

JIMMY SILVER & CO. TO THE RESCUE!

It is a well-known fact that anyone in trouble can always find friends in need in Jimmy Silver & Co., the chums of Rookwood School. In or out of school the Fistical Four are ready to give a helping hand to the oppressed, and that is how they meet Mrs. Wickers of Coombe!

Holding The Fort!



A Splendid Long Story dealing with the adventures of the Famous Chums of Rookwood.

BY Owen Conquest.

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Widow of Coombe.**

TOMMY DODD, of the Modern Fourth at Rookwood, wore a worried look.

He was leaning against one of the old beeches in Big Quad, with his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a deep wrinkle in his brow.

So immersed was he in reflection, that he did not even observe Jimmy Silver & Co. as they came sauntering along from the School House.

Jimmy Silver glanced at him and smiled. Lovell and Raby and Newcome smiled, too.

They found something rather comic in Tommy Dodd's attitude, as he stood with his eyes fixed on the ground, unconscious of their proximity. It was a very unusual thing for Tommy Dodd to be so deeply buried in meditation.

"Halt!" murmured Jimmy Silver. The four Classical juniors halted.

"Something's up with Tommy!" grinned the captain of the Fourth. "He must be thinking of his sins, to judge by his look. Let's wake him up."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Lovell. And the Fistical Four trod softly towards the Modern junior, with the playful intention of waking him up by collaring his suddenly and sitting him down in the Quad.

Fortunately for Tommy Dodd, he observed them as they came closer, and Arthur Edward Lovell's outstretched hand was almost upon him when Tommy gave a jump and started back in alarm.

That, however, was not fortunate for him. He had forgotten the beech-trunk just behind him.

Crack!
"Yow!" howled Tommy Dodd. The back of Tommy's head had smitten the beech with a sudden and painful smite. Jimmy Silver & Co. burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Ow, ow!" Tommy Dodd rubbed the back of his head and glared at the Classical juniors. "You silly chumps! You startled me! Ow, wow, yow!"

"We were only going to wake you up, old top!" said Jimmy Silver. "What do you mean by going to sleep in the Quad, standing up like a horse?"

"I wasn't asleep, you Classical chump! Bw! I was thinking!"

"Gammon!"
"Fathead!" growled Tommy.

"Anything up?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Has Mr. Manders been going for you?"

"No. Ow!"

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"Dear old Knowles on the war-path again?"

"No, ass! Ow! I've hurt my napper—" "Lucky there's nothing in it!" remarked Lovell. "You might have damaged it if there had been!"

"Ass!" Tommy Dodd rubbed his head again. "Well, I suppose it's no good thinking; I can't do anything. It seems a shame, though!"

The Fistical Four looked at him. Tommy Dodd's remarks seemed rather cryptic to them.

"Of course you can't do anything," agreed Jimmy Silver. "You Modern chaps never can. But what's the matter? What's a shame? Tell your Uncle James!"

"About Mrs. Wickers!" said Tommy. "Well?"

"You remember her—the little widow at Coombe, who does sewing and things for Mrs. Chisholm?" said Tommy. "You've seen her coming here to the Head's house, I dare say."

"Lots of times," said Jimmy Silver. "Anything wrong there?"

"Yes," grunted Tommy Dodd. "I was trying to think whether I could do anything to help. But where's a chap to raise pounds and pounds? Can't be done!"

"Well, it wouldn't be easy!" said Lovell. "If it was bobs and bobs, or tanners and tanners—"

"Oh, don't be funny!" growled Tommy Dodd. "This is a serious matter. I say it's a shame. Her husband was killed in France, and it doesn't seem fair to me, somehow, that she should have to suffer for it. It was bad enough in itself, without losing her home, too. But a chap can't do anything. I was thinking, perhaps, I could call on her landlord and give him a pink eye. But I suppose that wouldn't do any real good!"

"Not to him, anyway," said Raby. "It's a shame, really. How do you know about it?"

"I was down in Coombe before dinner," explained Tommy Dodd. "I met one of the nippers there, and asked the kid how they were getting on. And little Franky told me. It's a shame. Of course, people have to pay rent for their houses; that's all right. But it's a rotten case, because old Grubb, the landlord, is a rich man. It isn't as if he was one of the little property-holders who've been hard hit by the war. He's got lots of oof. He could afford to let it go!"

"And he won't?"

"No; he won't! He ought to. Poor old

Wickers lost his life, and I don't see why old Grubb can't lose his money. That would make it fair all round. But—but—"

"Well, what's going to happen?"

"Bailiffs!" grunted Tommy. "Oh!"

The Fistical Four looked very serious now. They had a very dim and far-away idea of the mysterious processes of the law, but they knew there was some process by which a tenant's goods and chattels could be seized if the rent was not paid, and that the bailiff and the bailiff's men were the instruments thereof.

"Poor woman!" said Newcome softly. "I—I say, how much is it?" asked Raby.

"If a chap could help—"

"I don't know how much, but it's pounds and pounds," said Tommy Dodd. "I was trying to think it out, but—but I've only got twopence—"

"If we had time—" began Jimmy Silver. Tommy shook his head.

"It's got to be paid by two-thirty this afternoon—that's the last chance," he said. "My hat! It's two now!"

"And if it isn't paid the bailiff takes possession of the place," said Tommy. "Puts a man in, you know. Old Shingle is the bailiff—crusty old beast! I remember his slanging me last winter because I knocked his hat off with a snowball—awfully crusty old beggar! I jolly well wish now it had knocked his head off. Fancy poor little Mrs. Wickers with a man in possession—a rotten boulder mooching around the house. And the poor little woman with two nippers—and her husband buried over in France. Oh, it's too bad. It makes me feel ill!"

And Tommy Dodd gave a loud snort, expressive of a variety of feelings.

"If there was time—" said Lovell. "But there isn't!"

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows. "This is too jolly rotten!" he exclaimed. "It's got to be stopped!"

"Got any tin?" asked Tommy. "About five bob—"

"Then you can't do anything, any more than I can!"

"My dear chap, consider the difference in intellect!" said Jimmy Silver reprovingly. "Fathead!"

"It's up to us, somehow," said Jimmy Silver. "We haven't any money to speak of, certainly, but—"

"It's money that's wanted, ass!"

"But something's going to be done!" said Jimmy Silver firmly.

"Poor Mrs. Wickers is going to be done, and you're a silly ass, Jimmy Silver!"

A Screamingly Funny Story of Rookwood Next Week!

grunted Tommy Dodd, and he walked away, evidently in a very depressed frame of mind.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Up to Uncle James.

JIMMY SILVER wrinkled his brows. His chums looked at him silently. The Classical quartette were all deeply interested by poor Mrs. Wickers' misfortune, and they would gladly have done anything they could to help. But certainly they were not in a position to help in a financial way.

Given time, they could possibly have raised the required money somewhere, somehow, and they would have spared no effort to do so. But there was no time. The heavy hand was about to fall upon Mrs. Wickers' little home.

But Lovell and Raby and Newcome watched Jimmy Silver's thoughtful face with a faint hope. They had great faith in "Uncle James," of Rookwood. Often and often Jimmy Silver had risen to a difficult occasion when nobody else could see a way out.

But this time it really looked as if Uncle James was powerless.

"It's rotten!" said Lovell, breaking the silence at last. "It was Mrs. Wickers that Mornington took some quids to the other week, you know, when the fellows thought he was blowin' his cash at the Bird-in-Hand. It came out through Tubby Muffin watchin' him. I suppose he just helped her to tide over for a time. But the chopper's coming down now, and no mistake. We can't do anything, Jimmy."

Jimmy made a gesture.

"I'm thinking!" he said.

"Well, what about?"

The junior captain of Rookwood drew a deep breath.

"It's up to us!" he said.

"But what—"

"You chaps know anything about the law?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

"Blessed if I do, or want to!" he answered. "I only know it's something the lawyers live on, to save the trouble of working. What—"

"Well, I don't know much about it," admitted Jimmy Silver, "but I've heard about cases like this before—read 'em in the papers. Now, if Mrs. Wickers had time to pay, we could rally round, and see her through—somehow. The question is to gain time."

"But that's the point. There isn't any time," said Lovell. "The man will be in possession in half an hour!"

"He won't!" said Jimmy.

"What'll stop him, then?"

"Us!"

"Us!" echoed Jimmy Silver's chums.

"Little us!" agreed Jimmy.

"Well, if giving the bailiff a thick ear will do any good, I'm your man!" said Arthur Edward Lovell at once. "I could knock out old Shingle. I've seen him often enough, and I know I could. But would that stop him?"

"No, ass! And you'd be landed in choko for assault and battery! Don't you know the law has to be respected in this country?" demanded Jimmy severely.

"Oh, blow the law!"

"Why, you're a blessed Bolshevik!" exclaimed Jimmy indignantly. "The law's all right. There's always two sides to a question, and the law takes notice of both sides. Now, I tell you I've read about these things. It's the law for Shingle to put his man into Mrs. Wickers' house till the rent is paid or the goods and chattels sold. But it's also the law that Mrs. Wickers can keep him out if she likes!"

"My hat! Is it really?"

"Certainly!"

"Then what the thump's the good of the law if it can be walked round like that?"

"Well, lawyers must live!" said Jimmy tolerantly. "Anyhow, what we've got to deal with is the matter as it stands. If Mrs. Wickers doesn't let the bailiff in he can't get in, can he?"

"Couldn't he bust the door?"

"No; that's against the law!"

"Well, my word!" said Lovell, in amazement. "He can walk in if the door's not locked, but if it is locked he mustn't bust it!"

"Exactly!"

"Well, the chap who said the law was an ass knew what he was talking about!"

"Never mind that; that's the law! To shove a way into the house they have to get an order or an injunction, or something, from some old johnny in a wig, and that takes time. Everything connected with the law takes time; that's the beauty of it. There's no hustle about the law. Now do you see?" asked Jimmy Silver. "If the bailiffs are kept out, that gains the time we want, and, somehow or another, the old hunks can be paid."

"But—but little Mrs. Wickers couldn't stand a siege in her house!" ejaculated Raby. "The bailiff would be mooching round all the time, looking for a chance to dodge in if the door was opened."

"Then it must not be opened."

"But Mrs. Wickers couldn't."

The poor little soul hasn't the nerve—

"Probably not; but we have. The end study is famous for its nerves!" said Jimmy Silver calmly.

"We—we— But we—" stammered Newcome.

"We're going to be the garrison," said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Dash it all, old Wickers stood up for us when the Huns were coming!" said Jimmy Silver warmly. "It's up to us to stand up for his little home and his widow!"

"That's all right; but can we—"

"We can, and we're going to! Come and get the bikes!"

"But—but—"

"No time for 'buts,' old chap. You can understand a billy god another time, when it's not so pressing. Get a move on!"

And, without waiting for further discussion, Jimmy Silver started for the bike-shed at a run.

His chums blinked at one another.

"Well, of all the stunts!" ejaculated Lovell.

"I fancy we're going to look for about the biggest scrape we ever landed into!" observed Raby.

Lovell grinned.

"Well, let's go and look for it!" he said. "Anyhow, Jimmy's going, so we've got to go, too. Come on!"

And the Co. ran after their leader.

In a very short time the Fistical Four were wheeling their bicycles out of the gates.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Rookwood to the Rescue.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. put on a speed in Coombe Lane that was almost reckless, but their excuse was that they were, so to speak, riding to the rescue.

The four bicycles fairly hummed along the lane.

In a very brief space of time they were in the old-fashioned High Street of Coombe, and there they had to slacken a little. They turned from the High Street into Water Lane, a straggling street that led down towards the river.

Water Lane was not a wealthy quarter. Little detached cottages stood in little trim gardens, poor, but neat and clean and homely. Half-way down the street a crowd was gathered outside poor Mrs. Wickers' cottage. The news that the "broker's man" was coming had spread, and neighbours had gathered round, to express sympathy and indignation, or to look on and talk. Lovell uttered an exclamation, as he made a gesture towards a fat man, who was marching along towards the cottage on the pavement.

"That's old Shingle!" he said.

The rescuers were only just in time.

Mr. Shingle, the bailiff, was a stout and rather important gentleman, with a red face and thick side-whiskers. He walked with his fat chin well up, perhaps from a consciousness of his own importance, or perhaps to give room for his double chin to expand over his collar.

Behind him, a shabby man, with a hungry face was shambling humbly.

This, evidently, was Mr. Shingle's factotum, the "man" whom he put in possession when hapless tenants did not pay their rent.

Mr. Shingle did not deign to walk with his "man." He kept ahead, and affected to be ignorant of the man's existence.

Jimmy Silver & Co. passed the pair on the way and shot ahead, reaching Mrs. Wickers' cottage a good distance ahead of them.

The crowd cleared back a little as the four bikes came buzzing on, and the juniors jumped down at the garden-gate.

There was a Rookwood fellow coming down the street—Rawson of the Fourth—and Jimmy Silver called to him.

"Hallo! What's the row here?" asked Rawson, crossing over.

"Take our bikes, old chap, will you?" said Jimmy Silver hurriedly. "We may be staying here. I'll explain later. Do us a good turn!"

"Certainly!" said Rawson, very much surprised, but willing to oblige.

He took the four bikes in charge, and the Fistical Four entered the garden.

"You stand at the gate a bit, Lovell!" muttered Jimmy. "If those cads come up before we're ready, keep 'em back somehow!"

"What-ho!" said Arthur Edward, clenching his fists.

"You're not to hit them, you ass! That's against the law!"

"Look here, I'm not a dashed lawyer!" growled Arthur Edward. "How am I to know what's against the law and what isn't? What's the matter with hitting Shingle in the eye?"

"Ass! You come in with me, then!" said Jimmy, catching Lovell by the arm. "Raby, you stay at the gate, and keep them in talk somehow. Give us time to get ready for the cads!"

"Leave it to me!" said Raby. George Raby stationed himself at the gate, and the other three ran up to the house. Master Franky's chubby face was glued to a front-window pane, and he ran to open the door.

Mrs. Wickers came down the little hall—or rather, passage—as the juniors entered. The poor widow's face was pale, and wet with tears.

"Oh, Master Silver!" she exclaimed.

"We know all about it, ma'am," said Jimmy Silver, taking off his cap. "We've come to help."

"Oh, but—but—"

"Mr. Shingle is just down the street."

"I'm expecting him every minute," faltered the widow. "It is terrible! My poor little home, and the children—"

Mrs. Wickers' tears flowed afresh. "What can I do? I could pay my way, with the pension and the garden and the sewing, only it's what I owe for so long! It was because little Alice was ill, and the money went then. But, of course, you young gentlemen wouldn't understand about that."

"We jolly well do understand," said Jimmy Silver, "and we're going to see you through, Mrs. Wickers."

The widow shook her head.

"But I mean it!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"We're going to raise the tin somehow—you take my word for that!"

"But I—I couldn't—I couldn't let you!"

"Yes, you could, and you're going to," answered Jimmy. "That's all right! But we've got to get the time to do it. See, Mrs. Wickers? You're not going to let those men in. See?"

Mrs. Wickers started.

"But they'll come in!" she said.

"They can't, if you keep them out. They have to start another process or something. It's the law," explained Jimmy.

"If—if you're sure it's the law, Master Silver—"

"Quite sure!"

"Well, I suppose you know, up at the big school," said poor Mrs. Wickers.

Jimmy Silver suppressed a smile. Valuable as a knowledge of the law undoubtedly was, that was not a subject included in the curriculum at Rookwood. But Jimmy was willing to let it go at that. He was sure of his ground, and it was necessary to reassure the widow.

"Will you leave it to us, ma'am?" he asked. "We will see you through. We know just what those bounders can do, and what they can't do. You can rely on us!"

"I'm sure I trust your judgment, Master Silver, and it's very kind of you. But what can we do?"

"Fasten all the doors and windows, and tell them to go and eat coke!" answered Jimmy promptly.

Mrs. Wickers smiled through her tears.

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She was not likely to tell Mr. Shingle and his man to go and eat coke, but she was ready to carry out the rest of Jimmy's instructions.

"We'll help!" said Newcome. "You'll allow us, ma'am?"
 "Yes, yes, yes! Anything you think best!"

"Good!"
 The little cottage contained only four rooms and a passage, and it was not a lengthy task to secure the doors and windows. There were only two doors, one back and one front. Newcome ran to the back door, and locked and bolted it. Lovell fastened the windows of the sitting-room and kitchen. Jimmy Silver remained at the front door, ready.

"Right!" called out Newcome.
 "All serene!"—from Lovell.
 Jimmy shouted to Raby at the gate.
 "This way, Raby!"
 From the gate there was a sound of voices in dispute. Mr. Shingle and his factotum were there.

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
 No Admittance.**

GEORGE RABY had his foot against the gate. There was no lock on it, only a latch, and it could not be fastened.

Mr. Shingle laid a fat and heavy hand on the gate to open it. As Raby's boot was in the way, naturally it did not open.
 Mr. Shingle frowned at the Rookwood junior.

"Are you holding the gate, boy?" he exclaimed.

"Not at all, old top!"
 "You have your foot against it!" exclaimed Mr. Shingle.

"Well, that isn't holding it, is it?" asked Raby, with a sweet smile at the bailiff.

"Open the gate at once!"
 "My dear man, I'm not a gate-opener!"
 "Let me pass in!" shouted Mr. Shingle angrily.

Raby cast a glance behind him at the house. He was there to keep the bailiff and his man back until Jimmy Silver had made the preparations for a siege.

"The question is, who are you, and what do you want?" he said. "I'm doing the lodge-keeper stunt at present for Mrs. Wickers, and I can't let in suspicious characters!"

There was a giggle from the crowd in the road, and Mr. Shingle's fat face became purple.

"Mrs. Wickers knows perfectly well who I am, and what I have come for!" he snorted. "I am here to put a man in possession for the rent!"

"Got any credentials to show?" inquired Raby.

"I shall not show them to you, boy!"
 "I am afraid I can't let you pass until I'm sure about you!" said Raby, still with his foot planted against the gate, keeping it shut. "You may be a burglar, for all I know!"

"Boy!" roared Mr. Shingle.

"Man!" replied Raby.
 "Will you release that gate at once?" thundered Mr. Shingle. "Otherwise I shall box your ears!"

"Look out for your waistcoat if you do!" retorted Raby undauntedly. "I shall biff you on the watch-chain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the road.

Mr. Shingle glared at Raby, but certainly he could not box the Rookwood junior's ears without exposing his ample waistcoat to attack. So he refrained. He grasped the gate with both hands and shoved. Raby kept his foot jammed to it, close to the ground, and the gate did not move.

"Smunk!" roared Mr. Shingle, His man came up.
 "Yes, sir?"

"Push this gate open, Smunk, you fool! What do I pay you for?"

Smunk grasped the gate in his turn, and the bailiff and his man shoved together. It was at that moment that Jimmy Silver's call came from the house.

"This way, Raby!"

It was only just in time, for the pressure without was too strong for the junior. Raby made a sudden jump back and ran for the house.

Mr. Shingle and his man were pressing

with full force on the gate when Raby jumped away from it. It flew wide-open with startling suddenness, and the two men sprawled headlong upon the gravel path inside.

Crash!
 Bump!
 "Yooooooooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the delighted crowd in the roadway.

While Mr. Shingle and his man were sprawling, Raby reached the house and ran inside. Jimmy Silver slammed the door, locked and bolted it, and put the chain on.

"Done 'em!" gasped Raby.
 "Good man!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. He looked through the keyhole.

Mr. Shingle and Smunk had staggered to their feet, very red and breathless and gravely. The bailiff was relieving his feelings by "slanging" the hapless Smunk. He talked to Smunk with great emphasis for several minutes, while the crowd outside chortled. At length, however, Mr. Shingle came back to the business in hand, and walked up the garden-path to the house, Smunk following at his heels like a bullied dog.

Rap, rap, rap!
 Mr. Shingle gave three terrific knocks at the door, which could have been heard as far as the High Street.

"Oh dear!" gasped Mrs. Wickers.
 She made a movement as if to open the door, overawed by the truculent Shingle, and the unknown and mysterious powers of the law that he was supposed to wield.

But Jimmy Silver interposed.
 "Leave him to us, ma'am!"

"If—if you're sure, Master Silver—" faltered Mrs. Wickers.
 "Quite sure, ma'am!"

"Very well, Master Silver," said the widow resignedly.
 Rap, rap, rap!

"Will you let me in, Mrs. Wickers?" thundered the bailiff, in a voice that rang through the little cottage from end to end.

There were startled gasps from Alice and Franky, and Alice began to cry. Mrs. Wickers trembled, but Jimmy Silver did not falter. It required more than a loud and bullying voice to disturb the serenity of "Uncle James" of Rookwood.

"Hallo! Who's that?" he inquired through the keyhole.

"Open the door!"

"Is that Shingle?"

"Yes!" roared the bailiff.

"Then you can go and eat coke!"

"What!"

"Coke!"

"Why, you—you—what—who—" spluttered Mr. Shingle. "I demand admittance to this house at once!"

"Rats!"

"Smunk!" howled Mr. Shingle.

"Sir?"

"Don't stand there staring like a fool! Go round and get in at the back door, and open this door for me!"

"Yessir!"

Smunk went round the cottage. There was a chuckle from the Fistical Four inside, as they heard Smunk trying over the back door. He came back to his master in a few minutes.

"It won't open, sir!"

"What!"

"It's locked inside, I think, sir!"

"Fool! Find an open window, then!"

The hapless Smunk went round the house again. But he came back after a fruitless quest.

"All the winders seem to be fastened inside, sir!"

Mr. Shingle gave a snort. He was growing intensely exasperated. He was a busy man, and this was wasting his time. He had other homes to break up, and he felt indignant at being delayed in carrying out that happy task.

He rapped fiercely on the door again.

"Mrs. Wickers, if you do not admit me at once you will take the consequences!" he thundered.

"Oh dear!" gasped the widow.

"All right, ma'am; he's only blowing off gas!" said Jimmy Silver reassuringly.

"There aren't any consequences!"
 "Will you let me in immediately—immediately?" raved Mr. Shingle.
 "Not this week, old top!" answered Jimmy Silver through the keyhole.
 "I give you one minute!" thundered Mr.

Shingle. "If the door is not opened in one minute I will have it broken in. Smunk, get an axe!"

"Yessir!"

There was a wail from little Alice and a sob from Mrs. Wickers.

"Oh, Master Silver, if they're going to break in—"

"Only spoof, ma'am!" answered Jimmy Silver. "He dare not do it. Even bailiffs have to obey the law." And Jimmy called through the keyhole: "Mr. Shingle, if you do any damage to this door you will be held responsible. You'll be prosecuted, you rotter! Understand?"

There was a furious snort from Mr. Shingle. He was quite aware that he dared not carry out his threat—at least, if there was anybody in the place who was acquainted with the law on the subject. With poor people, ignorant of the law, Mr. Shingle sometimes took chances, but he was aware that it would not pay him to take chances now.

The minute elapsed, but there was no attack on the door; neither had Mr. Smunk fetched an axe.

Outside, in the little wooden porch, Mr. Shingle fumed and snorted. He was quite at a loss.

"Smunk!" he rapped out at last.

"Yessir?"

"Stay here. Enter the house as soon as the door is opened, and do not leave it again!"

"Yessir!"
 And Mr. Shingle whirled round and strode away, still snorting with fury; and his fat form disappeared up the street, followed by a loud and prolonged hiss from the crowd of onlookers. The faithful Smunk remained on guard, sucking at a tobaccoless pipe in the porch, and looking thoughtfully into the honeysuckle.

**THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
 Besieged.**

VICTORY!" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Hurrah!"

"He—he is gone!" exclaimed Mrs. Wickers breathlessly.

"He's gone, mum!" howled Master Franky, from the front window. "I see him go. He's mizzled, mum!"

"Oh dear—oh dear!" said the widow.

"Of course he's gone!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Nothing for him to do here. He's left his man, but it won't hurt you if the man stands in the porch for a bit, will it?"

"Not at all!" smiled Mrs. Wickers.

"We'll stay on, if you don't mind," said Jimmy. "They may come back and try some dodges. It's a half-holiday at Rookwood to-day. Mind, after we're gone you're not to open door or window. They can't do anything so long as you keep them shut out. They've got to get some authority from some old donkey in a court somewhere. I don't know how many days it takes, but it's a good many. Before the time's up we'll manage to square the rent with Mr. Grubb."

"Oh, sir!"

"You won't be able to go out and do any shopping," said Jimmy. "But that's all right. We'll do some shopping for you."

"But—but I—"

"This is our treat, Mrs. Wickers!" said Jimmy Silver firmly. "You're to give me a list of things you want, and we'll get them—grub and so on. Shell out, you chaps!"

"Oh, rather!"

Jimmy Silver held out his cap, and the chums of Rookwood "whacked" in contributions so far as their limited financial resources allowed. Fifteen shillings reposed in the cap. It was all they had.

"But—but I can't allow—" gasped Mrs. Wickers.

"Stuff!" said Jimmy. "Ain't we in charge of this fort, holding it against the Huns? You're only a member of the garrison, Mrs. Wickers. You place this matter in my hands, just as if I were your—your father, you know."

Mrs. Wickers laughed. She could not help it.

However, Jimmy Silver had his way, and Mrs. Wickers, having made up the list

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required, it was handed to Lovell, who was to do the shopping.

"Now, we mustn't let Smunk get in while you're getting out, old top!" said Jimmy. "You get out of the back door, and Raby's to bolt it immediately you're outside. I'll talk to the Smunk-bird through the keyhole here, and keep him busy."

"Right-ho!" Jimmy Silver looked through the keyhole of the front door.

Mr. Smunk was shifting from one leg to the other, apparently growing tired already. "Hallo, old man!" said Jimmy. "Do you want to come in?"

"Yes!" growled Smunk. "Getting tired of waiting?" "Ang you!"

"My hat! You're more likely to be hanged than I am," said Jimmy Silver. "Why can't you show your face like an honest man, instead of coming here with a mask on?"

"Eh? Wotcher mean? I ain't got a mask on!" "What! Isn't that a Guy Fawkes mask you're wearing?" asked Jimmy Silver, in surprise.

"You—you young rip!" roared Mr. Smunk, greatly enraged at having his features mistaken for a Guy Fawkes mask.

"My mistake!" said Jimmy Silver. "Natural mistake, under the circs, Mr. Smunk—don't you think so?"

"I wish I 'ad 'old of 'your hear!" was Mr. Smunk's reply. "Hard lines on you, waiting here like this, Smunky! What will they do without you at the pub?"

"My eye! I'll—I'll—" Words failed Mr. Smunk, and he began to kick furiously at the door by way of expressing his feelings. "Go it, old bird!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly.

Mr. Smunk went it. He was thus engaged when Arthur Edward Lovell came round the cottage from the back, grinned at him, and passed on to the gate. Mr. Smunk stopped kicking the door, and stared after him. He realised that the back door must have been opened, and he rushed round the house.

But the back door was closed and bolted; and at the kitchen window Raby kissed his hand to the enraged bailiff's man.

Mr. Smunk shook his fist in response, and retired to the front porch again, in a very

surly temper. The bailiff's man was not enjoying his afternoon.

Mrs. Wickers made tea, and Jimmy Silver & Co. started a game with Alice and Franky to keep up their spirits. Newcome displayed a keen and well-sustained interest in Alice's doll, and did not seem to tire of seeing it open and shut its eyes—indeed, he displayed wonder and delight every time Alice made the doll move its optics—and Alice was quite happy.

Franky rode about on Jimmy Silver's shoulders in a state of great delight, oblivious of bailiffs and men in possession. There was quite a happy family in the cottage when Lovell returned with a bag crammed with provender of various kinds.

Mr. Smunk blinked at Lovell with beery eyes as the junior came up the garden-path. He understood that the Rookwooder had brought provisions for the siege, and he grinned at him evilly.

"So you're a-going in agin, are you?" he said. "Well, when you goes in, in I goes, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, young feller-me-lad!"

"Thanks, I don't smoke!" said Lovell politely.

"You jest look out!" said Mr. Smunk. "I'm here, Jimmy!" called out Lovell.

"I know you are, old top!" called back Jimmy. "I could hear your fairy footsteps a mile off!"

"Fathead!"

"Got the provender?"

"Yes, here it is; but this bat-eyed blighter says he's coming in when I do!" "You jest watch!" sneered Mr. Smunk.

Jimmy Silver had expected this emergency, and he was ready for it.

"Bring it round to the kitchen window, Lovell!" he called out.

"Right you are!"

Mr. Smunk followed Lovell round to the kitchen window with a very vengeful expression on his face. Jimmy Silver's face appeared at the little window. Behind him was Raby, with a garden-broom in his hands. Mr. Smunk had a rather dubious expression as he looked through the glass and saw that broom.

Jimmy opened the lower sash of the little window as Lovell put the crammed bag on the sill. He caught the bag and drew it in, and at the same moment Mr. Smunk shoved Lovell roughly aside, and shoved his head and shoulders in at the window after the bag.

"Now, then!" he said triumphantly. The little window was just about large enough for Mr. Smunk to crawl in through—if he was not stopped.

But he was stopped!

Jimmy Silver dragged down the sash again, and Mr. Smunk's triumphant remark was cut short, and turned into a howl of anguish, as the sash caught him on the back of his neck.

The expression on Mr. Smunk's face was extraordinary, as he stood pinned, with his head inside, his body outside, and the sash jammed on the back of his neck.

"Leggo!" he howled.

"Not a bit of it!" answered Jimmy Silver cheerily. "I'm holding this sash for the present!"

"You're a-breaking of my neck!" wailed Mr. Smunk.

"Yes? Is it of any value?"

"Why, you—you—you—" "I dare say we could screw the window like this," remarked Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "Would you mind, Smunk?"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Let me give him a oner on the napper with this broom!" said Raby. "He's nicely placed. He won't want more than one!"

"Yoop! You keep that broom away!" shrieked Mr. Smunk. "I'll 'ave you up for 'sault and battery! Yoooop!"

"Better fasten him in as he is!" said Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell outside. "Shall I spank him?"

"Yow-ow-ow! You keep off!" yelled Mr. Smunk, kicking out wildly behind.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'll tell you what!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'll push up the sash again, and you knock his head out with that broom, Raby. Catch him fairly on the boko with it, and he'll go, I think!"

"Leave it to me!"

"Yow-ow-ow—elp!"

"Ready?"

"Go it!" answered Raby.

Jimmy Silver pushed up the sash again. Raby was brandishing the broom, and Mr. Smunk did not wait for his head to be knocked out—as Jimmy fully expected he wouldn't! He withdrew it quickly.

Slam! went the window again, and Jimmy fastened it, grinning through the panes at the infuriated Mr. Smunk.

Mr. Smunk shook an enraged fist at him. He came very near smashing the glass in his wrath, but he did not venture to go that length.

"Well, I am coming in!" called out Lovell, as Mr. Smunk stood rubbing his neck and muttering.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"No need, old chap. You get home, and ask Rawson for the bikes, and bring them as far as the corner, and wait for us there. We're coming out at dusk, you know. These rotters aren't allowed to act after dark—that's the giddy law!"

"Well, that's rather a sensible law!" remarked Lovell. "I'm off, then!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell walked away whistling.

Mr. Smunk eyed the juniors grinning at the window, with feelings too deep for words. As Lovell was not going in again, after all, Mr. Smunk's chance of getting in along with him had vanished. Jimmy Silver kissed his hand to the enraged bailiff's man and smiled sweetly. Mr. Smunk scowled and tramped round to the front of the house again to resume his vigil in the porch.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Victor.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were very cheery that afternoon—it was a rather unusual and rather exciting way of passing a half-holiday, and they had the pleasant consciousness that they were doing good. Little Alice and Franky forgot all their troubles in the merry company of the Rookwood juniors, and even poor Mrs. Wickers brightened up and smiled. Jimmy Silver's method of dealing with the difficult situation had astounded the poor woman; but his success was very encouraging, and the widow had the firmest faith in "Uncle James," of Rookwood.

During the afternoon Mr. Shingle re-appeared, and made some excited remarks when he found his man still outside the house—like a very shabby Peri at the gate of Paradise.

"Haven't you got in yet, you fool?" inquired Mr. Shingle.

"I ain't 'ad a chance, guv'nor!"

"What do I pay you for?" roared Mr. Shingle.

Smunk did not answer that question. He asked another.

"'Ow am I to get any grub, sir? I'm 'ungry!"

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"You have to get into the house. The tenant has to keep the bailiff's man while in possession. You've been in enough houses to know that, you idiot!"

"But I can't get in, can I?" wailed the hapless Mr. Smunk.

"That's your business. You should get in."

"Am I to stay 'ere without nothing to heat?" demanded Mr. Smunk, showing signs of rebellion. Even the worm will turn; and undoubtedly Mr. Smunk was a worm.

Mr. Shingle snorted. "You ought to have got in, somehow. I don't pay you to loaf around in front gardens admiring the landscape. Get in, and they have to feed you!"

"But I can't get in!" howled Mr. Smunk. "There's a gang of young rips in the 'ouse, a-keeping of me hout!"

"That's your look-out! Get in, somehow!"

And Mr. Shingle stalked away in great dudgeon.

Mr. Smunk groaned.

He had to keep up his vigil till dark; and he was hungry, and more thirsty than he was hungry. He thought of the tap-room at the Black Boy, and groaned again. Then he shook a dirty fist at a grinning face that looked from a window, and settled down to his vigil.

After dark, he would have to retire—as the bailiff's delightful occupation cannot be carried on after sunset—but it was not near dark yet. But Mr. Smunk was aware that the schoolboys would have to get away before dark, and he still hoped to dodge in when they dodged out. Once inside, he was a fixture. The poor widow would have to provide for his wants, and Mr. Smunk meant to be very exacting as a compensation for the troubles of the afternoon.

But he was not inside yet.

Jimmy Silver was thinking over the question of retreat, as the dusk began to fall over Coombe.

At the end of the street Lovell was waiting with the bicycles for the garrison of the cottage to return to Rookwood. The Co. had to join him without letting Mr. Smunk into the house.

"You'll remember, Mrs. Wickers, to keep doors and windows fastened all day to-morrow," said Jimmy Silver. "After dark they can't do anything, so you'll be all right when we're gone. To-morrow we're going to raise the wind somehow to see you clear, but until we've done that you've got to keep those rotters outside. You catch on?"

The widow smiled faintly.

"Yes, Master Silver; I'm leaving it to you. I don't know how to thank you!"

"Don't trouble," answered Jimmy.

"We'll chance it about call-over, for once, and not leave till it's quite dark. And we'll manage all right about that old bird outside. You're to bolt the door after us, you know!"

"Yes, yes!"

"And if they give you any trouble after dark, you'd only have to go to the police-station, but they won't dare do that; they know too much about the law!"

Jimmy looked from the window.

It was growing dark now, but Mr. Smunk's weary form could still be seen among the honeysuckle—shifting from one tired leg to the other and back again.

Mr. Smunk ceased to be a blot upon the landscape, however, as the darkness deepened.

But he was still there!

"Now, we've got to be jolly careful, you chaps!" said Jimmy, in a low voice.

"Strictly speaking, the man can't enter when we open the door, as it's after sunset, but, as a matter of fact, he would rush in and make out afterwards that it wasn't quite dark if he was tackled over it. We've got to see that he doesn't."

"You bet!" assented Raby.

"He's waiting there—ready to rush," said Jimmy. "If we get the back door open, he may nip round in time before it's closed again. We'll go out by the front door."

"But then—"

"And we'll 'de the rushing," said Jimmy coolly. "If we rush into Smunk and bowl him over, that's his look out; he shouldn't be in the way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If he falls down and we fall on him, we

needn't be in a hurry to get up; there's no law about that. And Mrs. Wickers will have time to bolt the door after us."

"Good egg!"

And so it was arranged.

Jimmy Silver withdrew the bolt on the front door, and he heard a heavy breathing outside, which showed that Mr. Smunk had heard the sound, and was close at hand and on the alert.

Then he rattled the chain off.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Wickers!" he murmured. "We're going. You'll remember to fasten the door at once."

"Yes, yes, Master Silver."

"And don't let anybody in on any account."

"No, no."

"I'll run down on my bike to-morrow, and see how you're getting on, and to see if you want anything. Keep your pecker up, you know!"

Jimmy Silver coolly. "I've fallen over something—"

"So have I!" chuckled Raby.

"Why, it's Smunk!"

"Dear me!" said Jimmy Silver. "Is that you, Smunk?"

"Which you know it is!" raved Mr. Smunk. "I'll 'ave the lor of yer! 'Sault and battery, that's wot it is! Yarooogh!"

"My dear man, how could you expect us to see you in the dark?" remonstrated Jimmy Silver. "You must have been in the way. Are you hurt?"

"Yurr'rgghh!"

The key had turned in the lock, and the bolt was shot. Jimmy Silver picked himself up.

"Come on, you chaps!" he said.

He walked down to the gate, followed by his chuckling chums.

But Mr. Smunk did not rise so soon. There was no breath left in his weary carcase, and he remained sprawling on the ground



KEEPING THE BAILIFF AT BAY! Jimmy Silver dragged down the window sash, and Mr. Smunk's triumphant remark was cut short, and turned into a howl of anguish, as the sash caught him on the back of the neck. "Yoooop!" (See Chapter 5.)

"I will remember, my dear—dear boy," said the widow.

"Good-night, then! Now, ready, you chaps?"

Jimmy Silver turned back the key, and threw open the door; and in an instant, the three juniors rushed out in a bunch.

Mr. Smunk had his foot on the doorstep, his hand outstretched.

Crash!

The collision was terrific.

But three bodies are heavier than one. Mr. Smunk went staggering blindly back from the shock.

He landed on his back in the porch, and the three juniors of Rookwood sprawled over him.

The door closed.

From the hapless Mr. Smunk, sprawling breathlessly under three Rookwood juniors, there proceeded a series of remarkable sounds. The three juniors seemed, to him, to have at least half a dozen knees and elbows apiece, and all that formidable number of knees and elbows seemed to be jabbing into Mr. Smunk at once.

It was no wonder he roared.

"Hallo! We've run into something," said

for several minutes. When he picked himself up, he bestowed a final kick on the door, by way of a parting benediction, and limped away. The siege of the cottage had ended for that day.

Jimmy Silver & Co. sauntered along Water Lane, to the corner of the High Street, where they found Lovell with the bicycles.

And the Fistical Four rode home cheerily to Rookwood. Roll-call had long been over; and the four had to present themselves in Mr. Bootles' study to explain. Needless to say, they did not mention that they had been doing garrison duty in a besieged cottage. They expressed meek regret for being late; and Mr. Bootles gave them a hundred lines each and dismissed them.

Prep in the end study was rather neglected that evening. Jimmy Silver & Co. had something more important than prep to think of—how to "raise the wind" and see the widow of Coombe through her troubles. And "Uncle James" of Rookwood set his active wits very seriously to work on that subject.

THE END.

THE POPULAR.—No. 240.

There is Another Topping Rookwood Story in This Week's "Boys' Friend"!