

READ "THE STAR OF THE FILMS," A MAGNIFICENT NEW CINEMA SERIAL JUST STARTING!

# The BOYS' FRIEND

TWELVE PAGES! TWENTY-SIXTH YEAR!

1d  
1/2

No. 988. Vol. XX. New Series.

THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending May 15th, 1920.]

## Tubby Muffin's Treasure!



### TUBBY STANDS TREAT!

Muffin's fat face was beaming as he sat on the counter. There was a smear of jam about his mouth and another on his nose; but evidently he was enjoying himself. The village tuck-shop was crowded to its utmost capacity. "Hallo, you fellows!" called out Conroy, as the Fistical Four appeared in the doorway. "Did you know Tubby had become a millionaire?" "Not exactly a millionaire, old chap," purved Muffin, "not quite that—only awfully rich!" "H'm!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Wedge in, you chaps," went on Muffin. "Order anything you like. I'm paying, you know. Pile in!"

#### The 1st Chapter. Findings Keepings!

"Oh dear!"  
Tubby Muffin uttered that ejaculation in tones of dismay.  
The fattest junior in the Fourth Form at Rookwood was "up against" it.  
It was a half-holiday at Rookwood School, and immediately after dinner Jimmy Silver & Co. had gone out of the gates, and taken the footpath to Coombe Heath. Tubby Muffin had noted that each member of the Fistical Four was carrying a bundle or a packet, and he suspected a picnic—for which excellent reason Tubby had followed on the track of the Co. Tubby's idea was to drop in on the picnickers—quite by accident, of course—and bestow his fascinating company upon them in return for a "whack" in the good things—the lion's share if possible.  
But his luck was out. He lost the

track of the Fistical Four on the wide heath, and he tramped to and fro in search for them in vain. They had vanished somewhere among the gorse, and it dawned upon Reginald Muffin that they had spotted him on the track, and heartlessly given him the slip, though they must have known he was hungry. They could not have failed to know that, because he always was hungry.  
But that was not the worst. As he tramped in search of the vanished picnickers, Tubby Muffin sighted two youths in Etons, who were sauntering by a track across the heath towards Coombe. They were Pankley and Poole, of Bagshot; and the moment they spotted Tubby Muffin they grinned and waved their hands to him, and turned in his direction.  
It was then that the dismayed Tubby exclaimed:  
"Oh dear!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had vanished goodness knew where. And Pankley and Poole were bearing down upon him, evidently with the intention of improving the shining hour with a little "rag."  
Tubby Muffin was looking for a picnic, not for a ragging. After a dismayed blink at the grinning Bagshot fellows, he took to his heels.  
"Tally-ho!" shouted Pankley.  
And the two Bagshot juniors broke into a run in pursuit.  
"Oh dear! Rotters! Oh dear!" gasped Tubby.  
He put on his very best speed—but Tubby had too much weight to carry to have a chance against the Bagshot fellows.  
He blinked over his shoulder, and was dismayed to see their grinning faces only a dozen yards behind.  
"Oh! Ow!"  
He plunged on desperately.  
"Hold on!" shouted Poole.

"Ow! Wow!"  
"We're only going to roll you into the old quarry!" shouted Pankley.  
"Oh dear! Beast!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
Tubby rolled and plunged on. He had a lingering hope that Jimmy Silver & Co. might appear in sight, in which case the Bagshot Bounders would have been promptly put to flight. But Jimmy Silver & Co. did not appear. Probably they were enjoying their picnic in one of the grassy hollows of the heath, utterly oblivious of Tubby Muffin's dire peril.  
Tubby was exerting himself to the utmost, and the perspiration poured down his fat face in streams.  
Pankley and Poole dropped into an easy trot, just keeping pace with him. They could have overtaken him at any moment if they had so pleased, but it entertained the humorous young gentlemen to keep Reginald Muffin on the run.

They grinned gleefully as he plunged and panted on, in the belief that his frantic exertions were keeping him ahead of his pursuers.  
Tubby Muffin blinked back again.  
His pursuers were still at the same distance, not showing much sign of exertion. Pankley waved an encouraging hand to him.  
"Keep it up, Fatty!" he called out.  
"Yow-ow!"  
"Put it on!" chortled Poole. "We shall have you in a minute!"  
"Oh dear!"  
Tubby put on a spurt, in the hope of shaking off his pursuers. He stumbled on a slope, and rolled down the slope into a deep hollow, where a late rainfall had left shallow pools among the grass.  
There was a loud splash, as Tubby Muffin landed at the bottom of the hollow.  
"Hold on!" ejaculated Pankley.  
The two Bagshot juniors stopped at





Continued from the previous page.

**TUBBY MUFFIN'S TREASURE!**

the top of the abrupt slope, and looked down at the hapless Tubby, yelling with laughter.

Tubby was not laughing. He was sitting breathlessly in two inches of water and feeling wet.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow, wow!" was what he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Rotters!" howled Tubby. "I'm wet! Come and help me out of this, you beasts!"

Pankley and Poole roared.

"Rather too muddy down there for us," chuckled Pankley. "Good-bye, Muffin! I hope you've enjoyed your little run!"

"Never knew you were such a sprinter!" grinned Poole. "You ought to go in for racin', Muffin. You'd easily win a hundred yards—against an elephant!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Bagshot Bounders, leaving Tubby in his hapless plight, turned away, and trotted off towards the distant village, apparently considering that they had sufficiently improved the shining hour.

Tubby Muffin squirmed in the wet grass.

He was too breathless to get out of it for some minutes. He sat there and gaped like a newly-landed fish, while the damp soaked through his trousers.

"Oh dear! Ow, ow, ow! Groooogh!"

The fat Classical scrambled to his feet at last.

Pankley and Poole were gone; he was safe now. But he was damp, and he was discomfited. Tubby Muffin was not enjoying his half-holiday.

"Oh dear! It's all Jimmy Silver's fault!" mumbled Tubby. "I'd jolly well lick him, only—the beast would lick me! Ow! Now, I've got to get out of this somehow—groooogh! What the thunder's that?"

"That" was a little packet lying half-hidden in the wet grass at the bottom of the hollow. Tubby's boot had struck against it as he scrambled up. He stooped and picked up the packet in wonder.

For a moment he forgot that he was breathless and wet, in his interest in his peculiar discovery.

The packet, by its appearance, had lain in the grassy hollow for a long time, probably for weeks. How it had come there was a mystery, for no one could be supposed to have entered the hollow, unless, like Tubby, he had rolled in by accident. It looked as if the packet must have been tossed in by someone passing along the footpath that wound along the edge of the hollow.

Tubby turned it over in his hands inquisitively.

The packet was tied with string, the thick brown paper being soaked with water and half-rotten. Patches of the wet paper came away in Tubby's fat fingers, showing cardboard underneath.

"What the thump—" murmured the fat Classical. "I—I wonder if it's anything valuable. If it is, findings keepings! If it isn't, perhaps I ought to take it to the owner. I'll see."

Tubby jerked off the string, and dragged away the rotted paper wrapping. Inside was an oblong cardboard box, also tied with string.

The box was very quickly opened. Inside that was a small roll of oilskin, containing— As Tubby unrolled the oilskin and saw what it contained he jumped, and the box almost fell from his hands.

For the box was packed with currency notes.

Tubby's eyes grew wide and round. He could scarcely believe their evidence for a minute or two.

But his round eyes told him true. Currency notes—pound notes, in wads, fastened with little rubber bands.

"Great Scott!" stuttered Muffin.

With trembling fingers he counted one of the wads of pound-notes.

Twenty-five!

And there was about a dozen of the wads.

Tubby gasped.

How the packet had come there, to whom it belonged, he could not even guess. But there it was, and he had found it! Tubby, who had striven in vain to borrow a humble "tanner" that afternoon, held hundreds of pounds in his fat hands! It was dazzling!

Certainly it wasn't his! But Tubby's fat brain was at work now, thinking out reasons to justify him in keeping his tremendous find.

In the first place, findings were keepings.

Tubby felt sure of that now. If Tubby had lost his watch, and someone else had found it, Tubby certainly wouldn't have thought that findings were keepings. But that, of course, would have been different!

In this case, Master Muffin felt that there could be no reasonable doubt that findings were keepings.

Besides, the currency-notes hadn't any owner. The owner wouldn't leave them there in the hollow, to be found by chance. Possibly some burglar, after robbing a bank, had thrown his plunder there in fleeing from pursuit. That really seemed the most plausible explanation. In that case—well, the burglar wasn't entitled to them. That was certain.

"Hundreds of quids!" Tubby's round eyes danced. "Why, of course, they're mine! I—I'd better not say anything about this! Some rotters might think I hadn't come honestly by this money; fellows are so suspicious. I—I'd better keep it dark, I think."

Tubby Muffin looked up with a suspicious glance; but there was no one in sight from the hollow.

He sorted the wads of notes out of the box, and began to bestow them about his person.

Never before had Reginald Muffin experienced the difficulty of possessing so many currency-notes that it was inconvenient to carry them all! But it was rather a delightful difficulty to be in. Tubby Muffin could have stood a great deal of difficulty of that kind.

His pockets were stuffed with wads of notes, his trousers-pockets bulged with them, and his jacket bulged. The sensation of having his pockets bulging with money was most enjoyable. Tubby Muffin quite forgave the Bagshot Bounders for having caused him to roll into the hollow.

He clambered up the slope at last to the footpath on the heath. He did not think of looking for Jimmy Silver & Co. any more. Jimmy Silver & Co. could go and eat coke! Tubby did not care two pins for their wretched picnic! He was rolling in money now—bulging with it. With a face that beamed like unto the harvest moon, Reginald Muffin trotted off towards Rookwood School.

**The 2nd Chapter. Rolling in Money!**

"Hallo!"

"Here's Muffin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Four Rookwood juniors came out of the wood into the lane as Tubby Muffin came trotting along. Jimmy Silver, Raby, Lovell, and Newcome burst into a chorus of chuckles as they sighted the fat junior.

"Been for a walk, old top?" inquired Jimmy.

"Did you miss a picnic?" chuckled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Fistical Four roared.

Tubby Muffin stopped, and surveyed the hilarious juniors with a lofty gaze.

"I don't quite see where the cackle comes in, you fellows!" he said haughtily.

"You see, we spotted you rolling after us," explained Lovell. "That's why we dodged you. Had a nice walk on the heath?"

Tubby sniffed.

"As a matter of fact I haven't been for a walk," he answered.

Tubby Muffin had not been trained on the same lines as George Washington, who—according to his own statement, at least—could not tell a lie. Tubby could, and often did.

"The fact is, I've dropped in to see my banker," said Muffin, with a careless air.

"Your which?" ejaculated Lovell.

"My banker."

"Do you mean that you've been playing banker?" asked Jimmy Silver, perplexed.

Another sniff from Muffin.

"Certainly not! I called to see my banker—to get some money, you know."

The Fistical Four blinked at him. They had often heard surprising statements from Reginald Muffin, owing to his anti-Washington proclivities. But assuredly they had never heard a more surprising statement than this.

"You've called on your banker to get some money!" repeated Raby, in a dazed tone.

"Oh, yes!"

"Let's see the money!" grinned Lovell. "You were trying to borrow a tanner of me to-day. You hadn't called on your banker then, I suppose?"

"Just so, I hadn't!" agreed Tubby Muffin calmly. "But I have now. If you don't rely on my word, Lovell, I—"

"Catch me!" said Lovell derisively.

"Look here, then!"

Tubby Muffin dived a fat hand into his pocket, the Fistical Four watching him with grinning faces.

They fully expected Tubby to draw his fat fingers forth empty, with a lame explanation that he had "lost" the cash. That really seemed the only thing to expect.

To their amazement Tubby Muffin held up a bunch of currency-notes.

"Look at that!" he said loftily.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked; in fact, they devoured the wad of notes with their eyes.

Twenty-five pound-notes!

There was no mistake about it.

"You young idiot!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver aghast. "Where did you get all that money?"

"From my banker—"

"Fathead!" roared Jimmy. "Do you think we're going to swallow a yarn like that?"

"Where do you think I got them, then?" demanded Tubby Muffin defiantly. "I've often told you fellows my people are rich—"

"Rats!"

"You wouldn't believe me."

"We don't now!"

"You can see for yourselves," answered Tubby Muffin. "Here's twenty-five quid, and I can have as much more as I like!"

"Well, my hat!"

Tubby Muffin grinned with satisfaction. He had succeeded in impressing the Fistical Four; and his manner was growing more and more lofty. He was a wealthy fellow now—the wealthiest fellow at Rookwood, in fact. Even Mornington, in his palmy days, had never had a hundred pounds about him. And Reginald Muffin had a good deal more than that bulging in his pockets.

"You fellows needn't be jealous!" he said, with a curl of the lip. "We can't all be rich, you know. You poor rotters—"

"Us what?"

"Poor rotters!" said Tubby cheerfully. "You poor rotters have only got to be civil, and I may be generous to you!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Of course, you'll have to be respectful!" said Tubby warningly.

"I'm not standing any cheek, or any rotten familiarity!"

"Great pip!"

"Keep your distance, and be civil and respectful, and I may honour you with my notice!" said Muffin.

"Oh crumbs!"

The Fistical Four could only blink. This fine flow of eloquence from the most impecunious fellow at Rookwood—the greedy hanger-on who had to be shaken off—took their breath away. Under the kindly influence of the smiles of Fortune, Reginald Muffin was developing!

"I believe I owe you a small sum, Silver," continued Tubby, in the same lofty manner.

"I believe you do!" gasped Jimmy.

"How much is it exactly?"

"Blessed if I know—any number of bobs and tanners!" answered Jimmy. "What do you want to know for, as you never square?"

"I'm going to square. I can't remember such trifles myself," said Muffin. "However, I dare say a pound will cover the lot. Here's the pound!"

He detached a pound note from the wad, and held it out to Jimmy Silver with quite a ducal air.

The captain of the Rookwood Fourth did not take it, however.

"It's for you!" said Tubby.

"Keep it!" said Jimmy Silver quietly. "If you want to pay your debts, Tubby, you're welcome—when you have the money."

"Haven't I plenty of money now, you ass?"

"Whose is it?" was Jimmy Silver's reply.

"Mine, you ass!"

"Where did you get it, then?"

"From my banker."

"Ass!"

"Where do you think I got it, then?" howled Muffin.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"I don't know, but I know it can't be your money, Muffin. If you've stolen it—"

"Stolen it!" yelled Tubby indignantly.

"You'd better take it back to the owner—"

"I'm the owner, you silly chump!"

"Rot!"

Tubby Muffin gave the captain of the Fourth an indignant glare.

"Do you want this pound note, or don't you?" he snorted.

"No—not unless you prove that it's yours."

"Of course it's mine! I've been to my banker—"

"Is there a bank on Coombe Heath?" grinned Lovell.

"I—I've been to—to Rookham."

"You ass, we saw you on the heath."

"I cut across to the Rookham road."

"What bank at Rookham?" asked Newcome.

"Rookham and County!" answered Tubby Muffin promptly.

He had often noticed the big bank at the corner of the High Street in Rookham, and the name came quite pat to his tongue.

Tubby realised that it would not do to reveal that he had "found" the treasure. Nobody was likely to agree with him that findings were keepings.

Jimmy Silver paused.

"Well, I can't swallow it," he said at last. "It's too steep. Nobody ever knew that you had any money in the bank at Rookham."

"I'm not the fellow to brag—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You see, my father's opened an account for me there," said Tubby Muffin glibly. "I can draw as much as I like."

"Gammon!"

"Don't you believe me?" howled Tubby.

"Can't be done!"

"Go and eat coke, then!" growled Tubby Muffin; and he jammed the wad of notes back into his pocket and tramped on angrily towards the village of Coombe, which lay between him and the school.

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed in the same direction; they also were on their homeward way.

"Where on earth did the fat duffer get all that money, Jimmy?" asked Raby.

"I can't imagine! But it can't be his," said Jimmy. "Goodness knows how he came by it. I'm afraid that ass is getting himself into trouble. He hasn't sense enough to know right from wrong."

And Jimmy Silver frowned thoughtfully as he walked on towards the village. It was a puzzle to him, and he could not help feeling that there was trouble in store for the wealthy Tubby. But it was a puzzle that he could not solve.

**The 3rd Chapter. Tubby's Treat!**

"Join up, you fellows!"

The Fistical Four were sauntering in a leisurely way through the old High Street of Coombe, when Putty Grace called to them. Putty of the Fourth was standing in the doorway of Mrs. Wicks' little shop, with a glass of ginger-beer in one hand and a cake in the other.

The tuckshop was crowded inside. Jimmy Silver and his comrades stopped.

"Anything on, Putty?" asked the captain of the Fourth.

Putty grinned.

"You bet! A feast on!" he answered. "Everybody can roll up and order what he likes."

"Oh, good egg!"

The four chums came up to the door of the tuckshop at once. It was swarming with Rookwood fellows. Higgs and Jones minor, Rawson and Townsend and Topham, Peale and Gower and Lattrey, Conroy and Van Ryn and Pons, were there, and a good many more of the Fourth Form, and some of the Third and the Shell.

The village tuckshop was crowded to its utmost capacity.

Prominent, sitting on the little counter, was Reginald Muffin. He was the founder of the feast.

It was half an hour since Tubby had left the Fistical Four on the road. They had stopped at the outfitter's after entering the village, and there they had forgotten all about Tubby and his newly-acquired wealth. But they remembered him—and it—now.

Tubby Muffin was losing no time. He had fallen in with some Rookwooders in Coombe, and he was standing treat in the village shop. And as the news spread, all the Rookwood juniors who happened to be in Coombe had gathered to the feast.

Tubby's fat face was beaming, as he sat on the counter. There was a smear of jam about his mouth, and another on his nose. He was decidedly shiny and sticky all over; but evidently he was enjoying himself.

The other fellows appeared to be enjoying themselves, too.

"Hallo, you fellows!" called out Conroy. "Did you know Tubby had become a millionaire?"

"Not exactly a millionaire, old chap!" purred Tubby Muffin. "Not quite that! Only awfully rich!"

"Good old Tubby!" said Peale.

"It's rather nice to be awfully rich."

"Oh, I'm used to it!" said Tubby amiably.

He blinked across at the Fistical Four in the doorway.

"Wedge in, you fellows—the more the merrier! Order anything you like! I'm paying, you know! Pile in!"

"H'm!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Roll up, all you fellows! Don't spare the ginger-pop!" exclaimed Muffin. "Trot out the tarts, Mrs. Wicks, please!"

"Yes, Master Muffin."

"And some doughnuts—doughnuts all round!" said Muffin, with great liberality.

"Yes, Master Muffin!"

"Bravo, Tubby!"

Mrs. Wicks was kept busy. Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances, and they came into the tuckshop.

Tubby Muffin was bursting with generous hospitality, and the Fistical Four did not want to seem ungracious.

Indeed, as the other fellows had

**TWO SEPARATE SETS OF PRIZES**

**Bicycles & Cameras for Boys AND Girls**

A topping new puzzle-picture competition in "PUCK," for which every boy and girl should enter. Nothing to pay and two complete sets of prizes—one for boys—one for girls. Many Consolation Prizes. You'll find all particulars of this unique prize offer TO-DAY in

**Buy Your Copy TO-DAY!**

**PUCK - - 2d.**

The Famous COLOURED Picture Paper.



accepted Tubby's wonderful accession to wealth without question, Jimmy wondered whether he had been a little too suspicious.

"Ginger-pop, Silver?" called out Tubby.

"Ye-es, thanks!"

"Right you are! Buck up, Mrs. Wicks!"

"Yes, Master Muffin!"

"Tubby's fairly rolling in it, Silver," remarked Putty Grace, with a grin. "Fancy old Tubby! There must be something in his yarns, after all."

"Looks like it," said Conroy. "He won't get off under two or three pounds for this spread, I reckon."

"Has he told you where he got the money?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"From his pater, I think."

"First time his pater has ever dubbed up to this tune!" remarked Cyril Peele. "If Tubby wasn't such an ass, I should think he had been backing a horse that has got home."

"Not likely!"

"Well, it's likelier than his pater handing out a stack of currency-notes. Muffin's shown us a fistful."

"Yes, that's so, but—"

"Where did you get your tin, Muffin?" sang out Gower.

Tubby blinked at him over a jam-tart.

"My pater's stumped up," he answered. "He's sent me an order on his banker—Rookham and County Bank, you know—at Rookham. Rather decent of the pater—what?"

"Ripping!" said Gower heartily. "I'll swap my pater for yours, if you like, Muffin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My pater never does these things," grinned Peele. "We must make the most of Muffin's pater. Another dough-nut, please!"

"Help yourself, Jimmy!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin.

"Oh, all right—thanks!" said Jimmy Silver.

The Fistical Four joined in the spread, though Jimmy Silver was not yet free from his lingering doubts. But he did not want to hint at his doubts before the other fellows. He determined to tackle Muffin quietly on the subject later, and ascertain the truth, so far as he could; and if the duffer of Rookwood had put his foot in it, so to speak, to help him out if possible.

When the spread was over—which was not till it was time to start for Rookwood, for calling-over—Tubby Muffin was presented with a bill by Mrs. Wicks. That good lady had been jotting down innumerable items on a sheet of wrapping-paper, with a cross-ribbed pen, and the final result of her computations looked like something very deep in algebra.

She announced that Master Muffin owed her three pounds fifteen shillings and sixpence.

Master Muffin certainly would never have been allowed to run up a bill to that extent, had not Mrs. Wicks seen the colour of his money to begin with. But Tubby had displayed a roll of currency-notes, and Mrs. Wicks had no doubts.

The staggering total did not seem to have a staggering effect on Reginald Muffin. He tossed four pound-notes on the counter, with the air of a prince.

"There you are, Mrs. Wicks!"

"Thank you, Master Muffin!"

With almost an awed look, Mrs. Wicks handed Muffin his change, and Tubby slipped it carelessly into his pocket.

He gasped a little as he rolled out of the village shop. He had done not wisely, but too well with Mrs. Wicks' comestibles. But he was feeling very fat and shiny and happy.

As a rule, Tubby Muffin's company was not yearned for by his Form-fellows. But now he had quite an escort on his way home to Rookwood. Peele & Co. clung to him like brothers, and other fellows were very nice to him. Tubby, the impetuous, the deadly borrower, was quite a different person from Reginald Muffin, rolling in pound-notes. That was one of the agreeable results of Tubby's curious discovery on Coombe Heath. For the first time in his fat career, Reginald Muffin was popular.

His popularity, it was probable, would last exactly as long as his pound-notes; but Tubby wasn't thinking about that. Sufficient for the day was the evil thereof, in Tubby Muffin's opinion.

The 4th Chapter. Under Suspicion!

Mornington of the Fourth dropped into the end study after tea that evening. He found the Fistical Four at their prep.

"Busy?" asked Morny.

Jimmy Silver looked up.

"Not specially. Trot in, and sit down."

Valentine Mornington strolled in, and sat on a corner of the table. Only a week before, the dandy of the Fourth had been on fighting terms with the Fistical Four; but Morny had got over that.

"You fellows had your tea?" he asked.

Jimmy smiled.

"We didn't want any; Muffin did us so well at Mrs. Wicks. I suppose you've heard that Muffin is a merry millionaire now?"

"That's what I was going to speak about."

"It's jolly queer, isn't it?" said Lovell.

"Too jolly queer," answered Mornington. "Where did Muffin get all that money? He's been showing off wads of notes in the Common-room."

"He says his father's opened an account for him, or something of the sort, at the bank at Rookham."

"Do you believe that, Silver?"

Jimmy hesitated.

"Well, I didn't at first," he

"Wha-a-at?"

"I was at the gates when Muffin came in, and heard the yarn," explained Mornington. "I didn't believe a word of it, of course. The fact is, I was rather alarmed for Muffin. He's idiot enough to land himself into anything."

"I know that," said Jimmy Silver, "but—"

"So I buzzed into Mr. Bootles' study, and used his telephone, as he was not there."

"Whom the thump did you telephone to?" exclaimed Newcome.

"The bank at Rookham."

"Oh!"

"I caught the manager there, just before the bank closed," said Mornington, calmly. "I asked him if he had paid out a large sum of money to Reginald Muffin this afternoon."

"My hat! What did he say?"

"He said that nothing of the sort had been done, and that he did not even know the name of Reginald Muffin."

"Great Scott!"

The Fistical Four had forgotten



THE END OF THE CHASE! Tubby put on a spurt, in the hope of shaking off his pursuers. He stumbled on a slope, and rolled down into a deep hollow, where a late rainfall had left shallow pools among the grass. "Ow-ow-yow!" he gasped as he sat in two inches of water. "Rather too muddy down there for us!" chuckled Pankloy. "Good-bye, Muffin! I hope you've enjoyed your little run!" "Yah! Rotters!" howled Muffin.

answered. "But—but if it isn't true, where did the money come from? I don't know what to think. Tubby isn't a thief; and, besides, he couldn't have a chance of stealing wads of notes. He was stony this afternoon before he went out, and he was reeking with notes when we met him on the road over the heath. So he didn't bag the money in the school. I'm blessed if I know what to make of it!"

"He didn't get it at the bank at Rookham."

"He says he did," said Raby, rather nettled by Mornington's positive manner. "After all, if he didn't, where did he get it?"

"That's what ought to be found out, for Muffin's sake!" answered Mornington, unruffled. "He didn't get it at the bank."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've asked them."

prep now. Mornington's communication had almost taken their breath away.

"That's settled that!" said Jimmy Silver, after a long pause.

"It does, I think!" Mornington smiled. "Tubby's bagged that money somewhere, and spun a yarn about the bank to cover up what he's done. We don't want the police comin' to Rookwood after a thief, Silver."

"Good heavens!"

"So I reckoned it ought to be looked into, and I looked into it to that extent. Now, I'm leavin' it to you, as captain of the Form, to do as you think best."

And with that, and a nod, Valentine Mornington strolled out of the end study.

Jimmy Silver and his chums looked at one another. Their faces were very grave.

"I—I—I say, this is a go!" murmured Lovell.

"But—but Tubby can't have stolen money!" exclaimed Raby, aghast. "He's a born idiot, but he isn't a thief. Dash it all, there isn't any Rookwood fellow who could be a thief!"

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"I can't believe that," he said. "Tubby wouldn't steal. But he's such a silly idiot, that he might go awfully near to it without realising what he was doing. I'll have a jolly serious talk to him after prep."

The Fistical Four finished their work in a very serious mood. What Mornington had learned by telephoning to the bank, had put quite a new complexion on the matter. Jimmy Silver's doubts and suspicions had revived in full force.

After prep, Jimmy Silver quitted the end study, and walked along to Study No. 2, which Muffin shared with Putty Grace, Higgs, and Jones minor. He found all four of the juniors at home.

Study No. 2 had finished prep, and Tubby Muffin held the stage, so to speak.

He was holding forth on the subject of the next half-holiday, and a motor-car trip he was planning along the sea coast.

Higgs and Jones minor listened to him with deep respect, and Putty of the Fourth was eyeing him very curiously.

Tubby blinked round as Jimmy Silver came in, and gave him a welcoming grin.

"Trot in, old scout!" he said. "I'm just telling these fellows what I'm going to do on Saturday. You can come if you like. I'm having out a big car—the biggest in the garage at Rookham—"

"Jolly good sort, old Muffin!" said Higgs.

"Nothing like a good supply of currency notes to turn a fat boulder into a jolly good sort!" Putty Graee remarked reflectively.

"I want to speak to you, Muffin," said Jimmy Silver very quietly.

"Will you come along to my study?"

Tubby gave him a quick, suspicious blink.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"If you want to borrow money, Jimmy Silver—"

"I don't, you ass!"

"You can have the pound I owe you—"

"I don't want it. I want to speak to you—"

"I've promised to drop in and see Peele," remarked Tubby Muffin, glancing at the clock. "I'm afraid I can't come to your study, Silver. I've really got so many engagements—"

"I've got to speak to you, Tubby, and it would be better in private," said the captain of the Fourth.

Tubby sniffed.

"You can speak to me here, before my friends," he said loftily. "I've got no secrets with you, Jimmy Silver. If you're going to begin your rotten suspicions again—"

"It's about that money, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver gently.

"I don't care to discuss it with you," said Muffin, growing more and more lofty.

"What about the money?" exclaimed Higgs. "I suppose it's Muffin's money, isn't it?"

"I hope so."

"You know it is!" roared Tubby Muffin wrathfully. "Look here, Jimmy Silver, if you hint that I haven't come by my money honestly, I'll—I'll—I'll ask Higgs to punch your head!"

"And I'll jolly well do it, too!" exclaimed the bully of the Fourth belligerently. "You let Muffin alone, Silver! Muffin's my study-mate, and I'm standing by him. Let him alone!"

Jimmy Silver did not heed.

"You told us you'd had the money from the bank at Rookham this afternoon, Tubby," he said.

"So I did."

"The bank's been telephoned to, and—"

Tubby Muffin jumped.

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"And they don't even know your name there," said Jimmy.

"Oh!"

"Phew!" murmured Grace.

Higgs and Jones minor stared.

"You didn't get the money at the bank," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

"If you came by it fairly and squarely, Muffin, you wouldn't need to tell lies about where you got it."

"I—I—"

"For your own sake, kid, you must tell the truth," urged Jimmy. "I'm speaking as your friend. That money belongs to somebody, and you'll get into awful trouble if you keep it."

Tubby Muffin's fat face was crimson.

"My hat!" murmured Higgs.

He was not belligerent now; he was looking at Muffin uneasily and suspiciously.

"Where on earth did you get it, Muffin, you awful ass!" exclaimed Grace.

Tubby coughed to clear his throat. "The—the fact is—"

he stammered.

"Well?"

"The—the fact—the fact is—is—"

"What is the fact?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"The—the fact is—"

gasped Muffin.

It was so obvious that Reginald Muffin was seeking to invent a plausible yarn on the spot, that the juniors could hardly help smiling, serious as the matter was.

"Make it a good one!" advised Jones minor. "You found it in somebody's pocket—what?"

"I—I didn't—"

"Well, out with the merry facts!" said Putty.

"The—the fact is, I—I met my father in Rookham this afternoon," said Muffin. "He—he handed me the money."

"Then why did you tell us you got it from the bank?"

"I—I—well, I was just stuffing you, you know," said Tubby Muffin brightly. "I—I thought it was like your cheek catechising me, so I just stuffed you—see?"

"My only hat!" murmured Grace.

"Can't you think of a better one than that, Tubby?"

"It's true!" howled Tubby. "Can't you take my word, Putty, you beast?"

"So your father gave you the money in Rookham this afternoon?" said Jimmy Silver.

"Exactly."

"You don't mind if I telephone to your father, so that he can set all doubts at rest?"

"Oh! My—my father ain't on the telephone."

"I'll write in the morning, then."

"Look here, Jimmy Silver, don't you write to my father. Like your cheek, I think!"

"Cheek or not, I shall do it."

"Now I—I come to think of it, it—it wasn't my father," stammered Muffin. "It—it was my uncle."

"Your uncle met you in Rookham and gave you a fistful of currency notes?" howled Grace.

"Yes, that's it, exactly."

"Where does your uncle live?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"He's dead—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, he's in the—the Army," gasped Muffin. "Yes, that's what I meant to say all along. He's in the Army, and—and he's just gone to the Front."

"To the Front!" gasped Jimmy Silver dazedly.

"That's it. He came down to Rookham to say good-bye before going to the Front."

"You thundering ass!" roared Jimmy Silver. "What Front? Do you think the war's still on, you thumping clump?"

"Oh dear!" gasped Tubby. "I—I mean, he's gone to—Germany. He's in the Army of Occupation on the Rhine, you know. That's what I really meant to say all along."

"Not much difference," grinned Putty.

"No, there isn't, is there?" said Tubby. "Now I've told you the whole of the facts, Jimmy Silver—"

"The facts!" murmured Jimmy.

"Oh, ye gods!"

"I really don't see why I should explain my private affairs to you in this way," said Muffin. "You're inquisitive, Silver, that's what you are. I can't stand inquisitive chaps. Inquisitiveness is low!"

"Where did you get that money, Muffin?"

"Haven't I just told you?" howled Tubby Muffin, in great exasperation.

"You haven't told the truth, Tubby. For your own sake!" urged Jimmy Silver. "You know you can't have any right to that money. You will get into serious trouble. Can't you see that?"

"I decline to discuss the matter further," said Tubby Muffin haughtily. "I'm already late for my appointment with Peele. You can go and eat coke, Jimmy Silver!"

And with that Tubby Muffin rolled away, bestowing on the captain of the Fourth a final defiant snort as he went.

"What on earth does it all mean?" said Putty.

"I can't guess, but I'm sure that Tubby is landing himself in trouble," answered Jimmy Silver. "That money can't be his. Why should he tell such thumping lies about it, if it was? But I suppose nothing can be done, if he won't own up."

And Jimmy Silver walked away in



a very thoughtful mood. He was concerned for Tubby Muffin, and a little alarmed for him, but he did not see that he could do anything further. As he passed Study No. 1 on his way to the stairs, he heard Peele's voice within.

"Your deal, Muffin!"

Reginald Muffin was already on the way to getting rid of some of his superfluous and mysterious cash!

#### The 5th Chapter. Startling!

The next day, Tubby Muffin's sudden accession to fortune was the talk of the Lower School at Rookwood.

All the Fourth knew it, and the Shell, and the Third. And all, naturally, were interested.

Tubby Muffin fairly spread himself with importance.

But there was a small cloud on the otherwise sunny horizon. Tubby's weird explanations as to how he had come by the money met with little belief.

He had already told three variations of his yarn, and the three certainly could not all be true. If the money had come honestly into his hands, obviously there was no reason why he should spin any yarns about it at all; he had only to state the facts.

So Tubby Muffin, greatly to his wrath and indignation, found himself looked upon with the eye of suspicion.

Having already settled in his own fat mind that findings were keepings, and that he was fully entitled to stick to the wads of notes he had unearthed, Tubby was extremely indignant at such suspicions. He felt bitterly that his honour was touched thereby, and he considered that it was all Jimmy Silver's fault.

Jimmy, it is true, was only trying to save the fatuous youth from his own folly; but he did not earn any gratitude thereby. Master Muffin was only angry and indignant.

He was specially annoyed that fellows did not take his word. What the value of his word was, however, it would have puzzled Tubby himself to say.

Peele & Co. had already initiated Tubby into the mysteries of banker and nap, and relieved him of the trouble of taking care of about a dozen of his pound notes. The black sheep of the Fourth did not trouble very much about how Tubby had come by the money—so long as they came by some of it, in their turn. But in spite of Tubby's wealth, and his desire to "spread," he found most of the fellows rather stand-offish, and very chary of touching the money.

Even fellows to whom he owed long accounts, which he now offered to settle, declined to be settled with.

"No, thanks!" said Mornington, when Tubby presented a ten-shilling note, which, according to Tubby, covered the whole list of "bobs" and "tanners" he had extracted from Mornington at various times. "Keep it, my boy! I don't want to be arrested along with you."

"Arrested!" gasped Tubby.

"Receivers are arrested as well as thieves, you know," said Morny, with a grin.

"I—I—I jolly well won't pay you now!" howled the indignant Tubby.

"Not with that cash, you won't!" agreed Mornington.

And Tubby didn't; and he found it equally difficult to settle other accounts. It really was an extraordinary situation for Reginald Muffin. Never before, in all his history, had he been known to make an attempt to settle a debt. Now he was attempting to settle a score or more, and he found settlement more difficult than it had been to raise the original loans! Nobody would touch Tubby Muffin's money—excepting Peele and Latrey and Gower, and two or three fellows of their kind.

Even a gigantic spread at the tuckshop was declined, now that suspicion was abroad. Tubby was reduced to feeding in solitary state on the fat of the land. However, he found considerable comfort in doing so. Sergeant Kettle had not heard of the doubts that were abroad, and Tubby's pound notes were taken cheerfully at the school shop. And a good many of them went at banker and nap in Peele's study.

Tubby Muffin found himself eyed very queerly by the juniors; but he made up his mind that it was due to jealousy, and he adopted a haughty manner in return. And he found comfort, too, in the fact that he made a friend in the Sixth Form. Carthew of the Sixth had observed Tubby with a wad of notes in the school shop; and Carthew opened his eyes when he saw them. The sportsman of the Sixth was in a state of hard-up, owing to the unreliable conduct of a certain "gee-gee," which had been expected to come in first, but had come in seventh; and Carthew cast a greedy eye on Tubby's currency notes.

The Sixth-Former, naturally, had not heard the talk of the lower Forms on the subject of Tubby's notes. He supposed that the fat junior had received an unusually liberal remittance from somewhere. He spoke to Tubby very kindly outside the school shop.

"Hallo, Muffin, my dear kid!" said Carthew. "I've been going to ask you to tea for a long time; but you always seem so busy."

Tubby purred.

"When a fellow has a lot of engagements—" he murmured.

"Exactly! Come to tea with me this evening, will you, old fellow?"

"Old fellow"—from a Sixth-Former! Tubby Muffin wished that Jimmy Silver & Co. could have heard that!

"Certainly, dear boy!" he answered.

"I shall expect you!" said Carthew, and he walked away.

Tubby Muffin was a duffer, but he was not duffer enough to fail to guess that Carthew had another object in view, beside the enjoyment of his society. He had a shrewd suspicion of the card games and smoking that went on in Carthew's study—strictly under the rose. If he went to tea with the Sixth Form sportsman, he had to pay his footing. But Reginald Muffin was prepared to pay his footing. Carthew, at all events, was not likely to skin him more mercilessly than Peele & Co.

After lessons that day, Tubby put on a clean collar, and tied his tie a little more neatly than usual, and started for the Sixth Form passage. Jimmy Silver & Co. met him on the way, and Jimmy called to him.

"Tubby, old fellow—"

Tubby Muffin elevated his fat little nose in an expression of the loftiest scorn.

"Not so much of your 'old fellow,' young Silver!" he retorted.

"What?" ejaculated Jimmy.

"I don't want any of your familiarity! I'm going to tea with a friend of mine, in the Sixth Form!" said Muffin crushingly. "You fags can keep your distance!"

And Tubby Muffin rolled on his way, leaving the Fistical Four staring.

"Fags!" stuttered Lovell. "Why, I'll—I'll—I'll scalp him!"

Jimmy shook his head.

"Never mind scalp him," he said. "There's plenty of trouble in store for the young ass—when the owner comes after those currency notes! I—I wonder whether I ought to speak to Mr. Bootles about it! I suppose I can't! But there will be trouble!"

Unconscious of the dark prognostications of the captain of the Fourth, Tubby Muffin rolled cheerily along the Sixth Form passage towards Mark

Carthew's study. He passed the door of Bulkeley's study, which was partly open. Bulkeley and Neville, of the Sixth, were at tea in the study, and Tubby Muffin caught Bulkeley's voice as he passed.

"Counterfeit notes—"

Tubby Muffin halted suddenly in the passage. Those words struck him like a thump on his fat chest.

He blinked towards Bulkeley's doorway. The voice of the Rookwood captain went on:

"You remember when the counterfeiters were arrested, Neville—the time that kid Clare, Smythe's cousin, was here. One of them was hiding among the old quarries on the heath. The police collared him, and they got a lot of the counterfeit notes the rascals had been printing. But it seems there were a lot more. The fellow threw them away before he was caught, and they haven't been found. I met Boggs, the Coombe bobby, on the heath this afternoon, poking around, looking for them—"

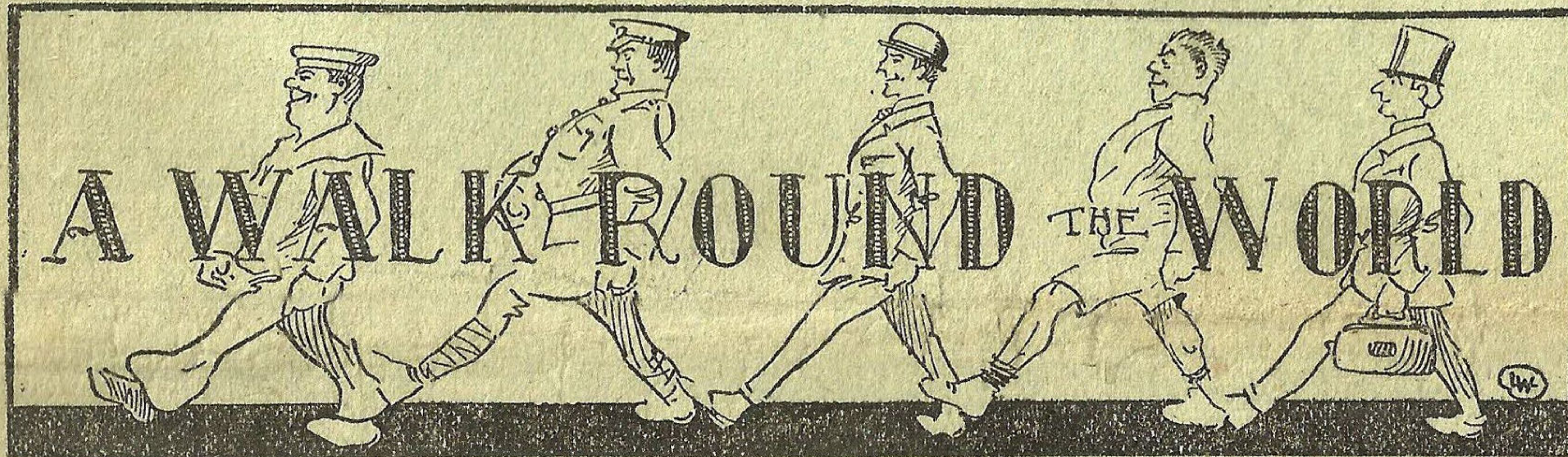
"Oh!" gasped Tubby Muffin.

The fat junior stood rooted to the floor. Like a flash of light, the true explanation of his mysterious find came over him. He understood at last.

Carthew of the Sixth waited for his expected guest in vain. Tubby Muffin was not thinking of tea with his friend in the Sixth Form. He was thinking of the currency notes—the counterfeit notes—in his study and in his pockets; and of those that he had spent. And he was wondering, in dire terror, what was going to happen. And he was wishing, from the very bottom of his soul, that he had never acted upon that unscrupulous maxim that "findings are keepings."

THE END.

(Next Monday's long, complete story of Rookwood is entitled "The Tribulations of Tubby!" By Owen Conquest. Don't miss it!)



By LESLIE WILSON.

(A Splendid Series of Articles dealing with the Author's Experiences in Different Parts of the World.)

I have so much to tell, so many interesting incidents and strange happenings of my walk, that I find now I have been getting along too slow with my first two articles. And I realise that if I wish to take you with me to my journey's end, then I must cut out a great many things I had in my mind to write about.

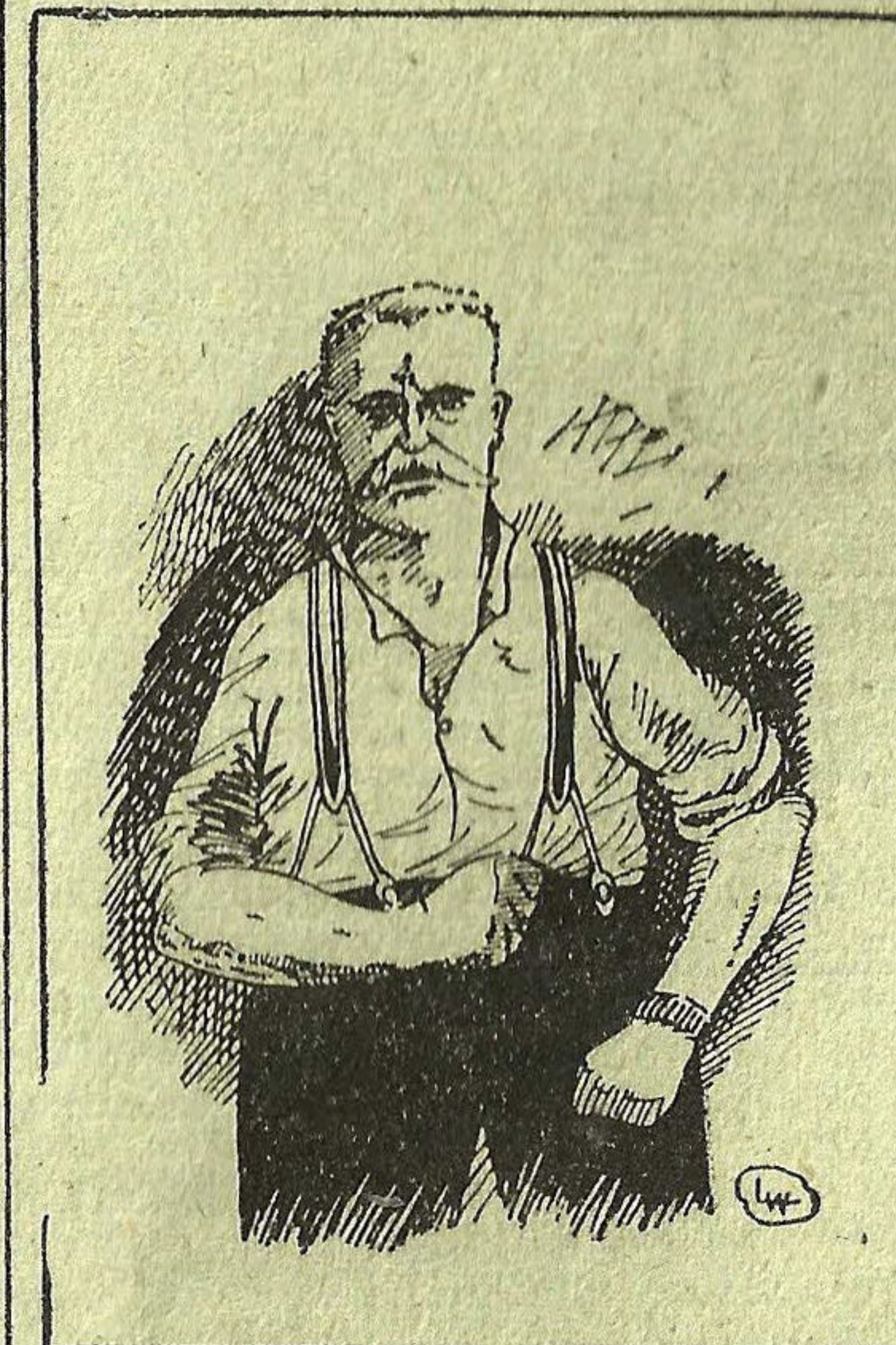
Already I have taken you with me but a few hundred miles. This week I shall finish my Australian walk, so that I may tell you of some wonderful happenings that occurred in Africa and elsewhere. Last week we arrived on the river Murray, Australia's largest river, and the border line between Victoria and New South Wales.

I crossed over this fine river between Wahgunyah and Corowa. From the last named place I followed the north bank of the Murray to Albury. It was between these two towns that I had to defend myself, for the first time on my long journey, from assault by a man. I had been walking all day, and well into a bitterly cold night. Towards midnight, feeling about done up, I decided that the town I was making for would have to wait over until the following day, and so I looked out for a likely place to put up at until the morning. I did not fancy sleeping out that night as it was too cold, and a very heavy dew had saturated everything out of doors, and I was very tired and hungry. Soon after I had decided to stop for the night I came upon a very large, low building, which I discovered to be, on a closer inspection, an hotel. I had noticed lights about the place when a little distance off, but just as I discovered, to my great joy, the character of the building, all the lights were extinguished. But I did not mind that. Here was a large hotel, with a comfortable bed within, and though it was midnight I did not doubt for one moment but that the good folk within would give

me something to eat and drink. I walked boldly up to the front door and knocked. I waited some few minutes, and knocked again. Then again, and once again, and yet again, rapping louder on each occasion, until I even heard the echo of the knocking in the gum-trees some hundreds of yards away. But the house may as well have been the house of the dead, for all the notice that was taken of my attentions on the knocker. So after giving the front of the hotel a fair chance I made my way round to the back, and paid attention to the back door. As there was no knocker I used my knuckles and the toe of my right boot, but no result came of all this noise. This continued silence of the inmates got my back up—you know what that means?—and I determined I would make them acknowledge my presence, even though they would not give me shelter. It is a law in Australia that no hotel or wayside inn may refuse shelter to a traveller, and I had ample cash in my pockets to pay for food and lodging—so I walked round to the side of the building to pay attention to the windows from which I had seen the lights so recently.

I had just got under the window, and was deciding how I would go about attracting notice, when I heard someone rush round the building from the back, and before I could turn to defend myself the man—the proprietor of the hotel it turned out to be—was all over me. He caught me a beautiful punch on the right side of the head, and a couple of beauties on the chest, that knocked me up against the side of the building and nearly broke the windows. The wall steadied me, and by now, having my wits about me again, at the fellow's next rush I slipped him easily, and, running off a little distance, I let my shoulder-straps slide down my arms, my bag falling to the ground behind me.

I was now ready for my enemy, and I had a chance to weigh him up, for a late moon was shining brightly, and lit up the scene splendidly. In front of me I saw a big figure of a



"I knew that he was a German!"

man, arrayed in shirt, trousers, and slippers. He was a much heavier man than I, but with satisfaction I noticed that his waist-line was much too big for a man in training, and I already knew—for he swore and yelled all the time that he was attacking me—that he was a German—and I knew something of Germany and its men folk. I was but a few brief seconds taking stock of the madman, when he rushed at me again. This time I was ready for him. He swung his arms, and came at me like an angry bull, but I

easily defended myself, and, getting the interior lines of the fighting and close up, I hit him repeatedly, until he tried to defend his stomach with his brawny arms, leaving his face well open. This was my chance, and I gave him a nice upper-cut with my right to the chin that nearly knocked his head off. At any rate, it put him on his back and stopped his tongue for a while. I waited very patiently for him to get up again and have some more, or explain his conduct, for, believe me, I did not feel kindly toward the Hun, and was longing to give him a further taste of my feelings toward him. After a few minutes the hotel-keeper sat up, and in that position, for a while, nursed his chin, and tried to gather together the poor wits that he possessed. A few more minutes and he was on his feet, and although he saw me standing near awaiting his pleasure, he turned, and started to move off to the back of the building. This did not suit me, so I stepped in his way and demanded an explanation from him.

I got out of him the story of how he had been pestered by tramps lately, so much that he had determined that very day to give the next unfortunate who disturbed him a good thrashing. He now made a sort of apology for attacking me, but he absolutely refused to allow me into his hotel, or to help me in any way, so as I was freshened up somewhat with this little "dust up," and not feeling so tired, I collected my hat, stick, and bag, and turned to leave. But the gentle Hun had not finished with me yet, for a great watch-dog, which he kept on a cable at the back of the premises, and which all this while was barking and straining at its chain, he released and set on to me, yelling to his dog to "go for me," and "eat me," "tear me to pieces," and so on. Oh, he was a nice Hun! But his dog was all right, for though he started for me with an ugly rush, the good animal stopped on my calling to him and talking to him in a language he understood, and instead of tearing me to pieces the intelligent creature trotted up to me, wagging his tail the while, and allowed me to pet and fondle him, much to the chagrin of his master, who betook himself indoors, while I took to the road again, leaving behind me a friend, even though I had made an enemy.

I walked through New South Wales, passing up through Wagga-Wagga—pronounced as one word, Woga—and, coming down west, recrossed the Murray into Victoria, turning eastwards into South Australia.

I had given to me, just before I left New South Wales, a splendid little specimen of a Scotch terrier

by an admirer. This little dog and I became very great friends, and I spent many a very happy evening while camped in the bush teaching my four-footed companion simple tricks—guarding my bags, warning, carrying, fetching, etc. I taught him how to warn me of anything suspicious without making a sound, and as each day went by I became more and more attached to my intelligent friend. In camp at night we would sit close up to our fire, and Buzz would watch me, with his big eyes full of the light of affection. When he heard strange sounds he would slightly turn his fine head in that direction and cock his ears. If he was very suspicious or uneasy, he would walk over to me and paw me gently with one of his forefeet.

As I got close to the South Australian border, I picked up the railway, intending to follow it across the desert. On the second day after striking the line, I was walking along between the rails, and had just passed through a cutting, and came out upon a very high embankment when Buzz and I at the same moment espied a hare sitting up at the foot of the embankment about thirty feet below us.

Buzz gave one glance at me to see if I disapproved of his going, and then off he flew down the steep slope after his quarry. The hare did not wait for Buzz, but just streaked off through the tall grass. Buzz set off through the bush on a hopeless chase, hopping straight up into the air at short intervals to try and catch sight of the hare above the tall grass, but after a few minutes' unsuccessful hunt, I saw him returning, and, oh, he did look ashamed of himself as he slowly climbed the slope again!

I was laughing quietly to myself at the dejected look on his face, when I was greatly startled to hear behind me, and almost above me, the sudden shriek and roar of a railway-engine. Without pausing to look around, I sprang sideways clear of the rails, and went flying head-over-heels down the thirty-foot embankment, to land in some thorny bush below. As I cleared the rails, the Melbourne-Adelaide express thundered by, and so close that the wind from her passing struck me like a blow. I lay still for a little while—I had to—and then commenced the slow and painful job of getting up and freeing myself from the bush that had been my resting-place. I had a hard job to get out of that bush, for thousands of thorns held my clothing, and I was a long time getting clear. And what a sorry sight I must have been then, covered as I was with bruises, cuts, and scratches, plastered with a mixture of blood and dust, my shirt in ribbons, and my trousers rent in many places, and by the time I had freed myself,





# BOB LAWLESS'S FOLLY

A Splendid, Long, Complete  
: Story of :  
FRANK RICHARDS & Co.,  
: of :  
CEDAR CREEK SCHOOL.  
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

### The 1st Chapter.

#### Only a Rehearsal!

"Laissez moi passer!"  
It was a woman's voice, rising to a scream. Frank Richards & Co. pulled in their horses quickly. The chums of Cedar Creek were riding home from school, at an easy trot, on the grassy trail that wound through the timber. On either side of the trail the big trees and thick underwoods rose like a wall of green, glimmering in the afternoon sunshine. Suddenly, from behind the trees, came that shrill cry. The three chums halted instantly. In another instant they had jumped from their horses. "This way!" exclaimed Bob Lawless.

The cry of a woman in peril was more than enough to draw the Cedar Creek chums to the spot. They gripped their riding whips, and ran into the timber, Bob Lawless leading, Frank Richards and Vere Beauclere were close behind him.

With a rush, they came through the screen of larches, into an open glade shadowed by great cedars.

The sight that burst on their eyes, in the glade, was so strange and startling, that they halted for a moment, staring.

A woman in a gaily-coloured costume stood in a half-crouching attitude, her big black eyes fixed upon a man in dilapidated attire, with a knife in his hand.

The man looked more like a Spanish bravo in a play, than anyone the chums had ever seen in that quiet and law-abiding section of British Columbia.

He looked as if about to spring like a panther at the highly-coloured dame. His swarthy face expressed the utmost ferocity.

"Carmen!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice.

Apparently that was the name of the lady.

The latter did not heed, save by turning a glance of sovereign contempt upon the swarthy bravo.

Then her glance turned, in surprise, upon the three schoolboys who had burst through the underwoods.

The bravo did not seem to see them.

With his long Spanish knife gripped in his dusky hand, he closed in on the lady, evidently about to strike.

With a spring, Bob Lawless reached him.

Before the knife was within a yard of the threatened dame, Bob had struck the bravo a terrific blow, and the recipient thereof went reeling and spinning across the grass.

"Whooooop!"

That was what the bravo yelled, as he went down; rather an unexpected exclamation from a Spanish bravo. "Carambo!" would have been more in keeping with the character.

"Pile on him!" yelled Bob.

Frank and Beauclere were not slow in piling on the bravo.

They were upon him as he rolled in the grass, and a knee on his ribs, and another on his neck, pinned him there. Bob Lawless kicked the knife into the thicket.

The Cedar Creek chums had been prompt to the rescue.

"All right now, miss!" exclaimed Bob, breathlessly, turning to the startled dame while his chums held the bravo pinned in the grass.

Bob anticipated an outburst of terrified thanks from the dame whose life had been so narrowly saved.

To his amazement, she burst into laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh dear! Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Lawless stood petrified.

He wondered, for a moment, whether it was hysterics but the young lady was laughing too heartily for that. She wiped her eyes, as tears of merriment flowed from them.

"Oh dear! Oh dear! Ha, ha, ha."

"Ma'am!" stammered Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let me go, you fools!" roared the bravo, struggling under Frank Richards and Beauclere. "You young idiots, I'll skin you! Lemme gerrup."

breathless and ruffled, and evidently in a towering rage.

"You silly young idiots!" he bawled, "What the thunder do you want to come butting in for?"

"I—I—we—"

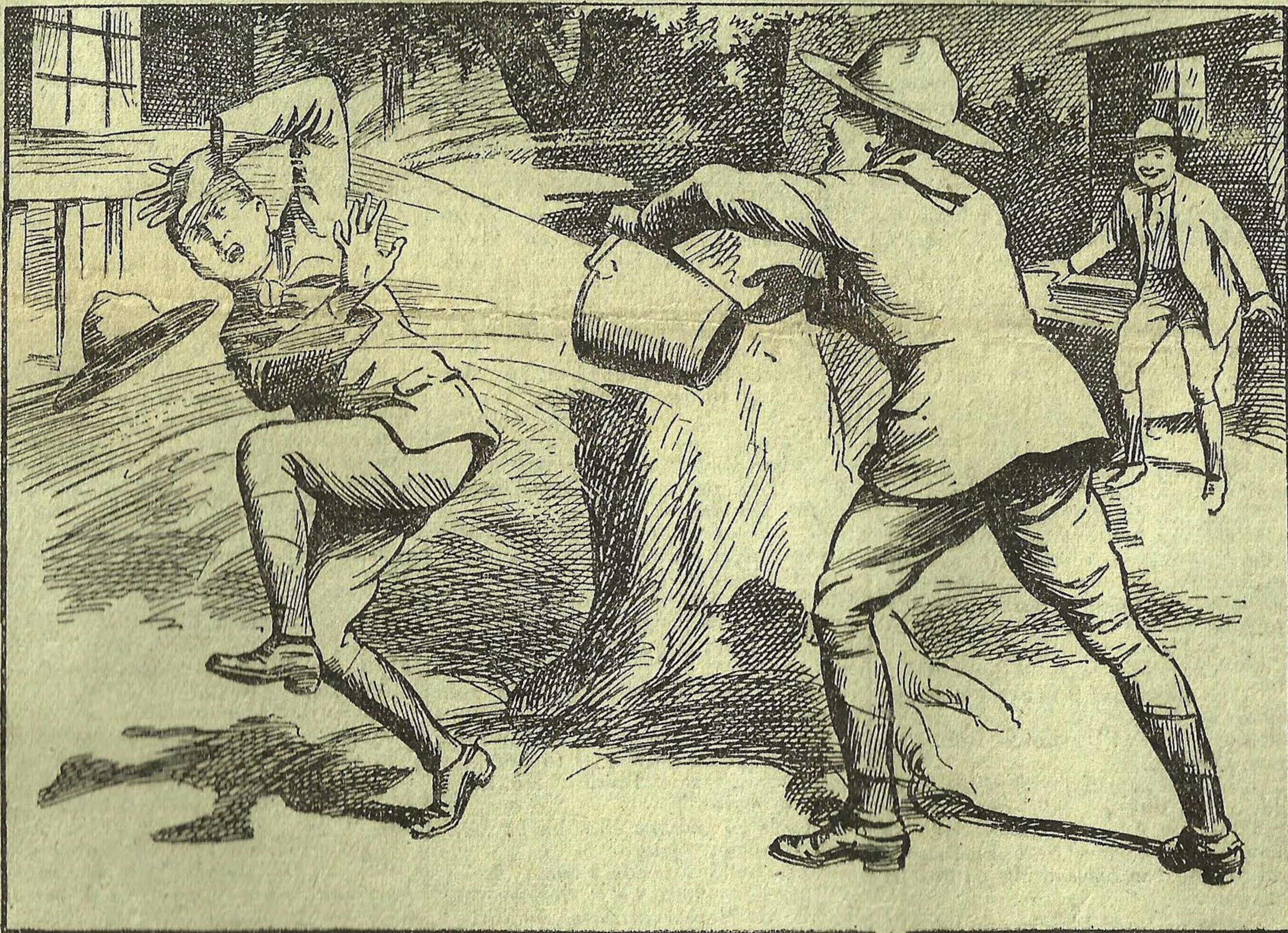
"I thought this was a quiet spot for a rehearsal," gasped the young lady. "Oh dear! Never mind, Charley, you're not hurt."

"I am hurt," growled Charley. "I've had a thump like the kick of a mule! Ow!"

"A—a—a—rehearsal!" babbled Bob Lawless.

The three schoolboys stood dumb-founded.

Their faces were so sheepish, that



**COOLING HIS ARDOUR!** Softly and silently Frank Richards came up behind the tree. Bob Lawless was gazing at the window and murmuring: "Clarissa!" The name had scarcely passed his lips when there was a sudden "swoosh" of water. The contents of the bucket came over Lawless in a drenching flood. "Groooooogh! Oh! Ooooooh!" he gasped. Frank Richards fled in the darkness, chuckling breathlessly.

"You keep where you are, you ruffian!" panted Frank. "You're going to be handed over to the sheriff for this."

"What! You young fool."

"Shut up! Kneel on his neck, Beau."

"You bet!"

"Groooooogh!"

"Please do not hurt my brother," exclaimed the young lady, checking her merriment at last.

"Your—your brother!" stammered Bob Lawless.

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"But—he was going—!" stammered Bob, utterly bewildered.

"No, no. Let him get up, please, at once."

"He's dangerous, miss!" exclaimed Frank Richards.

"Ha, ha! Not at all! Don't be angry, Charley—the boys did not understand."

"Lemme gerrup!" hissed Charley.

In blank amazement, Frank Richards and Beauclere released the bravo. He staggered to his feet,

even the enraged and injured Charley grinned, as he rubbed the place where Bob's knuckles had landed.

"It's all right, Clarissa," he mumbled, "What's the knife? What have you young jays done with my dagger?"

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Frank Richards.

Never in all his youthful career had Frank felt, and looked, so complete an ass as he felt and looked at that moment.

But really the Cedar Creek chums were not to blame.

They could not be expected to know that a company of players, on the way to Thompson Town had camped in the timber, and that the prima donna and the leading gentleman had selected that quiet and secluded glade for a rehearsal of the final scene in "Carmen." In fact, it was probable that they had never heard of Bizet's opera at all.

"Oh, my hat!" said Beauclere, "I—I think we'd better slide."

"What-ho!" murmured Frank.

The two schoolboys backed into the

underwood and disappeared. They felt that that was the wisest step to take, in the peculiar circumstances.

But Bob Lawless lingered.

He was feeling quite as big an ass as his comrades; but he felt, too, that some apology was due to the man he had knocked spinning with all the strength of his arm.

"I—I—I—" he stammered.

"Where's that pesky knife!" hooted Charley. "I don't want to lose that knife! Props are dear."

"I—I guess I'll find it," mumbled Bob.

The rancher's son retrieved the property knife he had kicked into the thicket. Charley grunted as the schoolboy handed it to him.

"I—I'm sorry I slogged you," stammered Bob.

"You young ass!"

"We—we were riding by on the trail, and—and we heard the lady scream, you know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Carmen. Bob's unhappy face was crimson.

"I—I'm sorry!" he mumbled.

And he backed away.

"Stop a moment." Miss Clarissa came towards the rancher's son with a charming smile, and held out a very shapely hand. "My dear boy, of course you did not understand—and it was very brave of you—wasn't it, Charley?"

"Ow!" was Charley's reply, as he rubbed his bruise.

"Don't be cross, Charley!"

"Yow-wow!"

Evidently Charley was cross!

"It was very brave of you," continued Miss Clarissa, as Bob shyly took her hand. "If I had really been in danger, I am sure you would have saved me. So I am very much obliged to you. What is your name?"

"Bob Lawless!" stammered Bob.

"Mine is Clarissa de Vere!" said the young lady, with another charm-

ing smile. "I don't remember any strolling company coming up the valley before. I've seen some down in Kamloops."

"Bother them!" said Frank.

"Oh dear!" mumbled Bob. "I guess we put our foot in it and no mistake! I hit that chap an awful sockdolager!"

"Ha ha!"

"Miss de Vere must think we're awful asses; but she was very nice about it all the same," said Bob.

"Is that her name?"

"Yes. She told me—"

"What a stunning name!" grinned Frank Richards. "But I believe theatrical folk generally have stunning names."

"It's her real name, of course," said Bob.

"More likely Huggings or Wiggins. But De Vere sounds better on the play-bills!" said Frank laughing.

"Rot!"

Bob Lawless spoke with unaccustomed sharpness and his chums looked at him rather curiously.

"Hallo! What's the row, Bob?" asked Frank. "Not waxy?"

"No, you ass! But it's her real name, of course; and a stunning name, too—Clarissa de Vere!" said Bob. "Just seems to suit her, somehow!"

"D-does it?"

"I—I wish I hadn't made such a goat of myself before her! She will think it's funny—"

"Well, it is funny; no mistake about that!" said Frank. "I never felt such an ass in my life!"

"Same here!" said Beauclere.

"But—but we weren't to blame," said Bob. "If she'd really been in danger, I'd have done anything—"

He broke off abruptly.

"Let's get off," he said.

"Right-ho!"

The chums of Cedar Creek remounted their horses, and rode away down the trail.

Frank and Beauclere had very quickly recovered their serenity after the unfortunate adventure; but Bob Lawless remained plunged in deep thought. He did not speak as they rode along the grassy trail.

At the fork of the trail they parted, and Beauclere rode away to his home, Frank and Bob keeping on to the ranch. Frank made several remarks as he trotted over the prairie with his cousin, but Bob did not answer them. He did not seem to hear them.

"What's the trouble, Bob?" Frank exclaimed at last.

"Eh? Nothing!" answered Bob, coming out of a brown study with a start. "What do you mean?"

"You've said hardly a word."

"Nothing to say."

"You generally have enough to say," said Frank, with a smile. "I suppose you haven't fallen in love with the prima donna, have you?"

Bob's face was flooded with scarlet. He did not answer, but gave his horse a touch of the whip, and broke into a gallop towards the ranch.

Frank Richards stared after him.

He had made his remark carelessly, without the faintest notion that he was hitting the right nail on the head. Hitherto, Bob Lawless had always been too level-headed a fellow to allow fantastic ideas to come into his mind. The rancher's son was the very reverse of namby-pamby; and he had been immensely tickled on the occasion when Chunky Todgers had been "mashed" on Molly Lawrence, of Cedar Creek. But now—

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Frank.

He gazed after his chum, and burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank could not help it.

The bare idea of his sturdy, matter-of-fact cousin being struck by the charms of an operatic lady was too much for him. He yelled.

Bob Lawless looked back over his shoulder, with a frowning brow, and then urged on his horse faster.

"Wait for me, Bob!" shouted Frank.

But Bob did not wait. He galloped on towards the ranch without looking back again.

Frank Richards rode hard, but he did not overtake his Canadian cousin before the Lawless Ranch was reached.

He did not see Bob again till supper.

Then Bob Lawless was very quiet and subdued, and he carefully avoided meeting Frank's amused glances.

It was not till they went to bed that he spoke on the subject. The two cousins had turned in, and it was after the candle was out that Bob sat up in bed and called across to Frank:

"Franky!"

"Hallo!"

"Don't be such a silly ass!"

"Eh?" Frank Richards sat up.

"What's the matter now? How am I an ass?"

### The 2nd Chapter.

#### Clarissa!

Frank Richards and Beauclere were waiting on the trail with the horses when Bob joined them.

Bob's face was crimson as he came out into the trail; and Frank and Beauclere also looked very flushed.

They looked at one another in silence for some moments. Then Frank Richards grinned.

"After all, we did the right thing," he said. "We—we couldn't know that it was blessed play actors."

"Of—of course, we couldn't!"





## BOB LAWLESS'S ... FOLLY.

(Continued from the previous page.)

"That rot you were talking—"  
"Only a joke, old chap!" chuckled Frank. "But if the cap fits, you know—"  
"Fathhead!"  
"All serene!"  
"A chap can admire a beautiful girl, I suppose," said Bob, "without playing the goat like Chunky Todgers!"  
"Of course he can!" said Frank, assuming a great gravity of tone. "You simply admire the lady's beauty—"  
"That's it?"  
"And charm of manner—"  
"Exactly!"  
"And sylph-like grace—"  
"You—you noticed how graceful she was, Frank?"  
"Not specially; but I dare say she was. What a beautiful colour she had, too!"  
"Oh! You noticed her lovely complexion?"  
"Yes, rather! It looked almost real!"  
"Almost real!" howled Bob.  
"Yes; it was done very cleverly, wasn't it?"  
"You thumping idiot—"  
"Eh?"  
"It was genuine, you dummy!"  
"Genuine grease-paint?" asked Frank.  
"Genuine complexion, you idiot!"  
"How do you know?" demanded Frank.  
"I—I—I'm sure of it, of course! I never thought you were such a thundering idiot, Frank!"  
"We live and learn, you know!" chuckled Frank. "I may say the same. I never thought you were such a thundering idiot, Bob, old scout!"  
"Br-r-r!"  
There was silence in the room for some time, and Frank Richards settled down to sleep.  
But there was no sleep for Frank Richards just yet. Bob's voice broke the silence.  
"I say, Frank—"  
"Hallo!" yawned Frank Richards sleepily.  
"Did you notice her eyes?"  
"Eh? Whose eyes?"  
"Clarissa's."  
"Who the thump's Clarissa?"  
"I—I mean Miss de Vere."  
"Oh, my hat! If you mean Miss de Vere, you'd better say Miss de Vere. You mustn't call young ladies by their Christian names, even when you rescue them from a property dagger at a rehearsal."  
"Don't be an ass, Frank!"  
"I don't think I'm the ass present just now!" chuckled Frank.  
"Did you notice—"  
"Her nose?" asked Frank.  
"N-no—her eyes."  
"I noticed that she had two," answered Frank. "I didn't take any special notice of them. If she had three, or only one, I dare say I should have noticed the fact specially."  
"You silly idiot!"  
"Thanks!"  
"You crass chump!"  
"Thanks! Good-night!"  
"Oh, go and chop chips!"  
Frank Richards chuckled, and laid his head on the pillow again. He was just sinking into sweet slumber when Bob Lawless' voice was heard again. Apparently Bob was not thinking of sleep.  
"Franky!"  
"M-mmm-m-m-m!"  
"Are you asleep, Frank?"  
"Grooh! Oh, no! Wharrer mar-rer?"  
"How old do you think she is?"  
"She? What—who? Molly?"  
"No, you ass—Clarissa!"  
"Eh? I don't know! About forty, I suppose!"  
"Forty!" yelled Bob.  
"I suppose so! Go to sleep, and let me!"  
"You chump!"  
"Snore!"  
"You silly monkey!"  
"Snore!"  
And Bob Lawless gave it up.

### The 3rd Chapter. A Serious Case.

Bob Lawless ate his breakfast the next morning with his usual hearty appetite. The extraordinary fancy that had come into his head had not

affected that department. He looked very sheepish when he met Frank's glance, and he avoided conversation on the way to the school that day.  
Vere Beauclerc met his chums at the fork in the trail, as usual. He had news for them.  
"I've seen our play-acting friends again," he said, as they trotted on towards Cedar Creek School.  
Bob Lawless looked at him eagerly. "You've seen her?" he exclaimed.  
"Her! Who?" asked Beauclerc, puzzled.  
"There's only one 'her' in Canada for Bob," explained Frank Richards. "He's thinking of Miss de Vere."  
"Oh, my hat!"  
"Franky, don't be a bigger ass than you were born!" said Bob crossly. "That's big enough, goodness knows. Where did you see her, Cherub—I—I mean them, of course?"  
"The company's camped near our cabin," explained Beauclerc. "They've got tents and things, and a couple of waggons. A rather dusty lot. They've been giving a performance at Cedar Camp in the big room at the hotel, and all the cattlemen came. I don't think the Cedar Camp chaps know quite what to make of operatic performances."  
"What lingo are they given in?" asked Frank, with interest.  
"Oh, English!" said Beauclerc, laughing. "It wouldn't be much use springing French and Italian on Cedar Camp. Even in English the galoots don't know what to make of it. I asked Bocus Bill—he went. He said they were all howling, and there was a band. That was all he knew, and he couldn't make head or tail of it; but there was a galoot he felt like lynching—some bullfighter in the play. He's seen bullfights in Mexico, and he don't like them."  
"They were rehearsing in French yesterday," said Bob. "I suppose they put it in English for the frontier towns. I'm going to see them perform at Thompson when it comes off."  
"Everybody's sure to go, whatever it's like," said Frank. "There's precious few entertainments come up the valley from the railway. Something rather new to have grand opera in the Thompson Valley."  
"Ever seen them in London," asked Bob, "before you came out here?"  
Frank nodded.  
"Yes; my father took me to Covent Garden once or twice in the summer holidays," he said.  
"Then you can tell us all about it."  
"Precious little, I'm afraid. But I don't think this company will be much like the opera company in London," grinned Frank. "They must be pretty hard up to be touring in a district like this."  
"One's jolly good, at least."  
"You mean the bravo we downed yesterday?"  
"No, I don't!" grunted Bob. "I mean Clarissa."  
And Bob rode on ahead of his comrades, and did not take part in the chat on the way to school. But at the gates of Cedar Creek he halted, and waited for his smiling chums to come up.  
"None of your little jokes here!" he said warningly. "I don't want to be chipped by all the school."  
"My dear chap, we'll keep it a dead secret," said Frank, with a chuckle. "Such things are not fit subjects for chipping. But that's only on one condition."  
"What's that?"  
"That you don't elope without telling us first."  
"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Beauclerc.  
Bob Lawless gave his chum a ferocious look.  
"You—you—you silly ass!" he spluttered.  
And Bob led his horse away with a red face, and refused to speak to his comrades again before school.  
Frank Richards & Co. found that the news of the operatic company had preceded them at Cedar Creek. Chunky Todgers knew all about it. He came to school through Thompson, and he had seen all the dead walls in that town plastered with bills, announcing the forthcoming arrival of the Grand European Opera Company. Probably, there was nothing European about the company save the title. But the arrival caused a good deal of excitement. Entertainments were few and far between in the Thompson Valley, and even a travelling conjuring show was always

sure of a packed audience at Gunten's Rooms.

Grand opera was a novelty, and it was sure of a plentiful attendance, though it was likely considerably to perplex the matter-of-fact citizens of Thompson.

"First performance on Saturday, at Gunten's Rooms!" said Chunky Todgers. "They're fitting up the big room ready now. There's a first-class orchestra, according to the bills. The first performance is 'Carmen.' That's queer, ain't it?"  
"What's queer about it?" asked Frank.

"Well, an opera is a musical play, ain't it?" said Todgers. "I should reckon they'd find something more romantic than Carmen to sing about. Carmen—galoots like car-drivers, I suppose. What is there romantic or operatic about Carmen?"  
Frank chuckled.

"It's a name," he said. "That's the heroine's name—a Spanish name, old chap."

"Blessed if it sounds to me like a name!" said Chunky. "I fancy you're mistaken, Richards—"

"What!"  
"You'll see that it's a play about car-drivers," said Chunky Todgers confidently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Saturday being a free day at Cedar Creek School, a good many of the fellows made up their minds to see "Carmen," at Gunten's Rooms. Tickets, it was learned from Chunky, could be obtained at Gunten's Store, over the counter, prices from a dollar upwards. Frank Richards & Co. decided to call in for tickets on their way home from school.

After lessons, they rode up the Thompson trail, and along Main Street of Thompson to Gunten's Store. There was a goodly crowd at the store, reading the announcements and discussing the forthcoming treat. Many of the citizens evidently did not know what to make of it, but most of them had determined to roll up and see what it was like. The leading lights of the operatic company had their quarters at the Occidental Hotel, the schoolboys learned, the lesser members being camped, with their waggons, on a vacant "lot" off Main Street.

The three chums purchased dollar tickets from Mr. Gunten, and came out of the store. Frank and Beauclerc returned to their horses, which were hitched to a post outside the store, but Bob paused.

"Don't you fellows wait for me," he said, colouring.  
"Oh, we'll wait," said Frank. "Do you want to get something in the store?"

"N-no."

"What is it, then?"

"I—I'm just going to stroll round to the Occidental."

Frank's eyes met Beauclerc's, and there was a simultaneous grin. At the Occidental Hotel Charles and Clarissa de Vere had taken up their quarters, with Signor Benzino, the baritone, and Monsieur Mungo, the manager.

"You want to see the chap you punched yesterday?" asked Frank.

"I—I— Well, come to think of it, it would be only civil to ask him how he is," said Bob. "He must have a bruise."

"Let's go and ask after his bruise," said Beauclerc, laughing.

"You fellows needn't come—"

"My dear chap, we're as interested in Mr. de Vere's bruise as you are," said Frank Richards. "Come on!"

And the chums walked away to the Occidental, Bob with a beautifully rich complexion.

### The 4th Chapter. A Wash-out!

Bill Todgers, the elder brother of Chunky, of that ilk, presided over the bar at the Occidental. William Todgers cheerfully gave the schoolboys the information they desired. Mr. and Miss de Vere were staying at the hotel; and Mr. de Vere, at that very moment, was in the smoking-room, engaged in a game of poker with Gentleman Jim. The chums went into the smoking-room and found the poker-players by the window, in a cloud of smoke. Gentleman Jim was a "sportsman," who earned a laborious and precarious livelihood by playing cards with any "galoot" who had more money than sense—a well-known character at the Occidental. But he was not looking specially happy over this particular game. Probably in Mr. de Vere he had met a gentleman as well acquainted with the wicked pasteboards as he was himself.

Charles de Vere glanced up at the schoolboys, and knitted his brows. Frank and Beauclerc remained

modestly in the background, but Bob Lawless resolutely approached the poker-table.

He waited till a round was open and Gentleman Jim was shuffling the cards for a new deal. Then he addressed the tenor.

"G-good evening, Mr. de Vere."

"Oh! You again!" said Charley.

"Ye-es. I—I hope—"

"Jh?"

"I hope you haven't felt any bad effects from—from what—what happened yesterday—"

"I've got a lump like a pigeon's egg," said Mr. de Vere gruffly. "I've a good mind to boot you!"

"I say, I guess I'm awfully sorry for the—the mistake!"

"Well, it's all O. K., never mind!"

said Mr. de Vere, more good-humouredly. "You can walk your chalks."

"Is—Is Miss de Vere well?" asked Bob timidly.

Mr. de Vere stared at him.

"I suppose so," he answered. "No reason why she shouldn't be, that I know of."

Gentleman Jim was dealing the cards, and Mr. de Vere transferred all his attention to the game.

Bob Lawless, somewhat abashed, rejoined his chums.

Possibly Bob had hoped to see the charming lady who had thanked him so nicely in the timber after the interrupted rehearsal. But Mr. de Vere evidently did not see his drift—or did not care to see it. He became totally oblivious of the schoolboy's existence as he proceeded with the game of draw poker.

"Well, coming home, old fellow?" asked Frank Richards, suppressing a smile.

"Not yet. Don't worry!"

"But—"

"Rats!"

Bob Lawless walked out of the hotel, and his grinning chums followed him.

In the extraordinary state of affairs they were determined not to abandon their comrade, if they could help it.

In Main Street again, Bob seemed to hesitate, and Frank and Beauclerc waited patiently. Bob turned to them at last.

"You galoots mosey off home!" he said abruptly.

"But aren't you coming?"

"Nope."

"Uncle will ask—"

"Tell him I've stayed on in Thompson a bit."

"Shall I tell him about Miss de Vere?" asked Frank innocently.

"No!" howled Bob.

Frank and Beauclerc exchanged glances. There seemed nothing to be done, and they walked away towards Gunten's Store, leaving Bob outside the Occidental. Looking back from a distance, they saw him engaged in conversation with the black porter.

"Well, this is a go, old chap!" said Frank. "We can't go home and leave Bob playing the goat here on his own."

Beauclerc shook his head.

"It's getting dark now," said Frank. "What the dickens are we going to do, Beau?"

"Keep an eye on Bob," answered Beauclerc. "The silly ass is going to hang round the place and see the singer, if he can. Who'd have thought Bob would ever play the ox like that?"

"Poor old Bob! He doesn't know what an ass he is!" said Frank, laughing. "I suppose we'd better keep an eye on him."

The chums walked in Main Street till darkness had quite fallen and the stars were coming out over the Thompson Valley. Then they returned in the direction of the Occidental. The front of the hotel was lighted up now, but Bob Lawless was not to be seen in the radius of light.

Frank Richards approached the negro porter, who was loafing outside the porch.

"Has Bob Lawless gone in?" he asked. "You know him, Peter."

Peter grinned.

"No, sah; he not gone in," he answered. "He gib me half a dollar to tell him which Missy de Vere's room. Me point out de winder," said the black man, grinning.

"Oh, my hat!"

"The howling ass!" murmured Frank. "What did he want to know her window for?"

"Let's look for him."

"Come on!"

The chums went round the hotel, to the block of vacant ground behind. Some of the windows in the two storeys of the Occidental were lighted. Darkness lay outside, and it was not easy to see their way over the rough ground, dotted with rubbish.

But they sighted Bob suddenly.

He was standing close by a stunted cedar that stood on the vacant lot,

staring up at a lighted window, curtained. Evidently that window belonged to Clarissa de Vere.

Bob Lawless was so rapt in his contemplation that he did not think of looking round him.

For some minutes his chums watched him from a distance of a dozen yards, in the glimmering starlight.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Frank, at last. "Jevver see such a silly idiot, Beau?"

"Not since Chunky was mashed on Molly Lawrence," murmured Beauclerc. "Shall we wake him up?"

"I suppose he will be ratty if we do," muttered Frank, in perplexity.

"But we're not going to leave him here playing the goat, that's certain!"

"No, fear!"

Frank reflected for some minutes. Bob Lawless did not stir or look round. His rapt gaze remained fixed on the lighted window. Evidently he thought his chums were far away, if he thought of them at all.

"I've got it!" whispered Frank at last.

He made Beauclerc a sign to be silent, and led the way, the Cherub following him. At the back of the Occidental was a trough for horses, with a tin bucket standing in the water. It was that which had put an idea into Frank Richards' head. He felt it was a time for drastic measures, for Bob's own sake.

"My hat!" murmured Beauclerc, as Frank filled the tin bucket and lifted it from the trough. "You're not going to—"

"Shush!"

Beauclerc, suppressing his chuckles, remained near the trough, while Frank stole softly towards the cedar-tree where Bob was standing, with the bucket of water in his grasp.

He was quite close to Bob, who heard and saw nothing. As Frank came within a yard of him, he heard him murmur:

"Clarissa!"

Frank Richards raised the bucket quietly.

The murmured name had scarcely passed Bob's lips when there was a sudden "swoosh" of swishing water.

The contents of the bucket came over Bob Lawless in a drenching flood.

Swoooooosh!

"Groooooogh! Oh! Ooooooch!"

Frank Richards fled in the darkness, chuckling breathlessly. He tossed the bucket back into the trough, caught Beauclerc by the arm, and ran.

From behind, as the chums retreated, came a wild sound of gasping, gurgling, and spluttering.

"Grooh! Hooh! Ooooooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank and Beauclerc scudded back to Gunten's Store, where the horses were tethered.

Bob was only a few minutes after them.

He came hurrying up to the horses, drenched and evidently in a furious temper, and he started as he saw his chums.

"You still here?" he ejaculated.

"We thought we'd wait for you," said Frank demurely. "Hallo! You look rather wet."

"It hasn't been raining," said Beauclerc innocently. "Have you been in the river, Bob?"

"Grooh! No."

Bob Lawless gave his chums a swift, suspicious look. But two grave and bland faces met his gaze.

"Some rotter chucked a bucket of water over me!" said Bob, breathing hard. "The skunk bolted before I could see who it was. Let's get home. I'm soaked."

"Too bad!" murmured Frank Richards. "Where were you, Bob?"

"Oh, hanging about. Let's get off!"

And the chums of Cedar Creek mounted and rode out of Thompson. They rode home by the Beauclerc's cabin, where Vere left his comrades. Bob and Frank galloped on towards the ranch without a word. When they arrived home, Bob Lawless hurried up to his room to change. Frank Richards followed him.

"Bob!" he said, as Bob Lawless towelled his damp head.

"Well?" grunted Bob crossly.

"Don't you think it's time you gave up playing the goat, old chap? Anybody would think you were potty, watching a window at the Occidental like—"

Bob jumped.

"You—you saw me? Then—then it was you? Why, I'll—I'll—"

He made a rush across the room, and Frank, with a yell of laughter, whipped out of the door and fled for his life. Evidently Bob did not think yet that it was time to give up playing the goat.