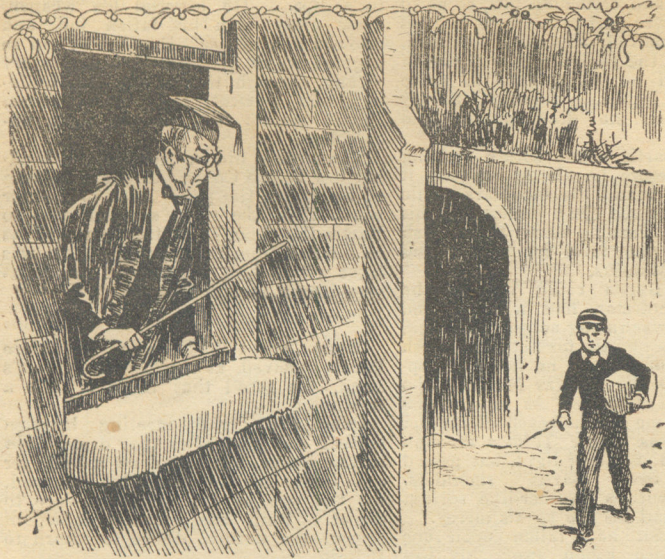


THE ROOKWOOD CHUMS IN JOYFUL MOOD!



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Peace and Good Will!

"MANDERS!"

"Yes, Manders!"
"Rot!" said Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome, with one voice.

Arthur Edward Lovell's face set into its most obstinate expression.

A hint of opposition from his comrades was enough to make Arthur Edward determined. And this was more than a hint.

"I said Manders, and I mean Manders!" said Lovell.

"And I said rot, and I mean rot, old bean!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Utter rot!" said Raby.

"Piffle!" said Newcome.

"Look here, you dummies!"

"Look here, you ass——"

"It's a jolly good idea!" roared Lovell.

"How could it possibly be a good idea, when it comes from you?" asked Raby. "Be reasonable!"

"You fathead, Raby——"

"You ass, Lovell——"

"I jolly well think——" recommenced Lovell, his voice rising, and his temper to match.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Newcome incredulously.

"What?"

"Draw it mild! You can't expect fellows who know you to swallow that." Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard and deep.

It looked as if there was going to be an argument in the end study in the Classical Fourth.

Arguments were not uncommon in that study. But really it was unfortunate, as it was the day before breaking-up, and Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were going home with Lovell for Christmas. At such a time a dispute came in rather awkwardly. Arguments were better left over till the new term.

"Hallo, you chaps, getting ready for Christmas?" asked a cheery voice at the door of the end study; and Putty of the Fourth looked in. "Is this your special brand of peace and good will, and things?"

The interruption was timely.

"Tell your Uncle Teddy about it," said Putty encouragingly. "What's the little trouble in the happy family?"

Jimmy Silver smiled.

THE POPULAR.—No. 563.

Fancy giving a Christmas present to an unpopular master! Funny as it sounds, that is what Arthur Edward Lovell does.

"Lovell's got one of his weird ideas," he said. "He's always pumping up some weird idea or other. Now he's got on to the weirdest he ever struck. He wants us to make Mr. Manders a Christmas present."

"Oh, my hat!" said Putty.

He stared at Lovell.

Mr. Manders, Housemaster on the Modern side at Rookwood, was not popular even with Modern fellows. Still less was he popular with Classicals. Least of all was he popular with Arthur Edward Lovell.

"True, Christmas was a time for peace and good will and general forgiveness of offence. Lovell was quite right there. But really, it was a surprise.

"I'll tell you how it stands," said Lovell, with a glare at his chums. He pointed to a box on the study table, neatly wrapped in brown paper and neatly tied with a white string. "See that? There's a clock in that box—a really handsome clock. The man in the shop said it would be an ornament to any schoolmaster's mantelpiece, and I suppose he knows. Well, that was going to be our Christmas present to Dicky Dalton."

"Not a bad idea, that," assented Putty. "Mr. Dalton is one of the best."

"We clubbed together to get it," pursued Lovell. "It was to be a joint present from this study to Mr. Dalton. We blued two pounds on it."

"Only——" said Newcome.

"Only——" said Raby.

"Only," said Lovell, "when we carted the dashed thing to Mr. Dalton, he said he was ever so much obliged, and thanked us for our good opinion of him, and so on, but that it was quite impossible for a Form master to accept a present from boys in his Form."

"Flooded us," said Raby. "We thought he would be pleased, you know. I jolly well know that the clock in his study has never been the same since a japing ass put gum in it!"

Putty of the Fourth grinned. He was the japing ass referred to.

"But there was nothing doing," said

LOVELL GETS THAT CHRISTMAS FEELING!

BY OWEN CONQUEST.

Jimmy Silver. "Come to think of it, I dare say Mr. Dalton is quite right. Only——"

"Only we didn't think of that before," said Newcome. "The quids are gone now, and there is the blessed clock!"

"A handsome Christmas present going begging," grinned Raby.

"So I thought——" said Lovell. "I thought of making Mr. Manders a Christmas present. It isn't as if we had to spend the money on it—the money's spent. Well, we don't like Manders. He's a Modern man; he teaches chemistry, and wears elastic-sided boots, and has the temper of a Hun, and the manners of a grizzly bear. In fact, he's a rank outsider in every possible way—the very edge. That's why! Just because he's the limit, just because we don't like him, just because he's always been a beast to us, that's why I propose making him a Christmas present. It's heaping coals of fire on his head."

"But——"

"And it's the right thing at Christmas-time," said Lovell, with a lofty look at his comrades. "The right thing, I tell you! At Christmas, a fellow ought to forget all offences, and forgive his enemies, and so on. I think it's a splendid idea to make Mr. Manders a Christmas present the day before we break up at Rookwood. These silly owls don't see it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a chuckle from the passage. Peele of the Fourth was lounging by the end study, and apparently he had heard. His opinion was expressed in that chuckle.

Whiz!

The cushion was in Lovell's hand in a moment. As he sighted Cyril Peele's grinning face outside the doorway, he hurled it, with deadly aim.

Crash!

Peele stopped laughing quite suddenly. A large and rather dusty cushion landing fairly on his nose was enough to reduce any fellow to a proper state of seriousness.

There was a bump in the passage as Peele sat down.

"Now cackle again, you cheeky sweep!" roared Lovell.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Peele scrambled up with a furious face. He clutched at the cushion and hurled it back into the study.

"Oh!" roared Lovell.

He caught the returning cushion with his chin. He went over the back of his chair like an acrobat, but landed on the floor with much less than the light activity of an acrobat.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Whoop! Oh! Ow!" roared Lovell.

He scrambled up frantically.
"You silly owls! Anything to cackle at? I—I—I'll smash him! I'll—I'll—"

Bursting with indignant wrath, Arthur Edward Lovell rushed from the study.

But Peele was gone.
Peele was much too keen a youth to linger in the vicinity, after flooring Arthur Edward Lovell like that. He had vanished into space.

Lovell tramped back into the study with a wrathful brow.

"The cheeky rotter!" he gasped.
"The cheeky cad! Chucking a cushion at me—the cheeky worm—"

"Well, you chucked it at him, old man," said Putty of the Fourth.

"You silly owl!"

"Eh?"

"If you can't talk sense, Teddy Grace—"

"Oh, my hat!" said Putty. "When it comes to chucking cushions, is it the law that you must always be the chucker and never the chucked?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell did not answer. His temper had suffered severely, and as Peele was gone, and Putty still there, that seemed to the wrathful Arthur Edward a sufficient reason for visiting his wrath upon Putty. So the cushion flew again, and there was a wild howl from Putty of the Fourth.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, as Lovell fielded the cushion and turned to smite again. "Putty's going to umpire for us, you know, about that rotten wheeze of making Manders a Christmas present—"

Biff!

Without heeding, Lovell smote at Putty, and the humorist of the Classical Fourth staggered into the doorway.

"You silly owl, Lovell—" he roared.

Biff!

"Yooop!"

Putty of the Fourth took almost everything humorously. But it was impossible to take that smiting cushion humorously. The smites were too emphatic for that.

"You dangerous ass!" shrieked Putty, as he staggered into the passage. "Keep off!"

Biff!

Lovell was warming to the work; he had tasted blood, as it were. There was solace in wreaking his wrath upon somebody; and Putty had asked for it—at least, Putty was close at hand, which came to much the same thing. So the dusty cushion smote and smote, till Putty of the Fourth fairly fled along the passage and vanished.

Lovell came back into the study and hurled the cushion into the armchair. He glared at his chums.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Well!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"I'm going to make Mr. Manders a Christmas present of that clock!" hooted Lovell. "See?"

"Hem!"

"If you fellows don't agree, I'll shell out what you put up for the clock and stand it all on my own. I think it's a good idea, and I'm going to take that clock to Manders this evening. See?" hooted Lovell.

And, with that, Arthur Edward

Lovell fairly stamped out of the end study, and the door closed after him with a terrific slam.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Amicable!

"**W**HERE on earth have you fellows been?"
Arthur Edward Lovell asked that question.

It was about half an hour later, and Jimmy Silver & Co., who had been looking everywhere for Lovell, returned to the end study for tea. They found Arthur Edward jamming the kettle on the study fire, and the tablecloth spread ready for a meal. In the fender was a plate piled with hot, buttered toast, and a dish containing an imposing array of poached eggs.

The three juniors stared. They had looked for Lovell in the Common-room and the passages, and then they had looked in the Form-room, and then they had looked round the quadrangle, thinking that he might have decided to relieve his feelings by a row with the Moderns. Having given him up at last, and returned to the study, they found him there, and quite unexpectedly found him preparing tea on an unusually lavish scale.

"Where have we been?" grunted Jimmy Silver. "We've been looking for you."

"I suppose you came back to the study while we were looking for you in the tuckshop?" snapped Raby. "You ass!"

"Look here, Raby—"

"You generally kept away a bit when you fling off in a silly tantrum," said Newcome. "We've looked for you everywhere, you duffer!"

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard and deep. But he seemed to swallow his emotions, whatever they were. His manner was calm.

"The fact is, you fellows, I came back to speak to you, and found you gone," he said. "I—I—I was a bit ratty. It's enough to make a fellow ratty—three silly asses gibing at him when he's got a really good idea. But it's Christmas-time, and—and—look here, I won't give that old clock to Manders if you don't want me to."

And Lovell, with a red face, turned to the kettle and teapot, and proceeded to make the tea.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at him, and then exchanged glances and grinned.

"Lovell, old man," said Jimmy Silver at last. "Nobody can deny that you are an ass. But"—the captain of the Fourth broke into a laugh—"I'm glad you've come round, old bean. We were looking for you to tell you that we've come to the conclusion that it's quite a good idea to make old Manders a Christmas present."

"In fact, a ripping wheeze!" said Raby.

"Tophole!" said Newcome solemnly. The three were not to be outdone by Lovell. If he was ready to let them have their way, they were determined that he should have his own way. Lovell was not going to have the genial spirit of Christmastide all to himself.

But Lovell shook his head.

"No," he said. "I thought it a good idea, but as you chaps are against it I'll chuck it up. Tea's ready."

"You won't chuck it up," said Jimmy Silver. "You'll jolly well take that clock over to Manders' House and present it to Manders."

"Hear, hear!" said Raby and Newcome.

"Well, if you insist—" said Lovell.

"We do, old man," said Lovell's comrades solemnly.

"Right-ho, then. But mind, I'm willing to chuck up the idea, if you like," said Arthur Edward amicably.

"Not at all!"

"Not a bit of it!"

"I say, this is a topping spread," said Raby. "And I'm as hungry as a hunter. And you got it all ready for us, Lovell?"

"Well, I'm afraid I showed a lot of temper about nothing, or next to nothing," said Lovell amicably.

"Oh, no, old chap!"

Really the friendly concord that reigned in the end study now was worthy of the best traditions of Yuletide.

Tea was quite a happy meal, all traces of irritation had vanished, and four beaming faces beamed at one another over the festive board.

Tea over, Lovell rose from the table and picked up the box from his desk. The box, wrapped neatly in brown paper, tied with white string, looked exactly as it had looked before, and it never even occurred to Lovell, or his friends, that it might have been tampered with during their temporary absence from the study.

"Good luck, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver. "Give the kind regards of the whole study to Mr. Manders."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Mr. Manders.

MR. MANDERS, Housemaster of Manders' House, frowned.

That was not an uncommon thing with Mr. Manders.

Frowns were more frequent upon his sour visage than smiles. Even the near approach of the festive season did not make him smile. Even the fact that the term was at its end did not seem to cheer him, though for some weeks he was going to be clear of school and the labours and worries of school. Undoubtedly he was as glad to be done with his House for a time as his House was to be done with him. But Mr. Manders was one of those lugubrious persons who take their pleasures sadly.

Besides, he had reason for frowning now. Walking across the quad, in the misty December afternoon, his hat had been knocked off by a snowball. The snowballer had vanished unseen. Mr. Manders had replaced his hat with feelings too deep for expression in words. It was an outrage—an insult—an affront! Somebody deserved to be expelled for it. Somebody certainly would have been caned severely had Mr. Manders known where to lay a finger on that somebody. But he did not.

He stood at his study window staring out into the falling dusk of the quadrangle, frowning. Possibly one of his own boys had done that disrespectful deed; but more likely it was some Classical fellow—most likely, in Mr. Manders' opinion, one of those disrespectful young rascals that forgathered in the end study on the Classical side. Jimmy Silver or Lovell, in all probability. Mr. Manders thought it extremely probable. Still, as he had not seen the vanishing snowballer it was useless to carry over a complaint to Mr. Dalton. Mr. Manders generally required very little evidence before he punished an offender, as the Modern fellows knew only too well; but Mr. Dalton would require the matter to be made very clear before he caned a Classical, especially on the day before break-up.

Mr. Manders, frowning from his study window, was thinking the matter over

with his usual bitterness, when a junior came in sight, heading for his House. It was Arthur Edward Lovell of the Classical Fourth.

Roger Manders' frown intensified.

Lovell was innocent of knocking off Mr. Manders' hat with a snowball; he was even ignorant of the fact that such an unparalleled outrage had occurred at all. But Mr. Manders suspected him, and the sight of Lovell deepened his suspicions.

Mr. Manders set his lips.

He noted that Lovell had a parcel under his arm, and his eyes glinted at it. Probably some indigestible "tuck," which he was going to share with some young rascal on the Modern side. Did the Classical boy think that he could carry on his orgies—yes, orgies—in Mr. Manders' House? If so, he was going to be undeceived. Mr. Manders would see to that. And at the prospect of interrupting some spread in a junior study, caning the Modern fellows concerned, and reporting Lovell to Mr. Dalton, the Modern master's brow relaxed a little. He did not quite smile, but he felt comforted.

Lovell disappeared into the House.

Mr. Manders, having no doubt whatever that Lovell was heading for some junior study, selected a cane, as a necessary preparation for seeking that study. A knock came at his door.

"Come in!" snapped Mr. Manders.

The door opened, and Lovell of the Classical Fourth stepped in.

Mr. Manders, cane in hand, stared at him blankly. Something seemed to be wrong with the theories he had formed in his acid mind, for obviously it was Mr. Manders himself whom Lovell had come to see. The Modern master laid down the cane. Apparently it would not be wanted now, which was a little disappointing.

Lovell looked cheerily and brightly at the Modern master. He was not discouraged by Mr. Manders' frown. He did not expect to find any other expression on Mr. Manders' face.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Manders!"

"What do you want here, Lovell? Have you come to confess—"

"Eh?"

"Have you come to confess that you hurled a snowball at me in the quadrangle twenty minutes ago?"

"Nunno! No, sir! Oh, no! I didn't, sir! I had no idea—"

"I trust you are speaking the truth, Lovell," said Mr. Manders sourly.

"I assure you, sir—" stammered Lovell.

He felt that this was not a good opening.

"Then what do you want?"

"Nothing, sir! I—"

"You can scarcely have come to my study for nothing, Lovell. You are doubtless aware that my time is valuable?"

"Yes, sir. Oh, certainly, Mr. Manders! But, you see, it being Christmas-time, and—"

Lovell stammered under the cold, hard eye of the Modern master.

"It is not yet Christmas-time, Lovell, as the term is scarcely ended, and the date of Christmas is December the twenty-fifth," said Mr. Manders. "Neither do I understand your reference to that date. Will you kindly explain your meaning immediately, without further wasting my time?"

"Yes, sir," gasped Lovell. He laid the box on the table. "I—that is, we—my friends and I, sir—we thought being Christmas time, sir—we thought—"

"Why have you brought that box to my study, Lovell?"

"That—that box, sir. It's in that box."

"What—what is in that box?"

"The Christmas present, sir," said Lovell, getting it out at last, discomfited and confused as he was under Mr. Manders' hard, gleaming eye. "I—we—us—that is, my study—we thought, being Christmas-time sir, we—we hoped, sir, that you would accept this little present from us, as a mark, sir, of our—our esteem and—good will, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Manders simply stared at Lovell. Never had the sour old gentleman been taken so utterly by surprise.

He was a suspicious gentleman—very suspicious; but he had never dreamed of suspecting this.

He was too amazed, for some moments, to do anything but stare at Lovell, still frowning, from force of habit.

Then his grim face relaxed.

Possibly even Mr. Manders, sour as he was, was not wholly uninfluenced by the spirit of Christmas. Even to his ear Christmas Chimes were not merely a disagreeable noise.

His face relaxed. He did not smile, because that required an effort on his part, but he ceased to frown. Lovell's flushed, earnest face, full of respectful

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kindliness, was no longer displeasing to his eyes. He was pleased—for once in his career as a schoolmaster, Mr. Manders was pleased. Boys—boys, too, whom he had disliked—had thought kindly of him at Christmas—had clubbed together to buy him a little present as a token that they realised their own faults and his many virtues; really, it was a pleasing reflection.

"Well, well," said Mr. Manders, and his voice was less like the grinding of a saw than it had ever seemed before. "Well, well, well! This is somewhat—hem!—unusual—very unexpected; but—well, well, well! Certainly it is a very kindly thought, Lovell—a very kindly thought indeed."

Lovell beamed.

He had considered all along that he was right, and now he knew it. He had touched the right chord.

With a beaming face he watched Mr. Manders untying the string of the parcel.

The brown paper was unwrapped.

The box which contained the handsome new clock, an ornament to any master's mantelpiece, came into view. Mr. Manders, with an unusually amiable expression on his face, removed the lid of the cardboard box.

And then—

Lovell, standing at a little distance, on the other side of the table, could not see into the box. But he had no doubt, of course, that the clock was there—that handsome timekeeper on which the end study had expended two pounds, and which, of course, bore no trace of having been offered to Mr. Dalton and offered in vain.

But the expression on Roger Manders' face was inexplicable. With a chill, Lovell realised that something was wrong.

What was wrong he could not even begin to imagine. But the gathering thunder and fury in Mr. Manders' face showed that something was very wrong indeed.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Manders, in a choking voice. "A pretty trick—a very pretty trick, indeed! Upon my word!"

Lovell was dizzily conscious of a scent in the study—a peculiar scent—an ancient and fish-like smell.

It could not possibly proceed from the cardboard box that had held the clock—how could it possibly do so? Yet it seemed that it did so; it had not been perceptible before the box was opened. Now it was there—strong, and growing stronger.

What did it mean?

Mr. Manders' eyes were fixed on him with a terrible expression. Never had the Housemaster of Manders' House looked so infuriated.

"You young rascal!" he hooted.

"Sir!" stuttered Lovell.

"You impudent young scoundrel!"

"Mr. Manders!"

Obviously something was wrong—frightfully wrong! Even yet Lovell could not guess what it was.

"You—you—you—you dare—?" Mr. Manders choked. "You dare to—insult me—insult a Housemaster—you—"

Words failed him.

"I—I—I—" babbled Lovell, wondering if Mr. Manders had gone suddenly mad. Even if he didn't like the look of the new clock, he might have been a bit more civil than this. Mr. Dalton had been civil.

"You impudent rascal!" roared the Modern master. "How dare you! How dare you bring this—this offal to my study?"

"That—that what?" stammered Lovell.

"This—this—this offensive offal—this—this— You impertinent young scoundrel! Take it away!"

Lovell craned over the table to look into the box, utterly amazed and astounded. He could not believe his eyes. Instead of that handsome clock—that ornament to any master's mantel-piece—which the box should have contained, Lovell's stunned eyes rested on an ancient kipper—a kipper that had seen its best days, and seen them long ago—a kipper that had obviously been discarded by the former owner as unfit for human consumption—a kipper that had been consigned to the dustbin, for there were traces of dust and ashes on it. No clock—not a sign of a clock—nothing but that ancient and miserable and powerfully aromatic kipper.

Lovell wondered if he was dreaming.

He had left that box tied up in his study, with the handsome clock inside it. He had found the box as he had left it. In the interval, the handsome clock had been changed for a kipper that could not be called handsome by the wildest stretch of imagination. It seemed like black magic to the dazed Classical junior.

Mr. Manders was still talking, with infuriated emphasis, but Lovell was too dizzy with amazement to heed him. He stared at the kipper as if it had been the spectre of a kipper—a Christmas phantom.

"Rascal! Insulting young scoundrel! But this is what I have been led to expect from Mr. Dalton's boys! A vile practical joke in the worst of taste—offensive—base—villainous. As a rule I should not care to chastise any boy not belonging to my House, but in this case I feel bound to depart from that rule."

Lovell woke up, as it were, at those words.

Mr. Manders was grabbing up his cane. "Sir!" gasped Lovell. "I—I—Yaroooooop!"

There was no chance of explaining, even if Lovell had understood what had happened, and had been able to explain. The cane was descending.

Whack, whack, whack! "Mr. Manders! Stoppit! Oh, my hat! Yaroooooh!" roared Lovell, and he gave up all attempt at explanation and fled for the door.

Mr. Manders followed. The cane rose and fell with lightning rapidity.

Whack, whack, whack! "Yow-ow-ow-ow-woooooop!"

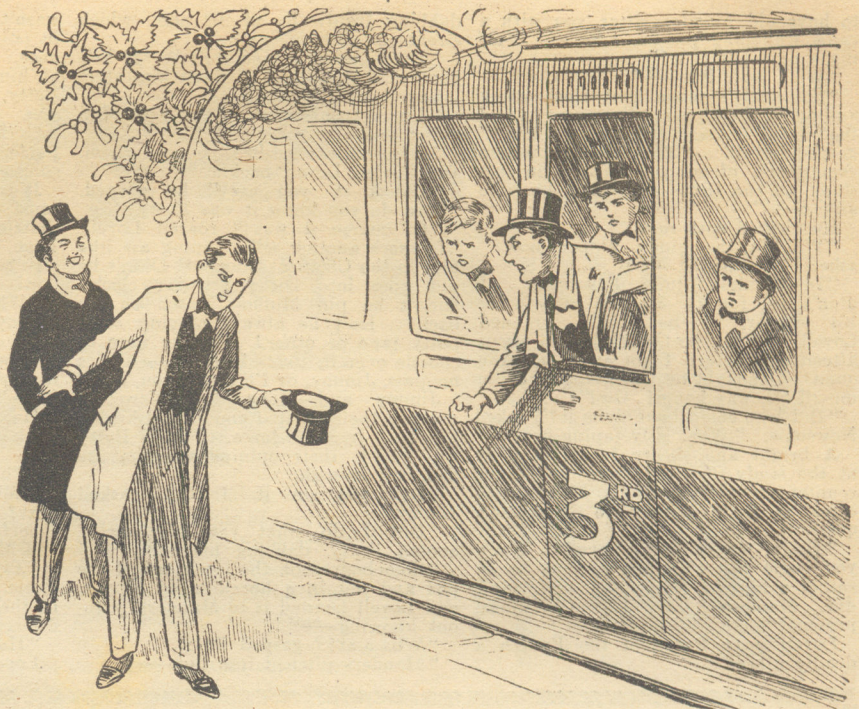
With the cane thrashing down on his hapless shoulders, Lovell grabbed wildly at the door-handle and got the door open. He leaped into the passage, the cane coming down again as he leaped, and a wild yell rang through Manders' House.

Lovell rushed down the corridor to the door. But the enraged Modern master was not finished yet. He rushed after Lovell, still handing it out with the cane.

Whack, whack, whack, whack! "Great Scott!" Knowles of the Sixth almost staggered with astonishment at the sight of his Housemaster, with crimson face, pursuing a fleeing Classical junior, lashing with the cane. "Mr. Manders—what—"

Mr. Manders brushed past him, still in furious pursuit of Lovell. Knowles stared after them blankly.

Whack, whack!



"Good-bye, old bean," said Peele mockingly. "When you make any more Christmas presentations don't forget to ask me for help!"

Lovell reached the door on the quad. By great good fortune it stood open.

Lovell cleared the steps of Manders' House at a single bound, and rolled in the snow in the quadrangle.

He was up again in a twinkling, fleeing for his own House as if for his life.

Mr. Manders stopped at the door. Infuriated as he was, he realised that a Housemaster's dignity had to be considered, and that his dignity would have been considerably impaired by a chase across the quad, cane in hand. Perhaps, too, it occurred to him that Lovell had had enough. Certainly Lovell had had a good deal.

He felt as if he had had much too much as he raced wildly across the quad and bolted into his own House like a rabbit into a burrow.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Hilarious!

CRASH! The door of the end study flew open. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome started to their feet in surprise and alarm as Lovell rushed in.

Lovell staggered to the armchair and collapsed into it. He collapsed there and gasped and groaned.

His three chums stared at him. They had been waiting for Lovell to return, curious to hear the result of the presentation to Mr. Manders. They had wondered how the Modern master would take it—whether he would pooh-pooh the thing and tell Lovell to take it away—whether he would decline it pleasantly and politely like Mr. Dalton—whether he would be pleased, and accept it graciously. Really there was no telling what Mr. Manders might do. He was, as Raby remarked, an unreliable old bird. So the trio waited with some curiosity for Lovell to come back.

But whatever they expected, they had not expected this. It was plain that Lovell had been through the time of his life.

"What on earth's happened?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Ow! Wow! Oh dear!"

"Did Manders cut up rusty?" asked Raby.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Lovell, old man—" urged Jimmy Silver.

Groan!

"Have you brought the clock back?"

Groan!

"Can't you tell us what happened?" demanded Raby.

Groan!

Lovell seemed in no hurry to gratify the burning curiosity of his comrades. He was too busily occupied with aches and pains, and pains and aches. Jimmy Silver & Co. had to wait.

But Lovell explained at last.

"Some villain took the clock out of the box and put in a horrid old kipper—a smelly old kipper that he must have rooted out of a dustbin. I—I never guessed—never knew that—"

"Great pip!" said Jimmy Silver faintly. "Then when Manders opened the box—"

"There it was!" groaned Lovell. "Staring him in the face—scenting the whole blinking study! Oh dear!"

"But who—what—how—" babbled Raby.

"He didn't give me a chance to explain!" groaned Lovell. "He thought it was an insult. Oh dear! I—I suppose I can't blame Manders! What the thump was the man to think when I'd told him I was bringing him a Christmas present, and he opened the box and found that ghastly kipper? He was in a frightful rage!"

"My hat! I should think so!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"It was a jape, of course—a jape on me," mumbled Lovell. "I can't think you fellows would play a trick like that on me."

"Fathead! Somebody must have sneaked into the study while we were all out and opened the box and played that rotten trick," said Jimmy Silver. His face broke into a smile. "It's funny in a way."

"Is it?" hooted Lovell. "Is it funny?"

to have old Manders after you with a cane, walloping you as if he was beating a carpet? Is it?"

"Well, no! But——"

"Somebody's taken that clock away and put in the kipper. I'm going to find the awful rotter and smash him!" gasped Lovell. "The clock's hidden somewhere, of course—perhaps in his study all the time—and that horrible kipper——"

He choked with rage.

"Where's the giddy kipper now?" asked Newcome.

"In Manders' study, I suppose. I didn't stop for it! He can have it for his supper, if he likes!" groaned Lovell. "Oh dear! He got in about fifteen cuts before I got away into the quad! I thought he was going to chase me all the way home! Ow!"

"But who could have done it?" asked Newcome. "What silly japing ass——"

A bright and cheery face looked in at the study door. It was the cheery countenance of Putty of the Fourth. He came as if in answer to Newcome's question.

"Hallo, you're back, Lovell! I saw you come in. You seemed to be in rather a hurry. How did it go? How did Manders like his Christmas-present?"

Lovell gave Putty of the Fourth a deadly glare.

dabbing frantically at his nose, which streamed crimson.

"Hold him!" gasped Putty. "If he's gone mad, hold him! Keep him off!"

Lovell scrambled up.

"I'm not finished with you yet! I'm going to——"

Jimmy Silver rushed between them, and hurled Lovell back.

"Chuck it you ass!" he gasped.

"How do you know it was Putty?"

"Of course it was!" roared Lovell.

"Is there another silly, japing ass like him in the Classical Fourth? Didn't he put gum into Dicky Dalton's clock? Didn't he pin Muffin's watch on his back? Isn't he always playing some potty jape or other! Coming here to shortle over it, too! I—I—I'll—— Let me pass, Jimmy, or I'll punch you, too!"

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome grasped their excited chum, and hurled him back by main force. Even if Putty was guilty, their opinion was that he had had enough.

"Did you do it, Putty?" asked Jimmy.

"Did I do what, you silly owl?" hooted Putty, dabbing his nose.

"Somebody took the clock out of the box and put in a horrible old kipper, and Lovell handed it to Manders, without knowing——"

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Putty.

"Manders pitched into him——"

wasn't Putty, as Putty denied it. Putty, in point of fact, denied it with reluctance. It was, as he said, a jest worthy of him at his best. Still, it was not Putty, and the fellows wondered who it was.

Cyril Peele could have told them; but Peele was wisely keeping his own counsel.

It was not even known what had become of the missing clock till the Classical Fourth went to bed that night. Then, when Arthur Edward Lovell clambered into bed, there was a sudden howl.

"What's the trouble now?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Lovell snorted.

"Some silly ass has shoved something in my bed! I've barked my toe on it——"

He turned back the bedclothes. A clock was revealed. Lovell stared at it.

"The—the—the clock!"

"Whom are you going to give it to next?" asked Putty of the Fourth cheerfully. "Dalton's turned it down, and Manders would be hardly safe——"

"Try the Head next," suggested Peele. "But for goodness' sake look in the box first, and don't take him a disused kipper——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell lifted the clock out of his bed,

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STARTS NEXT WEEK!

Some japing ass had played that awful trick on him. And Putty's japing proclivities were well known. And Putty had known all about the intended Christmas present! Putty of the Fourth was the man, of course. Lovell did not want any proof, and he had no time to waste in inquiry. He leaped from the armchair like an arrow from a bow and leaped at Putty.

Before Teddy Grace knew what was happening Lovell's arm was round his neck—not lovingly. Putty's head was in chancery, and Putty was yanked into the study and Lovell was hammering at his features as if determined to drive them through the back of Putty's hapless head.

Putty yelled and struggled.

"You potty ass! What—leggo! My hat! Draggimoff! Oh! Ow! Yaroooh!" The end study rang and echoed to Putty's frantic yells.

"You rotter!" roared Lovell, pounding away frantically. "You japing ass! You funny idiot! Take that! Pulling my leg were you? Take that, and that! I'll teach you to play your potty japes in this study! Take that!"

"Yarooog! Help!"

"Lovell——" gasped Jimmy.

"Take that—and that—and that—and that!" bawled Lovell.

Putty took them—he had to! With his head in chancery, he had no choice about the matter.

But he succeeded at last in hooking his leg into Lovell's, and bringing Arthur Edward with a crash to the floor.

Lovell sprawled on the study carpet, and Putty reeled against the wall.

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"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Putty.

"I'll give him something to cackle at!" yelled Lovell. "Will you silly dummies let me get at him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Putty. "Oh, what a jest! No, I didn't do it—but I wish I had! Ha, ha, ha! Why on earth didn't I think of it? Ha, ha! Some fellow did! Oh, my hat! I must tell this along the passage!"

In his enjoyment of that tremendous jest Putty of the Fourth seemed quite to forget the damage to his nose. He staggered out of the study, howling with laughter. In about two minutes all the Classical Fourth knew what had happened, and laughter fairly boomed along the Classical Fourth passage. Fellows yelled, and roared, and wept, and rocked with merriment.

"Look here I'm going to smash that japing ass!" roared Lovell.

Christmas geniality, peace and good will had evidently taken a back seat in Arthur Edward's estimation now.

"But Putty says he didn't do it!" gasped Jimmy.

"Bosh!"

"It was some other ass——"

"Rot!"

"Chuck it, old man! Oh, my hat! Listen to the fellows yelling!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from from the passage.

"They seem to think it funny!" snorted Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Obviously the Classical Fourth thought it funny. There was no doubt that they thought it very funny indeed.

There was a good deal of speculation concerning the unknown jester. Lovell, when he grew calmer, admitted that it

and turned in, with feelings too deep for words—at all events, for words that were suitable for utterance at Christmas-time.

Rookwood School broke up the next day. It was still a mystery who had rung the charges, as it were, on the Christmas present in the box in the end study. But it was not to remain a mystery. The Fistical Four were in the train at Latcham Junction, and the train was about to start, when Cyril Peele came across to speak a word of farewell.

"Merry Christmas, you chaps!" he said affably.

"Thanks—same to you!" said Jimmy Silver, rather surprised.

He had not expected that cordiality from Peele.

"Good-bye, Lovell, old bean! Making any more Christmas presents?" Lovell glared.

"Always willing to lend a hand, when you do," said Peele. "Try Manders again on his birthday, old bean, and rely on me to help you, if I can."

Lovell jumped up.

"You!" he roared.

He grabbed at the handle of the carriage door. Jimmy Silver seized him and dragged him back just in time.

The train moved on, leaving Peele grinning on the platform. Jimmy Silver & Co were off for the Christmas holidays.

THE END.

"JIMMY SILVER & CO'S CHRISTMAS JAPE!" is the title of next week's rousing yarn of the Heroes of Rookwood.)