

THE BEST FOR SCHOOL AND ADVENTURE STORIES!

# The BOYS' FRIEND

TWELVE PAGES! TWENTY-SIXTH YEAR!

No. 1,007. Vol. XX. New Series | THREE HALFPENCE. | [Week Ending September 25th, 1920.]

## The Mysterious Tenant!



### IDENTIFYING THE MAN IN BLACK!

Newcome threw himself recklessly on the man to hold him down, while Raby dabbed at the swartly face with a sponge. There was only time for one dab, but the sponge came away stained! Mr. Lasker's dusky complexion could evidently be washed off!

#### The 1st Chapter. Tubby Tries It On!

"Come in old chaps!"  
Tubby Muffin's manner was hospitality itself. Tubby was seated in the armchair in the end study; and he took the trouble to rise to his feet, as Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome appeared in the doorway.  
The chums of the Fourth stared at him grimly. They were not in a very cheery mood that afternoon; and Tubby Muffin's fat, affectionate smile was quite wasted on them.  
"Hallo, what are you doing here?" granted Jimmy Silver.  
"Travel!" snapped Newcome.  
"And the sooner the quicker!" added Raby.  
Tubby Muffin coughed.  
"Take tea now?" he asked.  
"We're going to have tea," answered Jimmy Silver. "But we're not asking guests to tea, Roll along!"

"I'm not here exactly as a guest, Jimmy."  
"Quite so. Travel!"  
"The fact is—"  
"As you're here, you might as well have kept the fire in!" crowded Raby.  
"Anybody seen any sticks?"  
"I'll light the fire," said Muffin.  
"Hallo, do you want to make yourself useful for once?"  
"My dear chap, it's a pleasure to do anything for old friends like you fellows," purred Tubby.  
"Oh, my hat!"  
Jimmy Silver & Co. were tired, after a long tramp on Coombe Heath that afternoon. They sat down to rest, and watched Tubby Muffin as he routed firewood out of the bottom of the study cupboard and lighted the fire.  
Tubby jammed the kettle on the sticks, and turned a smiling face to the astonished juniors. It wasn't like Reginald Muffin to make himself useful in this way, as a rule; and the Co. wondered whether Reginald was ill.

"I'll lay the table now, Jimmy."  
"Hold on a minute!" said Jimmy Silver sarcastically. "There's nothing for tea—just bread-and-margar, and a kipper among three. It's not worth your while, Tubby, for the fourth part of a kipper."  
Tubby Muffin looked pained.  
"My dear old chap," he said, "I'm not thinking of such things. If you're short of Tommy I don't mind standing something. In fact, I've got a cake for tea."  
"A cake—you?" repeated Jimmy.  
"Look here!"  
Tubby pointed triumphantly to a paper parcel on the table. Undoubtedly it was a cake—one of Sergeant Kettle's three-shilling cakes—worth eighteen-pence in pre-war recall. At Rookwood, as elsewhere, the war had brought its changes, and nowhere more conspicuously than in the tuckshop. Cakes had doubled in price, but by way of compensation, they had been halved in size!

"Well, my hat!" said Raby blankly. "Fancy Tubby with a cake, and not scoffing it at sight! Are you ill, Muffin?"  
Tubby Muffin laid the table without heeding that question. While the chums of the Fourth rested after their tramp, the fat Classical prepared tea. They could only watch him and wonder. If there had been a great spread in the end study, Tubby's industry would have been easily explicable. But in the circumstances it was quite inexplicable.  
"You fellows still miss Lovell?" asked Tubby, looking up from the steaming teapot.  
"Yes, ass!" said Jimmy Silver curiously.  
"He's been gone more than a week now," remarked Muffin.  
"What difference does that make, ass?"  
"You used to have rows with him, you know," pursued Tubby. "I've often heard you slanging one another in this study."

The three juniors glared at Reginald Muffin.  
"The fact that they had sometimes had 'rows' with Arthur Edward Lovell was not agreeable to recall, now that poor Lovell had had to leave Rookwood School, and was parted from his old chums.  
"Do you want me to pour that tea over your silly head, Muffin?" inquired George Raby.  
"Eh? No!"  
"Then shut up!"  
"But I was saying—about Lovell, you know—"  
"Shut up!" roared Raby ferociously.  
"He was rather a hot-tempered ass, and very trying to a chap's nerves, you know," argued Tubby. "Take it all in all, you could find a much more agreeable study-mate than Lovell."  
Raby jumped up.  
"Don't waste the tea!" called out Jimmy Silver. "Your boot will do!"  
"Here, I say!" Tubby Muffin dodged round the table. "I say, you

keep off! Ain't I getting your face for you? If you kick me, Ruby— Yaroooh!"

"Now are you going to shut up?"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Tubby Muffin did not shut up; he selected the fat, and he judiciously left the subject of Lovell alone.

After the application of Ruby's boot to his fat person, it might have been supposed that Reginald Muffin would cease his good works in the end study. But he didn't. He went on with his industrious labours, and finished making the tea, and poured it out, and cut the bread-and-margarine, and performed the necessary dissecting operations on the kipper.

"Ready, you fellows?" he said.

"Look here, what's this game, Muffin?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"You're welcome to a quarter of the kipper, if it comes to that; but what are you driving at?"

"I've another lump of sugar, old chap!"

"Sugar's short!"

"I've brought some," said Tubby.

"Oh, my hat!"

Tubby Muffin produced lumps of sugar at which the trio stared again. Tubby had an inordinate appetite for sugar; nobody's ration was safe in his neighbourhood. Yet here he was, giving lumps of sugar away!

"That's a miracle," changed seemed to have come over Reginald Muffin, all of a sudden.

"Pile in, you fellows," he said. "If I'd had more time I'd have made you some toast. I will to-morrow."

"Are you going to get tea here to-morrow?" said Newcome.

"Certainly, old chap!"

"Are you looking for a job as far as a Fourth-Form study, then?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"I'm not exactly! More sugar?" asked Tubby.

"No, thanks!"

The three juniors were hungry, and they did full justice to the bread-and-margarine and the small allowance of kipper. The cake, to finish with, was very welcome. Tubby cut it generously and handed it round. In spite of themselves, Jimmy Silver & Co. could not help feeling a little mollified towards Reginald Muffin. He was a factless ass, on the subject of Lovell, no doubt, but they were willing—as they ate the cake—to believe that he meant well.

"Lick the cake?" asked Tubby, beaming.

"Topping!" said Jimmy.

"We're nice and comfy here all together, ain't we?" said Tubby.

"Oh, yes!"

"The shall pull together all right in this study, I think."

Jimmy opened his eyes.

"I don't quite catch on," he said.

"Are we going to be favourites with Muffin?"

"The fact is— Tubby hesitated a little.

"Well?"

"The fact is, now Lovell's gone, you know, I've felt that you fellows will miss him a lot," said Tubby, "and—and the best thing you can do is to have some really nice chap as a study-mate in his place. Me, frinstance!"

"You!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Tubby Muffin nodded and smiled.

"Little me," he said. "Ripping idea, ain't it? That's the stunt, Jimmy, old boy. I'm going to go with you in this study, now Lovell's gone! I have some more cake!"

The mystery was a mystery no longer!

**The 2nd Chapter. Nothing Doing!**

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked fixedly at the fat Classical.

They understood too.

Reginald Muffin was not exactly popular in No. 2, his own study. Higgs and Jones minor and Putty Grace, his study-mates, would have given half a term's pocket-money to give him change out. Neither was Tubby himself contented there. Alfred Higgs was too liable to use a heavy boot if he missed a cake; Jones minor had often showed Tubby's head under the coal-locker, on account of a misunderstanding about tarts. Tubby had often threatened to leave; but the "housing problem" was severe in his case. There was no other study willing to take him in. Now he had solved the problem by Lovell's departure from Rookwood. He was going to "dig" in the end study with Jimmy Silver & Co., in Arthur Edward's place. At all events, he hoped he was.

The expressions on the faces of the Co., however, seemed to hint that Tubby's excellent idea was likely to meet with opposition.

"Have some more cake, old

fellows," said Tubby Muffin rather hurriedly.

"You fat bounder!" said Ruby.

"I—I say, old chap!"

Jimmy Silver burst into a laugh; he knew that Tubby's kind attentions were explained now—also the contribution of a cake to the tea-table. That cake was a sprat to catch a herring. Having once insinuated himself into the end study, Jimmy Muffin's new manners and customs would not be long in disappearing. But he had not yet succeeded.

"We're not looking for a new study-mate," said Jimmy. "We don't want anybody else in Lovell's place. Thanks very much, Muffin; but try next door."

"I say, Jimmy, old scout—"

There was a heavy step in the passage. Higgs of the Fourth looked in, with a black frown upon his rugged face.

"Oh, he's here!" he exclaimed, evidently alluding to Reginald Muffin. Muffin looked rather alarmed.

"He's here," assented Jimmy Silver.

"Are you pinning for his society? If so, take him away. We're not."

"Not at all," remarked Ruby.

"Bother his society!" said Higgs.

"My cake's gone!"

"Oh! Your cake?" said Newcome.

"I—I say," stammered Tubby.

"Is that my cake?" roared Higgs, advancing into the study, and staring at the remnants of the cake.

"Is that my cake?" said Jimmy, who follows behind scolding my cake? I like that. Do you call that fat villain to be a fellow's cake?"

"You awful spoofer, Muffin!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Did that cake belong to Higgs?"

"You—you see?"

"Ha, ha, ha," roared Ruby.

"You can cackle!" shouted Higgs, in great wrath. "I paid three bob for that cake, and you've scooped it. I want my three bob!"

"I'll pay for the cake, Higgs, if you're so particular about a few bob!" said Tubby Muffin, with lofty contempt.

Alfred Higgs extended a large hand. "Shall you, then," he said, "don't mind your having the cake if you pay for it. I can get another with the money. Shall you?"

"I happen to be short of tin at the present moment—"

"Oh, cheese it! Jimmy Silver, I'll trouble you for three bob!" said Higgs angrily. "You've had the cake—"

"We thought Muffin was standing it!"

"You ought to have known him better, that's what I'd like to say. Anyhow, I want my three bob!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances. Higgs' claim was just, if it came to that; and they realised that certainly they ought to have known their Muffin by this time.

In silence, the three chums extracted each a shilling from his pocket, and the three coins were handed over to Alfred Higgs.

That fairly youth sorted, and took his departure, much to Tubby Muffin's relief, rather uneasily at the Fiscal Three.

"I—I say!" he murmured.

"You fat rascal!" growled Jimmy Silver. "We're short of tin, and you've stuck us up for a three-bob cake!"

"Well, I—I wanted to stand my whack, you know!" murmured Tubby. "As—as I'm going to be your study-mate, you know—"

Putty Grace looked into the study.

"That fat villain's here, isn't he?" he said.

"Hallo, have you missed anything?" asked Ruby, with a grin.

"My sugar ration's gone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hope you're not going to make a fuss about a few lumps of sugar, Grace!" said Tubby Muffin, with dignity.

"I am!" answered Putty grimly. "Quite a funny business. A very diabolical of a fuss, if you don't hand over my sugar instant!"

"How can I hand it over, when we've had it for tea?" asked Tubby, in an injured tone.

"Oh, you've had it for tea, have you?" said Putty. "Then I'll give you something else to follow it!"

"Here, I say— Yaroooh!" roared Tubby Muffin, as Putty grasped him by the shoulders.

Tubby's first friend, and the fat Classical, came down on the study carpet with a bump.

"Yoop! Help!" yelled Muffin.

"Rescue! I say, Jimmy! O-ow-ow!" Ruby, you rotter! Yoop!

Newcome— Oh dear! Help!

Putty of the Fourth had taken Tubby by the back of the neck, and was vigorously rubbing his fat little nose in the carpet. Instead of going to the rescue, Jimmy Silver & Co. roared with laughter.

"There, I think that will do," gasped Putty at last, quite breathless from his exertions, and he walked out of the study, leaving the fat Classical sprawling on the floor and spluttering.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling rotters! O-ow!"

"You'd better travel," grinned Ruby. "Jones minor may miss something next, and he knows where to find you."

"I haven't taken anything of Jones', he hadn't anything to give me," said Jimmy, laughing. "We'll make up the sugar to Putty, as we've had his lot. And now, if you don't want to be jumped on, roll out of the study."

Tubby sat up.

"I'm going to be your study-mate, you know!"

"Rats!"

"If you don't want me, Jimmy Silver—"

"I don't!"

"Do you call that grateful, after I've stood you a cake for tea?"

"Oh, kick him out!" said Jimmy.

"Hullo, Morry!" Mornington of the Fourth looked in. "The Muffin been bawling anything of yours?"

"Not that I know of," said Mornington, with a smile. "I've brought you a letter up, Jimmy. I thought you'd like to have it at once, as it's in Lovell's."

"Mornington tossed the letter to the captain of the Fourth, and sauntered away. Jimmy Silver slit the envelope eagerly. He was very anxious for news of his old chum. Tubby Muffin struggled to his feet, and blinked morosely at the three juniors gathered eagerly round the letter from Lovell.

"I say, Jimmy—"

"Shurrup!"

"Yes, but look here—"

"I've got a letter here from Lovell—"

"Blow Lovell!" said Tubby Muffin crossly. "Bother Lovell! Let Lovell go and eat cake! What I want to know is—"

Tubby Muffin got no farther. Three anxious youths wanted to know what Arthur Edward Lovell had to say, and Tubby Muffin's conversation at such a moment was more than superfluous. "Three p's" hands were laid on Muffin, and he went into the passage so suddenly that he hardly knew how he had got there.

Jimmy Silver slammed the door.

"Yow-ow-ow!" came from the passage.

Then there was a sound of retreating footsteps, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were left to read Lovell's letter in peace.

**The 3rd Chapter. The Letter from Lovell!**

"Read it out, Jimmy!"

"There had been no news from Arthur Edward Lovell for a week, and the end study were quite anxious on the subject. They missed Lovell sorely. It was a case of absence making the heart fonder. Even yet they could hardly realise that their old chum was gone from Rookwood for good. Somehow or other, it seemed that Lovell's place in the end study was waiting for him to come back to it.

Jimmy Silver read the letter aloud, and Ruby and Newcome listened attentively.

"Dear old Pal," it began, evidently being intended for all three. "I haven't had a merry time since I've been home. Everything is more or less at sixes and sevens. The pater is a good bit like a bear with a sore head. The mater's worried, and even the gas aren't so sweet-tempered as they used to be. Thank goodness Teddy is still at Rookwood!"

"It's so jolly hard to get used to being poor after being well off. Not that we were ever rich, you know. But I suppose the war was enough to go round, and now there doesn't seem to be. And there's been awfully rotten Pikkingham, that's awfully rotten lawyer bast, who bunked with the pater's money, and I think it's rather upset father, but had made up his mind to his losses, but now he seems to be hoping again, and it worries him no end—the uncertainty I mean."

"Everybody believed that Pikkingham had got out of the country with his goods, as he had his passport and all that; but it's been found out that

some of the bonds he bagged have been sold in England. I don't know how he managed to sell them. I suppose he knows the ropes, the beast, and I dare say he needed the ready money. Anyhow, it seems certain that a few weeks ago he was still in England, and he looks as if he mayn't have got away yet, after all. This makes the pater think there may be a chance still of nabbing the awful rotter, and getting back some of the stuff. Of course, I hope daddy's some sensible outlier and more quiet when there wasn't any hope. He's chiefly worried about my young brother at Rookwood. I hope you're giving Teddy a look-in every now and then. He's written to the pater for a new bike. Of course, he can't have one. But he doesn't know what's happened, and of course, you're not to tell him anything."

"If there's any news of that little grey-whiskered beast Pikkingham I'll tell you so. No more at present. From your old pal, A. E. LOVELL."

"P.S.—was no end tickled by your yarn of the jape you played on that fellow in blind at the bungalow. I said I had been there."

"P.P.S.—Keep an eye on my minor."

"Poor old Lovell!" said Ruby.

"What a thumping long letter for him. The last was short and sweet. I say, we'll have young Teddy Lovell to tea to-morrow. We've ought to try to like the young rogue, for old Lovell's sake, you know."

"I wish that Pikkingham rotter could be found," said Newcome. "How ripping it would be for old Lovell to be able to come back to Rookwood."

"Depend on it he's lying pretty low, if he's still in the country," said Ruby.

Jimmy Silver put the letter in his pocket.

He thence looked at him inquiringly.

"I did not understand the deep cloud of thoughtfulness that shadowed the youthful brow of Uncle James."

"Well, Jimmy?" asked Ruby.

"Well," said Jimmy absently.

"But have you got in your nodder?"

Jimmy did not reply.

He walked to and fro in the study two or three times, his chums watching him in surprise.

He stopped at last, his brow wrinkled.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he asked.

"Of what?"

"Of course, until I got this letter, I took it for granted that the man was out of the country," said Jimmy Silver musingly. "Lovell's father thought so."

"What the thump?"

"What was Pikkingham?"

"Yes. But if Jimmy Silver set his lips, said his eyes gleamed under his bent brows. "Is it possible, is it?"

"What are you driving at?" howled Ruby. "Do you think you've seen the man somewhere?"

"It's his possible."

"But you wouldn't know him by sight. You never saw Mr. Lovell's solicitor before he bunked."

"No, but—"

"So you saw him, you wouldn't know him," said Ruby. "Are you going in for day-dreams, Jimmy?"

"I've got an idea in my head," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "There may be nothing in it, or there may be something. I'm going to look into it, for old Lovell's sake."

"But what—" ejaculated Ruby, in amazement.

"Look here, Jimmy—" began Newcome.

Jimmy turned to the door.

"Where are you going now?" demanded Newcome.

"To send a wire to Lovell."

"What on earth for?"

"To ask him to send a photograph of Pikkingham, if he can get one. The police are sure to have one. He was a well-known man before he slogged."

"But what—"

"Can't stop now. Post-office closes soon."

Jimmy Silver fairly ran from the study.

Ruby and Newcome stared at one another, and the latter tapped his forehead with a significant way.

"Potty!" he said.

"Looks like it!" agreed Ruby.

They followed their chum downstairs. They were in time to see Jimmy Silver ranning his bike down to the gates.

"Jimmy?" bawled Ruby.

The captain of the Fourth did not even turn his head. He jumped on his machine, and dashed down the road towards Coombe.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Ruby.

It was nearly an hour later when Jimmy Silver wheeled in his bike, his chums met him as he came into the School House.

"Well, are you going to tell us the name of this game?"

asked George Ruby, rather gruffly.

Jimmy hesitated.

"Wait till we get Lovell's answer," he said. "I've wired him. I—I'd rather not tell you yet. You'd only think my idea was all rot."

"So it is, most likely, whatever it is," remarked Newcome disparagingly. "You know what your ideas are, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver grimaced.

"Wait till to-morrow, then," he said. "I've got to think it out."

"Prep won't wait till to-morrow," said Ruby. "Are you coming up to the study?"

"I'll follow you. I've got to speak to Synthe of the Shell."

"What the thump do you want to speak to that ass for?"

"The pleasure of his conversation, old chap," answered Jimmy Silver, and he walked away towards the Shell passage.

Ruby and Newcome, very much perplexed and rather exasperated, returned to the end study for prep. They found a fat junior ensconced there in the armchair, who looked at them warily as they came in.

"Hallo, you fellows!" murmured Tubby Muffin deprecatingly.

Two separate and ferocious glares were fixed upon the fat Classical. Ruby and Newcome were not in a pleasant humour just then.

"Get out!" snapped Ruby.

"I'm going to do my prep here, you know," murmured Tubby Muffin. "You see, I'm going—"

"You are," interrupted Ruby grimly.

And Tubby Muffin went on his neck. Tubby's prep was done in his own room, and his prep was done in his old study that evening. One more his designs upon the end study had been frustrated, much to Tubby's annoyance, and much, too, to the disappointment of his present study-mates.

**The 4th Chapter. On the Track!**

Adolphus Synthe, of the Shell, was reclining in his comfortable armchair, with a cigarette between his lips, when Jimmy Silver thumped at the door, and he started suddenly that he nearly swallowed the cigarette as the door was thrown open and Jimmy came in.

Synthe glared at his visitor. The captain of the Fourth was not a person to whom Synthe had any liking. Jimmy Silver had never found favour in the lofty eyes of Adolphus; a loss which he bore with great fortitude.

"What the thump do you want?" growled Synthe. "I don't remember asking you here, Synthe."

"You didn't," assented Jimmy.

"What the dickens have you come for, then?"

"I want to ask you something."

"If it's money—" began Adolphus.

"Don't be a silly ass, Synthe!" Jimmy Silver closed the door. "I want to ask you a question or two. You remember going to the bungalow on the health a couple of weeks ago, to hold one of your precious card-parties there. We came after you to rag you, you remember."

Adolphus frowned.

"Remember you acted like a cheeky git?" he replied.

"You found that place had been taken by a new tenant—a man whose name turns out to be Lasker," said Jimmy, unheeding. "But before you found the place was occupied, did you go in with your pals?"

"What about it?" snapped Adolphus.

The remembrance of that unhappy excursion was not agreeable to the dandy of the Shell. He still seemed to feel the heavy swipes of the stick wielded by the man in black.

"Lasker pitched into you—"

"He acted like a low-bred ruffian," snarled Adolphus.

"I'll be along with a pipe and see him, only the Head has placed the bungalow out of bounds, and there'd be a fuss," Jimmy smiled.

"Quite so. But you got into the place, and he chased you out with a stick."

"Oh, let it drop! If that's what you've come to talk about, Jimmy Silver, there's the door," said Adolphus restively.

"What I want to know is this—did you notice anything specially while you were in the place?"

Adolphus hesitated.

"I don't remember anything particularly striking about the place, but I do remember seeing a ghost of a fellow in a black coat, who seemed to be looking at me. I don't know who he was, but I do remember seeing him. I don't know who he was, but I do remember seeing him. I don't know who he was, but I do remember seeing him."

"What a queer story!" said Jimmy, with a grin.

"I don't know who he was, but I do remember seeing him. I don't know who he was, but I do remember seeing him. I don't know who he was, but I do remember seeing him."

"I don't know who he was, but I do remember seeing him. I don't know who he was, but I do remember seeing him. I don't know who he was, but I do remember seeing him."



"I don't quite follow," said Smythe with a frown.

"That man Lasker keeps himself very close in the bungalow," said Jimmy. "Anybody passing the place would think it was still untenanted."

He bothered the Head into putting the Fourth out of school bounds, with his complaining about Rookwood fellows. He's hardly ever seen in the village, and he's laid into village kids with his stick for hanging about his fence. Doesn't it strike you that he may have some reason for wanting to be low, and keep out of general view?

Smythe stared.

"Never thought about it," he answered.

"Well, think about it now," said Jimmy. "When I saw him I noticed that his whiskers were dyed, for instance. Did you?"

"I believe so. Lots of old johnnies dye their whiskers," said Smythe. "I'm not interested in the cheeky rotter!"

"I am," said Jimmy. "Think a bit, Smythe. You got into the house, and I didn't see you notice anything that—that—"

"That what?" granted Smythe.

"That might look as if he was a fellow hiding from the police, for instance?"

Smythe gave a jump.

"Oh gad!" he ejaculated. "I shouldn't wonder, Silver. I remember those dashed War Bonds—"

"War Bonds?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, his eyes glistening.

"Yas. You see, we got into the house without knowin' a new tenant was there, an' directly he saw us he started in with a big malacca cane. He scattered us, an' dodged like thunder. Some of the fellows got out of the windows. I dodged through the front room, and bunked out of that window. In that room, on the table, were no end of papers. You see, we'd detached him while he was looking at them, or something of the kind. I couldn't help notice the bundles of War Bonds."

"You're sure?"

Adolphus sniffed.

"I've seen enough of my pater's War Bonds to know when I see it," he answered. "And there was a pile of them."

"Worth a lot of money?"

"Thousands of pounds, I should think."

"My only hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, catching his breath.

It was a strange and startling confirmation of the half-formed suspicion in his mind.

"Come to think of it," said Adolphus, "I shouldn't wonder if he was some sort of a rotten thief. With all that money, what does he want to live in a little lonely bungalow for, without even a servant? Look at the way he treated us, too—layin' into a fellow with a big stick, without givin' him a chance to explain an' apologise. I only hope the bobbies are after him, and that they'll get him. I'd give a week's pocket-money to see him ranted away to the treadmill, by gad!"

Evidently Adolphus of the Shell had not forgotten or forgiven the malacca cane wielded by the man in black.

"You didn't notice anything else special?" asked Jimmy.

"Nothing in particular, I say, what have you got in your head about that cad, Silver?"

"Nothing that you'd understand, old sport," answered Jimmy Silver, rather ungratefully; and he left the study.

Adolphus sniffed scornfully, and returned to his cigarette.

Jimmy Silver made his way to the end study. His heart was beating unusually fast with the excitement of the discovery he felt himself on the verge of making.

Was it possible—would it be barely possible—that he would be able to help Lovell, and in this utterly unexpected way?

But, with all the whirling thoughts that were in Jimmy's mind, prep had to be done as usual, and Jimmy settled down to work in the end study as attentively as he could.

Ruby and Newcome regarded him curiously several times, quite aware that there was something "on" in Jimmy's active brain, and quite at a loss to guess what it was. But Jimmy evidently did not intend to confide in them yet, he wanted to be sure first. So they did not bother Uncle James with questions.

Not only his chums, but most of the Classical Fourth noticed that evening that Uncle James, of Rookwood, was in a mood of deep and unusual thoughtfulness. In the Common-room he uttered hardly a word, and Patsy Grace playfully inquired whether he was in love, without even receiving an answer.

Mornington approached him on the subject of the coming football practice, and found that Jimmy's mind was leagues away from football. Oswald asked him what he had got on his mind, and Conroy inquired whether it was water on the brain; but Jimmy shook his head and smiled.

Only one fellow in the Fourth fancied that he guessed the subject of Jimmy's remarkable attack of deep reflection. That one was Reginald Muffin. And towards bed-time Tubby approached the captain of the Fourth with a sweet and forgiving smile.

"It's all right, Jimmy!" he said reassuringly.

"Eh?" said Jimmy absently.

"I know what you're thinking about, and you can take my word for it that it's all right."

Jimmy started. He was wide awake now, and he fixed his eyes on the fat Classical in astonishment.

"You—your name?" he ejaculated.

Muffin nodded and smiled.

"Yes, and it's all right," he said. "Don't you worry, old top!"

"How do you know anything about it?" demanded Jimmy. "I haven't even mentioned it to Ruby and Newcome, so you can't have listened at the keyhole in your usual way."

"I hope you don't think I would do anything of the kind, Jimmy," said Tubby Muffin reproachfully. "I repeat that it's all right. I'm a forgiving chap."

"What the thump—"

"I can see it's worrying you," said Muffin. "My dear old fellow, it's all plane sailing now. Leave it to me."

"Leave it to you! What do you know about Lasker?" exclaimed Jimmy, in astonishment.

"Lasker!" It was Tubby's turn

Tubby blinked at him. He did not see what there was to laugh at.

"And then I don't want any meanness about a cake or so, or a few tarts," he said. "I want that understood. Otherwise I shall decline to come into the study at all."

"I think you'd better decline to come," said Jimmy.

"Because if you do come you will get the boot!"

"Eh?"

"Like that?"

"Yarooooh!"

And it dawned upon the powerful brain of Reginald Muffin at last that he had quite misunderstood the cause of Jimmy Silver's deep reflection.

The 5th Chapter.

What Jimmy Silver Suspected.

The next morning, when Ruby and Newcome looked for Jimmy Silver after breakfast, they found him in conversation with the morning postman. They waited till that conversation was over, and then joined him.

"Nice morning!" said Jimmy Silver affably.

"What the thump have you been chivvaging the postman for?"

His conversation is so delightful, you know."

"You silly ass, Jimmy Silver!" exclaimed Ruby, in great exasperation. "I believe you're going off your dot!"

"Bow-wow!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

Jimmy went in to morning classes with a thoughtful shade still on his brow. Mr. Bootles found him a little inattentive in class, and rewarded him with fifty lines.

with a narrow face and sharp eyes, with grey beard and whiskers and thin hair. His chums glanced at it.

"Is that Pilkingham's mug?" asked Newcome.

"That's it."

"What the dickens do you want it for?"

"Watch!" said Jimmy.

He selected a brush from his colour-box, dipped it in Indian ink, and proceeded to tint the hair, whiskers, and beard in the photograph black. His chums watched him in blank amazement.

"Whom is that like now?" asked Jimmy Silver, when he had finished.

"It's a bit like that ill-tempered rotter at the bungalow," said Ruby, staring at it.

"Exactly!"

"Only he wears his beard pointed like a Frenchman, and this is a bushy beard in the picture."

"Easy enough to trim it to a point."

"And the man at the bungalow has a dark complexion like a foreigner, and this chap looks pale," said Newcome.

"Easy enough to stain the complexion—just as easy as to dye the whiskers," said Jimmy Silver.

"Great Scott!"

Ruby and Newcome understood now, and they stared at their chum breathlessly.

"You've caught on!" asked Jimmy.

"Jimmy! It's impossible!"

"Pilkingham!" said Ruby dazedly.

"Lasker—Pilkingham! But Lasker looks like a foreigner!"

"He would want to, as the police are looking for him. Mind, I'm not

but the startling possibility fairly took their breath away.

"It's—but—" murmured Ruby.

"But—too thick!" muttered Newcome.

"I should have thought of it earlier, I believe," said Jimmy soberly; "but I took it for granted that the runaway solicitor was out of the country, as the police believed so. Now it turns out that he's in the country, after all. He's hiding somewhere; the police can't find him. He must be somewhere. And there is there a safer place to hide than a lonely bungalow for a card-party, and all the folk in the village don't know there's anybody living there. We shouldn't know anything about it, though it's so near Rookwood, but for the fact Smythe's stunt of using the empty bungalow for a card-party, and our following him there. You can see what it all looks like."

"But—but you can't go to the police with a yarn like that, Jimmy! They'd only grin—"

"Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"I'm not thinking of that yet," he said. "We've got to make sure first. There's enough evidence for us to look into the matter—what?"

"We've got to see whether he really is swarthy-complexioned," said Jimmy. "If he is he's not Pilkingham. It's a complexion-stain, the chances are that he's the man. People dye their whiskers to look younger, but they don't stain their complexions to look like foreigners without a jolly good reason."

"But how—"

"We can't hold his head under a pump!" said Newcome, with a faint grin.

Jimmy set his lips.

"It's got to be put to the test," he said. "I know it's risky. We shall get into a fearful row with the Head if we're wrong. But we can't chance that for old Lovell's sake. Are you fellows game?"

"Oh, we're game for anything, old scout!" said Ruby resignedly. "Don't get us sacked from Rookwood if you can help it. I'd rather not go home so early in the term, if it's all the same to you."

"Ass!" said Jimmy Silver politely.

"I know it's risky, but we're going to do it. Of course, the rotter can't know we've done this. He will think it's only a jape, because he got us a licking."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Come and see."

And Ruby and Newcome, not without lurking misgivings in their hearts, followed their leader from the end study.

The 6th Chapter. Put to the Test!

"I saw, Jimmy—"

"Well?"

"Hem! Nothing!"

The sun was sinking, and a red glow lay over the wide expanse of Coombe Heath, as the three juniors came in sight of the lonely bungalow.

The little building had the same deserted appearance as of old, and it's lonely and uninhabited look strengthened the suspicion in Jimmy Silver's mind—that the strange occupant was indeed a fugitive from justice, "lying low" till the pursuit was over.

Ruby and Newcome both betrayed an ittle trepidation as they approached the garden gate. Jimmy Silver's plan was simple enough, but it was a drastic one, and it had nearly taken his chums' breath away when it was explained to them. Both of them were loyal, and they were bound to go to any extent, if there was a chance of helping Arthur Edward Lovell thereby, but—

"There was a 'but'."

Jimmy Silver, however, was not in a mood for "buts." He stopped at the gate, which was almost hidden by the wild and weedy shrubbery growing within. The garden was utterly desolate, the laurels and ivy and straggling bushes.

"You know what you've got to do?" said Jimmy.

"I see—"

"I suppose you're game?"

"Ye-es;—of course. It will mean an awful row if he goes to the Head about it," murmured Ruby.

"And he's sure to!" said Newcome.

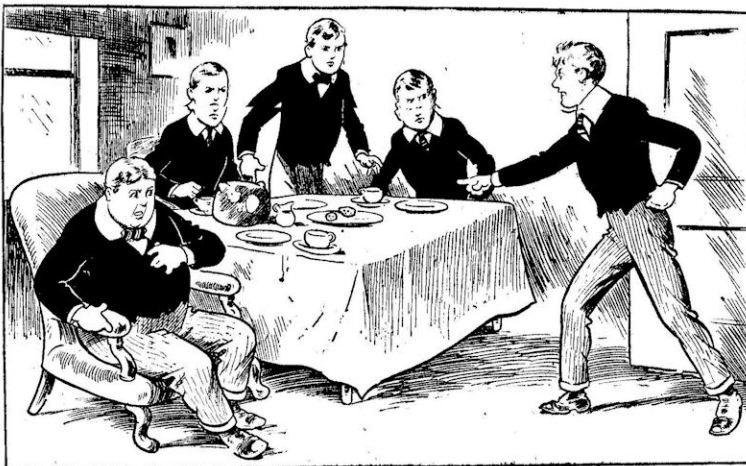
Jimmy squared his chin resolutely.

"I don't care! It's for Lovell's sake! I'm morally certain he's the man. We've got to find out."

"Oh, Jimmy!" said Ruby. "It's all in the day's work. I dare say we can stand a flogging."

"Never mind that now," granted Jimmy Silver.

"We shall mind it to-morrow!" murmured Ruby.



TUBBY MUFFIN STANDS' A CAKE! "Is that my cake?" roared Higgs, rushing into the study. "You awful spoofer, Muffin!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Did that cake belong to Higgs?"

to look astonished. "Who the thump's talking about Lasker? Do you mean that rotter at Heath Bungalow? Better Lasker! Don't wander from the point, Jimmy. I tell you I'm a forgiving chap, and I over the ungrateful way you treated me at tea-time, when I stood you a cake."

Jimmy Silver burst into a laugh. Evidently there was a slight misunderstanding.

"You needn't worry," said Tubby Muffin encouragingly. "I forgive you, old fellow. And I'm willing to come and dig in the end study."

"Oh!"

"Quite willing. Only—"

Still in a state of misunderstanding, Reginald Muffin felt that to him to raise his terms a little. "Only, of course, I shall have to make some conditions."

"Conditions?" repeated Jimmy.

"Yes. It will have to be understood that if I come into the study I'll have the arm-chair."

"The arm-chair?"

"Yes. Higgs always makes a fuss if I take the arm-chair in No. 2—just because it's his, you know. Nothing of that sort if I come into the end study. I want that understood at the start."

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

But the captain of the Fourth did not worry about lines. He was thinking of the strange possibility that had dawned, and that excluded all matters of lesser importance. Was it possible that he—Jimmy Silver—was going to save Arthur Edward Lovell from the disaster that had befallen him? The bare idea of it was quite dazzling. Truly, such a success would redound to the never-dying glory of Uncle James of Rookwood.

Still his puzzled chums were kept in the dark. It was not till after lessons that day that they were enlightened. After leaving the Form-room Jimmy inquired eagerly for the packet had arrived for him directed in Lovell's well-known hand. He bore it to the end study, followed by his puzzled comrades.

He snipped the string, and opened the packet. There was a letter inside, and a photograph. The letter ran:

"Dear Jimmy,—I got your wire all right. I send you herewith a photograph of the beast. Lots of them, if you want them. The police have been circulating his photograph, and the pater has some of them. I asked him for one. He wants to know if you've seen a beast anything like Pilkingham. Too much luck, I'm afraid."

Jimmy examined the photograph carefully. It was that of a man

sure yet," said Jimmy cautiously.

"But—"

"But—but—" stammered Ruby. "Jimmy, you're dreaming! It can't be possible!"

"Too jolly good to be true!" said Newcome, shaking his head. "You're off-side this time, Jimmy. Give it a miss!"

"Listen to me," said Jimmy quietly. "You remember Lasker was here, making complaints about fellows going to his bungalow, the day Lovell's pater came. You remember we thought at the time he must know Lovell's pater and not like him, because he dodged seeing him or meeting him. We all noticed that the time, and wondered."

"I—I remember!" muttered Ruby.

"Then the way he keeps himself close in that lonely place, and cuts up savage if a chap goes near—it's not natural. And he never gets a letter there from anywhere—"

"How do you know?"

"I asked the postman this morning."

"Oh!"

"And when Smythe was in the place—you remember?—he saw a bundle of War Bonds on the table."

"Phew!"

"If it's his own money, the fellow's rich," said Jimmy Silver. "Take it all together, what does it look like?"

Jimmy's chums were silent. There was little doubt what it looked like;

"Look here, Raby——"

"Oh, go ahead, old chap! Don't mind me!" said Raby. "We're backing you up, only I must say I think it's a potty stunt. But go ahead!"

Jimmy Silver boldly entered at the gate. Raby and Newcome squeezed through a gap in the fence, under cover of the shrubbery inside, and lay there, playing possum, as it were. From a canvas bag Raby drew a large wet sponge, borrowed from the dormitory at Rookwood. Mr. Lasker's foreign, Spanish-looking complexion was going to be tested, if all went well. It was rather a hair-brained scheme, but Jimmy was, probably, counting upon success to see him through. For if by a happy stroke of luck he succeeded in identifying the absconding solicitor, Pilkingham, certainly nobody would bother about what drastic measures he had used.

On the other hand, if he did not succeed—— But Jimmy Silver, always hopeful, gave less thought to that aspect of the matter. He remembered chiefly that he was trying to help old Lovell, and that the tenant of Heath Bungalow was a bad-tempered rotter, anyhow, even if he wasn't the absconding and badly-wanted Mr. Pilkingham.

Jimmy advanced up the garden path, and stopped half-way to the door. Then he picked up pebbles, and calmly showered them on the sit-

ting-room window. It was quite a lawless act; Jimmy knew that. But he comforted himself with the reflection that he was acting in the interests of the law, if his suspicion was well-founded. His object was to "draw" the tenant of the bungalow, and in that he succeeded perfectly. The window was thrown up, and the dark, angry face of the man in black stared out, and an angry fist was shaken at the junior.

"You young rascal!" shouted Mr. Lasker. "Go away at once!"

"Rats!" retorted Jimmy cheerfully.

"Do you want me to come out to you?"

As a matter of fact that was exactly what Jimmy Silver did want, but he did not say so.

"Suit yourself, old top!" he answered.

The angry face disappeared from the window, the door opened, and the man in black ran out, stick in hand.

Jimmy darted back to the gate and jumped over it, the tenant of the bungalow close behind.

On the footpath outside, Jimmy turned and looked back with a grin. The man in black was shaking the stick at him over the gate.

"You young rascal! I will—— Oh!"

It was just then that Raby and Newcome carried out their part of the contract.

One on either side of the man in

black, they leaped out of the shrubbery and pounced on him.

Mr. Lasker was taken by surprise. Before he quite knew that he had run into an ambush he was seized by the shoulders, and was down on his back on the weedy path.

He gave a gasping howl as he landed there.

"Quick!" panted Newcome.

He threw himself recklessly on the man in black, to hold him down while Raby dabbed at the swarthy face with the wet sponge. Jimmy Silver came springing back over the gate to help.

Squash! went the wet sponge into the dark, swarthy countenance of Mr. Lasker. But Raby had no time for more than one rub.

A furious fist struck him on the chest, and he rolled over, knocked out by the savage drive. The next second a kick almost lamed Newcome, and he jumped away yelling.

Jimmy Silver arrived on the spot as the man in black leaped up and lifted his stick.

Whack!

Jimmy threw up his arm and warded off the blow, which would have hurt him rather seriously if it had lighted on his head, at which it was aimed. He gave a cry of pain; his arm was numbed by the blow.

"Hook it!" gasped Raby.

"Oh crumbs!"

With a furious face, his eyes glittering savagely, the man in black

fairly threw himself on the three juniors, lashing at them with the heavy stick.

That stick was rather too dangerous at close quarters. Even Jimmy Silver had to see that the game was up.

Raby squirmed into the shrubbery, and Newcome jumped away in another direction. Jimmy dragged open the gate and fled outside. He sped down the footpath, and Raby and Newcome joined him there, having escaped through gaps in the fence.

The man in black brandished his stick over the gate.

"I know you!" he shouted. "I shall come up to the school in the morning! I shall——"

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not hear any more. They were sprinting in the direction of Coombe, Newcome limping painfully. Not till they were out of sight of the bungalow did they stop.

Jimmy Silver rubbed his arm. Raby rubbed his chest. Newcome sat on a stone and rubbed his leg and groaned.

"What a go!" mumbled Raby. "Did I ever mention to you, Jimmy, that you're the biggest idiot at Rookwood? If I didn't it was an oversight."

"Ow, ow, ow!" mumbled Newcome.

"Give me that sponge!" said

Jimmy. The sponge was still gripped in Raby's hand.

"Bother the sponge!" groaned Raby, tossing it to him. "I didn't have time to rub his beastly face! Ow! It was a potty stunt! I told you so! Ow! What a cheery prospect with the Head in the morning! Ow!"

Jimmy Silver, unheeding, examined the sponge. He was still hopeful. One rub had not made any perceptible difference to Mr. Lasker's swarthy complexion, but—— Jimmy examined the sponge carefully.

"Look!" he said quietly. On the clean surface of the sponge was a faint brownish stain.

"That wasn't there before, Raby!"

"My hat! No!"

"His complexion washes off!" said Jimmy, with a deep breath. "We've found out what we wanted to know. Come on!"

In silence the three chums turned back to Rookwood. The discovery, though they had expected it, startled them. If it was not proof it was something very like it, and not one of the three doubted any longer that the man who had robbed Lovell's father was the mysterious tenant of the bungalow.

THE END.

(Don't fail to read the *Rookwood School story*, entitled: "*Patty Grace to the Rescue!*" in next Monday's issue of the *BOYS' FRIEND*.)

A SPLENDID LONG COMPLETE TALE OF FRANK RICHARDS & CO.!



FRANK RICHARDS' TRIUMPH!

A FINE TALE OF CEDAR CREEK.

By . . . MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The 1st Chapter.

Todgers makes Terms! "I guess I want to change parts with you, Franky." Chunky Todgers made that statement. Frank Richards & Co. received it as they often received Chunky's remarks—with a choke.

Chunky's fat face was very serious in fact, solemn. Evidently he had thought the matter out, to his own satisfaction. "What do you think of the idea, Richards?" he went on. Frank Richards choked again.

"My dear old, I don't think of it at all!" he answered. "You're down in the cast as an extra conspirator. You can be an extra conspirator, or you can go and eat cake! Take your choice. "I'm afraid I shall have to insist!" said Todgers solemnly.

"Fathead!" "I mean, it will be interrupted and mucked up, like Dicky Bird's play last week," explained Todgers. "And who's going to interrupt it?" demanded Bob Lawless warmly. "The Hillcrest chaps," answered Chunky.

"Oh!" Frank Richards looked interested at last. "I have the Hillcrest chaps got some stunt on for mucking up our play, same as we did there last Saturday?" "Sure!" "How do you know?" asked Bob. "I don't mind telling you. I dropped on the Hillcrest galoos going home last night," said Chunky.

"No need for us to guess it," said Frank. "You can tell us if you know all about it, and we'll jolly soon stop them." "Chunky shook his head. "What's the stunt?" demanded Bob. "That's telling!" "What?" "You see, if I don't have a good part in the play it won't be much of a success, anyhow," said Todgers.

expected that their old rivals of Hillcrest School would seek to "chip in" and make a failure of the grand performance. And if the enemy had had plans to that effect, and Chunky knew those plans, it was up to Chunky to reveal them, so that measures might be taken in time. They relied upon the pump as a persuader. Chunky roared and wriggled as his head was held under the pump by Frank and Beaulere, and Bob Lawless seized the handle. "Now, then, Chunky—" "Yow-ow-woop!" "Are you going to explain—" "Yarsoooh!" "Go it, Bob!" Bob Lawless dragged at the pump-handle. "There was a gush of water, and Chunky Todgers gave a terrific howl. "Yowsooop! Help!" "Now, you fat duffer—" "Richards! Lawless!" It was Mr. Slimmey's voice. "What are you doing to Todgers? Release him at once! Do you hear?" "Oh, my hat!" "I do not approve of this horse-play," said Mr. Slimmey severely. "I am really surprised at you, Richards!" "Alien!" Chunky Todgers dabbed the water from his head, and grinned at the chums of Cedar Creek.

"Yah!" he said defiantly. And he scudded away to the school-house, and Frank Richards & Co. were left to listen to a severe lecture from Mr. Slimmey, which they subjected. Frank Richards could not even guess what it was Dicky Bird & Co. intended. The performance was to take place in the Cedar Creek school-room, and already a large number of tickets had been sold at fifty cents apiece. The proceeds were to go to the Mission Fund, and the Thespians were very keen to help on that worthy object. Dicky Bird & Co. had to be defeated somehow, and during dinner Frank Richards was thinking over the matter deeply, trying to guess what it was that the fertile brain of Master Bird had hatched. But he could not guess. The previous Saturday, the Hillcrest amateur actors had bagged the Cedar Creek school-room to give a play there, with the amiable object of taking the "shine" out of the Thespians, and the wrathful Thespians had settled them and their play ruthlessly. Frank, hidden under the stage plank, had introduced a cloud of pepper into the drama, and the drama had terminated suddenly in a volcanic eruption of sneezing. "But that game could not be played twice. Cedar Creek were going to be very careful that there was nobody hidden under the stage when they performed on it, and the mere sight of a Hillcrest fellow about the place would have warned them. And Chunky Todgers knew what the scheme was, and would not tell unless he was given Brutus' part! After dinner, when the Cedar Creek fellows came out into the play-

RETREATING IN DISORDER!

There was no hope for Dicky Bird & Co. The long whips sang through the night air and curled round their startled legs. "Lay into the scallywags!" yelled Billy Cook. Chunky took good care to avoid the Co. He did not want his head put under the pump again, and any similar method of persuasion tried on him. He felt that he held the trump card in his hand, and that the president of the Thespians was bound to "come round." It was not till Cedar Creek was going in to afternoon lessons, and they were safe in the school-room, that the astute Chunky approached Frank. "Made up your mind, old scout?" he asked affably. "Yes!" growled Frank. "I'm to play Brutus!" "No." "The play's a goner!" said Chunky. "I'm sorry to see you muck up a really good thing, Frank, out of sheer conceit. Couldn't you manage to do the right thing, old fellow, putting conceit aside for once?" Frank Richards breathed hard. "You burbling chump—" he began. "No good calling a chap names because you're jealous of his histrionic powers!" said Chunky. "It's mean!" "You—"

ferred from a collision between his head and his pinewood desk. Afternoon lessons were rather a worry to Frank Richards that day. Naturally, his thoughts were with the grand performance of the morning, and his exasperating possibility that it might be "mucked up" by the unknown machinations of his old rivals. He could not think of any scheme by which Dicky Bird and Co. could hope to serve the Cedar Creek play as their own had been served. But he knew only too well the deep resourcefulness of Master Richard Bird. He was more exasperated with Chunky than with Richard Bird. Dicky Bird was the rival of Cedar Creek and all its works, and all was fair in war. But Chunky was bound to stand by his own school, if his colossal conceit had not blinded him. Frank was glad when lessons were over. As the Cedar Creek fellows marched out of the school-room he made a sign to his comrades, and they surrounded Chunky Todgers as the latter emerged into the playground. Chunky eyed them uneasily. "Come along to the corral, Todgers," said Frank. "Um! I'm not coming—" "You want your pony, don't you?" murmured Bob. "I don't want my head under the pump again, thank you!" grinned Todgers. "Yank him along!" growled Bob.

mitted to with the best grace they could. The 2nd Chapter. Chunky's Trump Card! Frank Richards wore a worried look as dinner that day. Upon his shoulders, as president of the Thespians Society, rested the responsibility of that great production of "Julius Caesar." He was stage manager and coach, and a good many other things, and he had plenty to do. Now, on top of his other responsibilities came the news that the old rivals of Cedar Creek were preparing an offensive to take place on the great day. If he had known the plans of Dicky Bird & Co. it would have been easy enough to guard against them. But only Chunky Todgers knew, and he refused to tell unless his price was paid. The estimable Chunky was justified in his own view. He was quite convinced that he was the only good actor at Cedar Creek, and that without his aid the performance would be a miserable failure. That view Chunky had entirely to himself, but he had it, and he had it bad, so to speak. For the sake of the Thespians themselves, Chunky was as firm as adamant. He declined to budge an inch. Without information on the sub-

"We've got to get it out of him somehow. "I guess I'll yank if you touch me!" retorted Chunky. The three chums glared at him. But he was within call of Miss Meadows in the school-house, and he grinned at them sardoniously. "I Hands off, you know!" said Chunky. "I'm willing to talk the matter over with you. But no larks." "Will you tell us—" "You know my terms!" said Chunky loftily. "I want to save the play for you. Is it fair on the audience to charge 'em fifty cents and spring your silly acting on them? Give 'em something good." "You thumping ass!" "Put your blessed conceit aside for the good of the cause, you know," said Chunky. "You know I can play your head off at Shakespeare. Give me a chance, and make the play a tremendous success. Is it a go?" "After all, I dare say he's only pulling our leg," said Frank, after a pause. "What could Dicky Bird do, anyhow?" "You'll see to-morrow if I don't play Brutus!" chuckled Todgers. "We'll take jolly good care that nobody hides under the stage!" said Beaulere. "That isn't the stunt!" grinned Chunky. "Nothing of that kind. Quite different."

ground, Chunky took good care to avoid the Co. He did not want his head put under the pump again, and any similar method of persuasion tried on him. He felt that he held the trump card in his hand, and that the president of the Thespians was bound to "come round." It was not till Cedar Creek was going in to afternoon lessons, and they were safe in the school-room, that the astute Chunky approached Frank. "Made up your mind, old scout?" he asked affably. "Yes!" growled Frank. "I'm to play Brutus!" "No." "The play's a goner!" said Chunky. "I'm sorry to see you muck up a really good thing, Frank, out of sheer conceit. Couldn't you manage to do the right thing, old fellow, putting conceit aside for once?" Frank Richards breathed hard. "You burbling chump—" he began. "No good calling a chap names because you're jealous of his histrionic powers!" said Chunky. "It's mean!" "You—"

Fortunately, Miss Meadows entered at that moment, or Chunky Todgers would probably have suf-



There was no hope for Dicky Bird & Co. The long whips sang through the night air and curled round their startled legs. "Lay into the scallywags!" yelled Billy Cook.



"What is it, then?"  
"That's telling!"  
"I'm not," said Bob impatiently. "The Hillcrest galoots can't do anything. We shall be here early to-morrow to get the stage ready, and if a Hillcrester shows up around the stage we'll scalp him!"  
"They won't show up to-morrow, though," said Chunky, greatly enjoying his secret.  
Frank gave him a sharp look.  
"They don't show up to-morrow, how are they going to interfere with the play?" he asked.  
"I mean, you won't see them," chuckled Todgers. "Ho, ho, he, he! You'll never guess. You see, they'll be out of sight."  
"Where will they be, then?"  
"That's telling!" said Chunky once more.

The chums of Cedar Creek gave him expressive looks. But Chunky was quiet as usual.  
He did not mean to show up his trump-card, excepting upon his own terms.  
"Oh, go and eat oke!" snapped Frank, at last.  
"No, no, walked away to the corral for their horses, and rode home, leaving Chunky Todgers to his own devices.  
"I'll come along to-morrow, ready to play Brutus," Frank said, the fat boy winked at them.

Frank Richards & Co. trotted away down the trail without an answer.  
"The 3rd Chapter!"  
**A Startling Discovery.**  
The following day was free, so far as school was concerned. But the Cedar Creek Thespians had plenty to do in the schoolhouse that day.  
After breakfast, Frank Richards & Co. rode to the backwoods school, arriving there not much later than the usual time.  
Some of the other Thespians were there to meet them; but Chunky Todgers had not yet appeared. Chunky was not likely to stir out early on a Saturday.

But while the preparations were going on, to change the big school-room into an auditorium, Frank Richards' youthful brow was wrinkled in thought.  
"Nothing was seen of Dicky Bird & Co. during the morning; and the Thespians lunched in the playground on provisions they had brought with them. It was after lunch that Dicky Bird clattered up on his pony, and glanced in at the open gates. He saw his handiwork, and Richards & Co., who regarded him rather grimly, said:  
"Hallo! You're all here!" called out Master Bird. "What time does the show begin?"  
"Six," said Frank.  
"I hope you'll have better luck than we had last week," said Dicky Bird amiably. "I dare say we'll come along and see you make jays of yourselves. Not this time, Bob!" he added, and he wheeled his horse and rode away as Bob Lawless hurried an apple.

But the apple was not wasted. It landed on the fat chin of a rider who appeared in the gateway as the Hillcrest fellow dashed away. There was a bang as the chunky Todgers.  
"Yarooop!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Wharver you chucking apples at me for?" demanded Chunky indignantly, as he slipped from his fat pony. "I've a jolly good mind to lambaste you, Bob Lawless!"  
"Pile in!" growled Bob.  
"I won't knock you out just before the play," said Chunky graciously. "I say, Richards, have you made up your mind?"  
"Shore off, you fat owl!" growled Frank.  
"You're not going to give me Brutus?"  
"No, fathead!"  
Chunky Todgers snorted.  
"You'll feel sorry when the water swamps down your neck!" he exclaimed.  
"The what?"  
"Water!"  
"Oh, nothing!" exclaimed Todgers hastily. "D-d-did I say water? I wonder what made me say water? Of course, I didn't mean anything of the kind."  
"You walked hurriedly away, evidently feeling that he had said too much.  
The Co. exchanged glances.  
"So that's the stunt?" said Bob slowly. "Dicky Bird's got some idea of swamping us with water! How the bump is he going to swamp us with water when we're indoors?"  
Frank wrinkled his brows in perplexity.  
"They couldn't work any stunt from the show, surely," he said.  
"There's the rain-water tank on the schoolhouse roof, but—"

"By gum!" exclaimed Bob. "Is that it? But how—"  
"Frank's eyes gleamed.  
"We've got to look into this," he said quietly. "The tank is over the stage end of the school-room. If they had some dodge for letting the water run while the play's going on, it would be a wash-out, and no mistake. But—but it would take no end of time to bore a hole through the timber of the roof; and they couldn't get there, without being seen. Well, I don't think—"  
"Perhaps they've been already!" said Beaulieu thoughtfully. "They may have been here last night, getting ready. They could easily have climbed over the fence if they'd wanted to."  
Frank Richards jumped up.  
"We'll jolly well look at the roof, and see if there's any sign of them!" he exclaimed.  
"No, no, no!"

Bob Lawless cut off to the stables to borrow Black Sam's ladder, and it was set up at the end of the lumber schoolhouse.  
"I'm coming, come rolling up as Chunky shouted the ladder. There was an expression of alarm on Chunky's fat face; an expression which told only too plainly that he saw his trump-card in danger.  
"I—I say, wharver you fellows going to examine the roof?" he exclaimed.  
"Can't you guess?" grinned Bob.  
"Nunno! I say, you come down, Frank Richards! You'll break your neck on the roof!" exclaimed Todgers anxiously.  
"Never mind my neck," said Frank, laughing. "I fancy I'm on the track now, Chunky! You've given it away, you see."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
Frank Richards stepped on the roof. The slope was slight, and Chunky's anxiety for the safety of Frank's neck was quite superfluous.  
On the roof was a long, low tank of zinc, placed there for catching the rain. A pipe from it down to a tap in the yard. From the higher part of the building, adjoining the schoolhouse, gutters ran to the tank, which was nearly full of water from the September rains.  
The 4th Chapter.

**A Surprise for Dicky Bird!**  
Six o'clock found a distinguished audience swarming into the lumber school-room at Cedar Creek.  
The grand performance of "Julius Caesar" had been well advertised, and received plenty of support.  
Nearly all the cattlemen on the Lawless Ranch had leave to come, and they came in a merry crowd; and "gals" from the Thompson Town came by the score. All Cedar Creek and its parents came, of course. Fellows who were not in the cast were found something else to do, and nearly everybody was busy with some duty or other. Chunky Todgers did not show up again, but he was not missed.  
Bilby Cook, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch, arrived early with the cowboys, and he was taken aside by Bob Lawless as soon as he came.  
The ranchman listened with wide-open eyes to what Bob had to tell him in low tones.  
"By Jehosophat!" he ejaculated.  
"We can depend on you, Bilby!" asked Bob Lawless, when he had finished his whispered explanation.  
Bilby Cook chuckled.  
"You've got me surprised, particularly. I'm your antelope, with the hide on. Leave it to me. I'll have Poker Jake and Ten-Spot with me, with our quirts, and I guess there'll be a surprise party for them young limbs. You leave it to your uncle."

"Right-ho!" said Bob. "You don't want to hurt them, you know, but if you touched them up a little it might do them good."  
"I should smile!" said Bilby Cook.  
And while the numerous and distinguished audience poured into the lumber school, Bilby Cook and his two comrades loitered round outside, and chewed tobacco and waited. They had business on hand before they joined the audience inside.  
Frank Richards & Co., relying on Bilby Cook, as they knew they could do implicitly, gave no further thought to Dicky Bird.  
They gave their whole attention to "Julius Caesar."  
The stage was ready, the curtains in working order, the actors in the green-room ready made-up for their parts. Vere Beaulieu glanced through a slit in the curtain and surveyed the audience inside.

"What are we going to do about this?" asked Beaulieu. "We shall all be busy in the play when they come."  
"We'll have somebody ready for them," answered Frank, with a

chuckle. "We'll have a talk with Bilby Cook when he comes, and get him to look after Dicky Bird & Co. this evening."  
"Good!"

The chums descended the ladder into the playground. Chunky Todgers met them there, with a very anxious face.  
"—I say, have you galoots found anything out?" he asked.  
"Ha, ha! Yes!"  
"I was going to tell you, you know!" mumbled Chunky.

"Well, anyhow, you owe it to me that you've found it out," said Todgers. "You can't deny that, Richards. So I think it's up to you to do the decent thing. I suppose you're going to let me play Brutus now?"  
"Well, my hal!"  
"—I was going to do the right thing, old chap. Shall I go and get ready for the part now?" asked Chunky eagerly.  
"Not quite!" gasped Frank. "I suppose we owe you something, Chunky."  
"I guess you do," said Frank.  
"Good! I—Yarooop! Wharver you're roared at by the Thompson Town, Richards took him by the collar and spun him round.  
"Paying up!" answered Frank cheerfully. "Now, then, all to go!" roared the Thompson Town.  
Three boots smote Chunky Todgers at the same moment.  
"Yarooop! Ow-ow-ow! Yow-woop!"  
"Ow, my hal another—"

Chunky fled.  
The chums rushed in pursuit, and Chunky Todgers yelled again, and still again, as the boots smote. He staggered on his fat pony, and went careering wildly out of the gates of Cedar Creek. And he did not play Brutus in the grand performance.

The music's stopped."  
"Let's get in and scout around," said Dicky.  
Two or three late-comers went in at the gates, and the chums of Hillcrest followed.  
"Strut in, room only, gentlemen!" they heard the voice of Black Sam announce in the porch.  
"Show started, darkey?" asked Dicky Bird.  
"Y. Fifty cents, Mass' Bird."  
"Oh, we're not coming in!" grinned Dicky. "Our constitutions wouldn't stand Cedar Creek acting!"  
And the trio strolled away in the decreasing autumn dusk, when they stopped under a window of the schoolhouse and listened. Voices could be heard from within. The words could not be distinguished, but the tone of indignation was unmistakable—the first hot and strong.  
"They're at it," murmured Dicky Bird. "Now they're going to get a lecture surprise. Come on, then!"  
The three of Hillcrest scouted round the end of the schoolhouse, where there were no windows.  
They could not venture to search for a ladder on the premises; but the noise was such that they needed a ladder.  
The previous night Dicky Bird and Fisher had climbed to the roof, "bunked up" by Blumpy below. They were prepared to do the same again. It did not occur to them for a moment that the case was not clear. Not for an instant did they suspect that their "stunt" was known to the Cedar Creek Thespians, and guarded against.

"Here we are!" whispered Dicky Bird. "Give me a bunk, Blumpy!"  
Blumpy gave the required bunk.  
Dicky Bird mounted on his shoulders, and was groping above for a hold, when there was a sudden deep chuckle in the dusk. A whip sang through the air, and the long lash whirled round Dicky Bird's startled legs.  
"Yooop!" yelled Dicky.  
He slipped from Blumpy's shoulders, and collapsed on him, catching him round the neck in a mad grasp, and dragging him to the ground.  
"Hallo, what the thunder—" ejaculated Fisher.  
In a few minutes more, but for the interruption, the contents of the rain-water tank would have been streaming down on the actors within the schoolhouse. But it was not to be! Three burly cattlemen loomed up in the gloom, with grinning faces, their heavy "quirts" grasped in their hands.  
"Hyer they are, the scallywags!" chuckled Bilby Cook. "Lay into them!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
The long whips rang and sang round the legs of the astounded Hillcrest fellows.  
Whack! Lash! Whack!

veiled the thickening audience with great disfavour. Mr. Meadows, Mr. Slimmer, and Mr. Shepherd had front seats with Mr. and Mrs. Lawless. Beaulieu's father was there, and a crowd of other fathers, as well as mothers and sisters and cousins. Mr. Penrose, of the "Thompson Press," and Mr. Smiley, from the Mission, had come in on the nod, so to speak, the Press being admitted free. The fact that the affair was in aid of the Mission Fund, was the great draw; and Mr. Smiley, from the Mission, had brought Mrs. Smiley and the Misses Smiley and the Masters Smiley, all looking very merry and bright, though it was noticeable that Mr. Smiley looked round him rather uneasily as he sat down, perhaps remembering the happenings at the performance on the previous Saturday.

Outside the gates of Cedar Creek, hovering among the pines on the trail, were three youths, who watched the in-going crowd with grinning faces. Dicky Bird, and his comrades Blumpy and Fisher, seemed in high feather.  
The heroes of Hillcrest hung about in the dusk till the last of the audience had gone, and only two or three late-comers still lingered on the trail.  
Lights gleamed from the windows of the Cedar Creek schoolhouse now, and a strain of music was heard. Mr. Slimmer kindly consented to oblige with a solo on his violin, as a prelude to the grand performance.  
"Hear the squeak!" said Dicky Bird. "They'll be getting to business now. They may as well get to business, too."  
"You bet!" grinned Blumpy.  
"Better wait till it's quite dark," said Fisher cautiously. "I don't want to be spotted climbing the schoolhouse roof. Let 'em get fairly into the first act before we drop 'em. They let us get started last Saturday, you know, before they peeped us."

"The music's stopped."  
"Let's get in and scout around," said Dicky.  
Two or three late-comers went in at the gates, and the chums of Hillcrest followed.  
"Strut in, room only, gentlemen!" they heard the voice of Black Sam announce in the porch.  
"Show started, darkey?" asked Dicky Bird.  
"Y. Fifty cents, Mass' Bird."  
"Oh, we're not coming in!" grinned Dicky. "Our constitutions wouldn't stand Cedar Creek acting!"  
And the trio strolled away in the decreasing autumn dusk, when they stopped under a window of the schoolhouse and listened. Voices could be heard from within. The words could not be distinguished, but the tone of indignation was unmistakable—the first hot and strong.  
"They're at it," murmured Dicky Bird. "Now they're going to get a lecture surprise. Come on, then!"  
The three of Hillcrest scouted round the end of the schoolhouse, where there were no windows.  
They could not venture to search for a ladder on the premises; but the noise was such that they needed a ladder.  
The previous night Dicky Bird and Fisher had climbed to the roof, "bunked up" by Blumpy below. They were prepared to do the same again. It did not occur to them for a moment that the case was not clear. Not for an instant did they suspect that their "stunt" was known to the Cedar Creek Thespians, and guarded against.

"Here we are!" whispered Dicky Bird. "Give me a bunk, Blumpy!"  
Blumpy gave the required bunk.  
Dicky Bird mounted on his shoulders, and was groping above for a hold, when there was a sudden deep chuckle in the dusk. A whip sang through the air, and the long lash whirled round Dicky Bird's startled legs.  
"Yooop!" yelled Dicky.  
He slipped from Blumpy's shoulders, and collapsed on him, catching him round the neck in a mad grasp, and dragging him to the ground.  
"Hallo, what the thunder—" ejaculated Fisher.  
In a few minutes more, but for the interruption, the contents of the rain-water tank would have been streaming down on the actors within the schoolhouse. But it was not to be! Three burly cattlemen loomed up in the gloom, with grinning faces, their heavy "quirts" grasped in their hands.  
"Hyer they are, the scallywags!" chuckled Bilby Cook. "Lay into them!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
The long whips rang and sang round the legs of the astounded Hillcrest fellows.  
Whack! Lash! Whack!

Dicky Bird & Co. dodged frantically, yelling with anguish. They had not reckoned on this!  
Within, Frank Richards & Co. were playing "Julius Caesar" to a crowded house, in great spirits. Without, Dicky Bird & Co. were hopping and jumping to escape the lashes of the cowboys' long whips.  
It was another defeat for Dicky Bird. He realised now that the rain-water tank was not destined to swamp down on Brutus & Co.  
"Yow-woop-woop!" roared Blumpy. "Keep those whips away, you rotters! Wharver you up to?"  
"Yooop! Stoppi!" spluttered Fisher.  
"Give 'em some more!" chuckled Bilby Cook. "Make 'em hop!"  
"Leave off!" shrieked Dicky Bird. "Oh, on crickey! Ow, ow, ow!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Two or three Hillcresters broke into flight at last. They were not thinking now of swamping the Cedar Creek Thespians and "washing out" the grand performance. They were only thinking of saving their suffering legs from the lashings of whips.  
They dashed away round the schoolhouse, with the three cowboys in hot pursuit, in a state of great hilarity—which was not shared by Dicky Bird & Co.  
"Whack, whack, whack!"  
Across the playground went the three, hopping and dodging, with the long whips playing round their legs; and by the time they reached the gates, they felt that life was hardly worth living.  
They dodged out on the trail, and to their great relief, Bilby Cook and his comrades halted in the gateway, roaring with laughter.  
"Have you had enough, young 'uns?" roared Bilby Cook. "You ain't set the tank gone yet, you know! Haw, haw, haw!"  
"Ow, ow, ow," mumbled Dicky Bird, as he dodged breathlessly into the pines. "They know all about it, somehow! Oh, Yarow, waw!"  
"Oh dear!"  
"Oh crumbs!"  
"Ain't you coming back?" howled the ranch foreman. "Haw, haw, haw!"  
Dicky Bird & Co. were not likely to come back. They had had quite enough of the quirts.  
They limped away through the pines and cedars, and took the homeward trail, sadder if not wiser. Unfortunately, Bilby Cook had tempted them into the vicinity of the lumber school again that evening.  
"I guess them young scallywags have hit out on the home trail!" grinned Bilby Cook. "I calculate we can go in and see the play now, boys."  
And the "boys" went in to see the play, leaving word with Black Sam, the doorkeeper, to keep an eye open in case the disturbers of the peace should return. But the heroes of Hillcrest did not return. They knew when they had had enough, and on this occasion, Dicky Bird & Co. felt that they had had a little more than enough.  
"Julius Caesar" went with a bang. "Frank Richards' assiduous coaching had had its effect, and the Grand Performance really was very creditable for a schoolboy cast, and the good folk of the Thompson valley by the Grand Performance, they were willing to be pleased.  
As Mr. Penrose said later, in the columns of the "Thompson Press":  
"A well-known play by the late W. Shakespeare was produced with remarkable success at Cedar Creek Schoolhouse, that centre of the social activities of the section, entirely by local talent, which was of a quality to astonish Eastern managers had they been there to behold it!"  
Perhaps Mr. Penrose exaggerated a little, but, at all events, the performance was a great success, and there was round on round of applause for the schoolboy actors when they had finished, and the "noblest Roman of them all" had duly expired on the stage.  
Mr. Smiley shook hands warmly with Frank Richards after the play; he was all smiles, for the Mission Fund benefited very considerably by the Grand Performance. And, in fact, there were congratulations on all sides, and the only persons who were not pleased with the events of the evening were Chunky Todgers, and three tired and dusty youths who arrived home with lingering aches in their legs, where the quirts had landed; but at Cedar Creek, nobody was bothering about Chunky Todgers or Dicky Bird & Co.

(Do not fail to read the long complete story of Frank Richards & Co. in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)

**YOUR EDITOR'S TIP!**  
A Grand Illustrated Football Annual is going away free with this issue.  
**FREE**  
with :  
The "GEM" Library:  
Order this week's Bumper Number : to-day! Out on Wednesday : with a **FREE** PRICE 11d.