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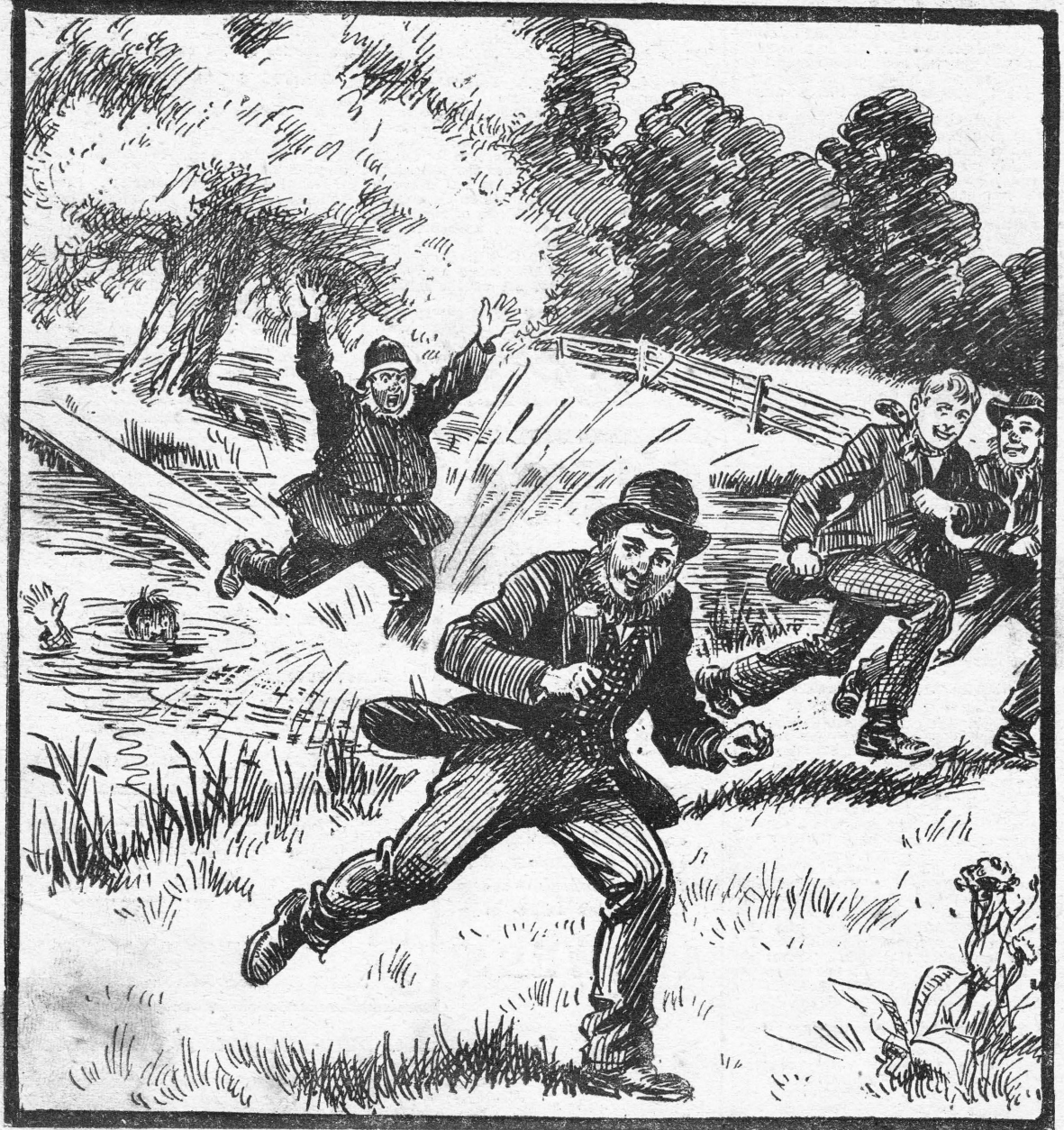
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# The POPULAR 2<sup>D</sup>

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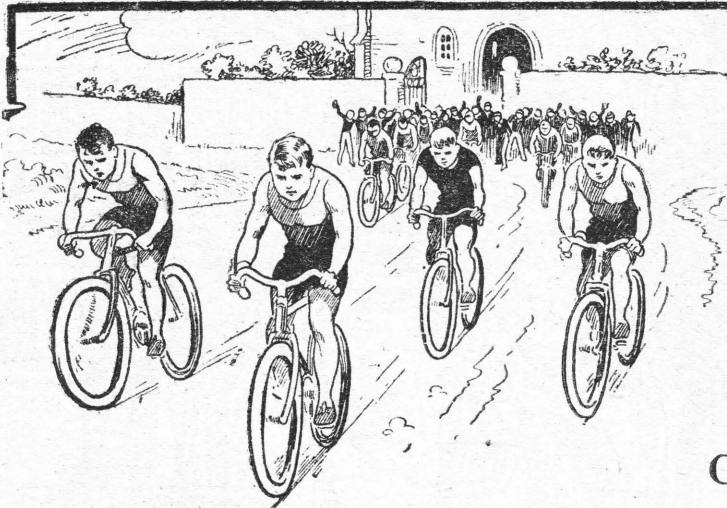


**THE BOGUS FOOTPADS IN FULL FLIGHT!**

(An amazing episode from the New St. Jim's Story in this issue.)

## THE STORY OF THE GREAT ROOKWOOD FIFTY-MILE CYCLE RACE!

What can be more exciting than a great cycle race of fifty miles? It is recorded here below in the masterly style of one of your favourite authors, who has for many years led the Rookwood characters along the road of fame. It is the greatest sporting and school yarn the POPULAR has ever had!



# Rivals Of The Road!

BY  
OWEN CONQUEST.

### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

#### Trouble for Tubby!

**M**Y hat! Just look at Muffin!" Jimmy Silver uttered that exclamation.

The leader of the Classical Fourth was standing at his study window, gazing out across the sunny quadrangle.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome, the other members of the Fistical Four, joined their chum at the window.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Lovell. "Tubby's going some!"

Tubby Muffin certainly was. He was mounted on a green bicycle, and he was whizzing round the Rookwood quadrangle as if he was on the celebrated Herne Hill racing-track.

Tubby was attired in a pair of shorts and a vest that was somewhat tattered. As Newcome remarked, it was about time Tubby made some investments in vestments!

The energy of the fat junior was surprising, in view of the mountain of flesh he carried. His plump legs were revolving rapidly, and he bent a perspiring face over the handlebars. Round and round the quad he sped, at a pace that grew more dizzy and reckless with each advancing moment.

The Fistical Four stared at the strange spectacle in amazement.

"What's the little game, I wonder?" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Looks as if Tubby's in training for something," said Raby.

"Trying to reduce his weight, p'raps," suggested Newcome.

Whatever he was trying to do, Tubby Muffin was certainly causing a sensation. Faces appeared at other study windows; and voices were heard urging Tubby to "go it." Not that he needed any urging.

The fat junior knew that he had an audience, so he pedalled away more vigorously than ever. Tubby always played to the gallery when he had an opportunity. And he had a first-rate opportunity now. He would show these fellows what a speed-merchant he was on a bicycle. He would break all previous records for pace.

Unfortunately, Tubby broke something else, as well as records.

A tradesman's boy hove into view. He was sauntering through the quad with a basket of eggs on his arm, and he was reading a paper at the same time. Consequently, he was not aware of Tubby Muffin's wild gyrations.

Neither was Tubby aware that the tradesman's boy was approaching. His eyes were glancing downwards instead of ahead of him. He had now attained the utmost speed of which the green bicycle was capable. And he was heading straight for disaster.

Jimmy Silver & Co. uttered a warning.

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shout. Tubby Muffin mistook it for a shout of approval, and he scorched harder than ever.

"The—the mad chump!" muttered Jimmy Silver, aghast. "He'll come a terrible cropper!"

Before the words were out of Jimmy's mouth the catastrophe happened.

The tradesman's boy, who was just reading about a terrible railway collision, suddenly found himself knocked flying.

The eggs—there were a couple of dozen of them—shot out of the basket, and were smashed to pieces on the flagstone; and Tubby Muffin landed on top of the wreckage.

"Ow!"

"Ah!"

"Groo!"

"Yarooooo!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were startled at first. They feared that Tubby Muffin might have broken his neck, or, at least, sustained serious injury. But when they saw him scramble to his feet and rush to remonstrate with the tradesman's boy, for not looking where he was going, they knew the fat junior was all right.

"My only aunt!" gasped Lovell. "What a smash!"

"I could see it coming," said Newcome. "Neither of the silly chumps was looking where he was going. They say that the age of miracles is past, but it isn't. It's a miracle that Tubby didn't break his fat neck!"

"By Jove, yes!"

Tubby Muffin, with the yolks of many eggs streaming down his plump person, was engaged in telling the tradesman's boy exactly what he thought of him.

"I've a jolly good mind to wipe up the ground with you!" he roared. "Why can't you look where you're going?"

"Talk about the pot calling the kettle black!" chuckled Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin was waving his arms about excitedly, like a human windmill. And he was fairly dancing with rage.

"You've busted my bike to bits!" he stormed.

"Wot about my heggs?" retorted the tradesman's boy.

"Bust your eggs!"

"You seem to 'ave done that already!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the onlookers.

The fierce battle of words between Tubby Muffin and the tradesman's boy came to an end at last; and the village youth picked up the empty basket and walked off.

Tubby Muffin was left alone with the wrecked bicycle. It was a very complete wreck, too. The handlebars were twisted, and the mudguard was flattened. The chain had slipped its moorings, and there were a couple of spokes missing from the front wheel.

Tubby stood gazing down at the wreckage with a woeful expression on his face.

"Wonder whose bike that is?" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Tubby's, of course," said Lovell. "He wouldn't look so sick about it, if it was someone else's."

"But Tubby hasn't got a green bike," said Newcome. "There's only one fellow on the Classical side who has a green jigger, and that's Kit Erroll."

"Eh? Who's taking my name in vain?" said a quiet voice in the doorway.

The Fistical Four spun round, to be confronted with Kit Erroll himself.

"Hallo, Erroll!" said Jimmy Silver. "Think you could recognise the bike if you saw it?"

"Sure thing!"

"Come and identify it, then."

Erroll crossed to the window. He glanced out into the quad, and saw the battered bike, and Tubby Muffin standing mournfully beside it. Then he gave a gasp.

"My bike! My green bike! Has that fat boulder been riding it? I—I'll jolly well burst him!"

And Erroll, breathing threatenings and slaughter, darted to the door. Within half a minute of leaving Jimmy Silver's study, he rushed into the quadrangle and came quickly up to Tubby Muffin.

"What do you mean by borrowing my bike and busting it to bits?" he shouted wrathfully.

"Oh, really, Erroll—"

Tubby Muffin backed away in alarm.

"Hands off!" he yelled. "This isn't your bike—it's mine!"

Erroll gave a snort.

"Think I can't recognise my own property?" he said. "This isn't the first time you've borrowed my bike without permission!"

"But this is my bike!" howled Tubby.

"It arrived this morning—a present from my aunt at Farlington. Ask Mack, the porter. He saw it arrive. Besides, if you look in the shed, you'll find your bike there, safe and sound."

Tubby Muffin was a notorious fibber. It had been said of him that he could lick Baron Munchausen and Ananias into a cocked hat, so far as telling whoppers was concerned. But on this occasion his words seemed to ring true.

Kit Erroll examined the battered bicycle that lay on the ground. If it wasn't his own machine, then it was an absolute counterpart of it. It was the same make, it had the same type of tyres, and it was the same size.

"It looks remarkably like my bike," said Erroll. "But I'll make assurance doubly sure by having a look inside the cycle-shed."

And he hurried away to investigate,

The Boy with a Dark Secret! See Next Week's Rookwood Story!

Five minutes later, Erroll rejoined Tubby Muffin.

"Pon my word, Tubby, you were quite right!" he said, in tones of contrition. "My own jigger is in the shed, and this must be yours."

"Pity you couldn't believe a fellow in the first place!" grunted Tubby.

"But I didn't know you'd had a bike sent you. I didn't even know you had an aunt at Farlington."

"Well, you know now. You shouldn't have jumped to conclusions and call a fellow a fibber!"

"I'm awfully sorry—"

"Well, if you put it like that," said Tubby loftily, "I'll accept your apologies!"

And with that he walked painfully to his battered machine.

**THE SECOND CHAPTER.**

**The Fifty Miles Race!**

**T**AKE it up tenderly, lift it with care!" chuckled Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
The Fistical Four strolled up to Tubby Muffin as he was gently raising his battered machine.

"I say, you fellows, that was an awful smash I had!" said Tubby.

"Well, you asked for it!" growled Lovell. "You were scorching round the quad as if you were trying to lower the world's record. What was the idea?"

"I was training," said Tubby.

"Training! What on earth for?"

"The fifty miles cycling race."

"The what?"

"The which?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. blinked at Tubby Muffin in amazement.

"The fifty miles cycling race," repeated Tubby calmly. "It's coming off on Wednesday, you know. I suppose you fellows will enter for it, as it's open to all the juniors. But I don't mind telling you that it will be a waste of time and energy, so far as you chaps are concerned. You see, I've already made up my mind to win."

Jimmy Silver grasped the fat junior by the collar and shook him.

"What the dickens are you babbling about?" he demanded. "You're talking absolute balderdash!"

"Oh, really Silver— Leggo my collar, you beast! You're throttling me! It's a fact about the fifty miles race. I heard the Head jawing about it to old Dalton. Couldn't help hearing, of course. The Head's got a voice that booms through the building, like a blessed thunder-clap. He was telling Dalton that one of the school governors, Sir Brian Beverley—quite a sporty old boy—had arranged a fifty miles bike-race, open to all juniors. Sir Brian's going to give a gold cup to the winner—a real gold cup, mark you, not a nickel silver affair. I haven't decided yet where to keep the cup when I've won it. Pr'aps the study mantelpiece would be the best place."

The Fistical Four continued to stare blankly at Tubby Muffin.

Tubby's startling statement took a good deal of digesting, as his statements usually did.

Cycling races often took place at Rookwood, but never over a distance of more than ten miles. The juniors grew dizzy at the mere thought of a fifty miles race.

"Of course, it's absurd!" said Jimmy Silver at length.

"Muffin's romancing, as usual!" said Newcome.

"He'll tell us next that there's going to be a running race from John o' Groats to Land's End!" chuckled Raby.

Tubby Muffin blinked wrathfully at the juniors.

"You're a set of Doubting Thomases!" he exclaimed. "Anybody would think I was always telling fibs, the way you doubt my word!"

"Well, you're not exactly a disciple of George Washington," said Lovell. "You tell about a hundred whoppers a day on an average. And you can hardly expect us to swallow your latest."

"But it isn't a whopper—it's a fact! I swear by my beard—"

"Ass! You haven't got one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four were strongly inclined to bump Tubby Muffin on the flagstones

for inventing such an incredible yarn. But they were soon to learn that it was true.

Conroy and Van Ryn came dashing out into the quad. Their faces were glowing, and their eyes gleaming with intense excitement.

"Have you heard, you fellows?" asked Conroy breathlessly.

"Eh?"

"Have we heard what?"

"There's going to be a fifty miles bike-race on Wednesday, open to all juniors!"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Did you get that tale from Tubby?" he asked.

"No. It's on the notice-board, for all the world to see. And the Head's signature is underneath the announcement, so there's no catch in it."

"Told you so, you fellows!" said Tubby Muffin triumphantly. "Now pr'aps you'll apologise for doubting my word?"

"We'll go and have a look at the announcement first," said Lovell.

And the Fistical Four hurried away to read the notice-board.

A goodly crowd had already assembled to read the Head's announcement.

The latter was genuine enough. There could be no doubt about that. The familiar signature of Dr. Chisholm was not one that could be easily imitated.

Perched on the shoulders of Lovell and Newcome, Jimmy Silver declaimed the announcement aloud:

**"NOTICE!**

"Sir Brian Beverley, a prominent member of the Board of Governors, has very kindly offered to award a Gold Cup to the winner of

**A CYCLING RACE OF FIFTY MILES,**

open to all juniors on the Classical and Modern sides.

"The race will commence on Wednesday next, at eleven a.m. The starting-point will be the school gateway, and the route will be a circular one, passing through the town of Latcham, Hartfield, Farlington, Swanleigh, and Kingsworthy, and finishing at Rookwood.

"Would-be competitors should hand in their names to Mr. Dalton, the official starter; and they are urged to go into training for the event without delay."

Jimmy Silver, his cheeks aglow with excitement, jumped down from the shoulders of his chums.

"It's true enough," he said.

"Fifty miles!" gasped Newcome. "Why, it will be a killing race!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Lovell. "It's not such a terrible ordeal as it sounds. After all, we've often biked that in a day, when we've been on holiday."

"And some time ago there was a big national cycle race which lasted a whole week," said Raby.

"I reckon we shall have had quite enough cycling by the time we've finished the course," said Jimmy Silver. "The fellow who comes in first will have earned the gold cup and the V.C. into the bargain!"

Tubby Muffin, who had followed the Fistical Four into the Hall, gave a chortle.

"I shall win hands down!" he said confidently. "There's no stopping me, once I get fairly wound up on a bike. And my green bike's a beauty—at least, it will be when I've had it repaired. I tell you, it's a waste of energy for you fellows to enter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors were mightily amused at the prospect of Tubby Muffin taking part in such a Spartan event. It was as much as Tubby could do to cycle to Latcham without exhausting himself. It would take him about a week to cycle fifty miles; and he would stand no earthly chance of winning—unless every other competitor met with serious mishap.

The Head's announcement caused quite a flutter at Rookwood.

Classicals and Moderns lost no time in going into training.

At last the great day dawned.

Naturally, the school was granted a whole holiday on Wednesday, and seniors and fags, and even masters, turned out in full force to see the start of the great race.

There were no less than ninety starters. All looked merry and bright, and full of

confidence, as they lined up with their machines.

It was impossible, of course, for the whole of the competitors to start off together from the same spot. Mr. Dalton lined them up six abreast, in fifteen rows. And Jimmy Silver & Co. were delighted to find themselves in the front rank.

It was going to be a great duel between Classicals and Moderns. The winner of the gold cup would bring lustre to his House. If he happened to be a Classical, Jimmy Silver & Co. would rejoice with a great rejoicing. If he chanced to be a Modern, Tommy Dodd & Co. would be transported into the seventh heaven of delight.

Tubby Muffin found himself in the rear rank of all; and in the rear he would be likely to remain. There wasn't a fellow there who would permit himself to be overtaken by such an egregious ass as Tubby.

Mr. Dalton was about to start the competitors on their long journey.

There was a last anxious survey of tyres, to make certain they were properly pumped up. And then the word of command was given, and the great army of cyclists mounted their machines, and moved off down the dusty road, to the accompaniment of loud and prolonged cheers from the excited crowd in the quadrangle.

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.**

**First Man Home.**

**T**UBBY MUFFIN was left at the post, so to speak.

Being a very bad cyclist, Tubby rushed full-pelt into one of the stone pillars of the school gateway.

There was a grinding collision, and Tubby was shot clean out of the saddle. He landed on all fours in the gateway, and the onlookers roared.

Tubby Muffin roared, too, but not with merriment.

"You utterly stupid boy!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton, hurrying to the spot. "Could you not see that pillar?"

"Ow—yessir! I—I hoped to clear it!" moaned Tubby. "But the blessed thing seemed to mesmerise me, and I went bang into it!"

"I do not think you had better participate in this race, Muffin," said Mr. Dalton. "You appear to have no control over your machine. If you ran into a steamroller in the same way that you ran into that pillar you would come to serious injury."

"Oh, really, sir, I don't often do things like that. I haven't had a really nasty spill on my bike since—er—lemme see—yesterday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows roared, and Mr. Dalton smiled.

"Of course, Muffin, if you insist on taking part in this race, I am powerless to stop you," he said. "Sir Brian Beverley has clearly stipulated that the contest is open to all juniors. But if you take my advice, you will abandon the idea of entering. You cannot possibly hope to win, for you have lost valuable time at the start."

"Oh, I shall soon make that up, sir," said Tubby Muffin confidently. "I believe my front tyre has burst, but I've no doubt one of the fellows will fix me up with another."

"I will!" volunteered Hansom of the Fifth.

"Thanks awfully, Hansom!"

Mr. Dalton looked grave.

"I am sorry you have disregarded my advice, Muffin," he said. "Without wishing to be an alarmist, I have fears that you may meet with a dreadful accident on the road."

"Don't you worry about me, sir," said Tubby. "I know how to look after myself."

There was a delay of nearly half an hour while Tubby Muffin was fixed up with a new tyre.

"I've lost a bit of time at the start," said Tubby, "but it won't take me long to catch up to the others. Once I get fairly going, I shall tear along like a giddy cyclone!"

Hansom of the Fifth laughed.

"I hope you come in first, kid," he said. "But I'll wager you a hundred to one in doughnuts that you don't!"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin mounted his machine, and started off amid a burst of ironical cheering. He had as much hope of catching the other eighty-nine cyclists as a tortoise would have of overtaking an express train. But his hopes were high as he pedalled furiously away in the direction of Latham.

Meanwhile, the serious side of the race was beginning to develop.

The Fistical Four had led at the start, and they still led at the end of the first five miles. They cycled abreast, and were going strongly, with a powerful wind at their backs. On the homeward journey they would have that wind in their faces. It wasn't a pleasant prospect, but Jimmy Silver & Co. didn't worry. The conditions would be the same for everybody.

Hard on the heels—or rather, on the back wheels—of the Fistical Four came the Three Tommies—Dodd, Cook, and Doyle, of the Moderns. They, too, were riding very strongly. At the end of the first five miles they were as fresh as daisies.

Next in order came Mornington and Erroll. These staunch chums were thoroughly enjoying the first stages of the race; though they realised that a grim struggle lay ahead of them.

"It's goin' to be fearfully faggin' an' fatiguin' later on, when we've got the wind in our faces," said Mornington. "I shall feel inclined to hop off an' rest my weary limbs by the wayside."

"You won't throw up the sponge surely?" said Erroll. "That sort of thing's awfully feeble."

Mornington smiled as he flashed along.

"You'll feel like throwin' up the sponge yourself later on," he said.

"I dare say. But I shall stick it out."

Conversation languished after that. The juniors needed all their breath for the great effort they would be called upon to make.

At the town of Hartfield, fifteen miles from Rookwood, the same order was maintained.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were still in the vanguard, closely pursued by their Modern rivals. Then came Morny and Erroll, and behind those two the road was clear. The rest of the competitors had dropped far behind.

The narrow, cobbled streets of Hartfield were congested with traffic, and the cyclists were swallowed up in the stream of vehicles. But Jimmy Silver & Co. came through safely, and sped on into the open country beyond.

Twenty miles had been covered when the first mishap occurred.

Raby picked up a bad puncture, and was obliged to dismount. His comrades would have stayed to help him, but Raby waved them on.

"Go ahead, you fellows!" he said. "Never mind me!"

"It's frightfully bad luck," said Jimmy Silver commiseratingly.

"But it's all in the game," replied Raby. "I expect there will be a good many more victims of bad luck before the race is over."

Raby was right.

The cyclists were approaching the town of Farlington, when Newcome's chain started giving trouble. He was obliged to dismount and wheel his machine to the nearest garage.

Jimmy Silver and Lovell went on alone. Tommy Dodd & Co. were creeping up, closer and closer. It was going to be a grim tussle.

It was not until the half-distance was reached that anybody began to show signs of exhaustion.

Although they had ridden twenty-five miles at a fast pace, the cyclists had been favoured by the wind. They had not had to walk up a single hill. The conditions had been glorious.

But a different tale had to be told now. The road took a sharp turn, and a blustering wind, which blew right into the juniors' faces, made progress difficult.

Lovell stuck it out as long as he could, but at last he rolled off his machine and staggered towards the roadside.

"I must take a rest, Jimmy," he muttered. "I'm utterly whacked!"

Jimmy Silver nodded sympathetically. He would have been glad of a rest himself, but with Tommy Dodd & Co. challenging his

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position as leader, he dare not take it. So he went doggedly ahead, wondering how long it would be before the gates of Rookwood came into sight.

Jimmy missed his three chums sorely. It was not nearly so pleasant cycling alone. Presently he turned his head and saw that the three Tommies had been reduced to two. Tommy Cook had dropped out, exhausted, just as Lovell had done.

The next ten miles were like a nightmare to Jimmy Silver. What with the blustering wind and the steep hills up which he had to toil, he was fast becoming exhausted.

"I must snatch a few minutes' rest at Swanleigh, or I shall crack up altogether!" he muttered.

Again he turned his head. The two Tommies had now been reduced to one—Tommy Doyle, the Irish junior. What had happened to Tommy Dodd? He had picked up a puncture, perhaps, or had been compelled to call a halt, owing to physical stress.

Feeling cheered by the thought that he now had only one rival to contend with, Jimmy Silver bucked up a little. But in spite of his improved progress, he was soon to be deprived of the lead he had held so long.

On a level stretch of road, approaching the charming little town of Swanleigh, Tommy Doyle overtook his rival.

The Irish junior was cycling with tremendous energy. He whirled past Jimmy Silver at such a pace that Jimmy appeared to be merely crawling.

"Cheerio!" sang out Tommy Doyle, as he sped past.

"Great Scott!" gasped Jimmy Silver, as he gazed at the flying figure in front. "I'd give a term's pocket-money to possess that fellow's energy! He's going along like a house on fire, as if this was the first mile instead of the thirty-fourth or thereabouts!"

As Tommy Doyle disappeared in the distance, Jimmy Silver's hopes seemed to disappear also. But he plodded on gamely. He remembered that a race wasn't lost till it was won. Anything might happen to Tommy Doyle. His wonderful burst of energy couldn't last for ever.

At Swanleigh, two things happened which put fresh heart into Jimmy Silver.

In the first place, he treated himself to ten minutes' rest in some shady tea-gardens, and was greatly refreshed by a cup of tea. And secondly, when he emerged from the tea-gardens, he met Bulkeley of the Sixth, who was on a motor-cycle.

Bulkeley slowed up when he caught sight of the Classical junior.

"I've come along to watch the progress of the race," he explained. "Go ahead, young Silver! You're a good second!"

"But Tommy Doyle—"

"He's about two miles ahead, and going very groggily," said Bulkeley. "He seems to have used up all his energy, and he hasn't a kick left in him. You ought to overtake him with ease."

"Oh, good!"

Hope came surging back to Jimmy Silver. Refreshed by his rest, he rode on at a good pace.

Half a mile after mile passed under his rapidly revolving wheels. But there was no sign of Tommy Doyle.

As a matter of fact, the plucky Irish junior had gone on until he could go on no longer. When Bulkeley of the Sixth had seen him he had been well-nigh exhausted, but he had struggled on for a good many miles after that.

It was not until Jimmy Silver was within five miles of home that he came upon his rival.

Tommy Doyle reclined at full-length by the wayside—whacked to the wide!

A curious lump came into Jimmy's throat as he looked at that forlorn figure. He realised what a valiant fight Tommy Doyle had put up—toiling onwards and ever onwards, until compelled by sheer exhaustion to relinquish the struggle.

Jimmy Silver got off his machine.

"Are you all right, Tommy?" he asked, a trifle huskily.

The Modern junior was too exhausted to reply. He simply waved a feeble hand in the direction of Rookwood, and his look seemed to say:

"Don't waste time jawing to me. Go on and win!"

Jimmy Silver decided to go ahead and to

send somebody to Tommy Doyle's assistance as soon as he reached Rookwood.

He felt that he had the race in his hands now. And it came as a tremendous shock to him, on glancing over his shoulder, to see a green bicycle bearing down upon him. Jimmy had to look twice at the rapidly gaining bicycle, to make sure he was not dreaming.

But it was no dream. It was stern reality.

"Erroll!" he muttered. And then he applied himself heart and soul to the task of keeping in front.

Kit Erroll came on, riding strongly. He had ridden a finely-judged race, having kept his energies in reserve for a final spurt. His bicycle had served him splendidly, and had not given him the slightest trouble from the start.

Mornington had dropped out long since, but Erroll had stuck doggedly to his task, overtaking one fellow after another, until now he had only Jimmy Silver to beat.

But Jimmy was determined not to be beaten. In spite of the strong head-wind, in spite of his weariness, he pedalled away with a do-or-die expression on his face.

Kit Erroll gained on him—he actually drew level—but he could not do more than that.

The two juniors struggled on side by side in silence. And they were still riding abreast when the school gates came in sight.

It was certainly an amazing finish to a race of fifty miles, to find two fellows approaching the school gates together. In a short race a close finish would have been the natural thing to expect; but nobody, in his wildest imaginings, had anticipated a tight finish over a course of fifty miles!

A volley of cheering burst from the fellows who were perched on the school wall.

"Silver!"

"Erroll!"

"Stick it out, you giddy heroes!"

"It's a win for the Classics, in any case!"

Jimmy Silver brought his tired leg-muscles forcibly into action. So did Kit Erroll. Jimmy put on a last desperate spurt. So did Erroll. But the first bicycle to cross the whitewashed line in the school gateway was not Erroll's.

Jimmy Silver beat the game and plucky rider of the green bicycle by a foot!

The scenes that followed beggared description. A perfect pandemonium broke loose.

Both Silver and Erroll were surrounded by their schoolfellows, and borne shoulder-high towards the school building.

It had been the greatest cycle race ever known in the long and varied history of Rookwood School. And Jimmy Silver, the popular leader of the Classical Fourth, was joyously acclaimed on every side as the winner of the gold cup!

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### The Tribulations of Tubby.

TUBBY MUFFIN cycled slowly into the town of Farlington.

The fat junior cycled so slowly, in fact, that it was marvellous how he retained his balance. Had he been competing in a slow cycle race he would have proved an easy winner.

Tubby was tired. Gone were his fond dreams of winning the Gold Cup. He had got as far as Farlington, and that was as far as he intended to go. He could not have cycled another mile to save his life.

Farlington was a haven of rest for the weary and perspiring Tubby. His Aunt Bertha lived there, the aunt who had presented him with the green bicycle.

"I'll drop in and see the old dear," panted Tubby. "I've always been the apple of her eye, and she makes a great fuss of me. What's more to the point, she always has plenty of grub in the house. And I'm so jolly peckish that I could eat a donkey's hind leg off!"

This was not Tubby's first visit to Farlington. He had happy memories of a blissful week spent there in the summer—a week of orgies and banquets; seven long days of sheer delight.

"Aunt Bertha's a brick—or rather a briciness!" murmured the fat junior. "I should like to spend two or three days at

**If You Want a Yarn with a Thrill, Don't Miss Next Tuesday's Rookwood Yarn!**

her place, but I don't quite see how I'm going to wangle it."

Tubby Muffin turned out of the busy High Street into a quiet avenue, at the end of which stood his aunt's house.

Aunt Bertha was a maiden lady of considerable means. It was not strictly true that Tubby Muffin was the apple of her eye. She had lots of other nephews of whom she was more fond. That was why Tubby only received a present from her once in a blue moon, so to speak.

All the same, Aunt Bertha was always delighted to see her plump nephew from Rookwood; and knowing Tubby's weakness for the good things of the table, she pandered to it for all she was worth.

Tubby was in a state bordering on collapse when he arrived at his aunt's house.

A prim maid opened the door to him. Then she hurried into the drawing-room and announced that Master Reginald had "turned up unexpected."

Aunt Bertha came bustling out into the hall.

"Why, my dear Reginald," she exclaimed, going forward to greet her nephew, "this is indeed a surprise! What brings you here? Have you got a holiday?"

"Yes, aunt," said Tubby. "A stolen one," he added, under his breath.

"Come into the drawing-room, my dear boy," said Aunt Bertha. "You seem hot and dusty and tired."

"I'm all that, and more," said Tubby. "And I'd prefer the dining-room to the drawing-room, if you don't mind. I've had nothing to eat since brekker."

"Dear me! I must ask cook to prepare a meal right away."

Aunt Bertha ushered her nephew into the dining-room. Then she hurried away to the kitchen.

Tubby Muffin sank down on to the settee and picked up a paper which was lying there. It was the latest edition of the "local rag." Evidently it had only just been published, for it was damp from the press.

Glancing casually at the paper Tubby's eyes alighted on a paragraph in the Stop Press column—a paragraph which made him sit up and take notice.

"CYCLING ACCIDENT.

"A cyclist named Muffin was involved in a rather serious accident this afternoon in Farlington High Street. His machine was caught in the tramlines, and he was badly thrown. Muffin was conveyed to the local hospital suffering from concussion and shock."

Tubby blinked at that paragraph in amazement.

"A cyclist named Muffin!" he murmured. "By Jove, that might have been me! If anybody at Rookwood was to see this paragraph they'd think I'd come a cropper!"

This started a train of thought in Tubby Muffin's mind.

Here was the very opportunity he wanted—the opportunity of spending a few days with his Aunt Bertha. He would cut out this paragraph and post it to the Head of Rookwood, and the Head would naturally surmise that it was Tubby who had met with the accident, and not merely a namesake. Consequently, he would not expect Tubby to return to Rookwood for several days at least.

It was rather a caddish thing to do; it was, in fact, downright deception; but Tubby Muffin did not view the matter in that light. Here was a golden opportunity of snatching a holiday, and Tubby told himself that he would be a fool not to take advantage of it. So he hunted for a pair of scissors and cut out the paragraph, and placed it in an envelope addressed to Dr. Chisholm, with the following covering note:

"Mr. Dockter Chisholm, Eskwire.

"Dear Sir,—You will see from the cutting I enclose that I have been in the wores, and am suffering from slight discussion and shock. But please don't worry about me, or go to the trouble of making inquiries about me, bekwase I shall soon be all right, and hope to be back at Rookwood in a few days.

"Yours respectful,

"R. MUFFIN."

Tubby popped out and posted the letter before the meal was brought in. He told himself that it was a masterpiece, and that the Head would be sure to swallow it.

"Of course, I shall have to appear a bit strange in my manner when I get back to Rookwood," he mused. "I must complain of pains in my head, and all that sort of thing. Then everybody will think it was me who met with the accident."

It was with a tranquil mind that Tubby Muffin sat down to a bumper repast. The cook had prepared an excellent meal, and Tubby did full justice to it.

"How long will you be staying, Reginald?" asked Aunt Bertha.

"Oh, two or three days, aunt!" was the reply. And Tubby's face beamed like a full moon at the prospect.

But alas for the fat junior's hopes!

Next morning, when the Head received Tubby's letter and the cutting enclosed, he was very concerned.

Tubby had asked Dr. Chisholm not to go to the trouble of making inquiries; but the Head, who felt a strong sense of responsibility in the matter, decided to telephone to the hospital at Farlington and find out how the patient was progressing.

After breakfast he put through a trunk call to Farlington, and after a certain amount of delay he got in touch with the hospital.

"Is that Farlington hospital?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I am Doctor Chisholm speaking—the headmaster of Rookwood School."

"Oh, yes, sir?"

"You have a patient named Muffin in your hospital, I believe? He met with a cycling accident yesterday."

"That is so, sir."

"I trust he is making favourable progress?" said the Head anxiously.

"If you will hold the line a moment, sir, I will inquire."

"Thank you!"

There was a brief interval. Then the voice of the hospital official came over the wires.

"I am happy to report that Mr. Muffin is making excellent progress, sir. He hopes to return to work to-morrow."

"To—to work?" stammered the Head.

"Yes, sir. He is employed as a shop-assistant in Farlington."

"Bless my soul! Surely you are making a mistake? Muffin is a schoolboy, fifteen years of age. He belongs, in fact, to my school."

"We have no schoolboy here, sir. The Muffin who met with the cycling accident is a man of forty."

"Good gracious! Are you quite sure of that?"

"Positive, sir!"

The Head thanked his informant and replaced the receiver on its hooks in a dazed sort of way. There was some mystery here—a mystery which did not take the worthy Head long to solve. After a few moments reflection, he realised what had happened. Tubby Muffin must have seen this paragraph in the paper, and he was trying to obtain a holiday on the strength of it. The Head remembered that Tubby had an aunt who lived at Farlington. Doubtless the fat junior was hoping to spend a few days with her, and to deceive the Head into thinking that he was in hospital.

Dr. Chisholm looked very grim. He rang for the page and despatched him in quest of Bulkeley of the Sixth.

A few moments later the captain of Rookwood appeared.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, Bulkeley. I wish you to go to Farlington, and call at the house of Muffin's aunt. The address is The Cedars, Shelley Avenue. You will find Muffin there. He is endeavouring to obtain a holiday by false pretences, and I wish him to be brought back to the school immediately."



NEAR THE END OF THE RACE!—Tommy Doyle reclined at full length by the wayside—whacked to the wide. A curious lump came into Jimmy Silver's throat as he looked at the forlorn figure. He got off his machine. "Are you all right, Tommy?" he asked. But the Modern was too exhausted to reply. (See Chapter 3.)

"Very good, sir."

A fast train took Bulkeley to Farlington in under the hour.

Tubby Muffin had the shock of his life when he looked from the window of the dining-room, where he was having an enjoyable snack, and saw the captain of Rookwood come striding up to the front door. In fact, Tubby nearly fell through the floor in his astonishment and dismay.

Bulkeley explained the situation to Aunt Bertha, and that good lady was very angry indeed with her nephew.

"Reginald," she exclaimed, "come here, sir! I find that you have grossly deceived me, and also your headmaster. You have no right to be here at all!"

"Oh, really, aunt—"

"You will return to the school at once, and I hope Dr. Chisholm will punish you as you richly deserve!"

"Oh crumbs! How did the Head get to know that I wasn't in hospital, I wonder? This—is this awful! Hang on a bit, Bulkeley; don't go yet. I don't see why we shouldn't both wangle a holiday together."

"Well, I'm dashed!" gasped Bulkeley.

Aunt Bertha glared at her erring nephew. "You will return at once, Reginald!" she snapped.

"Oh, all right, aunt!"

Tubby Muffin realised that there was nothing for it but to obey orders. So he fetched his cap and his green bicycle and accompanied Bulkeley to the railway-station. The bicycle was placed in the luggage-van, and Bulkeley and his prisoner entered a first-class carriage and were soon being whirled away towards Rookwood.

As they appeared in the gateway a crowd of juniors surrounded them, and a chorus of questions was flung at the fat junior. But Bulkeley waved them aside with a frown. "Stand back there, you young asses!" he said.

"Where did you find him, Bulkeley?" asked Jimmy Silver. "He wasn't really hurt, was he?"

"No; he was swinging the lead, as usual," was the curt reply, as the captain of Rookwood piloted the quaking fat Fourth-Former through the crowd to the Head's study, where a painful interview followed.

The Head decided that nothing short of a public flogging in Big Hall would meet the case. And by the time the ordeal was over, Tubby Muffin bitterly regretted ever having embarked on the fifty miles cycling race.

THE END.

(Next Tuesday's story of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood is entitled: "The Page-boy's Secret!" Don't miss it!)

## THE 'FLUENCE THAT FAILED!

(Continued from page 17.)

Miss Meadows did not stand back. She grasped Chunky Todgers by one fat ear, and the magic passes ceased all of a sudden, and Chunky gave a dismal howl.

"Yooooop!"

"Come!" snapped Miss Meadows.

"Ow! Leggo!" wailed Chunky.

Miss Meadows, with a firm grip on his ear, led him out before the class.

Chunky's fat knees were knocking together now.

It was only too evident that something was wrong with the mesmeric influence; it was quite certain that Miss Meadows was not affected by it at all, and did not even know she had been mesmerised.

"Now, Todgers, explain what this extraordinary conduct means!" exclaimed Miss Meadows angrily.

"Oh dear!" gasped Chunky. "Ain't you ain't you under the 'fluence, then?"

"What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the class.

Miss Meadows blinked at Chunky Todgers dazedly, and then she understood.

"You—you—your incredibly foolish boy!" she stuttered. "Is it possible that you supposed you were mesmerising me? You—you— Bless my soul! I have never heard of such absurdity and such impertinence! Todgers, hold out your hand!"

Chunky Todgers held out his hand, with a lugubrious look.

He did not think of trying the magic 'fluence again.

Even Chunky realised at last that the 'fluence was no use.

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-woooooop!"

"Now go back to your place, Todgers, and if I ever hear of any of this nonsense again, I shall punish you much more severely!"

Chunky crawled back to his seat.

His fat face was dolorous for the rest of the afternoon. And after lessons he was busy writing out his lines; he found he had time, after all.

And the next morning, when Bob Lawless asked him how the 'fluence was going on, Chunky only snorted. The 'fluence was not going on at all—it had gone off for good.

Chunky Todgers was no longer a believer in mesmerism.

THE END.

(There will be another ripping story of the School in the Backwoods in next week's extra special issue. Turn to page 2, and find out all about the next story. It is entitled: "The 'Satted' Claim"!)

## PURSUED ACROSS THE SEA!

(Continued from page 10.)

But, of course, Sylvester, if he had got out of the window, could not have got out at the top. And the window was so big and heavy that the little fag would have found his strength severely taxed to open it at all.

Wharton pushed it up, and looked out. In the distance he caught sight of Jackson, the postman, crossing to the gates, with his sack on his shoulder.

Under the window was a sound of voices. Coker of the Fifth was standing close at hand, talking to Potter and Greene: He was laying down the law on the subject of football, and pointing out that Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, was a silly ass not to think of playing him, Coker, in the first eleven, in the approaching fooler season.

"Hallo, Coker," called out Wharton. "Have you seen a kid get out of this window?"

Coker looked round.

"Don't interrupt me, you Remove fag—"

"But have you seen anybody get out?" asked Harry. "Young Sylvester was detained, and he seems to have vanished."

"No, I haven't!" growled Coker.

"Have you been here long, you chaps?"

"We've been standing here ever since Coker began to talk," said Potter, with a grunt. "It seems like about two hours."

Coker snorted.

"Ten minutes," he said—"about ten minutes."

"Then he can't have got out of the window without you seeing him," said Harry, greatly puzzled. He closed the window again. "I say, you chaps, this is jolly queer. Where the dickens has young Sylvester got to?"

"He's cut detention, and he's hiding somewhere, I suppose!" yawned Johnny Bull. "I'm hungry! Let's go and have tea."

"But I don't see how he could have come out of the Form-room without our seeing him," said Harry. "We were playing leap-frog in the passage while we waited for the postman—after Blane was gone."

"Well, as he isn't in the Form-room, he must have got out of it somehow," said Bob Cherry. "Let's go and have tea."

Harry Wharton was puzzled; but he could not see any grounds for alarm. The kidnapper, of course, came into his mind, but he dismissed the thought. The kidnapper might possibly have got into the school, but Wharton did not see how he could have got out again—with Sylvester. Up to a few minutes ago the fag had been in the room, and he could not have left by the window without being seen by Coker & Co., and Harry Wharton and his friends had been in the passage.

It was very puzzling. Doubtless, however, the fag had slipped quickly out of the room without the juniors noticing him—that was the conclusion Wharton came to. And the Famous Five, abandoning the idea of asking young Sylvester to tea, since he could not be found, repaired to Study No. 1, where a royal spread was the outcome of Colonel Wharton's "quid."

But call-over came, and still there was no sign of Sylvester. Harry Wharton & Co. reported to Mr. Quelch all that they knew, and then they had to repeat it all again to Dr. Locke.

Of course, the Head was very worried. "Perhaps—perhaps he has merely broken bounds," he suggested hopefully.

Mr. Quelch shook his head.

"No, sir!" he said. "The poor lad was pursued across the seas, and they've got him at last!"

"Then we must call in the police!" said the Head. "We will trust that they will succeed in finding the boy."

Harry Wharton & Co. also hoped so, too, but they had their doubts.

THE END.

(On no account must you miss next week's long complete story of the Chums of Greyfriars School. Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, is called in to investigate into the strange disappearance of Sylvester—and there are some surprising results.)

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