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The BOYS' FRIEND ^{1d}/₂

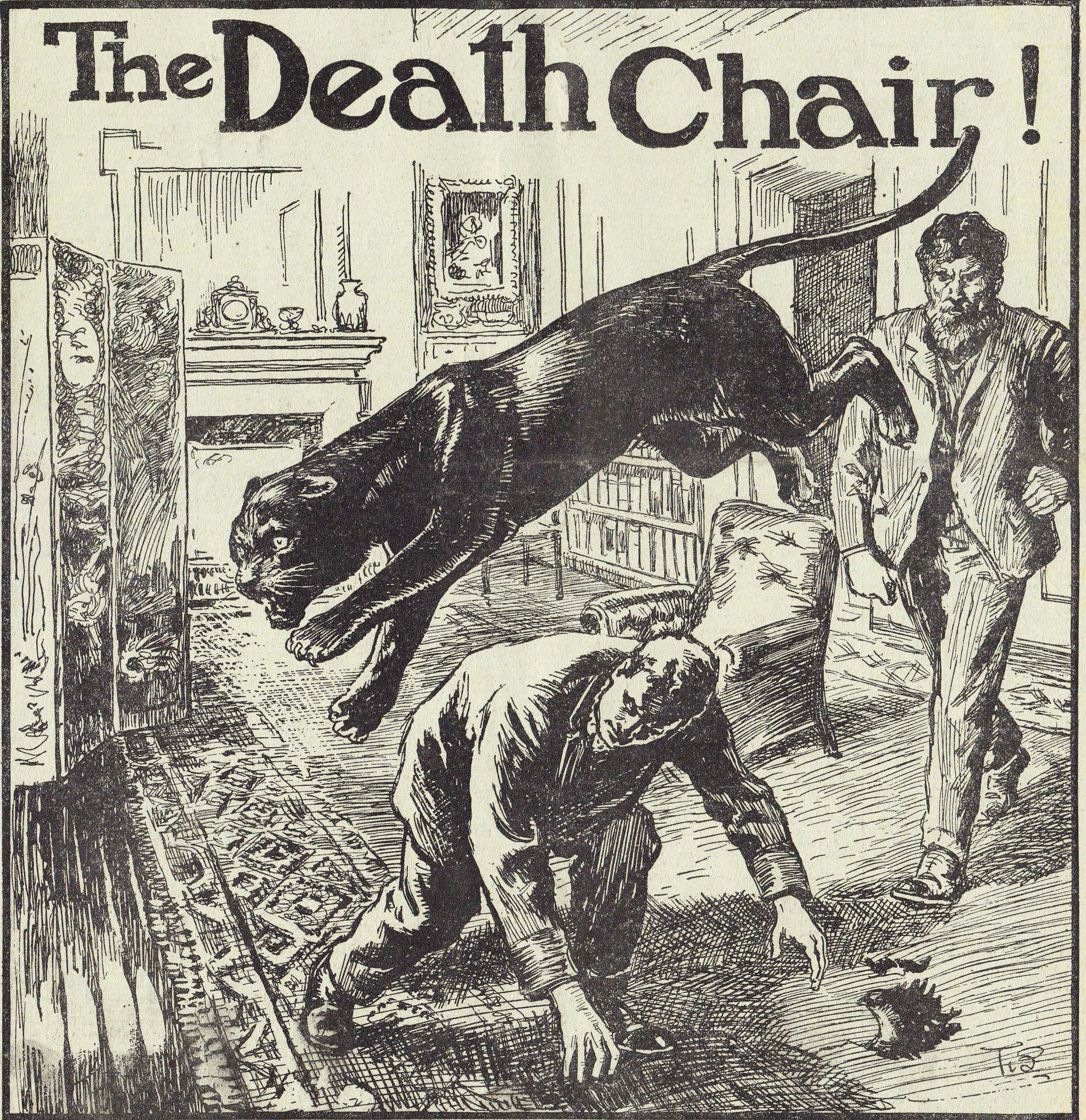
TWELVE PAGES! TWENTY-SEVENTH YEAR!

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THREE HALFPENCE.

[Week Ending December 24th, 1921.

The Death Chair!



"Bulldog" Holdfast dropped quickly on all fours as, with a lithe spring, the enraged animal flew at him! (A thrilling incident in the powerful, long, complete detective drama inside.)

Look Out for Our Greatly Enlarged Christmas Number—Out On Thursday!

"Now, whose ball is this?" demanded Higgs ferociously.

"Yow-ow-ow! Yours! Leggo!" Lattrey grabbed Muffin's other ear.

"You sold me that ball for four bob!" he shouted.

"Yaroooh!"

Snooks of the Second came into the Common-room, with an expectant look on his face.

"Your parcel's come, hasn't it, Muffin?" he asked. "Where's my footer?"

"Yours!" ejaculated Higgs.

"Yes. Muffin sold me that footer for half-a-crown."

"Why, the—the—the fat swindler!" roared Higgs. "That's three fellows he's sold it to!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. came along to the Common-room, and Tubby Muffin yelled for help.

"Jimmy! I say, Jimmy, make 'em leggo! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" asked the captain of the Fourth.

"Leggett's asking for you, Tubby."

"Oh dear!"

"He says he saw a parcel come for you," said Lovell. "Here he is."

Albert Leggett came in.

"You've got the parcel, Muffin?" he asked.

"Oh dear!"

"I say, that looks a decent footer," said Leggett. "Is that it you've got hold of, Higgs?"

"That's it. And—"

"Hand it over, will you?" said Leggett.

"Why the thump should I hand over my football to you?" demanded Higgs.

"Your football! It's mine."

"My hat!" yelled Lattrey. "Have you bought it, too?"

"It's mine!" howled Snooks of the Second. "I paid him half-a-crown for it in advance."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell.

"I-I say—" gasped Muffin.

Perhaps Tubby had not foreseen all four claimants claiming the footer at once; or perhaps he had not thought about that side of the matter at all. Certainly, it was a difficult situation now for Reginald Muffin to deal with.

"You young rascal, Muffin!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Do you mean to say you've got money out of four fellows for the same football?"

"Nunno! I-I—"

"He had five bob out of me for it!" bellowed Higgs; "and I'm jolly well bagging the footer!"

"You're not!" exclaimed Leggett hotly. "I gave him five bob for it, and I've his written receipt to show for it."

Leggett flourished the sheet of impot paper, adorned with Reginald Muffin's signature.

"I don't care if you've got a ton of receipts," said Higgs. "I know I'm having that ball, when I've paid for it."

"So have I," said Lattrey. "I paid four bob."

"I paid half-a-crown!" howled Snooks.

"You got it cheap, Snooks," chuckled Lovell. "It looks worth about three bob."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I-I say, do leggo my ears!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "I-I say, I-I can explain. It—it was all Jimmy Silver's fault!"

"Eh? How was it my fault?" demanded the astonished Jimmy.

"You wouldn't lend me fifteen-and-six."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lattrey made a grab at the ball, and, taking Higgs by surprise, jerked it away from him. He darted to the door with it, evidently on the principle that possession was nine points of the law.

Leggett rushed in, however, and grasped Lattrey before he could escape. He whirled him round, and Lattrey staggered against a chair and rolled over. The football dropped from his hand. In an instant Leggett had hold of it, and was springing to the doorway. Once he had that footer safe on the Modern Side, Leggett felt that he could bid defiance to all comers.

But Snooks of the Second was not to be denied. Snooks put out a foot just in time, and Leggett tripped over it and fell on his hands and knees. The football rolled away.

Higgs rushed to retrieve his prize.

Tubby Muffin was left unattended for the moment. He made the most of the moment. How the contest for the footer ended, Reginald Muffin did not care, so long as he was clear of the dispute. He made a jump to the door, and fled down the passage, as Higgs grabbed the disputed footer.

Higgs was the biggest fellow in the Fourth, and a hefty fellow in a scrap. He relied on that to see him through. He put the footer under his arm, and held up a big fist to defend it.

"This footer's mine," he said.

"You fellows can settle the claim on Muffin how you like—get your money back or take it out of his hide, any old thing you please. I'm sticking to the footer."

"It's mine!" howled Leggett, Lattrey, and Snooks in chorus.

"Go and eat coke!"

The three eyed Higgs wolfishly. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on, grinning, wondering how the queer dispute would end. Lovell offered the loan of his pocket-knife to cut the article into four; but that humorous offer was not even listened to.

"Hand over that ball!" roared Lattrey.

"Rats!"

Higgs strode towards the door with the footer under his arm. As a rule, both Leggett and Lattrey were careful to avoid trouble with the burly Higgs. But they were excited now, as they saw the football on the point of vanishing from their gaze like a beautiful dream. They made a simultaneous rush at the bully of the Fourth.

Higgs had to drop the footer to tackle the two of them. He tackled them quite easily, knocking them right and left, and Snooks pounced on the ball while he was thus engaged.

Leaving Higgs and Lattrey and Leggett still struggling, Snooks darted out of the Common-room, and fled breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Snooks bags it!"

"After him!" yelled Lattrey.

"After him!" panted Higgs.

It was a couple of days later, and Tubby Muffin was in a cheerful mood. He came into the end study smiling, to borrow a stamp.

"Hallo! Got the quids?" asked Lovell, with a chuckle. And Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned.

"Not yet," said Muffin. "I want a stamp, that's all. I've done the puzzle, and the quids are as good as mine."

"Bravo!" grinned Raby. "Remember your old pals when the quids come rolling home."

"I will!" said Tubby generously. "Lend me a tuppenny stamp, will you? It's really a sprat to catch a whale, you know."

"Here's the sprat," said Jimmy Silver, laughing, as he tossed over a stamp. "I fancy we shall be a long time seeing the whale."

"Oh, it's a cert," said Muffin confidently. "Of course, I mayn't get the whole prize. One or two other fellows may bag a whack in it. But I hardly think so. It needs brains, you know."

"Then where on earth do you come in?" asked Raby.

"Rats to you, Raby! Wait till you see the quids," said Tubby Muffin disdainfully. "I've worked out the puzzle, and I'm sending in the answer to-day. They have to be in by Saturday. Result announced a week later. Even if I get only a hundred pounds, I shall feel fairly satisfied."

"I should!" chuckled Jimmy.

"What's the puzzle?" asked Newcome.

"On, I don't mind showing you!"

of the ball, you know, and it stands to reason it means them. Don't you think so?"

"Fairly obvious," said Jimmy Silver.

"You think I'm right? Well, I think I am, you know. I say, won't it be glorious when the cheque for five hundred pounds comes along!" said Tubby Muffin, his eyes glistening.

"Ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "I should say that that prize will have to be whacked out among the whole lot who go in for it."

"Oh, that missing word wouldn't occur to everybody!" said Tubby.

"Everybody hasn't my brains, you know. I sha'n't grumble if I get only a hundred pounds. But I'm expecting two fifty at least. Thanks for the stamp, Jimmy. I'll return it when I get the prize."

"Do!" said Jimmy, laughing.

And Tubby Muffin rolled away to post his solution.

After that, Reginald Muffin lived in a state of expectation, counting the hours.

He spent his five hundred pounds—in his imagination—at least five hundred times. Sometimes he decided to have a motor-car, sometimes he favoured a winter vacation in Naples, at other times he determined upon a gorgeous time in London in the vac, painting the West End red. He dropped into the habit of saying "When I get my money" as if there was no possible doubt on the subject.

The week seemed to Tubby Muffin to crawl by.

"Oh, it couldn't be less than fifty!" said Tubby Muffin confidently.

The fat Classical waited more eagerly than ever. Every morning and afternoon after lessons, three juniors and a fag looked for Muffin, to see whether his letter had arrived. The few days mentioned by Messrs. Twister lengthened into nearly a week, and between expectation and anxiety, Reginald Muffin was in almost a frantic state. No doubt there was a lot of clerical work in connection with that huge competition—Tubby realised that. But he was feverishly anxious to get his cheque.

With regard to the spending of his prize, he had reluctantly given up the idea of a motor-car. It looked as if it wouldn't run to that now. He had moderated his transports, as it were, and come down to a motor-bike. It remained to be seen whether the prize would run even to that!

At last, after lessons on Friday, Tubby Muffin found a letter in the rack, with the name and style of Twister & Co. on the flap of the envelope.

"Here it is!" he gasped.

A crowd of fellows gathered round Tubby Muffin, eager to see the prize, and perhaps to congratulate the prize-winner. Higgs and the other claimants were foremost. They intended to have their due before Tubby had a chance of getting to the tuckshop with the money—if any.

Tubby inserted a fat thumb into the envelope, and jerked it open.

There was a folded letter inside, and Tubby Muffin unfolded it with fat fingers that trembled with eagerness.

The letter was printed—which looked as if Messrs. Twister & Co. had had to turn out quite a lot of them. Adhering to the letter was a two-penny stamp.

Muffin blinked at it.

"Well, where's the cheque?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Where's the money?" hooted Higgs. "You owe me a pound, you fat spoofer!"

Tubby Muffin stared at the letter. His fat jaw fell.

He seemed hardly able to credit his eyesight.

"M-m-mum-m-my hat!" he articulated at last.

"What's the news?" chuckled Lovell.

"Oh dear!"

Lovell jerked the letter away and held it up for the crowd to read. There was a yell of merriment. The letter ran:

"Sir,—Herewith we have pleasure in handing you your share of the £500 prize in the Football Competition.

"The number of prizewinners amounting to 60,000, your individual share of the £500 prize amounts to 2d. (twopence) which we enclose.—Yours faithfully,

"THE ADJUDICATOR."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Rookwood juniors.

"Tuppence!" gasped Tubby Muffin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fifteen-and-six for a rotten football that bursts if you touch it, and twopence on the letter!" roared Lovell. "And a tuppenny prize! You get the postage back, Tubby!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh dear!" groaned the Rookwood prizewinner. "I-I say, it's a swindle, you know! What's the good of tuppence? Oh crickey!"

"Where's my pound?" bellowed Higgs.

"Gimme my half-crown!" shrieked Snooks of the Second.

"Muffin!" yelled Leggett.

"Muffin!" howled Lattrey.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, I say, hold on!" roared Tubby Muffin. "Leggo! Yaroooh! You can—can have the prize if you like! Yaroooh!"

"Divide it!" shrieked Lovell. "I'll lend you a pair of scissors to divide the prize!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

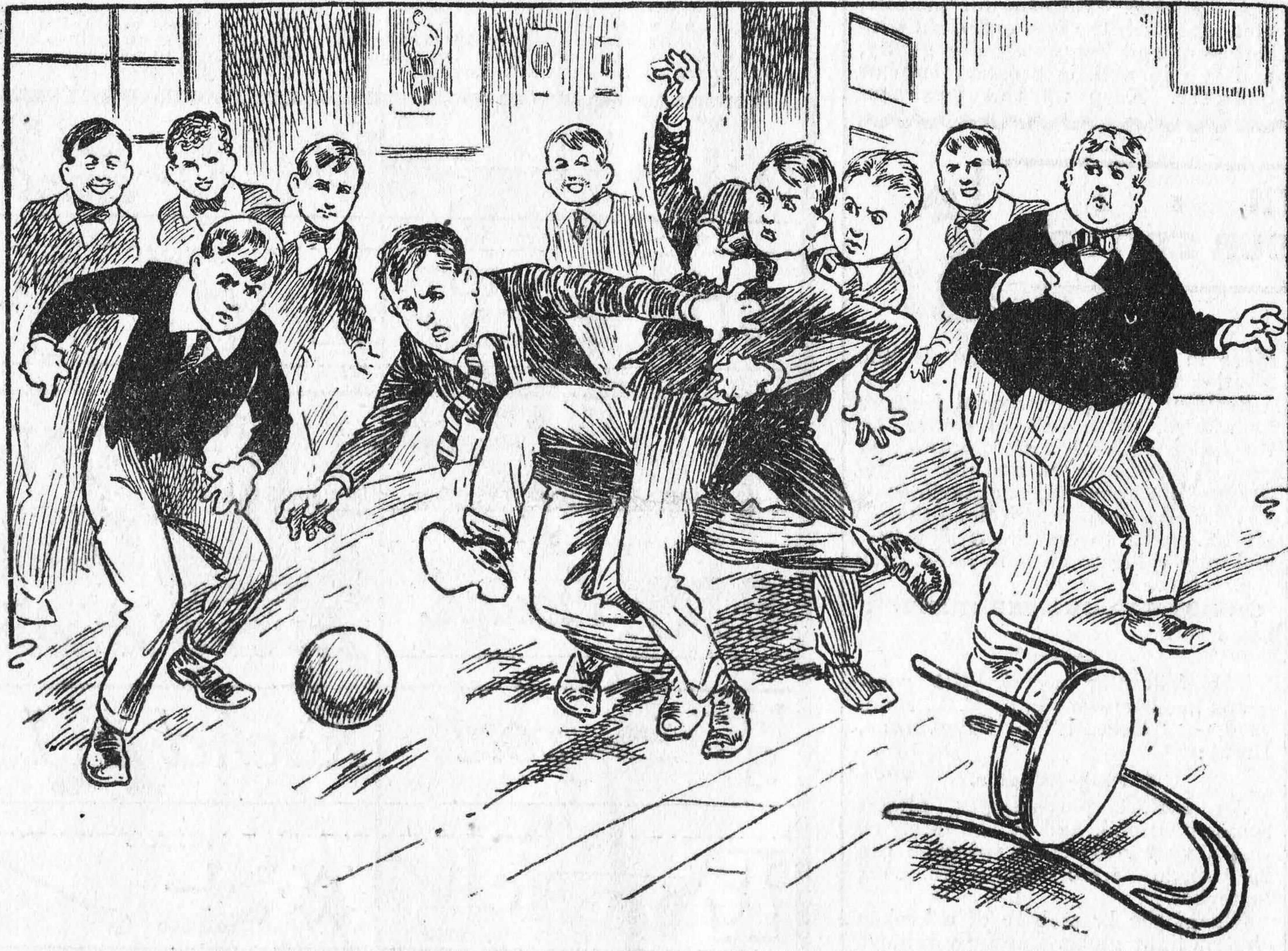
"Oh! Ow! Yow! Help!"

Tubby Muffin fled for his life, with three juniors and a fag hot on his track. The four purchasers of the burst football seemed excited. Certainly they did not seem likely to get much recompense out of Tubby Muffin's handsome prize.

Tubby Muffin departed into the quadrangle at great speed, with Higgs & Co. in his wake. The five of them vanished into the quad, all going strong!

THE END.

(Mind you read the grand Christmas story of the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. appearing in the enlarged bumper number of the BOYS' FRIEND. Out on Thursday.)



THE PRIZE FOOTBALL! The football fell to the Common-room floor and bounced away. Immediately there was a concentrated rush for it by the several juniors to whom it had been sold!

The three juniors rushed in pursuit of Snooks, and Jimmy Silver & Co., yelling with merriment, followed them, quite interested in the fate of the new football.

Snooks was almost at the end of the passage. He glanced back, and saw the three racing in chase, and put on speed. He came to the corner of the passage just as Oswald of the Fourth came strolling round. There was a terrific collision. Oswald went one way, Snooks another, and the football a third. As the ball rolled along the corridor, Higgs made a rush at it, but Leggett and Lattrey were close behind. They clutched simultaneously at Higgs.

The burly Fourth-Former whirled round as they clutched. He lost his footing, and sat down—heavily.

Bang!

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

Higgs had sat on the ball!

There was no very keen claimant for that ball afterwards. But three furious juniors and a ferocious fag went seeking Reginald Muffin up and down and round about, breathing fire and slaughter. Tubby Muffin was not a bright youth, but he was too bright to be found just then. They sought him, but they found him not.

The 4th Chapter.
Tubby's Prize!
"Five hundred pounds!" murmured Tubby Muffin complacently.

said Tubby Muffin. "You can't enter for it, you know, without sending fifteen-and-six for a footer. You get this paper along with the footer. I'm the only chap at Rookwood going in for it."

"The other chaps haven't your ways of raising the wind," said Jimmy. "How are you getting on with Higgs in your study?"

"He's rather a beast," said Muffin. "I've promised him a pound out of the prize to keep him quiet. Rotten, you know—he says that if the prize doesn't come, he's going to slaughter me, and he doesn't think it will come. Silly ass, you know. I've had to promise a pound each to Lattrey and Leggett and Snooks. They were positively violent about it, you know—blaming me just because they were quarrelling over that football. Still, I sha'n't miss four pounds out of five hundred. I can afford it."

"But if it doesn't come, it looks to me as if you're booked to be slaughtered four times over!" chuckled Lovell.

"Oh, it will come all right!"

"Better buy a 'Daily Mail' and sign the insurance coupon, in case it doesn't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four looked at the puzzle. It was not a very difficult one. There was a missing word to be supplied to a sentence which ran: "You can get the best footballs from—"

"I've filled in 'Twister,'" said Tubby proudly. "They're the makers

Higgs & Co. eyed him surlily at times, but the remote chance of receiving their money back made them decide to wait. If Tubby got the prize, or part of the prize, well and good. If he didn't—really, if he didn't, Tubby's life was not likely to be worth living at Rookwood afterwards, unless he found some other means of satisfying the four purchasers of the burst football.

The great day came at last, and there was a letter for Muffin. The name of "Twister & Co." on the flap of the envelope made Tubby's fat heart thump as he saw it.

He tore the letter open. It contained a printed slip, giving the answer to the missing word puzzle, and announcing that there had been a number of winners, and that the shares of the prize would be despatched to each winner in a few days.

Muffin's face fell a little.

"Well, I've won, anyhow," he said to Jimmy Silver. "Looks as if I sha'n't bag the whole five hundred, though."

"It does!" agreed Jimmy.

"If there's ten winners, I shall only get fifty pounds!" said Tubby Muffin rather ruefully.

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Fifty pounds isn't bad!" he remarked. "Let's hope it will be as much as that. Let's hope, at least, that it will come to four pounds. If it doesn't, I think you'll be in want of a coffin when Higgs & Co. have done with you, old top."