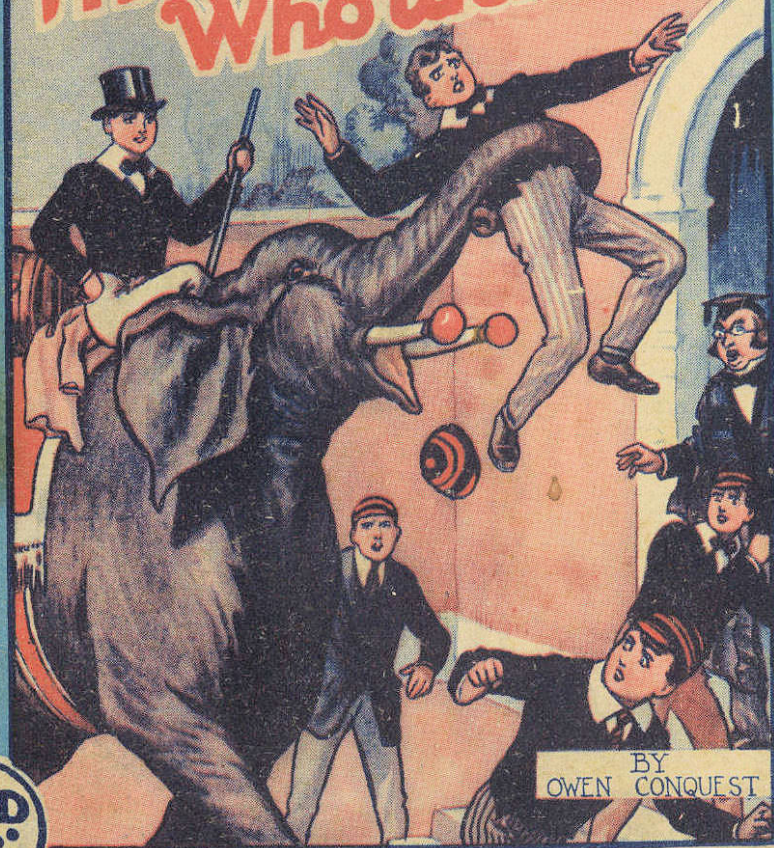


The Boy Who was Soft!



BY
OWEN CONQUEST

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You can read the ADVENTURES of JIMMY SILVER & Co The cheery chums of ROOKWOOD

'Laughter, Thrill,
sport & drama!'



IN
The

POPULAR

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The Boy Who Was Soft!



The Story of an Extraordinary New Boy Who Comes to Rookwood School.

By
OWEN CONQUEST.

CHAPTER 1.

A Traveller with a Trunk!

RUN for your lives!"
"What?"
"Run!" yelled Tubby Muffin. Muffin of the Fourth came bolting in at the gates of Rookwood, his fat face crimson with exertion, and gasping with wide-open mouth.

Jimmy Silver & Co., who were chatting near the gateway, jumped aside just in time, or the fat Classical would certainly have charged into them like a steam-roller.

Jimmy Silver caught Muffin by the collar as he charged past, to stop him.

But Tubby was going full speed, and it was not so easy to stop him.

He swept round, with Jimmy's grasp on his collar, and went right round Jimmy before his fat legs became entangled and he sat down.

"Yoop!" spluttered Tubby.

He sat down and panted.

"You silly duffer!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "What's the row?"

"Run!"

"What are we to run for?" demanded Lovell.

"Yaroo! The elephant!"

"The what?," shrieked Raby.
"Help! Run! Wild elephants! Yoop! Gimmo a hand up! I'm out of breath! Help!"

"Wild elephants!" repeated Newcomp.

"Is he potty?"

"Oh, dear! Run for your lives!" gasped Tubby Muffin, struggling to his feet. "Wild elephants—whole herds of them—you'll be trampled to death, and tossed and gored—Yaroooh!"

"What the—"

"Run!"

And by way of setting an example Tubby Muffin ran, streaking for the School House at top speed.

The Fistical Four stared after him in bewilderment.

Tubby Muffin was evidently scared out of his podgy wits, but for what reason Jimmy Silver & Co. could not surmise. Certainly they were not likely to believe that herds of wild elephants were in the road outside the gates.

"Potty!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "This is fatty degeneration of the head, I suppose."

"Look at him!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, my sainted aunt!"

Tubby Muffin was speeding on blindly for the House in search of shelter.

Half-way he came on Bulkeley of the Sixth.

He did not even see him.

Bulkeley received the charge of the fat Classical and staggered.

"What—what—who—how——" stammered Bulkeley.

Tubby did not heed.

He rushed on for the steps of the School House, and he went up the steps at a speed that was quite remarkable, considering the weight he had to carry.

A gentleman in cap and gown and spectacles stood in the doorway, regarding the charging Tubby with a frown of disapproval.

It was Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth.

As Tubby came bolting up the steps Mr. Bootles called to him.

"Muffin!"

"Run!" panted Tubby.

"What? What?"

"Wild elephants!"

"Muffin! What——"

But Tubby was not stopping.

He circumnavigated the astonished Form-master and vanished into the House.

His heavy footsteps pounded up the staircase, and he disappeared; a key turned in a study door above.

Tubby had reached the refuge of his study and locked himself in.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles.

He blinked out into the quadrangle.

Bulkeley had gathered himself up from the gravel path, and was dusting his clothes, with a very ominous expression upon his face.

"Bulkeley!" called out Mr. Bootles.

The Sixth-Former looked round.

"Whatever is the matter with Muffin? He appears to be frightened."

"Out of his senses, I should think, sir," answered Bulkeley. "He's knocked me over, the young donkey!"

"He seemed to be very frightened," said Mr. Bootles. "Perhaps there is something in the road."

Mr. Bootles blinked in the direction of the gates.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were proceeding in that direction.

Something, evidently, was going on outside which had scared Tubby Muffin out of his fat wits.

"Mad bull, perhaps," Lovell remarked thoughtfully, as the chums of the Fourth moved towards the gates.

"Oh, my hat!" said Newcome, halting. "If there's a wild bull, I don't want to be introduced to him."

"Well, if there's anything of the sort we'd better close the gates," said Jimmy.

"Hallo, there's old Mack looking out! What's the row, Mack?"

Mack, the porter, had come out of his lodge, and put his head out of the gateway, evidently having observed the remarkable flight of Tubby Muffin.

The porter did not answer Jimmy Silver's question.

He gave one glance into the road and then bounded back from the gateway as if he had been electrified.

"Oh!" gasped Mack.

He sprinted for the open doorway of his lodge.

"What is it?" roared Lovell.

Mack did not heed.

He sped into his lodge, and there was a sudden bang as the door slammed after him.

The next moment there was the sound of a shooting bolt and the click of a key, and it was followed by the louder sound of dragging furniture.

Old Mack was barricading his door.

The Fistical Four gasped.

"What the merry dickens——"

"I'm jolly well going to see!" said Jimmy Silver determinedly.

He strode on to the gates and looked out.

There was the sound of heavy, thundering footsteps just outside as he did so, and even as he put out his head a gigantic form loomed over him.

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Look out!" shouted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver backed away with a jump.

A gigantic elephant was turning in at the gates, and the sight of Solomon in all his glory would not have astonished the juniors more than the sight of an elephant at the gates of Rookwood.

But Jimmy backed too late.

The huge animal was upon him, and as Jimmy jumped back the trunk whipped out and curled round him.

As if plucked away from the ground by a giant's hand, Jimmy Silver was swept into the air by the curling trunk.

CHAPTER 2.

So Simple!

"YOO-OO-OOOOP!" Jimmy Silver spluttered breathlessly.

It seemed to him like a nightmare, as well it might.

But it was no dream.

The captain of the Rookwood Fourth was whirling in the air, coiled in an elephant's trunk, and the huge animal stepped on steadily, bearing Jimmy Silver with him into the quadrangle.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome jumped out of the way, aghast.

In the doorway of the School House Mr. Bootles stood petrified, his scanty hair rising almost on an end.

There was a yell from a dozen different directions, as the elephant was sighted in the quad.

Juniors and seniors scuttled out of the way of the enormous quadruped.

It seemed to Jimmy Silver that the end of all things had come; he was too dazed even to be terrified.

The elephant trod on sedately towards the House.

Seated on his neck, apparently guiding him, was a youth of about fifteen, in Etons.

The rider appeared absurdly small in comparison with the gigantic animal he was riding, but he was rather a sturdy and well-built fellow.

Behind him on the the elephant's back were a bag, a coat, and a travelling-rug.

All eyes were fixed upon the elephant and his rider as they came lumbering up towards the School House.

Earth and sky ceased to swim round Jimmy Silver, as he found himself carried steadily in the trunk.

A horrid feeling came over him, for a moment or two, that he might be dashed to the earth, as he had read of wild elephants doing with their victims. But he was carried on steadily.

As if in a dream, he heard a voice from above calling to him, from the youth in Etons astride the elephant's neck.

"Keep your pecker up, kid! He won't hurt you!"

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"It's only his fun, you know!"

"Ow!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles, as

the huge animal loomed up before the steps. "Is—is—is this a dream? What—what? I am convinced that I cannot be awake! Bless my soul!"

There was a hurried tread behind him. "What—what is this?"

It was the Head.

Dr. Chisholm had seen the extraordinary visitor from his study window.

He hurried to the door, without thinking of the possible danger of meeting such a visitor at close-quarters.

The sight of a Rookwood junior in the elephant's trunk was enough to banish any such consideration from his mind.

He blinked out over his glasses in consternation.

A crowd of Rookwooders gathered round—at a respectful distance from the elephant, however.

At the steps the huge animal halted.

Jimmy Silver, dazed and breathless, found himself set on his feet on the School House steps.

He had not been hurt, but he was doubtful whether he was on his head or his heels for a few moments.

He stood gasping for breath, half wondering whether he was still alive.

There was a loud trumpeting from the elephant.

The rider tapped the huge head with a stick, and it ceased.

Then he raised his cap to the astounded headmaster.

"Who—who—who are you, sir?" thundered Dr. Chisholm.

"Grace, sir!"

"What?"

"Teddy Grace, sir—I mean Edward!"

"Oh!" exclaimed the Head. "You are the new junior——"

"Yes, sir!"

"M-m-my hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver blankly.

Jimmy had seen a number of new fellows arrive at Rookwood in his time, but he had never seen one arrive like this before.

This new boy was evidently something rather new in new boys.

Teddy Grace did not seem aware of anything unusual in his mode of arriving at school, however.

His round, chubby, cheerful face was quite calm and unconcerned.

He tapped the elephant again with his stick, and the animal knelt down before the steu".

The new junior alighted gracefully and picked up his bag, his coat, and his rug. "Good boy!" he said approvingly to the elephant.

"Boy!" gasped the Head.

"Yes, sir!"

"You—you—you are Edward Grace?"

"Yes, sir. I'm often called Putty, sir," said the new boy, with an innocent smile. "What?"

"Putty, sir. Because I'm considered rather soft, sir," said Grace meekly.

There was a chuckle from some of the juniors.

It ceased, however, as the Head's glance gleamed round on them.

Dr. Chisholm evidently did not consider it a laughing matter.

"Grace! Boy! What—what do you mean by arriving at school in this manner?"

"My father sent me, sir."

"I am aware of that, Grace. Your father did not send you, I presume, mounted upon an elephant?" thundered the Head.

"No, sir; he put me in the train at Clapham Junction."

"Then why—how—"

"There wasn't a cab in Coombe to be had, sir," said Grace meekly.

"A—a—a cab?"

"None at all, sir. So I looked round for something else to bring me to Rookwood."

"For—for something else?" stammered the Head, as if he could hardly believe his ears.

"Yes, sir! I could have hired a bike," said Grace meekly, "but I had my bag to carry, which would have been awkward on a bike."

"Bless my soul!"

"I thought of a horse, sir—"

"A—a horse?"

"Yes, sir; but I wasn't able to get a horse."

"Boy!"

"But luckily there was a circus camped on the common, sir, so I went there, and was lucky enough to be able to hire an elephant!"

"To—to—to hire an elephant?" stuttered the Head, obviously nonplussed.

"Yes, sir; I thought an elephant a good idea, as he was able to carry my bag quite easily."

"Bless my soul!"

"And he's quite tame, sir," rattled on

Teddy Grace cheerily. "He takes up people in his trunk, sir, and sets them down. The man showed me how to drive him, and how to tap him to make him take up a chap in his trunk. Would you like to try, sir?"

"What?"

"He would whisk you off in a jiffy, sir!"

"Am I dreaming?" murmured the Head. "Whisk—whisk me—me—off?"

"Yes, sir; and take you round the quad, and then set you down again all right. Shall I make him—"

The new junior made a motion towards the elephant, and the Head jumped back.

"Grace! You—you utterly stupid boy! I forbid you to do anything of the kind!" gasped Dr. Chisholm.

"It's great fun, sir—"

"Silence! Send that animal away at once! I shall punish you severely for bringing it into the precincts of Rookwood!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Send it away immediately!"

The new junior glanced towards the gates.

"The man's following me, sir; he will take it away. I—I thought you'd be pleased, sir!"

"Pleased?" exclaimed the Head.

"Well, I should have arrived late if I'd walked, sir," said Grace, in an injured tone. "I've paid quite a lot to hire the elephant, so as not to be—ahem!—late. My father told me, sir, never to be late; he says that procrastination is the thief of time, sir!"

The Head stared at the new junior.

That cheery youth's face was quite serious, and it really seemed impossible to suspect him of an intention to pull the Head's august leg.

With all his experience of boys, Dr. Chisholm had never come across one quite like this before; and it was evident that he did not know what to make of Teddy Grace—who was called Putty because he was "soft."

Either he was very soft indeed, or else he was a most reckless young rascal; and the Head could not decide which he was.

"Send that animal away at once!" said the Head at last. "Then you will accompany Mr. Bootles to my study!"

"Yes, sir! Here comes the man!"

And Dr. Chisholm rustled back into the House.

CHAPTER 3.

The New Boy!

"WELL, I'm blown!" Thus Arthur Edward Lovell, expressing his feelings with more force than elegance. "Same here!" said Jimmy Silver, laugh-

ing. "The cheeky young ass!"

"He must be soft!"

"The Head will lick him, anyway."

"Serve him jolly well right!" opined Smythe of the Shell. "I never heard of such cheek in a fag, by gad!"

The new junior was in the Head's study with the headmaster and Mr. Bootles.

The man from the circus had led away the elephant, leaving the Rookwood fellows in a buzz of excited discussion.

The sensation caused by Teddy Grace's remarkable arrival was not likely to wear off for some time.

"Anybody know what Form he's going into?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Never heard of his existence before," said Mornington. "Where's Tubby Muffin. He will know."

"Ha, ha! Tubby's hiding somewhere!" roared Lovell. "He thought it was a wild elephant!"

"Well, I'm not surprised he was startled," remarked Jimmy Silver. "I was rather startled when the beast picked me up in his trunk. I've a good mind to punch Grace's head when the other Head's done with him!"

"Rather in a funk, weren't you?" remarked Peele.

"Blue funk, I should say!" observed Gower agreeably.

Jimmy looked at them.

"Do you want your heads knocked together?" he asked politely. "If you don't you'd better dry up!"

"But I say," broke in Lattrey of the Fourth, "that chap must have lots of tin to be able to hire an elephant to ride to school. It was a fool's trick, but it must have cost some money."

Arthur Edward Lovell gave him a sarcastic glance.

"A new chap, rather soft, with lots of tin," he remarked. "What a chance for you, Lattrey! How long will it be before you're teaching him how to play poker?"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Lattrey; and he turned away.

Peele and Gower went with him, and the three seemed to be engaged in earnest discussion as they went.

The black sheep of Rookwood were already discussing the possibility of making a good thing out of a youth who was evidently well off, and who was so soft that he was nicknamed Potty.

Jimmy Silver & Co. proceeded to the Fourth Form passage to look for Tubby Muffin.

That fat youth was supposed to know everything that was going on, and a little over, as Lovell had expressed it.

The door of Study No. 2 was found locked.

Arthur Edward Lovell delivered a terrific bang upon it.

There was a loud howl within.

"Yow! Help! Keep off! Drive it away!"

"You silly ass!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Do you think the elephant's come upstairs? Let us in!"

"Oh! Is that you, Jimmy Silver?" gasped Muffin.

"Yes, ass!"

The study door was unlocked, and Tubby Muffin blinked out uneasily.

He seemed relieved to find that there was no elephant in the passage.

"I—I say—is—is—is it gone?" he gasped.

"Yes, you duffer; long ago!"

"Oh, all right! Of—of course, I wasn't frightened," said Tubby Muffin. "It wasn't that, you know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I simply came in to have tea," exclaimed Tubby. "I—I locked the door because—because—because—"

"Exactly!" assented Jimmy Silver.

"Now, as you know everything, Tubby, perhaps you know who Teddy Grace is?"

"New chap coming into the Classical Fourth," answered Tubby at once. "I happened to hear Mr. Bootles—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at. He's rich," went on Tubby Muffin. "Mr. Bootles was speaking to Mr. Mooney, you know, and he mentioned that Grace was the son of Mr. Grace, a wealthy coal-owner."

Tubby had quite recovered himself now. "I say, has he come?" he asked. "I was going to see him when he came, because—because—"

"Because he's rich?" asked Mornington.

"Certainly not! I hope you don't think I'd stick up to anybody on account of his money? I was going to see him because—because—"

Tubby Muffin paused, apparently not able to think of a reason on the spur of the moment.

"Well, he's come," said Jimmy Silver. "It was Grace who came on the elephant and scared you out of your podgy wits, Tubby."

"I wasn't scared!" said Tubby Muffin warmly. "Do you think I'm afraid of an elephant? I simply happened to be in a hurry. If I hadn't been in a hurry I should have stopped and stroked him."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look out!" yelled Flynn from the passage. "The bullifant! Look out!"

There was a sound of loud stamping in the passage.

It was made, as a matter of fact, by Patrick O'Donovan's boots, which were of a good size.

But to Tubby Muffin's ears it was the tread of the elephant, and he uttered a howl of terror and dived under the study table.

"Keep it off!" he yelled. "Drive it away! Shut the door! Lock it! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come and stroke him, Tubby, bedad!" "Yaroooh!"

There was a roar of laughter in the corridor.

"Hallo, what's the joke?" asked a cool voice. And Jimmy Silver looked round, to see the new junior on the landing.

Teddy Grace was strolling airily, with his hands in his pockets, and looking as cool and self-possessed as if he had been at Rookwood a couple of terms at least.

There was none of the shyness of the average new boy about him.

"Hallo!" said Jimmy Silver. "Have you been licked?"

Teddy Grace opened his innocent blue eyes wide.

"Licked?" he repeated. "No. Why?"

"My hat! Has the Head let you off?" shouted Lovell.

"Let me off? I haven't done anything, have I?"

"You've come to Rookwood mounted on an elephant," said Jimmy Silver. "Don't you call that something?"

"Why shouldn't I come on an elephant, if there was an elephant handy?"

Jimmy rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

That question was reasonable enough, in a way.

"They wouldn't have thought anything of it in India, for example," said Grace.

"We're not in India," remarked Raby.

"Wasn't the Head waxy?" asked Oswald.

Grace nodded.

"Yes. I thought he was rather in a bate, but he cooled down. I heard him say to Mr. Bootles, as I came away, that the boy seemed to be a perfect fool. I don't know what boy he was alluding to, unless it was one of you chaps."

"Why, you cheeky ass," said Lovell; "he meant you, of course! And my opinion is that the Head's right!"

"He would be pleased to know that, I'm sure," said Teddy Grace meekly. "I say, is this the Fourth Form passage—Classical?"

"Yes."

"Thanks! I'm looking for Study No. 2. It seems that that's to be my study here."

"Here you are," said Jimmy Silver.

"Yaroooh!" came from under the table in No. 2, as the new boy entered the room. "Gerrout, you beast!"

Grace jumped.

"What the dickens——" he exclaimed.

"Yah! Drive that beast away, Jimmy Silver!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth's the game?" exclaimed Teddy Grace. "Why—what—who——" He stared at Tubby Muffin's face as it blinked out from under the table.

"Oh!" gasped Tubby, in great relief.

"You ain't the elephant?"

"Do I look like an elephant?"

"Is he in the passage?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Some beast said he was!" gasped Tubby, crawling out from under the table at last. "I say, are you the new chap Grace?"

"You've got it."

"You can come to this study if you like, old chap," said Tubby Muffin hospitably. "This is a really nice study—mine, you know. You'll find Jones minor all right, too. Higgs is rather a beast, but we put up with him. You'll be comfy in this study. Do come!"

Teddy Grace stared at the fat Classical.

"You're awfully good!" he said.

"Not at all," said Tubby. "The fact is, old fellow, I like you, you know."

"My hat! And you've known me about ten seconds!" said Grace. "This is very flattering."

"My dear fellow, I know a good chap when I see him," answered Tubby Muffin affably. "Of course, I don't know anything about your father being a wealthy coal-owner."

"Wha-a-at?"

"It's simply that I like you," explained Tubby. "We shall get on together, I'm sure of that. Do come!"

"The fact is, I've come," said Grace. "Mr. Bootles says this is to be my study."

"Oh, good!" said Tubby Muffin, with great satisfaction. "I say, what a lark it was, your coming to school on an elephant! I wasn't scared at all, you know. When you know me better, you'll know that I'm practically as brave as a lion."

"You look it!" said Grace.

"Yes, don't I? Sort of lofty manner and fiery eye, and all that!" said Tubby intently. "Being a new fellow here, Grace, you'll want looking after a little. Don't you be afraid. I shall protect you."

"Thanks!"

"Not at all; rely on me. By the way," added Tubby Muffin, glancing at the doorway and sinking his voice, "do you happen to have a half-crown about you you don't want, Grace? I've run out of tin, and I wanted to stand a rather nice tea for—for you, you know; sort of welcome to Rookwood."

Teddy Grace eyed the fat Classical.

There was no doubt that Tubby Muffin thought the new junior soft, and he was certainly losing no time in getting to work.

A smile of great simplicity came over Teddy's face.

"Would half-a-crown be enough?" he asked.

Muffin beamed.

"Five bob would be better, of course," he answered. "If you could make it five bob till—till Saturday—"

"But is that sufficient?"

Tubby could have hugged him.

He believed in striking the iron while it was hot; this delightful, trustful simplicity might not last long at Rookwood.

"Make it ten!" he said.

"Well, if you think ten's enough—"

said Grace, hesitating.

Tubby Muffin decided to go the whole

unicorn, so to speak.

"I'll tell you what, Grace," he said,

"make it a quid, old chap."

And Tubby held out a fat hand that almost trembled with eagerness.

"Gold or notes?" asked Grace.

"Eh! It doesn't matter which."

Grace felt in his waistcoat-pocket and squeezed a coin into Tubby Muffin's fat hand, and quitted the study.

As the door closed after him, Tubby emitted a fat chuckle of glee.

He blinked at the gleaming coin in his hand in unutterable delight.

But that expression of delight changed somewhat as he looked more closely at the coin.

For the coin of the realm that lay in Tubby's fat palm was not a sovereign. It was a bright new halfpenny.

And Tubby Muffin looked at it, and looked, and looked; and the expression on his fat face grew quite extraordinary as he looked.

CHAPTER 4.

Obedying Orders!

"AFTER prep!" said Cyril Peele.

"Yes, You're very good."

"Not at all."

Jimmy Silver paused as he came along from the staircase.

Jimmy was due in the end study for prep, where Lovell and Raby and Newcome were already at work.

He had been over to the Modern side to see Tommy Dodd on football matters.

As a matter of fact, he had forgotten the new boy's existence.

But Teddy Grace, alias Putty, was brought back to his mind, as he came into the Fourth Form passage on the Classical side.

Putty was chatting at the door of No. 1 with Peele, Gower, and Lattrey.

The trio were exceedingly civil to Grace. In fact, their manner was flattery itself.

It was doubtless very agreeable for a new fellow, a stranger in the school, to be taken up and "battered" in this way by three old hands; and Teddy Grace was looking pleased.

But Jimmy Silver did not look pleased.

He was quite aware of the object of the shady trio in "buttering" the new fellow, who seemed both wealthy and simple—quite a catch for Peele & Co.

The trio went into their study as Jimmy came along, and Grace moved on to his own.

Jimmy Silver hesitated a moment or two, and then overtook the new fellow and tapped him on the shoulder.

Grace looked round with a smile.

"You'll excuse me," said Jimmy. "As you're a new kid here, and don't seem quite up to the ropes, I think I ought to tell you—"

"Go ahead!"

"You've just been making some arrangement with Peele and his friends, in the first study."

"That's so."

"I don't want to butt in," explained Jimmy. "But I'm going to give you a tip."

"You're jolly good!" said the new junior, holding out his hand.

Jimmy glanced at the open palm in surprise.

Grace seemed to be expecting something.

"How much?" he asked.

"How much what?" asked the captain of the Fourth.

"Didn't you say you were going to give me a tip?" asked the new junior innocently.

"Well, of all the chumps!" said Jimmy Silver. "You duffer, I don't mean a tip—I mean a word of advice."

"Oh, I see! That's jolly good of you! My father told me always to listen to good advice."

"When you meet those fellows after prep, you may be asked to play cards, or some such rot," said Jimmy. "That kind of thing goes on in that study. I'm speaking to you as a new chap who doesn't know the ropes. You'd better keep clear of anything of the kind. It's against the rules here, and it means bad trouble if it's found out—apart from the rottenness of it. See?"

"I see."

"You seem to have more money than sense, from what I've seen of you," added Jimmy. "If you get into a little game in Peele's study, you'll have more sense and less money, see?"

Grace laughed outright at this sally.

"Thanks very much," he said. "I'll remember that."

Jimmy went on to his own study, very doubtful about whether his good advice would be of any use to the new junior.

But he had done all he could; and if Putty chose to get into trouble after that warning, it was his own look-out.

Putty looked after him with a rather amused smile, and then went into No. 2, where Tubby Muffin and Jones minor and Higgs were at work.

Alfred Higgs gave him a rather disagreeable look.

"Oh, you're the new kid!" he snapped.

"That same!" agreed Putty.

"And they've bunged you into this study?"

"Oh, he's welcome here," said Jones minor tolerantly. "Let the kid alone. Higgs. You're always grouching."

Higgs grunted.

"We were three already," he said. "And Muffin takes up enough room for two. Why couldn't he be bunged in on Mornington and Erroll? Bootles ought to have more sense. I suppose Bootles sent you here, you young greenie?"

"Yes."

"Well, you can tell him from me that he's an old chump!" growled Higgs.

"Certainly."

Teddy Grace turned to the door. Jones minor grinned, and Higgs jumped.

"Where are you going?" roared Higgs. Putty looked back.

"To Mr. Bootles' study," he answered.

"Wha-a-at for?"

"To give him your message."

"You—you—you crass idiot!" roared Higgs. "If you do, I'll give you a jolly good hiding!"

Putty looked surprised.

"Don't you want me to take your message?" he inquired.

"No, you idiot!"

"Then why did you give it to me?"

"Oh, shut up!" was Higgs' reply. "Of all the howling idiots—of all the shrieking dummies—"

"Jolly near potty, I should say," remarked Tubby Muffin, whose friendly regard for the new junior seemed to have vanished—perhaps on account of the new halfpenny.

"Fancy putting that fool in here!" said

Higgs. "I suppose they think this study is a home for idiots?"

"Well, they would, wouldn't they?" remarked Putty.

"What?"

"Only agreeing with you, you know," said Putty innocently.

"I suppose," said Higgs darkly, "that you can't help being a fool. But if you are a cheeky fool, Master Putty, you'll get scragged. Remember that."

"I will," assented Putty.

"You won't have any prep to do, as it's your first day here," continued Higgs, "so you can make yourself useful."

"I'm going to unpack my books and things."

"Your books and things can wait. You can get supper while we're doing our prep."

"Oh, let him alone!" said Jones minor.

"Shut up, Jones! I shouldn't mind giving you a thick ear, though you have got a major in the Sixth!" said Higgs. "Grace, or Putty, or Plaster, or whatever your name is—"

"Yes, Higgs, or Wiggs, or Pigs, or whatever your name is—"

"Haven't I told you not to be cheeky?" roared Higgs. "You're on the point of getting scragged, I can tell you. Now, I'm going to have toasted cheese for supper. You're going to toast it."

"Am I?" said Putty doubtfully.

"You are! You'll find the cheese in the cupboard and a frying-pan underneath. You toast it in the pan. Make up a fire."

"What with?"

"Find something!" said Higgs.

"Blessed if I care what!"

"But—"

"If that cheese isn't ready when I'm ready, I'm sorry for you, that's all," said Alfred Higgs.

And he settled down to finish his prep. Putty remained in thought for some minutes, while his study-mates were working at the table.

Apparently he decided to obey the orders of the Fourth Form bully, for he went to the study cupboard and got out the cheese.

Then he looked round for fuel, the fire being nearly at its last gasp.

Higgs grinned over his prep as he heard the fire crackling.

His instructions were being obeyed.

There was a pleasant scent of toasting

cheese in the study before prep was over.

Jones minor was the first to finish, and he rose from the table, yawned, and pitched his books away.

"Hallo, how are you getting on, cocky?" he asked, with a grin.

"First-rate," answered Putty.

"Blessed if I know where you found any fuel," said Jones minor. "We're right out of coal and wood."

"Higgs told me to find something," answered Putty simply, "so I found something. I couldn't find anything but books. But they were all right; those with stiff covers made quite a good fire."

Jones blinked at him.

"B-b-books!" he stuttered.

"Yes; there wasn't anything else."

"You—you dangerous maniac!" howled Jones. "Have you been burning our books to make a fire?"

"Not yours; only Higgs'."

Alfred Higgs jumped up as if electrified.

"My books?" he roared.

Putty nodded, with a smile.

"Yes. I looked into them first for the name," he said. "I've only burned your books, Higgs, as it was for you, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jones minor. And Tubby gave a fat chuckle.

The expression on Higgs' face was extraordinary.

"You—you—you've burned my books?" he stammered, as if unable to believe the evidence of his ears. "You—you—you—"

"There wasn't anything else," said Putty, in surprise. "You told me to find something, and you said you didn't care what."

"I—I—I—"

"You were going to lick me if the cheese wasn't ready—a hiding, you said," pursued Putty. "I was bound to get it ready. I didn't want a hiding, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Higgs did not laugh; he gasped with fury.

"Mum-mum-my books!" he spluttered. "Why, I—I—I'll smash you! I—I'll squash you! I—I—I'll—"

"But you told me—"

"You told him, Higgs!" yelled Jones minor. "Your own fault for being such a beastly bully, Higgs! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll smash him!" shrieked Higgs.

He rushed frantically at the new junior, who dodged round the table.

He was a good deal more active than the bulky Alfred, and he dodged quite easily; and they went round the table thrice, while Jones minor yelled with merriment.

"Stop him!" howled Higgs.

"Stop him yourself!" grinned Jones.

"He's only done what you told him."

Higgs grasped the table to drag it aside. As he dragged it, Putty dodged out of the study.

The bully of the Fourth rushed after him, and reached the door as it slammed.

He grabbed the handle and dragged at it; but it did not open from outside, and the door did not open.

"Let go!" roared Higgs.

"But you're going to lick me, you know," came a cool, soft voice from outside.

"Let go!"

Higgs clasped both hands on the door-handle and then dragged with all his strength.

It was unfortunate for Higgs that the junior outside let go at the same moment.

The door flew open suddenly, and Higgs went half across the study, bumped into a chair, and rolled on the floor.

He lay on the carpet gasping for breath, and feeling as if he had landed in the middle of an earthquake, for a full minute.

When he recovered himself he scrambled up, and rushed to the open doorway with a deadly gleam in his eyes.

But the corridor outside was empty; the new junior had vanished.

CHAPTER 5.

Something Like a Scrap!

"TROT in, dear boy!"

Cyril Peele spoke in his sweetest tones as the study door opened, after a quick tap, and Teddy Grace stepped in rather hastily.

Putty closed the door behind him at once.

Peele & Co. had finished prep—they never prolonged their labours more than they could help—and they had been making some little preparations for their distinguished guest.

A bright fire burned in the grate, and the table was cleared of books and papers, and a comfortable armchair was drawn up to the fire for the visitor.

"Sit down, old fellow!" said Lattrey.

Putty sat down.

"We're goin' to have a little supper," remarked Gower. "I hope you haven't had supper in your study, Grace."

"No."

"That's good. We've got somethin' rather nice."

Tramp, tramp, tramp! sounded in the passage.

Alfred Higgs was in search of the new junior.

There was a sound of the opening and slamming of doors.

Higgs was looking into studies up and down the passage, with a furious face, regardless of the surprised stares of the occupants.

"Hallo, is that somebody on the war-path?" remarked Lattrey, listening.

"I think it might be my study-mate, Higgs," said Putty simply. "He's after me, I believe."

"After you?" exclaimed Peele warmly.

"Yes; I think he's annoyed."

"Higgs is a beastly bully," said Lattrey. "What have you done to get his rag out?"

"I did what he told me!" explained Putty. "As he said he would give me a licking if I didn't, I thought I'd better."

"But—but he's not after you because you did what he told you, surely?" explained Peele.

"Yes, I believe so. He wasn't satisfied somehow."

"Higgs is a bullying rotter!" said Gower. "He'd better not come here kickin' up a shindy. Let's have supper. We might have a little game after supper till bed-time, if you care for it, Grace."

"Certainly!"

"Ever played poker?" murmured Lattrey.

"No, never."

"We'll teach you, if you like."

"You're very good."

"Not at all, old fellow!" said Peele affectionately. "We want to make you feel at home, your first night here, you know."

Crash!"

The door flew open, and Higgs' furious face stared in.

His eyes glittered as they fastened on Putty.

"Oh, here you are, are you?" he roared.

"Here I am!" assented the new junior, smiling at him, without moving from the armchair.

"I'm going to smash you!"

"Please don't!" murmured Putty.

Lattrey and his friends exchanged a quick glance, as Higgs strode savagely into the study.

It was up to them to protect their distinguished guest, for it was pretty certain that the new fellow would not have any energy left for learning the game of poker, after a fight with the bully of the Fourth.

The three juniors gathered in Higgs' path.

"Stop this, Higgs!" exclaimed Peele, as boldly as he could. "You're not goin' to rag the new kid!"

"I'll rag you, too, if you don't let me get at him at once!" raved Higgs.

"You're not goin' to touch him!"

"Will you get aside?"

"No!" said Peele desperately. "Stand up to the brute, you fellows!"

"You bet!"

Higgs rushed furiously at the three nuts of the Fourth, hitting out with his heavy fists recklessly.

He was in too furious a temper to count odds.

The trio backed away from the rush, but they rallied, and tackled Alfred Higgs together.

Peele went down, yelling, as he caught Higgs' knuckles with his chin, but the other two fastened on Higgs at close-quarters.

The bulky intruder was whirled back.

Cyril Peele jumped up, as Higgs struggled furiously with his study-mates, and piled in again.

With the three juniors clinging to him like cats, Higgs found that he had booked too large an order to be carried out, so to speak.

He went staggering towards the doorway, still struggling.

Putty sat in the armchair, with his hands in his pockets and a cheery smile on his face, watching the conflict.

It did not seem to occur to him to take part in it.

Perhaps he felt that, as a guest, it was

his business to leave the matter entirely in the hands of his hosts.

At all events, he did so.

His hosts had their hands full. Alfred Higgs was a redoubtable adversary even against three.

Peele and Gower and Lattrey were gasping and dishevelled by the time they got him to the doorway.

There, with combined effort, they ejected him, and Higgs went bumping into the passage.

"Well pitched!" chuckled Conroy of the Fourth.

Conroy was coming along with Van Ryn and Pons, and the three Colonials stopped as Higgs was hurled forth from the study.

Higgs sprawled on the floor, breathlessly, and Peele & Co., equally breathless, gasped in the doorway.

"Now clear off, you bully!" panted Peele.

Higgs sat up.

"Yow-ow-ow I'll smash him—I'll smash you—I'll smash the lot of you! Yow-ow-ow-wooooo!"

"Go it!" exclaimed Conroy heartily. "We'll stand here to catch you as you drop, Higgs. Try again!"

Higgs was quite resolved to try again.

He scrambled up, and charged into the three juniors in the doorway.

Lattrey & Co. backed a little, and Higgs got into the study; but they closed on him again, and, after a brief struggle, he was hurled out once more.

He landed with a terrific crash at the feet of the Colonial Co.

"Bravo!"

"Well chuckled!"

"Try again, Higgs!"

"Yow-ow-ow-woow! Grooogh!" came from Higgs, as he sprawled on the floor. "Ow! Ow! Wooooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get the poker!" exclaimed Cyril Peele breathlessly. "We'll give him the poker if he comes in again!"

"Good egg!"

But Alfred Higgs did not come in again.

He was feeling as if he had been under a lawn-mower, and even the truculent bully of the Fourth had had enough for the present.

He staggered up, gasping, and shook a furious fist at the three nuts, and limped away to his own quarters.

A minute later there was a howl from Study No. 2.

It was the voice of Tubby Muffin raised in anguish.

The Fourth Form bully, defeated by Peele & Co., was "taking it out" of the unfortunate Tubby.

Conroy looked at his companions.

"Walk this way!" he murmured.

And the three Colonials walked into Study No. 2.

Alfred Higgs' grasp was on Tubby Muffin's fat ear, and Tubby was wailing dismally.

The next moment the grasp of the Colonial Co. was on Alfred Higgs.

"Cut off, Tubby!" said Conroy cheerily.

"Leggo!" roared Higgs. "You rotters—yarooooooh!"

"Rub his head in the ashes!" said Conroy gently. "Sorry, Higgs, but you've asked for it, you know!"

"Yrrrrrrrrgggh!"

Higgs had given considerable trouble to Peele & Co., but he was as an infant in the grasp of the three sturdy Colonials. He howled dismally as his head was well rubbed into the ashes, and howled louder still as the toasted cheese—prepared by Putty—was gently shoved down his back.

Tubby Muffin fled, chortling, followed by wild howls from the bully of the Fourth.

"I think that will do!" smiled Conroy.

And the three Colonials sauntered out, leaving Higgs clutching wildly down his back for the cheese, and in a mood compared with which the temper of a Tirpitz might have been considered amiable.

CHAPTER 6.

Playing Poker!

"THANKS so much!" murmured Putty.

He smiled sweetly at Peele and Gower and Lattrey as they stood gasping for breath after the battle.

The three nuts were not feeling happy.

They had driven out the invader, but he had left his marks upon them, and they had considerable damages to show.

It was some time before the dusty and dishevelled nuts had reduced themselves to order and were able to proceed with supper.

Neither were they feeling very amiable

towards their guest, though their politeness did not wane.

He had landed them into that struggle, and they inwardly resolved that he should pay for it when the "little game" began.

Outwardly, all was harmony.

The supper was excellent; Cyril Peele had taken care of that.

There were good things galore, and Putty was pressed on all sides to partake of them, which he did with hearty goodwill and good appetite.

Supper was over at last, and Peele & Co. prepared for the more serious business to come.

The table was cleared.

Peele produced a little silver box from some recess and opened it, displaying a pack of playing-cards.

"Never played poker before?" he asked. Putty shook his head.

"It's quite simple," said Peele blandly. "You'll pick it up in a brace of shakes."

"You'll like it," said Lattrey.

"Oh, I'm sure I shall!" said Putty cheerily. "Are we going to play poker now?"

"That's it."

"Shall I get the poker?" asked Putty innocently.

"Wha-a-at?"

"You'll want the poker, I suppose."

"The—the poker?" repeated Lattrey dazedly.

"Yes; you can't play poker without a poker, surely?" asked Putty, with a look of surprise.

The nuts of the Fourth stared at him blankly.

Apparently unconscious of their transfixed astonishment, Putty rose and picked the poker out of the fender.

Poker in hand, he smiled at the astounded nuts.

"I'm ready!" he announced.

"You—you're ready?" bawled Peele. "Oh, my hat! Oh, gad!"

Lattrey drew a deep breath.

"You're makin' a mistake, Grace," he said. "The game of poker is a card game."

Putty looked puzzled.

"Oh! Not juggling with a poker, or anything like that?" he asked.

"Nunno."

"You play it with cards," explained Peele, as patiently as he could, "You

have a little money on it, too—to make it interestin', you know."

"Do you?"

"That's the idea. Begin with a bob, you know," said Gower. "Of course, we wouldn't play—ahem—for money—that is, big stakes. But there has to be somethin' on the table; that's one of the—rules."

"Sit down, old fellow, and we'll have a round to show you," said Peele.

Putty did not sit down. He remained standing, and for reasons best known to himself he kept the poker in his hand.

"I'm so sorry!" he muttered.

"Nothing to be sorry about that I can see," remarked Peele, with a stare. "Now, we take five cards each—"

"Don't give me any, thanks."

"Eh? You can't play without cards!"

"You see, you didn't say at first that it was a card game," explained Putty, with sweet simplicity. "If you'd mentioned it, of course, I should have told you that I never play cards for money!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"In fact, I've promised my father never to!" said Putty.

Peele & Co. exchanged glances with gleaming eyes.

Their polite urbanity was wearing thin now.

"Well, this isn't really playin' cards for money, you know," said Peele, after a pause. "It's really a lark."

"Oh, we're going to play for nuts?" asked Putty.

"N-n-no! Just a bob or two, to make it interestin', you see."

"So sorry!" murmured Putty. "By the way, I think I'd better be getting along and seeing about unpacking my books. Would you fellows like to come and help me?"

The three nuts rose to their feet.

The expressions on their faces were decidedly unpleasant now.

There was a humorous glitter in Teddy Grace's eyes, which they did not mistake.

Under his soft manner there was the firmness of a rock, and the three young rascals realised that there would be no poker played in that study with Putty in the game.

It dawned upon them that the soft new junior, who was called Putty because he was so soft, had been pulling their legs all along—that he was quite "up" to their

game, and had allowed them round with which to hang themselves.

As they realised that the polite manners of Peele & Co. dropped from them like a cloak.

Their eyes gleamed at the new junior. "So you've been foolin' us?" said Peele at last, his voice trembling with rage.

Putty burst into a laugh.

"My dear chaps, you've been fooling yourselves!" he answered. "Why don't you laugh?"

"Laugh?" repeated Peele.

"Yes; it's funny, if you look at it the right way."

Peele gritted his teeth.

"It may be funny," he said; "but you won't feel funny by the time you get out of this study. Collar him, you fellows! We'll rag the cheeky cad till he's black and blue!"

The three nuts came round the table at Putty.

Teddy Grace did not seem alarmed; perhaps he had expected that development. His hand came up, with the poker in it.

"Don't crowd a fellow," he said, backing towards the door. "If you do, you may get a lunge—like that—"

"Yarooooh!"

"Or a tap—like that—"

"Yoooop!"

"Or a poke in the ribs—like that!"

"Yah! Oh! Yoooop!"

Peele & Co., yelling with pain and rage, jumped back from the reckless lunges of the poker.

Putty reached the door and put his left hand behind him to open it, keeping his eyes on the enraged nuts.

The trio rushed forward as the door opened.

But again the lunges of the poker drove them back, yelling.

"Ta-ta, old nuts!" said Putty sweetly; and he slammed the door and walked down the passage, into the arms of the Fistical Four.

"Hallo!" cried Jimmy Silver. "What are you carrying round a poker for?"

"I've been playing poker—"

"What?"

"This kind of poker, and they don't seem to have enjoyed it— Dear me, here they come!"

The study door flew open, and Peele & Co. rushed out furiously.

They stopped at sight of Silver & Co.

The Fistical Four grinned.

It occurred to Jimmy Silver that his good-natured warning to the new junior had not been needed.

Peele & Co., with scowling faces, retreated into their study.

"Another friendship broken!" sighed Putty. "I suppose these things happen because I'm soft. I'm called Putty, you know, because I'm so soft."

And Jimmy Silver & Co. chuckled. They had discovered by that time exactly how soft the new fellow was.

CHAPTER 7.

Astonishing the Natives!

"GREAT SCOTT!"

"The awful ass!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Look at him!" ejaculated Tabby Muffin. "And Bootles may come along at any moment!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. had come in from the quad, when surprised exclamations drew them in the direction of the Form-room passage. And then their surprised exclamations were also heard.

A score of fellows, at least, were gathered there, all of them looking astonished.

A junior of the Fourth Form was walking down the corridor with his hands in his pockets.

It was Teddy Grace, the new boy in the Fourth, more commonly called "Putty."

Although a new fellow, who had been hardly a week at Rookwood, Teddy Grace betrayed no sign of shyness or bashfulness. He sauntered down the corridor as if it belonged to him.

But that was not what drew the surprised glances of the Rookwooders. They were used to that in Teddy Grace already.

What astounded them was that Teddy Grace had a cigarette between his lips, which he was smoking quite cheerily and unconcernedly.

There were bold, bad blades in the Lower School who smoked, but however bold they were, they were always careful to do it in the privacy of their studies or behind the wood-shed—somewhere, at least, where they could not be spotted by the eye of authority.

The Form-room passage was a very public spot; at any moment a master or a prefect might have come along—even the majestic Head himself.

Teddy Grace did not seem to care.

He did not seem concerned by the astounded stares of the Rookwooders. He nodded cheerily to Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Are you off your dot?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Eh? No!"

"What are you up to?" asked Lovett.

"Smoking!"

"Don't you know it's against the rules?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Don't you know you may be spotted here any minute?" exclaimed Raby.

"Oh, quite!"

"Do you want a flogging?"

"Not at all."

"If this is one of your jokes," said Jimmy Silver, "I don't quite see where the joke comes in. I warn you that Mr. Bootles won't take it as a joke if he sees you—or Bulkeley, either!"

"No?" said Grace inquiringly.

"No fear! You'll get it in the neck!"

"I don't think so," remarked Grace, shaking his head, and then blowing out a puff of smoke that made Jimmy Silver cough.

"You silly ass!" gasped Jimmy.

"Take it away from him!" growled Newcome.

Teddy Grace turned and sauntered back along the passage, followed by a score of pairs of eyes.

His cool nerve was almost unnerving.

"Cave!" called out Tubby Muffin suddenly from the corner of the passage.

Tubby turned a fat, excited face upon the new junior.

"Here comes Carthew!" he called out.

Jimmy Silver was debating in his mind whether to take the cigarette away from the new junior, and bump him on the floor as a warning. It was not only that smoking was against the rules, but it was regarded as bad form by the juniors themselves.

But the news that Carthew of the Sixth was coming alarmed Jimmy for the new fellow.

Carthew of the Sixth was rather a black sheep, and was suspected of smoking in his study himself; but that was not likely to make him go easy with a junior caught playing the same foolish trick.

"Grace!" called out Jimmy Silver anxiously.

"Hallo!"

"Put that muck away!"

"Why?"

"Carthew's coming, you ass!"

"Who's Carthew?"

"Carthew of the Sixth—a prefect! If he catches you—"

"Here he comes!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell. "And serve the silly ass right, too!"

Mark Carthew turned the corner into the Form-room passage.

He glanced along at the crowd of juniors, a little surprised to see so many fellows gathered there.

Then his eyes fell on Teddy Grace.

He stared.

Grace did not seem alarmed, however. He did not remove the cigarette from his lips, but went on smoking with perfect calmness under the staring eyes of the prefect.

"By gad!" ejaculated Carthew blankly.

He strode towards the new junior.

"Grace!" he thundered.

"Yes, Carthew?"

"You are smoking!"

"Yes, Carthew," said the new junior meekly.

"In the Form-room passage!" exclaimed the prefect in amazement. "Are you out of your senses?"

"I hope not, Carthew."

The prefect dropped his hand on Grace's shoulder with an iron grip.

"You'll come straight with me to the Head!" he snapped.

"Certainly!"

"Bring the cigarette with you!"

"Oh, yes; I haven't finished it yet!"

"By gad! You'll find pretty soon, Grace, that this kind of cheek won't do for Rookwood!" said Carthew.

And the Sixth-Former marched Putty of the Fourth away towards Dr. Chisholm's study, still with a grip upon his shoulder.

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

"That means a jolly good licking for Grace!" he remarked.

"Serve him jolly well right!" growled Lovell. "I never heard of such cheek! Why, even Townsend or Lattrey wouldn't smoke in public!"

"Blest if I can understand the chap!" remarked Mornington. "He's a practical jokin' ass, but I thought he had some sense. I fancy this will be a public floggin'."

"He's asked for it!" said Conroy.

"An' he'll get it!"

The juniors, wondering what was going to happen in the Head's study, gathered at the corner of the passage, to watch and

wait for Teddy Grace's return. They expected to see him come along the corridor wringing his hands, if not wriggling with anguish. And they listened for the expected sound of woe and wailing from the Head's study.

CHAPTER 8.

Quite Innocent!

"COME in!"

Carthew threw open the door of the Head's study and marched Putty of the Fourth into that dreaded department.

Most of the Rookwood juniors entered the Head's study in something like fear and trembling, but Putty of the Fourth walked in cheerily enough. It was evident that the cool young gentleman experienced no unusual trepidation in the presence of the Head.

He held the half-smoked cigarette between his thumb and forefinger now, and it was still emitting a curl of smoke.

Dr. Chisholm's eyes seemed glued on it for a moment.

Then he glanced at the prefect.

"Well, Carthew?"

"I have brought this junior to you, sir," said Carthew. "I found him smoking a cigarette in the Form-room passage—parading about with it, in fact, as if he wanted to show that he cared nothing for the rules of the school!"

Dr. Chisholm's glance was almost terrific as it fixed upon Putty.

That innocent-looking youth looked more innocent than ever. His mild blue eyes met the Head's terrific glance confidently. Never had a schoolboy looked more as if butter would not melt in his mouth.

"Grace!" exclaimed the Head.

"Yes sir!"

"You have dared to smoke a cigarette in this school—and actually in public—in a public place!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Kindly hand me my cane, Carthew!"

Carthew obeyed cheerfully. Carthew had a fixed belief that the more the juniors were caned the better it was for them; and he never, in discharging his duties as a prefect, erred upon the side of sparing the rod.

Teddy Grace looked surprised.

"Are you going to cane me sir?" he stammered.

"Cane you!" repeated the Head angrily.

"Most certainly I am going to cane you, you silly and disreputable boy! You will learn that you cannot, with impunity, introduce the customs of a tap-room into this school!"

"But, sir——"

"Hold out your hand, Grace! I shall cane you with the greatest severity."

"Certainly, sir, if you wish; but it seems rather hard that I should be caned for doing as my father told me——"

The Head started.

"Your father?" he repeated.

"My father, sir!"

"Do you dare to tell me, boy, that Dr. Grace told you to smoke tobacco at school?" gasped the Head.

"Oh, no, sir! Tobacco isn't good for boys; my father says it stunts the growth, and he ought to know, being a medical man," said Grace meekly. "I wouldn't smoke tobacco for anything, sir."

"What! That cigarette——"

The faintest of grins dawned upon Putty's simple face.

"That isn't tobacco, sir!"

"What! Not tobacco?"

"Of course not, sir! I should think it very wrong to smoke tobacco, sir," said Putty meekly.

The Head seemed at a loss for speech for a moment or two. Carthew of the Sixth could only stare.

"Grace," stuttered the Head, at last, "if that cigarette does not contain tobacco, what does it contain?"

"A medicated mixture, sir."

"A—a—a what?"

"Medicated mixture, sir," said Grace cheerfully. "It's for keeping off influenza, sir!"

"Influenza!" murmured the Head.

"Yes, sir—it's a disinfectant. Father said I was to be very careful not to catch the 'flu,' sir," said Putty simply. "He gave me these medicated cigarettes to keep it off."

"Bless my soul!" murmured the Head.

He looked hard at Putty's face; but only smiling innocence met his gaze.

"Give me the cigarette!" he said abruptly.

Putty laid the cigarette, now extinguished, on the writing-table. The Head picked it up and examined it.

Carthew set his teeth. His look was not pleasant as it dwelt on the new junior.

He realised that he had been a little hasty in marching Putty of the Fourth into the Head's study. He had heard of the new juniors' practical joking propensities, and it dawned upon him that his leg had been pulled.

"This is certainly not tobacco," said the Head, after a pause. "It is a mixture of harmless herbs. No doubt it is a disinfectant."

"I wasn't inhaling the smoke, sir," said Putty meekly. "Only disinfecting the mouth with it, according to the pater's instructions. My father is rather an authority on influenza, sir."

"You must be aware, Grace, that your action was liable to misconstruction," said the Head.

"Yes, sir," said Putty. "That is why I have shown the cigarette to Mr. Bootles, my Form-master, and explained the matter to him."

"Oh! You have told Mr. Bootles?"

"Yes, sir; I was afraid of being misunderstood," said Putty innocently.

"You had better write to your father, Grace, and request him to send you something else in the place of these medicated cigarettes," said the Head abruptly.

"Certainly, sir! I hope you are not going to cane me."

"Of course not!" said the Head testily.

"It was a mistake. You did quite right in bringing the boy to me, Carthew; but on another occasion, I suggest to you to be a little more careful. It will save you from wasting my time and your own."

"Yes, sir!" gasped Carthew.

He left the Head's study rather hastily.

Instead of commendation for his efficiency in discharge of his prefectorial duties, he had received what amounted to a wiggling; and his temper was not pleasant as he strode away. He did not stride very far. He was anxious to interview the cheerful new boy as soon as that exasperating youth was outside the Head's quarters.

"You may go, Grace!" snapped the Head, as the new junior still lingered within his study.

"Thank you, sir!" said Putty demurely.

Dr. Chisholm dropped his eyes upon his papers; but he looked up again, as Putty lingered in the study.

"Why do you not go, Grace?" he rapped out sharply.

"I—I—I'd rather give Carthew time to get clear before I go, if you don't mind, sir!"

"What?"

"I—I'd rather——"

"What utter nonsense!" exclaimed the Head angrily.

Teddy Grace did not quite agree. He had noted very clearly the look in Mark Carthew's eyes as he went out.

Dr. Chisholm was about to speak again, but he checked himself, rose to his feet, and put his head out at the door.

A dozen feet from the doorway stood Carthew of the Sixth, with his brows knitted and his teeth set, in an attitude of grim waiting.

He made a step forward as the study door opened, his fists clenched and his eyes gleaming—under the belief that it was Teddy Grace who was coming out.

Then he stopped, almost paralysed, as he saw that it was the Head.

Dr. Chisholm's glance fixed upon him grimly. He could see at once that Putty's apprehensions were not without grounds.

"Well, Carthew," he rapped out, "what are you waiting for?"

"Oh, sir! I—I—nothing!"

"Is it possible," exclaimed the Head, "that it was your intention to punish Grace, although I have stated that he was not to be punished?"

"Oh, no, sir! Certainly not!" gasped Carthew.

"Then what are you waiting for?"

"I—I—I wanted to speak to the boy, sir; that—that's all. I—I was going to—to——"

"Well, to what?"

"To—to warn him not to smoke his medicated cigarettes in public again, sir!" gasped Carthew, hoping that that would pass.

"Very good! You will understand, Carthew, that Grace is not to be punished for this incident."

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

And Carthew retired, covered with confusion, and very glad to get out of the sight of the Head's keen eyes. Dr. Chisholm turned back into his study.

"You may go, Grace!" he said curtly.

"Thank you, sir!"

And Putty of the Fourth went, with a smiling face.

CHAPTER 9.

A High Tea!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. met the new junior at the corner of the passage, in great perplexity.

Carthew of the Sixth had passed them, with a savagely scowling face, and had bestowed a cuff on Tubby Muffin as he passed—Tubby's fat ear being handy. Apparently something had gone wrong in the Head's study. When Putty of the Fourth came along, smiling and serene, the juniors surrounded him.

"Not licked?" exclaimed Lovell.

Putty opened his eyes.

"Licked! No, why?"

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Not licked! Not after marching up and down the Form-room passage smoking."

"Oh, you misunderstand—just as Carthew did!" said Putty cheerily; and he explained.

There was a chortle among the juniors when they understood.

It was clear now why Carthew of the Sixth had passed them with an expression which Lovell likened to that of a demon in a pantomime.

"You cheeky bounder!" said Jimmy Silver. "You've been pulling Carthew's leg, then—making him make a fool of himself——"

"It was his own fault, for coming along just then!" said Putty.

"Any prefect who had come along would have taken you in to the Head," said Townsend.

Putty nodded.

"Yes; I rather expected that," he said. "It's rather a joke to pull the prefect's leg. I thought it might be Bulkeley who would catch me. I haven't pulled Bulkeley's leg yet."

"I'd rather advise you to leave the captain of the school alone!" said Jimmy Silver warningly. "The fact is, Grace, you're a little too funny for Rookwood. It may land you in trouble."

"Dear me!"

"Carthew won't forget this; he will find a chance of scalping you," said Jimmy. "You can expect to be called on to fag for Carthew, and when you're in his study you'll find he's got a good reason for using his ashplant; nothing to do with this, of course, but a jolly good brand-new excuse, which will be good enough for the Head if necessary."

"Oh!" ejaculated Putty.

He looked a little dismayed.

Putty of the Fourth was rather a peculiar youth in some respects, and he seemed to have been born with a japing kink in his nature. A practical joke had an irresistible attraction for him; and reflection generally came too late—as in the present instance.

He had succeeded in making an enemy of a prefect in the Sixth—which was certainly not a good beginning for a new junior in any school.

The Fistical Four grinned as Putty's face lengthened.

"Not so funny now—what?" chuckled Lovell.

"Can't be helped!" said Putty philosophically. "After all, it was a good joke. Besides, I explained the matter, and Carthew ought to be satisfied, The Head was."

"The Head's a bit more innocent than Carthew!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Carthew knows you were pulling his leg. And you were pulling his leg. And you will hear of it again."

"And I must say," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, "that it will serve you right, Grace. There's such a thing as being too funny!"

And the Fistical Four went off to the end study to tea, leaving Putty of the Fourth to derive what consolation he could from their remarks.

The new junior remained for some minutes in thought.

But his face cleared very soon. He was not very much given to reflection, and he certainly did not believe in meeting troubles half-way.

"Bother Carthew!" he murmured.

And with that remark he dismissed the bully of the Sixth from his mind, and walked cheerily away.

Tubby Muffin met him at the foot of the big staircase and laid a podgy hand on his sleeve.

"What about tea?" he asked. "You haven't forgotten?"

"Not at all!" said Putty cheerily. "It's up to me! A high tea at six sharp—that was the arrangement."

"It's getting on for six now," said Tubby anxiously. "I have not seen you do any shopping. Can I do it for you? I don't mind! In fact, I'd be glad to oblige you, Putty!"

Putty grinned.

"My dear chap the shopping's all done!"

he said. "You turn up in the study at six, and you'll find the high tea all ready."

"Can't I help you with the cooking?" asked Muffin.

"Leave it to me, my fat pippin!"

And Putty went cheerily upstairs. Tubby Muffin was left with a very cheerful expression on his fat face.

Tubby had a fixed belief that he was entitled to live on the fat of the land; and if he did not get a good spread in the study, he felt that there was something rotten in the state of Denmark, so to speak.

It was Tubby's idea that it was up to the new junior to stand a study feed, to pay his footing at Rookwood, as it were. The other occupants of Study No. 2 concurred. Jones minor emphatically, and Higgs still more emphatically. In fact, Higgs, who was a good deal of a bully, promised Putty a thumping if the spread did not come off soon, and if it was not satisfactory when it did come off.

And Putty had meekly agreed to stand a high tea that day; in fact, he assured Higgs that it would be a very high tea.

Putty was busy in Study No. 2 for some time; but just before six he came out, and found Higgs and Jones minor and Tubby Muffin in the Fourth Form passage.

Higgs gave him a rather surly look. The bully of the Fourth had had his rubs with the new junior already.

"Tea ready?" he demanded.

"Ready, my lord!" answered Putty cheerfully. "You fellows don't mind if I don't stay in to tea. I find I've got another engagement."

"What rot!" said Jones minor. "If you're standing the spread, stay in and have a whack in it!"

"Certainly," said Higgs. "If there's plenty, at any rate."

"I don't know about plenty," said Putty thoughtfully. "I've done my best, and I'm pretty certain that there's more than you can eat."

"Well, that's all right."

"Right as rain!" said Tubby Muffin brightly. "You're not half a bad sort, Putty, though you're such a silly ass!"

And Tubby Muffin rolled on to the study, followed by Higgs and Jones minor—Putty of the Fourth descending the stairs rather hastily as they went.

He seemed to be in rather a hurry to keep his other engagement.

The three juniors entered Study No. 2.

and they looked rather puzzled. The study table was not set for tea; there was nothing on it but a large dish; with the cover on.

Higgs uttered an angry exclamation.

"Is the cheeky ass spoofing us?" he exclaimed. "Where's the high tea?"

"Must be in the dish," said Tubby Muffin.

"There can't be much in one dish."

"He said there was more than we could eat," remarked Jones minor.

Higgs strode to the table and lifted the cover from the dish. The next moment he staggered back, with a gasp.

"Ooooooh!"

There was a kipper in the dish.

It was not a new kipper, by any means. It looked like a kipper that had been on active service for a very long time. And the scent that proceeded from it could not be called agreeable.

"What the——" gasped Jones minor.

There was a howl from Tubby Muffin.

"Oh, the rotter! That's the high tea—it's one of his rotten jokes!"

Alfred Higgs glared at the ancient kipper.

His brain did not work swiftly; but it dawned upon him at last that this was the "high" tea Putty had arranged; and it could not be denied that the kipper was very "high" indeed; it was more than gamey.

"The—the—the cheeky idiot!" gasped Higgs. "Why, I'll—I'll—I'll——"

Words failed him. He hurled the dish-cover into the grate with a terrific crash, and rushed from the study in search of Putty of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 10.

Catching a Tartar!

"GRACE!"

Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, was taking the roll at calling over.

There was a moment's pause after Teddy Grace's name had been called.

All the rest of the Fourth were there, but Putty had not put in an appearance. He had been missing since the high tea in Study No. 2; and Alfred Higgs had hunted for him up and down Rookwood in vain.

"The silly ass will get lagged!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell. "I wonder what potty trick he is up to now?"

The big door opened softly; and Teddy Grace slipped in and dodged into the ranks of the Fourth.

"Grace!" repeated Mr. Bootles, raising his voice.

"Adsum!" answered Teddy cheerfully.

And Mr. Bootles, after a glance in his direction, went on with the roll.

Higgs fixed a deadly look on the new junior. He knew that Putty had been dodging him; but it was impossible to escape calling-over, and Putty had been obliged to turn up at last.

Higgs did not mean to lose sight of him again.

When the Rookwooders were dismissed from the Hall, Higgs hurried to join Teddy Grace going out.

Putty sauntered after the Fistical Four into the Common-room, and Higgs followed him there.

"Now, you rotter!" exclaimed Higgs, striding towards him.

Putty looked at him.

"Hallo, what's the trouble?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Blessed if I know!" said Putty. "Higgs appears to be annoyed about something. I hope I haven't offended you, Higgs."

"I'll jolly well show you whether you have or not!" roared Higgs. "What about that high tea, you rotter?"

"Didn't you like it?"

"Like it!" gasped Higgs.

"You seemed pleased when I suggested a high tea," said Putty simply. "It was as high as I could make it."

"And I'm going to give you a thundering good hiding for your high tea!" snorted Higgs.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, interposing. "Is that what you call thanks for hospitality, Higgs?"

"Get aside, you ass!"

"He spoofed us!" howled Tubby Muffin.

"What he called a high tea was a high old kipper!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, wasn't it a high tea?" demanded Putty.

"You funny ass!" said Jimmy Silver.

"All the same, Higgs——"

"Let me get at him!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, rats!"

Higgs dodged round Jimmy Silver, and rushed at the new junior. Putty of the Fourth promptly dodged round the big mahogany table.

The bully of the Fourth dashed in pursuit.

But at that game the nimble new junior had a great advantage. The burly Alfred was soon panting for breath, and the rest of the Fourth howled with laughter as they went round and round the big table.

"Stop him!" howled Higgs at last. "You cackling idiots, stop him!"

"Catch him!" answered Jimmy Silver, laughing.

"Muffin, stop him at once!"

"Stop where you are, Tubby!" said Jimmy Silver, taking the fat Classical by the collar.

"I say, Jimmy—"

"Shurrup!" chuckled Jimmy. "Go it, Higgs! Here we go round the mulberry bush!"

Higgs rushed in pursuit of Putty once more, and the nimble junior circled actively round the table. Twice round they went again, amid howls of laughter, and Higgs stopped, panting.

He shook a furious fist at Putty across the table.

"You rotter!" he roared.

"Same to you, old bean!" answered Putty affably.

"I'll smash you!"

"Go ahead!"

"I—I—I'll—"

Higgs sprawled furiously across the table. It was the only way of getting at his enemy.

As he sprawled across Putty whipped round the table with lightning speed and grasped Higgs by the ankles.

Higgs squirmed round on the table, surprised to find his enemy behind him, and kicked furiously to free his legs.

But Putty's grip on his ankles was like iron, and he dragged Higgs back across the table with ease.

"Here, hold on!" roared Higgs, in great alarm as his shoulders approached the edge of the table. "Do you want to break my neck, you mad duffer?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Higgs shoulders and head were on the table now, and part of his back—just enough of him to keep his head from crashing down to the floor. His struggles ceased suddenly. He could not free his ankles, which Putty was holding high; and if he slid off the table, the result was likely to be exceedingly painful to Higgs' head, hard as it was.

The juniors yelled with laughter. Nobody seemed inclined to go to the enraged Alfred's help. He clutched at the table with his hands, but the smooth mahogany offered no hold.

Putty grinned at him cheerfully.

"Let go!" roared Higgs.

"Not this evening, dear boy!"

"You—you—you—"

"I'm afraid I must pull you off, old bean," said Putty. "It may damage the floor. That can't be helped."

"Hold on!" shrieked Higgs, in great alarm.

"What for?"

"You—you crass idiot, you'll crack my skull if you land me head-first on the floor!" raved Higgs.

"What does it matter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo! You—you villain—leggo!"

Higgs wriggled spasmodically. He was terrified at the idea of the back of his head coming down with a crash to the floor. And no wonder! Certainly it would have meant a serious case for the sanatorium.

"Make him leggo!" wailed Higgs, "Jimmy Silver, you chortling idiot, make him leggo! Lovell, you cackling ass—Morny, you frabjous chump—"

"Are you always as polite as that when you're asking favours?" inquired Putty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo!"

"My hat! Your feet are a good weight, Higgs," remarked Putty. "Do you take eevens or fifteens?"

"Help!"

"Make it pax!" suggested Putty.

"I'll smash you!"

"You look like getting the smashing," remarked Putty, keeping Higgs' wriggling feet well up. "If you damage the floor with your napper, it will most likely be put down to your bill, too. Make it pax, old bean, or I'm afraid I shall have to floor you."

"I—I won't!" gasped Higgs.

"Then here goes!"

"Stop!" roared Higgs. "You mad idiot, hold on! I—I—I'll make it pax."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Honest Injun?" asked Putty.

"Ye-es!" groaned Higgs. "Oh, you beast! Honest Injun!"

"Done!" said Putty cheerfully.

And he released Higgs' ankles, and the

bully of the Fourth was allowed to slide to the floor, right end uppermost.

Higgs stood panting for some moments, He scowled savagely at Putty and clenched his fists—hard!

“Pax, you know!” murmured Putty.

Higgs gave an angry snort and strode away. “Pax” was a binding compact, even on the bully of the Fourth. Putty smiled cheerfully as the burly Alfred stamped out of the Common-room.

He seemed quite satisfied with the result of the argument. Higgs was not satisfied, certainly; but then it was impossible to satisfy everybody.

CHAPTER 11.

Fagging for Carthew!

“FAG!” Carthew of the Sixth called out sharply.

It was the following afternoon, and it happened to be a half-holiday at Rookwood.

The weather was fine, and most of the fellows intended to spend that half-holiday out of doors—Putty with the rest. But as Teddy Grace came along to the doorway Carthew’s harsh and unpleasant voice fell on his ears.

The new junior paused.

Several other fellows who heard Carthew call scuttled off in various directions; nobody was anxious to fag for Carthew, especially on a half-holiday. But the prefect was too near Putty for the latter to scuttle off, and his eyes were fixed grimly on the new boy.

“Fag! Come here, Grace!”

Teddy Grace looked at him.

“Do you want me, Carthew?” he asked meekly.

“Yes, you young sweep! I want a fag,” grinned Carthew. The Sixth Form prefect was quite within his rights in calling on a junior to fag, though whether Carthew really wanted a fag just then was a question. Grace had a suspicion that what he really wanted was to wipe off the score of the previous day.

“Well, here I am,” said Putty, with a sigh.

“Go to my study at once.”

“Yes, Carthew.”

“And wait there till I come.”

“Very well.”

Putty glanced out into the sunny quadrangle, which was so near and yet so far, and headed for the prefect’s study in the Sixth Form passage.

He expected the prefect to follow him there to explain what duties were required of him but Carthew seemed in no hurry.

Putty waited about five minute, and then he looked out of the study.

Carthew could be seen at the end of the passage, chatting with Knowles of the Modern Sixth.

Teddy Grace understand well enough now that he was not really wanted to fag—it was a way of detaining him for the half-holiday, and spoiling any little excursion he might have planned. This was Carthew’s tit-for-tat for the affair of the cigarette.

Doubtless the situation was humorous, from Carthew’s point of view possibly he wanted to show the humorist of the Fourth that he could be humorous, too. But, like many humorists, if not most of them, Putty did not fully appreciate humour when it was directed against himself.

He did not see anything funny at all in remaining shut up in Carthew’s study, when he wanted to be out of doors in the shine. Besides, he had arranged to join the Fistical Four that afternoon in a ramble on Coombe Heath.

Putty of the Fourth walked about restlessly in the study for some time. Mark Carthew showed no sign of putting in an appearance.

It was really impossible for the energetic junior to keep idle for long, and he was soon improving the shining hour by pouring ink into Carthew’s clock, and gum into the inkpot.

He had just finished the latter operation when Carthew, at last, appeared in the doorway of the study with a sardonic grin on his face.

“Hallo! Have I kept you waiting?” he asked.

“Yes, you have!” grunted Putty.

“Don’t scowl at me!” snapped Carthew.

Teddy Grace cleared his clouded features with an effort. Carthew’s eye had wandered to his ashplant; and it was easy to see that he was seeking an excuse for a “licking.” It was a case of the wolf and the lamb over again.

“That’s better,” jeered Carthew. “We’re going to teach you how to behave yourself at Rookwood, my pippin!”

"Thank you, Carthew!" said Teddy Grace meekly.

"Eh?"

"Thank you so much! It is so kind of you!"

Carthew scowled. If Putty expected the soft answer to turn away wrath, he was doomed to disappointment.

"Don't give me any of your jokes, Grace," said the Sixth-Former. "Now, I shall want you for a good bit of the afternoon. Were you going out?"

"Yes; and I'm late already."

"That's too bad; I'm afraid you'll be a bit later," grinned Carthew. "I hope you're not lazy, Grace. I've a way of making lazy fags industrious. I don't mind how much trouble I take. In fact, I enjoy it. Now, I've let my fag off for the afternoon; I'm always kind-hearted to fags. You're going to take his place, see?"

Putty was silent.

"It's three now," said Carthew, looking at his watch. "At four, or soon after, I'm coming in to tea. You're to tidy the study, and make it as spick and span as a new pin. If I see a speck of dust anywhere, I'll skin you! Got that?"

"Yes, thanks."

Carthew smiled.

You're to have tea ready at four," he continued. "I shall require a rather good tea—say, eggs and rashers, and a cake, and some biscuits, and you'd better get some ham, too, and a few trimmings. Knowles and Frampton are coming in to tea, and I want a good table."

"Yes," growled Putty.

"If you don't do exactly as you're told," went on Carthew agreeably, "I shall skin you! You can ask Wegg of the Third what he gets when he annoys me. It may be a lesson to you."

"You're doing this because you made a fool of yourself to the Head yesterday," said Teddy, between his teeth.

Carthew raised his eyebrows.

"That little matter of the influenza cigarette?" he smiled. "Not at all! I'd forgotten about it. Didn't you hear the Head say that you were not to be punished for that?—A prefect of the Sixth Form, my boy, has to carry out the Head's orders, not oppose them. That matter is entirely closed. I am now dealing with you as a fag."

"Oh, I understand!" grunted Putty.

"You've got your yarn all ready in case I should complain to the Head."

"I really don't know what you're talking about," said Carthew. "In fact, you talk too much. Shut up, will you? Now, remember tea—a good spread—ready at four o'clock, or you'll wish you'd never been born!"

And Carthew turned to the door.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Grace.

"Well?" said Carthew, looking back.

"You've forgotten the money."

"What money?"

"If I'm to get you a big spread, I suppose I shall have to buy the things," said Putty. "I can't get them on tick, I suppose; so you'd better leave me the money, hadn't you?"

Carthew shrugged his shoulders. Putty did not know the Sixth Form bully yet. It was no new proceeding for Mark Carthew to order his fag to prepare tea without providing the necessary funds. In such a case, the fag was supposed to manage somehow. He could use his own money, or he could raid some other fag's study cupboard, or he could lay in supplies on "tick"—in fact, he could do anything he liked so long as he did not disappoint the bully of the Sixth at tea-time. Carthew was not particular.

Teddy Grace did not understand all that yet, and he waited for the prefect to hand over the cash. Carthew made no motion to hand over any cash.

He turned to the door again, as if the matter was settled. Putty, perplexed, followed him.

"I can't get the things without money, Carthew!" he exclaimed.

"Can't you?" asked Carthew, looking back.

"Of course I can't!"

"You'd better manage, somehow, to have the spread ready," remarked the bully of the Sixth. "I'm sorry for you otherwise."

Putty understood then, and his eyes flashed.

"Do you think I'm going to stand a spread for your tea-party out of my own pocket?" he howled.

"My dear kid, I don't think about it at all," grinned Carthew. "All I know is, that if there isn't a first-class spread ready at four o'clock, there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!"

"Why, you thumping swindler!" ejaculated Putty.

"What!" roared Carthew.

He strode back to his study, snatched up his ashplant with one hand, and colared the unfortunate fag with the other.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooh!" roared Putty, struggling frantically in the Sixth-Former's powerful grasp. "Oh! Ah! Ow! Stoppit!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yooop! Leggo! Stoppit! Oh, my hat!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"There!" gasped Carthew, pitching the hapless Putty across the study. "Is that enough, or do you want some more?"

"Yarooop!"

Putty sat down upon the hearthrug with a bump, gasping for breath. He blinked dizzily at the big Sixth-Former.

"Do you want any more?" roared Carthew.

"Ow! Yow! No! Wow!"

"I thought I'd bring you to reason! You mustn't bandy words with a Sixth-Form prefect, my boy!" grinned Carthew. "It doesn't pay. You'll find that out in the long run. Now set to work, and don't forget tea at sharp four! You're such a funny merchant, Grace, that you ought to see something funny in this."

Carthew himself evidently saw something funny in it, for he laughed loudly as he went down the passage.

Putty apparently did not.

He sat on the hearthrug and gasped for breath, and rubbed his shoulders ruefully, feeling for once like anything but a humorist.

CHAPTER 12.

A Little Rag!

PUTTY of the Fourth rose to his feet at last.

Carthew had gone over to Mr. Manders' house, to see Knowles and Frampton, and probably to play banker in the seclusion of Knowles' study. That was one of Carthew's delectable amusements on a half-holiday which was whispered of in the Lower School. The black sheep of Rookwood was careful—he had need to be—but it was impossible for his shady pursuits to be quite concealed. Putty had heard a good deal about Carthew since making the latter's acquaintance, and what he had learned of him had not inspired him with respect for the bullying prefect.

If he had been commanded to fag for Bulkeley or Neville, Putty would have done his fag's duties without repining, like any other junior at Rookwood; but with Carthew it was quite a different proposition. Bulkeley or Neville would not have ordered him to supply a spread at his own expense.

Putty had plenty of pocket-money, but he was not in the least degree inclined to spend it on Carthew.

He had the prefect's orders to carry out, but he intended to carry them out in his own way.

As he did not intend to provide the required spread, it was certain that he was booked for a severe licking; and as that was certain anyway, Putty up his mind to earn it fully, on the principle that it is as well to be hung for a sheep as for a lamb.

Carthew had told him to tidy the study, and Putty proceeded to tidy it—on original lines.

He tidied the mantelpiece first, by sweeping off every article it contained into the fender, with a terrific crash.

Then he pitched the bookcase forward, and landed the books on the floor in a shower. To the heap of books he added an inkstand from the table, and a bottle of gum, with the cork out.

He was grinning by this time.

The scamp of the school seemed, in fact, quite in his element in fagging for Carthew in this style.

A fat face glimmered in at the doorway while he was thus engaged. Tubby Muffin gazed in amazement and horror at the havoc in Carthew's study.

"Wha-a-at are you up to, Putty?" he gasped.

"Fagging for Carthew."

"My hat! He'll skin you alive!" howled Tubby. "Why, this will mean a prefect's licking, Putty, you silly ass!"

"Come and lend me a hand!" said Putty. "I've got to get the carpet up yet!"

"The kik-kik-carpet!" stuttered Tubby.

"Yes; there's lots to be done. You see, I'm going to have a licking anyway, and this won't make it much worse!" said Putty cheerfully. "Come in and help!"

"No jolly fear!" gasped Tubby Muffin.

And the fat Classical scuttled away, terrified at the idea of even being near at hand to such a scene of catastrophic havoc.

Putty grinned, and continued his labours.

He jerked out the table-drawer, which was full of books, papers, and other articles.

He emptied it by the simple process of letting it fall on the floor with a crash.

There was a flat tin box among the articles, locked, but it burst open as it crashed on the floor.

The lid flew open, and several articles rolled out on the carpet.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Putty.

He had not meant to proceed to the length of breaking a lock, but the damage was done now, and could not be helped.

He glanced at a folded pink paper that had fallen from the burst tin box, and gave a jump.

The title printed on the pink paper was "Racing Tips."

"My only summer chapeau!" gasped Putty.

He fairly blinked at the racing paper. He had heard hints and whispers about Carthew, but this was a clincher. He understood now why the tin box had been locked. The discovery of such a paper in a prefect's study at Rookwood meant a very painful interview with the head-master, probably to be followed by immediate departure from Rookwood.

Putty grinned as he picked up the pink paper. If he had been inclined to "sneak," he held the bullying prefect in the hollow of his hand now.

There were scribbled words on the margin of the paper, next to a list of horses—notes made by the amateur punter regarding the form of the "gee-gees," evidently for guidance in laying bets. There were plenty of papers about the study with Carthew's writing on them, and at a glance Putty saw that the marginal notes on "Racing Tips" were in the prefect's hand. Naturally, Carthew had never expected a paper in a locked box to come to light. He had not been careless enough to leave it in the drawer without precaution.

Putty stood amid the wreck he had made and examined the pink paper with an interested eye.

He held in his hand evidence enough to get the bully of the Sixth expelled from Rookwood—or, at least, enough to get him severely reprimanded and punished, and degraded from the rank of prefect.

Putty did not intend to make that evidence known. Carthew certainly deserved

to be expelled; but the junior had no intention of betraying him. Whatever Carthew deserved, it was not his business to "sneak."

But he realised at once the use that that incriminating paper might be to him.

"My hat!" murmured Putty. "I fancy I shan't get that licking after all!" He looked at his watch. "Half-past three! Lots of time yet."

He thrust the folded paper into an inside pocket, and sauntered out of the study, shutting the door after him.

Tubby Muffin met him with a scared face as he went up to his own study in the Fourth Form passage.

"Finished?" gasped the fat Classical.

"Oh, yes."

"Carthew'll boil you in oil!"

"My dear old porpoise, Carthew won't touch me," smiled Putty. "If he comes inquiring after me, tell him I've gone down to Coombe, and shan't be back till call-over."

"Oh, crickey!" gasped Tubby.

Putty went into his study, and came out in a few minutes, smiling cheerily. The annotated racing-paper was in a safe place now.

The new junior walked contentedly out of the School House and away to the gates. He had nearly reached the gates when there was a sound of running feet from the direction of Mr. Manders' house.

Putty looked round quickly.

Carthew of the Sixth was speeding after him, with a red and angry face. He had spotted the junior from Knowles window.

"Stop!" shouted Carthew.

"Another time, dear boy!" called back Putty.

"I'll—I'll—"

"Go and eat coke, old top!"

Putty dashed out of the gates at top speed, with Carthew rushing on his track. He was well down the lane when Carthew glared out of the gates.

"Come back!" roared Carthew furiously.

Putty paused for a moment to kiss his hand at the infuriated prefect, and then sped on.

Carthew made a stride out of the gates, but he stopped and turned back. It was not much use to think of pursuing the elusive junior up and down the country lanes.

His wrath had to be bottled up till a more favourable opportunity. But Putty

had to return by locking-up, and then he could be dealt with. And Carthew's plans for dealing with him were almost blood-curdling.

He returned to Mr. Manders' House; and at four o'clock he took his friends to his study in the School House, without much expectation of finding that Putty had left tea ready for him. It was only too plain that the fag had mutinied. Carthew did not quite expect to see a spread; and he was very far indeed from expecting to see what he actually did see.

When he threw open the door of his study and glanced in, he could not believe his eyes at first.

Knowles and Frampton looked in and whistled.

"What the thunder—" said Knowles. "Have the Huns been here?" grinned Frampton.

Carthew stammered.

"I—I—I told him to tidy up the study!" he gasped. "I—I told him not to leave a speck of dust—"

"By gad! He's left a good many!" grinned Knowles. "You don't seem to keep your fags in order on this side of Rookwood, Carthew, old sport."

"He—he—he's wrecked the study!" gasped Carthew dazedly. "Look at the mantelpiece—and the fender—and the carpet—and my books—and papers! My hat! I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"I shouldn't lick him," said Knowles. "I'd take him to the Head, and get him a flogging! That's better."

"I—I will! I'll have him flogged! I'll have him expelled from Rookwood, if I can!" gasped Carthew. "Treating a prefect's study like this—a prefect's, you know! He must be mad! I'll make him clean up this muck on his bended knees. I—I—I'll—"

Carthew's voice failed him, and he fairly babbled with rage.

"You'd better come to tea with me, after all," remarked Knowles, repressing a grin. "This study really doesn't look inviting."

Carthew nodded speechlessly.

He went back to Mr. Manders' House with his friends in a state of mind that can hardly be described. His only consolation was the thought of what was to happen to Putty of the Fourth when he came in.

But Putty of the Fourth had his own ideas about that.

CHAPTER 13.

The Trump Card!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. came back to Rookwood in the falling dusk, with Putty of the Fourth. The new junior had joined them on the heath, and had enjoyed a ramble among the old quarries. The juniors came home together in a cheery mood; Putty the cheeriest of all.

Jimmy Silver was looking rather grave. Putty had told him of the way he had fagged for Carthew, and Jimmy was thinking of the consequences.

"You don't seem to understand that it's serious, Grace," he said, as they came up to the gates of Rookwood. "Carthew will be as mad as a hatter."

"I shouldn't wonder," assented Putty. "I'm rather a hopeful chap, as a rule, but I never expected that Carthew would be pleased."

"He will skin you!" said Lovell.

"I hope not."

"I'm afraid he will take you to the Head," said Jimmy Silver; "and I'm afraid it will mean a flogging, Grace!"

Putty shook his head.

"Well, what do you think Carthew will do, then, you ass?" exclaimed Raby.

"I don't think he'll do anything."

"Oh, you're potty, then!"

"Wait and see," said Putty, with a grin.

Putty walked in cheerily with Jimmy Silver & Co.—The Fistical Four feeling very much perplexed. They were not aware of the existence of Putty's trump-card—in the shape of "Racing Tips," securely hidden in his study.

A good many juniors were waiting about the doorway, and they looked very expressively at Putty as he came in with the Fistical Four. Tubby had spread the news of the ragging of Carthew's study.

"Carthew's waiting for you," said Tubby Muffin. "He's hanging about waiting for you to come in, Putty."

"How very kind of him!"

"Here he comes!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Carthew of the Sixth was not far away. He came down to the crowd of juniors near the big doorway as he saw Putty. The prefect's brows were knitted, his face pale with suppressed fury.

"So you've come back, Grace!" he said, between his teeth..

"Yes, thank you, Carthew!"

"I suppose you know what you're booked for?"

"Am I booked for anything, please, Carthew?"

"I'm not going to lick you myself——"

"Thank you so much!"

Carthew trembled with rage.

"I'm going to take you to the Head!" he went on, almost choking. "You're going to get a flogging, you young ruffian! Come with me!"

"I'll come with you with pleasure, Carthew," said Putty meekly, as the bully of the Sixth grasped him savagely by the shoulder. "I want to see the Head! I want to ask him what I had better do with the copy of 'Racing Tips' I found in a prefect's study——"

"What!"

Carthew's grip suddenly relaxed.

He stared blankly at Teddy Grace, who returned his look with a sweet smile.

"Of course, I'm rather a simple chap," said Teddy. "I'm called Putty because I'm so soft, you know; but I can't help thinking that it's against the rules for a Sixth-Form prefect to have racing papers in his study——"

"You—you—I—I——"

"Especially marked in his own handwriting," pursued Putty gently. "Do you think it is against the rules, Carthew? As a prefect, you ought to know."

Carthew gave him one look, and rushed away to his study. There was a buzz among the juniors who had heard Putty's startling words.

Silver caught him by the arm.

"Is that true?" he asked breathlessly.

Putty smiled.

"True enough," grinned Mornington.

"I fancy Carthew's rushed off to see whether his merry racin' paper is missin'. What a game! Putty, you funny idiot, you take the cake, and no mistake!"

There was a shower of questions, but Putty did not answer them. He did not intend to give Carthew away more than was absolutely necessary for the purpose of saving his own valuable skin.

Carthew had not reappeared when the juniors went in to call-over. Jimmy Silver chuckled at the thought that the Sixth-Form bully was searching frantically among the debris in his study for the racing paper that was not there.

After call-over, Putty of the Fourth

sauntered along to Carthew's study. The Sixth-Form bully turned a crimson and furious face on him, his hands twitching with the desire to seize the cool, smiling junior and smite him.

Putty stepped coolly into the study and laid three-halfpence on the table. Carthew watched him with glittering eyes.

"I'm sure you don't mind selling me that old paper at cost price, Carthew," said Putty gently.

Carthew panted.

"Have you—have you got it about you?" he asked huskily.

"Should I be idiot enough to come in here if I had?" smiled Putty.

"Where have you hidden it?" hissed Carthew.

"In a safe place, old bean."

Putty strolled to the door, Carthew watching him a good deal like a tiger. The junior glanced back at the door.

"That merry paper won't come to light so long as you behave yourself, old nut," he said sweetly. "But don't be a bully any more, Carthew. I shall be angry if you do. Besides, it's bad form."

And Putty of the Fourth sauntered away, whistling. Carthew did not follow him. Not for a king's ransom would he have dared to lay hands upon him just then.

CHAPTER 14.

A Collision on the Line!

"HERE he is!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell.

Teddy Grace of the Fourth looked round quickly.

The new junior at Rookwood was sauntering down to the gates, after lessons, when Arthur Edward's dulcet tones fell upon his ears.

"Stop!" called out Jimmy Silver.

The new junior stopped. He gave the Fistical Four a nod and a cheery smile as they came towards him, but his look was very wary.

For the expressions of Jimmy Silver & Co. boded trouble.

Trouble was not a new experience to Teddy Grace; indeed, he seemed to be born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, so to speak.

"Coming out for a run?" asked the new junior, as the Fistical Four came up.

"No!" grunted Lovell.

"We've been looking for you," said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, now you've found me."

"Mind he doesn't dodge," said Raby.

Teddy Grace backed away a little.

Raby and Newcome moved round him, to cut him off from the gateway, while Jimmy Silver and Lovell were evidently prepared to collar him if he tried to bolt.

"Anything the matter?" asked Teddy mildly.

"Lots!" answered Jimmy Silver. "You haven't been at Rookwood long, Teddy Grace. We thought you were rather soft when you first came—"

"I'm called Putty because I'm considered rather soft!" murmured the new junior meekly.

"But we know better now," continued the captain of the Fourth, unheeding.

"And the fact is, Grace, you have too much nerve for a new kid. And you're so funny."

"Much too funny!" concurred Newcome.

"We don't mind you playing your monkey-tricks on the Modern chaps," said Jimmy Silver, "and you can pull Mr. Bootles' leg, or play tricks on Carthew of the Sixth, as much as you like. But when you begin on us, it's time the stopper was put on. See?"

"Oh!" murmured Putty of the Fourth. "Tricks—on you! I really shouldn't have the nerve. Really important people, like you chaps, have to be treated with respect."

"None of your cheek!" roared Lovell.

Putty raised his eyebrows.

"But I'm only acknowledging your importance, old man," he said. "Isn't that what you want?"

"Don't waste any chin-wag on him!" growled Lovell. "Bump him! That's what he's been asking for ever since he came."

"Wait a bit," said Jimmy Silver. "We had a pie in our study cupboard, Putty. We've just taken it out, and we've found that there's nothing but an old boot under the crust. We thought of you at once."

"Just one of your games!" said Raby.

Putty of the Fourth looked more wary than ever.

"So kind of you to think of me," he murmured. "I really take that as friendly, Silver."

"So we looked for you," continued

Jimmy. "We've decided that you are too funny, Master Putty, and that you've got to be reduced to a proper state of seriousness."

"Thank you so much."

"The best method we can think of is to give you a jolly good ragging. You understand."

Teddy Grace nodded.

"I think I catch on!" he assented.

"I thought I'd explain first," said Jimmy. "Next time you can't resist being funny, you can select some other study. The end study is taboo to practical jokers. See?"

"I see."

"And now bump him!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell impatiently.

"I'm sorry, Putty," said Jimmy Silver, "but you've got to have your lesson. I really hope it will do you good."

"That's very kind of you."

The soft answer is said to turn away wrath, but Putty's soft answers seemed to have the reverse effect upon the Fistical Four of Rookwood.

"Nail him!" snapped Lovell.

And he made a stride towards Teddy Grace.

That cheery youth made a sudden jump away at the same moment in the direction of the gateway.

He collided with Raby and Newcome, who collared him at once; but the new junior slipped through their hands like an eel. Newcome staggered away, and George Raby sat down with a sudden bump.

And Putty of the Fourth was fleeing for the gates at top speed.

"After him!" roared Lovell.

The Fistical Four rushed in pursuit.

Putty's flight had been so sudden that he had gained a start, but Jimmy Silver & Co. rushed hotly after him.

Putty was quite as fleet of foot as the Fistical Four, however, and he kept his lead, and reached the gateway well ahead of his pursuers. He went through the old stone gateway like a deer.

But Teddy Grace's luck was cut.

It was unfortunate for him that someone was about to enter the gates just as he sped out with full steam on. It really was a thing that could not be foreseen, especially in the hurry of the moment.

A tall gentleman in a white hat and an eyeglass was just turning in at the gates, and Putty saw him—too late!

Crash!

Right upon an ample white waistcoat the new junior crashed, a good deal like a battering-ram.

Jimmy Silver & Co. halted suddenly as they beheld that awful catastrophe.

"Mum-mum-my hat!" stuttered Lovell. "That's Sir Leicester Stuckey! Oh, erikey!"

"Hook it!" gasped Raby.

The Fistical Four "hooked it" at great speed.

Like the gentleman in "Macbeth," they stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once.

In a moment almost they had melted away from view.

Putty of the Fourth would have been glad to melt away, too, but he had no chance.

He tottered dizzily from the shock upon the well-filled white waistcoat of Sir Leicester Stuckey, gasping for breath; what time Sir Leicester staggered back and sat down in the road.

Sir Leicester's white hat went in one direction, his eyeglass in another, and the baronet himself sat in the road and spluttered.

"Oh! Ah! Groogh! By gad! Hoop! Yoop! Begad! Ow!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured the dismayed Putty. "I—I—I'm sorry, sir—"

"Yow-ow-wooop!"

Teddy Grace recovered his breath, and dodged round the seated gentleman to flee. From the expression on Sir Leicester's face, he judged correctly that a prolonged interview with him would be of a painful nature.

But the baronet was active for his years. As Teddy Grace dodged, Sir Leicester reached out with his walking-stick, and hooked him with the crook of the handle.

"Stop, you young rascal!" he panted.

Teddy Grace had to stop, for his leg was hooked from under him—and he stopped on his hands and knees.

Sir Leicester Stuckey scrambled up, and gripped the junior by the back of the collar, jerking him to his feet. Still holding the unfortunate Putty in an iron grip, he collected up his hat and his eyeglass with the other hand. Putty wriggled painfully in his grasp.

"I—I'm really sorry, sir!" he gasped.

"It was an accident—"

"Ow! Oh! Begad! Ooooh!"

"I didn't see you, sir—"

"You should have seen me!" roared Sir Leicester.

"I—I—I—"

"Come with me, you young rascal! I shall take you to your headmaster!" thundered the baronet.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Putty. "I—I assure you, sir—"

"Come!"

And Putty of the Fourth was marched in at the gates with a grasp like a vice on his collar.

CHAPTER 15.

Catching It!

"MORE trouble!" grinned Mornington.

"Putty once again!" chuckled Townsend.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

From all directions the Rookwood fellows looked on as Putty of the Fourth was marched across the quadrangle, with Sir Leicester Stuckey's grip on his collar.

Sir Leicester was well known at Rookwood, though Putty, as a new fellow, had never seen him before.

He was a governor of the school, and his place, Stuckey Croft, was only a mile from Rookwood. He was a rather lofty gentleman, and was known to have a temper—indeed, disrespectful Rookwooders had described him as an old Hun. Certainly he looked rather Hunnish as he marched Putty of the Fourth towards the School House.

Teddy Grace went quietly and meekly; there was nothing else to be done. But he was not feeling happy.

Sir Leicester did not heed the stares and grins on all sides as he progressed across the quad. The Rookwooders had never seen a Rookwood fellow marched along by the collar before, and they were interested.

"Putty's in for it, and no mistake!" remarked Mornington, as the baronet stalked into the house with his victim. "What on earth has he been up to, I wonder?"

"Some of his tricks!" grunted Higgs of the Fourth. "He's always up to something. A licking will do him good."

"He, he, he!" came from Tubby Muffin. "He biffed into old Stuckey at the gates! I saw him! Knocked him over! He, he, he!"

"I—I say, sir," gasped Putty, as he

entered the School House with his conductor—"I assure you it was an accident!"

"Nonsense!"

"On my word, sir—"

"Hold your tongue!"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Putty.

"Bless my soul! What is this?" exclaimed Mr. Bootles, whisking out of his study.

The master of the Fourth blinked at the baronet and the junior over his glasses in great surprise.

Sir Leicester halted.

"Is this boy in your Form, Mr. Bootles?" he demanded.

"Yes, certainly! What—what—"

"Then, sir, I hand him over to you for punishment! He has assaulted me, sir—assaulted a governor of the school!" roared Sir Leicester, in great wrath and indignation.

"Bless my soul! Grace, what—what—"

"It was an accident, sir!" faltered the unhappy Putty.

"It was not an accident!" thundered Sir Leicester. "The boy rushed at me, sir, like a mad bull—like a ferocious bull, sir! Look at my hat! Look at my waistcoat, sir! I have been rolled in the dust! I, sir, a governor of the school!"

And Sir Leicester spluttered.

"Pray come into my study, sir!" gasped Mr. Bootles, with a glance at the crowd of Rookwooders gathering round.

"Boy, go into your master's study!"

Putty cast a longing look at the doorway on the quad., but there was no escape for him. He walked meekly into Mr. Bootles' study, followed by Sir Leicester, who had released his collar at last. Mr. Bootles was a nervous little gentleman, and easily flustered; and he was very much flustered now by the wrath of so great a personage as Sir Leicester Stuckey.

Teddy Grace set his collar straight, and looked as meek as he could.

"Now, sir—" murmured Mr. Bootles.

The baronet pointed a podgy forefinger at Teddy Grace.

"That boy, sir, rushed at me and knocked me spinning—me, sir! I demand the most severe punishment for his insolence! The most condign punishment, sir!"

Mr. Bootles took up his cane.

"Have you anything to say, Grace?" he asked.

"Yes, sir! I—"

"What does it matter what the boy says,

sir?" snorted Sir Leicester. "I have told you what occurred!"

"Really, sir—"

"The boy will speak untruthfully. He has done so already!"

"That's not true!" exclaimed Putty indignantly.

"What? What?"

"I've told you the truth; it was an accident. I didn't see you before I biffed on you. I—I mean, before we collided."

"You should not have been rushing about at such a speed, Grace, as to collide with people you do not see!" exclaimed Mr. Bootles severely. "I shall certainly punish you—"

"I should think so!" exclaimed Sir Leicester. "Begad! I should think so, indeed!"

"But it was an accident, Mr. Bootles!" pleaded Putty.

"You should not have such accidents, Grace!"

"But, sir—"

"Hold out your hand!"

There was evidently nothing more to be said.

Swish, swish, swish!

With Sir Leicester looking on, purple with indignation, his white moustache bristling with wrath, Mr. Bootles laid on the cane with unusual energy.

Swish, swish, swish!

Putty of the Fourth had been caned before—not undeservedly—but he had never had anything like this.

Swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Even Sir Leicester Stuckey was satisfied with the infliction, as he testified by a deep grunt, which was to be taken as a sign of approval.

His angry face cleared a little as he left the Form-master's study and strode away to the Head's quarters.

Mr. Bootles laid down his cane.

"You may go, Grace," he said quietly.

"I warn you, my boy, not to play these foolish practical jokes—"

"Ow! But really, sir— Yow!"

"You must learn, Grace, to restrain your unruly sense of humour," said Mr. Bootles severely. "Yesterday my cane in the Form-room was split. I suspect you of this outrage, Grace."

"Oh, sir!"

"But this latest prank passes all bounds—an actual assault upon a governor of the school!"

"But I assure you, sir——"

"You may go."

"Yes, sir. But——"

"Leave my study, Grace!" snapped the master of the Fourth.

And Putty left it, rubbing his aching palms, and with a decidedly lugubrious expression on his face.

CHAPTER 16.

Putty's Little Scheme!

"**W**HOOP!"
"Putty again!" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell.

It was the following day, which happened to be Wednesday, a half-holiday at Rookwood. The Fistical Four were strolling in the quad. after dinner, discussing what was to be done with the afternoon, when they heard that loud and lamentable howl under the old beeches.

It was Putty of the Fourth—evidently in trouble again! He was wriggling in the grasp of Knowles of the Modern Sixth, and the Modern prefect was laying on his ashplant with considerable vigour.

"Whoop! Yoop! I didn't—I wasn't——" yelled Putty.

Whack, whack!

"That's for the gum in my slippers!" said Knowles. Whack! "That's for the oil in my ink-bottle!"

"I didn't——"

Whack, whack!

"And that's for being a cheeky young cad!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Here, hold on, Knowles!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Moderns can't cane Classical chaps. Put the brake on!"

Knowles scowled at the captain of the Fourth, and bestowed another sounding whack on Putty, as if to show that he could cane Classics, in spite of Jimmy Silver's opinion to the contrary.

Then he tucked the ashplant under his arm and strode away.

"Ow, ow!" gasped Putty. "The beast! I've a jolly good mind to go to Bulkeley! Ow!"

"Bulkeley would give you another licking for playing tricks on a prefect!" grinned Raby.

"I haven't!" roared Putty.

"Bow-wow!"

"It's all put down to me!" gasped the unhappy humorist. "I haven't been near Knowles' study. Some silly Modern duffer

has been playing tricks on him, and he thinks——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "That's what comes of being such a jolly funny merchant. You get the benefit of the doubt."

Putty glared indignantly at the Fistical Four as they yelled. Again he failed to see the humour of the situation.

"I'm getting fed up!" he growled. "You cackling asses——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll jolly well make you all sit up somehow——"

"You can't, old bean!" chuckled Lovell. "Every time you let your giddy sense of humour get out of hand we shall know it was you, and you'll get it in the neck. And every time it isn't you, you'll get it, anyway. Serve you jolly well right, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four walked on, laughing. The woes of the humorist struck them as funny.

Putty wriggled painfully, and there was quite a thoughtful expression on his face as he moved away.

He was feeling very much injured.

But as he reflected the cloud left his face, and a smile took its place.

The glimmer in his merry eyes showed that some new idea had come into his fertile brain, and that the trouble that had fallen upon him had not had much effect upon his cheery proclivities.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "What a wheeze! What a thumping wheeze! Bootles—and Knowles—and those silly asses—and old Stuckey. Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! Do you like being licked?" asked Tubby Muffin, joining him under the beeches. "You seem to be enjoying yourself, Putty."

"Just thinking of you, old bean!" answered Putty cheerfully. "I want a chat with you, Tubby. You know everything, don't you?"

"I fancy I know most things that go on in Rookwood, anyway," said Tubby, with pride.

"You always will, old fellow, so long as they make keyholes to the doors," agreed Putty.

"Look here, you ass——"

"About old Stuckey," said Putty. "I hear that he's a governor of Rookwood, and lives near the school?"

"That's so. I know all about him," answered Tubby Muffin. "His place is called Stuckey Croft—off the Coombe Road. He's a jolly old Tartar, too! The Head doesn't really like him dropping in at the school the way he does; but he can't say so, as the old donkey is a governor. He, he, he!"

"Isn't he a nice man?"

"A regular Hun!" answered Tubby impressively.

"Doesn't he often ask the fellows to tea at his place, and all that?"

Tubby stared.

"No jolly fear! He's had Knowles of the Sixth there, I believe. Knowles is rather a slithy chap, and he knows how to butter anybody. You have to pull old Stuckey's leg a lot to get on with him."

"Still, he'd be pleased if a fellow dropped in to tea, I should think."

Tubby Muffin chuckled.

"I shouldn't like to be the fellow!" he answered.

"Why not?"

"Well, it would be check—and old Stuckey's about the last man in the world to stand cheek. If a fellow walked in there without being asked, he would go out on his neck, I should think. It's a fine place, too!" said Tubby. "I've seen it through the gates. Old Stuckey's no end wealthy—flunkeys, and all that, at Stuckey Croft. I'd go if he asked me."

"But he hasn't?"

"Nunno. He's not a nice man."

"But if a chap came in there in a friendly way—suppose I did, for example—to have tea with him—"

"Don't be such a silly ass, Putty," said Tubby Muffin warningly. "He would lay a stick about you as likely as not!"

"Oh! Then I jolly well shan't honour him with my company!" said Putty, laughing.

And he strolled away to the gates.

His cheery face wore a happy smile as he sauntered on to Coombe.

Arrived in the village, he entered Lamson's, the establishment that supplied most of the Rookwooders with bats and balls and other paraphernalia of outdoor games. Putty was not in search of a new cricket-bat, however. He politely requested permission to use the telephone.

Lamson's telephone was not infrequently used by Rookwood fellows, and Putty's polite request was at once acceded to.

He was shown into a stuffy little office at the back of the shop, and left to his own devices there.

He sat down at the instrument, after seeing that the door into the shop was closed. He was very desirous that his little talk on the telephone should not be overheard.

Probably Mr. Lamson would not have been so obliging if he had known why, and to whom, the humorist of Rookwood wished to talk on the telephone. Fortunately, he did not know.

Putty removed the receiver from the hook and called up the exchange. And the number he gave was the Head's number at Rookwood, and the voice in which he spoke was remarkably unlike his usual tones. He had assumed for the occasion a deep, bass voice, which was astonishingly like the gruff tones of Sir Leicester Stuckey, of Stuckey Croft.

CHAPTER 17.

Jimmy Silver & Co. are Pleased!

"SILVER!"

"Hallo, Rawson!"

"You're wanted—Head's study."

Jimmy Silver did not look pleased.

"Now, what the thump can the Head want?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "I've done nothing—simply nothing! If Putty has been up to some game, and the Head is putting it down to me—"

"Was he waxy, Rawson?" asked Newcome.

"No; he looks quite tame," answered Rawson. "But you'd better get off, Jimmy; the Head doesn't like waiting."

Jimmy nodded.

"We have to humour these head-masters!" he remarked.

"We do—we does!" grinned Lovell.

And Jimmy Silver made his way to Dr. Chisholm's study with the kind thought of humouring his headmaster—which really was quite necessary.

He was relieved to find the Head apparently in a good humour. There was no reason why the Head shouldn't be in a good humour, for that matter; but a junior visiting his study was always prepared for the worst.

"Ah! I sent for you, Silver," said Dr. Chisholm, looking at Jimmy over his glasses. "I have received a message on the telephone—a somewhat gratifying message—concerning you and your friends, Silver."

"Indeed, sir?" said Jimmy, in great astonishment.

"Yes, Silver. Sir Leicester Stuckey has rung me up, and asked me to speak to you. You and your friends appear to have made a rather favourable impression upon Sir Leicester."

"I—I'm glad of that, sir," stammered Jimmy.

Apparently Sir Leicester thought more of him than he did of Sir Leicester! It was rather surprising, as Jimmy had certainly not exchanged more than a dozen words with the great man while he had been a Rookwood fellow.

"Sir Leicester Stuckey would be pleased, Silver, if you and your friends—Lovell, Raby, and Newcome—would visit him at Stuckey Croft this afternoon."

"My hat!"

"Eh? What did you say, Silver?"

"N-n-nothing, sir!" gasped Jimmy.

"You seem surprised, Silver. This is a very courteous action on the part of Sir Leicester. I am sure that you and your friends will accept the invitation."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Jimmy.

Whether he wanted to accept it or not, there was nothing else to be said. An invitation from a governor of the school was like an invitation from Royalty, and amounted to a command.

"Sir Leicester says he will be glad to entertain you to tea at half-past five precisely," said the Head. "You and your friends will take care to be punctual, Silver."

"Oh, certainly, sir."

"That is all, Silver. You may go."

Jimmy Silver left the Head's study in a state of great astonishment.

There was nothing surprising in the invitation in itself, but it was very surprising as coming from so crusty and Tartaric an old gentleman as Sir Leicester Stuckey.

"Well?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell, as Jimmy rejoined the Co.

Jimmy Silver explained, and the three juniors whistled.

"Well, my word!" said Lovell. "Old Stuckey can't be such a Hun as we've supposed. Why has he picked us out, I wonder?"

"Nicest chaps at Rookwood!" suggested Newcome.

"I don't see how Stuckey knows that," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "We've got to go, anyway; couldn't refuse. May be a good tea, too."

"Well, he couldn't do less than stand us something decent if we're going to walk a mile for it," remarked Raby.

"It's rather a distinction, too," said Lovell. "Precious few fellows get asked to Stuckey Croft. Knowles has been there; he sucks up to old Stuckey—ahem! I mean Sir Leicester. After all, the old fellow's looks may be against him. Asking chaps to tea looks decent."

"May have quite a good time," said Newcome; "and grub's a bit short in the study, too."

Upon the whole, the Fistical Four were feeling pleased.

There was a good deal of time to elapse before half-past five, so they repaired to the end study to get on with the "Journal"; but when the time drew nigh to start for Stuckey Croft, they devoted some time to making themselves unusually presentable. It was, as Lovell remarked, an occasion to be dressed for a bit. And the Fistical Four donned their best bibs and tuckers, as it were, in honour of that very special occasion.

CHAPTER 18.

Kind Invitations!

B UZZZZZZ!

Mr. Bootles laid down his book as the telephone-bell rang in his study, and picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that Mr. Bootles?" came a deep, somewhat gruff voice along the wires.

"Quite so."

"You know my voice, I presume, Mr. Bootles. I was speaking to you yesterday in your study—"

"Bless my soul! Is it Sir Leicester Stuckey?"

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Bootles!"

"Good-afternoon, Sir Leicester!"

"I am afraid, Mr. Bootles, that I showed—ahem!—some little heat on the occasion I referred to. I was very much—hem!—annoyed."

"Not at all, Sir Leicester," answered Mr. Bootles, considerably surprised that so important a personage as Sir Leicester Stuckey should have rung him up to render an apology. "Not in the least! The boy—Grace—was a most—hem!—disrespectful young rascal— What did you say?"

"Could you possibly spare me this after-



Helter-skelter the Fistical Four scattered out of the house, and behind them came Sir Leicester, raging, with braided crutch. (See Chapter 20).

noon, Mr. Bootles? I know you are a very busy man——"

"My dear sir——" murmured the flattered Mr. Bootles.

"If you could make it convenient, sir, to visit me this afternoon I should be delighted to receive you."

"Bless my soul!"

"I have long desired to have a conversation with you, Mr. Bootles, but I have been afraid of trespassing upon your time."

"Dear me!"

"As to-day is, I understand, a half-holiday——"

"Quite so! Quite so!"

"I thought, therefore, that you might be able to call in. It would be a very great pleasure to me."

Mr. Bootles grinned over the telephone from sheer satisfaction.

Courteous attentions like this from a great man like Sir Leicester did not often come the little Form-master's way.

"My dear Sir Leicester, I shall be delighted—honoured!" he exclaimed. "It will be a very great pleasure to me to call—a very great pleasure, indeed."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Bootles. I am sure you do not mind my ringing you up in this informal way?"

"Not at all—not at all! A pleasure—an honour!"

"Shall I expect you, then, at five o'clock?"

"Undoubtedly."

Mr. Bootles almost purred as he put up the receiver. His chubby little face was full of gratification. He was very pleased at that moment to reflect that he had properly punished Teddy Grace for "biffing" the august baronet, who had become so gracious all of a sudden.

Probably his satisfaction would not have been so complete if he had been aware that a minute later the telephone-bell rang in Mr. Manders' room over on the Modern side, and if he had heard what followed.

Mr. Manders, the Modern master, gave a snort as the bell rang and startled him out of an abstruse mathematical calculation.

He jabbed the receiver off the hook and snapped into the transmitter:

"Well?"

"Is that Mr. Manders?"

"Yes. What is wanted? Who is speaking?"

"Really, Mr. Manders, I supposed you knew my voice. I wish to ask Cecil

Knowles, of your House, to visit me at Stuckey Croft."

"Oh! Ah! Yes!" Mr. Manders' acid voice became as sweet as honey at once. "My dear Sir Leicester, quite so—quite so! Knowles will be delighted, I am sure!"

"Pray excuse me for giving you the trouble——"

"Not at all! It is no trouble! It is, in fact, a pleasure, Sir Leicester! Pray command me in any way."

"Thank you, Mr. Manders. You are very good. If, then, you will tell Knowles that I should like to see him at half-past four to tea——"

"I will tell him immediately."

"Thank you! I shall expect him, then."

"You may be sure, Sir Leicester, that Knowles will be delighted. I will tell him immediately."

Mr. Manders' voice was sweet, but his look was rather sour as he hung up the receiver. He really didn't see why the wealthy baronet could not ask him to tea. He would have walked to Stuckey Croft with the greatest of pleasure to bestow his fascinating society upon the wealthy gentleman. Apparently Sir Leicester did not know how fascinating his society was.

However, the slightest wish of the great man was a thing to be scrupulously observed; and Mr. Manders at once called to a fag, and sent his message to Knowles of the Sixth.

Knowles was in his study, with Frampton and Catesby, when the message reached him, by the medium of Tommy Dodd of the Fourth.

"Couldn't take a pal, I suppose?" asked Frampton, when Tommy Dodd was gone.

Knowles laughed.

"I'm afraid not, without being told. Old Stuckey is a bit of an old corker—like as not to bite a fellow's head off. I have to treat him very carefully. He's worth keeping up, though; he's got pots of money, and the pater says he will be useful some day when I leave school. He talks awful rot, but I give him his head, and let him jaw!"

"Your deal, Knowles," said Catesby.

Knowles looked at his watch.

"Lots of time before four," he remarked.

And the game of banker went on in Knowles' study.

Another game was going on in another quarter. The telephone-bell rang in the prefects' room, in the School House—the

Classical side—and Bulkeley, who was in the room, went to the instrument.

"Is that Carthew?" came a gruff voice on the wires.

"No—it's Bulkeley! Is Carthew wanted?"

"Oh, Bulkeley! Kindly ask Carthew whether he would care to come to tea at Stuckey Croft this afternoon."

"Certainly! Carthew!" Bulkeley called to Carthew of the Sixth, who was in the window talking to Neville. "Sir Leicester Stuckey is asking you to tea. You'd better come."

Carthew came like a shot.

His voice was as honey-sweet as he accepted the invitation.

"I shall expect you at four o'clock, then, Carthew!" came the deep, gruff voice on the wire.

"Certainly, sir—delighted, I'm sure—indeed—Hallo, he's rung off!"

Carthew gave the other seniors in the room a rather boastful look as he left the telephone. Whether it was a pleasure or not, it was a great distinction to be asked to tea by Sir Leicester Stuckey.

Carthew's satisfaction, like that of some other persons at Rookwood, would have been considerably diminished if he had seen the "baronet" at the other end of the wire.

Teddy Grace, with a sweet smile, rose from the stool in Lamson's office, and put the receiver back on the hook. He had finished telephoning for that afternoon. With really noble self-denial, he had resisted the inclination to ask the Head himself to tea at Stuckey Croft—even Putty of the Fourth felt that that would be going a little too far.

He passed out through the shop, and thanked Mr. Lamson very sweetly; and sauntered down the village street with a smile upon his face, which showed that he was placidly at peace with himself and all the world. He was feeling quite grateful to the inventor of that wonderful instrument, the telephone.

CHAPTER 19.

Visitors for Sir Leicester!

MARK CARTHEW, the first on the list of Sir Leicester Stuckey's distinguished but unexpected guests, arrived in good time at Stuckey Croft. Carthew was looking very pleased

with himself, and he was sporting his best tail-coat and his shiniest hat. He glanced at the extensive and well-kept grounds, as he came up to the magnificent portal, and was still more pleased. Sir Leicester Stuckey was undoubtedly an acquaintance worth cultivating, even if it did require no inconsiderable amount of buttering to keep him in a good humour.

He gave his name to the footman who admitted him, and was rather surprised that he did not seem to be expected. His name was taken in to Sir Leicester, who was in the library, and the footman returned with a lurking grin of impertinence upon his smooth face.

"Sir Leicester is sorry that he cannot see you, sir."

Carthew stared and reddened.

"Sir Leicester is expecting me," he exclaimed warmly. "My name is Carthew—Mark Carthew. Sir Leicester asked me to call at four o'clock."

"Sir Leicester's gout is bad to-day, sir, and he is not receiving anyone."

"There's some mistake," said Carthew. "Sir Leicester telephoned to me personally, asking me to call at four o'clock. Perhaps he has forgotten."

The footman gave him a doubtful look, but he returned to his master. A deep voice was heard from the open door of the library.

"Show him in!"

The voice did not sound agreeable, but Carthew was relieved. He had begun to feel very perplexed and uncomfortable. The footman showed him into the library, where Sir Leicester Stuckey sat by a huge fire, with one foot propped upon a cushioned stool. His red face was a little redder than usual, and his eyes had a far from hospitable glitter in them. Carthew, considerably abashed, approached him in some trepidation.

Sir Leicester fixed a glittering eye upon him.

"So—what is your name?"

"Carthew, Sir Leicester; you—you telephoned—"

"When did I telephone?"

"This afternoon, sir—"

"I did not telephone this afternoon!" snorted Sir Leicester. "I am not in a state to telephone this afternoon. Yow-ow!" That ejaculation, apparently, was due to a twinge in Sir Leicester's gouty leg. "What do you mean, boy, by coming here with a state-

ment that I telephoned to you, when I did nothing of the sort?"

"But—but—but——" stammered the bewildered Carthew. "You—you did——"

"What!"

"At least, I—I—I——"

"James!" roared Sir Leicester.

James appeared.

"Show this young gentleman out, James! As for you, Carthew, or whatever your name is, I shall mention this to your headmaster. Yow! A schoolboy joke, I presume—a joke—yow!—on me!"

"Oh, no, no!" gasped Carthew. He would as soon have thought of joking with a tiger in the jungle as with Sir Leicester Stuckey. "I—I was rung up——"

"Show him out!"

"I assure you, Sir Leicester, I—I——"

"Show him out!" roared Sir Leicester.

James touched Carthew on the elbow, and the prefect of Rookwood almost tottered out of the library. Sir Leicester gave a snort of angry contempt, followed by a yelp, as he caught another twinge from his leg.

The footman was grinning as he almost pushed the Rookwood prefect out of the door. Carthew wondered whether he was on his head or his heels as he almost limped away down the drive.

Sir Leicester Stuckey snorted, and snorted again. His temper was never good, and when the gout had the upper hand, it was worse than ever. He regretted that he had not laid his crutch about the Rookwooder who had disturbed his lofty repose that painful afternoon.

And when James—a little nervous himself—announced another visitor, at half-past four, Sir Leicester indulged in a snort that could be heard in the hall by Knowles of the Modern Sixth.

"Have I told you, James, that I cannot see anyone, or have I not?" he demanded.

"Master Knowles——"

"Another boy from Rookwood! What does he want?"

"Ahem! Master Knowles says you telephoned, Sir Leicester——"

Sir Leicester sat bolt upright, and yelped as his leg twinged.

"Telephoned!" he thundered.

"Ye-e-es, Sir Leicester——"

"Begad! Telephoned! Show the young rascal in!" gasped Sir Leicester. "This is a piece of concerted insolence—what they

call, I believe, a rag! Begad, I'll rag them! Show the young scoundrel in!"

Knowles of the Sixth advanced towards the baronet with an insinuating smile upon his face—but the smile became a little frozen as he saw Sir Leicester's purple face and the expression upon it.

"So I telephoned to you, did I?" thundered Sir Leicester.

Knowles jumped.

"Ye-es—certainly——"

"You young rascal!"

"Wha-a-at!" stuttered Knowles.

"Telephoned! By gad! I shall certainly telephone to your headmaster, and report this insolence!"

Knowles blinked at him.

"But you—you asked me to tea," he stammered. "You—you telephoned to—to ask me——"

"How dare you stand before me and utter such falsehoods, boy?" thundered Sir Leicester. "I am very well acquainted with your motive—I am aware of what you call a rag. A rag, by gad! James, turn this fellow out!"

"B-b-b-but——" spluttered Knowles, in blank bewilderment.

"Kick him out!" roared Sir Leicester.

James took Knowles by the arm and led him away. He deposited Knowles, as it were, outside the great door, and closed it on him, leaving the unfortunate Rookwooder wondering whether he was dreaming. It was several minutes before Knowles recovered himself sufficiently to limp away.

Sir Leicester fumed and puffed in his chair. Excitement was decidedly not good for a gouty leg; but Sir Leicester's temper had a will of its own, and was not to be denied. And Sir Leicester had reason to be wrathful. He could only conclude that he was being made the victim of a concerted, practical joke; which, in the case of so important a person as himself, almost amounted to sacrilege.

It was in fear and trembling that James announced Mr. Bootles, when that gentleman arrived, chubby and cheerful, at five o'clock.

"Mr. Bootles, from Rookwood, Sir Leicester."

Snort!

"Have I not told you, James——"

"But Mr. Bootles, sir, says it is a special appointment——"

"Nonsense!"

"That you telephoned, Sir Leicester——"
 "Telephoned!" shrieked Sir Leicester.
 He grasped his crutch and raised himself from his chair.

"Mr. Bootles! Telephoned—telephoned! Mr. Bootles!" he spluttered. "A—a master—a schoolmaster—entering into a schoolboy rag! Outrageous! Come here, Mr. Bootles!" roared Sir Leicester.

Mr. Bootles heard that roar in the hall, and came to the doorway of the library, surprised by such a peculiar summons, but still chubby and smiling.

He stopped in the doorway, however. Sir Leicester's look was not exactly inviting.

"Mr. Bootles——"

"My dear Sir Leicester——"

"So I telephoned to you, too, did I?" roared Sir Leicester.

"Ye-es, certainly——"

"Are you not ashamed, sir, to lend yourself to such a ridiculous prank?"

"Eh?"

"At your age, sir, and in your position!" roared Sir Leicester. "Have you no sense of dignity—of propriety?"

Mr. Bootles gazed at him, transfixed.

"I—I trust so!" he gasped. "I—I certainly trust so. I—I fail to understand you, Sir Leicester. You telephoned——"

"I did not telephone!"

"Bless my soul! You asked me—invited me——"

"I asked you nothing!"

"I—I—really, sir—really this reception—this conduct—really, Sir Leicester Stuckey—really——" babbled Mr. Bootles.

Sir Leicester pointed at him with a hand that trembled with wrath.

"You have lent yourself, Mr. Bootles, to a schoolboy prank. You are the third person to come here and insult me! I shall complain to Dr. Chisholm! By Jove, sir, you will see that I am not a man to be treated with impunity, Mr. Bootles—not with impunity!"

"I—I assure you, I—I——"

"I did not telephone to you, sir, and I had not the slightest desire to see you—not the slightest! Why should I have, by Jove? Mr. Bootles, you are an insolent knave!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Now I have told you what I think of your conduct, sir, leave my house, or, by Jove, I will have you thrown out of the door!"

Mr. Bootles backed away into the hall in

alarm—the baronet's crutch looked quite dangerous. He really looked as if he would have used it as an offensive weapon if Mr. Bootles had been within reach.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Bootles. "Upon my word! I—I—I have never—never— Bless my soul! Extraordinary! Outrageous! The unfortunate man must have been drinking! Bless my soul!"

Mr. Bootles was so overcome that James had to take him by the elbow and lead him out. He mopped his perspiring brow as he went down the drive. And he made up his mind that he would never, never accept an invitation again from Sir Leicester Stuckey, if he ever received one, which was doubtful.

CHAPTER 20.

Nice for the Fistical Four!

"HALLO! You fellows look in great form!"

Teddy Grace smiled cheerfully at the Fistical Four. The cheerful new junior was hanging about the lane, not far from the entrance to Stuckey Croft, when Jimmy Silver & Co. came along.

Certainly, the Fistical Four looked unusually spick and span. Their jackets were nicely brushed, their trousers nicely creased, their ties nicely tied, and they wore their best hats and their best smiles. It was a distinguished occasion, and the chums of the Fourth were doing justice to it.

"We're going to make a rather special call, you see," explained Jimmy.

"Dropping in to see Sir Leicester Stuckey, you know," remarked Lovell negligently.

"Not really?" exclaimed Putty.

"Yes; he rang us up this afternoon," said Raby carelessly.

"Lucky bargees!" said Putty enviously.

"Could you take a pal in?"

"Not quite!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "By the way, you young sweep, have you been playing any tricks on Bootles?"

"Bootles?" repeated Putty.

"Yes; he passed us in the lane a few minutes ago looking jolly queer."

"I thought he looked rather queer when he passed me," said Putty demurely. "Perhaps he's feeling sorry for caning me yesterday."

"Fathead!" answered Jimmy, and he walked on with his chums; Teddy Grace glancing after them with a smile.

"Jolly decent place, this!" remarked

Arthur Edward Lovell, as the Fistical Four walked up the drive. "Shouldn't mind coming here sometimes. Tea on the lawn would be all right, wouldn't it?"

"Topping!" said Newcome.

"Old Stuckey can't be such a bad sort," went on Lovell. "It's really decent of him to pick us out and ask us to tea. Well, here we are!"

Jimmy Silver rang.

He observed a rather peculiar expression on the well-shaven face of James as that well-fed menial opened the door. James was possibly getting fed-up with visitors from Rookwood School.

"Sir Leicester is expecting us!" Jimmy Silver explained, as James showed a disposition not to open the door very wide.

"Sir Leicester cannot see anyone this afternoon," said James.

"He is expecting us. Take in our names!" answered Jimmy rather sharply. "Silver, Lovell, Raby, Newcome."

"Sir Leicester has given instructions for no one to be admitted—"

"What rot!" said Lovell. "He must be expecting us, as he telephoned—"

James gave a start.

"Telephoned!" he repeated.

"Yes, to Rookwood!"

"If this is a joke, young gentlemen—"

began James.

"I don't see any joke!" said Jimmy Silver, surprised, and not pleased by the footman's manner. "Take in our names to Sir Leicester at once!"

"I'm afraid I cannot—"

"I tell you Sir Leicester telephoned to us to come at half-past five!" exclaimed Jimmy angrily. "Come on, you chaps!"

And as James showed no disposition to grant a passage the Fistical Four pushed him aside and entered. The man's conduct was really amazing, and they could not help suspecting that he was not quite sober.

"Now, show us in at once!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"I tell you, young gentlemen—"

"Where is Sir Leicester?"

"In the library, sir. But—"

"Well, we want to see him. It's an appointment, man! Don't you understand?" snapped Jimmy.

James stood nonplussed. He could see that the juniors were there in good faith, but he simply dared not announce them to

his irascible master. A bell rang, and James hurried to the library.

"What is it, James? Is it some more of them?" came a gruff, ferocious voice, which made Jimmy Silver & Co. blink at one another.

"Yes, Sir Leicester!" gasped James. "Four young gentlemen from Rookwood—"

"Begad!"

"They—they say you telephoned, Sir Leicester—"

"Telephoned!"

It was a roar, in a voice like unto the voice of the bull of Bashan.

"Show them in! Telephoned! Begad! I'll give them telephone! Show them in!"

James made a sign to the amazed juniors, who entered the library.

Sir Leicester Stuckey was standing by the hearth, leaning on his crutch, his face purple.

"So—so you have come to—to see me?" he gasped, with a glare at the Fistical Four.

"Yes, sir!" stammered Jimmy Silver in dismay. "We—we—we've come to tea, sir—"

"You have come to tea! You—you have come to—to tea! I—I presume I telephoned—what?"

"Yes," answered Jimmy Silver. "You telephoned to Rookwood—"

"By gad!"

What happened next was like an earthquake to the astounded juniors.

Heedless of the twinges in his gouty leg, the angry gentleman strode towards them, grasping his crutch.

"Telephoned!" he spluttered. "Telephoned, by gad! T-t-tut-telephoned—"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, my hat!"

"Yarooooh!"

"Yooop!"

The juniors jumped right and left, with yells of astonishment and anguish, as Sir Leicester started in with the crutch.

Whack, whack! Biff! Yaroooop!

"Help!"

"Run for it!" shrieked Lovell. "He's mad! Run for your lives!"

"Oh, crikey!"

Helter-skelter the juniors scattered into the hall. Behind them came Sir Leicester, raging, with brandished crutch.

"Telephoned! I'll give you telephone! By gad! Young rascals, sweets, scoundrels,

take that—and that! Telephoned! Take that!”

Whack, whack! Crash!

“Run for it!”

How the unfortunate juniors got out of the door they never knew. But they got out, and went down the drive as if they were on the cinder-path! Lovell's hat remained in the hall, Raby's on the doorstep, and Newcome's on the drive. But they did not stop for their hats. They would not have stopped for the treasures of Golconda.

They ran!

The lodgekeeper stared at them as they came whooping down the drive. They bolted frantically out into the road.

“Oh, crumbs!” gasped Lovell, pausing to gasp for breath at last. “What—what—what the thunder—”

“Ow!”

“Oh!”

“Yow-ow! I'm hurt!”

“Oh, dear!”

The chums of the Fourth had not enjoyed their visit to Stuckey Croft. But Teddy Grace, to judge by his look when they passed him again, was enjoying himself.

The mystery of the telephone remained a mystery. After a visit from Sir Leicester Stuckey the following day the Head made a stern inquiry. Nothing came to light—officially. But unofficially Jimmy Silver & Co. came to a conclusion on the subject which caused them to pay a visit to Putty's study, and without stopping to ask questions fall upon that youth and smite him hip and thigh.

CHAPTER 21.

Putty is Wanted!

“SILVER!”

Bulkeley of the Sixth rapped out Jimmy Silver's name sharply.

Jimmy was going out with his hat under his arm, but he stopped at once and turned back. Rookwood juniors were always ready to oblige old Bulkeley; and, moreover, Bulkeley's tone indicated that delay might be dangerous. So Jimmy Silver came along promptly.

“Yes, Bulkeley?”

Bulkeley was frowning.

“Has Grace, of your Form, gone out, do you know, Silver?”

“The new kid? I don't know.”

“Well, I want him.”

The voice of Arthur Edward Lovell came through the open doorway in loud and impatient tones:

“Are you coming, Jimmy? We're waiting.”

“Wait a bit, then, old scout!” called back Jimmy.

Lovell's impatient face looked in at the doorway.

“You must stop to talk to some silly ass when a chap's waiting for you!” he said. “You— Oh, Bulkeley! I—I—ahem—”

Lovell promptly disappeared again.

“Do you want me to find Grace, Bulkeley?” asked Jimmy Silver hastily.

“Yes. Not if you're playing cricket, though,” said Bulkeley, who was always considerate, even to fags. “Somebody else will do.”

“Oh, that's all right—only practice,” answered Jimmy Silver cheerily. “I'll look for him at once.”

“Send him to my study,” said Bulkeley.

“Right-ho!”

Bulkeley went back to his study, still frowning. It was easy to guess that the vials of wrath were ready to be poured out on the devoted head of Teddy Grace, the new junior in the Fourth Form.

Jimmy Silver looked out on the steps, where Lovell and Raby and Newcome were waiting for him.

“Seen Putty?” he asked.

“In his study, I think,” said Raby.

“Right! You fellows run along; I'll come after you. Putty is in a row again.”

“Bless him!” grunted Lovell.

The three juniors started for Little Side, while Jimmy Silver went up to the Fourth Form passage in search of Teddy Grace. It was a sunny spring afternoon and a half-holiday, and most of the fellows were naturally out of doors; but Putty of the Fourth was discovered in No. 2 Study.

The new junior seemed busy.

Teddy Grace dabbled in water-colours, and he was now occupied in giving some touches to a sketch.

“You're wanted, Putty,” grunted Jimmy Silver at the door.

“Can't come.”

“Bulkeley wants you.”

“Bother Bulkeley!” answered Teddy Grace, without looking up

"Fathead! You're to go at once. Is that a picture?" added Jimmy Silver, glancing at Putty's sketch.

"It's going to be," said Putty cheerfully. "Don't you recognise the scene?"

Jimmy Silver gazed at it attentively. Putty's art was rather of the impressionist order, and so it was not really easy to guess what the picture was intended to represent.

"Battle scene?" asked Jimmy.

"Ass!" answered Putty impolitely.

"Well, I suppose that's cannon smoke, isn't it?"

"Don't you know clouds when you see them?"

"Hem! Not when I see them looking like that!" said Jimmy, with a grin. "Isn't that a big gun in the middle of the picture?"

"Don't you know a bridge when you see it?" snorted Putty.

"Oh, my hat!"

"It's the little bridge over the Croft Brook," explained Putty. "Of course, it's not finished yet. I'm going there again this afternoon."

"Better go and see Bulkeley first."

"Bother Bulkeley! What does he want?" asked Teddy Grace crossly.

"He wants you—and I fancy it's a case for the ashplant," chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Some more of your monkey tricks, I suppose."

"Well, he'll have to wait a bit."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"You're a new kid here, Putty," he remarked; "but you must have learned by this time that the captain of the school can't be kept waiting. You're going at once."

"Rats!"

"Otherwise I shall help you along. I've got a bat here—"

"Look here—"

"Like that!" continued Jimmy, bringing the bat into play.

"Ow!" roared Putty. "You silly ass—"

"And like that—and that—"

Putty of the Fourth dodged frantically as Jimmy Silver lunged with the bat. He had to dodge out of the study, and Jimmy cheerily drove him along to the stairs, still lunging.

"You silly chump" roared Putty, turning on the staircase landing. "You howling idiot, I tell you— Yaroooh!"

"Have some more?"

"I'll—I'll—"

"You'll trot along," agreed Silver. "I'm wasting too much time on you now. There's another!"

"Yooop!"

Putty of the Fourth fled down the stairs. Jimmy Silver followed him, with his bat ready for action. The captain of the school was not to be kept waiting, even by the cheekiest junior at Rookwood.

Teddy Grace turned on the next landing, with a red and wrathful face.

"Look here, Jimmy Silver, you silly chump!"

"I'll keep it up as long as you do," answered Jimmy, lunging with the bat. "There's one—and there's another—and there—"

But the new junior had had enough; the bat was not to be argued with. He jumped back and fled down the lower staircase.

It was unfortunate for Tubby Muffin, the fattest junior on the Classical side of Rookwood, that he happened to be coming upstairs just then.

Putty came round the curve of the staircase at full speed, and met Tubby in full career. The collision was terrific.

Tubby Muffin sat down, clutching at the banisters, and roaring. Putty reeled back from the shock and sprawled.

"Yaroooh!" roared Tubby. "What—what the thump— Oh! Ow!"

"Oh!" gasped Putty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you thumping ass!" spluttered Tubby Muffin, scrambling up in great wrath. "You dangerous lunatic! You're always playing tricks. I'll jolly well teach you to biff me on the stairs!"

Tubby Muffin was not usually a fighting-man, but he was roused to great wrath by the shock he had received. He fairly hurled himself upon the sprawling Putty, punching right and left.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Go it, Tubby!"

"Ow-ow-ow! Gerroff!"

Thump, thump, thump!

"There, you silly ass—there, you chump—biffing a fellow over on the staircase! Take that—and that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Putty of the Fourth struggled wildly under the weight of the fat Classical. He was at a disadvantage, sprawling on his back on the stairs, with the fat Tubby scrambling over him. The yells of the un-

fortunate Putty woke the echoes of Rookwood.

Townsend of the Fourth looked up from below.

"You'd better chuck that!" he called out. "Bulkeley's coming!"

Thump, thump!

"Yoop! Help! Dragimoff!"

Jimmy Silver ran down and collared Tubby Muffin, jerking him away from his victim, as Bulkeley appeared on the scene.

"What's this thundering row about?" exclaimed the captain of Rookwood angrily.

"Yow-ow-ow!" gasped Putty, sitting up dazedly. "Oh, dear! Oh!"

"Biffed me over!" roared Tubby Muffin indignantly. "He's always playing tricks. Just like a monkey! Biffed me over! I'll biff him!"

"More of your pranks, I suppose, you young rascal!" growled Bulkeley, helping Putty to his feet by the collar.

"Ow! It was an accident——"

"Yes, I know your accidents, you young sweep! Come along!"

And the hapless Putty was marched off to Bulkeley's study, with the Rookwood captain's grasp upon his collar.

CHAPTER 22.

The Straight Tip!

TEDDY GRACE gasped for breath as he put his collar straight in George Bulkeley's study. The captain of Rookwood regarded him with a frowning brow.

Since he had been at Rookwood the new junior had been in hot water more times than he could count. His predilection for practical jokes of all sorts and sizes had become too well known for his comfort.

It was quite useless for him to plead not guilty. Any other fellow could have an accident, and it was an accident; but an accident in Putty's case was put down at once to his "monkey-tricks."

So he did not even attempt to explain the disaster on the staircase. He waited meekly for Bulkeley to begin.

"Well, you young rascal?" said the prefect at last.

"Oh, Bulkeley!" murmured Putty.

"You've been trespassing!"

"Eh?"

"As you're a new kid, you mayn't know

that Sir Leicester Stuckey objects to fellows going on his ground," said Bulkeley. "You ought to know, however, that Stuckey Croft is out of bounds."

"Stuckey Croft!" repeated Putty. "I haven't been there—really, Bulkeley. I heard that some fellows went there the other day, and there was some trouble; but I wasn't one of them, really."

Bulkeley gave him a sharp look.

"Some fellows were asked there to tea, over the 'phone," he said. "It came out that Sir Leicester hadn't asked them, as they thought. It was somebody playing a trick."

"Was it, really?"

"It hasn't come out who did it. I've got my suspicions. Things like that didn't happen before you came to Rookwood."

"Oh, Bulkeley!"

"Sir Leicester Stuckey was very angry, and he's made no end of complaints," continued the captain of Rookwood. "Now he's complaining again about Rookwood fellows going about his grounds without permission. You've been seen there—along the Croft Brook."

"Oh!" said Putty. "That's all right, Bulkeley. There's a footpath across, you know. Anybody can use the plank bridge."

"So long as they don't leave the footpath," said Bulkeley. "But you do—er you did. And Sir Leicester has complained."

"Well, I may have gone along the stream to sketch——"

"You had better go along some other stream to sketch, then!" answered Bulkeley.

"But I've got to finish my picture!" urged Putty. "I'm painting a really good water-colour of the brook and the plank bridge."

Bulkeley picked up his cane.

"I believe you knew the place was out of bounds," he said. "Anyway, you know it now. You're not to use that footpath again, and you're not to go anywhere near the Croft Brook. The Head's waxy with old Stuckey ringing him up to complain."

"But my picture——"

"What?"

"My picture isn't finished——"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Bulkeley.

Swish!

"Ow!"

"That's a tip," said Bulkeley grimly. "Now, whether you go to Croft Brook to sketch or to play monkey-tricks, I don't know. But I know that if you go there again, under any circumstances whatever, I shall take you to the Head for a flogging!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Keep that in mind," said Bulkeley sternly. "If you're ever found near the place again, you'll be flogged. That foot-path is out of bounds for Rookwood fellows, owing to the trouble it's caused. Do you think you can remember that, or shall I give you another lick to impress it on your mind?"

"I—I think I can remember, Bulkeley!" gasped Putty.

"Mind you do. You're giving altogether too much trouble for a new kid!" growled Bulkeley. "I think you'll have sense enough to keep clear of the place now, though. I hope so, for your own sake. You can cut!"

Putty of the Fourth was glad enough to "cut."

He left Bulkeley's study, rubbing his palm dolorously. As it happened, his intentions in visiting Sir Leicester Stuckey's property were quite harmless; but he was becoming a dog with a bad name, so to speak.

He returned to his study in a thoughtful mood.

Putty was a determined youth, not to say an optimistic one, and he was very keen on finishing his impressionist picture of the Croft Brook. He was conscious of good intentions, though he was not given the credit for them. And it really was selfish and inconsiderate of Sir Leicester Stuckey to wish to bar off a promising young artist from the scene of his artistic labours.

"I'm jolly well going, all the same!" murmured Putty, as he packed up his sketching materials. "Bulkeley's an ass—and old Stuckey is a beast! I'm going, all the same!"

"I say, Putty——"

The fat face of his study-mate, Tubby Muffin, looked in at the door. His eyes lingered on Putty's satchel.

"Cut!" snapped Putty.

"Where are you going, all the same?" grinned the fat Classical.

"Be-r-r-r-r!"

"Bulkeley's just gone out," said Tubby

Muffin. "He's gone over to Abbeywood, I think. I—I say, wharrer you going to do with that stump, Putty?"

"I'm going to give a fat boulder a thumping good licking!"

Tubby backed into the passage.

"I say, Putty, old chap, don't bear malice, you know!" he urged, from outside the doorway. "You biffed me over, and I thumped you, so it's fair and square. You shouldn't play tricks, you know!"

"It was an accident, you fat duffer!"

"Oh, yes, I know! You're always having accidents!" grinned Tubby. "But I say, don't be waxy, you know! I—I was jolly glad when you became my study-mate, Putty, old chap! I never went for you as Higgs did, did I?"

"You couldn't!"

"Well, I wouldn't, anyway. The fact is, I never like a chap so much as I did you, Putty!"

"Bosh!"

"And I'll tell you what," continued Tubby confidentially, but keeping a wary eye upon his study-mate. "Now you've had a remittance, Putty——"

"How do you know I've had a remittance?"

"I happened to see you open the letter. What do you say to a real good spread in the study?" asked Tubby eagerly. "I'll do the shopping for you. I'll do the cooking. In fact, I'll do everything. All you've got to do is to stand the tin," said the fat Classical generously. "What do you say, Putty?"

"Rats!"

"What have you got in that satchel, Putty?"

"Sketching things, fathead!"

"I think it's jolly selfish of a fellow to take his tuck away and feed by himself!" said Tubby Muffin loftily. "There isn't any fun in a picnic all by yourself, Putty."

"I'm not going on a picnic, you fat cor-morant!" growled Putty.

Tubby Muffin winked.

"I'll come with you, old chap!" he said.

"Do—and I'll roll you in the brook!" answered Putty.

"If you don't want my company, Teddy Grace——" said Tubby, in a very lofty tone.

"Well, I don't!"

"Ahem! He, he, he! I can take a joke with anybody," said Tubby Muffin. "He, he, he! Shall we start now, Putty!"

"I'm going to start," answered Putty, "and if I see you around I'll scalp you! It's not a picnic, and you can go and eat coke!"

Putty came out of the study, and Tubby Muffin dodged away. The new junior went downstairs, and Tubby followed him—at a cautious distance—into the quad. As Teddy Grace neared the gates he looked back, and found the fat Classical on his track.

As Putty of the Fourth was going out of bounds, with a flogging hanging over his head in case of discovery, he naturally had a strong objection to Tubby's company. Anything that happened within the knowledge of Tubby was pretty certain to become known far and wide.

Putty turned back, and charged towards the fat Classical with his satchel swinging in the air.

Tubby Muffin gave him one alarmed blink and fled.

"Stop!" roared Putty. "I'm going to scalp you! Come back, Muffin!"

Instead of coming back, Tubby Muffin put on speed, his fat little legs going like clockwork, in the direction of the cricket-field.

Putty of the Fourth chuckled, and went cheerily out of the gates, satisfied that he was rid of the inquisitive Tubby for the afternoon. But that was a little mistake on his part.

"I say, Jimmy."

The Fistical Four were on the cricket-ground, with the rest of the Rookwood juniors, when Tubby Muffin came rolling breathlessly up.

Cricket was in full swing at Rookwood, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were giving their whole attention to the practice games. Silver was about to send a ball down to Tommy Dodd at the nets when Tubby jerked him on the sleeve.

"Don't bother, Tubby," said the captain of the Fourth without looking round.

"But I say——"

"Busy!"

"Yes, but it's important, Jimmy," pleaded Tubby Muffin. "It's a matter you ought to take up, as captain of the Form."

"Oh, my hat! What is it?" asked Jimmy Silver impatiently, bestowing his attention upon Tubby Muffin at last.

"Suppose a fellow——"

"Well?"

"Say, a fellow's study mate——"

"Buck up!"

"Suppose he had a remittance," said Tubby earnestly. "Suppose he spent it in tuck——"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Suppose he went out to have a picnic all by himself," said Tubby, with the solemnity of an owl. It was evidently a very serious matter in the opinion of the fat Classical. "Well, suppose——"

"Cut off!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"But I haven't finished yet. Suppose he was going out of bounds, like a greedy rotter, you know, to have a picnic all by himself——"

"Dry up!"

"I say, Jimmy—— Look here, it's up to you, you know," said Tubby Muffin, catching the captain of the Fourth by the sleeve again. "What I want is——"

"You want a thump, and you'll get it pretty soon if you don't leave off bothering!"

"I want you to come with me, Jimmy——"

"Eh! Where?"

"After Putty!"

"Blow Putty!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Cut off, and don't worry!"

"But he's got a feed——"

Jimmy Silver turned on the fat Classical, took him by his podgy shoulders, and sat him down in the grass with a bump.

"There! Now take a rest, and give me one," he said.

"Yarookh!"

Jimmy turned away. The idea of leaving cricket, to pursue Putty in search of a supposed feed, was amusing; but it was also exasperating when the junior cricket captain was busy.

Tubby Muffin scrambled up, but he did not venture to tackle Jimmy Silver on that important subject again. He looked round, and finding Tommy Cook, of the Modern Fourth, at hand, approached him confidentially.

"I say, Cook, old chap," began Tubby, "I want you to back me up——"

"You want me to back you up?" repeated Cook.

"Yes, that's it. Suppose a fellow——"

"I haven't time to listen to your chin-wag, old chap, but I'll back you up with pleasure," said Tommy Cook. "Here goes!"

"Here, I say! Wharrer you at?" roared Tubby Muffin, as Tommy Cook grasped him

"Backing you up!" answered the Modern junior cheerily.

And he backed Tubby Muffin up—against the pavilion, with a crash.

"Ow! Yoop!" roared Tubby. "You Modern beast! Yaroooo!"

"Want any more backing up?" asked the humorous Modern.

"Yoop! No! Yah!"

Tommy Cook walked away, chuckling, leaving the unfortunate Tubby leaning on the pavilion, gasping for breath.

"Ow! Wow, wow!" mumbled Tubby. "I suppose I'd better try Higgs. Only he's such a beast; a chap never knows how to take him!"

The fat Classical looked round for Higgs of the Fourth. He found that burly youth looking on at the cricket, with a darkened brow. Higgs was a big and burly fellow, and could lick almost anybody in the Fourth, and he seemed to regard that as a reason for being allowed to shine at cricket. Jimmy Silver took quite a different view, and Higgs was not likely to become a member of the junior eleven unless he could play good cricket. Fortunately, Jimmy Silver was one of the fellows Higgs could not lick.

"I say, Higgs, old chap—" murmured Tubby Muffin, approaching the bully of the Fourth with some trepidation. Alfred Higgs had a very uncertain temper and a heavy hand.

Higgs scowled at him.

"Nice for me, isn't it?" he said.

"Eh!"

"You know how I play cricket!" said Higgs warmly. "Silver thinks I can't! What does he know about cricket?"

"Nothing at all," said Tubby promptly.

"I never saw such a thoroughly rotten cricketer as Jimmy Silver."

The soft answer did not turn away wrath, however.

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" snapped Higgs.

"C-c-certainly not!" stammered Tubby.

"I—I mean, he's a jolly good cricketer—best cricketer at Rookwood—"

"He's nothing of the sort, and you know it!"

"Of—of course he isn't. He's a silly ass!" gasped Tubby. "I quite agree with you, Higgs."

Tubby would certainly have been willing to agree with Higgs if he had only known what to agree to.

"You're a silly idiot, Muffin!"

"I—I know, I mean—"

"Silver's a fair cricketer. But he doesn't bat as I do."

"That he doesn't, Higgs, old chap. I heard Mornington say that he'd never seen a chap bat as you do."

Higgs snorted.

"If you're going to repeat Morny's silly cheek to me, Muffin—"

"Nunno! I mean—"

"I've got a late cut that's something rather special," said Higgs. "Silver can't see it."

"Oh, he's an ass!" said Tubby. "He can't see anything. He wouldn't give me a chance in the footer, you know."

"Thumping ass if he did."

"Ahem! I—I quite agree," mumbled Tubby. "You know all about it, Higgs. I've often been surprised at the amount you know. Now, speaking of Putty—"

"Who's speaking of Putty?"

"I—I am."

"Well, don't."

"Suppose Putty was going on a picnic. Higgs, old chap—suppose he had a lot of tuck in a satchel—"

"That reminds me," said Higgs, with a glare. "Who's been at my cake?"

"Your—your cake!" stammered Tubby.

"Yes, my cake! I told you what I'd give you if you touched my tuck again. Now I'll jolly well— Come back!" roared Higgs.

But Tubby Muffin was fleeing for his life.

The fat Classical gave up the idea of getting recruits on the cricket-field. And he was smitten with a dread that Putty might already be engaged upon the picnic, and that he might be too late. He rolled out of the school gates by himself, and took up the pursuit of the new junior unaided.

"After all, the beast's out of bounds," murmured Tubby, "I know where he's gone—I know jolly well! And if he cuts up rusty, I might consider it my duty to mention to Bulkeley that the beast's been trespassing on old Stuckey's ground again. He, he, he!"

And, much encouraged by that thought, the fat Classical hurried along after Teddy Grace, who had long been out of sight.

He became very wary as he crossed a stile leading into the fields that lay along the Croft Brook.

There was a public footpath across the fields leading to the plank bridge over the brook. Anyone who wandered along the brook from the path was trespassing on Sir

Leicester Stuckey's property; and there had been so many complaints on the subject that Dr. Chisholm had placed the footpath itself out of bounds for Rookwood juniors. The seniors were supposed to know how to behave with more circumspection than the smaller fry.

Tubby had need to be wary—for there was the possibility of meeting Sir Leicester or one of his keepers or a Rookwood prefect. It was likely enough that Bulkeley himself would come back from Abbeywood by way of the footpath across the brook—and the fat Classical knew what to expect if Bulkeley found him there.

But the thought of Putty's supposed feed drew Tubby Muffin on like a magnet.

Tubby was quite assured in his fat mind that Putty had retired to that secluded spot to enjoy a plentiful picnic all by himself; and Tubby was indignant at the bare idea. Wherever there was a spread Tubby felt that he had a right to be included.

CHAPTER 23.

In Deadly Peril!

PUTTY of the Fourth was at work.

For once, he was busy without being engaged upon practical jokes or "monkey-tricks" of any kind.

About a hundred yards from the plank bridge he was ensconced under the trees, busily daubing.

The greatest of impressionist pictures ever exhibited was not quite so thoroughly impressionist as Putty's work. Even the artist himself was a little puzzled at times to distinguish between his trees, his bridges, and his clouds. But he was enjoying the pursuit of his art, and, after all, that was the chief concern.

Putty had forgotten all about Sir Leicester Stuckey and Bulkeley and everybody else, like a true artist, in the midst of creative effort. He did not see or hear Tubby Muffin approaching.

He gave a jump and dabbed a daub that was more impressionist than ever as the fat Classical suddenly tapped him on the shoulder.

"Oh! You ass!" gasped Putty.

"He, he, he!"

"You—you fat chump! What are you doing here?"

Tubby Muffin grinned.

"You're out of bounds, Putty!" he said,

wagging an admonitory fat forefinger at Teddy Grace.

"So are you!" growled Putty.

"That doesn't matter so much—I'm not a tricky monkey, always getting into hot water!" grinned Tubby. "You're going to have a flogging if you're caught here. I heard Bulkeley say so."

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Where's the grub?"

"Eh! What grub?"

"The picnic."

"There isn't any picnic, you fat duffer!" shouted Putty, in great exasperation. "I've come here to paint."

Tubby Muffin knitted his brows sternly.

"Now, look here, Putty," he said. "I'm willing to be friendly. I'm willing to join you in the picnic. I'm willing to go halves with you. I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

"Fathead!"

"It's no good trying to pull my leg," continued Tubby. "I'm pretty sharp. You have to get up very early in the morning to pull the wool over by eyes, I can tell you! It's no good telling me that you've come here to daub that silly rot—"

"That what?"

"Silly rot!" said the cheerful Tubby. "You've come here to have the feed all to yourself; and I think it's greedy—selfish, in fact. I hate selfishness. You wouldn't go out of bounds simply to play the goat with that silly daubing—Yaroooh!"

The exasperated artist lost patience. Tubby Muffin suddenly found himself sitting in the grass, without any clear idea as to how he had got there.

"Wow-wow-wow!" gasped Tubby. "Way, you rotter, I've a jolly good mind to tell Bulkeley! I believe he's coming home this way, and I'll go and meet him, and—"

"Shut up!"

Tubby sat in the grass and blinked at Teddy Grace in great wrath. He had come there for a feed—not a bumping.

"Yow-ow! You rotter! If you haven't got a feed here, you're playing some trick on old Stuckey, and bring him howling along to Rookwood again. I'm not going to let you! I'll jolly well go and meet Bulkeley—"

"Better not go over the plank bridge," grinned Putty. "It's not safe. I've looked at it."

"I'm going—"

"If you do we shall lose the fattest idiot at Rookwood, and some home for idiots will be deprived of a future inmate!"

"You cheeky ass!" roared Tubby.

He scrambled to his feet and started along the brook. There was evidently no prospect of joining in the feed—if feed there were.

Putty called after him, really anxious:

"Don't go on the plank, Tubby! I tell you it's not safe!"

"You can't spoof me!"

"I've looked at it, you fat idiot!" howled Putty. "I was going to the other side myself, only it wouldn't do. The wood's rotted."

"Rats!"

Tubby Muffin kept on without looking back. But he stopped all of a sudden. On the other side of the brook, coming through the trees, a stalwart figure appeared in sight. It was Bulkeley of the Sixth.

Teddy Grace, farther along the stream, was not in view, but Tubby Muffin's fat figure was fairly under Bulkeley's eyes as the captain of Rookwood came towards the brook.

Bulkeley knitted his brows as he saw him, and hurried his steps towards the plank bridge.

"Muffin!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tubby. "I—I—I'm not here, Bulkeley—I—I mean, I've only just come—I mean, I was just going. I say, that bridge isn't safe!"

Bulkeley came striding across the plank.

The plank bridge, which was seldom used, had long been out of repair, but it might have been crossed successfully with caution. But the rapid and heavy strides of the big Sixth-Former were too much for the rotted plank. There was a loud crack as Bulkeley reached the middle.

Tubby Muffin stared at him blankly, in horror.

As the plank gave way Bulkeley staggered back, the water swishing over his boots. Then he fell headlong.

The brook was not deep, but as Bulkeley crashed backwards his head struck the broken plank, and he rolled helplessly into the water and plunged under.

Tubby Muffin stood rooted in the grass of the bank, frozen with horror.

Bulkeley's head came up.

His face was white and his eyes were closed. He was unconscious.

"Grace!" shrieked Tubby. "Teddy Grace! Putty!"

"Oh, shut up!"

Putty of the Fourth was at some distance, and he was busy. He had seen and heard nothing of Bulkeley so far.

Tubby Muffin ran frantically back along the bank.

"Putty—Bulkeley—in the water—drowning!" he gasped.

"What?"

"He'll be drowned!" shrieked Tubby.

Putty jumped up, forgetful even of his picture. He ran out from under the trees to the water's edge. A white face glimmered on the water as the unconscious captain of Rookwood was swept by into the deeper water below the bridge.

"Good heavens!" panted Teddy.

He pitched off his cap and jacket and plunged in, without stopping a second to think.

It was fortunate that Putty of the Fourth was a good swimmer. With powerful strokes he reached the unconscious Sixth-Former and grasped him, bringing Bulkeley's head well above the water.

Tubby Muffin watched him from the bank in gasping terror.

Bulkeley was quite unconscious. But for Putty's prompt aid he would have drifted into the deep water and disappeared. But a strong grasp was on him now and Putty, swimming stoutly, made for the bank, keeping the unconscious prefect's head well up.

It was a hard struggle for the junior, good swimmer as he was, for he was in deep water now, and the current was strong. He was white from his exertions as he struggled to the rushes.

"Help me, Muffin, you fool!" he panted.

Tubby Muffin woke from a trance, as it were, and plunged into the shallow by the bank up to his knees, and lent his aid.

Bulkeley was dragged ashore into the grass. Tubby Muffin was splashed from head to foot with water and mud, and he sank down gasping in the grass beside Bulkeley.

"Ow, ow, ow!" he spluttered. "I—I'm wet! Wow! I'm muddy! Ow!"

Putty dragged himself from the stream. He was gasping for breath, and almost at the end of his tether. And for some moments he remained in the grass, breathing spasmodically, while his strength returned.

CHAPTER 24.

Keeping it Dark!

"O H. dear!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "I—I'm wet!"

Putty rose with an effort. He was streaming with water, and was a good deal wetter than Tubby Muffin. Bulkeley lay in the grass, his face white and set; but there was a trace of colour creeping into his cheeks, and he was stirring slightly.

The Rookwood captain was coming to himself.

"Oh, my hat! What a go!" gasped Teddy Grace.

"I'm wet, Putty—wet all over!"

"Bother you!"

"Why, you unfeeling rotter!" howled Tubby indignantly. "Suppose I catch cold—and influenza—and pneumonia—"

"Bulkeley seems all right," remarked Putty, utterly regardless of those terrible risks that fat Classical was running. "He's coming to. He'll be all right in a minute. Oh, crumbs—and that means a flogging for me!" ejaculated Putty, as the precise situation dawned upon him.

"Serve you right!" retorted Tubby Muffin. "I'm as wet as anything, and you don't care if I catch—"

"Oh, dry up a minute! What the dickens am I going to do? I'm jolly well not going to be flogged, and Bulkeley's bound to report me—he always keeps his word—"

"Ow, ow! I'm soaked—"

Putty made up his mind swiftly.

Bulkeley was fast coming to himself; and as soon as his eyes opened they would rest on Putty—with direful results to that disobedient youth. Bulkeley, in regard to Putty, had been acting under the Head's instructions—and even the fact that Putty had dragged him out of the water would not excuse him for leaving his duty undone. It was possible that the prefect's ingratitude might save Putty from the promised flogging; but it was not by any means certain, and the junior was naturally not disposed to take the risk.

Bulkeley did not need his care; and though Putty would not have left him alone, Tubby Muffin was there, and he could remain.

Putty decided at once. He clapped the grumbling Tubby on the shoulder.

"I'm going to cut off," he said hurriedly.

"You stay with Bulkeley, Muffin; you're not booked for a flogging—"

"I'm wet!"

"Don't mention my name," went on Putty. "Bulkeley saw you, didn't he?"

"Yes, I say, I'm awfully wet!"

"Well, then, you can stay; and if you don't mention that I've been here, Tubby, I'll stand you a feed in the study this evening."

Tubby Muffin looked more attentive. He even forgot for a moment that he was wet.

"What sort of a feed?" he asked cautiously.

"Anything you like!" said Putty desperately, as the prefect stirred again. "If Bulkeley knows I've been here, I'm done for. It's a flogging from the Head."

"I know that. Will there be a cake?"

"Yes, yes!"

Putty grabbed up his sketching things in hot haste.

"And tarts?" called out Tubby.

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"All right, then. I say, what about one of the sergeant's pies—"

But Putty of the Fourth was gone. He disappeared through the trees, with his belongings under his arms and in his hands; and did not stop to pack them till he had sprinted across a field and escaped into a lane. After that he took the road to Rookwood.

He was not feeling very cheerful now. He was soaked to the skin, and his impressionist picture was indefinitely postponed. He left a track of water behind him in the dusk, as he trotted along, for some distance.

Near Rookwood he stopped to make himself as presentable as he could before entering the school; he did not want his state to attract attention.

Fortunately, most of the fellows were still on the cricket-ground, and Putty was able to dodge into the House unnoticed.

He pitched his satchel into his study, and hurried up to the Fourth Form dormitory to change his clothes and dry himself.

His damp clothes were tucked away safely out of sight, and in a very short time Putty of the Fourth descended from the dormitory, looking as bright and clean as a new pin.

He sauntered cheerfully out of the School House, feeling none the worse for his ad-

venture, but conscious that it behoved him to keep that adventure very carefully secret.

"Hallo! Where have you been this afternoon?" asked Higgs, meeting him in the quadrangle.

"Sketching, dear boy."

"What rot!" said Higgs.

Putty smiled and walked on to the cricket-ground. Jimmy Silver greeted him with a frown.

"Hallo, slacker! Not much more light for practice!"

"Better late than never!" answered Putty cheerfully.

"Well, get your bat, and let us see what you can do," said the captain of the Fourth. Teddy Grace complied. He was very willing to be occupied at cricket when Bulkeley arrived, in case there should be any lingering suspicion in the prefect's mind that he had been on Sir Leicester Stuckey's land that afternoon.

Jimmy Silver took the ball, and Putty stood up cheerfully to the bowling of the Fourth Form's champion bowler, and it was some time before his sticks went down. Jimmy Silver condescended to give the new junior an approving look.

"Not bad!" he said.

"Not at all," agreed Putty. "Will you be wanting me for the junior eleven?"

Jimmy sniffed.

"I'm at your service if you do, you know," said Putty.

"The eleven isn't at your service, though," answered Jimmy. "You've got too much nerve for a new kid, Putty. I suppose you've been up to some of your tricks this afternoon."

"Tricks!" repeated Putty.

"If I find pepper in my teapot, or mustard in my cake, I shall come along to your study and bring a stump!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Hallo, Algy, what's the row?"

Jimmy's cousin, Algy of the Third, had just arrived, at full speed, breathless with excitement.

"Guess!" he gasped.

"No time—get it off your chest!"

"Tubby Muffin—" spluttered Algy Silver.

"What about him?" asked Teddy Grace quickly. "Has the silly ass been chattering—I mean—"

"Oh, it's true!" said Algy. "I wouldn't have believed it, but Bulkeley said so himself. Come on, they're just going in! I

came to tell you, Jimmy! Fancy—Tubby Muffin—that fat chump! Come on!"

And Algy cut off again.

"But what's happened?" roared Jimmy Silver, in surprise.

But the fog was gone—evidently bursting with the surprising news, whatever it was. And Jimmy Silver, in great wonder, followed him—and so did Teddy Grace.

CHAPTER 25.

Borrowed Glory!

GEORGE BULKELEY opened his eyes, with a gasping breath.

He gazed round him dazedly, and started as he saw Tubby Muffin squeezing the water out of his clothes.

"What—what's happened?" muttered Bulkeley faintly.

"I'm wet!"

"What?"

"Wet all over!" growled Tubby.

Bulkeley sat up in the grass, still dazed, and put his hand to his head. There was a bump, where he had struck the plank, and he was feeling sick and dizzy.

"I—I remember now!" he muttered. "I—I must have been stunned, I think. Oh, my head. But—but I fell in the water. My hat! Did you pull me out, Muffin?"

Bulkeley was looking round him; there was no one in sight but the fat Classical. Tubby, who was squeezing the water out of his jacket, blinked at him.

"I yanked you out by the collar," he answered.

"Well, my hat!"

Tubby Muffin's statement was quite correct; he had dragged Bulkeley out by the collar after Teddy Grace had brought him into the rushes.

But as there was no one else on the spot, George Bulkeley naturally supposed that Tubby had done more than that. He knew he must have floated down-stream after falling into the water.

"Where did you get me out, Tubby?" he asked.

"Just here."

"The water's deep here," said Bulkeley, with a look of blank wonder at the fat Classical.

"And jolly wet, too!" grunted Tubby.

"I never knew you were such a swimmer, Muffin."

"Such a—a—a—a what?" exclaimed

Tubby, staring at the captain of Rookwood in his turn. "Oh! I—I see! Just so—quite so. Oh, I'm simply a splendid swimmer, Bulkeley! First-rate, in fact!"

Tubby was under strict injunctions not to mention that Teddy Grace had been there, and the feed in the study depended on it, so Tubby had to be very careful to keep his compact. But it dawned upon him that Bulkeley must be aware that someone had gone into the stream for him, at a very great risk. A glimmer came into Tubby's round eyes. For the first time it came into his mind that here was glory to be reaped—cheap.

Glory did not often come Tubby's way. He was distinguished for his gargantuan appetite, for his marvellous scent for a feed, and for his uncommon powers as a borrower of cash. But these distinctions could not exactly be called glorious. And here was glory—going cheap, as it were—to be had for the asking!

Almost unconsciously Tubby began to swell.

His fat conscience was satisfied with the plea that he was bound to keep Putty's secret, after promising to do so. His promise suddenly assumed an unaccustomed sacredness in Tubby's eyes.

He simply couldn't go back on Putty, who trusted him! And if the alternative was to let Bulkeley believe that he—Reginald Muffin—had performed an action of great valour, what was Tubby to do?

After all, he would have done it if Putty hadn't—or, at least, he would have if he could have—so it came to the same thing, really—or, at least, Tubby tried to believe that it did.

George Bulkeley was silent for some minutes, getting his breath and rubbing his head. He was not much hurt, and he was recovering fast. More than anything else, he felt utter amazement that it was Tubby Muffin who was his rescuer.

For he knew that only a hefty swimmer, and a plucky one to boot, could have got him out of the water; and Tubby certainly was not famous for either quality.

Tubby, growing more important in his looks every moment, finished squeezing his jacket, and put it on. He was already reflecting how much Bulkeley's gratitude would be worth to him.

When this got out it would make some fellows feel small, Tubby reflected—fellows who called him a fat grampus, and a fat

frog, and things like that, and never believed that he could do anything but demolish great quantities of tuck.

Bulkeley's voice interrupted these pleasant reflections. The prefect had risen to his feet, and was regarding the fat junior thoughtfully.

"I'm very much obliged to you, Muffin!"

"Not at all, Bulkeley! Don't mench!" said the fat Classical, in quite an airy way. "Jolly glad I happened to be on the spot, that's all. Right chap in the right place—what?"

"You must have had some trouble with me in the water," said Bulkeley. "I was quite unconscious, till I came to just now."

"Well, it was a bit of trouble," confessed Tubby Muffin. "You're rather heavy, you know."

"It beats me!" said the captain of Rookwood. "I—I mean, I'm very deeply obliged to you. I should never have thought—ahem! You ran a great deal of risk coming into deep water for me."

"Never stopped to think of it!" said the cheerful Tubby. "Just tackled the job, you know, and put it through. Efficiency, you know. That's me all over."

Bulkeley smiled.

"It was plucky!" he said.

"Well, as you make a point of it, Bulkeley, I admit it was plucky," said Tubby Muffin modestly. "I'm not the chap to brag, I hope. Still, it was plucky. The Muffins are a plucky family. As for me, personally, I don't mind mentioning to you, Bulkeley, that I'm as brave as a lion."

And Tubby Muffin swelled, till he really seemed in danger of sharing the fate of the frog in the fable.

"Better get in and get these wet things off," said Bulkeley. "We may catch cold. Better run."

"Right you are, Bulkeley! I say, you're not going to report me for being out of bounds, are you?" asked the fat Classical anxiously.

"Under the circumstances, I think I can undertake to let you off for that," said Bulkeley, with a smile. "But you mustn't do it again."

"Tisn't as if I was a-bounder always playing tricks, like Putty, for instance, is it?" said Tubby, with a grin.

"No," said Bulkeley, with a nod. "Quite different. But what did you come here for, Muffin?"

"I—I thought there was a picnic, and there wasn't," said Tubby.

Bulkeley laughed. Tubby's presence by the Croft Brook was fully explained. The captain of Rookwood was crossing the field with long, rapid strides, and Tubby Muffin kept at a trot to keep pace with him. He was soon gasping for breath, but Bulkeley would not let him slacken down. It was necessary to keep warm till the wet clothes could be changed.

They arrived at Rookwood in quite a warm glow.

Mr. Bootles met them as they came in at the gates, and he stopped and looked at Bulkeley quickly.

"What has happened?" he exclaimed.

"An accident, sir," said Bulkeley. "The plank on the Croft Brook went, and I tumbled in."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Bootles. "But Muffin—"

"I'm awfully wet, sir!" put in Tubby importantly. "Soaked to the skin, sir! But I don't mind. I've saved Bulkeley's life—haven't I, Bulkeley?"

"It's true, sir," said the Rookwood captain, as Mr. Bootles blinked at the fat Classical over his glasses in great astonishment, and several fellows gathered round curiously. "I knocked my head on the plank I think, and lost my senses. Muffin must have gone into deep water for me, and how he got me out goodness only knows. He's much heftier than anybody ever thought."

"Bless my soul!" said the amazed Mr. Bootles. "Muffin, I am very pleased with you. I should never have dreamed—ahem!—"

"It was my pluck, sir," said Tubby cheerfully.

"What?"

"Pluck, sir! I've got no end of pluck. Ask Bulkeley. He knows."

"Ahem! You had better go in and change your clothes at once."

Bulkeley strode on, and Tubby Muffin trotted after him, leaving the Fourth Form-master blinking. If it had been Silver, or Lovell, or Tommy Dodd, Mr. Bootles would not have been surprised; but the idea of Tubby Muffin as a hero needed getting used to.

There was a buzz of surprise among the Rookwood fellows who had heard what was said. The news spread on all sides. Bulkeley and Tubby Muffin had disappeared into

the House when Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived from the cricket field.

But they soon learned the news. And the brief and emphatic comment of Jimmy Silver was:

"Rats!"

CHAPTER 26.

Official!

"TUBBY MUFFIN!"

"He's saved Bulkeley's life!"

"Rats!"

"Bulkeley says so!"

"Then he's dreaming!"

"If Bulkeley thinks so, it's time he woke up!" said Arthur Edward Lovell emphatically. "What do you think, Putty?"

Putty of the Fourth had quite a dazed look. The news that there had been an heroic rescue, and that Tubby Muffin, of the Classical Fourth, was the heroic rescuer, simply flabbergasted Teddy Grace. As for the credit that might have been reaped from his exploit, the scamp of Rookwood had not given that a thought; but still less had he surmised that Tubby Muffin would lay claim to that same credit.

"I think it's rot!" gasped Putty. "I'm jolly sure Tubby never went into the water for Bulkeley."

"I'll believe it if I hear Bulkeley say so," said Jimmy Silver.

Mornington came down the stairs.

"Tubby says—" he began.

"Where is the fat spoofer?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"He's in the dorm, changing. He's wet right enough," said Mornington. "Wet and muddy. So was Bulkeley. The fat bouncer says he rescued Bulkeley at the risk of his life—owing to his tremendous pluck—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's modest about it!" grinned Lovell.

"Well, that's what he says," said Mornington laughing. "Gammon, of course."

"Spoofer!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "Let's ask Bulkeley."

"Yes, rather!"

Quite a crowd of fellows went along to Bulkeley's room. The door was locked. Bulkeley was towelling himself dry. Jimmy Silver knocked.

"You at home, Bulkeley?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"You've been in the water?"

"Yes."

"There's a yarn that Tubby Muffin

fetched you out," said Jimmy, through the door. "Nothing in it, of course?"

"It's true, Silver."

"Eh?"

"Quite true."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Muffin fetched me out of deep water, risking his life to do it," said Bulkeley, from within. "Never mind his swank—he did it! Now cut off!"

Jimmy Silver almost tottered away from Bulkeley's door. The news was nearly too much for him.

"It—it—it's true!" babbled Jimmy. "Tubby—Tubby Muffin did it! He did it! Oh, my only hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"The fat boulder—he didn't!" exclaimed Putty indignantly.

"Bosh! If Bulkeley says so, it is so," said Jimmy Silver; "and that settles it. You fellows, we haven't done Tubby justice. There's more in Tubby than meets the eye."

"And there's plenty of him that meets the eye, too!" remarked Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tubby Muffin!" said Jimmy. "Tubby—a giddy hero! Who'd have thought it? Let's go and see him, and hear all about it. Tubby Muffin—my hat!"

And nearly all the Fourth Form marched up to the dormitory to interview Tubby Muffin—Rookwood's Hero!

CHAPTER 27.

Heroic!

"MUFFIN!"

"Tubby Muffin!"

Jimmy Silver opened the door of the Fourth Form dormitory.

The dusk of a spring afternoon was closing in on Rookwood School. The sunset glimmered in at the high windows of the dormitory, and shone upon Reginald Muffin, of the Classical Fourth—more commonly known as Tubby Muffin, on account of his circumference.

Tubby Muffin had just changed his clothes, and he was now busily occupied in brushing his hair.

Upon his fat face was a smile of smug satisfaction.

Tubby Muffin was in high feather that afternoon.

"Hallo, you fellows!" he remarked.

Jimmy Silver marched in, with nearly all the Classical Fourth at his heels, and a good many of the Moderns.

All eyes were fixed upon Tubby Muffin, in astonishment and keen interest. For once the fat Classical was the cynosure of all eyes, and he basked in the limelight.

"Tubby, old scout—"

"Tell us about it, Tubby!"

"Go it, fatty!"

"Oh, you've heard!" remarked Tubby, in a lofty manner. "I wasn't going to talk about what I've done, you know. It was really nothing to me. Anything really plucky is just in my line!"

"Oh!"

"The fact is, you fellows have never really known the kind of chap I am," said Tubby Muffin severely. "You know now, I hope. I'm not going to talk about it. True heroes are always modest. I read that in a book once."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Tubby, my modest and unassuming hero—"

—began Jimmy Silver. "That's it—that's me all over!" assented Tubby brightly. "Modest and unassuming. And the best of the bunch, all the time!"

"That's me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Modesty, thy name is Muffin!" murmured Raby.

"But we want to hear the thrilling yarn, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "We couldn't swallow it at first. But we've asked Bulkeley of the Sixth, and he says you pulled him out of the water. It beats us—"

"Look here, Jimmy Silver—"

"Ahem—I mean, it's very surprising! Nobody ever suspected you of being a giddy hero before, Tubby!"

"Though you might have guessed it from Tubby's unassuming modesty!" remarked Arthur Edward Lovell solemnly.

Tubby dabbed his unruly hair with the brush.

"I don't mind telling you fellows about it," he said.

"I thought not!" murmured Jimmy.

"Eh! What did you say?"

"N-n-nothing! Get on with the washing!"

"Well, the plank went, and Bulkeley went!" continued Tubby. "He banged his napper on the plank, and he went into the water like a—a—a—like anything. It fact."

Tubby gave his hair another dab, putting in a dramatic pause at the most thrilling moment of the stirring tale.

"And then?"

"Well, what could I do?" said Tubby. "There was Bulkeley whiffing along into deep water, unable to help himself. I thought it out with marvellous swiftness. Without stopping to think a moment, I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you fellows cackling at?"

"Never mind; run on!"

"Without stopping to think a moment, I plunged into the raging flood——"

"Into the which?" yelled Tommy Dodd.

"The raging flood!" replied Tubby warmly. "Into the brook, you know."

"The Croft Brook isn't a raging flood. 'It's as smooth as a pond.'"

"If you're going to carp at everything I say, it's not much use my telling you about my heroic deed!" said Tubby Muffin loftily.

"Ha, ha! Shut up, Tommy! Let's get on to the heroic deed."

"Go it, Tubby!"

"I plunged into the raging flood," repeated Tubby Muffin, with a blink of defiance at Tommy Dodd. "The thundering billows nearly overwhelmed me——"

"My hat!"

"But, with heroic resolution, I fought my way up to Bulkeley——"

"Phew!"

"Seizing him by the hair, I bore him ashore——"

"Lucky he doesn't wear a wig!" remarked Doyle.

"Shut up, Doyle! Stick to it, Tubby!"

"I bore him ashore, amid the raging billows," said Tubby, who had quite a poetical imagination when once it got fairly started. "Exhausted by my fearful efforts, I staggered ashore with Bulkeley in my arms——"

"You carried the biggest chap in the Sixth in your arms!" shrieked Raby,

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin started.

"I—I—I mean, not exactly in my arms!" he stammered. "To be strictly accurate, I had him by the collar. I—I was speaking figuratively, of course."

"Stick to the facts, and let the figures alone, old trump," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "The facts are staggering enough."

"I laid him on the grass, and—and sank exhausted to the earth," said Tubby Muffin. "I was wet—awfully wet! But I never thought about myself. I never do——"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I looked after him like a long-lost brother," said Tubby. "He came to his senses at last, and sat up. He seemed surprised, somehow, that it was I who had rescued him."

"No wonder!"

"And he's not going to report me for breaking bounds," said Tubby. "It would have been different if it had been Teddy Grace. Putty is going to have a flogging if he goes on old Stuckey's land again. That's why he—he—I mean, Teddy Grace hasn't anything to do with it, of course."

"Keep to the point," urged Lovell. "Never mind Teddy Grace now. Did you carry Bulkeley home to Rookwood in your arms?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nunno; I couldn't, you know!"

"Go hon!"

"We walked home—at least, Bulkeley walked and I trotted," said Tubby Muffin. "Bootles met us as we came in. He told me I was a credit to the Form. So I am!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not the fellow to brag——"

"Oh, crikey!"

"Not in the least. I shouldn't have told you fellows all about this at all, only I think it may be for your good," explained Tubby. "You will be able to take me as an example, you see."

Jimmy Silver & Co. chuckled.

But for the fact that Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, had already corroborated the story of the rescue, they certainly would not have believed a word of the egregious Tubby's yarn. But Bulkeley's statement was unquestionable; and, amazing as it was, Tubby had to be believed.

Shorn of all exaggerations, there was no doubt that the fellow who had plunged into deep water to rescue George Bulkeley had done a very plucky thing—and Tubby was given that much credit.

"Well, old chap, you're an awful fibber," said Jimmy Silver. "But you've got more pluck than we ever thought——"

"Blessed if I understand it now," said Lovell.

"It's rather a corker, but there you are! Bulkeley says it's true, and I suppose he

knows," said Jimmy. "Tabby, old man, you're a giddy hero. Three cheers for the giddy hero of Rookwood!"

And the cheers rang through the dormitory, mingled with some laughter—and Tabby Muffin smiled expansively. Like the gentleman of ancient times, at that moment the fat Classical came near to striking the stars with his sublime head.

CHAPTER 28.

In Borrowed Plumes!

YOU fat rascal!"

Teddy Grace, the new junior in the Fourth Form, made that uncomplimentary remark as Tabby Muffin entered Study No. 2.

Teddy Grace had the doubtful honour of sharing that study with Tabby. Higgs and Jones minor, who also shared No. 2, were downstairs in the Common-room, where discussion was still going on concerning Tabby's heroic exploit.

Grace stared grimly at the fat Classical as he came in, and shook a clenched fist at the hero's fat little nose.

"You fraud!" he exclaimed. "You spoofing porpoise!"

Tabby blinked at him.

"I say——" he began.

"You fat spoofer! What do you mean by telling the fellows such thundering whoppers?" roared Teddy Grace.

"Look here, Putty——"

"I've a jolly good mind to give you away on the spot!" growled Putty of the Fourth savagely.

Tabby Muffin grinned.

"You can't!" he answered.

"I've a jolly good mind to. I'm not going to stand by and hear you spinning such thumping yarns!"

"If you're going to attempt to throw doubt on it, Grace, I can tell you it's no good. The fact is, I did rescue Bulkeley——"

"You did?" howled Teddy.

"Yes—at least, I pulled him out of the water," said Tabby. "You can't deny that, Putty. I certainly pulled him out, and I got jolly wet."

"You fat rascal! You caught hold of his collar after I'd brought him ashore," said Putty. "That's what you did."

"You can tell the fellows that if you like."

"Isn't it true, you fraud?"

"It may be true, and it may not," answered Tabby calmly. "You see, Bulkeley supports what I've said. He thinks—I mean he knows it was me."

"My hat!"

"I think you're jolly ungrateful," said Tabby warmly. "It was all for your sake, too."

"You've been telling these thumping lies for my sake?" howled Putty.

"Certainly. Didn't you make me promise not to mention that you'd been anywhere near the Croft Brook?"

"Yes; but——"

"Well, when Bulkeley came to he saw me—and what was he to think? I couldn't mention you'd been there, owing to my promise. Some fellows know how to keep a promise," added Tabby loftily.

Teddy Grace gave the fat Classical a wrathful glare.

He had cut off after pulling Bulkeley out of the water, to escape unseen, because he had been promised a flogging by the Head if he was caught on Sir Leicester Stuckey's land again. Putty did not care two straws about getting the credit for the plucky action he had performed, but he cared a great deal about a flogging.

It was true that he had bribed Tabby with the promise of a feed not to mention that he had been on the spot, and he had escaped before Bulkeley came fully out of unconsciousness. He had not had much time to think, and it had not even occurred to him that the egregious Tabby would attempt to shine in the rôle of heroic rescuer.

But Tabby "had" him, there was no doubt about that. To expose Tabby's pretence meant giving away his own trespass on Sir Leicester's land, and that meant a flogging from Dr. Chisholm.

The alternative was to remain quiet and listen to Tabby's "swank," and let it pass, which was very exasperating, and, indeed, put him in the position of being accessory to a falsehood. That was not a pleasant position, but there seemed no help for it.

Tabby Muffin grinned again as the new junior remained silent. He felt that he was master of the situation.

"If I hadn't been such an honourable chap——" he went on.

"Such a what?" gasped Putty.

"Honourable chap—I should have given you away. But my word is my bond," said the fat Classical with dignity. "Some fellows are honourable and some aren't. I happen to be one that is, that's all."

"Oh, my hat!" said Putty.

"Don't you be afraid," said Tubby encouragingly. "I'm going to keep your secret. I shan't give you away. Nobody's going to know from me that you went on old Stuckey's land to sketch after Bulkeley had warned you not to. I'm a fellow of my word. You just hold your tongue, and it's all right."

"And let you go on telling lies?" growled Putty.

"Of course, I should disdain to tell a lie," answered Tubby calmly.

"What do you call it, then?"

"I may have emphasised my part in the bizney, that's all. After all, I did pull Bulkeley out—"

"After I'd been in for him and got him to the shore, you fat fraud!"

"Never mind that; I did pull him out, and that's what I've said I did. If you think you're going to bag my glory, Putty—"

"Wha-at?"

"All the fellows know now what a plucky chap I am. It's no good you trying to deny it! I call this simply mean jealousy," said Tubby. "You ought to be proud of me as your study-mate. I'm surprised at you, Putty. I am, really."

Teddy Grace stared at him.

"You—you—you fat idiot!" he gasped. "I suppose you're a bigger fool than anything else."

"Not much of a fool to rescue Bulkeley from being drowned, I should think."

"But you didn't do it!" shrieked Putty.

"If you're going to begin that again, I've got nothing more to say. I decline to discuss the matter with a fellow who's jealous of me. Now, what about that feed?"

"What feed?"

"Look here, you know you promised to stand a study spread if I kept it dark about you sketching by the Croft Brook this afternoon—"

Putty of the Fourth breathed hard.

"I never thought for a minute that you'd make it an excuse for telling all these lies," he said.

"I wish you wouldn't be so personal, Putty," said Tubby Muffin peevishly. "Anybody would think I was a regular fraud to hear you talk."

"What are you?" hooted Putty.

"Look here, what about that spread? I'm jolly hungry. After what I've done I'm fairly famished. I suppose you're going to keep your word, as I've kept mine."

"I suppose it's no good talking to you, you fat idiot!" growled Putty.

"Well, I'd rather have tea, if you don't mind, old chap. We can talk after tea."

Teddy Grace gave it up.

He felt it incumbent upon him to stand the promised spread; for Tubby had, in fact, kept his side of the bargain, though he had enlarged upon it. And Reginald Muffin's fat face was soon beaming over a festive board. Jones minor and Higgs came in to tea, and the change in their manner, towards Tubby Muffin was quite striking. Hitherto, Tubby certainly had not been a person of much consequence in Study No. 2. Now he was treated with considerable respect by two of his study-mates, at least.

Putty's cheerful face was grown quite morose. It was irksome to him to hear Tubby Muffin rolling out "whoppers" that were growing larger and larger with every repetition, and to remain silent when he knew the facts. It was not the fact that the fat Classical had bagged the glory that properly belonged to him that worried Teddy Grace; he did not care about that. It was the mountain of untruthfulness that was growing up under his eyes that worried him. But there seemed no help for it.

There was a tap at the door as the juniors finished tea, and Bulkeley of the Sixth looked in. George Bulkeley was a little pale, but otherwise looked none the worse for his adventure that afternoon.

He gave Tubby Muffin a nod and a cheery smile—a great honour from so important a personage as the captain of the school.

"Oh, having your tea?" he said. "I was going to ask you to tea in my study. Muffin, but another time—"

Tubby jumped up at once.

"I'll come with pleasure, Bulkeley!" he exclaimed.

"But if you've had your tea—"

"That's all right. I've finished here. I'll come."

Bulkeley laughed. Putty's spread in No. 2 had been quite plentiful, but the

fat Classical was quite ready for another tea. Probably he would have been prepared for a third after that.

"Come on then, kid," said the captain of Rookwood.

Tubby Muffin rolled out of the study, and trotted along the passage with Bulkeley, followed by a good many glances from the Fourth Form fellows. Tubby held his fat little nose very high now; he was a great man at present. It wasn't every junior in the Fourth Form who was asked to tea, and called for personally, by the captain of Rookwood.

Reginald Muffin enjoyed his tea in Bulkeley's study. It was quite a good tea, and Tubby, in spite of his earlier exertions in his own quarters, seemed to be blessed with an excellent appetite.

"Thanks very much, Bulkeley!" he said, when it was finished, and he rose to depart. "I'll come to tea again to-morrow, if you like."

"Oh!" said Bulkeley, rather taken aback.

"I'll come with pleasure."

"Oh!" repeated Bulkeley, with quite a curious expression on his face. "Certainly! Do!"

CHAPTER 29.

Triumphant Tubby!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. couldn't understand it.

The Fistical Four were puzzled, and so were all the other fellows.

Tubby Muffin, having done a very plucky thing, and shown what good quality existed somewhere under his layers of fat, might have been expected to show some other good qualities, and at the least a glimmering of modesty.

But Tubby Muffin didn't.

The day after the adventure at the Drott Brook, Tubby was still spinning the yarn. He had always been a hard worker with his chin, as Arthur Edward Lovell expressed it, but his chin had more exercise than ever now. And the burden of his song, so to speak, was the uncommon heroism of Reginald Muffin of the Classical Fourth.

How a fellow who had ever done anything really decent could be such a hopeless braggart was a puzzle. It was really perplexing.

And though the juniors agreed that Tubby had done a really good thing, they began to get rather fed-up with the story of the heroic rescue.

Moreover, it was only kudos that Tubby Muffin wanted. Being a fellow of such uncommon deserts, he felt that he was entitled to other rewards of merit. As a heroic rescuer, with his blushing honours thick upon him, he seemed to feel entitled to extract little loans from his admiring Form-fellows; and, indeed, he secured quite a little harvest of "bobs" from fellows who did not like to say "No" under the circumstances.

All Tubby's "bobs" went the same way—to the tuckshop; and that day, for the first time in his fat career, he really had what he considered enough to eat.

He dropped in to tea at Bulkeley's study, as he had promised. Bulkeley was very kind; he could not forget that the fat junior had pulled him out of deep water, and, so far as he could see, saved his life. Naturally, he felt friendly towards the junior; but between the Sixth and the Fourth there was a great gulf fixed, which was not to be passed even by the friendliest of feelings. Tubby Muffin appeared to have grown blind to the existence of that gulf.

Neville of the Sixth was at tea with Bulkeley when Tubby dropped in, and Tubby was quite friendly to Neville. The latter was very dry in his manner, but Tubby did not notice it. He chatted freely over tea, and Bulkeley and Neville became very silent, but Tubby was equal to doing enough talking for three at any time.

The two great men of the Sixth had the privilege of hearing Tubby Muffin's opinion of the prospects of the first eleven, now that cricket was coming on at Rookwood.

Tubby's opinion on that subject was really not very valuable, but he propounded it as if it were far above rubies.

He became so very friendly that he addressed Bulkeley as "George," a mode of address that made the captain of Rookwood jump.

When Tubby was gone Bulkeley breathed deep and hard. He looked at Neville, and Neville looked at him.

"Well!" said Neville.

"Well!" murmured Bulkeley.

"I suppose that cheeky little beast did pull you out of the water yesterday?"

"He certainly did."

"I suppose you can't very well thrash him?"

"Well, under the cires——"

"I can't understand it," said Neville.

"That fat little swanking ass isn't the fellow to do it. Sure you didn't go to sleep by the brook and dream it?"

Bulkeley laughed.

"I've still got the bump on my napper where I knocked it on the plank," he said.

"Well, it beats me! Is that fag coming to tea with you every day?"

"I—I don't know."

"Well!" said Neville again. And he let it go at that, not finding any way of expressing his feelings.

Tubby Muffin rolled away along the Sixth Form passage, quite contented with himself and things generally. He felt that he was getting on in the Sixth; it wasn't every fag at Rookwood who had pals in the top form. In fact, nobody but Tubby had, which was another proof of Tubby's uncommon merits.

He ran into Carthew of the Sixth at the corner of the passage, and Carthew gave him a shove. Tubby bumped against the wall and yelled.

"Wow!"

"What are you doing here, you fat young sweep?" demanded Carthew. "Looking for grub in the studies—what?"

"I've been to tea with my friend Bulkeley!" answered Tubby Muffin, with a great deal of dignity.

"Your what?" yelled Carthew.

"My friend George."

"Your friend George!" repeated Carthew. "My hat! Is this what Rookwood is coming to?"

"And you'd better look out, Carthew!" said Tubby warningly. "If you bully me I'll tell George——"

"You—you'll tell George!"

"Yes, rather! And I'll tell George to boot you!" said Tubby, growing bolder. "Now I'm friendly with George you can look out, Carthew, so I tell you! In fact, I want you to understand——Yaroo! Leggo! Wharrer you at, you beast?"

"I'm giving you something to tell George!" grinned Carthew.

Smack, smack, smack!

"Ow! Yow! Yoop! Oh, my hat!"

Tubby Muffin tore himself away and ran

for it, without making any attempt to interview George.

He felt injured—in a double sense—as he rolled away to the Fourth Form quarters. This wasn't the way a hero ought to be treated. But Carthew always was a rotter.

Tubby Muffin had had tea—an ample tea—in Bulkeley's quarters, but the sound of crockery in the end study drew him thither. He blinked in on Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Hallo, my giddy hero! Any more heroic rescues to-day?" grinned Lovell.

"I don't think you ought to joke about it, Lovell, considering that I plunged into the roaring flood at the risk of my own life, and——"

"Nuff said! Go and tell another chap about it!" implored Lovell.

"Go and tell Putty, your merry study-mate!" chuckled Raby. "Putty doesn't seem to believe that you did it all!"

"He's jealous!" said Tubby Muffin calmly. "He knows jolly well that I pulled Bulkeley out of the water. He saw me——"

"He saw you?" ejaculated Newcome.

"He saw me after I came in, I mean—jolly wet! He doesn't seem to think anything of my reflecting on the study. I call it ungrateful!" said Tubby. "You fellows having tea?"

"Looks like it. doesn't it?"

"I don't mind joining you. I've had tea with George, but——"

"George!" repeated Jimmy Silver. "Which George? There's lots of Georges at Rookwood."

"Bulkeley, I mean."

"So you call Bulkeley George, do you?" asked Arthur Edward Lovell, with a curious look at the fat Tubby.

"Naturally, as he's a pal of mine."

"Oh! Is he a pal of yours?"

"Well, I saved his life, didn't I?" demanded Tubby. "Isn't that enough to make a fellow a fellow's pal?"

"Does he like it?" asked Lovell, with a grin.

"Like me calling him George? Of course. We're so friendly, you know. I don't stand on ceremony with George, I can tell you."

The Fistical Four chuckled. They had a very strong opinion that Tubby Muffin would not take long to wear out George Bulkeley's gratitude.

The fat Classical sat down to tea, and the chums of the end study did not say

him nay. When the table was cleared—it was a sort of race between the Fistical Four and Tubby—the fat youth took his leave, and rolled along the Fourth Form passage in search of other fellows who felt disposed to stand a free spread to a hero.

Tubby Muffin was making the most of his heroism. He believed in making hay while the sun shone.

CHAPTER 30.
Bulkeley's Pal!

BUMP!
The following day, after lessons, Jimmy Silver was coming along to Study No. 2 to call on Putty of the Fourth, when the door of that apartment suddenly opened, and a fat figure whirled out.

It landed at Jimmy's feet with a loud concussion and a roar, and Jimmy Silver recognised it as Reginald Muffin.

A boot appeared for a moment in the doorway, which looked like Teddy Grace's, and was withdrawn.

Jimmy Silver stopped.

"What the dickens—" he began.

"Yaroooh!"

"Tubby—"

"Yow-ow-ow! The rotter! That's because he's jealous of me!" wailed Tubby. "I've a good mind to tell George!"

Jimmy Silver laughed as he picked up the fat junior and set him on his feet. Tubby Muffin gasped for breath.

"I say, Jimmy—I say—groogh!"

"Well?" said Jimmy.

"I believe you could lick Putty, couldn't you?"

"I could lick you, you fat boulder, and I jolly well will if you don't cut off!" growled the captain of the Fourth.

"But I say, Jimmy, look at me! I've been kicked out of my own study, you know—me, you know! Fancy that! I'll tell you what—you give Putty a jolly good hiding, and I'll take you to tea along with me in George's study. George will welcome any friend of mine."

"Fathead!"

"He's an ungrateful beast, you know!" gasped Tubby. "After I've kept his secret—"

"Whose—George's?" grinned Jimmy.

"Nunno—Putty's."

"What on earth secrets are you keeping for Putty, you duffer?"

"Why, about—I—I mean—ahem!—nothing! I don't know anything about Putty going on old Stuckey's land, of course."

"So he's been going there again, has he?" growled Jimmy.

"Oh, no! Not at all! He hasn't, and I don't know anything about it," stammered Tubby Muffin. "I—I must get off now, or George will be waiting tea for me."

And Tubby Muffin rolled away to have tea with George once more.

Jimmy Silver entered Study No. 2. He found Putty of the Fourth looking flushed and angry.

"Is that the way you treat a giddy hero?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "Heroes oughtn't to be booted out of their studies, Putty."

Teddy Grace gave a snort.

"It's all gammon!" he growled. "I believe the fat villain's going to squeeze money out of Bulkeley—he was mumbling something about it. I won't allow it!"

Jimmy's face became grave.

"I hope he'll stop short of that," he said.

"But I don't see how you can stop it, Grace, if he does. But I didn't come here to talk about Tubby. I've just seen Mr. Bootles."

"Well?" grunted Putty. "Don't say I'm in a row again. I haven't done anything that I know of."

"That's the question. Have you been on old Stuckey's ground again?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Blow old Stuckey!"

"Blow him as hard as you like; but that isn't an answer. The old hunks has been complaining again; he's rung up the Head on the telephone, Mr. Bootles says. Now, I know you went along the Croft Brook several times to paint—those queer things you call pictures—"

"Fathead!"

"Sir Leicester Stuckey has told the Head that a Rookwood boy has been trespassing," said Jimmy Silver.

"Tubby Muffin was there on Wednesday," said Putty, with a grin. "So was Bulkeley, for that matter."

"Bulkeley was only on the footpath, and it's not out of bounds for the Sixth. The brook is on old Stuckey's property, and

he makes no end of a fuss if anybody goes there; he thinks fellows go there to fish."

"Well, I haven't been there to fish, anyway."

"No, you go to sketch," said Jimmy. "Or else to play tricks on somebody. I know you! Anyway, sketching there is barred. According to what the old hunks has yarned to the Head on the telephone, a Rookwood kid was seen there sketching one day this week—and that couldn't be Tubby."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Mr. Bootles has told me to speak to any fellow in the Form who thinks of defying old Stuckey, and give him a serious warning," continued the captain of the Fourth. "I'm fed up with the subject, and if I catch any chap trespassing there I shall punch his head! You can go and make your daubs somewhere else—see?"

"I'm not going there again," growled Putty. "But I don't see how I was seen last time I was there. I certainly wasn't aware of it."

"Then you have been there this week?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Possibly."

"Well, it looks to me as if you're booked for a row," said Jimmy Silver. "Old Stuckey must know it for certain, or he wouldn't ring up the Head on the subject. I must say you deserve to get a licking, Putty. Bulkeley took the trouble to warn you specially."

"I don't believe I was seen. If I was, why hasn't the old hunks complained about it before?"

"Blessed if I know!"

With that, Jimmy Silver quitted the study, leaving Teddy Grace in a thoughtful and worried mood. He had been on the Stuckley Croft land once that week—on Wednesday afternoon; the occasion when he had rescued Bulkeley. It was now Friday, and if he had been seen there, it was curious that the incident had not been mentioned to the Head before. And he had been very cautious indeed; so far as he was aware, no one had seen him there, excepting Tubby Muffin, and Tubby was certainly keeping it dark for good reasons.

And Putty had other worries, too, concerning that eventful Wednesday afternoon. Tubby Muffin was displaying more and more the charming inwardness of his fascinating nature.

So long as the fat Classical was content with egregious swanking, Putty felt that he could be silent, and give him his head, as it were. But Tubby had been thinking the matter out, and with results. He had let drop a hint in Putty's presence concerning a little loan he intended to raise from his friend George.

Teddy Grace remained some time in thought after Jimmy Silver had left him. When he quitted Study No. 2 at last he made his way to the Sixth Form quarters.

There he waited about till Tubby Muffin came out of Bulkeley's study.

The fat Classical had invited himself to tea with Bulkeley again, and the captain of Rookwood was still enduring Tubby's society with fortitude. His position was rather difficult. Any fellow but Muffin might have been expected to exhibit a little tact; but tact was not one of Reginald Muffin's gifts.

It really looked as if the fat junior intended to "hang on" till Bulkeley's patience was worn out; and it was a rather interesting question how long that would take.

Tubby came rolling down the corridor with a fat and contented face, and Teddy Grace caught him by the shoulder at the corner. There was a half-crown clutched in Tubby's fat paw.

"Hallo, Putty!" said the fat Classical genially, if a little uneasily. "Come along to the tuck-shop, old chap. I'm standing ginger-pop."

"Where did you get that half-crown, you fat fraud?" muttered Putty.

"Look here—"

"Where did you get it?" growled Putty, shaking him. "Have you squeezed it out of Bulkeley, you fat rotter?"

"Ow! Look here, Putty. What does it matter to you if my pal George makes me a loan?" demanded Tubby indignantly. "I'm going to settle up; I suppose you know that?"

"You've stuck Bulkeley for half-a-crown—"

"He's lent me half-a-crown!" answered Tubby Muffin, with dignity. "Why shouldn't he, after what I've done for him? There's such a thing as gratitude, Teddy Grace— Yaroo!"

Tubby Muffin fled, with Putty's boot to help him. But he fled in the direction of the tuckshop.

Teddy Grace remained in painful thought for some minutes. The affair was taking a serious turn now.

He realised that Tubby was too thoroughly obtuse to understand that he was wrong or acting unscrupulously. But the fact remained that the captain of Rookwood had been swindled out of money—for that was what it amounted to, whether Tubby understood it or not.

It was a very unpleasant position for Putty of the Fourth. To reveal the facts was to ask for a flogging from the Head, but the alternative was scarcely less unpleasant.

He walked away at last to Bulkeley's study. He found the captain of Rookwood looking very thoughtful. How to deal with the clam-like Tubby was growing to be a problem for the head of the Sixth.

Putty laid a half-crown on the table. "From Muffin, Bulkeley," he said quickly. "He doesn't need it, after all, and he's much obliged."

"All right!" said Bulkeley, with a smile. Putty left the study quickly. He had relieved his mind and his conscience by paying Tubby Muffin's debt. But evidently that was a process that could not be contained indefinitely. Tubby Muffin could play at that game much longer than Teddy Grace could.

CHAPTER 31.

Bulkeley Sees Light!

TROUSERS—one guinea!" Jimmy Silver stopped as he came on Tubby Muffin in the Form-room passage after lessons on Saturday morning. Tubby was seated at a window there, with a stump of pencil in his hand, a soiled sheet of paper on his knee, and a thoughtful frown on his brow.

He was evidently making calculations. "Trousers—one guinea!" he was murmuring. "That's cheap. I'm letting Bulkeley off too lightly; but, after all, he's a pal. There's the waitcoat; but I won't say anything about that now. That will keep!"

Jimmy Silver dropped his hand on the fat junior's shoulder, and Tubby looked up with a start.

"What are you up to?" asked Jimmy Silver, very quietly.

"Making up an account, old chap!" said

Tubby affably. "I say, what do you think? Is a guinea enough for my bags? I spoiled them, you know, rescuing Bulkeley from the water. I'm entitled to compensation, aren't I?"

"Compensation!" repeated Jimmy.

"That's it! Considering that I saved Bulkeley's life, he can't grumble at paying for the trousers, can he?"

"Oh!"

"It's up to him, I think," said Tubby Muffin. "What do you think, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver breathed hard through his nose.

"I think you're a disgusting fat worm!" he answered. "Have you the neck to get money out of Bulkeley because you pulled him out of the Croft Brook?"

"That's a rotten way of putting it—a very rotten way. It shows a low, suspicious mind, Jimmy!"

"What!"

"I don't want to rub it in, but I've noticed before that you're not so high-minded as I am, Jimmy. I never look at things in that low, suspicious way," said

2

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Tubby Muffin calmly. "Besides this is simply a matter of business. My trousers

"You fat rotter—"

"My trousers have been quite spoiled—well, very nearly spoiled. I think, if Bulkeley knew, he would be willing to pay for the damage. I feel bound to tell him. I don't mind doing brave and generous things—that's me all over—but I can't afford to stand Bulkeley the price of a pair of trousers, and that's what it amounts to. Of course, I should offer to let him have the trousers if he pays for them!" added Tubby, with dignity. "I'm honest, I hope."

Jimmy Silver looked at him. There seemed to be no words in the English language equal to the occasion.

"Trousers—one guinea!" repeated Muffin, returning to his calculation. "That's fair, and Bulkeley can't grumble. I'm really letting him down lightly. Some fellows would make it thirty shillings; but I hope I'm not a profiteer. The waistcoat will keep—another time, perhaps—"

"What about the socks?" asked Jimmy Silver sarcastically.

Tubby nodded.

"Yes, the socks were wet," he said. "Not exactly spoiled, but there was damage—there certainly was damage. But the socks will come in another time, Jimmy. I think a guinea for the trousers will do at present. What do you think?"

"I think you're a measly toad!"

"It's rather ill-natured of you, Jimmy, to call me names, just because I've done a splendid act of courage, and put you in the shade. Look here, talk sensibly, and give me your opinion! Shall I make up a complete bill, with all the items, or shall I spring them on Bulkeley one at a time?"

Jimmy Silver did not answer that question.

He took Tubby Muffin by the collar and knocked his head on the wall, by way of expressing his opinion and his feelings, and went his way, leaving Muffin yelling.

"Silver!"

Jimmy Silver stopped, as he was going out into the quad, at the sound of Mr. Bootles' voice.

"Yes, sir?"

"Kindly tell Bulkeley that the Head wishes to see him in his study."

"Certainly, sir!"

Jimmy Silver hurried out and found the captain of Rookwood on the cricket-field, and delivered his message.

Bulkeley frowned.

"Stuckey again, I suppose!" he muttered. And he strode away to the School House.

Putty of the Fourth was coming out as Bulkeley entered, and the Sixth-Former stopped him.

"Don't go out of gates, Grace!" he rapped out.

"Eh? Why not, Bulkeley?" demanded Putty.

"You may be wanted."

"Oh, dear!" groaned Putty. "More trouble! What have I done this time, Bulkeley?"

"I fancy you know. You can wait, any way."

Bulkeley went on to the Head's study, and found Dr. Chrisholm with a knitted brow.

"Sir Leicester Stuckey has communicated with me again, Bulkeley," said the Head, in a rather acid voice. "It appears that his complaint is not without grounds, as I thought at first. It is certain that some Rookwood boy was trespassing upon his grounds on Wednesday afternoon."

"Muffin was there, near the footpath; but, owing to what he did for me, I thought he could be excused for breaking bounds, for once."

The Head nodded.

"Quite so, Bulkeley; but this does not refer to Muffin. A Rookwood boy has been seen sketching there—taking unwarrantable liberties with Sir Leicester's property, in the way he describes it."

"On Wednesday afternoon!" repeated Bulkeley. "It was on Wednesday afternoon that I was pulled out of the brook by Muffin. At that time there was certainly no other Rookwood boy there."

"It appears to be certain that some boy was there during the afternoon. Sir Leicester informed me over the telephone yesterday that a guest of his was taking photographs in the ground, and one of the negatives when developed, showed the figure of a schoolboy seated sketching by the brook. The photographer apparently had not seen him, but the figure came out in the photograph."

"Oh!" said Bulkeley.

"In order to place the guilt upon the right shoulders, as he chooses to express it," went on the Head dryly, "Sir Leicester has had an enlargement made of the photograph, and now tells me that he recognises the boy perfectly as the boy who was reported on a previous occasion for the same conduct."

"Grace of the Fourth Form, sir."

"Exactly. Sir Leicester states that the photograph was taken at about four o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. I should like you to ascertain, Bulkeley, where Grace was at that time on that day."

"It is very odd, sir. It was about a quarter-past four when I came back from Abbeywood, by the footpath," said Bulkeley. "I saw Muffin there, but I certainly saw nothing of Grace. I will question him at once, sir."

"Please do so, Bulkeley."

Bulkeley quitted the Head's study with a thoughtful frown on his brow. The news that Teddy Grace had been by the Croft brook almost at the time of his rescue was startling. A curious suspicion had risen in Bulkeley's mind.

His rescue by Tubby Muffin was astonishing enough in itself—and was still more astonishing in the light of Tubby's subsequent vagaries. Another possible explanation now occurred in Bulkeley's mind.

"Grace!" he called out.

Putty of the Fourth was waiting in the doorway of the School House with a worried brow. In spite of the care he had exercised, and of the fact that Tubby Muffin had kept his secret, he had a feeling that his disobedience of orders on that memorable occasion was destined to come to light.

"Yes, Bulkeley?" he answered, quite dispiritedly.

"Come to my study."

"All right. Any old thing!"

Teddy Grace obediently followed the captain of Rookwood into his study. Bulkeley fixed his eyes upon him sternly.

"Where were you at four o'clock on Wednesday afternoon?" he demanded.

"At—at which——"

"Were you on Sir Leicester Stuckey's estate?"

No answer.

"I warned you that afternoon about going there, Grace."

"Ahem!"

"Did you pull me out of the water?"

"Eh?"

"I asked you a question," said Bulkeley grimly. "I was unconscious in the water owing to knocking my head. Someone pulled me out. I found only Muffin with me when I came to. You must have been there a few minutes earlier, at any rate. Tell me the truth."

"The—the fact is——"

"Was it you pulled me out, and have you been keeping it dark because of the flogging to come?"

"Ahem! You—you see——" stammered the unfortunate Putty.

"It is known that you were there about four, Grace. A photograph was taken, and it happens, and you show up in it."

"Oh, what rotten luck!" groaned Putty. "Who'd ever have thought of a thing like that? Oh, dear! There's no rest for the wicked!"

"And now——"

Tap!

There was a knock at the door, and it opened to admit Tubby Muffin. The fat Classical rolled in with the familiar ease that was now natural to him when he visited his friend George's study.

CHAPTER 32.

Tubby's Little Bill—And the Payment Thereof!

"I SAY, Bulkeley——"

"I'm glad to see you, Muffin," said the captain of Rookwood grimly.

Tubby nodded and smiled, though he was looking rather suspiciously at Teddy Grace from the corner of his eye.

"I thought you would be, George," he replied. "I've just dropped in, old chap, to show you this little account."

"That what?"

"I hope you'll think it's all right," said Tubby, presenting his little bill. "If there's any item you think isn't quite fair, you just tell me, George, and we'll discuss it. I want to do the fair thing by an old pal."

George Bulkeley's face assumed a quite extraordinary expression as he looked at

the grubby sheet of crumpled paper presented by Tubby Muffin.

It was quite an interesting document. It ran:

ACCOUNT OF DAMAGES SUSTAINED IN RESCUING BULKELEY OF THE SIXTH.

| | £ | s. | d. |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| To 1 pair of trowsers, spoiled . . . | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| To waistcoat, damaged | | 10 | 0 |
| To 1 pair of Sox | | 5 | 0 |
| 1 shirt, spoiled | | 10 | 0 |
| To 1 pair of pants, damaged . . . | | 12 | 6 |
| Totle | 2 | 18 | 6 |

Bulkeley read that precious document and read it again, and stared at it, and then stared at Tubby Muffin. The fat Classical met his stare with a happy smile.

"How does that strike you, George?" he asked.

"How—how—how does it strike me?" babbled Bulkeley.

"Yes, old infant. If there's anything that doesn't seem fair, don't mind telling me. I'm a businesslike chap."

"My—my hat!" gasped Bulkeley.

Teddy Grace was looking on in silence, but with a gleam in his eye. He had a suspicion of what was on the paper.

Bulkeley turned to him.

"Look at that, Grace," he said.

"Oh, I say—" began Tubby Muffin un- easily.

Teddy Grace looked at the paper, and his face flushed with wrath.

"You fat swindler!" he roared, forgetful of Bulkeley for the moment, and he made a stride towards Tubby Muffin.

The fat junior jumped back in alarm.

But Bulkeley interposed.

"Hold on, Grace! Muffin, this account appears to be for damages sustained in getting me out of the Croft Brook the other day?"

"Yes, Bulkeley!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "If—you think I've overcharged you—"

"Never mind that now. I was surprised at the time that you were able to get me out of deep water," said Bulkeley. "It was rather a hefty job for a junior."

"I—I'm a splendid swimmer, you know," stammered Tubby, with a very uneasy blink at Putty of the Fourth.

"You must be, if you did it. Did you do it?"

"Oh, I say, Bulkeley! If—if Putty says—"

"Never mind, Putty! Did you do it?" thundered Bulkeley.

Tubby Muffin cast a longing glance towards the door. This interview was turning out unexpectedly painful.

"If you doubt my word, Bulkeley—" he murmured feebly.

"I do."

"Oh, I say! Fancy that!" gasped Tubby. "After I plunged into the raging flood and rescued you at the risk of my life—now you begin making a fuss over a few items—"

"Hold your silly tongue a minute, Muffin! Grace!"

"Yes, Bulkeley!" groaned the unfortunate Putty. "Go it! Don't mind me!"

"Was it you got me out of the water? Tell me the truth, you young rascal!"

Putty hesitated.

"You needn't be afraid of the flogging," growled Bulkeley. "I've a pretty clear idea how matters stand now, and if it was you who saved me, I'll do my best with the Head to let you off with a caning."

"Oh, good!"

"I—I say, it wasn't Putty!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin in great alarm. "He wasn't there at all! I never followed him to the brook because I thought he had a picnic there—"

"What!"

"And I never yelled to him when I saw you fall in, Bulkeley. I never did! And I didn't promise to keep it dark that he was there!" spluttered Tubby Muffin, in a great hurry—rather too great a hurry, in fact. "Nothing of the sort occurred, Bulkeley. You can take my word for it. As for the feed he promised me, it never came off. Putty will bear me out in that."

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Putty.

"We had a bit of a feed in the study, but it wasn't for that. I never agreed to keep it dark that Putty was there. Besides, I did get wet, you know. He splashed me—"

"Ha; ha, ha!"

"It's all very well for you to cackle, Putty—"

"Muffin, you lying little rogue!" thundered Bulkeley.

"Oh, dear! He's accusing me of lying now, just because I want him to pay for the trousers!" gasped Tubby Muffin. "It's ungrateful! It's sharper than a serpent's tooth, just like you read in Spokeshave—I mean, Shakespeare. I—I'm shocked at you, Bulkeley! A chap ought to be grateful when a chap's saved a chap's life at the risk of a chap's life— Yaroooooh!"

The heroic rescuer suddenly found himself caught by the collar, and a cane whacking upon his plump person with considerable energy. Tubby Muffin's indignant protestations changed to yells of anguish.

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo! After I saved you—yaroooh!—life! I wish I hadn't—Wow! Yoop! Oh, crikey! I—I'll let you off with ten-and-six for the trousers, Bulkeley—yaroooh! I say, old chap, I won't charge you anything—yah! Oh! Yoop! Whooop!"

Tubby Muffin was bundled out of the study, and he fled, roaring. It was the end of Tubby's triumphant career as a hero. He looked anything but heroic as he streaked down the Sixth Form passage yelling.

"And now, Grace, you young rascal—"

Teddy Grace sighed.

"Lay it on lightly, Bulkeley," he murmured. "I did pull you out of the river, you know, and if I hadn't broken bounds I couldn't have done it, could I? And—and I'm not going to send in a bill for damages."

Bulkeley laughed.

"You're coming with me to the Head," he said. "I'll get you off as lightly as I can."

"You're a brick!" said Teddy gratefully.

And he followed Bulkeley to the Head's study with all the fortitude he could muster.

Jimmy Silver & Co. heard the news later, and they were not very greatly surprised. True, they had not thought of Putty of the Fourth in connection with Bulkeley's rescue, but anything was less surprising than an heroic rescue by Tubby Muffin. The Fistical Four looked for Putty in his study, and found him rubbing his hands, while Tubby Muffin was groaning dismally in the arm-chair.

"So it was you!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

Putty grinned faintly.

"Little me!" he answered. "Ow! It's all right. I've been caned by the Head. But I don't mind. It was the flogging I objected to. As for the caning, I shouldn't wonder if I didn't deserve it. These headmasters have to be given their head, anyway."

"They do," agreed Jimmy. "I think you've got off lightly."

"So do I," answered Putty. "If I'd known it before, I think I'd have chanced it; but floggings aren't to my taste. Bulkeley put in a word for me, and the Head was rather decent about it. Ow!"

"And you—you fat rascal!" exclaimed Jimmy, turning to Tubby Muffin.

Tubby blinked at him dolorously.

"Bulkeley licked me!" he gasped. "Me, you know! Jeyver hear of ingratitude like that? I never did! Sharper than a serpent's tooth, you know. Ow!"

"Ingratitude!" stuttered Lovell. "What had Bulkeley to be grateful for, when you never did anything but spoof him all the time?"

"That's a rotten way of putting it, Lovell—ow! Mr. Bootles himself said I was a credit to the Form—wow!"

"That was before he knew you were lying."

"Look here, Lovell—ow-ow! I've been licked, you know!" gasped Tubby. "I'm suffering an awful lot! But the worst of it is that Bulkeley somehow seems to think that I've acted badly in the matter. Fancy that!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"He does!" said Tubby. "You'd hardly believe it, but he does! Me, you know! Old Spokeshave—I mean, Shakespeare—was right about the serpent's tooth, wasn't he? I'm not going to speak to Bulkeley again. I won't go to his study to tea any more, if he asks me on his bended knees! If there's anything I can't stand, it's ingratitude—ow! I used rather to like old Bulkeley, but I must say he's turned out an ungrateful brute—ow! What do you think, Jimmy?"

But Jimmy could not say what he thought. He could only gasp.

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In Africa, lion hunting is by no means the sport it was half a century ago. The rapid growth of civilisation, the new railways, the building of ports on the coast have driven what remains of the species far inland, and the work of bagging him to-day is more in the nature of a task than of an adventure. Moreover, Mr. Lion has got to know something of the ways and the habits of his hunters, and, being intelligent as well as cunning, takes great care not to be caught napping.

How He Starts!

To hunt lions successfully, the sportsman must be prepared to spend money. Usually he takes with him eight or a dozen native hunters, the same number of camels or ponies, and, of course, supplies, tents, and wagons. His first job then, on striking a country which promises sport, is to make inquiries among the native kraals and villages he might link up with, and from one or the other of these ascertain whether lions are in the neighbourhood. Usually there is no lack of evidence if such is the case. Lions are particularly partial to cattle, and if one or more should be in the vicinity a bewailing native owner will soon make known his loss.

The Trail of Footprints!

Well, then, having discovered that, the hunter, accompanied by his natives, sets about tracking his lion down. To his trained eye it is not a difficult matter, for lions, as a rule, prefer to conduct their own hunting upon soft ground, and usually leave plenty of evidence in the way of footprints. Long before the lair is reached the hunter receives plenty of evidence that he is approaching his quarry's headquarters. The presence of vultures in a tree; a low growl; a frightened jackal; a chattering of birds, is quite enough to warn him that he is near the spot.

The probabilities, seeing that it is daylight, are that Mr. Lion will be sleeping, concealed in the grass or under a bush. Very carefully and stealthily the hunter arranges his natives in a huge circle so that they completely surround the suspected spot. Then he takes his own position down wind, some distance away from them.

Native Beaters!

At a prearranged signal these natives will cause a disturbance, and, arousing the lion, drive him towards the hunter who, if he's lucky, of course, shoots him as he approaches. Supposing, however, that the lion is suspected to be awake and alert, the plan usually adopted is to set fire to the grass near him and drive him out that way.

But it is perilous work—hard work, too. It sounds simple enough here, but constant disappointments and pitfalls await the hunter. He may track a lion all day and yet not come up with it; on the other hand, he may track it to its lair only to find the lair empty. On the top of all that there is always a big possibility that some unscrupulous native, upon whom he relies for information, may have led him on a false scent simply in the hope of extracting the money which is usually paid for such information.

A Live Bait!

Another method of hunting lions in a country known to be plentifully supplied with the species is the "zeriba" method. A zeriba is a thornbush enclosure, which is built into the form of a narrow conical-shaped hut, with the hunter inside it and a loophole from which to shoot. Tethered to the zeriba is a donkey or a pony or some other live bait, to attract the notice of Mr. Lion when he should come that way. For a night, two nights, or even more, the hunter keeps a watchful vigil from this zeriba, and upon sighting a lion in quest of the bait, of course, shoots.

But the most risky method of all is that employed by the hunter who watches by night at the drinking pool. Lions, like all other jungle denizens, prefer to drink by night, and usually one is favoured by all animals. The evidence of the tracks in the mud are, of course, sufficient to tell the hunter which pool this is, and, having discovered it, he conceals himself down wind on fine, starry nights, his gun in hand, ready to fire at sight of his quarry. I suppose this is the most popular way of hunting among sportsmen who are fond of the thrill of the thing, but it is risky—very.

Crude Methods.

The native way of hunting lions is essentially crude. Usually it consists of beating round the lion's lair, disturbing him, and, upon his showing himself, hurling spears or darts or firing poisoned arrows at him. The skin obtained by this method, however, is usually worthless, and the flesh, by reason of the poisoned weapons, uneatable. Moreover, it is seldom that such a party wins free without some casualties.

Yes, lion hunting is a great sport, provided you can find the lions. But many big game hunters who have spent years in Africa will tell you that it is a sport which is very much overrated, and, once the novelty has worn off, not worth the candle.

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