

Pulling Carthew's Leg!



*A rollicking Story of
Jimmy Silver & Co.
of Rookwood School*

By
OWEN CONQUEST

THE FIRST CHAPTER Cricket First!

"**B**BETTER go in!" said Jimmy Silver judiciously.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave an impatient snort.

Raby and Newcome hesitated.

The words of "Uncle James" of Rookwood were words of wisdom. For the Fistical Four of the Fourth had lines to do—a hundred lines each—and those lines had to be handed in by tea-time. And it was Carthew of the Sixth to whom the lines had to be handed, and Carthew was a prefect who was not to be trifled with.

So undoubtedly Jimmy Silver's advice was good.

But—there was a but!

For the sun was shining down most pleasantly on the green cricket-field, dotted with white-clad figures, and Lovell & Co. didn't want to go into a stuffy study and write lines. They did not want to one little bit. On the other hand, they wanted to play cricket.

"Better go in!" repeated Jimmy Silver, with serene wisdom. "You see, we've got the lines to do—"

"You can please yourself," said Lovell. "I'm playing cricket! It would be a sin and a

shame to waste weather like this sticking indoors. Come on!"

Lovell stalked away, and Raby and Newcome looked doubtfully at their study-leader.

"May as well stick it out, if Lovell does!" said Raby.

"Can't desert him," remarked Newcome.

"One in, all in!"

Jimmy Silver gave a grunt.

"Chance it, then," he said. "After all, Carthew can only double the lines. Let's stick to the cricket."

"Hear, hear!"

And the Fistical Four, dismissing Carthew of the Sixth from their minds—for the present at least—joined Mornington and Erroll and the rest of the cricketers, and were soon enjoying themselves in their own way. Peele and Gower of the Fourth, who were loafing idly about the cricket-field without any desire to handle bat or ball, exchanged a grin. They had heard the discussion of the Fistical Four.

"Those silly asses are booked for a row!" Gower remarked. "Carthew never loses a chance of being down on them, and now they're asking for trouble."

Cyril Peele nodded, with a smile. He was not displeased at the idea of trouble falling upon the chums of the end study.

"I hope they'll get all they ask for!" he remarked charitably. "Silver collared my cigarettes the other day, and shoved them down the back of my neck——"

"Cheeky cad!" said Gower.

"I'd have licked him for his confounded cheek, only——only——"

"Only you couldn't!" suggested Gower sweetly.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Peele.

There was a shout from the pavilion.

"Peele! Gower!" It was Jimmy Silver's voice.

The two slackers looked round.

"Hallo!" called back Peele.

"Playing cricket?"

"Rats! No!"

"We're making up sides for a little game before tea," said Jimmy Silver, coming towards them. "Play up, you fellows, we're short. Lots of the chaps are out of gates!"

Peele sneered.

"You never ask me to play when it's a question of a match!" he said.

"Naturally, as you can't play for toffee!" answered Jimmy Silver.

"Well, if I can't play for toffee, you don't want me now," said Peele sourly.

"Quite different, old bird!" said Jimmy good-humouredly. "Any fellow can play in a pick-up game. Come on, now!"

"Rats!"

"Shan't!" said Gower.

"Oh, kick those slackers off the field!" exclaimed Lovell. "We don't want them lounging through the game!"

Jimmy Silver eyed the two black sheep of the Fourth.

"Try to please me this time," he said sweetly. "For instance, if you don't play, I shall take you by the nose like this——"

"Yurrrggh!"

"And squeeze it——like this——"

"Groooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the cricketers, as Cyril Peele danced, with Jimmy Silver's finger and thumb gripping his nose. Even Gower grinned.

"Leggo!" shrieked Peele.

"Will you play now?"

"Yow-ow! Yes!"

"Good man!" said Jimmy Silver approvingly. "Come on!"

And Peele came on—and played. But, judging from the expression on his face, he was not enjoying that game of cricket.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Something like a Scheme!

"STOP!"

"After them!"

"Hook it!" muttered Peele desperately.

Two flying figures were racing away from the cricket-field before the "pick-up" game had been in progress a quarter of an hour.

Peele and Gower were "fed"—in fact, more than fed. They had only been looking for a chance to bolt, and now they had found it, and they were bolting. They started off at a run together at the same moment, and they put on a burst of speed that really did them credit.

Jimmy Silver was at the wicket, and Morny was bowling to him, and they were too busy to heed. But three or four fieldsmen started after the fugitives.

Peele and Gower headed direct for the School House. The pursuers did not follow them far, however. Their shouts were intended chiefly to scare the two slackers, and they had that effect. Peele and Gower came pelting into the House at breathless speed, and they crashed into Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, who was coming towards the door.

Mr. Dalton staggered back.

"What——" he ejaculated.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

The young form-master gripped the juniors each by the collar, and steadied them. He frowned down upon the breathless pair, looking greatly inclined to knock their heads together.

"What do you mean by rushing into me like that?" he exclaimed, wrathfully.

"Ow! They're after us!" spluttered Gower.

"Those beasts!" panted Peele. "It's a rag!"

"Who are after you?" snapped Mr. Dalton.

Peele jerked his head towards the open



"Now, will you play?" demanded Jimmy Silver, as he squeezed Peele's nose between thumb and forefinger. "Yow-ow! Yes!" gasped Peele, amidst a roar of laughter from the fellows around. (See Chapter 1.)

doorway. Mr. Dalton looked out. In the distance two or three juniors could be seen strolling in a leisurely way back to the cricket-field. They had not followed the terrified slackers within fifty yards of the School House.

Peele gritted his teeth with rage.

"I—I thought they were after us!" he stammered.

"Pah!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

He released the two gasping juniors.

"You will take fifty lines each!" he said.

"Go to your study and write them out at once!"

"Ow! Yes, sir!"

The two juniors escaped upstairs.

They went breathlessly into the first study, and Peele threw himself into a chair. He groped in his pocket for a cigarette, to comfort himself—Peele being in the habit of comforting himself in that manner.

"Chuck that, you ass!" grunted Gower. "You'll make the study smell of smoke!"

"Who cares?" growled Peele.

"Well, I do! If Dalton comes nosing in, and smells the smoke——"

"Hang Dalton!"

"He's a good deal more wide-eyed than old Bootles was," said Gower. "I'm not taking any chances with him!"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Peele.

He smoked his cigarette through sullenly, but he did not light another. The black sheep of the Fourth had already found that it was a risky business to smoke in the studies since their new form-master had taken control. Gower, with an angry face, waved a newspaper to clear off the rings of blue smoke.

Cyril Peele uttered a sudden exclamation.

"My hat!"

"Well, what have you got on now?" growled Gower.

"What a stunt!" exclaimed Peele, his eyes glittering. "Dicky Dalton is awfully down on smoking in the studies——"

"More fool you for smoking here!"

Peele jumped up.

"Those rotters are sticking out at cricket, and Carthew will come to their study at tea-time for their lines!" he exclaimed.

"What the thump——"

"Suppose he found they'd been smoking there?" exclaimed Peele. "What price that, old bean?"

Cuthbert Gower stared.

"He won't!" he said. "They never smoke, that goody-goody crowd. They're down on it!"

"Oh, you're dense!" said Peele contemptuously. "You don't catch on! I've got a whole box of fags in the drawer, and I'm dying for a good smoke. Come along to the end study."

"What on earth for?" demanded Gower.

"For a smoke, of course!"

"You utter ass! Jimmy Silver would scalp you if he found you smoking in his quarters!"

"He won't find me!" said Peele, with an evil grin. "He's too jolly busy at cricket, and everybody's out of doors. It's as safe as houses. Carthew is goin' to find their study reekin' with smoke and strewn with cigarette-ends. Catch on?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Gower.

He burst into a chuckle.

"I'm game! Come on!"

The two young rascals emerged from the study. The Fourth Form passage was clear; the summer weather had tempted all, or nearly all, of the Classical Fourth out of doors after

lessons. In a minute or less Peele and Gower had scuttled along to the end study.

Peele threw the door open.

The study, sacred to the Fistical Four, was vacant. Jimmy Silver & Co. were busy at cricket, and likely to remain so for some time to come. It was, as Peele had said, as safe as houses.

The two slackers stepped in, and Peele closed the door.

A minute more, and two cigarettes were going strong, and the two young rascals grinned at one another through the smoke.

Peele had twenty cigarettes in his packet, which was quite a good supply, and which was more than the two Giddy Goats could negotiate, although Peele stated that he was "dying" for a smoke.

They smoked away industriously.

In a short time the study was drifting with cigarette-smoke, and cigarette-ends adorned the carpet and the fender.

By that time it certainly looked as if the owners of the study had been indulging lately in a very orgy of smoking, strictly forbidden by all the rules of Rookwood School.

At his fourth cigarette, however, Cuthbert Gower seemed to "hang fire." Peele pushed the box towards him, but Gower hesitated.

"No good overdoin' it," he remarked.

Peele sniffed.

"Be a man!" he said, scornfully.

Gower felt more like being sick, but he was not proof against the taunt. He lighted a fifth cigarette, with many inward misgivings. Peele was already at his sixth.

Gower was a long time smoking that cigarette. He had a curious feeling, as though the foundations of the universe were shifting a little.

"Like 'em?" asked Peele.

"Oh, rippin'!" gasped Gower. "Groooh!"

"What's the matter?"

"N-n-nothin'."

"Have another!"

"I—I—I haven't finished this yet."

Peele threw down his sixth cigarette-end, and lighted a seventh fag. He was tougher inside than his chum and had had more practice at this peculiar pastime. But he was beginning to feel some qualms. He was

smoking fast, and Gower was smoking slowly, when the study door suddenly opened, and the two young rascals jumped to their feet in dire alarm. For a moment they thought that they were caught by the sudden return of the Fistical Four. They could have cried with relief when they saw that the new arrival was only Tubby Muffin.

The fat Classical coughed as he put his head into the study and caught the thick smoke.

"Gug-gug-gug!" spluttered Tubby.

He blinked through the smoke at Peele and Gower.

"My hat! You fellows smoking here!"

he ejaculated.

"What'll Jimmy Silver say?"

"You spying fat brute!" hissed Gower. "What do you want?"

"I came in to see if Jimmy Silver was in to tea yet," answered Tubby. "I suppose I can come in if I like, Gower."

"You fat rotter——"

Peele made his chum a sign to be silent. The two schemers were at the mercy of Reginald Muffin's tongue now.

"Come in and have a smoke, Muffin, old chap," said Peele, smoothly.

"I—I say, Jimmy will kick up a row——" Muffin hesitated.

"He won't know. He's at cricket, and won't be in yet."

"Oh, all right!" said Tubby.

He rolled into the study and closed the door, and cheerfully accepted a smoke from Peele's packet.

He winked cheerfully at the other two juniors. Tubby rather fancied himself as a "dog" and a "goer," though it was not often

that he was admitted to the honourable society of the Giddy Goats of Rookwood.

"Prime, ain't they?" he remarked.

"Glad you like 'em!" said Peele affably.

He would gladly have kicked Reginald Muffin the whole length of the Fourth Form passage. But evidently that was not feasible. Tubby Muffin knew too much, and he had to be conciliated.

"Have another, Gower?"

"No, I won't!" said Gower, whose complexion was assuming a very curious shade in art greens. "I—I—I'm off!"

"Oh, stick it out!"

"Groooogh!"

Gower left the study hastily. It really looked as if Cuthbert Gower had not, after all, enjoyed his smoke.

Peele finished his cigarette and threw away the end, and put the remainder of the packet into his pocket. Tubby Muffin blinked at him.

"Oh, don't give in yet, Peele, old bean!" he said. "I'm just beginning to enjoy this."

"Better cut before Silver comes in, fat head!"

answered Peele. "Come on!"

He piloted Muffin out of the study and closed the door.

"Keep this dark, Muffin!" he said impressively. "If Silver knew you'd been smoking in his study he'd raise your scalp! Not a word, mind!"

"Not a syllable!" chuckled Muffin.

And he rolled away, feeling every inch a "goer" and a "dog." Peele walked away to his study, satisfied in his mind, though not quite at ease inside. He grinned at Gower as he went in.



At full speed the two slackers raced into the School House, to crash headlong into Mr. Dalton, Master of the Fourth. (See Chapter 2.)

"All serene!" he remarked.

"Groooh!"

"Feeling bad?"

"Ooooooh! You silly idiot!" moaned Gower. "I—I'd wring your neck, only I—I'm afraid to move. Grooogh! Oooooooh!"

Undoubtedly Cuthbert Gower had not enjoyed his smoke!

THE THIRD CHAPTER

Accused!

A CROWD of ruddy and cheery youths came rather noisily up the staircase, in great spirits. Jimmy Silver & Co. had finished cricket, and they were ready for tea—quite ready. As for Carthew of the Sixth, they had forgotten all about him; there were so many more important matters than Carthew to be thought of.

But they were reminded of his existence as they came up the stairs. A sharp, unpleasant voice was heard calling.

"Silver! Lovell!"

"Hallo, there's Carthew tootling after you, Jimmy!" said Conroy.

"Let him tootle!" answered Jimmy cheerily.

And turning a deaf ear to the voice of the charmer, he went on with his chums to the end study.

"Silver!" bawled Carthew from the lower hall.

Still the Fistical Four were deaf. They wanted their tea; and they wanted to leave Carthew till afterwards. But Carthew of the Sixth was not to be left.

He came up the big staircase in pursuit, with a wrathful face. Jimmy Silver threw open the door of the end study.

"Oh, my hat!" he ejaculated, as the atmosphere smote him almost like a blow in the face.

The window was shut, and the door had been shut, so there was still plenty of tobacco smoke about. And there were at least a dozen cigarette-ends in full view.

Jimmy Silver stared round the study.

"What on earth——" he exclaimed.

"Some rotter's been smoking here!" ejaculated Arthur Edward Lovell in great wrath.

"Awful cheek!" exclaimed Raby.

"By Jove!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'll find out the merry smoker who's been turning our study into a tap-room——"

Putty Grace called from the passage:

"Carthew's coming, you fellows!"

"Oh, let him come!" sighed Jimmy Silver. "Carthew seems like the giddy poor—always with us."

There was a heavy footstep outside, and Mark Carthew of the Sixth loomed up in the doorway.

"Silver! Your lines were to be handed in by tea-time—— Why, what—what—— You young rascals!"

Carthew sniffed.

He sniffed, he snorted, and he stared. And a gleam of unholy joy came into his narrow eyes.

He had caught his old enemies of the Fourth at last! The study was reeking with smoke—evidence strong enough to convince the most doubting. True, Carthew, although eager to "catch out" the end study at all times, had never really suspected them of bad habits like this. The discovery was a surprise to him as well as a pleasure. But there could be no doubt about it now—he had the evidence of his eyes, not to mention his nose.

"You horrid, dissipated young rascals!" he exclaimed. "Precious fine goings-on in this study, and found out by chance, too! If I hadn't come here for your lines, I should never have known!"

"Never have known what?" demanded Jimmy Silver, not for a moment realising that he and his chums were already found guilty of the smoke.

Carthew waved his hand.

"This!" he replied. "Smoking, you young scoundrels!"

Jimmy's eyes flashed.

"We've not smoked——"

"What do you take us for?" roared Lovell indignantly. "We've just found out that some rotter's been smoking in this study while we were at the cricket."

Carthew laughed.

"I rather think that's a little too thin," he remarked. "You may as well own up now you're found out!"



Gower and Peele whipped their cigarettes from their mouths and started up in alarm as the door crashed open, and Tubby Muffin stumbled in. "Hello, you chaps!" he exclaimed in surprise. "What are you doing here—smoking in Jimmy Silver's study?" (See Chapter 2.)

"I tell you——"

"That's enough!" interrupted Carthew.

"You've been smoking, the whole crowd of you, and a regular orgy you must have made of it. Cigarette-ends all over the place——"

"There's a dozen fellows can prove that we've been at the cricket for the last hour!" howled Raby.

"And what were you doing before that?" sneered Carthew.

"We were in the study after lessons," said Jimmy Silver. "Only for a little while——"

"Long enough to make beasts of yourselves with smoking, apparently," said Carthew, with great enjoyment.

"We haven't——"

"If you're going on telling lies, you can

tell them to Mr. Dalton, not to me," said Carthew coolly. "Follow me."

The Fistical Four exchanged glances of dismay.

"I tell you, Carthew——" began Jimmy Silver.

"You needn't tell me any lies, Silver."

"I'm not telling you any lies, you cad!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver fiercely. "Nobody here has been smoking. Some cad——"

"Keep all that for Mr. Dalton," said Carthew gloatingly.

It was really the chance of a lifetime for Carthew. Mr. Dalton, the new master of the Fourth, did not like him, and had spoken quite plainly on the subject of Carthew's bullying proclivities. Many a report taken

to the form-master by Carthew had been pooh-poohed by Mr. Dalton, who had no desire whatever to make mountains out of molehills. But this time, Carthew felt, Mr. Dalton would be bound to "sit up and take notice." In Carthew's sour opinion, he favoured the Fistical Four; and this time he would have to be down on his favourites. For there was no denying the evidence of the smoke in the study, and Jimmy Silver's explanation was much too lame.

"Follow me!" snapped Carthew. "I shall take you to your form-master at once! I fancy you won't get off so easily as usual, this time."

He strode from the study.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Lovell. "I—I say, Jimmy, who could have done this dirty trick? This will land us into hot water with Dicky Dalton! He—he mayn't believe us——"

"It's rotten!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"Are you coming?" shouted Carthew, from the passage.

"Oh, we're coming!" snapped Jimmy.

And the Fistical Four followed the bully of the Sixth, in a very dismal mood. Carthew felt that he had them on the hip; and Jimmy Silver & Co. could not help feeling so, too. They were very doubtful indeed about Mr. Dalton's reception of their explanation; and kind as Dicky always was, there was no doubt that if he believed them guilty he would come down on them with a heavy hand. Mr. Dalton was kind, but he had a very strict sense of duty.

Carthew, with four hapless juniors at his heels, tapped at the door of the Fourth Form-master's study.

"Come in!" said the deep voice of Mr. Richard Dalton.

Carthew composed his grinning face into an expression of gravity suited to the serious occasion, and entered. Jimmy Silver & Co. followed him in in dismal silence.

Mr. Dalton appeared to be busy with a mass of papers, but he turned from his task and fixed his eyes upon his visitors.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"I have to report these juniors, sir——"
began Carthew.

A momentary frown appeared on Mr.

Dalton's face. It indicated that he was getting a little tired of Carthew and his unending reports. Carthew noted it, and smiled inwardly.

"It is a very serious matter, sir," he pursued. "I have just been to their study to ask for lines which have not been handed in, and I found the room reeking—simply reeking—with tobacco smoke. It is a wonder, indeed, that the disgusting young rascals are not ill from the excessive amount they must have smoked."

"They do not look ill!" said Mr. Dalton sharply.

Carthew realised that he had not made a good point there, and he went on rather hastily:

"The study reeks with smoke, sir, and cigarette-ends and matches are scattered all over the room. Perhaps you would care to step there, sir, and see for yourself?"

"I shall certainly do so," said Mr. Dalton drily. "But I will question these boys first. What have you to say, Silver?"

"We haven't been smoking, sir," answered Jimmy.

"Never have, sir!" chorused the Co.

"They would lie, of course!" remarked Carthew parenthetically.

Mr. Dalton gave him a cold look.

"I see no reason to suppose that these boys would lie, Carthew," he said. "On the contrary, I have always found them extremely truthful and straightforward. However, I shall undoubtedly investigate the matter, and will proceed to the study at once. Follow me, my boys!"

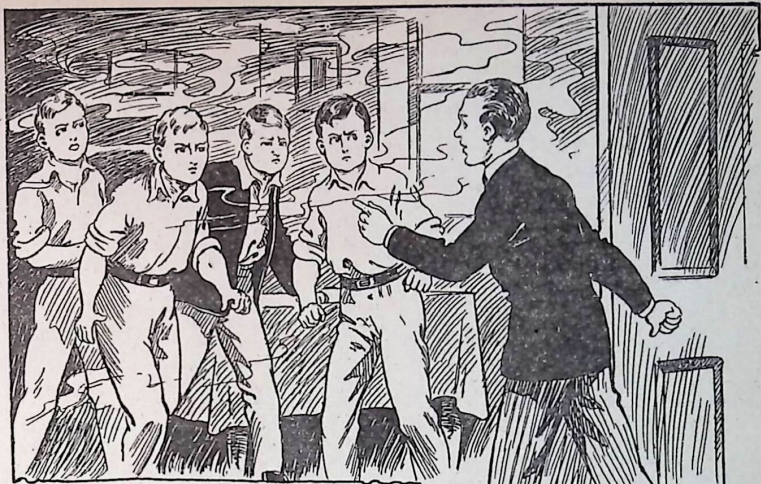
And Carthew and his victims marched back to the end study at the heels of the master of the Fourth.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

Dicky's Way!

"SHOCKING!"
That was Mr. Dalton's exclamation as he put his head into the end study in the Fourth.

Half a dozen juniors were gathered round the doorway, staring into the room, surprised and curious at the state of it. They made way respectfully for the form-master.



A gleam of unholy joy showed in Carthew's eyes as he sniffed the thick atmosphere. "You've been smoking!" he rapped. "We haven't!" Jimmy answered indignantly. (See Chapter 3.)

Mr. Dalton's face set very grimly. His look did not comfort the Fistical Four.

"Very shocking, sir!" said Carthew. "I was shocked when I found it out. I may say, however, that I have always suspected these boys of something of the sort. My opinion of them has always been a low one."

Mr. Dalton did not seem to hear that observation. He fixed his eyes, with a very penetrating look, upon Jimmy Silver & Co.

"What explanation do you give of this, Silver?" he asked quietly. "You have denied smoking here, yet it is plain that several persons, at least, have been smoking in this room this afternoon."

"We've been down at cricket, sir," said Jimmy. "There was no smoke in the study when we left it."

"Then you state that some other persons have been smoking here during your absence?"

"Yes, sir, that's the only explanation." Carthew sneered. He did not believe a word

of that explanation, but Mr. Dalton looked very thoughtful.

"That some boys in my Form are addicted to smoking in secret I have already learned," he said. "But I fail to see why anyone should smoke in your study, Silver, without your knowledge or permission. If they did not care to do so in their own rooms, safer quarters than this might easily be found."

The Co. were silent.

It seemed to them that they read condemnation in Mr. Dalton's look and tone, and they had a feeling of being caught in the toils.

"Have you any idea of who may have smoked here, Silver?"

Jimmy opened his lips, but closed them again. His thoughts ran at once to Peele and Gower. But it was only a suspicion, and, in any case, he could not have spoken. Even to save himself, he did not feel disposed to act the part of a "sneak."

"You have a suspicion, Silver?" asked Mr.

Dalton; whose keen eyes read a good idea more in Jimmy's face than the junior supposed.

"Ye-es, sir," stammered Jimmy.

"How long were you at the cricket?"

"About an hour, sir; we'd just come in—"

"You can prove this?"

"There were a dozen other fellows on the ground."

"Lots of us, sir," called out Mornington, from the passage.

"Very good!" said Mr. Dalton. He gave a slight sniff at the atmosphere of the study.

"I should imagine that the smoking was more recent than an hour ago."

Carthew's eyes glittered.

"I should hardly think so, sir," he ventured. "It seems pretty plain that they were smoking here before they went down to the cricket. You see, the window was closed, and—"

"I see," said Mr. Dalton quietly. "If it proves, Silver, that I have been deceived in you, and that you are addicted to breaking the strict rules of the school, I shall report you to the Head for a flogging. But we shall see. Mornington!"

"Yes, sir," said Morny.

"Kindly go along the passage, and call the whole of the Classical Fourth out of their studies."

"Certainly, sir."

Carthew knitted his brows. He could see no object in this at all; but he had a suspicion that Mr. Dalton had some idea of letting his "favourites" off. In a few minutes all the Classical Fourth were in the passage, with two exceptions. Mr. Dalton's keen eye ran over them.

"Where are Gower and Muffin?" he asked.

"Gower's in my study, sir," mumbled Peele reluctantly. "He—he's not feeling very well, just now, sir."

Mr. Dalton smiled grimly.

"Well or ill, I require Gower here," he said.

"Mornington, bring Gower here immediately."

"Yes, sir."

"Grace, you will fetch Muffin; he belongs to your study."

"Certainly, sir."

The juniors waited in silence and wonder. Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged glances. That

"Dicky" was driving at something they knew; but they could not guess what it was. But their hopes were rising.

Mornington came along the passage with Gower. That unhappy youth was looking very pale. He seemed to have a strong disinclination, too, to meet his form-master's eye.

"You do not seem well, Gower," said Mr. Dalton.

"Nunno, sir," mumbled Gower.

"Have you been smoking?"

Gower jumped.

"S-s-smoking! Nunno, sir! Never smoked in my life, sir."

"Groooogh! Yaroooooh! Leggo! Rotter Yooop! Oooooooch!"

Terrific yells came from Study No. 2, from the doorway of which Putty Grace was propelling Reginald Muffin, with a grip on his collar. Muffin was resisting feebly.

"Grooogh! Don't I keep on telling you I can't move?" he wailed. "I shall be ill in a minute—grooooooch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Muffin!"

"Ow! Groooogh! Yes, sir!"

"Are you ill?"

"Yes, sir! Awfully! I—I feel very bad, sir," gasped Muffin. "I—I hope you'll excuse me from lessons to-morrow, sir. Oooooooch!"

"Have you been smoking?"

"Oh, no, sir! I never do; don't like it, sir!"

"Then why is there a smell of tobacco about your clothes, Muffin?" asked the form-master, in a grinding voice.

"Oh dear! Is there?" moaned Muffin.

"I—I never thought of that, sir."

"And why is there a smell of tobacco about your clothes, Gower?"

Gower groaned. He was in no state to undergo a strict examination, when his unhappy inside was in a state similar to that of Vesuvius in its most active moments.

"It is perfectly plain to me that both of you have been smoking," said Mr. Dalton sternly.

"Oh dear, no, sir!" gasped Tubby Muffin,

"and—and please, sir, I'm not ill."

"What?"

"I—I don't feel ill at all, sir," gasped Muffin eagerly. "Quite all right, sir; fresh as a fiddle—I mean fit as a fiddle, strong as a lion, sir! Grooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you think I've been smoking, you're quite mistaken, sir," pursued Tubby. "I wish I hadn't now——"

"What?"

"I—I mean I never did, sir, and Peele and Gower can tell you the same. I told them distinctly that I wouldn't—not in Jimmy Silver's study, sir. Didn't I, Peele?"

The hopeful Tubby blinked at Cyril Peele for confirmation. But all he received in reply from Peele was a scowl like unto that of a demon in a pantomime.

"So you smoked with Peele and Gower in Silver's study, Muffin?" said Mr. Dalton sternly.

"Nunno, sir, I—I'm just telling you I didn't!" gasped Muffin. "Quite the contrary, sir! I said to Peele—'What will Jimmy say?' I simply went into the end study to tea, sir—I mean to see if the chaps had come in—I—I really mean to say, sir, that I never went into the end study at all. I wouldn't, of course, without being invited."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Classical Fourth.

"M-m-may I go now, sir?" asked Tubby Muffin hopefully. "I—I'm feeling a bit queer, sir—that is to say, I'm feeling as right as rain, sir——"

"Peele, Gower, and Muffin will follow me to my study!" said Mr. Dalton, in a deep voice. "Silver, you and your friends are completely exonerated by Muffin's confession and——"

"But I haven't confessed anything, sir," yelled Muffin, in alarm. "I'm denying the whole thing, sir; from start to finish."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Carthew, you will see now that you have made a mistake," said Mr. Dalton drily. "Peele, Gower, Muffin, follow me!"

Mr. Dalton strode away down the passage; and the three hapless smokers followed him, in the lowest possible spirits. Jimmy Silver turned a beaming smile upon his chums.

"Isn't he a corker?" he exclaimed.

"Isn't old Dicky the real goods? Fancy his nosing it all out like that, and bagging them! Good old Dicky!"

In great spirits the Fistical Four went into their study. Carthew of the Sixth seemed rooted to the floor. The innocence of the Fistical Four was clear enough; and Carthew, as a dutiful prefect, ought to have been pleased that justice was done, but did not seem pleased somehow. He seemed quite the reverse, in fact, as he strode after the Fistical Four.

"You've got off this time!" he said bitterly.

"Mr. Dalton's screened you, as usual. I might have expected that——"

"Why, you know as well as we do, now, that we never smoked here," exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily. "You——"

"Wait till I catch you again!" said Carthew, between his teeth. "I won't take you to Dalton next time. I'll take you to the Head! Just wait!"

And with that Carthew strode savagely from the study, and slammed the door after him.

"His nibs seems to be waxy!" yawned Lovell. "Now, what about tea? I wonder how Peele & Co. are getting on with Dicky? Enjoying the interview—I rather don't think!"

Jimmy Silver looked thoughtful as he sat down to tea. There was a gleam in his eyes, under his knitted brows; a gleam his chums knew well in the eyes of Uncle James.

"Well, what is it?" asked Lovell.

"Carthew's going to bowl us out again, if he can, in wicked, dissipated ways, and take us to the Head!" said Jimmy, with a chuckle.

"He won't have any luck!" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha! Poor old Carthew never does have much luck with this study."

"I think dear old Carthew will keep an eagle eye on us, and that it will be as easy as falling off a form to pull dear old Carthew's leg!" said Jimmy Silver. "And if I don't make dear old Carthew wish he'd never heard of this study, you can use my head for footer. I'm going to have a big think——"

"And I'm going to have a big tea," said Lovell. "Pass the sardines."

And the Fistical Four settled down cheerily to tea, while downstairs three unhappy youths limped out of Mr. Dalton's study,



Wailing and moaning feebly, Tubby was pushed before Mr. Dalton. "Grooooo! I do feel ill!" he gasped. "Muffin! Have you been smoking?" demanded the form-master. (See Chapter 4.)

wringing their hands; having made once more the ancient discovery that the way of the transgressor is hard!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER A Non-smoker!

"JIMMY!"
"You thumpin' ass!"
"What the dickens——"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome uttered those ejaculations in a sort of chorus.

They stared at Jimmy Silver. They were astounded.

The Fistical Four were strolling in the quadrangle at Rookwood. They were in full view of the study windows of Mr. Dalton, the master of their Form—the Fourth. And they were in full view of Carthew of the Sixth, who was coming along from the School House, and who scowled blackly at the sight of the cheery quartette.

And at that moment, in open quad, Jimmy Silver drew a cigar from his pocket and put it in his mouth.

It was really amazing.

Certainly there were fellows at Rookwood who smoked in strict secrecy. Strict secrecy was needed, for the Head was very severe upon that subject. But a surreptitious cigarette in a study or a box-room was very different from a cigar in the quadrangle. Indeed, the most reckless of the "Giddy Goats" of Rookwood never ventured on cigars. It would have led to too much trouble with the "central powers."

And Jimmy Silver never smoked at all, of course. And here he was with a big cigar in his mouth, as cool as a cucumber, in full view of his master's windows, of a prefect, and of a couple of score of fellows of various Forms.

"You shriekin' ass!" hissed Lovell. "Put that rubbish out of sight! Can't you see Carthew?"

"I see him!" assented Jimmy.

"And he sees you!" ejaculated Raby. "You howlin' chump, Jimmy! You'll be landed now, and serve you jolly well right! What do you want muckin' about with a filthy cigar?"

"This cigar is all right," answered Jimmy Silver calmly. "Best cigar I've ever tasted!"

"You silly owl!"

"You horrid fathead!"

"Chuck it away!" breathed Lovell.

"No fear. This cigar cost fourpence!" said Jimmy Silver warmly. "Catch me chucking away a fourpenny cigar! Got a match?"

Carthew of the Sixth came up, almost breathless, in so great a hurry was he to catch Jimmy Silver in the act, as it were. His eyes were gleaming. Only a few days before Carthew had reported the Fistical Four to their form-master for smoking in their study, and it had turned out that they were not guilty. Carthew had been annoyed and exasperated, and ever since he had been looking for another chance. Now, evidently, he had found it.

"Silver!" he thundered.

Jimmy looked round innocently.

The big cigar was still in his mouth, and

fifty pairs of eyes had seen it. But as he met the prefect's glare Jimmy jerked it out, and put his hands behind him with the cigar in it.

"Yes, Carthew?" he said meekly.

"You are smoking—here in the quad—smoking a cigar!" exclaimed Carthew, as much astonished as pleased.

It was a real pleasure to the bully of the Sixth to catch Jimmy Silver "out" like this, but he was astonished. The utter recklessness of Jimmy's proceeding was amazing.

"S-s-smoking?" stammered Jimmy. "I—I wasn't smoking, Carthew!"

"You can tell the Head that!" grinned Carthew. "Come with me at once!"
"Silver!"

It was Mr. Dalton's voice.

The master of the Fourth had thrown up his window, only a few yards from the spot, and was leaning out.

"Ye-es, sir?"

"Is that a real cigar?"

"N-n-no, sir!"

Carthew jumped.

"Hand it up to me, Silver."

Jimmy Silver cheerfully handed up the cigar to Mr. Dalton. The form-master looked at it, and an involuntary smile crossed his lips. Carthew blinked at it.

Now that he saw it closely and more clearly, he became aware that the cigar was made of chocolate.

Jimmy Silver's amazing "recklessness" was explained now.

Lovell & Co. burst into a chortle. They realise that "Uncle James" of Rookwood had expended the sum of fourpence on a chocolate cigar for the special purpose of pulling Carthew's leg. He had waited till Carthew came by to produce that cigar, and the bully of the Sixth had fallen blindly into the trap.

There was a loud chuckle from the crowd of juniors round the master's window. Carthew looked almost green.

"What were you going to do with this cigar, Silver?" asked Mr. Dalton.

"Eat it, sir," answered Jimmy demurely.

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

"Oh!" gasped Carthew.

"Please may I have it, sir?" asked Jimmy, in his meekest manner. "I—I really wasn't going to smoke that cigar, sir. You—you can't smoke chocolate cigars, sir. They—they won't draw, sir."

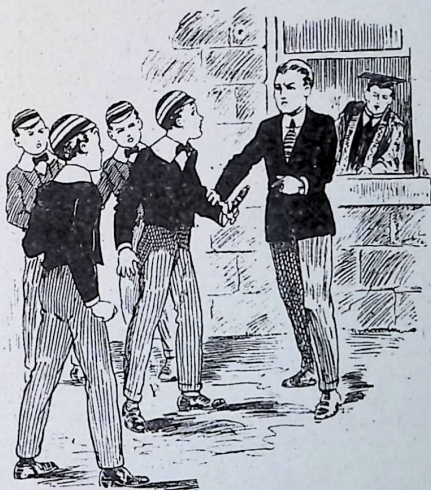
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You may certainly have it," said Mr Dalton, handing it back. "Carthew, you will understand now, probably, that it was wiser not to take the matter before the Head. If you had exercised a little more intelligence, Carthew, you would have known that this junior was playing a prank. It occurred to me at once when I saw him from my window."

With that, Mr. Dalton shut down his window and retired from the scene. Carthew fixed his eyes on Jimmy Silver with an expression in them that a Hun might have envied.

"You—you—you——" he stuttered.

Jimmy Silver calmly bit off the end of the



Carthew almost fell over himself in his hurry to reach Jimmy. "Silver!" he thundered, pointing to the cigar. "You are smoking—here in the quad—smoking a cigar!"
(See Chapter 5.)

cigar under Carthew's furious eyes. The strictest non-smoker could not have objected to biting off the end of that cigar.

Carthew made a savage stride towards him. The Fistical Four drew together, as if ready for battle.

"Stop that, now, Carthew!" said Bulkeley curtly. "The kid's done nothing."

Carthew gave an angry grunt, and strode savagely away. Bulkeley's advice was good, but the bully of the Sixth had no intention of heeding it. Judging others by himself, he did not believe in the decency of the Fistical Four, and he still hoped to "catch them out."

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked away in a merry mood, and the famous cigar was divided into four equal parts with the aid of a pocket-knife, and disposed of on the spot. It had served its purpose.

"But Carthew is a sticker!" said Jimmy. "He will try again. We'll give him another chance when I've thought it out. The dear boy believes we're black sheep of his own merry hue, and he won't be happy till he can report us to the Head for smoking, or backing horses, or something. The smoke stunt is worked out, I think. Perhaps we'll give him a chance of catching us squiffy next."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Fistical Four, as they sauntered cheerily in the sunny quad, discussed a plan of campaign; and from their explosive chuckles it might have been guessed that another plot was being plotted for the especial benefit of Carthew of the Sixth.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

Uncle James has a Big Idea!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. went in cheerily to lessons that afternoon. They passed Carthew of the Sixth in the corridor, and the prefect scowled at them.

Jimmy answered his scowl with a sweet smile.

The feud between the Sixth Form bully and the end study was growing bitter on Carthew's side, though the Fistical Four managed to keep their good temper.

But they were wrothy, all the same. Carthew persisted in thinking, or in professing

to think, that the end study was not above suspicion.

To be considered in the same light as fellows like Peele and Gower was very exasperating to the Co. Cyril Peele's dingy blackguardism was not in their line at all, and they did not like the suspicion.

The more Carthew's bitter dislike made him suspect them and yearn to catch them out, the more they were determined to make Carthew sorry for himself.

Mr. Dalton gave the Fistical Four a glance as they came in. The master of the Fourth rather liked the cheery Co. He couldn't help liking them, and they liked him.

He was quite well aware that Carthew's suspicions were utterly without foundation, and that Jimmy Silver & Co. were exactly what they appeared to be—frank and healthy schoolboys, perhaps a little reckless and careless, but with no serious faults of character at all.

Lessons proceeded amicably in the Fourth Form room. Nearly all the Fourth pulled well with their master. Only slackers like Peele and Gower and Tubby Muffin dreaded Mr. Dalton's eye.

After lessons, Jimmy Silver paused at the master's desk as he went out. Mr. Dalton looked up.

"If you please, sir——" began Jimmy.

"Well, Silver?"

"Our study's getting a bit shabby, sir," said Jimmy. "The paint's been a good bit knocked about, what with fencing and—and other things——"

"Such as ragging and horse-play," suggested Mr. Dalton.

"Ahem! We—we think it's about time the study had a new coat of paint, sir."

"No doubt it will be seen to, as usual, during the vacation, Silver," said Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir; but we thought we'd like to try our hand ourselves," said Jimmy eagerly. "If there's no objection, sir, could we paint the woodwork in the study—out of lesson-time, of course?"

Mr. Dalton regarded him thoughtfully.

"Paint is very expensive now, Silver, and I doubt whether it would be provided——"

"We want to buy the paint ourselves, sir."

said Jimmy. "We only need some paint and boiled oil and turpentine, and—and I've had a remittance from home, sir, which will cover it. I want the study to look nice when my father comes next week, sir."

"There is no objection, Silver," said Mr. Dalton kindly. "I am, indeed, glad to see you desire to make your study look nice. Certainly you have my permission."

"Thank you, sir!"

Jimmy Silver passed on, and rejoined his chums in the corridor.

"All serene, old beans!" he said gleefully. "Dicky's given his permission to paint the study."

"Paint the study!" exclaimed Mornington. "What the merry thump do you want to paint your study for?"

"Make it look nice," explained Jimmy.

Mornington looked at him suspiciously.

"Come off!" he remarked. "What's the stunt? You're not looking out for work, I suppose, and it's jolly hard work."

"My dear chap," said Jimmy, "the end study is the place where fellows work. We're famous for it. Get a move on, you chaps. We've got to make up a list of the various mucks we shall want."

The Fistical Four proceeded to their study, leaving Valentine Mornington rather puzzled. Certainly junior studies generally showed signs of wear and tear towards the end of the term. But Morny had never heard of a fellow wanting to paint his own study before.

Any amount of shabbiness was preferable to that hefty job in the general opinion. The Rookwood fellows were quite content to leave the painting to the painters.

Arthur Edward Lovell seemed a little puzzled as Jimmy sat at the study table, with a pencil and paper, making out a list.

"I don't quite catch on!" Lovell remarked.

"You wouldn't, old chap."

"Look here, Jimmy, you cheeky owl——"

"One pound of paint," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "Timnings, in Coombe, charges eighteenpence a pound for paint, and eighteenpence is—*is* one-and-six, so we shall have to make a pound of it do."

"Waste, I call it!" said Lovell. "The paint in this study will jolly well do for me.

Besides, how far will a pound of paint go? It won't do even the window-sashes."

"We're only going to touch up the worst places," explained Jimmy. "We can't paint the whole bag of tricks. Too expensive. But we must have some paint, to keep up appearances."

"I don't see——"

"Half a pint of boiled oil," said Jimmy, scribbling it down.

"What the thump's boiled oil?"

"I think it's linseed oil, boiled. I know that painter chaps use it, anyhow, and it sounds workmanlike."

"But——"

"Three pints of turpentine," said Jimmy.

"You owl!" roared Raby. "I don't know much about painting, but if you put three pints of turpentine to a pound of paint you'll just about drown it."

"It will be sticky," said Newcome, shaking his head, "or it'll come off on our clothes, or something."

Jimmy Silver gave his chums a pitying look.

"You don't catch on," he said compassionately. "We're going to paint the study—some of it—but that's camouflage. What we're really out for is to catch Carthew, or to let Carthew catch us, which comes to the same thing."

Lovell brightened up.

"Oh, I see! Make him sit in the paint, or something."

"Dear old bean, you wouldn't take a prize in a brain show," said Jimmy. "In this study you'd better leave the thinking to your Uncle James."

"Look here——"

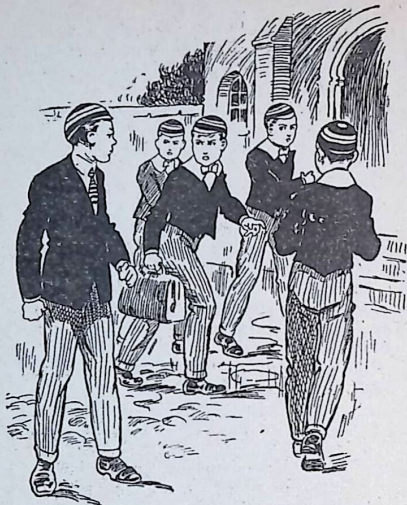
"The paint and the boiled oil," said Jimmy, with laboured patience, "are just to keep up appearances—camouflage, in fact. What we really want is three pints of turpentine—or turps, I think painters call it—in three nice big bottles."

"What on earth for?" shrieked Lovell.

"Carthew."

"I don't see——"

"Naturally. I suppose you've looked in at Timnings', in Coombe, sometimes, as we pass the blessed shop a dozen times a week—more or less. Timnings sells paint and things——"



Carthew eyed the juniors suspiciously as he heard the clinking of glass from the bag. (See Chapter 7.)

"I know that, ass!"

"The price of bottles," said Jimmy, "has risen."

"Bub-bub-bottles?" said Lovell dazedly.

"Yes, bottles."

"What on earth's that got to do with it?"

"Lots! Go to Timmings for a bottle of turpentine, and what do you think he will give it you in?"

"A—a bottle, I suppose."

"Exactly—an old bottle. Generally an old gin-bottle."

"A—a gin-bottle?"

"Yes. Sometimes a whisky-bottle, and sometimes a rum-bottle. But he mostly uses gin-bottles. I fancy Mr. Timmings has a taste for gin, and he uses them in his shop. Now, he might give us any old bottle; but when we go for our turpentine we are going to request specially to have it in gin-bottles, with the old labels left on."

"Oh!"

"If Timmings hasn't them in stock we'll wait. We're in no hurry. Y'ever notice the colour of turpentine?"

"Not specially."

"Y'ever notice the colour of gin?"

"I've seen old Mack's gin-bottle—the time we put gum into it."

"Well, my infant," said Jimmy Silver, "there's been serious accidents owing to people putting turps in gin-bottles and not taking the labels off. The colour's much the same. Anybody seeing a gin-bottle full of turps, and not knowing the facts, would take it for a bottle of gin. And if a spying cad—fellow like Carthew, f'rinstance—saw such things in this study—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Lovell, catching on suddenly.

There was a merry chorus of laughter in the end study. Tubby Muffin looked in inquisitively.

"I say, what's the joke, you fellows?" he inquired.

"You are, fat old bean!" said Jimmy Silver calmly.

Tubby Muffin sniffed and rolled away in disgust. In the end study the Fistical Four chortled jocosely.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER At Last!

CARTHEW of the Sixth was suspicious.

It was several days since Jimmy Silver's talk with his chums in the end study, and during those few days Carthew had given a great deal of attention to the four. It was surprising, indeed, how much time Carthew found to devote to these youths that he did not like. His hope of catching them out sometimes grew faint, but it never quite failed.

Sometimes, indeed, he wondered whether he was quite on the wrong track, and whether Jimmy Silver & Co. were just what they appeared to be, and hadn't any shady secrets at all.

But he hoped for the best—or, rather, for the worst.

His opinions of others were coloured by his own shady nature, and he never really

thought well of anybody. So he was not likely to think well, if he could help it, of fellows he disliked.

Sooner or later he was going to surprise the four in some serious infraction of the school laws—the more serious the better. Until that happened he could only live in hope.

And now he was not only suspicious, but he felt that he had the most reasonable and solid grounds for suspicion.

It was Wednesday, and a half-holiday. Jimmy Silver & Co. had walked down to Coombe, and Carthew's eyes had fallen on them when they returned. Jimmy was carrying a bag, which gave a clink as of glasses in Carthew's hearing as he passed. Then Jimmy had given Carthew a startled look, and hurried into the School House with an air of flurry.

Carthew was wasting his afternoon, as a matter of fact, in hunting the Fistical Four. Perhaps they knew it. But just now they seemed very anxious to get out of sight.

The bully of the Sixth strolled into the School House after them, and debated in his mind whether he should follow them to their study.

It was suspicious, in the first place, that the four should be in their study at all on a glorious afternoon, when all the other fellows, or nearly all, were at cricket. And what was it that had clinked in the bag? A bottle of pickles might have clinked against a jar of jam, certainly. But pickles and jam could be bought at the sergeant's little shop behind the beeches. There was no need to carry such things up from Coombe on a hot afternoon. But—certainly it couldn't be smokes! Smokes didn't clink when they knocked together in a bag. But what was it? A hope, rather than a suspicion, dawned in Carthew's breast. Every step on the downward path was easier than the last. Was it possible that from cheeking prefects, and smoking, these young rascals had fallen to darker vices—such as drinking?

That was too good to be true, for that meant the instant "sack" from Rookwood in case of discovery, and the prospect of getting the Fistical Four expelled was too entrancing a vision.

Still, there was no doubt that something—such as a bottle—had clinked; no doubt that Jimmy Silver had looked flurried and scuttled away like one guilty!

Carthew ascended the staircase at last. As he came near the corner of the Fourth Form passage he heard Tubby Muffin's voice.

"What have you got in the bag, Jimmy? Tuck?"

"No, you fat guzzler!"

"Well, what is it? Can't a fellow look?"

"You can look if you keep it awfully dark."

Carthew stopped. His tread was stealthy, and he was sure that the juniors had not heard him.

A moment later there was a startled exclamation from Muffin.



Carthew's hand dropped on Tubby Muffin's shoulder with a grip of iron. "What was in Silver's bag?" he asked in a low voice. (See

Chapter 7.)

"Booze!"

"Shush!"

"I—I say, Jimmy, you're not going to drink that awful muck, are you?" gasped Muffin.

"Of course not, ass!"

"Then what have you got it for?"

"Never mind; buzz off, fatty! You ask too many questions."

"I say, if the Head knew——"

"Shut up! Kick him, Lovell!"

"Yaroooh!"

Retreating footsteps were heard as Tubby Muffin came round the corner and almost ran into Carthew. The Pistical Four were going on cheerily to their study.

Carthew dropped his hand on Muffin's shoulder with a grip of iron, and the fat Classical squeaked.

"Wow!"

"What was in Silver's bag?" asked Carthew, in a low voice.

"I—I——"

"You saw it?"

"Ye-c-es!"

"Tell me what it was!"

"I—I'm not going to sneak, even if they are boozing beasts! I—I mean—— Yow-ow-ow! Leggo my ear! Wow-wow!"

"What was it?" hissed Carthew.

"Yow-ow-ow! Only some bottles of gin! Yow-ow!"

"Cut off!" said Carthew.

Tubby Muffin cut off quickly enough, rubbing his fat ear. He was anxious to get out of the reach of Carthew's finger and thumb.

Carthew stepped round the corner and glanced along the Fourth Form passage. The passage was empty; the weather had tempted everybody out of doors on that glorious afternoon. It was exactly the opportunity for a set of young rascals with depraved tastes to indulge in an orgy. Carthew could have no doubt now, only—only—Not only was it too good to be true, but really seemed incredible in itself. The blackest of black sheep at Rookwood had surely never descended to the level of gin-drinking! Even Carthew could not believe it without the clearest proof.

He heard a click at the other end of the passage. The door of the end study had been locked inside.

Carthew breathed quickly.

Why had those four young rascals locked themselves in their study, when summer skies and sunshine called them out of doors?

The suspicious prefect trod softly along the passage.

He had to make sure.

He had put his foot in it more than once; he had not forgotten the chocolate cigar. It was barely possible—more than barely, if Carthew had only known it—that the juniors had known he was watching them; that they had clinked two old ginger-beer bottles on purpose; that they had put Tubby Muffin up to giving him false information—anything, in fact, was more than probable than gin-drinking in a Rookwood study.

Carthew had to be very careful; all the more because if he could bring a successful accusation against the four, their disgrace and ruin was certain and inevitable. Nothing was to be left to chance.

With great caution, Mark Carthew trod along the passage, making scarcely a sound. He was not aware that at the keyhole of the end study a keen ear was listening very intently for precisely those faint, stealthy sounds of creeping feet.

He reached the door and stopped. He stood listening.

There were sounds in the study—sounds that could only have been made by glasses clinking against a bottle.

Carthew's eyes glittered.

Incredible as it was, too good to be true as it was, it was growing a certainty now. But he continued to listen.

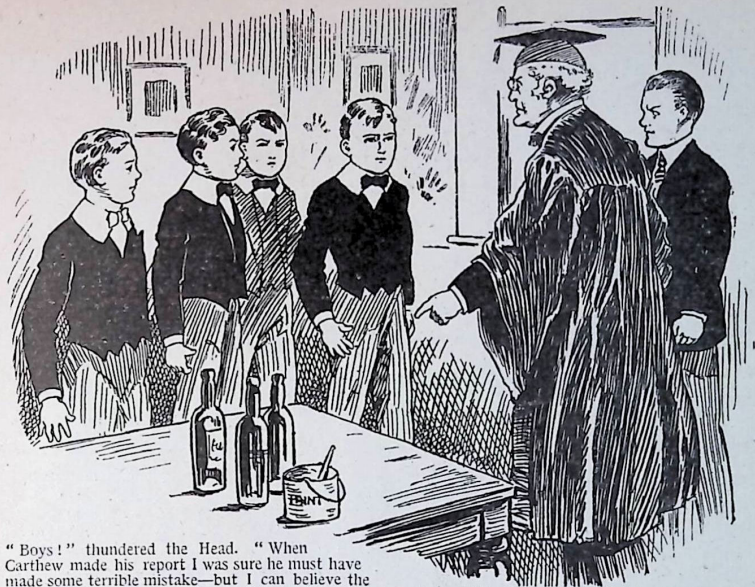
"I—I say, isn't it a bit too strong, Jimmy?"

That was the voice of Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Well, it's a bit strong," said Jimmy Silver. "But I suppose we want something stronger than water!"

"Oh, yes, rather!"

"It will make the study smell a bit," said Raby. "A fellow coming in will niff it at once."



"Boys!" thundered the Head. "When Carthew made his report I was sure he must have made some terrible mistake—but I can believe the evidence of my own eyes. You will be sent away from Rookwood this very evening!" (See Chapter 8.)

"Nobody will come in."

"Carthew might be spying about."

"We passed him in the quad. He's out of doors."

Carthew smiled. Every word uttered in the study was distinctly audible to him as he stood outside the door. The Fistical Four really seemed bent on betraying themselves into the hands of their old enemy.

"I'll spill some eucalyptus," continued Jimmy Silver. "That will drown the smell, you know."

"Good egg!"

"Now then, go it, you fellows!"

There was a gurgling sound.

Any other prefect at Rookwood who had supposed that juniors were drinking in a study would have chipped in instantly, not so Carthew. Carthew preferred to wait till some of the spirit had been consumed;

then the state of the juniors would be an incontrovertible proof of their guilt. Carthew felt that he held his old enemies in the hollow of his hand. He was not going to risk failure by being in a hurry."

"I—I say—hic!—it's awfully strong——"

"Don't fall over, you ass!"

"Grooh!"

There was a sound of someone falling heavily into a chair. Carthew's eyes glittered.

Bump! Another junior, apparently, had sprawled on the carpet. There was a sound of feet staggering to and fro, and a clink.

Carthew felt that it had gone far enough. He gave a sudden thump on the door.

"Let me in, Silver!"

"Hi!"

"Do you hear me?"

"Who' zat?" came in blurred tones.

"Carthew! Let me in at once!"

"Cert'nly, ole f'ler!"

Staggering feet approached the door, and it was unlocked. Carthew strode into the study, his eyes blazing with triumph.

"Now, you young rascal——"

Jimmy Silver gazed at him dully, and sank into a chair. Lovell and Raby were sitting with their eyes closed; Newcome was curled up on the rug, without motion. On the table stood an empty bottle—a gin-bottle, with a label on it bearing the words "Best Gin." On the floor, in the corner, stood two other bottles, full of a pale liquid. Carthew did not need telling what that liquid was. The labels on the bottles were plain enough to read yards away.

His eyes fairly gloated over the chums of the Fourth.

"Caught!" he said.

"Eh?"

"This means the sack for you!" said Carthew gloatingly. "The merry sack! Do you understand, you young rascals?"

"Wharrer say?"

"Just wait a bit!" grinned Carthew.

He put the key on the outside of the lock, left the study, and turned the key. His victims were safe now. Then Carthew hurried away to the Head's study. He was not going to Mr. Dalton. Mr. Dalton could learn what had happened to his favourites when he found that the Head had expelled them from Rookwood School. Carthew chuckled at the thought. That would be a "facer" for Mr. Richard Dalton, and a handsome repayment for his contemptuous manner towards the worthy Carthew! The bully of the Sixth seemed to be walking on air, as he approached Dr. Chisholm's study.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

Before the Beak!

"NONSENSE!"

That was Dr. Chisholm's remark when Carthew made his amazing report.

Carthew flushed.

"I saw them with my own eyes, sir——"

"It is impossible!" exclaimed the Head.

"Rookwood boys—addicted to drink! I cannot believe it, Carthew! You are under some strange delusion!"

"Will you step to the study, sir, and see them?" said Carthew. "All four seem to me to be under the influence of drink, and certainly there are three bottles of gin in the study—one empty and two full."

"Good heavens!" said the Head aghast.

He rose hastily and followed Carthew out. Undoubtedly the matter needed full and instant investigation. With a very agitated manner, Dr. Chisholm rustled away to the Fourth Form passage. Dignified old gentleman as he was, he was almost running as he went towards the end study. Carthew found it hard to keep his face grave and composed; he had a strong impulse to grin. They arrived together at Jimmy Silver's door.

"It is locked!" said the Head.

"I have the key, sir! I thought it better to lock them in in their present state!"

"Yes, yes! Unlock the door at once!"

Carthew turned the key, and threw the door open. His eyes gloated in. He fully expected to see the Fistical Four stretched about the study as he had left them.

He stared blankly.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were gathered round the table, with absolutely no sign of intoxication about them. Jimmy was softening a brush in turpentine, and Raby and Newcome were looking on cheerily.

The four juniors stood respectfully to attention as the Head swept in.

Carthew blinked.

The recovery of the four had been remarkable. But the three tell-tale bottles were there—all on the table now, and one that had been full was half-empty! And the tell-tale labels stared the Head in the face!

"Boys!" thundered the Head.

"Yes, sir!"

"What—what are you doing?"

"We're just going to paint the study, sir," said Jimmy Silver respectfully. "Mr. Dalton gave us permission, sir, and we've bought the paint ourselves."

"Carthew informed me that——"

"There is the gin, sir," said Carthew. "They've been drinking more since I left. Both these bottles were full. They've got the paint here to drown the smell of spirits, I think, sir."



Jimmy Silver & Co. threw themselves on the floor and fairly howled with laughter "Poor old Carthew! Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 8.)

"Silver! Have you been drinking?"

"Not since dinner, sir."

"What! You drank at dinner——"

"Yes, sir. I always have a glass of water with my dinner——"

"I was not referring to water, Silver. You have bottles of—of intoxicating liquor in this study. What are these bottles, sir?" thundered the Head.

"Gin bottles, sir!"

"Silver! You dare to confess—though I can trust the evidence of my own eyes! When Carthew made his report, I was sure that he must have made some terrible mistake. But now, shameless that you are, you shall be sent away from Rookwood this very evening——"

"What for, sir?"

"Have we done anything wrong, sir?" asked Lovell.

"Boy!" gasped the Head.

"Mr. Dalton told us we might paint the

study, sir," said Jimmy Silver, innocently.

"We've got the turpentine to mix the paint and to clean the brushes, sir."

"T-t-turpentine!"

"Yes, sir."

The Head's face was a study for a moment.

"Is it turpentine in those bottles, Silver?" he asked in an altered voice.

Carthew felt quite sick.

"Yes, sir," answered Jimmy Silver cheerily.

"Mr. Timmings always sells his oils in old gin bottles, sir. They're cheap."

The Head stood quite still and silent. Carthew would have fled, if he had dared to move.

Once more he realised that the Fistical Four had pulled his egregious leg—and this time he had dragged the Head into it!

"Turpentine!" repeated the Head in a faint voice. "Take the corks out of the bottles, Silver, so that I can—can smell the

liquid. It—it looks very much like an—
intoxicating fluid.”

“Certainly, sir!”

Jimmy Silver dutifully removed the corks. He wondered whether the reverend Head of Rookwood knew the smell of gin! At all events, Dr. Chisholm knew the smell of turpentine, and one sniff satisfied him.

He threw a terrible look upon Carthew.

“So, Carthew, you have accused these perfectly innocent boys of the disgusting vice of drinking, because, with their form-master’s permission, they had painter’s materials here to paint their study.”

His voice was like the rumble of thunder. The hapless Carthew’s knees knocked together.

“I—I thought——” he mumbled faintly.

“You thought!” thundered the Head.

“I scarcely believe that you are capable of thinking, Carthew. You have brought me here—you have wasted my time—you—you—— And you stated—you explicitly stated, sir, that you had seen these juniors under the influence of drink ten minutes ago in the study. Did you suppose that they had been drinking turpentine?”

“I—I thought—they—I——” stammered Carthew.

“Silver, I am sorry that for one moment I allowed Carthew’s ridiculous mistake to influence me. Carthew, follow me! I have to speak to you very seriously, sir, in my study!”

“May we go on painting the study, sir?” asked Jimmy Silver demurely.

“Certainly, my boy—certainly! I am glad to see you so harmlessly and industriously occupied.”

“Oh, thank you, sir!”

“Come, Carthew!” said the Head in a grinding voice.

Carthew limped away after the Head, with a dreadful sinking feeling. The juniors gravely watched him go. But their gravity only lasted till the Head was out of the Fourth Form passage. Then Jimmy Silver closed the study door, and looked at his chums. And a wild yell of laughter rang through the end study.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Poor old Carthew!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

And—abandoning paint and turpentine—Jimmy Silver & Co. fairly threw themselves on the carpet, and kicked up their heels in a paroxysm of merriment. And at tea-time the whole Fourth Form had heard the story, and were roaring over it.

Carthew was quite pale when he limped out of the Head’s study after the Head had had a “very serious talk” with him. It had been rather a lengthy talk, and rather an emphatic talk, and Carthew had not enjoyed it. He almost crawled away when it was over.

And it dawned upon Carthew that he would do wisely to let the end study alone after that. He was really quite afraid of making another catch. His catches were a little too unfortunate.

The end study did not, perhaps, look much better when the amateur painters had finished painting it. But the Fistical Four felt that their time and money had not been wasted. Carthew was giving them a much-needed rest; and nearly all Rookwood was chortling over the story of how they had succeeded in pulling Carthew’s leg!



THE END

FULL INSIDE!



Even William George Bunter's capacity has its limits, and in the above study by Mr. Chapman, Billy appears to have reached—or even passed—the safety limit! Judging by the contented expression on his face, however, Billy appears to have no fears for the future! The question is, whose pie was it?