

OUR GRAND SCHOOL YARN!

AN AFFAIR OF HONOUR!

A Splendid Rookwood School Story, showing how the Boy from Canada got his own back on Pankley & Co. of Bagshot.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Trouble in the Study!

HIGGS snorted. Alfred Higgs of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood had an expressive snort.

Higgs was evidently "ratty." Higgs, as the biggest fellow in the Fourth, and a good deal of a bully, was accustomed to see fellows sit up and take notice, so to speak, when he was ratty.

But on the present occasion his angry snort passed unnoticed.

There were three fellows in Study No. 3 with Higgs. One was Dick Van Ryn, the South African junior, who had earned Higgs' unwilling admiration by licking him. Another was Charles Pons, the new boy, who hailed from the great Dominion of Canada. The third was Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin, generally called Tubby Muffin, on account of his circumference.

Tubby Muffin was too busy to notice Higgs. Van Ryn had laid in unusual supplies for tea, to entertain the new junior hospitably; and Tubby was making hay while the sun shone. Van Ryn was making himself pleasant and agreeable to the new fellow, and did not even look at Higgs. And the new fellow, quite a stranger to Rookwood, did not know anything about Higgs, and was quite unaware that any special importance was to be attached to his angry snort.

Higgs glowered at the three.

"Look here, I'm not going to have that chap in this study!" he roared. "I tell you I'm not standing it!"

"Take Jimmy Silver's advice, and keep smiling," suggested Van Ryn. "It can't be helped, you know. I've asked Mr. Bootles to put Pons in this study, and he's agreed—and there you are."

"You had the cheek to ask Bootles without asking me first?" spluttered Higgs.

"What was the good of asking you? You always cut up rusty."

Higgs jumped up.

"Well, I won't have it!" he roared. "We don't want the born idiot here. Look at him, the spooney ass!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Pons, speaking for the first time.

"You shut up!"

"But—"

"Dry up! I'm talking!"

"You generally are," remarked Van Ryn, with a sigh.

"Look at the burbling idiot!" continued Higgs indignantly. "Calls himself a Rookwood chap! Look at him! Why, the whole school is cackling at him. He let himself be taken in by the Bagshot Bounders!"

"I couldn't help that!" pleaded Pons.

Higgs gave a louder snort than ever.

"Just think of it! He let Pankley lead him off to Bagshot, and made out that Bagshot—that blessed casual ward—was Rookwood. Fooled him like a baby! Did you ever hear of such an ass? Bagshot will be laughing to death over it. He oughtn't to come to Rookwood at all. He ought to go to a lunatic asylum. We don't want the fathead in this study. No fear!"

Pons' handsome, dark face was crimson.

He realised that it was likely to be a long time before he heard the end of his unfortunate adventure on his first day at the school.

Certainly he had been fooled most completely by the practical jokers of Bagshot, the old rivals of the Rookwood juniors.

But there were plenty of excuses for poor Pons. A stranger from a distant Colony

could hardly be expected to know anything about the rivalry between Rookwood and Bagshot, or to be on his guard against such an extraordinary practical joke.

Everybody was down on Pons for being taken in so easily, feeling that it reflected on Rookwood generally.

Only Van Ryn, in the kindness of his heart, stood by him, feeling that it was up to him as a fellow-Colonial.

The opinion of the Classical Fourth was that Pons was a hopeless duffer, and, with schoolboy plainness of speech, they did not hesitate to tell him so.

Higgs' indignation was simply overwhelming at the idea of the duffer being "planted" in his study. And his lordly permission had not even been asked.

"Now, I don't want to quarrel with you, Van Ryn," said Higgs. "You're a good sort, though you're cheeky. But I'm not having that chump in this study."

Pons rose to his feet.

"I don't want to come where I'm not welcome," he said. "I'll cut!"

"And the sooner the quicker," growled Higgs.

"Sit down!" said Van Ryn.

"But—but—"

"You see, you've got to have a study," explained Van Ryn. "You'll get chipped wherever you go until the fellows forget about it. You'd better stay here. Besides, Bootles has fixed it now. As for Higgs, never mind him. He's always a bit of a Hun, and you'll be able to stand him when you get used to him. Sit down!"

Pons considered for a moment, and then he sat down again.

"If my Form-master has put me here, I've a right to stay," he said.

"Exactly."

"Then I'm staying!"

"That's right!"

Higgs' face was almost purple.

"And what about me?" he roared.

"Oh, I'll try to stand you," said Pons calmly. "I wish you'd improve your manners a bit. But I dare say I shall get used to them."

Higgs stared at the new junior speechlessly. Van Ryn grinned, and Tubby Muffin gave a fat chuckle.

"My hat!" Higgs found his voice at last. "It's no good talking to you. Will you go out of this study on your feet or on your neck? That's the question."

"Well, I sha'n't go on my feet!" said Pons. "Then you'll go out on your neck!"

And Alfred Higgs came round the table with a rush and laid violent hands on the new junior.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Higgs Meets His Match!

JIMMY SILVER, the captain of the Fourth, stopped in the passage.

"Hallo, that sounds like war!" he remarked.

There was a sound of a terrific struggle in No. 3. Certainly it sounded like war.

"Oh, come on!" said Lovell. "It's only that new duffer in trouble again."

"Tea's ready, you know," said Raby.

But Jimmy Silver did not come on.

"The new kid's a howling idiot!" he remarked. "But if Higgs is bullying him it's time for Uncle James to chip in."

"Oh, don't begin Uncle Jamesing now!" urged Newcome. "I tell you tea's ready!"

The Fistical Four were coming in to tea after football practice, and they were hungry.

And there was a feed ready in Oswald's study. The Co. were anxious to get there.

So was Jimmy Silver, for that matter. But Jimmy Silver had a very strong sense of duty as captain of the Fourth and Uncle James to Rookwood generally.

"Crash, bump!" came from the study.

"Dash it all, we ought to look in!" said Jimmy.

"But tea—"

"Never mind tea for a minute—"

"Look here, the new kid is a howling ass and born to find trouble!" growled Lovell.

"Look how the Bagshot Bounders took him in yesterday!"

"Well, if he's a silly ass, it's up to wise-aces like us to look after him a bit," suggested Jimmy.

"Oh, rats!"

"You fellows coming?" shouted Oswald from his study doorway.

"Just a minute, Oswald."

Jimmy Silver thumped at the door of No. 3, and opened it.

His comrades growled, but they stopped, too. After all, it would only take a few minutes to bump the bully of the Fourth and reduce him to reason.

But the scene that met their eyes in the study amazed them.

Van Ryn and Tubby Muffin were looking on at it, grinning.

Alfred Higgs had grasped Charles Pons, of Canada, with the intention of hurling him neck and crop from the study. That was Higgs' simple and drastic method of settling the question.

As Higgs was a head taller than the younger lad, and a very powerful fellow in every way, he did not anticipate any difficulty in carrying out his programme.

But difficulties had a way.

Pons had returned to Pons for grasp, and Higgs, to his amazement, found himself held.

The slim arms that were wound round him seemed to be made of steel.

Pons' dark, handsome face was quite calm—in fact, smiling. Higgs was red with rage.

The two juniors were stamping and trampling about the study in a terrific struggle. Chairs had been knocked right and left, and some of the tea-things were on the floor.

But the steel-like grip round Higgs' burly body did not relax.

Van Ryn had intended to interfere, but there was no need for his interference.

The Canadian was quite capable of taking care of himself.

Jimmy Silver burst into a hearty laugh.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome could not help grinning. If Charles Pons was a duffer, he was a very capable duffer in some ways.

"My hat!" ejaculated Lovell. "That kid's got some muscle! I couldn't hold Higgy like that!"

"Leggo!" roared Higgs.

Pons grinned.

"Well, I didn't begin," he remarked.

"Are you going to keep the peace if I let go?"

"You're going out of this study, or I do!" howled Higgs.

"Then you'll go!"

"Out you go!" gasped Higgs.

And he made a tremendous effort to whirl the new junior round to the door.

For a moment he thought he was succeeding. They swung to the doorway, and the Fistical Four crowded back to give them room. But in the doorway it was Higgs who was swung outward, and the Canadian sud-

denly let go. Higgs went spinning into the passage, his arms flying wildly.

Crash!
"Yooop!" roared Lovell, as Higgs' right hand caught him across the nose.
"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Higgs.
He sat down in the passage, with a resounding bump.

Lovell rubbed his nose furiously.
"You silly ass! Oh, you dummy!"
"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Van Ryn. "He is a corker, and no mistake! How the dickens did you do it, Pong?"
Higgs scrambled up breathlessly.
"I'll smash him! I'll slaughter him! I'll scalp him! I'll—"

He rushed into the study again.
"Poor old Pong!" murmured Raby.
But Pons was not in need of sympathy.
He was not quite big enough to tackle Higgs at fisticuffs, but with wonderful quickness he closed in with him, and, once in his grasp, Higgs had no chance to use his fists. Pons had received one heavy drive which made his head sing, but that was all. How Pons did it, the juniors could hardly see. It was evident that he was a wrestler of uncommon skill. Higgs' muscular arms were pinned down to his sides, and the two juniors struggled chest to chest. Pons' grinning face looked coolly into Higgs' flaming and furious one.

The bully of the Fourth was struggling frantically.

But it seemed to be a circle of iron that was enclosing him, and he could not break it.

His breath came in quick, sudden jerks.
"Ow! You—you're breaking my arms!" he gasped at last.

Pons nodded.
"If I put the screw on they'd break, right enough," he said calmly, "and your ribs along with them! I think I'd better do it!"
"Ow!"

"Have you had enough?"
"Groooh!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you rotter!" groaned Higgs.
"Stand up to a chap and use your fists! I can't do this wriggling business!"

"Well, I can't do the fist business against a fellow your size!" grinned Pons. "You are a rotten bully to tackle me when you're a head taller!"

"You cheeky rotter! Yow-ow!"
"Make it pax, Higgy!" grinned Van Ryn.
"Yoop!"

"Better make it pax!" grinned Jimmy Silver.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I won't!" gasped Higgs. "I'll smash him! I'll pulverise him! I'll— Yow-ow-ow! I say— Yaroooh!"

"Make it pax, you ass!" gasped Van Ryn, almost weeping with merriment.
"Yow-ow-ow!"

Higgs made one more effort, and then he crumpled up in the Canadian's iron grasp.
"Yow-ow! Leggo, you—you boacon-structor! I give in!"

Pons let go at once, and Higgs staggered against the wall. He was utterly out of breath, and quite "done."

"Oh, dear!" he gasped. "You—you rotter! Ow! Look here, you're not going to stay in this study, all the same!"

Pons shrugged his shoulders.
"Oh, cheese it, Higgy!" said Van Ryn. "For goodness' sake, let's have some peace! It's like living with a Hun with you in the study!"

"If that rotter stays here, I shall change out!" roared Higgs.

"Well, we'll try to survive it if you do!"
Higgs shook a weak fist at Pons, and staggered out of the study. He had had enough—for the present, at least. Van Ryn gave a shrug. He was almost the only fellow in the Classical Fourth who could get on with Higgs, and he had found him very trying. If Higgs chose to change out of the study, it was probable that there would be dry eyes there over his departure.

The Fistical Four went on to Oswald's study, grinning. There had been no need for Uncle James' intervention, after all.

"There's more in that new kid than meets the eye," said Jimmy Silver sagely.

"Awful duffer, though!" said Lovell.
"Well, after all, he was a stranger here, and Panky is a deep beast!" said Jimmy Silver. "Anybody might have been taken in as Pong was—"

"Bow-wow!"
"He's a silly fathead!" remarked Raby.

"But he can wrestle, no mistake about that! I'll get him to give me some tips."

The Fistical Four joined Oswald in his study, considerably interested by the form the Canadian junior had shown. The Canadian junior went on with his tea in Study No. 3, showing small signs of the exertion he had been through. Tubby Muffin gave him a benevolent blink across the table.

"If Higgs changes out, it will be ripping!" he remarked. "I'd much rather have you, Pong!"

"Thanks!" said Pons, laughing.
"Of course, you're an awful ass, the way you were taken in by the Bagshot Bounders!"

"I suppose I shall never hear the end of that!" growled Pons.

"You never will, till the chaps get something else to think about!" grinned Van Ryn. "You must try to dish Pankley somehow, and make the score even, and then you'll hear the end of it!"

"Good idea!" said Pons. "I'll think over that."

Tubby Muffin chuckled.
"You'd better let Pankley alone," he remarked, "a duffer like you, you know. He, he, he!"

But Pons was looking very thoughtful. Van Ryn's suggestion had taken root in his mind. That was one way, at least, of setting himself right with the Rookwood Fourth, if he could contrive it.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Pankley Surpasses Himself!

GO it, Panky!"
Cecil Pankley, the great chief of the Fourth Form at Bagshot School, beamed upon Putter and Poole, his study-mates.

The great Pankley had been thinking. And his admiring chums, who knew the glimmer in Panky's eye when they saw it, guessed that a "wheeze" was working in Panky's mighty brain. So when he gave utterance to a soft chuckle Putter and Poole knew that the moment had arrived, and they chorused:

"Go it!"
"I've got it!" said Pankley.
"Good man!"

"The wheeze of the season!" said Pankley impressively.
"Go it!"

"We've been giving Rookwood rather a rest of late," said Pankley. "They're really not up to our form. Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd can't quite keep up their end against Bagshot."

"No fear!"
"We've done them brown, many a time and oft," pursued Pankley, perhaps forgetting that he, also, had been "down brown" occasionally by Jimmy Silver & Co. "They're played out, really. Still, a chap must have some fun. You know that new kid who's gone to Rookwood—Pong or Bong, or something."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You know the way we spoofed him, bringing him here from the station, and stuffing him that this was Rookwood?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Putter and Poole.
"Well, a silly idiot like that oughtn't to be wasted," said Pankley. "There's no end of fun in a crass ass like that. And he's a Rookwood chap, anyway. Every time we pull his silly leg it will make Jimmy Silver sit up. In fact, that born idiot is their heel of Achilles—"

"Their which?" asked Poole.
"Don't you know that Achilles was only vulnerable on one spot—his giddy heel?" demanded Pankley severely. "Well, that utter idiot, Pong, is their Achilles' heel. See? We can fool him as much as we like. I've got a wheeze. He's a French chap—"

"French-Canadian," said Putter.
"Well, French-Canadian, then. He's half French, and he's got a French name. Stands for reason that he's a good deal like a Frenchy."

"I suppose he is," said Putter, looking puzzled. "But what's that got to do with the wheeze?"

"That's where it comes in. Being a Frenchy, that's where we catch him. You've heard about French duels?"

"Duels!" ejaculated Poole.
"Yes. You know, they skewer one another when they have a row, instead of punching noses. Of course, they don't hurt one another with their skewering; it's only a sort of comedy. Well, Pong, being a Frenchy, more or less, will have that sort of rot in his blood, and he will be touchy, about his honour and glory and things—Frenchies are, you know—and—"

"But what the dickens—"

"So we're going to send him a challenge."

"A—a—a challenge?"
Pankley nodded.

"Yes, a challenge to a merry duel."
Putter and Poole stared at their leader. He had succeeded in taking their breath away.

"A—a—a duel!" babbled Poole at last.
"A regular, deadly, blood-and-thunder, honour-must-be-satisfied, duel," said Pankley. "Being a born idiot, he will think we are in earnest."

"Oh!"
"And being a touchy Frenchy, he will take it quite seriously. You see, we point out that honour demands satisfaction, and all that—"

"Oh, my hat!"
"And there's a deadly meeting on the heath," said Pankley, grinning. "We get a couple of the cadets' rifles, with blank cartridges—"

"Great pip!"
"And there's a blaze-away, and you, Putter, fall down fatally wounded."

"Oh, do I?" said Putter.
"Certainly! And we make the poor old Frenchy fairly skip," grinned Pankley. "After that we'll let him know it's a jape."

"But—but you don't think he's idiot enough to fall into a trick like that?" exclaimed Poole.

"Rookwood chaps are all idiots, and he's the champion idiot," said Pankley serenely. "He was idiot enough to come here thinking this was Rookwood, and let us pull his leg. I think he's idiot enough for anything. And if he does take it on—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"If he does, it will be a screaming joke against Rookwood. We'll let them know all about it, you bet."

"But—but he couldn't be such an ass," said Poole.

"Well, when we take over the challenge we shall see whether he's such an ass or not," said Pankley. "If he accepts the challenge, that will prove what kind of an ass he is, and then we can go ahead with the jape. If he doesn't, we can let it drop, and no harm done."

"Well, that's so. He can't be such an idiot, though."

"We'll see," said Pankley. "You can come over to Rookwood with me with the challenge, Poole. Putter's the injured party who sends it. When Pong was here he trod on Putter's foot, or something, and honour has to be satisfied. Putter is thirsting for gore!"

"Oh crumbs!"
"He sends his seconds with the challenge, in the French style," Pankley rubbed his hands. "Master Touchy Frenchy is afraid of being thought a funk, and he accepts the challenge, and then we make a regular guy of him. Just imagine the fun if the silly idiot does take it seriously. We'll have a crowd of Bagshot chaps there to yell when the duel comes off."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Putter and Poole.
Pankley jumped up briskly.

"No time like the present," he said. "Of course, we shall have to keep it dark from Jimmy Silver; he wouldn't let us jape the duffer. You come and get your bike, Poole."

In a few minutes Pankley and Poole were cycling away to Rookwood to carry out Panky's extraordinary scheme.

It was an amazing scheme, worthy of the mighty brain of the great Pankley. But even Panky had some doubts as to whether Pong would be duffer enough to be taken in to that extent. He hoped he would, but he had some doubts. It all depended upon how crass a duffer the new Rookwood fellow was. And Pankley had fooled him so easily once, that he had hopes of fooling him again to a still greater extent.

The two Bagshot juniors arrived at Rookwood, and leaving their machines at the porter's lodge, crossed the quadrangle. There was a shout from Jimmy Silver in the distance.

"Hallo, Bagshot Bounders!"
The Fistical Four bore down upon the enemy as they came up to the School House. Pankley jerked out his handkerchief, and waved it in the air.

"Flag of truce!" he exclaimed.
Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"White flag is a flag of truce," Jimmy replied.
"Well, this is a white flag."

"You must be colour-blind, Panky. That's a black flag, so I suppose you've come here as a pirate, and we always bump pirates."

Pankley glared. His handkerchief, perhaps, was not quite so clean as it might have been, but it was not so bad as all that.

"No larks," said Poole. "We've come on a visit. Returning Pong's visit, you know. I suppose you're aware that he visited us the other day?"

The Fistical Four grinned.

"We can't help him being a silly ass," said Lovell. "After all, he went to the right place for a born idiot."

"Oh, rats!"

Pankley and Poole hurried into the House, the Fistical Four deciding to respect the flag of truce.

"Is Pong anywhere about?" asked Pankley, addressing the first junior he met inside, who happened to be Tubby Muffin.

"Yes; he's my study-mate."

"Show us where to find him. Only a friendly visit," said Pankley reassuringly.

"Oh, all right!"

Tubby Muffin led the Bagshot juniors to Study No. 3, and left them there. Pankley tapped at the door.

"Come in!" called out Pons' voice.

Pankley opened the door. Pons was alone in the study, getting through some lines he had received from Mr. Bootles. Pankley was glad to find him alone.

The Canadian stared at the Bagshot juniors.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Good-afternoon, dear boy!" said Pankley, coming into the study, followed by Poole. "We've come over for a little talk—rather an important matter. Shut the door, Poole."

Pons rose to his feet, and pushed back his cuffs.

"Only a friendly talk, I tell you," said Pankley. "There's a dozen Rookwood chaps within call. We haven't come here to rag. Sit down."

"Oh, all right! What the deuce is it, then?"

Pankley's manner assumed a portentous gravity.

"You were at Bagshot the other day," he said. "You trod on Putter's foot. Putter is my chum, and I'm acting for him in this matter. I'm his second."

"His second?" exclaimed Pons.

"Exactly!"

"Does Putter want me to fight him? I don't mind."

"You accept the challenge?"

"Certainly!"

"Then choose your weapons!" said Pankley.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Challenge Accepted!

PONS stared blankly at the Bagshot junior. He had supposed that Pankley brought over a challenge to a fistical encounter with Putter, and the Bagshot junior's remark made him jump.

"Weapons!" he ejaculated.

Pankley nodded gravely.

"This isn't an ordinary matter," he explained. "Putter has been insulted. You trod on his foot, and called him a silly ass. An insult like that can only be wiped out in blood!"

"Oh, my hat!"

A peculiar glimmer came into the Canadian's eyes.

Pankley was quite satisfied that he was a born idiot, owing to his experiences at Bagshot; and certainly only a born idiot could have taken the ridiculous challenge seriously.

But it was barely possible that the great Pankley had made a little mistake, and that Pons was not quite such a duffer as he supposed.

But certainly Pons' next words bore out Pankley's opinion of him.

"A duel?" he asked.

"Exactly!"

"As the challenged party I have a right to choose the weapons," said Pons.

Poole gasped, and Pankley had hard work to suppress a chuckle. He had judged the French-Canadian correctly, he considered. Unless he was a born idiot, how could he have answered like that? The scheme was going to work!

"Quite so!" said Pankley as gravely as he could. "We've come over as Putter's seconds to arrange the meeting. As a French chap, you understand how these things are done, and that honour can only be satisfied by skewering!"

"Mais oui," said Pons. "Vous avez raison, non cher!"

"Eh?"

"I mean, you are right. Honour must be satisfied. There is French blood in my veins. I understand perfectly. I accept the challenge!"

"Oh, good!" gasped Poole.

"I will meet Monsieur Putter where and when he likes!" exclaimed Pons, gesticulating

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in an excited manner. "Only one of us shall leave the field of battle alive!"

Poole stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth. It was the only way to keep back a yell of laughter.

"Good!" said Pankley. "Will Coombe Heath suit you—under the trees by the old quarry? That is a lonely place."

"Oui, oui! The dead body can be thrown into the quarry, and nothing need be known," suggested Pons.

"Exactly!" gasped Pankley, almost overcome. "Ex-ex-exactly! The quarry will come in very handy for disposing of the body."

"Splendid idea!" stammered Poole.

"Then, as the seconds, we settle the details now," said Pankley. "Coombe Heath, by the old quarry, four o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. That suit you?"

"Oui, oui!"

"And the weapons?"

"Anything you like. I have none, unfortunately."

"You haven't any duelling rapiers?" asked Pankley gravely.

"Non."

"Nor any pistols?"

"I regret it, none."

"Well, any kind of firearms will do for blowing a chap's roof off. I can get a couple of the cadets' rifles—"

"Tres bien!"

"And some cartridges. That suit you?"

"Parfaitement."

"And you'll keep it dark, of course? Duelling isn't allowed in England. We've got a lot to learn yet from our Allies," said Pankley. "The police would interfere—ahem!—if they knew."

"Secret as the grave, of course!"

"Don't tell any of your friends here. It might spread, you know!"

"I understand."

Pankley felt relieved. If Pons had confided the matter to any of the Rookwood fellows, Pankley was not afraid they would inform the police—not at all. He was afraid they would enlighten Pons, for certainly no Rookwood fellow would have thought that the proposed duel was anything but "spoof."

But Pons seemed to have no suspicion. He nodded gravely.

"But what about a second for me?" he asked. "I must have a second."

"A Bagshot chap would act for you," said Pankley. "Poole, here."

"I'd be honoured," said Poole.

"You are very good!"

"Not at all. An honour and a pleasure!" gurgled Poole.

"Then I accept your offer. You shall be my second."

Poole rose to his feet and bowed. Pons rose also, and bowed in return. It was, as Pankley told his friends later, as good as a scene on the cinema. The only trouble was that the Bagshot jokers found it difficult to preserve their gravity.

"Then all's arranged," said Pankley. "It's understood that you don't tell any of the chaps here that there's going to be a duel to the death?"

"Certainly not!" said Pons, with a momentary glimmer in his eyes.

Pankley and Poole took their leave. They seemed to be suffering from suppressed internal convulsions as they hurried back to the porter's lodge for their bikes. But it was not till they were riding home to Bagshot that they gave vent to their feelings. Then they yelled.

"Did you ever hear of such a howling ass?" roared Pankley.

"Ha, ha! Never!"

"A duel to the merry death!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And poor old Putter is to be chucked into the quarry when slain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Poole.

The two japers rode home in great spirits. Putter met them at the gates of Bagshot School.

"Well, did he spot the jape?" was Putter's question.

"No fear!"

"He's accepted the challenge?" yelled Putter.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Four o'clock on Wednesday, on Coombe Heath—cadets' rifles, and a duel to the giddy death!" gurgled Poole.

Putter shrieked.

"And you're to be chucked into the old quarry, Putter, when slain."

Putter wept.

The merry trio proceeded to relate the story in the Junior Common-room, and the Bagshot fellows gasped when they heard it.

And there were few in the Fourth Form of Bagshot who did not resolve to be on the scene on Wednesday afternoon and see the duel a la mort. Poole intended to take his camera. He thought that a snapshot of the duel would make an agreeable picture, which could be sent to Jimmy Silver & Co. afterwards.

Meanwhile, Pons went cheerfully on with his lines till Van Ryn came into Study No. 3. The South African junior regarded him rather curiously.

"What did the Bagshot Bouders want?" he asked.

Pons looked up with a grin.

"I have something to tell you, mon ami." He remarked, "I have an idea—I think it is a good idea."

Pons proceeded to explain his idea.

Van Ryn listened with astonishment at first, staring blankly at the Canadian junior. But as Pons proceeded the South African's face relaxed into a grin, and the grin became a laugh, and the laugh a yell. He roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Van Ryn lay back in the study armchair and yelled.

"Hallo! What's the merry joke?" asked Jimmy Silver, looking into the study. "Somebody been fooling your born duffer again?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is a secret," said Pons gravely—"a terrible secret—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Van Ryn.

"Oh, blow your secrets!" said Jimmy.

"What are you cackling at, you duffers?"

Van Ryn, chuckling, explained; and then Jimmy Silver yelled too. And if Pankley & Co. could have heard they would probably not have been quite so pleased with themselves.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Duel!

"GREAT pip! There he is!"

It was Wednesday afternoon.

Pankley, Putter, and Poole crossed the heath from the direction of Bagshot School in the clear, frosty afternoon.

Excellently as their little scheme had worked, the Bagshot trio had had a lingering doubt. They wondered whether Pons would really be ass enough to keep the appointment at the old quarry.

But as they came through the trees from the road across the moor they saw the Canadian junior.

Pons was first in the field.

He stood by the old quarry, with his arms folded, his face dark and stern, in a Napoleonic attitude.

He was alone, and waiting for the enemy.

"By gad!" murmured Putter. "The howling ass has come right enough!"

"Oh, I knew he would!" said Pankley airily.

"Of all the screaming duffers—" murmured Poole.

"Mind you don't laugh," admonished Pankley. "If you cackle, that will give it all away."

"Ha, ha!"

"Shurrup! He can see us from here. You know what you've got to do, Putter. You fall down fatally injured—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"We chuck you into the quarry—"

"Oh, do you?" said Putter.

"Yes, ass—only slide you into the bushes, you know. Then we tell Pons to fly."

"Poor old Pong!"

"And he flies!" grinned Pankley. "Later on we'll drop in at Rookwood, and let him see Putter alive and well, to relieve his mind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!"

The three juniors assumed looks of great gravity as they came under the trees. They saluted Pons with becoming solemnity.

Pons gave a graceful bow.

"I have waited, messieurs," he remarked. "Just four," said Pankley, consulting his watch.

"Tres bien!"

Here and there on the heath heads appeared in view. A good number of Bagshot juniors were looking on from a distance, not to miss the fun. Pons did not appear to observe them.

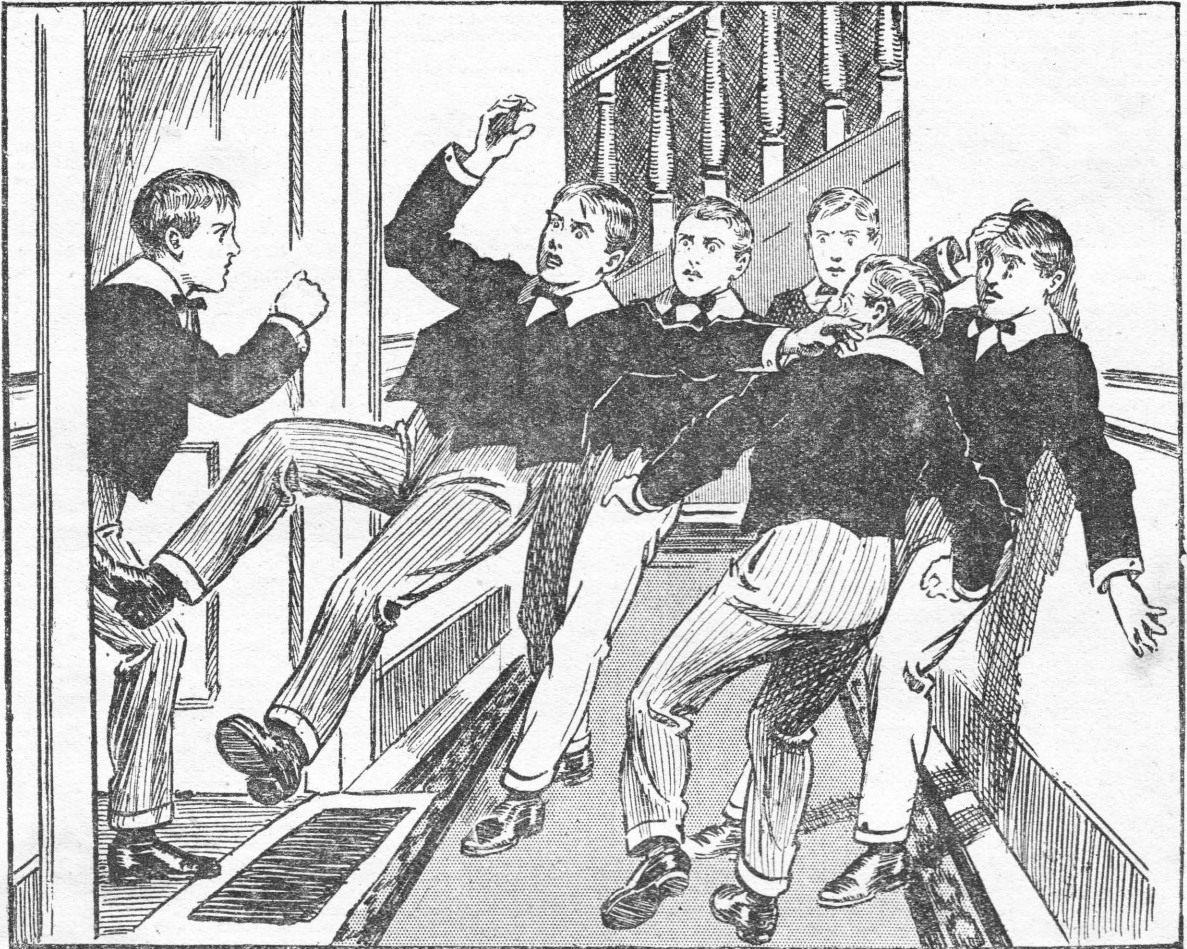
Pankley unfastened a long bundle he carried, wrapped in canvas.

A pair of the rifles used by the school cadet corps were disclosed to view.

Pons glanced at them.

"Good!" he ejaculated.

"How many paces?" asked Poole.



Pons let go suddenly and Higgs went spinning into the passage, his arms flying wildly. Crash! "Yoop!" roared Lovell, as Higgs' right hand caught him across the nose. "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jimmy Silver. (See Chapter 2.)

"Say ten," said Putter. "I want to make sure of him."

"Does that suit you, Pons?"

"Parfaitement."

"Ten paces, then," said Pankley. "Take your stand while we load the rifles."

The distance was measured off carefully. Pons stood waiting in a Napoleonic attitude. He was quite calm.

"I—I say, Panky," whispered Putter, "you—you're sure that you've got blank cartridges?"

Pankley gave him a withering look.

"Do you think I should make a mistake, you fathead?" he asked.

"Nunno; but—"

"If you're getting nervous, you ass—"

"I'm not; only mistakes do happen—"

"Look at them yourself, fathead!"

"Oh, all right!" said Putter.

"Take your place, ass, or Pong will begin to smell a rat."

Putter went to his place, facing Pons at a distance of ten paces.

The two seconds proceeded to load the rifles.

This operation was performed with due seriousness. Then the deadly weapons were handed to the two principals.

Pons gripped his rifle with a businesslike air.

"When I drop the handkerchief you fire," said Pankley.

"Oui, oui!"

"Are you ready?"

"Quite ready!"

"Go ahead!" said Putter.

"Level your popguns, and wait for the word!"

"What-ho!"

The rifles came to the shoulders. Deadly aim was taken.

"My hat!" murmured Poole. "Pong must be an awful beast as well as a silly fool! He really thinks he's going to wing poor old Putter!"

Pankley nodded.

"This lesson will do him good, then!" he remarked. "He'll feel a bit different after winging him. Don't cackle, you ass! Now—"

"Hold on a minute; I've got to get my camera ready!"

"Buck up, then!"

"The Rookwood chaps will enjoy this photograph," murmured Poole, as he opened the view-finder. "They'll gloat over it—I don't think!"

"Now, then!" said Pankley, raising his hand with the handkerchief in it. "Eyes front! Ready?"

The duellists blinked along the levelled rifles.

All was ready.

The handkerchief fluttered from Cecil Pankley's hand.

Bang, bang!

The two reports sounded almost as one. Putter, as per programme, uttered a piercing yell, and fell backwards.

To the astonishment of the seconds, Pons gave a shriek at the same moment, spun wildly round, and fell on his side.

They stared at him.

A deep, anguished groan came from the fallen Canadian.

"Oh, mon Dieu! Je suis mort! Helas!"

Then he lay still.

Pankley rushed madly towards him, his face white as a sheet. A crimson stream was flowing over Pons' white collar, dyeing the grass upon which he lay. The Bagshot juniors gazed at him in speechless horror.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Not According to the Programme!

PANKLEY and Poole stood transfixed, gazing down at the fallen junior. Putter leaped to his feet. It had been arranged for Putter to go through the ceremony of appearing fatally injured. But it was evidently no time for jokes now. Putter came running up with a scared face.

"What—what's happened?" he panted.

Pankley's teeth chattered.

"Look at him!"

"He—he's hit!" stuttered Putter.

The Canadian groaned again. His hand was clutching at his collar, and his fingers came away dyed crimson.

Putter's knees knocked together. How had it happened? He turned a wild look upon Pankley.

"Panky, you silly idiot, I—I asked you specially if they were blank cartridges!"

"They—they were!" groaned Pankley. "I got them out of the right box, I'll swear!"

"Then they must have got mixed!" gasped Poole.

"But—but I looked at them!"

"Oh, you fool!"

"You silly fool!" groaned Putter. "I knew there'd be some bungle! You've given me a loaded cartridge, and—and now—"

Groan!

The three juniors were almost overcome with horror.

Pons blinked up at them.

"It is nothing!" he gasped. "I—I am— Oh! But you are not to blame. It was a fair duel!"

Pankley groaned.

"I forgive you, Monsieur Putter!" moaned Pons. "If I die, you shall throw me into the quarry, and say nothing!"

"Pong, old man," gasped Pankley hoarsely, "it—it was only a joke! We—we thought they were blank cartridges!"

Pons smiled faintly.

Then his features became convulsed, and he writhed in the grass and groaned.

"Ah, je suis mort! Je vais mourir!" he groaned.

There was a crash in the trees and bushes by the quarry, and Dick Van Ryn of Rookwood came panting up.

"What's happened?" he exclaimed. "I heard shots here! Why, what—what's happened to Pong?"

"It—it was an accident!" said Pankley huskily. "We—we were fooling him!"

"Look at the blood!"

"The—the cartridge wasn't a blank somehow!"

"Oh, you champion idiot!" exclaimed Van Ryn. "Don't you know better than to play jokes with firearms?"

"I could have sworn—"

"Lend me a hand with him. I've got a trap on the road," said Van Ryn hastily. "He may not be fatally injured. Let's get him to the surgeon's at once!"

Pankley took the Canadian's legs, and Van Ryn his shoulders, and they carried him towards the road.

Pankley could not help thinking it lucky that Van Ryn had happened to be driving by in a trap at that terrible moment. Without that, the wounded junior could hardly have been got to the surgeon's.

The trap was waiting by the roadside. Jimmy Silver was sitting in it, holding the reins.

He stared at them as they came up, carrying the groaning Pons.

"What on earth—"

"An accident!" panted Pankley.

"Good heavens!"

"No time to talk now!" interjected Van Ryn. "He's got to be got away! Help me in with him, Pankley!"

Pons was laid in the trap.

Groan!

"You fellows had better say nothing about this till you hear what the surgeon's got to say," said Van Ryn, as he followed the wounded youth into the trap. "Get off, Silver! Drive as fast as you can!"

"Don't jolt him too much!" gasped Pankley. "I—I say, let me tie up his wound first! Look at the—the blood!"

"I'll look after him while we're going. Buck up, Jimmy!"

The trap started.

Pankley gazed after it stonily, as it disappeared down the road, across the heath, in the direction of Coombe.

Putter and Poole came slowly up and joined him.

The trap had disappeared, driving at a rate that was certainly not good for a fellow who had a bullet in his body.

Pons lay in the bottom of the trap, with Van Ryn at his side. Jimmy Silver drove on to the village, but he did not stop there. He passed the gates of Mr. Scoggins, the surgeon, without thinking of halting, and drove on towards Rookwood. In the lane he slackened speed, and looked round with a grin.

"All serene now," he remarked. "Not dead yet, Pong?"

Pons sat up.

He did not look as if he were perishing now.

He was chortling.

"Right-ho!" he said. "Poor old Pankley!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just imagine Pankley's face when he calls on the surgeon!" gurgled Van Ryn.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"I have spoiled my collar," said Pons regretfully, "and it is very uncomfortable to have red ink flowing down my shirt-front. But it was worth inking a shirt and a collar."

"Ha, ha, ha!" I should say so!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "You're not such a duffer as you look, Pong!"

"Thank you!"

"I saw Putter fall down!" grinned Van Ryn. "He jumped up quick enough when Pong went down, though!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Rookwood juniors drove on in great spirits.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Quite a Surprise!

PANKLEY & Co. looked at one another after the trap had gone.

"What an awful ending to a rotten joke!" groaned Poole. "I—I say, he can't be fatally injured, can he?"

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"No, no!" gasped Pankley. "Only—only a wound, you know! Goodness knows how the wrong cartridge got into the box. Somebody ought to be prosecuted!"

"We shall be prosecuted when this gets out!"

"Oh, don't!"

"Let's get on to the surgeon's, for goodness' sake, and hear the worst!" mumbled Putter.

But as the dismayed trio started a crowd of Bagshot fellows arrived on the spot. The distant spectators had observed that matters had not gone quite according to programme, and they wanted to know what was the matter. They looked very blue when they learned what the matter was.

"Well, you've done it now, Panky!"

"You awful ass!"

"Putter will be hung!"

"You'll all go to prison, too!"

"Of all the silly idiots—"

"It was a rotten joke, anyway!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Pankley, not much comforted by these remarks. "Some of you get those confounded rifles away, and hold your jaws! It mayn't turn out to be serious."

Pankley and Putter and Poole started for the village, with very uneveable feelings. Truth to tell, they were more anxious about poor Pons than about the consequences to themselves. But the consequences were certain to be very serious.

They started at a walk, but they broke into a run, and arrived in Coombe in a breathless state.

Pankley rang a loud peal at the door of the village surgeon's.

Mr. Scoggins, the surgeon, stepped out into the hall, frowning. Mr. Scoggins was at tea, and he was not pleased by the disturbance at his door.

"What is it? What is the matter?" he exclaimed. "An accident?"

"How is he, sir?"

"What! How is who?"

"Pong, sir."

"What do you mean—Pong?"

"The—the chap who was brought here wounded, I mean. How is he?"

Mr. Scoggins stared at Pankley, as well he might.

"What do you mean? Is this a joke?" he rapped. "Nobody has been brought here!"

Pankley staggered.

"Isn't he here? A Rookwood chap. Didn't Jimmy Silver bring him here in a trap?"

"Certainly not!"

Pankley looked at his comrades in bewilderment. What did it mean?

"You—you—your sure, sir?" stammered Putter.

"I suppose I should know whether anyone has been brought here or not!" snapped Mr. Scoggins. "If this is one of your practical jokes, you young rascals—"

"Nunno. But—but—"

"Close the door, Mary!"

Mr. Scoggins went back to his tea, and the door was closed in the faces of the Bagshot trio.

Pankley looked helpless.

"They—they didn't bring him here," he gasped. "What have they done with him? They—they wouldn't take him to Rookwood like that!"

"They must have."

Pankley pressed his hand to his brow. He simply couldn't understand it.

"Let's get on," he muttered at last. "I suppose they must have taken him to the school, the silly fools! Buck up!"

A visit to Rookwood, under the circumstances, was not pleasant; but the Bagshot juniors were too terribly anxious to think about that. They ran on up the lane towards the school, tired and dusty and breathless.

They were panting and perspiring when they arrived at the gates. Lovell of the Fourth was waiting there.

"Oh, you've come!" he exclaimed.

"Is Pong here?" gasped Pankley.

"Yes."

"Where—where is he?"

"They've taken him to his study."

"Not—not to the sanatorium?" ejaculated Poole.

"No; it's being kept dark at present," said Lovell. "Only a few of us know. If you want to see him, I'll take you in."

"He—he—he's not—"

The word almost froze on Pankley's tongue. "He—he's not—not—not dead?"

"Not yet."

"Is—is—is he going to die?" groaned Putter.

"Yes."

"Ow!"

The miserable trio followed Lovell to the

School House. They fairly ran up the stairs to the Fourth-Form passage. But Pankley opened the door of Study No. 3 very softly.

Pankley & Co. tiptoed in.

"Where is he—?" began Pankley.

He broke off suddenly.

There were half a dozen juniors in the study having tea. And at the table, with a very cheery face, engaged in the act of eating sardines, was Charles Pons, of Canada!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Good Old Pankley!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. jumped up, grinning as the astounded Bagshot juniors stared into the study.

Pankley & Co. could scarcely believe their eyes.

"Pong!" gasped Putter.

"So pleased to see you, Monsieur Putter!" said Pons. "Do you want any more satisfaction?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Rookwooders.

Pankley almost staggered. It was dawning upon him now that his leg—the great Pankley's leg—had been pulled. If there had been a born idiot in the transaction it was not Pong who had been the born idiot!

"You—you—you're not hurt?"

"Thank you, no. A blank cartridge does not hurt," said Pons, in a tone of surprise. "I was a little uncomfortable from the red ink, but that was all."

"Red ink!" shrieked Putter.

They understood fully now. Pankley turned a ferocious look upon Lovell, who had followed him, grinning, into the study.

"You—you rotter! You said he was going to die!" he howled.

"So he is," said Lovell. "Pons isn't immortal any more than the rest of us. He's bound to go the way of all flesh, isn't he? Not for another seventy years, I hope; but it's bound to come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" mumbled Pankley.

"You took me for a howling duffer," put in Pons; "I took you for howling duffers, too. Who was right?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" murmured Pankley.

"I knew you were going to spoof with blank cartridges, as I couldn't believe you were idiot enough to be thinking of anything else," went on Pons cheerfully. "But cartridges sometimes get mixed, and I thought that if I fell down dying you would suppose they'd got mixed—as you did. You were going to spoof me into believing that I had winged Putter, and you couldn't do it, you ass! But I spoofed you into believing that Putter had winged me, because you're a born idiot!"

The expression on Pankley's face was excruciating. The Rookwood juniors laughed till they wept.

"I fancy Rookwood scores this time," grinned Jimmy Silver. "Will you stay to tea, Panky, old scout? You're so entertaining!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pankley & Co. did not stay to tea. With crimson faces they sneaked out of the study, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. yelling. They did not speak till they were in the road. Then Putter and Poole spoke—with emphasis.

"Pankley, you ass!"

"Pankley, you idiot!"

"I—I'm jolly glad it's no worse, anyway," mumbled Pankley.

"And that's the chap you were going to spoof, taking you in all the time!" hooted Poole.

And the unfortunate Pankley had nothing to say. He could not deny that his tremendous jape had been turned on his own head, and that he had been taken in all along the line. It was time for the great Pankley to hide his diminished head.

In Study No. 3 at Rookwood there was much merriment. Never had the rivals of Rookwood been so completely "dished" before; and the cream of the joke, as Jimmy Silver remarked, was that Pankley had laid the whole scheme himself, and had taken no end of trouble to bring about his own undoing. Jimmy Silver & Co.'s opinion of the new junior was quite changed now, since the Bagshot Bounders had met more than their match in "Pong" of the Fourth.

THE END.

(Another splendid long complete tale of Jimmy Silver & Co., entitled: "Too Clever by Half!" by Owen Conquest, will appear next week.)