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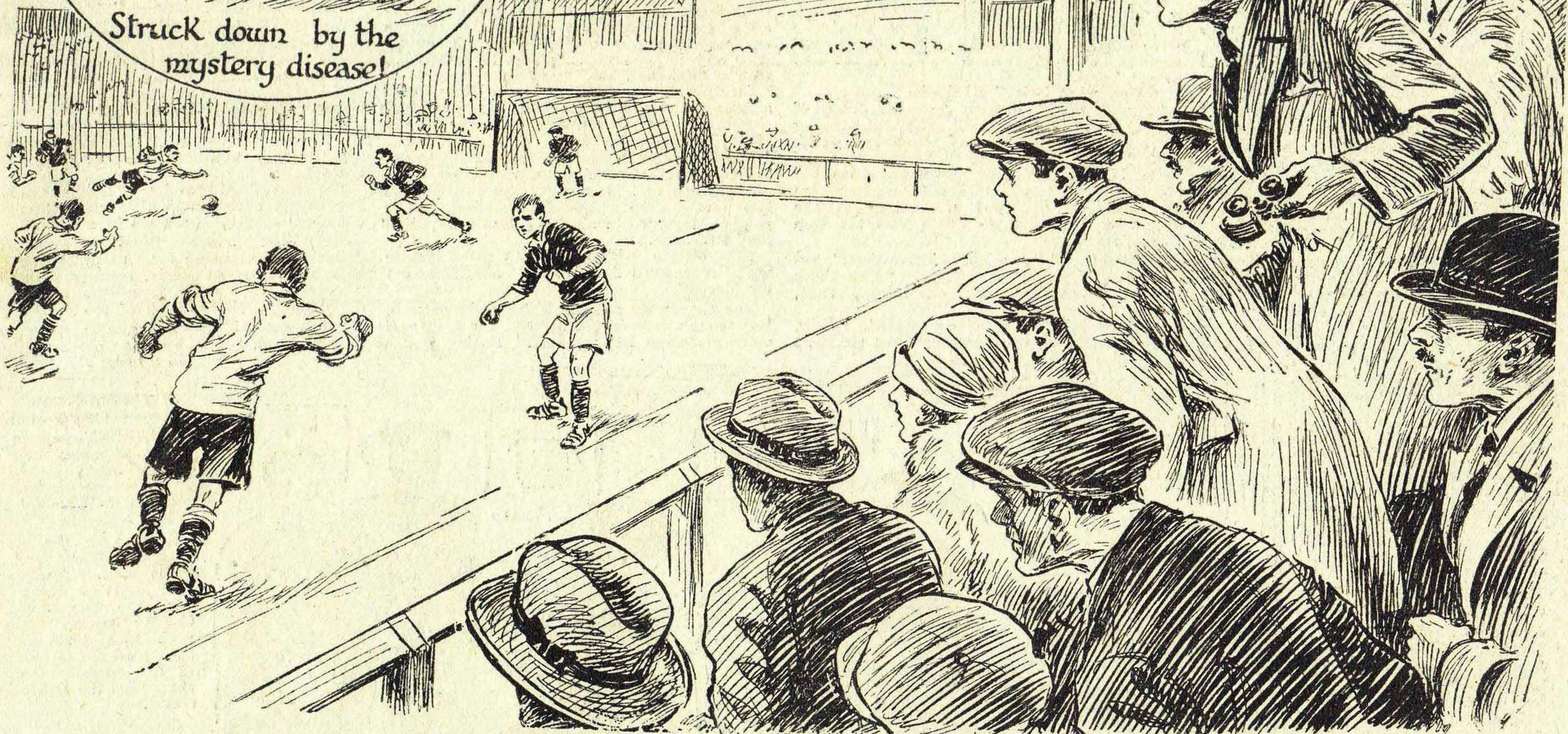
[Week Ending February 6th, 1926.]



Struck down by the
mystery disease!

THE MARKED TEAM!

BY FRANCIS WARWICK



The millionaire detective witnesses the strange collapse of Grimshaw of Claybourne City!

The 1st Chapter.

The Paralysed Players!

"FOOTBALL sensation! Football sensation!" yelled the newsboy as he raced across Piccadilly Circus. "Football sensation!"

A tall, striking-looking man in evening-dress, who had just come out of the Viennese, beckoned to the youngster and bought a copy of the special edition. By the glittering lights from the restaurant he glanced over the headlines.

"Gad!" murmured the deep, drawing voice. "Jimmy, young feller-me-lad, Cartwright, the Newcastle centre-half, has got it this time!"

Jimmy West, the young assistant of the Hon. John Scarlett, the Park Lane millionaire 'tec, whistled.

"Crums, skipper, it's thundering rum! He's the eighth First Division footballer to get this strange disease, or whatever it is! It's a giddy mystery!"

Scarlett nodded, drawing at the Egyptian cigarette that he held between his lips.

"It is a mystery, young feller. Cartwright, just like the previous seven, collapsed during to-day's game. Newcastle were playing the Arsenal—but I suppose you know that. Collapsed suddenly in the second half, just after a throw-in, and when the doctors examined him it was found that his legs were paralysed. No reason for it that the doctors can find! The eighth mystery casualty of the football field we've had in the last nine weeks!"

The two stood side by side, reading the account of the Newcastle player's amazing collapse. The newsboy ran on towards Leicester Square, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Football sensation! Newcastle player's mysterious collapse! Football sensation!"

And it was a sensation. Football enthusiasts, and the rest of the public, too, were startled and agitated at the news.

The eighth mysterious casualty of a First Division player! What could lie behind it all? Struck down during play with semi-paralysis, just as the other seven footballers had been; it was almost uncanny! Startled Londoners scanned the news-sheets and speculated on the meaning of it. All over England mystified journalists were hard at work on leading articles, which sought to solve the riddle—and failed!

"There's foul play somewhere," grunted Jimmy West as he and Scarlett climbed into a taxi.

"Obviously," murmured Scarlett. "But where's the motive for foul play? What has Cartwright done? What have any of these footballers done that anyone should seek to injure them? And, above all, how has the stunt been worked? Here are these fellows on the football field, presumably out of reach of any man except the other players. Yet suddenly they have gone down, struck down in a moment with paralysis.

Jimmy's eyes were still glued to the paper.

"Here's a list of the other seven, skipper," he said. "Five of them—Bedford, Martin, White, Jones, and Hillman—are all of Wichester United. Then there was Swimm, of the Spurs, and Lornly, of Everton. And now Cartwright, of Newcastle! If they had all been of the same team there might have been a solution; it would have looked as though someone had a grudge against that team, and were out to knock 'em out of running for the Cup or League honours. But this is a different thing altogether."

Scarlett nodded. "When those five Wichester men were taken ill in the same strange way, in six successive weeks, I thought someone was out to keep the United from collaring the Cup again this year. They won it three years ago, you remember. But when men of other teams got this paralysis, it promptly knocked that theory on the head."

(Continued overleaf.)

TUBBY MUFFIN IN THE ROLE OF BLACKMAILER!

A Friend In The Fifth!

By Owen Conquest.

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



The 1st Chapter.
Up Against It!

"NOTHING doing!" Jimmy Silver made that remark, and Lovell and Raby and Newcome grinned.

It was tea-time, and the Fistical Four were in the end study, but not at tea, when Tubby Muffin's fat face looked in.

There was no sign of tea in the end study.

The chums of the Classical Fourth, like the seed in the parable, had fallen upon stony places. Cash had run out—a thing that sometimes happened in the best regulated studies.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were debating an important matter. The problem was whether to cut down to Hall for tea before it was too late, or whether to drop in on some friend in the Fourth. Tea in Hall did not attract them, but the alternative was doubtful. There was plenty of hospitality in the Classical Fourth passage, but the supplies did not always equal the hospitality. And there was no time to lose, as the four had come in rather late from football practice. Tea in the study was, so to speak, a movable feast, but tea in Hall was fixed and immutable. A fellow who was late for tea in Hall was sent hungry away.

Tubby Muffin looked into the end study. He often looked into a study about tea-time, like a lion seeking what he might devour. Jimmy Silver waved an impatient hand at him, and warned him that there was nothing doing. The problem of their own tea was sufficient to occupy the minds of the Fistical Four, without bothering about Reginald Muffin's.

"I say, Jimmy—" began Muffin.

"Hook it! Nothing doing, I tell you," said Jimmy. "This study is stony; broke to the wide; in a state of famine. Buzz off!"

"But—" "We've got time to wedge into Hall," said Lovell. "But it's no good leaving it too late."

"I say—" "Shut up, Muffin! Let's try Morny's study," said Raby. "Morny's generally got something."

"If we draw him blank," said Newcome, "we may be too late for Hall."

"Cut in and ask him, quick!" suggested Raby.

Jimmy Silver laughed. "Well, you can't pop your head into a fellow's study and jerk out 'Got anything for tea?'" he said.

"If we waste time talking we shall miss tea in Hall."

"I say—" "Shut up, Muffin! Don't bother now."

"Hall is a cert, and Morny may or may not play up," said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"We don't want to understudy the giddy bow-wow who lost the substance in reaching after the shadow. I vote for Hall."

"Wash-wash and doorsteps!" said Raby.

"I'd rather risk it with Morny."

"Better a dinner of dried herbs than missing a chance of a stalled ox," said Lovell.

"I say—" hooted Muffin.

"For goodness' sake, Muffin, clear off! You're a worry!" exclaimed Lovell. "Don't I keep on telling you to shut up?"

"But, I say—"

Tubby Muffin's wily scheme comes to an abrupt end when Jimmy Silver & Co. chip in!

"Let's try Morny," said Jimmy Silver. "Cheese it, Muffin! No time to waste now." Unheeding Tubby Muffin, Jimmy Silver & Co. left the end study and hurried along to Study No. 4.

Jimmy tapped at the door and looked in. Mornington and Erroll were there at the tea-table. They nodded cheerily to the captain of the Fourth.

"Trot in!" said Mornington. "I say, Jimmy!" howled Muffin from the passage.

"Knock his head against the wall, will you, Lovell?"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Morny, old man," said Jimmy Silver, "we're up against it in our study. If you're looking for guests to tea, there are four candidates, and we'll do the same for you next week."

Mornington smiled. "Jolly glad to have you to tea," he answered. "You're as welcome as the flowers in May, old bean!"

"Oh, good!"

"The only difficulty is that we've got nothing left but one egg—"

"Oh!"

"But you're welcome to that, as far as it will go among four," said Mornington.

"We were goin' to leave it over, anyway. It happens to be a bad one."

"You silly owl!"

Jimmy Silver withdrew from Mornington's study. Evidently there was nothing doing in that apartment.

"Still time for Hall, if we run," said Lovell.

"Oh, let's try Oswald," said Raby.

"Jimmy," howled Tubby Muffin, "I want to speak to you, you ass! I came to ask you—"

"Cheese it!"

"But I want—"

"Rats!"

The chums of the Fourth hurried to Oswald's study. Only one fellow was in that study when they arrived there—Flynn of the Fourth.

"Where's Oswald?" asked Jimmy.

"Gone to tea with Conroy," answered Flynn. "Hooker's gone with him."

"Oh, my hat!"

Jimmy stepped back into the passage again. Oswald's study was drawn as blank as Valentine Mornington's.

"Might tea with Flynn," murmured Newcome.

Jimmy shook his head decidedly.

"Flynn's not a pal of ours. Can't sponge on anybody but a pal. It will have to be Hall."

"I say, Jimmy—" "Shut up, Muffin!"

"What about Conroy?" asked Raby.

"He's a pal of ours, and he must be in funds if he's got Hooker and Oswald to tea."

Jimmy grinned.

"If he's got two to tea he can't want four more. He's not a millionaire," he said.

"It's Hall. Come on, before it's too late."

"My idea all along," grunted Lovell. "I told you so."

"Then tell us again. Run for it!" said Jimmy.

"You fellows—" bawled Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy Silver & Co. raced down the Classical Fourth passage to the stairs, unheeding the fat Classical. They went down the staircase three steps at a time.

Tubby Muffin rushed after them.

"Jimmy!" he yelled.

But the hungry juniors did not heed. Already they feared that they were late for Hall, and football in keen wintry weather had given them excellent appetites—appetites which made the prospect of holding out till supper quite a dismaying one. They went down the stairs at a great speed, quite forgetting the valuable maxim, "Festina lente." It was a case of more haste and less speed as Lovell stumbled over and rolled on the middle landing and his hurrying comrades stumbled over him and strewn themselves in various directions.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ow!"

"You ass, Lovell!"

"You chump, Raby!"

"Oh dear!" Jimmy Silver picked himself up. "Oh, my eye! Some silly ass bunched an elbow in my eye! Ow!"

"Some silly owl bunched a silly eye on my elbow!" groaned Raby.

"You fellows—" roared Muffin, following down the upper staircase.

"Come on!" exclaimed Lovell. "We're late already."

He rushed down the lower staircase.

His comrades rushed after him.

There was a hurried and breathless rush along corridors. The chums of the Fourth arrived at a big oak door—which was shut!

"Too late!"

"Whose fault is that?" hooted Lovell.

"Yours, ass, for stumbling over like a silly goat—"

"Look here—"

"I say—" Tubby Muffin hurried up breathlessly. "You fellows—"

Jimmy Silver & Co. turned on Reginald Muffin with goaded looks. It was bad enough to miss tea, without being persecuted in this way by Tubby Muffin. They closed round the fat Classical.

"Bump him!" howled Lovell.

"Yes, rather!"

"Give him beans!"

"Hold on!" yelled Muffin, in alarm.

"Hold on—I mean, leggo! I say, Jimmy—"

"I say, you chaps—"

"Oh, my hat! Leggo! Nice way to treat a fellow who's asking you to a spread—"

"What?"

And Jimmy Silver & Co. in great astonishment, released Reginald Muffin as if Reginald had been red-hot.

The 2nd Chapter. Taken To Tea!

"A—A—A spread!" It was not, perhaps, very polite; but Jimmy Silver & Co. might have been excused for being astonished. Really, Reginald Muffin, of the Classical Fourth, was the very last fellow to whom they would have thought of turning for relief in a time of scarcity. Tubby was a great man at a spread—anybody else's spread. But he was not given to standing the same. When he was in funds—which was seldom—his cash generally flowed in a steady stream over the counter in Sergeant Kettle's little shop. Doubtless Tubby would have thought of others had he more than enough for himself. But he never had quite enough. His stowage capacity was very extensive.

"A spread?" repeated Lovell blankly.

"Gammon!"

"Chuck it!"

"I mean it!" howled Muffin indignantly.

"Look here, that's what I came to tell you about! Wouldn't you like to come to a spread?"

"Wouldn't we just?" grinned Raby.

"Oh, rather!" said Newcome, with deep feeling. "I could scoff tea in Hall to-day and say that it was nice. I could nearly scoff you, Tubby!"

"Well, come along with me, then!" said Tubby loftily.

"My hat!" said Jimmy. "Look here, Tubby, if this isn't gammon—"

"It isn't!" hooted Tubby.

"Well, if it's the genuine goods, we're no end obliged, and we'll come with pleasure!" said the captain of the Fourth.

"We beg to accept your kind invitation, dear Reginald!" grinned Raby.

"If you're pulling our leg—" began Lovell suspiciously.

"I'm not, you ass!" hooted Tubby.

"Oh, all right, then!"

"You fellows have stood me feeds often enough," said Tubby. "Why shouldn't I stand you one in return, now that I can do it?"

"That's all right," agreed Jimmy. "Right as rain! Only a fellow never exactly expected—hem!"

"The fact is, a lot of fellows have stood

me tea this term, and I haven't been able to return their hospitality," said Muffin. "You see, my uncle, Captain Muffin, is away on a voyage, and so I haven't had my usual whacking remittances from him. That's how it is. I've been short of cash."

"Oh!"

"Hem!"

"But I'm going to make up for it," said Muffin. "I'm beginning with you fellows. This way."

"That isn't the way to your study, fat-head!" said Lovell, as Tubby turned to the right after mounting the stairs.

"The spread's in the Fifth."

"What?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. stopped.

Muffin stopped, too, and blinked at them peevishly. He was leading them into the Fifth Form passage, and it was apparently there that the spread was to take place.

"What do you mean?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "I suppose you haven't borrowed a senior study for your spread, have you?"

Muffin grinned.

"No; I'll explain. I've got a friend in the Fifth—"

"What rot!" grunted Lovell.

"This pal of mine," continued Muffin calmly, "is rather well off, and stands jolly good feeds. He's asked me to tea whenever I like, and is glad if I bring friends with me. Well, I'm taking you fellows, see? Mind, it will be a good spread. I've told Bailey—"

"Bailey!" exclaimed the Fistical Four with one voice.

"Yes, old Bailey, you know."

"More haste, less speed!"

middle landing, and his hurrying comrades stumble

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, my hat!"

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"Oh, my hat!"

put it to the test. We'll go to Bailey's study—"

"And get kicked out!" snapped Lovell.

"Well, he can't kick out the whole crowd of us," said Jimmy. "We'll see if it's genuine. And if it is, well—we're jolly hungry, and I'd tea with Carthew of the Sixth, or a Prussian Hun, rather than not tea at all. If it's spoo, we'll sling Muffin into the study at Bailey—"

"Oh! Ha, ha!"

"And leave 'em to it," said Jimmy. "Bailey will make Muffin sorry that he started in life as a giddy humorist, in that case."

"Good! Come on!"

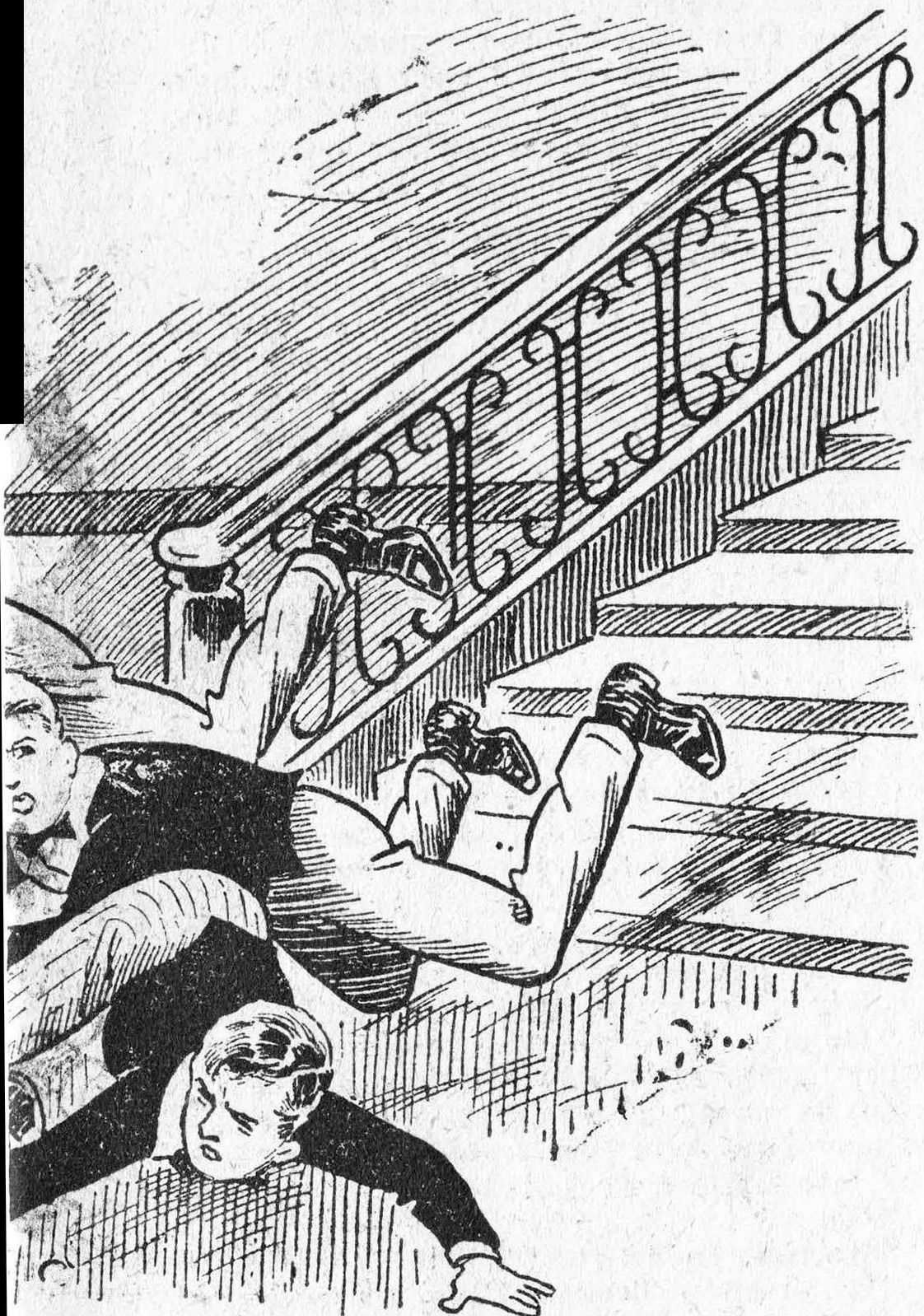
The Fistical Four restarted, with Muffin in the lead. To their surprise, Muffin showed no signs of uneasiness. Indeed, he marched along the Fifth Form passage as if that passage belonged to him.

It really looked as if the thing was genuine; as if Harold Bailey of the Fifth Form actually was standing a feed to Muffin of the Fourth, with permission to Muffin to bring his friends.

But if it was genuine, it was amazing.

The bully of the Fifth was about the last fellow at Rookwood to extend hospitality to juniors. If he had taken up this sort of thing, it was something in the nature of a miracle; it was more surprising than the leopard changing his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin.

Hansom and Talboys of the Fifth were lounging in their study doorway, and they glanced at the little crowd of juniors



Jimmy Silver & Co. went down the stairs at a great speed. Suddenly Lovell stumbled over and rolled on the ground over him and strewn themselves in various directions. "You ass, Lovell!"

coming along. Edward Hansom held up a commanding hand.

"What do you fags want here?" he demanded.

"Not to see you, Hansom," answered Jimmy Silver politely. "Would you mind turning your head while we pass?"

"What?"

"You see, your features worry us."

The captain of the Fifth reddened with wrath.

"You cheeky fags, clear out of this passage!" he snapped.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Tubby Muffin warmly. "I suppose we can call on a friend in the Fifth if we like."

"You scrubby young scoundrel! Who's your friend in the Fifth?" demanded Talboys.

"Bailey," answered Muffin. "He's asked us to tea."

"You're going to tea with Bailey?" asked Hansom, staring.

"Yes, we are."

"Well, Bailey's a rank outsider," remarked Talboys. "But I'd have thought that even Bailey would know better than to ask fags to tea. I wonder if there's anythin' he's left undone to disgrace his Form?"

"Oh, it's the limit!" said Hansom, in disgust.

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked on, grinning. Hansom and Talboys were evidently dis-

gusted. In their opinion, Bailey was letting down his Form in bestowing civility and hospitality on fags. That was not the view of the Fistical Four. In their opinion, it was a leg-up for the Fifth to entertain their honourable selves.

Tubby Muffin marched on to Bailey's door.

Even at the last moment Jimmy Silver & Co. half expected the fat Classical to own up that it was a joke, or to spin them some lame excuse. But Reginald Muffin did neither.

He raised his hand and tapped at the door.

"Who's there?" snapped Bailey's voice within the study.

"Muffin!"

"Oh! Come in, Muffin!"

The fat junior grinned at his companions.

"Come on, old chaps," he said.

And Reginald Muffin marched in with his flock.

The 3rd Chapter.

A Feed in the Fifth.

HAROLD BAILEY, of the Fifth Form, had been moving restlessly about his study, with a black scowl on his face, while he waited for his guests.

The table was laid for tea.

It was handsomely laid. A spread was prepared which might have made any hungry junior's mouth water. Bailey of the Fifth must have given quite an extensive order at the tuckshop. There was nothing unusual in a handsome spread taking place in Bailey's study. As a rule, he was well supplied with cash, which he spent freely; in fact, he would have been well supplied always with that necessary article but for his belief that he knew something about "gee-gees" and his constant hope—never realised—of spotting winners. Mr. Joseph Hook, at the Bird-in-Hand, encouraged the sportsman of the Fifth in his elusive search for winners, and made quite a good thing out of it. But when the "gee-gees" had not run away with Bailey's money he had plenty, and he often stood a handsome spread to other Fifth Form fellows, and even to Sixth Form men. He was not popular. Hansom, his Form-captain, would hardly speak to him; the Rookwood prefects had rather a suspicious eye upon him; he had a study to himself because nobody in the Fifth cared to dig with him. Nevertheless, he could always gather friends of a sort round his study table—when it was well spread. Money was his only qualification, and he made the most of it.

But although spreads on a lavish scale were quite common in Bailey's study, it was extremely uncommon for fags to be asked to them. Indeed, it was probable that it had never happened before. Unless the leopard had completely changed his spots, it was difficult to account for Harold Bailey's amazing hospitality to Fourth Form men.

The sportsman of the Fifth did not look hospitable as Tubby Muffin came in with his followers. Indeed, his eyes glittered at Muffin for a moment.

Reginald nodded to him affably.

"Kept you waiting, old man?" he asked.

"It doesn't matter."

"I've brought a few friends with me," said Muffin. "You know Silver, I think—and Lovell, and Raby, and Newcome."

"Yes," breathed Bailey.

"Glad to see my friends—what?"

"Yes," gasped Bailey.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances. There was something in this that was quite beyond their comprehension. They did not expect Bailey to look good-tempered—he was not a good-tempered fellow—but they could not help thinking, from his look and manner, that he would have been glad to kick Tubby Muffin out of the study.

Undoubtedly he looked like it. Yet, if he did not want Muffin there, why did he have him there?

He was under no compulsion, so far as the Co. knew, to stand Muffin a spread or to tolerate his company.

"Sit down, you fellows," said Muffin.

The chums of the Fourth hesitated.

It was true that they were hungry—in fact, famished. They intensely disliked the idea of holding out till supper. But the bully of the Fifth was no friend of theirs, and if he did not want their company they did not want his spread. If he wanted to make up for past delinquencies by standing them a spread, that was a different matter; they were prepared to meet him half-way. But they wanted to have it clear.

They exchanged glances, and then fixed

their eyes on Bailey. It was for the owner of the study to ask them to sit down.

"All ready, you fellows," said Muffin. "It's all ready, isn't it, Bailey?"

"Yes," muttered Bailey.

"Look here," said Jimmy Silver. "Muffin's brought us to tea here, Bailey, and we've come. We don't quite catch on; but if we're not welcome, you've only to say the word. See? If you want to be civil, we'll be glad to tea with you; if not, say so in plain English—we sha'n't mind."

Bailey opened his lips, and then, catching the eye of Reginald Muffin, closed them again.

"Bailey's jolly glad to entertain my friends," said Muffin.

"He can say so, then," said Lovell.

Bailey looked at Muffin again. Then, with a visible effort, he said:

"I'm glad to see any friends of Muffin's."

"Honest Injun?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes."

"We're great friends, aren't we, Bailey?" asked Muffin.

"Yes," gasped Bailey.

"The fact is, I'm taking Bailey in hand, you fellows, and he's grateful," said Muffin.

"Bailey's done a lot of shady things—blackguardly things, you know—backing horses, and all that. I've talked to him about it, and persuaded him to turn over a new leaf."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Since he's made friends with me he hasn't done anything of the kind," continued Muffin. "Have you, Bailey?"

"No," mumbled Bailey.

"Quite a reformed character, you know," said Muffin, beaming. "You fellows needn't mind sitting down at his table. No cards or smokes in this study now, are there, Bailey?"

"No," Bailey's face was crimson. "Sit down, you—your fellows."

"Thanks," said Jimmy; "we will."

The juniors drew up chairs to the table and sat down. Bailey of the Fifth sat down also, with a red face and a constrained manner. Tubby Muffin beamed on his friends.

"Tuck in, you chaps!" he said. "It's a ripping spread, isn't it?"

"Top-hole!" agreed Raby.

"Bailey does these things in style, you know," said Muffin. "He can afford it. I've saved him no end of money since he chucked up backing horses with that rotter Hook, haven't I, Bailey?"

"Oh!" gasped Bailey. "Yes."

"You're grateful, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes!"

Bailey did not look grateful. Jimmy Silver & Co. were more and more mystified and astonished.

However, Bailey had welcomed them to the feed, and they hesitated no longer. It was a great spread—doubly welcome to fellows fresh from football who had missed their tea. The Fistical Four proceeded

to do it full justice—Tubby Muffin was doing it more than justice.

Bailey's appetite did not seem very good. But his guests more than made up for that deficiency.

The chums of the Fourth enjoyed their spread. They talked cheerily to Bailey, generously overlooking the fact that they had always regarded him as a most unpleasant bully, with whom they had always been on the worst of terms. If Bailey wanted to be friendly, they were prepared to be friendly, especially as he was displaying friendliness in so solid and unmistakable a form. Bailey of the Fifth answered them only in monosyllables, but he answered civilly.

It was all rather mystifying. Tubby Muffin in the role of good angel, saving the blackguard of the Fifth from his wicked ways, was amazing—the chums of the Fourth did not know what to make of it. But Muffin had said so, and Bailey of the Fifth had assented. It seemed to them that there was something behind all this; but they could not even surmise what it was.

At all events, the spread was excellent and ample; there was no doubt on that point, and that, after all, was the point of the greatest importance for the moment.

The Fistical Four enjoyed themselves.

Reginald Muffin's fat face beamed with satisfaction over the festive board. Bailey did not seem much of a trencherman; but his guests cleared the well-spread table in good style. Jimmy Silver & Co. were feeling very cheery and content when they rose at last, and thanked Bailey in their very politest manner for the spread.

"It's all right," muttered Bailey. "You're welcome. Hold on a minute, Muffin—I want to say a word to you."

"Certainly, old chap!"

The Fistical Four retired from the study, understanding that Bailey wanted to say a word in private.

"Wait for me, you fellows!" called out Muffin.

"No need for them to wait," muttered Bailey.

"I prefer them to wait for me," answered Reginald Muffin calmly. "Jolly good feed, Bailey; I'll come again soon, and bring some other friends with me."

"Will you?" muttered the Fifth-Former.

"Certainly, old chap."

"Look here, Muffin," Bailey's voice was low, to escape the ears of the four juniors waiting in the passage. "Look here, I've stood you a ripping feed, and your dashed friends, too—"

"My what?"

"I—I mean, your friends. Now give me the letter."

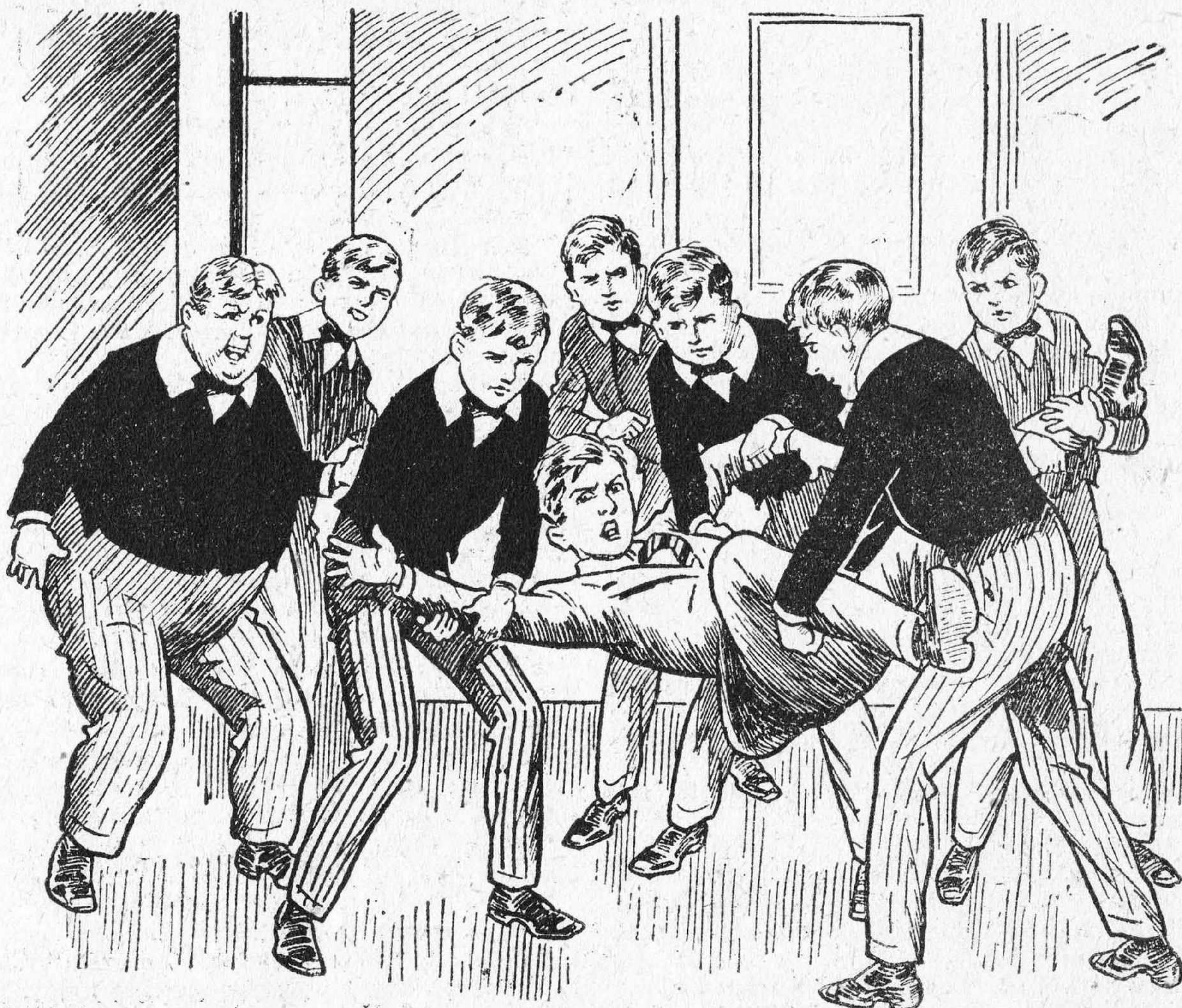
"What letter?"

Bailey of the Fifth breathed hard.

"You've got the letter from Joey Hook—the letter you bagged last week. Give it to me."

"Sorry, old man, and all that," said Muffin, with a cheery grin, "but I can't give you that letter. You see, I'm doing this for your own good. Ever since I've had that

(Continued overleaf.)



A ROUGH HANDLING FOR BAILEY! Bump! "Whooop!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Classical juniors. It was an unusual and quite exhilarating experience for Fourth-Form fellows to bump a great man of the Fifth. The juniors made the most of it. Bump! Bump! "Give him another!" "Give him beans!" yelled Muffin. Bump! The hapless Bailey smote the floor again, with a fiendish yell.

A Rare Treat—"A Hero in Haste!" next Monday's splendid long complete story of the chums of Rookwood School. Be sure you read it, boys!

A Friend In The Fifth!

By Owen Conquest



(Continued from
previous page.)

bookmaker's letter, with your name on it, Bailey, you've been ever so much nicer a chap. You've chucked up bullying. You've dropped breaking bounds and chumming with rank outsiders at the Bird-in-Hand. You've improved in a lot of ways. You see it yourself, I'm sure."

Bailey of the Fifth fairly trembled with rage.

The look on his face was a little alarming; and Tubby Muffin prudently backed towards the doorway.

It was true that the shady sportsman of the Fifth was in his power, so long as he held the letter Joey Hook, the bookmaker, had written to Bailey. The "sack" for Bailey of the Fifth depended on Muffin—and Muffin realised his power to the full.

Nevertheless, Bailey's temper seemed on the point of breaking out. His grasp closed almost convulsively on a toasting-fork, which happened to be the nearest article to his hand, on the study-table. Reginald Muffin did not like the look of the toasting-fork.

He backed out of the doorway promptly. Bailey of the Fifth was at his mercy; but he did not trust Bailey's temper, all the same.

"Muffin!" called out the Fifth-Former. "See you another time, old bean!" called back Muffin, and he walked away cheerily with the Fistical Four.

The 4th Chapter.

Some Person or Persons Unknown.

BANG! "Hallo, what's the thumping row?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell.

It was evening, and prep was over in most of the studies of the Classical Fourth. Most of the fellows were downstairs in the junior Common-room, when Lovell came along. He found Teddy Grace otherwise known as Putty of the Fourth, banging energetically at the door of Study No. 2. Putty of the Fourth shared Study No. 2 with Tubby Muffin, Jones minor, and Higgs. Now it seemed that the door was locked on Putty; at all events, it did not open to his hefty attack.

He turned a red and wrathful face on Lovell.

"I'm locked out of my study!" he growled. "I cut up here for my 'Holiday Annual,' and I can't get in. Some ass is pulling my leg."

Bang! Bang! "If it's you, Muffin, I'll burst you!" Putty roared through the keyhole. "Do you hear, you fat villain?"

"I say, it's not Muffin in there," said Lovell. "I've just passed him on the lower stairs."

"Then it's Jones minor or Higgs—"

"It jolly well isn't; they're both in the Common-room."

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Putty.

He was surprised. His impression had been that one or the other of his study-mates had locked him out, by way of a joke. But it seemed that the unknown occupant of Study No. 2 did not belong to that apartment at all.

"Some cheeky ass butting in where he doesn't belong!" exclaimed Putty of the Fourth indignantly. "Is it one of your gang, Lovell?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

Bang! Bang! "Let me in, whoever you are!" roared Putty. "I want my 'Holiday Annual,' see? I'll scalp you, you silly owl! Open this door."

There was no answer from within the study.

Bang! Bang! Putty of the Fourth was getting excited. It really was not pleasant to be locked out of his quarters in this way, by some person or persons unknown.

The attack on the study-door echoed along the passage, and several of the Classical Fourth came along to inquire what the matter was. Five or six fellows gathered round the door upon which Teddy Grace was banging.

"Breakin' up the happy home, what?" asked Mornington, coming up the staircase with Erroll.

"Some cheeky ass has locked himself in my study!" howled Putty.

"That row can be heard downstairs," said Erroll, with a smile.

"I don't care."

Bang! Bang!

"You'll have the prefects up here soon," said Lovell.

"Blow the prefects!"

Bang! Bang! Thump!

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome came up. The crowd outside Study No. 2 thickened. The general impression was that some fellow from the Modern side had invaded the Classical quarters, and had taken refuge in Study No. 2. Unless, indeed, it was some raider from Manders' House, it was difficult to guess who could possibly be lurking in the locked study.

The news spread that a Modern raider was locked in Putty's study, and it led to a general gathering of the Classical Fourth in their passage. That passage, almost deserted a quarter of an hour before, was now thronged.

Jones minor and Higgs, as indignant as Putty at the invasion of their quarters, joined him in thumping on the door. The other fellows stood round and grinned, ready to collar the supposed Modern if he attempted to escape. So far, not a word had come from the locked study; but several times a sound of a movement had been heard.

"I say!" Tubby Muffin arrived on the scene at last, with a red and excited face. "I say! Who's in there, you chaps?"

"Some Modern cad!" said Lovell. "We're going to lynch him when he comes out."

Bang! Bang!

"My hat! Sure it's a Modern?" asked Tubby, and he seemed relieved.

"Well, nobody's seen him so far, but it must be a Modern," said Lovell. "Why

CHEERY CHUMS.



The famous Fistical Four of Rookwood School who are the leading characters in Owen Conquest's top-notch stories.

should a Classical chap butt into a fellow's study and lock the door?"

Muffin started.

"'Tain't a Modern, then! It's Bailey."

"Who?"

"What?"

"Which?"

"Bailey of the Fifth!" ejaculated Lovell.

"Your friend in the Fifth, what?" chuckled Mornington.

"What utter rot," said Jimmy Silver. "What should a Fifth-Form man be doing there? The Fifth don't rag junior studies, fathead."

"It's Bailey! He's after the—the—the—" Reginald Muffin broke off just in time. He realised that it was judicious not to mention what the Fifth-Form man was after in No. 2 Study.

But Muffin had no doubt about it. Muffin was not a clever youth, but he was too clever to carry the bookmaker's letter about with him. Once already he had been collared by Bailey of the Fifth, in a quiet spot, and savagely and ruthlessly searched for the letter. Muffin had found a safe place of concealment for that valuable document—in his study! And he knew that Bailey of the Fifth was there to look for it.

All eyes were turned on Muffin; even Putty of the Fourth ceased banging on the door in his surprise.

"A Fifth-Form man raiding our study!" exclaimed Putty. "What rot! What is Bailey after, if it's Bailey, you fat duffer?"

"Well, I know it's Bailey!" exclaimed Muffin.

"Rubbish!"

Jimmy Silver tapped at the door. "Who's in there?" he called out. "You may as well own up; we're staying here till you come out."

No answer.

"He will have to come out for dorm, whoever he is," said Raby.

"He won't!" howled Muffin. "Fifth-Form

dorm is later than Fourth—he means to stay there till we're gone to bed."

"Yes, if it's Bailey, but it isn't—"

"I tell you it is!" howled Muffin. "Look here, we've got to root him out. I won't have him rooting about my study."

"Ha, ha, ha! Do you think he is after your rolled-gold watch?" roared Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Muffin stooped to the keyhole.

"Unlock this door, Bailey!" he shouted. Silence.

"I'll jolly well fetch up a prefect if you don't! Do you hear, Bailey? You'll have to open the door if Bulkeley tells you."

Still no reply.

"Then I'll jolly well fetch up Bulkeley!" exclaimed Muffin. "You fellows stay here while I'm gone."

Click!

The key turned back in the lock.

Muffin's words, of course, were heard in the study, and they had had the expected effect. Bailey of the Fifth could not venture to let a Sixth-Form prefect discover him "rooting" about a junior study. It was better to face the juniors, at the risk of a ragging.

"That's done it!" chuckled Lovell. "Ten to one it's a Modern kid! Why—what—who—my hat! Bailey!"

Harold Bailey of the Fifth stepped from the study with a crimson face, under the amazed eyes of the throng of juniors in the passage.

The 5th Chapter.

Unpleasant for Bailey!

BAILEY!

"Oh gad!"

"Phew!"

Bailey's face was burning. As a Fifth-Form man, a senior of Rookwood, he felt

deeply the humiliation of his position. And his position was not only humiliating; it was rather alarming. Jimmy Silver & Co. had no intention of allowing Harold Bailey to depart in peace, without explaining himself, and their looks showed as much.

"So it really is Bailey!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver in great astonishment. "A Fifth-Form man ragging in Putty's study!"

"It's not a rag!" muttered Bailey. "I've done no harm. I—"

"We'll jolly soon see about that!" exclaimed Higgs.

Higgs strode into the study. Bailey made a move to depart, but a crowd of juniors closed up in his way. He was not departing yet.

"Why, the place is fairly up-ended!" shouted Higgs. "Look at it, you fellows. Just look!"

"Phew!"

A dozen fellows stared into the study.

Undoubtedly it looked considerably disturbed. Desks were wide open, the table-drawer was jerked out, the floor was littered with papers and other things. The room looked as if someone had been searching through it, hurriedly and recklessly, as indeed was the case. Even the shabby old carpet had been pulled up in several places, and the books tumbled off the book-shelves. Many of the books lay on the floor inside out, as they had been thrown after being shaken. Where Mr. Hook's letter was hidden Bailey had no idea, and his search had extended far and wide, in all sorts of places.

"A rag!" exclaimed Lovell. "A Fifth-Form rag!" exclaimed Mornington. "By gad, we'll jolly well teach the Fifth not to come raggin' here."

"Yes, rather!"

"Collar him!"

Bailey of the Fifth backed up against the wall with a hunted look as the Classical juniors crowded round him. He had chosen a propitious time for searching Muffin's

study—after prep and before bed—but for the accident of Putty coming up for his "Holiday Annual" it was unlikely that he would have been disturbed there. But luck had been against him.

Tubby Muffin grinned a fat grin. He could see that Bailey had not been successful in his search; Bailey's look showed that. The sportsman of the Fifth would not have cared much for a ragging, if he had succeeded in getting possession of the bookmaker's letter. Now he looked like getting the ragging without having got the letter.

"This is too jolly thick!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell indignantly. "There'd be a jolly row if we started ragging in the Fifth, what?"

"There's goin' to be a row now the Fifth have started raggin' here," grinned Mornington. "Collar the cheeky cad."

"Hands off!" snarled Bailey. "I tell you it's not a ragging. That young scoundrel Muffin has taken something belonging to me."

"Gammon!"

"Hold on," said Jimmy. "We all know Muffin. If he's been raiding a cake or something from Bailey's study—"

"I haven't!" yelled Muffin.

"Isn't Bailey his pal?" chuckled Morny. "He's been talkin' to us about his friend in the Fifth—takin' fellows to tea with Bailey."

"What has Muffin taken that belongs to you, Bailey?" asked Jimmy Silver. "If he's got anything of yours, we'll jolly well make him hand it over. Give it a name."

"It—it—it's a—a letter."

"What utter rot!" said Oswald.

"Too thin!" said Jones minor.

"You kids remember," said Bailey, looking at Jimmy Silver & Co. "You were ragging at my study door the other day, and Muffin picked up some of my letters. He's kept one of them."

"Is that so, Muffin?" asked Jimmy.

"You—you see—" stammered Muffin.

"Muffin's just the chap to read another fellow's letters," said Mornington. "But I don't see why he should keep them. If Bailey's lost a letter, he's only got to put a notice on the board."

"Of course he has!" said Reginald Muffin. "Look here, you fellows, Bailey says I've got a letter of his. Let him go to Mr. Dalton and say so, and I'll go with him."

"That's fair play!" said Putty.

Bailey of the Fifth breathed hard. Wild horses would not have dragged him to the presence of a Form master, to make any reference to that dangerous epistle.

"That's a fair offer," said Jimmy Silver. "Muffin would jolly well get a flogging for bagging a chap's letter, if he's done it. Take him to Mr. Dalton, Bailey."

Bailey did not answer that.

"It's all gammon, of course," said Lovell.

"I don't know," grinned Mornington. "I fancy some of Bailey's letters aren't the kind he would like a Form master to see. It may be a sure snip from a bookie about the latest races at Latcham."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crimson deepened in the wretched Bailey's face. The way of the transgressor is hard, and the Fifth-Form sportsman's sins were finding him out.

"Oh, my hat! Is that it?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

The Classical juniors exchanged grinning glances. They had an idea now how matters stood.

"Never mind what the letter is," said Bailey, between his teeth. "It's mine, and that fat cad Muffin's got it. I came to his study to find it."

"I say, kick him out, you chaps!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin. "I say, you're not going to let the Fifth rag my study! Look at my desk—upside down, and all my things on the floor."

"Collar him!" shouted Higgs. "He's jolly well ragged my study, and we're jolly well going to rag him."

"Hear, hear!"

Bailey of the Fifth made a wild rush along the passage towards the stairs.

"Collar him!" roared Lovell.

There was a rush at Bailey.

In five or six pairs of hands, the bully of the Fifth went sprawling along the floor.

"Give him jip!" howled Tubby Muffin. "Give him beans, you fellows!"

"Ow! Oh! Yow! Leggo!" roared Bailey.

"Bump him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bailey of the Fifth struggled frantically. But there were too many of the juniors for Bailey. He was swept off the floor in innumerable hands.

Bump!

"Whooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Classical juniors. It was an unusual and quite exhilarating experience for Fourth Form fellows to bump a great man of the Fifth. The juniors made the most of it.

Bump! Bump!
"Give him another!"
"Give him beans!" yelled Muffin.
Bump!

The hapless Bailey smote the floor again, with a fiendish yell. He wrenched himself loose and raced for the stairs, with a yelling mob at his heels. On the stairs he was collared again, and there was another terrific struggle.

"Cave!" yelled Oswald. "Perfect!"
Bulkeley of the Sixth came tramping up the stairs, with his ashplant in his hand and a deep frown on his face.

"What's this thundering row?" roared the captain of Rookwood.

Whack! Whack! Whack!
The ashplant distributed impartial whacks among the swarm of fellows thronging on the stairs. There was a wild scampering back into the passage, and Bailey of the Fifth was left sprawling on the stairs, breathless and dishevelled, at the feet of the astonished captain of the school. Bulkeley stared at him blankly.

"What the dickens! Bailey—a Fifth Form man ragging here with a mob of fags!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by it?"

"Ow! Oh! Groooh!" spluttered Bailey. "You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself—a Fifth Form man!" exclaimed Bulkeley hotly. "Now then, clear off, or I'll give you a taste of the ashplant, Fifth Form man as you are!"

And Bailey of the Fifth picked himself up and limped away breathlessly down the stairs, with the frowning prefect at his heels.

The 6th Chapter. Shell Out!

TUBBY MUFFIN rolled into his study with a cheery grin on his fat face. Muffin felt that he had reason to feel cheery.

That valuable document was still safe; Bailey had not found it. The bully of the Fifth, who had so often kicked and cuffed the fat Classical, was still under his podgy thumb—compelled to dance to any tune piped by Reginald Muffin. For Reginald, there was deep and intense satisfaction in that curious situation—feelings that were not, of course, shared by the Fifth Form sportsman. Since the bookmaker's letter had fallen into Muffin's hands, Bailey's life had been a good deal like a prolonged nightmare. The fear that Muffin might show the letter, that he might lose it and that it might be found, haunted the wretched Bailey day and night—every moment the shadow of the "sack" loomed over him. Which, from Muffin's point of view, served him right! A fellow shouldn't be a black-guard, and he shouldn't be a bully, and, above all, he shouldn't bully Reginald Muffin! Bailey had asked for it all, and now he was getting it, and Tubby Muffin considered that matters were in a quite satisfactory state.

"Much obliged to you chaps," he said, as the Fistical Four looked into the study, after the exciting exit of Harold Bailey from the Fourth Form passage. "I don't think that cad will come back in a hurry."
"Cad, is he?" grunted Lovell. "The fellow you took us to tea with, you fat bounder!"

Muffin grinned.
"It was a jolly good tea, wasn't it? I'll take you again. I'll make Bailey stand a feed to every chap in the Fourth, one after another, what? Serve him jolly well right, I think."

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked expressively at Muffin. They came into the study, with Putty of the Fourth and Jones minor. Putty closed the door, and turned the key in the lock—a proceeding that Muffin eyed with some surprise and a vague uneasiness.

"Now, hand it out!" said Jimmy Silver tersely.

"Eh—what?"
"Bailey's letter."
"Wha-a-a-at letter?" stammered Muffin.
"You've got a fives bat here, Putty?" asked the captain of the Fourth.
"I'm sorting it out now," answered Putty.

Muffin backed round the table in alarm.
"Look here, you chaps, what's this game? I jolly well won't take you to tea with Bailey again, Jimmy, if you don't mind your eye."

"You fat bounder!" said Jimmy wrathfully. "Do you think we'd have tea'd with Bailey of the Fifth if we'd jolly well known

that you were frightening him into standing a feed because you'd got hold of some letter of his? If you weren't a bigger fool than anything else, I'd jolly well give you the licking of your life!"

"Oh, I say!"
"Now hand out the letter."
"Wha-a-t for?"
"It's Bailey's property, you fat scamp! I'm going to hand it to Bailey," answered Jimmy Silver. "Sharp's the word!"

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DON'T MISS THIS SPLENDID TREAT, CHUMS!

"I—I say, I haven't any letter," spluttered Tubby Muffin. "You—you—you can search me if you like."

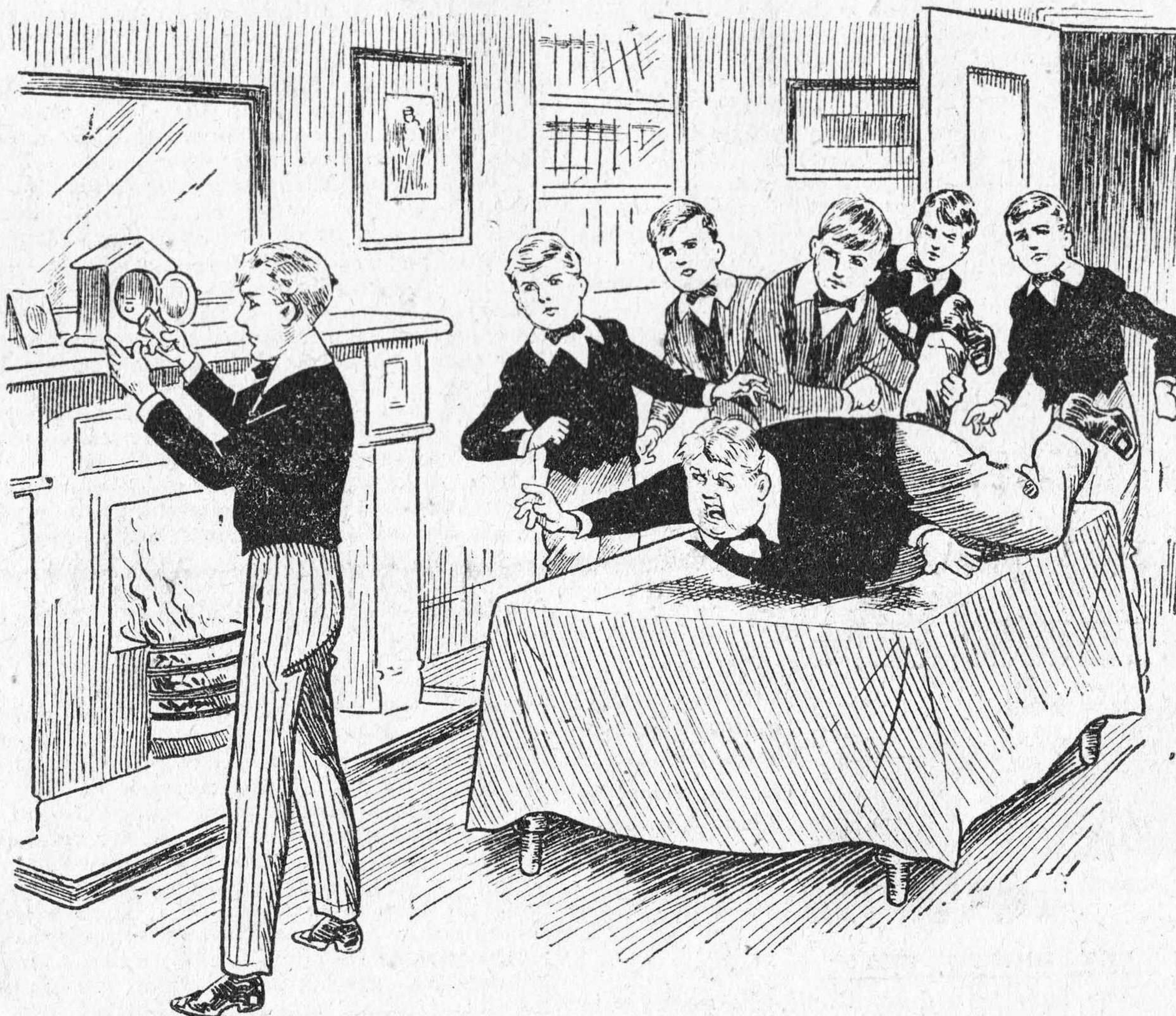
"It's hidden in this study—that's why Bailey came here," said Putty of the Fourth. "Cough it up, Fatty!"

"I—I say, I'm keeping that beastly bully in order, you know," urged Tubby. "I've told him I'll spring that letter on him if he gives us any more bullying, and—and I've warned him to stop breaking

"Yow-ow-ow! I haven't any letter! I never picked it up, and I haven't read it! I wouldn't, you know! 'Tain't from Joey Hook at all; it's from somebody else—quite a different chap! Besides, there isn't any letter at all! Whoop!"

Whack, whack, whack!
"Oh, you rotters! I won't take you to tea with Bailey again!"

Whack!
"There isn't any letter—"



THE MISSING LETTER! Jimmy Silver stepped to the mantelpiece and picked up the clock. He jerked the tin back open. Inside, among the works, was a scribbled sheet of notepaper, rolled up small. Really, it was a very ingenious hiding-place; Bailey at least had never thought of searching the inside of a clock for his missing letter.

bounds and playing the goat. I'm really reforming him, you know. Of course, I'm acting in this matter from the very best of motives. You fellows know me well enough to know that, I'm sure."

"Oh, my hat!" said Lovell, staring at the fat Tubby in wonder. "Is it from the best of motives that you're sticking Bailey for teas in his study? Is that how you reform him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Well, I stood you fellows tea there, too," said Muffin. "I'm whacking it out, ain't I?"

"Oh, crumbs!"
"Generous, I call it," said Tubby indignantly. "'Tain't every fellow who'd got the run of a Fifth Form study who would whack it out with his friends, I can tell you. But it's me all over—generosity itself."

Jimmy Silver burst into a laugh. Really, it was not of much use talking to Reginald Muffin. The only way to his fat understanding was by means of the fives bat!

"Will you hand over the letter at once, Tubby?"

"No, I won't."
"Up-end him over the table," said Lovell. "I'll lay on the fives bat till he coughs it up."

"Yaroooh!"
Raby and Newcome, Jones minor and Putty collared the fat Classical, and he sprawled face down on the table, wriggling with apprehension.

"I—I say, I haven't got any letter!" he roared.

in junior studies, that clock did not "go," and No. 2 Study had long since given up the attempt to make it keep time.

Jimmy jerked the tin back open. Inside, among the works, was a scribbled sheet of notepaper rolled up small. Really, it was a very ingenious hiding-place; Bailey, at least, had never thought of searching the inside of a clock for his missing letter.

"Is that it?" asked Lovell.
"Well, I don't want to look at Bailey's private letters," said Jimmy, "but it's stained with liquor, and smells of baccy, so very likely it's from old Hook at the Bird-in-Hand. Anyhow, Bailey will know."

"I—I say, Jimmy—"

"Shut up, Muffin!"

"I—I say, let's keep the letter," wailed Muffin. "Don't you want to reform Bailey? He's an awful rotter, you know! It's for his own good, you know! And—and think of the spreads in his study—"

"Oh, bump him!" said Lovell.
"Yaroooh!"

There was a sound of bumping and frantic yelling as Jimmy Silver walked out of the study with the crumpled letter in his hand.

Leaving his chums to it, Jimmy went down the passage and turned into the Fifth-Form quarters across the landing. He knocked at Bailey's door and opened it.

Bailey of the Fifth was in his study. He was looking very dusty and untidy, and still breathless, and he gave the captain of the Fourth a furious glare as he looked in.

"You young rotter! You—"
"Can it!" said Jimmy Silver disdainfully. "Look at that letter! Is it yours?"

He tossed the crumpled note on the study table. Bailey stared at him blankly for a moment, and then clutched up the letter with an eager hand. He stared at it as if hardly able to believe in his good fortune, and then turned and jammed it into the study fire and drove it home with his boot. In a few seconds it was consumed.

Jimmy Silver grinned. Evidently it was the letter from Joey Hook of the Bird-in-Hand. Bailey's action was a proof of that. "All serene?" asked Jimmy, with a laugh.

Bailey turned to him.
"Yes. Thanks!" The bully of the Fifth was so intensely relieved that he was quite civil for once, indeed grateful. "That's awfully decent of you, Silver. Thanks again."

Jimmy nodded and left the study. He left Bailey of the Fifth feeling quite a new Bailey; the shadow of the "sack" lifted at last.

The next day Harold Bailey of the Fifth Form was looking quite merry and bright. Not so Reginald Muffin.

Spreads in Bailey's study were a thing of the past for the fat Tubby; he had lost his friend in the Fifth! But that was not the worst! Now that he had nothing to fear from the fat Classical, Bailey proceeded to indemnify himself for the terrors Tubby had given him. For days and days afterwards, Bailey of the Fifth occupied many of his leisure hours in hunting Reginald Muffin, and Reginald occupied almost all his spare time in dodging Bailey of the Fifth! The number of kicks and cuffs that Tubby collected during those exciting days were beyond all counting. But probably he did not collect many more than he deserved.

THE END.

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