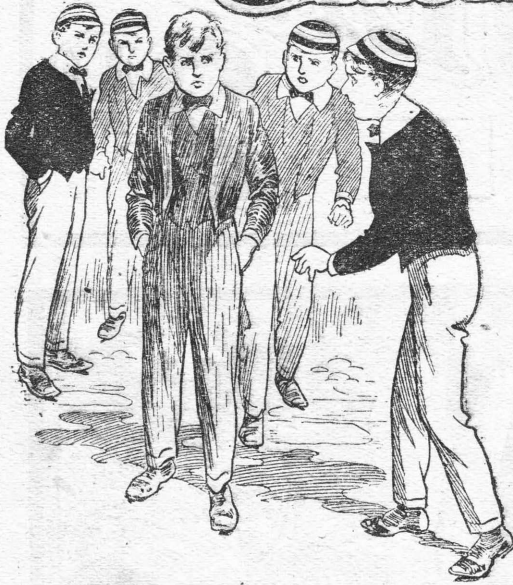


SERIOUS CHARGES AGAINST JIMMY SILVER!

Jimmy Silver, of the Fourth, finds himself in a decidedly unpleasant position when he is accused of being a junk and a rotter. Rookwood is surprised! That Jimmy should be a coward seems incredible, and yet what else are they to believe when the evidence against him is so strong and convincing?

HERO OR FUNK?

Jimmy Silver's Ordeal!



The most amazing Tale of Rookwood ever written, by the world-famed author

OWEN CONQUEST

(Author of the stories of Jimmy Silver & Co. appearing in the "Boys' Friend.")

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Ripping Idea!**

SILVER! Bulkeley, captain of Rookwood, called out to Jimmy Silver in Big Quad, as that junior was wheeling his bicycle towards the gates. With Bulkeley was Neville of the Sixth, and Bulkeley and Neville were also crossing towards the gates with their bicycles.

Jimmy Silver looked round, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Look here, Silver! Raby tells me you're cycling to Latcham this afternoon. And—"

"And you want to come with me," finished Jimmy Silver, nodding his head.

"Well, it'll be company for me. I tried to get those asses Lovell, Raby, and Newcome to come, but the lazy slackers said it was too much fag. However, you chaps will do, if you behave—Yarrough! Leggo!"

Jimmy Silver's cheerful words ended in a dismal yell as Bulkeley's finger and thumb closed like a vice on his ear. Pulling the august leg of the good-natured captain of Rookwood was usually quite safe up to a certain point.

Jimmy Silver, however, had apparently overstepped the point.

"Stop that rotting, youngster," commanded Bulkeley sternly, "an' listen! While you are in Latcham, I want you to pay a cricket account at Stubbins', the sports outfitter. Neville and I are cycling to Middlewood to fix up a match with Middlewood College, an' don't want to have to go round to Latcham. Here's the cash and the account."

And Bulkeley, releasing Jimmy Silver's ear, took an envelope from his pocket, slipped five pound Treasury notes into it, and handing the envelope to the junior, rejoined his chum.

"Well, of all the nerve!" observed Jimmy Silver, staring after the seniors as they vanished through the gates, "Never even asked if I—"

Jimmy Silver paused as Tubby Muffin, who had watched the transaction with wide open eyes from the shelter of the old beeches, rushed up excitedly.

"I—I say, Jimmy," he gasped breathlessly, "halves, you know!"

"Eh?"

"Halves!" said Tubby firmly. "I sha'n't be satisfied with less. And—here, I say! Wait for me! I'm coming with you."

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been suddenly hitched on behind, the bicycle could not have been stopped more abruptly.

"Leggo! Wow! You silly idiot!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "Leggo! You'll have me off! Wow!"

Jimmy's words were prophetic, for the abrupt stop of the machine promptly caused him to take a header over the handlebars.

"You—you dangerous ass! You—you raving maniac!" roared Jimmy Silver, sitting up in the roadway. "Why, I—I'll wipe up the blessed road with you—"

"But—but I say, Jimmy! I—I'm coming with—with you, you know!" gasped Tubby. "Look—look here, Jimmy, old pal, I—I've got a ripping idea! I—I—"

Tubby stopped and backed warily as Jimmy Silver rose to his feet, a Hunnish glare in his eyes. But just when the alarmed Tubby was about to bolt, Jimmy stopped and grinned.

"I've also got a ripping idea, Tubby, old son," he chuckled. "Let's hear yours though, Tubby. I'll tell you mine later on."

Tubby Muffin looked round mysteriously.

"Collar Bulkeley's grub," he whispered darkly.

"Eh?"

"Collar Bulkeley's blessed grub!" repeated Tubby, in a thrilling whisper.

"Bulkeley's sent you to Latcham for grub, hasn't he? Well, we can get the stuff, take it to a quiet place, and scoff it, and when we get back, tell the old scout that the Bagshot cads have raided it—see? Ripping idea—what? He, he, he!"

"He, he, he!" echoed Jimmy Silver grimly.

"Ripping idea—almost as ripping as mine. But come on, old bean! Jump up behind if you're coming!"

Tubby's podgy face was beaming like a full moon as he jumped on the step and Jimmy Silver began to drive the pedals round.

The conversation for the next half-hour was very one-sided. Jimmy Silver had no breath to spare for talking. But the fat Classical fully made up for Jimmy's remissness in that respect.

He was so full of his "ripping idea" and its possibilities, indeed, that he failed to notice that Jimmy had branched off from the Coombe road, and not until Jimmy slowed down at the cross-roads when about three miles from Rookwood did he notice anything amiss.

Then as the bicycle stopped he jumped down and stared around in astonishment.

"I—I say, Jimmy, wh-where are we?" he gasped in alarm. "Where are you going to?"

"I'm going to Latcham," grinned Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "But you, my pippin, are now going back to Rookwood. Nice little walk for you—"

"What?"

"This is the ripping idea I spoke about, Tubby. Just to teach you a lesson with regard to shoving your nose into other people's business, and not to be so beastly suspicious. Ripping idea—what?"

Tubby stared blankly for a moment. Then, as Jimmy Silver put his leg over the saddle, he awoke to sudden life.

"Here—I say! Stop, you beast! Wait for me!" he shrieked, dashing forward.

Jimmy Silver pushed off just a second too late, and Tubby's fat hand gripped the saddle desperately.

Whoop! Bump!

For the second time that afternoon Jimmy came a cropper and rolled in the dust. He was up again the next moment, however, and this time Tubby Muffin did not escape the just wrath of the ex-junior captain of the Fourth at Rookwood. And a weird wail of woe arose from the fat youth as his feet were swept from under him and he sat with a thump on the stony road.

"Ta-ka, Tubby!" called Jimmy Silver, leaping into the saddle.

And leaving the astounded Tubby sitting in the middle of the road gasping like a stranded fish, Jimmy Silver rode away, chuckling hilariously.

He rode on, feeling he had administered a well-needed lesson to the Peeping Tom of Rookwood.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Good Samaritans!

WOW! Ow! Ow! The howling rotter! He did that on purpose! Oh dear!"

Thus Tubby Muffin as he sat in the road shaking his podgy fist after the swiftly vanishing figure of Jimmy Silver.

The fat Classical had never been so astonished in his life. But his wrath and dismay greatly exceeded his astonishment. His great expectations of a gorgeous feed—at Bulkeley's expense—had suddenly faded away like a beautiful dream.

And now the dismal prospect of a three-mile tramp along the dusty road to Rookwood did not at all appeal to the fattest and laziest junior in the Classical Fourth.

"Ow! The spoofing beast!" spluttered Tubby, rising slowly and painfully. "I see it all now! The mean, greedy beast wants to scoff all the blessed grub himself. I'll jolly well tell old Bulkeley! Fancy pinching Bulkeley's grub!"

Tubby paused, and his eyes opened wide as they fell upon an envelope lying in the roadway. That it had fallen from Jimmy Silver's pocket he hadn't much doubt—nor had he any doubts as to its contents.

The envelope was unsealed, and somewhat hesitatingly the over-curious fat youth drew out its contents; and a scared look overspread his face as he counted the five Treasury notes.

But he gasped aloud as he saw the accompanying cricket account.

"Why—what—what—my hat!" he murmured in disgust. "Then it's not for grub, after all! Fancy that! What a blessed sell! And after—Oh!"

Tubby Muffin fairly jumped as he became suddenly aware that he wasn't alone. Seated on a gate a few yards away were two distinctly horsey-looking gentlemen who had watched the little episode between Jimmy Silver and Tubby Muffin in great amusement. But when Tubby drew the five Treasury notes from the envelope, their amusement changed abruptly to looks of deepest interest.

As Tubby looked round, however, they descended from the gate and approached the startled junior.

Both the gentlemen were known by sight to Tubby Muffin.

One of them, whose outstanding features were a red nose and blue chin, was Mr. Joey Hook, bookmaker and cardsharp. The other was Joe, the potboy from the Bird-inland at Coombe—evidently out for his "half-day off."

And as Tubby recognised them, he gave a gasp of alarm, hurriedly slipped the Treasury notes and account back, and stuffed the envelope into his jacket pocket.

Mr. Hook and his friend did not, however, appear to notice the action. Indeed, their one concern and thought appeared to be for the welfare and comfort of Tubby Muffin.

Mr. Hook's manner was good-natured and considerate in the extreme as he dusted the fat junior down. His friend kindly picked up Tubby's cap, dusted it, and placed it gently on the astounded Tubby's head.

Then Mr. Hook, shaking his fist indignantly after the now distant figure of Jimmy Silver, turned an anxious face to Tubby Muffin.

"Shameful! Scandalous!" he ejaculated warmly. "To treat a young gent like you in that disgraceful manner! Excuse my anger, young sir, but it—it fair makes my blood boil the way that young scoundrel treated you. 'E jist missed a good 'iding bolting like that!"

Tubby frowned darkly. "Come to that, I—I'd have thrashed him myself, but—but the rotter boited!" he exclaimed valiantly. "Only—only wait until I get back to Rookwood! I—I'll be getting along now and wait for him—"

Mr. Hook shook his head kindly, but firmly. "I won't 'ear of it!" he said. "I won't 'ear of you trampin' all that way in your state. You're not fit! No—what you wants is rest and refreshments—to—to recuperate—that's the word! No; you're comin' with us now, to a place I knows of—a friend of mine's place—to 'ave a feed. An' after that you can come back with me and Joe in the trap to Rookwood."

And laying his hand on the astonished Tubby's shoulder, Mr. Joey Hook led him gently but firmly along the road.

Needless to say, the prospect appealed keenly to Tubby Muffin. It was very plain just then to Tubby that both Mr. Hook and his friend the potboy were dogs with bad names—disgracefully misjudged and misunderstood at Rookwood.

Tubby's fat face was very bright as Mr. Hook led the way through a wicket gate, and round the back of a house standing well back from the road, and half hidden by trees.

Under the shade of a tree in the garden were tables and chairs. And Joe and Tubby seated themselves, whilst Mr. Hook went indoors to arrange with his friend about the refreshments.

It was a pretty spot, and Tubby smiled with satisfaction as he looked from the shining river at the bottom of the garden across the lawn to the house. And then Tubby gave a start as his roving eyes fell upon rows of casks and stacks of bottle cases in the yard; while from an open French window came a sudden waft of stale beer and tobacco.

"I—I—I say," he stuttered aghast. "Wha—wha—what place is this? Wh—why, it's—a—a pub-public-house!"

"Course it is!" grinned Joe, highly amused. "The Jolly Fisherman, kept by a

friend o' Mr. Hook's. Why, what's up now?"

For Tubby had jumped to his feet and was blinking around in great alarm.

Tubby Muffin was not a very particular chap in most respects. But had he known that Mr. Hook's friend's "place" was nothing more nor less than a riverside public-house, he would certainly not have followed his kind benefactor so blindly.

"But—but—look here," stammered Tubby, after a pause, "I must be g-gug-going! I didn't know it was a beastly low p-pub—pub! I shall be s-sac-sacked if I'm caught here! Oh dear!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Joe the potboy. "What a nervous young gent you are! What 'arm is there in callin' 'ere for refreshments, eh? An' come to that, who's to see you—an' who's to know you're 'ere? Why, yer as safe an' sound in this garden as you'd be in your little bed up at the school, my son!"

Tubby didn't feel so sure about that—though it certainly was true that the garden was secluded. The high hedge well hid the garden from the view of any chance passers-by on the road. In fact, the only person who could possibly see the fat junior was old Bill Adams, the boatman, who was tinkering with his ancient motor-boat on the far side of the river. And even he could scarcely recognise anyone at that distance.

But even as Tubby stood hesitating, Mr. Hook bustled up bearing aloft a tray piled high with cakes and biscuits and bottles of lemonade. There were also glasses containing a slightly darker liquid on the tray—but evidently the contents of these were for Mr. Hook and his friend's consumption.

"There you are, my son!" said Mr. Hook heartily. "Pile in, and welcome! It's a pleasure to treat a young gent like you!"

And all Tubby Muffin's qualms and misgivings vanished. He piled in.

Tubby was hungry and thirsty, and it was a sight to see the way he shifted the good things Mr. Hook had so kindly provided. But evidently the sight, interesting as it was, bored the good-natured Mr. Hook, for he took a greasy pack of playing-cards from his pocket and began to shuffle them casually.

Tubby had just finished his fourth lemonade when he jumped as he became aware of the little pile of cards at his elbow.

"I—I say," he gasped, "wha—what's these for?"

Mr. Hook raised his eyebrows. "Only a little game—banker! Just to pass the time away," he explained affably.

"Sorry my friend's got no draughts or dominoes. Perhaps, though, you'd prefer nap, Master Muffin?"

"But—but—the fact is, I—I don't want to play!" explained Tubby, in alarm.

"Look here—you two play, and—and I'll—I'll watch. I'd much rather—really I would!"

Mr. Hook frowned.

"Come, come, Master Muffin!" he remonstrated, in a hurt tone. "You're surely not goin' to spoil the afternoon like that? I'm surprised at you bein' so unsofisticated. It's ungrateful—that's what it is—ungrateful!"

"But—but, I—I haven't any money—not of my own!" gasped Tubby. "Besides—"

Mr. Hook laughed heartily.

"Bless me, we'll soon put that right, if that's what's troubling you!" he smiled good-naturedly. "What's the matter with bits of paper—played with 'em many a time myself? All you got to do is sign 'em—and there you are! Not that you'll need 'em, o' course—I can't see a sharp young gent like you losin' at banker! Not likely! Why, as soon as I set eyes on you, I said to meself,

"Now, there's a born banker-player, if you like! No; don't you worry about that, Master Muffin!"

Tubby Muffin swelled visibly.

Next to his "tummy," his vanity was his tenderest spot. And there was certainly no harm in playing for fun with bits of paper—as far as he could see—especially if the other players played with cash!

So, deciding to take Mr. Hook's advice and not to worry about it, Tubby Muffin settled down to his first essay at banker under the exceedingly able tuition of Mr. Hook and Joe, the potboy.

With frequent pauses, whilst Mr. Hook made various pilgrimages to the house to refill glasses, the game proceeded merrily. And very soon Tubby himself began to think he was indeed a born banker-player, for quite a little pile of cash was accumulating on Tubby's side of the table.

Unfortunately, Tubby never dreamed that

it was just a little encouragement—sprats to catch whales, so to speak. And Tubby's disappointment was great when his luck began to turn and his pile of cash dwindled down gradually. But even when it was all gone the fat Classical did not worry, but plunged cheerfully and recklessly with the scraps of signed paper.

Tubby was quite enjoying his little flutter in fact. And he was more than sorry when Mr. Hook, who had been closely scanning the "scraps of paper," suddenly chuckled and gathered the cards.

"There, that'll about do for this afternoon!" he exclaimed somewhat thickly, winking solemnly at Joe. "I hope we'll 'ave more pleasant afternoons together, Master Muffin."

Mr. Hook rose as he spoke, swaying a little. And there was a gleam in his eyes that Tubby didn't like a bit. It struck Tubby quite suddenly then that the liquid refreshments his two new-found friends had been imbibing was something stronger than the lemonade he himself had partaken of.

Tubby blinked nervously at Mr. Hook.

"Ye-yes, rather!" he gasped, with a dismal attempt to look unconcerned. "I—I—I quite enjoyed the little flutter, you know. B-but—what about the trap? Hadn't we better be g-gug-going now?"

"What's that?" snapped Mr. Hook grimly. "Don't you be in such a 'urry, my lad! What about settling up—eh?"

Tubby fairly jumped at the sudden change of tone in the man's voice.

"What—what do you m-mean?" he stuttered.

"Ho, ho, ho! What do I mean, 'e's askin'!" grinned Mr. Hook sarcastically.

"I suppose we 'aven't been playing at banker—and I suppose you don't owe me a matter of five quid, young shaver?"

"F-five q-quid!" gasped Tubby Muffin, aghast. "But—we were only playin' for—fun! And—and, look here, I—I haven't any money at—at all!"

"Why, you young liar!" shouted Mr. Hook. "Didn't I see you with five quid in your 'ands only an hour ago? Now, look 'ere, me lad, I've got your IOUs for just five quid! An' you don't stir from 'ere until you've stumped up—see? So look slippy, or inter the river you goes—that's straight!"

Tubby Muffin, his fat knees almost knocking together with fright, stared at his nice, kind friends of an hour ago.

But, though a young rascal in most respects, Tubby Muffin had no intention of giving up five pounds that didn't belong to him—nor had he any desire to take an involuntary dip in the river.

So he did the best thing under the circumstances. He made a frenzied bolt for it. But, unfortunately, Mr. Hook and Joe had apparently anticipated such an intention.

Though they had no objection to Tubby going, they strongly objected to his taking the five pounds with him.

And barely had the unfortunate Tubby taken half a dozen steps, when he felt himself grabbed roughly and dung, yelling wildly, to the ground.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In the Hands of the Philistines.

WITHOUT the tremendous weight of the fat youth, Jimmy Silver soon made up for lost time, and rode into Letcham a little after four. He was whistling cheerily, as he dismounted outside Stubbins', the sports outfitters, and felt in his inside pocket for the envelope Bulkeley had given him. Then quite suddenly his whistling ceased, and with rapidly growing alarm he hurriedly went through his pockets.

But from each pocket in turn his hand came empty away. The envelope containing the five pounds and account Bulkeley had entrusted to his care had disappeared.

"My only hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver, in blank dismay. "Must have dropped out when I was rotting with that fat ass, Tubby Muffin. Oh crumbs!"

In a far from happy mood Jimmy Silver mounted his machine again. There was nothing else for it but to return the way he had come and search for the missing envelope.

At top speed Jimmy drove the pedals round, his eyes on the alert for anything white lying in the roadway. But the miles flew by, and Jimmy reached the scene of his farewell encounter with Tubby Muffin

4 Tell all your pals that "The League of Seven!" appears next week!

without a sign of the lost envelope. Dismounting, Jimmy began to search the road eagerly, but to no purpose, and his face was very sombre as he gave it up at last.

Pushing his bike, Jimmy Silver was walking moodily away from the spot towards Rookwood, scanning the road keenly as he went, when he gave a jump.

From beyond the high hedge on his left came a sudden wailing, followed by a yell for help in the unmistakable tones of Tubby Muffin. It was nothing new to hear wails of woe and yells for help from the Falstaff of Rookwood; and Jimmy Silver grinned as he moved towards the hedge.

Then suddenly he halted as if transfixed. For the sounds of distress were proceeding from the garden in the rear of a disreputable riverside inn—a place with an unsavoury reputation, and strictly out of bounds to all Rookwood.

"M-my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver agast. "The silly, mad fool! What blessed trouble has that senseless idiot got himself into now?"

And leaning his bike against the hedge, he passed through the wicket-gate to investigate.

Entering the garden, he stared in astonishment at the scene before him. Struggling in the grip of Mr. Joey Hook and the pot-boy from the Bird-in-Hand, at Coombe, and yelling shrilly, was Tubby Muffin—which was in itself enough to astonish Jimmy Silver. When the late captain of the Classical Fourth saw the table with its tell-tale bottles, glasses, and cards, he fairly gasped in alarm.

Jimmy Silver, however, lost no time in looking around. A Rookwood fellow was in danger, and it was up to him to go to the rescue, whatever the circumstances. With a shout of anger he hurled himself at the burly figure of Joey Hook, and what happened after that, even Jimmy himself has no clear recollection.

Mr. Hook turned with a snarl, and grappled with him savagely. Joe, the pot-boy, also released the yelling Tubby on realising that the newcomer was a factor to be reckoned with. Together, full-grown men, they gave the junior captain of the Fourth at Rookwood a very rough time. For all that, Jimmy Silver fought strenuously, and had the men only fought fair, the sturdy junior would have more than held his own. But fair play had never been a jewel admired by the two shady scoundrels. Far from sober, they fought and kicked like savages.

Tubby Muffin, too scared to move, stood watching helplessly as the struggling figures lurched this way and that amid a trampling of feet and sundry gasps and much strong language.

There was a crash and a tinkle of breaking glass as the trio lurched against the table, upsetting that and the contents over the combatants. Dazed by the fall, Jimmy Silver was sitting helpless amid the ruins.

And a moment later he was being roughly dragged towards the river at the bottom of the garden. As he realised the ruffians' intention, he began to struggle frenziedly.

But he was still dazed, and, despite his struggles, he felt himself lifted and swung through the air.

Splash!

A sudden chill shot through the junior as he soured under. But almost at the same instant his head struck something with tremendous force, and for the moment the world seemed to end in a blaze of light to Jimmy Silver.

For what seemed a lifetime, Jimmy Silver wallowed mechanically in four feet of water—though in reality it was but a few seconds. Then he found his feet, and slowly and dazedly staggered out and collapsed in a limp heap on the soft mud, and lay there flat, his mind a welter of confused emotions.

For a full minute he lay motionless. He heard as in a dream the shrill yelling of Tubby Muffin. Then came a confused vision of the sprawling arms and legs of the fat Classical, as he whirled overhead and fell with a tremendous splash into the deeper water far out.

"Help! Silver, oh, help!"

As from afar, Jimmy Silver heard Tubby's terrified shriek. Dazedly and weakly, he raised himself on one elbow, a wave of giddiness sweeping over him as he did so, and stared dully and helplessly at Tubby's white, fear-stricken face as it appeared above the surface of the water.

Then, in a dim sort of way, Jimmy Silver

realised that Tubby could not swim—was, in fact, drowning. But he still stared, helpless and incapable of movement.

But other help was at hand. There came a sudden shouting, and the figures of Bulkeley and Neville appeared tearing down the garden. A splash, and Bulkeley was ploughing his way with vigorous strokes towards the drowning junior. Almost at the same moment came the chug-chugging of a motor, and old Bill Adams' ancient motor-boat was lumbering across from the far side of the river.

But Bulkeley's grasp was already on the drowning junior. As if he were watching the players on a cinema screen, Jimmy Silver saw Bulkeley, swimming stoutly, making for the bank, and saw Neville plunge into the shallows and help the Sixth-Former ashore with his burden.

And then, quite abruptly, as if awaking from a trance, Jimmy Silver came back to the world. His brain cleared, and the whole horrible feeling left him as quickly as it had come. But he was still sick and giddy, and his face was pale and drawn as he staggered to his feet, and slowly approached the two seniors as they laid the sodden form of Tubby Muffin on the grass.

"Is—is he all right?" he asked faintly, looking down at the limp figure on the grass. Bulkeley and Neville looked up, and Jimmy Silver's face went whiter still at the scorn and contempt in their glances.

"He's coming to," said Bulkeley harshly. "He'll be all right in a minute, small thanks to you, you coward, Silver!"

There was a wealth of scorn in Bulkeley's tone, and the junior staggered back with white-set face. Then suddenly the meaning of it flashed upon him. They had not seen the whole of the wretched business, and were calling him a coward. In their eyes, he had lain there watching Tubby drowning without raising a hand to help.

"I—I—I—"

Jimmy Silver stammered and stopped, flushing furiously. It struck him then what a lame excuse—that a feeble defence, to say that he had struck his head, and that he had been physically incapable of going to Tubby's rescue.

And yet it was true. But even as he stood haltingly, with crimson face, Bulkeley turned his back abruptly as the motor-boat stopped about a couple of yards from the bank, and the old boatman, his face stern and concerned, stood up.

"Is the youngster safe—all right?" he called out. "I saw the young gent go in, but I couldn't get the old tub to go in."

"Yes, thank Heaven!" said Bulkeley. "He'll be himself soon."

Tubby Muffin was, indeed, rapidly regaining consciousness. His face was still white and drawn; but he was stirring a little, and a trace of colour was visible in the podgy cheeks.

As they waited silently, Bulkeley's eyes roved idly round the garden. Joey Hook and Joe, the pot-boy, were nowhere in sight; they had, like the cowardly scoundrels they were, bolted on the approach of the seniors. In the billiard-room window could be seen the frightened face of the innkeeper, watching the group in the garden in apprehensive alarm.

Then Bulkeley's face set grimly as his eyes rested on the overturned table under the trees, with the grass all around strewn with broken glass and playing-cards, a scene that to Bulkeley told its own disgraceful story.

"Oh! Ah! Ow!"

Bulkeley dropped on his knees beside Tubby Muffin as the fat Classical gave a gasping sigh and opened his eyes. He blinked at the group dazedly for a moment.

"Ow! Oh dear!" he gasped faintly. "Wh—where am I? Am I drowned?"

"You're all right, Muffin," said Bulkeley quietly. "Just keep quiet for a minute until you feel better."

Tubby Muffin sat up in the grass, looking pale and dazed.

"But—but I remember now. Tho—those brutes pitched me in! D—did you see them? I jolly near drowned!" he gasped. "I—I say, who—who pulled me out?"

"Bulkeley!" said Neville quietly. "It was Bulkeley yanked you out, Muffin!"

Tubby Muffin grunted.

"I—I say, I—I feel rotten, and awfully wet, you know!" groaned Tubby peevishly. "I—I say, Bulkeley, you might help a fellow up, instead of standing there staring. I've been jolly near drowned, an' a lot you seem to care!"

Bulkeley bent down and helped the fat Classical to his feet without a word. It was very evident that Bulkeley stood in no danger of becoming embarrassed by a touching scene of rescued thanking rescuer.

But though it was abundantly plain that Tubby had really come to himself spiritually, so to speak, it was very evident that he was far from being himself physically. He swayed dizzily in the captain's strong grasp, and was plainly not fit to stand, much less walk.

"Better get him to the school at once," said Bulkeley, with a concerned glance at Tubby. "But how on earth are we going to do it?"

"Better carry him to the boat, an' I'll run him down to the school boathouse," suggested Bill Adams. "You'll have to wade out with him, though. There's some old piles hereabouts, and I can't get the boat any nearer in. But it's only about four foot deep at most."

"Good—and thanks!" said Bulkeley, his face clearing. "That will simplify matters. We'll cycle back, and wait for you at the boathouse. Then we can take him to the sauney. He looks jolly bad!"

Tubby Muffin really did look ill, and he was groaning dismally as Bulkeley and Neville waded out with him and laid him in the bottom of the boat. Then Bulkeley splashed his way back to Jimmy Silver, his face dark and ominous.

"Silver!" he exclaimed harshly. "I will not ask you what all this means—that," went on Bulkeley, with a nod of disgust towards the overturned table, "tells its own story. You had better go back in the boat with Muffin now. You will have every chance to explain to the Head later on."

"But—but my bike's—"

"Never mind your bike!" rapped out Bulkeley. "We'll see to that. Get out to that boat at once!"

Jimmy Silver turned slowly, and, with his face clouded and miserable, splashed to the waiting boat and boarded it. Then Bill Adams started the engine, and a moment later the boat moved out into mid-stream.

The whole business seemed like some horrible nightmare to Jimmy Silver just then. His head was aching abominably, and he could not think clearly. In fact, it had all happened so quickly that he had hardly had time to think at all up to now.

But, unfortunately, it was real enough. Bulkeley's last words told him plainly that not only did they regard him as a sheer funk, but as a pub-haunting blackguard as well.

And Jimmy Silver was wondering dismally and confusedly what the outcome of it all would be as he crouched, wet and dispirited, by the side of Tubby Muffin in the front of the boat.

"Ow! Oh dear I do feel awful! I—I say, Jimmy. I—I think I'm going to have pneumonia, or appendicitis, or something! I'm awfully wet, too!"

Jimmy Silver pulled himself together with an effort to banish his worrying thoughts and forebodings as the gasping wail of Tubby Muffin broke on his reflections.

"I—I—I say, Jimmy," went on Tubby feebly, "I—I'm sure I'm going to die—I'm soaked through, you know! But—but look here. What's Bulkeley going to d—do?"

Tubby's fat face was full of alarm. It was plain to Jimmy Silver that the fat youth was feeling ill; but it was also very plain that he was not seriously ill—at least, not too ill to think over things, and to worry about saving his own precious skin.

"Never mind Bulkeley, Tubby," said Jimmy rather kindly. "Just lie down and don't worry, there's a good chap!"

"But—but, I say, there'll be an awful row about this! Oh dear, what am I to do? I shall be fl—fogged, and sa—sacked! Bulkeley saw those cards and things, and—and that beast, Joey Hook! He'll think I was playing—playing cards with those cads! But—but, of course, I wasn't—certainly not, Silver!"

"Then that's all right, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "Don't you worry now about the cards—just lie down and be quiet."

But Tubby, like Rachael of old, refused to be comforted.

"But—but you won't t—tell anyone that I was there—that I was in the garden?" spluttered Tubby fearfully.

"I shall tell the truth!" exclaimed Jimmy quietly. "But I won't give you away, if that's what's worrying you, Tubby."

"You—you mean you won't mention my

Next Week's Story of Jimmy Silver & Co. is GREAT!

name—won't say anything about me at all?" gasped Tubby, in a relieved tone.

Jimmy Silver hesitated. Not only did Tubby look wretched, but he also looked feverish and ill. And all Jimmy was concerned about was to pacify his excitement, and to persuade him to lie down.

"No!" he said briefly, at last.
"You—you won't mention my name—honour bright?"
"On my honour!" said Jimmy, with a smile.

Tubby Muffin lay down again with a deep gasp of satisfaction, and for the remainder of that journey to Rookwood was silent.

But Jimmy Silver little dreamed what the consequences to himself were to be for that promise so lightly given.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The White Feather!

"RATS!"

"Rot!"
"Bunkum!"
"Bosh!"

"Tell that to the marines!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I tell you it's true!" howled Peele angrily. "Both Gower and myself were standing by the gates when they arrived, wet through and carrying Muffin. And we heard Bulkeley tell Greely all about it, and he ordered 'em to take Tubby to the sanny!"

"Wha—what!"
"Perhaps you'll believe us now!" sneered Gower spitefully. "Fancy Jimmy Silver showing the white feather, eh? My hat! Only what one can expect, though! Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell's eyes flashed and he clenched his fists.

"No need to get ratty, Lovell," growled Gower, somewhat nervously. "It's true enough—every word of it! And you'll know soon enough!"

"And here's Silver now," announced Peele triumphantly. "Ask him yourselves! Anyway, he looked jolly sick, I can tell you, when Bulkeley was telling old Greely about it all at the gates!"

There was a stir of interest among the group at the foot of the Classical steps, as Jimmy Silver was seen approaching from the direction of the sanny.

Raby, Newcome, Putty Grace, and, in fact, most of the juniors were grinning. Jimmy Silver, they knew, would soon give the lie to the wonderful yarn, of course!

But the amused grins faded as Jimmy Silver came nearer, and they noted his bedraggled appearance and downcast face.

"I—I say," muttered Mornington of the Fourth slowly. "It's all rot, of course, but—but he looks pretty sick, and—well, hang it all, there must be something in the yarn—something's happened, anyway!"

Jimmy Silver came up slowly and his face crimsoned as his eyes encountered the curious glances. Lovell stepped forward, his face set and grim.

"I—I—I say, Jimmy, old man!" he exclaimed, with a nervous laugh. "Look here! Is—is it true that Tubby's been nearly drowned?"

"Yes!" replied Jimmy quietly.

"B-but look here," stammered Lovell. "There's a wonderful yarn going round. They—they say that Tubby was drowning, and you—you lay in the grass without raising a hand to help him. Silly rot, of course. And—"

Lovell stopped and stared. He had half hoped, half expected a hearty laugh—or at least a prompt denial for answer. But to his astonishment and alarm there was neither. But his chum's face was set and wretched.

"I—I—I—" Jimmy Silver stammered and stopped, conscious that all eyes were fixed upon him curiously.

"By gad!" ejaculated Mornington of the Fourth.

"Sure—surely it can't be true, Jimmy?" muttered Lovell aghast.

"It—it's true enough," said Jimmy Silver slowly. "But—but—"

"Silver!"
Across from the direction of the sanny came Bulkeley, his clothes sodden, and his boots squeaking dismally. The astounded juniors eyed him expectantly as he came up.

But when he saw Silver his face set grimly and he stopped at once.

"Silver, one moment! It has just struck me!" began the captain harshly. "I gave you an envelope this afternoon to take to Stubbins' in Latcham. Did you deliver it?"

"I—I—I—" "Well?" snapped Bulkeley suspiciously. "I—I've lost it!" faltered Jimmy Silver slowly.

"You've lost it?"

"Yes, Bulkeley," said Silver wretchedly. "I—I must have dropped it out of my pocket, for it was gone when I reached Latcham. I was searching for it when I heard—heard—"

Jimmy Silver's words ceased as he remembered his promise to Tubby Muffin. And it was then for the first time that the junior realised what a serious position he was in. How on earth could he explain or defend himself without bringing the fat Classical into the story at every turn?

In tense silence Bulkeley waited, and Silver's face paled as he read the frank disbelief in Bulkeley's glance.

"Very well!" exclaimed Bulkeley at last. "I will see you later about this matter, Silver. Cut off now and get changed! You will be required very soon in Dr. Chisholm's study, I fancy. So hold yourself in readiness."

Without a word Jimmy Silver mounted the steps and passed indoors. Bulkeley, without a glance at the group of astounded juniors, followed, his brow dark and clouded.

For fully a minute the excited Fourth-Formers blinked at each other in silence. Then an excited buzz broke out.

"Well, my only hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Would you believe it!" gasped Conroy in sheer amazement.

"Blessed if I believe it even now, by gad!" drawled Morny thoughtfully. "Jimmy Silver a blessed funk! No—hang it if I do! There's a mistake somewhere!"

"But he admits it himself," sneered Peele. "And it's jolly plain Bulkeley thinks so, too. He spoke to him like—like—"

"Like talkin' to a dog, old bean," grinned Adolphus Smythe of the Shell. "My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

But there was no answering laugh—unless the sniggers of Gower and Peele could have been called laughs. Most of the fellows—Classicals and Moderns alike—were looking grave and concerned. Silver's extraordinary lapse—if lapse it could be—was no laughing matter to them.

"Let's get out of this before I slay someone!" groaned Lovell irritably. "What on earth can have come over Jimmy. He must be potty! Hang it all, we know jolly well he couldn't play the funk! But—"

"It beats me altogether!" exclaimed Raby uncomfortably. "Besides, there's something else behind it all. What did old Bulkeley mean about that envelope business? It's jolly queer!"

"It's—it's rotten!" muttered Arthur Newcome miserably.

"Rotten isn't the word for it," snapped Lovell. "But come up to the study for goodness' sake, or I shall bust. We'll wait for Jimmy and have the thing out."

And Arthur Edward Lovell led the way gloomily towards the end study where the three chums discussed the astounding news almost in whispers, as they waited for Jimmy Silver. He appeared presently, tubbed and changed. But his expression was still gloomy in the extreme.

"Look here, Silver! It can't be true—what you admitted just now. Hang it all, what's it all mean?"

"It's true enough, Lovell. I—I did lie watching Tubby Muffin drowning! But—but—"

"Well?" queried Lovell wonderingly.

Jimmy Silver pulled himself together with an effort.

"The fact is, you chaps," he went on quietly, "I—I've never been given a chance to defend myself yet—to tell the whole story. Before Tubby went in I was pitched in, and—and I only fell into shallow water and must have hit my head against a submerged log of wood or something. Anyway, it was a tidy old jar—fairly knocked me silly. I can't understand it myself. I wasn't exactly unconscious, and I could see Tubby was drowning. And yet I couldn't have raised a hand to help him if—"

Jimmy Silver stammered and stopped, fully conscious that his words sounded halting and weak. But Lovell's face wore a relieved expression.

"Look here, Jimmy," he ejaculated warmly. "I don't jolly well pretend to understand it. It's all jolly mysterious. But you're our pal, an' we know you better than anyone else. And if you give us your word that you didn't funk—didn't play the coward, then I, for one, am going to believe you. And hang everyone else!"

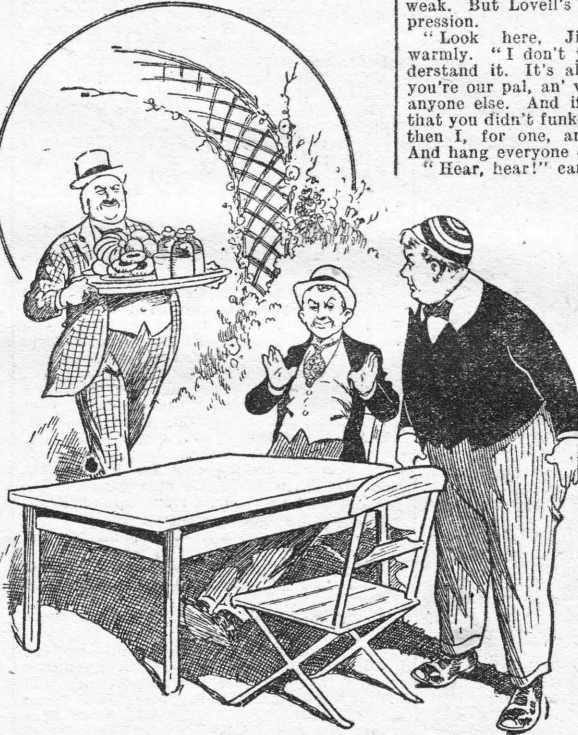
"Hear, hear!" came from Raby and Newcome promptly and enthusiastically.

Jimmy Silver's face cleared a little.

"Thanks, you fellows! I didn't funk it! And you chaps know jolly well I'd have gone to help Tubby like a shot if I could! But—but—that's not all!"

"Eh?" inquired his friends.

"I—I can't explain fully," muttered Jimmy slowly. "I—I've given my word not to do so. But the whole business happened in the garden of the Jolly Fisherman near the cross-roads leading to Middlewood and Latcham. And Bulkeley and Neville think I was pub-hunting and brawling with Joey Hook an' that cad Joe, the potman from the Bird-in-Hand in Coombe. It was those two who pitched Tubby and myself into the river. Not only that, but—but Bulkeley gave me five pounds to pay a cricket account in Latcham. And—"



FEEDING THE BIRD BEFORE PLUCKING! Mr. Hook bustled up, bearing aloft a tray piled high with cakes and biscuits and bottles of lemonade. "There you are, my son!" he said heartily, "Pile in, and welcome!" Tubby Muffin hesitated no longer. (See Chapter 2.)

Too Much Smoke—That is what the Knuts of Rookwood Think Next Week!

and I've lost the money. You chaps heard him ask me about it. Bulkeley thinks I've pinched it to play cards with—I'm certain he does!"

There was an astounded silence as Jimmy finished.

Then Lovell gave vent to a long whistle of amazement.

"My only hat, Jimmy!" he gasped. "You've fairly been having an afternoon out. All the same it's frightfully serious! But—but surely you can explain—"

Lovell's words ceased as a sharp rap sounded at the door, and Bulkeley entered. He shot a glance of hearty contempt at Jimmy Silver.

"Silver, the Head wants you in his study! Follow me at once!" he exclaimed, in an ominous tone.

And Jimmy Silver gave his chums a miserable glance, and followed the captain of Rookwood out of the room.

Without a doubt Bulkeley had acquainted Dr. Chisholm with the facts, as far as he knew them. And plainly it was the captain's duty to do so.

But Jimmy Silver wondered vaguely as he followed Bulkeley's stalwart figure how he was going to explain his position, how he was going to defend himself without giving Tubby Muffin away.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

At the Bar of Justice I

"COME in!"

Dr. Chisholm's brow was dark as Bulkeley of the Sixth entered the sacred study of the headmaster of Rookwood with Jimmy Silver. And there was more than a trace of anger in the Head's keen glance as it rested on the junior's downcast face.

"Silver," began the Head sternly, "doubtless you are fully aware why I have sent for you. Bulkeley has brought to me a very disquieting and discreditable report regarding your conduct this afternoon, a report that is as astounding as it is distasteful!"

The Head paused, and Jimmy Silver's face crimsoned under his piercing gaze.

"The charge," "owardice, happily, does not come within my province," proceeded the Head quietly. "I have no power, nor do I wish to judge any boy's conduct in that respect. That matter must be left to your own conscience, Silver. But—"

"I am not a coward, sir!" muttered the junior through clenched teeth. "Bulkeley has only told you one half of the story. I have not had a fair chance to—"

"Silence, Silver!" snapped Dr. Chisholm angrily. "I do not wish to—"

"But it's not fair, sir," protested Jimmy Silver hotly. "Everyone is calling me a coward. They say I watched Muffin drowning without moving to help—"

"That is perfectly true, sir!" exclaimed Bulkeley grimly. "Both Neville and myself saw—"

"It is true enough, but not all the truth!" broke in the junior passionately. "Bulkeley saw me lying there; but he did not know that I had been thrown into the river, that I was injured, and unable to go to Muffin's help!"

"I certainly did not know that, Silver," ejaculated Bulkeley, in surprise, "or I should certainly have made sure of the facts before making the matter public. And in those circumstances I think it only right that the facts should be heard."

Dr. Chisholm frowned thoughtfully, and drummed his fingers on the table before him.

"Very well, Silver, I will hear what you have to say," he said quietly.

And in low tones Silver told his story, only relating the happenings from the time he was flung into the water to his boarding the motor-boat. And the Head's brow darkened as the junior spoke of Joey Hook and his companions. When he had finished, however, the Head was eyeing him thoughtfully.

"I am strongly inclined, Bulkeley, to believe this boy's statement. He is certainly entitled to be given the benefit of the doubt. Under the exceptional circumstances it would be unjust to do otherwise. But—"

Dr. Chisholm's voice became harsh as he turned a glance like steel upon the junior.

"But," he proceeded grimly, "though that disposes of the charge of cowardice in so far as I am concerned, it is my intention to subject the further disgraceful charges

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brought against you in the strictest investigations. Silver," went on the Head, with a note of anger in his tone, "you have been found, under the most shameful circumstances, on the premises of a disreputable inn strictly out of bounds to Rookwood boys. That in itself would fully justify me in instantly expelling you. To my mind," went on the Head, "it seems too amazing and incomprehensible that any boy of this school—much less a junior—can have laid himself open to such grave charges. And I cannot, and will not, believe it possible without the strongest proofs of guilt. I intend, therefore, to give you every chance to defend yourself, Silver. And now what have you to say?"

"I—I—I—"

"Well!" said Dr. Chisholm, as the junior stammered helplessly.

"I cannot explain, sir," exclaimed Jimmy Silver stoutly, pulling himself together with an effort. "But I have done nothing that I am ashamed of!"

The Head's face darkened with anger.

"Does that mean, Silver, that you actually refuse to explain?" he thundered.

No answer.

"Then there is only one construction that I can place on your silence, unless—unless, possibly, you are keeping silent from a desire to shield someone else, from a foolish, misguided sense of schoolboy honour. If that is so, Silver, let me warn you as to the seriousness of your position. Unless you can satisfactorily explain your conduct, I shall have no other course than to expel you with ignominy. Now will you answer me?"

Silence, during which the Head's brow grew darker and darker.

"Very well, then, Silver," said Dr. Chisholm, in a determined tone. "As you still persist in this foolish refusal to speak, I will not, for the moment, question you further on these charges. There is, however, one other matter—a very grave matter indeed, that I hesitate to bring against you, but which certainly requires some explaining by you. Bulkeley informs me that he gave you the sum of five pounds to pay an account in Latcham. But I understand," added the Head grimly, "that you claim to have lost the money. Is that so, Silver?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then cannot you see, boy, that under the circumstances under which you were found in these places you in a very grave position—that you are responsible, and must give a satisfactory account of the money?"

Jimmy Silver raised his head and met the Head's keen gaze unflinchingly.

"I understand fully, sir!" he exclaimed somewhat bitterly. "But it is the truth! I did lose the money! It was while searching the spot where I thought I had dropped the envelope that I heard—heard—"

"Yes, Silver?" said the Head testily.

"Proceed!"

"I—I—that is all I can say, sir!" stammered the junior. "But I am speaking the truth. I have lost the money, and not used it as you think, sir!"

"As I think!" repeated Dr. Chisholm angrily. "I have not suggested in any way what I think about the matter, Silver. You state you have lost the money, and there is not an atom of evidence to the contrary. But this foolish, obstinate silence must end, Silver. I demand here and now that you give a full and accurate account of your movements this afternoon. Otherwise—"

The Head paused meaningly, and his lips set in a determined line. Jimmy Silver's lips were also compressed and his head downcast. He knew that the eyes of both the Head and the astonished captain of Rookwood were fixed upon him acutely.

"I am waiting, Silver!" thundered Dr. Chisholm.

"I—I'm sorry, sir! But—but I cannot explain further!" muttered the junior miserably.

"Very well, Silver! I have given you—and still intend to give you every opportunity of defending yourself. To this end I will give you until six o'clock to-morrow evening to think over the matter. By that time your companion in yesterday's affair, Muffin, will be discharged from the sanatorium, when I hope to get the truth of this astounding business. Should, however, nothing come to light in extenuation of your conduct, or should you still persist in this foolish silence," went on the Head in cold, deliberate tones, "you will be expelled from Rookwood! You may go!"

In grim silence Jimmy Silver turned and

left the room, and the door closed behind him.

And that evening all Rookwood was in a buzz of excitement, and the astounding affair was on every tongue. It was soon known that Jimmy Silver was practically under sentence of expulsion, and the news was discussed by all the excited juniors, gravely and volubly.

And Jimmy Silver found himself under a cloud, and treated to the "marble eye" on all sides. The accusation of cowardice—perhaps the most heinous offence in a school-boy's eyes—was in itself enough to earn him the contempt of his schoolfellows.

For Jimmy Silver's strenuous denials of guilt counted for nothing against the evidence of Bulkeley and Neville of the Sixth. And even his own chums of the end study eyed him oddly, though they stood by him loyally, and vainly tried to hide their inward uneasiness as Jimmy persisted in his unaccountable silence.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Tubby Explains!

"TUBBY—I say, Tubby Muffin!"

Jimmy Silver called out eagerly as the fat figure of the Falstaff of Rookwood slowly descended the sanatorium steps. It had been known to all and sundry that Tubby would be present in class that morning. And Jimmy Silver, long before the rest of the Fourth had finished breakfast, was hovering round the sanny with the intention of questioning the fat junior at the earliest possible moment.

Tubby's face was still pale. And he blinked nervously and apprehensively at Jimmy Silver as that junior approached him. "Glad to see you, Tubby!" said Jimmy sincerely. "Feeling better now?"

"I—I—I'm all right now," stammered Tubby uneasily. "I—I—I say! I—I—I'm in rather a hurry, you know! I shall miss breakfast if—"

"Just a moment, Tubby," exclaimed Jimmy Silver, laying a hand on the fat youth's shoulder. "I'm sorry to worry you just now, but—but it's frightfully serious. It's about that five pounds you saw Bulkeley give to me. Look—"

"I—I say, you know. I shall miss my breakfast!" gasped the fat junior, in alarm. "Besides, I know nothing about Bulkeley's five pounds—absolutely nothing! Never even knew you had the five quid, in fact, Jimmy Silver!"

"What?"

"Come to that, it's no business of mine, either, Jimmy Silver, if you did drop the five quid on the Latcham Road—jolly careless of you, I think!" proceeded Tubby, with great dignity. "And I decline—"

"Then you do know something about it?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver eagerly.

"Certainly not, Silver!" said Tubby, in great alarm. "And I decline to discuss the matter! I shall be late—"

"But—"

"Look here, Silver," said Tubby loftily. "Once and for all, I decline to discuss this matter further with you. If you think I know anything about Bulkeley's five pounds, you're jolly well mistaken! And, as for playing banker with the cash, I'd never dream of such a thing. Certainly not! In fact, even when Joey Hook threatened to pitch me into the river, I refused stoutly to pay up out of Bulkeley's money. I was jolly plucky about that, I think. I told him straight the five pounds wasn't mine, and—I mean—that is to say, I—I—I know nothing about the cash—absolutely nothing!"

stammered Tubby hastily. "So now let me go! I shall jolly well miss my breakfast!"

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"Do you actually mean to say, Muffin, that—that you've been playing rotten cards with Bulkeley's five pounds?" he ejaculated, tightening his grip on the fat youth's shoulder.

"Nunno! Certainly not! Not a bit of it, Silver!" gasped Tubby indignantly. "Haven't I jolly well told you I didn't play with the money? You surely don't doubt my word, Jimmy Silver? I was too jolly sharp for that beast Joey Hook. I can tell you! In fact, I had it in my pocket even when I was pitched into—into—I mean—that is to say—I mean—to say when I didn't—I mean, I never had the money at all, of course! I—I—I—"

Tubby floundered helplessly. Even the fat, obtuse mind of Tubby Muffin grasped the

fact that he had given himself hopelessly away. But that fact did not worry Tubby for long—not nearly so much as the fear of missing breakfast. Tubby had already had one breakfast in the sanny. But illness had by no means impaired his appetite, and Tubby was quite ready for another.

"Look—look here, Jimmy!" he spluttered peevishly. "I want my breakfast. Let me go now! Hang Bulkeley's five quid! I'm jolly hungry!"

"Just wait a minute, Muffin!" exclaimed Jimmy grimly. "You've practically admitted you had the money all the time. And—"

Tubby jumped. "I didn't! I wasn't! I haven't!" he spluttered frantically. "I've never seen it. In fact, I know nothing about it. Besides, it ain't my fault if the blessed envelope fell out of my pocket. Why, it may even now be lying in Bill Adams' old tub. Anyway, it wasn't in my pocket when I came to look in the sanny, so it must be. You can't blame me for that! You'll admit that yourself, Jim—"

Tubby broke off, and the ex-junior captain of the Fourth almost gasped aloud with relief. There were often golden grains of truth to be found in Tubby Muffin's romances. And Jimmy really felt he had found one at last.

"Here, I say!" gasped Tubby, as Jimmy Silver was turning away with gleaming eyes. "You w-won't tell?"

"I'm going up the river to search Bill Adams' motor-boat," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

And in blank amazement the fat Classical watched Jimmy Silver as he strode across the quad and vanished through the gates. Then, suddenly remembering breakfast, Tubby hurried indoors.

For the next hour, Tubby was very busy indeed—with his chin. The first half-hour he spent eating, and the next half-hour talking—two chin exercises in which Tubby Muffin excelled. And for once the fat youth had someone ready and eager to listen to him.

Indeed, Reginald Muffin was just then the cynosure of all eyes. For that half-hour Tubby fairly revelled and basked in the limelight. And he was swelling with importance and smiling brightly with smug satisfaction as he entered the Fourth Form-room that morning. But, unfortunately for Tubby Muffin, this happy state of affairs did not last long. Barely had the Fourth taken their seats when Bulkeley of the Sixth entered. And there was a curious look on Bulkeley's face as he approached Mr. Bootles.

"Dr. Chisholm wishes to see Silver and Muffin in his study immediately, sir," he exclaimed quietly.

Mr. Bootles looked surprised. "Ah! H'm! Certainly Bulkeley!" he exclaimed mildly, turning to the class. "Silver—Muffin, you will follow Bulk—Bless my soul! Where is Silver?"

Mr. Bootles blinked around in astonishment on realising that Silver was not present. Tubby Muffin, however, though the summons to visit the Head had alarmed him considerably, did not intend to miss this opportunity of airing his knowledge.

"Ple-please, sir, I know where Silver is!" he gasped breathlessly. "He's gone up the river, sir—fancy that!"

"Bless my soul! This is most unusual—what—what!" gasped Mr. Bootles. "However, Muffin, you will follow Bulkeley to Dr. Chisholm's study, and I will send Silver immediately on his return, Bulkeley."

And not looking at all happy, Tubby Muffin rose reluctantly from his seat and rolled after Bulkeley to the Head's study.

But he looked simply terrified, and his knees almost knocked together with fright when he entered that sacred apartment a moment later.

For Dr. Chisholm was not alone. Seated on the extreme edge of a chair, and looking exceedingly uncomfortable, was old Bill Adams, the boatman.

"Muffin," said the Head gravely, after Bulkeley had explained Jimmy Silver's absence. "I have sent for you in connection with that affair up the river yesterday. This gentleman is Mr. Adams, who claims to have witnessed the whole occurrence from the far side of the river. In fact, Muffin," went on the Head grimly, "Mr. Adams has told me an astounding story."

Tubby Muffin's podgy face paled visibly. "H-ha-ha he, s-sir?" he stammered.



THROWN IN, AND POWERLESS TO HELP! As Jimmy Silver lay motionless in the mud, his mind a welter of confused emotions, he had a vision of the sprawling arms and legs of Tubby Muffin. The fat Classical whirled overhead and fell with a tremendous splash into the deep water.

(See Chapter 3.)

"Yes, he has, Muffin!" snapped Dr. Chisholm. "And as his story concerns you—or, at least, a boy who answers exactly to your description—I am going to ask you a few questions which I require answering carefully and truthfully. First of all, Muffin, have you seen or have you any knowledge of that?"

Dr. Chisholm, as he spoke, laid the envelope Silver had lost, and he had found—and lost again. In fact, it was the envelope containing Bulkeley's five pounds.

"No-o-no, sir," gasped Tubby in alarm. "You've never seen this before?" exclaimed the Head.

"N-no, sir—never! Certainly not! Not at all, sir!" gasped Tubby hurriedly. "I know nothing about Bulkeley's five pounds. I'm as innocent as a baby, in fact, sir! And if—if Silver tells you I found it on the road outside the Jolly Fisherman, then he's telling wicked untruths, sir. Because I didn't! And as for playing cards with Joey Hook—why, I'd never even dream of such a thing! In fact, I wasn't near the Jolly Fisherman yesterday afternoon—not within miles of the place. You—you can ask Jimmy Silver, sir—he'll tell you I wasn't—he promised me he would, anyway."

"Muffin!" said Dr. Chisholm, in a dangerous voice. "You are telling deliberate untruths, and are the most stupid, foolish boy I have ever dealt with. This envelope containing five pounds which you disclaim all knowledge of, was found by Mr. Adams in his boat, and he has been kind enough to bring it back, with the suggestion that it had fallen from your pocket as you lay in the boat yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, s-sir!" gasped Tubby.

"Also," went on the Head grimly, "Mr. Adams, when asking after your condition, happened also to ask about Silver, of your Form, and while doing so dropped several hints which led me to question him, when he was good enough to relate what I firmly believe are facts that will lead to this astounding affair being cleared up. He states that he saw you, first of all, consorting with those two unspeakable scoundrels, and that

Silver apparently only entered the precincts of that inn to come to your help. And—"

"D-d—does he, really?" stammered Tubby, in a shocked voice. "Oh, my! What wicked untruths! Fancy tha—"

"Silence, Muffin!" thundered Dr. Chisholm. "I may add that I place every reliance on Mr. Adams' story. There are, however, several points that only you can clear up. Muffin, Now" went on the Head grimly, picking up a cane from the table, "unless you at once confess to your share in yesterday's happenings, Muffin, I shall not only fog you, but expel you immediately from Rookwood. But I demand the truth. At the slightest suggestion of a falsehood, Muffin, I shall—"

The hapless Tubby shivered apprehensively as the Head swished the cane suggestively. And after that it did not take Tubby Muffin long to arrive at a decision.

He decided to confess! And for once Tubby Muffin told the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!

But to Tubby Muffin's great astonishment and relief, Dr. Chisholm's stern face relaxed somewhat as the fat Classical tearfully proceeded with his woeful tale.

The Head, in fact, was looking quite relieved by the time Tubby had finished.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "I really believe, Muffin, you wretched boy, that you did enter that disreputable resort in ignorance of the character of the place. And I also think you acted afterwards not comprehending the seriousness of what you were doing. Were it otherwise, I should certainly expel you at once. And as it is I intend to punish you severely for your astonishing falsehoods!"

"Ow!" gasped Tubby. "But in consideration of your narrow escape yesterday, and the resulting illness," went on the Head drily, "I will postpone your punishment until a more favourable opportunity. You may go, Muffin!"

And Reginald Muffin went with alacrity, sincerely hoping the favourable opportunity would never present itself, and that the postponement would therefore remain indefinite.

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THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Not a Coward!

BULKLEY'S face wore a determined expression as he left the Head's study that morning. Jimmy Silver had been proved innocent of the charge of pub-haunting, and the five pounds had been found. But the accusation of cowardice still hung over the junior's head. And Bulkeley felt that, as he had been the first to charge the junior, and to make the matter public, it was up to him to find out the truth.

For, though Bill Adams' story had convinced Bulkeley at last that Jimmy's story was correct, he knew that unless proof was forthcoming that the junior had really injured his head, he would still remain under a cloud at Rookwood.

And Bulkeley had determined to furnish that proof. And to this end he had persuaded Dr. Chisholm to allow him to accompany Bill Adams up the river. And a talk he had with the old boatman on the way convinced him more than ever that Jimmy Silver had not faked going to Tubby Muffin's rescue.

"Him a coward—no fear!" said Bill Adams emphatically. "I saw the young 'un pitched in, and I guessed what had happened when he crawled out and dropped in the grass. There used to be an old landing-stage at the bottom of that there garden; and the 'oss—leastways, what's left of them—are still there. That's why I couldn't get the old tub nearer in yesterday. No, the young gent hurt his head, without a doubt, and a tidy old jar it were, I bet!"

"Well, we'll soon know for certain," said Bulkeley. "And if it is so, I'll soon let the fellows know, you may be sure. It's on—Hallo! Yonder's the Jolly Fisherman, now! Have you got a boathook?"

The boatman had a boathook. But, as it happened, that article was not necessary, for the boat stopped with a dull thud about a couple of yards from the bank. And, looking down, Bulkeley could plainly see deep-sunken piles, stumps, and long pieces of timber running the complete length of the garden edge. Without a doubt, Jimmy Silver's story was true.

"That settles it!" ejaculated the senior grimly. "And now where's Silver? I've got something to say to him about this! Unless that fat fool Muffin's spoofed me, he must be up here!"

"Likely up at the cottage yet," said Bill Adams. "It's only round the bend there. We'll run up and look!"

And the boatman, who had been steering directly across towards the old ramshackle buildings where he housed his boats for hire, altered his course, and a moment later the boat turned the bend, and the old boatman's cottage came in sight.

"Hallo! There's the missus!" ejaculated Bill Adams all of a sudden. "What on earth—Good heavens!"

Startled, the senior followed his glance, and saw a woman rushing about frantically on the edge of the steep bank topping the river-bank. Then Bulkeley's eyes fell upon a splash of black and white far out on the shining surface of the river. The boatman was struggling frantically with his engine to get more speed on the boat. And then Bulkeley also saw the reason, as the objects out in the river became clearer.

"Good heavens! It's Silver—in the river!" he gasped.

"And my little girl!" muttered Bill Adams tensely. "Get ready when I cut off the engine, young sir!"

Bulkeley could now plainly see Jimmy Silver's face and the head of the little girl he was strenuously fighting to keep above water. Jimmy Silver's face was white and drawn, and he was plainly at his last gasp.

"Stick it, Silver!" shouted Bulkeley, leaning over the side as the engine was shut off and the boat glided silently towards the struggling figures in the water.

"I—I'm done!" gasped Jimmy Silver faintly. "T—take the kiddie, Bulkeley!"

With a tremendous effort, Bulkeley took the child from the junior's grasp, and handed her into Bill Adams' ready, strong grip. Then Bulkeley leaped swiftly over the side.

For directly the child was taken from Jimmy Silver's grip, the junior had fallen back and sunk like a stone.

Then the ex-captain's head appeared, followed by his shoulders. And in his strong grasp he held the limp form of the junior.

Jimmy Silver's face was white, and his eyes were closed. The junior was unconscious.

"Help me!" gasped Bulkeley, gripping the side of the boat. "He's unconscious!"

The boatman bent down and lifted the junior into the boat, and Bulkeley followed, breathing spasmodically. A moment later the boat touched the bank. Jumping out, Bulkeley laid the limp, sodden form of Jimmy Silver in the grass, while the boatman handed his little girl into the eager, thankful arms of her mother.

Bulkeley knelt by the side of Jimmy Silver anxiously. But just then the junior opened his eyes and sighed deeply.

"How—how's the kiddie?" he gasped.

"Right as rain, young 'un!" said Bulkeley.

"Thanks to you, young sir!" exclaimed the boatman thankfully. "You're a rare plucked 'un—that you are! But you'd best come and have something hot to drink."

Bulkeley shook his head.

"Better get back to Rookwood now—thanks all the same!" he exclaimed quietly.

"Come, Silver, if you feel fit!"

And at a brisk trot Bulkeley started for Rookwood, with Jimmy Silver by his side.

But when opposite to the Jolly Fisherman Inn, Bulkeley called a halt.

"Yesterday, Silver," exclaimed Bulkeley quietly. "I called you a coward for not going to Muffin's help over there. I was wrong! I know now that you did not funk—you did injure your head. And now—"

"That's all right, Bulkeley!" gasped Jimmy Silver hastily. "No need to rub it in! All serene. I—I—I say, did old Bootles miss me in class? I came to search for—"

For something. And while I was talking to Mrs. Adams her little girl strayed, and fell into the river. But—but about that five—"

"I guessed what had happened," said Bulkeley. "And now you've no need to worry about the five pounds or anything. Silver. The money's been found, and Muffin's confessed; but the Head wants to see you when you get back, an' you'll hear all about it then."

THE END.

(Full particulars of next week's Rookwood story will be found on page 27.)

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