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JIMMY SILVER & CO., OF ROOKWOOD, ARE HERE AGAIN THIS WEEK!



GUNNER SAVES THE SITUATION!

By Owen Conquest.

That Peter Cuthbert Gunner is every kind of an ass, all Rookwood is agreed. But that he is also a hero they are destined yet to discover!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Rookwood Paper-chase!

"ME!" said Gunner. Gunner of the Fourth spoke emphatically, as well as ungrammatically.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner was not particular about grammar, but he was very particular about having his claims considered on all subjects and all occasions, in season and out of season.

But Gunner's remark, emphatic as it was, passed unheeded.

"Lovell's one," said Jimmy Silver. "And the other—"

"Me!" repeated Gunner.

A crowd of the Rookwood Fourth were in the changing-room, and Jimmy Silver was making the final arrangements for a paper-chase. There were to be two hares, and the rest of the Fourth were to be the pack. Jimmy Silver had already selected Lovell, and was about to pick out the other "hare" when Gunner butted in.

"Now, who's the other?" went on Jimmy Silver, apparently deaf.

"Me!" For the third time Gunner butted in. "I suppose you mean 'I,'" remarked Raby, with sarcasm.

Gunner shook his head.

Gunner was as blind to sarcasm as he was to grammar.

"No, I don't mean you, Raby. I mean me!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at in that," said Gunner. "You'd better pick me out, Silver. You want a fellow who can run, and you want a fellow with a little intelligence."

"That suits you," remarked Mornington. "You've got a little intelligence—a very little."

And there was another chuckle in the changing-room.

Gunner did not heed.

"I'm the man you want," he said. "It isn't merely running that's needed in

a hare—Lovell can do that almost as well as I can, and I admit it—"

"Only 'almost'!" snorted Lovell.

"Yes. But you want a fellow with some sense of strategy, and so on," said Gunner. "I'll undertake to give you something to think about in following my trail across country. No sticking to the beaten track for me."

"You see—" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, can it!" interrupted Gunner. "Look here, you leave me out of the football matches. You make out I can't play football. Of course, that's only your ignorance of the game—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But there it is, I'm left out," said Gunner. "But even you can't be ass enough to suppose that I can't run as a hare in a paper-chase. Now, put me down as hare, old man, and tell Lovell to be careful to follow my lead, and I'll give you a ripping run this afternoon. Any fellow who catches me will be welcome to kick me as hard as he likes."

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

He was a good-natured fellow, and very tolerant of Gunner, who, of course, could not help being an ass. Gunner had to be left out of games, because the way he played football would have made the angels weep, and football was a serious matter. But if Gunner was keen to distinguish himself in a cross-country run, Jimmy did not see, on the whole, why he should not be gratified. Probably he would not be of any use; but then he was not likely to do any harm.

"Make up your mind, old man," said Gunner encouragingly. "Don't leave your best man out of everything, you know."

"Anybody object?" asked Jimmy Silver resignedly, with a glance round.

"Oh, give him his head!" said Raby. "Lovell will give us a good run after Gunner's caught."

"I shan't be caught!" snorted Gunner.

"Do you mind, Lovell?" asked Jimmy.

Arthur Edward Lovell hesitated a moment or two. Really, Gunner was not the companion he would have chosen for the run. But Lovell was a good-natured fellow, and he nodded at last.

"All serene," he said.

"That's settled, then," said Jimmy Silver. "Try not to be caught in the first hundred yards, Gunner."

Gunner snorted.

"And don't trespass anywhere," added Jimmy Silver. "There was a row last time you trespassed on Barker's land; old Barker doesn't like fellows crossing his fields."

Another snort from Gunner.

"Blow old Barker," he answered.

"Blow him as hard as you like, but don't trespass on his land," said Jimmy Silver. "We don't want him coming up to Rookwood to make complaints. Now, then, get hold of your bags, and clear."

There were two bags of "scent" all ready, and Lovell and Gunner picked them up and slung them on.

Then the whole crowd of juniors turned out of the changing-room and went down to the gates.

THE SECOND CHAPTER, Gunner Going Strong!

"BUCK up, Lovell!"

"Fathead!"

"Now, look here, Lovell—"

"Cheese it!"

The two hares trotted side by side through the wood, dropping the trail of torn paper lightly as they went. Already Lovell repented him of his good-nature in accepting Gunner as his comrade on the run.

Lovell, in point of fact, was rather a determined fellow himself, and given to regarding his own opinion as the last word. So it was quite certain that he

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would never pull with a fellow who was also like that, only more so.

They came out of the wood, Lovell ahead and Gunner labouring on his track, and turned into the tow-path along the Roke.

"Lovell!" shouted Gunner.

"Follow on!"

"Don't pump yourself out at the start, fathead! You'll want some wind left for getting home."

"I've plenty of wind, fathead!" snorted Lovell. "But if you haven't we'll go easier." And he slackened down.

"I've lots of wind," gasped Gunner. "Heaps! Now, then, where are you heading now?"

"Across the bridge."

"Better cut across these fields and go over the plank bridge farther on," said Gunner.

"Those fields belong to Mr. Barker, fathead. And can't you see the board up: 'Trespassers will be prosecuted!'"

"Blow the board!"

Gunner clambered over a fence and dropped into the field. Lovell halted and gave him a glare of the greatest exasperation. Mr. Barker was a farmer who was supposed to have a cross and crusty temper, but who, perhaps, had some reason for supposing that his crops were of more importance than schoolboy paper-chases. At all events Mr. Barker was well known to cut up extremely rusty if his farming-land was trespassed upon, and once or twice he had been up to the school with a complaint. To Gunner this was a trifle light as air.

"Come back, you thumping ass!" roared Lovell. "You can't go across Barker's fields."

"This way, Lovell!"

"There's not even a footpath——"

"That's all right."

"Come back! There'll be a row with old Barker!" yelled Lovell.

Gunner laughed scoffingly.

"If you're afraid of old Barker you can hook it, and I'll carry on alone. I'm not afraid of any Barker that ever barked!"

"Who's afraid?" bawled Lovell wrathfully.

"Looks as if you are! If you're not, come on."

Gunner trotted across the field, dropping the scent as he trotted. Lovell breathed hard and deep. Gunner was leaving the paper trail for the pack to follow, and Lovell could scarcely take another direction, leaving another trail. Neither did he want to remain where he was, to be caught by the oncoming pack.

He choked down his wrath and clambered over the fence and followed Gunner.

Leaving a trail of trampling and torn paper through Mr. Barker's winter oats, the hares ran on towards a plank bridge which crossed a little stream, a tributary of the Roke. Leaning against a tree near the bridge was a burly man, in gaiters, with a whip under his arm. He had a plump, red face, which grew redder and redder with wrath as he saw the two Rookwood juniors ploughing towards him through his winter oats.

The two hares had not yet observed Mr. Barker, but he had observed them, and he did not seem to be pleased.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Lovell suddenly.

He halted in dismay as he spotted the farmer

"Come on, Lovell!"

"It's Barker!"

"Blow Barker!"

The burly form detached itself from the tree and stepped out in the path of

the two juniors. Mr. Barker's whip was no longer under his arm; it was in his hand, and he was gripping it hard. Gunner slackened down at the sight of this lion in the path.

"Now you've done it!" gasped Lovell. "Can't be helped. We can't turn back now."

"Can we go on, fathead, with Barker in the way?" shrieked Lovell.

"Yes. Up-end him."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Are you going to be caught, ass? Back me up, and we'll jolly soon shift Barker."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Peter Cuthbert Gunner rushed on, charging straight at the burly farmer. Lovell gazed after him spellbound for a second. Then he followed. He could not refuse to back up his comrade.

Crash!

Mr. Barker most decidedly had not expected that charge. He had fully expected that the schoolboys would seek to dodge him, and that he would rush after them, laying on his whip. Instead of which, Peter Cuthbert Gunner cannoned into him like a battering-ram, and Mr. Barker went sprawling.

Gunner reeled from the shock.

"Buck up!" he panted.

Lovell raced up and crossed the plank bridge like a flash. Gunner was darting after him when the sprawling farmer clutched at his ankle and brought him down. Gunner landed with a heavy bump.

"Now, you young rascal!" gasped Mr. Barker.

Arthur Edward Lovell looked back from the farther side of the stream. He beheld the interesting sight of Peter Cuthbert Gunner wriggling in the grasp of Mr. Barker, trying to escape, with about as much chance of escaping as if he had been in the grip of an octopus. Gunner was a burly fellow for his age, but he was an infant in the grasp of the big farmer. Wriggling, and struggling, and kicking, Gunner was led away across the field by Mr. Barker, Lovell staring after him.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell.

Far in the distance he could see the bobbing heads of the pack. Mr. Barker and his prisoner disappeared behind a fringe of willows. Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if ever a silly ass asked for it, Gunner did!" he murmured. "Lucky I got through!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell took up the run again, scattering scent behind him as he ran, and taking the shortest possible out of Mr. Barker's land. He had had enough of Mr. Barker. It seemed probable that Gunner would have too much.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Rough on Mr. Barker!

"THE chump!"

"The ass!"

"The duffer!"

"Bother him!"

The pack had arrived at the fence bordering Mr. Barker's field. Across the fence lay the scent, and Jimmy Silver & Co. halted, and told one another what they thought of Gunner.

It was Gunner, they were sure of that; Lovell would never have taken that route willingly.

Evidently Gunner had seized the lead, and Lovell had followed on, having little choice in the matter. And the pack had no more choice, either, unless they were to give up the chase and accept defeat. Which, of course, was not to be thought of.

For a few minutes they halted, taking breath, and expending it again in remarks on the subject of Gunner.

"My fault!" said Jimmy Silver ruefully. "I might have known that that silly owl would put his silly hoof into it somehow. And I warned him specially not to trespass on Barker's land."

"Your fault, old man," agreed Putty of the Fourth. "You always were a bit of an ass, as I've told you before. But we're going on, Barker or no Barker; we're not going to be beaten."

"No fear!" said Mornington.

"Come on!" exclaimed Raby, putting a leg over the fence. Newcome followed his example.

"That's all very well," sneered Peele. "But what about the row with the beak afterwards, if Barker kicks up a fuss?"

"And he will!" said Gower.

"We've got to chance that," said Jimmy Silver. "It's rotten, but we can't chuck up the chase. Follow on!"

Jimmy Silver vaulted over the fence and took up the trail again. Right through Mr. Barker's winter oats ran the scent of torn paper and on the scent trooped the Rookwood juniors.

Peele and Gower exchanged a glance and walked back. But most of the pack followed the captain of the Fourth.

The scent led on to the plank bridge over the field stream, and the pack ran hard to reach that point. They wanted to get clear of Barker's land, if they could, without meeting Mr. Barker. In the distance the farmhouse could be seen, half hidden by a fringe of willows, and all the juniors had the corner of an eye in that direction as they pelted across the field.

"Cave!" exclaimed Mornington suddenly.

"Look out!"

"There's jolly old Barker!"

Of the disaster that had happened to the hares, of the capture of Gunner, the pack knew nothing so far—they had been too far out of sight at the time to know anything about that.

As the paper trail ran on, they supposed that the hares were well ahead across the stream, and supposed that they had got through Barker's land unscathed. But they could see that they were not going to get through unscathed themselves, for from beyond the line of willows the burly form of a farmer in gaiters appeared, dashing to intercept them, with a whip in his hand.

"Put it on!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "If he cuts us off from the bridge we shall be in a hole."

"Go it!" panted Raby.

The juniors fairly flew.

But Mr. Barker succeeded in cutting them off from the bridge, and he interposed his bulky figure between them and the plank that crossed the stream and shook his whip at them.

"Go back!" he roared.

The juniors slackened down, panting. The angry farmer brandished his whip.

"Get off my land! Do you hear?"

"Excuse us, sir," said Jimmy Silver in his silkiest tone. "It's a paper-chase, and if you wouldn't mind letting us pass, sir, we'd be ever so much obliged!"

Jimmy was rather an adept at the soft answer that turneth away wrath. But soft answers had no effect whatever on Mr. Barker. He was thinking of his trampled oats and the outraged rights of property.

"Go back! Get off my land at once!"

"You see——"

Mr. Barker wasted no more time in

woods. He came at the juniors flourishing his whip, with the evident intention of driving them before him like a flock of sheep.

Jimmy Silver set his lips. "We're not going back!" he rapped out. "Look here, Mr. Barker—we'll pay for any damage done. That's a fair offer!"

It was a fair offer, but Mr. Barker was not in a reasonable mood. He still had an ache in his stout ribs where Gunner's bullet head had smitten him. He rushed at the juniors, laying round him with his whip.

"Oh, my hat!"
"Ow!"
"Yaroooh!"
"Hook it!"

The pack scattered and ran, but they ran onwards, towards the bridge. The farmer kept pace with them, lashing furiously at all within his reach, in a towering rage. A whip-lash curling round bare legs was painful—very painful indeed. Wild yells rang across the field as the pack dodged and twisted and ran.

One by one they sprinted across the plank.

"Thank goodness we're out of that!" gasped Newcome.

"Are we out of it?" chuckled Mornington. "I fancy we shall see the Barker man at Rookwood over this."

"Bound to," said Raby. "All that idiot Gunner's fault."

"We'll jolly well lynch Gunner!"

"Yes, rather."

"That dummy—that fathead—that ass Gunner—"

"Come on! Can't be helped now," said Jimmy Silver. "Keep smiling."

And the pack ran on.

undoubtedly he would be, at roll-call—then the schoolmaster could send for him. If the headmaster of Rookwood had to send for Gunner, or call for him personally, there was no doubt that Gunner would suffer for his trespass.

Dr. Chisholm, no doubt, would take care that his boys did not trample on Mr. Barker's winter oats again, if he had to make a journey from Rookwood to Barker's Farm to reclaim Gunner. That was Mr. Barker's idea, and no doubt he was right.

Gunner had tried the door, and kicked at it till his toes ached. He had tried the wooden wall all round, but it was stout and strong. So he raged in vain.

But something had to be done—that was clear.

Gunner was no longer thinking of the paper-chase. However, that had gone on—it had gone on and left him. Wherever the pack were, they must be far ahead of Gunner by this time. He could not rejoin Lovell; he could not even get after the pack and overtake them before they reached Rookwood. That was bad enough. But Gunner realised that that was not so bad as remaining a prisoner in Mr. Barker's shed till the Head of Rookwood was forced to intervene personally in the matter.

Gunner's wits were neither active nor bright. But necessity is the mother of invention. Gunner's eyes turned at last on the roof of the shed—attracted perhaps by a ray of wintry sunlight that peeped in through a hole in the thatch.

The roof was four feet above his head. But the rough timbers of the wall gave handhold and foothold, and Gunner clambered breathlessly out on the sloping roof, and rolled off and sprawled on the ground.

"Ow!"
He picked himself up.

He was quite near the farm buildings, and it behoved him to get farther away from them as soon as possible. Gunner glanced round him, and saw a gate at a distance, beyond that a meadow, on the farther side of which was a lane. That was his shortest cut to safety and freedom, and Gunner started for the gate at a run.

"Hallo, there! Stop!"

He was seen.

Gunner did not even turn his head. He raced on and reached the gate, and dragged at it. It was padlocked.

But a padlocked gate was not likely to stop Gunner. He clambered over it desperately.

"Stop! Bull! Bull!"

Gunner rolled over the gate into the meadow. He picked himself up again, and stared back at a farmhand, who was gesticulating and shouting.

"Silly ass!" murmured Gunner. "What the thump does he mean, bull? Is he calling me a bull? Must be potty!"

And he streaked across the wide meadow towards the lane. A high hedge separated the meadow from the lane, and there was no sign of a gate; but Gunner was confident of forcing a way through the hedge somehow.

Gunner looked back again as he ran, and saw the farmhand at the gate he had left, still gesticulating wildly, though he gave no sign of following Gunner into the meadow. He was still shouting, but the wind carried away his voice.

"Oh, sorry, kid!" gasped Gunner suddenly.

As he was running hard, while he was looking back, he had nearly fallen over a child that was playing in the meadow. He stopped just in time as the little girl gave a startled shriek. Gunner halted breathlessly.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Narrow Squeak for Gunner!

CHEEK!

Thus Peter Cuthbert Gunner. Gunner was thrilling with indignation.

His present quarters was a shed belonging to Mr. Barker's farm buildings. Mr. Barker, with a ruthless disregard of the liberty of the subject, and of the extreme importance of Gunner's liberty in particular, had marched Peter Cuthbert into that shed and locked him in. Gunner's angry expostulations had not even received an answer. The shed was locked on the outside, and the farmer had left the hapless Gunner there and gone away—to intercept the pack crossing his fields, with rather disastrous results to himself, as it had happened.

Gunner tramped about the shed in burning indignation. He was locked up—locked up like some tramp caught pilfering, to wait for the police. It was intolerable.

Not that Mr. Barker was going to call the police in Gunner's case, of course. He had locked Gunner in the shed to keep him safe while he dealt with the rest of the trespassers. That Gunner was a "hare"; that it was very important for him to rejoin the other hare and lead the way across country; that the Rookwood paperchase would be "mucked up" if Gunner was kept out of it—all these considerations did not appeal to Mr. Barker in the least.

Like a careless Gallio, he cared for none of these things! His view was that this schoolboy had chosen to trespass on his land, in defiance of a conspicuous board which stated that trespassers would be prosecuted—and having come on the land unpermitted, Gunner could stay on it.

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"Sorry, kid! Don't howl; you know you're not hurt," he said encouragingly. Gunner was a good-hearted fellow, and he would not have hurt a child for worlds.

The little girl seemed about five years old. She fixed big, blue, startled eyes, that looked like saucers, upon Gunner. She was seated in the grass, with a ragged "teddy bear" in her arms. She really had some cause for alarm, as Gunner had very nearly trodden on her.

"Don't cry, kid!" said Gunner. "Look here, you know, you oughtn't to be sitting in the grass—it's damp! You run home to your mother—see?"

And he kindly picked up the little girl and set her upon her feet.

Gunner's intentions were good, but the child was alarmed, and she proceeded to howl at the top of her voice. And then suddenly, above the screaming of the child, there came a deep, alarming sound, and Gunner spun round, with his heart thumping.

From a muddy hollow in the meadow, where there was a pond, a terrific figure had emerged, and Gunner knew now, as his heart thumped against his ribs, what the farmhand had meant by shouting "Bull!" and why the gate had been padlocked. Mr. Barker's prize bull—a gigantic animal that looked elephantine in its proportions, with wicked, savage eyes—was glaring at Gunner scarcely twenty yards away.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Gunner.

Bellow!

The child screamed with fear.

Gunner was an ass—there was no doubt about that. All Rookwood was agreed that he was every kind of an ass. But perhaps Gunner's heart made up for the deficiencies of his head. The bull was already upon him, lashing his stumpy tail, his eyes gleaming with malice.

Gunner had ample time to sprint to safety himself. But it did not even occur to him to go alone. He seized the little girl in his arms and ran.

The child kicked and struggled and screamed. One little claw was dug into Gunner's eye, and another tore at his hair.

Bellow!

Behind Gunner, as he ran with his struggling, clawing burden, sounded the awful bellow of the bull. There was a heavy thudding of hoofs on the damp grass of the meadow.

Gunner took a flashing glance over his shoulder. Right on his track came the gigantic animal, with head lowered.

That glance spurred Gunner on to a terrific effort. He fairly flew over the grass, with the child in his arms. Bellow! Trample! sounded behind him. On Mr. Barker's farm never fewer than two sturdy men at a time dealt with that gigantic, savage animal.

Gunner would have been tossed like a wisp of straw, and he knew it. His throat was dry; his breath came in spasms; his heart thumped on his ribs.

High before him rose the hedge bordering the lane, and alone Gunner could have plunged and scrambled through somehow, with damage to his clothes and his skin, but with safety ahead; with the child in his arms he could not.

He swerved from the hedge and ran along it, desperately watching for a gap, an opening, a gate. He heard a frightful crash. The charging bull, blind with his head down, had charged right into the hedge. Had Gunner received that charge—

With savage roar on roar, the bull disentangled himself from the thorny hedge and took up the chase again, wildly infuriated now.

Gunner tore on frantically. In the corner of the field at last he sighted a gate that gave on the lane, and discerned a woman's frightened face looking over it. Gunner raced desperately for the gate.

"Quick!" he panted, holding up the child into the woman's arms; and the little girl was taken from him over the gate.

Thud, thud!

Gunner made a desperate spring.

He clutched the top bar and rolled over into the lane, and the next second the strong gate shook and creaked and groaned under the impact of a charging head.

Gunner rolled dazedly on the ground.

"Oh, my hat!"

He staggered to his feet. On the other side of the gate the bull was parading up and down, bellowing and lashing.

But Gunner was safe now; the gate was too strong for the savage brute. He gasped and panted, winded to the wide, and feeling as if his breath would never come back. The woman was holding the child in her arms, soothing her frightened shrieking.

"I say, if you know where that kid lives, you might take her home," said Gunner, when he had recovered his breath a little.

The woman nodded. She was too busy with the frightened child to speak.

"All serene, then!" said Gunner.

And he started off at a walk for Rookwood. There was not a run left in him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Painful Prospects for Gunner!

TA-RA-RA-RA!

The bugle rang out as the quarry was sighted on the Rookwood road.

"Only Lovell!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Where's that ass, Gunner, then? We haven't seen him on the road."

"Goodness knows."

Arthur Edward Lovell looked back and grinned breathlessly. It had been a long and a hard run, but it was near the finish now; the gates of Rookwood were in sight. The pack had thinned out. Behind him, on the road, he could see Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, Morny and Oswald and Conroy, and two or three more strung out behind. The rest of the pack had tailed off, run out, and were making their way homeward by various ways.

"Put it on!" said Morny.

Lovell was putting it on, determined not to be caught in the last lap. Almost at the end of his tether, but still resolute, Arthur Edward pounded on to the school gates. After him, faster and faster, came the pack, tailing off, however, in the final rush. Oswald dropped behind, and Newcome, and then others, till only Jimmy Silver and Mornington were keeping pace with the hare, and they were not gaining.

Jimmy forged ahead at last, putting on a spurt, and had the chase lasted three minutes longer Arthur Edward Lovell would have felt the tap on his shoulder. But the school gates were quite close now, and the school gates were "home." With a final burst Lovell rushed into the old gateway and staggered breathlessly against the ancient stone pillar, and turned a breathless grin on Jimmy Silver.

"Done you!" he gasped.

"Just!" said Jimmy cheerily.

The pack trailed in. Tired and per-

spiring, the juniors hurried to the changing-room.

"Jolly good run!" said Lovell, as he towelled a crimson face. "That ass Gunner nearly mucked it up, of course! Did you fellows have any trouble with the Barker bird?"

"Didn't we?" grinned Mornington. "What did you go across his land for?" demanded Conroy.

"That ass, Gunner—!"

"Well, we guessed that!" said Jimmy Silver. "But what became of Gunner? You dropped him somewhere."

Lovell chuckled.

"Barker got him. Last I saw of him Barker was marching him off by the collar towards his farmhouse."

"Great pip!"

"He hasn't come in," said Dickinson minor. "Has Barker got him still?"

"Looks like it," said Jimmy Silver gravely.

It was a grave case. As Gunner had been dropped out of the paper-chase he would naturally have taken the direct route home, had he been free, and so had had ample time to get in.

"Barker's got him!" said Mornington. "That means a lot of trouble! If he keeps him the Head will have to claim him!"

"I jolly well wish he would keep him for good!" growled Jimmy Silver.

"No such luck!"

After changing, Jimmy Silver & Co. went up to the end study for tea, and after tea they came down to see whether Gunner had turned up. All the stray members of the pack had come in by that time, but Gunner had not appeared.

It was certain now that he was being detained by the irate Mr. Barker, and all the juniors realised how serious the matter was. Gunner would be missed at roll-call and inquired after.

The Head would have to be told where he was, the juniors would have to admit that they had trespassed on forbidden land, and they knew what would follow. They could barely imagine the feelings of the Head if he had to go personally to Mr. Barker's farm to claim Gunner. The mere imagination made them shudder.

A crowd of the Fourth went down to the gates, in the faint hope of seeing Gunner coming in, after all.

Their feelings were almost Hunnish.

That ass Gunner had caused the trespass to take place, and he could not even keep clear of the farmer upon whose land he had trespassed.

As if a complaint from Mr. Barker was not serious enough, he had made it necessary for the majestic Head himself to bestir himself in the matter, to face an exceedingly disagreeable interview with an angry man. The general opinion in the Classical Fourth was that lynching was too good for Gunner; that something lingering, with boiling oil in it was nearer the mark.

And then, all of a sudden, Gunner dawned on them.

He came plodding up the lane, and the juniors stared at him in deep and intense relief. Never had they been so glad to see Gunner. Indeed, nobody could remember ever having been glad to see him before. But undoubtedly all the fellows were glad to see him now.

"Great gad! Here he is!" exclaimed Mornington. "He's got away somehow. The Head won't have to do the giddy ambassador stunt."

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver fervently.

Gunner came tramping up.

"Well, fathead," said Jimmy Silver grimly, "what's happened to you?"

"That man was frightfully cheeky!" said Gunner. "Locked me in a shed!

I fancy he was going to keep me till I was sent for! Cheek, you know!"

"But you got away?" asked Jimmy. Gunner sniffed.

"Of course I did! I burst a hole through the roof of the shed and cleared. Jolly nearly got gored by a bull, too, crossing a field. But it's all right. Did you catch Lovell?"

"Not quite."
"Well, I suppose you wouldn't have," assented Gunner. "Lovell wasn't much good without me to give him a lead; but, of course, you fellows are a lot of duds!"

Gunner tramped away to the changing-room.

"That man Barker was cheeky—locking a chap up in a shed," said Gunner. "My idea is that he ought to be given a lesson. Who's game to come back with me and duck him in his own pond?"

"Oh, my hat! That's your idea, is it?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"That's it."
"You don't think you've caused trouble enough already with your fat-headed pottness?"

"Eh?"
"You know the Head's warned us not to go on Barker's land, since the last time he made a fuss about it. Haven't you sense enough to know that Barker is absolutely certain to come up to the school now and see the Head?"

"That can't be helped, can it?"

"Well, no, not now," said Jimmy; "but you—"

"It's all right," said Gunner. "All right, is it?" hooted Lovell.

"Yes. Let's wait at the gates for Barker and give him a jolly good ragging as soon as he comes!" said Gunner.

"Great Scott!"

"It's no good talking to you," said Jimmy Silver. "Put his head under a tap."

"Here, I say— Leggo! Yaroooh! Ooooooooooooooh!" spluttered Gunner.

Gunner struggled desperately. But many vengeful hands were upon him, and the tap played on his head and his face, and he streamed with water. Then he was bumped down on the floor of the changing-room, where he sat in a breathless state, trying to get his second wind.

"That's a sample, you crass ass!" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Now it's barely possible that Barker mayn't come up here grousing. If he doesn't, you get off with that. But if he does—and he's pretty sure to—and we're called up before the Beak, you're going to get a Form ragging—see?"

"Groooogh!"
And Gunner was left to gasp.

**THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
A Surprise for Rookwood!**

"YOU'RE for it, you fellows!"

Tubby Muffin made that observation quite cheerily as the juniors were on their way to Hall for roll-call. Tubby had tailed off in the first fifty yards of the paper-chase, and had been nowhere near the Barker territory. So he could afford to be cheerful about it.

"What do you mean, fatty?" growled Lovell.

"Barker's come."
"Oh!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were not in high spirits as they went into Hall. Mr. Barker, apparently, had arrived at Rookwood, and they could guess why he had come.

Mr. Dalton was taking the roll. Just as the Fourth Form master had finished calling the names, the upper door opened, and the Head entered the Hall with a burly, red-faced man at his side.

"I have been informed by Mr. Barker," said the Head, going straight to the point, "that a number of boys belonging to Rookwood trespassed on his land this afternoon—engaged, as I understand, upon a paper-chase, in spite of my very strict prohibition. All boys concerned in the matter will stand forward."

"Come on, you chaps!" grunted Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy led the way, and almost all the Classical Fourth followed. With dismal faces the crowd of delinquents stood before the headmaster and the red-faced gentleman beside him.

Mr. Barker ran his eyes over the group. He pointed to Gunner.

"That's the boy!" he said. "I don't know his name, but that's him."

"Gunner!"

"Yes, sir!" murmured Peter Cuthbert.

"Stand forward!"
Gunner stood forward.

What followed made the Rookwooders blink.

Mr. Barker stepped towards Gunner, and for a second the juniors supposed that he was going to take the matter of punishment into his own burly hands.

Instead of which, Mr. Barker grasped Gunner by the hand—to Gunner's absolute astonishment—and shook hands with him, with a vigorous grip.

"Young gentleman," said Mr. Barker, with emotion in his voice, "you came on my land to-day without permission. Come on it as often as you like, and anywhere you like; and any time you care to look in at the farm, sir, you'll find me and my missus and

my little girl glad to see you. I'm proud to shake you by the hand, sir."

And Mr. Barker fairly wrung Gunner's hand with a grip that nearly made Gunner yelp.

Gunner stared at him blankly.

"But—but what have I done, sir?"

"Has—has—has Gunner done anything, sir?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Then he hasn't told you!" exclaimed Mr. Barker. "You don't know that he saved my little girl from my prize bull?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"She'd got into the field, through some hole in the hedge, with her teddy-bear," said Mr. Barker. "Nobody saw her; she'd got away somehow without being noticed. And there she was, in the field with the bull—my prize bull, that I never go near myself without another man with me. What would have happened if this young gentleman hadn't cut across that field in getting away from my shed I don't dare to think. Her mother was looking for her in the lane, and had just caught sight of her across the gate as—"

Mr. Barker's powerful voice shook. He gave Gunner another grip that made him wriggle. "My wife saw it all, sir, and my man Bill, though he was too far away to help. You could have got away easy without my little girl, and you nearly got yourself killed to save her. Master Gunner, I'm your servant for life, sir, and your schoolfellows should be proud of you!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Gunner. "Is that it? That was nothing, sir; I'd forgotten that."

"I shan't forget it in a hurry, sir," said Mr. Barker.

And he wrung Gunner's hand once more, and left the Hall with the Head, who was smiling genially—not at all the expression Jimmy Silver & Co. had expected him to wear on this occasion.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Gunner—great Scott!" stuttered Arthur Edward Lovell. "That ass, Gunner! That chump, Gunner! And Gunner—"

"Three cheers for Gunner!" called out Bulkeley of the Sixth.

"Hip-hip hurrah!"

The old Hall of Rookwood rang with it. And then Gunner, still in a state of astonishment, found himself collared by his Form-fellows and carried shoulder-high out of Hall.

THE END.

("THE PRICE OF FRIENDSHIP!" is the title of next week's rousing tale of Rookwood.)

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