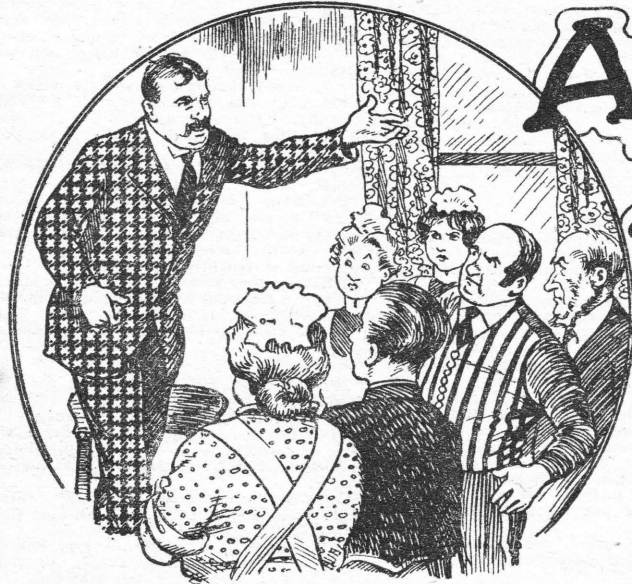


THE SCHOOL WITHOUT A STAFF! An amazing situation arises when the domestic staff of Rookwood School goes on strike against authority, leaving confusion in their wake!



A Strike at Rookwood!

A Splendid Long Complete Story of JIMMY SILVER & CO., the Chums of Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

(Author of the famous Rookwood Stories now appearing in the "Boys' Friend.")

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Fat of the Land!

RASP, rasp! Putty Grace halted outside Study No. 2 on the Classical Side at Rookwood as the sound of a file in use came to his ears.

The junior flung the study door open, revealing the fat figure of Reginald Muffin, who was diligently engaged in filing a piece of metal screwed up in a miniature clamp attached to the corner of the table. A little pile of metal filings strewed the table, and the sudden rush of air caused by the fan of the door as it was unceremoniously flung open, wuffed them about the fat person of Tubby Muffin, who looked up in surprise.

Putty Grace stared in astonishment. "What's the little game?" he asked. A guilty flush surmounted the cheeks of the fat junior.

"G-game! I'm making a key," he replied.

"A which?" "A key. You see, I've lost the key of my locker, so I thought I would try and make one myself."

"Oh!" Rasp, rasp! Tubby Muffin picked up the file and then resumed his task.

"Look here," ventured Putty Grace, "how am I to do my prep with that blessed row going on?"

"Stop it!" roared Grace, with some heat. "That row sets my teeth on edge."

"It's nearly finished now," said Muffin. "Another five minutes and you can get on with your rotten prep."

"Thanks!" exclaimed Grace laconically. "I'll trot along and see Jimmy Silver for five minutes. If you're not finished by that time, you'll have to do it in the passage—savvy?"

Tubby did not answer. Instead, he bent over the clamp, and the file commenced to move forwards and backwards with renewed vigour.

Rasp, rasp, rasp! Putty Grace, with his fingers in his ears, left the study to have a chat with Jimmy Silver.

The next five minutes were very busy ones for Reginald Muffin, but the key was finished in the time, and he surveyed it with a look of pride.

"The only thing to do now is to see if it fits," he mused. "I'll try that to-night, though I don't want the beasts to spot me."

"Finished, porpoise?" It was the voice of Putty Grace, who had returned at the expiration of the five minutes.

"Yes, old chap," grinned Tubby Muffin.

"Don't 'old chap' me," said Grace darkly, "or I shall dot you one!"

And he drew out his books for preparation as Jones minor and Higgs strolled in.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jones minor. "Opening a workshop?"

"It's a new stunt of Tubby's; he's cutting a key," said Grace.

"What?" "That's it," broke in Tubby Muffin. "I've lost my locker key, and I've cut another."

"Hum!" grunted Higgs. "About the only thing you could cut is a jam-roll!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Really, Higgs—"

"You had better clear up that rubbish. I want to do my prep," said Jones minor.

And Reginald Muffin unscrewed the clamp from the table and swept the metal filings into the dustpan. This done, the occupants of Study No. 2 settled down to the uncongenial task of preparation, and silence reigned in that apartment save for the busy scratch of pens.

"Bed-time, kids." George Bulkeley, the good-natured captain of the school, put his head into the study and issued that command.

"Right-ho, old scout!" said Putty Grace cheerfully.

And the juniors tramped up to the Fourth Form dormitory, where, after the usual hum of conversation had died down, the Fourth Form tumbled in between the clean white sheets, and were soon in the land of dreams.

There was one junior who did not fall asleep, and that was Reginald Muffin. As a rule, the egregious Tubby was the first to fill the dormitory with his snores, and the last to awaken in the morning. But on this occasion he tossed restlessly in his bed as the old clock in the tower chimed out the hours of ten, eleven, and twelve. As the last stroke of twelve died away, Tubby Muffin scrambled out of bed, and began to hastily pull on his trousers over his pyjamas. With many a cautious glance he stealthily made his way over to the door, and his heart came into his mouth as it creaked under his touch. He stood still, trembling, but no sound came to his ears save the steady breathing of the occupants of the two rows of beds.

"Good!" he muttered. Tubby Muffin crept silently down the stairs to the domestic quarters. He passed the kitchen with bated breath, and tiptoed down the stairs to the cellar, which did duty as a store-room.

Fumbling in his pocket, the fat Classical withdrew a key—the key which was supposed to fit his locker—and, with many a nervous glance, he applied it to the lock.

Click! The door flew open, and, with excitement which nearly caused him to whoop with

triumph, Tubby Muffin stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. A match flared up, and the end of a candle was produced from his capacious pockets, which, when its rays penetrated the gloom, revealed to the fat junior a vast quantity of food.

"My hat!" he murmured. "This is prime!"

And he smacked his lips in anticipation as he gazed upon the boxes of biscuits, tins of preserves, jars of jam, the store-room held.

For the next half-hour the fat junior's jaws were busy as he sampled everything that took his fancy. Crumbs strewed the floor, and several open tins of preserves were lying at his feet, but even his voracious appetite had its limit, and he closed his innings, so to speak, with a refreshing bottle of ginger-beer. His fat face was smiling, and streaks of jam smeared his mouth, as he rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Better shove those empties out of the way," he muttered to himself, "or Mrs. Maloney might get suspicious."

And the fat Classical proceeded to conceal the empty tins and ginger-beer bottles behind the packing-cases. This done, he rolled to the doorway, blew out the candle, and was about to close the door, when his gaze became riveted upon two points of light that were turned in his direction.

Tubby Muffin seemed rooted to the spot as those two points of light assumed the shape of a huge rat, which crawled towards him. Then the fat Classical's power of movement returned to him, and, with a terrified yell, he bolted down the passage as fast as his little legs could carry him. Up the stairs he went, regardless of the noise he was making, and only paused for breath as he halted outside the Fourth Form dormitory, shivering in every limb.

"Oh dear!" he gasped. "It was awful!" Footsteps sounded along the passage, and he suddenly realised that things would go hard with him if he was discovered outside his dormitory at that hour of the night. With a bound he sprang into the dormitory, and, without stopping to remove his trousers, crawled in between the sheets, where, two seconds later, to all appearances, he was fast asleep.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the figure of Mr. Bootles, clad in a dressing-gown and holding a lighted candle, peer in at the open door of the dormitory. He, seemingly satisfied that every member of the Form was asleep, silently withdrew a moment later.

Tubby Muffin breathed a sigh of relief as Mr. Bootles' footsteps died away, and, with a satisfied grunt, turned over, and was very soon snoring in earnest. But his sleep was

troubled by dreams, in which the rat figured prominently; so that when morning broke Tubby Muffin, for once in a way, was thankful, and Jimmy Silver & Co. rubbed their eyes in amazement as they beheld his ample figure before the wash-basin on the first stroke of rising-bell.

"My hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Who said that the age of miracles had passed?"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Scrivvens is Sacked!

"SCRIVVENS, what are you doing here?" Mrs. Maloney, the House-dame, addressed that question to Joseph Scrivvens, a young man who had recently been engaged as cook. Scrivvens was standing in the open doorway of the store-room, holding several empty ginger-beer bottles and preserve-tins in his arms. Mrs. Maloney's tone was not gracious. The store-room was her responsibility, and it was forbidden for any other member of the domestic staff to enter that apartment.

"What are you doing here?" she repeated severely.

Scrivvens turned and confronted her.

"I found the door open—" he began.

"Indeed!"

Mrs. Maloney's tone was very expressive.

"So I entered to investigate," Scrivvens resumed. "Someone has been here and helped themselves. Look at these!"

And he motioned to the empty bottles and tins that he held.

Mrs. Maloney's eyes nearly started from her head as she beheld the remains of Tubby Muffin's feed.

"You rascal!" she exclaimed heatedly. "Piffing! Thank heavens I've found you out!"

"What!" exclaimed Scrivvens, with equal heat. "Mrs. Maloney, ma'am, how dare you accuse me of piffing! I'm as honest as the day, I am!"

"Don't tell untruths!" said Mrs. Maloney severely. "You will only make your case worse than it already is!"

"But I tell you, ma'am, I found the door open as I was passing! I've only been here two minutes!" exclaimed the cook excitedly.

"I don't believe you!" said the House-dame decidedly. "How could anyone else open the door? There's only one key, and you know where I keep it—the rest of the staff don't!"

"I don't know anything about it, ma'am!" pleaded Scrivvens. "You are wrongfully accusing me—honest, you are!"

"Then what are you doing with these empty bottles and things?" demanded Mrs. Maloney, with asperity.

"I was going to bring them along to you, ma'am," replied Scrivvens.

"Nothing of the sort, sir! You were going to conceal the evidence of your guilt!" exclaimed the House-dame.

"I tell you—" began Scrivvens, crimson with wrath.

"Come with me to the Head," said Mrs. Maloney heatedly, "and we'll see what he has to say! I'm responsible for those stores, Scrivvens, and don't forget it!"

"But, ma'am—"

"Follow me!"

And the House-dame, with the unfortunate Scrivvens in her wake, made her way over to Dr. Chisholm's study.

Tap!

"Come in!" came the kindly voice of the Head.

Mrs. Maloney and Scrivvens marched in, and Dr. Chisholm looked up in surprise at his visitors.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Dear me! What is it, Mrs. Maloney?"

"I have a complaint to make, sir!" began the House-dame tartly.

"Indeed! What is it?" asked Dr. Chisholm.

"I found Scrivvens in the store-room this morning, and numerous articles of food are missing!" said Mrs. Maloney.

"What!" exclaimed the Head severely.

"Scrivvens must be the thief, sir! He was—"

"It's a lie!" broke in the temporary cook.

"A downright lie!"

"Silence, Scrivvens!" commanded the Head. "I'll hear what you have to say in a moment! Pray proceed, Mrs. Maloney!"

"Scrivvens is the only member of the staff who knows where I keep the key of the store-room," went on the House-dame. "I

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found him with his arms loaded with empty preserve-tins!"

"Hum!" ejaculated Dr. Chisholm. "What have you to say, Scrivvens?"

"I deny the charge, sir!" exclaimed the cook.

"What were you doing at the store-room?" asked the Head. "You are aware that it is forbidden for any member of the staff other than Mrs. Maloney to enter the store-room, I presume?"

"I am fully aware of the fact, sir. I happened to be passing this morning, and, seeing the door open, I naturally looked in."

"If what you state is correct, Scrivvens, why didn't you refer the matter to Mrs. Maloney?" asked the Head.

"I was about to do so, sir, when she came in!" faltered the cook.

"Hum!"

Mrs. Maloney snorted.

"He must have visited the store-room in the night, sir," she said.

"Ah," said Dr. Chisholm, "that reminds me! Mr. Bootles was awakened during the night by some disturbance originating from the domestic quarters. He visited each dormitory in turn, but all the boys were in their beds and asleep, and I can only conclude, Scrivvens, that you were responsible for that disturbance!"

"What!"

Words failed the unfortunate Scrivvens. He almost staggered.

"Under the circumstances, Mrs. Maloney's suspicions appear to be only too well founded!" continued the Head. "I must therefore ask you to leave the school, Scrivvens! I will not put up with this petty piffing!"

"B-but I'm innocent!" exclaimed Scrivvens, clenching and unclenching his hands spasmodically.

"Enough!" commanded the Head. "Mrs. Maloney caught you in the act of transferring the evidence of your guilt to some place of secrecy. I must ask you to leave the school!"

"But this is rank injustice, sir!" burst out the cook. "Never before in the whole of my life have I been accused of stealing, and, as my references will testify, I've been beyond suspicion!"

"I'm sorry, Scrivvens," said the Head, "but you'll have to leave my employ!"

"Won't you reconsider your decision, sir?" pleaded the cook. "I'm innocent!"

"I have given my decision, my good man, and I abide by it!" exclaimed the Head, a little testily. "Go!"

"B-b-b-but—"

"Silence! Leave my study!"

And Scrivvens, with a heart as heavy as lead, and wearing an injured expression, left Dr. Chisholm's study, followed by the house-dame.

"You can think yourself lucky, Scrivvens," said Mrs. Maloney, "that Dr. Chisholm didn't give you in charge as well!"

That was like putting a red flag before a bull, to the cook. He told her what he thought of her, and by the time he had finished, Mrs. Maloney had assumed the colour of a lobster.

"You scoundrel!" she exclaimed. "How dare you talk to me like that—you, a thief, too!"

But Scrivvens, feeling much better now that his pent-up emotions had found a vent, was striding away, and he neither heard the house-dame's words, nor saw the fist that she shook after his retreating figure. He was going to seek solace with Sergeant Kettle, with whom he was on very friendly terms. To be sacked from the school for an offence which he hadn't committed had absolutely taken the wind out of his sails, and his bitterness towards the Head, and Mrs. Maloney especially, increased as he strode towards the school tuckshop.

Two juniors were coming out of that establishment as the cook walked in with a face a picture of despair.

"What's up?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"I've been sacked, Master Silver!" groaned Scrivvens. "Sacked for an offence I haven't committed!"

"What?"

The discharged cook there and then confided his trouble to the junior captain, and as Jimmy Silver learned the facts, his face grew troubled. He liked Scrivvens, and he believed his version of the story.

"I—I say! I'm awfully sorry, Scrivvens," he faltered. "But perhaps something will turn up to prove your innocence!"

"I don't think so, Master Silver," said the miserable cook. "But, still, I hope so, too!"

And he entered the tuckshop, leaving

Jimmy Silver and Arthur Edward Lovell in a thoughtful mood.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Deputation to the Head!

"WHICH I think you've been treated very unfair, Scrivvens," was Sergeant Kettle's opinion, when Scrivvens had related to him his grievance.

"Very unfair!"

Mr. Scrivvens wrung his hand warmly.

"I'm glad you believe in me," he said gratefully. "But what am I to do? No one will take me into their employ with the character of a thief?"

Sergeant Kettle did not answer for a moment. He was deep in thought.

"I've been reading a lot lately about strikes," he said at length. "My hey—I'm going to emulate the deeds of these 'ere people I've been reading about."

Scrivvens stared in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Why," exclaimed the old soldier, drawing himself up to his full height, "I'm going to call a meeting—I'm going to champion the oppressed!"

"But—"

"It's all right, my boy, leave it to me. I'll close my shop and we'll call a meeting of the domestic staff. Justice is justice!"

And with that wise remark, Sergeant Kettle commenced to close his shop, whilst the discharged cook regarded him in astonishment.

"Come on!" ordered the old soldier, when the shop was neat and tidy. "We'll hold the meeting in the kitchen."

And he marched off with his arm linked in that of the bewildered Scrivvens. Arrived at the kitchen, Sergeant Kettle sent Tupper, the page-boy, to gather together the remainder of the domestic staff at Rookwood. In five minutes they were all present, most of them wearing expressions of inquiry.

The old soldier mounted a chair and surveyed his audience like a general reviewing his troops.

"Comrades," he began, "I have called this meeting to point out to you the injustice wot's been done in this school!"

"Good old sergeant!"

"Ear, 'ear!"

Sergeant Kettle beamed upon his fellow-workers and cleared his throat.

"Our respected friend Mr. Scrivvens," he resumed, "has been wrongfully accused of stealing from the store-room, and—"

"Shame, shame!"

"Good old Scrivvy!"

The domestic staff instantly sympathised with the discharged cook. He was very popular with them all, and he reddened with pleasure as he bowed acknowledgment.

"Thank you very much!" he faltered.

"As I was sayin'," went on Sergeant Kettle, "our respected comrade has been fired out for an act which he hadn't done, and I think it's up to us to march in a body to the 'Ead and make him see reason."

"Ear, 'ear!"

"Go it, Kettle!"

"If 'e don't," roared Sergeant Kettle, "we all 'and in our resignations until our friend 'ere is reinstated!"

"That's the idea!"

"Every time."

"Britons never shall be slaves!"

Scrivvens had to tell the story of his grievance over again, and the domestic staff overwhelmed him with sympathy.

"The first move," bellowed the old soldier, in his authoritative voice, "is to form a deputation to the 'Ead, and I offers to be leader and spokesman. Do you agree?"

The domestic staff replied in unison:

"Yes."

"I thank you, my comrades! Then we'll start now. Fall in behind me, and we'll see that fair play is done!"

The domestic staff formed up in two behind the old soldier, and at a given word, marched off in the direction of the Head's study.

The Fistical Four, who were passing, stared in astonishment as the deputation came along.

"What's the giddy game?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"We're seeing the 'Ead, Master Silver!" grunted Sergeant Kettle.

"Oh, my hat!"

"He will be pleased!"

The deputation tramped along the passage. Dr. Chisholm's study was reached, and the old soldier rapped boldly on the door.

"Come in!"

The deputation marched in. "What does this mean? Bless my soul! Dear me!" spluttered Dr. Chisholm, in amazement. "What are you all doing here away from your duties at this time of day? Explain yourselves!"

The majority of the staff began to feel nervous, and edged towards the door, but old Sergeant Kettle put his back to it and glared at them as though they were a lot of raw recruits on their first parade.

"Steady, boys!" he whispered hoarsely. "Stand fast!"

"You appear to be the leader, sergeant!" exclaimed the Head, turning to the old soldier. "State your business as quickly as possible; I am very busy!"

"Well, sir, it's like this 'ere," began Sergeant Kettle. "We want our comrade, Scrivvens, reinstated. We believe he's innocent, sir!"

Now the old soldier had broken the ice, his followers gathered courage.

"Hear, hear!"

"That's it, sir!"

Dr. Chisholm's brows contracted in a frown, and his eyes gleamed.

"It is out of the question," he said firmly. "I have already made my decision, and I am not prepared to alter it!"

"But Scrivvens is innocent, sir. I've known Scrivvens a long time now, sir," said the old soldier, "and a more honest fellow I've never met!"

"Be that as it may," said the Head, "he's no longer in my employ!"

"But he must be reinstated!" exclaimed Sergeant Kettle, raising his voice in his growing excitement. "We've agreed to stand by him, ain't we?"

And the deputation chorused an assent. Dr. Chisholm was getting angry.

"I will hear no more of what you have to say, Sergeant Kettle! You will go back to your duties!"

"Beggin' your pardon, we do nothing of the sort, sir!" exclaimed the old soldier. "We don't leave 'ere until our comrade is taken back into your employ!"

"What?" exclaimed Dr. Chisholm testily. "Am I to be threatened by my own staff? Go at once!"

"We stays 'ere, sir!" roared the old soldier. "If you don't take Scrivvens back we'll all come out on strike!"

"What—what?" exclaimed the Head. "How dare you, Kettle? You are discharged!"

"If I goes, the whole lot of us goes, don't we?" said Sergeant Kettle to his following.

"We does!"

"Then you are all discharged!" shouted Dr. Chisholm, crimson with anger. "My decision with regard to Scrivvens is irrevocable!"

"We don't consider ourselves discharged!" said Sergeant Kettle. "We are out on strike—strike! Do you hear, sir?"

"Kindly leave my study at once!" rapped out the Head. "I give you twenty-four hours to collect your baggage and leave the school premises!"

"Very good, sir!" said Sergeant Kettle grimly.

And, with many a warlike glance hurled in the Head's direction, the deputation left the study.

"Oh, he'll come round later on," confided Sergeant Kettle to his "union." "Meanwhile, we does no work! You hear?"

"Right-ho!"

And the crowd of servants dispersed to their quarters to wait for the Head to "come round."

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

All Hands to the Wheel!

"O N strike! Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"Great snakes!"

"Oh, my hat!"

These remarks greeted Dr. Chisholm's announcement to the effect that all the domestic staff except Mrs. Maloney had struck.

"I want all of you, my boys, to put up with this sudden inconvenience. This movement on the part of the staff will necessitate any of you with a knowledge of cookery reporting to the house-dame. Lunch will be served as usual, but you'll have to wait on yourselves. Kindly keep the building as clean as you can until I can engage a new staff," said Dr. Chisholm.

Quite a hubbub of conversation ran the round. The situation appealed to the younger members of the school, who saw a chance of

missing lessons if they were engaged on domestic duties.

"There will be no lessons this afternoon, under the circumstances," went on Dr. Chisholm. "And none of you are to molest or annoy the discharged servants. I have given them twenty-four hours to collect their things together and leave the school. You may go!"

The juniors streamed out at a rush, and the seniors followed at a more leisurely pace. Mrs. Maloney was surrounded by willing helpers in a moment, and the foremost amongst them were the Fistical Four. Tubby Muffin, for reasons of his own, was keeping well in the background.

"I'll peel the potatoes!" said Jimmy Silver, rolling back his sleeves.

"And I'll do the cabbages."

"And I'll help, too."

Mrs. Maloney beamed upon her youthful helpmates, and each was given a job towards the preparation of lunch.

"This is better than swotting at mouldy lessons!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"Hear, hear!"

"Hope the new servants don't arrive for a day or two!" chuckled Tommy Dodd. "I rather like this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The kitchen presented a busy spectacle. A score of juniors, with coats off and sleeves rolled back, were wiring in. Very soon the pleasant odour of cooking food began to assail the nostrils of the willing juniors.

Conroy, the Colonial junior, came staggering into the kitchen with a huge pile of plates stacked one on top of the other. Arthur Edward Lovell, who was about to lift the lid of the giant saucepan in which the cabbage was boiling, leaped backwards with a yell of anguish as the burning steam caught his wrist.

"Ow-yow!" he yelled.

Crash!

Conroy tried to avoid Lovell's backward leap, but without success, and the pile of plates rocked uncertainly, and finally crashed to the ground, where they reposed in a thousand little pieces.

"You dangerous maniac!" roared Conroy. "Look at those plates!"

"Blow the blessed plates!" growled Arthur

Edward Lovell. "Why didn't you look where you were going?"

"You howling ass, how was I to know you were going to leap backwards?" roared Conroy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Good old Lovell!"

"I've burnt my blessed wrist!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Blow the servants, blow the cabbage, and blow the blessed plates!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of the morning passed off without a hitch, and when lunchtime came round the temporary cooks lined up with their dishes and marched into the dining-hall, where they were received with cheers from their hungry fellows.

After the meal came the washing-up, and, after a few breakages, this passed off satisfactorily. The volunteer cooks felt that they deserved well of their country, and, after a few words from Dr. Chisholm, thanking them for their services, the juniors departed from the kitchen in high humour.

Most of the school had their tea in their studies, so that the absence of the domestic staff was not missed at that meal.

"I wonder how long this state of affairs is going to last?" said Jimmy Silver to his chums, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, who were seated at the table in their study doing their prep.

"All this bother over that chap Scrivvens!" said Jimmy Silver. "I believe the chap is innocent, though!"

The chums were still discussing the servants' strike when Bulkeley, the captain of the school, put his head in at the study, and announced that it was time for bed.

And the juniors trooped up the staircase to the Fourth Form dormitory.

After the usual chatter the juniors settled down to sleep, but Jimmy Silver, try as he might, could not sleep for more than half an hour at a stretch.

Every time the clock in the old tower chimed out the hour, its ringing peal awoke the junior captain.

"Oh, hang it!" muttered Jimmy Silver. "Blowed if I can sleep—Hallo! Tubby's talking in his sleep!"



THE GRUB-RAIDER TRACKED DOWN! The Fistical Four pushed open the door of the store cupboard. Tubby Muffin, perched upon a biscuit tin, and with a pork-pie half-way to his mouth, seemed paralysed for the moment. His eyes started from their sockets as he beheld the angry faces of Jimmy Silver & Co. "Oh dear!" (See Chapter 5.)

To the ears of the junior captain came the high-pitched voice of the fat Classical.

"Jolly good idea!" mumbled Tubby Muffin.

Jimmy Silver sat up in his bed, and was about to throw a slipper at the talking junior when Muffin's voice increased in volume.

"Key fitted the store-room a treat! He, he, he!"

Jimmy Silver was all attention now, and he returned the slipper to its accustomed place beside the bed. He was on the verge of a discovery, he felt sure.

"That beast Mrs. Maloney didn't suspect me!" rambled on the fat Classical junior.

The rest of the sentence was unintelligible, but what Jimmy Silver had already heard gave him an idea.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "The fat rogue! I—"

The words froze on his lips as Tubby Muffin flung out his arms, yawned, glanced cautiously around, and scrambled out of bed. He had wakened up.

"Wonder what he's up to now?" mused Jimmy Silver, as he watched the fat junior pull on his trousers and make for the door.

Tubby Muffin stealthily opened the door and disappeared on the other side. His disappearance was a signal for action from the junior captain, who scrambled out of his bed and crept over to that occupied by Lovell. He shook that junior, and placed his hand over his mouth to smother the exclamation that Arthur Edward tried to utter when he awoke.

"S-sh!"

"Wharrer—marrer? 'Tain't rising-bell yet?" gurgled Arthur Edward Lovell, yawning.

"Get up!" whispered Jimmy Silver. "Muffin's just gone out—to the store-room, I believe!"

"What!"

"He's been talking in his sleep, and I heard him," said Jimmy Silver. "I believe it's he who's been scoffing the grub!"

Lovell was out of bed in an instant, and began to pull on his trousers as Jimmy Silver awoke Raby and Newcome.

Five minutes later the Fistical Four crept down the staircase, and made their way over to the domestic quarters. They stepped silently down the passage where the store-room was situated. They nudged each other when they saw a flickering light from underneath the store-room door.

"We've got him!" whispered Arthur Edward Lovell.

"S-sh!" cautioned Jimmy Silver. And the Fistical Four crept towards the door, which appeared to be ajar.

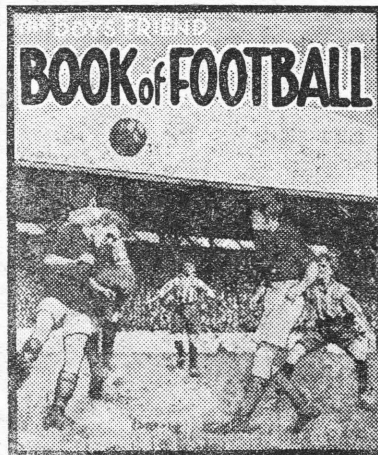
THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

All's Well that Ends Well!

"ALTOGETHER, you chaps!" said Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four pushed open the door of the store-room with a bound.

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NEXT MONDAY'S
"BOYS' FRIEND"
Be Sure You Get It!

"Oh dear!"

Tubby Muffin, perched upon a biscuit-tin, and with a pork-pie half-way to his mouth, seemed paralysed for the moment. His eyes started from their sockets as he beheld the angry faces of the Fistical Four.

"So we've caught you, you fat rotter!" said Jimmy Silver grimly.

"Oh crumbs!"

The quick changes that passed over the face of Tubby Muffin would have done credit to a contortionist at that moment. He sat quivering like a jelly, and his fat little legs trembled visibly.

"You're the thief, after all!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell. "It wasn't poor old Scrivvens!"

"Really, you chaps, I— Oh dear!" stammered the fat Classical. "I—I heard a noise, so I came down to investigate, and I—"

"Don't tell any more whoppers!" hooted Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, really, Silver," said Tubby Muffin, with an attempt at injured innocence, "I tell you I heard a noise, and came down to investigate!"

"And this is how you investigate, is it?" asked Raby, pointing to the pork-pie that the fat Classical was still grasping in his podgy hand.

"That's it—I mean, I— Oh dear!"

Tubby Muffin's inventive mind failed him at that moment. He was fairly in the toils, and he realised it.

"You're a worm!" said Jimmy Silver scornfully. "A chap that will let another fellow—and innocent at that—get the sack for an offence he never committed ought to be drawn, slaughtered, and boiled in oil!"

"Really, Silver, you do me an injustice! A fellow with my principles would scorn to stoop so low!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin indignantly.

"Where is the key of this room?" growled the leader of the Fistical Four.

"K-k-key!" stammered the fat Classical.

"W-w-what key?"

"You know what I mean, you fat rotter! You gave the whole show away talking in your sleep!" said Jimmy Silver.

Muffin's face was a study.

"Oh, collar him!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell, who was beginning to shiver with the cold.

The fat junior backed away hastily, and in doing so dislodged a pile of biscuit-tins that were stacked behind him.

Crash, crash!

"That's done it!" said Jimmy Silver. "The whole blessed school will be awake now!"

"Oh dear!" mumbled Tubby Muffin. "What shall I do?"

Before the question could be answered there was the sound of hurrying feet, and a second later Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, appeared with a lamp in his hand. He nearly jumped clear of the floor when he saw Muffin and Jimmy Silver & Co. grouped in the store-room in semi-night attire.

"Bless my soul! Silver, Muffin, what does this mean?"

"It means, sir, that Muffin has a confession to make!" said the leader of the Fistical Four.

"A confession! What do you mean? Why are you out of your dormitory?" gasped Mr. Bootles, in astonishment.

"Own up!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell, giving Muffin a prod in the back which pushed him to the front.

Tubby Muffin was so frightened that he still clasped the pork-pie he had been about to demolish when the Fistical Four had interrupted his orgy.

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" he spluttered, in his confusion. "But Scrivvens did not pinch the grub from here!"

"What!"

"You see, sir, it was me!" confessed Tubby Muffin miserably. "I—I made a key to fit the store-room lock and thought it would be a ripping idea to have a proper feed now and again."

"You wretched boy! Then all this trouble with the staff has been caused by your unnatural desire to fill your stomach with eatables?"

"That's it, sir! You see, I'm underfed and require a lot of nourishment!" mumbled Tubby Muffin.

"Bless my soul! You will appear before Dr. Chisholm in the morning; and, meanwhile, you had better all go back to your beds!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The juniors returned to their dormitory, where the Fistical Four tumbled into bed and slept the sleep of the just. Not so Tubby Muffin; his sleep was attended by dreams in plenty, and expulsion from Rookwood loomed prominently in all of them.

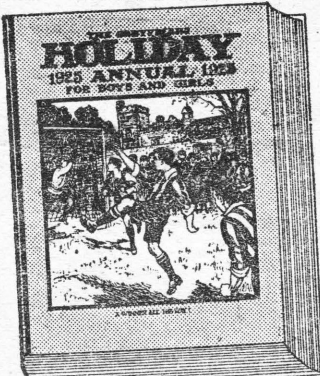
A forlorn figure crawled away from Dr. Chisholm's study the next morning, and that figure was Tubby Muffin. The fat junior had received a severe wiggling from the Head, followed by a more severe caning. The servants came back to their duties, and Sergeant Kettle's role as Champion of the Oppressed was short-lived. As Arthur Edward Lovell expressed it, everything in the garden was lovely—thanks to Silver's timely discovery.

THE END.

(Look out for "Tubby's Concertina!"—a splendid long complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood in next week's special issue.)

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