

Great Sea Adventure Yarn — **“Topsail Tony!”** by David Goodwin — In This Issue!

The BOYS' FRIEND 2d

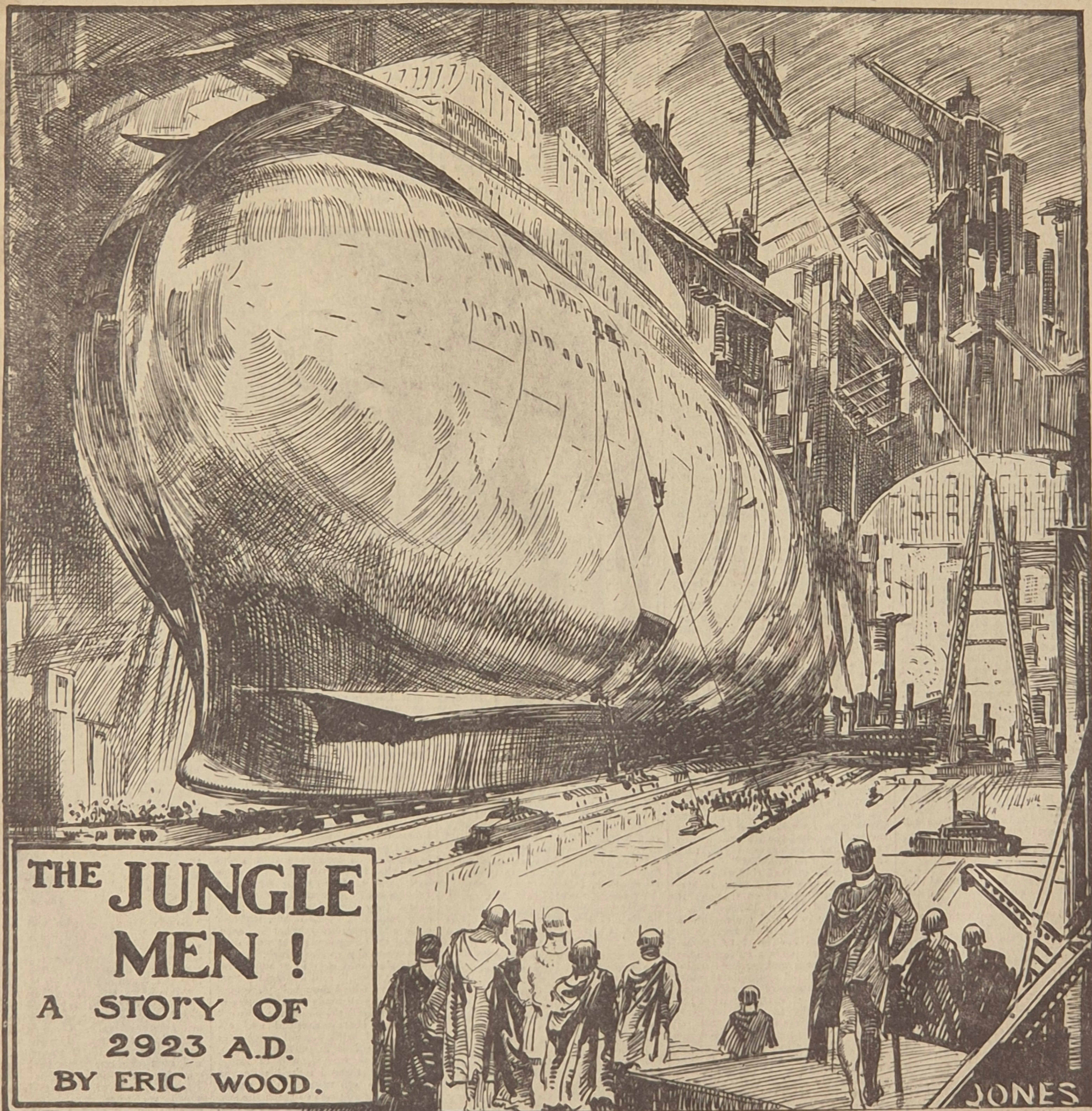
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[Week Ending January 26th, 1924.]



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Working the Oracle!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

(Author of the Tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Popular.")

Putty Grace gives his uncle a very rough time of it when he visits Rookwood!

The 1st Chapter. A Peculiar Problem.

"Oh dear!" Jimmy Silver was quite startled. It was a deep, deep sigh that he heard, and it proceeded from Study No. 2 in the Classical Fourth. And he recognised the tones of Teddy Grace—better known in the Fourth as "Putty."

Putty of the Fourth, as a rule, was the cheeriest junior at Rookwood. His face always wore a smile. Even when his over-developed sense of humour led him into japes and scrapes that ended in trouble, Putty's cheery spirits were seldom dashed. Even after a Head's licking he had been known to come up smiling.

And so that deep, deep sigh from Putty of the Fourth startled Jimmy Silver. Jimmy was coming along the Fourth Form passage with a football under his arm. But he dismissed games practice from his mind for the moment to turn into Study No. 2 and ascertain what was the matter.

Grace of the Fourth was alone there—his study-mates, Tubby Muffin, Higgs, and Jones minor, were out of doors. Grace was sitting on the corner of the study table, with a letter in his hand. Apparently he had been reading the letter, and found therein cause for deep sighing. His face was lugubrious.

"Bad news, old chap?" asked Jimmy Silver sympathetically. "Rotten!" groaned Putty.

"From home?"

"Yes."

"Sorry!" said Jimmy. "Anything a fellow can do?"

Putty shook his head sorrowfully. "Nothing, thanks! It's pretty awful. My uncle Theophilus—"

Putty broke off with a groan.

Jimmy Silver was deeply concerned. He had never heard of Grace's Uncle Theophilus before—he had heard of him, certainly he would have remembered a name like that. But if there was anything amiss with the old gentleman Jimmy was sorry enough, especially as Grace seemed to take it so much to heart.

"Ill?" asked Jimmy.

"Worse than that."

"Poor old chap! Dead?"

"Worse than that."

Jimmy Silver was startled again. He did not quite see what there could be worse than death.

"Worse?" he asked in perplexity.

"Much worse."

"Then what—"

"He's coming here."

"Eh?"

"Coming to Rookwood to visit me," said Putty.

Jimmy Silver stared at Putty of the Fourth. Putty was still looking lugubrious, but there was a glimmer in his eye.

"You silly owl!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver at last. "Are you trying to pull my leg, you howling ass?"

"You wouldn't ask that question if you knew my Uncle Theophilus," said Putty gloomily. "His name's Theophilus, and he looks just as if it might be. He's coming here. He's attached to me."

"No accounting for tastes," said

Jimmy. "Perhaps he doesn't know you very well."

"Fathead! He's so jolly attached to me that he wants me to leave Rookwood and go to live with him."

"Is there insanity in your family?" inquired Jimmy.

"Eh? No! Of course not!"

"Then how do you account for it?"

"You silly ass!" roared Putty of the Fourth. Like many humorists, Putty did not wholly relish humour that was directed towards his own humorous self.

"Well," argued Jimmy. "A man who knows you, and still wants you to go to live with him must be a bit loose somewhere in the crumpet. Doesn't it strike you like that?"

"You silly chump!"

Jimmy Silver grinned. He felt that his leg had been pulled, and that he had been done, as it were, out of unnecessary sympathy. A visit from an uncle, even an uncle named Theophilus, could not be such a very serious matter.

"You see," said Putty, "I'm one of six."

"Six what?"

"Nephews of my Uncle Theophilus Bubb."

"Poor old nunky—if they're all like you!"

"Ass! This letter is from my pater," groaned Putty. "He tells me that nunky has decided to adopt one of his nephews, and take the lucky man to live with him. The lucky man's going to have a tutor, and live at home, and brighten life for Uncle Theo. It doesn't seem to have occurred to Uncle Theo that he won't brighten life much for the lucky man."

Jimmy chuckled.

"Is the old gent wealthy?" he asked.

"Tons of it."

"Then it might be a jolly good thing for the lucky man."

"I fancy he would earn it, if he had to brighten life for Uncle Theo," groaned Putty. "The pater seems to think I'm in luck. He says that Uncle Theo is giving me first chance. Five other jolly old nephews are also rascals."

"Well, what is there to grouse about?" demanded Jimmy Silver. "If you don't like the idea you can tell the old sport so, can't you?"

Putty shook his head dismally.

"Uncle Theo isn't a man you can say 'No' to," he answered.

"I suppose he doesn't bite?"

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised if he did. Anyway, he barks—loud. He licked me last holidays for sitting on his hat. I believe he's a very good old sort—one of those crusty johnnies, you know, with a heart of gold. He stood by the pater like a brick once, when he was up against it, and the pater thinks a lot of him. The pater had experience of the heart of gold, you see—I've chiefly had the crust."

"I see! Your pater doesn't want you to let him down?"

Putty nodded.

"He says I can please myself—but that I'm to take jolly good care not to hurt nunky's feelings. Now, how are you going to refuse a beneficent offer

from a benevolent uncle without jolly well hurting his feelings?"

Jimmy Silver shook his head. That was a problem to which he could find no solution.

"Why not accept the offer?" he suggested. "It would be a bit hard on nunky to have you around every day, but he's asking for it."

"Fathead!"

"Probably he would soon get fed-up?" suggested Jimmy. "I think that's very likely myself."

"Ass!"

"He may be keen now to take you away from Rookwood, but I really

Raby and Newcome nodded assent. Snowballing the Bagshot fellows was the best device they could think of for killing time on a snowy afternoon.

"Come with me, then," said Putty.

"What's on?" asked Raby.

"Is it a rag?" asked Lovell, with interest.

"Well, yes. I want you to back me up in a shindy."

"Right you are!"

A "shindy" was just what the Fistical Four wanted to keep them warm that afternoon. So, without asking further questions, they went for their coats and their caps, and sallied out with Putty of the Fourth.

A snowball whizzed across the quad from the direction of Mr. Manders' house, and whisked off Lovell's cap.

"Hallo! Those Modern cads!" exclaimed Lovell, as he fished his cap. "Let's give 'em jip!"

"Never mind the Moderns now," said Putty hastily. "You can rag them any time. We've got to get to the station at Coombe."

"What on earth for?"

"For the jape, old infant. Hurry up!"

So Arthur Edward Lovell shook his fist at the Moderns, and followed his companions down to the gates.

There was snow in Coombe Lane, snow on the hedges, snow ridging the leafless branches of the trees. But the five juniors went along the lane at a trot, and they arrived in the village in a glow.

The hall after two chimed out as they arrived opposite the little railway-station.

"Just in time," said Putty cheerfully.

"For what?" asked Newcome.

"The train's in at half-past two."

"I know that! but—"



"YAROOOH!" Mr. Bubb suddenly grasped Jimmy Silver and Lovell by the backs of their collars and brought their heads together in a sounding concussion. "Yaroooooh!" yelled the two hapless juniors simultaneously. "Groooh! Help!"

think I could guarantee that in a week's time he would be still keeper to send you back."

"You silly owl!" roared Putty.

"Have you come in here to be funny? Go and eat cake."

Jimmy Silver chuckled, and left Study No. 2—leaving Putty of the Fourth to wrestle with his peculiar problem.

The 2nd Chapter. Backing up Putty.

"You fellows busy?"

It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at Rookwood School, and Jimmy Silver & Co., as a matter of fact, were not busy. There had been a heavy fall of snow, and football was off. The snow was still coming down in light, whirling flakes. The Fistical Four were looking out at the weather from a Hall window in the School House when Putty of the Fourth came up.

"Not very," answered Jimmy Silver. "Just thinking whether we should go and look for the Bagshot Boulders, and give 'em snowballs."

"Mighty as well," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "No good hanging about in the studies."

"Get your snowballs ready."

"Snowballs! Are we snowballing somebody?" asked Jimmy Silver, mystified.

"That's it."

"But what—"

"It's all right! You fellows buzz snowballs at the Johnny I buzz them at," said Putty. "He'll be along in a minute now. I'll explain later."

"Look here, if we're going to snowball somebody, I'd jolly well rather you explained beforehand," said Jimmy Silver warmly.

"No time—here he is!"

The juniors looked across the snowy street at a stranger who had stepped out of the railway-station.

He was a middle-aged gentleman in a fur coat, with a bowler-hat jammed tightly on his head. He had rugged features, and a bristling grey moustache, and his brow was stern.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had never seen him before, but evidently Putty knew him.

"That's the merchant! Buzz them at him!"

Putty started with a well-aimed snowball which smote the bowler-hat amidstships, and fairly lifted it from the stranger's head. The fur-coated gentleman jumped.

"What—what—what—" he roared.

"Go for him!" gasped Putty, stooping to grab up more snow.

"Give him all you can!"

Whiz, whiz, whiz, whiz! Jimmy Silver & Co. were a little bewildered, but they played up. They took it for granted that Putty had some cause for grievance against this stern looking gentleman.

Snowballs crashed on the fur coat. One landed on the stern gentleman's nose, and burst there, smothering his features with snow.

There was a roar from the stranger that was a good deal like the roar of a bull. He had spotted his assailants now, and he came charging across the street with his umbrella gripped in his hand.

"Hook it!" gasped Raby.

But there was no time for hooking it. The stern gentleman was very active. He came on the Rookwooders like a whirlwind, and his umbrella smote right and left.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Help!"

Like straws before the wind, the Fistical Four were scattered by the charge. Jimmy Silver dodged round a pillar-box, Raby backed into the porch of the Red Cow, Lovell and Newcome sprawled in the snow, roaring. Putty of the Fourth was still less fortunate. A grasp of iron was on his collar, and he was held under the umbrella, which came down on him almost like a flail.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Yooooooooooop!" roared Putty.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-wowooooop!"

"You young rascal! You young— Bless my soul! Edward!"

The raining swipes of the umbrella ceased suddenly, and Mr. Theophilus Bubb, holding his hopeful nephew at arm's length, stared at him blankly.

The 3rd Chapter. The Kind Uncle.

"Uncle!" gasped Putty.

Jimmy Silver gasped, too. This was Uncle Theophilus—and this was Putty's way of greeting his uncle!

"You silly ass!" stuttered Jimmy.

"You—"

"Edward!" thundered Mr. Bubb.

"Oh dear!"

"What does this mean?"

"Leggo!"

Mr. Bubb released his nephew. Putty of the Fourth stood before him, wriggling and writhing. The whacks had burst the ribs of the umbrella, and very nearly Putty's. Mr. Bubb was well on in middle-age, but he was a hefty gentleman.

Lovell and Newcome crawled out of the snow and backed away. The Fistical Four—at a safe distance—blinked at Putty and his uncle.

"What does this mean, Edward Grace?" thundered Mr. Bubb.

"Oh dear! Only a lark, uncle!" groaned Putty.

"A—a lark?"

"That's all."

"You have been snowballing me—your uncle—for a lark?" gasped Mr. Bubb.

"Oh dear! Yes!"

"You young rascal!"

"I—I say—"

"You young ruffian!"

"Oh, uncle!"

Mr. Bubb glared at his nephew. He was very angry—not without cause. Perhaps, like the prophet of old, he felt that he did well to be angry. Certainly he was very angry indeed.

"I have a great mind, Edward, to step back into the station and take the first train home!" he thundered.

"Oh, uncle!"

"A very great mind indeed! I am well aware, Edward, that you are given to practical joking. If you wish me to carry out my intentions towards you, you will have to curb this propensity. Do you hear?"

"Yes, uncle."

"As for these young rascals, who perhaps have led you into this—"

"Oh, no, uncle!"

"No jolly fear!" gasped Lovell.

"Do they belong to Rookwood?" demanded Mr. Bubb.

"Yes, uncle."

"They are a disgrace to their school! I shall report this to their headmaster! An unprovoked attack—"

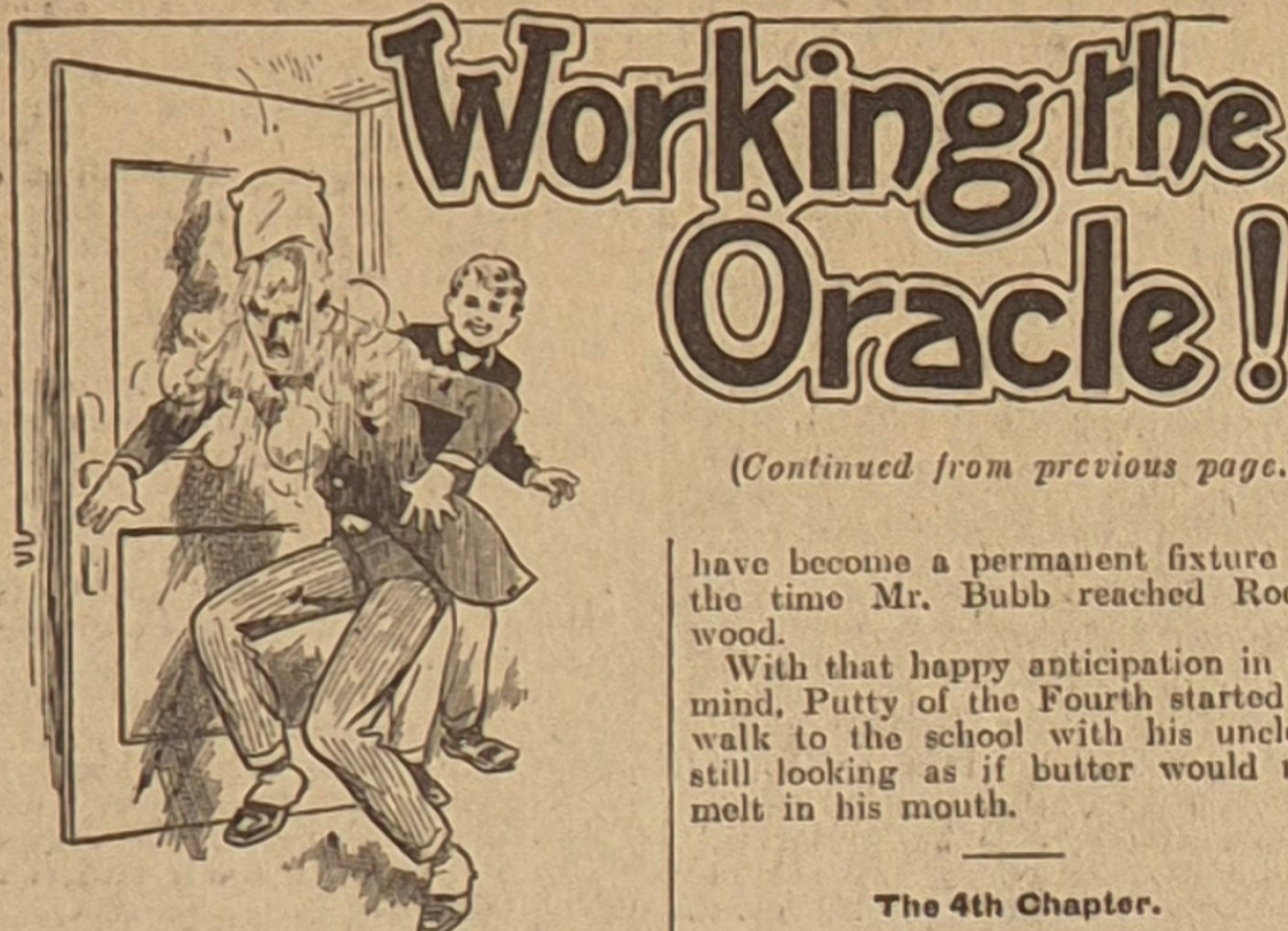
"I—I say, uncle—"

"Silence! Come with me! I forbid you to speak to those four ruffianly boys again! They are not fit associates for you. Come!"

Putty of the Fourth came—he had no choice about that. Mr. Bubb

(Continued overleaf.)

Screamingly funny—"Bucking up Cuffy!" next week's long story of the chums of Rookwood School. Make sure you read it!



(Continued from previous page.)

have become a permanent fixture by the time Mr. Bubb reached Rookwood.

With that happy anticipation in his mind, Putty of the Fourth started to walk to the school with his uncle—still looking as if butter would not melt in his mouth.

The 4th Chapter. Sticking to It!

Jimmy Silver & Co were back at Rookwood before Putty and Putty's uncle arrived there. They were engaged in a snowball battle with the Modern fellows, among the old beeches, when Putty conducted Mr. Bubb in at the gates, past the porter's lodge, and up the path to the School House. Catching sight of Mr. Theophilus Bubb in the distance, the Fistical Four dodged behind the frosty trunks, hoping to keep out of his view. They trusted to luck, and to Putty, to keep the old gentleman from reporting them to the Head for the unfortunate incident at Coombe.

Fortunately, Mr. Bubb's keen eyes did not light on them; among the crowd of Classical and Modern fellows. He marched on with his solid, heavy tread towards the School House, dutifully escorted by his nephew Edward.

Dr. Chisholm, the Head of Rookwood, had just descended the steps of the School House, and was about to walk across the quad to the Modern side to see Mr. Manders. But as he saw Mr. Bubb coming up with Putty, the Head paused, and saluted him courteously. He was slightly acquainted with Mr. Bubb; and it was the business of the Head to turn on a special courtesy towards the parents and relatives of Rookwood fellows. He had a rather fixed and mechanical smile which he used for such occasions.

Mr. Bubb bowed and raised his hat to the Head. That is to say, he bowed and started raising his hat.

But the hat did not rise far. It rose less than an inch, and, amazing to relate, most of Mr. Bubb's rather thick iron-grey hair rose with it.

Then the hat stopped in its upward career, with a sudden jerk, that took Mr. Bubb quite by surprise.

The gum had set by that time, and the hat was firmly attached to Mr. Bubb's hair. The jerk was quite painful to Mr. Bubb, who was not accustomed to having his hair pulled.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. The Head blinked a little over his glasses. A sudden and startled "Oh!" was not a customary greeting.

"Mr. Bubb, I think—" "Ow!"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. Mr. Bubb tugged at the hat. He was so startled and amazed by its unexpected adhesion to his head that he forgot everything else for the moment. He tugged, and gave a yelp of pain at the result of his own tug.

"Good gad!" he gasped. The Head looked at him, amazed and dignified. Then with a slight salute he walked away towards Mr. Manders' house. He did not know what was the matter with Mr. Bubb, and did not appear to care to inquire. Indeed, a dreadful suspicion crossed his mind that the old gentleman had been drinking.

Putty watched his uncle with a sweet smile. At the same time, he backed out of reach. Mr. Bubb, with a crimson face, put both hands to his hat. He tried to raise it gently from his head. But the hat stuck.

"Upon my word, this is absolutely astonishing!" gasped Mr. Bubb. "My—my hat appears to be stuck to my hair, Edward."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Putty. "I should not have thought it possible, Edward—but it is the fact! I am utterly amazed—it is most astounding—"

Mr. Bubb, crimson, astonished, almost unnerved at the strange occurrence, jerked again and again at his hat.

The sight of an old gentleman trying to jerk an obstinate hat off in the quadrangle of Rookwood naturally drew attention. Quite a number of Rookwood fellows gathered round, apparently under the impression that this was some sort of an entertainment.

"There is something—something wrong!" gasped Mr. Bubb. "I—I am astounded! I—"

"Try again, sir," said Mornington.

"Shall I give it a pull, sir?"

"I don't mind lending a hand, sir," said Townsend. "It seems to be sort of stuck on, sir. Too much bear's-grease, perhaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The hair-oil's frozen, perhaps," said Mornington, with great gravity.

"Stop inside, sir, and hold it over the Hall fire."

Mr. Bubb glared round. He realised that he was providing an entertainment for hilarious youth; and he hurried into the house. Putty dutifully followed him.

"Will you call on my Form master, Mr. Dalton, uncle?" murmured Putty.

"I—I cannot go to Mr. Dalton's study with my hat on," gasped Mr. Bubb; "and—and it will not come off! It is extraordinary! Some sticky substance seems to have got into the hat, and it adheres to my hair."

"Is it possible, uncle?"

"Bless my soul! It—it will not come off! Try to get it off for me, Edward—gently."

Mr. Bubb bent his head, and Putty took hold of the hat's brim with both hands. He gave a tug.

"Yaroooo!" roared his uncle.

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"Oh, uncle!"
"You young idiot—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Gently!" roared Mr. Bubb.

Putty gave another tug, and Mr. Bubb gave another fiendish yell.

"Whooooo!"

"D-did that hurt, uncle?"

"You young fool!" spluttered Mr. Bubb. "Let go my hat at once!"

"But I'm trying—"

"Yooop!" roared Mr. Bubb.

He fairly wrenched the hat out of Putty's dutiful hands. In that wrench it came off, at last, and Mr. Bubb dragged it away from his hair. With a crimson face and gloaming eyes he glared into the hat. Perhaps a suspicion was already dawning in his mind.

"Some adhesive substance—I—I think gum—is in the hat; it—it has stuck to my hair; it—it—it was in your hands, Edward. Have you dared, you young scoundrel—"

Mr. Bubb made a jump at his nephew. Putty made a jump for the stairs.

"Stop!" roared Mr. Bubb.

Putty was a bright youth—much too bright to stop just then. He went up the staircase three at a time. After him went his enraged relative, gripping his umbrella. Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, looked out of his study, and fairly jumped as he saw Putty of the Fourth vanish up the staircase at top speed, with a ferocious-looking old gentleman raging in his track.

"What—" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the doorway, where a dozen juniors were staring in.

"Boys, what—who—" "It's only Grace's uncle, sir," said Mornington. "He's visiting Teddy Grace, sir."

"Upon my word!" murmured Mr. Dalton.

He retreated into his study again, much surprised.

Putty of the Fourth reached Study No. 2 and bolted in, with Mr. Bubb only a yard behind him. Putty had just time to slam the door and turn the key.

"Edward!" roared Mr. Bubb.

"Yes, uncle?" came Putty's voice, soft as the cooing dove.

"Let me in!"

"Oh, uncle!"

"I am going to thrash you."

"What for, uncle?"

"For playing this—this dastardly trick!" roared Mr. Bubb.

"Oh, uncle!"

"I will disinheret you!"

"Oh dear!"

"I will cut you off with a shilling!" roared Uncle Theophilus.

"Make it eighteenpence, uncle."

"Wha-a-t?"

"Eighteenpence."

"I—I—I—"

Words failed Mr. Bubb. He bestowed a terrific thump on the study door and stamped away.

The 5th Chapter. Amusing Uncle!

"Uncle Theo!" Putty's voice was soft and gentle, but his eyes were wary. It was an hour later, and Mr. Bubb was leaving Mr. Dalton's study, after a talk with the master of the Fourth.

Tupper, the page, had kindly conducted Mr. Bubb to a bath-room, where he was able to wash the remains of the gum from his hair, and Tupper, for a consideration, had undertaken to clean the hat.

The feelings of Mr. Bubb, as he scrubbed gum from his hair, were not avuncular in the least, they were quite Hannish. His mind was made up—or almost made up—to quit Rookwood at the earliest possible moment, without another word to the nephew who possessed so misdirected a sense of humour.

But Mr. Bubb relented. He had five other nephews, and not one of those nephews would ever have ventured to snowball him, or to put gum in his hat. Those five nephews had a keen eye on the main chance, and Mr. Bubb was well aware of the fact.

It was for that reason probably that his favour was bestowed upon Teddy Grace. Certainly, Putty could not be suspected of seeking to propitiate him for the sake of his money—that was quite certain.

So, when he was newly swept and garnished, Mr. Bubb decided to speak to the master of the Fourth before he left; and from Mr. Dalton he received an account of Putty that placated him a good deal. A very good and clever boy, Mr. Dalton declared Teddy Grace to be; a credit to his class and to his school, only with a lamentable propensity for practical joking, which Mr. Bubb knew already.

Mr. Dalton, having been made aware of what was at stake, said as much for Putty as he could. He did not wish the junior's prospects to be spoiled by his thoughtlessness. So Mr. Bubb was restored to good-humour when he emerged from the Form master's study, and in the corridor he found Putty waiting for him, looking, as usual, as if the softest butter would find it difficult to melt in his mouth.

"You young rascal!" said Mr. Bubb. "Take me to your study."

"Yes, uncle. I've got tea ready for you. I—I thought you'd like to have tea in the study," said Putty meekly.

Mr. Bubb smiled.

"Very well," he said.

And Putty led him to the Fourth Form passage, and showed him into Study No. 2. The table was laid for tea, and it was a very handsome spread. There were already four guests in the study. The Fistical Four had been asked. Jimmy Silver & Co. were rather dubious about meeting Mr. Bubb at tea, but they were hungry after ragging the Moderns in the snow, and the spread was ample and tempting, so they chanced it. Tubby Muffin also was there. It was his study, and Tubby felt entitled to a "whack" in any spread that took place in his own quarters.

Mr. Bubb glanced rather severely at the Fistical Four. But they all smiled at him as sweetly as they could, and he made no allusion to the affair at Coombe.

"G-good-afternoon, sir!" murmured Jimmy Silver, just as if they

hadn't met before that day. "So—so pleased to meet Grace's uncle, sir."

"So jolly pleased, sir!" murmured Lovell.

And Raby and Newcome ducked their heads and grinned as politely as they knew how.

Mr. Bubb gave them a nod. Evidently he was in a good temper again. He was not, possibly, so severe and stern a gentleman as he looked. Certainly Putty of the Fourth was a nephew calculated to try the most amiable avuncular temper.

"Here's your chair, uncle!" said Putty gently.

It was a large, comfortable chair, with a cushion on it. Mr. Bubb sank down wearily on the cushion.

Buzzzzzzzzzz!

The sudden raucous buzzing of a loud electric bell as he sat down made the old gentleman jump.

"Why, what—what is that?" he ejaculated.

Buzzzzzzzzzzzz!

It was like a telephone bell. It was loud, it was raucous, and it was incessant. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked about them in amazement; even Tubby Muffin took his gloating eyes off the cake for a moment. Mr. Bubb stared round the study as the deafening buzz of the bell buzzed on.

"Is this another of your jokes, Edward?" thundered Mr. Bubb.

"M-m-my jokes, sir?"

"Are you ringing that bell?"

Putty held up both hands—empty. Obviously he had no bell about him, and was touching no bell.

"Then it is one of these young rascals!" Mr. Bubb roared, to make his voice heard above the din of the buzzing electric bell. What do you mean by it? Hay?"

Buzzzzzzzzzzzz!

Mr. Bubb jumped up in great wrath. At the same instant the electric bell ceased.

He fairly blinked round him.

"It—it—it has stopped!" he stutered.

"Blessed if I understand it," said Jimmy Silver in astonishment. "There's no electric bells in junior studies that I know of."

"It is a trick of some sort!" snorted Mr. Bubb. "I suspect my nephew! Take care, Edward!"

"Oh, uncle!"

"I have forgiven you twice!" thundered Mr. Bubb. "Take care! Have I not told you many times that I have an utter detestation of practical jokes?"

He sat down again as he delivered that warning.

Buzzzzzzzzzzzz!

The instant Mr. Bubb sat down the electric bell recommenced. He gave an almost convulsive start.

"What—what—what—"

"I say!" Tubby Muffin spoke in a stage-whisper. "I say, he's ringing it himself! He's got it about him! Is your uncle mad, Putty?"

"Shurrup!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Mr. Bubb glared.

"The—the sound comes from the—the floor—in that—that corner!" he hooted. "There is a bell there, I—"

He jumped up. Instantly the bell ceased.

"I told you so!" whispered Tubby. "He's got it about him! It only rings when he sits down!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. blinked at Mr. Bubb. It really seemed that Tubby was right, and that Mr. Bubb had an electric bell in his pocket, which he set off whenever he sat down. An old gentleman who played such amazing tricks certainly could not be quite right in the upper story.

Mr. Bubb, almost overcome with surprise and exasperation, sat down again.

Buzzzzzzzzzzzz! The bell buzzed furiously.

"Good gad!"

Uncle Theophilus leaped to his feet again, and again the buzz of the bell ceased as if by magic.

"I—I—I am sure the sound came from that corner!" gasped Mr. Bubb. He plunged into a shadowy corner between a bookcase and the wall, and grabbed there. He rose with an electric bell in his hand.

"Why, there it is!" exclaimed Putty. "Who'd have thought it!"

There was a wire attached to the bell. Mr. Bubb, with a grim face, traced the wire. It ran under the study carpet to the leg of Mr. Bubb's chair, where it emerged from a hole in the carpet, and twined round the leg of the chair, and disappeared under the cushion. Mr. Bubb lifted the cushion.

"My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

On the seat of the chair lay a bell-push, of the flat variety. The cushion had lain on it. The weight of the cushion alone did not depress the push

sufficiently to ring the bell. But when Mr. Bubb sat on it there was plenty of weight for the purpose, and to spare.

Mr. Bubb, with growing excitement in his face, grabbed up the bell-push, and dragged on the wire, jerking a dry battery into view from the shadowy corner.

Then he turned on Putty of the Fourth with a basilisk glare. Putty met his gaze with an innocent smile.

"Did it amuse you, uncle?"

"Wha-a-a-t!"

"I-I thought I'd try to amuse you, uncle. You see, whenever you sat down you were bound to ring the bell. Quite a surprise, wasn't it?"

Mr. Bubb looked fixedly at his innocent nephew.

"This—this is another of your practical jokes, Edward?" he articulated.

"Yes, uncle," said Putty sweetly. "I've got a lot of dodges like that to entertain people. When I'm living with you permanently I hope I shall amuse you a lot with these gadgets."

Uncle Theophilus dropped into his chair. This time the bell did not ring. There was doubt in his face as he stared at his nephew. He seemed at a loss for words.

"You—you thought that would amuse me, Edward?"

"Didn't it, uncle?" asked Putty meekly.

"It did not!" roared Mr. Bubb.

"Oh, uncle!"

"How often am I to tell you, young rascal, that I detest practical jokes in any shape or form?" hooted Mr. Bubb. "I shall be sorry to be hard on you, Edward! Very sorry indeed! But I warn you most solemnly that if you play a single practical joke on me again I shall rescind the arrangements I have made—"

"Oh, uncle!"

"I shall rescind them all, and I shall definitely refuse to take you away from Rookwood—"

"Oh!"

"Or allow you to live in my house," hooted Mr. Bubb. "or to assume the old and honourable name of Bubb as my heir!"

"Dear uncle—"

"Enough!"

Mr. Bubb majestically waved his nephew to silence. And tea started in Study No. 2 in a thunderous atmosphere.

The 6th Chapter. Floury!

Jimmy Silver & Co. tried to make themselves agreeable to Mr. Bubb over tea. They tried hard. They talked to him cheerily, they told him about Rookwood football matches, and about the way they ragged the Moderns; they talked cheerily, pleasantly, and kindly. But it was all in vain. Mr. Bubb refused to be pleased. It was evident that he regarded the whole party with suspicion, and did not approve of Rookwood manners and customs in the very least. Equally evidently, doubt had crept into his mind as to whether he had acted wisely in planning to take his cheerful nephew Edward to dwell with him in his own residence. He had told Putty's father that the adoption of a bright young nephew would brighten his home, where cheery youthful voices were not heard. It now began to dawn upon him that the brightening process might be carried too far. If his experiences with Putty at Rookwood were to be continued ad lib, obviously life would become much too bright for his tastes.

This was a worrying reflection to Uncle Theophilus. But he was a gentleman of his word, and he would not disappoint his nephew if he could help it. But upon one point he was determined—no more practical jokes. One more, and all was over! Mr. Bubb was almost ferociously determined upon that! If his dutiful nephew asked for it, he should get it! He had been sufficiently warned, and it would be entirely his own fault if Mr. Bubb gave up his scheme and left him at Rookwood!

Jimmy Silver & Co. gave up their cheery attempt at chat at last, under the grim influence of Mr. Bubb's frowning brow. Even Putty of the Fourth seemed a little discouraged. Only Tubby Muffin did not heed—he was too busy with the good things on the table, and he did not care for conversation when he could use his podgy jaws to better purpose.

Tea was almost over when there was a tap at the door, and Flynn of the Fourth looked in. He gave Putty a wink and a nod.

"All serene!" he said.

"Right-ho!" said Putty.

Flynn went whistling down the passage, and Jimmy Silver & Co.

looked at Putty. Flynn's remark had evidently been a signal of some kind, and the chums of the Fourth wondered whether some more samples of Putty's weird sense of humour awaited Mr. Bubb when he emerged from Study No. 2. But it was no business of theirs, and they finished their tea, feeling rather anxious to escape from Mr. Bubb's chilling society.

Mr. Bubb rose at last. He glanced at his watch.

"No hurry, is there, uncle?" asked Putty. "I—I want to show you round the Fourth Form quarters, if you've time. You've never visited us at Rookwood before."

"Well, well, I should certainly like to look round, Edward," said Mr. Bubb, rather more graciously. "I confess, my boy, that I was beginning to doubt whether I should, after all, carry out my plans regarding you. But if you can control your unhappy propensity for practical joking, I will see what can be done."

"Yes, uncle," said Putty meekly.

He led Mr. Bubb along the Fourth Form passage. The Fistical Four followed them out of Study No. 2; Tubby Muffin remained. There were still eatables on the table, and so Tubby was still busy.

"These are the Fourth Form

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver, jumping back.

"It's a booby-trap!" yelled Lovell.

"A booby-trap in our study!"

"Putty, you dangerous ass!"

"That ass Flynn—"

"Grooooooh!" spluttered Mr. Bubb, clutching wildly at his floury face.

"Ooooooh! Gug-gug! I am suffocated! Oooooooh! Groooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear uncle—"

"Oh! Ow! Mmmmmmmmm!"

"You fixed this up with Flynn, Putty, you villain!" breathed Arthur Edward Lovell.

Putty grinned.

"You—you crass ass! Our study and—"

"Look out!" yelled Newcome.

Mr. Bubb, gouging flour from his eyes, glared round in search of a victim. For some moments he could not see, and then he could not see very clearly. Spluttering with flour and wrath, and white as a spectre in his floury covering, he rushed at the juniors. Probably he wanted to get hold of his humorous nephew chiefly. But Putty dodged warily behind the burly form of Arthur Edward Lovell, and it was upon Arthur Edward that the infuriated old gentleman's grasp fastened.

"Here, leggo!" roared Lovell, as

came up. But the enraged Mr. Bubb did not seem particular as to the identity of his victim. Perhaps he considered that all Rookwood juniors were much of a muchness. At all events, he grasped Valentine Mornington, and boxed his ears right and left.

"Oh gad!" yelled Morny. "Leggo! Is the man mad? I'll jolly well kick your shins! Oh, yarooooop!"

Morny went staggering, and then Mr. Bubb had a clear field for Putty. He hurled himself at his nephew. Mr. Bubb was supposed to be attached to his nephew, but he did not seem very attached now. To judge by his looks, he was more than semi-detached. He came at Putty like a hurricane, floury and furious, looking as if he intended not merely to cut him off with a shilling, but to cut him off in the bloom of his youth. Putty did not wait. He went down the Fourth Form passage as if it were the cinder-path, and beat Mr. Bubb to the stairs by a neck.

"Stop!" spluttered Mr. Bubb. "Stop! Young rascal! Scoundrel! Smothered! Suffocating! Smothered with flour! Stop! Scoundrel!" He was a little incoherent.

Putty of the Fourth did not stop. Just escaping the outstretched hands of Mr. Bubb, he made a flying leap

did not desire to meet his affectionate uncle any more.

"Oh, there you are!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Has he gone?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Thank goodness!" The rest of Putty emerged from the cupboard.

"Has he been gone long?"

"Over an hour!" grinned Jimmy.

"I—I hope he wasn't hurt."

"He sounded as if he was."

"Poor old nunky!" said Putty.

"Of course, a fellow couldn't foresee his getting so jolly excited over a harmless little joke."

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"Lucky for you you got out of sight!" he remarked. "I fancy Mr. Bubb would only have five nephews left by this time if he'd got hold of you. You've done it now."

"Think so?" sighed Putty.

"Well, from what he said on the staircase, I fancy he's not keen on taking you to brighten his home," chuckled Jimmy Silver. "He seemed chiefly to want to wring your neck."

"Dear old nunky! Perhaps it's just as well that we didn't meet again," said Putty. "Bit stuffy in that cupboard. But better than meeting nunky, I expect. I hope they let uncle have a wash before he went. He looked rather startling."

"Yes; but he was still a bit floury. You must be potty, I think. Putty. He told you plainly that he'd done with you if you played any more fool tricks on him, and then you fixed it with Flynn to rig up that booby trap." Jimmy Silver rubbed his head. "I've got a lump here, you ass! He nearly cracked my napper on Lovell's!"

And Jimmy Silver picked up his book and left the Form-room, rubbing his damaged head occasionally as he went.

Putty of the Fourth followed him with a cheery smile on his face. Uncle Theophilus' visit had been crammed with incident, but it could not be called a success. But Putty of the Fourth seemed satisfied.

A couple of days later Putty Grace was smiling over an epistle in his father's handwriting. He read out some of it to Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Your prospects of being adopted by your Uncle Theophilus are now entirely shattered. He does not intend, he tells me, to remove your name from his will, as, upon reflection, he is prepared to make allowances for youthful high spirits, and for the unfortunate propensity for practical joking, which you seem unable to control. But he declares that no consideration whatever will induce him to take you into his house, and that, so far from wishing to remove you from Rookwood, he considers that that is the very best place for you, among—"

"Among nice fellows like us!" asked Lovell.

Putty grinned, and continued to read:

"Among other young ruffians like yourself!"

"Cheek!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Putty folded up the letter.

"So that's that!" he said.

"Well, I'm sorry, old bean," said Raby. "But what the thump did you expect if you gave the old gent such a high old time?"

"You fairly asked for it," said Newcome.

"Begged and prayed for it, I should say," said Lovell. "I must say you've got what you deserve, Putty."

"Just that," agreed Putty. "You see, the pater said I could please myself, but I mustn't hurt nunky's feelings by a refusal. So the only way was to make nunky change his mind."

"Oh!" ejaculated Lovell.

Jimmy Silver laughed. He had had a strong suspicion of Putty's reasons for his extraordinary method of entertaining his affectionate uncle.

"And he seems to have changed it," sighed Putty. "He doesn't want me to brighten his home now. He's leaving me here to brighten Rookwood. I think I can bear it, though there are four more awful things to contemplate."

"What are they?" inquired the Fistical Four.

"Your faces, old beans."

And Putty of the Fourth fled before Jimmy Silver & Co. could reach him.

THE END.

(Next week's scintillatingly funny story of Rookwood School is entitled "Bucking Up, Cuffy!" On no account must you miss it! Order your copy of the BOYS' FRIEND in advance and avoid disappointment!)



TROUBLE FOR THE SNOWBALLERS! The stern old gentleman made a sudden rush at the Rookwooders who had been snowballing him, and his umbrella smote right and left. "Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell, as he sat in the snow. "Yaroor! Help!" Like straws before the wind the Fistical Four and Putty Grace were scattered by the charge.

studies, uncle," said Putty gently. "Rather nice quarters, what? The end study is the best; it belongs to these chaps, and I'm sure they'd like you to see it."

"Oh, certainly!" said Jimmy Silver politely.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave Putty a private glare. The end study was not in a state for receiving distinguished visitors. It seldom was without due notice. Lovell remembered that he had left a pair of football boots on the table, and that a jam-jar, lately cleared of its last remnant of jam, reposed on the window-seat.

But that could not be helped now. It was impossible to push rudely ahead of the visitor to make a hurried clearance of the study. Putty and Mr. Bubb had almost arrived at the end study, with the Fistical Four behind them.

The door of the study was ajar. Putty put his hand on the knob, but stepped back to give place to his uncle. Mr. Bubb pushed the door open and entered the study.

Whiz! Crash!

What happened next Mr. Bubb hardly knew. Something that had been lodged over the door descended on his devoted head and burst there. It was a large paper bag, and it was crammed with flour.

Flour drenched Mr. Bubb. It smothered his head—so lately washed clean of gum—it filled his nose and mouth and ears, it wedged into his collar and ran down his neck; it surrounded him in clouds. In the midst of whirling flour he staggered and spluttered.

"Gerroooh! Gerroooh! Ooooooh! Gug-gug-gug!"

an iron grast was fixed upon his collar.

"Leggo!" howled Jimmy Silver the next moment, as his collar was captured by Mr. Bubb's left.

Crack!

"Yaroooooh!" yelled the two hapless juniors simultaneously, as Mr. Bubb brought their heads together in a sounding concussion.

"Groooooh! You young rascals!"

"Yow-ow! Help!"

"You young scoundrels! Oooooh!"

"Whoop! Leggo!"

Crack, crack, crack!

Instead of letting go, Mr. Bubb knocked the two juniors' heads together again and again, as if he supposed them to be nuts that needed cracking. Jimmy Silver and Lovell yelled with anguish.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Rescue!"

Raby and Newcome valiantly rushed to their aid. Mr. Bubb was too floury to be touched if it could be helped, but evidently he was getting dangerous. Raby and Newcome grasped him and dragged him back from his hapless victims.

But they had to pay for their devotion. Mr. Bubb released Jimmy and Lovell, but he grasped Raby and Newcome instead.

Crack, crack, crack!

Wild yells rang from the two juniors as their heads were knocked together.

"What the thump's the row?" shouted Mornington of the Fourth, hurrying along the passage.

Mr. Bubb threw Raby and Newcome aside, yelling, and rushed at Putty Grace. That wary youth dodged behind Mornington as he

for the banisters, landed on them, and sailed down whizzing.

Mr. Bubb was no longer of an age when it was practicable to tackle a staircase in that manner. He went down by the stairs, but he went two at a time, in jumps like a kangaroo.

Putty, still on the banisters, curved round the landing, and went shooting down the lower flight. Mr. Bubb, as it happened, got no farther than the landing. He stumbled in a kangaroo-like jump, rolled over, and sat on the landing—with a bump.

And while he sat there Mr. Theophilus Bubb made some remarks, quite loudly, that were totally unfit for Rookwood juniors to hear, and which seemed to indicate that he was not really the right person to bring up an innocent youth like Putty of the Fourth.

The 7th Chapter. All Right for Putty!

"Has he gone?"

Jimmy Silver started as he heard that question. It was a couple of hours since Mr. Bubb had done his nose-dive down the Fourth Form staircase, and since that time Putty of the Fourth seemed to have melted away into thin air. Mr. Bubb had not seen him again, and his comrades of the Fourth had not set eyes on him. Jimmy Silver had gone into the Form-room later to fetch a book, and then he was startled to hear the whispering voice of Putty.

Putty's face looked out from a large cupboard in the corner, where easels and blackboards were kept. He looked out with a stealthy and very cautious look. Evidently Putty