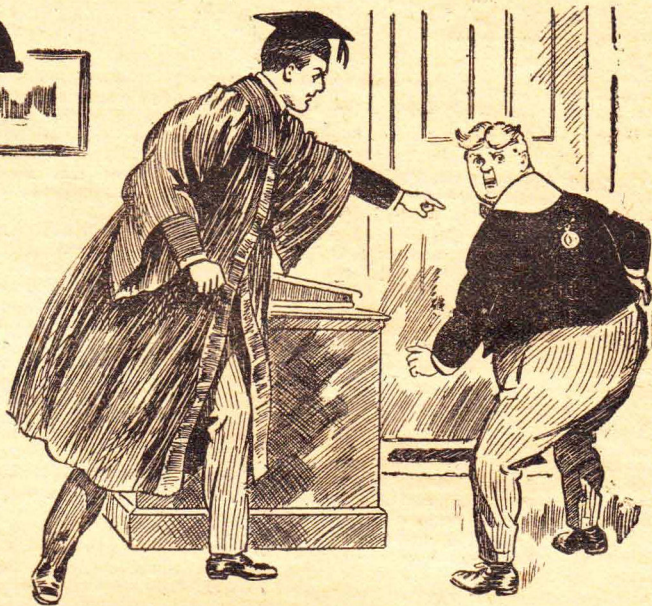


A LAUGH IN EVERY LINE OF THIS SPLENDID STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. OF ROOKWOOD!

The Watch that Went!

By Owen Conquest.

Certainly in size, weight and colour, Tubby Muffin's new watch wants a lot of beating. It's value—doubtful! At all events, this wonderful timepiece is the cause of sensational happenings at Rookwood!



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Watch that Went!

WHAT silly ass—"Eh?"

"What thumping chump—" "Anything biting you, Tubby?" inquired Jimmy Silver, turning his head as he fastened his collar-stud.

"What blithering duffer has been larking?" roared Tubby Muffin. "Where's my watch?"

Reginald Muffin, the fattest junior at Rookwood, stood beside his bed in the Classical Fourth dormitory, with wrath and alarm in his face.

He had slipped a fat hand under his pillow for his watch.

His hand came back empty.

The watch was gone.

It was true, undoubtedly, that watches were made to go! But there are ways of doing these things—and the way in which Tubby Muffin's watch had gone was neither grateful nor comforting.

"Your watch?" said Putty of the Fourth inquiringly.

"It's gone!"

"Rot!" said Lovell.

"Gone!" roared Muffin.

"Fathead!"

"It it's gone," said Valentine Mornington, "I suggest a vote of thanks to the burglar. I was fed-up with that watch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin spluttered, while the Classical Fourth chortled

As a matter of fact, much—too much—had been heard and seen in the Rookwood Fourth of Reginald Muffin's new gold watch.

That gold watch had been presented to Tubby at the end of the vacation by his uncle, Captain Muffin. It did not keep very good time, perhaps because Tubby sometimes over-wound it, and sometimes forgot to wind it at all. But it was magnificent to look at. It was a large size in watches, it had a tick that could have been heard in a thunder-storm, and when Tubby drew it out in the quad its golden glitter reflected the rays of the sun—and, indeed, almost outshone the solar luminary. The value of that watch, according to Muffin, was

enormous—and, indeed, it looked as if it would have fetched a considerable sum sold merely by weight.

Unnumbered times had Tubby proudly displayed that new gold watch and informed uninterested fellows that it was a present from his rich uncle, Captain Muffin. He would draw it out in the quad to compare the time with the time—generally different—indicated on the clock in the tower. He would draw it out in the Form-room, he would draw it out in the Common-room, he would offer to time corridor races for anybody and everybody. In fact, it was impossible to be an inmate of Rookwood School without becoming closely acquainted with Reginald Muffin's new gold watch.

And now it was gone!

"I want my watch!" roared Tubby. "I'm jolly well going to Mr. Dalton about it—"

"Hold on, fathead!" said Jimmy Silver, as the enraged Tubby turned to the door. "It's somewhere in your silly bed. Let's look."

"Let's!" said Putty.

Half a dozen juniors gathered round Tubby Muffin's bed and proceeded to dismember it.

Every article was taken off and shaken vigorously; and if the watch had been there, undoubtedly it would have come to light—and equally certainly it would have come to grief.

But the watch was not there.

Bedclothes were scattered far and wide and the bed was bare, but there was no sign of Tubby's magnificent gold watch.

Tubby Muffin stood almost in tears between rage and apprehension as the search went on. His watch—which for a week had been the apple of his eye, the object of many envious glances in the Lower School—was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

"Well, it's not here!" said Jimmy Silver, puzzled. "Are you quite sure you put it under your pillow last night, Tubby?"

"Quite sure!" hooted Tubby.

"Look in your pockets, fathead!"

"I've looked."

"Well, it means that some silly ass has bagged it for a joke," said the captain of the Fourth. "The silly ass

had better own up at once; it's a fool's trick to lark about with valuable things. Now, then!"

Jimmy Silver paused, like Brutus, for a reply. But no reply was forthcoming from the Classical Fourth fellows.

Tubby panted.

"It's been stolen! That watch was worth twenty-five guineas! There's been a thief here! I'm going to Mr. Dalton!"

"I should!" said Putty of the Fourth. "Better lose no time, Tubby; the burglar may be hiring a lorry this very minute to carry the watch away."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin, crimson with wrath, tramped to the door.

Putty of the Fourth stepped after him.

"Hold on a minute, Tubby! There's some dust on your jacket!"

Putty kindly brushed down Tubby's back. Then he stepped away, and there was a howl of laughter in the dormitory.

For Tubby Muffin's podgy back was now adorned by a dangling gold watch, deftly pinned to his jacket by a safety-pin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Reginald Muffin, quite unconscious of his new adornment, rolled out of the dormitory and hurried downstairs to report his terrible loss to Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth.

He left the Fourth Form dormitory fairly rocked with merriment.

"Putty, you ass!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fool's game, playing tricks with watches or money or anything like that!" said Arthur Edward Lovell oracularly.

"My dear man, it's the jape of the week!" said Putty Grace. "Muffin loves showing off that watch! He likes all Rookwood to stand round gazing at it! Well, everybody will see it now without giving Tubby the trouble of keeping on lugging it out of his pocket."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he's gone to Dalton to complain!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Why not?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I'm really doing this to please Muffin," said Putty. "I don't expect any thanks. But he never was a grateful chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"And the Classical Fourth were chortling as they streamed down from the dormitory."

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Right Behind!

HANSOM of the Fifth stared at Reginald Muffin, glanced at his pal Lumsden, and tapped his forehead significantly.

Lumsden of the Fifth fixed his eyes, as if fascinated, on Muffin's back as the fat junior passed.

Tubby rolled by the two seniors in the lower passage, unheeding them or their glances. He was heading for Mr. Dalton's study, and he was in haste.

Even in the Fifth Form at Rookwood they had heard of Tubby Muffin's new gold watch. In fact, everybody at Rookwood had heard of it. It was surmised that even the majestic Head could not fail to be aware that, during the vacation, Muffin's uncle had presented him with an expensive gold watch. So Hansom and Lumsden knew all about that celebrated timekeeper. But they were simply astounded to see Reginald Muffin pass them with the watch pinned to the back of his jacket.

Often and often they had seen Muffin showing off that gold watch. But never, never had they supposed that even a born idiot like Muffin would adopt this method of showing off a watch, howsoever magnificent and expensive and impressive.

"Potty, I suppose!" said Hansom.

"Well, this beats it!" said Lumsden. "Here, Muffin, you young ass, what's this game?"

Muffin blinked round.

"Is that some sort of jest?" asked Lumsden. "What game are you playing, you young ass?"

"Game?" repeated Muffin.

"Yes. Where are you going in that style?"

"I'm going to see Mr. Dalton, if he's down yet. Do you fellows know if he's down?"

"Yes; I saw him go into his study," said Lumsden. "But you're not going to see your Form master like that? Is it a jape on him?"

"Eh? I'm going to see him about my watch!" snapped Tubby Muffin, and he rolled on.

Hansom shook his head.

"Well, some of these Fourth Form kids are as full of tricks as a monkey," he said, "especially that young ass they call Putty. He's played tricks on me before now. But going to see your Form master with a watch pinned on your back is the limit. If it's a joke, I don't see the point of it, and I don't fancy Dalton will."

Headless of the perplexed Fifth-Formers, Reginald Muffin rolled on, and passed some Shell fellows in the corridor. Adolphus Smythe of the Shell glanced at him, and stared at the ticking watch on Muffin's broad back.

"Oh, great gad, look at that!" ejaculated Adolphus.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tracey. "That's a new way of showing off a watch! I say, Muffin, ain't you afraid you'll lose your watch?"

"Eh? What? Yes!" answered Muffin looking back.

"What! You're afraid you'll lose it, are you?" exclaimed Tracy.

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"Yes; and I'm going to take jolly good care I don't!" said Muffin. "Do you fellows know anything about it?"

He blinked inquiringly at Smythe & Co.

They blinked at him. Then it occurred to them that Muffin did not know that the watch was pinned on his back, and they chuckled.

"Somebody's bagged my watch," said Tubby. "It was missing from under my pillow this morning. I'm going to Mr. Dalton to complain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter!" exclaimed Muffin indignantly. "I can tell you that's a jolly expensive watch, and some fellow sneaked it from under my pillow, like a thief in the night, you know. Was it one of you fellows?"

"Eh?"

"Of course, anybody might have sneaked into the dorm and done it," said Tubby. "I didn't think of that at first. The Head says that gambling is next to stealing—"

"What?"

"And I know you fellows play banker in your study. I've seen you through the keyhole."

"The keyhole?" roared Adolphus Smythe. This was news to the sportsman of the Shell, who had supposed hitherto that his little peccadilloes were quite safe from observation when his study door was locked.

"Nunno! I—I mean, I should disdain to look through a keyhole, of course. I really mean— Here, you keep off!"

Tubby Muffin turned and fled. But he did not flee quite fast enough to escape the lunging boot of Adolphus Smythe.

Crash!

"Whooooop!"

Reginald Muffin sprawled forward, and nearly went on all fours. Fortunately, he saved himself, and ran on, and the second lunge of Smythe's foot was a few inches short.

Muffin arrived, rather breathless, at Mr. Dalton's study door.

The door was half open, and Tubby could see Richard Dalton in the study sorting out books that he would need for use in the Form-room that day. A Form master at Rookwood had plenty to do, and Richard Dalton was often busy before breakfast in the morning.

"Sir!" gasped Muffin.

The young Form master glanced round.

"Well, Muffin?"

"I've been robbed."

"What?"

"Robbed!" panted Muffin.

"Nonsense!"

"My watch—"

Mr. Dalton smiled involuntarily. He also knew all about Reginald Muffin's new gold watch. Often and often had he seen it drawn out for comparison of time with the Form-room clock.

"What has happened to your watch, Muffin?"

"It's gone, sir!" gasped Tubby.

"Do you mean that you have lost it?"

"No, sir. I've been robbed—burgled! It's been stolen!"

"Nonsense!"

"I—want you to send for a policeman, sir!" gasped Muffin. "You see, that watch it of immense value. It was given me by my Uncle Montague in the vac, sir—my rich uncle, Captain Muffin, sir—the uncle I had a yachting cruise with in the vac, sir. It's worth about thirty pounds, sir. I can't afford to lose that, sir. I—"

Mr. Dalton held up his hand to check the flow of Reginald Muffin's breathless eloquence.

"Kindly tell me what has happened, Muffin."

"I put the watch under my pillow, sir, last night. I always put it under my pillow for safety, sir, as it's of such immense value, and I wouldn't like to tempt anybody—"

"Absurd!" said Mr. Dalton. "I am sure that no boy in my Form could be tempted to so base a thing as theft!"

"But it's gone!" shrieked Tubby Muffin. "Some fellow sneaked into the dorm like—like a thief in the night, sir. I suspect Smythe of the Shell."

"What! Why?"

"He kicked me!"

"Kicked you?" said Mr. Dalton blankly.

"Yes, sir; a few minutes ago as I came along the passage."

"Upon my word! Is that a reason for suspecting him of taking your watch from under your pillow? You are an extremely stupid boy, Muffin."

"Oh, sir!"

"An unusually stupid boy," said Mr. Dalton. "I do not believe, for one moment, that your watch has been taken at all. Possibly it has been removed for a foolish practical joke; but it is more probable that you have forgotten where you have placed it. You should not make reckless accusations of theft in this manner, Muffin."

"But it's gone!" wailed Muffin.

"Nonsense! I shall inquire into the matter if you have not found the watch by breakfast-time. You will proceed to look for it at once, Muffin."

"But, sir, I—I—"

"Now you may leave my study!"

"But, I—I—"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Muffin, if you say another word I shall cane you!"

"Oh!"

Tubby Muffin backed to the door. There he turned to depart, Mr. Dalton glancing after him with a severe frown. Then there was an exclamation—almost a shout. The big gold watch, gleaming on the back of Muffin's jacket, had caught the Form master's eye, fairly making him jump.

"Muffin!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"How dare you, Muffin!"

"Wha-a-at?" stuttered Tubby, staring round at his Form master. "I—I don't understand, sir. I—"

"Is this a jest?" shouted Mr. Dalton.

"A—a—a what, sir?"

"Take that watch off your back at once!"

"Eh?"

"Take it off!"

"Tut-tut-take it off?" repeated Tubby Muffin dazedly, blinking helplessly at his Form master. He could only suppose that Richard Dalton was wandering in his mind.

"You incredibly stupid boy!" thundered Mr. Dalton. "How dare you come here and tell me that your watch was stolen, with the watch pinned on your back all the time?"

"Oh crumbs!"

Mr. Dalton strode towards the dazed Tubby, grasped him by the shoulder, and spun him round. Then he unhooked the safety-pin, and jerked the watch away. Tubby Muffin blinked at it dazedly.

"M-mum-my watch!" he stuttered.

"Did you not know that it was there, Muffin?" demanded Mr. Dalton a little more mildly, as it dawned upon his mind that the fat Classical was the victim, and not the perpetrator, of this peculiar jest.

"Nunno, sir! Oh dear! Mum-mum-my watch! Then—then it wasn't

stolen, after all!" gasped Tubby. "Some beast—"

"You are an absurd boy, Muffin! Take your watch, and kindly do not come to me again and talk such nonsense."

"I—I—"
Mr. Dalton twirled Tubby out of his study and shut the door on him. Reginald Muffin stood in the passage, watch in hand, blinking at his recovered treasure, scarcely able to believe his eyes. There was a sound of chuckling from the corner of the corridor. Tubby Muffin blinked along the passage, and beheld half the Classical Fourth waiting there, evidently to see him emerge from Mr. Dalton's study.

"I—I say—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Some beast had pinned this watch on my back, you know!" gasped Muffin.

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

"I wonder who it was!" ejaculated Putty of the Fourth.

"You!" yelled Tubby. "You made out you were brushing my jacket—I remember now, you rotter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you funny idiot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Classical juniors roared. Mr. Dalton opened his study door and glanced out.

"What is this noise?"

The Classical Fourth faded away round the corner.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Black Sheep!

CUTHBERT GOWER, of the Classical Fourth, went into his study after classes that day and slammed the door after him with a slam that rang along the passage as far as the end study.

He threw himself into a chair, with a sullen and wrinkled brow, and stared at his study mates, Peele and Lattrey. They stared at him.

"Steady on!" said Peele. "Don't shake the pictures off the walls."

Grunt, from Gower.

"What the thump's the matter with you, Gower?" asked Lattrey. "You've been like a bear with a sore head ever since we came back to school. Something happened in the vac?"

"No!" grunted Gower.

Cyril Peele grinned.

"Still stony?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, banging the door won't make that any better," said Lattrey. "And I can lend you half-a-crown, if you like."

"Blow your half-crown!"

"Well, that's jolly grateful," said Lattrey. "I'll keep my half-crown in my pocket, then. Ta-ta!" And Mark Lattrey walked out of the study, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Peele gave Cuthbert Gower a very curious look. Gower scowled at him in response.



BUMPING A TRICKSTER! Putty Grace struggled in the grasp of six or seven pairs of hands. But he struggled in vain. "Now then, you japing duffer," gasped Jimmy Silver. "Are you handing over that watch, or not?" "You silly ass!" Bump! Bump! Putty smote the fistones! (See Chapter 5.)

"Take my tip, Gower, old man, and don't be a goat," said Peele. "You asked me to lend you a tenner. Is that it?"

"I want a tenner," growled Gower. "I want it particularly and specially. I can turn it into fifty in a week's time. I've got a special tip—What are you grinning at?"

"I've seen you chin-wagging with Joey Hook," said Peele. "Is this one of his winners?"

"Yes, it is," growled Gower. "But I've had information from other sources too. I tell you, this time it's a cert, and if I had ten quid to put on a certain horse, it's fifty as safe as houses. Five to one on a certain winner, Peele. Look here, old man, if you can't manage ten, will you let me have five?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Peele contemptuously. "Haven't I been there myself? I know these certain winners—they come in about tenth or eleventh. Joey Hook wants your money, that's all."

"You bet with him yourself!" sneered Gower.

"But I don't take his tips."

"It isn't simply that," said Gower eagerly. "I heard something in the vac—some sporting men talking at a place. They were men who knew the game inside-out—friends of my elder brother—and they agreed that Chop Sticks was a sure snip, an absolute cert. They were backing him themselves, but they had to be awfully careful about it, not to let it leak out what a good thing it was. They said so."

"Bow-wow!" said Peele.

"I tell you it's so. The price then was ten to one against, and it's fallen

to five to one," said Gower. "That sounds like it, doesn't it? I can tell you, it will be evens on the day of the race, or odds on. The horse has been kept dark, and he's going to win hands down. I tell you, if I could raise the tin to back him, I should be rolling in money all this term. And—and I'm next door to stony. It's the chance of a lifetime, and I can't touch it. I think a fellow's pal might stand by him at a time like this."

"I haven't a tenner, ass!"

"A fiver, then. I know you've a fiver!"

"I happen to want it."

"Go and eat coke, then!" snarled Gower; and Cyril Peele shrugged his shoulders and left the study.

Cuthbert Gower remained alone, in dark and angry thought.

"Rotter!" he murmured, mentally referring to Peele.

Cyril Peele had a five-pound note, he knew that, and he refused to lend it to his pal in this emergency. Indeed, it would be quite like Peele to take advantage of his information and back Chop Sticks himself, and net a small fortune, leaving Gower out in the cold. That was a very exasperating thought to Cuthbert Gower.

He left the study at last and loafed along the passage, with his hands in his pockets, turning over fellows in his mind, and wondering to whom he could apply for a loan.

The door of the next study—No. 2—was open, and he saw the fellows there at tea. Tubby Muffin, Putty Grace, Jones minor, and Higgs were gathered round the study table. And Jones minor was saying:

"What's the time, Muffin?"

Tubby's fat hand went to his celebrated watch, and he drew it out.

"Half-past five!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby's three study-mates chortled. The fat Classical snorted, and jammed his watch back into his pocket, realising that the playful Jones had been pulling his leg.

"I say, Muffin," said Putty, a minute later.

"Well?"

"What's the time?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

This time Tubby Muffin grunted instead of pulling out his big, gold watch. Captain Muffin's expensive present was not brought into view again.

Gower walked on, with a moody brow.

That fat ass Muffin had a gold watch, which would have pulled Gower through his present emergency.

There was a certain gentleman who traded at Latham under the sign of the three brass balls who had sometimes obliged Cuthbert Gower with little loans on articles of jewellery, and Gower had only to pass a big gold watch like that across the counter to obtain more than the tenner he needed. If Muffin would have lent him the watch for a few days—

For Chop Sticks being an absolute "cert," bound to "romp home," it would only have been for a few days! The watch could have been redeemed out of the lavish winnings, and all would have been calm and bright!

But Gower realised that it would be no use asking Muffin to lend him that valuable watch for a few days, or even for a few minutes! Muffin would have been as likely to lend him his head!

Gower loafed sulkily along the passage, and went downstairs. The thought of Muffin's big gold watch lingered in his worried mind.

That thought was followed by other thoughts—thoughts that made Cuthbert Gower start and colour, and glance about him uneasily, as if afraid that others might read his mind.

Suppose he borrowed the watch?

Muffin would make an awful fuss. But, after all, it would only be borrowing it. It would be returned unharmed when that absolutely certain winner had romped home!

All that evening Cuthbert Gower was thinking of one thing, and one thing only—the temporary "borrowing" of Tubby Muffin's wonderful watch.

That night Tubby Muffin went to bed and snored in fat contentment, but certainly he would not have snored so peacefully had he dreamed of the thoughts in Cuthbert Gower's mind.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Dog with a Bad Name!

"WHAT'S the time, Muffin?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Edward Lovell asked the question when the Classical Fourth turned out of bed at rising-bell the following morning. And there was a chortle through the Classical Fourth dormitory.

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"Oh, rats!" grunted Muffin.

And Reginald Muffin did not slip his hand under the pillow for the watch until he had finished dressing.

When he did so, however, he started.

"I say! You fellows been larking again? Where's my watch?"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Are you going to tell us that blessed watch is still going?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It doesn't seem to be here," said Muffin; and he rooted through his bed with an anxious face.

"Rats!"

"For goodness' sake, Muffin, let's hear the end of that watch!" said Mornington. "It's really getting too thick, you know!"

"It's gone!" howled Muffin.

"Bow-wow!"

"Putty, you cheeky ass—"

"Not guilty, my lord!" grinned Putty of the Fourth.

"Gimme my watch!" roared Muffin.

"Haven't seen it," answered Teddy Grace. "Honest Injun, old fat tulip! Somebody else is japing you this time!"

"Who, then?" hooted Muffin, glaring round the dormitory.

"How the thump should I know?"

"Who's got my watch?" howled Reginald Muffin.

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver.

"For goodness' sake, turn up that watch, whoever's got it! I'm fed-up with that watch!"

"I think the whole Form's fed-up with it," said Gower. "You've shoved it somewhere and forgotten, Muffin."

"I put it under my pillow."

"Bow-wow!"

"Putty, you rotter—"

"I tell you I haven't touched your silly watch!" exclaimed Putty of the Fourth testily. "Give us a rest."

"Gimme my watch!"

"Look here, Putty, hand it over," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Enough's as good as a feast, you know. We don't want your japes twice over."

Putty turned red.

"Haven't you heard me say that I haven't touched it?" he demanded. "I don't know anything about it."

"That's all very well," said Lovell.

"But you touched it yesterday, and I said at the time it was a mug's game to play tricks with valuable things. Better give it to Muffin now and chuck it."

"If you haven't got it, Putty—"

began Jimmy Silver.

"I haven't," roared Putty. "And if you can't take my word you can go and eat coke!"

"That's all very well," said Gunner.

"You had it last time."

"Last time isn't this time, fathead!"

"Oh, own up, and give Muffin his watch before he deafens us!" snapped Gunner. "Let's hear the end of it!"

"You silly ass—"

"Chuck it, Putty!" said Mornington.

"Dash it all. It was a good wheeze the first time, but it's no joke now."

"Exactly what I think," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "You've got the watch, Putty, and you'd better cough it up!"

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Grace; and he stamped out of the dormitory with a very red face.

"Gimme my watch!" shrieked Tubby Muffin.

"Fathead!"

And Putty of the Fourth was gone.

Reginald Muffin looked as if he were on the verge of an apoplectic seizure.

"The—the—the awful rotter's going to keep it!" he gasped.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Jimmy Silver sharply. "It's one of his giddy japes, and you'll find the watch pinned on your back, or in your trousers-pocket,

or something. The fact is, Muffin, there's too much of you and your watch, and you've asked for it."

"All the same, a fellow shouldn't jape with watches and things," said Lovell. "It's a mug's game."

"I'm going to Mr. Dalton!" hooted Muffin.

"I fancy Mr. Dalton's fed-up with your watch, too!" said Jimmy. "Give it a rest. The watch is all right!"

"Do you think I'm going to lose a thirty-guinea watch?" shrieked Muffin.

"You won't lose it, ass! If Putty doesn't hand it back soon we'll jolly well make him!"

"Hear, hear!" said Lovell.

And the juniors went down from their dormitory, Tubby Muffin in an enraged and alarmed frame of mind.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Drastic Measures!

JIMMY SILVER'S face was very grave, and rather troubled when the Classical Fourth came out after lessons that morning.

He glanced at Putty of the Fourth in the corridor very expressively and Putty gave him a defiant look and walked away.

Generally the Fistical Four were on the best of terms with Putty, but there was a rift in the lute now. Even when they had been on the best of terms there had sometimes been trouble, owing to Putty's practical joking proclivities. Even among friends it was apt to cause exasperation when a fellow found another fellow's white rabbit in his hat-box along with his Sunday topper, or when he sat down in an armchair that had been carefully prepared with secotine and found it difficult to rise again. Still, Putty was a good fellow, and popular in his Form, and some of his japes were quite entertaining, especially to fellows who did not happen to be the victims of them.

But there was, as all the Classical Fourth agreed, a limit. On one occasion Mornington had missed a five-pound note, and found it in the lining of his hat—and, without asking any questions, Morny had promptly punched Putty's head. Money was an article that could not be jested with; but the irrepressible Putty did not seem to realise that there was a limit. On the trail of a jest he was a good deal like a bloodhound on a scent. His little joke with Tubby Muffin's watch had been funny enough, but most of the fellows agreed with Lovell that it was a "mug's" game to play tricks with such things. And now that the watch had disappeared a second time, nobody had the slightest doubt that Putty of the Fourth was the cause of its disappearance.

At dinner Tubby Muffin sat with a glowering, fat face. His loss did not affect his appetite, which was as Gargantuan as usual. But for once, his fat thoughts were not wholly concentrated upon what he was eating. He was thinking of his missing watch. Like Rachel of old, he mourned for that which was lost, and would not be comforted.

Putty looked grim and resentful, and Jimmy Silver, glancing at him, wondered whether, after all, his denials were well founded. But, in that case, who had the watch?

It was possible, of course, that some other practical joker had been at work, but Jimmy could not help feeling that it was improbable. As for the possibility that the watch had actually been stolen, the captain of the Fourth did not entertain that at all. There were black sheep in the Rookwood Fourth, but there was no fellow whom Jimmy would have cared

to suspect of stealing a fellow's watch from under his pillow at night. It was very much more probable that Putty of the Fourth was japing again.

After dinner, as the juniors came out into the quad, Tubby Muffin rolled up to Jimmy Silver with a determined expression on his fat face.

"What about my watch?" he demanded.

"Oh, bother your watch!" said the captain of the Fourth. "Hasn't that ass handed it back yet?"

"No, he hasn't!" growled Tubby. "Look here, I'll give him till class this afternoon; and then I'm going to speak to Mr. Dalton!"

The Fistical Four exchanged glances. They were extremely unwilling for the matter to become public property; but it could not be denied that Muffin was within his rights. The Fourth-Form jester had been given long enough to own up.

"It's rotten!" growled Lovell. "The Modern fellows will be in the Form-room this afternoon; they'll hear all about it. We shall have Tommy Dodd and that gang calling us pickpockets."

"I'm not going to lose my watch!" snorted Tubby Muffin. "My belief is that he's going to keep it."

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver. "Putty's not that sort. It's one of his idiotic japes!"

"Time he chuckled it, if that's all it is!" said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"No doubt about that. And we'll jolly well make him chuck it," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "We're not going to have the Modern cads making a song about watches being missing on the Classical side. We'd better look for Putty, and put it to him plain."

"Let's!" agreed Raby. "He's gone into the Cloisters," said Tubby. "He's been scrapping with Jones minor, for asking him whether he meant to pinch the watch."

"Come on!" said Jimmy. Several more of the Classical Fourth joined the Fistical Four in looking for Putty—Mornington and Erroll, and Oswald and Conroy, and Rawson and Townsend and Topham. It was quite a representative body of the Form; and they all meant business. Every fellow felt that it was high time that the matter came to an end. Reginald Muffin could not reasonably be expected to keep silent any longer about such a loss; indeed, if by some horrid chance it turned out that the watch had been stolen, the Head would certainly reprimand him for not having reported the matter earlier.

But the bare idea of the Modern fellows getting hold of such a story was repugnant to the Classicals. It was felt on all hands that the only thing to be done was to deal with Putty drastically. And if—which was very unlikely—he was not after all the practical joker who had abstracted the watch, it was his own fault—he could not blame fellows for believing that he had done twice what he had admittedly done once.

The army of juniors marched into the Cloisters and looked round for Putty. He was soon sighted. Putty of the Fourth was walking alone, with his hands in his pockets, not apparently in a happy mood to judge by the expression on his usually sunny face. No doubt it had been borne in on Putty's mind, at long last, that there was a limit in the matter of practical joking, which could not be passed without discomfort to follow.

He gave the Classical juniors a dark look as they came up.

"Looking for you!" said Lovell.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Putty gruffly.

"Muffin's watch!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"My gold watch!" hooted Reginald Muffin. "My valuable watch—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Putty. "My belief is that it was only a rolled gold watch, anyhow, and you could buy another for fifteen bob."

"Why, you—you—" Reginald Muffin choked with wrath. Some of the juniors grinned.

"That's all very well," said Rawson. "But if it was made of tin or copper it's Muffin's watch, and he wants it, Putty."

"Let him find it, then."

"Well, where have you hidden it?" asked Oswald.

"I haven't hidden it," said Putty, breathing hard. "Look here, I don't know anything about it. I did bag it yesterday, and pin it on his back, as you all know—it was a jape; and I'm willing to admit that it was a bit thoughtless. A fellow shouldn't jape with such things—"

"Oh, you can see that now!" said Arthur Edward Lovell sarcastically. "I told you at the time—"

"Yes. I can see it now, after this has happened," said Putty. "I don't blame you fellows for supposing it was me this time. But now I've given you my word that it's not you ought to be satisfied."

"Yes—if the watch comes home," said Lovell. "If you haven't got it, who has? Are you asking us to believe that there's another silly owl in the Form who's ass enough to jape with fellows' watches."

"It's gone far enough, Putty," said Jimmy Silver. "Have a little sense, old fellow, and chuck it."

"Then you can't take my word?" "Well, I'd take it on any other subject," said the captain of the Fourth.

"But the fact is, Putty, this japing is a sort of disease with you—and we know you've got the watch, you know. Hand it over."

"And quick about it," said Lovell. "Muffin's going to report the matter to Mr. Dalton—"

"Let him. If his watch is really missing, the sooner he reports it the better, I should think," growled Putty. "It looks to me as if some fellow has pinched it, knowing that you duffers would jump to the conclusion that it was another of my japes."

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Mornington. "Are we going to believe there's a thief in the Form, instead of a fat-headed, practical joker? Is that the jape, after all—your idea of a joke, to get the Modern fellows chipping us about it, and cause no end of a fuss, and then let the watch turn up after all? If that's what you call a jape, I don't see it."

"I tell you—" "Nuff said!" interrupted Arthur Edward Lovell. "You're going to hand over that watch, Putty, or tell Muffin where to find it, or else we're jolly well going to bump you till you do."

"That's it!" agreed Jimmy Silver. Putty of the Fourth backed away.

"I keep on telling you—" "Collar him!"

"Hands off!" roared Putty. "By Jove! I'll hit out—I— Take that, you cheeky rotter—"

"Ow!" gasped Lovell, as he staggered back under the impact of a set of hard knuckles on his nose. Arthur Edward Lovell sat down suddenly.

"Collar him!"

"Bump him!"

Putty of the Fourth struggled in the grasp of six or seven pairs of hands. But he struggled in vain against such odds, and he was collared and overpowered and swept off his feet.

"Now then, you duffer!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Are you handing over that watch, or not?"

"You silly ass!"

"Bump him, then!"

Bump!

"Yaroop!" roared Putty, as he smote the hard flagstones of the Cloisters with a somewhat hefty smite.

"Now, are you handing it over?"

"Leggo!" cried Putty, wriggling frantically. "I tell you—oh, my hat! You silly owls! Leggo! Ow, wcv!"

Bump!

"Whooooop!"

"By gad, he's an obstinate beggar!" said Mornington. "You silly ass, Putty, is your silly jape worth this? Why don't you own up?"

"Fathead!"

"Give him another!"

Bump!

"Yarooooh!" yelled Putty, in anguish. That frantic yell reached other ears—ears no less august than those of Dr. Chisholm, Headmaster of Rookwood, who was taking a gentle stroll in the Cloisters after lunch.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head. And Dr. Chisholm's stately steps turned in the direction of that terrific yell. He came on the scene quite unexpectedly.

Bump!

"Whoop! Leggo! Ow, ow, ow! Wow!"

"Boys!"

The Head's voice was not loud, but it was deep. It had an electric effect on the Fourth-Formers. Putty of the Fourth was dropped as suddenly as if he had become red-hot.

"Oh, my hat! The Head!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"The Head!"

A second more, and the juniors were scudding among the stone pillars of the Cloisters, vanishing from the Head's stern gaze like so many spectres at cock-crow. Putty of the Fourth was left sprawling breathlessly at the feet of his headmaster.

"Grace! What does this mean?"

Putty staggered up, panting.

"N-n-nothing, sir! Only a—a—a lark!" he stuttered. And Putty backed away among the pillars, and disappeared as fast as he could from the gaze of the Head.

Dr. Chisholm shook his head, and resumed his stately walk. And Jimmy Silver & Co. saw nothing more of Putty of the Fourth until it was time to turn up in the Form-room for class. Putty walked into the Form-room with head erect, and a defiant look on his face—heedless of the expressive glances turned upon him on all sides. Tubby Muffin rolled up to him.

"Will you gimme my watch before Mr. Dalton comes in—"

"Fathead!"

"It's your last chance—"

"Ass!"

And then the Master of the Fourth came into the Form-room.

THE END.

(What is going to happen now? See next week's rousing long story of Jimmy Silver & Co., entitled: "TUBBY'S TREASURE!")