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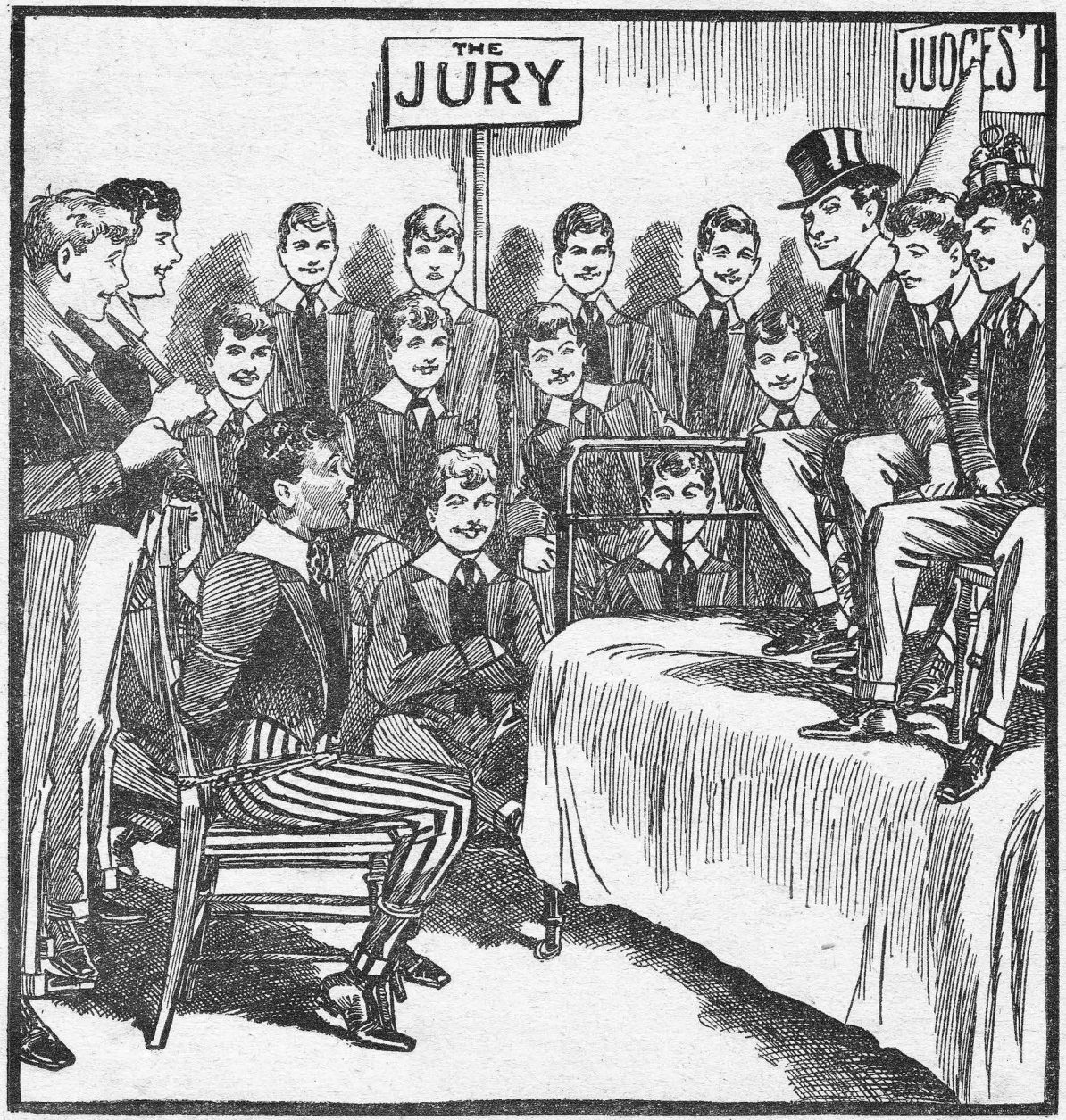

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?

NKY MINOR BEFORE THE GREYFRIARS POLICE COURT!

(A Tense Moment in one of the Long School Tales Inside.)

THE ROOKWOOD VENTRILOQUIST!

A Sp'endid Long Complete Story, dealing with the Adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Trouble in the Form-Room!

CARTHEW smiled as he came into the Fourth Form-room. The bully of the Sixth Form at Rookwood was feeling on very good terms with himself. Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth Form, was indisposed, and to Carthew fell the task of keeping the Fourth Form juniors in order until his return.

Carthew's idea of keeping juniors in order was based on the use of the cane, and plenty of it. And among the Fourth-Formers were a number of juniors the prefect had a special "down" on. Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, known throughout Rookwood as the Fistical Four; and Van Ryn, Pons, and Conroy, the Colonial Co., were likely to feel the full weight of his authority.

Already he had succeeded in exasperating them to the point of revolt, and had caused Van Lyn, the South African junior and amateur ventriloquist, to declare that he would stand no more bullying. The Fistical Four had actually "piled on" to their tormentor in sheer self-defence, only to find that they were worse off than before. They were reported to the Head and severely caned.

The bully of the Sixth had been somewhat roughly handled by Jimmy Silver & Co.; but he was not sorry the incident had occurred. The Head had been drawn into the matter, and had, as was to be expected, supported the prefect with his authority.

In any further resistance, the Fistical Four would be backing up against their headmaster, as well as against Carthew. Their old enemy felt that he had them in a cleft-stick, as it were. If they did not resist, he could persecute them at his own sweet will; and if they did resist, the Head would be down upon them again more severely than before. Carthew would have been quite pleased at being bumped on the Fourth-room floor, if it had resulted in a flogging in Hall for Jimmy Silver & Co.

The chums of the end study understood the position as well as Carthew. They came into the Form-room with glum faces. They meant to stand Carthew as long as they could, but if he went too far, and they couldn't, they knew what would follow resistance. They felt that they were caught, and that they were at the mercy of the mean-natured prefect; and it was not a pleasant feeling.

As for the South African junior's intention of "chipping" in, they thought little of it. If the end study couldn't back up against the bully, what good was any other study? None at all! But the Fistical Four, as well as Mark Carthew, were to be surprised that afternoon.

Carthew gave the four a malevolent look. He did not waste time before beginning on them.

"Silver!" he rapped out, before the juniors had fairly taken their seats.

"Yes, Carthew," said Jimmy, very quietly.

"Have you done the lines I gave you this morning?"

"No."

"I told you to bring them to me before afternoon lessons."

"My hands were too bad for writing, Carthew. I can't handle a pen yet."

"Don't pitch me any lying yarns, Silver! You are the biggest liar in the Form, I think."

Jimmy's eyes glinted, but he was silent. But at that moment through the half-open door of the Form-room came a thundering voice.

"Carthew! Is that the language you use to a junior?"

Carthew spun round in alarm.

For it was the voice of the Head!

"Sir!" stammered Carthew, taken utterly aback. He had supposed that the Head was in the Sixth Form-room, or in his study.

"Follow me at once, Carthew!" came the stern, commanding tones.

"Ye-e-es, sir!" stuttered Carthew.

He almost limped towards the door. The Head had not appeared there, and though it was a little singular that he had spoken to Carthew without looking into the room, Carthew had no choice but to obey him. The Fourth-Formers exchanged glances of keen satisfaction. The bullying prefect was in a row at last.

Carthew went into the passage, and stared. The Head was not in sight. How the old gentleman could have got out of the corridor already was surprising—Dr. Chisholm did not usually move in a hurry. But he was gone, and Carthew made his way reluctantly to the Sixth Form-room.

He entered the senior Form-room, where the top Form were at work with the headmaster. Dr. Chisholm was deep in Euripides with the Sixth; the Sixth, perhaps, not being quite so keenly interested as the doctor was. He looked round somewhat sharply as Carthew came in.

"Carthew! Why have you left the Fourth Form? I trust there is no more trouble with the juniors?"

Carthew stared at him blankly.

"I—I——" he stammered.

"Well, what is it?"

"I—I—I've come, sir," stuttered Carthew.

"I can see you have come, Carthew," said the Head testily. "I am asking you why you have come."

The Sixth-Formers all looked curiously at Carthew. The latter's face was growing crimson.

"But you—you told me to come, sir," stammered Carthew, in helpless bewilderment. He wondered whether the reverend Head had taken leave of his senses.

"I told you, Carthew?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have no recollection of doing so," snapped Dr. Chisholm. "When I placed you in charge of a junior Form, on your own offer to undertake Mr. Bootles' duties during his indisposition, it was understood that you would sacrifice your own work in this room."

"Yes, sir, but—but——"

"When did I tell you to come here, Carthew?"

"A—a few minutes ago, sir," stuttered the prefect.

"What!"

"You—you called to me from the corridor, sir, and—and—told me to follow you here."

"Carthew! Is this a joke?" thundered the Head. "Have you ventured, sir, to play a foolish joke on your headmaster?"

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Carthew.

The prefect would sooner have played a joke on a wild Hun than upon the Head of Rookwood.

"Then what do you mean, sir, by stating that I called to you from the corridor a few minutes ago?"

"But you—you did, sir."

"I have been in this room for ten minutes, Carthew."

Carthew felt as if his head were turning round. The seniors were beginning to grin. They could only suppose that—unheard-of as it was—Carthew was really venturing to "pull" the leg of the headmaster.

"I—I—I——" babbled Carthew.

Dr. Chisholm was looking at him very hard.

"If someone called to you from the corridor, Carthew, it was not I. Perhaps some junior was deceiving you, from a mistaken sense of humour."

"I—I suppose so, sir!" gasped Carthew. "I—I'm sorry I've interrupted you, sir."

Dr. Chisholm had already returned to Euripides, and Carthew left the senior room. He rubbed his nose in wonder as he went down the passage. Unless he was dreaming, Dr. Chisholm had called him out of the Fourth Form room; yet he denied having done so. If it was some fag's practical joke, the fag had imitated the Head's voice wonderfully. And what fag could it have been, when all the juniors of Rookwood were at classes?

Carthew returned to the Fourth Form room in a dazed state, blinking. He

found the juniors all in their places; and some of them smiling. The expression upon the face of Dick Van Ryn was child-like and bland; Conroy and Pons were grinning; and Jimmy Silver & Co. looked remarkably cheerful. They knew now that the voice from the passage had been produced by the Rookwood ventriloquist, and they could have hugged the junior from South Africa.

Carthew scowled at the class, and singled out Conroy, whose grin certainly was very noticeable.

"What are you laughing at, Conroy?"

The Australian junior became serious at once.

"Was I laughing, Carthew?" he asked.

"Yes, you were. Come out here."

"Carthew!"

It was the Head's voice from the passage again.

Carthew jumped to the door.

He peered out into the passage; it was empty. Carthew stared at the blank walls, and gasped. Then he spun round to the class again.

"Some junior is playing a trick!" he shouted. "Who is it that has been calling out from the passage? I know you know who it is!"

Silence.

"Silver!" thundered Carthew.

"Yes, Carthew."

"Someone has been calling to me from the passage, and imitating the Head's voice. Do you know who it was?"

"I don't think there was anybody in the passage, Carthew," said Jimmy Silver meekly.

"You know there was!" roared Carthew furiously. "I believe you have a hand in it. Come out here!"

Carthew snatched up Mr. Bootles' cane. The practical joker in the passage, apparently, dodged away too quickly to be caught, but Carthew intended that someone should smart for it.

"Carthew!"

It was the Head's voice once more. But Carthew did not look into the passage; he strode towards Jimmy Silver.

Swish! Swish!

"Yow-ow!"

Carthew pitched the cane on the desk again.

Jimmy Silver rubbed his hands, and gave Van Ryn an expressive look. The South African junior, certainly, had made Carthew "sit up" with his queer ventriloquial gifts; but Jimmy had not benefited much, so far. But Van Ryn was not finished yet.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
An Exciting Time for Carthew!

"CARTHEW, you cad!"

Carthew jumped, and looked round. The voice did not come from the class. It came from the wall-cupboard at the end of the Form-room, where the blackboards and easels were kept.

"Who—what's that?" ejaculated the prefect.

"Yah! Cad! Rotter! Bully!"

Carthew's face became crimson with rage.

He strode to the desk, and grabbed the cane, and then strode to the big cupboard.

Evidently some fag was hidden there—at least, that was the only explanation Carthew could think of.

The Fourth-Formers watched him, grinning, while he hurled the big door open, and peered in among the lumber in the cupboard.

All the Fourth knew by this time that the Rookwood ventriloquist was at work.

Mornington & Co. were exchanging dubious glances. They could have informed Carthew of the exact nature of the mysterious voice; but "sneaking" was a serious offence at Rookwood.

All the protection he could have obtained from Carthew would not have made Morny's life worth living afterwards, if he had betrayed Van Ryn. He knew it, and he was silent. He did not want to be mercilessly ragged and sent to Coventry; neither did the rest of the nuts.

As for Towny & Co., they were enjoying the prefect's bewilderment and discomfiture, and would have been sorry to spoil the joke.

Carthew's movements certainly were interesting. He peered among the lumber in the wall-cupboard, without finding anyone hidden there. He shoved the cane into every recess that was large enough to conceal a cat. But the practical joker did not come into view.

"Silly ass!"

Carthew spun round at the voice behind him.

"Who spoke?" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" yelled Carthew.

"Fathead!"

The voice came this time from Mr. Bootles' desk. Carthew rushed to it, and peered under it. But the space was empty.

"By gad!" gasped Carthew, in utter bewilderment. "I—I—I can't understand this! It's a trick of some sort!"

He glared at the grinning class.

The opprobrious epithets having ceased, Carthew took up the lesson again, in a very red and flustered state.

He was in a villainous temper by this time, and he rapped knuckles right and left with a ruler by way of solace.

Mornington came in for a rap, and scowled like a demon. Carthew was not in a mood to distinguish friends from foes now. Anybody who happened to be near him was in danger from the ruler.

"Mind what you're doin'!" shouted Mornington, sucking his knuckles furiously.

"Hold your tongue, Mornington!" snarled Carthew savagely.

"Well, let my knuckles alone, confound you! Yarooh!" roared Mornington, as the angry prefect dealt him a terrific box on the ear.

There was a howl of laughter from the Fourth. Mornington had enjoyed Carthew's rule in the morning; he was not enjoying it so much in the afternoon. The prefect was in too savage a temper to think of favouritism.

"Now shut up!" snarled Carthew. "I'll keep order in this class or I'll know the reason why!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" mumbled Mornington, rubbing his ear. "Oh, by gad! Oh, ow!"

"Silver, what are you laughing at?"

"Mornington, please," said Jimmy meekly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Hold out your hand, Silver!"

"Don't be such a beastly bully, Carthew!" came a voice from the back of the class.

"Who spoke?" shrieked Carthew.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Was that you, Muffin?"

Tubby Muffin jumped in dismay and terror.

"Nunno. No, please, Carthew, it wasn't!" he howled.

"Who was it, then?"

"Find out, fathead!" came the voice. And, for the life of him, Carthew could not tell from which junior it proceeded.

He gripped the ruler hard, and went in among the desks, gritting his teeth. There was a sudden sound of yapping and snarling fairly under his feet.

"Gr-r-r-r! Bow-ow-ow! Gr-r-r-r!"

Carthew jumped almost clear off the floor.

"Who's got a dog here?" he yelled. "Who has dared to bring a dog into the Form-room?"

No reply.

Carthew glared under the desks in search of the dog. But there was no dog to be seen. He came back towards Jimmy Silver, with a deadly gleam in his eyes.

"This is a trick!" he said hoarsely. "I don't quite know how you are doing it, Silver, but I know it is you! I'll thrash you within an inch of your life, you cheeky young cad!"

He grasped Jimmy by the collar, and dragged him out of his desk.

"Leggo!" roared Jimmy wrathfully. "Oh, my hat! Yow-ow! Stoppit!"

The ruler was crashing on his shoulders: Carthew was in too great a rage to care how hard he struck. "Let go, you rotter! I'll kick your shins——"

"I'm not standing this!" roared Lovell. "Come on!"

He rushed out of his place, and drove his fist fairly into Carthew's face. The prefect reeled away, releasing Jimmy. Raby and Newcome rushed forward the next moment—the Fistical Four were always shoulder to shoulder. Both the juniors crashed into Carthew, hitting out; and the Sixth-Former went to the floor.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Van Ryn.

His ventriloquism had brought about rather unexpected results.

"Back up!" yelled Oswald.

Carthew staggered to his feet. He was gripping the ruler to rush on the Fistical Four, who faced him with gleaming eyes.

Oswald joined them, and the Colonial Co. were only a second later. Then came Flynn with a rush.

"Go back to your places!" roared Carthew.

"Let Jimmy Silver alone, then, ye spalpeen!"

Carthew struck furiously at Flynn by way of reply. The next moment the ruler was torn from his hand, and six or seven juniors surrounded him and seized him.

"Frog's-march!" roared Lovell.

"Hurrah!"

"May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb!" grinned Conroy. "There'll be a thumpin' row, anyway!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him socks!"

"Let go!" howled Carthew. "Release me! Oh, crumbs!"

The struggling prefect was caught up in the grasp of the juniors, and round and round the Form-room he went, experiencing, for the first time since he had been a senior, the joys of the frog's-march. Evidently the Fourth Form were quite out of hand.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Fall of the Tyrant!

THE Form-room door was flung suddenly open.

Framed in the doorway appeared the awe-inspiring figure of the Head, towering in wrath.

"Cave!" stuttered Jones minor.

Bump!

The Fourth-Formers dropped the prefect like a hot potato. Carthew sprawled on the floor, utterly breathless, unable to speak.

Dr. Chisholm strode into the Form-room, his brow like thunder.

"Carthew! Is this the way you keep order in this class?" he exclaimed.

"Gurrrrh!" came from Carthew.

"Go to your places!" thundered the Head.

The juniors scuttled back to their desks like rabbits. Mornington & Co. had not joined in the rag; but most of Fourth had helped to give Carthew the frog's-march, and now they sat palpitating. But Van Ryn was as cool as a cucumber; he had not finished yet.

"Carthew!"

"Oh, don't yell at me!"

The Fourth-Formers jumped at that reply, in Carthew's sulky voice. Dr. Chisholm stood rooted to the floor.

"Wha-a-at!" he stuttered.

"I say, don't yell at me!"

"My hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Carthew! Are you out of your senses? How dare you address your headmaster in that manner?" thundered the Head, hardly able to believe his reverend ears.

"Groogh!" gasped Carthew.

As a matter of fact, he had not spoken a single word; he was still trying to get his second wind. The Rookwood ventriloquist had kindly spoken for him.

"I—I have never heard of such insolence!" gasped the Head. "Get up, Carthew! Do not sprawl upon the floor in that ridiculous manner!"

"I'm fed up with this, Dr. Chisholm! You can get somebody else to look after the Fourth! The little beasts won't let me bully them!"

"Wha-a-at!" articulated the Head.

Carthew stared blankly.

"I—I didn't speak, sir."

"Carthew, I begin to believe that you have taken leave of your senses! Are you in your right mind?" roared the Head.

"I—I never said——"

"I shall certainly not leave you in charge of the Form after this, Carthew! I should not think of it for one moment! You have the audacity—the unparalleled audacity—to tell me that you wish to bully these boys? I can scarcely credit my ears!"

"I—I didn't—— I—I never—— I—I——"

"Do not interrupt me, Carthew! You tempt me to administer corporal punishment, Sixth-Former as you are!"

"I—I——"

"So when you offered your services, Carthew, in Mr. Bootles' place, it was your intention to bully, as you call it, these juniors. And you have the unheard-of audacity to tell me so!" exclaimed the Head. "I am glad, Carthew, that in your unseemly excitement you have blurted out the truth. I begin to understand why there has been so much disturbance in this Form under your charge."

"I—I—I——"

"It is too late to attempt excuses, Carthew. You have addressed me, your headmaster, insolently. Unless you apologise for it this instant, I shall expel you from the school."

Carthew almost staggered.

"I—I apologise, sir!" he stammered, hardly aware of what he was wanted to apologise for. "I—I beg your pardon, I'm sure, sir! But I didn't——"

"That will do. You have shown your unfitness, Carthew, for the position I have placed you in. You will go to the Sixth Form-room at once, and ask Bulkeley to step here!"

Carthew, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, limped out of the room.

"I found this Form-room in a state of uproar!" said the Head sternly. "But for Carthew's amazing confession that he had been bullying, I should punish you all most severely. As it is, I shall pass over the matter. According to Carthew's own words, he was chiefly to blame."

The juniors were silent. Only Van Ryn closed one eye at Pons, who was next to him.

"Bulkeley will take charge of the class until Mr. Bootles recovers," added the Head. "I need not say that if there is any further disturbance, the punishment of the offenders will be most exemplary!"

Bulkeley came into the Form-room. Smiling faces from the Fourth greeted him. The juniors were only too glad to be put under the authority of the popular captain of Rookwood.

"Bulkeley, I should be glad if you would take charge of this class until Mr. Bootles is able to do so again. Carthew has proved totally unfit for the post!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Bulkeley.

The Head swept out of the Form-room. Bulkeley eyed the juniors rather grimly. But they smiled at him sweetly. And from that moment lessons proceeded in the Fourth Form-room without a hitch.

As soon as the Fourth came out, Jimmy Silver & Co. rushed up to Van Ryn, and collared him.

"Hallo! What's the game?" roared Van Ryn.

"Shoulder high!" shouted Lovell.

"Oh, I see!" The South African junior grinned. "Any old thing!"

On the shoulders of the Fistical Four Dick van Ryn was carried out in triumph into the quadrangle, amid cheers from the Fourth.

The Fourth Form had done with Carthew, and their trials and troubles were over; and they owed their rescue from the tyrant to Dick van Ryn, and for the present, at least, there was no more popular junior in the school than the Rookwood ventriloquist.

THE END.

Framed in the doorway appeared the awe-inspiring figure of the Head. "Cave!" muttered Jones minor. Bump! The juniors dropped Carthew like a hot potato, and stood breathlessly by, as Dr. Chisholm strode into the room, his brow like thunder. (*See chapter* 3).