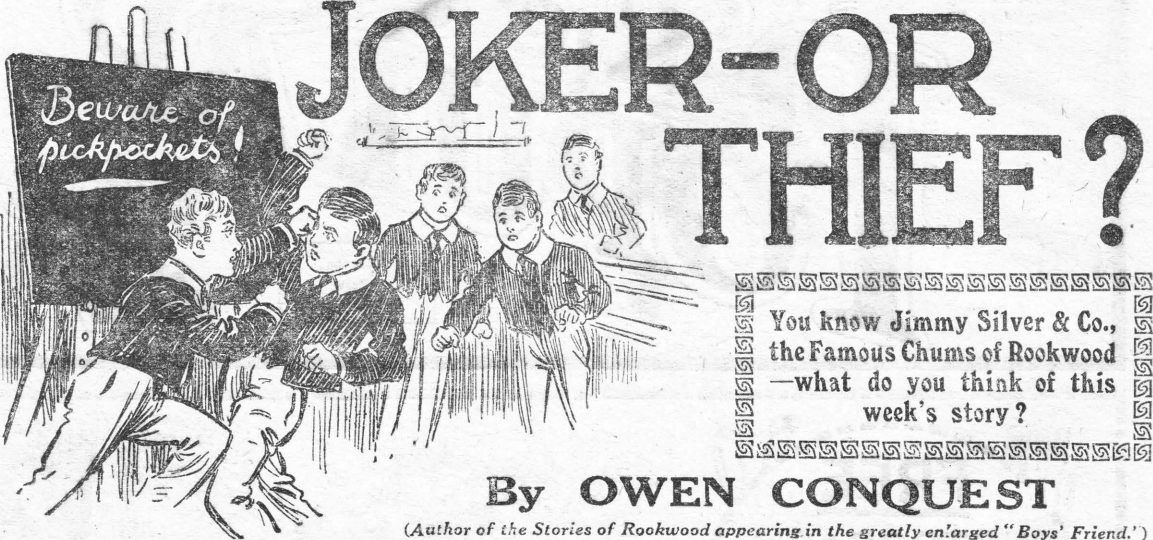


TUBBY'S LITTLE GAME! Tubby Muffin is the biggest and fattest duffer at Rookwood School, and when he tries to wangle a big reward from Val Mornington for the recovery of the latter's "missing" gold watch, there's some fun!



You know Jimmy Silver & Co.,
the Famous Chums of Rookwood
—what do you think of this
week's story?

By OWEN CONQUEST

(Author of the Stories of Rookwood appearing in the greatly enlarged "Boys' Friend.")

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Watch That Went.

WHERE'S my watch?"
Valentine Mornington, of the Classical Fourth, asked that question in the dormitory at Rookwood.
The Classical Fourth had turned out at the clang of the rising-bell—with one exception.
Tubby Muffin, the fattest and laziest fellow at Rookwood, was snatching a few extra minutes, at the risk of being late down—and the added risk of being bumped out of bed "on his neck" by Jimmy Silver, or some other fellow of an energetic nature.

Mornington was looking annoyed as he held up his waistcoat, upon which a slim gold chain glistened, to which a watch should have been attached, but was not.
Kit Errol glanced round quickly as his chum spoke.
"Lost your watch, Morny?" he asked.
"No."
"Then what—"
"It's been taken off the chain."
"Draw it mild!" remarked Jimmy Silver.
"It's been taken," repeated Mornington.
"Don't look as tragic as the ghost of Hamlet's father. I'm not accusin' anybody of stealin' it. Some silly idiot has bagged it for a joke, I suppose, and I want to know where it is. So I'm addressin' everybody present. Where's my watch?"
"Blest if I know," said Arthur Edward Lovell—"or care much, if you come to that. You shouldn't leave gold watches lying about."

"I didn't leave it lying about! I left it on the chain in my waistcoat, after windin' it up last night. Some silly chump has got out of bed and pinched it!" growled Mornington.

Jimmy Silver glanced round the dormitory. He was frowning.
Practical jokes with such valuable articles as gold watches seemed quite "past the limit" to Jimmy Silver. They were likely to give rise to disagreeable suspicions and surmises.

And Morny's gold watch was a very valuable one—a relic of the days when he had been the richest fellow at Rookwood, and had never denied himself any luxury, however expensive.

It was known in the Lower School that Morny's watch had cost twenty-five pounds, and it had often been admired.

Most fellows would have been rather more careful with such a possession; but Morny, though no longer rich, was as careless with his possessions as in his old wealthy days.

There was a general shaking of heads as Jimmy Silver looked inquiringly at his Form-fellows.

Apparently nobody was inclined to own up to "larking" with Morny's expensive watch.

"Look here, this is a fool joke, if it is a joke at all!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "As likely as not the Modern rotters will begin saying there's a thief on this side of Rookwood, if this gets talked about. The chap who's hidden Morny's watch had better own up!"

"Not guilty, my lord!" grinned Lovell. "Make every chap speak up, 'Yes' or 'No,' before we go out of the dormitory!" suggested Raby.

"Good!" assented Jimmy. "You stick at the door, Newcome, and see that nobody goes out!"

"Right you are!"
Arthur Newcome took up his position at the door, and the fellows who were ready to go down had to halt.

Then Jimmy Silver, as captain of the Fourth, proceeded to question the Classical juniors.

But every fellow answered at once with clear and emphatic "No!"

With most of the fellows, it was certain that if they said "No," "No" it was, and there was no further room for doubt.

But Jimmy looked rather keenly at Lat-trey and Peele and Gower, and one or two of the others, whose word was not always their bond.

But he had to admit that they spoke up readily enough.

"You haven't asked Muffin yet," remarked Lovell, when Jimmy was "through" with the Fourth-Formers.

"Tubby! Forgot him!" said Jimmy.
"Where is the fat bouncer?"
"In bed!"
"Have him out, then!"
Arthur Edward Lovell strode towards Muffin's bed.

Tubby Muffin had been snoring steadily through the questioning process, and was apparently asleep.

But as Lovell reached his bed he sat up suddenly and yawned.

"Hallo! Is it rising-bell?" he asked.
"Out you go!" was Lovell's answer.

"Hold on—I mean, let go—Yah, you rotter!" roared Tubby, as he was bundled out of bed, and rolled on the floor in a tangle of bedclothes.

"Tubby!" called out Jimmy Silver.
"Yaroooh!"
"Have you seen Morny's watch?"
"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Answer me, fathead!"
"Yoooop!"
"I'll squeeze a wet sponge down his back!" said Oswald, taking one from his washstand. "That'll liven him up!"
Tubby Muffin bounded to his feet.

"Yaroooh! Keep off, you Hun!" he roared.
He dodged round the bed as Dick Oswald came towards him, and ran into Jimmy Silver, who caught him by his fat neck.
"Stop, you fat duffer!" exclaimed Jimmy.
"Look here, Tubby—"

"Leggo!"
"Have you taken Morny's watch?"
"You're chook-chook-choking me!" spluttered Tubby Muffin.

"I'll chook-chook-choke you in earnest if you don't answer!" howled Jimmy Silver.
"We shall have a prefect after us soon! Somebody's taken Morny's watch away. Was it you?"

"If you think I'm a thief, Jimmy Silver, you—" spluttered Tubby indignantly.

"I don't, you fat idiot! Somebody's hidden the watch somewhere for a fathheaded joke, I suppose! Was it you, you burbling jabberwock?"

"Catch me getting up in the night to play a joke!" grunted Tubby Muffin. "Most likely it was you, Jimmy!"

"What!" yelled Jimmy Silver.
Tubby blinked at him.

"Well, you got up in the night to raid the Moderns once!" he replied. "So you might have done it to hide Morny's watch!"

"You crass ass!" gasped Jimmy Silver.
"You—you—"

"Perhaps it was Lovell, though!" said Tubby Muffin thoughtfully.

"Me!" roared Arthur Edward.
"Well, you're ass enough!" argued Tubby.
"Now, you'll admit that yourself, Lovell, as a reasonable chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Arthur Edward Lovell made a stride towards Tubby Muffin, who jerked himself away from the captain of the Fourth and dodged.

"Keep him off!" he roared.
"Shut up, you howling ass!" growled Raby. "Look here, Jimmy, it looks as if it wasn't a chap in this dorm at all. One of the kids from the Third Form dorm, perhaps."

"I say," gasped Tubby—"I say, perhaps it hasn't been bagged at all!"
"It's gone!" snapped Mornington.

"Yes; but I dare say you've pawned it!"
"P-pawned it!" howled Mornington.

And there was a chuckle in the dormitory at the idea of the dandy of the Fourth paying a visit to a pawnbroker's to raise money on his watch.

"Well, if you've pawned it, you know, you'd spin a yarn like this to keep it dark, wouldn't you?" said Tubby. "Looks like it to me, I must say!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You—you fat idiot!" howled Mornington. "I'll jolly well burst you!"

He made a rush at Tubby Muffin, who bolted across a bed to escape, and caught his foot in a blanket, and rolled over, with a yell.

"Yah! Help!" roared Tubby. "Help! Yooop! Help!"
The door opened, and Bulkeley of the Sixth looked in.

"Not down yet?" he rapped out. "Get a move on, you lazy young beggars!"

"Yaroooh! Help!" roared Tubby. Bulkeley stared at the fat Classical on the floor. There was no one near Tubby, and what he was yelling for help for was a mystery to the captain of Rookwood. "Muffin!" "Help! Fire! Keep him off!" "Ha, ha, ha!" "You silly young ass! What's the matter with you?" shouted Bulkeley. "There's nobody near you!" Tubby Muffin sat up and blinked round him. Mornington was sedately finishing his toilet. The other fellows were chortling. "Oh," gasped Tubby, "I—I—I thought I—"

"You'd better think out what you'll get if you're not down in five minutes!" grunted Bulkeley. And he left the dormitory. Tubby Muffin contrived to be down in five minutes. To do it in that short space of time he had to leave out most of his washing, but he made up his mind to that sacrifice cheerfully.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The Moderns' Little Joke.

TOMMY DODD & CO. of the Modern Fourth rejoiced. They rejoiced greatly. It had seemed to Jimmy Silver judicious to say nothing about the queer happening in the Classical dormitory, and most of the fellows quite agreed with him; they did not want to give the Moderns a "handle" against them. But during the morning the Moderns became fully aware of what had happened. Tubby Muffin was probably the culprit. Tubby never could keep his mouth closed indeed, he never had any desire to keep it closed.

It was, as Lovell remarked, always open either for eating or talking, two occupations that Tubby revelled in. In the Fourth Form room that morning Tommy Dodd & Co. showed that they knew all about it. That there was a thief in the Classical Fourth the Moderns, of course, did not believe for a moment.

But it suited them to assume that such was the case for the sake of pulling the Classical leg. Finding himself next to Lovell in class, Tommy Dodd went through a motion of buttoning up his pockets.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave him a volcanic look. He understood what that implied. "You Modern worm!" gasped Lovell. There came a whisper from Tommy Cook. "Mind your pockets, you fellows!" And there was a subdued chuckle. Mr. Bootles glanced round, becoming aware that all the attention of the Fourth was not bestowed upon his valued instruction.

The chuckle died away. "You will kindly pay attention, my boys!" said Mr. Bootles, with mild severity. Attention was paid, but certainly most of the Fourth were thinking of other matters as well as lessons.

Mornington's missing watch was in their thoughts, causing intense annoyance to the Classics and great joy to the Moderns, who realised that this was a quite unique opportunity for ragging their old rivals.

Mr. Bootles happened to step out of the Form-room to speak to Mr. Bohun, the master of the Third, in the corridor, and while he was out Tommy Dodd jumped up.

He stepped coolly out before the Form and took the chalk, and began to chalk on the blackboard.

The juniors watched him curiously. They supposed Tommy was going to chalk a caricature on the board to surprise Mr. Bootles when he came back.

But they soon saw that that was not the intention of the merry Modern.

What Tommy Dodd put on the blackboard was an inscription, in big capital letters, as follows:

"BEWARE OF PICKPOCKETS!"

Then he returned to his place, with a satisfied grin. The Modern juniors burst into a roar.

A fat chuckle came from Tubby Muffin, but the rest of the Classics looked furious. "You Modern rotter!" roared Lovell. "What do you mean by that?" "Can't you read?" answered Tommy Dodd. "Ha, ha, ha!" "Beware of pickpockets!" howled Tommy Doyle. "Look afther yer watches, bedad!" Jimmy Silver jumped up, his face pink with wrath. "You—you Modern rotter!" he exclaimed. "Rub that out at once!" "Bow-wow!" "Rub it out, or I'll rub it out with your silly head!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Rats!" "Collar him!" shouted Oswald. Most of the juniors were on their feet now.

Jimmy Silver scrambled along the desks to Tommy Dodd, who stood on the defensive, with an exasperating grin. "Will you rub that out?" demanded Jimmy. "Not to-day, old top!" answered Tommy Dodd cheerfully. "Isn't it valuable advice to the public? Ain't there pickpockets about?"

"No, you rotter, and you know it!" "Ha, ha! Where's Morny's watch?" "Not your bizney, you Modern worm! Rub that out at once!"

Tommy Dodd laughed. He was not likely to take orders from a Classical fellow, even the captain of the Form.

His laugh was suddenly cut short as Jimmy Silver pounced upon him.

"Now, you Modern rotter!" "Yah! You Classical ass!" "Mop him up, Jimmy!"

"Biff him, Tommy!" "Go it!"

Jimmy Silver, with a strenuous effort, yanked the Modern junior out before the class.

There were shouts of encouragement on both sides. They nearly reached the blackboard, but there Tommy Dodd rallied, and swept Jimmy back to the desks.

But Jimmy Silver made another effort, and rushed the Modern up to the blackboard, getting a firm grip on Tommy's collar.

His intention was to rub out the offending inscription with Tommy Dodd's hair, as a just punishment.

But there was likely to be a terrific struggle before the Modern leader's head could be used as a duster.

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They bumped into the blackboard, and it reeled a little, and there was a shout of warning from the class.

"Look out! You'll have it over!" Tommy Dodd rallied again, but again Jimmy Silver rushed him on, and Tommy's nose, instead of his hair, came in contact with the board.

There was a fendish yell from the Modern. At that moment Mr. Bootles, in the passage, became aware of the fact that something rather unusual was transpiring in the Form-room, and he hurried back.

A startling sight met his gaze. The easel was over, and on the fallen blackboard Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd were struggling in deadly combat.

Jimmy had the advantage, and his grip was like iron on Dodd's collar, and Dodd's face was being used to wipe off the chalked inscription.

It was a painful process for Tommy Dodd, as he testified by a succession of howls.

Cook and Doyle naturally, rushed to their leader's aid; and equally naturally, Lovell and Raby and Newcome rushed to stop them.

A battle royal was starting round the fallen blackboard, when Mr. Bootles fortunately returned.

The Form master's glasses almost fell off at the sight that met his eyes.

He stood blinking in the doorway, dumb-founded. "Boys!" he gasped at last. "Cave!" yelled Towle.

"Oh, my hat! Booties!" "Look out!"

The combatants separated as if by magic. They bolted back to the desks, leaving the blackboard and easel strewn on the floor.

Dusty and crimson and dishevelled, they sat and blinked at the wrathful Form master.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Talk of the School.

BLESS my soul! ejaculated Mr. Bootles. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

Certainly there were raggings between Classics and Moderns often enough, but this was the first time that the Form-room had been used as a battle-ground.

Mr. Bootles blinked at the blackboard, from which the chalked inscription had been rubbed—with Tommy Dodd's features, which were in an extremely soiled state in consequence. Then he blinked at the class.

"What does this mean?" he thundered. Dead silence. "Silver! Dodd! Lovell! How dare you!"

Silence. "This—this riot—this outbreak of—of violence— Bless my soul! I shall punish you all severely!" gasped Mr. Bootles.

"Silver!" "Ye-es, sir?" "How dare you!" "Ahem!"

"What was the cause of this uproar, Silver?" "I—I—I—"

"Explain at once!" roared Mr. Bootles wrathfully. "What was the cause of this unexampled outbreak?"

"The—The Moderns were cheeky rotters, sir," said Jimmy at last.

"Wha-at?" "Only Classical cheek, sir," said Tommy Dodd.

"Bless my soul!" None of the juniors felt inclined to mention the incident of the missing watch—with one exception.

That was Tubby Muffin. The fat Classical rose to his feet.

"If you please, sir, I can explain," he said. "You may do so, Muffin!" snapped Mr. Bootles.

"Mornington's watch is missing, sir—"

"What?" "Shut up, you fat beast!" hissed Jimmy Silver.

"Silence! What have you to say, Muffin? What has Mornington's watch to do with the matter?"

"It's missing, sir. Morny missed it this morning in the dorm," said Tubby Muffin. "Some chap has put it somewhere. The Moderns think it's been stolen."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Bootles. "This is very serious. Is it possible that you, Dodd, have brought an accusation of theft against other boys?"

Tommy Dodd crimsoned. He gave Tubby Muffin a look that ought to have withered the fat Classical on the spot; but Tubby, not at all withered, sat down with a fat grin of satisfaction.

The matter which the other juniors did not want known to the masters was "out" now. There was no possibility of keeping it dark.

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Tommy. "I—I never meant anything of the kind, sir! It was only a joke!"

"You should not make such jokes, Dodd. So that is the cause of the uproar!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles. "You are to blame, Dodd."

"I—I—"

"You should not say such things, even for a joke, Dodd! I shall cane you severely for being the cause of this disturbance! Come here!"

Swish, swish, swish! Tommy Dodd returned to his place, squeezing his hands.

The juniors looked daggers at Tubby Muffin.

Tubby had not meant to sneak about the

Modern junior, certainly; but his uncalculated statement had been the cause of Tommy Dodd's punishment.

"And now," said Mr. Bootles sternly, "I must hear the particulars of this matter, which should have been communicated to me earlier. Mornington, it appears that your watch is missing?"

"Yes, sir," said Mornington reluctantly.

"Was it a valuable watch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly give me the particulars of the loss."

Mornington, with visible reluctance, explained; and Mr. Bootles' face grew more and more portentous as he listened.

All the juniors were serious enough now, Moderns as well as Classicals.

Now that the matter was officially known, it was for the masters to deal with, if not the Head himself.

That was quite enough to make the juniors grave.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles. "Mornington, you have been very careless with your watch, considering its value. That, however, does not excuse the boy who has taken it. I command that boy to stand up at once!"

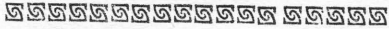
No one stirred.

"Unless the watch is returned to Mornington immediately, I shall be compelled to conclude that it has been stolen!" boomed Mr. Bootles.

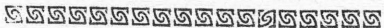
The juniors looked very uncomfortable. Nobody in the Fourth believed for a moment that the watch had been stolen.

That theory seemed to them absurd, for Morny's gold ticker was so well known that a thief could not hope to dispose of it undetected.

Morny's monogram was on the case, in



DON'T MISS



diamonds, and the watch could be easily identified anywhere.

Even if anyone in the Fourth was rascal enough, it was difficult to believe that anyone was stupid enough to take so easily recognised an article to keep.

But Mr. Bootles was portentously grave; and, indeed, it was difficult to see why the practical joker should keep the watch so long, if he intended to return it at all.

A practical joker who carried his joke to the extent of starting suspicions of theft in the school was less a joker than a born idiot.

The affair was, in fact, a puzzle, and Mr. Bootles had reason for taking a serious view of it.

There was a long silence in the Form-room. Mr. Bootles, like Brutus, paused for a reply; but no reply came.

Nobody in the Fourth seemed to have anything to say.

"In order to have this matter cleared up, and prevent unpleasant discussion, I will allow the foolish boy to pass unpunished," said Mr. Bootles, more mildly. "That is, if the watch is restored to its owner at once." The juniors looked at one another.

It was a good offer, and a chance for the unknown culprit to get clear of the affair, which was now becoming so serious.

But there was no answer.

"I am waiting!" boomed Mr. Bootles.

"If you please, sir—" began Jimmy Silver.

"Was it you, Silver?"

"Eh? Oh, no, sir! But—but I was going to suggest that it may have been a chap from some other dormitory, sir."

"That is very improbable, Silver," said Mr. Bootles dryly. "A boy from another dormitory could scarcely have entered without awakening someone, especially as he would not know precisely where to look for Mornington's clothes, and would have to search for them in the dark. If he had struck a light, someone would certainly have awakened."

Jimmy was silent.

Put like that, he realised that the affair could not be due to a raider from another dormitory.

How was a fellow from the Third or the THE POPULAR.—No. 201.

Shell to find Morny's waistcoat in the deep darkness without giving the alarm?

Evidently it was one of the Classical Fourth who had relieved Morny of his watch, and the fellow was then present in the Form-room, listening to what was said on the subject, without giving a sign!

Was it, after all, a thief?

It certainly began to look like it, for a practical joker would scarcely have refused Mr. Bootles' offer to get clear of the affair by handing over the watch and owning up.

Yet no one spoke.

The joker, or thief, whichever he was, was there undoubtedly, but he was keeping his own counsel.

Mr. Bootles' plumb face set more grimly. "Very well," he said. "I am forced to conclude that Mornington's watch has been stolen. The thief, I need hardly say, will be expelled from the school when discovered. The matter closes here for the present. I shall discuss it in the session of masters this evening, and decide what measures are to be taken. We will now resume."

Lessons went on in the Form-room from that point, nearly every fellow in the room suffering from a sense of deep discomfort.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Masters' Session.

AFTER lessons there was endless discussion of the subject among the Fourth-Formers on the Classical side.

The Moderns, of course, were not concerned in the matter, as they had their sleeping quarters in Mr. Manders' House.

After tea there was the session of masters in the masters' room in the School House. Masters' session was a regular institution at Rookwood.

At stated intervals the staff met to discuss school matters, the Head sometimes coming to the meetings, though more often not; for his assistants discussed matters much more at their ease in the absence of the awe-inspiring doctor.

On the present occasion there was a matter of unusual interest for the masters to discuss, and that was the measures to be taken for the detection of the thief in the Classical Fourth.

A number of the juniors lingered near the masters' room, watching the masters as they gathered.

From their serious looks it was clear that they had been already apprised of the topic to be introduced by Mr. Bootles at the meeting.

Mr. Bootles came along with Mr. Bohun, looking very distressed.

Mr. Wiggins, the master of the Second, was preternaturally grave.

Mr. Bull, the mathematics master, had his brows knitted.

Mr. Mooney, of the Shell, gave the juniors a severe glance as he passed them, as if he was trying to pick out the thief among them, as Arthur Edward Lovell muttered in furious tones.

Then came Mr. Greely, the master of the Fifth, with Monsieur Monceau, the French master.

The junior caught the word "voleur" on Mossoo's lips as the two masters passed.

Mr. Manders, the science master, came last, with a look on his acid face that Lovell likened to a gargoye.

The door of the masters' room closed, but a murmur of voices could be heard from within.

"They're at it!" growled Lovell.

"Rotten!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"All Rookwood's going to ring with it," said Conroy. "My hat! I'd like to be within hitting distance of the silly idiot who bagged Morny's watch."

Jimmy Silver & Co. went up glumly to the Fourth Form quarters.

The honour of their Form was concerned in the discussion now going on in the masters' room, and they felt it keenly.

As they passed Mornington's study they heard the voice of Tubby Muffin.

"You'd better take my tip, Morny, old man."

"Oh, dry up!" came Morny's reply.

"You want to get your watch back, don't you?"

"Buzz off!"

"If you're hard up, Erroll can lend you the money," suggested Tubby Muffin. "In fact, I dare say the Fourth would be willing

to make a whip-round for it, as there's such a fuss being made."

"Will you clear off, you silly young ass?" demanded Mornington. "Kick him out for me, Erroll!"

"Certainly!"

"Here, I say, hands off! Why, you rotter, when I'm trying to do you a good turn!" howled Tubby.

A fat form came whirling through the study doorway, and Jimmy Silver grinned as he caught it by the hair.

"Yaroh!" roared Muffin.

"Steady on, steam-roller!" said Jimmy.

"Yow-ow! Leggo my hair!"

Tubby Muffin jerked his head away, and rubbed it.

"Look here, Jimmy," he began, "I've just been pointing out to Morny—"

"Bow-wow!"

"But it's jolly important, and I think you ought to speak to Morny—"

Mornington II., of the Second Form, came along the passage.

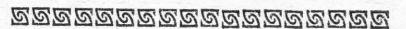
He put his head into No. 4.

"You're wanted, Morny," he said to his cousin, "Masters' room."

Mornington grunted as he rose to his feet. "More jaw about that dashed watch, I suppose!" he groaned. "All right, 'Erbert, you can tell 'em I'm coming, and tell 'em to go and boil their heads!"

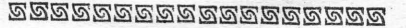
The fag grinned.

He was not likely to take that message back to the severe assembly in the masters' room.



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Mornington made a grimace to the Fistical Four as he came out of the study.

"I'm going through it," he said. "I wish I'd never said a word about the watch now! I'd rather lose it than have all this bother."

"I've offered to show you how to get your watch back, Morny—" began Tubby Muffin.

"Oh, ring off!"

Mornington walked away with his cousin, and the Fistical Four went on to the end study.

Tubby Muffin blinked after Morny, and then blinked into No. 4.

"I say, Erroll—" he started.

"Clear off, for goodness' sake!" said Erroll. "Can't you see when a fellow's fed up, Tubby?"

"But Morny's watch—"

"Oh, bother! Buzz off, or you'll get this cushion!" exclaimed Erroll, in exasperation.

Tubby Muffin promptly retreated from the doorway.

He gave a discontented grunt, and after some moments' reflection followed Jimmy Silver & Co. to the end study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Fairly Caught

JIMMY! Jimmy Silver uttered an impatient exclamation as Tubby Muffin's fat face appeared in his doorway.

Jimmy was in a harassed mood, and the infliction of Tubby's company and Tubby's conversation was the last straw.

"Jimmy, old nut—"

"For goodness' sake, Tubby, buzz off!" said the captain of the Fourth. "Give a fellow a rest!"

"If you call that polite, Jimmy Silver—" "Well, it's politer than my boot, which you'll get if you don't give me a rest!" growled Jimmy.

"With mine to follow!" said Lovell.

"Well, if you don't care for the good name of the Form, I suppose it's no good talking to you," said Tubby Muffin loftily. "Some

fellows think of such things. I do! I don't like the Classical Fourth being the talk of the school. Fellows are saying we've got a thief in the Form. I think the matter ought to be cleared up."

"Can you clear it up, fathead?" snapped Raby.

"I think so."

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Newcome.

"I can make a suggestion—"

"Make it, and then ring off!" said Jimmy Silver. "And cut it short, Tubby!"

"I suppose that's what you call grateful?" said Tubby Muffin sarcastically. "Well, here's my suggestion. When things are lost, what do you think is the best way of finding them again?"

"Looking for them, I suppose."

"Better than that!"

The proper thing," said Tubby impressively, "is to offer a reward."

Jimmy stared at him. "A reward!" he repeated.

"That's it!" said Tubby, with a nod. "I've suggested it to Mornington, as it's his watch that's lost; but he won't listen to me. I suppose he's hard up—though I mentioned that he could borrow the money of Erroll. The watch was worth twenty-five quid. Well, Morny ought to offer at least five to the fellow who finds it. Don't you think so?"

Jimmy Silver did not answer. He was looking very fixedly at the fat, self-satisfied face of Reginald Muffin.

But Lovell broke in angrily.

"You fat idiot! Why should Morny spring five quid? He would have to pay it to the fellow who bagged the watch; nobody else would know where to find it."

"Well, anybody might find it," said Muffin.

"Suppose a reward was offered, everybody would begin hunting for it. It would pay Morny to spring five quid to recover a twenty-five pound watch. Cheap, I call it!"

"Oh, you're an ass!"

"I'm not talking to you, Lovell! You haven't much sense, you know."

What do you think, Jimmy Silver? Will you put it plain to Morny?"

"No!"

"Of course, you could offer a reward yourself," suggested Tubby Muffin. "As captain of the Fourth, it's up to you to look after the honour of the Form. You could raise a subscription in the Form. It's worth five quid to clear the fellows of suspicion of stealing a watch. Think of the honour of the Form."

Jimmy Silver was silent, and his gaze, fixed on Tubby's fat face, was growing more penetrating.

Muffin, absorbed by his own valuable ideas, did not notice it.

He blinked round appealingly at Jimmy's chums.

"I say, what do you think of the idea, Raby?"

"Rotten!"

"Newcome, old chap, you're a chap with some sense," said Muffin. "Don't you think a reward ought to be offered?"

"No, I don't!"

Tubby Muffin gave a snort of impatience.

"Blest if I ever saw such asses!" he exclaimed. "It really looks to me as if you don't want Morny's watch to be found at all. I call that selfish. Why, I thought he'd jump at the idea rather than have the watch lost, and everybody saying there's a thief in the Form!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Lovell.

"Hallo! Here comes Morny!" said Raby, glancing out of the study doorway. "He looks worried."

Mornington glanced in at the end study.

"Been through it?" asked Jimmy.

"You bet! A blessed set of solemn old owls, all jawing at a fellow!" growled Mornington.

The Fistical Four grinned at that description of a masters' session.

It might have surprised that august assembly if they had heard it.

"I've had to jaw it all over again from the beginning," went on Mornington. "They've decided there's a thief in the Form."

"I told you so!" grinned Tubby Muffin.

"You fat owl! You seem to be glad of it!" exclaimed Mornington wrathfully.

"Oh, no! Nunno! Oh, no!" stammered Tubby. "N-n-not at all!"

"They dismissed me, an' I left 'em chawing over it," said the dandy of the

a businesslike chap. You take my advice, Jimmy, and put a notice on the board offering five pounds reward for the finding of Morny's watch."

"Do you think that would produce my watch?" asked Mornington.

"Sure of it!"

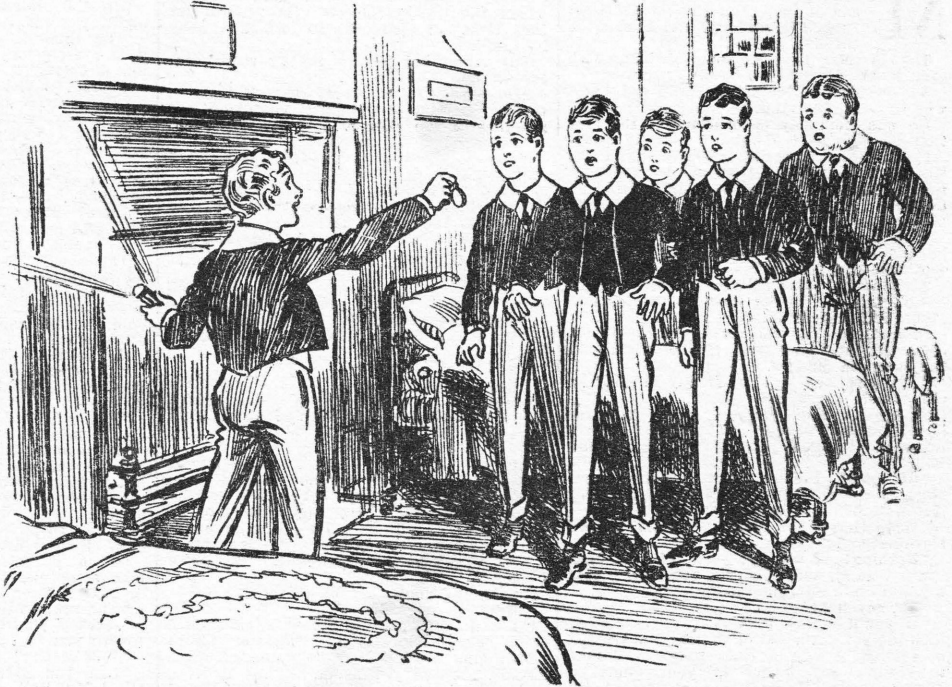
"Because the offer of a reward would start fellows hunting for it?" asked Lovell, staring blankly at Reginald Muffin.

Raby and Newcome were staring, too.

There was an atmosphere of grim suspicion in the end study, of which Tubby Muffin was blissfully unconscious.

"That's it," said Tubby.

"And where are they to hunt for it?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Fellows have been looking for it already, but they haven't had any luck."



RECOVERING THE MISSING WATCH! Jimmy Silver flashed the light of his electric torch up into the darkness of the chimney. A gleam of gold caught his eyes. A moment later he drew back his hand and held up Mornington's gold ticker. "Here it is!" he said. (See Chapter 6.)

Fourth. "I believe they're going to have all the Form up for examination. What silly ass was it invented masters' sessions? I say, let's scrag that fat villain for giving the show away to Booties!"

Tubby Muffin backed away.

"I—I say, it will be all right if the watch is found!" he stammered.

"It's not found," said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, it could be if a reward was offered," said Tubby Muffin persuasively. "It would buck the fellows no end, you know. I'm sure of it!"

"Quite sure?" asked Jimmy, eyeing him. "I really feel that I could answer for it," said Tubby Muffin eagerly. "Make it a reward of five quid and I'll set to work."

Mornington's glance met Jimmy's.

The same thought was in both minds at that moment.

Jimmy compressed his lips.

"Well, let's think this over," he said. "How would you make the offer of a reward, Tubby?"

Tubby's fat face beamed.

"Put up a notice on the board," he said. "Might as well simply tell the fellows, if you're going to do it at all, which I think is rot!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"That wouldn't do!" said Tubby promptly.

"Why not?" asked Jimmy very quietly.

"You'd be able to go back on it if it wasn't in writing"

"What!"

"I—I—I mean—don't fly out at a fellow!" spluttered Muffin. "I mean, it would be more businesslike to have it in writing. I'm

"Oh, a really clever chap, you know, like—"

"Like you—what?" asked Mornington.

"Like me," agreed Tubby. "I don't want to brag, but you fellows will admit that if there's a chap in the Fourth with real brains, I'm that chap!"

"You couldn't find the watch, though," said Mornington, shaking his head.

"Bet you I could!" said Tubby at once.

"Why haven't you done so already, then?" asked Raby.

"Oh, come now!" said Tubby warmly.

"The labourer's worthy of his hire—isn't he? Chap's time is worth something. Besides—"

"Besides what?"

"Oh, nothing! Now, you draw up that paper and sign it, Morny."

"And leave the rest to you?" asked Mornington.

"Well, yes."

"In fact you guarantee to find the watch before Booties calls the Head into the matter if I offer five pounds reward?" asked Mornington.

"Yes."

"Then we can't do better—" began Mornington, looking significantly at Jimmy Silver, who rose to his feet.

"Of course you can't!" agreed the delighted Tubby.

"Than collar this fat scoundrel, and make him own up where he's hidden my watch!" went on Mornington, much to Tubby's astonishment and dismay.

Tubby Muffin jumped. Then as the juniors advanced on him, he made a frantic rush for the passage. Mornington's finger and thumb on his fat ear swung him round. "Yaroo!" roared Tubby. "Leggo!" "I'll let you go when you've handed over my watch!" said Mornington grimly; and his grip tightened, to the accompaniment of a dismal yell from Reginald Muffin. "Lock the door, Jimmy!"

Click! Tubby Muffin, in utter dismay, blinked round at the chums of the Fourth. He was fairly caught.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Too Tricky!

MORNINGTON released Tubby's fat ear at last, and the fat Classical rubbed it ruefully, and blinked at the five juniors.

The Fistical Four surrounded him, with grim looks. As yet Tubby Muffin really did not know why he was suspected.

He was sublimely unconscious of the fact that he had given himself hopelessly away. It did not occur to his fat mind that there was no reason why he should be so eager for a reward to be offered, unless he expected to finger that reward himself; because he knew where to find the watch.

If he knew where to find it, it was because he had hidden it; it was a case of "those who hide can find."

That was obvious enough to Jimmy Silver & Co., but not in the least so to Reginald Muffin's obtuse brain.

In fact, he was working up an expression of sorrowful indignation as he blinked at the incensed juniors.

"I'm surprised at this, Jimmy Silver!" he said at last.

"Surprised that you're caught, you fat idiot?" asked Lovell. "You might have expected it when you let your silly chin wag."

"Of course, I don't know anything about Mornny's watch. How could I, when I was fast asleep all night?"

"What have you done with it?" asked Mornington roughly.

"Nothing! I haven't seen it! In fact, I'm not at all sure that you ever had a gold watch at all, Mornington!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"If you'll unlock that door," said Tubby, with dignity. "I'll go! I've not been treated in a friendly way in this study. I decline to remain any longer in your quarters, Jimmy Silver. Until you've apologised I'll thank you not to speak to me again."

"You didn't bag Mornny's watch last night?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Certainly not!"

"With the idea of having a rumpus kicked up about it, so that we should be awfully keen to have it found, and you didn't think you'd be able to spoof us into offering a reward for it?"

"Not at all! Naturally, I thought you'd offer a reward, rather than have the Fourth set down as a lot of thieves," said Tubby reproachfully.

"You thought that before you took the watch?"

"Yes," said Tubby unguardedly.

"And then you took it?"

"No, I didn't!"

"You've just admitted that you did!" yelled Raby.

"Nothing of the kind, Raby! I never said anything of the sort! What I meant to say was, that Snythe of the Shell is waiting for me, and I'll thank you to unlock that door, Jimmy Silver!"

"Never mind the door at present," said Jimmy, laughing in spite of himself. "You bagged Mornny's watch in the dorm last night, Tubby."

"Never even dreamed of such a thing, Jimmy! I'm afraid it's your guilty conscience that's making you suspect me," said Tubby, with a shake of the head.

"Oh, my hat! Then you started to talk about the affair, though we agreed to keep it dark. You thought a reward might be offered if the matter was made thoroughly unpleasant."

"Oh, no! Certainly not!"

"And then you brought it all out to Mr. Bootles, so that the masters would take it up."

"Ahem! I didn't!" "You didn't tell Mr. Bootles in class this morning?" howled Jimmy. "No!" "Why, the whole Form heard you!" shrieked Newcome.

Tubby shook his head obstinately. "Fellows make mistakes," he said.

"You've made a mistake. Very likely Mornny told Bootles. Or Jimmy Silver. It might have been Lattrey. He's a bit of a sneak. Not me! I'd scorn the action."

"Oh crumbs!" said Jimmy Silver, almost overcome.

The chums of the Fourth fairly blinked at Tubby Muffin.

That he should tell such astounding whoppers was surprising, but that he should expect anyone to believe them was more astonishing still.

Tubby Muffin had not a good memory, which the proverb declares is needful for the class of persons to which Tubby belonged.

The astounded silence in the study was broken by Tubby.

Apparently he regarded the matter as settled satisfactorily, quite mistaking the meaning of the silence.

"Now, about the reward?" he said.

"The—the—the reward?" articulated Jimmy Silver.

"Yes," said Tubby briskly. "I'm willing to overlook this unpleasantness if you fellows do the proper thing. Is a reward going to be offered for finding Mornny's watch?"

"Oh dear!" "You're wasting time, Jimmy. Are you going to make it five pounds' reward?"

"No!" gasped Jimmy.

"Well, say four! What do you say to four?"

"No! Not fourpence!"

"Not a merry brown!" said Mornington.

"Well, it's your look-out," said Tubby.

"Your watch may be spoiled if a fire's lighted under it."

"Eh?" "I don't say that it will, but it might. For instance, suppose a fellow hid it in a chimney?" asked Tubby. "I'm only putting a case, of course. He might have, or he might not. Well, if a fire's lighted under that chimney, what becomes of the watch?"

"My only hat!" gasped Lovell. "So you've hidden it in a chimney!"

"Certainly not!"

"B-b-but you said—"

"I said I was putting a case. And mind," said Tubby impressively, "if the watch isn't found soon it may be damaged. We haven't got central heating, like the Moderns in Manders' House, and fires may be started in the dormitory any time."

"In—in—in the dormitory!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"It's your look-out and Mornny's," said Tubby fatuously. "Don't blame me if the watch gets spoiled, that's all."

"That chap," said Arthur Edward Lovell, in measured tones, "ought to be in a home for idiots, or some place of that sort. He's wasted at Rookwood."

"Jimmy's wanted!" called out Oswald, from the passage.

The door was unlocked and opened. Dick Oswald grinned at the captain of the Fourth.

"The great pow-wow's over," he said. "All the Classical Fourth have got to trot into the Masters' Room to be jawed at, and you're to see that they all turn up, Jimmy. I've just had it from Bootles."

Jimmy laughed.

"Thank goodness it won't be necessary," he said.

"Watch not found?" exclaimed Oswald.

"No; but Tubby's just told us where to find it."

Tubby Muffin stared.

"Eh? What! I haven't!" he yelled.

"Nothing of the kind! I haven't the faintest idea where the watch is."

"Not in the dormitory chimney?" grinned Lovell.

Tubby gave a jump.

"How did you know?" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean, it's not there!" howled Tubby, in alarm "I was simply putting a case—merely a figure of speech, you know. What I meant to say, really, was— Yaroooop!"

Then the juniors hurried up to the Classical Fourth dormitory.

They gathered round the chimney, and Jimmy Silver flashed the light of his electric flash-lamp up into the darkness above.

It was a roomy old chimney, and there was plenty of space for his head and shoulders.

As he turned the light round, a gleam of gold in the interstice of the bricks caught his eyes.

A moment more, and he drew back from the chimney, and held up Mornington's gold ticker.

"Here it is!" he said.

"Good!" grinned Lovell. "Hallo, and here's Tubby!"

Tubby Muffin rolled breathlessly in. "H-h-have you found it?" he stuttered.

"Look!"

"Where was it?"

"In the chimney, where you hid it last night, you fat villain!" hooted Raby.

"Oh, draw it mild, Raby! If you found it in the chimney, it's pretty clear that you hid it there."

"What!" shrieked Raby.

"Those who hide can find, you know!" said Tubby, with a shake of the head. "I must say I'm shocked at you, Raby! I must say that, at least!"

"You—you—you must say that, at least!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "Slaughter him, somebody, while I go to the Masters' Room!"

Jimmy Silver departed, watch in hand, and wild and weird sounds of woe followed him from the Fourth Form dormitory.

Apparently his chums were carrying out his instructions.

Jimmy hurried to the Masters' Room, where he found a circle of more or less bald heads gathered in awfully serious conurbation.

Mr. Bootles blinked at him over his glasses.

"All the Classical Fourth are required, Silver," he said. "Did you not understand—"

"The watch has been found, sir," said Jimmy meekly, holding it up.

"Bless my soul!"

"And who was the thief, Silver?" demanded Mr. Manders sourly.

"N-n-nobody, sir! The watch was hidden in the dormitory chimney, and—and we found it there."

Mr. Bootles drew a breath of relief. "Then it was only a foolish practical joke after all," he said. "I am very glad to hear it."

"The practical joke, if such it was, should be severely punished!" snapped Mr. Manders. "Were you the person concerned, Silver?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"Can you give us the person's name?" asked Mr. Bull.

"Nobody has admitted hiding the watch, sir," said Jimmy, which was strictly true. Tubby Muffin certainly hadn't admitted it, and was never likely to. "We—we thought from the first that it had been hidden somewhere by some silly joking idiot—I—I mean, a practical joker, and—and—"

"Well, well; the matter has ended satisfactorily," said Mr. Bootles. "I am glad it is no worse. I shall certainly make endeavours to discover the foolish practical joker, and punish him as he deserves! You may go, Silver!"

And Jimmy Silver went gladly.

The watch had been recovered, and the mystery was a mystery no longer.

All the Fourth were glad to learn that it was not a case of theft, but nothing more than one of Tubby Muffin's weird devices for raising the wind.

But their wrath against the fat schemer knew no bounds.

It was generally agreed that it was necessary for Tubby to have a lesson.

Tubby did not see the necessity, and kept carefully out of the way of his incensed Form-fellows that evening.

But at bed-time he could keep out of the way no longer, and then the wrath of the Classical Fourth was visited upon his devoted head.

By the time Tubby Muffin crawled into bed he was feeling as if he had been through a succession of earthquakes, which was certainly no more than he deserved.

For some time after lights-out Tubby Muffin's voice was raised in woeful complaint, till a number of missiles from various parts of the dormitory added to his sufferings, but silenced his vocal expression of them.

After that Tubby Muffin suffered in silence.

THE END.