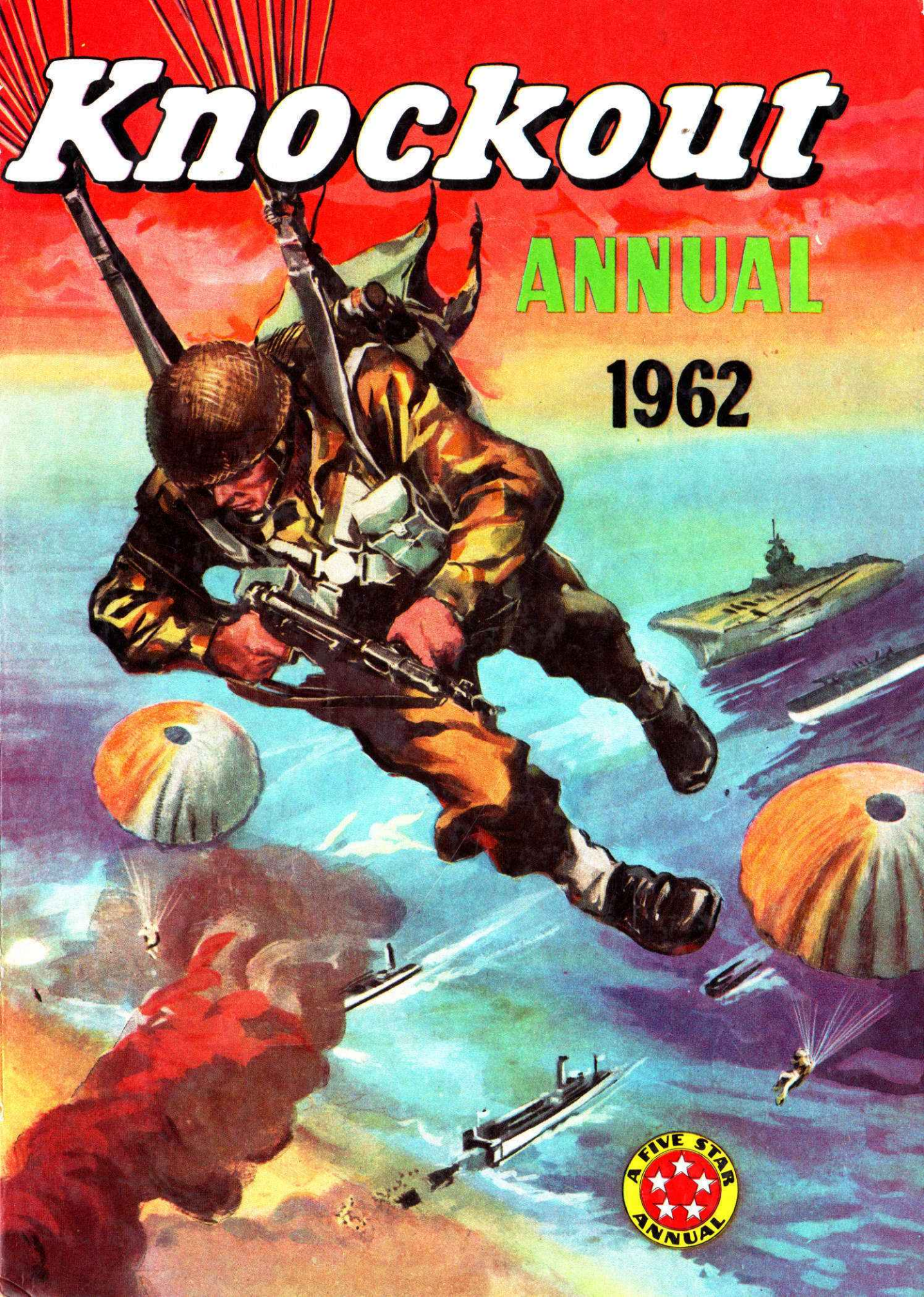


Knockout

ANNUAL

1962



THERE'S FUN FOR EVERYONE AT FAMOUS ROOKWOOD SCHOOL!
JOIN JIMMY SILVER AND CO.—AND HAVE A GOOD TIME!

The Plot That *Failed*

By OWEN CONQUEST

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A Joker in Class

BUZZZZ!

Mr. Dalton gave quite a jump.

The Classical Fourth jumped as one man.

English history was the order of the day in the Rookwood Fourth Form-room. Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, had a way of making history quite interesting to his pupils, and the Form master and Form were getting on quite nicely, when that sudden buzz of an electric bell came as an amazing interruption.

It sounded like the buzz of a telephone-bell, and in a Rookwood master's study the sound would not have been surprising. In a Rookwood Form-room it was very surprising indeed—in fact, astounding.

The sound was repeated, loud and insistent. Then it suddenly stopped, and there was silence—a silence that might have been felt.

The Fourth Form fellows stared at one another.

Somebody, some practical joker of unusual nerve, was playing tricks in the Form-room during class, playing a practical joke and interrupting the lesson. The buzzing of the bell could mean nothing else. It was almost incredible—quite unnerving. Even Monsieur Monceau, the French master, could not be ragged in class to quite that extent. And Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth, was about the last member of the Rookwood staff to be thus derided.

"My only aunt!" murmured Arthur Edward Lovell. "Some silly ass is asking for it. Look at Dicky's face!"

Lovell was whispering that remark to his chums Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome. But in the deep, tense silence his whisper was heard all over the Form-room.

Richard Dalton, familiarly known as "Dicky" in his Form, turned his eyes on Lovell.

"Silence!" he rapped out.

"Oh! Yes sir," gasped Lovell, turning very red.

"Someone has introduced an electric-bell into the room," said Mr. Dalton. "The boy who has this bell in his possession will stand out at once!"

Mr. Dalton fixed his eyes on Teddy Grace. He knew Putty's humorous reputation as well as his Form did.

"Grace!" rapped out Mr. Dalton.

"Sir," answered Putty.



"Have you an electric-bell in your pocket?"

"No, sir."

"Or in your desk?"

"No, sir."

Putty of the Fourth had an injured expression on his innocent face. His look implied that he considered it rather hard to be suspected in this way.

But Putty generally looked as if butter would not melt in his mouth. Indeed, it was his soft and innocent looks that had given him his curious nickname when first he came to Rookwood School.

Mr. Dalton's searching glance left him and passed along the class, and every face was rather uneasy under that penetrating look.

Cyril Peele shifted under it very uncomfortably.

Peele was not in his Form master's good books, and he had too many sins upon his conscience to care about meeting Mr. Dalton's clear and steady eyes at any time.

"Peele!"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Peele sullenly.

"Is that bell in your possession?"

"No, sir."

"Stand up and turn out your pockets, Peele!"

All eyes were on Cyril Peele as he turned out his pockets. But nothing in the nature of an electric-bell came to light.

Mr. Dalton set his lips.

"You may sit down, Peele. We will now proceed with the lesson. We have wasted enough time."

They proceeded with the lesson.

Apparently the incident was closed. Certainly, there would not have been much time left for English history had every fellow in the Fourth had to turn out his pockets for the Form master's inspection.

Buzzzzz!

"Oh, corks!" muttered Lovell involuntarily.

It was the bell again.

Buzzzzz!

Mr. Dalton strode away to the distant corner of the Form-room following the sound, as it were. It was from that spot that the buzzing seemed to come, and he went to investigate. The juniors grinned as they watched him; it seemed to them impossible that the bell could be there. But there was one member of the Form who did not grin. That was Putty. His face became all at once extremely serious.

It was one of the Rookwood humorist's weaknesses that when he was on the trail of a jape he never knew when to stop. He was always liable to carry a joke a little too far. And on this occasion, as on many others, Putty of the Fourth realised too late that he had jested not wisely but too well.

Mr. Dalton halted in the corner, and stooped his head over the joints of the hot-water pipes.

The expression on his face became absolutely terrific, as he stretched his hand behind the pipes and lifted a little electric-bell.

There was a gasp from the Form.

"He's got it!" murmured Mornington.

A wire was attached to the bell; a double insulated wire. Cunningly it had been trailed behind the hot-water pipes, next to the wall, out of sight. Mr. Dalton drew out the wire slowly and carefully, and followed it up as he drew it out.

It led him back to his class.

Behind the Fourth—all looking round at him—went Mr. Dalton, and he stopped at last exactly behind the form where Putty sat.

Behind the pipes at this spot was a tiny dry battery, hidden from sight till Richard Dalton spotted it and hooked it out. The double wire ran down under the pipes to the floor, and from the wall it ran under Putty's form. It was pressed carefully into a crack between two of the old oak floorboards quite out of observation till Richard Dalton jerked it up.

"Grace!"

"Hem!"

"Stand aside!"

Putty of the Fourth reluctantly stood aside. From under one of his boots came into view the end of the wire, attached to a little flat disc. In the centre of that disc was the button which Putty had been pressing with his foot whenever he wanted the bell to ring in the distant corner.

It was all clear now.

Richard Dalton gathered up the electric bell and wire and battery and disc. His face was grim.

"You denied having an electric bell in your possession, Grace, when I questioned you."

"Oh, no, sir!" said Putty at once.

"What?"

"You asked me whether I had a bell in my pocket, sir, or in my desk, sir," said Putty meekly. "I hadn't, sir."

Mr. Dalton gazed at him.

"That is quite true, Grace," he said, after a pause. "I acquit you of having deceived me, but your answer came perilously near to prevarication."

"Oh, sir!"

"You have wasted a quarter of an hour of the lesson, Grace. It would be unjust to detain the rest of the Form this afternoon to make up for lost time. You, however, will be detained the whole afternoon."

"Oh!"

For the remainder of that morning no one would have guessed that Putty of the Fourth was an irrepressible humorist, by his looks. He looked as if he found life an extremely serious proposition.

Poor Putty!

"YOU asked for it, you know."

Thus said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Keep smiling!" said Jimmy Silver encouragingly.

"You asked for it and you got it," said Lovell.

"What are you grouching about?"

Putty of the Fourth did not look grateful or comforted. It was correct that he had asked for it, but he was evidently not pleased at having got what he asked for.

It was a sunny, cold afternoon, and the Classical Fourth were playing the Modern Fourth at football that half-holiday. Putty had been down to play for the Classics. But the afternoon's detention knocked that on the head. Putty had to put in his half-holiday in the Form-room doing exercises.

"It's rotten!" he said. "Why, it was no end of a jape! Dicky Dalton ought really to have laughed."

Putty drifted rather dismally into the deserted Form-room.

There he had to remain while the rest of Rookwood was at leisure. Mr. Dalton came in and set him a detention task which was to last him till four o'clock.

Putty sat down to it glumly.

"You may leave the Form-room at four if your task is done, Grace," said the master of the Fourth.

"Thank you, sir!"

"I am sorry that I have been compelled to detain you."

"So am I, sir!" murmured Putty demurely.

Mr. Dalton frowned and left the Form-room.

Putty found it difficult to concentrate on his task, and went to the window.

He caught sight of Mr. Dalton, in hat and coat, walking down to the gates, apparently going for a stroll.

Putty returned to his desk, grunting; but his detention task did not tempt him. It occurred to him that as Mr. Dalton had gone out there was an opportunity of recapturing his electrical gadgets from the Form master's study.

The detained junior looked out of the Form-room; the corridor was deserted.

He left the Form-room and walked away quickly to Masters' corridor. In a couple of minutes he was in Mr. Dalton's study, and had closed the door after him.

The gadgets were not to be seen. Putty glanced round the study, and looked in the bookcase and the table drawer. But the electric-bell, the battery, and the coil of wire did not meet his eyes.

"Blow!" murmured Putty.

It was exasperating.

Mr. Dalton might return soon, and Putty did not want to be caught in his study, especially when he was supposed to be in the Form-room working at Latin irregular verbs. He really did not want any more trouble with Mr. Dalton that day. But he wanted his electrical gadgets.

As he stood hesitating, there was a sound in the passage and a footstep outside the door.

Putty jumped.

Acting upon instinct, not upon thought, Putty of the Fourth backed behind a Chinese screen near the study window, and was out of sight when the door opened.

The footsteps came on into the study; the door closed.

Putty, out of sight behind the screen, scarcely breathed.

He heard the footsteps cross quickly to the telephone, and heard the receiver taken off the stand. Apparently Mr. Dalton had come into his study to use the telephone, and it was quite possible that he would go when he had telephoned.

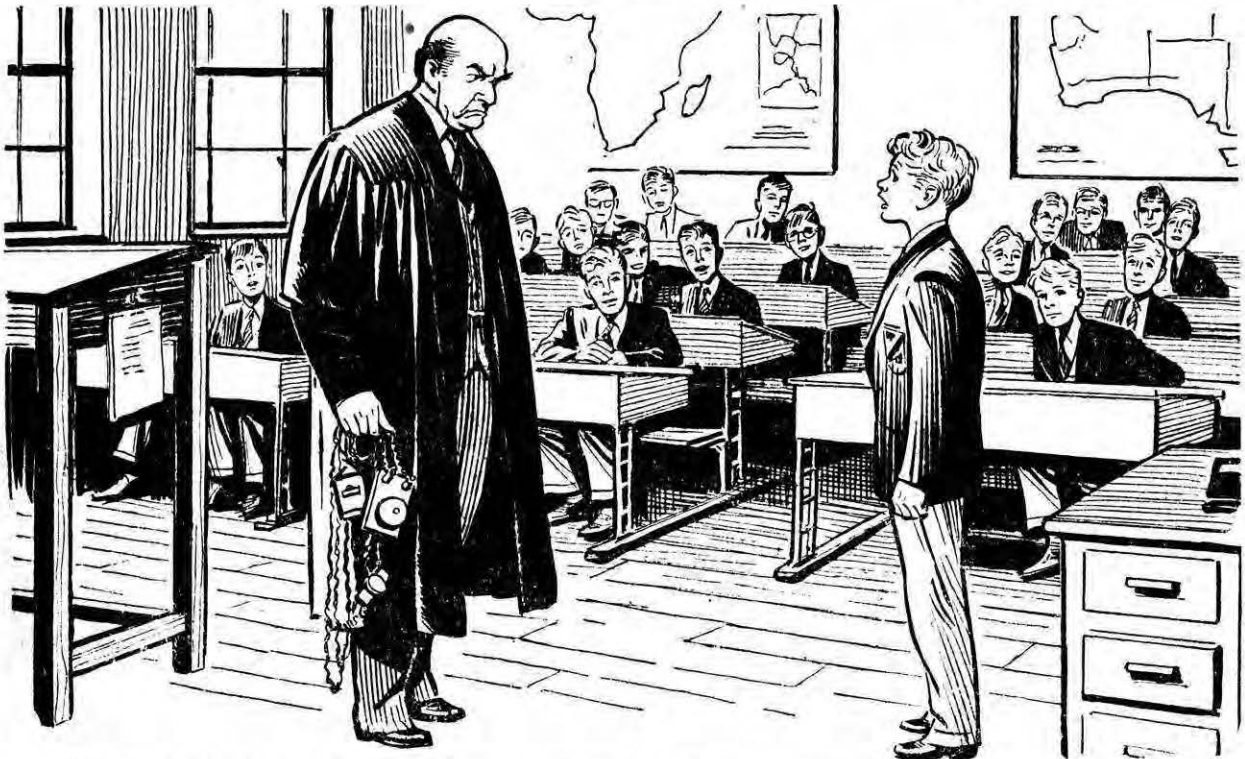
"Latham 101."

Putty jumped, behind the screen.

So far it had not crossed his mind that the person who had entered the study was not Mr. Dalton.

But the voice he now heard asking for a number was not that of Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth. It was the voice of Cyril Peele!

Putty peered round a corner of the screen. Cyril Peele was standing at the telephone, the receiver to his ear, his back to Putty. And Putty of the Fourth grinned cheerily at Peele's back. It was only Peele—only a junior who had taken advantage of the Form master's absence to use the telephone! But as he heard Peele's voice over the transmitter, and caught on to what the cad of the Fourth was saying, the grin vanished from Putty's face and he grew grave.



"You denied having an electric bell in your possession when I questioned you!" snapped Mr. Dalton.

The Trick on the Telephone

"**M**R. SPINDLES!"
"Mr. Spindles speaking."
Peele grinned.

Putty of the Fourth, behind the screen, was no longer grinning. He knew the name of the Latcham moneylender, whose prominent advertisements appeared every week in the *Latcham Times*.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Spindles!" said Peele, in a deep voice. "Mr. Dalton speaking."

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Dalton! May I ask——"

"I have seen your advertisement in the *Latcham Times*, Mr. Spindles. I am in need of some temporary accommodation."

"Oh, quite, quite!"

"I am speaking from Rookwood School. I am master of the Fourth Form here."

"Quite so."

"My position, I take it, is a sufficient guarantee, Mr. Spindles. I require a loan of one hundred pounds. Can you possibly give me a call this afternoon to discuss the matter?"

"I have every wish to oblige you, Mr. Dalton. We do everything we can to oblige our clients," answered Mr. Spindles. "As a rule, however, business is conducted here in my office."

"I quite understand. But the circumstances are a little unusual," said Peele, still in the deep, bass voice. "In my position, I cannot possibly take the risk of calling at your office. You are, perhaps acquainted with the name of Dr. Chisholm, head-master of Rookwood?"

"Oh, yes, certainly! A very admirable gentleman, sir."

"Very, but extremely severe in his judgments, Mr. Spindles. To be brief, I cannot take the risk of allowing Dr. Chisholm to learn that I am obtaining temporary accommodation from a moneylender. I will be frank, and admit that it would cost me my position here."

"My dear sir—my dear sir, I comprehend!" said the smooth voice of Mr. Spindles over the wires, some of the words coming to Putty's ears as he stood behind the screen. "I shall be glad to call upon you, if you so desire, after office hours. My office closes at four. If five o'clock would suit you, I——"

"Perfectly, Mr. Spindles!"

"Then I will be with you, sir, at five o'clock," said the moneylender. "I shall be very happy to oblige you, Mr. Dalton. You will find my terms extremely reasonable, I hope, but we can arrange details when I call."

"Thank you, Mr. Spindles. Ask for Mr. Dalton, and you will be shown to my study. I shall expect you at five, and I am very much obliged."

"Not at all, sir—not at all!"

Peele rang off.

He did not linger. The moment the receiver was back on the stand, Peele darted across the study

to the door, and disappeared into the corridor, closing the door after him.

Putty of the Fourth emerged from behind the screen.

"The awful rotter! The awful tick!" ejaculated Putty. "If Spindles comes here to see Dicky Dalton—why, a dozen Rookwood men know him by sight—that fat old rascal! Why, it's enough to get Dicky the push!"

Putty was not much given to reflection, but he did some hard thinking now.

The outcome of his reflections was that he crossed to the telephone and rang up Mr. Spindles' office number at Latcham.

Looking After Dicky!

As Putty of the Fourth walked away from the Form master's study he came on Cyril Peele.

Peele was loafing at the corner of the passage, with his hands in his pockets.

Putty grinned.

Evidently the cad of the Fourth was keeping one eye on Mr. Dalton's study. He did not mean to run any risk of missing the visit of the fat gentleman from Latcham.

"Waiting for somebody, old bean?" asked Putty.

"Find out!" replied Peele, politely.

Putty smiled and walked on. He repaired to the Classical Fourth passage. The junior football match was over, and the Fistical Four had come into the end study to tea.

They smiled cheerily at Putty of the Fourth as he looked in.

"I'll take a snack," he said. "I've got something to say to you chaps—there isn't much time now before five o'clock."

"Anything happening at five o'clock?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes; and I want you to help."

"Go it!"

"Is it a jape?" demanded Lovell.

"Just that."

"Then cut it out! This study isn't japing Dicky Dalton; and my opinion is that the more he licks you the better it will be."

"Thanks for your opinion! Now dry up and let a chap get in a word," said Putty imperturbably.

Lovell snorted back, but he "dried up" at last, and Putty of the Fourth proceeded to explain. And the eyes of the Fistical Four grew wide with amazement as they listened.

* * * *

A few minutes later, Cyril Peele started a little. Five strokes boomed out from the clock tower at Rookwood.

Peele's heart beat a little faster.

At any moment now Mr. Spindles, of Latcham,

might arrive at Rookwood, and ask to be admitted to Mr. Dalton's study. There was no doubt that the moneylender would keep the appointment—the arrangement had been explicit. And the moment the fat gentleman from Latcham appeared, Peele would spread the news that Spindles, the moneylender, had called on Mr. Dalton—and that news was certain to cause great excitement in the Fourth.

There was a step in the passage, and Tupper, the House page, came along. Peele's eyes glinted.

He had no doubt that Tupper was going to Mr. Dalton's study to announce the arrival of a visitor. It did not occur to him that he was the person for whom Tupper was looking; he knew nothing of an interview between Tupper and Putty of the Fourth, and of a tip of a half-crown that had changed hands.

"Somebody called, Tupper?" asked Peele—he could not restrain his eagerness for news.

"Yessir," said Tupper. "In the visitors' room now, sir."

"Waiting there, is he?" grinned Peele.

"Yessir."

"What name did he give, Tupper? You can tell me, you know."

"Certainly, sir," said Tupper. "Name of Spindles was what he give me, sir."

Peele grinned.

"Spindles, eh? I think I've heard that name before."

"I've seed it, sir, in the advertisements in the Latcham paper, sir," said Tupper. "Moneylender's name, sir."

"Oh, yes—I remember now," said Peele carelessly. "Well, you'd better get on and tell Mr. Dalton."

Tupper stared.

"Tell Mr. Dalton?" he repeated.

"Yes; he wants to see Mr. Dalton, doesn't he?" asked Peele, staring in his turn.

"No, sir; he asked to see you."

"What?"

"Master Peele, sir—that's what he asked for, sir, and I come looking for you, sir—Master Grace said I should find you 'ere, sir."

Peele staggered.

"What—what—what do you mean, you fool!" he exclaimed shrilly. "You—you mean to tell me that Spindles asked for me?"

"Jest so, sir; and the gent's waiting in the visitors' room, sir" said Tupper.

And the page walked away, having delivered his message to Cyril Peele.

Peele leaned on the wall, gasping for breath.

He wondered if he was dreaming.

Certainly, it was he who had telephoned to Mr. Spindles, and made that appointment for five o'clock at Rookwood. But he had used Mr. Dalton's name—he had imitated a man's voice. He was certain



Putty peered cautiously round the screen and grinned. Peele was using the master's phone!

that the moneylender had been deceived on that point.

What could it mean?

"Peele!" Arthur Edward Lovell came along the passage, with a very grave face. "Peele, you awful ass, what have you been up to? Do you think you can have moneylenders coming to see you at the school? If you've got any sense you'll get rid of that giddy visitor before he's seen."

Peele gasped.

"I haven't any visitor—I haven't—I didn't—I never——" he stammered incoherently.

"He's waiting for you."

"But I never——" stuttered Peele.

Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

"My advice to you is to sheer him off as sharp as you can," he said. "Some fellows have seen him already."

And Lovell stalked away.

Peele suppressed a groan. Something had gone wrong—frightfully wrong—that was clear. The only thing that remained for him to do was to get rid of that awful visitor at the earliest possible moment, hoping and trusting that Mr. Spindles would get clear of Rookwood without being noticed or recognised.

Peele tottered away, feeling as if his limbs would hardly support him. But he was almost running when he reached the visitors' room. Raby and Newcome were near the door of that apartment. They gave the cad of the Fourth expressive looks.

"You've done it now, Peele!" remarked Raby.
"Fairly done it!" said Newcome.

Peele did not heed them. He opened the door of the visitors' room and entered, closing the door quickly behind him.

It was deep dusk in the quad, and the light had not been turned on in the room. But Peele saw a figure standing at the window—a fat figure in an overcoat, holding a hat in his hand.

Peele did not venture to switch on the light. Juniors were not allowed to use the visitors' room without special permission, and the lighted windows might have caused attention to be drawn to the spot. Attention was about the last thing in the world that Peele desired at that moment.

Only one thought was in his mind—to get Mr. Spindles to go, to explain as quickly as he could that it was all a mistake, and to get him to go, only to get him to go—at once! If someone should come to the visitors' room and find him there with the moneylender! The bare thought of it made the cad of the Fourth sick with terror.

"Mr. Spindles!" he gasped.

The fat overcoated figure turned from the window. But the face was deeply in the shade, and Peele saw it very dimly, little more than a large beard.

"Master Peele?" asked a sharp, high-pitched voice.

"Yes, yes—it's all a mistake——"

"I do not understand you, Master Peele. I am here to keep my appointment with you——"

"I—I made no appointment——"

"What? I repeat that I do not understand you, Master Peele! Did you not telephone to my office at three o'clock this afternoon?"

"Yes—no, I mean——" articulated Peele.

"You made the appointment for five o'clock, after office hours. I am here. Now you tell me that it is a mistake! Does that mean that you do not desire to do business with me, Master Peele?"

"Yes—no, I mean—— Oh dear!" gasped Peele.
"It's a mistake. I never telephoned—I——"

"Do you mean that some trick has been played on me?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Then I had better see the headmaster."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Kindly tell me where to find Dr. Chisholm!"

Peele gave a gasp of sheer terror.

"If a trick has been played, wasting a busy man's time, it is for the headmaster of this school to inquire into it. You see that, Master Peele?"

"For mercy's sake don't do anything of the kind!" howled Peele, his knees knocking together with fright.
"I should get into no end of a row—it might be the sack for me! I—I—I——"

"It jolly well might!" said Mr. Spindles, in a

changed voice, which made Cyril Peele jump. "And serve you right if it did, you worm!"

Peele gazed at him open-mouthed. He was too dazed to try to understand how it was that Mr. Spindles, of Latcham, was speaking with the voice of Putty of the Fourth.

The door opened, and Jimmy Silver stepped in. The light was switched on, and Lovell and Raby and Newcome followed Jimmy in. Peele glanced at them, and then his dizzy eyes fixed on Mr. Spindles. In the light he could see that gentleman quite clearly now—and he could see that the face was the face of Teddy Grace, with a large beard—one of the "props" of the Classical Dramatic Society—fastened to his chin.

Peele stared at him dizzily.

Putty of the Fourth cheerfully took off the beard and slipped it into a pocket. Then he peeled off the big overcoat, and revealed the fact that his plump appearance had been caused by a padding of several cushions. He grinned brightly at Peele.

"Yes, I think it might mean the sack for you, old bean, if the Head knew, or if Dicky Dalton knew," he remarked cheerily. "It's rather lucky for you that the genuine Spindles hasn't turned up, what?"

Peele could only gasp. He felt as if his head was turning round and round.

"You little worm!" said Jimmy Silver. "Putty spotted you telephoning to Mr. Spindles' office this afternoon, in Dicky Dalton's name. Do you understand now, you rotter?"

"Oh!" gasped Peele.

Putty chuckled.

"The Spindles man isn't coming, old bean," he said. "After you'd cleared out of Dicky's study I rang him up and told him it was a trick and that he wasn't wanted at Rookwood."

"Look here!" muttered Peele. "It—it was only a jape——"

"That kind of jape is barred from Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver. "You'd be jolly well sacked if the Head knew, but we're letting you off with a flogging. Bend over that chair, Peele!"

"I—I won't! I—I——"

"Then you'll come to Mr. Dalton!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "You can take your choice, Peele!"

Peele's choice was quickly made. And for several minutes afterwards anyone passing the door of the visitors' room would have been surprised to hear a sound of steady whacking, as if someone was beating a carpet in that apartment.

Mr. Dalton never knew.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were satisfied to do good by stealth, as it were. And there was no doubt that they had done good, for there was a sudden end of Cyril Peele's scheming and plotting.