded by a horde of schoolboys, in exuberant spirits, going home for Christmas.

Still, there were five empty places in the carriage, and the party numbered five, so the old gentleman, howsoever much he desired to have the carriage to himself, really had no right whatever to interfere.

Probably he was an old gentleman of an interfering disposition. Possibly he was an old bachelor, unaccustomed to cheery and exuberant youth, and finding no pleasure in the contemplation of merry young faces.

Anyhow, he interfered.

As Jimmy Silver was following his bag into the carriage an arm was stretched across the entrance, barring his way.

He stopped, with one foot on the step and one in the carriage, in astonishment.

Two sharp grey eyes stared at him over a pair of gold-rimmed glasses.

"Kindly find some other carriage," said the old gentleman.

"What?"

"There is, I believe, plenty of room on the train," said the crusty one. "I am, in fact, assured that the train is not at all crowded. Please go farther along."

"My hat!" said Teddy Loyell.

"What a cheek!"

"My dear sir," said Jimmy Silver loudly. He was rather annoyed, but

Jimmy was a good fellow, and always respectful to age and considerate to the little infirmities of temper which sometimes come with age. "Please let me pass."

"Find some other carriage!" snapped the old gentleman.

"But—"

"I tell you there is plenty of room on the train. Close that door at once—there is a draught."

Arthur Edward Lovell gave an angry snort. With great self-control he had refrained from punching the cheeky head of his minor. But he was not going to stand sheer cheek from a perfect stranger.

"Shove in, Jimmy!" he exclaimed.

"Sorry, sir!" said Jimmy politely.

"There may be more room along the train, but we're a party of five, and we want to travel together. There are five seats here."

"Close that door!"

"You really can't expect to have six seats all to yourself, sir," urged the captain of the Rookwood Fourth.

"I should jolly well think not!" bawled Lovell.

"Shove in!" exclaimed Raby.

"Dash it all, the train will be going," said Newcome impatiently. "Don't play the giddy ox, old gentleman."

"What! What!"

"We've got to get in, sir," said Jimmy. "Please let me pass."

"I decline to have this carriage crowded by a mob of noisy schoolboys!" hooted the unreasonable old gentleman. "I absolutely decline to submit to anything of the kind. Go farther along the train!"

There was a slamming of doors. The train was about to start. The Rookwood party had no intention of splitting themselves into several parties spread among two or three carriages to please this unreasonable old gentleman, but it was too late for even that now. They had to bolt into this carriage or be left behind.

Jimmy Silver, shoved on from be-

hind by his comrades, pushed against the extended arm and pushed it aside.

He tramped across the carriage to the further seat, and his comrades followed him in and sat down, filling all the seats.

The gentleman in the fur coat glared at them.

He looked an expensive and wealthy old gentleman, and doubtless he had been accustomed to having his own way to an extent that was not good for him.

His eyes fairly glinted over his gold-rimmed glasses.

"You young rascals!" he ejaculated.

"Oh, can it, sir!" said Newcome cheerily. "Where's the damage? We're quite nice chaps when you get used to us."

"This impertinence——"

"Bow-wow!" said Lovell.

"What—what did you say?"

"Bow-wow!" repeated Arthur Edward Lovell independently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Slam, slam, slam! rang the doors as the guard hurried along the train. The fur-collared gentleman put his head from the window.

"Guard!"

"Yessir?"

"Turn these boys out!"

"Wot?"

"These noisy and disrespectful boys have crowded into my carriage!" snorted the old gentleman. "Turn them out."

The guard blinked in at the window.

"Wot?" he repeated. "Here, you young gent's got first-class tickets?"

"Certainly!" said Jimmy Silver, with a smile.

"Then what are you complaining of, sir?" asked the guard.

"I decline to have this carriage crowded by noisy and impertinent schoolboys! There is room farther along the train."

"Oh, my eye!" said the guard.

"Turn them out!"

"Have you engaged all the seats in this carriage, sir?"

"Eh! What? No!"

"Then wot the blinking thump are you talkin' about, sir?" asked the guard rudely. And he went on his way, slamming doors.

The fur-collared gentleman's face was purple. He leaned from the window.

"Guard!"

Slam, slam, slam!

"Guard! I am a shareholder in this company! I shall report you!"

Slam, slam, slam!

"Guard!" shrieked the angry gentleman.

The train started.

The fur-collared gentleman threw himself back into his corner seat. He gave the Rookwood party a glare, which was answered by Jimmy Silver & Co. with a polite smile, and by Teddy with a chuckle.

"Scandalous!" he ejaculated.

"Keep smiling, sir!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"What—what! Boy, you are impertinent!"

"Sorry, sir!" said Jimmy politely.

"But isn't it rather cheeky of you to want to bag a whole carriage?"

"Silence!"

"Eh!"

"Be silent! If you are to crowd this carriage, at least be silent!" snapped the old gentleman. "Scandalous, scandalous!"

And the fur-collared gentleman unfolded his "Times" and disappeared behind it; and the Rookwoods grinned cheerily at one another.

CHAPTER 20.

Trouble on the Train!

"DISGUSTING!"

It was the fur-collared gentleman who made that remark suddenly, popping it out like a pistol-shot. His head popped out from behind the paper, like the head of a tortoise from its shell, as he made it.

Really, it wasn't disgusting. Arthur Edward Lovell had sorted out a bag of jam-tarts. December weather made healthy fellows hungry, and jam-tarts

though not very solid, were welcome and comforting. Jam-tarts were handed along the carriage, and Jimmy Silver & Co. proceeded to dispose of them. Evidently the crusty old gentleman did not approve.

"Disgusting!" he repeated.

The fur-collared gentleman was elderly; he had passed through most of the seven ages of man; and he had left the jam-tart age far behind. The sight of schoolboys tucking into jam-tarts had an irritating effect on him. He did not like it; and it was clear that he was a gentleman who never hesitated to make his likes and dislikes known.

Obviously he was an old gentleman who was given his head, without limit, by affectionate relatives who, perhaps, were chiefly interested in the clauses in his last will and testament. Apparently he expected the same patient tolerance from the general public who were not in the least interested in his last will and testament. No doubt, with such an expectation, he met with many disappointments and painful shocks, which had not improved his temper.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at him.

"Did you address me, sir?" asked Jimmy politely.

"I addressed you all!" snapped the old gentleman. "And I said 'disgusting,' and I repeat 'disgusting!'"

"You must excuse us for not offering you a jam-tart, sir," said Jimmy. "We did not think you would care for it."

"Eh?"

"But you are very welcome, sir."

"Certainly!" grinned Lovell, holding out the bag. "Please take one, sir."

"They're quite nice, sir!" said Raby.

"Tip-top!" said Newcome.

The fur-collared gentleman breathed hard and deep. He was quite certain that the Rookwooders had not really misunderstood him; and assuredly he did not want a jam-tart.

He snatched at the bag in Lovell's hand, and it went to the floor and burst, and there was a scattering of tarts.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Look here!" roared Lovell. "You chuck this! This is too thick, sir, and I can jolly well tell you so! Haven't you got any manners?"

"What—what?"

Lovell and the others picked up the tarts. One of them was too dusty for human consumption, and Arthur Edward Lovell was powerfully inclined to hurl it at the angry face opposite him. The old gentleman was purple with bad temper by this time, and his purple countenance was a tempting target. But respect for age prevailed, and Lovell restrained his wrath.

"Disgusting!" repeated the fur-collared gentleman. "If you must crowd into my carriage and cause me incessant annoyance with chattering and shuffling your feet, at least you need not indulge in a disgusting orgy under my eyes. Pahi!"

Having thus delivered himself, the old gentleman retired behind the "Times" again, shutting out the offensive sight of schoolboys devouring tarts. Only an occasional snort from behind the newspaper indicated that he was still fuming.

Jimmy Silver grinned cheerily. He had come across ill-tempered and unreasonable gentlemen before; but this especial old gentleman really seemed to take the cake. Even Mr. Manders at Rookwood was not quite so savage-tempered and blind to sweet reasonableness as this old gentleman. Hitherto Jimmy had considered Mr. Manders the limit.

But the old gentleman ceased to snort at last, getting deeply interested in his paper, and apparently forgetting the existence of the obnoxious youths in the carriage.

Cash! Rattle! Jerk!

The train stopped in a station. It stopped rather suddenly, and the old gentleman, deeply absorbed in his paper, was not prepared for it. He lurched forward in his seat and nearly

fell across on Lovell's knees. His newspaper fell on Lovell.

"Oh, gad! Bless my soul!"

Lovell took hold of the newspaper with a wink at his comrades.

"Thank you, sir!" he said demurely.

"If you're done with it——"

"What—what?"

"Much news in it, sir?" asked Lovell affably.

The old gentleman righted himself, and glared at Lovell. He did not believe for a moment that Lovell really supposed that the newspaper was being offered to him, as done with by the owner.

"You young scamp! Give me my paper!"

"Not finished with it?" asked Lovell.

"No!" roared the old gentleman.

"Very well, here you are, sir!" Lovell tossed the paper back.

"You—you—you——" stammered the irate gentleman. He looked, for a moment, as if he would box Arthur Edward's ears. Fortunately, he refrained. Boxing Rookwood ears was a perilous undertaking.

He jammed down the window and put his head out to look at the name of the station. December mists hung rather thickly round the station, and the name, of course, was well hidden among prominent advertisements, as is customary in railway stations.

He was still leaning from the window when the train restarted after the interval, so to speak. Lovell, leaning across the bulky figure bundled in the fur-lined coat, deposited a jam-tart in the corner seat vacated by the gentleman at the window.

Jimmy Silver gave him a warning look.

The other fellows grinned.

It was the tart that had collected so much dust that it was unfit for human consumption. Lovell did not see, therefore, why the old gentleman should not sit on it. There was no other use for it, and the irate passenger was welcome to it.

The fur-lined gentleman sat down

again as the train rolled out of the station.

Squelch!

It was a large and juicy jam-tart. It was a large and heavy gentleman that sat on it.

The tart was reduced, at one fell swoop, to the shape of a pancake, with a juicy squelch that was audible all through the carriage.

The fur-lined gentleman started.

"What—what——" he ejaculated.

He rose from his seat and looked at it. Jammy traces were visible on the cushions, but the tart itself clung to the overcoat and whiskered round as the wearer whisked round.

There was a howl of laughter in the carriage. The sight of the old gentleman peering at the seat, while the tart was displayed to them sticking on the tail of his coat, was too funny. They roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What—what——"

The fur-lined gentleman gave a suspicious glare round the carriage at the juniors, and glared again at the stickiness on the cushion. Then he groped round his voluminous coat, and the sticky tart came away in his hand. He held it up and stared at it blankly.

It was some moments before he seemed to understand what had happened. Then he understood, quite suddenly, and with equal suddenness he leaned over towards Arthur Edward Lovell, and surprised that youth with a terrific box on the ear.

Smack!

Loud and clear, almost like a pistol shot, it rang through the carriage, and louder yet rang the surprised and enraged yell of Arthur Edward Lovell.

CHAPTER 27.

Only a False Alarm!

"YABOOOOOOOH!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Lovell leaped up.

Certainly, he had placed a sticky tart

for the irate gentleman to sit upon; but, equally certainly, the irate gentleman had asked for it. Rookwood ears were not to be boxed with impunity.

"You cheeky ass!" roared Lovell. "Laying your paws on me! By Jove, I'll jolly well back your shins!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. He caught his excited chum by the shoulder in time.

"Let go!" roared Lovell.

"Chuck it, old chap——"

"I tell you—— Whooooop!" roared Lovell, as the irate passenger smote again this time on his other ear.

While Jimmy Silver was restraining Lovell, the enemy was carrying on the war, so to speak. He boxed Lovell's other ear, and even that did not satisfy him; he proceeded to grasp Lovell by the collar, and with his free hand groped for his umbrella.

"Chuck it, you old donkey!" exclaimed Raby.

Lovell wriggled in the old gentleman's grasp. Elderly as the gentleman was, his grasp was hefty. Lovell plunged along the carriage to get loose, and the irate gentleman plunged after him. Teddy Lovell put out a foot at the right moment, and the angry passenger stumbled over it, and fell on his knees, releasing Arthur Edward.

His wrath instantly turned on Teddy.

The bag was grasped by the collar. Shake, shake, shake!

"Whooooop!" roared Lovell minor.

"Stop him! Rescue, you chaps!"

"Let him go!" bawled Lovell.

Smack, smack, smack!

Having shaken Teddy, the angry gentleman was boxing his ears. It was truly too "thick." Lovell jumped at him like a charging bull, and the angry gentleman staggered and sat down. Teddy was hurried flying across the carriage, and Lovell sprawled across the angry passenger. He sprawled over a huge fuz and a pair of dislodged, gold-rimmed glasses.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Newcome.

"What a shindy! I say, that boulder ought to be given in charge!"

"Mmmmmmm!" came a muffled roar from the irate passenger, gasping under the sprawling Lovell.

Teddy Lovell had staggered against the opposite door of the carriage. He turned the handle and sent the door flying open.

"What——" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

The bag gave him a cheery wink, dived down, and squeezed under the seat. The angry passenger, who was struggling to shift Lovell off his face, saw nothing of what was happening.

"Grooogh! Mmmmm! Will you gerroff?" he was spluttering.

For a second Jimmy Silver stared after the bag who had squeezed under the seat and vanished from sight. Lovell blinked at him, not understanding. But Jimmy caught on at once.

"Help! Stop the train!" he shouted. "He's gone!"

"He's gone!" yelled Raby and Newcome, playing up instantly.

"My brother!" roared Lovell, catching on last of all. Arthur Edward was not quick on the uptake, but he caught on at last. "My brother! Stop the train! Pull the cord! Help! Murder!"

The angry passenger sat up dizzily. He groped for his gold-rimmed glasses, and set them on his nose. He blinked at the juniors.

"You young rascals — ruffians — scoundrels — villains——" he spluttered.

"Murder!" roared Lovell.

"Manslaughter at least!" howled Raby.

Jimmy Silver pointed to the open door of the carriage, flying in the wind of the train.

The fur-lined gentleman stared round with a startled, scared look.

He knew that there had been five of the schoolboys, and now he saw only four, and the door of the carriage flying open. He knew that the missing one was the one he had hurled away when Lovell charged him over. His purple face became quite pale.

"Bless my soul! What has hap-

pened!" he stuttered, staggering to his feet.

"You've killed him!" roared Lovell.

"Boy!"

"It's murder! Stop the train!"

"Has—has—has that boy fallen out of the carriage?" stuttered the fur-lined gentleman in horror.

"He didn't fall out!" howled Newcome. "You flung him right against the carriage door, you know you did!"

"I—I threw him aside——"

"We all saw him fall against the door!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "We shall all be witnesses——"

"At the inquest!" said Raby.

"The—the inquest!" stuttered the fur-lined gentleman. That awful word seemed to take all the starch out of him, as it were. He collapsed into his seat, quite heedless now of sticky jam on the cushions.

He stared at the juniors with a chalky face. He could not deny that he had hurled the Rookwood fag off, and that Teddy had fallen against the opposite door of the carriage. Perhaps at that moment he repented him of being such an extremely bad-tempered old gentleman. Certainly he had meant the poor boy no real harm.

"Oh, dear! Goodness gracious! Bless my soul!" he articulated. "I—I never dreamed—I never supposed—I never intended——"

"You've done it now," said Raby.

"Goodness gracious! If—if the boy has fallen upon the line, he—he must have been injured——"

Lovell gave a scornful snort.

"Injured! Do you think a fellow could fall on the line from the train without being killed?"

"Oh, dear!"

"We're getting into a station now," said Jimmy Silver. "We shall be at Shepton in a few minutes. Keep round and see that he doesn't escape before the police arrive, you fellows."

"Yes, rather."

"This is what comes of losing your temper for nothing, sir," said Jimmy

Silver very gravely. "I hope, sir, that it will be a warning to you—that is, of course, if you are not hanged."

"Wretched boy!" gasped the fur-lined gentleman. "You are well aware that it was an accident—a dreadful accident——"

"I don't believe there was an accident."

"I'm certain there wasn't," said Newcome.

"Nothing of the kind," said Lovell. "We shall all be able to swear that there was no accident in the matter at all."

"Yes, rather."

The angry gentleman gazed at the juniors speechlessly. He wondered dizzily whether the law would allow a mob of schoolboys to swear his life away in this manner.

"We're stopping," said Lovell.

The train drew up at Shepton.

"We change here," said Lovell. "We shall have to give this man in charge——"

"Good gadi!"

The guard was at the door as soon as the train stopped. He opened the other carriage door and stared in.

"What's this here?" he demanded gruffly. "That there door is flying open. What's this here?"

"An—an accident, guard," gasped the fur-lined gentleman. "A sheer accident. I scarcely touched the boy——"

"Wot boy?"

"The—the unfortunate lad who has fallen out——"

"Wot!" stuttered the guard.

He stared at the juniors, remembering that there had been five of them. Now there were four. The guard's face assumed an expression of terrifying grimness.

"Wot's that?" he demanded. "You've shoved one of these here boys out of the train while it was going? Why, the young feller must have been killed."

"I scarcely touched him!" almost screamed the fur-lined gentleman. "I—I was boxing his ears for impertinence——"

"Do you mean you was assaulting him?" demanded the guard.

"I—I merely flicked him—a mere touch. Then—then I was knocked over; and—and the boy—oh, dear! It was a pure accident—I did not even see the boy fall. I never knew——"

"This here is a matter for the police," said the guard. "You stay where you are, the lot of you, till I've called a constable."

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "You'd better show up, Teddy—we shall lose the connection, at this rate."

"Ha ha, ha!"

Teddy Lovell, a little dusty but very merry and bright, crawled out from under the seat.

The guard stared at him. The irate gentleman blinked at him, with eyes that seemed to bulge from his head.

"The—the—boy did—did not—not fall out, after all?" stammered the passenger blankly.

"Not quite, sir," said Teddy cheerily. "Look 'ere," bawled the guard, "what's this game? Pulling this old covey's leg, hey?"

"He was so awfully excited," explained Teddy. "I thought I was safer under the seat till we got to a station, guard. He looked dangerous."

"Jolly dangerous!" agreed Lovell. "My belief is that he's been drinking." The guard burst into a chuckle.

"You young rips!" he said, and passed on.

"Come on!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "We change here, you know, and we've got a train to catch. Good-bye, sir—merry Christmas!"

"Good gad! Bless my soul!"

The angry gentleman undoubtedly was relieved to see Teddy Lovell still in the land of the living, and to realise that his bad temper had not led him to the length of inadvertent manslaughter. He was relieved; but his temper was not improved by the discovery that the playful schoolboys had been pulling his irate leg.

"You young rascals!" he said. "Im-

pudent young scoundrels! By Jove, if you were boys of mine——"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather pleased that they were not boys of his. Undoubtedly they would have been booked for a rough time, had they been so unfortunate.

The Rookwooders crowded out of the carriage. The irate gentleman followed them out.

"Hallo, the old bird's looking for more trouble!" said Lovell. "Let's bump him on the platform!"

"Fathead! Come on!" said Jimmy Silver. "Good-bye, sir, and a merry Christmas to you!"

And the Rookwooders marched away cheerily to catch their train, leaving the angry passenger glaring after them, with a glare that seemed almost potent enough to crack his glasses.

CHAPTER 28.

Asking For It.

"CHUCK IT!" said Teddy Lovell in a tired voice.

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned.

In the local train, now drawing near to Lovell's home, Arthur Edward felt it incumbent upon him to talk to Teddy Lovell for his own good. Undoubtedly, Arthur Edward had been greatly entertained by the fag's extraordinary jape, and the fright it had given the furlined gentleman. But on reflection Lovell realised that such tricks were dangerous, especially opening a carriage door while a train was in motion; and for a quarter of an hour Lovell told his brother so. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome fully concurred, but they felt a little tired; Teddy was tired and did not even care. But his major seemed, like the little brook, likely to go on for ever.

Hence his suggestion that his dutiful elder brother should "chuck" it.

Lovell frowned wrathfully. Jimmy Silver interposed with tact. Between Arthur Edward's sense of brotherly duty, and Teddy Lovell's Third-Form cheek, a shindy always seemed to be imminent.

"Must be getting pretty near now," said Jimmy Silver. "What's the station for your place, did you say, Lovell?"

"Proode," said Lovell.

Jimmy put his head out of the window as the train slowed.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated.

From a carriage farther down the little local train another head was projected—a head crowned by a silk hat, surrounded by a fur collar, and adorned by a pair of gold-rimmed glasses on a beaky nose.

"That merchant!" exclaimed Jimmy. "He's on the train!"

"Not the old hunk?" asked Raby.

"Yes."

"My hat!" said Lovell. "So he's going to our part of the world, is he? If we see him during the Christmas holidays, we'll jolly well snowball him."

The train stopped in a little wayside station.

Jimmy Silver & Co. alighted, at the same time as the fur-lined gentleman, who stared at the juniors with a grim stare, turned his back on them, and marched away with a frowning brow.

There was snow on the Mendip Hills, glimmering through the dusk of the December afternoon. The juniors came out of the little station in a cheery crowd. Outside a rather ancient-looking motor-bus was waiting.

"This takes us a couple of miles," said Lovell. "We drop off right at the gates of my place. But look here, what about shoving the bags on the bus and walking? I'd like to stretch my legs a little after the train."

"Good idea!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Perhaps you'd better get on the bus, Teddy."

"Perhaps I hadn't, Arthur."

"Look here—"

"Look here—"

"Better decide first and argue afterwards," suggested Raby with a grin. "The bus seems to be going."

"Shove on the bags, then!" grunted

Lovell, giving up his argument with his cheerful minor, Teddy Lovell evidently had a full share of his elder brother's obstinacy.

The baggage having been disposed of, Jimmy Silver & Co. started walking on a hilly road. The omnibus rolled on and passed them, and disappeared ahead, while the juniors sauntered on at a leisurely rate. They had forgotten the fur-collared gentleman, but they were suddenly reminded of him by the sight of a silk hat and a fur collar ahead of them on the road.

"My only summer hat!" exclaimed Newcome. "If it isn't that old merchant again! He's haunting me like a giddy Christmas ghost!"

"There's some snow in the hedges," said Teddy Lovell with a grin. "Let's give him a few in passing."

Arthur Edward Lovell was about to make the same suggestion. But when the suggestion came from his minor, Arthur Edward felt bound to frown upon it.

"You behave yourself, you young sweep!" he said severely. "Haven't you kids got any manners at all in the Third Form?"

"Oh, can it, old bean!" said Teddy derisively.

"The old johnny's looking round," said Jimmy Silver with a smile. "He's seen us. He doesn't look pleased, somehow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fur-lined gentleman, glancing round, started at the sight of the Rookwood party. He frowned deeply and halted in the road, waiting for them to come up.

"You young rascals!" he exclaimed as they drew near. "How dare you fool me?"

"Follow you!" repeated Jimmy Silver. "My dear sir, have you bought up the King's highway as well as the railway trains?"

"You impertinent young scamp—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Lovell. "We happen to be following this road to get home. See?"

"Nonsense! I do not believe a word of it! You are following me from sheer impertinence!" snorted the angry gentleman.

"Bow-wow!"

Really, it was an odd coincidence that the Rookwooders, after making a long journey by train with the old gentleman, should be following the same country road on foot on the slopes of the Mendip hills. But there it was—it could not be helped. They were no more pleased to see the furlined gentleman that he was to see them; but there was only one road to Lovell Lodge, and they had to follow it.

"Go back at once!"

"Eh?"

"I order you to go back instantly, and cease this impertinent persecution!" snorted the unreasonable old gentleman.

"Rats!" retorted Lovell.

The angry gentleman grasped his umbrella and made a stride at Lovell. Arthur Edward jumped back.

"Look here, you old duffer——" he shouted.

Swipe!

Lovell just dodged the swipe of the umbrella.

Whiz!

A snowball hurriedly collected by Teddy from under the hedge, smote the old gentleman's silk hat. It flew from his head.

"Give him another!" shouted Lovell.

"Good gad! You young rascals! Upon my word!" gasped the angry gentleman, and he rushed at the juniors, brandishing his umbrella.

But he might as well have rushed at a party of mosquitoes. The juniors were much too active for him. They scattered at once, with laughing faces, and gathered up snow with active hands. Snowballs fairly rained on the angry gentleman as he charged first after one junior and then after another, without reaching any of them.

He stopped at last, breathless, feebly waving the umbrella.

"Give him a few more!" gasped Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" chuckled Jimmy Silver.

"Let him rip!"

Arthur Edward Lovell planted a final snowball on the angry gentleman's chin, and then the juniors went on their way at a trot.

Looking back at a little distance, they discerned the angry gentleman groping for his hat under a hedge, and then dabbing snow from his coat with a handkerchief, his face crimson with wrath.

"Well, we've seen the last of him," said Lovell. "Trot's the word."

And the juniors trotted, and a quarter of an hour later they reached the gates of Lovell Lodge, and were glad enough to see the lights of the house shining hospitably through the December dusk.

CHAPTER 25.

Uncle Peter!

"YOU fellows all right?"

"Right as rain."

"Then we'll go down to tea," said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were very bright and cheery. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome had a large room with three beds in it, with a big window that looked over the Mendip Hills, and a roaring log fire in the grate. It was very cheerful and comfortable, and they had had a warm welcome from Lovell's father and mother, and they were ready for tea—an ample West Country high-tea for which their long journey had given them good appetites.

Lovell looked in at their door with a cheery face. The juniors had removed the signs of travel, and had made themselves look very nice, and a credit to the Classical Fourth Form of Rookwood.

"By the way," went on Lovell, "I told you my Uncle Peter was coming for Christmas——"

"You did, old man," said Jimmy. "Rely on us! We're going to be nice to him."

Lovell grinned rather ruefully.

"Well, I haven't seen him for donkeys' years," he said. "But I remember that he was frightfully sharp-tempered. He's a wealthy old Johnny, you know, and people suck up to him for his money. I'm afraid you men will find him a bit of a trial when he comes; but we'll try to give him a wide berth. If he forgets his manners take it as patiently as you can."

"We will," said the Co. solemnly. "We'll back you up, old man."

"Butter shan't melt in our mouths when we meet Uncle Peter," said Jimmy Silver. "We'll make him love us before we've done with him."

Lovell chuckled.

"Well, let's go down," he said. "Hallo! I dare say that's my uncle at the door now. Somebody's banging as if he wanted to knock the door through. That's his style."

"What a nice man!" murmured Raby.

The juniors went down the old staircase. The hall below, hung with holly and mistletoe, was brightly lighted. There was a sound of voices, and the juniors paused on the stairs. One of the voices from the hall seemed familiar to their ears.

"No. I have not had a pleasant journey!" said Uncle Peter, in reply to a question from Mrs. Lovell. "I have had anything but a pleasant journey. I have had a very unpleasant journey indeed!"

The juniors started, and looked at one another. They stopped at the bend of the staircase. An extraordinary expression came over the face of Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I was pestered in the train by a mob of unruly, disagreeable, disrespectful schoolboys," went on the voice. "Yes, help me off with my coat. Thank you! I was pestered—in fact, persecuted!—by a mob of young ruffians. What the

schools are coming to in these days, can hardly imagine. They do not flog the boys sufficiently, Mabel, that is the root of the trouble. In my day we were soundly flogged."

Mrs. Lovell's voice was heard murmuring something gently in response. There was a snort from her formidable brother.

"We live in namby-pamby times, Mabel, that is the trouble. Boys are not thrashed sufficiently. Five young rascals—I might say scoundrels—yes, scoundrels! I was pestered, worried, persecuted! I have had a most unpleasant and uncomfortable journey."

"My dear Peter—"

"And that was not all," said Uncle Peter. "These boys—these young ruffians—happened to get out at the same station, and they followed me along the road, and actually assaulted me with snowballs! Look at my hat!"

"Shocking!" said Mrs. Lovell.

"Shocking? Outrageous, you mean! I suppose you mean outrageous Mabel."

In silent horror, Jimmy Silver & Co. gazed at one another on the staircase. Well they knew the rasping voice of the fur-lined gentleman. The fur-lined gentleman and Lovell's Uncle Peter were one and the same!

Mr. Lovell came along the hall to greet his visitor. The horrified juniors peering over the banisters, saw him shake hands with the grumpy gentleman. Mr. Lovell had a ruddy, cheerful face and a pleasant eye, and he bore his brother-in-law, as Arthur Edward had said, nobly.

"Welcome, my dear Peter!" he said. "It's really good of you to give us a few days at Christmas—really good! My sons are home from school to-day, and they will be very glad to see their uncle—very glad, indeed, after so many years!"

Grunt, from Uncle Peter.

"Let me take you to your room, my dear fellow," said Mr. Lovell. And his kind and hearty manner had a very

pleasant effect, even on the fur-lined gentleman.

Uncle Peter grunted again, but it was a more amiable grunt.

"So you haven't had a very pleasant journey down to Somerset?" said Mr. Lovell, as he piloted his formidable guest to the staircase.

"Far from it—far from it! A mob of disrespectful young scoundrels insisted upon crowding into my carriage, though I ordered them out and actually called the guard. The guard was impertinent. I shall report him to the company. They followed me, sir—followed me on this very road, and attacked me with snowballs, sir!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lovell.

"Such an outrage, sir——"

At the bend of the staircase Jimmy Silver & Co. stood in a horrified group. As Mr. Lovell mounted with his guest they had wild ideas of fleeing upstairs again. What was going to happen when the fur-lined gentleman recognised them they could not even guess. If only they had known in time that the terrible old gentleman was Lovell's Uncle Peter! But, of course, they had not known that, or ever dreamed of it.

"Why, here are the boys!" said Mr. Lovell unsuspectingly. "Arthur, this is your Uncle Peter, whom you have not seen for so long. My son's school friends—introduce your friends to your uncle, Arthur!"

But Lovell was speechless.

Two gleaming, glinting eyes were turned upon him over a pair of gold-rimmed glasses.

The fur-lined gentleman recognised Jimmy Silver & Co.

"You!" he stuttered.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"You!" roared Uncle Peter.

Mr. Lovell looked perplexed, and rather alarmed.

"What——" he began.

"These young rascals——"

"What?"

"These are the young scoundrels I

told you of. This one"—Uncle Peter pointed an accusing finger at Lovell. "This one was the worst."

"Good gracious! But——"

Lovell and his comrades scuttled down the stairs. The angry grunt of Uncle Peter, the astonished voice of Mr. Lovell, followed them. But they did not heed.

In the hall below, they looked at one another blankly, in silence.

"Well," said Lovell at last. "This is a go!"

And his chums agreed that it was.

CHAPTER 24.

The Wet Blanket!

"WHO'D have thought it?"

Thus Arthur Edward Lovell, in dismal tones.

"Nobody!" said Jimmy Silver, Jimmy and Baby and Newcome looked, as they felt, sympathetic.

It was, as the Rookwood fellows expressed it, hard cheese.

Lovell's worst enemy, if he had had one, would have admitted that it was exceedingly hard cheese.

Nobody would have thought it. Nobody could have foreseen it. Certainly Arthur Edward Lovell hadn't. But nobody could have.

It was just one of those hapless things that happen, and cannot be helped.

It was all the more unfortunate that it should happen at Christmas-time, when Lovell was home for the holidays, and had brought his three chums home with him.

That, so to speak, put the lid on.

"Was I to blame?" demanded Arthur Edward, appealing to his chums.

Three heads were shaken at once.

For once, Lovell was not to blame.

Generally, when Arthur Edward found himself in a scrape, the fellow at the bottom of all the trouble was Arthur Edward himself.

On this occasion, however, it could not be denied that Lovell of the Fourth was more sinned against than sinning.

"Who'd have thought it?" repeated Lovell. "We got into the giddy train to come home for the Christmas holidays—the most disagreeable old blighter in the wide world gets in along with us—he rags us and hags us, and we give him tit for tat—and then—it turns out that he's my uncle Peter, whom I hadn't seen for years—coming here for Christmas along with us. Oh dear!"

"Horrid!" said Jimmy.

"Awful!" agreed Newcome.

"Where is he now?" asked Raby.

"Goodness knows—gone out, I hope," said Lovell. "It isn't like home with him in it. He's worried you fellows a lot through the hole."

"Oh, no," said Jimmy, "a bit snappy, that's all."

"A trifle tart," murmured Raby. "But there must be some good in him somewhere, Lovell. Your mater's fond of him."

"Well, he's her brother," said Lovell. "He may have been a good brother; but I can't say much for him as an uncle. I've got a lot of uncles, you know, and I've been pretty well broken in to stand 'em; but Uncle Peter really is the giddy limit. I thought he was going to clear right out of the house, when he found that the chap who had checked him in the train was his blessed nephew. Wish he had!"

"Yes, rather."

"But he didn't," mumbled Lovell. "He stuck on. He never sees me without glowering at me. It worries the mater. The pater doesn't like it, either. I've tried to be jolly civil. You fellows have been jolly decent. But he's a clumping wet blanket, isn't he?"

"Oh, let him rip!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "We're having a good time here, Lovell; and every chap has one or two rusty and crusty relations who make life a worry. If we're jolly nice to him he may come round before the hols are over; and he may pat you on the head and give you his blessing when you start for Rookwood again."

Lovell grinned.

"Not jolly likely!" he said.

"Keep smiling, old chap!"

As a matter of fact, Jimmy Silver & Co. were in a cheery mood, in spite of Uncle Peter in the role of wet blanket at the Christmas gathering at Lovell Lodge.

The December darkness was falling, and the four juniors were gathered round the fire in the dining-room, chatting in the firelight, taking their ease in comfortable armchairs after a tramp on the snowy slopes of the Mendip Hills.

Only Lovell was rather worried.

He could have stood his Uncle Peter on his own, as it were, fearsome as that old gentleman was.

But he had a feeling that Uncle Peter had a harassing effect on his guests, which naturally worried him a little.

In truth, Uncle Peter was not a polished gentleman; he had never studied graceful manners on Chesterfieldian lines.

He did not like boys, and made no secret of the fact.

Disliking boys, it would have been rather judicious of him to spend his Christmas in some home where boys did not exist. Doubtless he had been unaware that Arthur Edward was bringing home friends from Rookwood School for the vacation. He could not have been pleased to find four Fourth Form fellows in the house, as well as Teddy Lovell of the Third. And the unfortunate meeting in the train, and the trouble that had happened there had deeply incensed him.

He was angry, and did not conceal the fact. He regarded Arthur Edward as a cheeky young rascal, and made that opinion well known. Mrs. Lovell, with the remembrance of many past kindnesses from the testy old gentleman, bore with him patiently. Mr. Lovell bore with him chiefly for his wife's sake. Arthur Edward bore with him because he could not help himself. But really he was hard to bear with.

"Keep smiling, old fellow!" repeated Jimmy Silver, as he glanced at Lovell's frowning face in the ruddy glow of

the firelight, "Don't think that Mr. Wilmington is worrying us. He isn't."

"Not a bit!" said Raby loyally.

"He's entertaining, in his way," said Newcome. "The way he roars out, for instance, something like a lion or a tiger, when he's annoyed——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, he had twenty years in India," said Lovell. "I dare say it touched his liver. It does, you know. And he wants to treat everybody as if everybody was a dashed coolie. I've heard him say that he used to kick his punkah wallas. I dare say a punkah walla isn't much class; but it's rotten bad form to kick a chap who can't kick back."

"That's so!" agreed Jimmy.

"Huh!"

The Rookwood juniors jumped.

They knew that expressive grunt.

Arthur Edward Lovell stared round the dusky room in horror. His comrades followed his glance.

They had come into the dining-room by the french windows from the garden half an hour since, and they had seen no one in the room, and supposed that it was quite untenanted.

That irritated grunt told that they were mistaken.

It proceeded from an ottoman in a recess of the long room; a spot, as Lovell now remembered, where Uncle Peter sometimes took a little rest.

Evidently, Uncle Peter had been taking a nap on that ottoman when the juniors came in and sat down round the fire, without perceiving him in the falling dusk.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Newcome.

The juniors stared across the room.

Through the dusk, they were aware of a form rising from a recumbent attitude on the ottoman, to a sitting posture, and of two glinting eyes that stared at them over gold-rimmed glasses.

It was Uncle Peter.

Mr. Wilmington had doubtless been asleep when the juniors entered. The sound of voices had awakened him at

last. In horrified silence, Jimmy Silver & Co. wondered how much he had heard of their conversation.

Arthur Edward Lovell almost growled.

He was already about as deep in disgrace with his terrible uncle as he could be. Both his father and his mother had warned him, not once, but many times, to be exceedingly tactful and respectful and conciliatory in dealing with the fussy gentleman.

And now——

"Oh dear!" mumbled Lovell.

"Huh!"

Mr. Wilmington snorted again, and rose from the ottoman. He came across to the four dismayed juniors, and stood in the firelight, his ruddy face red with anger.

"So that is how my nephew speaks of me to his friends, is it?" demanded Uncle Peter.

"Sorry!" gasped Lovell.

"Huh!"

"I—I didn't know you were listening," gasped Lovell.

It was rather an unfortunate way of putting it.

"What?" roared Uncle Peter.

"I—I mean——"

"I shall not complain to your father of your impertinence, Arthur."

"Oh!"

"I shall not trouble your mother with it."

"I—I——"

"I shall deal with you as an uncle has a right to deal with a disrespectful and impertinent nephew."

Smack!

"Yaroooooh!" roared Lovell.

He jumped away.

Uncle Peter had boxed his ears!

"You—you—you——" gasped Lovell.

"How dare you?"

"What?"

"If you weren't my uncle I'd jolly well hack your shins!" roared Lovell furiously.

"Good gad! Is that how boys speak to their elders in these days?" snorted Uncle Peter. "Good gad! Boys are

not flogged enough! That is the reason. In my young days I was flogged—flogged soundly. It has made me what I am."

"That doesn't say much for it," said Lovell.

"What—what?"

Uncle Peter made a stride towards Lovell. The Rookwood junior dodged round the dining-table.

"Let's get out of this, you chaps!" he exclaimed.

And the Pistical Four got out. Uncle Peter was left in solitary possession of the dining-room, and his angry grunt followed the chums of the Rookwood Fourth as they went.

CHAPTER 31.

Tremendous!

"I'VE got it!"

It was the following day, and Arthur Edward Lovell and his Christmas guests were tramping home for lunch, with their skates dangling over their arms. They had been down to the frozen stream at Froode for skating and had enjoyed their morning, three of them, at least, having forgotten the existence of Mr. Peter Wilmington. But every now and then a thoughtful shadow might have been discerned on the brow of Arthur Edward Lovell.

Lovell, evidently, had been thinking that frosty morning, as well as skating.

"Well, what have you got, old chap?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Not a cold, I hope?"

"No ass! About Uncle Peter——"

"Oh, Uncle Peter!" said Jimmy. "Why think of him till we get back to the Lodge?"

"Well, you see, I'm bound to," said Lovell. "The mater's been at me again; she's no end bothered about Uncle Peter's disliking me so much. It's a bit difficult for us to get on to it, but old Peter was a boy once——"

"I suppose he was," admitted Jimmy. "He doesn't look it; but I suppose he must have been, once upon a time."

"When he was a boy he was a good chap, according to the mater," said Lovell. "She gave me a long jaw about it last night. He went out to India as a young man for his people's sake. You see, they were rather short of money, and there were a lot of sisters and one brother, and he stayed single all his life to look after them. That's pretty decent, you know, especially as it made him such a crusty old card."

"I knew he'd got some good in him or your mater wouldn't think so much of him," said Jimmy Silver. "Let's all be as nice to him as we can."

"He put in twenty years in India and came home rich," went on Lovell. "According to what the mater tells me, he was a sort of earthly providence all the time. Well, that's jolly decent. The mater's very fond of him, or, of course, she wouldn't be bothered with such a hunk at Christmas time; and the pater has a lot of respect for him, though I don't see how he can possibly like him. Well, the mater would be no end bucked if Uncle Peter came round and forgave me and took a liking to me. I'm going to please the mater, if I can."

"That's right!"

"The question is—how?" said Lovell.

"That question wants a bit of answering," remarked Raby. "Uncle Peter may have a good heart, but he's got a dashed bad temper; and as for his manners——"

Raby left his remark unfinished.

"Well, I've got it," said Lovell. "I've thought of a way. No good being civil to him; he only snaps at a fellow. No good asking after his health; he only snorts. But, according to what the mater says, he has—or had—a good heart. I'm thinking of appealing to his gratitude."

"His which?" ejaculated Newcome.

"Gratitude," said Lovell.

"My only hat! How?" asked Jimmy in wonder.

Lovell smiled, the smile of superior wisdom.

"I've thought it out," he said. "Uncle Peter was attacked in India once by footpads—he calls them dacoits. He carries a lot of money about him—I've seen a wad of banknotes in his purse when he's opened it. He's never got over those dacoits, and he's always ready to be pounced on by footpads—nerves, you know. You fellows may have noticed that when he goes for a walk he always takes a big knobby stick with him. It's no good telling him that there are no dacoits in Somersetshire—he knows better."

The Rookwooders grinned.

"Well," went on Lovell, "Mr. Wilmington would never be surprised at being attacked by footpads. And since the war, of course, there have been a lot of footpads about, and so there would be nothing really surprising in a gang of them setting on Uncle Peter one night."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"That's the idea," said Lovell. "Three ruffians set on old Peter and get him down and begin robbing him. I rush in—"

"You rush in?" repeated Jimmy Silver dazedly.

"I rush in," assented Lovell. "Knocking the scoundrels right and left. I rescue him."

"Oh, my only summer bonnet!"

"Raising him from the ground, I help him back to the house," continued Lovell, evidently greatly taken with his wonderful idea. "He thanks me in broken tones—realises that his nephew is the goods, after all, as it were, and tells the pater and the mater bew mistaken he has been in me. In fact, the giddy clouds roll by, and everything in the garden will be lovely. That is, if old Peter has any gratitude at all."

Jimmy Silver & Co. stopped and stared at Lovell.

In the end study at Rookwood they had often heard weird schemes propounded by their chum—often and often. Generally they had sat on those

schemes. But of all the weird schemes that Lovell had ever propounded, this struck his comrades as the weirdest.

"Not wandering in your mind, are you, old chap?" asked George Raby, with an air of solicitude.

"Look here, Raby—"

"The question is, has the poor chap any mind to wander in?" murmured Newcome.

"Look here, Newcome—"

"Patience!" said Jimmy Silver. "If this is a sudden fit of insanity it's no good arguing with Lovell. We shall have to help him home and send for a doctor."

"Look here, Jimmy Silver—" roared Lovell.

"If it's a joke—" went on the captain of the Rookwood Fourth.

"It isn't a joke, you frabjous ass!" roared Lovell. "I've got it. It's a tremendous wheeze."

"But if you're not potty, and it isn't a joke, what the thump do you mean?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "Do you think that a gang of footpads are going to pile on old Peter just when you want them to, and let you knock them right and left just as you like? More likely to knock you on your silly head."

"Shall I put it into words of one syllable?" asked Lovell with deep sarcasm. "You might possibly understand it then. You fellows are going to be the footpads."

"Eh?"

"Us?"

"Oh, scissors!"

"That's the stunt!" said Lovell. "Something like a stunt—what?"

"Oh, dear!" said Jimmy Silver. "Yes, something like a stunt—but more like the wanderings of a giddy lunatic!"

"You silly ass! It's a regular catch! I suppose you fellows can blacken your faces?"

"Blacken our faces?"

"Yes. Footpads do that so that they won't be recognised. You can hide in a hedge and wait for old Peter to trot by and rush on him."

"Rush on your Uncle Peter!"

"Yes, and mop him over."

"Mum-mum-mop him over!" spluttered Raby.

"That's it! If he gets a bump or two it won't matter. It will make it all the more realistic."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And what about his big stick?" demanded Newcome. "You've just been talking about the big stick he carries around for footpads."

"You may get a lick or two," said Lovell with a nod. "But if you handle him short and sharp, he won't have time to get in more than one whack or so."

"You frabjous fathead!" gasped Jimmy Silyer. "Do you think we want even one whack from Uncle Peter's big stick?"

"I hope you're not a funk, Jimmy."

"You—you—you—"

"Look, here! You jolly well rush him, Lovell, and take the whacks from his big stick and we'll rescue him!" said Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly owl, what would be the good of that?" demanded Lovell. "I've got to get into his good graces, not you. I'm his giddy nephew. You won't see him again after this vac. I may have him landed on me every vacation now that he's settled down in England."

"Oh, my hat! What a prospect!" said Jimmy Silyer.

"Well, it's likely enough," said Lovell. "He spent his leave a good deal at our place years ago when he came over from India, when I was a kid. I remember him smacking my head when I was quite a nipper. The mater says he's a very affectionate man, though his manner is against him."

"It is—it are!" said Jimmy. "There's no shadow of doubt on that point. His jolly old manner is awfully against him. I should suspect him of being about as affectionate as a wild tiger fresh from the jungle."

"Well, the mater knows. It quite

touched me when she spun the yarn last night," said Lovell. "She wants us to be fond of one another. Well, if I can make the old codger attached to me, it's my duty. Chaps ought to please his mother if he can, I suppose."

"Certainly," said Jimmy. "I'm with you all the way there! But there are ways of doing these things."

"I've thought of a way. It stands to reason that old Peter must have some gratitude in him, if he's affectionate and so on, as the mater says. Saving him from robbery with violence is simply bound to touch his heart. I'm relying on you chaps to back me up."

"Oh dear!"

"It's as easy as falling off a form," said Lovell. "You know old Peter goes for long walks alone. He's fond of his own company—goodness knows why! Nobody else is. Well, you ambush him on one of his long walks—easy as anything. I do the rest."

"Suppose something should go wrong, and he should tumble to it?" demanded Raby.

"That's all right if you follow my directions carefully," explained Lovell. "So long as you don't try to manage things for yourselves, nothing will go wrong."

"Oh, my hat!"

"It's a tremendous stunt—tremendous!" said Lovell impressively.

Arthur Edward Lovell was evidently not to be reasoned with. So his comrades gave up the hopeless attempt to reason with him, and they went in to lunch.

CHAPTER 32.

Cut and Dried!

LUNCH at Lovell Lodge that day was not the brightest of functions.

Uncle Peter had not forgotten the episode of the previous day.

He was cross.

The dictatorial old gentleman, too much accustomed to having his own way and regarding himself as monarch of all he surveyed, did not seem to

consider it necessary to conceal the fact that he was cross while a guest in his brother-in-law's house.

Really, he seemed to think that he was still at his bungalow on the Hugli, where khidmutgars and punkah wallas trembled at his frown. It was painful to reflect on the life his punkah wallas must have led.

Mr. Lovell was rather subdued, as was natural in the circumstances. He was a ruddy, cheery man, but his brother-in-law had a rather depressing effect on him. Mrs. Lovell was rather troubled. She was deeply attached to her brother, whose good qualities she knew as no one else did. Certainly they did not show on the surface. She would have liked to see him display kind affection for her sons Arthur Edward and Teddy. She would have liked to see Arthur Edward and Teddy very fond of their Uncle Peter. It did not seem likely to come to pass.

The Rookwood juniors were very quiet and sedate at lunch. Lovell was very uncomfortable.

It was really rotten that his friends from school should have to stand the cross temper of a relation of his. Lovell felt it keenly.

Teddy Lovell had gone away to stay with some Third Form friends over the remainder of the vacation. On the day he had departed Uncle Peter had been almost amiable. No doubt he would have become quite amiable had Arthur Edward departed also.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were very circumspect. They felt for Lovell, and understood his discomfort.

All the juniors were glad when lunch was over and they were able to get away from the grim countenance of Mr. Wilmington.

Lovell seemed in rather low spirits.

The tremendous stunt he had elaborated should, in his opinion, have set matters right—carried out loyally by his comrades. But the three juniors had made it clear that they were not going to carry out that tremendous

stunt. It was rather too tremendous for their liking.

Lovell regarded it as the last word in diplomatic strategy. His comrades regarded it as the maddest wheeze that had ever been thought of outside the walls of Colney Hatch.

This was a difference of opinion that was not easily reconciled.

According to Lovell, everything was certain to go well if his comrades carried out his instructions to the very letter. According to his comrades, nothing was likely to go really well if Arthur Edward Lovell had a hand in the planning of it. This was another serious difference of opinion.

Had Lovell insisted in his usual high-handed way—which bore a distant resemblance to the manner of his Uncle Peter—his chums would probably have remained firm.

But Lovell, though he somewhat resembled his Uncle Peter, had had his manners formed at Rookwood School; not among khidmutgars and punkah wallas on the banks of the Hugli. He was aware of what was due to guests under his roof, and he respected the strong disinclination of his chums to enter into his wonderful scheme. Lovell at home was a little different from Lovell in the end study at Rookwood School.

But a total surrender on the part of Arthur Edward naturally had its effect on his chums. In the fable of *Æsop*, when the north wind competed with the sun to deprive the traveller of his cloak, the fierce gusts of the wind made the traveller draw his cloak tighter about him, while the smiling radiance of the sun induced him to throw it aside. So it was with Lovell and the Co. Surrender effected what lofty insistence could not have done. Jimmy Silver & Co. began to wonder whether, after all, there might not be something in Lovell's wheeze, and whether they might not, after all, help him out with it.

"You see, it's the pettiest idea a silly

ass ever thought of—even Lovell!" Raby remarked—out of hearing of Arthur Edward, of course. "But old Lovell seems keen on it."

"After all, if it leads to more trouble with his jolly old uncle, he has a right to have as much trouble with his uncle as he wants!" Newcome suggested.

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"It beats even Lovell's record as a fatheaded stunt," he said. "But, of course, there's a possibility that it might work."

"Lovell may be right," said Raby. "Miracles have happened before. Why not again?"

"If the old chap's keen on it, let's pile in and do as he wants," said Newcome. "After all, there would be a certain amount of satisfaction in bumping over that ferocious old Anglo-Indian."

"Something in that!" agreed Jimmy.

"We'll bring him down wallop in the snow," said Newcome, evidently looking forward to that. "A terrific wallop! That will make up for having to stand his scowling and growling. If Lovell wants us to handle his jolly old uncle, why not?"

"Then Lovell can butt in with his rescue stunt," said Raby. "If it works, all right! If it doesn't—well, it's Lovell's blizny."

"That's so!"

Jimmy looked inquiringly at his chums.

"Is it a go?" he asked.

And Raby and Newcome answered together:

"It's a go!"

The three chums sought Arthur Edward. That youth met them with a curious mixture between a reproachful frown and a hospitable smile. As a fellow who was, as he considered, left in the lurch by his pals, he was reproachful; as a host, he was bound to be hospitable and smiling. It was a mixture of feelings that produced quite a curious expression on Arthur Edward's speaking countenance.

But his mind was speedily set at rest.

"We're playing up, old man," said Jimmy Silver. "Mind, we think it's a fatheaded wheeze. But we'll play up, if you like."

"It's a potty stunt," said Newcome. "But rely on us."

"It's simply idiotic," said Raby. "But we'll all be silly idiots, if you really want us to be, Lovell. Can't say any fairer than that."

Lovell grinned cheerily.

"The wheeze is all right," he said. "It will work like a charm if you fellows play up."

"Oh!"

"I'll make all the arrangements. You fellows will only have to carry them out. Don't try to think for yourselves, you know."

"Oh!"

"Then it will be all right," said Lovell.

"H'm!"

"Old Peter is going down to the village after tea," went on Lovell. "We've got a chance of working the oracle to-day—a splendid chance! He's calling on the vicar about a blanket fund. He's standing blankets for the poor—he finds England jolly cold after India, and I suppose it makes him sympathetic. Well, there's only one way he can walk back from the vicarage, and it will be dark, of course. Three fellows with blackened faces rush out on him, and collar him—money or your life, and all that—"

"Ye-es!"

"As it happens, I happen to have walked out to meet him on the way home," said Lovell. "See? I've got it all cut and dried. I catch sight of him at the—the psychological moment—"

"The psychological moment!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Any old moment," said Lovell cheerily. "I mean, just when he's downed by the giddy footpads. I rush in and rescue him, knocking you right and left—"

"Not too much of your giddy knocking right and left," said Raby. "We're not blinking ditties!"

"You mustn't mind a thump or two, to give the thing a touch of realism," said Lovell.

"Then we'll jolly well give you a thump or two back!" said Raby warmly. "Real footpads would."

"Look here, Raby, if you are going to play the game—"

"Order!" said Jimmy Silver. "It's all right, Lovell. We're on. We'll jolly well get his stick off him at the first rush—that's rather important—"

"Jolly important!" said Newcome, with emphasis.

"Then we'll roll him over and give him hands-up and money-or-your-life!" said Jimmy. "You rush in, and we clear. And—and—we'll hope for the best. It may turn out all right."

"It may!" murmured Raby.

"It will. If you fellows don't make a muck of it," said Lovell confidently. "You've simply got to have a little sense and do exactly as I tell you!"

"Oh!"

"Then it's all out and dried," said Lovell with great satisfaction.

And his comrades agreed that it was.

Arthur Edward's face was very bright; he had no doubts. Jimmy Silver & Co. had a good many doubts; but they hoped for the best. At all events, it was settled now, and all out and dried.

CHAPTER 33.

Not According to Plan!

"WHAT a game!" murmured Raby.

"Oh, dear!"

"Keep smiling!" groaned Jimmy Silver.

Really, it was not easy to keep smiling in the circumstances. In the deep winter dusk the three Rookwood juniors lurked in a gap of frozen hedge at a little distance from the gate of Lovell Lodge.

It was cold, and a freezing wind came down from the Mendip Hills. But

the chums of Rookwood were warmly wrapped up against the wind; they did not mind that very much.

It was the task they were engaged upon that dismayed them. They had agreed to play up, under Lovell's masterly lead. Loyally they were keeping to their word. But they were dismayed, they were dubious, they were worried. The enterprise was so very extraordinary; the stunt was so exceedingly tremendous.

It might work. If it worked, it might have the results expected so confidently by Lovell. But—

There was a "but." In fact, there were an infinite number of "buts." The objections to the scheme were as innumerable as the stones on the Mendip Hills.

But the trio were "for it" now, and they meant to do their best. The rest had to be left to the fickle goddess Fortune.

So far, the task had been accomplished without hitch. The four juniors had gone out to look at a valley by moonlight. That excited no suspicion on the part of the old folks at home.

In a secluded spot behind trees and bushes three of the juniors had carefully blackened their faces, to disguise their identity, in the approved style of footpads.

Certainly, with their blackened faces, they were not recognisable. Their own parents would not have known them. Uncle Peter was absolutely certain not to recognise them. Moreover, Lovell had sorted out some old clothes in the way of overcoats and mufflers and boots, which altered their usual appearance almost as much as their blackened faces.

They were not very burly for footpads: although sturdy fellows for their age, they were, of course, youthful for that line of business. Probably the highways and byways had never been haunted by such diminutive footpads before. It was to be hoped that Uncle

Peter would not notice it in the darkness and the surprise and the general excitement.

Lovell gave the finishing touch to the decoration of his chums and then left them and went back towards the Lodge.

He was to remain in cover till the attack took place. Then he was to rush in to the rescue. Like Caesar of old, he was to come, to see, to conquer.

With hefty blows he was to knock the footpads right and left—at least, that was his intention. Possibly the three amateur footpads had some other intentions on that detail.

Defeated single-handed by the heroic rescuer, the trio were to flee, to wash their faces, and resume their ordinary attire, and to walk back to the Lodge, where they would hear with surprise and admiration of the attack on Uncle Peter and his heroic rescue by Lovell.

By that time, of course, Uncle Peter's crusty surliness would have melted away under the influence of gratitude, like snow in the sunshine. That, at least, was Lovell's confident expectation. Possibly he was right—if all went well. What chiefly worried the juniors was the deep and uneasy doubt that all mightn't go well.

They had seen Uncle Peter start on his walk to the village, and had noted, without pleasure, the hefty stick he carried under his arm. Once upon a time Mr. Wilmington had been attacked by dacoits in the Indian jungle. Ever since he had been ready for such happenings, so the attack was not likely to surprise him or to strike him as a "spook" affair. If all went well, he would not suspect a spook. But would all go well? The more Jimmy Silver & Co. thought about Uncle Peter's big stick the less they liked the idea of it. They agreed that the big stick was to be left away from Uncle Peter at the first rush. That was all very well; but suppose Uncle Peter did not play up, as it were? Suppose the big stick was not left away as per programme—and suppose

it landed with terrific smites on the craniums of the Rookwood juniors? It was a big stick, a hefty stick—the kind of stick that no fellow would willingly catch with the top of his head. Jimmy Silver & Co. disliked the idea of that big stick intensely.

The only solace in the whole affair was that, if all went well, not only would Mr. Wilmington learn to love his dastful nephew, but in the process of educating him on that point he would be bumped over in the snow and rolled in it. Undoubtedly there was solace in that anticipation. Still, the amateur footpads wished that he had left the big stick at home—or, alternatively, as the lawyers say, that he would forget it and leave it at the vicarage.

With blackened faces and old dark mufflers drawn round their necks and up to their ears, the three juniors lurked in the shadow of the hedge and waited and watched for Uncle Peter.

Exactly when he was to return from the vicarage they did not know. They had to wait till he turned up. It was not a pleasant vigil. Lovell had spoken of that as a trifle. It was not a trifle to the anxious and worried juniors lurking under the hedge in the bitter winter wind. They felt more and more inclined every moment they waited to bring down Uncle Peter with a terrific bump when they rushed him; but they were feeling almost as keenly disposed to deal with his nephew in the same manner.

The moon was up, glimmering on the hills and fields and snowy hedges and lanes. It sailed higher and higher in a steel sky. The light was an advantage in one way—an irascible Anglo-Indian had to be seen to be collared. But it had its disadvantage—the ambushed juniors found that they were growing too visible to the eye as they lurked in the gap in the hedge.

They had to go back through the gap, into the field behind the hedge,

It was no use standing there for Uncle Peter to see them a dozen yards off when he came along.

This made the prospective attack a little more difficult. Instead of a sudden rush, carrying all before it, there had to be first a scramble through the gap out into the lane, and then a rush. But it could not be helped.

With snow over their shins to add to their general discomfort the three hapless juniors waited on the inner side of the hedge, spying through the gap to watch for Mr. Wilmington.

"How long?" mumbled Newcome at last.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Raby. "That ~~was~~ Lovell—"

"Suppose we chuck it, and go and look for Lovell and give him a jolly good hiding?" suggested Newcome. Arthur Newcome's temper seemed to be deteriorating.

Jimmy Silver grinned ruefully.

"Stick it out!" he said.

"Suppose the old duffer stays for supper with the vicar?" groaned Raby. "It would be like him. We know he's every kind of a beast."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Suppose—" went on Raby, in a deeply pessimistic mood.

"Hush!"

Raby's suppositions were interrupted by a heavy tread in the snow, coming up the lane.

Jimmy Silver peered through the gap.

"It's old Wilmington!" he whispered.

"Good!"

Uncle Peter was coming up the lane, on his homeward way to Lovell Lodge. The juniors watched him, with sinking hearts.

Certainly Mr. Wilmington had no suspicion that three Rookwooders were hidden behind the hedge ready to pounce upon him. He couldn't possibly have had any suspicion of the kind. But he was a wary old bird.

He had his stick in his hand, prodding the snow with it as he came along, and his sharp, glinting eyes were well about him, scanning the shadows of trees and hedges as he came. Obviously the old gentleman had never forgotten the lesson of caution impressed upon him by his adventure with dacoits in the Indian jungle.

It did not look as if it would be easy to take him by surprise. But the Rookwooders were for it now; it was neck or nothing.

"Ready?" whispered Jimmy Silver.

"Ye-es!" muttered Newcome.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Raby.

"Follow your leader!" said Jimmy desperately. "We've got to go through with it now!"

"Oh, all right."

Uncle Peter was almost abreast of the gap in the hedge, Jimmy Silver, taking his courage in both hands, so to speak, leaped desperately through the gap and rushed him down.

Raby and Newcome scrambled after him. Unfortunately Raby caught his foot in a trailing root of the hedge, and went headlong into the snow. Newcome, following him, sprawled headlong over him.

Jimmy Silver reached Uncle Peter alone.

Doubtless the rush of three sturdy juniors, all at once, would have bowled Uncle Peter over. Jimmy's rush didn't.

"What—stop—who—highway robbery, by gad!" spluttered Uncle Peter as the black-faced, muffled figure rushed on him.

Uncle Peter was cross-tempered, surly, and had the manners of a bear—a bear whose education has been neglected. But he had plenty of courage; he was not in the least dismayed. He swung up his big stick and made a terrific swipe at the black-faced assailant.

Had that swipe landed on Jimmy Silver's head he would have seen more stars than were seen by an astronomer.

mer, and of larger size than dreamed of in the wildest astronomical visions.

Fortunately he dodged it. But the stick swiped again, and Jimmy Silver rushed in under it and closed with Uncle Peter. That was the only way to escape the swipe, unless he took to his heels.

"Help! Robbery! Murder! Help!" roared Uncle Peter.

He roared for help; but, in point of fact, he did not need much help. Jimmy Silver was grasping him, but his arms would not go round Uncle Peter's portly figure wrapped in a huge fur-lined overcoat. He held on to Uncle Peter a good deal like an Alpine climber holding on to the Matterhorn.

"Buck up, you chaps!" gasped Jimmy.

It was unprofessional language for a footpad. But Jimmy was seriously in need of help—much more in need of it than Uncle Peter, who was roaring for it with a voice that showed that age had not withered his vocal powers.

Newcome and Raby scrambled up breathlessly.

They rushed into the fray. Jimmy Silver had seized Uncle Peter, but he had caught a Tartar in that hefty old gentleman. Uncle Peter had seized Jimmy by the back of his collar with his left hand, and held him as in a vice. With his right hand he brandished the big stick. It swept round in a circle, and Raby and Newcome jumped back in hot haste, just in time to escape its sweep.

"Come on, you scoundrels!" roared Uncle Peter. "Help! Help! Come on. Robbery with violence, by Jove! Help!"

"Ow!" gasped Jimmy, almost suffocated, as Uncle Peter's grip held his head almost buried in the huge overcoat. "Wow! Help!"

There was a rush of footsteps. Down the snowy lane came Arthur Edward Lovell at top speed, rushing to the rescue.

It was Jimmy Silver who needed rescuing. But Arthur Edward, of course, was not there for that purpose. He attacked the footpads.

"Yar-cooh!" roared Raby as Lovell's flat took him under the ear.

"Whoop!" yelled Newcome, sprawling in the snow under Lovell's left.

It was realistic; there was no doubt about that.

It was too realistic for the Rookwood footpads. Newcome and Raby scrambled up, breathing vengeance, and fairly hurled themselves at Lovell.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell as he went spinning in his turn and crashed down into the snow.

"Arthur! My nephew!" exclaimed Mr. Wilmington. "Great gad! Stick to the villains, my boy. I can help you!"

He plunged forward, dragging Jimmy Silver after him by the collar, the hapless Jimmy struggling in vain to escape from a grip that was as hard as that of an iron vice.

He flourished the stick in his right hand, and Newcome and Raby just dodged it. Lovell sat up in the snow.

He shook a furious fist at the footpads. It was time for them to run—high time. They had forgotten their role for the moment under the exciting influence of Lovell's overdone realism.

However, they remembered it now, and bolted through the gap in the hedge into the snowy field. They supposed that Jimmy Silver would follow, and Lovell supposed so. But Jimmy Silver, gladly as he would have followed, was not in a position to do so. The grip on his collar held him fast.

Mr. Wilmington brandished his stick after the fleeing footpads.

"Come back, you scoundrels!" he roared.

They vanished.

"Robbery with violence, by gad!" gasped Mr. Wilmington. "Thank you for coming to my help, nephew."

"I—I heard you!" gasped Lovell.

"I've got one of the rascals!"

"Oh!"

Lovell staggered up.

"I've got one of the scoundrels! Help me to get him to the house, and your father will telephone for the police. He shall be given into custody and charged," said Mr. Wilmington, with great satisfaction. "He will get three years for this! By gad, I'm almost glad that it happened, as I've got one of the scoundrels, and he can be made an example of!"

Lovell simply gaped. He did not share his uncle's satisfaction at having captured one of the scoundrels; and no words, in any language, could have done justice to the feelings of the unhappy scoundrel whom Uncle Peter had captured.

CHAPTER 34.

Not a Success!

JIMMY SILVER could have kicked himself. Knowing his old pal Lovell as he did he was well aware, from experience, that any whoeze propounded and planned by Arthur Edward was practically bound to end in disaster.

Yet, in spite of experience, he had let himself in for this.

It was no uncommon thing for a fellow who aided Arthur Edward Lovell in a stunt to "come a mucker." But the mucker was absolutely unnerveing.

Jimmy made a desperate effort to wrench himself loose from the grasp of Uncle Peter. He might as well have tried to escape from the coils of a boa-constrictor.

Mr. Wilmington's grasp was on his collar as if riveted there. His large hand grasped the collar of Jimmy's coat, his muffler, and his shirt collar. It was a large handful, and Mr. Wilmington's extensive hand had closed on it and held it as if his fingers were the teeth of a bulldog. There simply was no escape for Jimmy Silver. He

was a helpless captive to Uncle Peter's boy and spear.

Lovell stared at the two.

He was so utterly dismayed and confounded that he could do nothing but stare. Uncle Peter did not recognise Jimmy, so far. Indeed, Lovell did not know him; he only knew that one of his comrades had been captured. It really did not matter which. One was enough!

"Let us have a look at the scoundrel!" said Mr. Wilmington; and he held Jimmy at arm's length, as if he had been an infant, heedless of his wild wriggles, and turned his face to the moonlight. "The scoundrel is disguised—blackened his face, by gad. A young fellow for this kind of work, I fancy—hardly more than a boy. Young reprobate!"

Lovell tried to collect his senses.

"Small—shall I hold him, uncle?" he gasped.

Jimmy Silver had a gleam of hope.

But Mr. Wilmington shook his head.

"No, you could not hold him, Arthur. He is a very muscular young scoundrel; he would get away from you. I have him safe enough."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I wish we could have caught the other rascals," said Mr. Wilmington. "But the police will soon be on their track. You acted very bravely in coming to my help as you did, Arthur."

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

"Possibly the other rascals might have helped this young villain to escape, if you had not interfered when you did."

"Oh, dear!"

"Yes, my boy, I probably owe it entirely to you that I have been able to capture this rascal."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Come along with me, Arthur. Those dastardly ruffians may return. Let us lose no time in getting to the house and telephoning for the police!"

"I—I say, uncle——"

"You have raised yourself very

"much in my estimation, Arthur," said Mr. Wilmington, as he started for the lodge, fairly dragging the hapless prisoner along by the collar. "I did not think you had so much pluck, by Jove! The way you knocked those ruffians over was splendid. I mean it—splendid. There is certainly more in you than I believed. You are something more than the silly, cheeky, namby-pamby schoolboy I supposed you to be. I had the lowest possible opinion of you, Arthur—indeed, I could not wholly comprehend how my sister's son could be such a worthless young noodle!"

"Oh!"

"I think much more of you now, Arthur—very much more. I shall try to understand you better. It was plucky, by Jove. And very fortunate, too, as you are really responsible for the capture of this miscreant. We shall be better friends after this, my boy."

Lovell suppressed a groan.

It was the object of his tremendous stunt to become better friends with his formidable uncle. But he could not suppose that desirable result would accrue when Uncle Peter recognised his prisoner.

While he was speaking Uncle Peter was marching at a great rate towards Lovell Lodge.

Jimmy Silver, wriggling hopelessly, was marched on in his iron grip. When he did not walk he was ruthlessly dragged; he had to go. Lovell followed in a dazed frame of mind.

A wild idea came into his head of charging his uncle from behind, and thus giving the prisoner a chance of escaping. But he realized that that desperate expedient would make matters worse rather than better.

Something had to be done; he knew that. But what was to be done was a mystery. Long before Lovell's dazed brain could even begin to solve that mystery the lights of Lovell Lodge gleamed through the winter darkness.

Mr. Wilmington hurled open the gate, and marched his prisoner up the gravel drive to the house.

Lovell tottered after him.

He dared not think of what was going to happen now. It was only clear that his tremendous stunt was not going to be a success.

Mr. Wilmington rang a terrific peal on the bell, and then banged on the knocker with his free hand. His other hand never relaxed for an instant its grip on the prisoner he had captured.

The door opened.

The parlourmaid who opened it stared, and gave a little shriek, at the sight of the black-faced prisoner wriggling spasmodically in Mr. Wilmington's muscular grip.

Uncle Peter strode in, dragging his prisoner with him.

"Call Mr. Lovell!" he rapped out.

"Upon my word! What—what is this?" Mr. Lovell came out into the hall in amazement. "What—who—"

"Good gracious! What has happened?" exclaimed Mrs. Lovell.

"I have been attacked by footpads!" thundered Uncle Peter.

"Peter!"

"My dear fellow!"

"Arthur came to my help—most gallantly to my help," said Mr. Wilmington. "He showed great courage, and by his intervention enabled me to capture one of the gang—a desperate young rascal! Look at him!"

Mrs. Lovell gave her son a look instead of looking at the prisoner. Arthur Edward ought to have appeared extremely bucked. Praise from Uncle Peter was praise indeed. Instead of which he seemed to be sunk into the very deepest depths of dejection.

"Look at this scoundrel!" continued Mr. Wilmington, holding Jimmy Silver at arm's length in the lighted hall. "A mere boy, from his build, but a desperate young villain. There were two others, but they got away. He is disguised with a blackened face—a regular footpad dodge. The devils

use the same trick in India. But we will see what he is like before he is handed over to the police, Lovell."

Jimmy Silver gasped.

"I will telephone for the police," said Mr. Lovell, staring blankly at the wretched prisoner.

"Let us see what the young scoundrel is like first, so that we may identify him on another occasion," said Mr. Wilmington. "It appears to be soot that is rubbed on his face. A sponge and a little hot water——"

"Certainly! Certainly!"

Jimmy Silver shuddered.

He was not recognised yet; but evidently he was going to be recognised. Not that it made much difference; for he would have had to reveal his identity before the police were called in. Matters could not possibly be allowed to proceed so far as that!

He had a faint hope of getting loose from the iron grip of Uncle Peter, of bolting upstairs and escaping by a window. But Mr. Wilmington took no chances with his prisoner. He did not relax his grasp for a moment; and he was still gripping Jimmy's collar, when a maidservant brought a basin of hot water with a sponge floating in it.

Mr. Wilmington grabbed the sponge and rubbed it unceremoniously over the prisoner's face.

"Groogh!" gasped Jimmy.

Arthur Edward Lovell leaned on the wall, feeling quite giddy. What was going to happen now?

With a heavy hand, Uncle Peter rubbed the sponge over Jimmy's face, and the soot came off, blackening the water and leaving Jimmy's unhappy countenance whiter.

"Now look at him," said Mr. Wilmington, to his brother-in-law. "You may know the young scoundrel by sight, Lovell; he may be a native of these parts. Do you know him?"

"Bless my heart and soul!" said Mr. Lovell faintly.

He knew him!

Mr. Wilmington threw the sponge

into the basin and fixed a deadly glare on Jimmy's washed, flushed face. Then he jumped.

"Silver!" he exclaimed.

"Jimmy," said Mrs. Lovell blankly.

Uncle Peter stared at the Rookwood junior as if he could scarcely believe his eyes, as indeed he scarcely could.

"Silver! James Silver! A friend of your son's, Mabel! By gad! A Rookwood boy taking to highway robbery—a guest in this house attempting to rob another guest by violence! Upon my word! Why, the hardened young rascal is actually grinning! Grinning, by gad! You young miscreant, have you no sense of shame?"

Mr. Lovell gasped.

"I—I hardly think the—the—the attack can have been seriously intended, Wilmington," he said. "It is some schoolboy hoax, I should imagine."

"What?"

"You say there were two others—now that I recognise Silver, I can hazard a guess at their identity——"

"What! Three Rookwood boys engaged in highway robbery!" thundered Uncle Peter. "Three guests in this house conspiring to rob another guest! Good heavens!"

"It was a lark!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "Can't you understand that it was only a lark?"

"I do not believe it!" hooted Mr. Wilmington. "Your own friend, Lovell, came to my rescue—he could not have suspected——"

Arthur Edward Lovell staggered forward. The time had come to own up. Lovell realised that.

"I—I—I——" he stammered.

"Well?" snorted his uncle.

"I—I—I was in it!" gasped Lovell.

"What?"

"It—it—it was a stunt," groaned Lovell. "I thought it might make us better friends, Uncle Peter——"

"Stunt and nonsense!" roared Uncle Peter. "I see now that it was a disgraceful—a ruffianly practical joke, and

that you were a party to it, Arthur. It confirms the opinion I have hitherto held of you—a silly, impertinent, worthless young rascal!”

“Peter!” pleaded Mrs. Lovell.

“A worthless young rascal!” roared Uncle Peter.

“Wilmington!” exclaimed Mr. Lovell sharply. “It was a foolish practical joke—foolish and thoughtless—quite unjustifiable, but— Let my son explain. Why did you play this extraordinary trick, Arthur? Such disrespect to your uncle—”

“I meant it for the best,” groaned Lovell. “The mater wanted Uncle Peter to like me better, and—and I thought he would if I rescued him from footpads. That’s all, father.”

Mr. Lovell stared blankly at his son. Then, as the full egregiousness of Arthur Edward’s wonderful stunt dawned upon him, he burst into a roar of laughter. He could not help it; he laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. Even Mrs. Lovell could not help smiling.

But Uncle Peter did not smile.

He snorted.

“A laughing matter, by gad! A laughing matter—what—what? Great gad! I am attacked and insulted, and made a fool of—and it is a laughing matter! Good gad! Oh, good—very good indeed! Huh!”

“Peter—”

“Wilmington—”

“Very good—oh, very good!” snorted Uncle Peter. “I leave this house to-morrow—I will not stay here to be insulted! Huh!”

“Uncle—” gasped the dismayed Lovell.

“Mr. Wilmington—” exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

Uncle Peter turned on them. He grasped Jimmy again with one hand, Lovell with the other. He brought their two heads together with a resounding concussion.

Crack!

“Ow!”

“Wow!”

Uncle Peter tramped up the stairs and disappeared.

That was the happy state of affairs when Raby and Newcome—with washed faces and many misgivings—came snoking in later at a back door. Uncle Peter had not been placated, that was clear; he had not learned to love his nephew, Arthur, that was clearer! All the fat was in the fire, that was clearest of all! By the widest stretch of imagination, Arthur Edward Lovell’s wonderful stunt could not be called a success.

CHAPTER 35.

Slippery!

“POOR old Lovell!”

Jimmy Silver spoke with deep commiseration.

Raby and Newcome nodded.

It was a bright, frosty January day, and, apart from their sympathetic commiseration for their chum Lovell, the three Rookwood juniors were feeling quite merry and bright.

The keen air of the Somersetshire uplands was invigorating. There were still some days of the vacation to run, and the holiday at Lovell Lodge was quite pleasant and agreeable, in spite of the drawback of the presence of Lovell’s Uncle Peter.

The weather was freezing, and the flooded meadow at the back of the Lodge was a sheet of ice. Across that glistening sheet the chains of Rookwood had made a slide. With ruddy faces glowing and scarfs flying in the wind, they simply could not help enjoying life as they whizzed and whizzed again across the ice.

The three were waiting for Lovell, and sliding while they waited. They stopped at the sight of Arthur Edward Lovell coming down from the house and stood in a group, waiting for him to join them.

If ever a fellow looked as if he deserted sympathy and commiseration, Arthur Edward Lovell did just then.

His face was downcast, his head

drooped. He almost limped as he came towards the ruddy-faced trio on the edge of the frozen meadow.

"Foot old Lovell!" murmured Jimmy.

Lovell joined his chums.

He did not speak; he only looked at them with a dismal countenance.

"Been through it?" asked Raby.

"Only jaw," said Lovell glumly. "I'd rather have had a licking, I think. A Head's licking at Rookwood is nothing to a jaw from the pater at home!"

"Poor old chap!"

"And the mater, too," groaned Lovell.

"It's too thick! Look here, you chaps. Haven't I done my level best to get on good terms with my Uncle Peter?"

The three juniors coughed.

Undoubtedly Lovell had done his best to placate his somewhat formidable uncle, Mr. Peter Wilmington. He had striven hard to do so. His comrades freely acknowledged that. But it could not be denied that Lovell had been a little wanting in tact. He meant well, but his methods left much to be desired. Instead of placating Uncle Peter he had exasperated that gentleman so intensely that Mr. Wilmington had declared his intention of shaking the dust of Lovell Lodge from his feet forthwith.

Hence a family difficulty—not to call it a row—from which Jimmy Silver & Co. had tactfully withdrawn, elaborately affecting not to know that anything was going on.

Their position was not wholly pleasant as Lovell's guests for the vacation, on ill terms with Lovell's uncle, who was also a guest. They gave him as wide a berth as they could; but whatever contact was established, so to speak, matters were irksome.

"Is he going?" asked Newcome.

"He says so," answered Lovell.

"Makes out that I've insulted him. The pater and mater know I haven't. They think I've acted the goat. Me, you know."

"Hem!"

"Not that I believe he's really going,"

went on Lovell. "That's too jolly good to be true. It would improve the last week of the vac, if he did, wouldn't it?"

"Hear hear!"

"But it's all gas, I think," said Lovell.

"The mater's persuaded him to stop, and the pater thinks it's up to him to say the same. And—and I had to put in a word. Of course, the mater would be worried if her pet brother cleared off in a huff. I don't want that. I don't mind standing him for the mater's sake. So I told him I was sorry, and said I hoped he would stay. So I do, you know, for the mater's sake, not for my own, of course."

"You didn't mention that, I hope?"

"Nunno! I'm afraid he'll come round and stay on," said Lovell. "Oh, dear! Anyhow, I know I'm jolly well not going to try to make him good-tempered any more. I'm going to give him a wide berth. Must see him at meals, but at other times I'm going to dodge round a corner whenever I see him."

"Good egg!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Come on the slide, old man," said Raby. "It will buck you up after going through it with your people."

"It's a tip-top slide," said Newcome. Lovell brightened a little. In the open air, in the cheery company of his chums, he could forget—or almost forget—the obnoxious existence of Uncle Peter.

"Come on," he said.

"Hallo, there's your giddy uncle!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

Lovell looked round.

From the direction of the house Mr. Wilmington was striding towards the juniors, a bulky and imposing figure in his big fur-lined overcoat.

His purple face wore a frown, but whether that indicated any special attack of bad temper or not the juniors did not know. His face perpetually wore a frown.

"Scowling, as usual!" grunted Lovell.

"Let's keep clear of him, for goodness' sake!"

"Arthur!"

Mr. Wilmington was calling.

Arthur Edward Lovell turned a deaf ear. He had been "jawed," as he called it, for a solid hour that morning. Any fellow who had been jawed for a solid hour might have been excused for feeling fed-up.

Lovell had had enough, and he did not want any more. He affected not to hear the rusty, rasping voice of Mr. Wilmington.

"Come on, you chaps, let's slide."

"I say, he wants to speak to you," whispered Jimmy uneasily.

"Only some more jaw. Let's get on."

"Oh, all right."

The juniors turned to the slide. Mr. Wilmington increased his pace and came on very rapidly. More rapidly still the Fistical Four of Rookwood started on the slide and went whizzing across the slippery ice, one after another.

"Arthur!" shouted Mr. Wilmington.

He stopped at the slide. The juniors were already more than a dozen yards away. Mr. Wilmington waved his hand and shouted:

"Arthur! How dare you run away when I am calling to you! I order you to come here at once!"

Lovell, going at full speed, could scarcely have obeyed if he had wished. And indubitably he did not wish. He whizzed on regardless.

"Arthur!" bawled Uncle Peter.

He made an angry stride after the juniors. It was unfortunate.

The stride landed Mr. Wilmington on the slide, and he was totally unacquainted with slides and unaccustomed to slides. Probably it was fifty years since he had been on a slide, and half a century is quite a long time. He had long ago forgotten the pursuits of boyhood—if ever he had been a boy at all, which the Rookwooders were inclined to doubt.

Slides, therefore, were new and surprising things to the old gentleman from India.

What happened to him he scarcely knew.

One of his legs flew away, as if it had suddenly become endowed with the volition of a bird.

The other leg raced after it.

In a dazed and dizzy state, Uncle Peter flew along the slide, after the Rookwood juniors, his hat spinning away through the air, his hands wildly waving, his mouth wide open, his gold-rimmed glasses slanting down his purple nose—a remarkable sight, a sight for gods and men and little fishes!

CHAPTER 16.

Going Strong!

"GREAT Scott!"

"What a jolly old sport!" exclaimed Baby.

"Go it, sir!"

"Bravo!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had reached the end of the slide, and jumped off into muddy trampled snow. It was not till then that they became aware that Uncle Peter was bound on the same voyage.

They looked back and saw him coming along, and their admiration was great.

It did not occur to them for the moment that Uncle Peter's voyage across the ice was involuntary. They did not know that he had stepped on the slide by accident.

They supposed that he was joining in the game as they saw him coming along the slide; indeed, it was scarcely possible for them to suppose anything else. And they were pleased.

It is looked as if Uncle Peter was getting better-tempered, as if he was remembering at long last that he had been a boy himself in the dear dead days beyond recall.

Undoubtedly it was sporting of an elderly gentleman, of his years, to venture on a schoolboys' slide—if he had done it intentionally. And they supposed that he had done it intentionally.

"Go it, sir!" shouted Raby encouragingly.

"Bravo!"

"Good man!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Good old uncle!" said Lovell. "Why, this is ripping! He seems to have come round all of a jolly sudden! Blessed if I ever expected to see him joining up in a game like this."

"Going strong, too!" said Jimmy.

"Yes, rather."

Uncle Peter was going strong—very strong; much stronger than he desired, in fact.

The slide was well worn; it was smooth as glass, and more slippery than polished glass; it was a deadly trap to the feet of the unwary. Once started on that catastrophic slide to stop was impossible; to pause was out of the question.

Mr. Wilmington's feet plunged wildly. Every effort he made to stop only seemed to add to his momentum.

Once he detached one foot from the ice, but he flew along on the other, and the peculiar stork-like attitude of the old gentleman travelling on one leg was really remarkable. The Rookwooders would have grinned if they had dared. Still, they admired the old sportsman, who was plunging into this risky game at his time of life. Few gentlemen of his age and circumstance would have dared it.

Mr. Wilmington's floating foot came down again, and he proceeded on two legs—fairly whizzing. The miracle was that he did not land on his back, but Fortune stood his friend. Had he crashed down, certainly he would have gone through the ice into a foot or more of water, which would have been extremely uncomfortable for him.

He whizzed on.

His hat was gone, his hands waved wildly, his eyes wide open and staring, gleamed over his slanting glasses.

He was bewildered, dizzy, dazed. He hardly knew what was happening; only he knew that the happening was awful.

In his efforts to stop, he stooped and whizzed on in a crouching attitude, and then suddenly he sat down.

But he did not stop.

His momentum was too great for that.

Sitting on the smooth ice, he shot onward with terrific velocity, and reached the end of the slide.

There he plunged headlong into trampled snow.

"Bad landing!" said Jimmy Silver. "But what a jolly old sport to take it on at all! Help him out."

"Yes, rather."

The juniors rushed to Mr. Wilmington's aid.

He was rolling and plunging in the snow, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, breathless and dizzy and bewildered.

The Pistical Four grasped him and righted him, and he sat up, wheezing and spluttering.

"Groooh! Ooooooh! Oh, great gad! Mmmmm!"

"Well done, sir!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Grooh! What? Grooh!"

"It was fine, uncle!" exclaimed Lovell with genuine admiration. "It was jolly of you to come and join us."

"It was indeed, sir!" said Raby.

"Awfully pleased to see you on the ice, sir," said Newcome.

"Grooh! You young rascals! Ooooooh!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

Mr. Wilmington staggered to his feet. His face was crimson with fury, and he shook an enraged fist in his nephew's startled face.

"You young rascal!" he roared.

Lovell jumped back.

"What—what—" he stammered.

"I might have broken a limb!" roared Mr. Wilmington. "No doubt you desired to see me break a limb. You would be pleased to see me break all my limbs, I am assured of that. I might have been seriously injured, of course."

"Uncle——"

"You deliberately tricked me upon the ice!" bawled Uncle Peter.

"Eh! Oh! No! Not at all!" stammered Lovell. "I—I—I thought you were joining in the game, uncle."

"What!" roared Mr. Wilmington.

"We—we all thought so, sir!" gasped Jimmy Silver blankly. "Didn't you want to slide, sir?"

That seemed to infuriate Uncle Peter.

He made a jump at the captain of the Brookwood Fourth, with a large hand uplifted to smite.

It was fortunate for Jimmy that Uncle Peter's foot slipped in the snow in his haste.

Bump!

Mr. Wilmington understudied a catharine wheel, and landed in the snow, in which his purple face was buried. He struggled there and roared with muffled roar.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not go to his aid again.

"Better cut!" said Jimmy.

All the Brookwooders realised that they had better. And they accordingly "cut" with great speed, leaving Uncle Peter to sort himself out entirely on his own.

"Jevver see such an unreasonable old hunk?" demanded Lovell hotly, when the four had put a field between themselves and Uncle Peter. "If he didn't want to slide, why did he get on the slide at all?"

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"He seems to have got on it by accident," he said.

"Was that our fault?" hooted Lovell.

"Not at all! The dear man seems to think that it was, but it wasn't! I say, he looked no end of a card when he was coming along on one leg!" chuckled Baby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"More jaw for me when we get in!" said Lovell, with a sigh.

"Hard cheese, old chap."

"Let's make a day of it," said Lovell desperately. "I'll telephone home and

we'll get some lunch at an inn, and not get back till supper. We'll keep clear of old Peter all day."

"Hear, hear!"

And the Pistical Four sauntered on with cheery faces, quite bucked at the idea of making a day of it, and seeing nothing more of Uncle Peter for a whole day.

CHAPTER 37.

The Trail of Vengeance!

"RATS!"

"Dear old bean——"

"Rot!"

"For goodness' sake, Lovell——"

"Bosh!"

Arthur Edward Lovell was adamant.

His three chums were worried. Really, Arthur Edward Lovell was, at times, enough to put too heavy a strain on the patience of Job.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had come out in the bright, frosty January morning, while Uncle Peter was still having his breakfast in bed. It was very pleasant to miss seeing Uncle Peter. That alone made the morning merry and bright.

Uncle Peter was going skating that morning on the frozen Froode on his majestic own. After the unfortunate occurrence on the ice the previous day, the juniors did not dream of accompanying Mr. Wilmington on his skating excursion. If Mr. Wilmington was going to the stream at Froode, the Brookwooders were going in the opposite direction—at least, three of them were. But to their dismay, Jimmy and Baby and Newcome discovered that Lovell was on the war-path.

Lovell's idea was that he was going to lie in ambush among the trees by the frozen Froode, with a stack of snowballs ready to hand. When Uncle Peter started skating, Lovell was going to start snowballing. He was going to let the Anglo-Indian gentleman have it right and left.

Three eloquent voices argued and urged as the Pistical Four walked along the lane to Froode.

"Your father will be wild if you actually mop up old Peter with snowballs!" urged Jimmy Silver. "And your mother——"

"They won't know," explained Lovell. "I'm not going to let old Peter see me. I shall be in ambush. He will think that some of the village lads have been snowballing him."

"Now, look here, Lovell!" said the three together, as they reached the bank of the frozen Froode.

"Chuck it!" said Lovell.

"You chuck it, old bean, and come for a tramp," said Jimmy Silver. "When a fellow feels ratty there's nothing like a long walk to pull him round and make him smile again."

"Who's ratty?"

"Eh? You are, aren't you?"

"No!" asserted Lovell. "Nothing of the kind! I'm simply fed-up with old Peter, and I'm going to give him the kybosh! That's all! Now, you fellows, cut—you don't want old Peter to see you about here, or he may suspect you of snowballing him, and then the fat would be in the fire!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged dismayed glances. Evidently Arthur Edward was beyond argument. They had to give him his head.

"Hook it, old chaps!" said Lovell. "I'll see you later. Hook it before old Peter comes hiking along!"

"I think you're an ass, Lovell!"

"I know you are, Jimmy! Ta-ta!"

The three juniors left Lovell to his own devices at last. In a rather worried frame of mind they tramped away, hoping—though doubting—that Lovell's new stunt would not lead to a new peck of troubles for Arthur Edward.

Lovell had no doubts. He seldom had. Quite confidently and cheerfully he proceeded to lay his ambush on the bank of the glimmering, frozen Froode.

There was plenty of snow banked up close at hand, and in a screened spot under frosty trees and bushes, close by the river, Lovell stacked up snowballs ready for use.

He popped back into close cover as

Mr. Wilmington came tramping along the frozen, grassy bank, grunting as he came.

The portly gentleman passed within a few yards of Lovell, fortunately without seeing him.

He stopped a little farther on and sat down and put on his skates.

He stepped out cautiously on the ice, testing it as he went, and then slid away.

Lovell grinned and turned to his stack of snowballs.

As he did so a strange and startling sound reached his ears.

Gra-a-a-ack!

Lovell, startled, spun round towards the frozen stream, a snowball gripped in his hand. There was no longer a portly, fur-coated figure to be seen on the ice.

Uncle Peter had disappeared!

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CHAPTER 35.

Rookwood to the Rescue!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL stood rooted to the bank.

The snowball dropped from his nerveless hand into the frozen reeds.

His face was like chalk as he stared at the deserted river. Only a minute before, the elephantine figure of Peter Wilmington had been rolling across the ice. Now the ice was bare; but in the middle of the stream there was a gap in it—a wide gap where broken ice floated and dark water welled up. But of Uncle Peter nothing was to be seen.

"Good—good heavens!" panted Lovell.

It seemed like an age—an eternity—but it was only a few seconds before a large, thickly gloved hand shot up from the water and clutched at the broken edge of the ice.

Lovell panted with relief as he saw it, and as he saw the head of Mr. Wilmington follow it.

There was a loud snort from Mr. Wilmington. His sudden plunge had taken him deep down, but he had come up again, snorting like a grampus. He snorted again with annoyance as the edge crumbled in his hands.

He was not, for the moment, alarmed; doubtless he supposed that he could drag himself out.

But Lovell saw alarm flash into his face—terror into his eyes. The ice broke as fast as the stout gentleman grabbed at it, and his enormous overcoat, soaked with water, was dragging him down with its heavy weight. His chin went under and he spluttered. Frantically now he grabbed at the crumbling ice, and it dawned upon Lovell that his uncle could not swim.

Lovell was there on the trail of vengeance. But he was thinking now only of his uncle's danger. He cast a wild glance up and down and across the stream. But there was no human being in sight.

"Uncle!" shouted Lovell.

Mr. Wilmington's eyes turned on

him. He saw his nephew for the first time, and hope flashed in his face.

"Help!" he panted.

"Uncle! Hold on! I am coming!"

Lovell stared round him desperately, and ran to a fence a little distance back from the bank. With a strength of which he would not have been capable at any other time, he tore the top rail from the fence and rushed back to the bank with it.

A moment more, and he was speeding across the ice to the gap where Uncle Peter struggled.

Crack—crash—a-sack!

The ice, weakened by the extending gap and Uncle Peter's frantic clutching, cracked and split under Lovell as he approached the gap. It caved in under him as he was extending the fence-rail to Mr. Wilmington, and Lovell went through feet first.

The water surged up round his neck, chilly and bitter.

"Ooooh!" gasped Lovell.

But his head did not go under. The fence-rail fell across the gap from side to side, and Lovell's hold was on it.

"Uncle! Catch hold!" he spluttered.

But the water-logged overcoat was dragging the old gentleman down, and his half-frozen fingers no longer gripped at the breaking ice. He was plunging under helplessly, when Lovell caught at the fur collar and dragged him up again to the rail.

"Catch hold!" he gasped.

Mr. Wilmington got his hands to the rail, and then his arms over it. He hung on to it helplessly.

"Help!" yelled Lovell.

His desperate shout rang far across the frozen stream. But there were no ears to hear.

"We've got to get out of this, uncle," muttered Lovell. "Hold to the rail. You can do that?"

Mr. Wilmington nodded; he was almost past speech now.

Lovell gripped the rail and dragged himself out with its help. The ice creaked and groaned, but he got out of the water.

Getting his uncle out, however, was quite another matter. The ice-edge was certain to break away if he dragged the heavy gentleman upon it.

But there was nothing to do but to try it; and Lovell, leaning over the rail from the ice, gripped Mr. Wilmington by the collar.

"Try to climb out, uncle. Hold on to the rail and try to get on to the ice while I pull."

The old gentleman nodded again, and made an attempt to clamber on the ice. There was a terrific crash, and the ice went—and Lovell went with it. Head first he plunged into the icy water. He came up spluttering.

His grasp was still on his uncle's fur collar, and Mr. Wilmington's head was dragged from the water. Lovell caught desperately at the rail with his free hand.

He held on, keeping his uncle afloat with one hand, holding on desperately with the other.

"Help!" he shouted wildly. "Help! Help!"

Only the echo answered him.

"Hold on to the rail, uncle!" he gasped. "Can't you hold on?"

But there was no answer from Mr. Wilmington. He was utterly helpless now, overcome by the cold. He could not even grasp at the rail; only the Rockwood Junior's hold saved him from slipping away under the ice.

Lovell panted.

The bitter cold of the water was searching him through and through; his fingers were numbed, his face turning blue. Without letting Mr. Wilmington go, he could not even make an attempt to clamber out; and to let Uncle Peter go was to let him go to his death.

Arthur Edward Lovell had many faults and weaknesses; he was hot-headed, he was obstinate; he was exasperating at times to his best friends. But his sterling qualities came to the fore in these fearful moments. He could have saved himself by letting go

his hold on Uncle Peter—Uncle Peter whose dislike and unreasonable temper had almost spoiled his Christmas holidays—but the thought of doing so did not even cross his mind. It was sink or swim together, and Lovell held on desperately, though with despair in his heart.

"Help! Help!"

His desperate voice rang far and wide. A mist was floating before his eyes now; the leafless trees on the bank—so far away—seemed to be gilding away from him, like a vision in a dream. From the half-conscious man he was holding came a faint, husky whisper:

"Save yourself, my boy! I'm done—save yourself."

Lovell did not heed, even if he heard.

"Help! Help!"

His voice was failing, but he put all his remaining strength into that desperate shout. He did not see three running figures in the field beyond that ran desperately towards the river. But suddenly he heard a shout that was music to his ears.

"Hold on, Lovell!"

It was Jimmy Silver's voice.

"Help!"

"Hold on, old chap! We're coming!"

Lovell's brain was swimming. It was like a dream to him now—like some tormenting vision of troubled sleep. Three figures that seemed dim and uncertain to his dizzy sight loomed on the ice. A hurdle was pushed across the gap. Suddenly the weight of his burden was taken from him—other hands had grasped Mr. Wilmington. And then a helping grasp was on Lovell, and he was drawn from the water.

What happened next he did not know. Everything, river and frozen ice, leafless trees and steel sky, were swimming round him. He came to himself with a jerk. He was in the frozen weeds on the river-bank. His wild eyes turned on his chums.

"Jimmy—"

"Can you walk, old fellow? Let me help you up! You must get going or you'll freeze."

Lovell staggered up with the help of Jimmy Silver's strong arm.

"My uncle——"

"We've got him safe! Get that coat off and put mine on—quick! Now get going, old man. Raby, you help Lovell home while we look after Mr. Wilmington."

"Come on, old man."

Lovell found himself running, with Raby's hold on his arm. Jimmy Silver and Newcome attended to Uncle Peter. The huge fur coat was discarded—it was already freezing into a hard mass in the rushes. The skates had been taken off the old gentleman's feet. But Uncle Peter, though almost in the last stage of exhaustion, was still Uncle Peter.

"I can walk!" he snorted. "You need not hold me—I can walk! I am not a baby to be carried! I tell you that I can walk perfectly well."

"Better let us help you, sir——"

"Huh!"

Uncle Peter started to walk, and reeled over helplessly. After that he allowed Jimmy Silver and Newcome to take an arm each, and help him along. He staggered as he plodded between them.

Arthur Edward halted and looked back.

"Come on, old chap," said Raby. "Better keep going. You're soaked through, you know, and the weather's freezing."

"I'm all right," said Lovell.

Rapid motion had restored the circulation and Lovell was himself again now. He was tired and a little dizzy, but that was all. He looked back along the lane at Uncle Peter, who was coming on unsteadily, with Jimmy Silver and Newcome helping him on either side.

"You cut in, Raby, and tell them to get hot-water bottles ready," said Lovell.

And he ran back to his uncle.

His help was welcome, for Mr. Wilmington, with all his obstinate determination, could scarcely keep going, and the two juniors had their hands full with him.

Three helpful pairs of hands now propelled Uncle Peter along, half carrying him; and they were wholly carrying him by the time they reached the door of Lovell Lodge.

The door stood wide open. Raby was already there. Mrs. Lovell ran out to meet her brother.

"Peter!"

Mr. Wilmington grunted.

"I am all right, Mabel—quite all right. Pray do not make a fuss. There is no occasion whatever for a fuss. Huh!"

Although there was no occasion for a fuss, getting Mr. Wilmington up to his room was a hefty task for the Rookwood juniors and several servants, who manfully lent a hand. Afterwards Lovell declared that it would have made a decent thirteenth job for Hercules, on a par with any of the other twelve. But Mr. Wilmington was landed at last and rolled into bed, with hot-water bottles and blankets, and left to steam.

Arthur Edward Lovell, who was, fortunately, as fit as a fiddle, very soon recovered from the effects of his ducking. But it was different with Uncle Peter. That hapless gentleman was confined to his room for a whole week; and anyone passing near his room during that period could not fail to hear the coughing, snorting, grunting and growling, by means of which Uncle Peter expressed his feelings. His temper, never very reliable, seemed to have suffered from his ducking and the cold that followed it. And Uncle Peter in his room was a good deal like a Bengal tiger in a cage.

The Rookwooders were sympathetic. They were glad that it was no worse, and hoped that Uncle Peter would soon

be better. But it was not to be denied that the house was much more comfortable and cheery, with Uncle Peter confined to his room, though even the doctor entered that room in fear and trembling.

Jimmy Silver & Co. wished him a happy recovery. But possibly they did not yearn to see him downstairs again before the vacation ended. They felt that they could quite like Uncle Peter—so long as he was at a safe distance.

But coming in one day from a ramble they found Uncle Peter down, propped in innumerable cushions, before a terrible fire. He was speaking to his sister and brother-in-law when the juniors looked rather timidly in.

"A fine lad—a fine lad, Mabel! Lovell, you ought to be proud of that boy of yours. Cheeky—well, I like a lad to be able to speak up for himself. Why, here is the boy! Arthur, you young rascal, come here!"

Arthur Edward came rather gingerly. His father gave him a smile, his mother beamed on him. Uncle Peter glared at him.

"Do you know that you saved my life?" he boomed.

"Did I?" gasped Lovell. "Sorry! I—I mean, I'm jolly glad! I—I hope you're better, Uncle Peter."

"Never better in my life!" snorted Uncle Peter. "That ass of a doctor says I'm not to smoke cigars for a week at least. I'll show him! Give me a light. No, on second thoughts you needn't give me a light. Give me your fist, my boy. You're a cheeky young rascal, but you're the right stuff—the right stuff, and your old uncle's proud of you!"

And Mr. Wilmington demonstrated his changed feelings by giving Lovell a grip that made him wriggle.

The last few days of the vacation were calm and bright at Lovell Lodge. When the time came to return to Rookwood, Arthur Lovell was quite sorry to part with his Uncle Peter, a state of affairs that he certainly could never have foreseen. By luck and pluck he had succeeded, at long last, in placating Uncle Peter!

THE END.

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AMAZING CAR CRASHES!

SOMERSAULTING in a racing car at 110 miles an hour, and then continuing the race soundly, a bit far-fetched, doesn't it? But it's true.

It happened to Borzaccini, the famous Italian driver, at a race on the Monza track—the Italian Brooklands—a few years ago, and it all started when the speeding car threw a wheel and crashed tail over radiator. Of course, the car was completely smashed, and everyone expected to find the driver dead. But, to their amazement, he crawled out of the wreckage untouched, and a few moments later was in the race again, having taken over another of his team's cars.

"Crash at 100 m.p.h., and you'll probably sustain a few bruises; crash at 60 m.p.h., and you can kiss yourself good-bye," say the racing men—and it certainly seems to be true, for there are heaps of instances that prove it.

Six Racers in a Smash!

One of the most sensational crashes that have ever happened occurred in 1927, during the Le Mans Grand Prix, a twenty-four-hour event, in which the cars race throughout the night.

It started when one of the drivers of the big Bentley team came round a blind corner all out, and found that another car had crashed right across the road.

He was going much too fast to stop in time, and he had to choose between ramming the wrecked car or going into the ditch. Naturally he chose the ditch, his car hitting the bank with such force that it was thrown back across the road on its side, in which position it was immediately rammed by a second Bentley, whose driver had been right on the heels of the first.

The road was now completely

blocked, and before anyone had time to warn them, three more cars—a third Bentley, a French Schneider, and an S.A.R.A. racer—had crashed into the melee.

The headlights of the racers, cutting through the darkness, showed a piled-up tangle of twisted metal that had once been cars, out of which it looked impossible that anyone could have escaped alive. Yet, with the exception of the driver of the first car, who had two broken ribs and sprained a shoulder, not one man was scratched!

But the most wonderful thing about the crash was that the third Bentley was extricated from the wreckage, re-started, and actually won the race!

A Record Pile-up!

But the world's record pile-up—and, incidentally, the world's record narrow escape—occurred on the American Indianapolis track during their famous five hundred miles race.

Instead of being oval or round like ordinary racecourses, the Indianapolis track is square, the proper way to drive a car round it being to skid it round the turns like a dirt-track bike.

It was this method of skidding corners that caused the crash, for one driver skidded too much. Before he had had time to straighten out, a Duesenberg racer had gone into his tail, with the result that the Duesenberg skidded, too, and got mixed up with a third car.

Within a second two more cars were involved in a mix-up, the first one smashing off a front wheel and then ramming a low wall at the outer edge of the track, while the second actually collided head-on with the first car of all, which had by this time turned completely round.

At 100 m.p.h. the whole five cars skidded madly down the track, to stop completely wrecked some two hundred yards down the straight.

Yet, with all this, the only damage was a sprained wrist!

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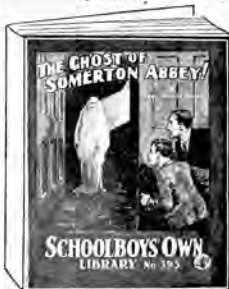


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