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The POPULAR

MEET **2^d**
The RIO KID

EVERY TUESDAY,
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Feb. 19th,
1928.
Now Series
No. 473.

IN A
ROARING WESTERN TALE

inside!



THE
KID'S ESCAPE!

TUBBY MUFFIN'S LUCK! With an old coin in his possession worth, according to Gunner, at least three pounds, Tubby Muffin proceeds to dream golden dreams of unlimited tuck. But his happiness is very short-lived!



**THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Gunner Knows!**

REGINALD MUFFIN of the Classical Fourth was evidently "bucked."

Anybody could have seen at a glance that Tubby Muffin was bucked.

His fat face was irradiated with smiles. Had Muffin of the Fourth been asked to tea in the prefects' room, or given the free run of the school shop, he could not have looked more merry and bright.

Jimmy Silver & Co. noticed it when they came in to tea. Tubby Muffin met them in the Fourth Form passage, and the Fistical Four could not help observing the happy satisfaction in his exceedingly plump countenance.

"Tubby's had a remittance!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Or somebody else has!" suggested Jimmy Silver.

Tubby greeted the four with a happy grin.

"You fellows go in for numismathematics?" he asked.

"Which?" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Numismathematics."

"What on earth is numismathematics?" asked Raby. "Is it a game?"

Tubby sniffed—the sniff of superior knowledge.

"It's the science of coins," he explained.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Do you mean numismatics?"

"I dare say that's it," admitted Tubby. "I know it's a jolly long word, and begins with 'numis,' anyhow. Gunner knows all about it, and he told me. You fellows go in for it?"

"Well, I prefer footer, as a game," said Jimmy Silver. "But you're not looking so bucked over numismatics, Tubby, surely? Of course, I know you've always been keen on collecting coins—you owe a few to every fellow in the Fourth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not exactly taking up numismatics—I mean numismatics," said Tubby Muffin. "But Gunner goes in for it, you know, and he knows all about it—at least, he says so. He's told me about my guinea. Like to see it?"

"Your guinea?"

"Yes, my King George I. golden guinea!" said Tubby, beaming. "Gunner says that George guineas are worth a lot of money. He's got one in his collection at home that's worth three pounds, he says. If his guinea is worth

three pounds, mine is worth three pounds, isn't it? Fancy that, you fellows!"

"Where on earth have you dug up a George I. guinea?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in amazement.

"I bought it!"

"For three pounds?" ejaculated Lovell.

Tubby gave a fat, happy chuckle.

"No—for threepence! You see, I've got a business head on me. You fellows mayn't have noticed that I've got the sharpest head in the Fourth—"

"I thought you had the fattest," said Lovell.

Sniff from Tubby.

"Well, you fellows may be jolly clever, but you've never picked up a George guinea at a second-hand stall for threepence, and found out that it was worth three pounds," he said.

"And have you?" demanded Newcome.

"Just that!" grinned Tubby. "It was on a stall in Latcham market, you know, last term. Everything in the tray was threepence, and that guinea was among the lot. Of course, the man didn't know its value. He must have thought it was an imitation. It was rather old and dirty. I thought I'd polish it up, you know, and put it on my watchchain, and fellows wouldn't know it wasn't real, would they? Well, I was going to polish it, only—"

"Only you were too lazy!" suggested Raby.

"Well, it got left over," said Tubby. "But the other day I came across it, and I polished it up, and then Gunner saw it. Gunner's great on numismatics—I mean numismatics. He spotted it at once, and told me it was a genuine guinea, just like his, and worth three pounds. Fancy that?"

"Chiefly fancy, I should say!" grinned Lovell.

"Well, Gunner knows!"

"Gunner's the biggest ass at Rookwood, present company excepted," said Jimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's got one like it!" hooted Tubby. "Look here, if you fellows care to go in for numistingummy I'll let you have it to start a collection. It's worth three pounds, but I'll let it go cheaper to an old pal. You can have it for two-pounds-nineteen-and-six, Jimmy."

"Not really?" asked Jimmy, with gentle sarcasm.

"Yes, really, old chap! I believe in being generous to an old pal," said

Tubby. "Come into my study and see it."

"Well, we'd like to see it," said Lovell.

And the Fistical Four followed Reginald Muffin into Study No. 2.

Tubby Muffin sailed along as if he were walking on air.

The discovery that what he had taken for a cheap imitation was in reality a genuine golden guinea had bucked him immensely.

Three pounds was the value, according to Gunner of the Fourth—and three pounds was a huge sum to Tubby. The amount of tuck it represented fairly dazzled him.

Tubby's study-mates were in the room—Putty Grace, Higgs, and Jones minor. They were passing a glimmering coin from hand to hand, and examining it. Tubby gave a whoop.

"Here, mind what you're up to with that guinea! It's jolly valuable!"

Tubby grabbed his guinea and handed it to Jimmy Silver.

"Look at that!" he said.

The Fistical Four looked at it with interest. If Tubby had had such a stroke of good fortune, they were glad of it. But they could not help having some doubts. Such things happened, that was certain, but such happenings were rare. Rare old coins, priceless old editions of books were sometimes picked up on a second-hand stall for a mere song. But not often!

But the guinea—now brightly polished—certainly looked very imposing. If it was not gold, it was a good imitation.

Gunner of the Fourth looked into the study while the juniors were examining Tubby's prize.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner was looking very pleased with himself. It was seldom—very seldom—that Gunner's opinion on any subject was heard with respect. It was true that he regarded himself as an authority on most subjects, especially cricket and football. Other fellows regarded him as a first-class duffer on all subjects, especially cricket and football! Gunner, who had plenty of money, sometimes had expensive hobbies, which he took up and dropped as the spirit moved him. Among other things, he had given his attention to numismatics, and fellows who had been home with Gunner had seen his collection. So it had to be supposed that, on that subject at least, Gunner had some idea of what he was talking about. And it was so rarely

that fellows acknowledged that Gunner knew what he was talking about that Peter Outhbert was now feeling almost as bucked as the happy owner of the coin.

Jimmy Silver & Co. passed the George guinea from hand to hand, and then they passed it to Gunner and looked at him inquiringly.

"The goods—what?" asked Lovell, doubtfully.

Gunner nodded.

"Yes, look at it! I've got one just like it—bust of George the First, with GEORGIUS D.G.M. BR. FR. ET. HIB. REX FD. Then, on the other side, four crowned shields—one for England and Scotland, one for Ireland, one for France—you know our kings had the title of King of France in those days—and one for the Electorate of Hanover, where old George came from—Star of the Garter in the centre— Oh, quite genuine!"

Gunner spoke in an off-hand way, like a fellow to whom such knowledge was familiar.

"But imitations of these things are made sometimes, for chaps who can't afford the genuine article," remarked Jimmy Silver.

"I know that!" Gunner was disdainful. "This is genuine, though. Just the same as mine."

"It doesn't seem very heavy for gold."

"Same as mine," said Gunner.

"Well, if it's all right, good luck for you, Tubby!" said Jimmy Silver. "Congrats, old man!"

"Like to buy it?" beamed Tubby.

"Thanks, no," said Jimmy, laughing. "Three pounds would want a lot of looking for in the end study."

"I'll let you have it for two-seventen-six if you're taking up numis-what-d'ye-call-it," said Tubby.

"But I'm not!" grinned Jimmy.

"I'd buy it myself, only I've got one like it," said Gunner. "You can take it to the dealer at Latham, Tubby. Of course, he won't give you three quid—he has to make his profit. He might give you two, or thirty shillings." Tubby's face fell.

"I'd rather sell it about the school for three pounds," he said. "I say, Peele!" Peele of the Fourth looked into Study No. 2, probably attracted there by the fame of Tubby's golden guinea. "Like to buy this coin, Peele, old man? Two pounds seventeen and six to an old friend like you!"

"Let's look at it," said Peele. Jimmy Silver & Co. quitted Study No. 2, leaving Peele examining the lucky find. They walked on to the end study to tea. Apparently Cyril Peele did not buy the George guinea, for a little later Tubby Muffin looked into the end study.

"Jimmy, old man," he said, "you being an old pal, I'll let you have that guinea for two-fifteen."

"Nothing doing!" said the captain of the Fourth.

"Dash it all, two pound ten!" said Tubby. "There!"

"But I don't want it, old man!"

"I've offered it to every chap in the Fourth," said Tubby plaintively.

"Only Gunner would care to have it, and he doesn't want it, as he's got one. Look here, Jimmy, numis-thingummy is a great science! You learn no end of history and things from it. Why not take it up, and start with my guinea?"

"Bow-wow! Try next door!" said Jimmy, laughing.

And Tubby Muffin grunted and departed. He was still greatly bucked by the discovery of his unexpected

treasure; but evidently golden guineas were a drug in the market in the Rookwood Fourth. Reginald Muffin unwillingly made up his fat mind to leave the sale over till the following day, when he would be able to get across to Latham, and bargain with a dealer.

In the meantime, he remained hugely bucked by his good fortune, and that night he dreamed of golden guineas and of unlimited tuck, and a sweet and happy smile lingered on his fat features as he slumbered.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Lost, Stolen or Strayed!

"HELP!"
"What?"
"Help!" Thieves! Fire!
"Grooogh!"

Reginald Muffin was a little incoherent.

He bounced out of Study No. 2 and ran into Jimmy Silver, sending that youth staggering against the passage wall. It was no joke to be run down by a fellow of Tubby Muffin's weight and circumference.

It was Wednesday afternoon, a sunny half-holiday. Rookwood fellows had various schemes for the afternoon, and Jimmy Silver & Co. intended to take a little run on their bicycles. Tubby Muffin's intention was to take the train from Coombe to Latham with his precious George guinea in his pocket to drive a bargain with the antique dealer in the market town. The cause of Tubby's sudden excitement was a mystery.

Jimmy leaned on the passage wall and gasped for breath. Lovell grasped Tubby as the fat Classical staggered from the shock, and righted him.

"What's the matter, you fat duffer?" he exclaimed.

"Ow! Thieves! Wow!"

"What?" yelled Lovell.

"Help! Thieves! Murder! My gig-gig-gig—"

"Your what?" shrieked Raby.

"They've stolen my gig-gig—"

stammered Tubby. "Your gig!" exclaimed Newcome. "Gone potty? You never had any gig, you fat chump!"

"My gig-gig-gig-gig-gig-guinea!"

"Oh, your guinea, you ass! Have you lost it?"

"I haven't lost it!" yelled Tubby.

"It's been took—I mean taken! Taken away from my study! My guinea—three pounds! I'm going to Mr. Dalton! I'm gig-gig-going to the Head! I—I—I—"

Arthur Edward Lovell grasped Tubby by the shoulder and shook him vigorously.

"Shut up that rot!" he commanded. "Yooop!"

"Your silly guinea may have been lost, but it hasn't been stolen!" snapped Lovell. "If you say it has again I'll bang your silly napper on the wall!"

"It's been stolen— Yaroooop!"

Bang!

Arthur Edward Lovell was as good as his word.

The concussion between Tubby Muffin's bullet head and the passage wall rang loudly. Still more loudly rang the fiendish yell uttered by Tubby.

"There!" said Lovell. "Now talk sense!"

"Yarooop!"

"That isn't sense!"

"Whooop!"

"Nor that," said Lovell, shaking the fat Classical. "You've lost your silly guinea!"

"Grooogh! Ow! I haven't!" wailed Tubby. "I put it away safe last night. Now it's gone!"

"What rot!" broke in Valentine Mornington. "There's nobody would steal it even if it was genuine, which I don't believe!"

"It was genuine enough," said Gunner. "Whoever has bagged Tubby's guinea has bagged three quid!"

"I don't think!" said Morny, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Look here!" roared Gunner. "If you think I don't know anything about numismatics, Mornington, I'm ready to punch your head!"

"Which would be proof!" remarked Putty of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, have you got it, Mornington?" yelled Tubby.

"What?"

"Well, somebody's got it, and you're making out that it's of no value!" howled Tubby. "Hand it over, or I'll go to the Head!"

"You silly owl!" roared Mornington, while the Classical juniors roared with laughter. The passage was crowded with fellows now, called to the scene by Tubby's frantic uproar.

"Better keep that fat fool quiet!" remarked Peele of the Fourth. "We don't want the other Forms to begin chippin' us about havin' a thief in the Fourth!"

"Yes, rather!" said Lovell emphatically. "Smythe and his lot would be glad to get hold of it—and the Modern cads, too. If Muffin says another word about his silly guinea being stolen I'll bang his silly head again!"

"But it's gone!" howled Muffin. "Guineas can't walk, you ass!"

"Silly chumps can lose them, though!" said Peele.

"Have you got it, Peele?"

"Eh?"

"You're making out that I've lost it. If you've got it you just hand it over, or I'll go to the Head!"

"You silly owl!" exclaimed Lovell. "Will you shut up?"

And Arthur Edward Lovell tapped Tubby's head on the wall again, by way of reminder.

"Yoop! I say, make him leggo!" howled Tubby. "He's got it!"

"Who's got it?" hooted Lovell.

"You have!"

"I!" spluttered Arthur Edward. "Yes, you rotter! That's why you're banging my head!" howled Muffin.

"You hand it over, or I'll go to Mr. Dalton!"

"Why, I—I—I—" gasped Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "We'd better see to this before that fat duffer starts a lot of talk in the school. Roll him into his study."

"The fat duffer's dropped it somewhere," said Peele. "It will turn up again."

"I'm pretty certain of that," said Jimmy Silver. "Bring him in."

Reginald Muffin was pushed into his study, and that room, and the doorway, and the passage outside, swarmed with Classical Fourth-Formers. The various occupations planned for the afternoon were "off" now, while the mystery of the missing guinea was inquired into. All the fellows present agreed that Tubby should not be allowed to spread a yarn through the school that his guinea had been stolen—the honour of the Fourth was at stake; and even Cyril Peele, the blackest sheep in the Form, was as keen on that as any other fellow. Tubby Muffin's desire was to rouse up

the Head, and the Fourth Form master, and the police—indeed, he would have been willing to call out the military. But Tubby Muffin was not allowed to have his way. A swarm of the Classical Fourth hemmed him in his study; while Jimmy Silver, taking the lead as captain of the Fourth, proceeded to investigate.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Serious for the Fourth!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. did not believe for a moment that the golden guinea bearing the effigy of his defunct Majesty, King George the First, had been stolen. They were quite certain that it was only some of Tubby's "rot." But that opinion was shaken very soon.

Tubby frantically explained where

Jones minor had seen him place it. And Tubby earnestly, passionately, and frantically asseverated that he hadn't.

"Uncle James" began to look worried. It was a horrid thought, that there was a fellow in the Form base enough to commit a theft. But the guinea was gone.

According to Gunner, the guinea was worth three pounds. Most of the Fourth believed that that old coin would sell at Latcham for at least thirty shillings. A good many fellows in the Fourth were hard up—some of them in a perennial state of hard-upness. Was it possible that some miserable rascal had descended so low as to purloin the guinea, to sell it for what he could get?

It was a hideous thought, and yet there seemed no other explanation. Jimmy Silver looked round with a clouded brow when Tubby had finished spluttering out his statements.

Looks to me as if Tubby's leg is bein' pulled—some ass has hidden his silly guinea for a jape."

Jimmy Silver drew a breath of relief. The suggestion was quite a plausible one, and it banished the horrid thought that a theft had been perpetrated.

All eyes turned on Putty of the Fourth. Putty's practical joking proclivities were well known.

Putty Grace turned crimson.

"Of course, you're alluding to me, Peele," he exclaimed. "I shouldn't be fool enough to play practical jokes with money, I hope. Anyhow, I never touched the guinea—I didn't even know where Tubby had put it. I haven't seen it since yesterday afternoon."

"Same here," said Higgs.

"And here," said Jones minor.

"That settles that," said Jimmy Silver. "Putty's a japing ass, but we all know we can take his word."



COLLARED! Even as Gunner made a jump at Tubby Muffin, three or four fellows made a jump at Gunner, and collared him. "Bump the silly ass," said Jimmy Silver. "It will teach him not to be so cocksure!" (See Chapter 6.)

he had left the guinea—in his study, in a cardboard box once devoted to pen-nibs, in the drawer of the table. He had placed it there, after showing it round the junior Common-room the previous evening. As it happened, Jones minor had been in the study when he did so, and had left the study with Muffin afterwards. After that, Muffin had not re-entered the study before bed-time.

That morning, as he excitedly asseverated, he had not been in the study at all. He had come after dinner to fetch the guinea and take it over to Latcham. And he had found the cardboard box empty—the golden guinea conspicuous by its absence.

In these circumstances it was really impossible to suppose that Tubby had dropped it anywhere. Tubby was a first-class duffer; but it had to be admitted that he must know whether he had gone to the table drawer and taken the guinea out of the box where

"I say, this is pretty rotten, you fellows," said Jimmy.

"Looks rotten for Tubby's studymates," said Peele.

Putty of the Fourth turned on him.

"How's that?" he demanded fiercely.

"You needn't jump down a fellow's throat!" said Peele coolly. "I only mean that Tubby's studymates would know where the guinea was, and would be able to bag it without being noticed."

"Look here—" roared Higgs.

"I'm not accusing anybody," said Peele hastily. "I've already said that I don't believe it was stolen."

"Where is it, then?" howled Tubby.

Peele hesitated.

"If you've got anything to say, Peele, you'd better cough it up," said Jimmy Silver, with a glance of disfavour at the black sheep of the Fourth.

"Well," said Peele, "we all know that there's a practical jokin' ass in this study always playin' some trick or other,

"And any fellow could have come into the study, in the evening after Tubby put it away," said Lovell. "Most of the fellows were downstairs, and nobody would notice. Any fellow might have come up to his study and slipped in here. Why, you were in your own study yourself, Peele, till close on dorm."

Peele shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, my belief is that it's a joke on Tubby, and I think it will be pretty rotten if there's a yarn spread about that there's a thief in the Fourth," he said.

And with that, Cyril Peele left the study and walked away with Gower.

"That much is right enough, anyhow," said Jimmy Silver. "You ought to have locked it up, Tubby. Anyhow, you're not to talk about a theft unless we can make sure."

"I want my guinea!" bawled Tubby.

"I'm going to the Head! I'm going to the police! I'm going to—"
 "You're going to shut up!" roared Lovell.

"Look here—"

"Don't be an ass, Tubby!" said Mornington. "If any fellow has got hold of your guinea for a joke, he will chuck it away as soon as the Head gets going. He won't risk being accused of stealing it."

"Oh! Oh dear!" gasped Tubby Muffin, quite aghast at that dreadful possibility.

"It's almost unbelievable that the beastly thing has been stolen," said Jimmy Silver. "Anyhow, we'll put it down as a joke so far, and give the silly fool a chance to return it. I'll put up a notice at the end of the passage."

"Good idea," said Erroll.

"But, I say—" howled Tubby.

"You've said enough! Shut up!"

And, heedless of the wrathful ejaculations and lamentations of Reginald Muffin, the Classical juniors decided the matter according to Jimmy Silver's view. Tubby was warned with dire threats to say no word of a theft outside the Fourth; and Jimmy, before he went out, pinned up a notice at the head of the stairs for all the Classical Fourth to read. It ran:

"The silly owl who has hidden Tubby Muffin's silly guinea is hereby ordered to return it to Study No. 2 before call-over. Otherwise he will be found out, and will get a Form ragging."

"(Signed) J. SILVER."

Then the Fistical Four went out to their bicycles, hoping that the missing guinea would have turned up by the time they came in for call-over.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Dark Suspicions!

"THAT'S Peele!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.

The chums of the Fourth were pedalling into the market town of Latcham, which lay on their route that afternoon. Ahead of them, on the sunny road, they had a view of a cyclist's back.

The juniors had been out some time, and had not ridden direct to Latcham. They were quite near the market town when they turned into the main road from a leafy lane, and the cyclist was some little distance ahead of them then.

They did not see his face, as he did not look round; but they knew it was Peele. He was not in Etons, and he was not wearing a Rookwood cap, but the look of him was familiar. He was grinding rather hard at his pedals; the ride from Rookwood to Latcham was rather a long one for a slacker like Peele.

The Fistical Four had been round and about the lanes, and covered a much greater distance, but they were as fresh as paint. They glided on behind Peele in a cheery bunch on the wide country road.

"Peele's bucking-up, getting out as far as Latcham on a bike," remarked Raby. "He looks nearly done, though."

"My hat!" ejaculated Arthur Edward Lovell suddenly.

Edward looked startled.

"It—it can't be possible!" he exclaimed.

"What's that?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"What the thump is Peele bilking over to Latcham for?" said Lovell.

"He's a dashed slacker. He never does five miles on a bike, and this is a jolly

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long ride. Muffin was going over to Latcham with his blessed guinea, if it hadn't been missing. He was going to call at Sanderson's, the antique place, to sell it if he could."

Jimmy gave Lovell a sharp look. "Old man, that sounds a bit suspicious," he said. "You can't suspect that Peele's got Tubby's guinea in his pocket."

Lovell reddened.

"Well, no," he said. "I admit it flashed into my mind. We know Peele's a shady card, and he goes in for betting on gee-gees. It struck me as queer that he should come over to Latcham. But I suppose even Peele wouldn't be such a rotter!"

"I hope not," said Jimmy.

"Sanderson's shop is in the market square," said Raby. "We pass the top of the square, getting through the town. If Peele stops at Sanderson's and— But we're jolly well not going to watch him."

"Of course not!" said Lovell hastily.

The Fistical Four pedalled on in silence. They were entering the town now, a little behind Peele. Had they come on Peele farther back on the country road they would have passed him very quickly; but in the narrow old streets of the ancient Hampshire market town they could not put on speed. Once or twice now they caught Peele's profile as he turned his head slightly, and there was no doubt that it was Cyril Peele of the Classical Fourth Form of Rookwood. Peele kept ahead, and pedalled into the market square, and a few minutes later he stopped, and the Fistical Four rode past him.

He had stopped at an old shop, outside which a wooden post stood, a relic of old days when horses had been tied there. Peele had leaned his bicycle against the post, and was going into the dusky old shop, down two steps from the square, as the four rode by. And the shop was Sanderson's. The little window contained cases of coins, sheets of foreign stamps, stuffed birds, and a stuffed monkey, and other such articles dealt in by old Mr. Sanderson. The Fistical Four had not the slightest desire to spy on Peele; but they simply could not help seeing that the cad of the Fourth entered the shop that Tubby Muffin had intended to visit for the purpose of selling his George guinea.

They rode on in silence, feeling extremely uncomfortable.

It was a strange coincidence at the least.

Peele certainly might have had some business that afternoon at the antique dealer's. He might; but it was improbable. The coincidence was altogether too odd.

Even Jimmy Silver, much as he hated to be suspicious, could not help thinking it likely that, if they entered Sanderson's at that moment they would find Cyril Peele dealing with Mr. Sanderson on the subject of a George the First guinea.

Nothing would have induced the chums of the Fourth to follow Peele into the shop, to watch him, on bare suspicion.

But they felt very uncomfortable as they pedalled on, unable to drive suspicion from their minds.

Arthur Edward Lovell spoke at last.

"It looks queer, you fellows," he said.

"Beastly queer!" agreed Jimmy Silver.

"What the thump was Peele doing at that shop?"

Jimmy did not answer.

"I—I suppose it's only a coincidence," said Raby hesitatingly.

Grunt from Lovell.

"I—I hope Tubby's guinea will turn up," said Jimmy Silver. "Peele's a bad hat, and we all know it; but we can't find him guilty of an awful thing like that without jolly strong evidence. Better not think about it—anyway, till we're certain that Tubby's guinea is gone for good!"

"That's right," agreed Newcome.

But it was a little difficult not to think about it. If Tubby's guinea remained missing Peele's visit to the antique shop at Latcham could only be considered very suspicious. They remembered, too, that Peele had not been wearing a Rookwood cap—but an ordinary cloth cap instead. Why had he not wanted Mr. Sanderson to know that he was a Rookwood fellow—for what other object could he have had?

The chums of the Fourth succeeded in dismissing the matter from their minds at last. They stopped at the inn at Rookham for tea, and after that pedalled home to Rookwood School at a leisurely pace, timing themselves to get there for call-over.

One of the first fellows they noticed as they came in was Peele of the Fourth. He was talking to Gower, and he took no heed of the Fistical Four. They had been behind him all the time at Latcham, and he had not seen them there. The four looked at him; but if they were looking for signs of a guilty conscience they did not observe any. Peele's manner was quite normal.

"Just in time for call-over," said Mornington, coming in with Erroll. "Hallo, Tubby! Found your giddy guinea?"

Tubby Muffin rolled in from the quad, fat and glum. He shook his head.

"No! It's been stolen!" he growled. "I say, Jimmy, that guinea hasn't turned up yet. I knew it wouldn't. And it's call-over now, and something's got to be done."

"After call-over," said Jimmy Silver. Cyril Peele glanced round.

"Better make sure before you talk about your bogus guinea bein' pinched, Muffin," he said.

"It's not a bogus guinea, and I'm quite sure!" hooted Tubby.

"Peele seems rather keen that fellows shouldn't suppose that there'd been a theft!" murmured Lovell, as the Fistical Four went into Big Hall.

Jimmy Silver nodded. He remembered that Peele had taken that line all along, and that he had been rather surprised by Peele's unexpected concern for the honour of the Form. Unwilling as he was to think evil even of the black sheep of the Fourth, a conviction was forcing itself into Jimmy's mind that the George guinea had really been stolen, and that Cyril Peele was the thief!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Found!

M. R. DALTON was taking roll-call. Calling-over seemed a long process to some of the Fourth on this occasion. Tubby Muffin had agreed—reluctantly—to let the matter of the missing guinea stand over till after roll; he was eager for the theft to be proclaimed, and investigation commenced. Jimmy Silver & Co. were anxious now for the matter to come to a head. And most of the Classical Fourth were curious to know whether the notice, posted in the Fourth Form passage by the captain of the Form, had produced any effect. Certainly, if the guinea had been abstracted for a foolish practical joke, it was likely that the jester would have returned it by this time.

The juniors crowded out after roll, and most of the Classical Fourth headed for Study No. 2 at once.

That study and the passage outside were crowded. Jimmy Silver glanced over the room, hoping to see the guinea; but it was not to be seen there.

"It's not been brought back!" hooted Tubby Muffin. "I knew it wouldn't be! The thief's sold it by this time, Jimmy Silver, and you're jolly well responsible."

"Yes, Silver's responsible," said Gunner, in his positive way. "If the guinea doesn't turn up, Silver ought to compensate Muffin."

"What rot!" said Mornington. "If the guinea doesn't turn up," said Jimmy Silver quietly, "the matter will have to be reported to Mr. Dalton. It doesn't seem to have been brought back."

"I'm going to Mr. Dalton now!" exclaimed Tubby.

"I—I suppose you'd better!" admitted the Captain of the Fourth.

"The sooner the better," said Gunner. "That guinea was worth three pounds, as I've said before."

"Three farthings, more likely," said Peele.

"I tell you I know something about numismatics!" roared Gunner.

"About as much as you know about cricket, I fancy," sneered Peele. "But before you go to Dicky Dalton, Silver, hadn't you better look round the study? The jolly old joker may have brought it back, you know."

"It isn't here."
"You haven't looked yet," said Peele. "Well, I can't see it!" snapped Jimmy, his suspicions of Peele deepening every moment.

Peele jerked out the table drawer. "Might be there!" he said. "That's

where the fat duffer kept it, and that's where it might be put back."

"Oh, rot— My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy as a golden glimmer caught his eye.

"My guinea!" yelled Tubby Muffin. "Great Scott!"

Muffin pounced on the guinea. There it was, glimmering in the table drawer, among papers and pens, pencils and nibs, and old letters. The George guinea had turned up, after all.

"So it was a giddy jest, and the practical joker has brought it back!" exclaimed Mornington.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another.

Their faces were red and they were feeling utterly sheepish and sick with themselves. For by that time they had grown convinced that Peele had stolen Tubby's guinea. Circumstantial evidence, and their knowledge of Peele's shady ways, had convinced them. Had the unknown jester kept the guinea back, they would not have had the slightest doubt that Peele had taken it and sold it in Latcham that afternoon. They would have condemned him, in their own minds at least, and the condemnation would have been unjust!

That reflection was enough to make the Fistical Four feel very sick with themselves. They stood flushed and silent, scarcely daring to look at Peele.

Had he been aware of their suspicion they would have asked his pardon at once. As he knew nothing of it, however, it was better to say nothing. It was a case of the least said the soonest mended.

"Well, there's your spoof guinea, Muffin!" said Peele, with a sneering grin. "You've got it!"

"Tain't a spoof guinea, you beast!"

"Quite genuine!" said Gunner. "I'll stake my knowledge of numismatics on that! I think I know something about numismatics."

"Think again!" sneered Peele. "Well, there the rotten thing is, anyhow!" said Putty of the Fourth. "You'd better keep it in your pocket now, Muffin. If you leave it about the study again I'll scalp you!"

The crowd of juniors broke up, all glad that the missing guinea had turned up, and that there was no longer the shadow of a suspected theft over the Classical Fourth.

Tubby Muffin did not return the guinea to the table drawer. He was taking no more risks with it. He disposed of his valuable prize in an inner pocket, there to remain till he could dispose of it for cash.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Terrible for Tubby!

"SIXPENCE!" said Tubby Muffin.

It was the following day, after classes. During that day Tubby Muffin had been making a collection for his return ticket to Latcham. With a golden guinea in his possession, worth anything from thirty shillings to three pounds, Tubby was still in his usual impecunious state. He came up to Jimmy Silver & Co. and held out a fat hand.

"Just sixpence more," he said. "I'll settle it out of what I get for the guinea."

Jimmy Silver & Co. sorted out coppers, and the required sum was made up. Then Reginald Muffin, in high feather, trotted out of the school gates, on his way to Coombe to take the local train.

(Continued on the next page.)

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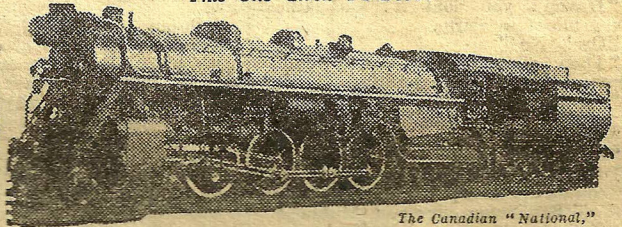
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The George guinea was safe in his pocket. Gunner of the Fourth called to him as he started:

"Don't take less than thirty bob, Muffin! It will go cheap at that."

"I won't!" agreed Tubby.

And he trotted away in great spirits. Tubby was expected back to tea. In Study No. 2 there was some expectation. With ready cash in his possession, Tubby was going to stand a study spread—howsoever large the sum he received for his guinea, it was not likely to last Tubby very long. Higgs and Jones minor and Putty considered that it was, indeed, high time that Tubby stood a feed—he generally shared them, but seldom stood them. And Tubby had graciously invited the Fistical Four and several other fellows. With this chance at last of spreading himself, Tubby was going to do the thing in style.

So at tea-time Jimmy Silver & Co. came in, and instead of going on to the end study as usual, they stopped at Study No. 2. The table was set for tea—crochery and chairs had been borrowed along the passage. All was ready for the spread, with the exception of the spread itself. That had to wait till Tubby came back with his new supplies of cash.

"Not back yet?" asked Lovell.

"No. He won't be long now," said Putty of the Fourth. "Hallo, trot in, Gunner!"

Gunner trotted in. The numismatist was on the list of invited guests. He brought his studymate, Dickinson minor, with him. Oswald and Topham and Townsend came in a little later. It was quite a gathering.

"Here he comes!" said Putty, who was looking from the study window. "I can see him. I suppose he'll stop at the tuckshop as he comes across. No, he's coming right on!"

A few minutes later the heavy footsteps and stertorous breathing of Reginald Muffin were heard in the Fourth Form passage.

Tubby appeared in the doorway.

"Welcome home, old man!" said Higgs.

"All ready, Tubby!" said Jones minor.

Tubby did not answer. He blinked in at the assembled company, and they could not possibly fail to observe that the expression on his fat face was not happy. It was, indeed, glum, to the deepest depth of glumness.

"Haven't you sold it?" exclaimed Jones minor in alarm.

"Ow! No!"

"Then what about the spread?" demanded Jones indignantly.

"Oh dear! There won't be any spread."

"Well, you fat chump—"

"Shut up, Jones!" said Gunner.

"Tubby's quite right not to sell it if he couldn't get the value. How much did old Sanderson offer you, Muffin?"

"Twopence!" roared Muffin.

"Twopence!" said Gunner dazedly. "It's worth three pounds—two at the very least! Is the man mad?"

Clunk! Tubby Muffin threw the golden guinea on the table. He did not seem to care where it fell.

"He says it's an imitation," mumbled Tubby. "He says it's a dummy coin, the kind they make to put in a showcase, or something. He says they're quite common. Only yesterday a fellow came in to sell one to him, thinking it was a real guinea. Oh dear!"

Jimmy Silver gave a start.

"A fellow tried to sell one to him yesterday!" he exclaimed.

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"Ow! Yes; and Mr. Sanderson told him it was bogus," said Tubby dismally. "He says it was exactly the same as mine. Oh dear!"

Jimmy Silver compressed his lips. He had little doubt of the identity of the fellow who had tried to sell an imitation George guinea to Mr. Sanderson the previous day, thinking it was real. He understood, too, how it was that the missing guinea had been returned to Tubby's study. Even Peele had not cared to become a thief for the sake of a few pence.

"Mr. Sanderson's got a dozen of them," roared Tubby. "He says I can have them at twopence each if I like. Ow!"

"You footlin' ass!" said Townsend. And he walked out of the study with Topham. Oswald and Dickinson minor grinned and followed them. Evidently the spread was "off"—very much off.

Tubby Muffin sank into a chair, with a woebegone face. He had counted his chickens rather too early, and now they were never to be hatched. It was a terrible blow for Tubby.

"It's utter rot!" exclaimed Gunner. "I know something about numismatics. I can tell you all about coins and—"

"More than a dealer in them!" grinned Putty.

"Certainly. I tell you that George guinea is exactly like the one in my collection at home. Buck up, Muffin!" said Gunner encouragingly. "You can take my word for it that—"

"You silly ass!"

"What?"

"You thumping idiot!"

"Are you calling me names, Muffin?"

Tubby glared at him.

"You burbling jabberwock!" he howled. "You don't know what you're talking about! You never do! I might have known you were only gassing out of the back of your neck! Making me believe that bit of gilded tin was worth three pounds! Yah!"

"Why, I—I'll—"

"Fathead! Chump! Ass!" roared Tubby. "Now I've been all over to Latcham for nothing, you—you—silly owl! You ought to be put in a home for idiots! You know as much about numismatics as you know about footer! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunner made a jump at Tubby. At the same time three or four fellows made a jump at Gunner, and collared him.

"Bump him!" said Jimmy Silver. "Gunner's the cause of all the trouble, with his fatheaded cocksureness. He doesn't know enough to go in when it rains, and he sets up to teach us numismatics. Bump him!"

"Leggo! Yaroooh! I— Oh, my hat!"

Bump, bump, bump! The juniors felt that Gunner had asked for it, so they gave it to him. Peter Cuthbert Gunner smote the study carpet with his burly person, and smote it again and again. Then half a dozen boots helped Gunner out of the study—and the foot that landed hardest was the fat foot of Reginald Muffin.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Rough Justice!

JIMMY SILVER beckoned to his chums and walked along the Fourth Form passage to Peele's study. He threw open the door, and Peele, who was smoking a cigarette, gave him an impudent glance through the smoke. Lovell, and Raby, and Newcome followed the captain of the Fourth into the study.

"I don't remember askin' you fellows to call!" drawled Peele.

"We've come on business," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Yesterday Muffin's guinea was taken from his study, Peele—"

"Has he lost it again?" yawned Peele.

"Nobody's likely to take it again, as it turns out to be a medal, worth a few pence. But yesterday it was supposed to be worth some pounds," said Jimmy Silver. "That is why it was taken."

"Didn't it turn out to be a giddy practical joke?"

"So we thought. We don't think so now," said the captain of the Fourth. "Yesterday Mr. Sanderson was offered a guinea just like Tubby's—by a fellow who thought it was real and wanted to sell it. That guinea was Tubby's guinea—and you were the fellow, Peele."

Peele sat up.

His face was a little pale, but he was quite cool.

"Sanderson's at Latcham, isn't he?" he asked.

"You know he is."

"Well, I never went near Latcham yesterday."

"You—you didn't—" ejaculated Lovell.

"Not at all!"

"May a fellow ask where you did go, as you were out of gates?" said Jimmy silver very quietly.

"No bizney of yours, but I don't mind mentionin' it. I had a spin on my bike, Rookham way."

"And you didn't pass through Latcham?"

"No," yawned Peele.

"Yesterday," said Jimmy Silver grimly, "we rode through Latcham, Peele, behind you, and saw you get down and go into Sanderson's shop."

Peele sprang to his feet. The cigarette dropped unheeded to the floor.

"You—you—" he gasped. "You rotters! The guinea was put back. It wasn't stolen. It—" he panted helplessly.

"You put it back, after hearing from Sanderson that it was worthless," said Jimmy Silver. "We know it all now. And now—"

"You can't tell the Head. You can't prove—"

Cyril Peele's coolness was gone now, and he fairly panted with terror.

"We're not going to tell anybody," said Jimmy Silver. "We're going to give you a lesson, you horrid cad, to keep your dirty paws from stealing, and disgracing your school. Bend him over!"

The next five minutes were purgatory to Peele of the Fourth. He did not even dare to yell, lest he should attract a prefect to the study, to hear for what he was being punished. Lovell had brought a fives bat, and Peele, bending over a chair, took a tremendous licking without a word. A Head's flogging would have been a jest to that licking. Lovell's powerful arm was quite tired when he had finished.

Then, without a word to the cad of the Fourth, the Fistical Four quitted the study, leaving Cyril Peele groaning.

Tubby Muffin mourned long over his disappointment. Gunner recalled the episode with painful feelings. But it was Cyril Peele who retained the longest and more painful recollection of the episode of Tubby Muffin's golden guinea.

THE END.

(There will be another topping long complete tale of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, next week, entitled: "Keepin' It Dark!")