



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Tubby Comes to Grief.

COME on!" Jimmy Silver called in at the door of Study No. 3.

There were three juniors in the study—Van Ryn, the South African, Higgs, and Tubby Muffin.

Van Ryn and Higgs were working at their prep; Tubby Muffin was sprawled gracefully in the armchair, reading a newspaper.

Tubby blinked up as Jimmy Silver looked in. "I say, this is jolly interesting!" he exclaimed.

"Bow-wow!" said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, you chaps! Banister-race!"

Van Ryn and Higgs jumped up at once. Prep could wait when a banister race was on.

"I say, just listen to this!" said Tubby.

"Eh! What is it?" asked Jimmy, pausing. "About a chap who got shell shock," said the fat classical. "He lost his speech from the shock, and couldn't speak—dumb, you know."

"Poor chap!"

"My hat! I wish you could get shell shock, Tubby!" remarked Higgs. "It would be a blessing to this study!"

"Hard lines on the chap!" said Jimmy. "I dare say he'll recover, though. They often do."

"I don't know about its being hard lines," said Tubby Muffin. "Suppose it happened to a chap at school? No lessons, and a jolly easy time, you know, while it lasted—they couldn't make a chap work in that state. Seems to me that some fellows have all the luck."

"You fat duffer!" said Jimmy Silver. "Come on, you chaps! Bootles has gone to see the Head, and the prefects have a meeting in their august quarters, and the coast is quite clear!"

"Ripping!" said Van Ryn.

Tubby Muffin followed the juniors from the study. There was a peculiar gleam in Tubby's eyes. If Jimmy Silver had paid any attention to the fat Classical, he might have guessed that deep thoughts were working in Tubby's fat brain. But the captain of the Fourth did not even look at Tubby.

A crowd of Classical juniors had gathered on the middle landing. There were some Modern fellows, too, from Mr. Manders' House. It was a glorious opportunity for a banister-race—an opportunity that did not often occur. From the middle landing, the old massive banisters ran curling down to the lower passage—great banisters of ancient polished oak, which had been one of the sights of Rookwood for hundreds of years.

To sit on the broad top, and slide down, round the curve, and shoot off into the lower passage was a delightful feat—a little risky for fellows who hadn't a good nerve, perhaps. That amusement, naturally, was frowned upon by masters and prefects, who did not see any great amusement in the risk of a reckless junior breaking a leg. But just now masters and prefects were off the scene, and the opportunity was not to be missed.

The Fourth-Formers were gathered from near and far.

"Ready, Jimmy?" called out Lovell.

"Ready!" said Jimmy. "Now, then, Tommy Dodd, keep back! Moderns don't go first!"

"Rats!" said Tommy Dodd. "Better let me show you Classical duffers how to do it!"

"Fathead!"

"Shove that Modern ass back!"

"And mind how you go!" said Jimmy Silver. "It's rather a tricky turn at the bottom! Bootles will be ratty if any chap breaks his neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Form up and take your turns! Get out of the way, Tubby!"

"I'm going, too," said Tubby Muffin.

"Fathead! Buzz off!"

"I'm going, I tell you!" said the fat Classical indignantly.

Jimmy shook his head decidedly.

"You can't, you fat duffer! It's too risky for you!"

"What the dickens is the matter with you, Tubby?" exclaimed Raby. "You don't like sliding banisters?"

"I'm going!"

"You've always funkied it before," said Flynn.

"I tell you I'm going!"

"You can't!" said Jimmy Silver. "It's not safe for a clumsy fat duffer! Keep back, Tubby. Now, then, you chaps, follow your leader!"

Jimmy Silver threw his leg over the broad banister.

In a sitting position, he shot down the slope, sailing away in great style. He turned the lower curve, reached the bottom, and shot off into the hall, landing on his feet with the activity of a cat. Lovell came next, and then Raby, and then Newcome. Then Tommy Dodd had his turn, and Flynn and Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle and Oswald, and Higgs and Van Ryn.

The broad banister had half a dozen juniors on it at once, sailing down at whizzing speed. If any fellow had lost his nerve and tumbled off, there was a deep fall below the staircase, which would certainly have resulted in broken bones. But the Rookwood juniors had plenty of nerve. But it assuredly was not safe for a fat and unwieldy fellow like Tubby Muffin, whose nerve was decidedly not good.

But Tubby, for reasons best known to himself, was bent upon taking his turn.

He waited till the rest of the crowd had gone, and then rushed to the banister.

Jimmy Silver, who was coming upstairs for another flight, shouted to him in alarm.

"Get off, you young ass!"

But he was too far away to intervene.

Tubby Muffin did not sit on the banister as the rest had done, however. He rested his fat chest on it, and clutched at it with his fat hands, and went whizzing down with his legs flying over the stairs.

Jimmy Silver burst into a chuckle.

Sliding down in that way obviated the danger of a fall, and Tubby Muffin was safe enough.

The juniors in the lower hall howled with laughter as he came sprawling down, with his fat legs flying wildly.

But the laughter ceased suddenly as Tubby reached the end of the banister.

It ended with a curl, in a heavy oaken pillar, with a height of six feet from the floor. For an active junior to slide off and land on his feet was easy. But Tubby was not active, and he was not in a position to slide off freely. He plumped off, and landed on the floor with a bump.

"You silly ass!" ejaculated Lovell.

"Crawl away, you duffer, or you'll have somebody land on you!" said Tommy Dodd.

Tubby Muffin did not reply.

He did not move.

He lay stretched on the floor, and his eyes were closed.

Lovell ran towards him.

"Tubby, you fathead—"

"What's the matter with him?"

"Tubby, you fathead—"

"Oh, the duffer! He's hurt!"

The banister-race was at an end. Jimmy Silver hurried down the stairs again. The juniors gathered round Tubby Muffin with looks of alarm. In the midst of the startled crowd the fat Classical lay sprawled on the floor, his eyes closed, his lips tight shut, voiceless and motionless.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. A Startling Catastrophe.

WHAT is this? What—"

It was the voice of Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth.

The Form-master had come into the House, and he came quite suddenly upon the crowd of alarmed juniors.

The Rookwood fellows exchanged looks of dismay.

Mr. Bootles was not to have known anything about the banister-race; but it was pretty clear that he would have to know about it now.

The master pushed his way through the juniors, and blinked over his glasses at the still form of Tubby Muffin.

Mr. Bootles' ruddy face grew quite pale.

"What is the matter with Muffin?" he exclaimed.

"He—he's had a fall, sir!" stammered Jimmy Silver.

"A fall! From where?"

"The—the banisters, sir."

Mr. Bootles frowned grimly.

"Then you have been sliding down the banisters?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"A very foolish and reckless proceeding!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "Surely, Silver, as head boy of your Form, you should have known better than to allow a clumsy lad like Muffin to participate in such a perilous game?"

"I—I tried to stop him, sir."

"Jimmy told the young ass to keep out of it, sir," said Lovell.

"None of you should have done anything of

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 67.

the sort, as you know very well!" snapped Mr. Bootles. "I have spoken to you before on this subject. Now, Muffin is hurt, perhaps seriously. I trust this will be a lesson to you!"

The juniors looked very sheepish. They were concerned for the unfortunate Tubby, but they were angry with him, too. Why couldn't the duffer keep out of a game he was not fit for? And now there was going to be trouble.

Mr. Bootles knelt beside Tubby Muffin. Tubby's eyes opened, and he blinked at the Form-master.

"Are you hurt, Muffin?" asked Mr. Bootles. Tubby's lips moved, but he did not reply.

"Muffin!"

No answer.

"Do you hear me, Muffin?"

Tubby seemed to make an effort to speak, but no words came.

"Bless my soul, what is the matter with the boy?" exclaimed the surprised Form-master. "He does not seem to be bruised or hurt."

"It wasn't much of a fall, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "He only tumbled off the end of the banisters."

"Enough to give him a shock!" snapped Mr. Bootles. "You should have prevented him from taking part in such a reckless game, Silver! I am very angry with you! Every boy present will take a hundred lines; and you, Silver, will take five hundred, as I regard you as responsible!"

"Oh!"

"Muffin, if you are hurt, please tell me so," added Mr. Bootles irritably.

Muffin did not speak.

"What on earth's the matter with him?" muttered Lovell. "Has the fat ass gone off his rocker? Why doesn't he answer?"

"Tubby!" said Jimmy.

Mr. Bootles raised Tubby from the floor. His expression was very anxious now. There seemed to be something very wrong with the fat Classical, though it was difficult to tell what it was.

"Muffin, cannot you speak? Tell me what is the matter with you!" said Mr. Bootles. Tubby Muffin gave a queer gurgle. Then he put his hand to his mouth.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the alarmed Form-master. "Do you mean to say that you cannot speak?"

Tubby Muffin certainly did not mean to say so; but he intimated as much. He dabbed his mouth with his fat hand, and blinked and gurgled.

The juniors regarded him with horror and dismay.

"He—he can't speak!" mumbled Raby. "Oh, my hat! The shock, I suppose!"

"Dumb! Good heavens!"

"Dumb!" repeated Mr. Bootles. "It cannot have been sufficient to cause such a catastrophe. Muffin, I command you to speak to me at once!"

Gurgle!

"Muffin! My dear boy—"

Gurgle!

"Goodness gracious! This is terribly serious!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles. "Silver, you see what you are responsible for, you utterly reckless boy!"

Jimmy Silver was crimson. It was rather hard on Jimmy, who certainly had done his best to keep Tubby Muffin out of the banister-race. But the Fourth Form master had evidently decided that Jimmy was to blame.

"Jimmy wasn't to blame, sir," said Lovell joyfully. "Tubby would do it, after Jimmy had warned him—"

"Silence, Lovell! I regard Silver as responsible for this dreadful catastrophe, and I hope he will take it as a warning. Lovell, Raby, take Muffin to the dormitory and put him in his bed, while I telephone for the doctor."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Bootles hurried into his study in a very perturbed frame of mind, while the juniors conveyed Tubby Muffin to the dormitory.

The crowd broke up with alarmed and worried faces.

There was no great harm in a banister-race, though it was a little risky, and somewhat against the orderly rules of the House. The accident to Tubby could not have been foreseen; and it would have been difficult to prevent him from sharing in the race if he had made up his mind. But the Rookwood fellows sincerely wished that they had not taken advantage of that glorious opportunity after all.

"It's only because the fat bouncer's so rottenly unfit," said Newcome. He gorges

too much pastry, and never takes any exercise if he can help it. It wouldn't have happened to anybody else."

"And it wasn't much of a fall," said Higgs. "Anyway, we sha'n't have so much of his blessed jaw in the study."

"Oh, shut up, Higgs!" said several voices in disgust.

"Poor old Tubby!"

"I wish I hadn't punched him now for pinching my cake, beadad!" said Flynn, with great feeling.

And the juniors dispersed to their studies, to get on with their neglected prep, in quite a troubled frame of mind.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Sufferer!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. had taken Tubby Muffin to the Fourth Form dormitory. The fat Classical had not uttered a sound.

They helped him to undress, and put him to bed, and the fat junior looked at them very pathetically from the pillow.

"I say, Tubby, I'm sorry for this," said Jimmy Silver. "You ought to have kept out of it, you know. I told you to."

Tubby nodded.

"All your own fault, you know," said Lovell.

Tubby nodded again. He was prepared, apparently, to acknowledge that the catastrophe was his own fault.

"Blessed if I see what Bootles wanted to go for you for, Jimmy," said Newcome. "You couldn't help it."

"I suppose somebody's got to be blamed," said Jimmy philosophically. "It is rather rotten, though. And who on earth would have thought of a thing like this happening? Blessed if I should!"

"Tubby, old man," said Raby, "make an effort! See if you can't speak."

Tubby shook his head mournfully.

"Can't you get just a word out?" said Raby encouragingly.

Another shake of the head.

Mr. Bootles came bustling into the dormitory.

"Do not worry Muffin with talk," he said sharply. "You should really be more judicious. You may go. I will remain with Muffin until the doctor comes."

The Fistical Four left the dormitory. About half an hour later the buzz of the medical gentleman's car was heard in the quadrangle.

Mr. Bootles met Dr. Twist, and took him up to the Fourth Form dormitory.

Many glances followed them.

Some of the juniors waited in the passage outside to hear the doctor's verdict when he came out.

Dr. Twist was a considerable time in the dormitory.

When he came out his fat face was very grave in expression.

"Excuse me, sir," Jimmy Silver came forward. "May we know about Tubby—I mean Muffin?"

"Certainly, my little man," said the doctor affably. Jimmy Silver writhed inwardly at being called a little man. Really, the medico did not seem to understand that chaps in the Fourth were practically grown-up chaps. "I am afraid Muffin's state is somewhat serious. Doubtless he will recover his speech in time; in fact, I can almost say he will do so. A very remarkable and interesting case; not at all uncommon in these days, as it happens. Sudden shock may produce deafness, or loss of memory, or loss of speech. There have been many such cases in the Army."

"But it wasn't much of a shock, sir; only a tumble off the banisters."

Dr. Twist nodded.

"Quite so; that makes it more extraordinary. The unfortunate boy is very much out of condition physically, which may have had something to do with it. At present he cannot utter a syllable. But I have hopes—every hope—that he will recover, my little man."

"Is he going into sanatorium, sir?"

"That will not be necessary. Apart from the loss of speech, he does not seem to be injured in any way. It is not at all necessary to isolate him. In fact, the company of his schoolfellows may assist his recovery. Of course, it must be understood that there is no rough horseplay, and so on."

"Oh, yes; of course, sir! We'll look after him."

The medical gentleman returned to his car, and buzzed away.

The Classical Fourth did not see Tubby Muffin again till they went up to bed. They

found him fast asleep and snoring. Townsend remarked that he had not lost his snore as well as his speech, which was a pity. But Townsend was frowned down. It was not a subject for jokes.

The Fourth-Form dormitory was unusually quiet that evening. Even Higgs, the bully of the Fourth, was careful not to disturb Tubby.

Some of the fellows discussed him in whispers. Suppose he never recovered his speech—what a prospect for poor old Tubby! More especially, as Townsend observed, because he was a terrific talker, and generally ran on inexhaustibly so long as he could get a victim to listen to him.

When the rising-bell clanged out in the morning, and the Fourth Form turned out, Tubby remained in bed.

Lessons, in his present state, were out of the question.

Although not removed to the school sanatorium, Tubby had all the privileges of an invalid.

Tubby Muffin was still warm and comfortable in bed when the rest of the Classical Fourth went down. Some of the juniors saw his breakfast being taken up, and they noted that it was a more savoury breakfast than fell to the rest of the Rookwood juniors. Tubby was a privileged person now.

The fat Classical was absent from his place in the Form-room. There were no lessons for Tubby that day.

As Tubby was a champion slacker and the biggest dunce in the Fourth, he detested lessons almost as much as he detested the rising-bell. Upon the whole, Tubby was not much in need of sympathy. His catastrophe did not cause him any suffering save the painful ordeal of silence, and he was getting out of everything he did not like. After lessons the juniors found him sunning himself on an oaken bench in the quadrangle.

"They surrounded the sufferer at once."

"Talking yet, Tubby?" asked Tommy Dodd. Tubby shook his head.

"Had a pleasant morning?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Tubby nodded.

"Better than lessons?" grinned Rawson.

Nod.

"Think you'll recover soon?"

Shake.

"Appetite still good?"

Nod.

"Come and have a snack at the tuckshop before dinner?"

Tubby jumped up with alacrity.

In the tuckshop Tubby Muffin distinguished himself as usual. The catastrophe had evidently not affected his appetite in the least. The juniors were glad to see that he was quite his old self, with that one queer exception that he could not speak. But they were puzzled, too.

The "snack" did not in any way detract from Tubby's prowess at the dinner-table a little later. And when the bell rang for afternoon classes, and the Fourth went to their Form-room, Tubby Muffin rolled out equably into the sunny quad with the latest number of "Chuckles" in his podgy hand. And some of the Fourth Form began to wish that they'd had a shock and gone dumb, too!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Pig in Clover.

"COME in, Tubby!"

The Fistical Four were at tea in the end study, when the fat Classical appeared in the doorway.

Tubby Muffin was not always a very welcome visitor at tea-time. But in view of his affliction there was a hearty welcome for him now.

"Trot in!" said Lovell cordially.

The fat junior trotted in. Jimmy Silver handed him a chair, Raby selected a clean tea-cup, Lovell handed him the ham and tongue, and Newcome strolled out of the study to visit the tuckshop. When Tubby came to tea extra supplies were needed.

Tubby's fat face-beamed over the festive board.

He could not speak. And that no doubt was a serious deprivation to a fellow who had a remarkable fondness for the sound of his own voice. But in everything else Tubby was certainly in clover.

A fellow who was suffering under such a misfortune was deserving of any kind of consolation that could be offered. The juniors agreed on that. And the welcome consolation to Tubby was something in the eatable line.

Fortunately the study was in funds, and Newcome's addition to the festive board made

Tubby's little round eyes glimmer with satisfaction.

He sat and ate with the voracity of a Hun, and the Fistical Four kept him well supplied, until even Tubby had to call a halt.

Then he slipped a cake and a handful of biscuits and a couple of oranges into his pockets—a proceeding which the chums of the Fourth politely affected not to see.

Tubby gave a grunt of satisfaction as he rolled out of the study.

"He's bearing it jolly well!" remarked Raby. "Some fellows would be awfully down in the mouth over a thing like that!"

"And it's specially hard on a champion jawbones like Tubby," said Lovell. "He's standing it splendidly!"

"Queer that the shock didn't affect his health in any other way," remarked Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "Just dumbed him, and nothing more."

"Yes, it's queer."

The Fistical Four left the study. They met Van Ryn in the passage. He was talking to Flynn.

"It's jolly odd about Tubby," said Van Ryn. "His appetite seems not to have been affected in the least. Flynn says he's had him to tea."

"Has he?" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Yes; and he had tea in our study," said Van Ryn. "He did himself pretty well. And then he seems to have gone and had tea with Flynn. I wouldn't grudge poor old Tubby anything, but I hope he won't make himself ill with it!"

"But he's had tea with us, too!" exclaimed Love.

"My dear—"

"Sure, he'll burst a boiler if he goes on loike this!" grinned Flynn.

In the dormitory that night Tubby Muffin was looking a little queer, which was not surprising under the circumstances.

His motions were slow and heavy, and his complexion had assumed a peculiar greenish tint.

Perhaps the sausages and chips did not agree with the ham and tongue or the baked chestnuts, or perhaps the oranges were on bad terms with the bananas and tomatoes.

At all events, Tubby certainly was queer.

He groaned as he crawled into bed.

Bulkeley of the Sixth was seeing lights out for the Fourth, and he heard Tubby's groan, and came to his bedside.

"Anything wrong, Tubby?" asked the captain of Rookwood very kindly.

Groan!

"He seems to be worse," said Bulkeley.

"Have you got a pain, Muffin?"

Tubby nodded dismally.

"Where?"

Tubby tapped the place where his lowest waistcoat button would have been if he had had his waistcoat on.

Bulkeley looked perplexed.

"That's jolly odd!" he remarked. "It seems to be affecting his stomach! The doctor had better come."

There was a chuckle from some of the Classical Fourth, and the Sixth-Former looked round sharply.

"This isn't a laughing matter," he said. "It's no joke to be struck dumb. You might feel a little sympathy!"

"So we do," said Jimmy Silver at once. "We're awfully sympathetic. But it isn't that shock that's the matter with Tubby now."

"What is it, then?"

"Ahem! I think Tubby has made rather too good a supper!"

"Oh!" said Bulkeley.

"Sure, I warned him that the potted rabbit mightn't agree with the tomatoes and the cheese," said Flynn.

"And lemonade and ginger-pop and currant wine might disagree with any of them," suggested Townsend.

"Not to mention the bloater-paste and the sausages," said Topham.

"And the figs and bananas," said Jones minor.

"And the tomatoes—"

"And the ham—"

"And the tongue—"

"And the sugary biscuits—"

"And the toffee—"

"And the doughnuts—"

"And the cream-cheese—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby groaned dismally.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "You young asses, you'd better show Tubby your sympathy in some other way. If he's got all these things inside him, the wonder is that he isn't seriously ill. Muffin, you young duffer, I shall speak to the doctor about this, and he will give you some instructions about diet."



Tubby Muffin came sprawling down the banisters with his fat legs flying widely. Not being able to slide off freely, he plumped and landed on the floor with a bump. (See page 13.)

Whereat Tuby Muffin groaned more deeply than before.

Tubby's groans were heard for some time before the Classical Fourth went to sleep. His dumbness did not seem to have affected his groaning powers. But when Higgs threatened to throw a pillow at him if he didn't shut up there was a howl of wrath directed against Higgs, and the bully of the Fourth did not throw the pillow. Tubby was a privileged person, and he was at liberty to groan as much as he liked.

The next morning Dr. Twist saw Tubby again, and he looked very serious. He left written instructions as to Tubby's diet, and Mr. Bootles spoke to the sympathetic juniors on the subject.

That day Tubby was still free from lessons, but he did not look so cheerful as before.

Open-handed fellows were quite ready to stand treat at the tuckshop, but the doctor's instructions had to be obeyed.

And Tubby's glorious feeds had come to a sudden end.

Even the pleasure of slacking about the quadrangle while the other fellows were at work did not quite compensate Tubby for that, and during the day he looked dismal and mournful.

At teatime it was in vain that he presented himself at study after study with appealing looks.

"It won't do, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver kindly. "You know what the doctor says. It may be serious if you touch pastry while you're ill."

Tubby's lips opened and closed again. Then he shook his head vigorously to intimate that he wasn't ill.

But Jimmy was firm.

"Can't be helped, Tubby. Dr. Twist says you're to have your tea in Hall, where Bootles can keep an eye on you. Feeding in the studies is strictly forbidden."

"You must stand it, old chap," said Lovell sympathetically.

Tubby grunted dismally. He took a chunk of chalk from his pocket and scrawled on the table:

"I'm starving!"

"But you've had tea in Hall," said Raby.

Tubby snorted. Tea in Hall wasn't much to Tubby.

"Well, there's nothing doing," said Jimmy Army.

"Can't disobey medical orders."

Tubby snorted again, and rolled out of the end study. He tried study after study in vain. The Classical Fourth were sympathetic, but the doctor's instructions could not be disregarded. The pig was no longer in cloyer.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Jimmy Silver Smells a Rat.

"WHO'S been in my study?"

Jones minor asked that question in the Fourth Form passage at the top of his voice.

Jones of the Fourth was looking wrathful.

"Hallo! What's biting you?" asked Jimmy Silver, looking out of the end study.

"Who's been at my cupboard?" roared Jones.

"Ha, ha!"

"You cackling ass!" shouted Jones indignantly.

"Somebody's cleared out my cupboard! My cake's gone—and the toffee—and the ginger-beer!"

Townsend came out of his study with a fiery look.

"Who's been raiding my cupboard?"

"You, too!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"I'll scalp him!" roared Townsend. "Who was it, eh? I'd got a little supper laid in for five, and it's all gone!"

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Where's Tubby?"

"Tubby!"

"Oh, the fat rotter!" exclaimed Jones minor. "Tubby, of course!"

"Where is he?" roared Townsend. "I'll slaughter him!"

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"No, you won't. You'd better keep your cupboard locked."

"It was locked!" howled Townsend. "The lock's been busted!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"So was mine!" snorted Jones minor.

"And mine, too!" yelled Peele, coming out of his study. "Somebody's raided me and taken my cake—the cake my aunt sent me to-day!"

"Where's Tubby Muffin?"

"Where is that fat oyster?"

Lovell came out of the end study with a peculiar expression on his face.

"There won't be any supper to-night, Jimmy," he remarked.

"Eh? Why not?"

"The sausages and baked potatoes are gone."

"Gone!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Clean gone!"

Townsend burst into a laugh.

"You, too!" he exclaimed. "Muffin's cleared you out, too. Serve you jolly well right!"

"Dash it all, it's rather too thick!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "There's the doctor's orders, too."

"Oh, blow the doctor's orders!" growled Jones minor. "It's my grub I'm thinking about. Where's that fat villain?"

There was a rush of indignant juniors in search of Tubby.

The fat Classical was not found in his study. His study-mates had seen nothing of him.

A yell from the box-room announced that Jones minor had discovered Tubby there, and there was a rush of excited juniors to the spot.

Tubby Muffin was seated upon the end of an empty trunk, which was littered with the remains of the feed.

Only the remains, unfortunately. The juniors had arrived too late!

"You fat rotter!" roared Peele, clutching the fat junior by the collar. "Where's my cake?"

"Where's my toffee?"

"Where's my ginger-pop?"

"Where's my sosses?"

"Bump him!"

"Scrag him!"

Jimmy Silver pushed through the excited crowd, and dragged Tubby Muffin out of the hands of his persecutors.

"Cheese it!" said Jimmy.

"Look here, Silver—"

"My cake—"

"Let Tubby alone!" said Jimmy decidedly.

"He's a fat beast, but you can't rag a chap who's gone dumb!"

"I suppose he's not going to wolf everything in the passage because he can't jaw?" yelled Jones minor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump him!"

"Stop it, I tell you!" said Jimmy. "He's scoffed my tuck as well as yours. I tell you he's not going to be handled!"

Tubby Muffin, with great alarm in his looks, wriggled behind the captain of the Fourth.

Jimmy held the angry juniors back, the Co. backing him up.

"Keep smiling," urged Jimmy.

"You silly ass—"

"You frajions duffer—"

"Remember poor old Tubby's affliction—"

"Oh, blow his affliction!" snapped Peele. "I'm fed up with his affliction! He ought to be sent to a dumb asylum!"

"Don't be an unfeeling beast, Peele—"

"Oh, rats!"

Peele stalked majestically away. The other victims howled threats at Tubby, and followed him.

Tubby Muffin gasped with relief.

He had raided the junior studies regardless of consequences, and he had fully expected to have to suffer for his sins.

Jimmy Silver fixed a stern look on him.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 67.

"Look here, Tubby, this has got to stop," he said. "I've stopped them this time, but next time you'll get scragged!"

Tubby looked very pathetic.

"Yes, I know you're dumb," said Jimmy, relenting. "But you've got to draw it mild, you know. You'll wear out the fellows' sympathy in time."

Tubby sniffled.

"Oh, don't turn the tap on, for goodness sake!" exclaimed Jimmy in alarm. "You're welcome to my sosses and potatoes, for that matter. But there's the doctor's orders to be considered. I suppose you want to recover your speech, don't you?"

Snuffle!

The Fistical Four left the box-room. It was evidently not much use talking to Tubby.

When they were gone Tubby Muffin closed the box-room door and grinned.

Then he opened the trunk, and drew out several articles which had been hidden from sight. And Tubby's plump jaws were quickly busy upon Peele's cake. It had not occurred to Peele to look in the trunk.

In the dormitory that night there were some emphatic remarks made to Tubby Muffin, but he only replied with pathetic looks.

Even Peele relented at last, and dropped the subject.

The next morning, when the Fourth came down, Mr. Bootles met them in the hall, and stopped the fat Classical.

"How do you feel this morning, Muffin?" he asked.

Tubby shook his head to indicate that he was no better.

"You do not find your speech returning?"

Another shake.

"Do not lose hope, my dear lad," said Mr. Bootles kindly. "Dr. Twist is very much perplexed by the case, and he suggests consulting a specialist. Before long you will be seen by a very famous specialist, who will tell us exactly what is the matter with you."

Tubby Muffin's jaw dropped.

He blinked at Mr. Bootles with an expression which could not be supposed to indicate anything but consternation.

Even Mr. Bootles, who was not very observant, could not help seeing that his good news was not very welcome to Tubby Muffin.

"My dear Muffin," he said gently, "you need have no misgivings. It is not proposed to have an operation, or anything of that kind. You will simply be given a thorough examination by a gentleman whose knowledge of such matters is world-famous, and who will undoubtedly discover exactly what is the matter. You may take comfort from that, my poor boy."

Tubby Muffin nodded.

But the dismay in his face was too evident to be concealed as he went out into the quad.

In the quadrangle Jimmy Silver tapped him on the shoulder, and the fat Classical blinked round at him.

There was a new expression on Jimmy Silver's face—a very peculiar expression. His eyes were fixed on Tubby's podgy face with great keenness.

"That's jolly good news, Tubby," said Jimmy. "Isn't it?"

Tubby nodded dimly.

"Ripping to have a big specialist to see exactly what's wrong with your jaws, Tubby—what?"

Tubby grunted.

"He will see exactly how the matter stands," continued Jimmy. "I shouldn't wonder if he quite cures you, Tubby."

Tubby sniffed.

He rolled away, looking very discontented, and Jimmy Silver remained, looking very thoughtful. Strange thoughts, which had not come into Jimmy Silver's mind before, were working there now. And the outcome of Jimmy's deep reflections was the ejaculation:

"Spoofed!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Dr. J. Silver.

"IT'S up to us!"

"Us!" repeated Lovell.

"Us!" said Jimmy Silver firmly.

"What's up to us, fathead?" asked Raby inquiringly.

"Poor old Tubby's been in a shocking state for days," said Jimmy. "He must feel it deeply. He must miss his usual chinwag. Don't you think so?"

"Jimmy!"

"Well, he must," argued Jimmy Silver. "Tubby's a great hand at chinwag—as good as pretty nearly any Cabinet Minister in England. Think of what it means to him not to be able to wag his chin for days on end!"

"Jimmy!"

The Co. were shocked. This wouldn't have surprised them from Higgs or Peele, but it was amazing to hear Jimmy Silver referring to Tubby's dreadful affliction in this unfeeling way.

"Look here, being dumb isn't a joking matter, Jimmy!" said Lovell, frowning.

"Tubby's kind of dumbness is!" said Jimmy cheerfully.

"What do you mean, ass?"

"That's right," said Jimmy, with a nod. "I'm an ass, and you're an ass, and we're all asses—you and I and all of us, as Shakespeare remarks. Was it Shakespeare? The fact is, I'm so touched by Tubby's terrible sufferings at being deprived of the pleasures of chinwag that I'm going to cure him."

"Cure him?" said Newcome.

"Yes. It's time he was cured, and we're going to cure him."

"How can we cure him, fathead?"

"By giving him a shock."

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell. "What are you driving at?"

"I smell a mouse," explained Jimmy Silver. "For the past few days Tubby has been dumb, and living in clover, while I've been grinding through five hundred lines on the instalment system. Bootles says it's my fault that Tubby went dumb, so I'm going to cure him and set the matter right. Chaps who go dumb from a shock often start jawing again when they get another shock."

"Why, you told Higgs yourself it was dangerous!"

"So it is—if a chap's really dumb."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Only Tubby isn't any dumber than we are," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "The merry Tubby has been spoofing us!"

"My hat!"

"You can kick me if you like!" said Jimmy.

"I deserve it for not smelling a rat sooner!"

"But—but— Don't be an ass, Jimmy!" said Raby.

"I don't mean to be! I've been ass enough to let Tubby pull my leg, and that's enough. I was watching his chivvy when Bootles told him about the specialist this morning. Tubby was fairly knocked into a cocked hat."

"I noticed that," agreed Lovell. "He doesn't seem to take to the idea—blessed if I know why!"

"Well, I know why. It's because he's afraid he won't be able to spoof a London specialist as he does the village doctor."

"Oh!"

"I ought to have thought of it before!" growled Jimmy Silver. "I'd forgotten! But that evening we had the banister-race Tubby had been reading about the soldier chaps who went dumb from shell-shock. He even said it wouldn't be a bad thing for a chap, who'd be able to get out of lessons, and all that. Then he insisted on joining in the banister-race. What for—eh?"

"Because he was a silly ass!"

"He'd never been ass enough to tackle those banisters before. And he took care not to have a bad fall, either."

"You—you mean to say he was spoofing us all the time?" ejaculated Lovell.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"I know he was. He got the idea from the newspaper, and he went in for the banister-slide as an excuse for getting a shock."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Blessed if it don't look like it!" said Lovell. "But—but you might be making a mistake, Jimmy—"

"The end study never makes mistakes!" said Jimmy serenely. "But I am not going to run any risk. I don't propose pitching him neck and crop over the banisters or chucking him into the river. That would give him a shock, of course—"

"Ha, ha! It would!"

"But without giving him any shock that would hurt him if it's genuine, I think we can induce him to find his voice, if he's got one left. Let's go and see the chaps in his study; they will have to help."

"I say, if he's been spoofing us, he ought to be jolly well-slaughtered!" said Raby indignantly. "The fat beast had two bob off me to-day!"

"And a bob from me!" growled Newcome.

"Well, we'll slaughter him!" said Jimmy cheerfully. "Come on!"

The Fistical Four proceeded to Study No. 3. It was evening, and the Classical Fourth were mostly at prep. Van Ryn and Higgs were working, but Tubby Muffin reposed more or less gracefully in the armchair. Prep was over for Tubby—till lessons started again.

Jimmy Silver entered the study, and as he stood within it he put his hand behind him and extracted the key from the lock on the door.

"You two chaps are wanted, he said. 'Come on! It's rather important! You'll be interested!'"

Van Ryn and Higgs, somewhat puzzled, followed Jimmy from the study.

They were still more surprised when Jimmy silently inserted the key in the outside of the lock, and turned it.

"What the thunder are you up to?" demanded Higgs.

"Carrying out your idea, Higgy," said Jimmy Silver affably. "We've good reason to feel sure that Tubby can be cured of his dumbness by getting a bit of shock."

"Well, that was my idea all along!" said Higgs, more amicably. "All the fellows were down on it, though. You were!"

"But we've tumbled to something since," explained Jimmy. "Tubby's kind of dumbness can be cured quite easily, as it happens."

"How do you know?" asked Dick Van Ryn. "Watch your uncle!" said Jimmy.

Jimmy Silver fetched the ashpans out of the end study, and proceeded to tear up an old exercise-book into it. Then he struck a match, and lighted the fragments of paper, and there was a flare and a smell of smoke.

"What the dickens—" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver did not reply. He placed the ashpans close to the door of Study No. 3, and blew the smoke through the keyhole. And then he roared, in stentorian tones:

"Fire!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
A Wonderful Cure!

"FIRE!" Tubby Muffin generally extracted himself from an armchair with slow and leisured motions and a deep grunt of annoyance.

On this occasion, however, Tubby rose from the armchair in a way that was a close imitation of the motion of a jack-in-a-box.

He fairly bounded up with a gasp.

"Fire!" Tubby's podgy face turned pale, and he made a wild rush at the door. Smoke was pouring through the keyhole in thin spirals.

Tubby Muffin grasped the handle of the door, and dragged at it.

To his surprise and horror the door did not open.

He dragged and dragged, grasping and grunting, but the door did not budge. It was fast.

"Help, help, help!"

Tubby Muffin's voice rang through the study and the whole length of the Fourth Form passage.

There was a gasp from the juniors outside.

"Speaking by gum!"

"The spoofer!"

"It's the shock, bedad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! Help!" yelled Tubby from within.

"Let me out! Open the door! Yarooop! Help! Yah! Oh! Lemme out! Help!"

Jimmy Silver grinned and laid down the ashpans, and Lovell, chuckling, took it back to the end study.

Jimmy tapped on the door. "Hallo! Is that you, Tubby?" "Yes. Let me out!" "Why can't you come out?" "The door's jammed!" shrieked Tubby. "Don't go away, Silver! Help!" "No danger, dear boy!" "Ha, ha, ha!" "Let me out!" yelled Tubby. "But what's the matter?" "Matter!" Tubby bellowed. "The school's on fire, you silly ass! Lemme out! Smash in the door! Yaroooh!"

"All serene!" said Jimmy Silver. "Keep smiling! The school isn't on fire, and there's nothing the matter."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Only some old papers being burned, Tubby! No need to be alarmed about!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"But I'll let you out, you fat fraud, and jolly well bump you, too!" said Jimmy Silver, inserting the key in the lock and turning it back.

The study door opened, and Tubby Muffin rolled out into the corridor, gasping.

"I—I thought the school was on fire!" he spluttered. "There—there was smoke, and—and somebody was yelling 'Fire!'"

"Yes, I was yelling 'Fire!'"

"You silly ass!" hooted Tubby. "What were you yelling 'Fire!' for if there wasn't any fire?"

"To cure you of your giddy dumbness, dear boy!"

Tubby's jaw dropped. The expression on his fat face made the Classical juniors shrick.

In his alarm and funk, the fat Classical had forgotten all about his dumbness. He remembered it now, rather too late.

"Oh!" gasped Tubby. "Oh, dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Bootles came hurrying up the passage. He had heard Tubby's wild yells from afar, and, in utter amazement, had recognised the voice of the dumb junior.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles.

"Has Muffin recovered?"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy Silver demurely.

"He can talk as easily as anything now, sir!"

"Ripping, ain't it?" grinned Lovell.

"Muffin! My dear boy—"

"Oh, lor!" groaned Tubby.

Tubby Muffin was not a bright youth, but he could see that the game was up now.

All the Classical knew was that he had been spoofing, and certainly he would not be allowed to keep on his trickery. If he had attempted to deceive his Form-master farther Jimmy Silver & Co. would have deceived him promptly enough, though they had no intention of betraying Tubby otherwise.

The fat rascal deserved to be punished, but they did not want to "give him away."

Tubby's fat face was dismayed. He was "bowled out" with a vengeance, and he realised that deception had come to an end.

"You can speak, Muffin?" asked Mr. Bootles.

"Yes, sir," mumbled Tubby.

"Extraordinary!"

"Amazing, by gad!" murmured Lovell, with a chuckle.

"A most extraordinary and interesting case!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "How did you first feel your speech returning, Muffin?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Tubby.

"Dear me, what a smell of smoke!" said Mr. Bootles, sniffing. "Is anything on fire anywhere?"

"I think not," said Jimmy Silver. "I've been burning some old papers, but it's out now!"

"You should be more careful, Silver. The passage is quite smoky!" said Mr. Bootles. "I thought I heard someone calling 'Fire!'"

"Only a false alarm, sir."

"You are a very careless boy, Silver!"

"Ahem! Yes, sir."

"I should certainly give you an imposition for your carelessness, Silver, but in this happy moment I will not inflict a punishment," said Mr. Bootles.

"T-t-thank you, sir!"

"Muffin, I am delighted to see that you have recovered your speech. It will not be necessary to have the specialist down now. I will inform Dr. Twist at once. Did your speech return suddenly, Muffin?"

"Q-quickly suddenly, sir."

"Have you received a shock of any kind?" asked Mr. Bootles, with great interest.

"I—I—I—"

"I think Muffin fancied the school was on fire, sir," said Jimmy Silver, with great calmness.

"Ah, I understand! Silver, your carelessness has, after all, served a good purpose," said Mr. Bootles. "It was due to your carelessness in the first place, Silver, that Muffin became dumb. Your carelessness has been the cause of his recovery. It is a very remarkable coincidence!"

"Extraordinary, sir, isn't it?" said Jimmy Silver, with the gravity of a Chinese mandarin, while Lovell gurgled helplessly.

"Very extraordinary! And you feel that you can speak quite freely now, Muffin?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Excellent—excellent! I will inform Dr. Twist at once, and ask him to come. You feel quite well, Muffin?"

"Yes, sir. Only—only—"

"Only what, Muffin?"

"Only hungry, sir," said Tubby.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fourth-Formers.

Mr. Bootles smiled.

"I see that you are quite your old self, Muffin. I will go and telephone to Dr. Twist at once."

Mr. Bootles rustled away.

Tubby, not quite liking the looks of the Classical juniors, retreated into his study. The juniors followed him in.

"You spoofing oyster!" said Lovell.

"You thafe of the worruld!"

"You fat rotter!"

Tubby Muffin grinned feebly.

"I—I say, I—I was dumb, you know," he stammered. "It was the shock, you know. It restored my speech—like the soldiers you read about, you know!"

"Bump him!"

"Own up, you fat rotter!"

"Leggo!" howled Tubby, as the Classics grasped him. Certainly there was no sign of dumbness about Tubby now; his voice was in full vigour. "Yaroooh!"

Bump—bump—bump!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

The juniors streamed out of the study, leaving Tubby Muffin gasping one the floor.

And the wild howls that followed bore eloquent testimony to the fact that Tubby Muffin was no longer dumb.

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