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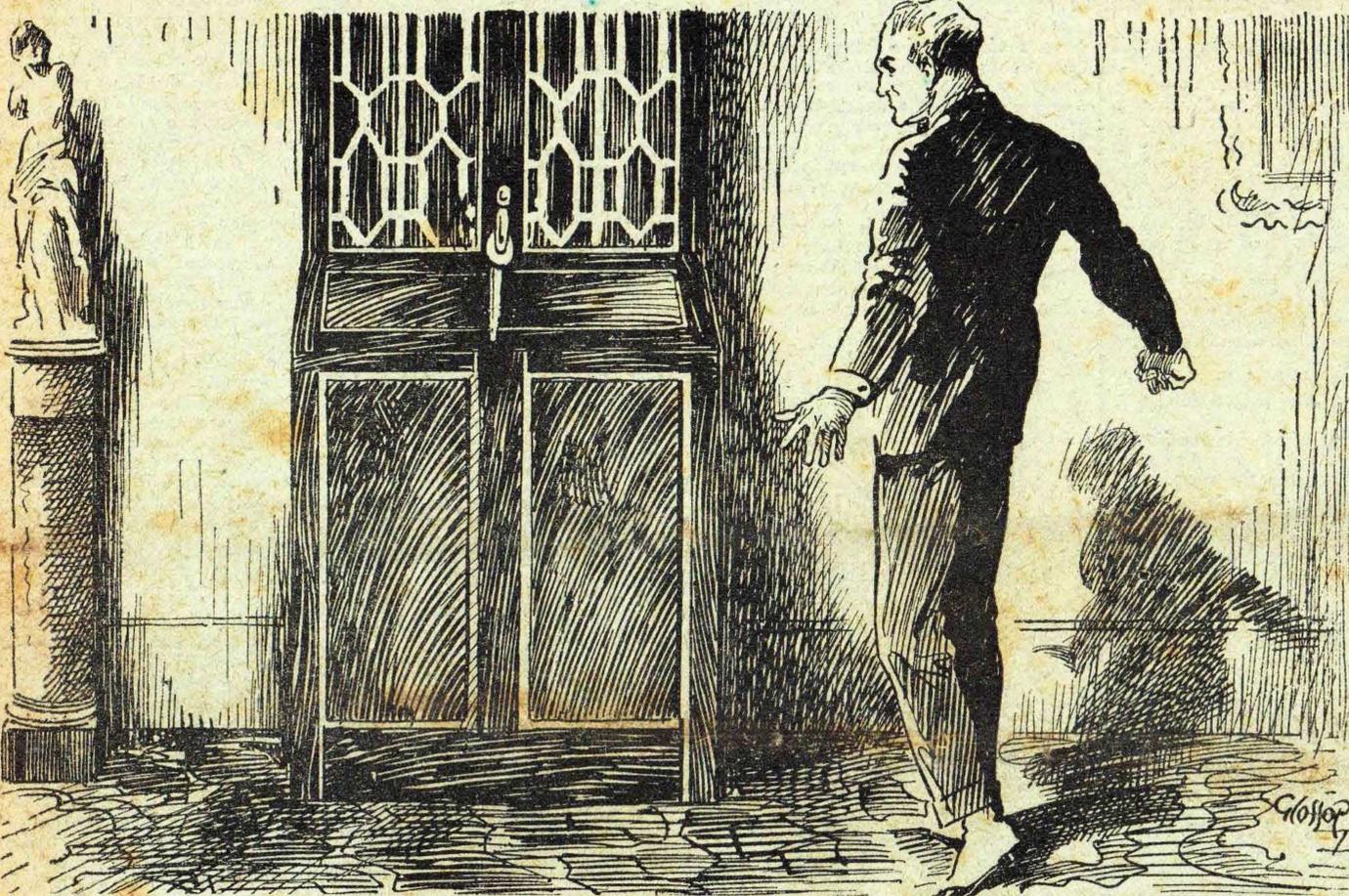
The BOYS' FRIEND 2d.

SIXTEEN BIG PAGES!

No. 1,134. Vol. XXIII.—New Series.]

THE BEST BOYS' PAPER IN THE WORLD!

[Week Ending March 3rd, 1923.]

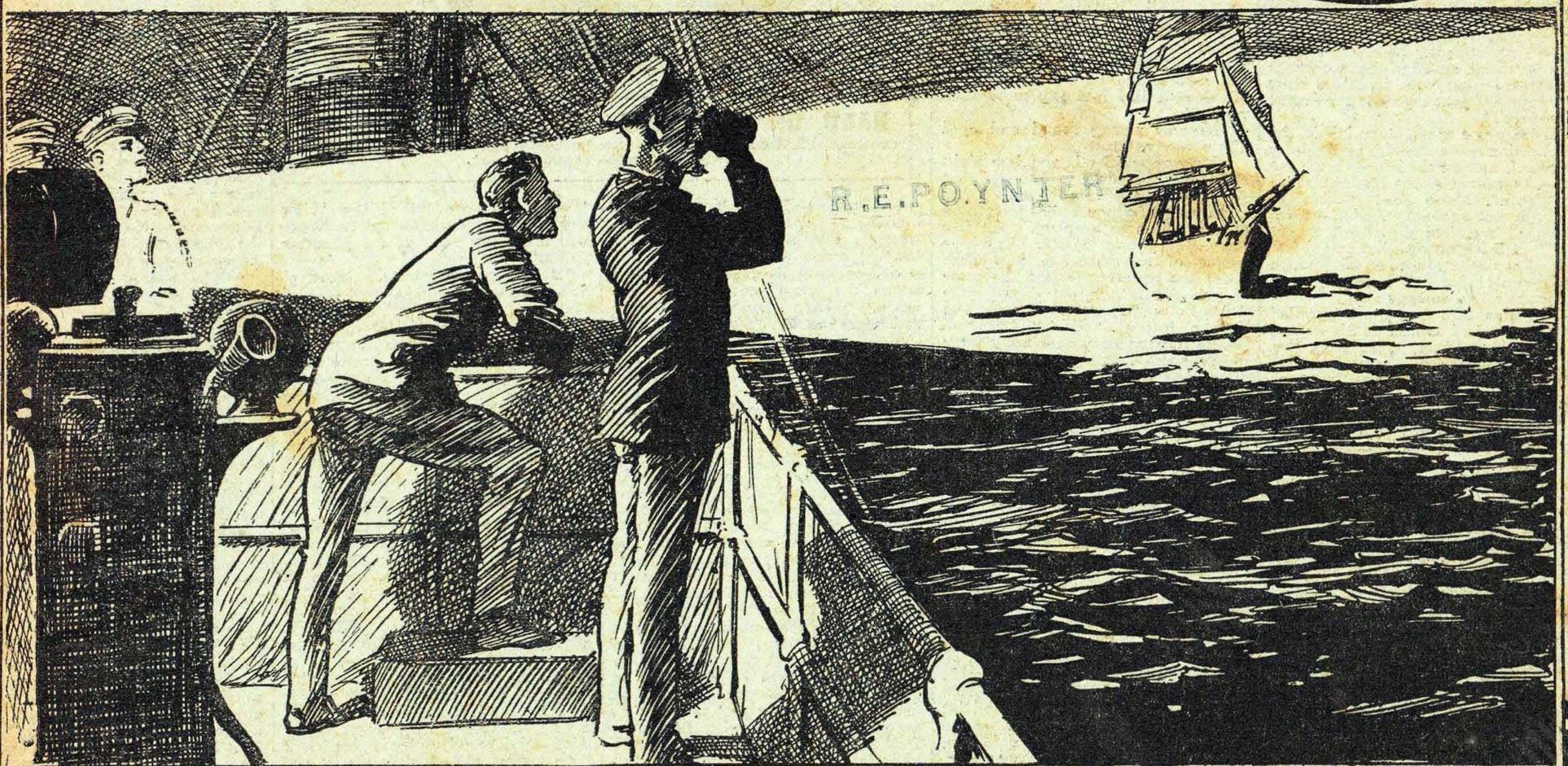


THE DAGGER WHIZZED BY HOLDFAST AND BURIED ITSELF IN THE BOOKCASE!
(A startling incident from "The Voodoo Mystery!" included in this number.)

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NUMBER!



TOM LUCAS
(Liverpool).



FOR A SECOND THE SEARCHLIGHT PLAYED ON THE MYSTERY SHIP—THEN SUDDENLY THE VESSEL VANISHED ALTOGETHER!
(A dramatic moment in Maurice Everard's Great New Story of the Sea!)

ROOKWOOD FOR EVER—ANOTHER GRAND STORY THIS WEEK!



The Fistical Funk!

By Owen Conquest.

(Author of the Tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Popular.")

George Raby is proved to be no coward, but the split in the Co. still continues.

The 1st Chapter.

Adolphus Smythe—Hero!

Adolphus Smythe, of the Shell at Rookwood, smiled. He was standing at his study window, looking out into the quadrangle. What he beheld in the quad seemed to interest Adolphus, and afford him some entertainment.

He had a view of the gravel path near the beeches, and along that path were walking Jimmy Silver, Lovell, and Newcome.

From the opposite direction came George Raby, also of the Classical Fourth.

Twenty-four hours ago those four juniors had been bosom pals, the inseparable "Fistical Four" of Rookwood.

Now George Raby passed his three old chums with averted eyes. The three passed him—with eyes also averted. Only Arthur Edward Lovell gave a slight sniff.

Adolphus Smythe grinned. The friends of Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather distressed by the disunion in the Co., but Adolphus of the Shell was not exactly a friend of the end study. Adolphus was a lofty youth—an exceedingly lofty youth—and on more than one occasion the Fistical Four had had trouble with Adolphus, the results to Adolphus being generally painful.

Adolphus would have licked these cheeky juniors all round, and thus imbued them with a proper respect for their betters. But Adolphus was not a fighting man—and, for the most part, he considered it judicious to regard the Fistical Four with distant scorn.

Now, however, other thoughts were working in the powerful intellect of Adolphus. Hence his cheery smile.

He turned back from the window. Howard and Tracy, his study-mates, were in the room. Tracy was smoking a cigarette—Howard had just smoked one, and was looking a little pale and troubled.

"I've been thinkin', you chaps!" announced Adolphus.

Tracy and Howard looked up. "We've stood a lot of cheek from those cheeky young cads in the Fourth," went on Adolphus. "Properly speaking, I ought to be junior captain, but Silver's got it. They cheek us—one of them knocked your topper off the other day, Howard."

Howard frowned. "I'd have thrashed him," he said, "but, dash it all, a fellow can't keep on gettin' mixed up in scraps with fags."

"And you remember Lovell shoving your cigarettes down the back of your neck, Tracy?" said Adolphus.

Tracy scowled. "You didn't wallop him, old man," said Smythe.

"I've never noticed you keen to tackle that crowd," snapped Tracy. "That's just what I've been thinkin' of," said Adolphus. "Usually, of course, a fellow disdains to take notice of fags. Can't be always mixin' up in scrapperin', as Howard says. All the same, I think it's up to us, considerin' our position in the school, to give those cheeky young cads a lesson occasionally."

"They're a bit tough," said Howard doubtfully, "and they always stick together, you know. Start raggin' one, and the others trickerle in at once."

Adolphus smiled. "I'm not thinkin' of a rag," he said. "I'm goin' to fight one of the crowd, fair an' square, an' lick him, as a lesson to the lot."

"Great Scott!" "If Adolphus Smythe had stated that he was going to fight Carpentier or Siki, it could scarcely have astonished his comrades more.

They blinked at him. "You're goin' to fight one of that lot in the end study?" exclaimed Howard blankly.

"Not Jimmy Silver?" exclaimed Tracy.

"Nunno! I'll let him off," said Smythe rather hastily.

"Lovell's a bit of a nut to crack," said Howard.

"I wasn't thinkin' of Lovell."

"Newcome's the easiest of the lot," remarked Howard thoughtfully. "But he can use his hands all right."

"I'm not pickin' out the easiest, of course," said Adolphus loftily. "I was thinkin' of Raby."

"More power to your elbow, old man," said Tracy. "Raby is a bit of a hooligan, mind."

"I think I can handle him."

"Hem!" Howard and Tracy exchanged glances. As a matter of fact, they did not believe for a moment that their elegant pal could handle George Raby of the Fourth. This sudden desire of battle on the part of Adolphus was amazing. It seemed as if the fighting-blood of the Smythes, after coursing calmly and peaceably through the veins of Adolphus for whole terms, had all of a sudden reached boiling-point.

There really seemed no accounting for this sudden belligerency on the part of Smythe of the Shell. Tracy and Howard wondered whether, after all, Adolphus was not the funky noodle they had always deemed him.

"Think I can't lick him?" demanded Smythe warmly.

"Hem! I hope so, old chap!" said Howard. "We'll come and see fair play, if you're goin' to tackle the cad."

"I'm goin' to knock him right out," explained Adolphus. "It will show those Fourth Form cads that the Shell must be respected."

"It will, old bean—if you knock him out. Let's go and look for him!" exclaimed Tracy with alacrity.

Tracy and Howard jumped up. Perhaps they were keen to see Adolphus in the unaccustomed role of fighting-man; perhaps they wanted to ascertain whether the elegant youth was simply "gassing." On the latter point they were quickly reassured. Adolphus Smythe followed them out of the study without the slightest hesitation.

Obviously, Adolphus meant business. It was amazing—but there it was. Tracy and Howard couldn't even begin to understand it; but they had to admit the fact.

In the corridor they came on Tubby Muffin of the Fourth. Adolphus called to him.

"Muffin, you fat bouncer! Where's young Raby?"

"Blessed if I know!" answered Muffin.

"Find him in the end study, most likely," said Tracy.

Muffin gave a chuckle. "Raby's not there," he answered. "Didn't you know they'd kicked Raby out of the study?"

"What?" exclaimed Howard. "Haven't you heard?" Tubby Muffin was quite keen to impart information.

"Raby funk'd in a row with the Bagshot Bounders yesterday, and Silver and Lovell and Newcome won't speak to him."

"Raby funk'd?" ejaculated Tracy. "Yes, rather! Ran away top speed, and left his pals to be ragged by the Bagshot rotters!" chuckled Tubby.

"They were awfully wild! Why, all the Fourth know about it, and lots of fellows won't speak to Raby now. Higgs is going to get a white feather for him. He, he, he!"

"Come on, you fellows!" said Adolphus hastily. "Don't stay listenin' to that fat animal's chatter!"

Tracy and Howard exchanged a glance. Then they grinned. Tubby Muffin's information had enlightened them. They had not heard before of the split in the Co., of the disgrace of George Raby, of his condemnation as a "funk" who had left his comrades in the lurch. Evidently Adolphus Smythe had been better informed.

The unexampled heroism of Adolphus was explained now—fully explained. Tracy and Howard grinned—the grin grew into a laugh—and the laugh into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Look here, what are you fellows cacklin' at?" exclaimed Smythe angrily.

"Come on, and let's look for Raby!" "All right!" gasped Tracy. "Ha, ha, ha! We're comin'!"

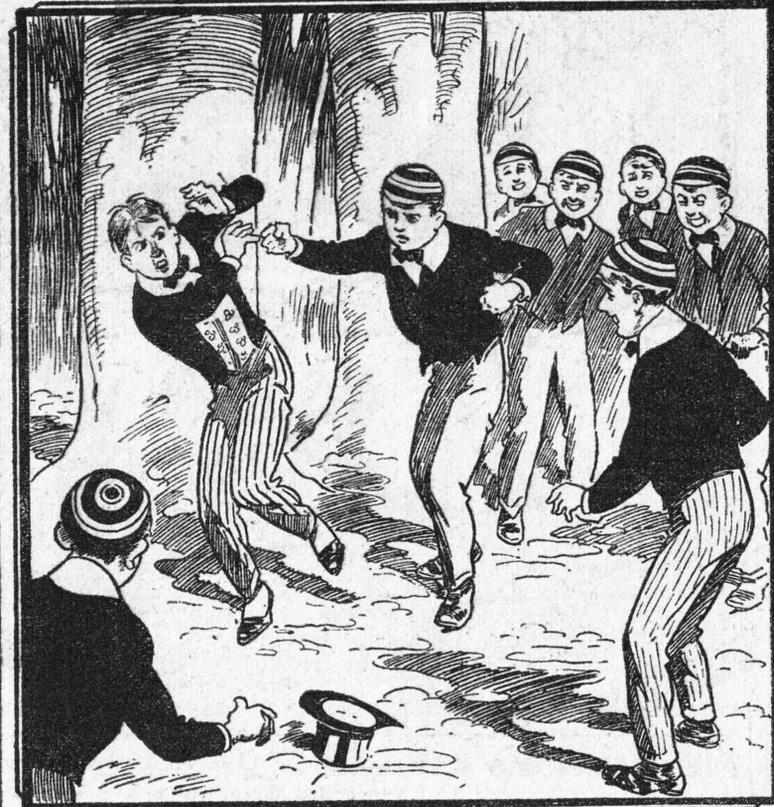
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Howard. "We're comin', my heroic old bean!"

"Look here—"

"Lead on, MacDuff!" grinned Tracy. And Adolphus, with a lofty frown, led the way, and Howard and Tracy followed him, still chuckling.

The 2nd Chapter. The Hapless Victim!

Jimmy Silver wore a worried look as he came towards the School House with his chums, Lovell and Newcome. Jimmy was feeling deeply distressed. The quarrel with Raby hit him hard.



RABY HITS OUT! Raby "sailed" into Smythe in the most thorough-going manner, and Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on, and felt their hearts warm towards their old chum. If Raby had funk'd the day before, he was not funk'ing now!

Newcome was feeling it, too, and probably Lovell also, though Arthur Edward would not have admitted it for worlds.

Raby was in disgrace, for most of the Fourth, taking their cue from the end study, looked on the hapless junior as a funk, and did not conceal what they thought of such a character. Jimmy had hoped that Raby would be able to make some explanation, but he had made none; indeed, he seemed to disdain to make any. Raby's attitude was, in fact, extremely irritating to his old friends. A fellow who had funk'd, and left his comrades in the hands of the raggers, ought at least to have been contrite and apologetic. Raby was neither the one nor the other. One might almost have fancied, from his attitude, that he regarded himself as the injured party.

That was exasperating enough. Nevertheless, friendship was not a thing that could be cast aside at a moment's notice. Even if Raby had shown cowardice, his old chums realised that they couldn't forget that Raby had been their pal for a long time. Even Lovell realised that. It wasn't as if the fellow had always been a funk, like Tubby Muffin, or Smythe of the Shell, or Leggett of the Modern Fourth. It was the first time Raby had shown the yellow streak, and if Raby had been properly contrite and apologetic, doubtless his chums would have made an effort and condoned his offence, at least, if it was never repeated. Instead of which, Raby had assumed the attitude of an injured party, so far as Jimmy Silver & Co.

could see, and evidently had his back up.

"The cheeky rotter!" Arthur Edward Lovell murmured. "A cringing funk, looking at us as if we'd done him some injury, you know!"

"Cheek, and no mistake!" agreed Newcome. "Still—"

Jimmy Silver's brow was wrinkled. "I can't get on to it," he said. "There can't be any mistake—Raby couldn't have had any reason—"

Snort from Lovell. "He saw us wriggling with Pankley & Co. ragging us, didn't he?" demanded Lovell. "We hadn't any chance against the odds. They ragged us, and made us look a set of asses. Didn't Raby run away—pelting along the towing-path as if he was scared out of his wits?"

"He did!" assented Jimmy Silver. "Well, then! If he'd come back—but he didn't! Never showed up at all—and never even said he was sorry! Just got his back up as soon as I spoke to him about it—"

"You spoke rather emphatically, old chap."

"Rot! Chap shouldn't funk," said Lovell. "Pankley and Price and those Bagshot cads will be chortling over it no end. We shall never hear the end of it. I'd never have believed it of Raby—turning tail and running away from Pankley! Pah!"

"I'd never have believed it, either," said Jimmy slowly. "It beats me! What reason could he have had, unless—"

"Funk," said Newcome. "It's odd, but there you are. Why, Tubby Muffin wouldn't have scooted like that, and left Rookwood chaps to be ragged by Pankley's crowd."

Jimmy nodded, and was silent. He was perplexed, and he was worried. But even if Raby was not what his pals had always believed him to be, he was still old Raby, and Jimmy wanted to stick to him. If there was something the matter with his nerves, he needed his friends to stand by him, not to

his shame much more keenly than the delinquent appeared to feel it himself.

"Hallo, you fellows!" Adolphus Smythe and his friends met Jimmy Silver & Co. outside the School House. "Seen Raby?"

"Blow Raby!" growled Lovell. "I'm lookin' for him," said Adolphus. "What the thump do you want Raby for?" growled Jimmy Silver.

"Last week," said Adolphus, "he cheeked me."

"Fathead!" "I'm goin' to lick him for it, that's all," said Adolphus. "Come on, you fellows, I think I see Raby over by the beeches!"

Adolphus & Co. walked on, and the three Fourth-Formers turned and stared after them. Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"So that's it!" he said. "Now Raby's supposed to be a funk, even that funky cad Smythe is going for him!"

"Raby shouldn't be a funk!" growled Lovell. "It's asking for trouble, to show the white feather at Rookwood."

Jimmy's eyes glistened. "Funk or not, nobody's going to pick a row with Raby and pitch into him," he said.

"Are you going to fight his battles?" snapped Lovell.

"Yes!" said Jimmy coolly. "And the captain of the Fourth walked after Smythe & Co. with a grim look on his face. Lovell and Newcome exchanged a look, and followed him. Three or four other fellows, who had observed that something was on, took the same direction.

Raby was walking under the beeches by himself, his hands in his pockets and a grim expression on his rather plump face. Probably Raby was feeling the estrangement quite as much as his former friends, though he made no move towards a reconciliation.

His reflections, whatever they were, were interrupted by the arrival of Smythe & Co. The three Shell fellows stopped in Raby's path, and the ostracised junior came to a halt, giving them anything but a friendly glance.

"What do you want?" he snapped. "You!" smiled Adolphus.

"Well, here I am!" snapped Raby. "The want's all on your side. Take your face away, for goodness' sake!"

"You cheeked me the other day," said Adolphus, unheeding. "At the time, I thought it hardly worth while to thrash you, as you deserved."

"Wha-a-at?" "Thinkin' it over, however, I've come to the conclusion that you cheeky fags must be kept in your place," said Adolphus, shaking his head. "There's such a thing as the fitness of things, you know."

"You silly chump!" snapped Raby. "That's enough! Put up your hands!"

And Adolphus Smythe, pushing back his cuffs in a businesslike way, put up his hands and advanced upon Raby of the Fourth. And there was a rush of a dozen fellows from different directions.

"A fight!" yelled Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth. "Raby—my hat!—and Smythe! Ye gods, this will be worth watching."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Raby, evidently astonished by this amazing belligerency on the part of Adolphus Smythe, stood staring at the hero of the Shell with his hands still in his pockets. Adolphus pranced up to him, brandishing his fists.

"Come on!" he shouted. "I—Yaroooooh!"

A grip of iron fell upon Smythe's collar, and he was whirled away from George Raby in the grasp of Jimmy Silver.

The 3rd Chapter.

The Awful Mistake of Adolphus!

Jimmy Silver swung the startled Adolphus round almost in a circle. He put all his beef into that powerful swing, and Smythe of the Shell fairly spun. When Jimmy let go, the Shell fellow went sprawling breathlessly, spreadeagled on the ground.

There was a roar of laughter from the jammers. Even Raby grinned. The sudden and complete downfall of Adolphus was quite startling and extremely entertaining.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Ow, ow!" gasped Adolphus, quite bewildered. "Oh gad! Ooooh! Wharrer you up to? Moooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Adolphus Smythe sat up. His collar had been jerked out, and his necktie streamed. He was utterly breathless and dumbfounded.

"Oooooooh!" he spluttered. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that enough for you to go on with?" inquired Jimmy Silver. "If not, there's some more on tap."

Howard and Tracy helped Adolphus up. He needed help. He stood, with their chummy support, and pumped in breath.

"Groogh! You cheeky cad! Moooooh! Wharrer you buttin' in for? Moooooh!"

"Looking for trouble, you know," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "You've been looking for trouble, so why shouldn't I?"

"Oh! Ow! Look here, you rotter—"

"You've found the trouble you've been looking for, Smythe!" chuckled Mornington. "It's named Uncle James!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Look here, I—I—I'm fightin' Raby," gasped Adolphus. "I'm not rowin' with you, Jimmy Silver, you ruffian!"

"You are!" answered the captain of the Fourth tersely. "Look here, if Raby's afraid—"

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hooted Adolphus. "I say—Oooooop!"

A tap on the nose interrupted Smythe of the Shell, and he roared instead of finishing his remarks.

George Raby pushed forward. He gave the captain of the Fourth a shove—not a gentle one, and Jimmy staggered aside.

"Mind your own business, please!" said Raby curtly.

"What?"

"Smythe's after my scalp. What are you buttin' in for?"

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"Can't you mind your own business?" asked Raby unpleasantly.

"Well, my hat!"

Jimmy Silver could only stare. For a funk, George Raby seemed to be pretty cool in the hour of peril—if there was peril in an encounter with Adolphus of the Shell. Indeed, he seemed to have no objection to a row with Jimmy Silver himself—the great chief of the Fistical Four, and the acknowledged warrior of the Fourth.

Taking no heed of Jimmy and his astonishment, Raby stepped up to Adolphus Smythe. He put up his hands cheerfully.

"Ready?" he asked.

"By gad, I'm goin' to smash you!" shouted Adolphus. "If you're not goin' to hide behind Jimmy Silver—"

"Am I hiding?" smiled Raby. "I'm waitin' for you to come on, old top. Shall I start you—with a rap on the nose?"

Raby reached out, evidently intending to suit the action to the word. Smythe of the Shell jumped back.

If Raby was a coward, he certainly was the most warlike funk that Smythe of the Shell had ever happened upon. The hapless Adolphus was conscious of an inward misgiving.

Had he made a mistake? But how could he have made a mistake, when Raby was turned down by his own chums for having shown the white feather?

It was a problem, and one that Smythe of the Shell had no time to think out. For Raby was following him up, and Smythe, as he backed away step by step, found Raby still at hand all the time, tapping at him and rapping at him, amid howls of laughter from the juniors.

"Is this a walking match, you Shell chaps?" called out Conroy.

"Is Smythe going to back as far as the School House?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Smythe, old man, stand up to him!" exclaimed Howard. "You asked for it, you know."

"He's a funk, you know!" said Tracy.

"Stick to him, Smythe!"

"Pile in, Adolphus! Never mind your nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The trouble was that Smythe of the Shell did mind his nose. That nose had already received three distinct raps; now it received a double rap, and Smythe yelled dismally. He did not like a postman's knock when it alighted upon his nose.

"Go it, Smythe!" shouted several Shell fellows.

"Go it, Raby!" called out Mornington.

Raby was going it—hard and fast. Smythe backed away, and away, right round one of the beeches, and then round another. The spectators had to follow the combatants up.

Adolphus was realising, by this time, that he had taken too much for granted, that he had made an awful mistake.

Whether or not George Raby was afraid of the Bagshot Bounders, it was only too obvious that he was not afraid of Adolphus Smythe of the Rookwood Shell. That was as clear as daylight.

How a chap could be afraid of one fellow, to the extent of running away and disgracing himself with his chums, and not in the least afraid of another, was a mystery. But there it was. Smythe had taken too much for granted—and now he had to pay for it. For even Adolphus could not give in without a struggle, or take to his heels. He was strongly inclined to flee across the quad, regardless of public opinion. But a licking was better than that—even Adolphus felt that it was. So he screwed up his courage—what there was of it—and put up the best fight he could.

As Smythe was a good deal older than Raby, and half a head taller, he ought to have been able to give an account of himself in the combat. But the account he gave was dismal.

Once or twice he got home a drive, but all the time Raby was knocking him right and left. Smythe went to grass at last; and it was only the laughter and jeers of the Rookwood juniors that drew him to his feet again. Smythe tottered up at last, and renewed the combat—or rather, he renewed the knocking right and left.

Perhaps Raby was not sorry for an opportunity of showing that he had been misjudged. Certainly he "sailed" into Smythe in the most thorough-going manner. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked on, and they felt their hearts warming towards their old chum. If Raby had funk'd the day before, he was not funk'ing now. True, Smythe was a much less dangerous enemy than Pankley of Bagshot. Nevertheless, he was a good deal bigger than Raby; and Raby was walking all over him with coolness and ease.

Crash!

Adolphus went down again; and this time all the laughter of the juniors could not induce him to rise. He lay and gasped.

He realised his awful mistake, and he had had enough. Raby dropped his hands and stood looking down at the Shell fellow grimly.

"Put him on his feet, Howard," he said. "I've not finished with him yet."

"Up with you, old chap!" said Howard.

Groan from Adolphus.

"Not finished, old fellow?" asked Tracy.

Groan!

"What about the lesson you were goin' to give those Fourth Form cads?" grinned Tracy.

Groan!

"Looks as if he's finished," chuckled Valentine Mornington. "Poor old Smythe, he seems to have woke up the wrong passenger."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Raby shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and turned away. Smythe could have gone on well enough, but wild horses would not have dragged him into another round.

Howard and Tracy helped their crestfallen chum away at last. Perhaps they sympathised. Certainly they grinned. Adolphus' actual performances, compared with the programme he had mapped out, struck them as funny. But the humour of the situation was hopelessly lost on Adolphus. He groaned and gasped dismally as his chums helped him away; and he made a mental resolve to be quite, quite sure that a funk really was a funk before he let himself in for a combat again. It was days and days before Adolphus fully recovered from the effects of his dreadful, disastrous mistake.

The 4th Chapter. Brought to Light!

Jimmy Silver, Lovell, and Newcome followed Raby of the Fourth, as that victorious youth walked away after the combat.

cheek won't make any difference. You've found pluck enough to whack a dummy like Smythe, but I expect you'd run for it if Pankley came along!"

And Arthur Newcome walked off in great dudgeon.

Jimmy Silver still lingered.

"Look here, Raby, old man—" he murmured.

"Oh, give us a rest!" snapped Raby. "You butted in to protect me from Smythe, didn't you?" His eyes glittered. "You thought me such a funk that I couldn't handle that dandy fool! You cheeky dummy!"

"I—I only meant—" stammered Jimmy, rather taken aback.

"I know what you meant. You're a meddling ass, Jimmy Silver, and you can keep your distance!"

"Look here, Raby, old man, I can't help thinking there's been some mistake," said Jimmy Silver, keeping his temper. "You left us in an awful scrape yesterday, and you couldn't expect us to like it. But if you had any explanation to give—"

"I shouldn't give it!" said Raby bitterly. "Why should I? I know the sort of pals you fellows are now, and I don't want any more to do with you. I'd rather pal with Tubby Muffin, or Peele, or that fool Gunner than with any of you chaps. Keep your distance!"

The bell for afternoon classes rang just then.

Raby walked away towards the School House.

Jimmy Silver followed more slowly, much troubled and perplexed in his mind. It is much to be feared that Jimmy Silver did not that afternoon bestow upon Mr. Dalton, his Form master, all the attention that that gentleman was entitled to, considering

with old Smythe—now we'll see him run away from Pankley again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver frowned and went out into the quadrangle. If the Bagshot junior had walked over to Rookwood to hunt for trouble, the captain of the Fourth was prepared to give him all he wanted, and a little over.

Cecil Pankley was crossing towards the House, when Raby appeared on the path under the beeches. Pankley caught sight of him and changed his direction, heading for Raby.

"Now for the giddy circus!" said Peele.

Raby stopped.

Cecil Pankley walked directly up to him; and the Fourth-Formers stared at the scene with breathless interest. They did not doubt for a moment that Pankley's intentions were hostile, and they fully expected to see Raby back off. Certainly it was an unheard-of cheek for a Bagshot fellow to walk into the Rookwood quad to look for trouble. But, as Peele remarked, probably he thought he could do anything he liked with a funk like Raby. From all sides the juniors gattered round, looking on eagerly.

"Run for it, Raby!" yelled Peele.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put it on!" shrieked Tubby Muffin.

"He, he, he!"

Raby did not seem to hear. To the amazement of the juniors, he smiled and nodded to Pankley of Bagshot. To their further and intense amazement, Pankley held out his hand to Raby. They shook hands in sight of two or three dozen staring fellows.

"How is he?" asked Raby.

All the fellows, converging round the two, heard that question, without in the least knowing what it meant.

"Raby did."

"Raby!" stammered Lovell blankly.

"Mean to say he hasn't told you?" asked Pankley. "What the merry thump is he keeping it secret for? What's this game, Raby?" And the Bagshot junior stared at Raby.

George Raby did not answer, but his plump face flushed.

"When did he do it, then?" articulated Lovell, at last. "Raby was with us all the time until that rag—"

"That was the time," said Pankley.

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy.

"Member I told you I was looking for my minor?" said Pankley. "The young ass was gone up the river, and I was after him. Well, he wasn't a hundred yards away when we met you chaps and ragged you. Raby was just coming to your rescue, you remember—"

"Well?"

"Well, then, it seems that he heard young Dick howl for help," said Pankley. "I thought he was funk'ing. Sorry, Raby, but—but you know what it looked like, when you turned round and bolted—awfully sorry, old chap. We couldn't see Dick from where we were."

"I know," said Raby quietly.

"After we left you fellows tied up, to wriggle home," continued Pankley, "we went on up the river. Then we came on Raby; he'd just landed Dick. The young ass had gone floating out on the river on a plank—one of his dashed tricks. Of course, he was upset, and Raby was just near enough to him to hear him howl. That's why Raby bolted; he was just in time to get hold of my minor and lug him out of the river."

Jimmy Silver and Lovell and Newcome stood silent. Their looks were quite sickly.

So that was it!

That was why Raby had bolted—that was why he had come in late. And the three Rookwooders, wriggling their painful way homeward, with their hands tied in a circle by the playful Bagshot fellows, had known nothing of it. And Raby had not told them!

"But how the thump don't you know about it?" asked the bewildered Pankley. "Is Raby playing the modest hero stunt and hiding his giddy light under a bushel?"

"What rot!" growled Raby. "I ran no risk. I fished your minor out without any trouble!"

"So—so—so that's why you bolted, Raby?" stammered Arthur Edward Lovell, colouring as he remembered how he had greeted Raby on his return.

Raby's lip curled.

"That's why!" he said sarcastically.

"I thought it was a little bit more important to fish out a drowning kid than to save you fellows from a ragging. My mistake, I dare say!"

"You ass!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"If you'd told us—"

"Did you give me a chance to tell you?" exclaimed Raby angrily. "The minute I got in Lovell jumped on me and called me a funk—"

"Just like old Lovell," remarked Mornington. "Guaranteed to put his hoof into it at the earliest opportunity!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley whistled.

"You fellows been rowing?" he asked. "Glad I butted in and let in some light on the subject, then. Ta-ta!"

And the Bagshot junior gave Raby a cordial slap on the shoulder, and nodded to Jimmy Silver & Co., and walked away to the gates. The crowd of juniors broke up, leaving the Fistical Four to themselves. Three members of that famous Co. were looking very contrite.

"I—I said I thought there was some mistake," said Jimmy Silver. "But—but we couldn't guess all that, Raby—"

"You didn't tell us you'd been in the river, old chap," said Newcome. "I never noticed you were wet when you came in—"

"I wasn't wet!" grunted Raby. "I dried my clothes at Giles' farmhouse. Ought I to have walked back to school wet?"

"N-no," said Lovell; "of course not! But—but—you see— You ought to have told us—"

"How much time did you give me to tell you before you jumped on me?" asked Raby sarcastically.

Lovell was silent. He could not help remembering that, regardless of the sage counsels of Uncle James, he had given his hapless chum no time whatever to speak before the row started.

"But after—"

"Yes, after—"

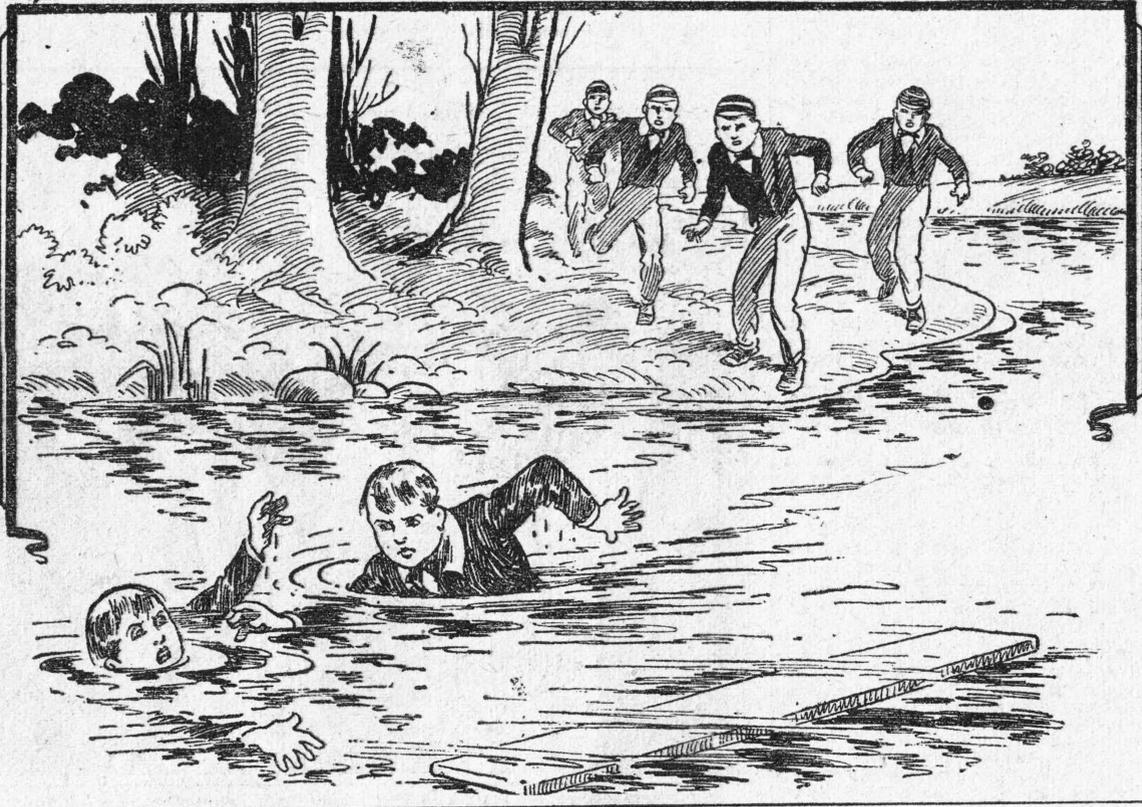
"Well, I didn't choose!" said Raby. "And I'd never have said a word if that ass Pankley hadn't butted in. You can think me a funk if you like, and be blowed to you!"

"We don't—now—"

"But you did!" said Raby bitterly.

"It's all over, old scout," said Jimmy Silver. "We're sorry—and we want to make it up!"

"Well, I don't!" said George Raby. And he turned and walked away, with his head very erect, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. staring after him quite blankly.



RABY THE RESCUER! Dick Pankley had gone floating down the river on a plank, and Raby was just in time to hear him howl, when he was upset. The Rookwood junior dived in and reached the fag just as the Bagshot fellows came on the scene!

Raby looked round, stopped, and stared at the three with a grim, uncompromising stare.

"Well?" he snapped.

"You put up a good fight with Smythe," said Jimmy.

"Well?"

"You didn't funk to-day," said Newcome.

"Well?"

"Well," said Lovell, with an effort, "you seem to have got over it, whatever it was. Yesterday was the first time I ever saw you show the white feather, and you seem to have got over it."

"Well?"

Raby's vocabulary seemed to be limited. He contented himself with that single monosyllable, rapping it out at his former chums in the most uncompromising way.

"Well, we don't want to row, old chap," said Jimmy, in his most conciliatory way. "Join up again and let's forget all about it."

"You can come back into the study," said Lovell.

Raby laughed harshly.

"If I wanted to come back into the study you wouldn't keep me out," he said.

"Oh, wouldn't we?" exclaimed Lovell, nettled.

"No! But I don't want to come back! I'm fed up with you! Go and eat coke, the lot of you!"

"That's enough for me!" said Lovell savagely, and he turned on his heel and walked away.

"Isn't it enough for you two?" asked Raby, staring at Jimmy and Newcome. "Do you want me to put it plainer?"

"No!" said Newcome tartly. "You did funk the Bagshot Bounders, and

the valuable instruction he was imparting to the Fourth Form.

Jimmy was perplexed, puzzled, and worried—seldom, indeed, had Uncle James of Rookwood had so distressing a problem to deal with.

Raby was the object of many glances in the Fourth class-room, though he did not appear to notice them.

His conduct was inexplicable to the Fourth-Formers. Even Smythe of the Shell would not have acted as Raby had done the day before; yet to-day he had walked all over Smythe of the Shell, obviously unafraid.

Uncle James was not the only fellow whom Raby had perplexed.

After lessons, Raby left the Form-room by himself, taking no notice of his old chums, who, indeed, took no notice of him. It appeared that the breach was past healing now; certainly neither side seemed disposed to make any advance.

Jimmy Silver had earned fifty lines during the afternoon—for bestowing more attention upon his personal affairs than upon the Form work—and he retired to the end study to scribble Virgil. When he came down, not in his happiest mood, he found a grinning group of juniors by the School House doorway.

"Where's Raby?" two or three fellows were asking.

"He, he, he!" came from Tubby Muffin. "Pankley's come, Jimmy!"

"Pankley!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

Tubby jerked a fat thumb in the direction of the gates. The rather lanky form of Cecil Pankley of the Bagshot Fourth was visible there. The Bagshot junior had just entered.

"Looking for Raby very likely!" chortled Tubby Muffin.

"Chance for Raby!" chuckled Peele. "He was no end of a giddy warrior

"All serene!" said Pankley. "Thought I'd walk over and tell you that he's all right now."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"Of course, he's caught a cold," said Pankley. "That doesn't matter—in fact, it serves him jolly well right! He'll think twice before he does stunts on the river again!"

Raby laughed.

"He's sent you a message," continued Pankley. "The young ass will be in sanny for a week, so he can't come over. He's asked me to tell you that he's no end obliged."

"All right," said Raby. "It was nothing."

"Nothing, wasn't it? My minor thinks it was a lot!" chuckled Pankley. "He's got an idea in his head that he's of some value. And—and, old chap, I'm not much of a hand at jaw, but—but I'm really grateful. Just to think that young Dick might have been done in, while I was ragging, instead of looking after him, as I ought to have been—"

Pankley's voice trembled.

"Isn't there going to be a fight?" demanded Tubby Muffin, in an aggrieved voice.

Pankley looked round.

"Fight!" he repeated. "What are you burbling about, you fat duffer? Think I've come over here to row with the chap who pulled my young brother out of the river yesterday?"

"What!" roared Lovell.

"Wha-a-at!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"What's that?" gasped Newcome.

Cecil Pankley stared at them in amazement.

"Didn't you know?" he asked.

"Didn't we know what?" howled Lovell. "What yarn are you spinning us? Who pulled your silly minor out of the river?"

"THE END."

(On no account must you miss "On Fighting Terms!" next Monday's great story of Jimmy Silver & Co., by Owen Conquest. And don't forget there's a FREE hand-coloured photo of Bert Manderson presented with every copy!)