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THE RIO KID'S GOLD MINE - Thrilling Western Yarn *inside!*

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JUST MISSED!

AT GRIP'S WITH A BULLY!

Many have been the tussles between Mark Carthew, the bully of the Sixth, and the Heroes of the Fourth. And in almost every case Carthew has come off second best. His latest encounter with Jimmy Silver & Co. is no exception!

The PREFECT'S PUNISHMENT!

by
OWEN CONQUEST

A ROLICKING LONG COMPLETE
TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO.,
THE CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Asking For It!

"HERE, Silver!"
It was Hansom of the Fifth who called.

Edward Hansom, captain of the Rookwood Fifth, had a powerful voice, and Jimmy Silver certainly must have heard him call.

But he gave no sign.

Hansom was standing by the staircase, talking with Lumsden and Talboys of the Fifth, when Jimmy Silver of the Fourth came along. He suspended his conversation with Lumsden and Talboys to call to Jimmy Silver, and by the tone of his voice it was evident that Hansom was in the imperative mood.

"Silver! Do you hear?"

Jimmy Silver did not seem to hear.

He was walking towards the big doorway on the quad, outside which his chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, were waiting for him. And Jimmy Silver, like Felix, kept on walking.

Hansom reddened.

Lumsden and Talboys smiled slightly. It was evident that the Fourth-Former heard, and equally evident that he did not intend to heed.

"Silver!" bawled Hansom.

Still, like the dying gladiator of old, Jimmy heard, but he heeded not.

Hansom left his comrades and strode across to intercept Jimmy's way to the door. Jimmy Silver had to stop then, with the big Fifth-Former directly in his path.

So he stopped.

"You cheeky little tick—" began Hansom.

"You cheeky big tick!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

"Go to my study at once, and fetch my Livy," said Hansom. "I want it for third lesson. See?"

Jimmy Silver smiled. Hansom, captain of the Fifth, was a great man in his Form—greater still in his own estimation. Being a great man, Hansom saw no reason why he should not fag juniors like a prefect of the Sixth. The juniors saw many reasons. They did not like fagging—and they did not like Hansom much. So it was a point upon which Jimmy Silver and Edward Hansom were not likely to agree.

"Do you hear?" snapped Hansom.



"Dear man, I could hear you across the quad," said Jimmy Silver affably. "The bull of Bashan isn't in it with you, old bean!"

"Are you going?"

"Oh, no, I'm not going!"

Lumsden and Talboys grinned. They were quite as keen as Hansom on keeping up the dignity and importance of the Fifth. But on more than one occasion they had found Jimmy Silver a hard nut to crack, and they had given him up. Their view was that Hansom would have been wiser to let Jimmy alone, and issue his lofty commands to more amenable fags of the Fourth, such as Tubby Muffin, or Peele, or Dickinson minor.

"Oh, you're not going, aren't you?" said Hansom.

"Not at all."

"Cut off at once before I lick you!"

"Same to you, dear man," said Jimmy. "Cut off at once before I lick you."

That was more than enough for Hansom of the Fifth. He simply could not allow himself to be defied in this way by a junior of the Fourth Form.

He made a jump at Jimmy Silver and grasped at him.

Jimmy Silver made a jump backward at the same moment, and Hansom's grasping hand swept the empty air.

Before he could grasp again Jimmy had dodged round him, and was speeding to the doorway.

"Oh!" gasped Hansom. "Stop! I'll—"

He sped after Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy cleared the doorway and came down the School House steps with a bound. Lovell and Raby and Newcome stared at him, wondering what was the cause of that sudden exit.

They understood the next moment, as the big Fifth-Former came charging out.

"Back up, you fellows!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"What-ho!" grinned Lovell.

Hansom of the Fifth, rushing down the steps, rushed fairly into the arms of the Fistical Four.

Jimmy Silver, great fighting-man as he was in the Lower School, would not have been of much use alone against a Fifth Form fellow. But with four sturdy juniors on the scene matters were quite different. Hansom could have handled one, or even two, of the chums of the end study. But in the grasp of four he was nowhere.

Almost before he knew what was happening Hansom of the Fifth was whirling in the grasp of four pairs of hands.

"Ow! Leggo!" he roared.

"Sit him down!" exclaimed Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky fags! You— Ow— oh—ah!" spluttered the Fifth-Former. Bump!

Hansom sat down on the lowest step. He sat there with a concussion that made him roar.

There was a chortle from the fellows in the quad who witnessed the sudden downfall of Hansom. Carthew of the Sixth, who was coming up to the House, grinned. Carthew was generally "down" on the Fistical Four; but he was not on good terms with Hansom, and he seemed entertained by the present proceedings of Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Hallo! Taking a rest, Hansom?" he asked.

"Ow!" gasped Hansom.

"You shouldn't sit on the steps, old man. Somebody might come out and fall over you!" grinned Carthew.

"Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lumsden and Talboys came out at

the doorway. They hurried down to falling off. Indeed, any interruption of His face was grim and stern. He felt the prefect's arm.

"Hook it!" murmured Jimmy Silver. And the heroes of the Fourth faded away in the distance, leaving Hansom to be picked up by his chums.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Follow Your Leader!

"FOLLOW your leader!" said Jimmy Silver. "Right-ho!"

It was a great temptation.

The big staircase was clear, the lower hall was untenanted. The great oaken banister, broad and polished, was more than tempting—it was irresistible.

Sliding down the big banister was strictly forbidden. The prohibition was reasonable enough, for certainly the proceeding was risky. Once a fellow had been hurt by whizzing down the banister at breathless speed, and rolling off into the hall instead of landing on his feet as he should have done.

So the powers had forbidden it, and rightly so. But the Fistical Four felt, perhaps, that such a prohibition should not apply to them personally. For they were not at all likely to lose their nerve and bag an accident—their confidence in themselves was without limit.

To sit on the big broad banister, to sail down it like an arrow from a bow, and from the lower end to jump lightly and land on one's feet, was a risky but attractive form of exercise. Any prefect who saw a junior performing such a feat was bound to cane him or report him to his Form master. A broken limb might very well have been the result of an accident.

But there were no prefects to be seen at this particular moment, and the smooth, polished banister was tempting. The Fistical Four were coming downstairs, and the banister was the quickest and most enjoyable method of descent.

So they adopted it, forgetting for the moment the stern prohibitions of the powers.

Jimmy Silver threw a leg over the banister and started. Nervous fellows sometimes slid down enfolding the banister with their arms and chests. Not so the Fistical Four, who certainly deserved to be caned for their recklessness. Jimmy Silver sat erect and astride, and sailed down gloriously, and after him came Lovell, then Raby, and then Newcome. Four juniors, sitting on the banister in file, whizzed down with a terrific rush.

And then, from the window recess in the lower hall, stepped Carthew of the Sixth.

Jimmy was half-way down when he saw him.

He did not need the grin on the Sixth Form bully's face to tell him that Carthew had deliberately waited, before showing himself, till the Fistical Four were committed to that mode of descent. It was just like Carthew! He had spotted them at the landing above, easily guessed how they would descend if they supposed that no eyes were upon them, and so had kept out of sight till they started. Now he had something to report!

But it was too late to stop! The four juniors whizzed on. Carthew threw up his hand.

"Get off that banister at once!" he shouted.

Carthew must have known, or at least ought to have known, that the whizzing juniors in full career could not possibly have got off the banister, except by

that perilous descent was liable to cause danger to the transgressors. A startled fellow might have lost his head and pitched off, with a broken leg or arm as the result.

Carthew should have been careful not to interfere till the reckless juniors were in safety. Instead of which he shouted up at them, coming close to the banisters.

"Get off at once! Do you hear?" The quartette whizzed on.

There was little time to think, the descent was so swift. But the leader of the whizzing file saw that Carthew was standing directly in the way of the jump-off. Carthew had not noticed that, or perhaps he did not care.

"Get aside!" howled Jimmy, as he whizzed.

Carthew did not heed, and did not move.

Jimmy Silver had an instant's choice—of tumbling headlong over the massy newel-post at the foot of the banister, or of jumping clear in the usual way before touching it and landing on Carthew.

Crashing on a Sixth Form prefect was a serious matter. But it was not quite so serious as tumbling headlong into the hall on a hard oaken floor. And it was impossible to stop.

Jimmy Silver's mind was instantly made up.

Down he came—it was only a matter of seconds. Within a few feet of the newel-post he lifted one leg clear and leaped for the floor at the side of the big staircase.

Crash!

As Carthew was in the way a collision was inevitable.

It was a terrific collision.

Jimmy came down on Carthew like a thunderbolt, sending him sprawling.

Carthew sprawled, yelling and gasping, on the floor, and Jimmy sprawled over him. Jimmy's fall was broken, and to judge by the sounds that came from Mark Carthew, he was broken, too.

Before Jimmy could rise, the next in line came whizzing off the banister, and Arthur Edward Lovell sprawled over Jimmy. Then Raby came landing, and sprawled over Lovell, and then came Arthur Newcome, sprawling over all of them.

Carthew, in a breathless and battered state, fairly disappeared under the juniors.

His muffled voice was heard spluttering beneath the stack of them.

"Groogh! Mmmmmmmmm!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy.

"Ow!" stuttered Lovell. "The silly ass! Oh dear! Might have broken all our necks! Wow!"

The Fistical Four scrambled up, breathless and shaken. But for Carthew they would have jumped clear one after another, and landed in safety. Now they were hurt, and it was evident that Carthew of the Sixth was still more hurt.

He sat up and roared.

"What is all this?"

Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, came hurrying from his study.

"Ow! Oh! I—I think my arm's broken, sir!" spluttered Carthew.

"Those young villains—ow—sliding down the banisters—wow—jumping on me—mooh—"

The Fistical Four stood silent. They knew what to expect now. They had transgressed the law, and the way of the transgressor was hard.

Mr. Dalton gave Carthew a hand up.

His face was grim and stern. He felt the prefect's arm.

"It is not broken, Carthew," he said coldly. "There is a bruise—that is all."

"They jumped on me!" roared Carthew. "Jumped on me from the banisters! It was intentional—ow!"

"We couldn't help it, sir," said Jimmy Silver. "Carthew stood right in the way. He ought to have known better."

Mr. Dalton knitted his brows. "You were sliding down the banisters?" he said.

"Ye-es."

"You are well aware that such a performance is strictly forbidden!"

The Fistical Four were silent. They could not deny it.

"I shall cane you severely for this," said Mr. Dalton. "Follow me to my study."

Carthew gasped.

"That isn't all, sir! They jumped on me, knocked me over. It was done on purpose—"

"I am sure not, Carthew. The boys have hurt themselves by falling over you, as you can see."

"I know jolly well that they did, all the same!" howled Carthew. "I told them to stop and get off the banister as soon as they'd started. They came on without taking any notice."

"That was inevitable if they had started," said Mr. Dalton drily. "On another such occasion, Carthew, you should be careful to give a reckless boy plenty of room to land in safety. He should be punished, but not by the risk of a broken limb."

Mr. Dalton, signing to the Fistical Four to follow him, walked to his study. Carthew was left gritting his teeth. In Carthew's opinion nothing short of a Head's flogging was adequate to meet the circumstances. It was clear that Mr. Dalton disagreed with him.

Carthew limped away, furious. But Jimmy Silver & Co. were not happy as they followed their Form master into his study.

Mr. Dalton selected a cane.

"You are very well aware, Silver," he said, "that the rule you have broken is made in the interests of the boys themselves. As head boy of the Fourth, you are expected to set a better example."

Jimmy coloured deeply.

It was quite true, and "Uncle James" of Rookwood realised that he had failed for once to play up in the way that might have been expected of him.

"I'm sorry, sir!" he said sincerely. "I didn't stop to think. I know I ought to have."

"Quite so," said Mr. Dalton. "You must try to remember the rules, and remember to regard them. Hold out your hand!"

Possibly Mr. Dalton thought that a severe caning would help to fix the rules and a due regard for them in the memories of the Fistical Four. Possibly he was right. At all events, he did not spare the rod, and when the chums of the Fourth left his study they were almost crawling, and their hands were tucked in anguish under their arms.

In the corridor they looked at one another with ghastly faces.

"Ow!" said Lovell, in a tone of deep feeling.

"Wow!" mumbled Raby.

"Mooooooooo!" murmured Newcome.

Jimmy Silver squeezed his hands and groaned.

"No more banisters for me! Ow!"

Ow! Wow! Blow the old banisters! Yow-ow-wow!"

The hapless four limped away. At the end of the corridor they passed Hansom of the Fifth, and that youth glanced at them and grinned.

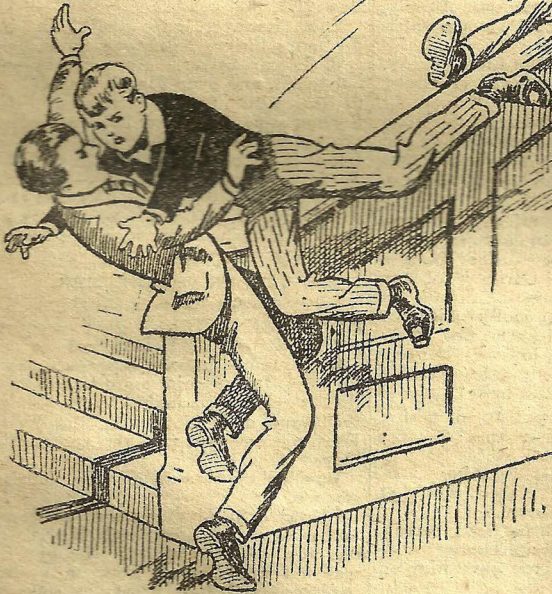
"Somebody licked you fags?" he asked genially.

And the suffering quartette limped on, lacking even the energy at that moment of anguish to collar Hansom of the Fifth and roll him in the corridor.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Carthew's Chance!

JIMMY SILVER cast a wary glance over his shoulder and quickened his pace. It was the following day, and the effect of Mr. Dalton's caning had, of course, quite worn off. Jimmy Silver, looking as cheerful as if he had never been caned in his life, was sauntering by the footpath towards Coombe, when he sighted Carthew of the Sixth.

Carthew was crossing the field from the opposite direction, and Jimmy could not have kept on without meeting him face to face.



There was a roar of pain from the bully of the Sixth.

"Ow!"

"Let go, you rotter!" panted Jimmy. Carthew, gritting his teeth, his eyes gleaming, compressed his grasp on the junior and forced him down on the

"Stop!" shouted Carthew.

Jimmy was not likely to stop.

Behind him came the heavy footsteps of the Sixth-Former, panting, in pursuit. The light walking cane that Carthew had been carrying under his arm was gripped in his hand now.

Jimmy Silver reached the wood, and plunged in among the trees and thickets, with his pursuer close behind. A second later his foot caught in an unseen wire, probably placed there for the benefit of trespassers, and he went stumbling headlong.

CRASH! "Stop, I tell you!" shouted Carthew. He stood glaring at Jimmy Silver & Co., as they whizzed down the banisters at top speed. Jimmy Silver reached the bottom, and unable to stop himself, he crashed into the Sixth-Former and sent him sprawling. (See Chapter 2.)

stump again. Taking care to keep clear of the lashing heels, Carthew laid on the cane with vim.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

There were footsteps in the wood, and three fellows came in sight. They were Hansom, Talboys, and Lumsden, of the Fifth. The three Fifth-Formers stared at the scene.

"Stop that, Carthew!" exclaimed Hansom.

Carthew gave him a glare.

"Keep off, and mind your own business!" he snapped.

Hansom of the Fifth did not keep off. With an angry frown, he strode up and caught Carthew's arm as another lash was descending.

"Let the kid alone!" he said sharply.

"You cheeky rotter—"

"Rats to you!" said Hansom contemptuously. "Who is it you're bullying? Oh, it's that cheeky young cad Silver! Well, I dare say he's asked for it, but he's had enough. Let him alone."

Carthew almost ground his teeth with rage. He was a prefect of the Sixth Form, and nobody in the Fifth, of course, had any right to interfere with him.

But Hansom, who was a big and powerful fellow, never was willing to acknowledge any superiority on the part of the top Form. Prefects like Bulkeley and Neville knew how to handle the rather obstreperous Fifth-Former and keep him in his place.

But it was different with Carthew, whose courage was seldom at the sticking-point, and who had often put up with a good deal of "swank" from Hansom rather than venture upon a "row" with him.

Hansom was quite in his element now. He quite enjoyed bearding a Sixth-Form prefect, and Carthew was the only prefect of the Sixth whom he could venture to beard.

Jimmy had no desire whatever to meet the bully of the Sixth at close quarters on his own, so he changed his direction, and walked across the grass away from the footpath, strolling along with a careless air as if he hadn't noticed the enemy in the offing at all.

But a wary glance back showed that Carthew had left the footpath also, and was crossing the field on his track. And Carthew was following on with rapid strides, with a grim expression on his far from prepossessing face.

Jimmy Silver broke into a trot.

It needed only one look at the bully's face to see that he intended to take advantage of this chance meeting in a solitary spot to deal with his old enemy of the Fourth in a way he could scarcely have ventured upon at Rookwood. So Jimmy put it on.

Ahead of him, on the edge of the field, was a stretch of woodland, and Jimmy headed for the thickets there at top speed. Once among the trees, he felt confident of dodging Carthew.

The sudden fall almost dazed him. He rolled over and scrambled up dizzily.

The next moment Carthew's grasp was on his shoulder.

"Stop, you young rotter!" growled the prefect.

Jimmy panted for breath. He had no choice about stopping, as he was in the grip of the angry Sixth-Former.

Carthew eyed him evilly.

"You jumped on me yesterday, Silver!" he remarked. "No end of a joke—what?"

"I wish I'd jumped harder!" gasped Jimmy.

"You're going to pay for it now!"

Carthew fixed his grip on the back of Jimmy's collar. By sheer force he bent the junior over a stump. Then the cane in his right hand came into play.

Lash!

Jimmy Silver struggled and roared. He knew that he was booked for a savage thrashing, and it was no time to stand on ceremony. He kicked out with vigour, and his boot crashed on Carthew's shin.

So, heedless of Carthew's fury, he held back the bully's arm, and the cane did not touch Jimmy Silver again.

Carthew struggled to free his arm, still keeping Jimmy's collar gripped in his left.

"Let go, you fool!" he panted. "That tag alone!" retorted Hansom.

"You're such a beastly bully, Carthew!" remarked Talboys, with a shake of the head.

"Bullying cad!" remarked Lumsden. Hansom grinned at his chums. He was enjoying the situation. This would show Carthew, at least, what he thought of the Sixth!

"Take your paw off my arm at once," gasped Carthew. "I shall report this to the Head! You're interfering with a prefect—"

"Report and be blowed!" said Hansom cheerfully. "You're bullying that kid, and you're going to stop it."

"Enough's as good as a feast!" said Talboys.

"Let go!" roared Carthew.

"Rats!"

"I tell you—"

"You let go that kid," said Hansom. "Now, then, sharp, or I'll jolly well make you!"

That was too much for Carthew. He was not a fighting-man when he could help it; but to be openly hectorated by a Fifth Form fellow was more than he could stand.

He released Jimmy Silver's collar, to free his hand. And that hand, clenched hard, was dashed full into Hansom's face.

"Take that, you cad!" he panted. Hansom took it—he couldn't help that. The blow was unexpected, and it landed fairly on Hansom's nose. The captain of the Fifth, went staggering back, and sat down in the grass with a heavy bump.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Licked To The Wide!

JIMMY SILVER jumped away, panting.

Carthew had no eyes for him, for the moment.

His eyes were on Hansom of the Fifth, who was sprawling in the grass and spluttering wildly.

Hansom sat up.

"Ow!" That was his first remark. "Wow! Ow!"

"Now mind your own dashed bizney!" said Carthew savagely, but a trifle apprehensively. He had floored Hansom quite successfully; but he was rather doubtful about what Hansom might do when he got up again.

"By gad! I—I—" gasped Hansom, feeling his nose, as if to make sure that it still adorned his visage.

Carthew backed away a pace or two. At that point, he would have been quite satisfied to let the affair end—even if he had to let Jimmy Silver off.

But Edward Hansom was not satisfied to let it end there. Hansom had been knocked down; and he was not to be knocked down with impunity. He scrambled to his feet, dashing a stream of crimson from his nose.

"You cheeky cad!" he roared. "Come on!"

"I'm not fightin' you!" growled Carthew. "You know jolly well that a Sixth Form prefect musn't scrap."

"Then he musn't punch fellows' noses," said Hansom, prancing up to the Sixth-Former. "Put up your hands!"

Carthew backed further away, rather

quickly. But he found Lumsden and Talboys in the way, grinning.

They pushed him back towards Hansom. Hansom pranced round the Sixth-Former, brandishing his fists.

"Come on, you funk!" he roared. "You've punched my nose! See if you can do it again!"

"Keep off!" yelled Carthew. "I'll report this to the Head!"

"Report that, too!" said Hansom, tapping Carthew on the chin with a heavy set of knuckles, "and that!" His left tapped Carthew's nose.

"Go it!" chuckled Talboys.

Carthew breathed fury. There was no getting out of it, and he realised it. He either had to fight Hansom of the Fifth, or to take a thrashing without fighting—and the former seemed the better alternative.

So he put up his hands and came on. Jimmy Silver looked on with keen interest.

He quite regretted having bumped Hansom on the School House steps a few days previously. No doubt Hansom was a lofty and rather overbearing fellow—but certainly his intervention now had been very useful to Jimmy. And it was quite a treat to see the bully of the Sixth handled by a fellow who could thrash him.

"Go it, Hansom!" sang out Jimmy, as Carthew staggered back from a whirlwind assault.

Hansom looked round at him.

"What's that? Cheese it, you cheeky fag!" he said.

Jimmy chuckled. Hansom had intervened on his behalf; nevertheless he did not want the fact to be overlooked that between the Fourth and the Fifth there was a great gulf fixed.

But Jimmy did not mind. He was willing to take any amount of swank from Hansom just then. For Hansom certainly was giving Carthew of the Sixth a beautiful licking.

Had Carthew been in conflict with one of the Sixth, he would have cried off as soon as he could; but for very shame's sake he could not accept defeat from a Fifth-Former, if he could help it.

For five minutes he put up something like a show, and after that he was driven about helplessly.

He went down at last, crashing.

Hansom stood and glared down at him, breathless, but triumphant.

"Take your time," he said sarcastically, as Carthew did not rise.

The bully of the Sixth gave him an evil look.

"I'm done!" he panted.

"Oh, you're not done yet," said Talboys. "Put in another round, Carthew, for the giddy honour of the Sixth."

"Sure you're done, Carthew?" asked Hansom. "My opinion is that you're not half licked yet."

"I tell you I'm done, you rotter," snarled Carthew. And he made the matter clear by remaining where he was, in the grass.

Hansom shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Well, if you own up licked, all right," he said. "You're not to touch that fag again, do you hear?"

Carthew gritted his teeth.

"Do you hear?" roared Hansom.

"Yes, hang you!"

"Mind you don't do it, then. Silver"

—Hansom turned to Jimmy, quite graciously. He rather fancied himself in the role of champion of the oppressed—"let me know if that bully touches you again, and I'll give him another jolly good hiding."

"Good man," said Jimmy, with a smile. He was not likely to call on

Edward Hansom for protection, at any time; but he was too tactful to say so.

"Not that you're to be cheeky to a prefect, either," went on Hansom, remembering the great gulf fixed between him and a fag of the Fourth. "If you do, I'll lick you myself."

"Go hon!" said Jimmy cheerfully.

Hansom frowned.

"No lip, or I'll lick you now," he said warningly.

"Ta, ta," said Jimmy Silver. "Much obliged to you, Hansom." And Jimmy walked away through the trees, feeling it wiser not to enter into a wordy war with his rescuer.

Carthew of the Sixth sat up in the grass, but he did not rise till the three Fifth-Formers were gone. By that time, Jimmy Silver was far beyond his reach.

The bully of the Sixth took his way to Rookwood in a bitter mood. He had been licked—by a Fifth Form fellow. No doubt he could cause trouble for Hansom by reporting him for attacking a prefect—but then the whole story would come out, and Carthew did not want his bullying to come to the Head's knowledge. Neither was he anxious to advertise the humiliating fact that he had been thrashed by a Fifth-Former.

On reflection Carthew felt that the less he said about the matter the better for himself.

That, however, only made him feel the more bitter, both towards Hansom and Jimmy Silver. Hansom he could not touch, and even Jimmy was difficult to deal with, if an obstreperous Fifth-Former was going to butt in on the pretext of stopping bullying. Carthew felt as if his teeth had been drawn; both the fellow who had thrashed him and the fellow he wanted to thrash seemed to be out of his power, which was not pleasant for a fellow who never forgot or forgave an injury.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Tubby Takes a Hand!

TUBBY MUFFIN gave a convulsive start. His fat heart almost jumped into his capacious mouth.

It was quite an ordinary sound that startled Reginald Muffin—simply the sound of a footstep in the Fourth Form passage; merely that, and nothing more!

But Tubby was in peculiar circumstances.

It was a half-holiday that afternoon, and most of the Rookwood fellows were on the playing-fields. Tubby had watched the Fistical Four sally forth together, and had naturally supposed that they would be occupied for some time. And in that time Tubby saw an opportunity for paying a surreptitious visit to the end study. That there was a cake in the study cupboard Tubby knew, and with Jimmy Silver & Co. at games practice there was no reason whatever, so far as the fat Classical could see, why he should not sample that cake. Doubtless, the Fistical Four, when they came in hungry to tea, would miss the cake, and would be wrathful. But wrath to come was a trifle light as air, in comparison with the cake. Tubby resolved to risk it; and now he was in the end study, with the cupboard door open; and he had been gloating over that cake when that sudden footstep outside disconcerted him.

Tubby whirled round from the cupboard in dismay. The footsteps were coming right on to the end study—and he was caught!

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Tubby.

He had no time to think. He acted on instinct. The lower part of the cupboard was pretty well filled with lumber and odds and ends, and there was barely

room for Tubby to squeeze in. He squeezed in, and drew the cupboard door nearly shut. It would not quite shut with Tubby there.

There he crouched and palpitated. One of the beasts had evidently come back to the study for something, and Tubby hoped from the bottom of his fat heart that the beast would not linger.

The door opened.

Tubby scarcely breathed.

Someone stepped inside the study. There was no sound of any further movement for a moment or two, and Tubby wondered. This did not seem like the entrance of one of the owners of the study. Tubby wondered whether it was some surreptitious marauder after the cake. But the newcomer did not approach the cupboard.

Tubby heard him move towards the table, and then, from sheer curiosity and wonder, Tubby peered out. The cupboard door was about an inch open, and it gave him a partial view of the study. The next moment Tubby almost betrayed himself in his astonishment. For the fellow standing by the table was not a junior at all. It was Mark Carthew of the Sixth Form.

Tubby controlled his feelings, and scarcely breathed. He was devoured with curiosity now. A Sixth Form prefect could not be suspected of raiding a cake; but evidently Carthew had some business in the study—business plainly of a surreptitious nature. Tubby wanted to know what it was; and Tubby was aware that if the bully of the Sixth found himself watched he would make matters painful for the watcher. So Reginald Muffin crouched in the bottom of the cupboard like a fat mouse.

Carthew was glancing about the study. He opened the table drawer at last, as if in search of something.

"That will do!"

Tubby heard him murmur the words.

A paper rustled in Carthew's hand. From the glimpse that Tubby caught of it, it seemed to be an old letter, which the senior had taken from the table drawer.

Tubby Muffin's astonishment intensified. Carthew was a "bad hat" in many ways, but he could not be supposed to be a thief. And if he was a thief there was no reason why he should steal an old letter from the end study. What on earth all this might mean was a deep and perplexing mystery to Reginald Muffin.

Carthew stood by the table, looking at the letter in his hand. He seemed to be reading it, but he did not finish. Crumpling it into his hand, he dropped it into a pocket.

Then he left the study.

The door closed behind him, and Tubby heard his footsteps dying away down the passage.

Then the fat Classical emerged gasping from his close quarters in the cupboard.

"Is he potty?" Tubby murmured, in utter bewilderment.

That really seemed to be the only explanation. Carthew's action was utterly inexplicable.

In his amazement and curiosity Tubby Muffin forgot even the cake. After a moment or two of thought he stepped to the door, and stepped out into the passage.

Carthew was disappearing by the staircase at the other end.

There was nobody about; all the Classical Fourth were out of doors on that sunny half-holiday. Tubby Muffin would have been out of doors himself but for the lure of the cake. Carthew, evidently, had observed all that, and had taken advantage of it to pay that secret

visit to the end study. But what on earth did he want with an old letter from Jimmy Silver's drawer?

Almost gasping with curiosity, Tubby Muffin rolled along the passage, and peered over the banisters.

From the lower landing Carthew, instead of going out on to the next flight of stairs, was turning into the Fifth Form passage.

Apparently he was on a visit to the Fifth, and that was odd, for all—or nearly all—the Fifth were out of doors.

Tubby scuttled down the staircase and peered round the corner into the Fifth Form passage. He was just in time to see Mark Carthew vanish into Hansom's study.

That study, Tubby knew, was vacant, for he had seen Hansom and Talbots go out of the School House together some time before.

By this time Tubby Muffin was fairly trembling with wonder and inquisitive-

ness. What was Carthew "up to" in Hansom's study? There were rumours in the school of the encounter that had taken place in the wood, and it was well known that Carthew was on the worst of terms with Hansom of the Fifth. Had Edward Hansom been there, certainly Carthew would not have visited the study.

"It's a jape!" murmured Tubby. "My hat! A prefect of the Sixth japing like a fag while a fellow's out! It's a rag on Hansom—can't be anything else."

That much became clear to Tubby's rather obtuse intellect. Carthew's visit to Hansom's study was the visit of an enemy, not of a friend. Tubby knew that.

"But—but why did he take that old letter from Jimmy's drawer?" murmured Tubby Muffin in bewilderment. "That wasn't a jape, that was—"

Then it flashed on his fat mind.

Trembling with excitement Tubby Muffin stole along the Fifth Form passage. Carthew had closed Hansom's door after him, and the fat Classical was in no danger of being seen. He stooped outside, and applied one eye to the keyhole, but the key was in the way, and he could see nothing of the interior of the room.

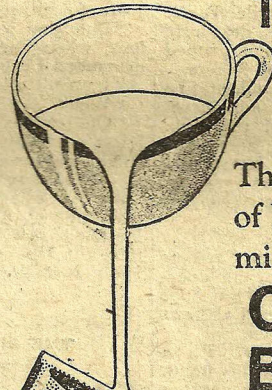
But he could hear!

There was a sound of rending and tearing. Carthew was "ragging" some of Hansom's property—probably his school books. Tubby Muffin was not a bright youth; but he quite understood now. Hansom of the Fifth, when he came in, would find his school books torn up and scattered about his room. He would find that old letter from the end study left on his floor, as if dropped there by accident by the ragger. That would be a clue—more than sufficient for the hot-headed Hansom. Tubby Muffin saw the whole game. The bully of the Sixth was killing two birds with one stone. There would be such a terrific row between Jimmy Silver & Co. and Hansom of the Fifth and howsoever it ended mattered little to Carthew; the more damage given on both sides the better the plotting prefect would be pleased.

"The awful beast!" murmured Tubby.

(Continued on next page.)

ATHLETES TRAIN ON IT



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The tearing and rending went on.

Tubby backed away from the door, and paused. His first thought was to scud down to the fields and warn Jimmy Silver & Co. But Carthew was not likely to remain long in Hansom's study. He would be gone before witnesses could arrive on the scene and catch him. And Tubby, apart from his disgust at this act of treachery, wanted very much to catch Carthew. He had the remembrance of many kicks and cuffs in his fat mind.

He crept to the door again.

The key was on the inside. How long would it take to jerk open the door, bag the key, jam it in the outside of the lock, and lock Carthew in?

Before the ragger knew what was happening, he might be locked in the study—if Tubby was quick enough! And he was quite off his guard; he would not realise what was happening, till it had happened!

Reginald Muffin set his teeth.

His fat heart beat fast; but he was determined. Softly, silently, he turned the handle of the door. But his fat hand trembled so much that the lock clicked.

There was a startled exclamation in the study. Carthew turned round towards the door—his own heart, probably, beating as fast as Tubby Muffin's at that moment.

Further concealment was futile. Tubby had time—just time—and with desperate haste he opened the door and groped round for the key with his fat fingers.

It was in his grasp in a second, and he dragged the door shut again, and thrust the key into the outside of the lock. He heard Carthew springing across the room to the door. He both heard and felt the senior's sudden furious grasp on the door-handle. The key clicked just in time.

Click!

A fraction of a second later Carthew was dragging frantically on the door-handle inside the study. But the door was locked, and half a dozen Carthews could not have dragged it open.

Tubby Muffin backed away with a breathless chuckle, the key in his hand. From within the study came a panting voice:

"Unlock this door—quick!"

Tubby grinned, and did not answer.

"Who is there?" breathed Carthew, through the keyhole. "Who is it? Whoever you are, unlock the door—quick!"

Reginald Muffin was very careful not to answer. Carthew had seen nothing of him, save a momentary glimpse of a hand, and Tubby realised that silence was golden.

"Open the door, there's a good chap!" whispered Carthew. "I'll stand you a quid to open the door!"

It was a generous offer; but Tubby Muffin, though not a bright youth, was bright enough to know that, once the door was open, he was likely to collect more kicks than halfpence from Carthew of the Sixth.

Instead of answering, Muffin rolled away down the passage, and rolled out of the School House in search of the Fistical Four.

In Hansom's study, Carthew of the Sixth stood dumbfounded. He was overwhelmed with dismay.

On the floor lay Hansom's Livy, his Virgil, his Latin grammar, his Greek lexicon, his Latin dictionary, and several other books—torn and rent and useless.

Any senior looking into the study would have supposed that some malicious fag had done the damage—had not Carthew been there to be found.

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And among the torn fragments on the floor lay a letter, written to Jimmy Silver by his father—the letter Carthew had taken from Jimmy's drawer. Hansom would have found it—and doubted not at all to whom he owed the destruction of his books.

Carthew had planned cunningly—unscrupulously, and now—

He shivered.

He was locked in the study, in the midst of the destruction he had wrought. And there was no escape for him!

While he stood, overwhelmed with dismay and apprehension, Tubby Muffin was seeking Jimmy Silver & Co., and the Fistical Four listened with blank amazement to what he had to tell them. Their faces grew dark when they understood.

"It sounds awfully thick!" said Jimmy Silver. "Let's go and look in the end study, and see if anything is missing."

It did not take long to ascertain that something was missing. Jimmy Silver had left his father's letter in the table drawer; it was gone.

Raby scuttled away to the Fifth Form passage, and came back with the news that he could hear somebody moving in Hansom's study—like "a giddy wild beast in a cage," according to Raby.

"Now do you believe it?" demanded Tubby Muffin warmly.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"But what were you doing here, anyhow, when Carthew came in, Muffin?" demanded Lovell.

"I wasn't after the cake—"

"What?"

"Of course, I wouldn't touch a fellow's cake," said Tubby. "But after what I've done, I shan't refuse it if you fellows offer it to me."

Jimmy Silver laughed, and handed over the whole cake to Reginald Muffin. He felt that Tubby had earned it. And then the Fistical Four went to look for Hansom of the Fifth.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Brought to Book!

CARTHEW trembled. There was a sound of many footsteps in the Fifth Form passage. He heard the voice of Edward Hansom, captain of the Fifth.

The wretched Carthew cast a wild glance round the study. He was almost tempted to try his luck from the window.

"The door's locked, right enough!" came Talboy's voice.

"You've got the key, Hansom?" asked Lumsden.

"Yes; young Silver gave me the key," answered Hansom; and there was a sound of the key scraping into the lock.

Carthew backed as far as he could from the door, his face white. He was utterly and hopelessly caught, and there was no help for him. It rested with Hansom and his friends whether he lost his prefectship—indeed, whether he stayed at Rookwood at all. They had only to report the outrage to the Head—and the thought of how Dr. Chisholm would regard such a malicious outrage by a prefect of the Sixth Form, made Carthew quake.

The door was thrown open.

Hansom of the Fifth stepped in, and Talboys and Lumsden followed him. After them came Brown major and Duff of the Fifth.

"Here he is!" said Hansom grimly.

Carthew looked at them with haggard eyes. He had known that this must come—that he would be kept locked in the study till Hansom & Co. were there to deal with him. He had picked up Jimmy Silver's letter from the floor and

burned it with a match—that intended trickery, at least, he was able to keep secret, or, at least, unproved. But the havoc he had wrought on Hansom's books could not be mitigated or disguised. They lay on the floor in tatters. "And that's a prefect!" said Lumsden. "A prefect of the Sixth! I wonder what the Head would say to this?"

Carthew gasped hoarsely:

"I—I'm sorry—I apologise, Hansom! I—I— There's no need to drag the Head into it!"

"You cringing worm!" said Hansom in measured tones. "This is because I licked you the other day in a fair fight—what?"

"I—I—" gasped Carthew huskily.

"And you wanted me to drop on young Silver for it?" Hansom's eyes gleamed with scorn at the wretched prefect. "Where's young Silver's letter—the one you were seen to take from his study?"

"I—I haven't—"

"That's it, I fancy!" said Lumsden, pointing to a fragment of charred paper in the fender. "The cad's been trying to cover up his tracks."

"I—I'll pay for the books!" breathed Carthew. "Don't make a row about this, Hansom. The—Head—"

There was no depth of humiliation too deep for the bully of the Sixth at that moment.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Hansom, in disgust. "You make a fellow's flesh creep. You'll pay for the books, of course—you'll jolly well buy a new set. See?"

"I—I'm willing—"

"And that isn't all. You've ragged here like a second Form fag, and you're going to take a fag's punishment! There's a malacca cane in that corner, Talboys. Hand it over."

Talboys handed over the cane. Hansom switched it in the air, and Carthew eyed it apprehensively.

"Bend over!" said Hansom tersely.

"Wha-a-at?"

"You'll take a dozen from me, or you'll go straight to the Head and answer for what you've done! Take your choice!"

For a moment Carthew stood savage and defiant, under the grim eyes of the Fifth-Formers. Then he weakened as he realised that he dare not resist; he dare not face the Head.

With a face white with rage and shame, he bent silently over a chair, as often enough he had made hapless fags bend.

"I thought so!" said Hansom.

And then he began with the malacca.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not witness Carthew's punishment. No doubt it was an entertainment in its way; but "Uncle James" and his friends would not seem to triumph over a fallen enemy.

Carthew, when Hansom had finished with him, limped away to his own study, there to hide his shame and fury.

The next day, when the Fistical Four came on him in the quad, Carthew gave them a look that the most Hunnish of Huns might have envied. The chums of the Fourth smiled sweetly at him in return.

And Carthew, enraged as he was, stopped short of plotting any further plots of vengeance.

The lesson in Hansom's study had done him good—and the bully of the Sixth had had enough!

THE END.

("Clarence Cuffy—Cricketer!" is the title of next week's rollicking long story of the chums of Rookwood.)