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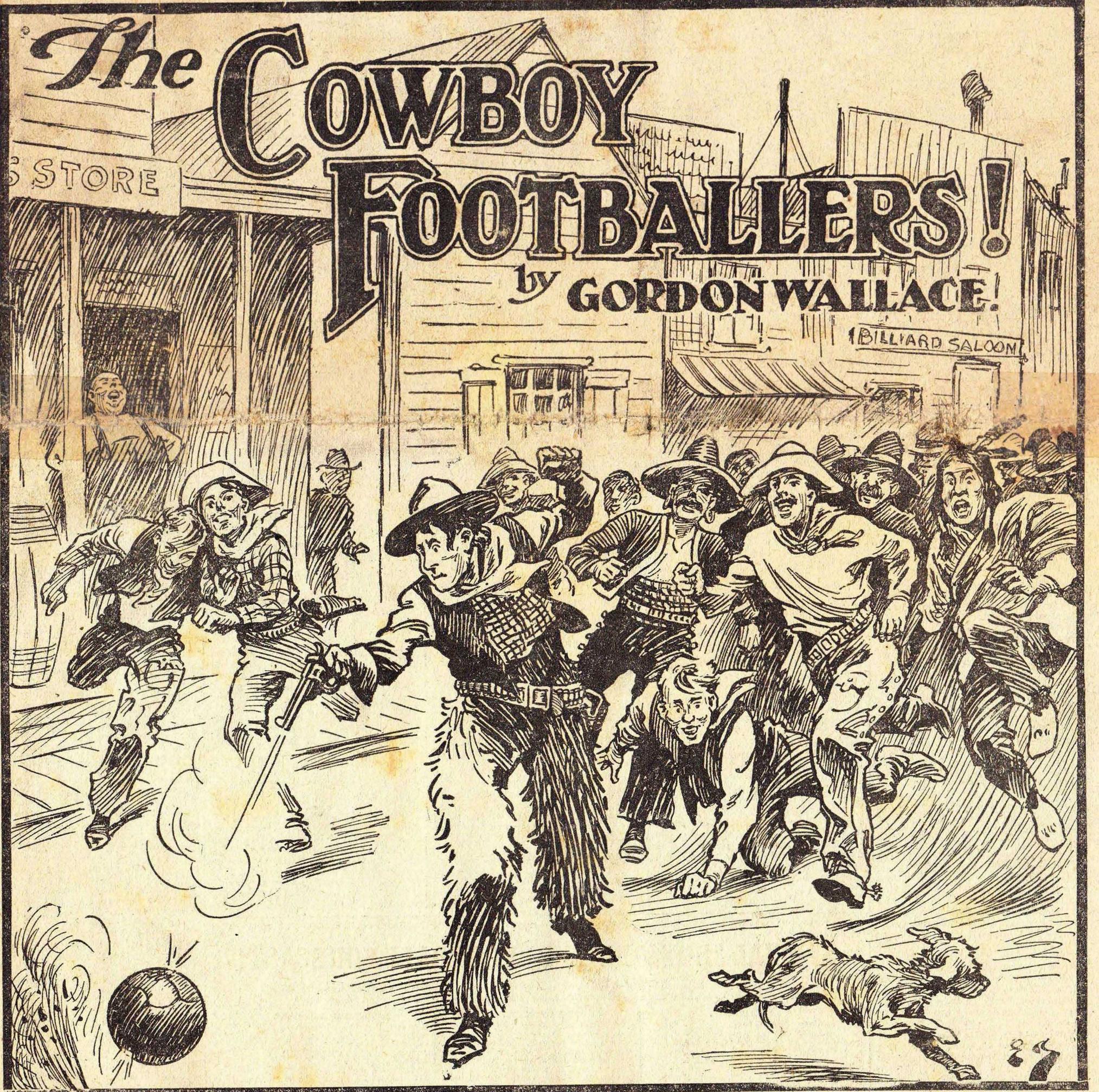
*all the shakers*

# The BOYS' FRIEND 1<sup>1d</sup> 1<sup>2d</sup>

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending November 5th, 1921.]



**FOOTBALL IN WYOMING!**

Read about King Football's reception by the cowpunchers of the Wild and Woolly West in "The Cowboy Footballers!"

## A SPLENDID COMPLETE ROOKWOOD SCHOOL STORY By OWEN CONQUEST.



# Putty's Proof!

meeting in the end study in the Fourth Form passage was a rather important one. The Classical Players had met to decide upon the play they were going to produce, and they were ambitious. Farce and comedy they had done, and done well—at least, to their own satisfaction. Now they were debating the question of giving Shakespeare a chance.

But there were difficulties in the way.

A successful Shakespearean representation would certainly put Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side in the shade. That was a great consideration. But an unsuccessful one—

There, as Shakespeare himself might have remarked, was the rub!

The Classical Players had little doubt that they could handle the "Merchant of Venice" in a quite masterly style, with the exception of Portia! However carefully Portia might be "got up," Jimmy Silver feared that, behind the footlights, the young lady would be an obvious Fourth-Former of Rookwood, which certainly would spoil the effect.

Putty of the Fourth was apparently under the impression that he had solved the difficulty by offering himself for the part.

Putty had that impression all to himself.

The older hands of the Classical Players were not impressed, and they were not pleased by the way Teddy Grace seemed to be taking the affair into his hands. Compared with the Fistical Four, Putty was quite a new fellow at Rookwood; and the opinion of the end study was that new fellows should be seen and not heard.

So instead of jumping with great relief at Putty's suggestion of a way out of the difficulty, Jimmy Silver & Co. gave him grim looks.

"There are some cheeky bounders," said Arthur Edward Lovell meditatively, "who simply ask to be chucked out of a study on their necks!"

"There are!" agreed Raby.

"Cheeky asses who think they can do things, when they can't do anything at all to speak of!" remarked Newcome.

"Hear, hear!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I've told you fellows that what you don't know about acting would fill—"

The Fistical Four rose in their wrath, and collared Teddy Grace.

The door of the end study was jerked open, and Putty of the Fourth, in the grasp of four sturdy pairs of hands, swept through the doorway.

Bump!

"Oh! Yoooop! Ow!"

Putty of the Fourth landed with a heavy concussion in the passage outside.

Slam!

The door of the end study closed again. Raby turned the key in the lock.

"That's that!" grunted Lovell.

And Putty of the Fourth limped away wrathfully to his quarters, while the committee of the Classical Players continued their discussion in the end study, without the assistance of his brilliant suggestions.

## The 2nd Chapter.

### Putty Means Business!

"He, he, he!"

With that unmusical cachinnation Tubby Muffin announced his arrival in Study No. 2, which he shared with Putty Grace, Jones minor, and Higgs. The three were at tea when the fat Classical rolled in. All three were looking rather thoughtful, perhaps a little cross. For they were all members of the great society of Classical Players, and they were all out of the cast for the forthcoming performance of the "Merchant of Venice."

Higgs was convinced that he was cut out for Shylock's part, and Jones minor would have been satisfied

with Antonio. And they had been offered only the parts of halberdiers in the duke's train, which they had declined without thanks.

Putty Grace, with much better grounds for his opinion, believed that he was suited for a prominent part; but the unfortunate discussion in the study had settled that matter. So Study No. 2 felt rather sore all round, and no one was pleased to hear Tubby's cachinnation as he rolled in to tea.

"He, he, he! Poor old Putty!" chuckled Tubby Muffin. "Fancy being chucked out on your neck!"

"Hallo! Who's been chucked out?" asked Jones minor.

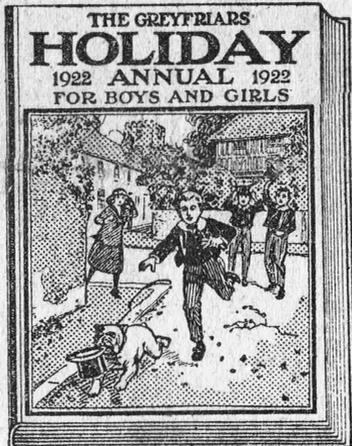
"I happened to be in the passage, and I saw him," said Tubby. "He came out of the end study with one jump, didn't you, Putty?"

"Go and eat coke!" growled Putty.

"It was a terrific bump!" said Tubby Muffin. "You looked no end funny when you sprawled, Putty!"

"I'll make you look no end funny,

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you fat duffer, if you don't stop cackling!" snapped Teddy Grace.

"Of course, I sympathise," said the fat Classical. "I've been badly treated in that study. I offered Jimmy Silver to take on the part of Shylock, and what do you think he said? He said that when they played 'Fat Jack of the Bonehouse' they'd give me the title-role."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at in that," said Reginald Muffin warmly. "I could act their heads off, I know that. I call it dashed cheek, you know. Besides, I'd play Antonio, or Gratiano, or Portia—"

"Portia!" yelled Higgs. "You!"

"Why not?" demanded Tubby.

"Putty offered to play Portia, and I suppose I'm a better-looking chap than Putty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How do you know I offered to play Portia, you fat bounder?"

"I happened to hear—"

"You couldn't make up as a girl, you know," said Higgs, shaking his head. "Why, I couldn't!"

Putty's only answer to that remark was a sniff.

"Oh, I don't know," said Jones minor loyally. "Putty's a jolly good actor. Best of the bunch, anyhow."

"I should jolly well say so!" grunted Putty. "And I'm going to prove to those silly owls that I can play a girl's part, too."

When Putty of the Fourth met the Fistical Four in the Common-room that evening, they greeted him with smiles. Putty came over to them.

"Settled about the 'Merchant of Venice'?" he asked.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Yes; we're making some rather extensive alterations," he replied. "We are going to give the play; but Portia will be cut, and the part rewritten for a male character. See?"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Putty. "Is that what you call playing Shakespeare?"

"We don't want any advice from new kids," said Arthur Edward Lovell loftily. "We know the ropes."

"You don't want me to play Portia, Jimmy?"

"Ha, ha! No."

"Not even if I prove that I can play a girl's part, so that even you will have to own up?" asked Putty.

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Oh, in that case, we'll put Portia in, and you shall be Portia," he said.

"But as it will never happen—"

"Well, I'll do my best," said Putty modestly. "When is the play coming off?"

"Fortnight from now. Rehearsals begin at once. We'll put you in as Bassanio, if you like."

"Both Bassanio! I'm going in as Portia, if at all."

"Last chance," said Jimmy. "If you don't take Bassanio, I shall ask Erroll; and once he begins to rehearse, that settles it."

"I'm going to mug up Portia's part," answered Putty Grace calmly.

"What's the use?"

"To get it ready, I mean, for when you've discovered that I can play a girl's part."

"Waste of time, old chap," said Jimmy Silver kindly. "I'm open to conviction, of course; but I shall want more convincing than you can give me, I fancy. How are you going to do it?"

"I'm going to think that out."

"Well, go ahead," said Jimmy, laughing.

"I will!"

The Fistical Four chuckled as Putty of the Fourth retired with a thoughtful brow. And later that evening Jimmy offered the part of Bassanio to Erroll, who accepted it; so that Putty's last chance of figuring in the Classical Players' version of the "Merchant of Venice" was gone.

But Putty did not seem to mind. Indeed, he was heard to remark that he wouldn't care to be found dead in the cast, if it was arranged as Jimmy Silver proposed to arrange it.

That evening, after prep, Putty's voice might have been heard—and, as a matter of fact, was heard—proceeding from Study No. 2, declaiming Shakespeare. Jimmy Silver & Co., coming away from the end study, passed his door, and heard Putty going strong.

"The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle dew from heaven upon the earth beneath."

The Fistical Four chuckled as they walked on. Putty was evidently sticking to his idea of playing the girl's part in the "Merchant of Venice," although the fiat had gone forth from the end study, the seat of authority.

"Cheeky ass!" said Lovell.

"Blessed if I know what idea he's got in his silly head!" said Jimmy Silver. "More cheek than sense, I expect."

"Yes, rather!"

Jimmy Silver was a little puzzled. Putty of the Fourth had undertaken to prove to him that he could play a girl's part with success; but during the next few days he made no allusion to the matter. Yet he could constantly be heard "spouting" Portia's lines from the play, as if he were convinced that he would appear in the cast as Portia.

But Jimmy hadn't much time to think about that problem. Besides the football, he was busy with rehearsals, which had commenced, and were going strong in the box-room at the end of the Fourth Form passage. So Putty Grace was left to go his own curious way without comment.

On Wednesday afternoon, instead of joining in footer practice, Putty cycled over to Rookham. No special note would have been made of that circumstance had it not happened that Tubby Muffin was in Rookham that afternoon. And the fat Classical mentioned in the Common-room that he had seen Putty coming out of the costumier's at Rookham with a big bundle, which made Jimmy Silver wonder a little. Putty Grace had plenty of money, but Jimmy did not like to see him wasting it in preparing for a part he was not going to play. So he tackled the cheery youth on the subject.

"Muffin says you've been to the costumier's at Rookham, Putty," said Jimmy bluntly.

"Jolly odd that Muffin sees everything," remarked Putty. "I suppose he was born like that."

"If you've been spending money on costumes for Portia—"

"Well, why shouldn't I, as I'm going to play the part?"

"But you're not."

"You remember our agreement," said Putty calmly. "If I convince you that I can play a girl's part all right!"

"Oh, rats!" said Jimmy Silver crossly. "You're wasting your money!"

"What's the odds, so long as you're happy?" said Putty affably.

"Well, a fool and his money are soon parted!" said the captain of the Fourth.

"Quite so. And a fool and his best actor are parted just as soon!" said Putty; and he walked away before Jimmy Silver had had time to digest that remark.

## The 3rd Chapter.

### A Visitor for Jimmy Silver!

"Please is this Rookwood?"

Old Mack, the school porter, blinked at his questioner.

It was Saturday afternoon—a fine November day. Most of the Rookwood Fourth were enjoying the half-holiday. Jimmy Silver & Co. had gone down to Little Side for footer practice, and Tommy Dodd and most of the Modern juniors were there, too.

Putty Grace had declined to join them; he had been seen to start for a walk, with a volume of Shakespeare under his arm, apparently bent upon "mugging up" Portia's part in the scented autumn woods.

Tubby Muffin was hanging round the tuckshop, morosely reflecting upon the cold-heartedness of a Fourth Form among whom he could not succeed in borrowing a single tanner.

Old Mack was enjoying the sunshine outside his lodge, when the stranger at the gates put in an appearance.

Old Mack was a crusty old gentleman, who had a short and sharp tongue for tramps and vagrants. But even crusty old Mack gave a kindly glance at the slim, tired-looking girl who timidly asked him whether it was Rookwood.

She looked about fifteen or sixteen, and was neatly though poorly dressed, with thick hair coiled under a shabby tam-o'-shanter. Her face was a little pale, and there was a pathetic droop to her lips. She looked as if she had seen hard times.

"Yes, miss, this 'ere is Rookwood School," said old Mack, quite graciously for him. He was rather puzzled; the girl certainly did not look like a beggar, and did not seem like a servant inquiring after a "place." And yet she was evidently very poor, though respectable; and could scarcely be a relation of one of the Rookwood fellows.

"Oh, thank you; I am so glad!" she said, in a soft and winning voice that quite pleased old Mack. "Are you the headmaster, sir?"

Old Mack blushed and gurgled. The wide-open, innocent eyes of the young girl dwelt on his questioning, without a trace of guile. Old Mack was immensely flattered at it being supposed, for an instant, that he was headmaster of Rookwood, even by this simple maiden. His gnarled old face coloured all over with gratification.

"Nunno, miss!" he gasped. "I—I—I'm the porter." Old Mack hardly liked admitting that he was only the porter, after being taken for the headmaster. But there was no help for it.

"Are you really?" said the girl innocently, as if even the porter impressed her very considerably. "Then perhaps you can tell me whether my cousin is here."

"Your cousin, miss? What's his name?"

"James."

Old Mack smiled at the innocent reply.

"I mean, his huther name, miss," he said. "There's James the footman, in the 'Ead's 'Ouse, and the sergeant's name is James—"

"His other name is Silver."

Old Mack started.

"Master Silver, of the Fourth Form?" he asked, in surprise.

"James Silver," the girl assented. "He is a schoolboy here, if this is Rookwood. Can I see him, please? I have walked such a long way to see James!"

"Well, I s'pose so, miss," said old Mack, considerably perplexed. He had never supposed that Jimmy Silver had relations so poor as this poor girl seemed to be, and the thought was in his mind that Jimmy's father, a wealthy gentleman, might really have "done something" for a niece like this.

# ANSWERS

EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

"I—I think Master Silver is on the football-ground now. I—I'll send him word if you'll step into my lodge and sit down for a spell."

"Thank you so much, sir!" said the girl gratefully. "I am so tired. Tell James that it is his cousin Clara."

"Yes, miss. This 'ere way." Old Mack debated whether he ought to conduct Miss Clara Silver to the visitors' room, but he decided not. So shabby a visitor was certain to draw many curious glances, which would cause her discomfort if she noticed them. Neither would it be very agreeable for Jimmy Silver to have so very poor a relation paraded before all Rookwood. Old Mack could be considerate—especially under the influence of a soft voice, and a pair of pathetic eyes, belonging to a young lady who had mistaken him for the headmaster of Rookwood!

So Miss Clara Silver was accommodated with an armchair in Mack's little parlour, with her shabby boots on the fender before a warm fire. She gave old Mack a very grateful look.

"I won't be a minute or two, miss," said old Mack, bustling out of the lodge.

"Thank you so much!" Old Mack hurried away, and, catching sight of Tubby Muffin loafing about disconsolately, called to him.

"Master Muffin, would you mind telling Master Silver that his cousin's come to see him? I ortent to leave my lodge."

Tubby brightened. "Jimmy's cousin Phyllis?" he exclaimed. "Oh, good!" Tubby thought at once of a handsome spread in the end study in honour of so distinguished a visitor, and of the possibility of squeezing into it.

"No, 'tain't that young lady," said old Mack. "Tell 'im it's his cousin Clara. She's awaiting in my lodge."

"Never knew he had a cousin Clara," said Tubby. "Never seen her when I've been at his show. I'll tell him all right."

Tubby Muffin scudded away to the football-ground. A practice match was going on, and Jimmy Silver, at centre-half, was busy, and he did not heed when Tubby bawled his name across the field.

Tubby put his fat hands to his mouth and roared:

"Silver! Jimmy Silver! Your cousin's come!"

Jimmy Silver heard that, and so did the Co. Arthur Edward Lovell lost his interest in the practice match.

"Phyllis come!" he exclaimed. "My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, in dismay. Jimmy liked his cousin Phyllis, and he liked her to visit Rookwood; but it was rather an awkward moment for a visit. The junior football captain of Rookwood had his responsibilities.

"Well, it's only practice," said Lovell. "Put Morny in your place."

"I suppose I'd better," said Jimmy. "You fellows keep on."

"Oh, I'll come with you!" said Lovell.

"Same here," remarked Raby. "And here," said Newcome, with some emphasis.

"Look here, we can't chuck up the practice like this!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver warmly. "Football is football. I say, Phyllis is a sensible girl—she'll understand. I'll ask her to come along to the ground for a bit. Tubby! Cut off and ask Phyllis if she'll come along to Little Side. You bring her here."

"Tain't Phyllis!"

"Eh?"

"It's your cousin Clara!"

"You fat chump!" roared Jimmy Silver, in great wrath. "Do you mean to say you've interrupted footer to pull my leg? I've not got a cousin Clara."

"She's waiting in the porter's lodge."

"Tell her to wait till the cows come home, then!" snorted Jimmy Silver. "Kick that fat idiot out, somebody! Now, then, get on with it!"

Conroy obliged with a boot; and Tubby Muffin was duly helped off the football-ground. He departed with a yell. Football was resumed, and Jimmy gave no further thought to the matter.

Tubby Muffin, bursting with wrath, rolled away to old Mack's lodge. He certainly had not been pulling Jimmy's leg with the announcement that his cousin Clara had arrived, and he was feeling very much injured. He rolled into the lodge with a wrathful fat brow.

"Ain't he coming?" asked old Mack.

"No, he isn't," said Tubby. The fat Classical caught sight of cousin Clara, and raised his cap. "Is—is that Miss Silver?"

"Yes," said a soft voice. "Did my cousin James—"

"He won't come, miss," said Tubby.

"Won't he see me?"

"He—he said you could wait till the cows came home, miss," said Tubby Muffin. "He's a brute, if you like."

There came a sound like a sob from the shabby figure by the fire. Old Mack gave a grunt.

"Orrid young rip!" he murmured. The girl passed her hands before her eyes. Tubby Muffin, whose inquisitive eyes had taken in every detail of the shabby, patched clothes, felt quite touched.

She rose wearily.

"I—I suppose I had better go," she said faintly. "My—my cousin does not want to see me. I—I suppose he is angry at a poor relation coming up to this grand school—" Her voice broke.

"Orrid young snob!" grunted old Mack indignantly.

"Beastly snob!" said Tubby Muffin indignantly. Tubby still felt the kick that had helped him off the football-ground. "I—I say, miss, I—I wouldn't go. I'll take you to him if you like, and jolly well show him up!"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Clara Silver, with a quaver in her voice. "Perhaps I was foolish to come. Perhaps Jimmy would not speak to his father and ask him to help us, so that we shall not be turned out of our house. I—I will go away at once! You are sure that he said he would not see me?"

"I believe I've seen her before somewhere," said Oswald. Jimmy Silver stared across at the shabby figure.

"Blest if I've ever seen her before," he said. "She's certainly no relation of mine."

"Jimmy Silver! Jimmy Silver!" "She's signing to you, Jimmy."

"Better go," said Lovell uneasily. Jimmy Silver started off, and most of the footballers followed him. The fellows on the ground had all gathered round Tubby and his companion. A good many significant glances were being exchanged. Jimmy Silver's reluctance to see his cousin had its own explanation in the eyes of a good many present. It was only too clear that this poor girl belonged to a branch of the family that had never been seen at Rookwood before, a branch of which the wealthier Silvers were not proud. At all events, that was the explanation that occurred to a good many Rookwooders. It seemed the obvious one.

Jimmy was frowning as he strode up. He was utterly puzzled by this girl claiming him as a cousin, and still inclined to suspect that it was some absurd "stunt" of Tubby Muffin's.

To his surprise, the girl quitted Muffin as he came up, and ran towards him, the juniors making way for her. She held out both her hands to the captain of the Fourth.

"Jimmy!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "You—you're not angry with me for coming here, are you?"

"But—but—but I don't catch on! I'm not your cousin."

"Jimmy!"

"I've never seen you before!"

"James!"

"Dash it all, Jimmy—" murmured Lovell, greatly shocked.

"It's the truth," said Jimmy Silver desperately. "I've got only one girl cousin, and that's Phyllis. I've never seen this—this young lady before! There—there's some mistake."

"You mean to say you don't know me, Jimmy?" exclaimed Clara, with a catch in her voice.

"No, I—I don't! Certainly not!"

"Lots of people don't know their poor relations," remarked Townsend. "It's awkward to know them sometimes."

"Beastly snobbish, I call it!" grunted Higgs.

"Shame!" yelled Tubby Muffin. Jimmy Silver gave an almost fierce glance round. There was condemnation in every face. Even his own chums looked shamefaced for him.

"Do you think I'm telling lies, you fellows?" exclaimed Jimmy. "I tell you this young lady is a stranger to me."

"You don't seem to be a stranger to her," remarked Mornington drily. "She knows you well enough."

"She—she seems to, but—but—" "Fancy a chap pretending he don't know his own cousin because she's poor!" said Tubby Muffin. "Fancy that, you fellows!"

"You fat rotter!" roared Jimmy

"His cousin Clara."

"He won't speak to her because she's a poor relation, Bulkeley."

"Shame!"

Bulkeley held up his hand for silence.

"Silver, is this—this young lady a relation of yours?"

"No!" panted Jimmy Silver desperately. "I've never seen her before. I—I suppose she takes me for somebody else. It's not my fault!"

"That is scarcely possible," said Bulkeley drily. "But whether she is your relation or not, if you don't want to see her—" He paused. The low, soft sobbing of the shabby girl went right to his heart. "I'm awfully sorry, miss," went on Bulkeley. "Can I—can I do anything for you?"

"We'll all help!" exclaimed Lovell eagerly.

"Yes, rather!"

"We'll stand by you, miss," said Tubby Muffin. "Don't you mind that brute! We'll look after you."

"I tell you—" shouted Jimmy Silver in rage and bewilderment.

"The less you say the better, I think, Silver," interrupted Bulkeley. "But this young lady cannot remain here. Miss—"

The girl looked round her, her head raised proudly.

"I am going," she said quietly. "I am sorry I have caused my cousin Jimmy any trouble. But he has cast doubt on my word. I think it only just to prove my words, so that you will not think me some impostor. If this gentleman is the headmaster—" She looked at Bulkeley.

"No, no!" said Bulkeley hastily. "I am a prefect—"

"Will you take this note?" said the girl, her voice catching again. "It will prove the truth of what I have said to Jimmy. Now I will go."

She placed a folded note in Bulkeley's hand, and, turning, quitted the spot.

The juniors looked after her as she disappeared into the quadrangle. Bulkeley of the Sixth stood with the note in his hand.

"What sort of a miserable blighter do you call yourself, Jimmy Silver?" inquired Higgs.

"Shame!"

"I've told the truth," said Jimmy almost huskily. "I—I can't understand it all; but I've never seen that girl before—"

"She's left the proof in Bulkeley's hand!" sneered Peele.

"It can't be proof of what's not true."

Bulkeley had opened the note. At the first sight of its contents he stared. Then he stared again, and frowned.

"The young rascal!" he ejaculated. "What is it, Bulkeley?" asked a dozen voices.

Bulkeley held up the note. He was frowning, but a smile was lurking round his mouth.

"You can see it!" he said.

Two or three score of fellows crowded and pushed to read the note. There was a gasp of stupefaction, followed by a howl of laughter. For this is what was written:

"THIS IS TO CERTIFY that Jimmy Silver, who agreed to play me as Portia if I proved that I could take a girl's part, is bound to keep his word. Signed,

"TEDDY GRACE, ALIAS PUTTY."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Putty of the Fourth—pulling our legs! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Putty!" said Jimmy Silver dazedly.

"The young rascal!" exclaimed Bulkeley, laughing. And he walked away, still chuckling.

"Putty!" roared Jimmy, as the truth sank into his brain. "Putty! Why, I—I—I'll squash him—I'll pulverise him—I'll—I'll— Didn't I tell you silly idiots that it wasn't my cousin! I'll spifficate him!"

Jimmy Silver rushed off the football ground in furious search of "Cousin Clara." He left the crowd rocking with laughter behind him. And perhaps it was fortunate for Putty of the Fourth that Jimmy didn't find him just then!

All Rookwood roared over the discomfiture of Jimmy Silver; and even Jimmy, after a time, realised that there was a humorous side to the affair. And Jimmy kept his word—Teddy Grace played the part of Portia when the "Merchant of Venice" was produced by the Classical Players. And he played it so well that Jimmy was rather glad than otherwise that Putty had, in his own peculiar way, put it to the proof!

THE END.

(Tubby's Tenner! is the title of the long, complete Rookwood School story appearing in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)



**JIMMY SILVER DISOWNS HIS COUSIN!** "I tell you I have never met this young lady before!" roared Jimmy at his doubting pals. "Fancy a chap not knowing his cousin because she's poor!" snorted Tubby Muffin. "What do you chaps think of that?"

"Well, he said you could wait till the cows came home!" said Tubby. "But if you come to the footer-ground he'll have to see you."

The girl hesitated.

"I'd go, miss!" said old Mack.

"I—I think I will, if—if this kind young gentleman will show me the way!" gasped Clara.

"Like a bird!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin. Tubby had never been called a "kind young gentleman" before, and he rather liked it.

"Thank you so much!" And Tubby Muffin led the shabby girl from Mack's lodge, and piloted her to the football-ground, with quite the air of a knight-errant of old.

#### The 4th Chapter. Proof Positive!

"Jimmy!"

"Jimmy Silver!"

"I say, Jimmy!"

"Oh, botheration!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver irritably.

That practice match seemed destined to be constantly interrupted. Not only Tubby Muffin, but a dozen other fellows, were calling on Jimmy Silver now. It was no use turning a deaf ear.

"Better go, Jimmy," muttered Lovell. "There's a girl with Tubby. She's waving her hand to you."

"I don't know her."

"Jimmy!" roared Muffin. "Ain't you coming to speak to your cousin?"

"That your cousin, Silver?" asked Mornington. "By gad, she's a pretty girl; not much like you, old bean!"

"I—I— What—" stammered Jimmy.

"You never answered my letters, Jimmy."

"Your—your letters?" said Jimmy dazedly.

"I was afraid that perhaps you hadn't received them, Jimmy, so I—I came. I—I had to walk, Jimmy, and I'm so tired."

"Poor kid!" murmured Lovell compassionately. There were murmurs of sympathy from the juniors.

Only Townsend and Topham and Peele exchanged grinning glances. The Knuts of the Fourth were rather entertained. Rookwood was learning something now about some of the Silvers who had hitherto been kept very dark, and Towny and Topsy found it amusing.

"But I—I—" stuttered Jimmy.

"I—I want to speak to you, Jimmy, dear," said Clara Silver softly. "Can—we go somewhere where I can speak about—about my father, Jimmy?"

"Your—your father?"

"Yes. He is too proud to ask your father for help," whispered Clara, in a whisper that was heard by a dozen fellows. "But I—I can't see him turned out of house and home, Jimmy, for the sake of a little pride. If you would speak to your father, I am sure he would help us. He has plenty of money. Won't you, Jimmy?"

"Of course he will, miss!" blurted out Lovell.

Jimmy Silver gasped.

Silver. "It's nothing of the kind. I tell you I don't know her."

"Rats!"

"Rubbish!"

"Shame!" bellowed Higgs.

"For goodness' sake, Jimmy, think what you're saying!" whispered Lovell. "She's poor, but she looks a nice girl. And, anyhow, it's your duty—"

Jimmy interrupted him savagely.

"You silly fool, do you think I don't know whether I've got a cousin Clara or not?" he exclaimed. "She says she's written to me. I've never had any letter from her. I've got no cousin Clara, I tell you. It's some awfully queer mistake, or else it's a plant!"

"Jimmy!"

There was a sob from cousin Clara. It went straight to the simple hearts of the Rookwood juniors. Some of them gathered round the poor girl protectively, and quite fierce looks were cast at Jimmy.

"Hallo, here comes old Bulkeley!" muttered Jones minor. "The captain of Rookwood was seen striding over from Big Side. Evidently he had spotted the strange scene in progress on the junior ground."

There was silence as Bulkeley of the Sixth arrived on the spot. He glanced at Jimmy Silver's crimson face, and at the sobbing girl.

"What on earth does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Who is this?"

A dozen voices gave the information before Jimmy Silver could speak.

"It's Silver's cousin."